International Power Transitions, Critical Realism, and the Rise of China

by

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International power transitions have been the subject of much theoretical and policy debate. This thesis critically examines theories of power transition with reference to both the historical record and the rise of China. The aims are to (a) demonstrate weaknesses in existing theories, and (b) propose an alternative theory that will enrich our understanding and explanation of the rise of China, and advance the quality of policy debate and deliberation on this issue.

The thesis first offers an internal critique of two contrasting theories: ‘power transition theory’ (PTT) and Mearsheimer’s ‘offensive realism’ (MOR). It is argued that existing theories of power transition have a limited capacity to (a) explain conflict and peace in past power transitions, and (b) assess the possible conditions for peace, order or conflict in prospective cases. The thesis next deploys an alternative philosophy of social science, critical realism, to extend this critique and guide construction of a new theory and methodology for analysis of power transitions. On a diagnostic level, critical realism’s critique of the positivist concept of causation highlights the pitfalls of relying upon historical regularities based on correlations. On the constructive side, critical realism allows us to identify and conceptualise a greater diversity of material and ideational sources of causation, as well as the interaction between them.

The significance of the alternative theory is that it bases its explanation of power transitions on the principles of causal powers and natural necessity. By using these principles the thesis also provides an external critique of PTT and MOR. That is, the thesis rebuts the claim advanced by both theories that there is a probabilistic relation between shifts in material power distribution and the incidence of war and peace. Instead, this thesis argues that the onset of war or peace in a power transition depends on how key states variably perceive both their external security environments and their own interests. Although motivational causes are complex and case-specific, a general theory of international power transitions, conceived as the hierarchical revision of regional military-security orders, is feasible.

The general theory advanced here comprises a network of propositions about the ontological determinants (great power agents, domestic interest structures, geographical space, military and economic resources) and causal sequencing of power transitions. The theory sets out an invariant three-stage power transition sequence, yet specifies a greater variety of generic power transition conditions, processes and outcomes than previous theories. The theory can, for instance, specify conditions for consensually based transitions in geopolitical order, and for transitions that occur in maritime regions. The generic features of the theory supply the finite limiting conditions that are necessary for undertaking a defensible prognosis of prospective power transitions such as the rise of China. A further advance on previous theories is the provision of guidelines for investigation of motivational causes.

In applying the theory to the rise of China, the thesis deploys an innovative methodology for evaluating the explanatory power of causal claims that operate in complex, multi-causal environments. Methodologically, the thesis also proposes a solution to the problem critical realism raises about the limited viability of prediction.
in such open systems. For critical realists, agent-level motivational causes, or tendencies, are just as significant for their actual or potential material effects as quantifiable military and economic resources. Consequently, demonstrations of conflict logic (or its absence) between the existing territorial and strategic interests of East Asian powers can be conducted on a highly tangible basis. Using the alternative power transition theory to frame such simulations enables us to explore concrete conditions for future conflict or compromise on regional security order. Such an explanation of possibilities is potentially more empowering than prediction because it allows the key actors to see greater opportunities for choice and mutual adjustment of interest definitions. Such factors may help to avoid, or at least minimise, the scope for future conflict. The innovative theory and methodology advanced in this thesis thus has the potential to improve both the quality of general policy debates and decision-making with regards to the negotiation of prospective power transitions, such as the rise of China.
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* CATB = Coexistence, Assimilation, Trivialisation, Breakdown
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis critically examines theories of international power transition with reference to both the historical record and the rise of China. The aims are to (a) demonstrate weaknesses in existing theories, and (b) propose an alternative one that will enrich our understanding and explanation of the rise of China, and advance the quality of policy debate and deliberation on this issue.

The thesis first offers an internal critique of two contrasting theories: ‘power transition theory’ (PTT) and John Mearsheimer’s ‘offensive realism’ (MOR). I argue that these existing theories of power transition have a limited capacity to (a) explain conflict and peace in past power transitions, and (b) assess the possible conditions for peace, order or conflict in prospective cases. The thesis then deploys an alternative philosophy of science, critical realism, to extend this critique and guide construction of a new theory and methodology for analysis of power transitions. On a diagnostic level, critical realism’s critique of the positivist concept of causation highlights the pitfalls of relying upon historical regularities based on correlations. On the constructive side, critical realism allows us to identify and conceptualise a greater diversity of both material and ideational sources of causation, as well as the interaction between them. The innovative theory and methodology developed in Part I of this thesis on the basis of critical realist insights is, in Part II, applied in a case analysis of the rise of China.

The role of this introductory chapter is twofold. First, I establish the rationale and significance of the project through posing and answering two questions: (1) why do we need a new theory? and (2) why critical realism? After this, I present the structure of inquiry of the thesis according to its sequence of chapters.

1.1: Why do we need a new theory?

International power transitions have been the subject of much theoretical debate in the discipline of International Relations (IR) since the emergence of classical realism during the 1930s and 1940s. Since then, the most systematic and general theorising on
the topic has continued to occur within various realist paradigms, especially those that centre on an hypothesised causal relationship linking various forms of material power distribution amongst states to a greater or lesser probability for major war.

This thesis challenges both the veracity and usefulness of these particular sorts of probability argument. Correlations between forms of material power distribution and conflict/peace may appear compelling on the basis of a positivist concept of causation that compares and weights causal claims according to event-regularity within obtainable data sets. Such arguments become undermined, however, when assessed according to the logic of an alternative, and as argued here, more sophisticated and well-founded philosophical realist concept of causation based on causal powers, natural necessity, and open-system dynamics.

Even when presumed as genuinely probabilistic, the potential ‘technological’ application of such theories to guide and anchor analysis and make reliable prognoses about relevant real-world problems, such as the rise of China, is still highly limited. Sometimes, and especially in the case of PTT, this is partly due to problems in conceptual scope and coherence. More generally, the problem is that a focus on material conditions that emerge immediately prior to outbreaks of conflict can only ever provide insight about symptomatic conditions rather than generative causes, the latter of which involves questions about the sources of state motivation. When state motivation is actually theorised, however, it tends to be more generalised and simplified than is empirically warranted.

The alternative theory that is developed and applied in this thesis does two things that give it both an explanatory and ‘technological’ advantage over existing theories. Firstly, the theory more clearly distinguishes features of the power transition process that are determinate, fixed and apply universally, from those that are variable and changeable across cases. On one hand here, we argue that it is possible to possess some general knowledge about limiting conditions, causal sequencing, and the causes of conflict or peace and stability in power transitions that is universal and definite in its claims. So long as such knowledge claims really are a correct or close approximation to reality, they are able to reduce more effectively the speculative component of future projection in comparison to the tenuous probability claims
advanced in the other theories. On the other hand, within the bounds of an invariant three-stage power transition sequence, the theory specifies a more variable (yet still fixed and finite) range of generic power transition conditions, processes and outcomes than previous theories. It can, for instance, specify conditions for consensually based transitions in geopolitical order, and for defining revisionist change in maritime regions. I argue that this range of precisely defined generic features and conditions provides a more accurate and reliable template of the possibilities for change in power transitions than found elsewhere in the literature.

A second advantage of my alternative theory is that it provides guidelines and methods for investigating and causally conceptualising state motivations in all their complexity and variation, and for then relating such case-specific information back to the general features and categories of the theory. The theory, accordingly, functions as a disciplined guiding and ordering framework, rather than as a substitute, for the in-depth empirical investigation of particular cases. Such a relating of the concrete/complex to the general/finite enables greater precision to be made in projections of future possibilities and options than is the case with existing theories.

1.2: Why critical realism?

If a key aim for the building of an alternative theory (and methodology) is to provide an improved basis for policy deliberations on the rise of China, then what value can the philosophy of critical realism contribute? At first glance, it might appear that drawing on critical realism is more likely to be a source of handicaps, rather than a facilitator of such an objective. There are at least three potential objections.

Firstly, one could argue that given critical realism is a paradigm of social science that is currently not well known in IR and on the fringes of the discipline, drawing on it is not a particularly efficient way of getting one’s ideas known and understood. Secondly, given that a good quantity of the existing philosophical and theoretical literature of critical realism uses a language that is heavy and demanding, it might also be argued that this imposes a further unnecessary encumbrance on any real-world analysis aspiring to be policy-relevant.
A third possible objection might be that receptiveness to a theory and methodology based on critical realism could be narrowed further owing to the fact that its founder, Roy Bhaskar, is an avowed Marxist and socialist, and that the movement has tended more to attract those from the political left (Brown 2007). My response to this, firstly, is to note my own ignorance of Bhaskar’s Marxism during my initial readings of his works. Secondly, and as will become evident, the treatment of the subject matter to which critical realism is applied in this thesis, and the arguments developed, clearly do not bear any relationship to the traditional left-right political divide.

I argue that the core of critical-realist philosophy, developed initially to correct common misconceptions and provide some more accurate alternative explanations of natural scientific practice (Bhaskar 2008 [1975]), should be viewed as largely apolitical in its foundations. Bhaskar subsequently used these improved conceptions of natural-scientific practice as a basis for critiques of positivist social science and relativist interpretative approaches, and to open up suggestive pathways for a new critical-realist social science (1998 [1979]; 1986). However, it was only with the introduction of his advocacy of science as a mission of ‘emancipation’ that Bhaskar’s Marxism began to overshadow and undermine the political neutrality of his initial body of concepts.1

This thesis does not follow Bhaskar down the latter path, and not just for reasons of maximising political neutrality. Bhaskar’s concept of emancipation requires accepting the idea, regarded here as logically implausible, that facts can sometimes secrete particular sorts of values (1998, 54-71). Instead, this thesis follows Sayer (2000, chap 7 and 8) in favouring a movement from explanation to normative deliberation (or more well informed policy debate), rather than to emancipatory critique. Such a move enables studies that use critical realism to more effectively reassert the scientific objectivity of their analysis, and of the grounds on which they expect their explanations, and those of others, to be scrutinised and evaluated.

Setting aside these objections, I argue that critical realism provides a genuinely progressive and (for the most part) coherent alternative to mainstream understandings.

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1 While some preparation was made for the ‘emancipation’ argument in Bhaskar (1998 [1979], 54-71), it is the work that followed (Bhaskar 1986) that established this stream of critical realism.
of causation and causal explanation in IR. Equally, however, I hold that much of this paradigm’s potential to generate (or in Bhaskar’s words, to be the ‘midwife’ of) progressive developments in social-scientific theory and methodology (including for future-oriented analysis) remains largely untapped. To generate a new stage of progress, practitioners of critical realism need to more squarely confront and resolve the problems the paradigm itself raises about (a) the peculiar challenges of evaluating causal claims in multi-causal real-world environments where there is no recourse to experimental arbitration, and (b) the limited viability of prediction in such open systems.

In addition then to building an alternative theory of power transition on the basis of critical realism’s progressive concept of causation, this thesis also proposes innovative methodological solutions to the above problems and demonstrates their utility through application to a case analysis of the rise of China. In the process of developing and justifying these innovations, it is necessary to engage in some measure of complex philosophical and theoretical discourse. If the understanding of causation, and methods of causal evaluation and futures analysis deployed in this thesis were readily explicable within existing mainstream IR paradigms, there would be no need for this. As this is not the case, and as certain aspects of the case analysis in Part II would otherwise likely be viewed (incorrectly) as ‘speculative’ and based on ‘intangibles’ according to some mainstream paradigms; exposition of critical-realist critiques and concepts becomes necessary as both a means to shed such distortions, and as a discipline on the process of theory/methodology building and case analysis.

I argue that the payoff for such efforts lies in a paradox. That is, the application of critical realism to critique and theory/methodology building undoubtedly adds, initially, to the complexity and abstraction of the analytical process. Yet, the result when well constructed and applied as a framework for case analysis is a level of clarified causal logic and integration – or de-mystification of real-world complexity – that cannot be attained through direct empirical investigation alone. Nor, arguably, through an application of existing mainstream concepts of causation in IR. To whatever extent then that this thesis is judged as advancing clarity, critical discernment, and synthesis in understandings about the causal drivers and processes that underpin or relate to the rise of China; any deemed success in this regard is, in
large measure, the product of a disciplined internalisation of the critical-realist understanding of causation, and the particular theory and methodology developed on this basis.

1.3: Structure of inquiry

This thesis is structured in two parts. The aim of Part I (Chapters 2 to 5) is to critically establish the need for, and construct, an alternative theory and methodology for the analysis of international power transitions. Part II (Chapters 6 to 8) then applies these innovations to a prospective (or future-oriented) case analysis of the rise of China.

Chapter 2 provides an *internal critique* of PTT and MOR. The focus is on consistency of logic and empirical fit within the subject matter addressed by the two theories. The IR theoretical literature is a broad one, and choices have had to be made in regards to critical focus. On the dynamics of change in international power hierarchies, the work of Gilpin (1981), for instance, might also be viewed as a prime candidate for such a critique. This option has been excluded on a number of pragmatic grounds.\(^2\)

*First* is the need for efficiency and cogency in the development of key arguments. Between them, PTT and MOR provide for an efficient, clear yet comprehensive account of the strengths and limitations of employing a predominantly ‘materialist’ approach (see below) to the explanation of international power transitions. *Second*, PTT and MOR represent clear critical points of departure, as well as continuity, with previously dominant theoretical paradigms; from balance-of-power classical realism in the case of PTT, defensive neorealism in the case of MOR. The critique thus provides an efficient means of indicating the broader evolution of theoretical debate on the subject. *Third*, PTT and MOR have been directly and contrastingly applied to assessing the prospects for the rise of China to proceed peacefully or non-peacefully, and to making policy recommendations for how the US should handle the process. Thus, these theories have particular relevance for and provide a useful comparative point of reference to the issue that forms the special focus of this thesis.

\(^2\) Gilpin’s work is nonetheless worth consulting as an example of a sophisticated synthesis of classical realist and neorealist perspectives on international politics.
Note that the term ‘materialist’ is, in this thesis, always meant as a shorthand for ‘brute materialism’. Arguments in this thesis about the causal power of ideas and conscious agency are, in fact, just as potentially compatible with a purely materialist philosophy of existence as they are with one based on mind-matter ‘dualism’. Coined by Wendt (1999, 94-5), brute materialism refers to IR theoretical frameworks that limit their field of explanatory focus or value to physical variables (military technology, geography, population), economic resources, and generalised instinctive behavioural tendencies. Such a view is commonly sceptical towards either (a) the causal difference that culture and ideas make to states’ security and strategic motivations, or else (b) the possibility for allegedly ‘intangible’ ideas to be operationalised in genuinely scientific causal analysis.

Chapter 3 introduces and deploys the conceptual framework of critical realism to advance arguments as to why this is a mistaken viewpoint. In doing so, the chapter provides the crucial pivot in Part I from critique to theory construction. Critical realism is used first to extend the critical examination of PTT and MOR, this time on the basis of an external critique. Chiefly, the chapter rebuts claims advanced within these theories that there is a probabilistic relation between shifts in material power distribution and the incidence of war and peace. Instead, it is argued that the onset of war or peace in a power transition depends on how key states variably perceive both their external security environment and their own interests. Culturally derived ideas in the form of ‘interest structures’ are real and exercise a more determinate causal impact on the incidence of war and peace than the structures of material capability distribution posited in the other theories. After establishing the ontological basis of ‘interest structures’, the remainder of Chapter 3 addresses key methodological issues involved in deploying them in ‘tangible’ causal analysis. In the process, the chapter develops innovative solutions to the unresolved problems raised by critical realism and mentioned in the previous section – that is, the problems of explanatory evaluation in open systems (absent a recourse to experimentation), and the limited viability of prediction in social science.

Next, Chapter 4 develops the concepts used to build the alternative theory of power transition. The central concept dealt with is ‘revisionism’. Despite the importance of this concept in IR, and its centrality to the subject of international power transitions in
particular, it remains considerably under-examined, and inconsistencies in its usage persist. It has also become overly associated with history’s more radical and insatiable imperialist powers such as Nazi Germany and Napoleonic France. It is rarely associated with the rise of the US. Thus, a chief aim of this chapter is to thoroughly rework this concept in a more logically and empirically consistent, as well as value-neutral direction. In the process, reference is made to several other mainstream IR concepts that are themselves redefined and adjusted to accommodate the alternative power transition model that emerges from this reappraisal of the concept of revisionism.

To complete Part I, Chapter 5 synthesises the various components and arguments of previous chapters into a summary statement of the alternative theory. The aim is to clarify the theory’s core propositions so as to enable it to be both readily tested and operationalised for case analysis. Note that while this theory has been developed through a rigorous process of crosschecking for logical-empirical consistency across diverse historical cases; due to word length and time constraints, it has not been possible to include a fully systematic demonstration of the empirical correspondence and adaptability of this theory. Such a demonstration will be provided in a later study.

The three chapters comprising Part II follow a sequencing logic and apply innovative methodological procedures that are developed and explained at length within Part I (along with some extra elaboration in the introductory sections of the chapters themselves). Chapter 6 begins with a unit- or agent-level interpretative analysis that identifies and explains the complex of interest structures underpinning contemporary Chinese grand strategy. The analysis of motivational causes in this chapter provides necessary materials and context for Chapters 7 and 8 that, in turn, explain and evaluate possibilities for Chinese revisionism. In addition to the use of various standard sources in English, the analysis also draws directly on source material from the Chinese language discourse on IR and Chinese foreign policy within China itself. The latter research component contributes some firsthand and novel insights into the

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3 These materials were accessed and obtained during a period of research at Fudan University, Shanghai from February to July 2008.
lines of debate in China about its grand strategic orientation, and the dialectical
tensions that exist amongst some of its interest priorities.

Chapter 7 applies my alternative model of power transition (which operates at the
level of inter-state interaction) to a future-oriented analysis. The chapter asks whether
contemporary Chinese interest structures are revisionist, and if so, what sort of
revisionism applies to China? An innovative method of closed-system rational
simulation is used together with the theory to demonstrate tangible possibilities for
hierarchical change, as well as conflict and peace, implied in the interaction of the
geopolitical interest preferences held by key actors.

Chapter 8 subsequently tests and evaluates my arguments about potential Chinese
revisionism and the possibilities for war and peace in East Asia. To this end, the
chapter deploys another innovative methodology, referred to as inter-theoretical
evaluation. Arguments advanced in my case analysis (and derived from my
alternative power transition theory) are tested through critically relating them to the
causal variables captured within three other theoretical theses that have been
advanced to explain and/or predict the dynamics of East Asian security order. These
include arguments about the causal role of: (1) the material balance of power, (2)
economic interdependence, and (3) socialisation according to common international
norms (in this case the ‘ASEAN Way’). Through further simulations, the analysis
pinpoints and evaluates practical conditions under which the various arguments
embody a zero-sum explanatory logic (that is, where one explanation is judged more
or less plausible than another), or else can be combined as part of an integrated
explanation. In doing so, the necessary conditions for the future validity of the various
explanations (including their falsifiability criteria) are made clear and transparent.

Finally, the conclusion (Chapter 9) summarises and reflects on the theoretical and
methodological innovations advanced in this thesis. To finish, I then demonstrate the
potential practical uses of these innovations to aid and refine the process of policy-
making analysis and deliberation for states involved in a prospective power transition.
The demonstration is conducted with reference to the choices (dilemmas, trade-offs,
and opportunities) that my case analysis indicates as confronting China and the US
respectively as they lead and negotiate the much anticipated power transition in East Asia.
PART I:

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY
Chapter 2: Two Mainstream Theories of Power Transition: A Critique

This chapter examines how two mainstream IR theories have understood and explained the phenomenon of international power transitions. The first of these is the ‘power transition theory’ (PTT) research program founded by A.F.K. Organski in the late 1950s. The second is the more recent theory of ‘offensive realism’ associated predominantly with the work of John Mearsheimer (hereafter MOR). This chapter develops an internal critique of the relative strengths and limitations of the explanations offered by these theories about the relationship between changes in international power structure and the incidence of war or peace. The focus is on consistency of logic and empirical fit within the subject matter addressed by the two theories.

This chapter has three main sections. Section 2.1 focuses on PTT. After summarising the main features of this research program, two major limitations are identified. Section 2.2 then introduces MOR into the critique. The analysis is structured around three areas in which MOR better succeeds in formulating and applying a theory that, even more so, is predominantly materialist in orientation. In the process, key limitations of MOR are also identified. Section 2.3 then addresses the limitations of both PTT and MOR when applied towards understanding the rise of China.

2.1: Power Transition Theory

Organski established the blueprint for PTT in World Politics (1958, chap 12). He applied the term ‘power transition’ to a phenomenon already generally treated by influential post-war classical realists such as E.H. Carr (2001) and Hans Morgenthau (2006). Despite such continuity, Organski presented his work as a challenge to mainstream depictions of the international system as a balance of power system. The balance of power has long been notorious for its varied and inconsistent usages (Wight 1978, chap 16). However, the usages that Organski had in mind referred specifically to the ideas of a mechanical tendency towards, or normative maintenance of, a general parity and equilibrium among major poles of power.
Organski claimed this notion of the balance of power (a) does not explain accurately enough the international historical record of the past 200 years (the industrial age), and (b) that periods of parity where they emerged were not the most peaceful, but especially war-prone (1958, chap 11). Organski acknowledges that the term balance of power is often used for any prevailing configuration of power, whether balanced or unbalanced. His dismissal of the concept’s utility derives from his preference for using the term to represent states of, or towards, parity and equilibrium alone, leaving distribution of power to function as the umbrella term instead (286-7). This is arbitrary though, and obscures the extent of continuity with authors such as Morgenthau.

The essential difference between Organski’s alternative and the classical realist mainstream was the fixed attention to and rigorous modelling of a more select group of variables. Morgenthau had expounded a more diverse range of material, social/ideational4 and subjective perceptual causal variables. These were mixed together in the analysis (unsystematically and inconsistently at times) to embody a highly fluid range of contingent possibilities.5 As a consequence most core elements of PTT can be found in Morgenthau’s work, although without the same emphasis, or systematic and exclusive treatment.

Morgenthau did, however, give similar priority to the idea that states, and especially great powers, can be identified as following either a policy of the status quo or imperialism (Morgenthau’s early but problematic equivalent to revisionism) (2006, chaps 4 and 5). Earlier, Carr (2001, chap 13) had also given priority to the role of interaction between satisfied and dissatisfied powers (terminology adopted by PTT) in driving processes of international change. Morgenthau’s multi-faceted schema of the domestically sourced attributes of national power further contributed to a mutable conception of power and order in international politics.6 This schema includes factors of national material potential and domestic governance that are emphasised with more singular focus in PTT.

4 For discussion of the ‘proto-constructivist’ elements in Morgenthau see Little (2007, chap 4)
5 On classical realists’ explicit arguments about complex multi-causality see Kurki (2008, 90-4)
6 Morgenthau’s list of elements of national power include: geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, military preparedness (technology; leadership; quantity and quality of armed forces), population (distribution; trends), national character, national morale, the quality of diplomacy and government (2006, chaps 9 and 10).
The normative preferences of both PTT and Morgenthau are also not as far apart as Organski makes them appear. In both perspectives, peaceful change is desirable and depends on compromise and accommodation, although the bases of these processes are articulated differently. For Morgenthau (2006, 558-68), compromise of non-core interests and a lack of conflict between defined core interests is emphasised; for Organski, integration of the rising challenger into the status quo international order.

The foundations of PTT derive from two main sources (DiCiccio and Levy 1999). The first was Chapter 12 of *World Politics*, where Organski developed an alternative conceptual scheme to the balance of power. He claimed that his alternative was a better fit with the historical record of international politics in the industrial age. At this stage, Organski focussed on establishing his new theory through mainly qualitative critical analysis that posited a more satisfactory correspondence with selective and non-systematically evaluated empirical evidence. Organski introduced key variables that would become basic tenets of PTT, and expressed an intention to subject these propositions to more rigorous empirical testing.

Development of methods through which the theory could be operationalised for testing ensued in the years following *World Politics*. In 1980, Organski, in collaboration with Jacek Kugler, published the results in *The War Ledger*. Much of the book was devoted to establishing the rationale for the selection of the measures through which the findings of empirical testing could be presented in the language of statistical correlation and probability.

The initial formulation of PTT had not proceeded along the strict inductive lines favoured by many post-war behaviouralists in political science. That is, the deriving of testable hypotheses from correlations observed within collected data sets alone (Dessler 1991). In the intervening period from 1958 until *The War Ledger*, however, Organski had come to accede to behaviouralist and strong positivist standards for the empirical validation of social scientific theory. That is, if a proposition about a causal relationship cannot be expressed in terms of a quantitatively measurable regularity, it

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7 Two contemporary PTT theorists describe the analysis in *World Politics* as ‘classical argument’ (Lemke and Tammen 2003).
has no real explanatory value. One result of this was that the authors pushed their thesis linking the subjective satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the challenger state with the absence or incidence of war more to the margins.

*The War Ledger* provided the ‘foundation for the empirical development of the power transition research program’ (DiCiccio and Levy 1999). While there have been some adjustments and extensions to the theory since, the book’s basic propositions remain at the core of the work of contemporary PTT theorists. Among the most important of these are:

1. System-wide great power wars generally occur when a later-developing but more populous state catches up and reaches a state of material parity with the most powerful state in the international system, or a regional sub-system. Parity is usually defined as equating to at least 80 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of the existing dominant power.

2. The incidence or absence of war in a transition period depends additionally on whether the emerging ‘challenger’ is satisfied or dissatisfied with its position in the international order and with the rules that underpin that system. Recent articulations of PTT present this as equally important as the relative power variable, despite its defiance of quantitative means of identification and definition (Tammen et al. 2000).

3. The long-term configuration of international power is determined by domestic potentials and national development trajectories, which even a major war will not disrupt. Referred to as the ‘Phoenix factor’, it is argued that rising powers defeated in a major war tend to bounce back faster than the victors. The hypothesis is that 20 years after the war, a defeated challenger will return to the level of GDP/capita they would have attained if the war had not occurred.

PTT theorists have also employed their relative power measures towards predicting, or rather *retrodicting*, the severity and duration of historic major wars. In contrast to

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8 A good summary of the contemporary consensus among prominent PTT scholars can be found in Tammen et al. (2000).
the above points, there remains a lack of consensus and common findings amongst PTT scholars on these matters.

The key strength of PTT is how it draws attention to the role of uneven development as a driver of long-term transformations in international structures of power. PTT is not the only IR theory to have linked differential national development with realist concerns of power hierarchy (Choucri and North 1975; Gilpin 1981). Organski was nonetheless one of the first to do this. Overall, there are numerous problems with the way in which PTT has been constructed as a general model of international politics that explains the causes of great power war. Two critical limitations of the theory are evident.

(i) Limited explanatory value
The first of these is the theory’s limited explanatory value. Indeed, the central proposition, and the one that absorbs most attention by PTT theorists, corresponds with intuitive common sense. That is, a rising state prepared to risk major war with the strongest possible rivals in the international system, will only do so if its relative material capabilities and potentials provide a realistic chance that it might prevail.

Variance in empirical tests of PTT have led to abandonment of debates over the location of a single law-like war threshold, and to the positing of a ‘zone of parity’ instead. That is, anywhere between 20 percent less or 20 percent more of the material capabilities of the (previously) dominant power (Tammen et al. 2000, chap 1). As a quantitative model, however, potential explanations for why this is the case – such as subjective differences in how different regimes might perceive risk as well as their own relative advantages and disadvantages – are left unexplored.

The zone of parity thesis points to an important condition that has often accompanied the outbreak of major great power wars. Such a tendency, though, however well correlated, is more of a symptom rather than a cause that would explain the impetus of the drive towards war. PTT theorists seem to recognise this themselves through their additional reliance on a distinction between satisfied and dissatisfied ‘challengers’. Despite the stated importance of this subjective and qualitative dimension, PTT’s conception of satisfaction and dissatisfaction remains underdeveloped. It is only in the
last two decades that efforts have been made to formulate empirical indicators for this variable. This is an issue that is not settled amongst PTT scholars apart from the general expectation that it be represented by an associated (or symptomatic) phenomenon that is quantifiable.9

If a state is satisfied or dissatisfied with its position in the international system, in what sense is this so? If a state is satisfied or dissatisfied with the existing rules of the game, what sort of rules more commonly move a challenger to resort or refrain from moving towards a military solution? PTT provides no clear answers to these questions.

(ii) Weak conceptual development

The qualitative concept building of PTT is weak overall. A key issue affecting the use of other concepts in the theory such as ‘dominant powers’ and ‘challengers’, ‘satisfied’ and ‘dissatisfied’ powers is the problematic definition of what a status quo consists of (Levy 2008). In PTT a status quo is invariably hierarchically structured in the shape of a pyramid, and reflects a normative order established and maintained by the dominant power of the day, whose interests it most closely serves.

It is at this point that the identity of PTT in critical opposition to balance of power theories is shown to be most problematic. Not all international orders have operated like a pyramid. Indeed, PTT is greatly at variance with the historical record in not recognising the 19th and early 20th century European power structure as established and maintained on a collective basis through the shifting cooperative and adversarial interactions of five great powers. Britain, by far the most prosperous and industrially advanced state for much of the 19th century and dominant in the global maritime domain, was, with the maintenance of a relatively small land army, much more limited in its land power leverage on the European continent (Levy 2008). To the extent that order was maintained and system-wide war avoided for an entire century, it was done so formally or informally amongst the five great powers party to the Concert of Europe.

9 The main surrogate variables and measures for satisfaction/dissatisfaction developed and debated by some PTT scholars include (a) extraordinary military build-ups, and (b) the similarity/dissimilarity of alliance portfolios (Kugler and Lemke 1996; Lemke 2002, 99-109).
Some international orders in history thus have operated in the way that balance of power theorists describe. At other times, PTT’s pyramid conception is the more pertinent fit. This is particularly the case with the (peaceful) transition that occurred as the US gradually reached parity and then overtook the power of Britain in the Western Hemisphere in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – a process that involved these two powers alone.

PTT indirectly captures at least one of the threads that contributed to the lead up to WWI – namely, the longer-term challenge of German power to Britain’s global maritime pre-eminence. However, the prospects of German Weltpolitik were conditioned by Germany’s ability or inability to secure itself against more local and immediate threats on the European continent. In this respect, Germany was unnerved by the mounting prospects that its existing position as the leading continental power would be gradually undermined by the rise of Russia in alliance with a France keen to wrest back Alsace-Lorraine. From this angle, the conflict can be viewed as a preventative war on the part of the leading power to reinforce and extend its lead, and counter any longer-term Russian challenge (Chan 2008, chap 4 and 5). PTT with its monothematic framework does not capture these extra crucial dynamics. PTT is also limited conceptually in capturing the radical revisionist and revolutionary challenges mounted by Napoleonic France and Nazi Germany. The regional status quo these powers challenged were not the child of any particular dominant power, but rather a multilaterally negotiated order, or collectively produced disorder, as was often the case during both the French revolutionary and inter-war periods.

While historically problematic, the PTT conception is a pertinent fit when it comes to thinking about the rise of China within a US-dominated Maritime East Asia. Of the ‘various international relations theories, power transition theory is probably the most widely used by scholars seeking to better understand the likely dynamics and consequences of the rise of China in the contemporary global system’ (Levy 2008). Given the problems of adapting the PTT conceptual scheme to significant parts of the

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10 I say indirectly because PTT theorists do not embed their analysis of Germany’s ‘challenge’ to the ‘dominant’ Britain in any spatial geographic context. Rather, the power transition relationship is identified abstractly on the basis of comparative GDP/capita. See below.
historical record, the apparent relevance and fit of the scheme to a major real world challenge helps explain the continued longevity of the theory.

The US has been the dominant strategic force in Maritime East Asia for the entire post-war period, and has played the dominant role in negotiating the terms and rules upon which the military-security relations of the region operate (Hara 2007). At the same time, if China’s GDP growth of the past three decades is sustained, there is clear potential, given considerations of population, for China to overtake the US in economic size during the first half of the 21st century. The question of whether China will emerge as a satisfied or dissatisfied power is also relevant (although is an imperfect terminology; see below). Evidence of this includes (a) trends of a sustained Chinese military build-up geared towards being competitive against US and other advanced regional capabilities, and (b) the consistent assertion of several sovereign territorial and maritime jurisdiction grievances with other states in the region.

The terms ‘dominant power’ and ‘challenger’ thus are not so problematic when applied to contemporary and prospective US-China relations, so long as these terms specifically refer to the military-security dimension of the relationship. PTT scholars usually do not make this important specification. Instead, they tend mainly to define and identify the dominant and challenger powers through reference to relative GDP/capita, sometimes combined with an index for capturing political capacity to extract resources from society. And except for Lemke’s extension of PTT (2002, chap 4) to cover smaller power interactions at the regional or sub-regional level, PTT scholars have not specified any spatial geographical referents through which to define what a ‘challenge’ to the status quo is in the first place. These deficits have helped perpetuate an unaddressed logical oversight within PTT. This concerns the question of whether a state that surpasses even the most powerful country in GDP should be considered as a ‘challenger’ if it refrains from building any military force that can project and compete beyond its own borders.

11 Organski and Kugler in The War Ledger (30-8) did make secondary use of composite indicators derived from the Correlates of War project, which do factor in military measures, as part of establishing GDP as their measure of choice. A number of subsequent PTT studies, while favouring GDP/capita as the more parsimonious expression of national capabilities, nonetheless have sought to strengthen their argument through demonstrating a close correlation between results using GDP measures with those using the COW composite indicator (Lemke 2002, 98-9).
In regard to the terms ‘satisfied’ and ‘dissatisfied’, Steve Chan (2008, chap 3) has done the most to dislocate the sense in which these terms correspond reliably to the ‘dominant power’ and ‘challenger’ (or status quo and revisionist powers) respectively. Chan argues that both dominant and challenger powers have the potential to be satisfied or dissatisfied simultaneously over different aspects of their respective conditions. A dominant power in a unipolar system, for instance, might be overall quite satisfied with its position until a serious challenger comes along and upsets its previous sense of security derived from great advantage. If the strategic agenda of such a rising challenger overlapped and conflicted with the self-definition of the dominant power’s security requirements, this would stoke a sense of dissatisfaction in the latter, and perhaps renew own its quest to extend its strategic advantage. The same could be said about the erosion of the advantages of a leading power within a multipolar balance, as we saw with Wilhelmine Germany.

Conversely, a rising challenger with an overwhelming potential power base (in terms of population, resources, advancing economy, stable political system), or who occupies a favourable geographic position, may be satisfied that its progress is assured so long as it does not provoke a fearful or premature counter-response from its neighbours. Such a power might not yet be fully satisfied if its long-term security were defined to require (at least) reaching a state of military parity with the dominant power in some areas beyond its borders. Nonetheless, such a power might develop patiently with a sense that time is on its side and assurance that it will not or cannot be impeded on its path towards a stronger and more influential negotiating position and strategic posture. Such a situation was operative in the case of the power transitions between the US and Britain in the Western Hemisphere, and then later across areas of the international maritime domain.

In situations where both the status quo and revisionist powers are dissatisfied, or satisfied, or in differing ways and degrees simultaneously both satisfied and dissatisfied with their international position, it becomes difficult to usefully employ such a distinction. For this reason, the theory developed in this thesis avoids this terminology. Instead the issue is conceptually framed in terms of the conflicting or complementary interactions of identifiably status quo-oriented and revisionist powers, or amongst different revisionist powers. This alternative is both more consistently
adaptable to historical cases, and enables a more precise description and explanation of the problem of international order and change in power hierarchy.

### 2.2: Mearsheimer’s Offensive Realism

Further limitations of PTT are shown through examining MOR. In his book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001), Mearsheimer succeeds better in formulating and applying a theory that is even more materialist in orientation. MOR is the more wide-ranging and inclusive of the two theories, in that his conceptual and explanatory framework is able to capture a greater spectrum of historical international power configurations and contingencies. Mearsheimer’s theory can accommodate both hegemonic and balance of power orders. Rather than PTT, however, Mearsheimer’s main point of both continuity and critical differentiation is with the original and formerly pre-eminent neorealist theory now known as ‘defensive realism’.

The foundation of contemporary defensive realism was laid in 1979 with the publication of Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics*. Waltz’s book represented a reformulation of the traditional balance of power conception of the international system in even more systematic and mechanistic terms (reflecting especially the influence of rational-choice and systemic economic theories). Departing from the previously common approach of favouring what Waltz labelled ‘reductionist’ unit-level and interactive accounts of international politics, Waltz made the case for an alternative ‘systemic’ approach. He attempted to show how the structural condition of international anarchy, and different distributions of power within anarchy (polarity), influence and constrain the strategic options and orientations of states.

Since publication, Waltz’s theory has remained a common reference within the IR theoretical literature (Little 2007, chaps 6 and 7). In addition to being a source of concepts underpinning contemporary neorealist theories and debates, the book has attracted much criticism. Such criticism usually concerns either (a) the limits of systemic theory in IR (neoclassical realists [Lobell et al. 2009] and liberal political economy approaches [Moravcsik 1997]), or (b) how not to do structural theory in IR (the constructivist critique about Waltz’s neglect of the socialising influence of
commonly accepted practices and norms in international politics [Wendt 1999, 96-109]). Mearsheimer’s theory was formulated against the backdrop of two decades of intensive debate among these theoretical camps and within neorealism itself (Little 2007, chap 7). Mearsheimer was thus in a position to capitalise on the improvements and conceptual extensions made by fellow neorealists in the intervening period (which encompassed the end of the Cold War), and fine-tune his own controversial arguments in critical response to the above debates. Drawing additionally on an extensive knowledge of international history, the result is one of the most formidable materialist explanatory accounts of international politics in the literature.

Mearsheimer’s location within the neorealist paradigm is demonstrated by (a) his adoption of the Waltzian systemic structures of anarchy and the distribution of power (polarity) as central causal factors, and (b) his deliberate simplified generalisation of the motivation of states. Both Waltz and Mearsheimer aim to illuminate aspects of international politics that are unchanging and universal. Of the two, Mearsheimer’s account captures a much greater variability in international conditions and state strategies. This is because his model is less parsimonious than Waltz’s model, and in fact less parsimonious and more multi-causal than Mearsheimer himself often seeks to depict it.

One essential difference is that Mearsheimer sees relatively more opportunities and incentives for powers to pursue expansion, and succeed at it. Waltz (1979, 126-7) emphasised that the operations of the balance of power tends to penalise a state with expansionary aims, or who accumulates too much of an unbalanced power advantage. Mearsheimer’s theory, therefore, while on one level aimed at illuminating processes deemed timeless and universal, also has within it the means to account for historically observable transformations in the international configuration of power. Thus, from certain angles, MOR can be analysed as a theory of power transition.

PTT and MOR are both predominantly materialist accounts of international politics (see section 1.3 of previous chapter). Under the rubric of ‘materialist’, we include propositions that generalise about human nature and hence suggest an argument with an implicit (and in IR invariably unexamined) biological basis. That is, the instinctive
tendencies and reactions, or unconscious drives of material organisms. According to this definition, MOR, with its uniform conception of state motivation, is the more thoroughly materialist of the two theories. PTT as we saw identifies a key factor of state satisfaction or dissatisfaction that varies from case to case (albeit without really explaining or even precisely defining it). Thus the scope of its generalisations about human nature is comparatively limited.

Mearsheimer’s theory represents an advance on PTT in regards to the conception of material variables and the modelling of the material context of international politics that is instructive here. The limitations, nonetheless, of Mearsheimer’s materialist focus are also necessary to identify. Such discussion will point the way towards a revised theory of power transition that better integrates the material with the cultural/ideational, and that more thoroughly accounts for the latter dimension. MOR represents an advance on PTT in three main ways.

(i) A more coherent capabilities-based concept of power
MOR brings a more coherent conception to the capabilities-based approach to understanding power shared by both theories. Key to this is Mearsheimer’s distinction between potential power (economy and population) and actual power (existing military capability) (2001, chap 3). PTT’s main focus is on the potential power dimension. It is only in the past two decades that a number of PTT theorists have realised the importance of accounting for the role of military development as a condition of power transition (Kugler and Lemke 1996).

Traditionally, PTT did not seem to assume either way that a ‘challenger’ would translate its growing economic profile into military investments. And yet it is hard to accept the notion that an emerging great economy is a ‘challenger’, or even a great power, if they perpetually refrain from building any military power projection capacity that would influence the physical security environment beyond its own borders. For a theory whose key aim is to explain conditions conducive to major war, this had been a major gap in their model. While the work of some PTT theorists has been attentive to this issue (Kugler and Lemke 1996; Lemke 2002, 99-109), in terms

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of basic conceptualisation, adoption of Mearsheimer’s division between potential and actual power does much to clarify the matter.

The approaches of both PTT and MOR to measuring potential power are broadly similar. Population and level of economic wealth and development are conceived as the key foundation of great power. Both models in establishing their economic indicators seek to capture and adjust for differentials in levels of modernisation, albeit through different means. In PTT, similarly advanced powers are compared principally in terms of GDP/capita (productivity). In cases where at least one of the countries being compared is at an earlier stage of industrialisation (and therefore not at parity in GDP/capita terms), an additional measure was developed to gauge the efficiency with which the state can extract and mobilise resources from society (usually measured in terms of internal taxation levels) (Organski and Kugler 1980, chap 2). A higher score on this measure is thus used to account and adjust for conflict situations in which a less modernised state proved competitive with more advanced or advantaged states (eg. the China-supported North versus the US-supported South in the Korean War) (1980, 86-100).

Mearsheimer (2001, 62-7) also views GDP measurements as useful when the powers compared are at a similar level of economic development, but a poor indicator when they are not. While Mearsheimer uses GDP to compare potential power in the period beyond 1960, for the bulk of his historical analysis (1816-1960) he employs a composite indicator that ‘accords equal weight to a state’s iron and steel production and its energy consumption’ (2001, 67). This is his way of attempting to capture qualitative differentials in mobilisable wealth and technological development.

MOR thus follows a similar path to PTT in its attention to differential national development as a driver of shifts in international power distributions over time. MOR’s explicit treatment of the military dimension, or actual power, however, provides a simple but coherent solution to what has often been a substantial missing dimension within PTT. For Mearsheimer, a nation’s power at any historical moment is ultimately a reflection of the relative size and quality of its armed forces, and especially its land army (together with supporting air and navy forces). In gauging relative power conditions just prior to the outbreak of a major great power war,
Mearsheimer makes particular use of comparative land army personnel numbers, and
the number of reserve personnel. These are treated in conjunction with a number of
qualitative factors (not captured in quantitative measures this time) such as the quality
of weaponry, strategy, organisation and the efficiency of the political administration
in mobilising economic and social forces (2001, 133-5).

The use of land power measures leads to a quite different assessment of the
international power equation during the 19th century and in the lead up to WWI than
that given by PTT. According to Mearsheimer’s measures, on the European continent,
Britain cannot be classified as the dominant power of a hierarchy. Rather, with one of
the smallest land armies amongst the European powers, Britain is depicted (more
accurately) as a peripheral or ‘offshore balancer’ that could lend weight to a particular
side or coalition in a conflict, but could not be a contender for primacy in its own right
(2001, chaps 7 and 8). Mearsheimer’s land power measures also contribute towards
a somewhat different characterisation of the relative power conditions correlated with
major great power war (2001, chap 9). That is, such wars occur when a ‘potential
hegemon’ emerges that, with the strongest and most efficient land forces (including
reserves) and a potential power base that can be mobilised more rapidly and
extensively than its competitors, is able to break away from the pack and contest for
primacy within a geographic region (2001, 44-5).

This thesis agrees with Mearsheimer that the military dimension constitutes the pre-
eminent attribute of international power, and therefore functions as the chief means or
currency of a power transition. Military power, as the ultimate means of physical
obstruction and destruction, plays the most essential role in the establishment or
undermining of a sense of physical security and independent agency for states. The
economic stability of a well-populated great economic power, for instance, without
any military projection capacity of its own would be potentially vulnerable in the
absence of a reliable external protector. It would open the potential for other, even
less populated, states that do have such a capacity, to physically interfere with that
power’s trade flows, or even its territorial integrity, to get their way in political or
even economic disputes. A state with such potential vulnerabilities, or else complete

13 See especially the tables on page 295 and 303.
security dependence, could not be considered a great power. It is thus accepted here, as in MOR, that to qualify as a great power, a state must be able to contend militarily with the most powerful potential opponent(s), at least within its own region (2001, 5).

In defining state power, where I differ with MOR, and also PTT, is in the explanatory weight placed on the complex and variable motivational underpinnings that physical power accumulation depends on for both its attainment and maintenance (see Chapter 4). In this respect a distinction is made between an internal and an external normative basis of power accumulation (or normative power). Internal accumulation refers to the factors impacting on the ability to effectively use power internationally such as the cohesion of a state and coalescence around shared objectives. External accumulation refers to the factors impacting on the security of any attained advantages beyond a state’s own borders – namely, the degree of external legitimation, alliance or resistance towards a state’s aims or attained position. While attention is given to both dimensions (and without neglecting the material basis of international power), special emphasis is given to the role of external legitimation in (co-) determining power transition outcomes – a factor neglected in both PTT and MOR.

(ii) Inclusion of spatial-geographic variables

The second advantage of MOR in comparison with PTT is that it adds greater coherence (and to neorealist theory also [Little 2007, 225-35]) by incorporating a more tangible geographic dimension. PTT theorists (with the exception of Lemke [2002]) are not always clear about whether they are talking about regional or global, continental or maritime balances of power. This has important consequences for thinking about relative capabilities and how a power transition is identified and defined. Mearsheimer removes the above conflations by proposing that all configurations of power are regional and continental. This is due both to the way in which geographic contiguity or separateness influences the relative security priorities and threat perceptions of states, and to what Mearsheimer refers to as the ‘stopping power of water’ (that is, ocean barriers). The latter is judged to increase security because of the much greater difficulties and costs of launching an amphibious invasion on the territory of another great power (2001, chap 4).
To make this step towards a regional conception of the balance of power, MOR makes a necessary distinction between the global nuclear balance and the conventional military balance – or the continuing independence of conventional strategic competition and potential for conventional war (if somewhat more limited) in a nuclear world (2001, 128-33). As will be addressed in Part Two of this thesis, this proposition is accepted here in regard to the region under special focus – Maritime East Asia.

There are two ways, however, in which my conception of the geographic dimension differs from Mearsheimer. Firstly, regions need to be understood as much in political-strategic terms as in geographic terms. In defining regions and sub-regions as part of my theory, I use the term geo-political region/sub-region to denote not just geographic contiguity, but also inter-subjective strategic value, and the particular field of relations and powers constituting the politics of a region at a given time.

Part of the identification and definition of a geo-political region certainly involves the material dimension of mutual military reach. This factor has actually been explored systematically not by Mearsheimer but by PTT theorist Douglas Lemke (2002, chap 4). In developing a concept of ‘region’ and accompanying quantitative measures for defining this variable, Lemke was the first within PTT to attend to the spatial-geographic deficit in the theory. Lemke’s definitions of a region remain unsatisfactory though. For in choosing to focus on the interactions of smaller local powers and screen out or control for great power interference, Lemke arrives at a definition that requires all countries of a region to have the capacity to militarily reach each other’s territory and contend in warfare with the others.

The result is the identification of a large number of sub-regions rather than regions per se (2002, 90-1). In the absence of genuine great powers or trans-regional superpowers, this is perhaps how strategic regions would be configured. However, this conception neglects the reality that in most cases, both presently and historically, it has been the strategic orientation, reach and capabilities of the great powers (whether in concert, through their rivalry, or as a unipolar hegemon) that have given definition and cohesion to the formation of identifiable strategic regions. Within the geopolitical region defined as Maritime East Asia in this thesis, for instance, the fact
of US unipolarity and US capacity to wage war and strategically influence all parts of this area throughout the post-war period has provided much of the strategic cohesion and definition to the region. Meanwhile in Europe during the Cold War, the adversarial bipolarity based around US and Soviet power defined the contours and scope of this geopolitical region and the sub-regional blocs within it.

In defining a geopolitical region, as well as a power transition, the normative dimension of strategic value and interest definition is as important as military reach. Whether strategically governed by the preferences of a single great power, or the concord or discord between two or more great powers; geopolitical regions ultimately take the shape they do as a result of the relative strategic value and meaning placed on particular areas of geographic space by the main actors concerned.

As a result of all these combined material and normative factors, the contours of geopolitical regions/sub-regions shift in historical time. For instance, prior to the process of German unification during the late 1860s we can speak of Germanic Central Europe as a sub-region of overlapping great power interests and influence, but not subsequently. Prior to the post-war developments of decolonisation and the establishment of the PRC (a strong China), East Asia as a geopolitical region had intersecting continental and maritime geopolitical dimensions. Subsequently though, apart from the Korean Peninsula, the geopolitical pivot in East Asia is now almost entirely maritime.

This leads to the second geographical consideration that differs from Mearsheimer. That is, my theory of power transition is designed to encompass change in both continental and maritime hierarchies of power. Most importantly, my theory highlights the qualitative differences (and common ground) between strategic expansion that occurs in some form of international commons and that occurs on a populated continental land mass. MOR is based on the primacy of land power (2001, chap 4), whereas the dimension of the rise of China that most impacts on American interests (and the region of East Asia as a whole) is maritime. There is thus need for a theory of power transition and revisionism that incorporates and accounts for the particular attributes of this dimension.
(iii) Greater empirical correspondence

The third advantage of MOR vis-à-vis PTT is the capacity of Mearsheimer to tie much more of the historical record of the past 200 years of great power relations to his descriptive and explanatory apparatus. Both theories are similar in their striving for a parsimonious account of great power relations aimed at uncovering some simple yet essential underlying general tendencies and processes that are regular across historical time – somewhat akin to the elegance of general laws in the physical sciences. Of the two, PTT is the more genuinely parsimonious, as it focuses on modelling and empirically testing only a small number of variables.

Mearsheimer also often, and quite famously, presents his theory in a deliberately simplified summary form and style (2001, 1-4; Mearsheimer 2006). On a number of occasions he has publicly expressed his admiration for simple and elegant theories that explain how the world works (Dahl et al. 2004, 389). Mearsheimer’s summary descriptions, however, belie the complexity of variables and qualifications that he often makes when applying these propositions to the extensive historical analysis he undertakes to test the theory. Indeed, it could be argued that in these summary statements, Mearsheimer provides a misleading caricature of his own theory, which is much more contingent and multi-conditional than he often depicts it. This actual complexity and variability is a strength in regard to MOR’s relative descriptive and explanatory power. By comparison, the cost of PTT’s more genuinely reductive model is a thinner account of a more limited range of historical situations.

One of Mearsheimer’s major simplifying assumptions concerns the motivations of states. He assumes ‘great powers have aggressive intentions’ (2001, 34) and are primed by the anarchic nature of the international system to maximise power, seek expansion, and weaken rivals whenever possible. The ultimate security goal is to become a regional hegemon. When Mearsheimer says that his theory ‘involves primarily the clashing of revisionist states’ (2001, 168), this is the sort of definition of revisionism he has in mind.

It is clear though from Mearsheimer’s historical analyses that his states are as much motivated by prudence as of expansion and aggression. Mearsheimer’s states are acutely tuned in to prevailing material power realities, and will usually only pursue
expansion if the right conditions prevail, which is actually quite rarely. States, and
great powers with an obvious reserve of latent potential power no less, avoid any
outward show of aggressive intentions and, in effect, contribute to the maintenance of
the status quo order so long as the balance of power poses excessive risks to
expansion.\(^\text{14}\)

Moreover, states that are separated from others by a major body of water, or whose
material power base preponderates over all others in their region (Britain and the US
are the paradigm cases), are depicted as being able to satisfy their security more easily
than contiguous continental peers. Such ‘offshore balancers’ (both the US and Britain)
and regional hegemons (US only) can afford to drop a militarily or territorially
expansionist agenda (if they so choose) once their basic security is established beyond

Mearsheimer also allows for the influence of ideology, although he suggests that in
any conflict between ideological and balance of power imperatives the latter will
usually prevail.\(^\text{15}\) More importantly, he also allows for a degree of subjectivity in
strategic perceptions and choice among options in a given instant, and the difficulty
often of ascertaining whether a given option is better than another. Actions taken by
Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan for instance, although ultimately
unsuccessful, are nonetheless depicted as not unreasonable (from a security
perspective) under the circumstances they were made. According to his theory,
Germany would have been expected, and probably ought to have gone to war in 1905
during the first Moroccan crisis, when conditions were allegedly more favourable

Mearsheimer does narrow down, in light of his simplifying motivational assumptions,
the basic or generic strategic policy options open to states. The main ones are
balancing, buck-passing, and aggression (other sub-categories that fit into some of
these categories include war, blackmail, bloodletting and bait-and-bleed) (2001, chap

\(^\text{14}\) This theme emerges in Mearsheimer’s discussion of Imperial Japan, Germany post-unification, and

\(^\text{15}\) Mearsheimer is evidently not so confident on this score in regards to the liberal ideological
tendencies of the US. Indeed, Mearsheimer’s refrain that not only do great powers act as MOR
predicts, but \textit{should} act according to MOR only makes sense if some states (namely the US) have some
tendencies to act in ways that attempt to deny or circumvent offensive realist logic (2001, 11-2, 22-7).
Successful regional hegemons, of which the US is the only example in modern history, may become status quo powers. If a potential hegemon in another region is not effectively balanced by its regional peers, though, such regional hegemons will usually be motivated to step in with an offshore balancing policy. Mearsheimer explicitly disapproves of strategies such as bandwagoning and appeasement that concede power to others. But he acknowledges that some great powers have in the past chosen these options (2001, 162-4).

Mearsheimer’s select group of viable state strategies nonetheless contributes to the complexity of the analysis, especially given that they are applied to an assessment of material conditions and indicators that are more variegated than in any other neorealist theory. In addition to quantitative military indices, the strategic calculus of states is affected by many factors. These include: geographical factors of continental contiguity, separateness, and the stopping power of water; differences in potential power and economic development; levels of technological sophistication and technological breakthroughs (a qualitative material factor); the regional strategic configuration that is shaped at a given time by the number of great powers in the system (polarity); and the irreducibly subjective choices other states make in deciding whether to balance, buck-pass or bandwagon with an aggressor.

When explaining how the Soviet Union came to produce more weaponry than Germany in WWII, Mearsheimer even slips in an argument about domestic politics. Similar to PTT’s political capacity argument, the crucial factor is located in the Soviet state’s relatively more efficient harnessing of the socio-economic system for total war (2001, 79-81). In other words, this is a more complex and multi-causal theory than appears on the surface and in the way the author often depicts it. This is a key reason why it is more consistently adaptable to the historical record than other neorealist theories and PTT. MOR quite simply has a more diverse and flexible suite of concepts and (largely material) conditions at its disposal.

That said, Mearsheimer’s simplification and under-examination of the motivational dimension in his theory remains problematic. This leads to similar limitations to PTT.

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16 As is common in MOR, however, Mearsheimer immediately qualifies his general disapproval here with a page sub-section titled ‘Conceding power for realist reasons’ (164-5).
in terms of the satisfactory location and conception of the causes of great power conflict. Problems in the approach of both theories to causal analysis will be taken up further in the following chapter. A number of preliminary points though can be made here on this issue and its implications.

Both MOR and PTT give priority to illuminating the material conditions through which transformative events in great power politics such as power transitions and major war take place. To the extent that both theories recognise a motivational causal dimension, the preference of each when developing the empirical means to support their motivational propositions is to draw upon associated (or symptomatic) variables that can be quantitatively compared.

In MOR, it is assumed that states will pursue expansion if they are presented with a set of material conditions that provide a reasonable opportunity for them to prevail. MOR’s conception of such material conditions is more variegated, flexible, and more given to qualitative description than in PTT. Yet, the emergence of the war-precipitating potential hegemon is always identified primarily according to the relative quantitative weighting of its military and potential power profile, rather than according to the implied orientation of its strategic interest definitions and agenda. While the measures and conceptions of variables often differ from PTT, MOR’s method of explanation of the causes of major war based on correlation of material indices is overall convergent in approach with the latter. Indeed, this is the one area where MOR employs a (comparatively simple) statistical method (2001, chap 9), albeit always qualified in actual case analysis by some combination of other variables conceived within the theory.

For the most part, there is nothing wrong and indeed some explanatory benefit in the attempt to gauge the connection between dissatisfaction or potential aggression with materially manifested patterns of behaviour. Expressions of dissatisfaction or aggression towards other states would count for little if the power in question lacked the material means to make good on their grievances or threats. Hence there certainly is value in continued debates over the best way to conceptualise and measure the material conditions that have commonly accompanied the path towards major war – both as a contribution to the explanatory equation in historic cases, and as an aid of
the perception of danger in prospective ones. Yet, the limitations of an exclusive focus on this approach need to be understood. There are both explanatory and practical/normative dimensions to this problem.

In regards to the explanatory dimension, PTT has built in a greater awareness of the limitations of its thesis about the material conditions accompanying the outbreak of major war. PTT does not assume that a war will necessarily occur within a zone of parity, on an understanding (under-specified) that motivations and the perceptions of the benefits or liabilities of a given international order vary considerably. PTT scholars often acknowledge the limited explanatory scope of their model, recommending that it be complemented with theories of the preference formation and decisions of government actors, such as rational choice game theories (Tammen et al. 2000, 41-2, 197-8; Lemke 2002, 38-9). Within MOR, it is possible to identify even more specific and mainly material conditions under which an overtaking form of power transition can take place (albeit uncommonly) without a war with the overtaken power.17 To the extent though that there are explanatory limitations to MOR, as well as PTT, it is on account of their practical consequences for the analysis and understanding of prospective cases of power transition – namely the rise of China – that they are considered here as so important to identify.

2.3: PTT, MOR, and the rise of China

For much of social science, explanatory theories are not purely of academic interest, but rather developed for application towards the solution of real world policy problems. Not surprisingly, the two theories under focus have in the past decade been used to generate policy recommendations, for the US in particular, towards the handling of several major long-term trends affirmed in their importance by both theories. Among these issues, the rise of China has received particular attention.

In applying PTT to the rise of China, the main utility of the theory is its focussing of long-term potential power trends such that a zone of parity with the US can be anticipated at some point in the 21st century. In light of the ‘Phoenix factor’, PTT

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17 MOR’s explanation of the relatively smooth and peaceful late 19th and early 20th century power transition involving the US and Britain is discussed in the next section.
would caution against expecting that even war could set back long-term trends of power redistribution. PTT thus presents the rise of China as something that the US needs to be prepared to adapt to rather than resist. On this basis, a group of prominent PTT theorists, in a collaborative volume published in 2000 (Tammen et al., 153-81), recommended that the US needs simultaneously to: (1) find ways of conditioning and offering incentives for China to become a satisfied power; and, regardless of whether this works (2) to forestall or minimise the erosion of American power and influence by being better and quicker at absorbing Russia and India into the pro-US, pro-NATO strategic camp. The ideal aim would be to condition and eventually absorb China itself into this common ‘status quo’ network and value system.

These PTT theorists did not consider whether Chinese satisfaction or dissatisfaction might be more related to the capacity of the US to accept some degree of change of the status quo (such as the emergence of a state of, at least, parity with the US in military terms within Maritime East Asia). Or whether the expansion of a pro-NATO, pro-US strategic alignment to include Russia and a rising India might equally constitute a shift from the status quo. Besides a normative bias towards the US, these conundrums can be attributed to (a) the lack of a coherently specified concept of the status quo in PTT, and (b) the absence of a coherent and value-neutral complementary concept to the status quo – such as the reworked concept of revisionism developed in this thesis.

This problem is also reflected in historical analysis, where the peaceful overtaking of Britain by the US in the Western Hemisphere is usually described by PTT scholars as the US accepting and integrating into the previous status quo established by Britain (Tammen et al. 2000, 23, 49-50).18 According to the alternative theory developed in subsequent chapters, this is a poor conceptualisation that would be better described as British accommodation, and sometimes appeasement, of American radical revisionism. This is not to argue that the US should necessarily follow this example in handling a rising China in Maritime East Asia. It is to argue that more concrete and useful policy evaluations can be generated by an explanatory account that focuses on

18 The argument has not essentially changed since first articulated in Organski (1958, 323-5).
discerning the conflictual or complementary implications between overlapping status quo-oriented and revisionist strategic agendas.

Mearsheimer in analysing the rise of China begins from a similar starting point as PTT – the projection of potential power trends. Given other aspects of his theory, however, very different recommendations for US policy are generated. Mearsheimer sees two main possibilities for the strategic situation in East Asia in the 21st century, depending on whether China’s high GDP growth rates can be sustained (2001, 393-400). If not sustained, then Mearsheimer believes the US would withdraw from the region and leave Japan to accept the burden of maintaining the balance of power in a multipolar structure with China, Russia and perhaps India. If Chinese growth were sustained, then given China’s overwhelming population base, China would emerge as a potential hegemon with the potential capacity to dominate all local rivals and challenge the US strategic posture in the region. According to Mearsheimer:

[If] China becomes not only a leading producer of cutting-edge technologies, but the world’s wealthiest great power, it would almost certainly use its wealth to build a mighty military machine. Moreover, for sound strategic reasons, it would surely pursue regional hegemony … [and] develop its own version of the Monroe Doctrine … What makes a future Chinese threat so worrisome is that it might be far more powerful and dangerous than any of the potential hegemons that the United States confronted in the twentieth century … China would likely be a more formidable superpower than the United States in the ensuing global competition between them (2001, 401).

Following this assessment at the conclusion of The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, Mearsheimer goes on to make an explicit appeal to the US to abandon ‘constructive engagement’ and pursue ‘containment’ instead:

American policy has sought to integrate China into the world economy and facilitate its rapid economic development, so that it becomes wealthy and, one would hope, content with its present position in the international system. This US policy on China is misguided. A wealthy China would not be a status quo power but an aggressive state determined to achieve regional hegemony… it is
not too late for the United States to reverse course and do what it can to slow the rise of China (2001, 402).

In the decade since, it probably has become too late for the US to slow Chinese economic growth without harming itself and its allies, given increased economic interdependence and the level of the Chinese economy’s embeddedness in regional and global production networks. The main problem, though, is how MOR closes off thinking and deliberation about alternative pathways, reinforcing singular and overly determinate projections, which are in this case remarkably pessimistic. In particular, Mearsheimer’s assumptions regarding the translation of wealth into the maximisation of military strength and the pursuit of hegemony are too inflexible and unconditional. While this is certainly a possibility, it would do better to take a step back from these assumptions and return to the basic underlying driver of Mearsheimer’s states – security.

In his analysis of the rise of the US in the Western Hemisphere, we have already seen Mearsheimer relax somewhat his assumptions regarding the expansionary drive of states, and the drive towards maximising military power (2001, chap 7). Clearly, the US at a certain point placed self-imposed limits upon its territorial expansion in the Western Hemisphere when it was capable of doing otherwise. The US also maintained a relatively modest growth in its land and naval forces both during and in the immediate decades after it had surpassed Britain in potential power terms (around 1890). US naval expansion in the early twentieth century proceeded in fits and starts depending very much on domestic political conditions (O’Brien 1998). Mearsheimer’s reasoning in this case is that America’s earlier expansion to become the dominant land power in North America; its huge (unchallengeable if fully mobilised) reserve of potential power; as well as Britain’s out-of-home region and globally stretched strategic posture, provided the US a margin of security much greater than was the case for any contemporary European great power. In MOR then, a low threat environment and accompanying sense of security can potentially weaken the drive for military or territorial expansion, although not necessarily the drive for local regional hegemony.
But if security is considered to be the most important underlying driver of states’ strategic behaviour, it makes sense to open up this variable to closer scrutiny and ask whether there might be other potential conditions under which great powers can attain a sense of security. MOR assumes that international politics in the contemporary era is qualitatively no different to early eras, and operates according to timeless principles. Nonetheless, it is surely inaccurate to suggest that the nature of international politics is the same now as it was during the era of competing European empires (that is, pre-1945) – the latter of which occupies a full three-quarters of the time period of Mearsheimer’s historical analysis (1792-present).

There is no doubt that sovereign territorial borders are much more stable and unchallenged in the contemporary era than ever previously in history. Norms against imperial expansion have become widespread if not universal. Most states today, and certainly the great powers, do not face as much of an external threat to their physical survival, except in the event they were subject to nuclear attack – an eventuality which mutual arsenals have so far deterred. Further, in Europe during the post-Cold War period we have seen potential regional military great powers such as Germany, France and Britain continue to place self-imposed limits on their national military outlay. They remain integrated within a multilateral alliance structure that depends on the strategic leadership and lion’s share material contribution of an external superpower. These potential regional great powers continue to show no sign of dissatisfaction with this arrangement in a security sense, despite MOR’s predictions throughout the post-Cold War period that the end of NATO and a return to destabilising multipolarity was inevitable (Mearsheimer 1990; 2001, 392-6).

In both Europe and East Asia, most regional states have tended more to trust than distrust the US despite its strategic dominance since the end of the Cold War (Gill et al. 2009; Sutter 2006). This is due in no small part to its relatively consultative approach to alliances, its complete lack of territorial aspiration in these regions, a consistent track record of facilitating rather than obstructing the free flow of commerce and mutual prosperity (Nye Jnr 2002), and the correspondence of its normative preferences and values with many regional states (Green and Twining 2009).
Within East Asia, however, China stands as a chief complainant of the US, which is viewed as the main obstacle to what China defines as the full realisation of its territorial integrity and recognition of its maritime rights and regional interests. Coexistent with this perception of US containment, however, is a contrasting perception that China is emerging within a relatively safe and progressive international environment by historic standards. This situation is officially described as facilitating (since the late-1990s) a 20-year ‘period of strategic opportunity’ for China to enhance its ‘comprehensive national power’ without serious impediments. And besides wariness about US moral encouragement of separatist forces in Tibet and Xinjiang, China knows it faces no realistic threat from the US to its physical existence as a unitary power on the Asian mainland, unless China was to directly threaten the US homeland.

Thus, a case can be made that the rise of China is not playing out in the more fully fledged Hobbesian state of anarchy (however prudent and rational) depicted by MOR. Rather the politico-strategic dynamics can more accurately be depicted according to Wendt’s concept of a Lockean culture of anarchy (1999, chap 6). In a Lockean culture, the mutually accepted and entrenched norm of respect for sovereignty and recognised territorial borders provides for basic existential security. This does not preclude though the emergence of serious disputes and conflicts over frontier boundaries, strategic access and influence, and relative power and status.

As the rise of China will initially play out in a maritime region, within which several key sub-regions contain sizable Chinese territorial and jurisdictional claims, the possibility touted by MOR of a Chinese drive for regional hegemony cannot be discounted. Given, however, that there are specific issues around which the process and outcome of an East Asian power transition can be soundly anticipated to pivot, it makes sense to examine how the actors involved perceive that their security is being affected by these issues and by the positions of the other actors. Given limits to overall existential security threats, examination of the compatibility or conflict between the interests the major players bring to these disputes may hold the key to assessing the conditions upon which a more or less peaceful or conflict-prone power transition might proceed.
Diverting analytical attention in this way is admittedly partly driven by a normative preference for giving peace a chance – or at least conflict minimisation and preservation of the prospects for establishing enduring terms of strategic co-existence or cooperation. Through honing in on the variable and potentially mutable interest definitions of conscious agents (and the motivational structures underpinning such preferences), a framework is opened up for considering possibilities for mutual interest adjustment and conditions for mutual security satisfaction.

There is also an undeniably realistic explanatory logic behind this analytical approach. That is, in terms of temporal sequencing, motivations and interests always emerge prior to the preparation of material capability. As argued in the next chapter, such motivations and interests are often not nearly as opaque and unknowable as MOR in particular presumes. What this means is that a rising state that is ‘dissatisfied’ can often be identified earlier and its possible strategic orientations narrowed down more tangibly and concretely than when material variables alone are employed to gauge these phenomena. Such early assessments in turn provide material that can be used in timely negotiations with a rising state to (a) probe and test the relative conditionality of some of its (and one’s own) interest commitments, and (b) gauge reactions to compromise proposals regarding aspects of a future regional security order.

Thus this matter of causal sequence, whilst important also in historical analysis, is of added import when examining prospective cases of power transition such as the rise of China. In the latter case, attending closely to more prior causes in the causal sequence is essential in terms of offering the most realistic prognosis of possible trajectories and policy options. Examination of the critical realist philosophy of science will further clarify these issues about causation and their implications for theoretical and research methodology issues relevant to the topic at hand.

2.4: Conclusion

The internal critique of PTT and MOR in this chapter has revealed some crucial limitations of employing a predominantly materialist approach to the explanation and understanding of international power transitions.
PTT was useful in highlighting the role of uneven development as a key driver of long-term transformation in international power structures, but the theory (i) has limited explanatory value, and (ii) has a problematic conceptual apparatus. Both problems are attributable to the behaviourist criteria that came to underpin causal analysis within PTT. On one hand, the search for general historical regularities based on the correlation of quantifiable material variables has generated insight only into symptomatic conditions often associated with the incidence of great power war, rather than its causes. On the other hand, the ongoing statistical testing of given propositions, and accompanying debates over adequate means of measurement, has taken precedence over qualitative considerations of the descriptive adequacy of key concepts. A lack of critical conceptual evolution has led to some persistently misleading or inaccurate characterisations of phenomena under study.

Mearsheimer’s even more thoroughly materialist theory was argued to have three advantages over PTT. These include: (i) a more coherent conceptual basis for a capabilities-based approach to measuring power, (ii) inclusion of spatial-geographic variables, and (iii) greater empirical correspondence enabled by a more complex and multi-conditional approach to causal analysis, as well as better concepts. Despite these advantages, MOR’s prioritisation of material conditions and indicators is accompanied by an overly simplified and generalised account of state motivation, as well as a lack of appreciation for the causal power and variable effects of ideas and socialising norms.

Their concepts and measures differ, but both PTT and MOR share a similar method of explanation of the causes of major great power war, along with similar limitations. Both theories give too much explanatory weight to more symptomatic material indicators, and neglect a more direct and in-depth investigation of the perceptions and interests motivating the key powers in specific power transitions. Such neglect (PTT) or over-simplification (MOR) of sequentially prior motivational causes means that the resources of these theories are too imprecise and speculative to be relied on to adequately evaluate possibilities for war and peace in a prospective case of power transition such as the rise of China.
All in all, such deficits highlight the need for a revised theory of power transition that, while retaining and adapting the better insights of these more materialist theories, is able to integrate them into a causal model that gives due recognition to the socio-cultural and ideational bases of state motivation. To do this though, we must first develop a more sophisticated concept of causation.
Chapter 3: Critical Realism, Causation, and Methodology

This chapter makes a transition from a critique of existing theories towards the development of an alternative theoretical and methodological framework for the study of international power transitions. Pivotal to this move is the use of the critical realist philosophy of science, associated principally with the early works of British philosopher Roy Bhaskar. In this chapter, critical realism is applied as both a diagnostic tool (through an *external critique*) and as an aid for theory construction. On a diagnostic level, critical realism’s critique of the positivist concept of causation, along with the alternative concept it provides, helps to identify further limitations of causal analysis within PTT and MOR. On the constructive side, the more sophisticated and multi-layered concept of causation of critical realism allows us to identify and conceptualise a greater diversity of both material and ideational sources of causation, as well as the interaction between them.

Section 3.1 introduces and summarises four concepts comprising the main features of critical realism’s unified philosophy of the natural and social sciences. Following this, I apply the critical realist concept of causation to the subject matter and methodology of this thesis. First, critical realist insights are used to extend the critique of PTT and MOR in sections 3.2 and 3.3. What emerges is the need to locate more accurately the sources of causal sequences in power transitions. In section 3.4, following a critique of neorealist claims about the causal properties of the international system, an alternative ontology is developed. It is argued that causation in power transitions is generated from the variable internal motivations or *interest structures/complexes* of great powers conceived as relatively empowered and sovereign *corporate agents*. Preliminary indications (elaborated further in Chapters 5 and 6) are given as to how such interest structures can be conceived and studied.

Critical realism’s pluralist concept of causation highlights the perennial problem in the social sciences of how to evaluate the relative explanatory power of competing causal claims that (a) apply directly to complex and multi-causal real world environments, and (b) cannot be subject to the powerful arbitrating means of

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19 Bhaskar’s philosophy was initially developed in regard to the natural sciences (Bhaskar 2008 [1975]). It was subsequently extended to the social sciences (Bhaskar, 1998 [1979]).
experimental testing. Critical realists themselves have made little progress towards addressing this problem. In section 3.6, an innovative solution is proposed in the form of a three-level explanatory evaluation process. Further methodological innovations developed include a proposed extension to the critical realist concept of causation (‘ideal-type’ versus ‘conditioned’ causation), and a novel method of closed system \textit{qualitative simulation} for analysis of prospective cases such as the rise of China. On the basis of critical realist principles, such future projection is conceived of as an ‘explanation of possibilities’, rather than as prediction.

\textbf{3.1: Key concepts of critical realism}

\textit{(i) The intransitive and transitive dimensions}

This first concept posits a dichotomy between the existence of a real world and real causal structures (the intransitive dimension) that exist and act independently of the social practice of scientific investigation and production of knowledge (the transitive dimension) (Bhaskar 2008 [1975], 21-4; Bhaskar 1998 [1979], 9-13; Benton and Craib 2001, 123, 129-30). In this view, science is a practice that attempts to evolve an ever deeper and more approximate perception and conceptual modelling of the generative mechanisms that operate in this real world. The intransitive dimension underpins the ‘realist’, whereas the transitive dimension provides the ‘critical’ part of the appellation ‘critical realism’. The content of these concepts is not particularly distinctive, and is shared in common with other forms of scientific realism that similarly challenge both hard empiricist and relativist philosophies of knowledge (Wendt 1999, chap 2). Critical realism’s distinctive contribution lies in its novel justifications for a realist concept of causation, along with its systematic and coherent application across both the natural and social sciences.

While the notion of real world independence continues to be a source of controversy in philosophical circles (Wendt 1999, 52-60), most natural and social scientists find it necessary to assume this in their work if it is to carry the distinction of knowledge providing progressive insight about the world. Still, where empiricist understandings about theory and epistemology are held, ambiguities can arise on this question. To take an example from mainstream IR, much of the discussion in Waltz’s \textit{Theory of International Politics} on the distinction between reality and theoretical representation
can be viewed as consistent with the intransitive/transitive concept. An ambiguity arises, however, when Waltz speaks of the need for theory to move away from reality in order to increase explanatory power (1979, 7-8). If what Waltz meant is that theories and models necessarily focus on particular mechanisms that for explanatory purposes are abstracted from the *totality* of reality, then this would be consistent with the intransitive/transitive concept.

More problematic from the critical realist perspective is Waltz’s statement (1978, 9) about an ‘infinity of possible explanations’ of an infinity of data, given their concept of stratification (see below) in which the world consists of distinct things and structured mechanisms with essentially finite properties. There are often multiple ways, according to critical realists, that things and inter-relationships can be defined and modelled. But the range of possible descriptions and explanations is not infinite. Some descriptions and explanations can be shown empirically to be better knowledge representations than others.

Mearsheimer’s views are less ambiguous in these respects and more consistent with the critical realist view. He argues that theories, while certainly human constructions and simplifications of reality, should nonetheless be conceived as attempts to accurately describe and explain observable reality – upon which criteria they prosper or fall (2001, 8-12). While the founders of PTT do not raise this issue directly, they frequently write as if the goal of their enterprise were to uncover and describe real causal conditions that operate regardless of whether perceived by conscious human agents.

As theoretical constructions, the works of Waltz, Mearsheimer, and Organski generally concur in practice with a key implication of the intransitive/transitive distinction. That is, the process of concept building and imaginative modelling that builds descriptions and causal hypotheses out of existing linguistic components and metaphors is just as important as empirical observation and the testing of models in the scientific process (Bhaskar 2008, 185-99, 118-26; Bhaskar 1998, 49-50). Less explicitly acknowledged within mainstream IR is the notion that the content, fit and inter-relationship of a model’s conceptual descriptions are equally important in debates about empirical validity as the statistical testing of given propositions.
Neglect of this dimension as a site of scrutiny and examination has been a particular problem within PTT.

The conceptual dimension within social scientific work is not just about getting descriptions right (or avoiding bad ones). It is also about recognising how questioning the descriptive fit or inter-relationship of already existing concepts can itself generate new insights and contribute to progress in knowledge. Problematising a well-known concept, and probing its logic and application to empirically observed phenomena, can potentially enhance its explanatory utility. This is precisely the treatment given to the concept of revisionism in this thesis, whose redefinition, and indeed reinvention, has proceeded in back-and-forth interplay between the probing of internal connotation/logic and the rigorous testing of empirical fit with diverse historical examples. The alternative power transition model developed later in Part I emerges principally out of the reinvention of the definition and inter-relationship of several familiar IR concepts, most notably revisionism.

(ii) Causal powers

Critical realism offers a concept of causation that contrasts considerably with the one most commonly assumed across the rationalist/reflectivist or positivist/post-positivist spectrum within IR. As Milja Kurki (2008, chaps 1 and 3) has argued, the most common understanding of causation within IR throughout the post-war period to the present day derives from what critical realists refer to as the Humean account of causation.

Humean precepts on causation underpinned various 20th century positivist philosophies and the behavioural revolution in the social sciences. Derived from a position of philosophical scepticism, 18th century Scottish philosopher David Hume established his concept of causation upon empirical, but non-realist, grounds. Hume argued that human beings could have no knowledge of the nature, ultimate source and meaning of causal powers. Relations of cause and effect are associations made by the human imagination out of habit derived from the sense perception of a constant conjoining of the same events. Upon this sceptical and subjective human perceptual

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20 For a more neutral account of Hume’s ideas on causation than provided by the critical realist critique, see Coventry (2007, chaps 6 and 7).
basis, the Humean concept goes on to limit the legitimate derivation of causal relationships to the observed regularity of events in the \textit{specific} sense that whenever event X is observed, event Y is the expected result (when X, then Y).

Critical realists, following Bhaskar, refer to this uniform relationship between a particular cause (or set of causal conditions) and a particular effect as \textit{regularity-determinism} based on the perception of \textit{invariant empirical regularities} (Bhaskar 2008, 69-79). In this thesis, however, the description ‘uniform regularity statements’ is argued as more preferable on the grounds that (a) it better encompasses the probabilistic uses that have also been made of this concept of causation. Moreover, it will be argued later in this chapter that (b) there is still a sense, consistent with but not acknowledged within critical realism, in which observed regularity remains as a crucial marker of causation – uniform or otherwise.

However labelled, this thesis concurs with critical realism that conceiving causation in terms of uniform regularity statements is too narrow a criterion, and provides an unrealistic depiction of how cause and effect operates in the observable world. To the extent that many reflectivists and constructivists in IR also equate causal analysis with the Humean concept, the ways in which so-called ‘constitutive’ ideational and social structural analysis are also loaded with causal assumptions tends to be obscured (Kurki 2008, chap 4, 178-82).

Bhaskar agrees with Hume that the ultimate causes and drivers of the powers operating in the universe are unknowable. Bhaskar nonetheless defines causal analysis (including causal laws) as an attempt at real description and explanation of the \textit{tendencies} of the innate powers (that is, the capabilities, liabilities, and ways of acting) of identifiable things under certain conditions (2008, 45-56, 229-38). When applied to the social sciences, this notion of causal powers is transferred to the motivations and \textit{reasons} held by conscious human agents for wanting to, intending to, or actually acting in a certain way (1998, 90-7). Social/ideational structures are also argued to possess causal powers in so far as they \textit{pre-exist} and shape (enable or constrain) the motivated activity of human agents that collectively \textit{reproduce} and sometimes \textit{transform} these structures (1998, chap 2).
Bhaskar’s concept of causation thus is based on ontology rather than epistemology. That is, a belief in the existence of real causal powers/tendencies located in real things, agents and structures that are in some measure autonomously constituted. Underpinning this ontology-based concept of causation are two further concepts – the stratification of phenomena, and the distinction between causation operating in open and closed systems.

(iii) Stratification and emergence

This concept is critical realism’s solution to the problems of reductionism and infinite regress in the philosophy of causation. These problems in fact disappear in the face of critical realism’s conception of phenomena as differentially structured, or stratified (Bhaskar 2008, 163-85; Collier 1994, chap 4; Benton and Craib 2001, 124-8).

The basis of the argument is that at certain points during the evolution of the universe, the active or dormant tendencies of relatively more basic causal entities have, under certain conditions, driven the emergence of new macro-structural relationships and mechanisms that have acquired distinct causal powers/tendencies of their own. The move from sub-atomic matter, to atoms, to molecules, to higher order chemical structures such as proteins, to the living cell, to the emergence of all sorts of multi-cellular biological systems and organisms; all these steps reflect the process of stratification. Critical realism also argues for the materially emergent properties of mind in human beings (Bhaskar 1998, chap 3), which is in turn the basis for arguments about agency and the causal power of the social/ideational.

Critical realism recognises that the object of study at a certain stratum is always causally constituted from or affected by powers operating at more micro- and often more macro-level strata as well. The argument about stratification is thus not about the causal independence of any stratum of observed reality (which is impossible). Rather it is about the integrity and relative permanence of structured natural or social/ideational/psychological mechanisms with certain determinate features and tendencies. Such mechanism structures are composed of relations of natural necessity

21 For instance, evolved biological organisms play some role in determining which chemical and physical laws are operative through an ability to self-select many of their own action contexts – the experiences to be avoided or sought out. The latter situation arises, for example, every time one decides whether or not to let one’s hand be roasted on a naked flame.
(or necessary connections) between entities and variables that are identified (more or less successfully) through the work of science, and represented in hypothesised explanatory models and laws. Far from simply cataloguing and systematising surface events, science is viewed as the progressive investigative penetration, and ever more approximate conceptualisation, of the deeper and, at least initially, unobservable real structures and mechanisms that constitute the natural and social worlds.

(iv) Open and closed systems

Critical realism conceives a crucial distinction between how causation operates within open and closed systems respectively (Benton and Craib 2001, 123-4, 128-9). As Bhaskar argues, the Humean concept of causation is so unsatisfactory because, for the most part,\(^{22}\) it is limited in its application to the closed conditions of an experiment where the behaviour of mechanisms is manipulated in isolation from intervening variables. Nature outside the laboratory, however, like large societies (and therefore politics and international relations), most usually operates on the basis of an open system.

The corollary is that both the social and natural sciences (outside controlled closed system conditions) are mostly explanatory, and not commonly predictive in any precise or consistent sense. In the open environment of nature, an identified causal mechanism may or may not be expressed, or only partially expressed, given its interaction and interdependency with a countless multitude of other causal mechanisms in its environment. This is the basis for Bhaskar’s conceiving of natural causal laws as tendencies rather than invariant empirical regularities. Such tendencies, under numerous possible conditions, ‘may be possessed unexercised, exercised unrealised [or unfulfilled], and realised unperceived (or undetected) by men’ (Bhaskar 2008, 18).

In the social sciences, and not least IR, closed experimentation is impossible. Analysts thus face a highly complicated multi-causal environment composed of multiple causal agents and structures interacting in complex ways that can often be unexpected, given

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\(^{22}\) Enduringly (but ultimately still only temporarily) undisturbed structures such as the orbits of the planets in the solar system constitute natural closed systems – but they are the more the exception than the rule.
that we can never know all the factors that might be, or become, causally relevant in a given context. Such open systems generally preclude the possibility for reliable or precise means of prediction – at least beyond some forms of more immediate-term forecasting in which the multiple necessary conditions and trends are already prepared and actively in trajectory. For Bhaskar, the upshot of this is that ‘the criteria for the rational development and replacement of theories in social science must be explanatory’ rather than predictive (1998, 45-6).

Having provided a basic outline of the critical realist concept of causation, we can now focus more specifically on its application to the subject matter and methodology of this thesis. We will begin by returning to the theories of power transition that were critically examined in the previous chapter.

3.2: Critical realism and PTT

It is not difficult to perceive how critical realism could explain the limited explanatory value of PTT. International politics operates in an open system, that is, a world of manifold interactive causal conditions. PTT has a narrow and rather abstract causal focus – chiefly, the posited relationship between a structure of (usually bilateral) material parity with the incidence of war. It is a causal relationship, moreover, conceived in terms of a Humean uniform regularity statement. A fixed set of causal conditions are stipulated (material parity, sometimes combined with a surrogate material variable to indicate satisfaction/dissatisfaction) and related to a single category of behaviour (the initiation of war or its absence).

Critical realism provides grounds for being sceptical (at least initially) towards Humean approaches to causal analysis that are applied to social phenomena operating in open systems. In the case of PTT, such scepticism can be applied to question whether the stipulated relationship between parity and war really is probabilistic. Key to this is whether or not there exists an apparent natural necessity or necessary connection linking the alleged cause and effect (Bhaskar 2008, 183-5, 201-2). With causes conceived as mechanisms, critical realism draws attention to the qualitative dimensions of explanation in science, both natural and social. That is, the need to observe and conceptually describe the relationships arising from the intrinsic
properties and roles of the parts that jointly constitute a perceived causal structure. If a qualitative description linking and arranging correlated variables into an empirically sound and logically coherent mechanism structure cannot be made, it is doubtful whether a meaningful causal proposition has been formulated (however well correlated) (Dessler 1991). This is crucial for a theory like PTT that uses such small aggregations of case samples to correlative test its propositions.

The causal link between parity and war is more or less indirect depending on whether GDP/capita measures are employed alone or together with military measures. As a measure of potential economic and human resources, and to some extent industrial modernisation, GDP/capita indicates some crucial conditions needed to build and develop competitive armed forces. However, it cannot indicate the degree to which a state will translate such potential resources into military development. Without a further explanatory hypothesis linking GDP/capita levels with varying levels of state military development, there would be no link between GDP/capita and war that could constitute a necessary connection.

In some recognition of this, PTT further stipulates the condition of a challenger state’s satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the status quo. In studies where this variable is operationalised in empirical tests (Kugler and Lemke 1996; Lemke 2002), the tendency has been to develop and use a surrogate material indicator. The two most common are military ones – extraordinary military build-ups, and the similarity or dissimilarity of alliance portfolios. The constitutional linkage between these variables and war is closer than is the case with GDP/capita. Both the products of military investment and brokered alliances are essential instruments of warfare. But they are only instruments; they do not behave or act of their own accord. What causal powers they do possess are activated and delimited in their use by other causal sources – namely, the authorisation of governments directed by motivated human agents. GDP/capita and military indicators are thus better conceived as dependent variables rather than as independent variables within the chain of causation effecting war and peace (a Y more than an X in ‘when X, then Y’).

On the question of whether the parity-war thesis is genuinely probabilistic, at the very least the satisfaction/dissatisfaction variable needs to be factored in. Yet, both the
definition of this variable and the measures used to operationalise it do not provide for a convincing argument about causal necessity. Military build-ups and alliances can deter as well as enable war. Nor does the general notion of dissatisfaction with one’s position in a power hierarchy necessarily imply that a state will go to war. Logically, and in the absence of other contrary motivations, the reaching of parity or an overtaking to become the number one military power might itself provide for satisfaction.

Ultimately, whether or not a war occurs during a power transition depends on whether a state develops and is committed to objectives that require war in order to be realised. That is, objectives that imply the need for forcible physical resistance towards the conservative or expansionary objectives committed to by other powers. Such objectives, moreover, generally relate to the governance or structure of power within tangible geographic spaces. In this sense, dissatisfaction is another dependent variable, in that it depends on particular types of unfulfilled objectives being present at the core of a state’s motivational disposition.

In short, PTT’s formulation of the causes of war in a power transition does not capture any direct chain of causal necessity. For GDP/capita to be meaningful as an enabling condition for war, states must have access to the right resources and the will to translate wealth into a modern competitive military. Such an orientation in turn depends on dissatisfaction, which, to be causally meaningful here, depends on states committing to geo-strategic objectives that require military contestation for their fulfilment. Only the latter provides the relevant causal connotations within the other claims – which, of course, are those made within PTT. Moreover, to understand the nature and level of commitment of states to the latter sort of geo-strategic objectives, we need to go even further back down the causal chain to the perceptions and interest structures that drive and perpetuate such motivations.

Given that PTT’s causal claims can be shown to be dependent on other unspecified causes, it is problematic to view the formulations of this theory as genuinely probabilistic. Whatever validity the zone of parity thesis might have as a motivating condition for war is absolutely contingent on the existence of certain types of state objectives that remain unspecified and un-theorised within PTT itself. As a result,
PTT cannot generate any reliable prognosis about the chances for war or conditions for peace in a prospective power transition such as the rise of China. Instead, the above analysis implies that once a potential zone of parity has been identified through GDP projections, any methodology designed to assess the potential for war needs alternatively to encompass (a) the identification of geo-strategic agendas that tangibly conflict, and (b) investigation into the content and nature of the interest structures that are causing the pursuit of such agendas.

### 3.3: Critical realism and MOR

In contrast to PTT, the more complex and varied conceptual apparatus of MOR is relatively more amenable to open system analysis. MOR is less parsimonious and more precise in its conceptual definitions of a wider range of general causal conditions. Mearsheimer’s application of his theory to historical cases for empirical testing demonstrates a comparatively more multi-causal perspective on the dynamics of international politics.

That said, MOR limits itself mostly to explanation in materialist terms. Mearsheimer’s world of international politics largely implies an inter-play of unconscious material forces and drives. In his depiction of this world, however, he is quite eclectic in the choice and use of methods. Mearsheimer only once uses and tests a Humean-type regularity statement. Similar to PTT, this occurs in his chapter on the causes of great power war where he seeks to correlate the percentage of years (since 1792) that involved great power war in European bipolar, balanced multipolar and unbalanced multipolar systems respectively (2001, chap 9). Unlike PTT though, MOR elsewhere uses extensive qualitative analysis and more varied concepts to describe and explain a wider range of (largely material) conditions operative in particular cases (2001, chaps 6-8).

MOR shares with PTT the tendency to represent key causal variables according to brute material indicators. There is, of course, a really existing brute material dimension to politics. Oceans, mountains, distance and climatic conditions limit the

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23 The concept of ‘brute materialism’ is Wendt’s (1999, chap 3), and is used to denote any aspect of the unconscious or inanimate material dimensions of existence.
free movement of people in the absence of suitably constituted technologies to aid the overcoming of physical barriers. Once the causal powers of weapons have been activated they exercise real destructive effects on people, buildings, terrain and machines. Various resources and technologies have specific and usually measurable capacities and limitations that make a difference to states obtaining in both the brute material and human political spheres.

Obviously though, any account of political life would make no sense in the absence of some concept of either human agency or human nature. The development and accumulation of military arsenals only means something to us in political terms if we can know, or otherwise desire to guess, the reasons and objectives to which people intend to use them. In political contexts, even something like an ocean barrier (MOR’s ‘stopping power of water’) presupposes not just physical limitation, but psychological predisposition and effect. In the latter case, the ‘stopping power’ assumes innate social psychological tendencies such as the survival-mindedness of great powers (leading to minimally adequate coastal area defences); a desire generally to win rather than lose any physical contest they initiate; and a desire to minimise the harm on one’s own side.

Critical realism would not _pre-emptively_ exclude the possibility that certain general tendencies within human nature might commonly manifest when conditioned within certain broad social organisational arrangements (the sovereign state) and international material-systemic constraints. It may also be that terms such as ‘survival’, ‘security’ and ‘self-help’ are useful somehow in capturing important aspects about how state interests and motivations are generally constituted.

Several of the fundamental generalising arguments of neorealism, however, are flawed. Neorealist arguments about systemic causation and state motivation raise fundamental issues about ontology and the location of genuine structural sources of causation. The following section systematically addresses these issues through (a) a critique of the neorealist account of systemic causation in international politics, and (b) the advancement of an alternative ontology and methodology for analysing great power military-security relations based on critical realist principles.
3.4: Locating causation in power transitions

In any social science, a fundamental task is the ontological one of identifying objects of study, and, in particular, of distinguishing between various relative agents and macro-structures (or unitary actors and systems). Such preliminary concepts embody implicit hypotheses about causation, and strongly influence the nature of the resulting theory (Wight 2006).

Within IR, every theory makes some form of distinction between these two basic components of social scientific analysis, however defined. In treating the unit part of the equation, initial judgements need to be made as to whether, or to what extent, the actor is conceived as an empowered agent capable of creating its own agenda and manipulating its environment. Or conversely, the extent or manner in which it is dominated by influences beyond its capacity to control. On the latter, decisions need to be made about the relative influence of environmental and internal unit-level factors, with the latter further dividing into considerations of biological/unconscious and ideational/institutional sources of motivation.

On the system/macro-structure side, judgements need to be made about whether such structures are simply the sum outcome of the interaction or negotiation between the agendas of relatively empowered (that is, autonomous agenda-setting) agents. Or conversely, the extent to which that system has intrinsic causal properties that produce an independent conditioning influence on the preferences and strategies of all the unit-level actors – whether individuals, organisations or states.

3.4.1: Neorealism and the international system

Since the advent of neorealism, a key locus of debate in IR has turned on how to characterise the macro-structural side of the equation. Within neorealism, the international system is said to possess intrinsic causal properties that condition the preferences and strategies of states. The two major systemic causal factors posited initially by Waltz and carried over into MOR, are the underlying condition of international anarchy, and the distribution of capabilities prevailing at a given time (or polarity).
Anarchy is conceived as the underlying cause of endemic security competition, rather than a cause of particular international wars (Waltz 1979, chap 6; Mearsheimer 2001, chap 2). Anarchy is, however, viewed as a crucial enabling condition that makes international war possible. In regard to the distribution of capabilities, various forms of polarity are purported to have a somewhat more direct influence on the probability of war than anarchy in itself – bipolarity is seen as more stable than multipolarity (Waltz 1979, chap 8; Mearsheimer 2001, 337-44). This latter factor, however, is still not regarded as the cause of war and peace in itself or in isolation.

In MOR though, the cause of major great power war does become more directly associated with a particular form of polarity, not identified in Waltz’s theory, referred to as ‘unbalanced multipolarity’ (2001, 344-6). In MOR, the structure of unbalanced multipolarity arises with the emergence of a ‘potential hegemon’ that takes the lead in both immediately available weaponry and rapidly mobilisable potential power, threatening the security of many other states in a region. Mearsheimer’s unbalanced multipolarity is the most obvious case within neorealism in which an alleged systemic cause is attributed to a situation that could just as easily, and as argued here more convincingly, be depicted in terms of the interaction of specific agent-level agendas and interest perceptions. This same observation in fact applies to all systemic causal claims advanced within neorealism.

In neorealism, and the topic of power transition, we are dealing primarily with explanatory accounts of great power relations. Great powers by definition are states that possess material capabilities substantially greater than the other middle and small powers in a region. Historically, the number of great powers in regions has remained well within single digits, and usually towards the more concentrated end of the spectrum (Kaufman et al. 2007).

Accordingly, Waltz, in making analogies between market theories and international politics, often bases his comparison on the behaviour of actors in oligopoly markets (1979, 103-4, 129-38; Little 2007, 176-80). Yet, this is something of a false analogy. Corporations comprising an oligopoly are in some ways not the most powerful actors, or at least not the only most powerful actors, shaping the market system. They do not
have sovereign rights, and they are not solely decisive in determining the regulatory framework within which they are required, and if necessary forced, to operate. In the contemporary age they do not have their own armies. Companies comprising oligopoly markets are thus constrained in important ways and to differing extents by the power and rights of states, singly or in cooperation. That is, they operate in a broader political-legal systemic framework that greatly delimits the scope of their activities and interests.

States, on the other hand, according to their mutually recognised sovereign entitlements, are not so constrained by external formal legal constraints. This includes any attempts to deny the right of a state to develop material capabilities, especially the means of security, beyond an externally imposed limited mandate. For a sovereign actor, its very will (however actualised through its domestic arrangements) is law within its domain. Consequently, any agreements, treaties and institutions it resolves to enter into with other sovereign entities are similarly an expression of this will. Further, for a sovereign state, any later unilateral abrogation or violation of such agreements, with the exception arguably of the recognition of the sovereign existence of other states, is not illegal in any sense (although may still be anti-social, and thus court consequences such as ostracisation or punitive responses from other states). States that are recognised as sovereign thus effectively possess a residual right of rebellion towards the terms of international society that is much broader than is the case for citizens in even the most liberal domestic regimes.

At first glance, such points might seem only to reinforce the case for neorealism. Closer scrutiny of these propositions, however, points instead towards an undermining of neorealist claims about the scope of the intrinsic causal properties alleged to emanate from the international system. On anarchy, for instance, rather than viewing this structural condition as primarily a cause, it is even more salient to view it as an effect of the desire of states and their populations to maintain the nation-state as the seat of sovereign agency. This is both sequentially more accurate, and less likely to prejudice considerations of the possibilities for cooperation or conflict, order or disorder within the condition of anarchy (or dispersed sovereignty). The wills of

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24 The British and Dutch East India Companies for instance once had the powers to wage war and conduct their own foreign policy.
sovereign states can, considered in the abstract, potentially be directed towards cooperation as much as zero-sum competitive goals.

The only intrinsic conditioning effect of the structure of anarchy is the relative added uncertainty (in comparison to well-established domestic polities) of the permanence and reliability of other states’ commitments to negotiated treaties, agreements and understandings. Even this point, though, can be over-estimated in terms of its alleged inhibiting effects on cooperation.

The logic of neorealism is most concerned with effects of uncertainty on states’ military-security behaviour. According to this logic, to ensure survival and sovereign independence, states are driven either to remain competitive with (defensive realism) or eclipse (MOR) the military power of rival security seekers. To do this, states use both internal balancing (military build-up) and/or external balancing (alliance). Yet, there is no convincing reason why peer great powers that have been erstwhile rivals cannot, in principle, potentially achieve cooperation and enduring concord in the military-security domain. Such a possibility is raised in some streams of defensive realism, where a levelling out of competitive impulses and consensus on a well-balanced mutual military-security disposition is conceivable under certain conditions (Jervis 1978; Glaser 199525; Van Evera 1998). To the extent that MOR in particular contradicts such an expectation, further defence of the possibility for great power security cooperation, beyond the confines of neorealism, can be made from two angles.

(i) An exaggerated uncertainty argument
First, we need to focus further on MOR’s over-estimation of the uncertainty generated by the residual right of rebellion in a system of dispersed sovereignty. One of Mearsheimer’s fundamental propositions is that – given great powers always possess some form of offensive military capacity and are not subject to any higher authority – ‘states can never be certain about other states’ intentions’ (2001, 30-1). From this arises a relentlessly circular argument and self-fulfilling prophecy: endemic uncertainty requires a state to assume and act as if others have aggressive intentions,

25 Glaser, whose most recent work (2010) has become more eclectic and normative, no longer considers himself a neorealist.
which indeed they will have, given endemic uncertainty and the fact that other states will, correctly, ascribe aggressive intentions to the state in question. The paradox is that intentions in this process actually do come to be assumed as knowable. For the paradox to be coherent, though, it must be assumed that the leaders and societies of some great powers, prior to their inevitable adoption of this deliberative logic, might have initially possessed some less aggressive or more idealistic cooperative tendencies.

The idea that states can never initially be certain of other states’ intentions is only true in the trivial sense that they are ‘impossible to divine with 100 percent certainty’ (2001, 31). At slightly less absolute odds there is in fact much that can be understood about the intentions of other states, for two reasons.

First, states are corporate rather than individual human agents (Wendt 1999, chap 5). People can withhold as much information as they please through silence. Corporate actors must maintain communicative channels between its members that enable the group’s values, interests, and agendas to be defined, propagated, re-negotiated and re-defined. Corporate agents are often able to maintain a degree of secrecy or coded communications. However, in complex and populous corporate bodies like states, public communication is unavoidable and cannot be completely guarded from external scrutiny. Such public communications, moreover, such as media, educational and official government materials, are in fact very revealing. This may even be especially the case in authoritarian states where a clearly defined and comprehensive political (including foreign policy) consensus is often propagated as the precondition for a mobilisable populous. The lines of revealed debate, whether in liberal-democratic or authoritarian systems, are equally informative.

To the extent that interests defined or debated within a national discourse have implications for the interests of other states, these issues of intention in turn become the substance of inter-state negotiation. This leads to the second weakness of the endemic uncertainty argument, which is that there are ways for states to probe and assess the credibility of commitments to or denial of intentions indicated in the national discourse. This can be done, in part, through the probity of diplomatic communication. Modern means of satellite surveillance can also today better track
any corresponding military build-ups. Moreover, conflicting interest commitments often get confirmed in the course of lower intensity diplomatic or military confrontations. In the latter situation, the disputing parties are especially compelled to provide some form of open justification for their standpoints, which often contain important indications of official strategic objectives. Specific and tangible reasons for why conflict might be possible in a prospective power transition can hence be tracked quite early, as well as the potential scope for interest complementarity and peace.

(ii) An unverified simplification of state motivation
MOR could always fall back, though, on a more psychologically grounded argument about the security-seeking behaviour of states. When neorealists argue about the propensity of states to pursue relative power gains, they seek to avoid grounding their case on the basis of a hard-wired ‘will to power’ in human nature, as the classical realist Morgenthau did (2006, chap 1).26 Instead, the source of the pursuit of power lies in the effects that anarchy and the prevailing distribution of power have on state security. Mearsheimer, in particular, seeks to differentiate his structural account from what he terms ‘human nature realism’ (2001, 18-22). Yet, this structural account would be impossible in absence of the assumptions he makes regarding the prior psychological disposition of the state units whose behaviour the structure of the international system is said to affect.

MOR, in fact, is as much dependent on an account of human nature as any other. MOR’s account of state motivation is relatively more specific than in Waltz’s theory.27 The psychological dimension of the theory is nonetheless its most simplified, under-examined and unverified component. For MOR to be broadly sustained on some level, efforts ultimately need to be made to better define, explain and verify the notion that there exist some real general tendencies of human nature that regularly manifest when conditioned within certain broad social organisational arrangements (the state) and international material constraints. To do this, some connection would need to be made with the discipline of psychology, and especially

26 Nietzsche, unsurprisingly, was a key formative influence on Morgenthau’s intellectual development (Frei 2001).
27 Waltz deliberately avoids elaborating beyond a vague base assumption that states are motivated by survival and security (1979, 91-2).
social psychology. Arguments about general human nature, after all, presuppose common human cognitive mechanisms and behavioural tendencies.

Better demonstrating and explaining some aspects of generality in state motivations across time and space would not necessarily preclude similarly important, and sometimes even more decisive, aspects of variability. MOR itself has developed a broad palette of variously combining material conditions that are depicted as affecting the strategic choices or options of states in variable ways, even whilst retaining some underlying constant motivations. Mearsheimer is even concerned that the US will continue to be overly influenced by liberal ideology and fail to do what his theory deems as necessary to undermine the rise of China. Neoclassical realists, whilst adhering to the neorealist claim about the primacy of systemic factors, have expanded their accounts to include a focus on domestic political and ideational variables (Lobell et al. 2009). They do so to explain (a) deviations from behaviour that would normally be expected from a neorealist systemic account, and (b) the policy choices of states in less constrained strategic situations judged to allow for greater value discretion.

Whatever the precise ratio of generality and variability in the motivational disposition of states, the question remains whether Waltz was correct to posit the existence of an emergent stratum at the level of the international system, and that arises from the material balance of power. The question is not whether an international system exists. It is whether the system operates as an autonomous stratum with intrinsic causal properties, or is simply a formal outcome or effect of the interacting agendas of empowered agents. My argument leans strongly towards the latter conception. Waltz’s move to focus on a material-systemic account of causation, along with his criticism in general of ‘reductionist’ accounts of international politics based on unit-level causes and interactive analysis, is viewed here as a misstep.

Analysis of international power politics inevitably entails a limited number of primary actors – the great powers. This, together with the fact that they are sovereign, means they possess a special capacity to influence the dynamics of the system through the very acts of defining their interest preferences and prosecuting their will. Great

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28 For analyses of numerous historic cases argued as defying neorealist expectations about either the balancing or power maximising behaviour of states, see contributions in (May et al. 2010).
powers are both empowered and constrained agents. Yet, to the extent that they are constrained, this is not simply the result of the objective condition of the material capabilities of other powers. Rather, it is the scope of ambition and interactive implications of particular interests referring to specific strategic spaces that most impacts on a given state’s sense of frustration, forbearance or satisfaction with its security situation, and its relative sense of feeling constrained or not. And as even Mearsheimer would concede, such particular interest definitions are based on perceptions of a complex strategic situation that to some degree are irreducibly subjective – the product of a limited and finite outlook.

Perceptions, however, are also invariably built up from sources outside the scope of neorealism, namely the internal socio-political life of states. Shared, and often institutionalised, perceptions of national identity (about its territory, history and deserved status), as well as various acculturated values and theoretical outlooks often influence the specific agendas of states in ways that have crucial effects on the interactive dynamics in the international system. States’ international orientations and interests are also commonly influenced by domestic economic interest demographics that acquire strategic stakes in the security of various regions and international spaces beyond its borders (Narizny 2007; Layne 2006).

The approach taken to analysing great power relations and power transition in this thesis accordingly is agent-based and interactive, rather than systemic or macro-structural. A word, however, needs to be said in regards to the alternative and non-material forms of macro-structural explanation in IR theory. Namely, those advanced by constructivists such as Wendt (as well as English school theorists29) on the emergence of shared norms and institutions that constitute international society.

3.4.2: Wendt’s account of international structure

As noted in the previous chapter, Wendt’s arguments about the possibility for different cultures of anarchy are considered here as compelling, and concur with the above arguments about the narrow intrinsic causal properties of anarchy (1999, chap

29 The foundational work of the English School is Bull (1977).
6). Arguably, a more convincing distinction between the Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian dynamics might have been made between a regressive Hobbesian ‘condition’ (a reversion perhaps to more instinctive survival responses provoked by at least one particularly aggressive and ambitious state) and Lockean and Kantian ‘cultures’ of anarchy. Wendt’s arguments about the progressive emergence of Lockean and (within Europe and across the North Atlantic at least) Kantian international social strata do, nonetheless, reflect important aspects of historical and contemporary international relations.

Yet, when it comes to international power transitions, I argue the essential impetus of the phenomenon to be located in unilateral perceptions of security needs, interests, and opportunities, rather than in any pre-existing or emerging corpus of shared norms (although the latter can potentially play some role in shaping or delimiting the former). This judgement extends no less to the prospective case that is emerging in East Asia through the rise of China.

The contemporary social dynamic in East Asia is largely Lockean, although relations within and across the US alliance network in the region bear more Kantian qualities. Certain territorial/jurisdictional/strategic disputes in the region have potential under certain circumstances to push great power relations in the region from rivalry to enmity. A full reversion to a Hobbesian condition though (with the accompanying threats to existential survival) would probably require some form of nuclear threat escalation between China and the US. At any rate, the thinness of the normative consensus on which the Lockean culture of anarchy rests, as well as the still very rivalrous great power strategic relations at play in contemporary East Asia, reinforces the case for favouring agent-level and interaction based analysis.

This does not mean that a process of resolving conflicts of interest and establishing a great power compromise consensus for regional security order might not eventually facilitate the emergence of a more fully fledged Kantian stage stratum of enduring security community. Even here though, common norms and institutions would have to be reproduced through the separate national political/legal and educational/propaganda systems of a limited number of social members bearing huge
material power differentials between them. Thus it is unclear whether the emergence of such a security community could ever be described as an autonomous macro-level stratum. At any rate, strategic and security policy outlooks among contemporary East Asian great powers persist in reflecting more an acculturation from domestic (and alliance) sources than a common inter-relational consensus.

3.4.3: An alternative view of structural analysis

In accordance with critical realism, taking a predominantly agent- and interaction-level approach does not necessarily make one’s analysis any less structural. From a critical realist perspective, all forms of causes, including those sourced from ideas, can be conceived as operating in the manner of structured mechanisms. Distinction between paradigms of social scientific explanation consists mostly of differences in the conception of the strata at which the most essential causal phenomena are claimed to be located. The difference is not one between structural and non-structural forms of explanation.

Critical realism, with its positing of the predominance of open system dynamics in nature and society alike, implies the need for multi-causal accounts that can capture the interaction of multiple causal mechanisms operating at different strata. To understand how the critique of neorealism remains consistent with this outlook, we need to again distinguish between systems that truly act as causal mechanisms, and those that are the systemic outcome of causal mechanisms operating at other levels. This time, the arguments will be extended in reference to neorealism’s other system-level causal theses about polarity.

Waltz (1979, chap 8) and Mearsheimer (2001, chap 9) both argue that international or regional systems structured according to bipolar or multipolar configurations are more and less stable respectively. Bipolar systems are stable because each great power has only one major adversary to balance against and so strategic moves can be calculated more predictably. Multipolar systems are inherently more unstable because (a) there are a greater number of potential conflict dyads, and (b) the balance of power is more difficult to calculate due to shifting alignments and shifting asymmetries in states’
national power. The greater uncertainty is said to increase insecurity, and so generate state policies that perpetuate the uncertainties.

A key problem with Waltz’s and Mearsheimer’s argument is that it is based on a relatively narrow range of historical experience. Arguments about bipolarity are based solely on the Cold War, while arguments about multipolarity are based on recent centuries of European history alone. Yet, even within this historical context, there were lengthy periods in the 19th century of relative peace and stability among the great powers in a multipolar Europe. Mearsheimer covers this, to a degree, with his argument that balanced multipolarity is less prone to system-wide war than unbalanced multipolar orders involving a potential hegemon (2001, chap 9). However, his sample is too narrow to enable his distinctions between polarities – especially between bipolar and multipolar orders – to be generalisable beyond the particular cases he uses and made the basis for a probability argument. What is more, if the rigid nature of the alliances on the European continent (minus Britain) that preceded WWI is taken into account, it seems more appropriate to define the polarity in the decade or two preceding the war as bipolar (see next chapter).

Similarly, unipolar orders can be stable and relatively enduring, such as seen in the past century of US strategic hegemony in the Western Hemisphere (established, moreover, through a power transition process that was peaceful), and recent decades of US primacy in Maritime East Asia. On other occasions, they have been unstable and short-lived, such as the decade of Napoleonic French or half-decade of Nazi German supremacy in Europe.

An alternative interpretation of this same historical record, and the one advanced here, is that the dynamics of a form of polarity cannot be anticipated in the absence of an understanding of the particular interests, strategies and worldviews at play. That is, the ways in which the implications of various subjectively derived national agendas overlap and interact within specific geographical contexts and material constraints. In the abstract, and similar to the case of anarchy, an increase in the number of great

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30 On the operations of the Concert of Europe from 1815-48, see contributions in (Kupchan et al. 2001). For a thorough overview of the management of crises between 1870-1914, see Part II of Choucri and North (1975).
power dyadic relationships in a region provides just as much prospect for an increase in the volume of inter-state cooperative agreements, as it does for an increase in potential sources of dissatisfaction, division and conflict.

If there are any general causal effects that can be associated with polarity, they are limited to the notion that the great powers are so relatively more capable and materially present (or potentially so), that this frequently causes other states (including the great powers between themselves) to place these states at the centre of their military-security planning. Beyond this, there are no intrinsic dynamics (peaceful/stable, conflict-prone/adversarial) to various forms of polarity in themselves. Neither can patterns of alliance be predicted in abstract from consideration of the case-specific interests of the states involved.

Thus to the extent then that the external environment inevitably affects foreign policy, states are not simply responding to a set geometrical system of material variables with a set solution. The process rather involves interpreting the way in which the interests and potential orientation of other states might impact on the formation or adjustment of one’s own preferences and aversions pertaining to particular strategic spaces and the overall balance of power. Accordingly, any reliable explanatory account of a power transition, or future projection of one, needs to identify how the key agents concerned perceive their security environment, and define and prioritise their interest preferences within a particular historical strategic context. To do this with scientific rigour and precision, however, we need to understand how such interests and perceptual outlooks exercise a causal (that is, structural) impact on the people that comprise the system of collective action (or corporate agency) that are states.

3.4.4: The significant causal status of state interest structures/complexes

This thesis argues that the interest structures of states comprise a distinct ontological category. As the generative structures comprising state motivation, interest structures are the site at which the real potential for any power transition first emerges. They are also the primary drivers of the power transition process from start to finish.
As claimed ontological entities, interest structures possess real emergent causal powers that are autonomous from and causally influence the individuals that collectively execute state policy. The emergent stratum is the domestic socio-political system of states. The adhesive that links individuals to the collective action that comprises the behavioural effects manifested at this stratum is the causal power of shared ideas.

Such an adhesive force is by no means always uniform across the entire membership of society. Some interest structures may indeed be underpinned by near whole-of-society support, but others reflect the influence of, or are opposed by, particular political factions and social groups.

Note that in complex open systems, foreign policy is generally driven by a plurality of motivations. The term *interest complexes* is thus also used to denote the interactive relationship of multiple (and sometimes conflicting) interest structures operative in the domestic life of particular states. In-depth and holistic study of the entire complex of interest structures that underpin a given state’s foreign policy agenda is especially crucial when seeking to identify and evaluate potentials for revisionism as part of a prospective (or future-oriented) case study. For future projections to be reliable, particular interests that have theoretically deducible and *tangible* revisionist implications need to be understood in the context of a state’s entire motivational disposition. In the case analysis of the rise of China in Part II of this thesis, Chapter 6 provides this function.

Given that the role of collective ideas is not usually conceived in causal terms within the mainstream IR literature (due to the dominance of the Humean concept), it is necessary to elaborate further here on their causal properties and, in turn, their capacity to be operationalised in causal analysis.

In his treatise on the human sciences, Bhaskar draws on Aristotle’s notion of ‘material cause’ to describe ideational social structures as the pre-existing material and tools out of which agents define and channel their goals (1998, 34-5). Such materials and tools

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31 One important exception is Legro (2005, 4-7, 179-80), whose theorising implies, but does itself fully develop, an alternative concept of causation akin to critical realism.
include language, concepts, theories, ideologies, and myriad forms of institutionalised relations. Institutions it should be noted are collectively reproduced ideas about rules, and mental images of the inter-relationship between defined roles, status positions, and legitimate resource allocations.

For every activity or event initiated by an agent, according to Bhaskar, there are both material and efficient causes at work. The latter are immediate conditions associated with the initiation of a particular event (namely, both the existence of sufficiently motivated and actively capable agents, and sufficiently permissive material conditions). The former represent conditioning structures that exercise a pre-active formative influence on and shape the motivated goals of active agents.

*Kurki’s extension to the critical realist concept of causation*

Kurki (2008, 218-34), following a lead from Wendt (2003), proposes that a fuller departure from the straightjacket of the Humean concept can be achieved through drawing further and more directly on Aristotle’s four-fold typology of causes – material, formal, efficient, final. Kurki agrees with Bhaskar’s basic distinction between constitutive and action-inducing types of cause. She argues, however, that the conception of the former benefits by the pairing and differentiation of Aristotle’s ‘material’ and ‘formal’ categories. The active category similarly benefits from a pairing of ‘final’ with ‘efficient’ causes.

Kurki defines ‘final’ causes as the intentions that trigger an action, and is analytically dependent on an account of ‘formal’ causes (see below). The ‘efficient’ category too, in presupposing the existence of actively capable agents, depends on ‘material’ and ‘formal’ categories in accounting for such a physical predisposition. Kurki’s causal schema thus further clarifies the critical realist insight that events can only be properly accounted for causally in terms of the pre-existing material and mental disposition of the agents concerned. Positivist philosophies of science, in particular, overlook just how much work in the natural sciences involves identifying and describing how such pre-dispositions are structurally constituted.

An inter-connectioned relationship between material and formal causes is present within the objects of inquiry of both the natural and social sciences. The natural world, as
depicted by critical realism, is stratified such that matter is differentially organised and moves, attracts and repels according to particular evolved forms of structured inter-relationships. To the extent that formal causes in the social sciences are more man-made and ideational, it is nonetheless evident through the empirical findings of neuroscience that ideas and perception are a product of the cognitive possibilities of the biological brain (Harris 2010, chap 3). In this respect, both the general tendencies of human nature and the variability of idea and motivation have their root in the material/formal causal mechanisms and capabilities located at the stratum of human neurophysiology.

While having a material basis of possibility, ideas exercise a causal power that is best understood according to Aristotle’s formal cause category. As Hume himself in effect recognised, ideas are the product of how the mind/brain perceives and organises the innumerable impressions that flow in from sensory experience (Coventry 2007, chap 4). For each human being, that more or less similar (but never identical) cognitive apparatus is born and nurtured within differing physical and social environments such that different brains derive variable lessons from a unique reserve of experiences and memories (Andreasen 2006). The process usually proceeds under the comprehensive shaping or compulsion of a common social culture that has accrued memories and lessons from a distinct and finite historical experience. Various instinctive psychological tendencies respond to and variously facilitate the embedding of such social norms in individual minds, especially during early formative stages (Legro 2005, 5-6).

Whatever the primary source of the organising of impressions in a given instant (the individual brain or social culture), ideational structures, once established, exercise causal effects in the way they frame, filter and influence how an individual cognitively and emotionally experiences new incoming impressions. They provide essential cognitive frameworks through which individuals interpret their environment and their role and identity within it. Ideas thus routinely play a role in pre-defining the scope of action in given contexts and how different inner drives and impulses are to be hierarchically prioritised and evaluated. Ideas are thus causal in the way they supply form to many actions.
This is perhaps most broadly the case with corporate agency. The need for constant communication between members means that most corporate actions pursue goals that are consciously pre-formed and articulated, rather than unconsciously or impulsively undertaken. It is for this reason especially that we can viably study and anticipate the potential causal effects of ideas directly (and most efficiently) through their symbolic manifestation in language transmission.

**Reasons as causes**
According to critical realism then, the actions of a human agent are in great part causally accountable in terms of the *reasons* motivating an actor. In Bhaskar’s words: ‘…any cognitive activity that takes action as its object or result … presupposes the causal efficacy of reasons, in the sense of their making a possible difference to the physical states that will actually obtain’ (1998, 92).

Critical realism distinguishes between reasons given or consciously held by human agents, and the actual source of motivations or rather the hypothesised real reasons underpinning articulated goals and behaviour (Bhaskar 1998, 90-7). Sometimes the two can be interpreted to closely correspond, and therefore the actual content of the reasoning of the actors – that is, their own concepts and descriptions – can be expounded at length. In such cases, they can be used directly as representations of the belief structures of given cultures or political entities. At other times, beliefs might be argued as misleading, false, or perhaps just incomplete rationalisations of behaviour or motivation. These are then contrasted with an alternative or supplemented explanation of motivations given by the external observer. Often there will be a mix between the two approaches, as is the case with the analysis of contemporary Chinese interest structures in Chapter 6.

**Interests as ‘beliefs about needs’**
In applying the notion of ideas as formal causes to IR analysis, the understanding here corresponds closely to Wendt’s characterisation of state interests as constituting ‘beliefs about needs’ (1999, 113-35). That is, a state’s or political community’s beliefs about how its objective reproductive needs (especially the physical and economic means of security) can be satisfied. As with Wendt, it is recognised here that interests are also constituted out of identity perceptions. This makes the potential
content of interest definitions even more variable in terms of the demands or expectations a state might bring towards the politics or political status of strategic spaces beyond its borders.

Such beliefs about needs and identity are not necessarily immutable, however resistant to change they may be in particular cases. Indeed, the nature of human agency is such that decisions can potentially be made to adjust or transform the content of defined interests in response to satisfactory or accommodative signals from other states (Glaser 2010), or shifts in the terms of domestic debate (Legro 2005).

Conversely, rigidity in interest definitions can exist, leading interaction within a particular strategic space to become mutually exclusive and physically conflicting. In such cases, recourse is best had towards explaining this in terms of the particular nexus of domestic perceptions and interest structures that invariably lie behind such uncompromising state postures. This does not, however, preclude the existence of more generalised social psychological tendencies that could be identified and usefully incorporated into the explanation.

3.5: Explanatory evaluation in open systems

The attribution of particular ideational structures to the motivation of actions actually or potentially undertaken by agents is complicated by the fact that such structures operate in open systems. Such open systems are composed not only of the multitude of material conditions and intentional actions of other agents in the external environment, but also of other motivational structures that operate within that agent’s inner life – conscious or unconscious. Critical realism thus raises, and is itself confronted with, the problem of how to develop methods for evaluating the explanatory power of causal propositions that apply within open systems.

3.5.1: Preliminary guidelines

(i) Practical interest as the opening move of evaluation

Usually, the starting point for explanatory evaluation in the social sciences lies in the practical interests or values driving a particular study (Kurki 2008, 149-61; Shapiro et
Both the natural and social worlds are multi-faceted and complex. Finite limits on investigation need to be placed somewhere – a process aided, critical realists would add, by the real stratification of the world. Pure science might be possible within the social sciences, but the impetus for social scientific work usually arises from the desire to solve or manage real-world problems. Furthermore, it is the nature of a given problem, so defined, that plays a key role in selecting the phenomena to be studied, and provides the basis for hypotheses about the existence and inter-relationship of identified causal mechanisms.

In the case of this thesis, the focus on power transitions and the rise of China arises from an interest in finding ways to prevent perceived conflict potential in East Asia from precipitating a breakdown in overall regional order and stability. The analysis thus takes the complex of causal factors underpinning the strategic agenda of an identified revisionist actor as a core variable cluster. It then seeks to critically evaluate the potential for other structures (conceived by other, sometimes competing, explanatory theories) to either inhibit or channel the expression of the core variable cluster in more peaceful or conflict-prone directions.

If one were alternatively to examine whether, for instance, economic interdependence conditions peace or prevents conflict, then this proposition would need also to be critically evaluated vis-à-vis the enabling or constraining effects of a range of other variables. These might include: the nature of the interest complexes underpinning existing geo-political or territorial disputes (and relative levels of commitment towards these); balances of material power and prestige; international or domestic normative structures; and the enabling or constraining role of geography.

(ii) The rational-empirical baseline

Critical realists agree with positivists that explanations and hypotheses must be disciplined and judged according to empirical tests and internal logic. Critical realism opposes paradigms of explanatory or judgemental relativism that imply that any explanation is as good as any other and cannot be falsified (Bhaskar 1998, 62-3).
This empirical and rational baseline for evaluation is indispensable in social science, but it remains insufficient in itself as a methodological guideline for analysis of open system phenomena. In open system contexts, we need some further standards for evaluating the validity and relative importance of hypothesised causal mechanisms in relationship to other, sometimes corresponding, sometimes competing, causal accounts within the discipline.

3.5.2: Existing explorations of IR critical realists

Some critical realist pioneers within IR, especially Kurki and Heikki Patomaki, have made preliminary efforts towards developing new analytical approaches that are more conscious of open system dynamics. Both authors speak of the need for building more integrative multi-causal narratives, and advocate an abandonment of the quest for fundamental singular causes.

Kurki’s work on broadening the concept of causation has some methodological implications, namely that it justifies the validity and need for interpretative methods in articulating ideational and social institutional types of causes (2008, 196-239). Beyond the empirical-rational baseline, however, the criteria through which the causal logic of the multi-causal accounts she advocates could be evaluated in comparison to competing explanatory approaches are left unspecified. This is a deficit of which Kurki is nonetheless conscious of, as acknowledged within the sub-section heading in her last chapter titled ‘Openings for further research’ (2008, 308-9).

Among IR critical realists, Patomaki (2002, chaps 4-6; 2008) has gone furthest in exploring methodological possibilities for building multi-causal explanatory accounts on the basis of open system dynamics. Patomaki’s engagement with critical realism has proceeded along some similar methodological pathways to my own. Most notably, Patomaki (2006) similarly recognises the potential utility of critical realism for the study of prospective or presently unfolding cases and trends, rather than just past processes and cases. Some of Patomaki’s most recent work (2006; 2008) has

32 Note that the methodological innovations I develop for this thesis (in section 3.6 to follow) are largely derived from an independent reading of the works of Bhaskar. My reading of Patomaki came after most of the thesis methodology had already been developed.
aimed at establishing ‘futures studies’ as a legitimate field within IR. In a recent book (2008), Patomaki ambitiously projects the interaction of a broad selection of hypothesised major trends in the contemporary global political economy into a systematic array of contrasting future scenarios.

Patomaki may have been a little over-ambitious with the latter project, even when we grant that his approach is explicitly non-predictive and provides a number of limiting provisos and analytical cautions (2008, chap 2). The sheer scale and complexity of the global domain being analysed engenders vulnerability on numerous fronts to exposure of inadequate or incomplete hypotheses and characterisations of trends in the global political economy and their implications. The lack of acknowledgement or awareness of some causal factors leads on occasion to one-sided or lop-sided accounts.

This is most evident in Patomaki’s characterisation of US interventionism in the post-Cold War period, especially since 9/11, as a trend towards neo-imperialism (2008, chap 6). Patomaki views this trend as analogous to the British return towards imperial expansion in the 1870s in an allegedly similar political-economy context of presaged relative decline and neo-liberalism. The analogy is extended to illustrate parallel possibilities, or scenarios, for a 21st century breakdown in global security order comparable in magnitude, although somewhat different in kind, to the cataclysm of WWI (2008, chaps 7 and 8).

Left out of Patomaki’s account of existing trends are such things as: the role of American pluralism at the domestic level, together with public criticism, in contributing to vacillations in foreign policy approach throughout its history; the depth of cohesion and common cause within US alliances such that there are strong potential limits to alliance partner defection (as well as US unilateralism itself); and an identification of potential sources for future unilateral actions on the part of other powers besides the US, which cannot be completely accounted for in terms of reaction to US conduct. As will be seen, some of China’s existing interests fall potentially within this latter category.

Patomaki’s work demonstrates the pitfalls of not just futuristic analysis, but also historical analogy, despite his acknowledgement of the limitations of both these
analytical approaches. In general, critical realism suggests inherent limits to the effectiveness of historical analogy. Causal mechanisms that appear as salient across different cases invariably operate within a uniquely combining constellation of diverse and often dissimilar variables. A mechanism common across cases cannot be presumed to always exercise the same effect when it is co-determining events (or otherwise inhibited) in interaction with different combinations of greater or lesser causes.

Despite of the problems, or excesses, in Patomaki’s methodological innovations, I argue that there is still much merit to his explorations. If subject to some further disciplines, they can still serve as the basis for some productive new research directions and approaches in IR.

3.6: Proposed solutions

3.6.1: A three-level process of evaluation

The two main methodological problems accrued from the above discussion are (a) criteria for explanatory evaluation that is mindful of open system dynamics, and (b) future projection. In regard to the first problem, the solution offered here is a three-level evaluative process comprising: (1) the ontological level, (2) the mono-theoretical level, and (3) the inter-theoretical level.

In this thesis, the three chapters comprising the case study of the rise of China in Part II corresponds to this schema. It is not necessary, however, for research to proceed strictly according to this sequence. Many research projects might focus more on particular levels, or jump around between them at various times during project development. The point is that a viable candidate for being both a valid and substantial causal hypothesis within the discipline generally, or in application to a particular case study, would need to perform well in all three evaluative tests.

For some theories, the first and second levels may be largely synonymous. This is especially the case with macro-systemic or social institutional theories in which a particular ontological claim (e.g. the existence of a social institution with its own
causal properties) is also the central (mono-) theoretical claim. For the power transition theory developed in this thesis, however, and, more generally, any theory whose explanations describe the interactions and relationship between multiple and differing causal entities and structures, it is useful to differentiate between the two levels.

This chapter has already introduced the principal ontological assumptions advanced within this study. The case was made that agent level and interaction level approaches are most suitable for causal analysis of great power relations and regional security order. It is accepted that states, as corporate agents, can be soundly characterised ontologically as individuals, so long as they are conceived to embody a pluralism of interacting (and sometimes conflicting) drives. A variety of interest structure motivations can accordingly be identified within particular states. At the ontological level, these are the sorts of basic propositions exposed to the scrutiny of critical evaluation. For critical realists, establishing the validity and correspondence of basic ontological categories and descriptions to observed reality is a crucial component of social scientific work.

The first chapter of Part II (Chapter 6) advances, in addition, claims about the ontological existence and casual properties of particular interest structures that comprise and drive contemporary Chinese grand strategy (on the basis of a unit level analysis). Chapter 7 then shifts to an application of my alternative power transition model, which operates at the level of inter-state interaction. Ongoing testing of (a) the concepts and causal claims comprising this interactive model (as presented in Chapters 4 and 5), and (b) its empirical adaptability to the case of the rise of China (Chapter 7), constitute the evaluative process at the mono-theoretical level.

In general, analysis at the mono-theoretical level may involve (a) applying, testing or revising an existing theory, or (b) building a new theory of either a newly perceived or already recognised phenomena. The scope of a theory’s applicability needs to be understood before any evaluation can be made. Some theories are more time-space specific in their application, and may even be intended only to describe mechanisms

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33 For a more complete summary of the ontological claims that underpin my theory, see Chapter 5.
deemed as peculiar to a single case. Other theories are explicitly designed for a more general, cross-case application (as is the case with my theory).

At the mono-theoretical level, a theory is evaluated according to the extent to which empirical evidence from relevant cases can be coherently matched to the key definitional categories and relationships stipulated by the theory. The question of whether, regardless of such empirical correspondence, the mechanism in question is causally substantial in the overall scheme of things, or the most adequate conceptual and explanatory formulation of a given phenomenon, is not addressed at this level, however. For this, the analysis needs to adopt an inter-theoretical perspective (to be addressed shortly).

Particular (mono-) theories capture particular sets of processes and mechanisms that are operative within the complex totality of reality. Their very establishment is an act of abstraction of some features of reality from the entire network of causes at the level of the concrete (Sayer 2010, chap 3). Moreover, in order for claims about the defining tendencies of particular causal structures to be made intelligible, many theories are, at some stage of their exposition, necessarily articulated in a way that presumes a closed system.

3.6.2: Ideal-type versus conditioned causation

To be coherent on this issue of what is often an unavoidable closed system abstraction in the establishment of models, critical realist social science needs to make a clearer distinction between what I call ideal-type and conditioned causation. In a nutshell, conditioned causation refers to the normal and usual mode of causation that is observable in the real world of open systems. Ideal-type causation operates much less frequently in the real world, and more typically is simply a device for analytical and theoretical abstraction.

Many natural sciences have recourse to experimental closures. Given the more unconscious or instinctive mechanisms that operate in natural systems, the production of invariant and predictable causal sequences within an experiment (where they occur) would perhaps be better characterised as chains of perfect causation. In the
social sciences, the equivalent notion of ideal-type causation can be applied in two ways.

The first denotes the idealised abstraction of a hypothesised real-world mechanism out of the complex totality of reality. Such a model is invariably represented in an ideal form at some stage of the analysis to indicate how the mechanism would operate if unimpeded by other variables. Such idealised abstraction plays an indispensable role in aiding the perception and communication of structural relationships in the stratified observable world. This is the case so long as there is an understanding that in the real world of open systems, there may, in any given case, be operating a whole host of other mechanisms that interfere with the ideal-type expression of the modelled variables.

The second application of ideal-type causation relates more specifically to the operation of ideational causes, including interest structures. It can be captured in the simple terms that in the absence of barriers to fulfilment, any desired goals and objectives of an agent could be fulfilled without trouble according to the ideal image of the motivated actor. There would be a clear, instant and predictable succession of cause and effect. To take one example, if ideal-type causation were the operative form of causation, the desire of China or any other disputant for sovereign control over Spratly/Nansha would, in the absence of inhibiting variables, immediately (or perhaps several hours later) express itself in actual unimpeded sovereign control.

States are highly conscious agents whose representatives and officials are largely aware of what they are doing, and engage in internal communications (both public and confidential) that render many of the objectives, and even motives, of state policy into the sphere of conscious awareness. Furthermore, objectives and interests are rarely vague and abstract in the sense of being intangible. Rather they contain numerous concrete referents that are fully tangible in their suggested material and spatial implications – and in the event they were fully realised in ideal-type fashion. An understanding of interest structures and their tangible ideal-type referents is thus essential in the causal analysis of both previously manifested and potential behaviour.
In contrast, conditioned causation is the normal state of affairs in which a particular causal mechanism, or motivational structure, is conditioned in its expression or prevented from ideally fulfilling itself by the broader causal environment. It therefore follows, contra the Humean concept of causation, that the same causal powers will, at different times, produce different effects or behaviours because an agent is under the influence or sufferance of other external forces and internal imperatives that condition or alter the expression of the other.

Returning to the example above, China does not need to achieve the ideal-type effect of unimpeded sovereign control of Spratly/Nansha before this desire on their collective part can be classified as a real cause. In fact, this motivational structure affects China’s behaviour all the time in a variety of ways. In this sense, a virtually invariant regularity can be seen in the way this desire is unfailingly expressed in word and deed. There are, however, differences across time in the way it is expressed depending on other prevailing conditions and the Chinese government’s subjective strategic response to these conditions and other internal motivational imperatives. There is here no invariant relationship between the causal complex that can be identified and a particular form of behavioural response.

One major contribution of the method to be advanced for evaluating competing causal claims at the inter-theoretical level is that it makes allowance for significant conditioned causation effects. As will be demonstrated later in the thesis, the explanatory power of some (mono-) theories can potentially be enhanced when claims about the ideal-type effects of causal mechanisms are supplemented with hypotheses about altered or compromised impacts as a result of interaction with other major causal variables.

3.6.3: Retrospective and prospective analysis

Most (mono-) theories, we have suggested, are at some point communicated in an ideal-type form in a way that presumes a closed system. The theory of power transition developed in following chapters, however, functions this way in only one of the two modes in which it can be applied. In application to historical cases, the variability (albeit still finite) of some its general features enables this model to avoid
the need to presume an artificial closure. Embodying a built-in understanding of open system dynamics, the flexibility of the model enables it to capture a comparatively more diverse range of historical cases of revisionism embodying very different dynamics.

The use of the model differs when applied towards a prospective case of power transition, as is undertaken in Chapter 7. In this case, an artificial closure is unavoidable. This is because in contrast to retrospective analysis where the model is applied to cases in which a power transition actually took place and became materially manifest, prospective analysis is dealing with potential, not actualised, phenomena. It is always possible that potential trends will never actually be realised, or eventually be transformed. For critical realists, in highly complex open systems there is simply no basis for making watertight long-range forecasts, and this is usually the case for nearer-term predictions as well.³⁴

This limitation should not be construed as rendering prospective analysis, or future projection, a futile endeavour. Indeed, this thesis agrees with Patomaki about the validity of analytically drawing out and explaining the tangible future possibilities embedded within existing causal structures. This thesis agrees also with the related idea that such analytical projections are potentially empowering. Through indicating some tangible potential consequences of existing behavioural and motivational tendencies, reflective agents are given some extra room to reappraise priorities, as well as possibilities for or against shaping the future in certain directions. This is surely the raison d’être of most social scientific work. In contrast to Patomaki, though, this thesis provides more precise guidelines and evaluative criteria for this analytical modality.

This thesis argues that for qualitative projection to be viable and useful to social science, a given study needs initially to focus more narrowly on a particular problem or causal mechanism, and then work outwards from there in critical dialogue with the broader discourse of the discipline. In other words, the credibility of qualitative projection depends on an initially solid and defensible set of characterisations at the

³⁴ For extensive evidence of just how poor the track record of prediction is in political science, see Tetlock (2005).
mono-theoretical and ontological levels. Sound qualitative projection thus needs to begin with a *closed system rational simulation* (CSRS) of the possibilities embedded within a particular set of hypothesised causal structures.

CSRS is especially useful for analysing conflict logic. The nature of conflict is such that it is almost common sense to observe that the potential for crisis can often be tangibly perceived and *explained* well in advance of any crisis event – without necessarily being able to predict whether or not it will occur. For instance, if there ever were to be a crisis or war over the future status of Taiwan, we already have sufficient evidence to generate knowledge capable of explaining many of the main causes (especially formal causes) that would contribute to the outbreak of this sort of event (without being able to predict the immediate conditions that might trigger it, its timing, or the trajectory it would follow). The use of disciplined rational simulation to *explain possibilities* can also help locate possibilities (or otherwise) for accommodating conflicting perspectives.

Chapter 7 uses CSRS to pinpoint and explain both conflictual and accommodative possibilities within the military-security order of contemporary and future Maritime East Asia. The analysis is consciously reduced to a closed system interactive dynamic. This enables us to assess how Chinese attempts to ideally realise its regional geopolitical agenda would interact with the geopolitical interests of other regional powers. For this purpose, other interests and causal processes are temporarily screened out. Chapter 7 applies generic indicators of my power transition model to demonstrate how various possible versions or adjustments of state interest definitions in contested sub-regions would influence (a) the hierarchical form of the regional military-security order, and (b) its potential dynamics (peaceful or war-prone; consensus or coercion based).

Some might view the various contingencies generated through CSRS as a form of prediction. Given the closed basis of the analysis, and the fact that in real world open systems the full range of initial conditions can never be fully known or anticipated, I argue *explanation of possibilities* is the more accurate term. Projected contingencies that become manifest should probably only be crowned as a prediction after the event. Even then, for a prediction to be viewed as more than luck, the explanation that
generated it prior to the event would need to be shown to have both a reasonable empirical correspondence and necessary connection with what transpired. Explanatory power – that is, the level of accuracy in claims about the workings and substantial impact of particular causal mechanisms and processes – thus remains as the primary criterion for assessing theoretical success within open system contexts.

3.6.4: The inter-theoretical level and CATB test

The essential aim of analysis at the mono-theoretical stage is to make the case for a particular explanation to be considered a major candidate for inclusion in the mainstream discourse pertaining either to the understanding of a particular case or the more general body of theory in a discipline. A mono-theory is more likely to do better in the marketplace, however, if the authors are cognisant of a broad range of theoretical developments and applications. This enables authors to better anticipate the limitations of their work and grapple with potential criticisms in advance. Most authors in IR do accordingly incorporate an inter-theoretical dimension to their analysis, at the very least as a pre-emptive defence strategy. It is also often done in recognition that different theories, within their particular limits, have constructive insights to offer.

The concept of inter-theoretical analysis advanced here denotes a critical process, and an often competitive one. However, its aim is to facilitate the integration, not fragmentation, of knowledge. The objects of inquiry in IR operate within an open system according to conditioned causation dynamics. It is thus argued here that a mono-theory, or its application to particular case(s), should provide its own preliminary investigation and account of its relationship to other causal mechanisms and alternative explanatory models in the existing literature.

The key term is relationship. Essentially, to what extent are two or more explanatory accounts compatible, and to what extent are they in conflict, and why? Critical realism defends the notion of a real world independent of our knowledge of it as a basis for the possibility of scientific progress. Thus in situations where there is some degree of conflictual overlap between different theories encompassing some of the same observed phenomena, one theory can potentially be evaluated as superior on
objective empirical-rational grounds.\textsuperscript{35} Alternatively, the process of competitive scrutiny might show weaknesses and strengths in both accounts, and encourage a new synthesis, or expose the need for a complete alternative to both.

Awareness of the critical realist concept of open systems helps place any competitive intra-disciplinary dynamics in a more constructive perspective. That is, the real world is greater and more complex than any individual mono-theory. The world invariably encompasses a host of other mechanisms or strata that lie beyond the scope of even the most convincing mono-theory. And to the extent that inter-theoretical analysis and scrutiny pose a potential threat to the integrity of one’s own work, exposed weaknesses and errors may nonetheless provide beneficial insights and promote progress in the overall discipline. A more flexible theoretical approach and weaker attachment to particular mono-theories can thus potentially promote greater theoretical integration in the discipline.

Once again, and especially in the case of inter-theoretical analysis, there is need for further criteria of explanatory evaluation beyond the empirical-rational baseline. As posited here, there are four basic categories or tests in which the relationship of one mono-theory to others can be qualitatively described and evaluated on the basis of a common, unifying criterion of natural necessity (that is, the presence or absence of a necessary connection between variables that is empirically supportable and logically coherent). Labelled respectively as ‘Coexistence’, ‘Assimilation’, ‘Trivialisation’, and ‘Breakdown’; these evaluation criteria are referred to here collectively in acronym as the ‘CATB test’. The first two categories represent a more positive or benign result for a theory subjected to an inter-theoretical test. The other two represent a more negative or crisis-inducing result.

The first of the benign categories is coexistence. That is, the existence of the other theories does not pose any conflict to the fundamental principles of one’s own explanatory account. The other theories might be explain mechanisms not causally related or interactive in any major way with one’s own domain of focus. Of most significance, however, are cases in which there is overlap, yet there is a

\textsuperscript{35} This argument thus challenges the more radically relativist connotations of Kuhn’s (1996 [1962]) famous ‘incommensurability’ thesis.
correspondence or translatability in the concepts employed and relations hypothesised.

The second benign category is assimilation. This denotes a theory’s ability to incorporate the insights of other theories, without being colonised by other perspectives. That is, the ability to make additions and adjustments that do not undermine the validity of most of the fundamental unifying principles and mechanisms of the theory. Unlike the category of coexistence, however, it is possible for a theory to, less benignly, induce a breakdown in another theory whilst assimilating, or effectively colonising, certain aspects of the other into its own.

The first and weaker of the two negative evaluative categories is trivialisation. In this case, hypothesised mechanisms and processes are not irrelevant to the explanation of events and dynamics, and exercise some significant conditioned causation effects. It has nonetheless become evident that, in application to particular cases, the mechanisms posited are of lesser importance than claimed, and vis-à-vis those advanced within competing explanatory accounts. Trivialisation is thus compatible with coexistence. Such a combination would represent a mixed scorecard in terms of explanatory evaluation – that is, valid, but of secondary (or tertiary) not primary causal importance.

The second and stronger negative category is the logical-empirical breakdown of a theory. In this case, certain fundamental principles and concepts of the theory are found to be in contradiction with empirical reality. The given theory may also be demonstrated as substantially inferior to an alternative theory. The latter might be able to encompass more of the empirical record (explain more facts or cases), better resolve logical contradictions embedded in the other, or better assimilate the insights of the other. Breakdown is the category of ‘falsification’ proper.

These four evaluative criteria do not always apply in a mutually exclusive way. Two or more theories may on different issues be simultaneously both compatible and conflictual. In areas at least where there is no unresolved conflict regarding overlapping terms of reference, inter-theoretical analysis can play a further constructive role. That is, it can be used to explore how contrasting explanations can
be integrated together to illustrate the patterns of conditioned causation operative in a particular time-space specific context.

In subjecting my arguments about Chinese revisionism to an inter-theoretical test in Chapter 8, three alternative explanations of East Asian security order in the existing IR literature are critically considered. These include: (1) material balance of power arguments as embodied in various neorealisms and PTT, (2) liberal economic interdependence arguments, and (3) constructivist arguments about socialisation according to common norms (in this case, the ‘ASEAN way’). I first assess the evidence for viewing these different classes of structural argument as valid according to presently observable causal impacts. Next, I stipulate the necessary conditions for their future validity. The CATB test is then used to identify and evaluate the possible terms of complementarity or conflict between each of these explanatory paradigms vis-à-vis my own theoretically informed arguments about Chinese revisionism.

Inter-theoretical evaluation is an ongoing process that cannot be fully decided in a single study. First, there is the fairness issue of allowing for an open-ended right of reply from proponents of critiqued theories. More broadly, it is only through the collective capacity of the discipline, and exposure to the varying knowledge bases and critical perspectives of its protagonists, that the relative strength of various ontological, mono-theoretical or inter-theoretical claims can be evaluated over time. For this reason, this study refrains from making immodestly unequivocal claims about any implied breakdown of other perspectives. Rather, this is for the discipline to collectively determine through debate over time.

Another factor that presses for caution in judgement is that within this study the main case study is prospective not retrospective. The weakness of prospective analysis is that there can be no definite determination of how the course of future events will unfold; or of which trends and mechanisms (and how they evolve) will exercise the greatest relative impact. Surprising major developments, or exogenous shocks, can occur that substantially alters the overall balance of variables, temporarily or permanently. The construction of an ultimate, universal and infallible open system model that could successfully identify and integrate the vast multitude of causal
mechanisms across man, society and nature is clearly beyond the capacity of mankind.

There is a flip-side strength to prospective analysis, however. That is, given the seminal causal role in IR played by conscious agents capable of reflexive thinking and continuous deliberation, there is some scope for choice and an ongoing adjustment of priorities and values. Indeed, the very act of prospective analysis that states invariably undertake and deliberate on in shaping their international strategies should itself be considered a key variable in the causal equation that determines the direction of events. Any official or public space opened up to deliberation on prospective trends and strategic choice accordingly opens up a sort of analytical limbo zone in which the future can be characterised as embodying multiple real possibilities; a zone that shrinks to the extent that space for deliberation closes up, and, for better or worse, resolutions become hardened and fixed. It is a premise of this thesis that certain details of the interests currently held by East Asian great powers are sufficiently ambiguous and under-determined to allow for meaningful deliberation on the possibilities, or otherwise, for a compromise accommodation on the region’s future military-security order.

Despite then the limitations acknowledged above, the innovative methodologies developed in this chapter offer some potent tools to aid the deliberations currently underway on issues of major concern and interest to all major stakeholders in contemporary East Asian security order – including China. Combined with an alternative theory of power transition, it offers a comparatively inclusive yet orderly integrative framework for identifying and evaluating tangible causal trends towards regional hierarchical change, as well as important potential conditions for future conflict or compromise. Further consideration of how my analytical framework can be used as a tool for policy-making and deliberation will be provided in the conclusion of this thesis.

3.7: Conclusion

In this chapter, a transition has been made from the critique of existing theories towards the formulation of an alternative theory and methodology for the study of
international power transitions. For this purpose, extensive use was made of the critical realist concept of causation.

Critical realism argues that the most common understanding of causal analysis held across the theoretical spectrum in IR – the Humean concept – is too narrow and of highly limited application within open systems. Humean ‘uniform regularity statements’ capture the dynamics of causation operating in closed systems. The challenge for social scientists is to better understand and model multi-causality based on *conditioned causation*, the usual mode of causation in open systems.

In this chapter, an innovative three-level process of explanatory evaluation was developed for this purpose, and to provide the structure of inquiry for the case analysis of the rise of China in Part II. The framework provides a novel way to combine both closed and open system methods of analysis, based upon *ideal-type* and *conditioned* models of causation respectively. The chapter also advanced a solution to the problem of future projection in open systems. As an alternative to prediction, a qualitative method of *closed system rational simulation* was developed to provide a tangible means for *explaining possibilities*. This enables us to precisely identify and map the potential consequences of existing powerful tendencies for regional change without presuming any uniform or immutable trajectory.

Critical realism also helped us to locate the more primary sources of causation operative in international power transitions. Applying the concept of necessary connection within mechanism structures to the critique of PTT and MOR indicated that materialist explanations of great power military-security relations are insufficient. The interaction of particular geopolitical agendas in overlapping strategic spaces, not brute material structures such as the zone of parity or forms of polarity, drive the dynamics of regional security orders. Adequate understanding and explanation of these agendas requires a primary focus on state motivations, and the perceptions and interest structures that underpin them. These arguments about the location and nature of the primary causal powers in power transitions are fundamental to the alternative power transition theory that is developed and applied in subsequent chapters.
Preliminary indications were given as to how state motivations can be operationalised in causal analysis. The basis for this involved two ontological propositions about (a) great powers as relatively empowered and sovereign corporate agents, and (b) the significant causal status and variation of state interest structures/complexes. The routine public communication that is necessary for states to function as corporate agents, and the causal power of collective ideas, together justify the use and reliability of interpretative methods to model ‘reasons as causes’ and ‘interests as beliefs about needs’.

At the beginning of the chapter, discussion was also made about the critical realist distinction between an intransitive and transitive dimension. In this view, a key objective of science is to bring our transitive concepts and theories into ever-closer approximation and contact with the intransitive world they attempt to describe and explain. Thus, without neglecting the importance of ongoing empirical observation and testing of propositions, critical realism places the critical evolution of the qualitative conceptual basis of theory at the centre of the scientific process. It is to this task we turn to now in developing the building blocks of an alternative theory of power transition.
Chapter 4: Reinventing Revisionism

This chapter provides the underlying rationale and definitions for the concepts used to build the alternative theory of power transition advanced in this thesis. The central concept that needs to be dealt with and developed here is ‘revisionism’. In the understanding advanced in this thesis, power transitions by definition can only be said to occur or potentially arise so long as there exists a revisionist challenge posed to a status quo order. If there are no revisionist actors there can be no power transition, potential or actual.

The chapter seeks to remedy several shortfalls in existing conceptualisations of the revisionism-status quo dichotomy. The concept is important to get right because of the way in which it captures a key necessary link of cause and effect in a power transition. On the causal side, it is commonplace to refer to a ‘revisionist state’ to indicate a certain type of motivational disposition or foreign policy goal. On the effect side, the concept of revisionism implicitly refers to a certain type of systemic order outcome. Combined together, one can see that a revisionist state is identifiable according to either its seeking or actual achievement (however temporary or permanent) of some sort of substantive transformation in the structure of the international system and the norms upon which it is based. Conversely, any actual revisionist outcomes are obviously driven initially by the agendas of revisionist states.

Section 4.1 critically reviews the main existing attempts in the literature to define and expound the concept of revisionism. The remainder of the chapter then develops a series of arguments underpinning an alternative understanding, and indeed re-invention, of the concept. In the process, reference is made to several other mainstream IR concepts which are themselves redefined and adjusted to accommodate the alternative power transition model that emerges from this thorough reappraisal of the concept of revisionism.

4.1: Revisionism in the existing IR literature

The term revisionism, or some equivalent, has been a mainstay concept within the IR literature during the entire post-war period. Yet, only a handful of authors have
provided any detailed exposition of the term’s meaning, scope and definitional referents. Even less satisfactory have been the very few attempts to relate the concept systematically and consistently to historical examples. The most explicit typologies of revisionism that, in addition, are presented together with lists of historical great power regimes judged to fit these categories, are provided by Morgenthau (2006, chap 5) at one end of the post-war period and Schweller (1994; 1999) more recently. It is precisely these two influential authors, however, that have contributed more than most to the implicit and common bias within IR that associates revisionism with a particularly aggressive and destructively anti-social type of state.

In the case of Morgenthau this bias was probably not wholly intended. For he was also concerned with portraying, in neutral terms, all states as driven by similar power and security drives (2006, chaps 1 and 3). In different contexts these common drives are said to manifest in either a policy of the status quo or imperialism. Morgenthau was clear that the policy of the status quo was not always purely defensive (and certainly not static), but an active and sometimes aggressive policy to maintain a particular distribution of power (2006, chap 4). It did not help, however, that the term he used to denote the agent of change, ‘imperialism’, had, in the time and place he was writing (early post-war America), come to take on wholly negative connotations as a byword for illegitimate conquest.

Morgenthau’s definition of a policy of imperialism as aiming at the ‘overthrow of the status quo’ and a ‘reversal of the power relations between two or more nations’ only added to the impression of an especially aggressive type of policy (2006, 57). There are, moreover, other aspects of Morgenthau’s arguments that implicitly cast such dramatic and unilateral attempts at international change in a disapproving light. Indeed, Morgenthau’s normative vision of a path to peace through great power accommodation and mutual concession of non-vital interests strongly suggests a preference for incremental over radical change to the status quo (2006, chaps 31 and 32). Morgenthau’s work reflects a preference for moderation, restraint, and a respectful awareness of the interests of other powers, along with disapproval towards ideological vanity and blind national egotism (2006, chaps 16 and 20).
Schweller (1994) revived the concept of revisionism as ‘revisionism’ so as to capture forms of state motivation – namely profit, advantage and ambition – that had been downplayed in significance by influential defensive realist theories. These theories had focussed largely on gauging the propensity of states to engage in balancing behaviour.\footnote{The main focus of Schweller’s critique is Walt (1987)} Like Morgenthau, who had made a distinction between imperialism that aims at world empire, continental empire and local preponderance (2006, 67-9), Schweller also produced a typology of revisionist goals. In this case, the distinctions made were between limited-aims revisionist and unlimited-aims/revolutionary states, as well as risk-averse and risk-acceptant states.

Schweller’s conception evolved during the 1990s. In 1994, Schweller made a distinction between unlimited-aims (‘insatiable’) revisionist ‘wolves’, and limited-aims ‘jackal’ revisionists. The latter were defined as band-wagoners that seek to gain in the spoils of victory as part of either a revisionist/wolf-led expansionary campaign or status quo/lion-led restorative or defensive campaign. In this article, wolves and jackals are depicted as ‘predators’ and ‘aggressors’, whereas the lions are depicted as satiated and defensive system managers – ‘providers of the common defence’ and ‘collective goods’. And ‘[w]hile they may seek to extend their values, status-quo states do not employ military means to achieve this end’.

By 1999, Schweller had ironed out some of the problems with the above formulation. The use of animal metaphors is mostly avoided, and the jackal category of bandwagoning lesser powers is more marginal in regards to the definition of revisionism itself. Rather, the distinction between limited-aims and unlimited-aims/revolutionary states now refers chiefly to different types of great power objectives. Schweller writes:

> The key question is whether the rising power views the protection and promotion of its essential values as dependent on fundamental changes in the existing international order; or whether it is merely dissatisfied with its prestige and position within that order … If the latter, then … its demands can be satisfied while at the same time preserving and perhaps strengthening the
established order. These limited-aims revisionist states are typically regional powers that seek … territorial adjustments, recognition as an equal … and/or changes in the rules and decision-making procedures within existing regimes (1999, 19).

This passage does represent some improvement, capturing as it does historical examples (1999, 22) of expansionary aims that were more limited than in the cases of the most notorious universalising imperial powers that were earlier the focus of Schweller’s definition of revisionism. This revised schema, however, brings in some new problems of its own.

The main definitional one is similar to one of the problems identified in PTT. Namely, the tendency to view relatively less ambitious or dissatisfied ‘challengers’ as operating within the bounds of the status quo order. This problem also has similar sources in a lack of grounding of the definition of ‘revisionist’ or ‘challenger’ in terms of some concrete spatial and geographic referents (note the vague use of the phrase ‘are typically regional powers’ above). More generally, there is a lack of any consistent or coherent specification of the essential tangible features constituting a status quo order and a ‘challenge’ or ‘revision’ in the first place. Surely there needs to be some important common element(s) of change of a status quo order involved when applying the term revisionism according to differences in degree. Otherwise, there could be no justification for using the term, however qualified, for allegedly more limited cases.

Despite the greater nuance that Schweller brought to his adjusted concept of revisionism, there was still one key aspect of his previously more biased conception that remained unchanged. That is, when selecting examples to fit his categories, the US was not placed in any of the revisionist boxes, whilst all of that country’s twentieth century enemy regimes were. The question accordingly arises as to how the US achieved such a powerful and, in many regions or sub-regions, dominant position in the international system. Surely the US has not always been a mere defender of the status quo order. If this were the case then we might imagine the current international system to appear much as it did in the early nineteenth century – at least in the Western Hemisphere. Given it is so evident that the US has indeed engaged in various
forms of strategic expansion throughout its history, it is surprising how rarely it’s path to world power has been analysed in terms of its leading role in various revisions of prevailing orders. That is, it’s various roles as a revisionist power.\(^{37}\)

There have been a few major contributions to the IR literature, such as key works of E.H. Carr (2001), Gilpin (1981) and Buzan (1991) that have treated the status quo-revisionism dichotomy in ways that preserve a greater sense of value neutrality across the two categories in the abstract. That is, a less automatic association of aggression and blame for instability (if it occurs) with the revisionist category alone. Of these authors, Buzan (305-11) is the only one who has also gone on to attempt a typology distinguishing different forms of revisionism in the manner of Morgenthau and Schweller.\(^{38}\) While these three authors’ treatment of revisionism is relatively more nuanced and value-neutral, theoretical articulation of potential conditions for peaceful or relatively stable revisionism, at least beyond appeasement or radical retrenchment on the part of status quo powers,\(^{39}\) is still under-developed.

Alistair Iain Johnston (2003) has noted the inadequacy of existing attempts to define and apply the concept of revisionism in IR, and the potential importance of this in terms of understanding the rise of China:

> Perhaps because … Nazi Germany is the paradigmatic revisionist state, international relations theory has tended to assume that we should recognize a revisionist state when we see one. But it is not always obvious. More refined indicators of revisionist and status quo diplomacy are needed. And when one does develop and apply these indicators…the orthodox rising-power-as-revisionist argument does not really help to explain the totality of China’s diplomacy.

\(^{37}\) Mearsheimer is a prominent exception to this, at least in regards to the rise of the US in the Western Hemisphere. Certain historical studies of US grand strategy, although not using the term revisionist, at least clearly depict the ways in which US strategic expansion has transformed regional orders (Layne 2006; Hunt 2007).

\(^{38}\) Buzan’s distinction between ‘orthodox’ and ‘revolutionary’ revisionism is discussed later in this chapter.

\(^{39}\) Carr’s arguments (2001, chap 13), in effect, about appeasement as a potential means of enabling peaceful change have since been tainted by his accompanying justification for compromise with Nazi Germany prior to WWII (or at least German inter-war irredentist claims). For Gilpin on retrenchment, see (1981, 192-7).
This thesis agrees with Johnston’s appeal for more ‘refined indicators’. But it differs substantially in terms of proposed solution, and with the follow-on notion that the concept of revisionism does little to explain China’s contemporary strategic agenda.

When developing his definitional indicators, Johnston gives special consideration to Gilpin’s (1981, 27-38) three international structures of (a) distribution of (material) power, (b) hierarchy of prestige, and (c) ‘rights and rules that govern or at least influence the interactions among states’. Johnston dispenses with the prestige category, arguing that realists seem to treat the term as coterminous or parallel with material power. This leaves two overarching categories comprising: (1) ‘the question of how proactive an actor is in challenging formal and informal rules of the major institutions in the international system that most other actors support most of the time’; and (2) ‘the attitudes and behaviour of an actor toward distributions of material power that appear to be disadvantageous to it.’ In regards to the second category he makes a distinction between dissatisfaction at the level of preference, and at the level of behaviour. For the latter material power category, dissatisfaction is defined as a clear inclination, and preparedness to use military force if necessary, to realise a redistribution of power.

This thesis agrees with Johnston’s characterisation of the material power dimension as revolving primarily around the military distribution, and with his taking seriously revisionist implications that are manifest at the level of preferences (of which emerge at an earlier stage than immediate behaviour geared towards realising a pre-formed strategic agenda). This thesis, however, disagrees with Johnston’s requirement for a ‘clear preference for a radical redistribution of material power in the international system’ to be evident [emphasis added]. Johnston moreover brings us no closer to a more precise and tangible set of referents for identifying what constitutes such a redistribution, radical or otherwise.

Issue is also taken with the overly broad and diffuse range of factors and indicators employed by Johnston. Essentially, this arises from a lack of discrimination in selecting for the sorts of ‘informal and formal rules’ or institutions that are most relevant for gauging a transition in the structure of power. Such factors as a state’s
participation rates in international institutions and degree of compliance with international norms are too diffuse and imprecise to tell us anything useful about how to identify a revisionist or status quo state in a particular politico-strategic context. Moreover, a focus on current pre-transition patterns of normative compliance obscures the fact that it is achievement of an elevated position in the international hierarchy of power that historically has opened up the greatest opportunities for a state to seek wider changes in regional or global political and economic norms and structures. Indeed, it is precisely because of this potential, in addition to questions of war and peace, that power transitions are of such wide and enduring interest.

Given the level of unknowns involved in thinking about the long-term transformational impact of a potential power transition, the solution proposed is to limit the issue of normative challenge or opposition in discussion of revisionism only to those particular norms, rules and institutions that have a bearing on the way a regional military security system/order is hierarchically arranged. This serves both to (a) better unify the normative and material power distribution categories that Johnston treats largely separately, and (b) remove any automatic association of international hierarchical change with the wholesale overhaul or opposition towards existing regional and international norms and practices.

The above critical arguments can be summarised as follows. To emphasise a positive first, all analysts have been intuitively correct in (a) their initial identification of historically generalisable categories of revisionist and status quo policies, and (b) in their common identification of a number of clearly-in radical cases of revisionism such as Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, Napoleonic France; and even some relatively more limited cases such as Bismarckian Prussia up to 1871 and the Soviet Union in the immediate post-1945 years. Despite this, no existing conception provides a satisfactorily precise, tangible and all-round consistent set of justifications for

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40 Johnston focuses on Chinese attitudes towards: the norm of sovereignty; compliance with international economic institutions and free trade norms; compliance with non-proliferation regimes; and accession to various human rights treaties. On these issues, the case for viewing China as a revisionist state is indeed unsupported. China has a record of being a staunch supporter of the norm of respect for sovereignty as the bedrock of international relations; has a reasonable record of cooperation with non-proliferation regimes; has been no more a barrier to the workings or extension of the global free trade system than other major powers; and there are a number of UN human rights treaties that China has ratified, but which the US has not.
recognising such a like kind. In addition, insufficient attempts have been made to work out how the rise of US power at various historical stages fits within a given definition of revisionism.

This latter shortcoming is significant, firstly, because the US has been the most successful revisionist power in the modern era. It is significant also because the US has not always behaved according to an ‘aggressor’ or ‘predator’ image. At some stages and in some contexts the US strategically expanded through forcibly acquiring additional sovereign territory, or by imposing some form of jurisdictional authority (Nugent 2008; Hunt 2007). Yet, pointing to various coercive or violent modes of strategic expansion alone would paint an incomplete and inaccurate picture of America’s rise.

In several contexts, America’s international extension has been facilitated by the consent of other states and their willingness to accept US parity or primacy. Moreover, on closer inspection this dimension of relative consent, which gives legitimacy, also assists a satisfactory explanation of why, for instance, Bismarck’s Prussia succeeded in consolidating their expansionary gains, whilst the successes of Nazi Germany and Napoleonic France were so short-lived. As will be seen, this question of (external) legitimacy is crucial when considering the possibilities or otherwise for contemporary Chinese revisionism to be channelled or negotiated in future towards a stable regional outcome.

4.2: Basic definition and agenda for conceptual development

It is proposed here that the most coherent and workable application of the term revisionism is to link it to the issue of hierarchical change in the military-security system/order of an identifiable geo-political region. Our basic definition of revisionism can thus be laid down here as:

*hierarchically consequential strategic expansion within a regional military-security system – expansion that, when successful, works to transform the basis of the order (material and normative) upon which that regional military-security system operates.*
Strategic policies that have revisionist implications favour the relative advancement of that state as a great power pole within a given geo-political region. The term revisionism, accordingly, is being applied here as a description at both the level of systemic order/outcome and policy/intention.

The remainder of this chapter will (a) expound at greater length upon the reasoning and considerations that have led to the adoption of this definition, leading to (b) the development of some more detailed and qualified definitional indicators for this and related concepts that form vital parts of an alternative power transition model.

The arguments are developed in four sections. In section 4.3, the proposed definition associating revisionism with hierarchical change in the specific domain of military-security order will be justified by comparison with the nature of power transitions, or political revolutions, at the intra-state level. In section 4.4, we clarify the concept further by separating out the contents of the term revisionism from that of three other commonly conflated concepts: irredentism, imperialism, and revolutionary vanguardism. A revisionist agenda or outcome may also be accompanied by or prosecuted through policies that fit within these latter categories. It is not necessarily the case, however, that revisionism will involve any of them, and so should be viewed as a wholly distinct category. Section 4.5 then expounds on four further positive features of the concept in its present reformulation (that is, considerations of what revisionism is, rather than what it is not). Finally, section 4.6 develops and defines the indicators for the alternative power transition theory that will be presented in its entirety in the concluding chapter to Part I.

4.3: International revisionism and domestic political revolution

It is largely because of the condition of anarchy that we intuitively draw upon the term revisionism as both an analogue and differentiation to the concept of political revolution in intra-state contexts. Taking this distinction beyond intuition, a formal distinction between the revision of international power structures and revolution of domestic political systems can be identified as located in the latter involving an extra dimension not experienced within the former. That is, within intra-state political...
revolutions the location and/or expression of the sovereign power undergo change. Major international shifts in regional power and security hierarchies do not involve a shift in legitimate authority of this intensity.

Within intra-state and international contexts alike, the quest for order is closely related to the quest to regulate the means of violence and conditions for common physical security. Within intra-state contexts, a key dimension of the quest for order, identified most famously by Max Weber (1978, 54), involves establishing the terms upon which an effective *monopoly* on the legitimate authorisation and use of violent force will operate. In any relatively stable domestic regime, the use of force and various military and police institutions are always effectively subordinate to the sovereign power of the day.

In authoritarian systems, sovereignty is located either in the hands of a dictator, or more usually, in the consensus of an elite governing council. In liberal-democracies the expression of sovereignty is more complex and *usually* less direct. Sovereignty in this case is located ultimately in the institution of an electoral majority, but mediated through a web of dispersed institutional powers, delegated authorities and the influence of various organised political parties and *special interests* (the latter of which are also common to politics in authoritarian systems). At any rate, what is easy to ascertain in liberal-democracies is that various military and police forces are clearly subordinate to a civilian authority, the government of the day, which further is dependent on a sustained electoral majority for its longevity and survival. The state’s constitution, and therefore institutional structure, can also in theory be potentially subject to any number of proposed changes through referenda (including the abdication of democratic sovereignty itself).

The apparently universal and ideal solution for managing violence within the state therefore has tended to be the attainment (forcibly or otherwise) of a sufficiently broad internal consensus or lack of resistance towards the location of sovereignty and structures of institutionalised power. Where this is not attained, or where such previous attainment is lost or undermined, the state lapses into a situation of a heightened risk of violent confrontation. A key factor usually is the attitude of the existing state armed forces towards the various protagonists.
To the degree that desire for revolutionary political change has a clearly widespread popular base, armed forces imbued with a strong sense of nationalism have sometimes opted not to violently confront a swelling wave of civil disobedience. In such cases, this has played a key role facilitating the resulting peaceful change in the location of sovereignty and in the state’s constitutional and institutional structure. Outstanding examples of this latter phenomenon include the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe accompanying the end of the Cold War (Thompson 2004, chap 4).

At the international level by contrast, sovereignty is dispersed and possessed by state agents, which among other things involves the ultimate right of authorisation of each state’s own foreign and strategic policies. Sovereignty means ultimately that no other power or institution of another state actor, or at the international level, has the authority to demand compliance without the voluntary consent and cooperation of the sovereign power. The most that can be expected within this set-up (international anarchy) is to harness a sufficiently weighty critical mass of material and moral support from other sovereign actors towards one’s own preferences, and in resistance to the aims of adversaries.

The different role of sovereignty in the international context has implications for how violence is regulated. Most important, sovereign states are not legally obligated to comply with any externally issued dictates on the volume and type of armed forces they can develop and deploy. A state may be limited in its prospects to achieve what it desires by other sovereignties that deny it crucial material or informational resources. There is, however, no legally authoritative limit on the forces a sovereign power can develop so long as they have the means.

The dispersal of military force and military goals in the international system has, of course, frequently created mutual security dilemmas as well as more concrete sources of threat and conflict. It has nonetheless tended to be accepted by state actors as a normal and legitimate state of affairs. Within intra-state contexts, any splinter of allegiance and command within state military forces is usually perceived as a threat to the stability of the polity. In international contexts, such division of primary allegiance and command is an accepted habitual feature of social relations.
A key consequence of the dispersal of sovereignty is that disputes and conflicts when they do emerge, and as is widely recognised, are not subject to any external or overriding arbitrating authority, at least in the absence of any voluntarily acceptance of it by the sovereign parties to the dispute. Yet, the dynamics that ensue are really not so different in kind from disputes and conflicts that arise in an intra-state context between revolutionary and conservative forces, especially in the anarchic moment of revolution itself. In both contexts, either opposing preferences are reconciled and compromised; or one side surrenders or retrenches from their position; or there is a more physical confrontation.

The heart of comparison is that in both domestic political revolution and international revisionism, what we invariably witness is a basic challenge to or change in the structure upon which public security is established. In domestic revolution, the solution universally drawn upon is the establishment of a secure new consensus and allegiance around a new (necessarily singular) location of the sovereign power, as well as constitutional and institutional structure. The aim is that once this new consensus is secured, and concentrated authority for regulating violence re-established and conformed to, the pursuit of other goals pertaining to the attainment of the good life can be more productively pursued. This will often involve some form of social revolution as well.

In the international context though, substantial change in the structure of power is often pursued without an accompanying ambition to extinguish the sovereign powers of all or sometimes any other states in the existing system. The common aim across various historic revisionist agendas rather involves a desire to change the hierarchy of power amongst a community of sovereignties in a way more favourable to the revisionist state or coalition. A revisionist state may believe that it needs to expand its sovereign territorial base in a certain direction for this end, so as to acquire easy and exclusive access to more resources, or attain some more favourable relative strategic positioning. In other cases, a revisionist may just want to increase its own means of security and its position in a regional power hierarchy through developing capacities for greater influence beyond its sovereign borders. The latter sorts of restrained ends and means would include: obtaining tight and exclusive military alliances, developing
extended conventional deterrence capacity, or a key position in the hierarchy of a
domain of international commons.

It is also possible that events and outcomes that are revisionist in effect may have
been driven by the more ambitious goal of eventually attaining to a universal
sovereign empire within a region. If such a goal were ever achieved though, it would
effectively destroy the international within that geographical part of the world, and
thus would, at the latter stages, no longer be revisionist. A number of states over the
past two centuries have realised a position of unipolar dominance or primacy within
their home region. No state in the modern age, however – not even Napoleonic France
or Nazi Germany – ever made the leap from unipolar hegemon to a (regional)
universal empire. At this final stage, where regional affairs become the internal affairs
of state, this would be a purely imperialist and revolutionary venture (see below), not
revisionist.

The key point of differentiation thus of revisionism vis-à-vis revolution is that in any
time and place in which it occurs, it is the position of most states that the
international, that is the condition of dispersed sovereignty, should be preserved. In
contrast to intra-state contexts, where security order emerges from closure on the
location of sovereignty, international security order is a product of the efforts of each
sovereign state (and most influentially the great powers) to internally deliberate on
and/or externally negotiate with others about definitions of security. More
specifically, this concerns the question of what they each perceive as the safest or
most practical distribution and disposition of externally (and in the case of territorial
or jurisdictional conflicts, also internally) projected armed force amongst them.

Order then may, in certain contexts, arise partly or wholly out of the sum of various
individual and autarkic decision-making processes. This is a presumption clearly at
the heart of MOR (although that same systemic order is then represented as having
some far-reaching rebound causal impacts of its own). For Mearsheimer’s states,
security can only really be satisfied through attainment of hegemonic advantage in
terms of externally projected armed force. Alternatively, sovereign states do have the
option, and have frequently used it, to negotiate and deliberate with their peers to
explore possibilities for a mutually acceptable basis for, at least temporarily, stable security order.

The latter point leads to a further implication that is worth exploring, but whose possibility tends to be dismissed by MOR. That is, a consent-based security order, not unlike a well-established intra-state order, should in theory remain also as one possible power transition outcome. The key defining points here are simply that the condition of dispersed sovereignty has been maintained, and a shift in the military-security hierarchy (or polarity) effected. It would thus even be consistent with revisionism for the powers concerned to evolve their level of military-security agreement and coordination to a confederation-type arrangement. This is an arrangement whereby the individual sovereignties initially establish and then voluntarily delegate administration of a joint force in certain over-lapping strategic spaces of a region to an autonomous multilateral or bilateral authority. The individual states as sovereignties, though, would still retain the right to pull out from or stop complying with any such arrangement (the residual right of rebellion) if for some reason they later deemed this as in their interest.

The key question that arises, and one that has relevance when thinking about the rise of China, is whether such arrangements are possible to establish and maintain within power hierarchies that are not unipolar. The most successful historical example of a consensual and confederal-type security order after all is the internal relations of NATO.\(^{41}\) Can such an enduring foundation of consensus be achieved in a shift away from a unipolar system to a new and stably enduring bipolar or multipolar order? Such an outcome is viewed here as theoretically possible. As will be discussed in Part II, however, several concrete strategic conditions and issues in contemporary Maritime East Asia (and the interest structures and identities that lie behind them) do pose considerable obstacles to the realisation of any such vision.

\(^{41}\) The multipolar Concert of Europe can also be viewed as establishing, to varying degrees of success at different times, some rudimentary principles for a great power consensus-based, but not confederal, security order (Kupchan et al. 2001, 112-21).
4.4: What revisionism is not

To clarify this proposed conception of revisionism further, we now turn to articulating the differences between this and a number of other concepts that have often been insufficiently differentiated, and sometimes even treated as synonymous, with the notion of revisionism itself.

4.4.1: Irredentism

This term is specifically territorial, and is defined here as: *any claim by a state on a territory it does not control, but views as a part of its territorial identity*. Such territory is always disputed, and most usually already under the control of another state. Irredentism is thus commonly a major source of antagonism and conflict in the relations between states, as the party that is dissatisfied usually has to threaten or actually go to war if it is to physically redeem its claim. However, an irredentist state is not necessarily a revisionist state, and a revisionist state does not necessarily bring with it an irredentist agenda.  

The efforts of the Serbian dominated Yugoslav rump state, for instance, to redeem territories populated with Serbian nationals in the wake of the break up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, cannot be considered as revisionist. In order to qualify as revisionist, any irredentist territorial claims need to have demonstrable implications for a regional hierarchy. This does not just entail consideration of the relative spatial-geographic distribution of territorial mass. It also involves the degree to which the broader strategic position of the adversary needs to be relatively weakened in order to successfully execute and *secure* a physical territorial redemption, as well as who that adversary is in the first place, or who their allies are.

For instance, the territorial scope of France’s pre-1914 claim over Alsace-Lorraine would, in terms of geography alone, not amount to any significant shift in Europe’s

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42 The theorists critiqued in this chapter generally do not make such a conflation. The association of territorial claims (as well as territorial expansion in general) with revisionism is nonetheless common within the discipline. For a recent theoretical contribution that does more directly conflate the content of these two concepts see Miller (2009, 85-119).

43 For this and other cases of irredentism that would not qualify as revisionism defined here see Ambrosio (2001).
hierarchical order. To the extent, however, that France might have needed (with the help of Russia) to significantly weaken Germany in order to secure re-establishment of control over the territories, such a claim would potentially have been conceivable at the time as revisionist in its implications (as indeed the military and territorial sanctions imposed on Germany after the war were in fact\textsuperscript{44}).

4.4.2: Imperialism

Imperialism is an alternative mode of territorial expansion, defined here as: the coercive extension of military and (at least quasi-) sovereign control over any populated territories with a pre-existing independent socio-political structure. Imperialism and irredentism can sometimes be conceived as overlapping. That is, an irredentist agenda is sometimes perceived as an imperialist imposition by either parts of or most of the population of the claimed territory. Imperialism though most usually encompasses the colonisation of societies or nations viewed as foreign in identity to the imperialising nation, and often located at a great geographical distance from the empire’s core.

This definition of imperialism is differs from Morgenthau’s, which in turn was different from more common usages. For Morgenthau, the policy of imperialism was synonymous with the revisionist one of seeking to change (in his words ‘overturn’ or ‘reverse’) the hierarchy of power between two or more other powers. This usage of the term is unsatisfactory for two reasons: (1) because an international power hierarchy can be changed through mediums other than territorial expansion, and (2) status quo powers can also pursue imperialist expansion (in the more commonly understood sense) as a defensive means to preserve their relative position or advantage in a particular power distribution. Britain’s return to policies of imperial expansion post-1880, manifested for instance in the ‘scramble for Africa’, and occasional attempts to control Afghanistan, can perhaps be best seen in this light (Choucri and North 1975, chaps 3-5; Patomaki 2008, chap 4). So can Austria-

\textsuperscript{44} The Versailles Treaty imposed a substantial demilitarisation on Germany, leaving France as the dominant military power in Western and Central Europe during the 1920s (Kissinger 1994, chaps 9-11).
Hungary’s de facto annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina during the late nineteenth century (Choucri and North 1975, chap 8).

Morgenthau’s usage makes most sense if it is presumed that all strategic expansion is continental and territorial. While for most of human history this has been the case, the constant development of ever more powerful technologies applied towards weaponry and transportation over recent centuries has changed how military force can be projected and power balances formed. Conventional armed force has become more mobile over longer distances. Traditional land power has sequentially been accompanied by the development of international military power configurations at sea, in the air, and in space.

In the maritime domain at least, such developments had already been long evident when Morgenthau first published Politics Among Nations in 1948. For much of the previous two centuries, Great Britain had been a naval hegemon, around Europe and globally. But during the half-century preceding 1948, such naval hegemony had been steadily eroded, with Britain voluntarily conceding to revisionist pressures in this domain from America in the Caribbean (Campbell 2007, chap 7), and Japan (in alliance initially) in East Asian waters (O’Brien 1998, chap 2 and 7; Kennedy 1976). Conversely, Britain opted to resist and compete with the emerging German revisionist challenge in the North Sea and English Channel (Kennedy 1980; Choucri and North 1975, chap 6). In the 1920s and early 1930s, Britain engaged in naval arms limitation accords that would channel American aspirations for a global navy ‘second to none’ into an agreement that set a limit at overall parity with Britain, despite the clear potential for the US to eventually eclipse the latter’s naval power (O’Brien 1998, chaps 6 and 7; Goldman 1994).

Zero-sum disputes are certainly possible within non-continental realms (see below). But so are cooperative approaches in which a new disposition of deployed force in specified geographical areas is negotiated between status quo-oriented and revisionist states. Given now the role and reach of air weaponry (including missiles) in conventional land power balances, continental hierarchies can also potentially shift through the evolution of a new balance of deterrence. Given that such modalities are
possible ways in which regional power hierarchies can be revised, the term imperialism applied in this context obscures more than it illuminates.

4.4.3: Revolutionary Vanguardism

Buzan (1991, 306-9), Schweller (1999, 19-21) and also Henry Kissinger (1957) are most associated with the concept of revolutionary states. In the work of these authors, revolutionary states fall at the most radical end of the revisionist spectrum, and denote the efforts of one particularly powerful state to dominate the system and redefine it in its own ideological image. It is argued here, however, that using the term revolution as a category of revisionism is not the most coherent and useful way of treating and synthesising these two concepts together.

Schweller’s juxtaposition is between limited-aims revisionists and unlimited-aims or revolutionary powers. Buzan makes a similar distinction primarily between ‘orthodox’ and ‘revolutionary’ revisionist states:

Orthodox revisionism is purely about power and status. It involves no major challenge to the principles of the prevailing order, but centres on a struggle within the existing order … Revolutionary revisionism combines a struggle for power within the system with a basic challenge to the organising principles of the dominant status quo (1991, 306).

Several of the criticisms applied to Schweller’s definitions apply equally here. Buzan’s treatment of revisionism, though, does have somewhat less of a status quo bias in his recognition (following Carr) that revisionist states can be motivated by security as well as profit. Buzan’s conception also contains a nuanced understanding that the same power might simultaneously be definable as revisionist in one strategic theatre and status quo in another. Following this, and according to the definitions developed in this thesis, US strategic policy in the post-Cold War period, for instance,

45 Buzan also devised a third category of ‘radical revisionism’ to denote the attempts at collective action by third world states (eg. the Group of 77) to reform patterns of representation and distributional benefit in international economic institutions. In Buzan’s own formulation, radical revisionism ‘may pose no central threat to the basic distribution of power and status in the system’ (1991, 309). Accordingly, this thesis regards this as a reform movement not revisionism.
can be defined as revisionist in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; but status quo in Maritime East Asia, the Middle East, and the Western Hemisphere.

The preference advanced here is for the shift towards a unipolar concentration of power in a regional military-security order to be defined as radical rather than revolutionary or unlimited-aims revisionism. On one hand, attainment of unipolar hegemony or primacy can sometimes eventually lead to an end-point in the desire for territorial expansion, as was the case with the Chinese Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) (Dreyer 1982), and the US on the North American continent. On the other, the road to unipolarity may not necessarily occur solely or even at all through territorial mediums. Such a road might encompass other modalities such as: outpacing potential rivals in defence proliferation within various international commons on the basis of a superior national economic base; or accumulating and being at the centre of a network of alliance dependencies and treaty relationships.

The question of revolution in international affairs is nonetheless an interesting one, and one in need of further clarification. To do this, basic questions need to be re-asked. Namely, what constitutes a revolutionary objective in the first place? And what sorts of actions are generally required in order to successfully promote such objectives? On the first question, Buzan and Schweller speak of revolutionary states as desiring an entire change of system, usually based on some form of new transnational ideology. This formulation is not perfect, but a workable starting point. Of the two authors, only Buzan moves us some way towards addressing the second question:

The rise of a strong revolutionary revisionist threatens not only the distribution of power, but also the domestic values and structures of all the states associated with the prevailing status quo. Monarchies rightly quaked before the prospects of triumphant republicanism, just as capitalist states feared the spread of communist power and influence. In both cases, a victory for the revisionists threatened major political transformations like those imposed by the Soviet Union on Eastern Europe after the Second World War, or those imposed by the West on Germany and Japan in the purging of fascism (1991, 306-7).
Change in the domestic constitution of states is critical to understanding revolution from an international perspective. For if a given power desires a certain ideology or alternative ordering of basic normative priorities to prevail in the international arena, it is the existence of a critical mass of other states with differing ideological priorities that poses the biggest obstacle. Such a state would, at very least, need to persuade and convert many other ideologically variant domestic regimes around to their normative preferences – or else sit and wait until such polities eventually ‘come around’ through their own volition. At a much greater level of perceived imperative though (whether as a result of domestic pressures or mounting external opposition and threat), the most logically ideal solution would seem to be an active policy of regime change or imperial annexation.

Revolutionary policies are therefore defined here as: an intention or action to change the domestic political order and policy orientation (including possibly the annexation and extinguishment) of an existing sovereign state. This definition is consistent with the distinction already made between international revisionism and intra-state revolution. The separation of terms, moreover, is useful for descriptive purposes. For while revolutionary policies may indeed be revisionist in their implications, revisionist agendas do not necessarily involve revolutionary policies. And revolutionary policies are not the preserve of revisionist powers alone. It is due to this that the Bush Administration’s regime change in Iraq can be viewed simultaneously as revolutionary and intended to further the strategic status quo in terms of entrenching America’s existing unipolar primacy in the region.

The example of the adversarial bipolar relationship in Europe between the US-led Western and Soviet-led Eastern blocs during the Cold War is especially instructive for grasping this distinction. According to the definitional indicators of my theory, the initial establishment of both these blocs are clearly definable as acts of revisionism. Nevertheless, once the Soviet Union had established an effective nuclear deterrent, the strategic policies of both sides in effect maintained a rough parity of conventional and nuclear capabilities in Europe, such that a quite rigid geopolitical status quo was maintained for decades. Within the West-centred IR discipline, the USSR is usually characterised as the revisionist power during these years. The perceived difference in
the policy orientation of the Soviet bloc in Europe vis-à-vis the West is somewhat illusory though.

The USSR was indeed built on an ideology that looked forward to a bright future in which the states of the capitalist sphere would eventually collapse and become socialist. But normatively, many in the Western political classes too looked forward to a bright future in which the states of the Eastern bloc would cast off the Soviet and Communist yoke and embrace liberal-democracy and capitalism. Communist rollback in Europe was, moreover, a serious policy option considered in Washington strategic deliberations during the early Cold War (Lieven and Hulsman 2006, 21-8). At very least, the US-led Western bloc pursued a soft version of this policy (Fukuyama 2006, 131-8) – best symbolised perhaps by the operation of Radio Free Europe.

Thus during most of the Cold War in Europe, both the US and USSR can be described as revolutionary in intention and aspiration, but defensively status quo-oriented, not revisionist, in geopolitical terms. In some sense this situation even reflected a degree of consensus of a negative or pragmatic sort. That is, a fundamental political and strategic division was recognised. Each recognised the other as an adversary, and that the other also saw things that way. In hindsight, the prevailing caution seems to have reflected a shared desire to ensure that this tenuous situation at least remained stable.

The key difference between the two sides was that the USSR maintained its bloc on more imperialist terms, whereas the Western bloc, with its basis nonetheless on US hegemony over strategic policy, was maintained on a relatively more internally consensual basis. This difference did prove consequential. For once USSR under Gorbachev began to indicate a strategic retrenchment from this region, the countries of Eastern Europe did prove to be primed for mass-supported revolution (Meyer 2009). In time this was followed by the extraordinary situation of these former Eastern bloc regimes voluntarily lining up to join an expanded Western security community in Europe (David and Levesque 1999). Although not usually conceived as such, the resulting extension of the US-led and guaranteed security network of NATO clearly counts as a case of revisionism according to my theory. In this case, the US

46 On the internal struggles within the Western bloc during the Cold War see Layne (2006, chaps 4 and 5)
did not have to pursue an active revolutionary or imperialist policy to succeed at strategic expansion over a well-populated continental space.

4.5: Aspects of revisionism

At this point, we redirect attention to conceptual features that shed light on what revisionism is. The four positive features expounded below advance novel insights about revisionism as a concept that is: about power; relative change; is value neutral; and expressed in geographical space.

4.5.1: Power

Power is a complex concept, denoting a phenomenon that is manifested in a countless variety of ways (Lukes 2005). It is also a concept that when applied to the social sciences is normally impossible to measure quantitatively, and therefore predict its potential impacts, with any precision. To be sure, there are aspects of social life that can be so measured and compared. This is especially the case with accumulations of various forms of non-living resources (military or economic) in reference to their relative uses and functions. The ease with which numerical indexes can be made of such categories has made them a natural focus for theorists seeking for (at least statistical) laws of human or social behaviour that are as simple, general and elegantly axiomatic as has been previously achieved within many natural sciences.

However, given that it is ultimately human beings that develop and employ such inert resources; in the study of international politics, we need also to account for motivations and structured relationships whose tendencies are formed and conditioned by a profusion of open-system causal factors – both brute material and ideational. Indeed, from a critical realist perspective, the concept of power needs to be supported by a plausible concept of causation and causal powers.47

On this basis, there is certainly a place for a capabilities-based approach to treating power in IR. The capacity of various forms of military and economic resources to

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47 This linkage of power to causation, as well as the notion of power as ‘a capacity not the exercise of that capacity’, is also central to Lukes’ (2005, 12) extensive study of power.
destroy, obstruct, deprive, protect or provide can be tangibly estimated. And it is clear that most states seek to obtain as much reliable information as they can about both their own and other states capabilities in this regard. Most states act as if the accumulation of military and economic resources – whether for themselves or by others – is highly consequential for their interests, international status and influence. Moreover, when compared with lesser powers, the material advantages of a great power enable them to extend significant influence into a greater number of geopolitical issues across a broader geographical canvas, even if their preferences do not prevail on every issue (Lukes 2005, 74-5). Thus, where military forces are accumulated by states in peacetime but not actually used in active combat, it make sense to evaluate and rank the relative power amongst states according to the quantity and quality of their military capabilities, as well as supporting economic and population resources.

As is seen in episodes such as the Vietnam War, and the experiences of the USSR and NATO in Afghanistan, however, states that have an overwhelming material advantage can nonetheless potentially have trouble achieving their defined objectives against less capable adversaries. The historical record also shows some instances in which a bid for unipolar hegemony, while temporarily successful, was eventually thwarted and completely reversed by the combined efforts of other states (e.g. Napoleonic France and Nazi Germany). Conversely, in the case of the US, ascendance to hegemony or primacy within particular geo-political regions or sub-regions has often been enduringly accepted or even invited by other states, with minimal resistance or counter-balancing occurring. In other words, experience demonstrates that there is something more to international power than relative military and economic capabilities alone.

The more holistic understanding of power advanced in this study shares some features with the conception developed by Patomaki on the basis of critical realist principles, and shaped additionally by the ideas of Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault. According to Patomaki’s definition (2002, 113): ‘Power is the transformative capacity of agents’ capabilities (= resources as competencies and facilities).’ When Patomaki uses terms such as capabilities and resources, he does not just mean material ones, but also, and especially, discursive ones. That is, ideas and institutions that constitute, or
have currency in, society and which exercise a formal causal influence on agents, or provide them tools for action and exercising influence. In Patomaki’s words:

When actors utilise, invent or innovate resources – normally to grasp or change the world – in the course of social interaction, they also produce discursive knowledge, techniques, practical knowledge and skills, which constitute internal social relations (2002, 113).

Patomaki’s insights point to an important normative dimension of international power that co-exists on at least equal terms with the brute material dimension, and is sometimes primary to it. Of course when we talk about power, what we are usually referring to are particularly strong and influential sources of causal efficacy (as opposed to just any casual source) (Lukes 2005, 30). And in contrast to Patomaki’s focus on ‘transformative capacity’, it needs also to be acknowledged that power, both material and normative, and for better or worse, can act to inhibit and prevent possibilities for change and transformation, as well as enable it.

Thus a more accurate form of concise and generic definition would be that: *Power refers to the relative causal capacity of a given agent in relation to their environment.* An actor that is more powerful relative to others in a particular social domain is accordingly one that possesses a relatively greater share of both material resources and normative assent according to the most important conditions constituting a given system of social interaction.

In different social contexts, the balance and constitution of material and normative variables comprising an equation of power differs substantially. Within an international professional or academic organisation, for instance, intellectual authority or prestige (sources of normative power derived from one’s internally recognised contribution to a given field) count considerably in terms of influence and power, as often do personal and institutional affiliations. When such factors facilitate access to or control over the distribution of economic resources, a material power dimension is brought in. Such a dimension may also have been brought in earlier through the

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48 What is referred to here as normative power is similar to Lukes’ (2005, chap 3) revised concept of the ‘third dimension of power’.
means of other organisations, such as governments or business corporations, who attempt to influence the direction of research taken in the field. Military power is usually not a relevant currency of power in these contexts. It is always possible though for the state to intervene by using police or military forces to shut down a particular conference or organisation and attempt to physically influence what research can and cannot be done. In liberal social contexts, the passivity of the materially coercive arm of the state is at least a background enabling condition for intellectual freedom.

In international relations by contrast, and in the case of power transitions and revisionism in particular, material variables such as military capability and the economic and population facets of potential power, are central currencies of power. This is the case even when we view these factors from a more normative angle. For what we witness in a power transition is the interaction between revisionist and status quo agents that bring to their interaction an, at least initially, differing set of perceptions and interests about what constitutes an acceptable or ideal configuration of relative military capability and geo-spatial posture between them.

Beyond the potential destructive, obstructive, and protective power properties of the material capabilities themselves, however, I argue that state power manifests additionally from the resolve and commitment demonstrated towards particular interest objectives, the latter of which exercise a normative power impact on the people that collectively enact that state’s corporate agency. Such objectives and any actions oriented towards achieving them (including the development of greater material capabilities) are in turn perceived and interpreted from the vantage point of other states. The latter are faced with deciding whether the normative agenda of the other state should be band-wagoned with, accommodated or resisted.

It would appear then that there are some important attractive and repulsive, or cohesive and divisive, forces operating in international (and intra-state) political settings. In the international domain, this is manifested in what is here dubbed positive and negative prestige. In intra-state systems, the equivalent is the existence or absence of authority expressed in the degree of conformity by society or particular groups to the command powers possessed by state institutions. In both contexts,
division and cohesion hinges around the phenomenon of legitimacy. In both cases, such legitimacy is determined by the degree to which a (presently) materially powerful agent is able to claim the normative assent of others to its objectives – that is, attain and sustain normative power.

In an international political context, normative power and legitimacy arise from both internal (intra-state) and external (inter-state) political sources. On the domestic front, normative power is most related to the issue of relative resolve and commitment towards the foreign policy objectives defined by state representatives. A government that defines a strategic agenda that resonates, draws the allegiance and willingness to bear risks, expenses and sacrifices, and encounters minimal resistance or divisions within its population compared to its rivals; such a government finds its power in the international arena, at least on particular issues, augmented beyond its material weighting. This is the dynamic that occurs when a materially stronger power finds itself in trouble within an asymmetric conflict situation.

Similarly important, and possibly more so in the context of international power transitions, is the external prestige dimension of normative power. As a normative category, the concept of prestige, commonly understood in the IR literature as reputation for power, is one that has not been carried over from its classical realist origins into neorealism.

A key exception is Gilpin (1981, 30-4) who retained more of the explanatory variety of the classical realists. While Morgenthau (2006, chap 6) characterised prestige as a conscious policy undertaken by a state to make an impression of power on others, Gilpin’s (1981, 31) discussion reflects more the understanding of Carr, and the one taken up here. In the latter, prestige is described as emanating from the perceptions of other states – to which I would add for greater clarity, regardless of the conscious efforts of the prestige-bearing state.

The conception of prestige advanced here differs from Gilpin’s in two main respects. First, rather than viewing power and prestige as separate, it is more accurate to view prestige as a key facet of a form of power – normative power – that has a closely interactive causal relationship with the material dimension of power. The second and
more consequential difference is the distinction made here between positive and negative prestige. Positive prestige represents an augmentation, the latter a diminishment, of a state’s international power. Such a distinction brings greater clarity to the concept and makes it easier to develop indicators through which the phenomena can be empirically identified and evaluated.

*Negative prestige* involves recognition of, as well as either adaptation or challenge, to a great power based on a perception of threat. *Positive prestige* conversely involves an acceptance by others of the legitimacy of a great power’s strategic disposition or expansion within a given geographical space. Revisionist agendas, of course, have often been effected through physical military success in war, or through prevailing in a less physical and more psychologically-based struggle that nonetheless has a materially coercive basis. However, the endurance of any strategic expansion achieved through force, the threat of force or other material threats, depends considerably on the balance of positive or negative prestige assessments that prevail in the aftermath. While not an absolutely determinate factor (see next chapter), a revisionist state whose gains have been made at the expense of accumulating negative prestige perceptions both within and beyond its new borders, bears potential vulnerabilities that are not experienced by a state whose revisionist agenda is supported by the normative assent of most other states.

Naturally, there can often be a duality of assessment, with bestowal of positive prestige dependent on a certain limited strategic disposition, beyond which the power of the other state is viewed as a threat. Positive prestige whenever it is attained, however, can only be a boon for the power of a state. For through pursuing its expansion within the bounds of the acceptable or tolerable in the eyes of other states – that is, expansion broadly consistent with others’ normative or pragmatic preferences for regional order – it more reliably stabilises and reduces the source of potential threats to its attained position.

It is important to reiterate that when distinguishing in definitional terms, and in peacetime, a great power from other lesser powers, the most relevant indicators are material measures. Nonetheless, when it comes to the crunch of any international confrontation or crisis, the normative power dimension of relative positive and
negative prestige frequently plays a crucial role in augmenting or diminishing the power of states.

4.5.2: *Relative change*

Revisionism is a relative concept that is necessarily defined in comparison to an existing or previous status quo order. This is a simple point, but its main implication is the often-overlooked one that the term revisionism is applicable to more than one form of hierarchical change. Thus in addition to the more commonly conceived radical or hegemonic shift towards unipolarity from some other previous polarity arrangement, more limited forms of revisionism can involve a shift from unipolarity to bipolarity or multipolarity, multipolarity to bipolarity, or vice versa. Limited revisionism can also involve cases in which there is a substantial change of ranking within a well-populated multipolar system (e.g. the outcome of German unification under Prussia during the 1860s), or substantial shift in the symmetry of a bipolar order (e.g. the power transition in Europe encompassing the fall of the USSR and expansion of NATO).

In regard to a definition of the status quo, the one advanced by Morgenthau remains largely satisfactory. In Morgenthau’s words: ‘The policy of the status quo aims at the maintenance of the distribution of power that exists at a particular moment in history’ (2006, 51). There are two aspects of status quo policies, however, that have been over-looked in the existing literature. The first is that the status quo too is a relative concept. Accordingly, if a status quo order is unipolar, a strict or *hard* status quo policy would seek to preserve this order and fend off challenges by contenders seeking to (a) transform order in a bipolar or multipolar direction, or (b) replace the existing hegemony or primacy with its own. A hard status quo policy within an existing bipolar or multipolar order would be directed at (a) fending off bids for unipolarity, or (b) preventing the entrance or diminution of other poles.

The second point is that in order to be more flexibly and usefully adapted to the empirical record, it is important to make a qualitative distinction between *hard* and *elastic* policies pursued by status quo states. A hard status quo policy involves a state actively resisting any change to an existing great power polarity. An elastic policy, on
the other hand, leads existing bearers and supporters of the status quo to accommodate or enable (through declining to resist absolutely) some degree of revisionist expansion and limited transformation of the regional strategic hierarchy. In this case, the appellation of status quo represents more an initial orientation and disposition, rather than a fixed and unbending posture.

An important distinction needs to be made between an elastic status quo policy, and radical strategic retrenchment. A status quo power that pursues an elastic policy will be adamant in their aspiration to remain a leading pole within any altered hierarchy. An elastic policy can accommodate a shift to parity, that is, limited revisionism accompanied by the status quo state’s own limited retrenchment. What a status quo state pursuing an elastic policy cannot tolerate is a complete overtaking or eclipsing of it’s power, or demotion from the ranks of the great powers and polarity. Acceptance of the latter would constitute a more radical retrenchment of its position.

Retrenchment, defined as a policy of voluntary strategic diminution or disengagement (as opposed to involuntary defeat and induced surrender in war), is in effect a mirror complement of revisionist expansion. Given finite geo-spatial constraints, where revisionism is successful yet not the result of military victory, then logically one or more status quo power(s) must have voluntarily allowed a relative diminution of their material weighting in the regional hierarchy. Whether this involves an active military withdrawal from a region/sub-region, or a passive policy of not engaging in an arms race and allowing oneself to be brought into parity or eclipsed by a rising state; such policies are equally defined here as retrenchment.

Accordingly, peaceful power transitions involving limited revisions of strategic hierarchies will necessarily entail (or have the conditions prepared by) some form of limited retrenchment on the part of status quo powers. A peaceful radical revision will necessarily be accompanied by a radical retrenchment. Therefore, in addition to policies of revisionism and the status quo must be added the third category of retrenchment (the latter two of which sometimes overlap in the case of limited revisionism). When thinking of these categories as referring to types of systemic order outcome, however, the traditional two-fold dichotomy between the status quo and
different types of revisionist order outcome remains as the most coherent conception. Retrenchment is not a category of order.

4.5.3: Value neutrality

Earlier in the chapter, it was argued that revisionism in IR has accumulated some overly negative or pejorative connotations that obscure how it can also be adjusted to more peaceful episodes of transition. In the absence of any other more benign complimentary concepts to the status quo in the discipline, it is necessary to reform the image of this concept in a more value-neutral direction.

On a critical realist basis, claims of value neutrality will always, at the very least, be made on descriptive/empirical grounds. All concepts and explanations within my theory are, accordingly, being presented as representations of real structures and processes, to be judged, further adapted, or abandoned as evidence and logic indicate.

It is nonetheless possible for a concept simultaneously to be value-neutral in a descriptive sense and value-laden in a normative sense. Revisionism, with its accrued associations in common usage with violent change and coercive overlordship, has often been value-laden in this latter sense. To the extent that it has, however, it has been based on a flawed descriptive foundation. On the basis of the conception of revisionism advanced here, it becomes possible to view it as potentially value-neutral in a normative sense also.49

For a concept to be normatively value neutral, it needs to be the case that the phenomenon being described can, from a particular cultural or interest perspective, be viewed as neither a good nor a bad thing in itself. That is, from a certain collective and subjective vantage point, different cases of the same phenomenon are judged variously as having been good, bad, or neutral in their effects.

In the case of revisionism, to a large extent this hinges on the case for the possibility of both peaceful and conflict-prone power transitions (presuming of course that most

49 This thesis disagrees with Taylor that theories inevitably secrete a single, exclusive value system. See ‘Neutrality in political science’ in Taylor (1985, chap 2).
people do have a value bias towards international peace and the absence of war). The concept of revisionism advanced here is indeed adaptable to several cases (often not formerly classified as revisionism) that many in the West at least would view as historical developments that were generally favourable and beneficial, at least in the long run. This includes the case of the US destruction and conquest of Imperial Japan in WWII that facilitated its post-war establishment of regional maritime hegemony – an act of revisionism that, like the Japanese imperial project it was countering, employed tremendous violence. In this case, the violence used to achieve this revisionist outcome is often justified as having been a necessary evil.50

For consistency, one must also apply the normative value-neutrality criterion to the status quo. That is, the possibility for some status quo orders to be viewed as unjust from a contemporary value perspective. One might look, for instance, to the (admittedly short-lived) Napoleonic ‘continental system’ and Nazi imperium as examples of status quo orders that lacked legitimacy and were justified in being resisted and overthrown. The modes of expansion of both these powers leading to the establishment of these orders would today be seen as violations of the UN Charter.

By contrast, according to contemporary international law, there was nothing illegal about Germany’s revisionist naval challenge to Britain in the early twentieth century, nor Britain’s arms race counter-response for that matter. The same applies today to consideration of China’s current gradual naval build-up.

Current international legal considerations are unlikely to be the only factors contributing to the normative assessments people make about particular revisionist agendas and status quo orders. The above discussion aims only to remove any automatic normative associations attached to the terms status quo and revisionism in the abstract. Normative evaluations of revisionism versus the status quo need always to be assessed anew and built out of the particulars pertaining to specific cases.

50 There has, however, been greater controversy over whether it was necessary to use the atom bomb.
4.5.4: Geographical space

Any theory of international power needs to be grounded in some concept of spatial-geographical context. After all, the transition of power and change in the balance of influence being spoken of is, by definition, taking place beyond the borders of any single state. Extending from the insights of MOR, and the lone contribution of Lemke within PTT, it is argued that, with the exception of the nuclear balance (to which can be added the military balance in outer space), international military-security orders are regional hierarchies.

Our concept of geopolitical region is applicable not just to continental regions, but also maritime regions, and hybrid continental-maritime regions as well. This distinction brings with it an important qualitative difference. That is, in maritime spaces that are recognised as ‘high seas’ in international law, revisionist expansion does not involve contestation over property rights of territorial sovereignty or jurisdiction. This does not mean that zero-sum contestation over relative levels of force presence or control over areas of the commons is not possible. A country that refused to cap limits on naval deployment (whether status quo or revisionist) might still potentially find itself the target of punitive measures to force negotiation of a more balanced mutual disposition. War could be the result of such a confrontation. Nevertheless, the non-proprietary legal status of the high seas, and the absence of populations to govern or control, does remove one key source of affliction that has frequently accompanied continental power transitions throughout history.

While an important factor, the overall picture is more complex and variable. For maritime regions can include within them island territories and land features whose ownership is contested. As with contemporary East Asia, the existence of such disputes, and accompanying legal and strategic disputes over the status of surrounding waters, can contribute to the very definition of an identified geopolitical region and its subregions. Variation in the possible forms of legal status within certain contested maritime areas in East Asia nonetheless adds greater complexity and nuance than in purely landed territorial disputes involving the politically exclusive category of sovereignty alone.
Conversely, modern technologies have increased the scope for revisionist strategic expansion in continental regions to proceed through modalities other than territorial aggrandisement. In the case of the cultivation of exclusive alliance dependencies and networks, such an option has always been available to states as a potential modality of geopolitical expansion. In addition though, twentieth-century developments in weapons technology have extended the potential geographical reach of conventional deterrent capabilities. Accordingly, revisionism can potentially be executed purely through a shift in the regional balance of deterrence (unilaterally or in alliance).

4.6: Definitional indicators

The remaining task of this chapter is to map out and define the contents of the indicators that comprise the generic descriptive categories of the alternative theory. These descriptive components together provide a basic map of the general constitution and sequencing of stages common to all power transitions. The basic sequence is very simple. Primary causation in power transitions is located in the motivational structures and geopolitical agendas of the key powers involved. This is the first and generative stage of a power transition. The other two stages in the sequence are generated chiefly from the causal structures identifiable at stage one. These are (a) the varying types of interactive processes through which a revisionist encounter with a status quo order can proceed, and (b) the generic forms of systemic order outcome that can potentially occur in a power transition.

It is at these two stages that the sequence model comprises a series of qualitative descriptive categories. These are organised as two sets of indicators – one for the second interactive process stage, and another for the third order outcome stage. The two sets of indicators, however, will be developed here in reverse sequence.

4.6.1: Order outcomes

It is at this stage that the term revisionism is operationalised as a marker of gradations of change within a regional power hierarchy. As a phenomenon that is expressed in

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51 The operational use of these indicators is addressed in the next chapter.
geographical space, any indicators for degrees of revisionism or for defining a status quo need to be rooted in tangible geo-spatial referents. For this purpose, the model employs and combines the concepts of *geopolitical region* and *polarity*.

The geopolitical region is the setting within which a power transition takes place, and from which status quo orders and revisionist agendas are definable. The term encompasses both the geo-spatial and political-strategic dimensions of this setting. Part of its definition is geographical, in that what is being identified is a political-strategic complex operating on a localised portion of the Earth’s surface. Moreover, geographical features often contribute to the separation of a given political-strategic complex from others located in other places. This was especially the case historically, before the exponential technological developments of recent centuries reduced the tyranny of distance, and helped to overcome many physical obstacles. In the modern era, as MOR emphasises, large bodies of ocean continue to provide a separating function, at least between continental regions. To the extent, moreover, that contestation persists in great power strategic relations, the issues that divide are still expressed locally in regards to the control or levels of relative influence within particular strategic spaces, continental or maritime. These are objectives that still depend upon concentrations of localised conventional forces for their exercise.

While geographical setting is important, it is the field of political-strategic relations prevailing in a given geographical area that contributes most decisively to the definition of geopolitical regions. And it is to denote key features of this field of political-strategic relations that we here employ the term polarity. A geopolitical region is accordingly a polarity system operating over a contiguous geographical area.

The similarities and differences in the uses of the concept here and in neorealism need to be clarified. Much of the descriptive content is the same. The poles being spoken of are indeed great powers, and defined by their possessing an overwhelming material, and especially military, lead over other countries in a regional system.

Whereas neorealism argues that particular forms of polarity have certain causal properties or tendencies, it is argued here instead that polarity should be regarded as an order outcome or *effect* of state activity, not a cause. The concept of polarity here
also goes further than MOR in the tying of its definitional content to geographical considerations. Part of this involves incorporating Lemke’s factor of mutual military reach as one key criterion. There is considerably more though to the connection between polarity and geography than this. Two other criteria need to be considered when distinguishing a geopolitical region. These are (a) the effects of the existing distribution of politically parcelled territory, and (b) the existence and location of areas of overlapping interest.

The first of these factors is crucial when considering the grounds for separating out a geopolitical region. For while brute geography and distance often do some of the work of separation, the role of these factors in themselves is frequently far from decisive. The best way to illustrate this is through reference to the role of the largest sovereignty on the contemporary Eurasian landmass – Russia.

In Eurasia, the distances involved are such that it is easy to regard the separation into regions such as Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and East Asia as geographically circumscribed. In the absence of modern technology, such a view would carry much weight, although this did not prove to be an insurmountable barrier for the thirteenth century Mongols. (By the same token, the Mediterranean Sea was not a barrier for the Romans in linking together Europe south of the Alps and Africa north of the Sahara.) In fact, and in the modern world this is especially decisive, the separateness and distinctiveness of these regions is a product chiefly of the historically evolved configuration of political and strategic power.

Today, the pole of Russia effectively sets the frontier boundaries demarking the edge of Europe, and the northern extents of Central Asia. Before the collapse of the USSR, these boundaries were further to the west and south respectively. In fact, the very existence of the contemporary geopolitical region of Central Asia, as well as the new geopolitical contours of Europe, are a direct product of this political/territorial collapse. To the extent that Russian territory is uncontested by others, this creates huge areas of internal sovereign political space that are geopolitically inactive. And it is the vast size of these inactive zones that contributes so much to the geopolitical separation of Europe from Central Asia.
Contemporary Chinese territory similarly contributes to the geopolitical separation of Central and East Asia. During various periods in Chinese history in which political fragmentation prevailed, a further geopolitical region was effectively opened up within the geographical/cultural area of China Proper.\textsuperscript{52}

The contemporary division of geopolitical regions across Eurasia is by no means the only one that could be imagined. The Mongol conquests, for instance, linked politically and culturally dispersed areas of Eurasia according to different administrative divisions and centres of power than prevail today. It would also be possible to imagine a large continental state, encompassing perhaps the Eurasian parts of the former Ottoman Empire together with parts of Russia, competing (or cooperating) with another vast continental state further in the East for influence over smaller states in a geopolitical region encompassing the Indian subcontinent.

This leads to consideration of the other crucial determinant of a geopolitical region. That is, the identification of areas of overlapping strategic interest comprising a geographically localised security complex. Frequently, this manifests in the evident commitment of great power poles towards differing agendas for how particular sub-regions should be politically and strategically governed. On occasion these visions can be complementary, or otherwise amenable to adjustment and accommodation. At others, they will be in conflict and contested on a zero-sum basis.

The overlapping security complex can also be identified at the whole-of-region level according to the existence of a general structure of (conventional) deterrence. This structure might be based on unilateral policies and strategic postures amongst the region’s poles, or alternatively might be better assessed through taking into account alliance relationships.

\textsuperscript{52} Major periods of political fragmentation include the Warring States period (403-221 BC), the period between the Han and Sui Dynasties (221-589 AD), the period between the Tang and Song Dynasties (907-960 AD), and the so-called warlords period from 1916-28. In addition, the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279 AD) existed in polarity with the Jin empire in the northern part of China Proper (and most other centralised dynasties at some time in their reign operated in polarity with other powers in Central Asia). All centralised dynasties were, moreover, established out of the military victories of a rising pole of power that originally ruled one localised area of China Proper (or in the case of the Mongol [1279-1368 AD] and Manchu Dynasties [1644-1912 AD], outside China Proper).
Having provided basic criteria for identifying geopolitical regions, we can now define the content of the indicators used at the order outcome stage. There are three categories: status quo, limited revisionism and radical revisionism. Each of these categories is identified initially according to the polarity existing within a particular geopolitical region. Such polarities are invariably supported by a prevailing normative structure that is usually institutionalised in formal treaty arrangements. Such treaties can be nominally universal in coverage (eg. the Versailles Treaty), or alternatively reflected in divided alliance relationships (eg. the division between NATO and the Warsaw Pact). Thus in addition to change in polarity structure, it is important to look for change or challenge to the treaty arrangements framing territorial and military-security orders. This is the equivalent of the state constitution within intra-state contexts.

The method for identifying a status quo order is fairly self-evident. The task involves establishing the validity of a polarity structure, with additional reference to corresponding treaty structures that support regional territorial and political-strategic norms. While the status quo is the benchmark from which revisionist change is identified or projected, the preservation or restoration (after challenge) of the status quo power structure also comprise possible order outcomes in a power transition.

Identifying and distinguishing between limited and radical revisionism involves somewhat more consideration. The difference between the two is the form of polarity shift. It is not one between more and less violent or peaceful forms of revisionism. There are conditions under which both limited and radical forms of revisionism can be conflict-prone or peaceful. This latter dimension is indicated at the second interactive process stage, not the order outcome stage. Yet, whether achieved peacefully or otherwise, revisionism of any gradation is always a challenge, because it always involves some degree of zero-sum adjustment within a finite space and field of relations.

Both limited and radical revisionism are primarily indicated by shifts in relations of control, primacy or deterrence. In landed contexts, control is here defined as military occupation in either a sovereign or quasi-sovereign capacity. The equivalent in maritime contexts is ‘sea control’ defined as the ability to prevent military penetration
of a maritime region or subregion by rival navies. Primacy is indicated by patterns of alliance and spheres of influence (whether voluntaristic or the result of hegemonic subordination).

In limited revisionism, if control or primacy is involved it takes place at a sub-regional level. In effect, a shift towards unipolarity over a single sub-region that previously embodied a different configuration of strategic influence or control. The previous configuration might have been bipolar or multipolar, or alternatively consisted of the territory or unipolar sphere of influence of another power. A genuine sub-region needs to be a substantial geographical segment of the entire geopolitical region, not a minor frontier region.

In radical revisionism, primacy (and potentially control in the case of a region of high seas) is effected over an entire region, and involves either the elimination or superseding of previously rival or co-existing poles. There is thus a move away from either bipolarity or multipolarity towards unipolarity across the entire region. In addition to violent ejection or diminishment, there is the possibility also of a power effecting a radical (or limited) revisionist shift through filling the strategic vacuum left by a retrenching power.

Limited revisionism can manifest alternatively in the establishment of a new region-wide deterrence or cooperative security relationship in an overlapping strategic space, continental or maritime. In such situations, the aim of a revisionist agenda is not to dominate but to counteract or prevent dominance by other states. That is, it challenges unipolarity or bipolarity.

On the normative side, establishment of a new polarity normally produces a corresponding shift in the normative order underpinning a geopolitical region. The new normative order may or may not be consensually based. It might embody a division (such as the post-WWII European Cold War order), or be forcibly imposed (eg. the Napoleonic treaty system). To whatever extent backed or lacking in consensual support, the revised military-security order will usually be further indicated through treaty arrangements that attempt, successfully or otherwise, to enshrine the legitimacy of the new order.
4.6.2: Interactive processes

At this stage of the model, there are two sets of indicators – active and pre-active. The active category denotes a series of generic means through which a revisionist encounter with the status quo order can proceed. These six generic active processes include: war, conquest, control, deterrence, alliance, and negotiation. The pre-active category denotes an assessment of the balance of positive and negative prestige.

Two types of dynamics indicated and assessed at the interactive process stage include (a) the extent to which a power transition was, or may potentially be, peaceful or conflict-prone, and (b) the extent to which a revisionist agenda was, or may potentially be, prosecuted on a coercive or consensual basis. It is the processes within the active category that indicate the existence of peaceful or conflict-prone dynamics. The issue is not always black-and-white, and most cases involve a combination of processes. Several of the six, moreover, have the dual potential to be accompanied by either peace or conflict.

Coercive/consensual dynamics are most indicated by prestige assessments. Prestige, after all, is comprised of the attitudes other states have towards the status quo order and revisionist agenda in light of their own motivational disposition and balance of interest priorities. Some less direct indication of coercive/consensual dynamics can nonetheless be discerned within discussion of the active processes as well.

The contents of the six active processes will be defined first, followed by further discussion of prestige.

War: This is the only one of the six that can be described as non-peaceful and coercive by its very definition. Like the next two processes, it is also a predominantly physical category of indicator. That is, war is indicated by the attempt to physically achieve geopolitical objectives through prevailing in a military-to-military contest. There is, of course, a fundamental psychological dimension to warfare that plays a key role in determining its initiation and outcomes. However, its distinguishing feature when contrasted to a state of non-war is the physical clash of armed forces to achieve physical objectives.
Conquest: In practice, conquest is usually accompanied or preceded by a war. It is defined here as the physical military occupation of land territory beyond a state’s prior areas of control. The territory does not necessarily need to be formally annexed. While usually a non-peaceful modality, it is nonetheless possible sometimes for conquest to proceed with minimal if any military-to-military violence on the basis that resistance is weak or otherwise successfully deterred. Further, the action may to some degree be consensually based. Nazi Germany’s 1938 annexation of Austria is an example of such a conquest.

Control: This term is used to capture equivalents of conquest and occupation within non-landed areas. Such areas include international commons such as the high seas and outer space, as well as maritime zones whose proprietary or administrative status is contested. Control occurs in these areas when the armed forces of a state or coalition are able to dominate and prevent, at will, the access and use of these spaces by its rivals. Achievement of control may or may not be preceded by a clash of armed force, and in some cases may in part be consensually based.

Deterrence: This is the first of two indicators comprised of both physical and subjective psychological elements. Physically, weapon arsenals are the means used to attempt to neutralise the forces of the other, and constrain the scope of their potential uses. Deterrence is also psychological because the use of such military means to constrain others’ actions presupposes that the other side has a certain type and level of risk aversion that, under anticipated force level conditions, will dominate their motivational disposition.

In a given case, such shifting force ratios may or may not exercise the intended deterrent effect, and indeed may sometimes be viewed more as an opening window of opportunity for aggression on the part of the rising state. In some cases, other states will, according to their perceptions and interests, view shifts towards military parity as threatening. At other times, mutual security satisfaction might be attainable. At the very least, though, shifts in the polarity of deterrence have historically played a major role in how the politics of geopolitical regions evolve, and in determining patterns of relative negotiational status and hierarchy.
Deterrence is a category in the model that, together with polarity, requires some quantitative treatment. In establishing that a shift in the balance of deterrence is constituting a revisionist shift in itself, quantitative comparisons of weapons inventories are often needed to gauge approximate levels towards parity, whether in an emerging bipolar or multipolar context. Any weapons compared need to be those actually deployed or flexibly deployable as a reserve back up within a region. As with the contemporary US, this is not necessarily the full national arsenal. Accordingly, and in contrast to PTT, it would be expected that in certain contexts, military parity might be reached well before GDP parity.

In determining a state of military parity, quantitative measures, while a necessary component of the process, are not sufficient in themselves. Qualitative assessment is needed of the types of weaponry and technology being matched and their particular powers of impact. Given the role of differential technologies and unilateral innovation, military parity is not inevitably the expression of a weapon-for-weapon or man-for-man numerical symmetry. In light of this, parity, in a deterrence structure context, is perhaps best defined as: a state in which poles of power possess the potential capacity (assuming further equivalences in motivation and strategic competence) to sustain an inconclusive outcome in region-wide conventional conflicts based upon open battle- (as opposed to guerrilla-) style warfare. In multipolar regions based on four or more great powers, this criterion for gauging parity (or qualification as a great power) is altered to encompass a similar potential capacity to sustain a stalemate, only this time in alliance with a single other peer or lesser power.

Shifts in the hierarchy of deterrence can be adversarial or cooperative. Adversarial shifts are indicated by ongoing arms races; relatively or wholly cooperative ones by the negotiation of arms control agreements and treaties, and/or the voluntary retrenchment of a previous bearer of the status quo. Revisionism in the hierarchy of deterrence can thus potentially proceed on a consensual basis. Conversely, the same shift might at other times enable the revisionist state to proceed with more coercive expansionary actions against some smaller states, whilst neutralising the will to resist of other great powers.
Alliance: The formation of alliances can have both offensive and defensive purposes. Alliances have been made by revisionist states to further the prospects for success in coercive wars of conquest. The alliance formations of most interest here though are those that, in themselves, can be viewed as constituting revisionist shifts in a region’s polarity structure, even absent their use for actual war.

Three conditions must be met in order for alliance formation to constitute a polarity shift. First, there needs to be evidence of a formal mutual defence guarantee. Second, the alliance needs to be exclusive of other great power poles in the region. An ‘alliance’ structure inclusive of all poles and most states in a region, would not be an alliance so much as a collective security or concert of power mechanism. Third, the alliance needs to be the expression of an enduring alignment of fundamental geopolitical interests, manifested in policies of coordinated response and deterrence towards the other poles (or potential poles) in the system. Alignment cannot be too temporary or part of an ever shifting manoeuvring of an essentially autonomous pole. At base, the states need to be aligned on the question of maintaining the relative competitiveness and deterrence posture of the regional geopolitical pole they jointly form.

Negotiation: This denotes the inter-subjective process of reaching agreements, both formal and informal (or tacit), on questions of military-security order. This process excludes instances in which terms are imposed by the victor of a major war. It is inclusive though of instances in which means of coercive diplomacy short of out-and-out war (eg. economic sanctions, the threat of war, and perhaps even some limited military engagements) were involved in shaping a negotiation outcome. In these instances, the powers being coerced are still judged as possessing sufficient discretion in their decision-making to be considered voluntary parties to the agreement.

There is, however, more to negotiation than just coercive bargaining. Of most interest are those instances in which negotiation and deliberation leads to a genuine consensus in which all parties view the order outcome agreed upon as legitimate. Instances in which, at the outset, preferences differed or were in conflict in some areas, but which were eventually adjusted for and a mutual accommodation reached.
*Prestige:* Prestige is a pre-active category because of its basis in the motivational sources that emerge prior to and shape the actions that states take. Prestige operates at the level of formal causation (in Aristotle’s terminology). In terms of causal analysis, therefore, prestige is a more substantial explanatory category in itself than is the case with the active categories. The latter indicate more *how* a power transition proceeded, than *why* it proceeded as it did. The category of prestige indicates both important how and why aspects of explanation.

Positive prestige is indicated from the support that particular states give towards the status quo, or to conditions under which they could support the revisionist agenda. Negative prestige is indicated from the perceptions of threat or illegitimacy expressed by states towards the policies of the leading revisionist and status quo powers. Subsequent chapters will elaborate on the methods for making such prestige assessments within case analysis.

**4.7: Conclusion**

This chapter has provided rationales and definitions for the concepts comprising a revised theory of power transition. Central to the discussion was the concept of revisionism. As a mainstream IR concept that has been persistently underdeveloped, the key aim of the chapter was to reformulate this concept in a more logically and empirically consistent, as well as value-neutral direction. More tangible, precise and consistent indicators were developed for differentiating cases of limited and radical revisionism within the military-security orders of geopolitical regions. These definitions are able to encompass cases of both more and less peaceful or conflict-prone, coercive or consensually based power transitions. Variability in the potential dynamics of a power transition is further captured by the diverse set of interactive process indicators developed. Chapter 5 will now incorporate these largely descriptive conceptual elements into a summary statement of the entire theory.
Chapter 5: The Alternative Theory

This chapter concludes Part I by synthesising the various components and arguments of previous chapters into a summary statement of the alternative theory. The aim is to clarify the theory’s core propositions so as to enable it to be both readily tested and operationalised for case analysis.

The establishment of any generic cross-case theory within the social sciences is invariably complicated by the fact that the phenomenon being analytically isolated operates in an open system. Where identical or similar processes are at play across differing historical and spatial contexts, it is expected that the dynamics, trajectory, and even some core features may differ as a result of the unique causal complexes operative in particular cases.

Yet, critical realism also depicts the world as structured and stratified in at least relatively permanent ways. Thus while the world is indeed extraordinarily complex and prone to evolutionary transformation, most of this arises from the interaction of causal mechanisms and conditions with determinate or finite structures and ways of operating. In articulating a synthesised statement of the alternative theory of power transition, this chapter will draw out and distil observations from previous chapters about both the determinate and variable (yet finite) features of the power transition phenomenon that apply universally.

Note that in my usage, the term determinate differs from, and is not synonymous, to the term finite. Determinate denotes those features of an international power transition that are definite, necessary and unchanging. Finite applies to those parts of my model where there is a circumscribed range of possibilities, and yet none of the individual categories within it are fixed or necessary, but are variable in their incidence.

5.1: Ontology of international power transitions

There are two types of determinate feature that a given theory can embody. The first is the ontology of a theory. That is, the causal entities, agents or structures that are
claimed by the theory to exist, to possess certain definite properties and tendencies, and whose non-existence would indicate the absence of the theorised phenomenon itself.

The theory advances five major ontological claims. Claim 1 states that great powers, conceived as relatively empowered and sovereign corporate agents, are the causal protagonists of power transitions. Claim 2 posits the significant causal status of state interest structures/complexes, and is the most theoretically consequential claim of the five. Geopolitically relevant interest structures are the primary drivers of the power transition process from start to finish. As generative structures comprising state motivation, moreover, they are the site at which the real potential for any power transition first emerges.

Interest structures, however, are important as much for their cross-case variability as for their determinate causal role. In contrast to existing theories of power transition, we advance an open system concept of state motivation that acknowledges states as motivated by multiple, and sometimes conflicting, goals and values. The definition and relative priority of these are determined as much by varying cultural perceptions, ideas, and domestic inter-group relationships, as by the influence of the brute material circumstances states find themselves in. State interests and motivations, accordingly, need to be investigated for their particular case-specific attributes, and in all their complexity, in order to attain adequate explanation and understanding of state behaviour (past, present, and potential).

The site of such investigation is the domestic socio-political system of states, which, unlike anarchy and polarity within neorealism, are argued as genuinely emergent structures that exercise real formative causal impacts on the individual agents that comprise the social system (in this case, individual human beings rather than states). The claim about corporate agency, in turn, is plausible so long as the identities and actions of state representatives are evidently moulded and conform to social prescriptions about their roles in a system of collective action. On the question of the reality of state corporate agency, this theory sides with Wendt (1999, chap 5), rather than Wight’s (2006, chap 5) sceptical view.
The three remaining ontological claims relate more directly to the material context of international politics. Claim 3 stipulates the indispensable role of geographical space as a stage setting, currency, and sometimes a material obstacle for geopolitical action. Claim 4 posits comparative military force as both the defining attribute of a great power, and core currency (together with geographical space) of a power transition. Both of these claims reflect an assimilation of key components of MOR. The main difference of their treatment in my theory lies in the mediating role of normative factors (ideas and values) in determining the meaning, and relatively benign or threatening security significance, that states superimpose on their brute material circumstances.

Finally, Claim 5 affirms and assimilates the insight of existing power transition theories that a supportive national economic base is the necessary underpinning for military power. Whatever the social system and mode of production through which the economic life of a state is constituted in a particular historical era; in order to develop and sustain weapons production and military organisations, state leaders need always to generate and sustain sufficient wellsprings of industrial capacity, public revenue, and food production. Accordingly, national economic security motives in whatever form they take (benign/malign mercantilist, liberal, or autarkic) invariably feature significantly within the interest structures of great power states involved in power transitions.

In addition to these ontological components, the three-stage sequence structure of the power transition process also counts as a determinate feature. The sequence is determinate in that it is impossible for a power transition to occur and circumvent any of the three stages. Introduced in the previous chapter, these stages are: (1) the generative motivational stage; (2) the interactive process stage; and (3) the order outcome stage (see Table 1). Both this sequence structure and the possible actions occurring at each stage are a product of and therefore circumscribed by the ontological features listed above. It is not an ontological entity in itself.
### Table 1: The sequence structure of an international power transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generative Motivational</td>
<td>Interactive Process</td>
<td>Order Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Primary source of causation</td>
<td><strong>Active</strong></td>
<td>Limited Revisionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intra-state perceptions and interest structures manifested in state geopolitical agendas</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Radical Revisionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conquest</td>
<td>Status Quo (preservation or restoration)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deterrence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alliance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-active</strong></td>
<td>Balance of positive and negative prestige perceptions</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The primary source of causation is at Stage 1, which captures the generative powers of the perceptions and interest structures that causally underpin the content of the various great power geopolitical agendas. From the vantage point of the Stage 3, Stage 2 might also be considered as causal in terms of the influence of various possible processes (eg. war, deterrence, negotiation) on the resulting order outcome of a power transition. In reality, however, these processes are more caused than cause, and are really just a conceptual way of capturing the variable (but finite) forms of interaction amongst the various true ontological entities and forces. Namely, the great powers and the shifting *relationship* of their interest motivations to other of their own and to those of other states; and with reference to material factors of geography, the balance of military force, and economic capacity. The categories within the order outcome stage – geopolitical regions, polarity, status quo, limited and radical revisionism – do not possess emergent causal powers of their own, but are rather the formal systemic *effect* and outcome of causal mechanisms located elsewhere. The individual generic categories comprising the contents of both Stages 2 and 3 are, moreover, variable/finite not determinate features of the model.
5.2: Three hypotheses about war and peace

The second type of determinate feature is more controversial when applied to the social sciences. That is, the discovery of determinate causal laws that arise out of the nature of the things identified at the level of ontology. The incidence and trajectory of a power transition is, indeed, mostly contingent on a unique case-specific constellation of multiple interacting causal tendencies. Most of these are generated from the motivations and actions of consciously reflective agents with the potential to change their collective mindset. Yet, it would appear that there are at least three non-trivial aspects of power transitions, relating to war and peace, that can be rendered in the form of a general and determinate hypothesis as a sort of preliminary audition towards law status (pending more extensive testing and debate). Such ‘laws’ are most easily discernible through qualitative not quantitative forms of logic – that is, considerations of natural necessity (or observable necessary connections between variables). As determinate causal claims, the revelation of a single case anomaly, or plausible hypothetical one, would be enough to stymie the possibility for them to be considered as laws.

**Hypothesis I:**

The first hypothesis arises from the limiting properties of the spatial-geographic setting of international geopolitics. That is, given that a revisionist agenda always applies to and occurs within a finite geographical space and field of military-security relations – the existing status quo power(s), or other revisionist competitors in a given region or sub-region, are always faced with the prospect of losing some former level of relative power and status. That is, any substantial increase of territorial control, or military capabilities deployed in coverage over a strategic space by a revisionist power, naturally and unavoidably diminishes the previous advantages of status quo powers in a rough inverse ratio (taking into consideration likely qualitative variations in weapon technology and innovations between these powers). Accordingly:

In a power transition there is always some form and degree of zero-sum adjustment that is being demanded, requested, or enacted.
While neutral on the question of war and peace, this first hypothesis nonetheless defines and explains the essential challenge of a power transition.

The spatial constraints are such that if a status quo power viewed their interests as best served by a hard status quo policy, then the only way to prevent any impending shift in polarity (even if only expressed as a shift in the balance of deterrence) would be through recourse to coercive military action. The latter contingency would mean war if the revisionist power retaliated rather than surrendered.

Conversely, any peaceful revisionist outcomes will have been facilitated by a corresponding limited or radical retrenchment on the part of the bearers of the status quo. If the power transition process proceeds largely on a consensual basis, however, such a zero-sum adjustment in material power relations can still potentially provide a basis for stable military-security order and mutual security satisfaction post-transition.

**Hypothesis II:**

This second hypothesis will be referred to as the generic cause of conflict in a power transition. Once again, as a phenomenon that is expressed in geographical space, where conflict arises in a power transition, it is always due to the existence of irreconcilable zero-sum differences over how particular strategic spaces of overlapping value should be politically and strategically governed. The range of possible mutually exclusive ambitions and objectives include sovereign territorial disputes, contestation over spheres of influence, or over relative military force deployments in particular strategic spaces. Stated axiomatically:

*The generic cause of any conflict in a power transition lies in the physical incompatibility of the geopolitical interest definitions held by the great power stakeholders within an overlapping strategic space.*

This generic cause is not determinate in an ‘if X, then Y’ sense. The determinacy of the generic cause is most clearly seen through reversing the formulation. That is, if Y (the incidence of conflict) occurs, it is always principally generated by X (the conditions stated in the generic cause formulated above). The conditions of the generic cause are not sufficient in themselves to generate an outbreak of conflict.
Various other conditions are always operative that, moreover, need to be perceived by the protagonists themselves as either enabling effective military action or as making resort to arms unavoidable.

The conditions of the generic cause are necessary ones though, unlike PTT’s zone of parity or the emergence of a potential hegemon in MOR. Sub-parity conflict initiation is possible if particular motivations and varying perceptions and thresholds of risk permit (witness, for instance, Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941). Neither do the propositions of PTT and MOR necessarily function as symptomatic conditions indicating the potential for or immanence of conflict. A zone of parity, and an overtaking or potential hegemon can potentially emerge without the incidence of conflict. In every case of power transition where a conflict occurs, however, one is always witnessing the physical manifestation of an incompatibility in the pre-formed geopolitical agendas and interests of the protagonists. If this normative incompatibility is removed, there is no potential for conflict.

While the generic cause of conflict stipulates this necessary condition of normative incompatibility, the actual content of the particular geopolitical agendas of states as well as the motivational sources underpinning them need to be filled in for each case under examination, and serve as the real dynamic causes. When examining the conditions for a more or less peaceful or conflict-prone power transition, the generic cause helps us to determine the factors that demand further investigation. In the case analysis of the rise of China in Part II, a key question underpinning the investigation, and derived from this generic cause, is: Are the current geopolitical interest definitions of China and the US (and other key regional stakeholders) compatible or incompatible in their physical implications within the overlapping strategic space of Maritime East Asia?

Hypothesis III:
The third hypothesis states that:

The relative gains of a revisionist state are guaranteed to be secure if it attains and sustains the consent to its position from all other great powers and most other states with a stake in a geopolitical region.
Or in even more simplified terms:

\[ \text{Mutual positive prestige} = \text{legitimacy} = \text{deep geopolitical stability} \]

In practice, such a condition of mutual positive prestige is not easy to attain in a power transition context, given the irreducible element of zero-sum adjustment involved. It is nevertheless plausible in light especially of the non-territorial modes of strategic expansion highlighted by this theory. Great powers in history, moreover, have not infrequently given enduring recognition to each other’s annexations – more usually when it is someone else’s loss.

The term consent needs qualification. In practice, consent can be genuine or tactical. Tactical consent refers to agreements that states make on suboptimal terms out of a sense of either temporary or permanent weakness and disadvantage in a relationship or regional strategic situation. The longevity of such an agreement cannot be guaranteed under changed conditions of relative power or alliance. It thus lacks the stability and reliability of genuine consent, which is what the above principle presumes. The Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 is a classic example of an agreement entered into from both sides on the basis of tactical consent. Contrary to the assumptions of MOR in particular, reliable clues as to the relative authenticity or expediency of consent to geopolitical agreements and understandings can often be obtained through study of the internal foreign affairs discourse and interest structures of states.

The determinacy of the third hypothesis does not apply to its opposite. That is, the notion that negative prestige stemming from other peer or displaced poles will inevitably threaten the loss and reversal of any revisionist gains. In modern times, this is precisely what happened to Napoleonic France, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. It did not happen, however, when the USSR established the Eastern Bloc at the end of WWII, where it sustained its imperial gains for four decades in the face of negative prestige from the US and Western European powers. When the Eastern Bloc did collapse, moreover, it was pre-dominantly driven by causes internal to the Bloc states (an internal legitimacy problem), and facilitated by the Soviet Union’s own moves toward retrenchment (Meyer 2009).
There are at least two general conditions that can retard the corrosive power of negative prestige. The first is an emergent material disparity so large that rivals or enemies can no longer militarily compete, individually or collectively. This situation was seen during the height of power of regional empires such as Rome and some Chinese dynasties (especially the Tang Dynasty), as well as American primacy in Maritime East Asia since 1945 and up until recently. The second condition is that existing rivals are unwilling to accept the risks, costs, sacrifice, or perhaps ruthlessness required to reverse an undesired geopolitical outcome. This describes the attitude of the Western powers towards the establishment of the Eastern Bloc at the end of WWII (despite the US nuclear monopoly). The corrosive power of negative prestige, while frequently significant, thus cannot be translated into a general hypothesis or law of reversal of fortune.

5.3: Variable features

The variable features of this theory are located within the three stages comprising the power transition sequence structure (Table 1).

The generic categories within Stages 2 and 3 represent variable but finite possibilities at the interactive process and order outcome stages respectively. In regards to Stage 2, I make the (determinate) claim that any power transition that reaches the active stage will involve at least one of the six generic processes proposed – war, conquest, control, deterrence, alliance, negotiation. These modalities are variable in their incidence, combination, and causes within particular cases, but represent the finite range of means that can be employed whilst remaining within the bounds of a power transition.

At Stage 3, I claim that the outcome of any power transition will closely approximate one of only three possibilities – limited revisionism, radical revisionism, or the preservation or restoration of the status quo. A limited or radical revisionist outcome will not necessarily be the product of the revisionist state that gave the initial impetus to a power transition. Historically, resisting powers have, in the course of their struggle with a revisionist, often come to define their own interests in a revisionist
direction. The aftermath of WWII in both Europe and Maritime East Asia should be understood in this way. Note that there is no determinate relationship between any particular processes at Stage 2 with any particular outcomes at Stage 3.

Greatest variability is located within Stage 1 of the model. Even here, the range of possibilities is not infinite. To qualify as relevant, interests formed at this stage must refer to the two primary currencies of international power transitions – geographical space (beyond areas of existing territorial control) and military resources. Yet, whatever finitude exists in the possibilities for state motivation in a power transition, attempts to narrow the range down to a handful of generic categories are not particularly useful for either historical explanation or future projection purposes.

One could, for instance, make a distinction between geographical control and deterrence interests. The problem is that we cannot know whether or not either of these categories is a potential source of a great power conflict, or even a case of revisionism, unless we can know or tangibly estimate (a) the minimum geographic scope and contour of expansionary ambitions, (b) the geographical or military development red lines that would trigger confrontation with status quo powers, and (c) the robustness, stability, and relative priority of the political motivations that underpin such geopolitical interests. No matter how finely we further sub-divide any generic categories here, to identify cases of fit or misfit we cannot avoid the need to define the specific ideational contents of state interests, and identify the reasons and socio-political forces that support or weaken the motivational force or potential commitment to defined interests. Both the influence of culture based on varied lessons of historical experience, and differences in the forms and dynamics of intra-state group relations, mean that the content of geopolitical interests (and levels of commitment toward them) cannot be deduced and predicted from a state’s brute material environment and potential power alone. Adequate explanation and/or future projection of power transitions requires state interests and perceptions to be investigated, conceptualised, and evaluated for their revisionist implications (or otherwise) on a case-by-case basis.

The methods for identifying and conceptualising interest structures provide, simultaneously, the means for undertaking assessments of the balance of positive and
negative prestige (the *pre-active* process operative at Stage 2). This, naturally, is because it is these very perceptions and interest structures that form the standpoints states take towards the policies and actions of other states; which in turn mould the propensity of states to engage in behaviours consistent with various of those listed in the *active* category of Stage 2. Note that state prestige perceptions (and the interest motivations underpinning them) can sometimes be highly dualistic, leading to policies that are fluid and changeable. The shift in Anglo-American/Soviet relations from allies in WWII, against the shared threat of Nazi Germany, to enduringly hostile rivals in the war’s aftermath, provides a good illustration of this point.

Evidence of both the existence of interest structures, and of positive and negative prestige perceptions held by states towards its peers, can be obtained from both word and deed. Official diplomatic communications and government documents are the most authoritative sources. Further and deeper insights can be gained through wider exploration of internal national discourses. The latter, however, needs to be supported by explanations of how currents in the national discourse are related to political interest structures that influence government policy (see Chapter 6).

Compared to prospective analysis, in historical cases, explanatory claims about the role of particular interests and ideas can be relatively more decisively confirmed or falsified through additional reference to the actions and responses that states made to events (eg. the wars initiated, participated in, or abstained from; the compromise proposals supported or dismissed; the treaty terms voluntarily or involuntarily agreed to, etc). In prospective cases, given that there is usually more ambiguity in the evidence (at least on particular details), assessments of state perceptions and interest priorities are relatively more interpretative. In-depth and evidence-based justifications need to be developed, and are indispensable, for supporting one interpretation over another.

The overall function of the three-stage sequence structure as a methodological tool differs too when applied to historical and prospective cases. In historical cases, the sequence structure, and the generic categories within it, are used to generate an orderly description that functions as a richly suggestive ‘thin’ explanation. In providing a framework for demonstrating *how* a given power transition proceeded,
such a ‘thin’ explanation in turn provides an efficient way of structuring further investigation into deeper and more particularised causal explanations concerning why a power transition occurred and took the trajectory (conflict-prone/peaceful, coercive/consensual) it did.

In contrast, when applied to prospective cases, such as the rise of China, the function of the variable indicators within Stage 2 and 3 changes and is arguably enhanced. That is, the indicators are used to identify tangible possibilities for hierarchical change or stasis in regional military-security order, as well as potentials for regional peace or instability, implied within the existing interests of regional powers. In other words, they become tools for explaining possibilities. The claim here is that owing to the knowledge we have of the variable/finite forms a power transition trajectory can take, the model enables us to (a) confidently identify the potential for a revisionist encounter with the status quo order, and (b) identify important conditions under which existing geopolitical agendas and their interactive logic imply certain power transition processes and outcomes and not others.

The task set for Part I of this thesis – exposition of an alternative theory and methodology for the study of international power transitions – has now been completed. Part II will now thoroughly apply it towards enriching understanding and explanation of the rise of China as a prospective case of power transition.
PART II:

APPLICATION TO THE RISE OF CHINA
Chapter 6: Contemporary Chinese Grand Strategy

The aim of this chapter is to identify and explain the complex of interest structures underpinning contemporary Chinese grand strategy. The analysis of motivational causes in this chapter provides necessary materials and context for following chapters that explain and evaluate possibilities for Chinese revisionism. On one hand, the present chapter (a) defines the contents, and (b) explains the robustness of particular interests that are later identified as revisionist in their implications. On the other, the chapter establishes a reliable basis for subsequent future-oriented analysis through placing such interests in the context of the entire motivational disposition of the Chinese state.

The chapter has four sections. Section 6.1 examines some case-specific methodological issues involved in identifying interest structures in Chinese foreign policy. The remaining sections then define and analyse the contents of each of these interest structures, as well as some of the inter-relationships between them.

6.1: Chinese interest structures: methodological issues

There are two components of state interest structures that always need to be identified and analysed. The first is their ideational manifestation in the form of real (that is, authentic, rather than misleading, representations of) government policy agendas. Such agendas, once consolidated, exercise real causal impacts through (a) supplying form and purpose to the political and foreign policy action of state representatives, and (b) influencing domestic social attitudes towards the state (in conformity or opposition).

Secondly, such ideational agendas are themselves a perpetual product of the socio-political networks and dynamics comprising the internal politics of a state at a given historical moment. Hence, the explanation of real grand strategic agendas requires an account of the domestic political forces that underpin either the stability or fragility of such agendas. That the institutional composition, inter-group dynamics, as well as political and social cultures within states are never identical across cases, means that
the analyst must consider factors that are *not* replicated across other, even similar, domestic political systems.

In the case of China, the fact that its domestic political system is based on the political hegemony of a single party (the Chinese Communist Party; henceforth CCP), that moreover has, in recent decades, reformed away from a previously more totalitarian system, remains central to understanding Chinese foreign policy. The intense concentration of power within the party and state apparatus, and the tight control exercised by this hierarchy over media, political/historical education, and civil society (Gilley 2011; Brady and Wang 2009), has fostered some distinctive patterns of foreign policy making and state-society relations in comparison to any liberal-democratic state.

To be sure, a generic mechanism in the foreign policy making process of *hierarchical manufacture and dissemination* (HMD) operates in some form within every modern state. In *representative* democracies, there is always a sense in which the government has a mandate to formulate and implement a foreign policy program reflective of their own strategic preferences. In liberal democracies, however, government policies are always expressed within a broader marketplace of ideas, and are subject to continual public critique and political contest. On foreign policy no less, political parties must sometimes be prepared to adjust existing policies and preferences or risk being ejected from, or prevented from being elected to, government. In a liberal democracy therefore, the mechanism of HMD is ultimately subordinate to another mechanism of *public discursive selection* (PDS).

In contrast, within the People’s Republic of China (PRC), HMD is the dominant foreign policy making mechanism. This does not preclude the possibility of public debate on foreign policy issues. Where debate occurs, it is conducted within a tighter and more multi-faceted set of enforced parameters and prohibitions. In addition to prohibitions common in democracies, such as against incitement to terrorism or racial vilification, public commentators and opinion leaders in China will not be published, or else may be punished or at least censured, if their views contradict core political narratives and interest definitions.
Beyond this coercive dimension, hegemonic regime narratives exercise a formative influence on the normative thinking of many Chinese through the tightly controlled media and education systems. In China, one will not find any seriously contradictory views to the regime’s interpretation of national history, the definition of Chinese territorial integrity, or about a future political system that would not require the CCP to maintain the leading role. Consensus and repetition is thoroughgoing in Chinese publications about politics and international relations, and much of the accumulated official narrative was established and consolidated during the earlier totalitarian phases of the regime (1950s-early 1980s). The depth of the regime's longstanding, closed propaganda legacy is such that even those strains of popular nationalism that are critical towards the government are (with the important exception of Han chauvinism [Leibold 2010]) largely just more passionate and one-sided defences of components of the regime narrative they have grown up with.

Since the ‘reform and opening up’ period inaugurated under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s, the CCP has allowed some expansion of the space for open policy debate. Public debate and alternative views within expert communities are today evident on numerous issues, including non-trivial ones such as China’s future geopolitical strategy, economic and social policy, and, within strict limits, the possibilities for political and institutional reform (Leonard 2008; Gilley and Holbig 2009). The regime has also expanded mechanisms of consultation (albeit still highly selective) with academic and other non-governmental expertise in the foreign policy making process (Lampton 2001; Zhao 2007). In addition, with the advent of the internet in China, the regime has needed to respond to and manage the unprecedented critical scrutiny and judgement of its conduct by an expanding online community (Shirk 2010; Xiao 2010; Hong 2007; Lu 2007).53

Manage is the key word here. For while the regime has become more responsive and willing to consult with a wider range of expertise and social forces, there has never been any question of abandoning the one-party system and centralised authoritarian decision-making procedures (Tsang 2009; He and Thogersen 2010). The role of

53 See also the reports on internet public opinion and government strategic responses in the annual ‘Blue Book’ published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: Zhongguo Shehui Xingshi Fenxi yu Yuce (Society of China: Analysis and Forecast).
debate where it occurs, therefore, does not translate into a mechanism of PDS. Rather, in the Chinese case, HMD co-exists with a mechanism of authoritarian consultation and management (ACM). To the extent that threads of the relatively more open discourse are woven into official policy at the national level, it occurs through negotiation within and voluntary selection by the regime’s top hierarchy, and without the additional selective effects of electoral pressures and outcomes.

The high degree of consensus (both enforced and genuine) in the Chinese polity simplifies somewhat the task of identifying regime interest structures. More than that, the ubiquitous spread and consistent expression of the regime’s view throughout the media and educational systems, and also in academic publications, means that Chinese interest structures are significantly transparent.

It is important to acknowledge two aspects of Chinese foreign policy where there is a relative lack of transparency. The first of these concerns the full extent of China’s military development as documented by several non-Chinese state and non-state organisations and analysts. The second concerns the workings of the top-level decision-making process, and the precise spread of foreign policy views and factional affiliations amongst the most influential individuals and institutions. Both of these, and especially the second, are indeed impediments to a more perfect understanding of Chinese foreign policy, and to anticipating the responses of Chinese statesman to critical events.

There is a tendency though among some governments and expert commentators to exaggerate the transparency issue in Chinese foreign policy. Indeed, to the extent that the transparency issue is extended to cover China’s future intentions, the critique is both misguided and unfair.

Firstly, the longer-term continuity or discontinuity of Chinese foreign policy cannot be anticipated with any more certainty or uncertainty than when the question is applied, for instance, to US or Japanese policy. Moreover, whether in the nearer or

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longer-term, no one can predict the precise response and standpoint that any of these powers would take, for instance, towards any future crisis over Taiwan or the Korean Peninsula, or indeed the timing and circumstances of such events, given open system dynamics.

Secondly, such doubts ignore the realities of corporate agency. Given that to realise its goals a state needs as far as possible to bring society along with them, or at least prevent crippling political divisions, the state must either inculcate or attempt to sell its objectives through common avenues of public communication. The high degree of consensus, consistency and ubiquity in the expression and rationale of national interests within China means that China’s current conception of its intentions should be viewed as significantly transparent to outsiders.

Even the uncertainty that arises when particular interests are variously interpreted within a polity, or viewed according to different schemes of priority, does not mean we cannot gain knowledge and more precisely define what those differences are. This is a challenge constantly faced by the Chinese themselves when needing to anticipate the foreign policy stances of incoming democratic governments. Within China, the lines of debate on the nation’s finite geopolitical options are in fact readily identifiable, even as the balance of views at the top of the regime’s hierarchy remains somewhat obscure. Indications of the influence of differing views in the debate can nonetheless be gauged through: (a) the evolution of the language in official government documents, white papers, official statements and media, (b) the qualitative and quantitative trajectory of the nation’s military development, and (c) the stances and actions taken by the government to critical events.

The following three sections systemically identify and explain the interest structures comprising contemporary Chinese grand strategy. In addition to using authoritative Chinese government sources and statements available in English, the analysis cites, and is generally informed by, a direct acquaintance with the dominant positions within the Chinese language discourse on IR and Chinese foreign strategy within the PRC. The explanatory accounts developed also draw upon sources from the extensive English language social science literature on contemporary China.
In this chapter, I make a distinction between interest structures that function as the fundamental objectives or ends of a state’s grand strategy, with those that take the form of doctrines or paradigms about the strategic means for pursuing such ends at a given time. Our analysis of Chinese interest structures begins (in section 6.2) with an examination of the former; that is, what the regime refers to as China’s ‘core interests’. For the most part uncontested within Chinese society itself, these core interests represent the most unconditional objectives of the regime. For each core interest, we (a) articulate its essential ideational content, (b) summarise its existing behavioural impacts, and (c) explain its causal robustness according to the key reasons and socio-political forces that underpin the regime’s commitment to such objectives.

After this, section 6.3 turns to critically examine the regime’s relatively more conditional and (at least partly) tactical ‘peaceful development’ strategy. Following an initial exposition of the ideational content and politico-strategic rationales underpinning this paradigm, I apply my three hypotheses about war and peace in power transitions to frame a demonstration of its conditional (and sometimes contradictory) relationship to other of China’s interests.

The final part of the chapter (6.4) tracks the regime’s emerging interest in a great power strategy based on sea power extension. Drawing directly on influential source material from within China’s national discourse, I posit a relationship between the recent trajectory of internal Chinese debate on the future of its geopolitical strategy, and the emergence of this official interest in sea power.

6.2: Regime core interests

The Chinese government explicitly introduced the concept of core interests into its diplomacy in 2009. At the conclusion of the first Sino-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue with the Barak Obama administration, one of the PRC negotiators, State Councillor Dai Bingguo, publicly stated: ‘To ensure the long-term, healthy and stable development of Sino-US relations, one condition of paramount importance is that we need to support, respect and understand each other, and to maintain our…core interests’ (cited in Wu 2009). Following this, he described China’s three core interests
as: (1) protection of China’s ‘fundamental system’ and state security, (2) the safeguarding of China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and (3) ensuring sustained economic growth and social development. Nothing of the contents articulated was new or revelatory. In the time since this statement though, the concept of core interests has become diplomatic code for those aspects of Chinese policy that will not be subject to compromise or interference in foreign relations.

Dai’s formulation is judged here to be an accurate and succinct summary of the key drivers of the regime that well corresponds with its actual behaviour. As such, the three categories provide an appropriate framework for social scientific analysis.

6.2.1: The ‘fundamental system’ and state security

Ideational content

Dai’s articulation of this interest as first in sequence drew some criticism from online voices within China, who questioned whether the regime was indicating it places preservation of its own power above other national goals (Wu 2009). A more recent official white paper places this interest in the middle of the sequence, and re-words it as ‘upholding … China’s political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability’ (WP 2011, section III). The adjustment is significant, as while it can still be consistent with the notion that external actors should not interfere in China’s internal affairs, there is a more implicit opening provided for the possibility of political reform.

This particular core interest can perhaps best be summarised as stable and non-disruptive political development free from external expectations. The refrain is that China is walking its own path to modernity and democracy based on its own historical conditions and cultural characteristics.

Existing behavioural impacts

One of the utilities of the formulation of this interest structure is that it can encompass and justify both conservative and gradualist reform tendencies within the regime. Political reform has not been as extensive and transformative as economic reform over the past three decades (Lai 2010). Even so, some important reforms have
periodically occurred during this time (He and Thogersen 2010; O’Brien and Han 2009).

The current CCP leadership have in recent years initiated internal Party and expert deliberations on the possibilities for political reform. One of the most interesting products of the reform discourse is a study undertaken by senior scholars at the CCP’s Central Party School (Zhou et al. 2007). The report (titled Storming the Fortress in English) provides a stage-by-stage blueprint for furthering democracy and the rule of law in China. The report’s authors believe that China can, by 2020, cultivate the rudimentary ingredients that are needed before proceeding towards democracy, which they estimate could possibly reach a moderate level of maturity by 2040.

Their proposals include a good many liberal reforms: establishing a system of mutual accountability and oversight amongst administrative, executive and legislative organs; strengthening the independence of the judiciary; and limiting the level of government control over the media. Other proposals are preparations for democratic reform: expanding the role of civil society and religious organisations as intermediaries between state and society; furthering intra-party democracy through enabling the election and candidate selection procedures of the CCP National Congress to operate in a more bottom-up and competitive fashion; and enhancing the role of the National People’s Congress (NPC) to debate and critically scrutinise legislation, including the annual national budget.

The reform vision in Storming the Fortress represents the outer limits to which the current CCP leadership are willing to permit public advocacy on the evolution of the ‘fundamental system’. Aspects of democratic reform that are ignored in the report are instructive. The report does not advocate the competitive (intra-party) election of CCP leaders, and affirms the need for the NPC to remain non-political, that is, accepting of the Party’s monopoly on steering the political line. There is also no mention in their specific recommendations covering the period to 2020 about expanding the popular franchise beyond the village level.
Those who do publicly advocate for more comprehensive democratisation continue to be treated by the government as illegal subverters of the state. Most recently, this was seen in the suppression and denunciation of ‘Charter 08’, and the diplomatic defiance of the state’s refusal to release from prison its chief organiser, Liu Xiaobo, after he was awarded the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize (Dyer 2010).55

The conflict between the regime’s priorities and the values of ‘Charter 08’ is present within the existing PRC Constitution. On one hand, the Constitution mandates a ‘people’s democratic dictatorship’ under the ‘leadership of the CCP’ (Preamble), and prohibits ‘sabotage of the socialist system’ (Article 1). On the other, it holds the legislature to be the ‘highest organ of state power’ (Article 57) and ‘instituted through democratic election’ (Article 3). It also provides explicitly for ‘freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration’ (Article 35). The former aspects could never be guaranteed if the latter reforms (revolutionary in total) were ever implemented.

The government’s position on ‘Charter 08’, as well as its intensely hierarchical methods of exercising power, national policy decisions and state personnel appointments, demonstrate that it continues in practice to equate the ‘fundamental system’ with the one-party hierarchy of command mechanism. While objectively not a democracy (this would require a shift in the location of the sovereign power from the Politburo Standing Committee to a citizen’s electoral majority), the existing leadership depict their system as an already emergent and unique form of democracy with Chinese characteristics (WP 2005a). That the regime has sought to inculcate in the public an association between the concept of democracy (with its progressive and emancipatory connotations) and the existing system attests to the strength of conservative political tendencies within the CCP hierarchy.

*Socio-political explanation*

What duly needs to be explained here are the socio-political forces and reasons underpinning both the reformist and conservative tendencies within the regime. On the reformist side, the regime has, since the abandonment of Maoism, entrenched a

55 The Charter 08 website is located at: www.charter08.com
general consensus in the national discourse about the need for ongoing gradualist reform in all spheres of administration. Dissatisfaction with the social chaos and stagnant development outcomes of the preceding period spurred the initial uptake of this norm. The combination of the successes of initial economic reforms to generate sustained growth, and the comparative experience of the Soviet system, has tended to reinforce consensus for gradual and stable reform rather than radical change.

As a state with a similar Leninist and imperial structure, the rigidity of the Soviet Union until the mid-1980s is perceived to demonstrate the vulnerabilities that can accumulate when institutions are not adapted to evolving trends (He and Thogersen 2010). In addition, the scope and pace of Soviet and then Russian reforms is interpreted as generating the undesirable outcomes of political and economic collapse. The latter especially is a routine point of reference in the national discourse, and frequently used as a defence against accusations of lagging political reform.

A major motivation for liberal and democratic types of reform proposals within Chinese elites arises from public dissatisfaction with the widespread corruption at all levels of public administration. The top echelons of the regime recognise an interest in publicly acknowledging and seeking to remedy the frequent abuses of power and favouritism (Ko and Weng 2011; Wen [S.] 2012). Demonstrations and public disturbances over local grievances have greatly increased in frequency across China over the past decade (Lai 2010), and the regime recognises that its legitimacy as the people’s party will erode if it appears unable to curb official abuse and injustice. Both President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao have publicly stated a belief that corruption is a threat that could lead to the collapse of both Party and state (Garnaut 2012b; Wen [P.] 2012).

While the CCP continues to enforce strict limits on public discussions of political reform, Chinese expert elites have been at greater liberty in recent decades to study and take inspiration from liberal-democratic political experience and theory. More Chinese experts now have a background of overseas study in Western countries, and more diverse literature on the political experience and theory of foreign countries is now easily accessible within China itself. Increase in elite support for liberal and
democratic reforms as a result of generational change cannot be discounted as a future possibility.

Conservative tendencies in the regime are supported by several factors. The most broadly held supporting factor is the desire to avoid disrupting China’s economic development. Gradualist reform has so far sustained a prolonged period of high growth. In the process, a new class structure has emerged, involving new wealthy capitalist and urban middle-classes. These income strata comprise a clear (yet substantial) minority of the population at several hundred million (Ye 2010; ‘China’s middle class …’ 2010). In contemporary China, it is people within these social strata that possess the capabilities (economic resources, higher education, connection to elite social/institutional networks, and spare time) that would be necessary to organise a viable political opposition movement (Garnaut 2012c). For the time being, however, these key beneficiaries of the reform period have in general been unwilling to jeopardise levels of stability and wealth generation that are unprecedented in modern Chinese history (Chen and Dickson 2008). In addition, the steady accumulation of international power that the existing political stability enables is attractive to many Chinese within these strata who are enthused by the regime’s national revival narrative.

The lower income majority of labourers and farmers are also more guaranteed to find or sustain employment in a high growth context, although under the current system industrial labourers in particular have little bargaining power to negotiate the conditions of their labour.56 Farmers have recourse to village elections and local public hearings, but are still systemically vulnerable to corruption or having their interests overridden through lack of consultation in implementation of higher-level administrative resolutions (O’Brien and Han 2009). Existing grievances towards the regime, across all classes,57 would likely prove less tolerable in the event of any prolonged national economic downturn and increased job scarcity.

Other factors underpinning conservative maintenance of the one-party state are internal to the operation of the regime and the logic of its political narrative. There are

56 See material on the ‘China Labor Watch’ website at: www.chinalaborwatch.org
57 On Chinese capitalist class grievances, namely corruption, see Chen and Dickson (2008).
two general concerns within the regime that act as a brake on the scope of political reform. These are: (1) a desire to avoid debilitating divisions within the governing hierarchy of the CCP, and (2) the potential dangers to CCP rule and PRC political cohesion of allowing more liberal access to information and freedom of expression.

The unity imperative is deeply embedded in the CCP’s internal culture. In part, this is a legacy of the Party’s long history of struggle with perceived class enemies. For those leaders that look to Chinese imperial history for guidance, moreover, one of the most persistent lessons interpreted by ancient historians concerns the role of factionalism, and the emergence of poles of power autonomous from the imperial centre, as harbingers of decline and turmoil (Liu and Ge 2001). Such lessons can easily appear confirmed by the painful political history of China during the first half of the twentieth century. Of more recent and vivid impact, though, are the perceived lessons of the ‘Tiananmen incident’. With regime conservatives prevailing over liberals in this crisis, the official interpretation entrenched within the Party is that this incident was a case of near miss survival for the regime, which in future can only be prevented by avoiding any public display of internal differences (Shirk 2007, chap 3).

There is some practical logic to this concern with unity and division in the contemporary Chinese context. If policy-making and deliberation were to become more pluralised within the CCP through expansion of intra-party democracy, for instance, decision-making and especially inter-governmental agreement could easily become less efficient than is the case under the current hierarchy of command system. Top CCP leaders may find that they have even more trouble overriding special interests that could delay or stalemate policy implementation. Without an accompanying process of popular democratisation, there would be even less guarantee than presently that policies arrived at would be primarily geared towards improving people’s lives and remedying the myriad developmental problems facing the nation.

Extension of the scope of popular democratisation, however, is constrained by the second concern. That is, the CCP regime would be lucky to survive the sort of major liberalisation of the public sphere that would be required to make genuine democratic politics viable. Democratic politics needs access to information, especially in situations where there is a demand to investigate and remedy popular grievances or
resolve conflicts of interest. However, unless the system of screening out most bad news stories in the media was maintained, more open access to information could easily lead a liberalised media, fairly or unfairly, to inundate the country with a torrent of bad news stories that could effect the level of public tolerance towards the regime. There are also risks for the CCP if it were to license open debate and scrutiny of its interpretation of Chinese history (see section 6.2.3 below).

Any major moves to liberalise the public sphere will likely continue to face tough resistance from both Party conservatives and the self-interest of those PRC official and commercial elites that profit from or whose unlawful conduct is relatively shielded by the status quo. This in turn feeds back into fears of internal disunity and confrontation between factions. There are thus strong motivating incentives within the regime against pursuing full implementation of the liberal-democratic strands of the Constitution, and for maintaining the ‘fundamental system’ on an illiberal and authoritarian basis.

6.2.2: Economic growth and social development

Ideational content

During the three decades of ‘reform and opening up’, economic development has been the leading imperative of the regime. The development trajectory inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping is invariably represented in the national discourse as the new China finally finding its feet. The achievements of the early decades of the regime that are routinely noted include the establishment and consolidation of most of China’s political and territorial unity, as well as independence and protection from foreign interference. At the same time, however, it is also mentioned in passing and without detail that several of the economic and social experiments of this earlier period were misguided and erroneous. Learning from this experience, the regime under Deng’s leadership discovered the ‘correct’ path for China ‘at the current historical stage’.

The essentials of this path include (a) recognition that China is still in the early stages of socialism and thus needs to make use of the methods of capitalism to generate growth and modernisation. The task of the reform period is thus the building of a
‘socialist market economy’\textsuperscript{58} to drive progress in the ‘four modernisations’ of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology. Complementary to this is (b) a commitment to developmental progress and reform on the basis of pragmatic experimentation and adaptability. In an aversion away from idealistic ideological blueprints, China’s leaders have promoted an eclectic approach based on ongoing learning from the expertise and experience of others as well as China’s own successes and failures. A central feature of this pragmatic turn included (c) a strategic shift to re-open China’s door to international trade and investment relations with capitalist countries.

On the basis of Deng’s paradigm, subsequent generations of CCP leaders have continued to evolve a national development agenda based on imperatives of high economic growth, opening up to the outside world, and the long-term goal of achieving a \textit{xiaokang shehui} (usually translated as a ‘moderately prosperous society in an all-round way’).\textsuperscript{59} The latter concept looks beyond economic growth in itself to encompass qualitative aspects of development such as wealth distribution, social welfare, environmental health, culture and leisure. The aim is for the average Chinese to reach a modestly well-off standard of living by 2020, and for China to become a moderately developed country by 2050.

Current leaders also promote the establishment of a ‘harmonious society’ through ‘people-centred scientific development’ (Zhao and Ni 2007, chap 4). The latter is essentially a program to correct accumulated imbalances of the reform era, chiefly between the levels of wealth and development in urban and rural areas, in eastern and western provinces, and between man and nature (in reference to China’s severe environmental challenges [Economy 2010]).

\textit{Existing behavioural impacts}

Countless researchers and journalists have documented evidence of China’s commitment to economic growth and social development in the reform period, and so only a brief selection of indicators is required here. In recent decades, the CCP

\textsuperscript{58} On this ideological transition, see Pu et al. (2009, chap 3) and Harding (1989).

leadership have consistently instituted an annual GDP growth target of 8 percent (reduced to 7.5 percent in 2012 [Back and Hong 2012]). In practice, the country has usually exceeded this. Official figures indicate an average of 9-10 percent growth per annum over the past two decades.

On social development, the government has introduced numerous programs to address inequalities in income and economic opportunity, improve environmental protection, healthcare, education and social security. No attempt will be made here to evaluate how much substantive progress has been made towards social development targets. At very least, it can be noted that the idea of a relationship between progress or regress on these quality of life issues with social and political stability is well entrenched in the national discourse.

Of most interest for the purposes of this study is the scope of the internationalisation of the Chinese economy that the ‘open door’ policy has facilitated. According to World Trade Organization statistics, China’s trade with the world was worth 55 percent of its GDP in 2010. This divides roughly in half according to exports and imports.60 Over the last two decades, China has shifted away decisively from a posture of resource self-sufficiency and has steadily increased its dependence ratio of imported energy and mineral resources. China already depends on imports for around 50 percent of its supplies of oil, iron ore, copper, lead, and zinc (‘China’s imports …’ 2011).

As the government and Chinese companies have increased their accumulation of surplus capital, the regime has since 2001 encouraged Chinese outward-bound investment as part of an official ‘going out’ policy (Yueh 2012). According to a report from China’s Ministry of Commerce, in the decade to 2010 ‘more than 13,000 domestic investing entities had established about 16,000 overseas enterprises … in 178 countries’ with a combined total stock of $317 billion (MOC 2011).

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60 These statistics are taken from China’s ‘country profile’ on the WTO website, accessed on 21 Nov 2012 at: [http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile](http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile)
Socio-political explanation

A simple but important initial observation is that China’s achievements in economic and social transformation in the reform period, while state-led, would have been impossible without the willing, or otherwise acquiescent, participation of most of the Chinese population. The Chinese people had also been responsive to previous state-led progressive campaigns, some of which (most notably the ‘Great Leap Forward’ and ‘Cultural Revolution’) had ended in serious failure. In the reform period, regime leaders were able to rekindle that responsiveness on a more pragmatic basis, and channel it into an evolving array of structural conditions that have been more successful in sustaining continuous growth and development (though not always improved living conditions for everyone [Lai 2010; Economy 2010]). A substantial part of that structural environment includes the expansion of market competition and space for the private sector. Equally significant, however, has been the ongoing deep managerial oversight of the state.

From the vantage point of the CCP regime, continued adherence to a policy platform of ensuring economic growth and social development is essential for its ongoing legitimacy. As a party founded on an ideology that views a socialist society as the vanguard of human material and spiritual progress, the regime has generated expectations in its population that, for credibility’s sake, it needs to continuously demonstrate it is both capable and willing to fulfil.

The internationalisation of the Chinese economy has become increasingly structurally entrenched during the reform period. The recent global financial crisis has motivated the regime to rebalance the sources of China’s growth towards the domestic market, chiefly through rapid urbanisation of the rural population (Ru et al. 2012, see abstract and opening general report). Yet, given existing levels of dependence on export revenue, both for government and the vast export-oriented industrial sector, any marked reversal in the balance of the domestic and international markets would need to be gradual and long-term in order to be stable and avoid precipitating a severe economic downturn. As a result of such interests, the internationally extended arm of the Chinese economy will likely continue to be perpetuated on the basis of a considerable degree of ‘path dependence’ for many years to come.
The international orientation of the Chinese economy is also generated from interaction between the regime’s development goals and sheer population numbers. The regime’s goals to facilitate even a modestly prosperous standard of living for its huge population and place the majority of Chinese in urban areas will generate ongoing increases in demand for industrial resources and consumables. As the elevation of Chinese living standards towards official targets is still only in the early stages, so it is also likely the case with importation trends. Chinese economic security is becoming increasingly dependent on markets, production sites, and investments well beyond its sovereign borders.

6.2.3: Sovereignty and territorial integrity

Ideational content
This core interest principally concerns the external recognition aspect of sovereignty, rather than the internal power structure dimension that is the focus of the first core interest. Even so, internal governance and separation of powers issues are an important component of territorial integrity issues such as Taiwan and Tibet, thus there is some overlap.

Like other states, China seeks to protect territory over which the state already exercises control. The two generic threats to such an objective are of course internal secessionist movements and external invasion. While understandably keen to maintain an effective deterrent against the latter, China knows that it currently faces no evident threat of an unprovoked attack on the territory it already controls, and that is recognised by all states as falling under PRC sovereignty. China is faced with ethnic separatist pressures, however, in its large Western provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang. Because some foreign governments extend residential, moral or diplomatic support to organisations that Beijing views as separatist in orientation, reinforcing recognition of its sovereignty over these areas has remained a live issue in Chinese diplomacy.

That the issue of territorial integrity looms so large in China as a foreign policy and external security issue, however, is chiefly a result of several major unresolved territorial disputes on China’s periphery. These include claims of sovereignty over: Taiwan and several nearby offshore islands (contested with the Republic of China
[ROC]); Southern Tibet (comprising the bulk of India’s current province of Arunachal Pradesh); the Diaoyu Islands, considered part of Taiwan province, in the East China Sea (currently administered by Japan as the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture); and all land features in the South China Sea (contested variously by Vietnam, The Philippines, Malaysia, the ROC, and Brunei).

China’s disputes in the East and South China Seas also extend to issues of maritime jurisdiction in the waters contiguous to China’s coast and contested land features. The US too has indicated that its strategic interests are impacted by China’s claims within Maritime East Asia. Thus for China, the defence of territorial integrity here also means overcoming American interference or obstruction of its irredentist goals.

China justifies its territorial claims on the basis of two ideas: (1) historical justice, and (2) a primordial territorial identity dubbed here as the ‘One China doctrine’.
According to the first justification, China is seeking to recover territories that were conceded to foreign powers in ‘unequal treaties’ under conditions of defeat in military conflicts in which China was not an aggressor. The territorial losses are especially tangible symbols of what is perceived in the Chinese national narrative as the ‘century of humiliation’. Beginning with the coerced opening of the Qing Dynasty by Britain in the First Opium War (1839-42), the period until the establishment of the PRC is viewed with bitterness as a time when sources of internal stagnation and corruption left China vulnerable to exploitation and invasion by predatory foreign powers.

With political unity and freedom from foreign interference established on the Mainland, and Hong Kong and Macao already transferred from British and Portuguese to PRC sovereignty, the main focus of the historical justice narrative has fixed on Taiwan. The symbolism is especially acute in this case. Taiwan was ceded to Japan at the end of the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-5), a defeat that was especially humiliating at the time given discrepancies in size and traditional Chinese norms of hierarchy in the relationship. Contemporary bitterness towards Japan, however, is even more the product of the latter’s full-scale imperial invasions in the 1930s and 1940s. The earlier loss of Taiwan is viewed as one of the key stepping stones that enabled the later Mainland offensives.
Taiwan is also viewed as unfinished business from the Chinese Civil War (1946-49). Once the forces of the Nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek were defeated on the Mainland, they retreated to Taiwan. The ROC government on Taiwan was able to maintain itself during the Cold War through its alliance with the US. With the US still maintaining an interest in the security of a now democratised Taiwan, the issue is framed in China as one of overcoming the last vestiges of foreign obstructions to Chinese unity and revival.

To support the historical justice justification, the regime makes reference to the provisions of the Cairo (1943) and Potsdam Declarations (1945) that instituted the terms of Japanese surrender at the end of WWII. The Cairo Declaration states that: ‘… all territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa [Taiwan], and the Pescadores [Penghu Islands, currently administered by ROC], shall be restored to the Republic of China. Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed’ (cited in Suganuma 2000, 120).

The PRC’s view is that the comprehensive victory of the CCP in the civil war against a KMT regime that had lost its mandate to govern means that the PRC inherits the provisions promised to the ROC in the Cairo Declaration. While Taiwan is specifically referred to as a territory to be returned to the Chinese, there are no such specific international legal provisions to draw upon in justifying other Chinese irredentist claims, such as Diaoyu and Nansha (known in English as the Spratly Islands). On maritime jurisdiction issues, China bases most of its entitlement claims on an interpretation of provisions in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The international legal basis for all of the PRC’s territorial claims is in varying ways contestable, and thus the regime has, since its inception, sought to bolster its claims with another form of justification. That is, the idea, or mythology, of a primordial Chinese territorial unity and the ancient title of any successful unifying regime to the lands defined as falling within it. According to this national myth, dubbed here the ‘One China doctrine’, the normative ideal, and indeed imperative, is the establishment of an undivided sovereignty over all territories defined as historically Chinese. The prospects for the thriving of Chinese civilisation are perceived as relative to the extent
in which national territorial unification is attained. The necessity of the doctrine is supported through reference to the ‘century of humiliation’. While this alternative justification carries little if any normative force beyond China itself, it nonetheless plays a major role in forming identity, perception and motivation on these issues domestically.

**Existing behavioural impacts**

This third core interest provides a textbook illustration of the diverse range of strategic behaviour that can be generated by a motivational structure on the basis of ‘conditioned causation’. In the case of the territorial claims, in particular, we are dealing with ideal objectives that are yet to be realised, but where actions to attain the ideal exist as a real future potential. Yet, despite this unrealised dimension, such goals have played a constant and indeed invariant causal role in the generation of varying regime behaviour across its entire history.

The discussion here will limit itself to behaviours manifested during recent decades. In regard first to Taiwan, since the 1980s, the normative content of the PRC’s claim (undivided sovereignty; unification under ‘one country, two systems’; ideal of ‘peaceful unification’) has remained constant, as have certain aspects of its strategic conduct. In regards to the latter, the most notable aspects include: vigilant efforts to prevent official diplomatic recognition of the ROC by other states; to prevent its membership in international organisations requiring state membership; facilitate its economic dependence on the Mainland; and a steady build-up and modernisation of China’s offshore military forces, for which deterrence of formal Taiwan independence is currently a primary objective. The regime also opposes US arms sales to Taiwan. In 2010, the PRC for the first time threatened economic sanctions on companies party to a US arms transfer (Garnaut 2010).

Other aspects of China’s policy towards Taiwan have been more changeable, depending on shifting international and domestic political conditions. In the early 1990s, the regime opened up indirect engagement mechanisms between senior

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61 This is evident in the PRC’s cross-strait policy slogans, laid down in the 1990s, of *yi shang cu zheng* (use commercial interests to push political objectives/or Taiwan’s political class) and *yi min bi guan* (use the people to pressure the official class) (Lee 2006, 194).
government advisors on both sides of the Strait (Wachman 2007, 5-9; Lee 2006, chap 3). Dissatisfaction with the increasingly independence-leaning policy direction of ROC President Lee Teng-hui (1988-2000) led the PRC to return to a hostile stance in Cross-Strait relations (Wachman 2007, 9-15). In 1996, the regime unsuccessfully attempted to influence the result of the first popular presidential election in Taiwan through firing missiles into waters near the island (Ross 2000). America’s response of dispatching of two aircraft carriers near Taiwan subsequently spurred PRC resolve to accelerate military modernisation.

The regime maintained a hostile stance through the remainder of Lee’s presidency, and through the two presidential terms of Chen Shui-bian (2000-08), whose Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) unambiguously favours Taiwan independence. Apart from massive expansion of Cross-Strait trade (Lin 2007), Cross-Strait relations were politically stagnant and unstable during this time. In 2005, the regime passed an ‘Anti-Secession Law’ that authorises the use of ‘non-peaceful means’ in response to acts the PRC would define as moves towards permanent Taiwanese independence (Zhao 2007).

Since the election of KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou in 2008, the PRC has, to an unprecedented extent, turned towards détente and engagement under the banner of advancing the ‘peaceful development of Cross-Strait relations’. The steady stream of Cross-Strait agreements in the years since have focussed on furthering cooperation and removing regulatory barriers to economic and cultural exchanges. No ground has been made on tougher political and security issues. Chinese leaders continue to uphold ‘one country, two systems’, despite the overwhelming rejection of this policy within Taiwan itself, including the present KMT administration. PRC coercive policies of ensuring the ROC’s diplomatic isolation (Lowther 2011), and its military and missile build-up directed towards Taiwan (Chang and Cole 2012), have not ceased. Exceptions to this include a provisional ‘diplomatic truce’ between the two sides to refrain from poaching each other’s micro-state allies, and the PRC’s coercive policies of ensuring the ROC’s diplomatic isolation (Lowther 2011), and its military and missile build-up directed towards Taiwan (Chang and Cole 2012), have not ceased. Exceptions to this include a provisional ‘diplomatic truce’ between the two sides to refrain from poaching each other’s micro-state allies, and the PRC’s

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62 For a timeline and information about these agreements, see the ROC’s ‘Mainland Affairs Council’ website: [http://www.mac.gov.tw/mp.asp?mp=3](http://www.mac.gov.tw/mp.asp?mp=3)


64 Opinion polls in Taiwan continue to show that more than 80 percent of the population reject ‘one country, two systems’ (Chan 2012).
approval of Taiwan’s participation as an observer in the World Health Assembly each year since 2009.

In regard to China’s other maritime territorial claims, in the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping introduced a policy of ‘shelving disputes’ and ‘joint development’ in disputed zones. These phrases have been a regular refrain on the issues of Diaoyu and Nansha ever since. During the same time, however, the regime has reinforced its commitment to a non-negotiable stance on the sovereignty issue. In 1992, the regime incorporated its claims to Diaoyu and Nansha into national law in Article 2 of the PRC’s ‘Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone’. Whenever a controversy emerges on these issues, diplomatic representatives of the regime always state that the PRC’s sovereign claims are ‘indisputable’. Maps published in China indicate the territories as part of the PRC, and without any indication that they are disputed.

On maritime disputes, Chinese conduct has oscillated over time between different degrees of passivity and confrontation. In both the East and South China Seas, small clashes between fishermen and patrol vessels in disputed areas, or involving irredentist activists from either side, have for decades periodically disrupted China’s relationships with other claimants. Since 2009, however, confrontation has escalated and become more regular. In the South China Sea, this has occurred despite China and ASEAN’s years-long negotiation and signing, in 2002, of an interim accord entitled the ‘Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea’.

Recent years have seen a renewed agitation in Chinese diplomacy towards the ongoing sovereignty contestation and economic activities in disputed areas of other claimants. China’s actions have included: major increases in patrolling activities and military exercises in and near disputed maritime areas; more frequent engagement in

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65 The text of this law can be accessed at: [http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/tsatcz392/](http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/tsatcz392/)
66 For a detailed chronology of various relevant events since this time, see the China-Japan and China-Southeast Asia sections of the *Comparative Connections* journal for the years 2010-12: [http://csis.org/program/comparative-connections](http://csis.org/program/comparative-connections) See also ICG (2012a; 2012b). For a Chinese perspective, see Wang (2012).
67 The text of the Declaration can be accessed at: [http://www.aseansec.org/13163.htm](http://www.aseansec.org/13163.htm)
In addition to promoting regulatory cooperation in the area, the Declaration establishes general principles of resolving disputes through peaceful means, refraining from the threat or use of force and from escalating disputes by occupying currently uninhabited land features. It is, however, not the detailed and legally binding ‘code of conduct’ that was initially intended by its advocates (Emmers 2007, 55-9).
low-level physical confrontations in disputed areas and tit-for-tat patterns of
diplomatic and symbolic legal retaliation with Vietnam, the Philippines, and Japan;
and the employment of strategically targeted economic sanctions (albeit so far minor)
towards other disputants during particular standoffs. Frequent editorials on these
issues in Chinese state-owned media since 2010, moreover, indicate a reinforced
determination towards prevailing in sovereignty disputes over the long term, as well
as a readiness to punish other claimants in future if their opposition to China’s
position is sustained.

China’s recent assertiveness in the South China Sea has also involved the US. No
openly tense incidents between the US and China in the South China Sea occurred
during the Bush administration after 2001. That was the year when a crash between a
US spy plane and Chinese fighter jet within an uncontested part of China’s exclusive
economic zone (EEZ) had created a brief diplomatic crisis. During 2009, the first year
of the Obama administration, the Chinese renewed their protests against US military
surveillance patrols in their claimed EEZ. The most notable of numerous incidents
involved the close surrounding of the US surveillance ship USNS Impeccable by five
Chinese fishing vessels.68 As in 2001, Chinese officials demanded, unsuccessfully,
that the US surveillance missions cease altogether.

In 2010, in formal dialogues between US and Chinese high officials, the Chinese a
few times indicated that it views the South China Sea as a ‘core interest’ just like
Taiwan and Tibet (Wu 2010; Sheridan 2010). Chinese officials have not made a direct
association between the term ‘core interest’ and their claims in the South China Sea in
their public diplomacy. Nevertheless, the term, with its non-negotiable connotations,
is certainly consistent with the way the territorial sovereignty aspect is routinely
treated in the internal Chinese discourse.

Socio-political explanation
Like the second core interest, the contents of this third one also have considerable
popular support. However, exactly what proportion of the population are true
believers of the ‘One China doctrine’, or rather pragmatic conformists that go along

68 See the US-China relations section of Comparative Connections, Vol. 11, No. 1-4 (2009). Accessible
at: http://csis.org/program/comparative-connections
with it for self-protection, career advancement, or concerns about socio-political stability is not known. There are no fine-grained or free-ranging social science surveys conducted about these issues in China.

This reveals an important point. That is, the basis of Chinese irredentist claims is a narrative about history that is taken for granted and never subject to public critical scrutiny. Both the historical justice and ‘One China’ mythology aspects of this narrative have been entrenched through several generations of propaganda, and initially under totalitarian political conditions. At the same time, however, the narrative draws normative strength and staying power from popular memories of Japanese imperialism and Chinese degradation and suffering that are recounted within many families, as well as more ubiquitously within the national discourse.

At the regime level, ongoing commitment to all of China’s outstanding irredentist claims is underpinned by two fears. These are (1) the fear of opening up internal political schisms, and (2) the fear of losing credibility. Both fears are well founded. Giving substance to the first is the fact that generations of regime propaganda have created a great many true believers of the ‘One China doctrine’ and its terms of national revival. PLA publications are highly doctrinaire in their commitment to the narrative, and express the necessity of preparing for military struggle to secure unredeemed territories, and not just Taiwan. Any CCP leader that made moves to abandon Chinese sovereignty claims would be unlikely to have the PLA, or at least a united PLA, on their side. Without PLA support, such leaders could be sidelined or ousted by other Politburo members opposed to such a policy shift.

The millions of Chinese netizens that express passionately nationalist views on territorial issues are another indication that there are a large number of devout believers in the ‘One China doctrine’ across Chinese society. Particularly alarming from the regime’s point of view is the criticism they receive on the internet suggesting they are a soft touch on territorial integrity issues, or selling out the national interest (Shirk 2007, chap 6 and 7; Hong 2007). In proportion to China’s massive population, the views of radical nationalist online agitators may not be representative of the views of the bulk of the population. As Susan Shirk argues, however, whether minority voices or not, authoritarian China has been responsive to radical nationalist voices on
numerous occasions since the 1990s in order to pre-empt the development of oppositional activism and division within the regime (Shirk 2007). The regime’s more assertive stance on territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas in recent years in great part reflects this perceived imperative.

At the same time though, in persisting with an uncompromising normative stance on these issues, the regime has simply been defending the terms of a long-standing narrative of its own creation. Accentuating concerns about political schism, many in the regime likely sense that the veracity of the narrative itself would become difficult to sustain if exposed to free critical and empirical scrutiny. This is the basis of the credibility fear.

The PRC’s claim on Taiwan is provided some support by factors other than a unilateral sense of ancient entitlement. Various external sources of legitimacy, however, can be countered with alternative interpretations. The Cairo and Potsdam provisions can be read as applying to the ROC only. The ‘One China’ policies of other states towards Taiwan could potentially denote ‘one civilisation’ or ‘one ethnic nationality’ (Zhonghua minzu), rather than ‘one sovereign state’ as understood in the PRC. The only international legal supports for the PRC on Diaoyu and Nansha are provisions, in treaties that it is not party to, that indicate that sovereignty of the territories is yet to be specified (Hara 2007, chap 6 and 7; Suganuma 2000, chap 4).

The ultimate support for the legitimacy of all of China’s territorial claims is thus the ‘One China doctrine’. This too is contestable, both on the basis of historical fact (Dreyer 2008; Wachman 2007, chap 2), and through recourse to alternative international legal principles such as ‘effective control’ and, in the case of Taiwan, self-determination. The rigidity of the stance taken on all sovereignty claims by the PRC, however, ultimately lies in the fact that the varying historical origins and bases for the claims are tied together in a common logic that is undermined if one of them is backed down from.

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69 This is an argument commonly advanced within Taiwan (Lin 2006; Liu and Wang 2007).
70 These include the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Reversion Treaty that transferred administration of Diaoyu/Senkaku to from the US to Japan in 1972.
In the case of Nansha, for instance, the claim is not supported by decisive evidence of effective or exclusive control, but rather early naming and mapping of various land features, as well as maritime navigation through the area by representatives of several imperial dynasties (Shen 2002; Valencia et al. 1997, 20-4; Tonnesson 2002, 6-7). On international legal grounds, this claim is the weakest link in the chain of China’s maritime irredenta. To back away from this claim, however, would make it harder to sustain the notion that Taiwan has been Chinese since ancient times.

Effective control and administration of the western and central portion of Taiwan was only ever in place during the last imperial dynasty – the Manchu Qing (Wachman 2007, chap 2). The island was never formally administered or permanently inhabited by Chinese communities during any previous hegemonic dynasty. There is no evidence that Taiwan received any more attention from earlier dynasties than Nansha. The Diaoyu Islands arguably received more attention than either during the previous Ming Dynasty, which included them as part of a maritime frontier to defend the Mainland from pirates and other threats (Suganuma 2000, chap 2 and 3). Thus backing down from the sovereignty claim over Nansha would pull away the grounds for including Taiwan as part of a traditional Chinese sovereign domain. For if similar justifying principles cannot be applied in one instance, why should they be applied in the other? Han Chinese presence in Taiwan would come to look more like a contingent outcome of modern history (akin to the case of Singapore). The case for Taiwan self-determination would become harder to oppose.

A situation where the regime could not logically sustain the ancient Chinese identity of Taiwan would in turn render other parts of the regime’s national unity narrative less defensible. The overwhelming majority of Taiwan’s population is Han Chinese. But if the claim of sovereignty over a Han Chinese territory is seen to be based only on the contingency of modern history, then this same logic can also be applied to territory in Tibet, Xinjiang, Manchuria, and Inner Mongolia, that in the dynastic era were dominated by non-Han ethnic groups and dynasties. Indeed, during the last millennium of the dynastic era, it was only those hegemonic dynasties ruled by non-Han groups (the Mongol Yuan and Manchu Qing) that incorporated territories in these

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71 On the history of the regime’s efforts to integrate traditionally non-Han regions into the Chinese national identity, see Zhao (2004, chap 5).
regions into a common empire. In these cases, however, ‘effective control’ of the PRC has been in place for over half a century, and there are both practical and humanitarian reasons (such as a large Han Chinese presence, peace and stability, and the resource needs of a huge population) for justifying the continuation of PRC sovereignty over these territories.

Whether a domino process of historical revisionism in China could further empower separatist causes in Tibet and Xinjiang, and undermine the international legitimacy of its rule in these areas is unknown, but is nonetheless a possibility taken seriously in the PRC precisely because of this uncertainty (Shirk 2007, 182). The broader concern, however, is that once scepticism was permitted on selected historical issues, it would be hard to justify why other issues should be exempt from critical reappraisal. The fear would be a domino effect that undermined the credibility of the regime’s political narrative on numerous fronts, leaving China more divided and unstable internally (not all true believers can be expected to concede to historical revisionism) and its people angry about China’s perceived humiliation internationally.

For these reasons, liberal public discussion about Chinese history will likely remain vigorously opposed within the senior ranks of the regime. Regime leaders perceive the least risky option as maintaining a social climate in which it is accepted as normal that official historical narratives be taken as indisputably true, and where calling such matters into question is taboo. Under such conditions, the regime will continue to face socio-political pressure to act in ways that are consistent with the ‘One China doctrine’.

6.3: The ‘peaceful development’ paradigm

Contemporary Chinese leaders do not frame China’s foreign policy strategy in terms of ‘core interest’ objectives alone. Indeed, over the past decade, Chinese official statements on foreign policy have, with similar frequency (both internationally and domestically), made reference to an aspiration for China to achieve a ‘peaceful rise’ in the twenty-first century and contribute towards ‘building a harmonious world’.
The fact that the regime has not included these objectives (key components of what is referred to here as the ‘peaceful development’ paradigm [PD]) among its core interests is significant. On one hand, this non-inclusion seems to reflect an honest appraisal and tacit recognition by the regime of the conditionality of PD vis-à-vis its third core interest in particular. On the other hand, however, recourse to the PD narrative in public diplomacy seems to have had some tactical use (between 2003 and 2009 chiefly) in obscuring the extent to which the irredentist agenda embodied in the latter core interest challenges and conflicts with the interests of other regional states.

Despite its relative conditionality, there are, nonetheless, grounds for treating the normative content of PD as a genuine guiding and limiting force on China’s present, and potentially longer-term, international conduct. That is, in both its authentic and tactical guises, it needs to be taken seriously as an interest structure in its own right. The following analysis of PD outlines the politico-strategic context in which it emerged and developed, and then summarises the paradigm’s essential ideational content. After this, I demonstrate the conditionality of PD, using my theory’s three hypotheses about war and peace to frame the critique and draw out key contradictions.

**Politico-strategic context and rationale**

While certain conceptual components of PD can be traced back to the earlier revolutionary decades of the PRC, the paradigm extends more fundamentally from the pragmatic turn in foreign policy consolidated by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s under the banner of an ‘independent foreign policy of peace’ (Chu and Jin 2008, 99-109). The regime’s efforts to improve relations with its neighbours and former enemies, and remove the strategic and economic liabilities of isolation, encountered some setbacks in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Following international criticism and economic sanctions in the wake of the Tiananmen crisis, and mounting evidence of persistent opposition towards China’s sovereign territorial claims on Taiwan and elsewhere, Deng incorporated an additional strategic guiding principle of tao guang yang hui, you suo zuo wei (Chen and Wang 2011). An accurate rendering of this reads as ‘concealing brightness and nourishing in obscurity, yet having a goal(s) to work towards’. The official translation, however, often renders the first two characters as ‘biding time’.
Employing the expression *tao guang yang hui* to signal a modest and self-contained foreign policy orientation was problematic given that one of its traditional applications is to conspiratorial episodes in Chinese history where a state stealthily built up its power and used duplicitous tactics to overthrow another state(s).\textsuperscript{72} Its use by regime leaders, from the 1990s to the present day, has thus often tended to reinforce rather than dampen suspicions of Chinese intentions held by outside observers (Chen and Wang 2011). The broadest connotation of the concept, however, is that through patience and caution in the face of obstructive or premature conditions, one can preserve oneself from danger and prepare for more favourable circumstances. The perceived danger in this case was the prospect of provoking a containment coalition that might pose a setback to China’s economic development and accumulation of ‘comprehensive national power’ (on the latter concept, see Craig 2007; Zhao and Ni 2007, 139-49).

With concerns about the rise of China increasing during the 1990s, especially in the US, CCP leaders were motivated to develop a more comprehensive narrative of reassurance. Under the fourth generation CCP leadership led by Hu Jintao, this has taken the form of the ‘peaceful development’ paradigm.

*Ideational content*

CCP researcher, Zheng Bijian, who has held positions in key Party advisory bodies, was the first senior figure to publicly expound the official concept of China’s ‘peaceful rise’. He did so in a speech to the Bao’ao Forum in 2003, later revised as an article published in America’s *Foreign Affairs* journal. Zheng (2005) emphasised that China’s focus in coming decades would be on domestic economic and social development. He stated that the choice made by leaders since Deng was to pursue China’s development and satisfy its needs through integration and adaptation into the existing international economic and political systems. Zheng articulated a modest view of China’s stature as still a poor developing country, and an awareness of the enormous challenges and obstacles to sustainable development in China. The PRC accordingly needs a peaceful and stable international environment to achieve its goal of becoming a ‘modernised, medium-level developed country’ by 2050.

\textsuperscript{72} The most well known historical case that the concept is associated with is the state of Yue’s destruction of the state of Wu in the Spring and Autumn period (Ye 2003, 5-9).
Most significantly, Zheng (2005) stated that China seeks to ‘transcend the traditional ways for great powers to emerge’:

China will not follow the path of Germany leading up to World War I or those of Germany and Japan leading up to World War II, when these countries violently plundered resources and pursued hegemony. Neither will China follow the path of the great powers vying for global domination during the Cold War. Instead, China will transcend ideological differences to strive for peace, development, and cooperation with all countries of the world.

Since 2003, the PRC leadership have placed the concept of China’s ‘peaceful rise’ at the centre of the national foreign policy narrative. Shortly after its adaptation into official public diplomacy, however, the wording was further revised to ‘peaceful development’ to avoid any connotation of a challenge to the existing international system (Jia 2005). Within the internal PRC discourse, the term is nonetheless often articulated alongside, and synonymous with, the goal for China to rise to great power status and gain greater influence as a major pole in world affairs.

PD has been extended to provide an interpretation of all aspects of the regime’s foreign and domestic policy conduct, and indeed forge a conceptual linkage between the two. In the English language, this is most clearly embodied in two Chinese government white papers (WP 2005b; WP 2011). That the regime felt the need to repeat the exercise demonstrates that they have not been entirely successful in persuading other countries of their professed long-term commitment to PD. The latter paper in fact comprised part of a diplomatic effort to mollify the shake-up in regional perceptions of China as a result of its uncompromising and assertive diplomacy on maritime territorial issues during the previous two years (ICG 2012a).

If PD is to be treated seriously, and not automatically dismissed as an empty or misleading rhetorical strategy, it needs to be viewed as a series of negative and positive pledges. The negative pledges (what China says it will not do) include claims that China will never pursue hegemony, engage in an arms race, attack others unless attacked, engage in aggression and expansion, or seek to establish a sphere of
influence. Nor will China ‘shift its own problems and contradictions onto other countries’, or ‘plunder other countries to further its own development’ (WP 2005b, section III).

More positive proposals include a normative commitment to ‘building a harmonious world’ on the basis of the ‘five principles of peaceful co-existence’\(^{73}\) and ‘new security concept’. The latter promotes the idea that security in the post-Cold War period can be furthered through increased economic and diplomatic interactions, rather than traditional strategic competition, on the basis of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination (MFA 2002). The regime promotes a ‘democratisation of international relations’ in which all countries, great and small, respect each other’s interests and negotiate on an equal footing, managing and resolving conflicts through dialogue and negotiation rather than resort to military means. The 2011 white paper further expresses a willingness to ‘explore new ways to establish and develop a new type of relationship among the major countries’ (section II) and identify ‘new dimensions in the common interests and values of mankind’ (section IV).

An important factor that counts in favour of taking the above seriously is that, in addition to being tailored to a foreign audience, PD is the prevailing official paradigm on foreign affairs and strategy within the PRC itself. PD is staple fare in Chinese media and academic texts, and a common point of reference in mainstream debates about China’s future foreign strategy. Aspects of the narrative also guided historical interpretation in a major documentary series produced and broadcasted on China Central Television (CCTV) in 2006 about the rise of nine past great powers.\(^{74}\) By all appearances, it seems that at least some influential figures in the regime have been working to inculcate in Chinese society a long-term commitment towards limited and moderate strategic goals.

\(^{73}\) These include: (1) mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty (2) mutual non-aggression (3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs (4) equality and mutual benefit (5) peaceful coexistence.

\(^{74}\) The 12-part series titled *Daguo Jueqi* (The Rise of Great Powers) was also released as a series of books in both the PRC and Taiwan.
Many aspects of the paradigm, moreover, are not new. The ‘five principles of peaceful coexistence’ and ‘new security concept’ were first formulated in the mid-1950s and mid-1990s respectively. The term peaceful development itself echoes the judgement made by Deng Xiaoping early in the reform period that ‘peace and development are the main themes of the time’. Aversion to imperialism, colonialism and hegemony has been a mainstay of official propaganda during the entire regime’s history. There is thus considerable foundation to PD within the PRC itself.

The conditionality of PD
Despite these factors, there are compelling grounds for maintaining scepticism towards the pledges contained within PD. In Part I of this thesis, I developed a theory that claims to provide knowledge about determinate features of the power transition process that do not change across human history. As part of this theory, three hypotheses were advanced about the generic determinants of war and peace. Application of these three principles can help us better discern problems with the pledges embodied in PD.

The first hypothesis proposes that international power transitions always involve some form and degree of zero-sum adjustment in military security hierarchy within a finite geopolitical region. This principle is neutral on the question of war and peace, as the theory of which it is part claims that such a zero-sum shift in material power distribution is neither a necessary nor sufficient cause of war in itself. Such zero-sum adjustment can potentially be executed on a consensual basis.

The first hypothesis supports the possibility of ‘peaceful rise’ and cooperative hierarchical change in principle. Power transitions, moreover, do not necessarily involve either radical revisionist or hegemonic forms of change. PD is consistent with these insights.

It is also possible to conceive of changes in a military-security deterrence structure that take place in the absence of an arms race dynamic. In effect, this would require an agreement between the revisionist and other powers that legitimised a period of catching-up towards military parity, such as was enabled for US naval forces vis-à-vis Britain during the inter-war period (Goldman 1994; O’Brien 1998).
It is difficult, however, to avoid the appellation of ‘arms race’ in situations where there is some active resistance towards a revisionist’s interests and efforts to catch-up. From a revisionist’s point of view, it would be easier and quicker to achieve their goals if status quo states refrained from augmenting their own forces and alliances in kind. Most revisionist states would likely prefer not to have to engage in an arms race, given the extra expenditures involved. However, once a state has resolved to either maintain or extend their relative position in a military-security hierarchy in the face of some degree of active resistance, that state has effectively become an active participant to an arms race.\textsuperscript{75}

Revisionists generally have an interest in depicting their efforts to catch-up in terms of legitimacy or fairness, and so there is a tendency to blame resisting powers for any arms race that ensues. In this vein, China too has sought to frame its efforts to field an ever more regionally competitive military as a ‘right to develop’ that cannot justly be denied. China is indeed not breaking any international law or treaty by doing so, and is only doing what the US, for one, has done in the past. In general though, PD tends to obscure the fact that China’s geopolitical objectives naturally have some substantial, and in this case quite difficult, zero-sum implications for the regional military-security hierarchy.

Beyond the emerging shift in the regional deterrence structure, China’s regional geopolitical interests also involve extensive territorial and maritime jurisdiction claims contested by other states. It will be recalled that our second hypothesis states that war is the product of geographically overlapping interest definitions that are incompatible in their physical terms of reference. This necessary condition is present in potential form within all China’s territorial disputes, as well as in differences over strategic and maritime jurisdiction issues with the US, as the next chapter will systematically demonstrate.

If China were willing, under certain conditions, to employ military force to settle these issues, would this not contradict PD? According to the interpretation in the

\textsuperscript{75} This point was conceded in a recent editorial in China’s state-owned \textit{Global Times}: ‘Arms race will happen, but who to blame?’, 20 March 2012, accessed: www.globaltimes.cn
PRC, the answer is no. Potential wars over sovereignty issues are exempted as a breach of PD on grounds that China would be acting in self-defence, a right granted under the UN system. If a war occurred over any of these issues, blame would be placed on the other parties who are viewed as breaching Chinese territorial integrity. Yet, if Chinese leaders do not expect that rival claimants will voluntarily defer to China’s position on territorial issues, and anticipate that non-peaceful means may be necessary to resolve the issues to China’s favour (as the regime seems to indicate through the premium it places on preparing a capability to ‘win local wars under information age conditions’), then claims of purely peaceful intentions are somewhat disingenuous.

China’s pledges that it will only attack if attacked by others, and will not ‘fire the first shot’, moreover, may not necessarily be what they seem. For instance, the official translation of what is widely considered the most authoritative Chinese military strategy textbook available in English defines ‘firing the first shot’ in both physical and political terms. It states that ‘if any country or organisation violates the other country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, the other side will have the right to “fire the first shot” on the plane of tactics’ (Peng and Yao 2005, 425-6). Given that, according to the PRC, several other countries are already violating China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, China could, with some internal consistency, permit itself to initiate military operations on these issues under circumstances of its choosing. There are, at any rate, ways to provoke conflict (such as sailing a large naval contingent into the claimed territorial seas of enemy occupied areas, and using it to blockade enemy forces) without actually firing the first shot.

Finally, the third hypothesis states that a state of mutual positive prestige (or perceptions of geopolitical legitimacy) amongst the great powers and most regional states is the most watertight basis for stable security order. Strategic stability is possible too under a state of mutual negative prestige, although the stability of the latter is less determinate and thus more shallow and vulnerable to disruption.

76 See Note 11
In applying the Marxist philosophies of dialectical and historical materialism to the concept of the ‘harmonious world’, theorists in the PRC retain a view of the world in which conflicts always exist in human affairs (Zhao and Ni 2007, 249-60; Crisp 2010b). PD nonetheless holds out the promise that if all states respect each other’s sovereignty and core interests, the sources of conflict can be minimised, and made more amenable to constructive efforts at accommodation and resolution. While a cyclical process, the paradigm also implies the possibility for a spiral of progress as the proper handling or settlement of differences over time entrenches mutual trust and builds constructive mechanisms of engagement and strategic partnership. PD, in other words, is a normative vision that promotes movement towards an ever-greater state of mutual positive prestige.

Once again, however, this vision runs up against the particular way in which the PRC defines its core interest of sovereignty. Many other states do not perceive PRC claims in the South China Sea, in particular, as ‘indisputably’ Chinese. More than that, many regional states perceive the prospect of Chinese control over economically and strategically important maritime areas as a potential hegemonic threat to their own national security and autonomy.

For China’s part, officials and elite commentators are, at best, ambivalent toward the US security role and alliance system in East Asia (Lieberthal and Wang 2012). While acknowledging the current stabilising role of the US in containing Japan as well as instability on the Korean peninsula, the regime contests the legitimacy of US defence activities in its peripheral seas, and its involvement in regional territorial disputes. If the US were not present, then China would above all need to negotiate regional geopolitics with Japan. In the East China Sea (and potentially the South China Sea also), current Chinese and Japanese interest definitions are largely irreconcilable, and the stakes involved have the potential to generate a major escalation of strategic rivalry in the absence of the US. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate in detail, the capacity of China to allow space for mutual accommodation and inclusive solutions to regional maritime geopolitical issues will be an essential litmus test for its peaceful rise and harmonious world doctrines.
6.4: Debating the path to great power status

In propounding PD, the regime is saying that ideally it favours peaceful and cooperative means of satisfying its core interests. Yet, other PRC actions and statements indicate a more limited faith in the prospect that dialogue and cooperation in itself can be relied upon to guarantee their long-term satisfaction. Rather, the mainstream consensus in China is that it is essential for the nation to raise its international material power profile well beyond the regional and global average.

China’s rising international power is not simply a natural by-product of successful economic growth, but rather the result of conscious assessments and ongoing internal debate about the means through which China can best guarantee its core interests over the long-term under a range of possible future contingencies. That the regime has sustained double-digit increases in its annual defence budget for most of the past two decades suggests the PRC is banking neither on moral suasion alone, nor on attaining only an average middle power profile to ensure its future security. Part of China’s military modernisation is directed at enhancing the regime’s existing internal security system across the vast territories and population already under its control. The more outward and maritime focus of China’s defence modernisation during the reform era, however, is unmistakable. There are two main drivers of this latter orientation, arising from China’s efforts to satisfy its second and third core interests respectively.

In regards to China’s third core interest, the rationale for maritime military development (supported also by air, space, and information warfare capacity) is especially obvious. The regime would be correct in perceiving that rival claimants on sovereignty disputes are unlikely to eventually come around to the Chinese point of view so long as China lacks the capability to threaten unacceptably adverse consequences if its will is indefinitely rebuffed. The objective of developing military power sufficient (if need be) to win local wars over sovereignty disputes, and deter or prevail against US intervention, is not contested in the Chinese national discourse.

In addition, however, the idea that securing China’s second core interest also necessitates a more outwardly extended national defence policy has taken on ever-greater currency within the Chinese discourse over the past decade. The key driver of
this trend has been the arguments advanced by a range of sea power advocates stemming largely from military (especially naval) circles – both academic and official. Despite the fact that certain aspects of this sea power advocacy contradict PD, it has nonetheless come to exercise a significant influence on mainstream elite and public opinion (Holmes and Yoshihara 2007; Wachman 2007; Ross 2009; Crisp 2010a).

The views of sea power advocates have been openly debated and contested in publicly accessible journals and media. The terms of this debate are important to understand and follow on an ongoing basis for two reasons. First, the competing visions have differing implications for the scope and nature of Chinese revisionism in East Asia and beyond. Second, the evolving grand strategy of the regime currently appears as an attempt to balance the competing priorities emphasised by various parties to the debate. Indeed, it seems that the strategic priorities emphasised by different parties to the debate all have supporters at the senior level of the regime.

Contemporary sea power advocacy in China stems largely from the influence of former-Admiral Liu Huaqing, considered the father of the PRC’s modern navy (Holmes and Yoshihara 2007, chap 3). During the early reform years, Admiral Liu established many of the concepts and naval developmental objectives that frame contemporary Chinese discourse about naval strategy. In the process, he was greatly influenced by the ideas of American sea power theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) (Holmes and Yoshihara 2007, chap 3; Liu [H.] 2004, 430-40).

Mahan is commonly associated with a deterministic view about the relationship between sea power, history and national destiny. Mahan’s most famous work (1965 [1890]) does indeed indicate a view (derived largely from the experience of Great Britain) that sea power and a capacity to control crucial maritime chokepoints and obstruct an adversary’s seaborne commerce is the key attribute distinguishing powers of the first rank. Mahan at times also emphasised the role of decisive naval battles in determining the ascendancy or decline of a nation. Mahan’s vast oeuvre of writings on geopolitics and sea power, however, taken together is more diverse and contingent in their arguments and conclusions than is often given credit for (Sumida 1997, chap 5).
Mahan’s ideas, formulated during the height of the colonial period, had been disparaged in Maoist China as providing justifications for hegemony and colonial expansion. Admiral Liu played an instrumental role in rehabilitating Mahan, demonstrating the applicability of many of the latter’s strategic principles to the strategic contexts faced by the PRC (Holmes and Yoshihara 2007, chap 3). Much of the maritime strategy discourse in China over the past decade has continued to employ his Mahan-inspired concepts. Many contemporary sea power advocates quote Mahan in their writings.

It is not known how such advocates are represented as a lobby within the regime hierarchy. They do appear to be a coherent grouping, as their arguments demonstrate consistency and common assumptions. Arguments reflecting the Mahanian sea power paradigm are commonplace in the PLA Navy’s flagship journal, Dangdai Haijun (Modern Navy), which suggests such views are well embedded in that institution. Articles reflective of this paradigm are also published in many other military and academic journals.

One of the key distinguishing features of Mahanian sea power advocacy is a view of globalisation less sanguine than that underpinning PD. PD emphasises the restraining and cooperation-inducing aspects of economic interdependence, and thus is justified according to an essentially liberal theory of globalisation. In contrast, sea power advocates emphasise the security vulnerabilities, and future resource and growth expansion needs of China’s globalised economy, and the potential competitive pressures that this will generate with other major powers in future (see for instance Liu and Zhui 2007; Liu 2007; Zhan 2007a and 2007b; Zhang 2003; Liu [X.] 2004; Yang 2004).

Approximately half of Chinese foreign trade and 80 percent of its oil imports are carried by sea across the Indian Ocean and through the Malacca Strait (Feng and

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77 This assessment is based on an examination of the articles published in this periodical from the beginning of 2007 to mid-2008. The articles were accessed in full-text during a period of research at Fudan University, Shanghai in 2008. Dangdai Haijun is affiliated with the PLA Navy Political Department (Cheung 2010).
Zhang 2007). This is commonly perceived in China as a vulnerability that could be exploited by other powers in a struggle over Taiwan or other territorial claims (Feng and Zhang 2007; Zhang 2005). The solution for sea power advocates is to no longer remain shy in building up naval power projection, including aircraft carriers. China needs to be capable of defending for itself its commercial transit through the Malacca chokepoint and beyond, wherever its vital economic interests are at stake. A substantial oceanic defence presence, moreover, is touted as essential for the exercise of a diplomatic leverage commensurate with genuine great power status.

Sea power advocates advance geo-strategic rationales for Chinese maritime territorial and jurisdiction claims that are more explicit and thoroughgoing than found elsewhere in the national discourse. The conception of Chinese maritime geography advanced resembles the way Mahan analysed the strategic geography of the Caribbean from the vantage point of the United States, with the proposed Panama Canal equivalent to the role of the Malacca Strait (Holmes and Yoshihara 2007, chap 4). Sea power advocates argue for a navy capable of enforcing ‘command of the seas’ (a Mahanian concept) within what is dubbed the ‘first island chain’ (Holmes and Yoshihara 2007, chap 4; ‘Daolian yu …’ 2007). Introduced into the mainstream lexicon by Admiral Liu, the ‘first island chain’ consists of island groupings controlled by US allied regimes running north to south from the Japanese home islands through Japan’s Okinawa prefecture, Taiwan, and The Philippines, and enclosed in the south by the Indonesian archipelago. The ‘first island chain’ is viewed as the greatest barrier to the development of Chinese sea power, and thus, for those who link sea power with national destiny, a key vulnerability and barrier to China’s long-term national rejuvenation.

Taiwan is depicted as bearing special strategic attributes. Located at the centre of the ‘first island chain’, control of Taiwan, and especially its surrounding waters, promises to be the ‘key’ that unlocks the chain. This would open up strategic access to the Pacific Ocean, and enable the regime to coordinate its northern and southern naval fleets to better enforce its claims in the East and South China Seas. Control of Taiwan

78 The statistics for oil imports have not changed as of 2010. See China’s ‘Country Energy Profile’ at the US government’s Energy Information Administration website: www.eia.doe.gov
is also depicted as useful for balancing and better deterring US forces based on Guam, the most crucial link in the so-called ‘second island chain’ (‘Daolian yu …’ 2007; Yu 2007; Yang 2004). Admiral Liu’s naval development agenda similarly envisioned China eventually projecting power beyond the first and towards the ‘second island chain’ (Holmes and Yoshihara 2007, chap 3).

Most sea power advocates take for granted a natural right for China to exercise ‘command of the sea’ within the ‘three seas’ (Yellow, East China, and South China) that fall within the ‘first island chain’. In doing so, these writers are implying a maximal interpretation of the maritime sovereign rights vested to UN member states in UNCLOS, as well as an audacious ‘historical waters’ claim. Ability to control these waters is spoken of in defensive terms as breaking the ring of ‘containment’ unjustly imposed by the US, Japan, and other allies, and ensuring the protection of Chinese sea-borne commerce along the home straight. The gravity of the task is reinforced through reference to China’s vulnerability during the ‘century of humiliation’, and laments about the lack of Chinese sea power consciousness that had facilitated this. One article published in Dangdai Haijun, however, has argued in more offensive, but nonetheless accurate, terms that mastery of the ‘three seas’ will enable China to control Japan’s ‘strategic lifeline’ (Zhan 2007c).

Critics of this sea power paradigm employ a range of counter-arguments. One common strategy is to pour cold water on the more deterministic assumptions of Mahanian sea power theory by employing counter-evidence and revised interpretations of the historic scenarios analysed by Mahan (Xu 2003; Wu 2008). Xu Qiyu (2003), a researcher at the National Defence University, sums up this view when he writes that rather than sea power determining the course of history, it is history (or more precisely the total historic context) that determines the utility and significance of sea power.

Some Chinese strategic thinkers adopt an alternative land-power or Eurasian centred grand strategy on the grounds that China stands a better chance of extending influence and balancing the US in this region than in maritime Asia where it faces greater strategic disadvantages (Holmes and Yoshihara 2007, 43-6). The land power paradigm of Beijing University Professor Ye Zicheng (2007) is particularly worth
examining for two reasons. First, some of Ye’s appeals are based on the need for consistency with PD, thus highlighting some of the key tensions within the Chinese discourse. Second, Ye’s comprehensive land-power centred vision provides a means to critically assess the viability of a Chinese grand strategy that would attempt to bypass the need for an ocean-going navy. The problems of Ye’s vision help explain why elements of the sea power paradigm have come to successfully influence mainstream opinion.

Ye argues, on the basis of his analysis of previous great powers, that the scope for maritime extension depends on geographic position, geo-political context and the strength of the national land base to support such extension (2007, chap 2). In China’s case, all of these variables are deemed unfavourable for the development of sea power. Ye argues that the overwhelming bulk of China’s sovereign territory and resources, population, and economic activity are land-based (2007, 114-29). Further, he argues that China’s greatest security challenges at present are internal rather than external, and so the bulk of national resources should be directed towards solving the socio-economic, environmental, and corruption problems of China’s internal development (129-41). The development of sea power capabilities beyond what is required to bolster China’s strategic position vis-à-vis Taiwan and the Spratly dispute would be a misappropriation of precious national resources (284-99).

One implication of Ye’s arguments is that, in time, and provided China were able to overcome its internal challenges, the country may be in a stronger position later on to extend maritime power. Ye, however, believes the prospects for maritime extension are limited by the proximity of two existing maritime powers, Japan and the US (300-32). Ye fears that Chinese naval expansion (unilaterally) into areas beyond the scope of China’s sovereign waters would risk igniting what he refers to as a traditional pattern of rivalry between land- and sea-based powers – for instance, Britain and Germany prior to 1914, and the US and Soviet Union during the Cold War. Ye does not believe the PRC could overcome an initial position of disadvantage and safely compete in a maritime rivalry. China’s interdependent economic relationships with Japan and the US, moreover, necessitate the maintenance of stable ties, and an atmosphere conducive to cooperative strategic partnerships for managing issues of mutual interest and concern. Strategic restraint on the maritime front is also
considered by Ye as more consistent with PRC pledges to avoid seeking hegemony, or enter into an arms race.

Ye does not relinquish the goal for China to become a strong power and major pole in world affairs – terms he himself uses. His alternative grand strategy relies above all on the extension of Chinese economic magnetism, and depends additionally on the interests of other Eurasian powers such as Russia and India to assist in containing US influence on the Eurasian landmass. The fostering of tightly interdependent relationships with the states on China’s periphery is viewed as a strategic hedge to ensure its interests are taken seriously, and to dilute the potential for a US-led anti-China alignment (2007, chap 4). Maintaining friendly and mutually beneficial relations with border countries is the chief means for promoting an image of China as a force for international peace, prosperity and stability.

Ye proposes China put special emphasis on cultivating its strategic partnerships with fellow Eurasian powers Russia, India and Europe (chap 5). Initial progress could be made by expanding the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to include India (and others such as Pakistan and Iran). Thinking more long term, Ye encourages cultivation of Europe’s participation also into a Eurasian-wide cooperative organization to manage Eurasian affairs, founded upon a four powers partnership.

Beyond being a ‘soft balancing’ mechanism vis-à-vis the US, a clear motivating purpose and function for such a Eurasian-wide cooperative organization is not explicitly articulated. However, connections can be made between this proposal and other parts of his analysis that promote the development of a network of commercial rail transportation across the entire Eurasian landmass (2007, 284). Herein lies Ye’s answer to China’s ‘Malacca dilemma’. If China is able to foster a situation whereby the bulk of its trade flows and energy/resource imports from Europe and the Middle East can be transported overland by a comprehensively linked rail infrastructure – a ‘new silk road’ – then it will have removed the basic rationale for pursuing sea power beyond its sovereign domain.

Ye acknowledges that his arguments about limiting the scope of China’s sea power development do not represent the majority view. Indeed, the purpose of his book was
to challenge the prevailing view which conceives of China as a composite land and sea power whose rise to world power and influence requires developmental emphasis and extension on both fronts (2007, 111-14, 258-63). As a prominent insider to the debate, Ye provides important testimony about the extent to which the sea power paradigm has been absorbed into the mainstream discourse. The extent to which sea power advocates are exercising an influence on mainstream strategic thinking in China, especially at the official level, is one that US Naval War College analysts James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara (2007) felt unable to answer on grounds of a lack of transparency in Chinese domestic politics. An article by US China scholar Robert Ross (2009), previously a prominent sceptic about Chinese interest in sea power, puts to rest many doubts in this regard. Ross holds a similar perspective to Ye regarding China’s essential strategic attributes as a land-based power. Ross nonetheless catalogues a large amount of evidence pointing to the increasing influence in China of what he calls ‘naval nationalism’ at both elite and popular levels.

In the contemporary Chinese discourse, the priorities and policies embodied in the sea power paradigm are engaged in an ongoing dialectic with those of PD. The appeal by sea power critics to China’s pledge to never pursue hegemony, for instance, has motivated at least one prominent sea power advocate to more tightly define his call for a strong navy as about the defence of sovereign rights and the upholding of international law. In turn, a distinction is made between rights of ‘unlimited extension’ within China’s sovereign domain, and ‘limited extension’ in accordance with international law and cooperation through the UN in waters outside China’s sovereign domain (Zhang 2004). The notion of ‘unlimited extension’ could still threaten the viability of PD in East Asia, especially if China’s sovereign domain is viewed as encompassing an ‘historical waters’ claim over the ‘three seas’. The latter proposition, however, does indicate an accommodation between the two paradigms.

The dialectic between the sea power and peaceful development paradigms manifested itself at the official level during the sixtieth anniversary celebrations of the PLA Navy (PLAN) in 2009. The event received high profile coverage in both China’s domestic and internationally oriented media. The centrepiece of the festivities was a display of

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80 Professor Ye is identified as a prominent voice in the debate in Shi (2008).
81 The adjustment of Zhang’s views in response to criticism is identified in Shi (2008).
Chinese naval vessels and aircraft (including some nuclear submarines), accompanied by vessels from fourteen other countries. President Hu Jintao gave an address on the theme of China’s contribution towards fostering a ‘harmonious ocean’. President Hu reiterated key assurances of PD, including the importance of adhering to international law (‘President Hu meets …’ 2009).

During the anniversary, the official Xinhua news site ran a prominently displayed special section on the celebrations. Even on its English language site, several articles posted reflected the views of the Mahanian faction, with calls for China to be prepared to ‘fight in regional wars’, ‘guarantee the command of its seas’, and ‘gradually extend its operational range beyond the offshore area’ to safeguard ‘expanding maritime rights and interests’. In one article it was declared that ‘the country must rule the waves with more overseas missions in areas vital to China's foreign trade’. Several articles described the event as a public consciousness raising effort about the importance of sea defence to China’s future. Others cited opinion polls and discussions in internet forums to indicate an already intense popular interest in sea power and the development of an aircraft carrier capacity (Peng and Cui 2009; ‘China’s ever-largest …’ 2009).

Nothing of prominence gets published in major state-owned media outlets in China without some form of high-level sponsorship (Shirk 2007, chap 4). Accordingly, the above is significant evidence for the influence of the Mahanian sea power paradigm among an unknown proportion of senior regime officials. In the years since this event, editorials in state-owned media have generally become more assertive in advancing the right for China to develop a strong navy, resist US ‘interference’ in regional maritime disputes, and challenge US military activities in the Yellow, East and South China Seas. Most editorials, however, attempt to reconcile this stance with PD, and concede the need for some form of accommodation, yet to be specified, with the US in the West Pacific. The same applies to the more open advocacy of China’s right to

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82 Quotations are from Peng and Cui (2009), Li et al. (2009), and ‘Chinese navy to …’ (2009).
develop aircraft carriers and a blue-water navy capable of defending overseas economic interests. One notable editorial argued that:

… only when the old logic of sea power, illustrated by … Mahan … is broken and a new strategy gains ground can the preparation be properly made … China’s ambition of building a blue-water navy is to pursue the basic right to develop, rather than maritime hegemony. The Chinese navy … would be able to better help maintain regional stability and world peace.84

In official defence white papers, the regime has consistently indicated a commitment towards ‘gradual extension of the strategic depth for offshore defensive operations’ (WP 2006 chap II). Recent defence white papers have added to this concept a goal of developing capabilities for ‘conducting cooperation [2008] (operations [2010]) in distant waters’ (WP 2008, chap V; WP 2010, chap III). A reference in the 2004 white paper (chap III) to strengthening capabilities for ‘winning … command of the seas and command of the air’ was never repeated.

In terms of the physical realisation of policy, the focus of China’s maritime military build-up has been on bolstering capabilities relevant to enhancing it’s bargaining and war-fighting power on regional territorial disputes. The concentration of resources required to contest advanced powers in the region, even asymmetrically, means that China has not yet diverted substantial investment towards fielding a trans-regional blue-water navy. The regime’s actions so far have only been directed towards preparing the normative grounds (domestically) and promoting the legitimacy (diplomatically) for such an endeavour. As part of this effort, China has increased its participation in maritime security cooperation (see defence white papers). Most notably, since 2009 the government has been sending naval vessels to the Gulf of Aden off Somalia to better protect Chinese merchant ships against pirates, and in coordination with an existing UN-sponsored multi-national force (Ng 2008).

Simultaneous with its growing interest in sea power, the regime is hedging its bets and pursuing many options embodied in Professor Ye’s Eurasian solution to the

‘Malacca dilemma’. The government has continued to deepen its energy relationships with Russia, the former Soviet states in Central Asia and Iran, including importantly the construction of direct overland pipelines (Seaman 2010). China has also continued to invest in the development of port facilities and transport infrastructure in Myanmar and Pakistan, to be used as overland transit options that bypass Malacca. Most remarkably, reports in *Global Times* have disclosed plans within the government to work towards a trans-Eurasian high-speed rail network for the transport of commercial goods between China and Western Europe according to the three routes specified by Ye. With a goal of being operative by 2025, it is estimated that such infrastructure may enable an overland trip from Beijing to London to be covered in two days (Kang 2010; ‘China to build …’ 2010).

For a number of reasons, however, these overland options cannot be expected to substantially reduce China’s economic dependence on the sea for the foreseeable future. First, it is hard to envision growth of energy consumption from overland sources in Russia and Central Asia outstripping growth from sources in the Middle East and Africa. Ye’s own un-referenced figures indicated that by 2010 China would be getting roughly half of its oil imports overland from Russia and Kazakhstan (Ye 2007, 292-3). This has proved incorrect. Various sources consistently estimate half of China’s oil imports come from the Middle East and 30 percent from Africa (Seaman 2010; Feng and Zhang 2007). It would take a radical reduction in imports from these sources to make Ye’s figures feasible over the long-term.

In regard to overland options from ports in Myanmar, Pakistan, or perhaps the Middle East, there are three main problems. The first is the security of transit. Are these countries stable enough to entrust the security of crucial commercial infrastructure that China would increasingly rely on? If the answer to this is not unshakeably affirmative, then China might be driven towards thinking about the notion of land power in ways beyond that envisioned by Ye. That is, China might be compelled to consider a network of foreign military bases. One editorial published in *Global Times* in 2009 has already argued that China needs to abandon the passivity of PD and harness economic, political and military resources to function as an active ‘regional

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85 See also China’s ‘Country Energy Profile’ at the US government’s Energy Information Administration website: [www.eia.doc.gov](http://www.eia.doc.gov)
stabiliser’, including on land in places like Pakistan and Afghanistan. It would remain a perpetual challenge for China to sustain a distinction, in practice, between this sort of role and that of a regional hegemon. In contrast, most of the Indian Ocean is a vast international commons in which port access is the only necessary encounter with the sovereign rights of other states.

The second problem with the overland option is that rail transport operates on fixed gauges. There is a question of whether a limited number of cross-Eurasian rail lines could handle the bulk of China’s vast and ever-growing economic needs. Maritime freight, on the other hand, can be manoeuvred with vastly greater flexibility, and the seas can support much greater quantities of traffic.

The third problem is that, for the foreseeable future, the overland option provides for only limited scope to bypass sea transit. The plan for a trans-Eurasian rail network does not currently include a link to the Persian Gulf oil-producing states (Iran excepted), let alone Africa. Even if the Myanmar and Pakistan options eventually enabled a complete bypassing of the Malacca Strait, there would still be some important stretches of sea transit to negotiate. Such residual economic dependence on the sea (if not partly reversible within the next decade or two) may well continue to lend weight to the case in China for a great power strategy based in significant part on the extension of sea power.

6.5: Conclusion

This chapter has examined the complex of interest structures, or motivational tendencies, underpinning contemporary Chinese grand strategy. It has shown that even in a case where the workings of the political system are highly veiled to outside observers, the public communication imperative of corporate agency generates ample evidence for identifying guiding policy ideas and the socio-political forces that produce and perpetuate them.

86 ‘China should act as a regional stabilizer’, 20 Oct 2009 (www.globaltimes.cn)
The underlying drivers of contemporary Chinese grand strategy are well captured by what the regime has dubbed China’s core interests. According to its peaceful development narrative, the regime proclaims that China seeks ideally to satisfy its core interests through peaceful and cooperative means. Other trends, however, such as China’s steady military build-up and emerging interest in sea power, indicate that the regime does not view its future security as guaranteed by dialogue and negotiation alone. In addition to the coercive capacity needed to prevail on territorial disputes, the idea that China needs a capability to defend against potential threats to its extensive overseas economic interests and future resource needs has become a leading view in the national discourse.

Despite pledges of peaceful development, the way in which China has long defined its core interest of territorial integrity contributes towards the presence of potential conditions for war, and an existing deficit of mutual positive prestige in East Asia. One of the most important conditions sustaining the tenacity of China’s commitment to its sovereignty claims is the regime’s prohibition on liberal discussion and debate about Chinese history. The regime’s enduring propaganda legacy has produced a multitude of true believers in the ‘One China doctrine’ at all levels of society. More pragmatically, many Chinese also fear that abandonment of Taiwan might empower the cause of separatist forces in Tibet and Xinjiang. The regime’s fear that it would undermine its credibility, legitimacy, and stability of its rule if it opened the door to historical revisionism is a powerful conservative force blocking general prospects for deeper liberalisation of the Chinese public sphere.

The second core interest of sustaining economic growth and social development also has a robust causal underpinning. This is a result largely of the expectations of gradually improving living standards that the regime has engendered in its people, and upon which the regime has also staked their legitimacy. In the coming decade, at least, the deep internationalisation of the Chinese economy will likely be sustained on the basis of some degree of path dependence.

Having identified and explained the reasons and socio-political forces that give existing Chinese core interests their motivational power and durability, the basis for viewing them as potential major drivers of future trends and events has now been
established. The remaining chapters of Part II will analyse the causal tendencies examined in this chapter in regard to their implications for prospective power transitions in East Asia and beyond.
Chapter 7: Defining Chinese Revisionism

Our in-depth investigation, in the previous chapter, of the interest structures comprising contemporary Chinese foreign policy motivation provides a basis now for conducting a future-oriented analysis in this and the following chapter. Given the focus of this thesis on the subject of power transitions, the key question is whether any of the interest motivations identified imply some form of revisionist geopolitical orientation; and if so, what dynamics (conflictual/peaceful; coercive/consensual) are potentially implied in their interaction with the interests of other regional states?

Cursory reflection on the various interests analysed indicates, according to geopolitical relevance, two candidates for an assessment of revisionist potential. These are: (1) the irredentist agenda of maritime sovereignty and jurisdictional claims embodied in China’s third core interest, and (2) China’s emerging interest in sea power extension to defend trade routes beyond its home region. It will be recalled that, according to my theory, neither irredentism nor spatial military expansion are, in themselves, necessarily revisionist. What needs to be assessed is whether the actions necessary to realise particular objectives of such kinds would, in any given case, have potential consequences for the overall military hierarchy, or polarity, of a region.

In this chapter, I demonstrate the utility of my theory to help draw tangible and realistic conclusions about future revisionist potential (or otherwise) from the information contained within existing interest structures, together with other relevant empirical evidence. To do this, I use the indicators developed in Chapter 4 to order and discipline the analysis according to the knowledge they contain about the finite range of possibilities at the ‘interactive process’ and ‘order outcome’ stages of the universal power transition sequence.

The chapter has three main sections. Section 7.1 sets the context through specifying both the physical and normative features of the geopolitical region and status quo order in contemporary East Asia. Section 7.2 then conducts a detailed examination of the implications of Chinese territorial and maritime jurisdiction claims for the future of this geopolitical region. The method of ‘closed system rational simulation’ (CSRS;
developed in Chapter 3) is used together with my theoretical indicators to demonstrate tangible possibilities for hierarchical order, as well as conflict and peace, implied in the interaction of the ideal preferences held by key states. Specifics of the analytical procedure I deploy are outlined at the beginning of 7.2. Section 7.3 subsequently applies a similar, yet altered, method to consider the implications of emerging Chinese ambitions to extend sea power beyond its home region.

7.1: The geopolitical region and status quo order

In analysing the rise of China, the geopolitical region and status quo order of greatest significance is defined here as Maritime East Asia (MEA). MEA is a coherent geopolitical region according to all three of the essential indicators specified in Chapter 4: politico-territorial distribution, great power military reach, and the existence of an overlapping or common security complex. Important aspects of this status quo order are also underpinned by an identifiable normative treaty structure.

Politico-territorial distribution
A key factor circumscribing the geopolitical region in contemporary East Asia is that most land territory in the region is uncontested by others and therefore geopolitically inactive. This is true of continental China and Southeast Asia, Japanese territory, and the archipelagos of Indonesia and The Philippines. MEA is also delimited by the geographical separation of the East Asian sovereignties from Central and Western Eurasia (due to the vastness of Chinese continental territory) and the Americas in the East (due to the even greater vastness of the Pacific Ocean).

Great power military reach
A defining feature of the post-WWII geopolitical status quo has been the capability of the US to project military power at will and uncontested through the seas contiguous to the coasts of all East Asian states. American unipolarity in MEA is accordingly the status quo reference point from which revisionist change can be apprehended.

Overlapping/common security complex
The capacity or potential for military reach is insufficient as an indicator of status quo orders and revisionism. Equally important is the need to demonstrate that the vital
strategic and security interests of contiguous states, or powers potentially capable of extending into the region, are fixated on the common geographical area. MEA in the post-WWII era has been a coherent unipolar order precisely because US power projection has been (a) constantly maintained and exercised, and (b) perceived by all states, from allies to adversaries, as affecting their vital security interests. Even for more neutral states such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia, American interests in the region, backed by military projection and alliances, influence security outlooks and strategic options, not least indirectly through containment effects on Japanese and Chinese military power.

With the rise of China, and its assertion of sovereignty and jurisdiction over large maritime areas, the coherence of MEA as a geopolitical region has been further reinforced through the emergence of contested subregions. These sub-regions are delimited by both political geography and the politics of territorial and strategic contestation. The geopolitical sub-region of Maritime Northeast Asia (MN) consists of the East China and Yellow Seas. MN is geographically circumscribed by continental China and the Korean Peninsula to the west and north, Japan to the east, and Taiwan to the south. Territorial and strategic contestation in the area predominantly involves China, Japan and the US.

The sub-region of Maritime Southeast Asia (MS) encompasses the South China Sea. It is geographically circumscribed by continental China and Taiwan to the north, peninsular Southeast Asia in the west, the Indonesian archipelago and Malacca Strait in the south, and the Philippines in the east. Geopolitical contestation in the area primarily involves China and the US.

One further potentially contested geopolitical sub-region can be identified in MEA. Encompassing the oceanic high seas between the first and second ‘island chains’ extending to the US territory of Guam and US administered Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, this sub-region is dubbed here as the Greater West Pacific (GWP).

Extensive economic linkages in East Asia increase the intensity of the overlapping security complex in MEA and its constituent sub-regions. Most intra-regional trade
has to pass through the waters of MS and/or MN. A third of the world’s sea-borne inter-continental trade in monetary terms (half in terms of gross tonnage) currently traverses the South China Sea. Most regional countries accordingly have a considerable stake in the military power structure and normative principles that govern this geopolitical region.

**Normative treaty structure**

In the post-WWII period there has been no all-inclusive treaty framework in the region pertaining to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of conventional military force postures. The US has exercised unipolarity through a combination of *de facto* force projection posture; alliance treaty relationships with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, The Philippines, and Australia; and defence cooperation and base-access agreements with other states such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and, more recently, Vietnam (Bitzinger 2006; Kaplan 2005). The US strategic presence is thus underpinned by a considerable degree of positive prestige (Goh 2008).

During the post-WWII era, the US has used its power to deter regional states from embarking on military solutions to territorial and irredentist disputes. In addition to active defence of the internationally recognised divisions of Korea and Vietnam, on issues such as Taiwan and Spratly, the US has in practice upheld the terms of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty (Hara 2007, chap 2 and 6). In instituting the terms of Japanese surrender in WWII, the treaty renounced Japanese ownership whilst leaving the allocation of sovereignty to be determined at another time. The US has maintained a similar posture of neutrality towards Diaoyu/Senkaku since it passed administrative jurisdiction of Okinawa to Japan in the 1972 Reversion Treaty (Hara 2007, chap 7). Not surprisingly, the PRC rejects the legitimacy of relevant clauses in the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the inclusion of Diaoyu in the Reversion Treaty. For one, neither the PRC nor ROC had been invited to negotiations of the 1951 treaty due to controversy over who was the legitimate government of China. More importantly, the PRC opposes its ‘One China doctrine’ against any notion that the sovereign status of these territories has ever legitimately been in dispute or in limbo.

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87 Sea-borne trade, moreover, accounts for around 90 percent of inter-continental trade (Cronin and Kaplan 2012, 7).
The other important normative element of the status quo in MEA concerns the respective rights provided by international law to coastal states and the militaries of other states within an EEZ. The US considers EEZs to be international waters. China argues that other states need the permission of the state enjoying jurisdiction before they can transit military vessels through the area. How this clash of legal interpretations is resolved will have an important impact on the future of geopolitical order and hierarchy in MEA.

### 7.2: Chinese irredentist and maritime jurisdiction claims

This main section of the chapter investigates whether Chinese claims on Taiwan, in the East China Sea, and South China Sea can be defined as revisionist in their implications according to the indicators of my theory. The chapter does not consider China’s claim to ‘Southern Tibet’, which is an outlier located well outside the geopolitical region of focus here.

Our assessment of each of China’s irredentist claims follows an identical five-step procedure, as follows:

**Ideal preference:** Each sub-section begins by articulating how China defines and interprets the details of its claims. Grey areas in which aspects of a claim have not yet been fully specified (and thus are ambiguous) are also identified.

**Preliminary order outcome assessment:** Order outcome indicators are then applied to these preferences to indicate what their ideal realisation potentially implies for the military-security hierarchy of MEA, especially its constituent sub-regions.

**Contemporary interests of other stakeholders:** Identifies the interest definitions of other key stakeholders that geographically overlap in their terms of reference with the above.

**Implied interactive processes:** Identifies the terms under which the interest definitions of the various parties can be viewed as either physically
incompatible or potentially compatible. The finite options in each case are structured according to relevant indicators at the interactive process stage.

*Adjusted order outcome assessment*: In the final step, the initial order outcome assessment is refined, and, if necessary, supplemented with a consideration of alternative possibilities in light of the interactive dynamics identified through steps 3 and 4.

### 7.2.1: Taiwan

*Ideal preference*

In recent decades, the Chinese government has indicated their preferred solution to the Cross-Strait dispute as ‘peaceful unification’ under ‘one country, two systems’. The degree of autonomy promised for Taiwan under this formula goes somewhat further than has been implemented in Hong Kong and Macao. The PRC says that Taiwan will be able to maintain a fully democratic *legislature*, and that no PRC military or administrative personnel will be dispatched to the island (WP 1993, section III). In exchange, the PRC expects that the ROC will be terminated as a constitutional entity, with sovereignty of ‘One China’ residing in the PRC, and Taiwan existing as a highly autonomous province within the latter. The PRC also expects that Taiwan’s defence cooperation and arms purchases from the US will have ceased prior to unification.

One key grey area concerns the procedures for regulating security in the immediate maritime areas around the island. On the issue of naval passage through the sea-lanes contiguous to Taiwan, at least, it is unlikely that the central government would endorse an arrangement in which it had to first obtain permission from the Taiwan authorities. Questions arise, however, about (a) whether the cessation of Taiwan’s defence relations with the US will be compensated through allowing Taiwan’s defence force to take sole legal responsibility for security in a given maritime perimeter around the island, and (b) the terms under which the PRC might expect a right of access to Taiwan’s ports for the PLA Navy. Politically, there are grey areas concerning (a) the legal mechanisms that could guarantee the autonomy of Taiwan’s
democratic system in perpetuity after transferral of sovereignty, and (b) the title, functions, and method of selection of the head of the executive government.

Preliminary order outcome assessment

In the context of MEA as a whole, Taiwan and its surrounding maritime area is not large geographically. The main geopolitical significance of Taiwan lies in its position at the intersection of the three geopolitical sub-regions of contemporary East Asia.

Whether incorporation of Taiwan would, in itself, comprise an act of revisionism depends on the strategic contingency required to achieve this objective. According to its ideal preference, the PRC would not need to execute a physical *conquest* of the island to achieve its goal. Ideally, *war* is avoided altogether. In this scenario, any revisionist implications would depend on the scope and nature of the coercive potential needed to attain the Taiwan government’s submission to unification on PRC terms, and keep the US on the sidelines. The issue of whether to define hierarchical change *at the point of unification* as entailing limited or radical revisionism, or else not yet revisionist, requires, in this scenario, an independent assessment of the evolved structure of military *deterrence* in the region as a whole, as well as China’s progress in actualising its other claims.

Contemporary interests of other stakeholders

The other primary stakeholder on this issue is the ROC. While the ROC is divided politically on aspects of Taiwan’s status and the strategic approach towards Cross-Strait relations, the polity is held together by a consensus on two fundamentals. These are (a) the independent sovereignty of the regime on Taiwan vis-à-vis the PRC, and (b) the conviction that Taiwan’s future status can only be legitimately determined through existing legal procedures provided in the ROC constitution. In other words, on the issue of unification versus independence, both sides of the mainstream political divide support Taiwan self-determination through referendum.

The two major political parties in the ROC are the KMT (the current power holder at the national level in both the executive and legislature) and the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party). The latter has been a key driving force in the promotion of a separate Taiwanese national identity. For adherents of this side of politics, the
struggle for independence and the democratisation process are understood in terms of decolonisation (Jacobs 2008; Lin 2006). The DPP built its support base through tapping into historical grievances towards the KMT’s post-war dictatorship held by many within the 80 percent of the population whose ancestry on Taiwan precedes the arrival of the KMT.

The mainstream position on Cross-Strait relations within the KMT is somewhat more complex. Nominally, KMT leaders adhere to a ‘One China’ policy on the basis of ‘different interpretations’ on each of the Strait. The interpretation of the current KMT administration is that ‘One China’ refers to the ROC. On the basis of the ROC Constitution and 1992 ‘Act Governing Relations Between Peoples in the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area’, the Cross-Strait status quo is conceived as ‘one ROC, two areas’ (Mo 2012).

The general conduct and rhetoric of the current KMT administration, however, suggests that this formulation is adhered to not on the basis of a literal belief in its reality, but rather as a pragmatic means for sustaining calm and forestalling confrontation in Cross-Strait relations as the PRC’s international power grows. Many committed KMT supporters feel a relatively greater sense of kinship with Chinese on the other side of the Strait than their political rivals do. Yet, the majority of KMT supporters and voters reject unification under ‘one country, two systems’. Most of the alternative unification models proposed in the mainstream Taiwan discourse – primarily forms of confederation, or else EU-style integration – involve the continued existence of a sovereign ROC (Lee 2006, chap 8). President Ma Ying-jeou and his cabinet ministers routinely refer to Taiwan as an independent sovereign country, and state that all Cross-Strait agreements that impact on Taiwan’s political status (including any interim peace accord) need to be subject to referendum (Lee 2009; Mo 2011). In doing so, KMT leaders are adhering to a long-term public opinion trend that has increasingly skewed towards favouring Taiwan independence (Keng and Chen 2009; Keng et al. 2009).88

88 In the latter article, scholars at National Chengchi University’s ‘Election Study Centre’ in Taipei utilise a method to separate peoples’ preferences based on pragmatic interest, from one based on an ultimate value position free from pragmatic constraints such as the PRC military threat. Their findings indicate almost 60 percent of the population support Taiwan independence. The majority of this group normally indicate in surveys that they support maintaining the status quo. Similar findings are
The US is the other major player in the Taiwan issue. The main interest at stake for the US is the credibility of US power. Policymakers in the US do not necessarily define this interest in terms of an ability to directly defend Taiwan and prevail in a war with China over the issue. The US no longer has a defence alliance treaty obligation to uphold with the ROC. Normatively, China has been very successful in sustaining Taiwan’s diplomatic isolation, and motivating regional states to distance themselves and avoid interfering in the issue. There is also a considerable asymmetry in the stake that China and the US each have in this particular issue, and in their respective willingness to bear sacrifices and tolerate escalation in a conflict situation.\(^8^9\) In light of such factors, several analyses published in major American think tanks in recent years have suggested that direct US military intervention in a Cross-Strait conflict cannot be guaranteed (Shlapak et al. 2009; Blumenthal et al. 2009; Murray 2008).

Beyond direct intervention, the credibility of US power will be reflected in either one of two factors. First, its ability to ensure some leeway for the ROC to extract concessions or compensations in any political negotiations with the PRC; or second, to localise any hot conflict, or maritime control attained by the PRC during hostilities, to the immediate Taiwan area.

**Implied interactive processes**

In their current form, the ideal preferences of the PRC and ROC for resolution of the Cross-Strait dispute are, at very least, incompatible in normative terms. Either the PRC has sovereignty over Taiwan, or the ROC does. It is not possible, logically or practically, for both these constitutional entities to possess sovereignty over Taiwan at the same time.\(^9^0\) This reality, in combination with the disparate political systems and

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\(^8^9\) For evidence that Chinese strategists are mindful of this factor, see Christensen (2001) and Sawyer (2009).

\(^9^0\) This argument obviously challenges the feasibility of the view advanced by some prominent contributors to the literature on Cross-Strait relations that some sort of shared sovereignty arrangement is possible (Bush 2005; Jakobson 2005). My position is that sovereignty has no meaning if it is not located at a single source or institution. The ultimate choice for any Cross-Strait settlement in regards to the determination of sovereignty is thus essentially binary – Taiwan’s incorporation into the PRC...
ideologies of the two regimes, generates the security dilemma experienced by the two sides.

On one hand, Taiwanese fear that if sovereignty is relinquished to the PRC, Taiwan will be even more completely isolated, and vulnerable (legally and physically) to gradual pressure and encroachments on their existing political and social freedoms. On the other hand, the PRC view recognition of ROC sovereignty, even in a confederation arrangement, as amounting to a situation of ‘two Chinas’, an outcome (along with ‘one China, one Taiwan’) towards which it has long indicated opposition (WP 1993, section III). The PRC would not endorse an arrangement in which it had to negotiate aspects of foreign policy for the whole of China (eg. diplomacy in multilateral institutions) on equal terms with the ROC, or which potentially enabled the ROC to ally with other liberal democracies against PRC policies in international diplomatic settings.91

According to the PRC’s existing outlook, a negative referendum outcome on any unification proposal in Taiwan would not be viewed as influencing the legitimacy of its sovereignty claim. China’s 1993 White Paper on Taiwan (section III) states that: “Self-determination” for Taiwan is out of the question’. In a second White Paper (2000), it was declared that the 23 million people on Taiwan cannot alone determine the issue. Rather, the outcome needs to reflect the will of all 1.3 billion Chinese.92

The PRC has indicated a preparedness to go to war over Taiwan under certain circumstances, including vaguely defined ones such as if ‘possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted’,93 or ‘if the Taiwan authorities refuse, sine die, the peaceful settlement of cross-Straits reunification through negotiations’ (WP 2000). Certain of its defence acquisitions indicate that China does not rule out the contingency of an amphibious operation (ie. conquest of some scope) (Shlapak et

(under a credible separation of powers arrangement) or sovereign independence for the regime on Taiwan.

91 Proposals for confederation in Taiwan either imply or directly stipulate these forms of empowerment for the ROC (Lee 2006, 169-65; Shih 2000).
92 For a more recent expression of this sentiment by a generally moderate Chinese scholar commentator, see Jian (2009).
93 See Article 8 of the Anti-Secession Law: http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200503/14/eng20050314_176746.html
Most non-Chinese military experts, however, believe the most likely object of a PRC military campaign would be to rapidly knock out the island’s air and naval defences and establish an economic blockade through control of the maritime area surrounding the island (Shlapak et al. 2009; Blumenthal et al. 2009; Bush and O’Hanlon 2007).

The ROC has also sustained extensive defence preparations (Shlapak et al. 2009; Blumenthal 2009), and surveys indicate about a fifth of the adult population are sure in their commitment to actively contribute to the defence effort in a conflict.94 In a recent survey of Taiwan’s youth (Shih 2012), around half the respondents supported the notion that ROC citizens should continue to resist and fight China if their government unilaterally signs a political settlement on PRC terms (ie. without recourse to referendum).95 The ROC is not willing to voluntarily relinquish their existing defence control of the maritime area surrounding Taiwan.

Adjusted order outcome assessment

The above analysis suggests that according to existing and well-entrenched interest definitions on both sides of the Strait, the PRC would need to exercise some form of physical coercion if it is to eventually prevail on the sovereignty issue. The concept of ‘peaceful unification’ surely excludes war or the live and targeted use of weaponry from its ambit, but not necessarily the threat of the use of force, and probably not economic sanctions. The above interactive analysis, however, indicates a Cross-Strait war as a real alternative possibility.

Including the possibility of war does not alter our preliminary assessment that the revisionist implications of Taiwan depend on a given contingency’s impact on the geopolitical sub-regions and overall deterrence structure of MEA. For instance: if the US were active combatants in a conflict, yet were able to contain it to the local Taiwan area, and maintain most of its existing freedom of manoeuvre through and

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94 This figure is derived from my analysis of the 2005 and 2008 ROC national security survey data sets compiled by Professor Emerson Niou. I am indebted to the ‘Election Study Centre’ at National Chengchi University for passing this material to me. On the same survey question, a further 10 percent indicate they will comply with government decisions in a conflict, while over 50 percent are effectively fence sitters that will decide at the time and under specific circumstances what they will do.

95 57 percent of those in the same survey, however, also agreed that Taiwan citizens should have the right to refuse conscription.
between the geopolitical sub-regions of MEA (excluding, of course, the Taiwan Strait); then there would be two possible assessments: (a) no revisionist shift from the status quo had yet occurred, or (b) a revisionist shift to at least qualitative parity in the structure of deterrence at the point of conflict had been reversed and/or set back. Such assessments would apply also to a scenario in which China made an initial pre-emptive attempt to gain broad military control of MN and/or MS down to the Malacca Strait, but were then thwarted and decisively defeated in these areas by the US and its allies.

Alternatively, a Chinese capacity to prolong an inconclusive military stalemate across these sub-regions would be one possible indication of a more consolidated limited revisionist shift towards bipolarity (especially if China’s capabilities were competitive within GWP as well). The deterrence, entirely, of an active US intervention role, so long as this occurred under the specific conditions that qualitative parity had been reached or exceeded, would be another.

In considering possible future order outcomes in MEA, however, a sole focus on Taiwan is greatly insufficient. In order to realistically assess possibilities for limited or radical revisionism in MEA, it is essential that we incorporate an understanding of the geopolitical issues arising from disputes in the East and South China Seas.

7.2.2: East China Sea

Ideal preference
China’s claims in the East China Sea are two-fold (see Figure 1). Firstly, China claims sovereignty over a grouping of five islets and three rocks known collectively as the Diaoyu Islands (Senkaku Islands in Japan). According to China, the islands are within the jurisdiction of Taiwan province. Secondly, China claims jurisdiction over a continental shelf which it claims ends at the foot of the Okinawa trench, encompassing most of the East China Sea. The two claims are mutually reinforcing. Diaoyu is situated on the continental shelf claimed by China. China argues that Diaoyu is not a natural extension of Okinawa, but rather divided from the latter by the Okinawa trench.
China has made a preliminary submission to the United Nations detailing some of the geographic coordinates of its continental shelf claim according to provisions in Part VI of UNCLOS (see citation beginning ‘Preliminary Information …’). In UNCLOS (Article 76), viable continental shelf claims provide states with ‘sovereign rights’ over resources on the seabed and subsoil extending to a distance of up to 150 nautical miles (approx. 300 km) beyond the outer edge of a 200nm EEZ. In the East China Sea, the distance separating the Chinese mainland and Okinawa is short enough that, even at its widest extent, the 200 nm point extending from China’s coast well exceeds the median point between the two coasts. According to China’s UN submission, at the widest distances identified, China’s claim extends between 60 and 100 nm further beyond the EEZ limit. In the narrower southern section, the 200 nm EEZ extends near the foot of the continental shelf. According to China’s claim then, the bulk of the sea in this area would constitute a 200 nm EEZ alone. Without the continental shelf claim, however, China would be unambiguously required to negotiate more equal-distance EEZs with Japan on the basis of UNCLOS’s equitability principle (the basis of Japan’s counter-claim).

To understand the geopolitical implications of China’s claims, it is necessary to examine both (a) distinctions in the terminology of rights UNCLOS provides for
states in a territorial sea, EEZ, and continental shelf, and (b) how China interprets these rights.

UNCLOS distinguishes ‘sovereignty’ and ‘sovereign rights’. Full ‘sovereignty’ applies to a territorial sea extending 12nm from a state’s coastal baseline (Article 2 and 3), as well as bays and internal seas of an archipelago that qualify under UNCLOS (Article 49). For EEZs and continental shelves, UNCLOS deploys the terms ‘sovereign rights’ and ‘jurisdiction’. In an EEZ, states are provided ‘sovereign rights’ for economically exploiting and managing natural resources in the entire maritime area, as well as ‘jurisdiction’ over the establishment of man-made structures, the conduct of marine scientific research, and environmental protection (Article 56). In areas of continental shelf extending up to 350nm, states are provided ‘sovereign rights’ for exploring and economically exploiting resources on the seabed and subsoil only (Article 77). States are also provided specific rights of ‘jurisdiction’ in regard to the laying of submarine cables, pipelines, and over establishment of man-made structures in these areas (Articles 79 to 81).

The key issue is how China interprets the respective rights UNCLOS provides both to a coastal state and to other states in an EEZ. This applies also to sections of the South China Sea. The question is whether China interprets UNCLOS as allowing a coastal state to regulate all military activity or traffic in an EEZ. In the 2001 EP-3/F-8 air collision and 2009 USNS Impeccable episodes, China made clear at least its opposition to foreign military surveillance operations in its EEZs.96 In dialogues with the US, the Chinese argue that such operations are ‘marine scientific research’ that has not been cleared for approval by the coastal state exercising ‘jurisdiction’ (see Chinese contributions in Dutton 2010). According to Article 143 of UNCLOS, marine scientific research is to be conducted for ‘peaceful purposes’, and its findings openly ‘disseminated’. US surveillance operations do not fulfil the latter condition, and arguably not the former either (Valencia and Amae 2003).

96 For an analysis of these legal issues as related to the 2001 incident, see Valencia and Amae (2003). On the 2009 incident, see the US-China relations section of Comparative Connections, Vol. 11, No. 1-4 (2009), accessible at: http://csis.org/program/comparative-connections
There is also a question of how China interprets the ‘sovereign rights’ provision. Given UNCLOS defines these rights as covering the ‘production of energy from the water, currents and winds’ (Article 56), virtually all matter within an EEZ could potentially qualify as an economic resource to be defended from the physical interference of others. As specified below, however, Part V of UNCLOS does qualify the rights of coastal states through providing rights of freedom of navigation, overflight and the laying of submarine cables for other states. China has yet to specify the terms under which it might permit free passage of foreign military vessels passing through its EEZ (that is, without needing to obtain Chinese authorisation first).

Preliminary order outcome assessment
The East China Sea comprises over half the maritime area of MN. The disputes in the area, moreover, directly involve a potential regional great power, Japan, whose strategic position is currently subordinated, and its security underpinned, by an alliance with the dominant power in the region, the US. Within the existing status quo, Japanese and US military forces predominate in the eastern half of the sea, and US surveillance operations often penetrate into the western side. Japanese forces occupy Diaoyu/Senkaku.

Whether China’s claims in the East China Sea are revisionist in themselves depends on the degree of exclusivity in the security arrangements China promotes for its claimed EEZ and continental shelf. If China opted to implement an exclusive security policy in its EEZs in which it was the sole security provider, and where all military passage of foreign militaries was subject to its authorisation or rejection, then the military-security hierarchy in the East China Sea would approach unipolarity. The establishment of a new unipolarity over a geopolitical sub-region that previously embodied a different hierarchy is one means of effecting a limited revision of the status quo geopolitical order. Full transition to unipolarity in MN, however, would require a similar exclusive policy in the Yellow Sea. An exclusivist policy vis-à-vis the US and Japan in the Yellow Sea, however, would need to draw on an extra-legal
‘sphere of influence’ argument in areas where the two Koreas are eligible for their own EEZs.97

Less ambitious objectives – such as China limiting its hostility to foreign military activities in the uncontested western side of the East China Sea only, whilst agreeing to joint security and resource development with Japan in areas where there are conflicting legal claims – would be even less decisive in their intrinsic implications for regional hierarchy. In both scenarios, our order outcome assessment ultimately depends on the interactive processes involved in reaching a settlement, as well as developments in other sub-regions.

Contemporary interests of other stakeholders
Japan claims sovereignty over Diaoyu/Senkaku, and challenges China’s continental shelf claim. The sovereignty claim significantly influences the scope of its claimed EEZ, and undercuts China’s ability to claim exclusive rights to the continental shelf (Hsiung 2007). Japan, however, claims in addition that the Okinawa trench does not mark the end of the continental shelf. Rather, they argue that China and Japan both reside on a common continental shelf that extends further east (Bush 2010, 67). Japan also argues that the largest islets of Diaoyu/Senkaku qualify as ‘islands’ under UNCLOS, thus qualifying for an EEZ of their own. While Japan applies UNCLOS’s equitability principle (Article 74) to divide the northern section of the East China Sea evenly with China, in the south, the possession of Diaoyu/Senkaku increases its relative share of the sea. Japan presently uses the outer edge of its claimed EEZ as the boundary of its maritime security perimeter and air defence identification zone (Bush 2010, chap 5).

Japanese leaders face considerable socio-political pressure to avoid conceding China’s sovereignty claim on Diaoyu/Senkaku (Bush 2010, chap 11; Shirk 2007, 145-6). In contrast to China, however, the risk is not so much regime instability as the collapse of political and electoral support for the cabinet or party forming government. A further comparative difference with China is that the issue of Diaoyu/Senkaku does not pose any potential threat to Japan’s broader territorial

integrity. Rather, the issues and risks arising for Japan in its disputes with China in the East China Sea concern (a) the extent of the relative decline of its regional status (Tokyo Foundation 2011), (b) the viability of the US alliance as the guarantor of Japanese security, and (c) the prospect of an involuntary strategic dependence and subordination to China, a country in which many of its people harbour hostile feelings towards Japan.98

The US has a considerable stake in these issues. In terms of territory and population, Japan is the largest and most significant country in the region over which the US extends a security guarantee. If Japan were to lose out completely to China’s maximal preferences in the East China Sea, the symbolism of the defeat would have an impact not only on the credibility of the US’s Asian security role, but potentially on its alliances in other regions as well.

In regards to Diaoyu/Senkaku, the US says they do not take sides in the sovereignty dispute. Top officials in the current and previous US administrations have clearly indicated, however, that as a territory currently administered by Japan it falls within the US-Japan alliance treaty. Yet, the terms of the treaty do enable the US to exercise a choice between direct defence of the territory, or back-up deterrence alone to localise and prevent escalation of any Sino-Japanese conflict over the issue (Bush 2010, 259-60).

In addition to the issue of alliance credibility, the US contests the extent of the ‘jurisdiction’ powers that China advances within its claimed EEZs, and of which the US has always defined as international waters. US administrations in the post-Cold War period have generally sought to sustain and extend America’s moment of global military primacy. America’s ability to do this has rested on its ability to maintain ‘command of the commons’ at sea, in the air, and outer space (Posen 2003). From the American point of view, China’s advocacy of restrictions on the freedom of other states’ naval and air forces in an EEZ poses an unwelcome precedent that could

potentially complicate its projection of power, not only in MEA, but elsewhere around
the world if other countries follow suit (Dutton 2012).

UNCLOS provides a degree of support to the American position. Article 58 states that
in EEZs:

… all States … enjoy, subject to the relevant provisions of this Convention, the freedoms referred to in article 87 of navigation and overflight and of the laying of submarine cables and pipelines, and other internationally lawful uses of the sea related to these freedoms.

Article 87 (in Part VII: High Seas) states in its second clause that: ‘These freedoms shall be exercised by all States with due regard for the interests of other States in their exercise of the freedom of the high seas, and also with due regard for the rights under this Convention with respect to activities in the Area [emphasis added].’ Article 90 reads: ‘Every State … has the right to sail ships flying its flag on the high seas.’ Article 95 states: ‘Warships on the high seas have complete immunity from the jurisdiction of any State other than the flag State.’ Article 96 extends these rights also to: ‘Ships owned or operated by a State and used only on government non-commercial service …’ The central point of contestation is the issue of how freedoms pertaining to the high seas are qualified and altered by the proviso in the italicised phrase in Article 87 that, above all, applies to the ‘sovereign rights’ and ‘jurisdiction’ of coastal states in an EEZ. UNCLOS itself does not provide a definitive answer.

In addition to legal argument, the US appeals to customary practice, including its own toleration of Soviet and, more recently, Russian military surveillance missions in close proximity to its coasts (Dutton 2012).

*Implied interactive processes*

There is much physical incompatibility in the interaction of existing ideal preferences. The most difficult issue is the sovereignty dispute over Diaoyu/Senkaku. Ideal realisation of China’s claim requires the expulsion of Japanese forces that currently fortify and defend the area. Japan cannot be expected to voluntarily withdraw to
facilitate a Chinese takeover and exclusive entitlement to the islands. A future war over the issue is a real possibility.

If China ever attempted the ideal realisation of an exclusive security posture across the full extent of its claimed EEZ, this too would require an expulsion of Japanese and US forces. The existing interest preferences of Japan and the US suggest that they would fiercely resist any attempt at coercive expulsion, especially in the eastern half of the Sea. War would be the likely result.

Even if the latter were never attempted during peacetime, a war over Diaoyu/Senkaku would nonetheless raise the premium of the East China Sea as a strategic space. The PLA would need some room to concentrate its forces against Japan’s territorial defences, and, if successful, to secure its gains in the aftermath (Hsiung 2007). War between Chinese and Japanese/US forces over control of areas of the East China Sea as a by-product of the territorial conflict is a real possibility.

An alternative possibility to these violent scenarios arises from the fact that at least in regards to issues of EEZ delineation and the rights of coastal and other states in these areas, the arguments of the parties all have backing, and are not entirely contradicted, by international law. Mutual recognition that the interests of all parties have a share of legal legitimacy could provide the basis for negotiated compromise solutions in maritime areas where contradictory international legal principles pertain, and which the law in itself cannot resolve. Given the importance of Diaoyu/Senkaku to the credibility of China’s ‘One China’ doctrine, however, it is unlikely that this approach could be applied on this particular issue.

Adjusted order outcome assessment
The preceding analysis enables us now to fine-tune our understanding of the scenarios considered in our preliminary assessment. First, we can see that a shift to unipolarity in the sub-region of MN would, in light of existing interest definitions, necessarily require a Chinese victory in a major maritime war with Japan and the US. The numerical and technological advantage required to decisively win such a battle and sustain control of the area is such that this event would necessarily follow not precede a revisionist shift in the whole-of-region structure of deterrence to at least bipolarity.
The obstacles to realising such a maximal objective are also such as to imply that China would need already to have developed sufficient forces to cover its vulnerability to economic blockade in MS, and to severely disrupt US and Japanese force and supply lines in GWP. The likelihood of success would appear low, unless coming in the aftermath of decisive strategic gains or victories in these other sub-regions, as well as Taiwan. The revisionist implications of this scenario are thus potentially radical more than limited.

The implications of a negotiated compromise on EEZ delineation and security in the East China Sea for the whole-of-region geopolitical hierarchy remain indecisive. According to my theory, a shift within a single sub-region from a unipolar to a bipolar structure of deterrence would not qualify as revisionist in itself. In this case, we say that a state has (a) marginally extended and strengthened part of their peripheral defence, or else (b) attained a strategic foothold at the margins of another geopolitical region. At the sub-regional level, a bipolar structure of deterrence is not always simply a reflection of the whole-of-region military balance. A reliable assessment needs to take into account any asymmetries in interest commitments and motivation. Thus, at the sub-regional level, a bipolar (or multipolar) structure of deterrence can be evident (despite an overall material power asymmetry) when the key states involved are able to mutually inhibit and obstruct each other’s ideal preferences or scope for unilateral action.

In the case of the East China Sea, it is possible that the various parties will be unwilling to bear the costs and risks of conflict escalation that insistence on the maximal realisation of ideal preferences would bring. In the case of the US, this would mean tacitly adhering to Chinese preferences in the western half of the sea to avoid military penetration without the latter’s prior consent. In the case of China and Japan, it would mean acknowledging legitimately overlapping claims on the eastern side, and agreeing to inclusive and equal terms of military security and resource development in that area. Regardless of whether such a settlement were more the product of the pre-emptive diplomacy of national leaders, coercive bargaining, or war; it is not possible to gauge the hierarchical implications of this for MEA without an understanding of possible corresponding developments in the South China Sea.
7.2.3: South China Sea

Ideal preference
Since its founding, the PRC has indicated its claims in the South China Sea through reference to a tongue-shaped arc comprised of nine broken dashes, encompassing approximately 80 percent of the Sea (see Figure 2). The arc extends in close proximity (often well within 50 nm) to the uncontested coastal baselines of Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Chinese leaders are yet to specify the legal status and meaning of the nine-dash line. What is known is that China claims ‘indisputable’ sovereignty over all land features (islands, reefs, rocks, sand banks etc) within this arc, including those permanently submerged under water. What remains ambiguous is whether the Chinese government views the status of the waters and air space within the arc as subject to negotiation purely through the regular provisions of UNCLOS; or alternatively, whether it intends to advance either an ‘historical waters’ or ‘historical rights’ claim.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry recently stated that no country, including China, is claiming sovereignty over the entire South China Sea (‘China committed to …’ 2012). To defuse recent tensions, the Ministry has also briefed embassies of ASEAN states that China mainly claims the land features within the arc and the territorial seas and EEZs they generate according to UNCLOS (ICG 2012a). Recent research from the International Crisis Group (2012a), however, reveals that there is no uniform view about the status of the nine-dash line across and within state agencies, and that the Foreign Ministry does not exercise a centralising authority on the issue.
The content of the Foreign Ministry’s briefings, moreover, do not negate the potential for an additional ‘historical rights’ claim to areas of water within the arc that are not captured by EEZ entitlements. Before passing the PRC’s 1998 ‘Law on the Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf’, National People’s Congress delegates negotiated the inclusion of Article 14 that states: ‘The provisions of this Act shall not affect the historical rights of the People's Republic of China’ (Zou 2001). The meaning of this clause has never been clarified. If intended as a basis for advancing entitlements beyond EEZs, there are two possible interpretations. The first possibility is that the ‘historic rights’ claim would be used to negate the right for other disputants to claim a pure EEZ over maritime areas extending into the nine-dash arc. On the grounds of the traditional use of the area by Chinese fishermen, China might insist on joint jurisdiction and exploitation of resources in these areas. The second possibility is that the ‘historic rights’ claim could be used to extend more exclusive jurisdiction over residual maritime spaces that are not captured by EEZ claims.
By contrast, an ‘historical waters’ claim would be an entire substitute for the need to negotiate EEZs or any other conditional forms of entitlement with other claimants. The claim would be unconditional sovereignty over the waters and air space within the nine-dash line. Within UNCLOS, there are three oblique references to ‘historic bays’ and ‘historic title’ that were likely included to cover ‘historical water’ claims that had been validated under preceding regimes of international law (Zou 2001). The fact that the nine-dash line was first introduced in 1947 (by the ROC) at a time when ‘historical waters’ claims were recognised to have potential legal validity is one source of support for this type of claim.

Other conditions for successfully advancing such a legal claim, however, would be insuperable for the PRC. In 1962, an International Law Commission report concluded that three factors should be considered when determining the validity of an ‘historical waters’ claim: (1) the exercise of authority over the area, (2) the continuity over time of this authority, and (3) the attitude of foreign states to the claim (Valencia et al. 1997, 26). China does not have evidence from any historical period that decisively satisfies any of these conditions, and the experience of at least the past two hundred years is in complete contradiction with these requirements. It is perhaps because of these difficulties that Chinese law and many Chinese scholars refer instead to China’s ‘historic rights’ (Li 2010). Such terminology may possibly have been adopted in order to preserve some room for compromise with other states, whilst maintaining political unity with more radical elite and online nationalists who view the nine-dash line as marking a traditional Chinese sovereign domain (ICG 2012a, section 5-E).

In regards to EEZ delineation in the South China Sea, the Chinese government appears to be considering a maximal claim. Most controversial are its apparent intentions to extend EEZs from islets within or baselines around the disputed Paracel/Xisha and Spratly/Nansha groups. In 1996, China declared a baseline around Xisha, suggesting it views the group as equivalent to an archipelago with internal sovereign waters and eligible for an EEZ. In a ‘Note Verbale’ sent to the UN in protest at the Philippines in 2011, the Chinese government explicitly stated a view

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99 A thorough exposition of the evidence used to support the Chinese case can be found in Shen (2002).
that Spratly/Nansha is ‘fully entitled’ to an EEZ and continental shelf. Under UNCLOS, however, there would be no basis for archipelago claims in either case, given that the law requires a much greater ratio of land to water (Article 47).

The question of whether any individual islets qualify as ‘islands’ under UNCLOS is more controversial. Many international legal experts advocate a more disciplined criteria for the ability to ‘sustain human habitation or economic life of their own’ (Article 121) than could be satisfied in the cases of Xisha, and also Japan’s Diaoyu/Senkaku claim (Valencia et al. 1997, 41-5). In the case of Spratly, only a few of the 25 to 35 land features that are above water at high tide (Article 121) are similar in size and vegetative life to the contender ‘islands’ in Xisha and Diaoyu. Nevertheless, if China advanced EEZ claims from only a few of the largest islets in Xisha and Spratly, much of the area within the nine-dashed line would still comprise an EEZ. In the absence of any ‘historic rights’ claim, however, China would be obliged to negotiate equi-distant arrangements with neighbouring states that have overlapping EEZ claims extending from their uncontested coastal baselines.

Regardless of the principles China eventually advances for the status of maritime spaces in the Sea, the claim of sovereignty over all land features is enough to suggest significant military defence interests in the area. The mainstream view in China, moreover, is that the country needs to develop capabilities that can credibly defend its trade shipments through the Malacca Strait all the way to its mainland ports.

_Preliminary order outcome assessment_

Once again, whether China’s claims in MS are revisionist in themselves depends on the degree of exclusivity in the security arrangements China advances in the maritime spaces of this sub-region. If China opted to exclude and prevent other major powers such as the US and Japan from being able to transit their military forces through the South China Sea, then, if successful, the military-security hierarchy in MS would become founded on Chinese unipolarity. While at first glance this might seem like a scenario of _limited revisionism_, we know from our analysis of the East China Sea that the resistance of other powers and corresponding developments in other sub-regions

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might realistically make for a more radical revisionist outcome. An aggregated assessment of possibilities for limited and radical revisionism in MEA will be provided shortly in the adjusted order outcome section below.

**Contemporary interests of other stakeholders**

Of all the sub-regions in MEA, MS involves the largest number of direct stakeholders. Of these, a distinction can be made between the interests of (a) the five minor powers that compete with the PRC over sovereignty and jurisdiction in the area, and (b) regional powers external to the disputes, namely the US, Japan, South Korea, and various non-claimant ASEAN states.

With the exception of the ROC (whose claims are similar to the PRC’s), Vietnam’s claims are the most extensive among the other contending parties. Vietnam claims sovereignty over all of Paracel and Spratly, but advances EEZ and continental shelf claims off its main coast only. Malaysia contests twelve land features in the southern part of Spratly, while the Philippines claims sovereignty over numerous land features in the Western part, as well as two other small land groupings within the nine-dash line. Both countries also claim an EEZ and continental shelf extension into the South China Sea (ICG 2012b).

At various times over recent decades, tensions and altercations over the disputes have been most common and volatile between China and Vietnam, and China and the Philippines. Vietnam, in particular, faces intense domestic political and popular pressure to stand up to China on sovereignty issues (ICG 2012b). Recent incidents with China have, however, hardened both Vietnamese and Filipino diplomatic stances on these issues (Thayer 2011), and prompted notable increases in defence acquisitions in both countries (ICG 2012b; The Hanoist 2012). Both countries are also engaging closer with the US, and look to the latter to counter-balance the potential for Chinese dominance.

For the US, recent Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea has been a key factor prompting the Obama Administration’s so-called ‘return to Asia’. The intention of the current administration is to shift from the current 50-50 split of the US navy between
the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, to a 60-40 ratio favouring the Pacific by 2020 (Garnaut 2012).

In the South China Sea, the US defines its interests in terms of freedom of navigation, preventing the potential for disruption or interference of regional trade flows, and peaceful resolution of disputes according to international law (Landler 2010). The US has maintained that it does not take sides in any of the sovereignty disputes.\(^{101}\) It is uncertain exactly under what conditions the US would intervene in any military conflict between the parties disputing sovereignty. At a minimum, the credibility of US power would hinge on its ability to prevent any Chinese strategic lockdown of the area during a crisis, and minimise any disruption to normal trade flows.

The importance of the South China Sea to the US needs to be understood in terms of its broader Indo-Pacific strategy. The South China Sea forms the shortest connection between these two oceans. Forces from America’s Pacific fleet are used to support operations in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. US forces stationed in the West Pacific and Japan rely on energy resources from across the Indian Ocean that passage through the Malacca Strait (Wang et al. 2008). If the US military and its economic shipments were denied access to the South China Sea, the US would become relatively more disadvantaged vis-à-vis China in a regional, or potentially extra-regional, conflict. Besides incurring higher costs for the extra distance of detouring between the two oceans, the US military would be delayed considerably behind China in being able to manoeuvre its fleets between the Indian Ocean and West Pacific.

An additional factor underpinning US interest in the South China Sea is the historically conditioned perception in that country regarding the dangers of conceding geopolitical power to authoritarian states. As Jeffrey Legro (2005, chap 3) has argued, the experience of WWII in particular drove the collapse of the previously dominant grand strategic paradigm of detachment from strategic affairs beyond the Western Hemisphere, and fostered the rise and consolidation of an alternative paradigm of active leadership. Christopher Layne (2006) argues further that the US policymakers

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\(^{101}\) Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s references, however, to the ‘West Philippines Sea’ in public statements during a trip to the Philippines in 2011 was interpreted in China as taking sides at its expense (Whaley 2011).
are culturally conditioned to view authoritarian states as more likely to have an interest in constructing exclusive trade blocs and relationships that undermine US economic interests and threaten its traditional preference for an ‘open door’ world. Accordingly, since the Cold War, the US has tended to confront challenges to its interests from authoritarian rivals at an early stage, and avoid ceding advantages that might require a more costly struggle later on to reverse an adverse domino effect against its interests.

Japan has also indicated a strong interest in developments in the South China Sea. With around 90 percent of its oil supplied from imports that transit the Malacca Strait and South China Sea (Cole 2008, 26), Chinese dominance of this sub-region would provide the latter potential leverage over the lifeline of Japan’s economy. Most of South Korea’s oil needs are also reliant on Middle East imports (Cole 2008, 31). The military security control of MS by a single power also enables it a potential capacity to selectively block intra-regional trade shipments, in regard to which almost all East Asian countries have acquired a major stake.

*Implied interactive processes*

At an irreducible minimum, physical incompatibility between interest definitions in MS is evident in the sovereignty disputes over land features. Full realisation and validation of these sovereignty claims ultimately depends on the ability of the winning claimant to expel the national flag and defensive fortifications erected in the area by other claimants. Once again, this is unlikely ever to be achieved in the absence of at least a credible threat of military and/or economic punishment. China’s interests here thus imply a real possibility of *war* with other claimants to achieve *conquest* of disputed territories.

Presuming China were successful in this endeavour, additional challenges pertaining to (a) the structure of *deterrence*, and (b) the legal status of various maritime spaces in MS, would immediately move to the forefront of the regional diplomatic agenda. In regards to the former, China would be expected to erect its own defensive fortifications and deterrent naval presence throughout MS to protect against any attempts to reverse its gains. To counter the potential for Chinese *control* of the area, the US would also be expected to increase its own naval presence in the Sea. If the US
had not directly intervened and fought with China during the wars over disputed land features, existing US interests suggest they would nonetheless establish a naval presence in the Sea in an attempt to localise conflicts and minimise disruption to regional trade.

In regards to maritime jurisdiction, China has four main options. Selection of the ‘historical waters’ option, entailing exclusive sovereign authority over the distribution of security and resource development in the area, would be sure to invite major war with the US and other states, allied or otherwise. Such an option is in conflict with the interests of all other major stakeholders in the South China Sea.

The second option consists of EEZ claims around contender ‘islands’ in (or baselines around) Xisha and Nansha, augmented by ‘historic rights’ claims in residual maritime space. This option conflicts with the opposition of all other claimants towards the validity of the nine-dashed line. Moreover, it consumes much maritime space that would otherwise comprise coastal EEZs for the other disputants. It also poses a challenge to the credibility of US power, albeit to a slightly less extent than the first option. Especially if the US had not intervened in land territory conflicts, confidence in the US as a regional security guarantor would plummet if it could not prevent China’s coercive imposition of terms against the wills of all other claimants. The US would be unlikely to stay on the sidelines on this matter, diplomatically or strategically, given additionally that there is no clear basis or precedent in international law for this type of ‘historic rights’ claim (Zou 2001).

The US would also be sure to assert rights of military transit within China’s claimed EEZs. This issue is also common to the third option, which involves China asserting EEZs off islets or islet groupings, without the additional ‘historic rights’ claim. This option would still shrink the area of other coastal EEZs relative to if there were no competing Chinese claim. The legal validity of Chinese EEZs off such islands, moreover, is contestable, and would likely be resisted by other claimants.

While it is possible that the US would actively support efforts to deny China EEZs in the central and southern areas of the South China Sea, its bottom line remains opposition to unilateral military security control by coastal states within EEZs that
straddle strategically important waterways. According to its existing interests, the US will not voluntarily accept an arrangement in which all military transit through the Sea is subject to the latter’s formal authorisation or rejection (as opposed to the current US practice of notification only). Attempts to impose such an arrangement would likely provoke an increase of US naval transits in defiance. Effective opposition to US free transit would require a preparedness to engage in war.

The final option for China would be to abandon any jurisdiction claims in the central and southern parts of MS apart from the 12nm territorial seas generated around individual land features in Xisha and Nansha. In the absence of a scenario in which the disputing parties mutually agreed to de-nationalise the Spratly grouping, this is the option that would preserve the greatest potential room for a consensual order in MS. Coercive occupation of land features by China would of course create bad blood in relationships with other claimants. This option, however, contains the compensation that these other states would be entitled to a full 200nm EEZ and extended continental shelf rights, subject to compromise with China only in regard to the territorial seas of land features contained within these zones. It also would reduce potential for direct disputes with the US and its allies over freedom of navigation. There are indications, however, that such a concession of potential jurisdiction rights might be difficult for the Chinese government to negotiate in its domestic politics.

Adjusted order outcome assessment
An integrated assessment of China’s irredentist and maritime jurisdiction claims indicates that its geopolitical agenda for MEA at very least implies a limited revision of the regional military-security hierarchy. Firstly, China’s vision entails the successful incorporation and securing of Taiwan, Diaoyu and Nansha. In addition to confronting and prevailing over the determined resistance of rival claimants, realisation of these objectives implies that the US has lost the capacity to comfortably deter coercive and potentially non-peaceful resolutions to regional territorial disputes across the full span of MEA. Further, according to its ideal preferences, China will at very least be determined to compel the US to end military surveillance operations in uncontested EEZs around the mainland coast, Hainan, and Taiwan. China’s ability to secure and sustain all these objectives will require an enhanced deterrence capability of region-wide scope, including in GWP (enabled especially by its incorporation of
Taiwan. Such objectives at the very least imply the emergence of a bipolar hierarchy
centred on China and the US/Japan.

In a limited revisionist order, however, aspects of regional order would represent a
compromise with US interests. The US and its allies would successfully uphold a
right to passage their military through the South China Sea, and parts of the Yellow
and East China Sea, without prior Chinese authorisation. While the US might
voluntarily agree to respect no-go zones in closer proximity to the Chinese coast,
China would guarantee it will not oppose free passage (and the right to defend such
free passage) of non-Chinese military vessels through international sea lines of
communication (SLOCs) penetrating the South China Sea and key straits. So long as
such a compact were voluntary and based on genuine (rather than tactical) consent,
space would be opened up for the negotiation of region-wide arms control and
security cooperation on the basis of the emerging bipolar military-security hierarchy.
While not necessarily marked by an absence of war, this scenario arguably represents
the outer boundary of what could be consistent with China’s ‘harmonious world’
doctrine.

Some of China’s apparent interest tendencies in regard to maritime jurisdiction,
however, clearly would, if not compromised, require a more radical revision of the
regional military-security hierarchy for their realisation. Any vision of regional order
that entailed a Chinese capacity to enduringly exclude non-Chinese navies and air
forces within the ‘first island chain’ down to the Malacca Strait implies (a)
preparedness to fight a major great power war over the issue, or else (b) a belief
(likely false) that neither the US nor Japan have the stomach for such a fight. To
prevent the US from viably re-contesting Chinese unipolar control of MN and MS,
moreover, China would need to take control of a large area of GWP to secure all
major entry points into the area. Control of the ‘three seas’ accordingly implies a
radical revisionist shift to Chinese unipolarity in MEA.

Control of the ‘three seas’ and a capacity to defend the Malacca Strait would not,
however, eradicate China’s vulnerability to economic blockade, but rather would be
the most anticipatable grounds for other powers’ to implement one in the Indian
Ocean. Thus for practical strategic reasons, at least, it is unlikely that China’s
geopolitical agenda in MEA will be prosecuted on radical revisionist lines, at least during the initial irredentist stages of its strategic expansion.

7.3: China’s broader naval objectives

In this section, I demonstrate an alternative method for applying the process and outcome stage indicators. In the preceding analysis, interest definitions and options could be specified to a considerable level of detail. The method used was thus the most reliable one of interactively simulating case-specific variables that are empirically known first, followed by the post-application of the indicators as a gauge of revisionist potential (if any). This is an explanation of possibilities proper, given that it is based on a detailed knowledge of real interest definitions and their motivational causes.

In contrast, the following analysis is more limited in its case-specific knowledge base. In regards both to government policy and expression in the national discourse, Chinese objectives for naval expansion beyond MEA remain broad-brushed and under-specified. They are also relatively more remote and long-term goals, and the Chinese themselves cannot predict what their needs and circumstances might be at a later, more ready stage, given open system dynamics.

As a result of these limitations, the previous method is supplemented here with an alternative one. The latter reverses the analytical sequence to pose the question: what would the interests of relevant states need to look like to match the criteria of the indicators? While a relatively more speculative exercise compared with the previous method, it is nonetheless argued here as appropriate and worth undertaking. This is because the hypothesising of interests is conducted according to a theory claiming knowledge about determinate and necessary conditions that are operative in all power transitions. The comparative limitation of analysis generated from this alternative method is that the contours and dynamics of future geopolitical sub-regions cannot be known or predicted in the absence of more finely specified interests.

The possibility for Chinese revisionism in geopolitical regions beyond MEA is suggested from two main sources. The first is the more restrained expression of the
official government position embodied in the previous two Chinese defence white papers (2008, chap V; 2010, chap III) which state that China is developing capabilities for ‘conducting cooperation [2008] (operations [2010]) in distant waters’. The second is the commonly expressed opinion in the national discourse that China needs to be capable of defending the passage of its seaborne foreign trade to (a) ensure the security of its core interests, and (b) attain a diplomatic leverage commensurate with genuine great power status.

On the basis of the formulation in the official white papers alone, there is nothing to suggest that China’s extra-regional naval ambitions are necessarily revisionist. The formulation could easily be consistent with the status quo if the operations referred to were (a) token contributions to non-traditional security cooperation under the leadership of other powers, or (b) small operations to protect Chinese nationals in which more capable powers did not have any interest to deter or obstruct.

The idea that China needs to be capable of defending its seaborne foreign trade is much more suggestive, albeit still lacking in open and unequivocal endorsement from the central leadership. For those who advance this argument, it is clear that the who which China potentially needs to be defended from are other major powers, primarily the US. Sea power advocates do not usually specify a precise direction for the proposed extra-regional naval policy. Common emphasis on the Malacca dilemma and China’s resource security suggests a concern primarily with the Indian Ocean extending to the Middle East and Africa. It is possible, however, that some advocates also have the passage of China’s trade with South America in mind.

The capability to defend against trade blockades from major powers implies the need for a substantial deterrence capacity. Practically speaking, the most effective means of doing this would be to develop into (or part of) a countervailing pole in the oceanic military-security hierarchy. In the Southern Pacific, for instance, this would mean approaching the (presently) difficult target of reaching and sustaining quantitative or qualitative naval parity with the US in a bipolar structure of power.

In the Indian Ocean, considerations of hierarchy are complicated by the rise, and potential revisionism, of India. The question of future Indian strategic independence
or alliance with the US is of equal significance as the potential for Chinese revisionism in this oceanic region (DeSilva-Ranasinghe 2011; Chandramohan 2010). In the event that India remained capably inferior and strategically subordinate to the US, the extension of a credible Chinese deterrence force across the Indian Ocean would be the only revisionist event in the region. Alternatively, if India were to surpass US capabilities operating in the area, whether as an independent pole or as the lead partner in an alliance with the US, India too would be a revisionist actor. It is thus possible to envisage a process of dual revisionism leading either to a tri-polar or new bipolar hierarchy.

In regard to the prospects of a more radical revisionist Chinese agenda beyond MEA, such an option does not cohere with China’s contemporary pledges to respect the interests of other states and never pursue hegemony. Moreover, in order to have any chance of securing such an objective, China would need first to have achieved a similar radical revisionist outcome in MEA. Otherwise, it would easily be harassed and distracted by the US and its allies closer to China’s home territory.

As suggested previously, the prerequisite for attaining a radical revisionist outcome in MEA would be an effective deterrence posture in the Indian Ocean to neutralise the threat of blockade. Even if the longer-term passage of events proceeded from Chinese limited revisionism in MEA, limited revisionism in the Indian Ocean, followed by radical revisionism in MEA; other powers would likely have the will, and if so, the options to stage a concerted resistance to any Chinese campaign to dominate the Indian Ocean. One major option would be investment in India’s rise and the latter’s possible willingness under such circumstances to house major joint India-US military bases. This would be to counter China’s advantage in controlling the inner lines connecting the Indian Ocean and West Pacific (ie. the South China Sea). Alliance of either of these powers with Indonesia, Australia, or other littoral states might also be options. Whatever the case, if existing interest tendencies of the US and India are sustained, China would have to fight a major war and destroy the combat naval forces of both these powers to realise a radical revisionist agenda in this area.

A limited revisionist trajectory in the Indian Ocean has greater potential to follow a peaceful path. China has no exclusive sovereignty or maritime jurisdiction claims in
the Indian Ocean. As such, there should be lesser obstacles to negotiating stable arms control and great power security cooperation in this region than in MEA. In areas that are predominantly international commons, however, conflicts can still potentially arise if (a) one power or bloc attempts to establish exclusive control over particular geopolitical spaces, (b) one or more powers are unwilling to engage in arms control and cease open-ended production and fielding of new warships in the area, or (c) if the status quo power(s) are hostile to the newcomer, and physically contest a shift in the existing hierarchy.

A China that continues to genuinely uphold the peaceful development paradigm would not be expected to attempt a policy of exclusive control within areas of international commons that would violate international law. For the US’s part, senior defence officials in recent years have spoken of US interest in forging an internationally collaborative ‘1000-ship navy’ to share the burden of securing the international public good of protecting international SLOCS (Cavas 2006; Committee on the “1000-ship navy” 2008).102

Even so, adoption of an elastic policy both within and beyond East Asia would be a psychological challenge for a US that is accustomed to military-security primacy in many parts of the world. Shifts in the structure of deterrence and polarity of geopolitical regions have accompanying political implications. An effective deterrence capacity creates an ability to potentially inhibit or obstruct the ideal preferences and unilateral action of the other. In the Indian Ocean, Chinese and/or Indian revisionism would mean that unilateral or single-bloc military interventions become potentially much more risky or costly. Interventions in security crises around the Indian Ocean littoral, if or when they occurred, would be more likely to be joint ventures managed on the basis of a concert of powers. Peaceful power transition outcomes thus will depend just as much on a US capacity to accept the loss of former strategic and security advantages and the emergence of new vulnerabilities and constraints in an altered deterrence structure, as on the restraint of the revisionist parties.

102 Note that the US currently has a 284-ship navy (Cronin and Kaplan 2012).
7.4: Conclusion

This chapter deployed an innovative method of ‘closed system rational simulation’, together with indicators from my alternative power transition theory, to assess the revisionist implications of contemporary Chinese interest structures. In addition to substantive case analysis, the chapter provided a demonstration of how to apply the theoretical indicators. Two different methods of application were advanced, the choice or balance of which depends on the degree of concrete case-specific knowledge that is attainable. An *explanations of possibilities* that employs a more comprehensive base of case-specific knowledge is less hypothetical and speculative than one in which general theoretical categories do all of the work, however soundly reflective of natural necessity the latter might be.

An important lesson of the analysis is the need to avoid considering issues at the sub-regional level in isolation from the whole-of-region level, and the whole-of region in isolation from a broader geopolitical context. It is not inevitable that the latter will have any significant relevance for the former. For instance, in the case of the limited revisionist outcome of German unification in the 1860s, the power transition was effected through developments in the sub-region of Germanic Central Europe only. Affairs in the sub-region of the Balkans were inconsequential to this at the time, and vice versa. In the case of MEA, however, there are many such inter-connections. Such inter-connections need always to be checked for in order to avoid misapplication of the indicators, and errors in the conclusions that would follow.

In regard to substantive case analysis, application of our present theory and methods indicates that China’s contemporary geopolitical agenda in MEA at very least requires a limited revision of the regional military-security hierarchy for its fulfilment. In this case, the implied power transition not only involves a potential shift in the structure of deterrence across the maritime spaces of MEA, but rather is complicated by an extensive agenda of irredentist and maritime jurisdiction goals. The interactive analysis of interests on sovereignty disputes, in particular, indicates that in the absence of any voluntary renunciation of claims, resolution of these issues will likely be coercive, with conflict a real possibility. It might be possible for China and the US to avoid a direct military clash, at least in a limited revisionism scenario. Nonetheless,
a limited revisionist settlement as the pragmatic resolution to conflict(s) is also possible under certain *initial* interest premises.

Radical revisionism in MEA would mean a Chinese ability to permanently exclude US and Japanese naval and air forces from operating and transiting within the ‘first island chain’. The existing interests of these powers, and the US ‘return to Asia’, suggest the unlikelihood of such a preference being realised through a process of peaceful (radical) retrenchment. A major great power war would likely need to be fought to attain this goal. In practical strategic terms, a decisive and conclusive outcome to the conflict would require (a) Chinese attainment of a strong deterrence posture in the Indian Ocean prior to such an attempt, and (b) a weakly committed US, and submissive and pacifistic Japan. A future China that remained genuinely committed to a ‘peaceful rise’, however, would never attempt such a gamble, and would be expected to make some compromise on those aspects of its existing maritime jurisdiction policy that imply such an exclusivist orientation.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge two key limitations to the analysis in this chapter. First, while the real possibilities simulated are based on existing interest structures and interest definitions; in real world open system, such interests are subject to evolution, and sometimes major transformation. The above analysis will need to be periodically checked and, if necessary, updated and adjusted. Even so, analysis in the previous chapter provides grounds for considering contemporary Chinese interest structures as having a robust causal underpinning. Secondly, the analysis has been conducted on the basis of a closed system. To be relevant to the explanation of phenomena in real world open systems, we need to consider the potential conditioning effects of other significant causal structures and processes. The following chapter addresses the second of these limitations.
Chapter 8: Testing Competing Arguments

This chapter subjects my arguments about Chinese revisionism and possibilities for war and peace in East Asia (established on the basis of a closed system simulation) to an open system ‘inter-theoretical evaluation’. The aim is to test these arguments, derived from my alternative power transition theory, through critically relating them to causal variables captured within three other theses that have been advanced to explain and/or predict the dynamics of East Asian security order. These include propositions about the causal impact of: (1) the material balance of power (advanced within variants of neorealism and in PTT), (2) economic interdependence (the cornerstone of liberal explanations of peace in East Asia), and (3) socialisation according to common international norms (as advanced by IR constructivists).

The chapter has three main sections that sequentially integrate consideration of these alternative causal propositions – vis-à-vis my arguments – into a broader (though never fully complete) open system analysis. Each section follows an identical four-step procedure, as follows:

- **Explanatory theses**: Each section begins with a summary of the main lines of argument advanced within the given explanatory paradigm. Both the general theoretical arguments and their specific applications to contemporary East Asian security order are articulated.

- **Existing impacts**: A critical assessment is made of the evidence that is used, or can potentially be drawn upon, to support these explanations.

- **Necessary conditions for future validity**: Structural conditions that need to be present in order for the theoretical claims to be judged plausible or implausible within a given time-space specific context are articulated. Not all of these are identified within the actual theories themselves.

- **Applying the CATB test**: Finally, the CATB test developed in Chapter 3 is applied to assess the relationship of these alternative explanations to my own
theoretically informed arguments about Chinese revisionism. In addition to identifying zero-sum relations between explanations (trivialisation and breakdown), the analysis also explores possibilities for explanatory integration (co-existence and assimilation). In regards to the former, logical conditions for trivialisation or breakdown are laid out for both mine and the other theories. Both the integrative and zero-sum critical arguments are ultimately evaluated on the same qualitative criterion of natural necessity – that is, the presence or absence of a necessary connection between specified variables that is empirically supportable and logically coherent.

Note that the analysis in this chapter marks the first occasion upon which the method of inter-theoretical evaluation is itself being demonstrated and tested. As a method designed to solve the more generalised problem in social science of explanatory evaluation in open systems (absent a recourse to practical experimental closures), we would expect any successful demonstration to yield novel and empirically persuasive insights about the means for (a) integrating the causal arguments of disparate theoretical paradigms, and (b) locating reliable and generally acceptable grounds for falsifying particular explanations. Arguments about the success of the following analysis in these regards are indicated in the conclusion of this chapter, the general lessons of which, however, are presented more systematically in the thesis conclusion.

8.1: Material balance of power

*Explanatory theses*

In Part I of this thesis, IR theories that prioritise the distribution of economic and/or military capabilities as a causal variable impacting on the incidence of war and peace were subject to extensive critique. The idea that different forms of material distribution intrinsically and necessarily contribute to the probability of war or peace has been thoroughly rebutted. By contrast, in this section material balance of power arguments will be examined on a more contingent basis. To do this, we assume that the real necessary condition for potential conflict in a power transition (that is, physically incompatible interest definitions in an overlapping geographical space) is present, as is indeed the case in contemporary East Asia.
Two theses will be considered here. The first is the idea, common to all neo-realisms and PTT, that asymmetrical material power balances favouring a status quo state or coalition inhibit, at least temporarily, aggressive challenges to the international system. The opportunity/cost ratio is judged in these cases to be sufficiently prohibitive as to deter revisionist states from prosecuting interests whose objectives physically conflict with those of status quo states. On the basis of this assumption, analysts of East Asian security routinely conclude that US military primacy has been a leading cause of the relative peace and stability in the region during the post-Cold-War period, despite the persistence of tense militarised disputes.

The second explanatory thesis is dubbed here as the breakout thesis, and denotes the proposition advanced in PTT and MOR, in particular, that there is a relative capabilities threshold beyond which a revisionist is no longer inhibited from launching a challenge entailing a potential risk of great power war. In PTT, the threshold is a ‘zone of parity’ in terms of GDP per capita. In MOR, the threshold is reached when a revisionist state possessing superior or competitive ‘potential power’ (population and economic base) reaches or exceeds parity in ‘actual power’ (immediately available military resources).

MOR assumes that all challenges to the status quo will ultimately be radical revisionist in aspiration. In contrast, advocates of defensive neorealism argue that radical challenges to the status quo are, from a security-seeking perspective, irrational and will be punished by the system (ie. by an opposing balancing coalition) (Waltz 1979, chap 6 and 8). They argue that rational security-seeking states (viewed as the norm) will realise this and avoid such a course of action. Some degree of accommodative bargaining is deemed possible amongst such states (Jervis 1978; Glaser 1995). Defensive realists also argue that mutual possession of nuclear weapons in the contemporary world inhibits objectives that require victory in a war between great powers for their fulfilment (Waltz 1981). These arguments are further variants of the inhibition thesis.

Existing impacts
As argued earlier in the thesis, neorealism and PTT generally have not advanced any conception of the mechanisms through which states commonly interpret or reliably
respond to the signals of the shifting balance of power. To adequately defend their theses on a general cross-case basis, they need ultimately to demonstrate the existence and routine over-riding power (vis-à-vis competing instincts or beliefs) of relevant human psychological and social-psychological mechanisms/tendencies rooted in general human nature. While these sorts of hypotheses and evidence might also assist a defence of material power balance arguments in application to particular cases, they are not crucial in the latter analytical context. All that needs to be demonstrated is that the cultural belief structure of the revisionist or other states reflects some form and degree of realist logic.

The discourse within China, and various actions of the Chinese government, suggest that both the inhibition thesis, and potentially the breakout thesis also, currently have causal validity. China’s commitment to its irredentist agenda, and expressions of frustration towards perceived infringements of its sovereignty by Japan, the US, and disputing parties within ASEAN, is unmistakable. Editorials appearing in the state-owned *Global Times* in recent years have referred to a rising tide of anger and calls for punitive action towards other disputants within public online forums. At the same time, however, these editorials also argue that China can afford to take a patient approach to these issues as the longer-term opportunity/cost ratio of economic and military power shifts in its favour. The editorials express resolve and confidence that China will prevail on these issues when the time is ripe.103

It is evident too that China’s more assertive diplomacy since 2009 was in considerable part due to a widespread perception in China that the Global Financial Crisis shifted the balance of power in its favour (Lieberthal and Wang 2012). Peking University Professor Zhu Feng (2011) argues that this fostered an over-confidence that led China to push too far, acknowledging that China is partly to blame for the souring of its relations with many of its East Asian neighbours.104 As these countries have shifted closer to the US, and the latter has moved to reinforce its strategic presence and


104 For a more muted and indirect criticism of China’s assertiveness in the same edited compilation as Professor Zhu’s article, see Wang (2011, 62-5).
leadership in East Asia, the Chinese government has made subtle moves to moderate its assertiveness, and re-establish calm in territorial disputes (ICG 2012a, section VI). A key move was the multilateral engagement with ASEAN in mid-2011 to reach agreement on the ‘Guidelines for Implementing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea’ (Thayer 2011).105

Meanwhile, China continues most years to register double-digit growth in its military budget. It is routine within the Chinese discourse, moreover, to point out or assume that China’s economic and military development will in future afford it greater advantage and leverage in its various territorial and maritime disputes.

**Necessary conditions for future validity**

For material balance of power arguments to be valid into the future, the cultural belief structure of the Chinese state will need to remain sensitively attuned, and generate modification of behaviour, in response to perceptions of advantage and disadvantage in comparative economic, military, and alliance trends. To establish that this is the case will require government statements, or else the state-owned media and mainstream Chinese discourse, to clearly reflect this sort of reasoning. Presuming that the interest structures underpinning China’s revisionist geopolitical agenda remain in place, we would expect also to see a continued materialised commitment to increasing the numerical and technological competitiveness of China’s offshore military projection. This in turn presumes that China’s economy will remain healthy enough to sustain large budgetary outlays for the military.

In regards to the breakout thesis, we would expect China to be inhibited from actions entailing a risk of war with the US until it reached at least 80 percent of US GDP/capita (PTT); or a close parity of regionally projected military force between China and the US/Japan alliance (MOR).

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105 The negotiation of the ‘Guidelines’ did not represent any novel advance in addressing the dispute, however, but rather was a symbolic re-affirmation of the existing ‘Declaration’ (which itself is not a formal or binding ‘Code of Conduct’).
Applying the CATB test

At the level of generalising theory, I argued earlier that my alternative theory offers a superior conceptualisation and account of general causation in power transitions than that provided by other theories. Part I has already demonstrated crucial flaws in the conceptual apparatus of PTT and in neorealist arguments about the causal properties of international anarchy and forms of polarity. Such conclusions, in effect, amount to charges of some degree of logical-empirical breakdown within these theories.

When applied to particular cases, however, in which the generic cause of conflict as stipulated by my theory is present, these theories become relatively more complementary with mine. Firstly, as perspectives that all emphasise the importance of military-security variables for the evolution of future regional order; both my arguments about Chinese revisionism and various neorealisms would all be trivialised or break down in the event that states ignored or abandoned existing geopolitical conflicts and military build-ups in favour of a sole focus on economic and non-traditional security cooperation. Secondly, and more important, my theory is capable of assimilating both the inhibition and breakout theses, including in the event that these proved to be generalisable under certain conditions.

According to my theory, state actions are determined by pre-formed perceptions and interest structures. While I argued that ideas derived from particular historical lessons and socio-political cultures foster variability in state motivations, it would not be inconsistent with this to accept the possibility that aspects of cultural belief structures might frequently be strongly influenced by general social-psychological tendencies. My arguments about variability would only break down if the same general and regular tendencies dominated all state motivation and perception (which the historical record demonstrates is not the case) (May et al. 2010; Lobell et al. 2009; Kaufman et al. 2007). By contrast, a thesis of variability in state interests and worldview could still assimilate a general thesis about how revisionist states perceive the costs and opportunities of the material power balance in contexts where bottom-line realisation of their agenda entails a risk of war with status quo great powers.

If, alternatively, there were problems with such a general thesis, even on such a specific conditional basis, my theory would remain untroubled either way. Indeed,
whether atypical or routine, my theory would be able to explain any such ‘deviation’ in empirical testing. In this case, such deviation would consist of the influence of other acculturated beliefs (or those of individual leaders) prevailing over the hypothesised social-psychological tendency so as to alter the expected inhibition and breakout thresholds. If such deviation were common across cases, the general breakdown of these theories would become even more extensive than was implied in Part I.

According to the open system perspective of my theory, it is prudent to treat general psychological expectations with great caution, given that even if they do exist, other perceptual or interest tendencies in a state’s motivational makeup might still potentially override them. On the issue of Taiwan, for instance, there are other cultural beliefs about strategy in China that need to be taken into account, and which mean that China is likely preparing for the contingency, if necessary, of a lower (that is, sub-parity) breakout threshold. Such beliefs include an understanding about asymmetries in motivation (Christensen 2001; Sawyer 2009), and the contemporary influence in the PLA and Chinese society of ancient Chinese ideas about the power of unorthodox fighting strategies to shock, surprise and out-manoeuvre a larger military force (Sawyer 2007; Sawyer 2006).

If such potential for a lower breakout threshold is real, other components of a material balance of power explanatory framework (especially from within the richer explanatory palette of MOR) can nonetheless still be assimilated into an assessment of the practical feasibility of such a contingency. For although this contingency does assume a condition of sub-parity in either GDP, or immediately available conventional weaponry between China and the US; China’s ‘potential power’ base of population and its large-scale and increasingly sophisticated industrial infrastructure nonetheless provides a formidable mobilisation potential. China, moreover, has certain geographical advantages that the US and its allies cannot match. These include the combination of close proximity to Taiwan and an enormous continental depth from which to launch missiles and aircraft, and locate or shift weaponry/war vessel production and training sites.
Indeed, experts now believe that to defeat or thwart China in the air in a Taiwan conflict would unavoidably require taking the war to the Chinese mainland (Shlapak et al. 2009). This would lead to a major escalation in which US bases in Japan and elsewhere in the region would become legitimate targets in the eyes of China. One expert on contemporary and ancient Chinese military strategy suggests that residing Chinese agents in the US continental homeland could easily sabotage vulnerable water and energy infrastructure systems to devastating effect (Sawyer 2006; Sawyer 2007, 393-99). Others have suggested that the use of tactical nuclear weapons might in extremis be preferable to the prospect of defeat from the perspective of China’s leadership (Bush and O’ Hanlon 2007, chap 8; White 2012, 78-81, 97-100).

While the potential efficacy of these tactics are partly material in basis, the above assessments are also based on the perception of an asymmetry in the motivational power driving states on the issue. That is, a perception that Chinese discourse and behaviour demonstrates a greater willingness on China’s part to take risks, absorb pain, and make sacrifices to uphold its interests on the issue of Taiwan than the US would be prepared to do. Deterrence (or inhibition) of US intervention would accordingly be expected to occur potentially at a lower, sub-parity threshold.

By contrast, on the issue of security order in the East and South China Seas, there are both material and motivational grounds for expecting that successful confrontation of major US interests in these areas would require China to develop a closer approximation of military parity. Motivationally, issues of freedom of navigation and alliance credibility have implications for the viability of the US’s broader international power position and overall grand strategy, and thus its interests here are more robust than is the case with Taiwan. Materially, China needs a greater quantity of sophisticated warships to contest and exercise control of these more extended maritime areas. Also, the greater distances involved mean that China does not have the same geographical advantages it does on Taiwan, and thus would be more equally exposed to the enemy’s disruption and harassment of its supply lines and areas of maritime control.106

106 For an argument that ‘sea control’ (as opposed to ‘sea denial) will not be a viable strategy for any major power in a future East Asia, see White (2012, chap. 4).
In sum, while the causal influence of both asymmetries of motivational power and various sources of material power can be captured within the purview of my theory, any evidence of the former in particular cases would tend to further shrink the scope of conditions under which the breakout theses of PTT and MOR can be reliably used as general predictive tools (trivialisation at very least). In the case of the rise of China, decisive empirical test conditions for the latter have yet to arise. Whatever the future of this particular case, however, it would seem that my theory is relatively more secure in its relationship to these other more materialist theories, and under a greater range of possible conditions, than vice-versa.

8.2: Economic Interdependence

*Explanatory theses*

In IR, liberal theories of the pre-requisites for peace building and conflict prevention are founded on an explanatory triad that includes (a) the liberal-democratic peace thesis, (b) cooperation in formalised international institutions, and (c) high levels of economic interdependence. In explaining the relative peace that has prevailed in East Asia during recent decades, IR liberals have not had easy recourse to the first two legs of the triad. Several regimes in East Asia (including China) are not liberal democracies, and multilateral cooperation in the region is less formal, regulatory and legally binding in handling major security issues than the institutional cooperation conceived in liberal theory (Weissmann 2012, 28-31; Goldsmith 2007). Liberal explanations of peace in East Asia have thus focussed almost solely on the third thesis.

The economic interdependence thesis argues that there is a significant correlation linking mutual trade dependence and a reduced probability of war, including cases where states are involved in unresolved militarised disputes. Proponents of this thesis have advanced several mechanisms through which this alleged causal link operates. Firstly, most studies that promote this thesis assume that once war erupts, trade relations between warring states cease or are largely reduced (Barbieri and Levy 1999). Upon this basis, it is commonly argued that states with both high ratios of trade to GDP, and a high ratio of trade with their adversary, threaten the economic basis of their domestic legitimacy if they opt to engage in conflict. Public revenues and
employment may rapidly decline, and influential lobby groups from trade-dependent economic sectors pressure the government to strike a more accommodating bargaining posture in disputes (Mansfield and Pollins 2001).

Another mechanism is the functionalist ‘spill-over’ thesis (Wan 2003; Weissmann 2012, 29-31). According to this argument, expanding economic interactions increase both the level of people-to-people contact and mutual recognition of common interests between states. Problems of cooperation in one sector necessitate the spread of engagement as experts and stakeholders from other areas are brought in to contribute to finding novel solutions and to spread and maximise benefits for each side. Advocates of this thesis argue, in effect, that the spill-over effects of economic cooperation have a socialising impact that can potentially transform regional security order. As one scholar has put it: ‘… economic interdependence and cooperation may … transform national purposes through learning. Decision makers may redefine national interests through exchange with their counterparts in other countries. Such a learning process may turn opponents of an international system into constructive participants – thus making the system more legitimate and durable’ (Wan 2003, 291).

More recently, some scholars have posited an alternative mechanism in which economic interdependence is claimed above all to effect the dynamics of crisis bargaining (Morrow 2003; Gartzke 2003). According to this view, states with basically symmetrical two-way economic dependence can signal resolve in disputes with relatively greater efficiency and accuracy through indicating a preparedness to use trade sanctions that would hurt both sides. States with mutual trade dependence can thus compel each other to move towards a peaceful settlement of differences without escalating to a more dangerous level of brinkmanship such as full armed mobilisation.

Finally, it has been hypothesised that the threat of turbulence in global financial markets may act as a further incentive for modern great powers to avoid open military
conflict. This thesis can potentially apply when many states impose minimal controls on capital in- and out-flows.

Existing impacts
Of all the theoretical arguments examined in this chapter, the impact of economic interdependence on East Asian security order is the most difficult to ascertain on the basis of existing evidence. Statistical data correlating the relationship between interdependence and peace/conflict is unreliable. On one hand, there remains much disparity in general cross-case assessments of this causal argument within the broader literature in regards to definitional frameworks, case-set selection, and, most importantly, in empirical findings (Mansfield and Pollins 2001; Barbieri and Schneider 1999; Barbieri and Levy 1999). On the other, it is possible to over-interpret case-specific evidence in East Asia of a correlation between the emergence of trends towards economic interdependence in during recent decades and a lowered incidence of inter-state war. Just because lingering militarised disputes in East Asia have yet to produce a hot war, does not mean it could not happen in future. Further, if war did break out between China and the US and/or Japan, the significance of the decades-long correlation would immediately become void. In this case, the thesis could only be salvaged if it were proven that interdependence played a crucial role in motivating the parties to cease hostilities at an early stage and return to negotiations. Substantial traces of such a rationale in government statements, official interviews, and authoritative voices in the national discourse would provide the necessary evidence for this.

In regards to the notion that intensified regional economic interactions are transforming the interests and outlook of China in particular (Wan 2003), evidence is limited and ambiguous. The evolution of the official ‘peaceful development’ paradigm, which exhorts states to recognise their common destiny and cooperate in an interdependent globalised world, is the strongest evidence in favour of this view. We have seen, though, how the Chinese regime has built a logic of conditionality into this narrative, such that China’s self-defence of its irredentist agenda can be exempted

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107 A number of articles advocate this hypothesis as a potentially worthy focus in future research on interdependence and conflict (Gartzke 2003; Mansfield and Pollins 2001; Barbieri and Schneider 1999). See also (Gatzke et al. 2001).
108 For a major statistical analysis establishing such a correlation in East Asia, see Goldsmith (2007).
from the constraints that adherence to ‘peaceful development’ would otherwise impose. There is, moreover, no evidence that the degree of the regime’s resolve on territorial and maritime jurisdiction disputes has been diluted. On the contrary, in recent years the regime has shown a willingness to step up the assertion of many of its claims and risk incremental escalation of previously more dormant disputes. China continues to refrain from escalating disputes to the point that war is threatened. Whether this is more reflective of concerns about the economic fallout of potential conflict, however, or inhibitions arising from the perception of a premature military power balance, cannot presently be ascertained.

**Necessary conditions for future validity**

Three general conditions need to be met in order for economic interdependence to be considered as a plausible causal contributor to any future regional peace. First, relations of dependence must be two-way and roughly symmetrical. That is, severe curtailing of mutual economic relations needs to be capable of inflicting serious harm to the economies of both parties. In situations where dependence is asymmetrical, by contrast, the party with negligible trade dependency is freed from this source of inhibition, and can more easily use the trade relationship as an extra coercive instrument to push its agenda in a dispute.

Measurements of asymmetry or symmetry at the level of a bilateral economic relationship alone, however, may provide less than the full picture. Indeed, assessments of the potential for economic harm on each side need to account for the broader network of trade relationships that their economies are embedded in, and risks of wider contagion. An asymmetric bilateral economic relationship between geopolitical rivals might be more symmetrical if conditions exist in which a rupture in the economy of the more dependent party could plausibly become a catalyst for a downturn in the broader regional or global economy. Such potential would need to be gauged partly in qualitative terms and consider such things as: the existence of enabling conditions for panic and volatility in global capital markets; the role and weight of the parties in multi-national production chains; and the availability or otherwise of alternative markets for production lines placed in limbo (Mansfield and Pollins 2001; Barbieri and Schneider 1999; Pan 2009). Such economic risks need, of
course, to be perceived by the disputing parties in order to be causally viable as inhibitors of armed conflict.

The second general condition is that a potential conflict must actually threaten to shut down or seriously curtail economic relations between the disputing parties. Most studies that advance the interdependence thesis assume such a causal relationship between war and trade disruption. Historically, however, there have been many cases in which warring parties continued to trade with each other (Barbieri and Levy 1999). For the interdependence thesis to be applicable, it must be demonstrated that the geographical location of the potential conflict zone will actually physically impede commerce between the disputing parties.

In cases where the above conditions are fulfilled, one further general condition needs to be satisfied in order for the interdependence thesis to be considered plausible. For the purposes here, I will state it within the terms of a power transition context. That is, in regards to the hierarchy of interest priorities held by the revisionist state, the prospect of not fulfilling its geopolitical agenda (or particular interests within it) needs to be considered as more tolerable and less threatening than any potential consequences of economic deprivation in a conflict or its aftermath. The same applies for defenders of status quo interests (in those cases where the latter’s interests are actually in conflict with the revisionist power[s]).

*Applying the CATB test*

The latter general condition, in particular, indicates that in real world open system contexts, arguments about the role of economic interdependence need realistically to be assimilated into an ontology of states as corporate agents motivated by multiple interest structures. The argument essentially claims that under substantial conditions of interdependence, states will prioritise interests for economic stability above the ideal realisation of geopolitical objectives whose attempted fulfilment would risk a war with their major trading partners. Later on, we assess this claim in the East Asian context. Firstly, however, we examine whether the other two necessary conditions for the validity of the interdependence thesis are present, or potentially present, in East Asia.
Firstly, symmetric versus asymmetric dependence. Overall ratios of trade (both exports and imports) to GDP are high in many East Asian states. Trade to GDP ratios as of 2010 for countries such as Vietnam (154.4%), Malaysia (177.6%), Thailand (138.2%), South Korea (107.3%), and Taiwan (132.2%), are much higher than for China (55.2%). From this we can see evidence of an asymmetry in the levels of overall trade dependence between China and several of the parties with which it disputes sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction.

The growth in the trade relationship of these states with China has also seen substantial growth. Yet, in the cases of Vietnam and the Philippines (GDP to trade ratio of 68.2%), total trade with China remains at a similar level (Vietnam) or still behind (the Philippines) comparable ratios of trade with the US and Japan. In comparison, the ratio of Taiwan’s exports to China is almost three times greater than for these states (four times if Hong Kong is included), standing at 28 (or 40) percent of its overall exports.

China’s own ratio of trade in these relationships is much smaller. Trade with Taiwan is highest at a still relatively small ratio of 3.92 percent of total Chinese trade, and 2.83 percent of its exports (Weissmann 2012, 75). Such asymmetries suggest that China can potentially wield its economic power as a coercive instrument in these relationships in ways that the latter cannot effectively reciprocate. During the 2012 standoff with the Philippines at Scarborough Shoal/Huangyan Dao, China displayed a readiness to use such advantages through restricting imports of Filipino tropical fruits and discouraging Chinese tourists from visiting the archipelago (ICG 2012b, 8).

According to the International Crisis Group (2012b, 27), increasing the economic dependence of these countries on China is a key part of the latter’s strategy towards its disputes in the South China Sea.

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109 Unless otherwise specified, statistics in this section are cited from the country trade profile section of the World Trade Organization website. Accessed in August 2012, the figures are for the year 2010. See: http://stat.wto.org/Home/WSDBHome.aspx?Language=E
The figures for China do not include Hong Kong, which has its own separate profile. As Hong Kong’s economy represents only 3.7 percent of the entire Chinese economy, this separation is judged, in most cases (and unless otherwise specified), as not creating a distorted picture for the purposes of my analysis here.
By contrast, the trade to GDP ratios for the major status quo powers of the US (27.8%) and Japan (30.9%), are considerably lower than for China. Further, the US and Japan are the destinations for a quarter of China’s exports, at 18 and 8 percent respectively. Japan is also the largest source of China’s imports (13.5 percent of total imports, including to Hong Kong). Translated into a percentage of China’s total GDP, exports to the US account for 5.25 percent, and Japan 2.55 percent (almost 8 percent combined). Imports from Japan are worth 4 percent of China’s GDP.

The US is less dependent on Chinese trade, with the most significant figure being the import ratio of 20 percent (exports are at 7 percent). Exports to China accordingly comprise only 0.8 percent of America’s GDP; Chinese imports are higher at 3.3 percent. Trade with China is relatively more important for Japan with export and import ratios both at around 25 percent (Hong Kong included). Exports to China thus comprise 4 percent of Japan’s GDP; imports 3.5 percent.

In terms of an assessment of these figures alone, and at the level of the bilateral dyad, it would appear then that there is some asymmetry of trade dependence in favour of the US, and a closer parity of dependence between China and Japan. As indicated earlier, however, there are a range of other factors that can potentially impact assessments of symmetry and asymmetry, as well as the depth of economic dependence. Such factors are considered here as part of the analysis of the second necessary condition for the plausibility of the economic interdependence thesis – that is, the extent to which war over territorial disputes would impede trade in East Asia.

At this point, we need to resume our assessment of the conflict scenarios that were identified in the simulations of the previous chapter. Firstly, in regards to Taiwan, it was suggested that if direct US military intervention were not forthcoming, there could emerge a contingency in which the geographical scope of a Cross-Strait conflict were limited to the local Taiwan area. The minimal purpose for a Chinese punitive military campaign would be to blockade Taiwan’s trade with the outside world. In turn, the basis for this would likely be that bilateral Chinese economic sanctions were not enough to yield the ROC government’s capitulation on the issue of Taiwan’s

110 On the importance of including Hong Kong when measuring Sino-Japanese economic relations, see Pan (2009).
The greater question would be whether the decisions of the US to not directly intervene, and of China to limit the conflict’s geographical scope, were a product more of economic stability concerns or military power balance considerations. Any broader war, of course, would necessarily include the East and South China Seas. Accordingly, the remainder of this assessment focuses on these areas.

Both the East and South China Seas (and especially the latter) are major trade thoroughfares. In assessing here the second general condition for the validity of the economic interdependence thesis much depends on the geographic location and disposition of disputed land features. Both the Spratly and Diaoyu/Senkaku groupings are clustered in specific portions of the Seas. The latter occupy a relatively small area. The former are more numerous and sprawled over a larger area, yet are still distinctly separated from other groupings by large swathes of maritime space. In the latter case, during a conflict, warships from China and Vietnam, in particular, would need to travel to and from the battle zone across sea-lanes carrying vast international trade shipments. Yet, it is not unthinkable that a war over Spratly involving only China and the other minor power disputants could be conducted without disrupting international trade flows in any major way. It is also possible to imagine a Sino-Japanese war over Diaoyu/Senkaku that is conducted within only the southern half or two-thirds of the East China Sea, with agreement that bilateral and international trade will proceed as per usual (with the exception perhaps of some strategically targeted sanctions) from the Japanese main islands to Chinese ports north of Shanghai.

By contrast, any wars that are conducted across entire maritime spaces within Maritime Northeast and/or Southeast Asia will interrupt not only the bilateral trade relations between the warring parties, but also much of the broader intra- and inter-regional trade conducted through East Asia. China, and other states’ trade relations with China, would be the most vulnerable to trade disruption in a broad maritime conflict. States along the periphery of these maritime spaces or beyond may still be able to establish lengthy detours in their mutual trade relations, albeit with additional
transport costs. Any fighting in Greater West Pacific, however, would sever all commercial transit between Northeast and Southeast Asia.

The US too would likely be affected if: (a) it could not efficiently find a substitute for Chinese imports at the same cheap prices that have long curbed US inflation; (b) if major US companies with production facilities in China (Pan 2009) could no longer make profits and were threatened with bankruptcy; or (c) if breakdown in trade with China pushed national economies in the region into recession, leading to a contraction of imports that spread the downturn to Europe and elsewhere, eventually affecting overall US trade. A prospective war whose potential scope of engagement threatened to obstruct all maritime trade flows to and from China would also affect patterns of shorter-term speculative investment in the absence of effective national capital controls. If some or all of these prospects are real, then the conclusion must be that the US is indeed more deeply dependent on the Chinese economy than a consideration of US-China bilateral relations alone would indicate.

In light of these considerations, we can make the following conditional evaluations about the interdependence thesis vis-à-vis my arguments about Chinese revisionism. First, the interdependence thesis would appear as valid if war occurred in future between China and states that have an asymmetric trade dependence on China, but never occurred between China and the US or Japan (despite continued differences over Diaoyu/Senkaku). In this scenario, my arguments about Chinese revisionism could still largely co-exist with the interdependence thesis. The shift to a bipolar structure of military deterrence is still compatible with this scenario, as is an order based on a Chinese compromise with the US and Japan over security arrangements and norms within EEZs. Inexhaustible Chinese toleration of Japanese ‘effective control’ over Diaoyu/Senkaku would be the only case in which my analysis of Chinese interest priorities would be mildly contradicted and trivialised, in which case the overriding power of the interdependence thesis (or economic stability motive) would likely need to be acknowledged.

If a Sino-Japanese war did occur over Diaoyu/Senkaku, but was limited in geographical scope to avoid disrupting trade, then the relative assessments for the two theories would be reversed. As an instance in which war did break out between major
states with symmetrical trade dependence, it would comprise an example of breakdown in the existing formulation of the causal logic of the interdependence thesis. Considered in terms of conditioned causation, however, it could be argued that the motivational tendencies associated with interdependence still apply. The very act of deliberate limitation of the conflict would be an indication of the causal power of economic stability motives. The decision of the US to not directly get involved and avoid escalating the conflict would likely also be driven by a desire to avoid jeopardising the transit of commerce in Northeast Asia and beyond. In this scenario, any re-formulation of the interdependence thesis that assimilated a conception of conditioned causation within open systems (as opposed to the existing focus in the literature on testing uniform cause-effect statements) could quite easily be adapted to co-exist with my arguments about the causal power of other interest structures. As was the case with material balance of power arguments, this would likely need to take the form of hypotheses about certain general social-psychological tendencies.

By contrast, any war whose geographical scope were sufficient to disrupt all trade with China, and for a protracted period of time, would count as an unambiguous example of breakdown in the interdependence thesis. Such an outcome would indicate that, in certain cases, territorial and geopolitical interests can be underpinned by political motivations with the power to override any imperative for economic stability. Salvaging the interdependence thesis as a generalisable theory would require re-casting it in radically more conditional terms.

Within my analysis too, a protracted great power conflict in Maritime East Asia that disrupts all China trade is not especially likely. Such a possibility can nonetheless be explained within my framework, and according to my case-specific conceptualisation of the interest structures driving relevant states. Still, given that economic welfare goals are so central to the contemporary interest structures of China, the US, and other regional states, my analysis also expects that interdependence is more likely than not to exercise some form of conditioning effect on these states’ behaviour towards territorial and geopolitical disputes.

Both the interdependence thesis and my conception of multiple state interest structures can anticipate and explain how economic interdependence could potentially
deter escalation to a regional great power war in East Asia. Each theoretical outlook, however, generates differing expectations about how such a deterrence power might affect the prospects for war or peace in disputes over territorial sovereignty. The difference is that the interdependence thesis treats the economic stability imperative as a universal overriding motive, whereas my theory expects that the relative motivational power of this imperative can differ across cases, and also between states within the same case (asymmetric motivation).

Thus, when proponents of the interdependence thesis advance the hypothesis that interdependence provides an especially efficient means for signalling resolve in crisis bargaining and compelling a move towards peaceful negotiation (Morrow 2003; Gartzke 2003), the pacifying effect of this mechanism depends on a state of motivational equivalence between the states concerned. The hypothesis can potentially break down, however, if at least one of the states really is prepared to endure a disruption of trade over the dispute. In practical terms, the main problem with the hypothesis is that it could encourage dangerous bluffing. For if a state of interdependence pertains between the two sides, and state motivations are essentially alike in their hierarchy of priorities; then all the US would have to do, for instance in a crisis over Taiwan or Spratly, is indicate a resolve to endure trade disruption, regardless of whether this were true or not. China would then get the hint and return to a posture of shelving disputes.

But if one of the states really is prepared to endure trade disruption, then signals that the other side feels the same way may not make any difference to the former’s cost-benefit calculations. The state that was bluffing might then be placed in the dilemma of either being compelled to fight an unwanted war, or suffering the humiliation and undermined credibility involved in backing off.

In the case of East Asia, this dilemma would be relatively easy to exploit, as the political geography of the region is such that any Chinese initiation of conflict with minor power third parties can place the onus of potential trade disruption on the US. That is, China could initiate a military clash in a localised area that would only become a wider conflagration if the US and its allies decided to intervene. The decision to disrupt trade would be all the US’s to make. Moreover, China might be
prepared to take this risk despite also being eager to avoid disruption of regional trade, on the calculation that the US has less at stake on these issues than China, and so will not be willing to light the larger fuse.

The interdependence thesis (which highlights the motive for economic stability) thus suggests a further reason why deterrence of US intervention in territorial conflicts (including this time those beyond Taiwan) might be expected to kick in at an, at least, *numerically* sub-parity stage in the regional military balance. On the basis of this reasoning, China would only need to be capable of prolonging an indecisive shooting match within the ‘first island chain’, without necessarily being able to win a war, in order to deter US intervention. According to my definition of deterrence parity, however (see Chapter 4), once China is so capable, the regional military-security hierarchy will likely already be approaching close to a bipolar parity (pending a similar capability in GWP).

Of course, if such deterrence extended to an unwillingness of the US and Japan to repel any Chinese initiation of an attempt to attain *control* of the waters within the ‘first island chain’, my arguments about the power of American and Japanese interests other than aversion to economic setback would at very least be *trivialised*. In the event this scenario occurred, it would appear as an unusual case in which interdependence was capable of simultaneously inhibiting war, without inhibiting aggression against the major strategic interests of other great powers. Such a scenario is judged here as highly unlikely, however.

Overall then, and under most of the scenarios considered above, the interdependence thesis does not seem to provide grounds for any major revision of my theoretically informed assessment about possibilities for Chinese revisionism and war or peace in East Asia. The tendencies that the former points to, however, do appear to reinforce incentives for mutual *great power* restraint and accommodation over direct military confrontation, escalation, and war. To be operative, though, such incentives, and associated strategic thinking, need to be perceived by the leadership of the states concerned. While the interdependence thesis is vulnerable to *breakdown* if this is not the case, my own theory and case analysis of particular interest structures has the means to explain outcomes either way.
8.3: Socialisation

*Explanatory theses*

The final explanatory paradigm to be integrated into our inter-theoretical evaluation consists of arguments about socialisation according to common international norms as advanced by various IR constructivists.\(^{111}\) Analysts that apply this explanatory focus to security studies aim to (a) track the development of common identity formation and community-building between states, and (b) assess the impact of these variables on conflict prevention and peace building independent of material variables such as the military power balance and economic interdependence (Acharya 2003).

In regards to East Asian security order, social constructivist analysis has focused mostly on the development of a Southeast Asian political and security community through the modality of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Acharya 2001; Kivimaki 2001). As ASEAN has been at the centre of the development of pan-East Asian regionalism over the past two decades, the question of whether, and to what degree, the foreign policy priorities of a rising China too are being transformed through processes of socialisation has become widely recognised in the literature as an important one. Despite this recognition, however, few studies have attempted to systematically advance and evaluate such a claim in terms of a clear causal model (Johnston 2003; Weissmann 2012; Qin and Wei 2008). For critical realist, Milja Kurki, the likely explanation for this would be that many IR constructivists eschew talk of causation in favour of so-called ‘constitutive’ approaches because, like positivists, they too associate causation with the overly narrow Humean concept of causality (Kurki 2008, chap 4).

Alistair Iain Johnston (2003) and Mikael Weissmann (2012) have arguably gone the furthest (albeit independently of each other) in articulating various ingredients for a causal model of the mechanisms and processes through which socialisation might effect Chinese foreign policy behaviour. A key aim of Johnston’s work was to address the deficit in many constructivist accounts about the micro-processes through which international socialisation influences state identity and security outlooks. He asks the

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\(^{111}\) For a general theoretical argument on this, see Wendt (1999).
question – who is being socialised? – and answers by saying that it is initially only the official and unofficial individual participants in regular regional dialogues that are subject to any substantive influence. These participants, to whatever extent they are converted, then have the task of advancing their case within China’s domestic policy debates and persuading political leaders in the face of competition for influence from other factions.

Johnston identifies two basic mechanisms of socialisation as persuasion and social opprobrium/shaming. He defines these terms as follows:

Persuasion involves the non-coercive communication of normative understandings that is internalised by actors such that new courses of action are viewed as entirely reasonable and appropriate. Social pressure, opprobrium … is different. The actor desires to maximise social status and image as ends in themselves … The process of choosing to act in prosocial ways is an instrumental or “consequentialist” one, not one governed by appropriateness per se. (Johnston 2003, 113-4)

The focus of most constructivist analyses of East Asian security order, including Johnston’s, is on persuasion. In other words, these scholars look for evidence of genuine internalisation of norms and transformation of state identity and security interests.

The particular norms in question are embodied in the so-called ‘ASEAN way’. Weissmann (2012, 33) summarises the four pillars of the ‘ASEAN way’ as: (1) the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, (2) the non-use of force to settle disputes, (3) decision making through consensus, and (4) informal diplomacy. The first two pillars are institutionalised in ASEAN’s ‘Treaty of Amity and Cooperation’, 112 which most non-member regional states, including China, have now acceded to. The latter two pillars are the principles through which diplomacy in organisations with ASEAN at the centre is conducted (eg. ASEAN+3 [APT], the

112 The text of the Treaty can be accessed at: http://www.asean.org/1217.htm
Institutionalised informality might be the best way of describing these arrangements.

For Weissmann, the various diplomatic modalities that have developed through application of these principles form important socialisation mechanisms that contribute significantly to peace building and conflict prevention in the region. Weissmann places a particular premium on the role of regular elite interactions and the long-term cultivation of personal networks of trust linking officials, retired officials, and well-connected academics across various states (2012, 37-49).

Diplomacy in the region is conducted along two tracks, one official (Track I) and the other non-official (Track II), that are nonetheless linked through these personal networks. Track II provides a means through which disputes and differences can be broached between the parties, whilst avoiding direct confrontation at the official level where government leaders may be compelled into a hardening of their position that sabotages the prospects for compromise or stability. In Track II forums, participants can explain their governments’ positions in a non-confrontational atmosphere. According to Weissmann (2012, 38): ‘Even if this process does not necessarily increase the level of agreement, it at least constitutes a learning process, whereby an understanding of the other’s perceptions and interests increases. Consequently, the risk for miscalculations and misunderstandings is reduced.’

Track II diplomacy is also viewed as an effective means for identifying areas of common ground and pre-negotiating agreements between states on disputed issues without the pressure of public exposure. Away from the spotlight of formal diplomatic settings, non-official government representatives are also provided space to explore and test reactions to policy innovations on difficult issues. According to the ‘ASEAN way’, upholding and sustaining the process through which consensus is sought is an end of utmost importance in itself.

Existing impacts
There is much evidence to suggest that the norms of the ‘ASEAN way’ have influenced China’s foreign policy behaviour over the past two decades. ASEAN’s non-confrontational diplomacy and consensus decision-making were able to allay
Chinese leaders’ initial reservations about regional multilateral forums being a potential means to gang up and isolate China on territorial disputes, namely Taiwan and the South China Sea. Since the mid-1990s, China has become actively involved in regional multilateral cooperation and dialogue (Shambaugh 2004/05). After the East Asian financial crisis, in particular, Chinese leaders began to see their country’s active involvement in regional trade and financial cooperation through ASEAN+1 and APT as a means of projecting an image of benign intentions and good neighbourliness. The efforts yielded a free-trade agreement with ASEAN, and a series of APT financial swap agreements to increase the region’s autonomy in future financial crises. In 2005, China adhered to the consensus principle through tacit acceptance of an expanded regional membership for the inaugural EAS meeting (to include India, Australia, and New Zealand), despite its previous diplomatic efforts to prevent this (Qin and Wei 2008, 129-36).

On security, participation in the ARF brought Chinese negotiators in contact with the discourse of ‘common security’, ‘confidence-building measures’ (CBMs), and ‘preventative diplomacy’. Johnston (2003) argues that the language of Chinese submissions on security issues to the ARF began to increasingly reflect this discourse. Participation in the ARF gave the impetus for China’s practice of producing a biannual defence white paper, and has shaped its understanding and practice of CBMs, joint military exercises with other states, and cooperation on non-traditional security issues. The development of the PRC’s ‘new security concept’ during the mid-1990s seems also to be correlated in time with China’s initial participation in the ARF. China’s participation in these ASEAN-based diplomatic modalities appears to have inspired China’s parallel initiative to develop the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as a forum in Central Asia for multilateral political, security, and economic cooperation (Shambaugh 2004/05).

While China’s disputes with the ROC on Taiwan and Japan in the East China Sea have been kept outside the ambit of regional multilateral diplomacy, China has made some concessions to the latter in handling the South China Sea issue. While still insisting that the various disputes be negotiated bilaterally, China nevertheless acquiesced to a process of multilateral dialogues on the issue in Track II workshops (Weissmann 2012, chap 4). After almost a decade, China and the ASEAN countries
reached official agreement on and signed the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC). A decade later, as tensions on the issue re-emerged, ‘ASEAN way’ diplomacy was mobilised to reach agreement in mid-2011 on the long-stalled (and largely symbolic) ‘Guidelines’ for implementing the DOC (Thayer 2011). Weissmann (2012, chap 3) has also shown the importance of elite personal networks and ‘ASEAN way’ diplomatic modalities for negotiating the sensitive process between the CCP and KMT that established the modus vivendi for the current détente in Cross-Strait relations.

Yet, given the evidence of China’s military build-up, its regular pronouncements of ‘indisputable’ sovereignty and recent growing assertiveness in territorial and jurisdiction disputes in the East and South China Seas; a crucial question arises as to whether the above behaviour reflects genuine persuasion, or else a tactical conformity that serves more instrumental purposes. Indeed, if China has been concerned largely about opprobrium effects that might provoke a region-wide containment of its interests before it is capable of effective counter-actions, then arguments about the military and economic power balance between various states may carry more explanatory weight than arguments about socialisation. My theory could also explain any such opprobrium concerns. That is, it would demonstrate that China is aware of the role of positive and negative prestige in augmenting and diminishing the geopolitical power position of states.

**Necessary conditions for future validity**

Despite the difficulty of ascertaining the depth of China’s internalisation of ‘ASEAN way’ norms in the present, there are conditions under which this may be clearly gauged in future. Such an assessment must be centred on China’s behaviour in its territorial and jurisdiction disputes, as well as their aftermath. There is potential for conflict between unilateral interests and common social norms in regards to these issues. The fact that ideal realisation of at least the territorial sovereignty claims would most feasibly require victories in war, is potentially in conflict with ‘ASEAN way’ principles of avoiding the use or threat of force, and maintaining restraint until consensus is reached. By contrast, if there were no potential conflict between social norms and individual interests, the causal impact of socialisation would be more self-
evident. The consistent maintenance of good form in social interactions would be sufficient evidence that states accept the appropriateness of the common norms.

The causal impact of socialisation in cases where individual interests are potentially in conflict with social norms can be evaluated according to both ‘strong’ and ‘mild’ criteria. The ‘strong’ criteria would obtain in any situation where (a) the means to fulfil a state’s interests would violate social norms, and (b) the state is materially capable of getting its way or mounting a viable challenge on the issue in question – yet (c) the given state opts to make a sacrifice and abandon its unilateral interest, or else maintain a perennial posture of self-restraint and self-denial. Such courses of action would provide perhaps the strongest confirmation of the socialisation thesis. They would indicate that the state has come to view protecting the integrity of the common normative order as an overriding priority.

It would, however, be unrealistic to argue that this criteria is necessary for the future validity of the socialisation thesis. As with economic interdependence, allowance needs to be made for significant conditioned causation effects. Accordingly, under the ‘mild’ criteria, some isolated anomalies or deviations from socially acceptable behaviour could still be absorbed. In this case, two criterion can be drawn upon to evaluate the plausibility of the socialisation thesis.

The first criterion is that in situations where a state gains through means that violate the social order, the state makes efforts in the aftermath to return immediately to a condition of normalcy. If a state’s behaviour after the period of norm violation were consistent once again, or even more so, with previously established normative expectations, and regardless of any increases in relative power, then it is likely that the state has internalised common norms on the basis of persuasion.

The second criterion applies where issues under dispute are complex and potentially enable more than two basic either/or zero-sum outcomes. In such a situation, we would expect that any norm violations would be followed by efforts to compromise with and compensate the interests of other social members on the basis of principles and procedures that do conform to good social form.
Applying the CATB test

In conducting the following test, it is assumed from the outset that (a) the reasons and socio-political pressures currently underpinning China’s irredentist agenda will continue to exist, and (b) these are incapable of being transformed through processes of international socialisation and foreign persuasion. Rather, if transformation of this interest structure ever does occur, the most feasible enabling condition would be a major liberalisation of the Chinese public sphere in which all aspects of Chinese history were freely exposed to the scrutiny of open rational-empirical inquiry and contested interpretation. At present, there are no observable tendencies to indicate this is a likely development.

On this basis, it would appear that in the case of the rise of China within East Asia, the ‘strong’ criteria for assessing the efficacy of socialisation may prove difficult to fulfil indefinitely. China’s leaders are greatly driven by an imperative to maintain the political stability and cohesion of the Chinese state, which governs 1.3 billion people (a number more than double the combined population of the other countries of East Asia). Under the ‘strong’ criteria, Chinese leaders would withstand intense domestic pressure and criticism, risk intra-party and/or public revolt, and be prepared to sacrifice their own political career and legacy, rather than act to enforce China’s contested sovereignty when materially more capable of doing so. Previous analysis and evidence presented in this thesis suggests this is unlikely. When faced with any immediate and pressing dilemma between upholding either its internal or external legitimacy, domestically acculturated CCP leaders will likely be prepared to prop up the former at the expense of the latter. If the ‘strong’ criteria were perpetually fulfilled, however, this would trivialise my arguments about the motivations underpinning China’s irredentist agenda (represented especially by the first and third of the regime’s core interests).

Under the ‘mild’ criteria, some violations of regional norms about the proper conduct for managing disputes can still be squared with the socialisation thesis. In the present case, both of the two ‘mild’ criteria potentially apply. First, disputes in the East and South China Seas are sufficiently complex as to be able to conceive of settlement outcomes that are not purely zero-sum. We have seen in previous analysis, however, that the terms under which compromise agreements over the delineation of EEZs
could be reached may be difficult for China to negotiate in its domestic politics. For the socialisation argument to be validated, in the aftermath of any victorious wars over disputed land features, China would need to immediately signal its intention to conduct follow-up negotiations over zones of maritime jurisdiction according to norms and procedures of the ‘ASEAN way’. That is, negotiation over EEZs would be non-coercive, and any Chinese military and economic extension into maritime areas beyond the territorial seas of Spratly or Diaoyu would be suspended indefinitely until consensus were reached on jurisdictional divisions. This would be one basis upon which my arguments about the motivational force of China’s maritime irredentism could co-exist with the socialisation thesis as part of an integrated explanation.

Whether or not China pushes a case based on ‘historic rights’ in the South China Sea will be a litmus test for the socialisation thesis. Given that all other disputants, and most other regional states, do not recognise such a claim as valid under international law; any Chinese inability to defer to a regional consensus on this issue would, at very least, trivialise the socialisation thesis. The same would likely apply to any Chinese insistence that Spratly and Paracel generate their own EEZs, in the event that broad regional opinion was averse to this also. If China attempted to impose either of these preferences through military and/or economic coercion, one would have to conclude that the socialisation thesis was approaching a point of breakdown. It would be a clear case of domestic sources of socialisation and legitimacy trumping international ones.

Beyond an application to the disputes themselves, the socialisation thesis might also be validated on the basis of the other ‘mild’ criterion – that is, a decisive return to normalcy in the procedures of regional diplomacy in the aftermath of war or dispute resolution. This is perhaps easiest to imagine on the basis that any wars that occurred were limited in scope to the contests over land features, with all maritime jurisdiction rights negotiated according to ‘ASEAN way’ norms. In the scenarios in which China unilaterally imposes ‘historic rights’ and/or EEZs off islets, though, it is still possible, even in these instances, to set out what a return to normalcy would entail.

It would mean that, despite China’s substantial increase in relative power as a result of its expanded military presence across the South China Sea, China would nevertheless return to a model of negotiation on the basis of consensus, equality
between sovereign states (regardless of discrepancy in size), non-coercion, and
ASEAN centrality. If most regional states wanted a continued US strategic presence
in East Asia on a permanent basis, then China would defer to this consensus and not
resist it. Once China had satisfied its territorial integrity interests, it would henceforth
refrain from resorting to economic or military threats (both overt and covert) to split
emerging consensuses on issues where its preferences differ with the majority of
smaller states. In other words, once a power transition had been effected, the future
development of the region would be largely liberated from realpolitik pressures and
tendencies. Pending the successful implementation over time of an effective arms
control regime in the region between the China and the US/Japan alliance,
geopolitical security would eventually become merely an issue of background
maintenance.

If such an outcome were to eventuate, it would, first of all, give considerable credence
to many of the pledges embodied in China’s ‘peaceful development’ paradigm (albeit
not necessarily the ‘peaceful rise’ pledge itself). It would also provide another basis
upon which the socialisation thesis could co-exist with my arguments about Chinese
revisionism.

Of course, it is not obvious how such an order could emerge if it were preceded by a
coercive imposition of expansive maritime jurisdiction rights in the South China Sea.
China would likely hope that the promise of economic rewards and a stake in joint
development and security of the area might motivate defeated rival claimants to drop
their rancour, lessen their misgivings about a breach of trust, and return to previous
forms of diplomatic engagement with China. If this happened, and a return to
normalcy ensued, we would conclude that any breakdown in the socialisation thesis
was limited and only a temporary affair. If it did not happen, and China decided it had
an interest in keeping ASEAN weak and divided (or defunct), with its individual
members often pressured through coercion towards accepting Chinese preferences on
various issues, then the breakdown of the socialisation thesis would prove more
complete and enduring. In the event of the latter, the ensuing debate in IR would
likely come to revolve around whether China’s behaviour was being driven more by
timeless power political and security motives, or a particular domestic socio-political
culture.
8.4: Conclusion

In this chapter, an innovative method of *inter-theoretical evaluation*, constructed on the basis of the critical realist concept of causation, was pioneered through application to the present case analysis of the rise of China. The primary aim of the evaluation was to assess how my previous arguments about possibilities for Chinese revisionism, and war or peace in East Asia, hold up when critically related to the causal arguments advanced within other existing explanations of Asian security order. As an *inter-theoretical* test, however, it provided for an equally probing critical assessment of the conditions of validity for the other three explanatory paradigms. Indeed, general understanding of the scope conditions of these theories has arguably advanced a step further through exposure to a critique based on natural necessity and an open system ontology.

Given I argue that power transitions can be potentially peaceful as well as war-prone, none of the other theories are capable of negating the possibility, in principle, for future Chinese revisionism. The implications of the theories rather extended mainly to the issue of possibilities for war, or otherwise, associated with China’s irredentist agenda.

A key finding of the chapter is that, when challenged on an inter-theoretical basis, the analysis generated by my theory appears generally to be more vulnerable to *trivialisation* than to *breakdown* (falsification proper). That is, while there is much empirical evidence to show that the interest structures I identify exist ontologically and significantly influence state behaviour; under simulated conditions of *trivialisation*, ideal fulfilment of China’s irredentist agenda remains perpetually inhibited by motivational structures prioritised by the other theories.

Any charges of *breakdown* in my arguments would most likely fall within the ontological and mono-theoretical stages of theory evaluation. So long as no fundamental logical-empirical flaws are detected in my conceptions of both Chinese interests structures and of the universal determinate features of power transitions, my theory-informed arguments will likely continue to avoid complete *breakdown* and irrelevance in the course of inter-theoretical testing. If this is the case, then this would
in part be because my theory and analysis has a certain built-in flexibility on the basis of an understanding of *conditioned causation* in open systems. Such flexibility is, in practice, prone to generating and pinpointing a range of variable (yet finite) possibilities, rather than making uniform predictions.

By contrast, the formulations of several of the other explanatory theses *were* found to be potentially vulnerable to *breakdown* under some simulated conditions of interaction with the interests underpinning regional territorial and jurisdiction disputes. In some cases, it was found that such *breakdown* could be ameliorated in the event that the theories were revised and assimilated to an ontology of multiple interest structures and conditioned causation in open systems. That is, rather than fixating on the relationship between a particular cause and particular effect (eg. parity-war; interdependence-peace), various identified causal structures can alternatively be conceived as exercising a range of potentially significant limiting, constraining or enabling effects on conflict/peace under varying conditions. On this basis, possibilities for *co-existence* with my arguments in integrated explanations often became plausible.

In other scenarios, however, the simulated *breakdown* was more the result of a hypothesised motive (eg. economic stability; upholding the integrity of common norms of international conduct) failing to manifest any form of anticipated effects (even conditioned causation ones) in the behaviour of the states involved. At present, however, these latter possibilities do not stand out as especially likely.

Ultimately, of course, it is only the course of events in the real world that can confirm or falsify the *realism* of any of the various pathways simulated in the analysis of this chapter. The question this raises about the predictive/non-predictive status of the more open system simulations of this chapter will be addressed in the next. It is important, though, to acknowledge here two potential reservations about the above analysis. First, proponents of critiqued theories may believe that I have misrepresented their arguments in some ways, or that I have been insufficiently probing and critical towards my own theory and case analysis. Second, one also needs to be open to the possibility that others will advance arguments about the conditioning effects or overriding power of other causal structures beyond those considered in this chapter. The
process of inter-theoretical evaluation, in other words, will be an ongoing one whose ultimate verdict does not lie in this particular study. It is maintained here nonetheless that the method pioneered in this chapter promises to remain a highly useful medium for assessing any critical counter-claims to the conclusions I have reached here.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

This thesis has critically examined theories of power transition with reference both to the historical record and the rise of China. The analysis of the thesis proceeded through three major steps: from a critique of the weaknesses and limitations of existing theories; to the establishment of an alternative theory and methodology for the study of power transitions based on critical-realist principles; and finally to an application of the latter in a future-oriented case analysis of the rise of China.

In this concluding chapter, I complete two final tasks. First, in section 9.1, I summarise and reflect on the theoretical and methodological innovations developed in the thesis. I structure this task according to the three levels of theory evaluation advanced in Chapter 3. That is, I summarise the various contributions that have been made within the thesis at the ontological, mono-theoretical, and inter-theoretical levels respectively. In addition, I reflect on the contributions offered for broadening the range of methodologies for conducting prospective or future-oriented analysis.

My other aim in this conclusion is to consider the potential practical or 'technological' uses of these innovations for advancing the quality of policy debate and deliberation on real-world prospective cases of power transition, such as the rise of China. In section 9.2, I offer arguments as to how the theory and methodologies deployed in the case analysis of the rise of China in Part II, and the findings so generated, are capable of fulfilling this objective.

9.1: Theoretical contributions

Ontological level
The initial contribution made at this level was the introduction of the critical-realist concept of causation itself to a subject matter that has previously been theorised on a more positivist and (brute) materialist basis. Critical realism bases its very concept of causation on ontology (that is, real causal powers that are expressed as the finite tendencies of structured entities and mechanisms) rather than epistemology (the perception of uniform event regularities that is the universal criterion for causal propositions in positivism). Critical realism also advances a crucial ontological
distinction between open and closed systems. Critical realists argue that positivists within social science advance a doctrine of causation that is too narrow, and that applies chiefly to phenomena generated within controlled experimental closures, of which most social science (and not least IR) cannot replicate.

My critique of PTT and MOR in Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated some key limitations of applying positivist causal assumptions to open-system contexts. Correlations between forms of material power distribution (PTT’s ‘zone of parity’; MOR’s ‘unbalanced multipolarity’) and the incidence of major war were found to be indicative (on a contingent basis, moreover) of symptomatic conditions rather than generative causes. The theories are correct in highlighting the causal powers that lie in the monetary and productive resources accumulated through national economic growth and development (PTT and MOR), as well as in military technologies and geography (MOR chiefly, but also some PTT theorists such as Lemke). The ontology of my theory assimilated and adapted many of these insights.

Both theories also recognise that economic and military resources are essentially tools that are deployed by motivated human agents. However, internalisation of positivist notions that (a) regularity and (relative) invariance are of greater causal significance than sources of variability, and (b) that quantifiable indicators provide the most (or only) tangible demonstration of causal efficacy, leads these theorists to under-theorise and/or over-simplify state motivation. Both theories, moreover, embody the common bias within IR positivism towards a ‘brute materialism’ that is sceptical of the scientific status of cultural and ideational analysis.

In Chapter 3, I used critical realism to demonstrate not only the possibility for ideational analysis to be both tangible and causal, but also the determinate role of such factors in the formation of state motivation, and, as a corollary of this, in the determination of war or peace in a power transition. Underpinning such propositions is my claim about interest structures as a distinct ontological category. Interest structures are a major sub-set of the shared ideas that determine the integrity of states (and/or groups and factions within them) as corporate agents with emergent causal impacts on their individual members.
I argued that interest structures could be considered as tangible causal entities on three counts. First, they contain numerous specific material referents in the form of preferences or aversions towards (in this case) existing geopolitical configurations, or revisionist proposals for physical change of such configurations. Second, we know through the findings of neuroscience that ideas and beliefs represent real organising structures in the brain. Critical realists draw on Aristotle’s typology of causes to argue that ideas exercise their causal power through comprising important parts of the ‘material/formal’ pre-dispositions that determine human action. Third, public communication through the currency of ideas is a necessary condition of action for corporate agents. Most corporate actions thus pursue goals that are consciously pre-formed and articulated, rather than unconsciously or impulsively undertaken. Consequently, state motivation is not as unknowable and uncertain as MOR presumes (including in such non-transparent political regimes as the contemporary PRC).

In contrast to existing theories of power transition, our notion of interest structures/complexes advances an open system concept of state motivation that acknowledges states as motivated by multiple, and sometimes conflicting, goals and values. The definition and relative priority of interests, moreover, are determined as much by varying cultural perceptions (lessons of history), ideologies, and domestic inter-group relationships, as by the influence of the brute material circumstances states find themselves in. State interests and motivations, accordingly, need to be investigated for their particular case-specific attributes, and in all their complexity, in order to attain adequate explanation and understanding of state behaviour (past, present, and potential).

In Chapter 8, it was indicated that wider assimilation of this open-system ontology of multiple interest structures could potentially facilitate greater theoretical integration in the discipline of IR. Many (mono-) theories in IR posit or assume some form of dominating motivation that over-rides the motives posited in other theories, either routinely or at critical moments. My thesis advocates against a sole focus on this approach and suggests the need to explore also the incidence and frequency of more compromised or altered (yet still causally significant) expressions of hypothesised state motives.
Mono-theoretical level

The central causal propositions of the two mainstream theories of power transition – namely, the ‘zone of parity’ thesis (PTT); arguments about the varying war propensities of different polarities and, in particular, the catalytic role of a ‘potential hegemon’ (MOR) – are general regularity statements defended on the basis of historical probability. This thesis indicated two major common weaknesses in these causal arguments. First, on the basis of a natural necessity test (that is, logically and empirically supportable critical reasoning about the existence or absence of necessary connections between variables), I argued that material power distribution indicators were highly dependent, or symptomatic, variables on the path towards war initiation. Moreover, whether such distributions actually function as symptoms of war potential, rather than just as an altered deterrence hierarchy, is similarly contingent on the presence or absence of physically incompatible and irreconcilable geopolitical interests which, in most cases, can be tangibly identified well prior to the power transition itself.

The second common weakness is that the derivation of cross-case historical event regularities generates a genuine problem of induction when applied predictively to phenomena that operates in an open system. Both PTT and MOR claim to have the empirical support of most historical cases from the past 200 years where relevant data sets are attainable. Even so, there have been some anomalous events. For instance, Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor represents a deviation from the conflict initiation threshold stipulated in PTT’s zone of parity thesis. The limited and dependent military-security posture of European powers in the post-Cold War period deviates from MOR’s expectations of competitive and de-stabilising state security behaviour in a condition of (potential) multipolarity. To the extent that America’s peaceful surpassing of Britain in the Western Hemisphere represents a deviation from MOR’s ‘potential hegemon’ thesis, Mearsheimer himself provides a suite of counteracting material conditions to explain the offsetting of war expectations. In light of the general influence of cultural factors and open-system dynamics, I would argue further that we cannot predict the future ratio of anomalies to confirming cases in regard to the above theses. Accordingly, there can be no fixed probability ratio for the power transition war threshold (PTT) or war likelihood (MOR) arguments of these theories (were such a ratio useful for case analysis in the first place).
Nonetheless, when conceived more conditionally as *breakout* thresholds for those revisionist powers whose interests potentially conflict with those of status quo powers, the core arguments of PTT and MOR do have some basis in natural necessity (see Chapters 2 and 8). That is, it is reasonable to infer that a rising state who is prepared (however conditionally) to risk major war with the existing or previous dominant powers in a regional system, will only do so once its relative material capabilities and potentials provide a realistic chance that it might prevail. Given that most historical cases of conflictual power transitions support this inference, it seems prudent to take such an insight seriously. Note, however, that the zone of parity and potential hegemon theses are, in this adaptation, reduced to representing a more dependent and *malleable* tendency in the chain of causation (given, in addition, the possibilities for sub-parity conflict initiation as a result of asymmetries in motivation and/or risk propensity). As such, these theories do not provide any fundamental or independent basis for making reliable predictions or projections of future possibilities for war or peace.

By contrast, the general propositions of my theory are more determinate and fundamental. On the basis of reasoning about natural necessity, Chapter 5 established an invariant three-stage causal sequence that applies universally to all power transitions, and which locates the primary source of the process, as well as war and peace, in the emergent interest structures and perceptual outlooks of revisionist and status quo states. At the same time, however, the theory specified a finite, yet substantial, range of variability in the possible interactive processes (war, conquest, control, deterrence, alliance, negotiation) and order outcomes (limited.radical revisionism, preservation/restoration of status quo) that power transitions can potentially embody (see also Chapter 4).

Such variability is not just possible on account of cultural and normative variation. It is also physically possible. As I argued in Chapter 4, modern military technologies have increased the scope for revisionist expansion, even in continental regions, to proceed through modalities other than territorial aggrandisement. Thus it is possible for entire regional military-security hierarchies to change through a shift in the balance of deterrence alone (unilaterally or in alliance). The non-territoriality of norms in the world’s oceans and other designated ‘high seas’ provides a further
condition of possibility for peaceful, and consensually based, revisionism in the maritime domain.

While the general features of my theory are more wide-ranging and determinate than is the case with existing theories, they still do not amount to a predictive model. My theory is, nonetheless, highly useful for future projection purposes in that it is argued to provide an accurate and comprehensive explanatory template of the workings of, and generic possibilities for change in, power transitions. Most notably, the definitional content of the theory’s ‘interactive process’ and ‘order outcome’ indicators enables us to (a) tangibly identify the revisionist potential (or otherwise) of a state’s geopolitical interests at an early pre-transition stage, and (b) clarify some important conditions under which their interactive logic with status quo interests implies certain power transition processes and outcomes and not others. The theory also provides guidelines for investigating and assessing the motivational robustness or stability of state interest structures. The theory is thus intended to be a disciplined guiding and ordering framework, rather than a simple predictive substitute, for the in-depth empirical investigation of particular cases.

As a general theory of power transition, its claims can potentially be falsified through reference to any historical case. For the determinate features of the theory, in particular, to continue to be treated on this basis requires them to be evidently valid in every possible test case.

Inter-theoretical level

The chief contribution at this level was the development and initial demonstration of the method of ‘inter-theoretical evaluation’ itself. The method (developed in Chapter 3, with further specifications in Chapter 8) was designed to address critical realism’s shortfall in not specifying any clear criteria for how to evaluate competing causal claims in open systems when there is no recourse to experimental arbitration (which is the norm in social science). Just as the problem critical realism raises about the need to develop appropriate models of explanation for open systems is of general relevance for the conduct of social science, so accordingly is my proposed solution to the above shortfall.
The method of inter-theoretical evaluation, or ‘CATB test’, consists of four contrasting qualitative criteria according to which differing causal explanations of overlapping empirical phenomena can be related to each other and evaluated. Two of these criteria (co-existence; assimilation) represent a more positive or benign result for a given theory subjected to an inter-theoretical test. The other two (trivialisation; breakdown) represent mild and strong forms of zero-sum evaluation outcome (that is, where one explanation is found to be stronger or weaker than another). With the exception of breakdown (which is the category of falsification proper), the other three evaluative criteria allow for, and can be used to indicate, possibilities for integrated explanations between initially disparate theoretical paradigms. The method is designed for use in both historical and prospective case analyses. I applied it to the rise of China in Chapter 8.

The CATB test is both an embodiment and extension of the critical realist understanding of causation. On one hand, arguments about the complementary or conflicting relations between explanations are to be based on, and judged according to, an over-arching natural necessity criterion (the existence or absence of necessary connections between variables). On the other, the method operationalises the conceptual distinction introduced in this thesis between ‘ideal-type’ and ‘conditioned’ causation.

The concept of ‘conditioned causation’ is especially crucial to the workings of this evaluation method (see section 3.6). The concept extends upon the critical realist insight that, in open systems, a particular causal mechanism may be ‘possessed unexercised’ or ‘exercised unrealised’. Given that in IR most causal propositions relate in some way to particular types of motives that drive actors’ behaviour, an ‘ideal-type’ formulation of the objectives such motives embody is frequently necessary for distinguishing and clarifying such causal claims. What the concept of ‘conditioned causation’ does, however, is direct attention towards the possibility of discovering some significant alternative behavioural effects (compromised or strategic) that can be generated from the same motive structure as the result of interaction with other causal tendencies in an open-system environment (including other internal motivations of an actor).
The concept of conditioned causation supplies three key advantages to the CATB test as a method for testing competing explanations. First, combined with an ontology of multiple interest structures, it provides a sound realist basis through which to discern opportunities (or otherwise) for integrating different causal factors emphasised across disparate theoretical paradigms. Second, it cautions against too readily dismissing explanatory theses when their ideal-type effects fail to reliably manifest. In the case of the ‘economic interdependence’ and ‘socialisation’ theses considered in the case analysis of the rise of China, for instance, Chapter 8 showed that a failure of these mechanisms to prevent conflict over territorial disputes would not necessarily equate to their complete causal insignificance or falsification. Indeed, it is plausible in such cases that these theses might potentially only be trivialised (that is, prove to be less powerful vis-à-vis other motives than initially posited), yet continue to co-exist as significant causal factors that limit the scope of conflict and disruption to regional peace and cooperation.

Third, and as a result of the above, allowance for conditioned causation enables us to more precisely and reliably locate the conditions for falsification, or breakdown, of hypothesised causal structures. General theories that allow only for ideal-type or uniform cause-effect relations (when X, then Y), and that do not provide for potential conditioned causation effects, will of course be falsified each time their ideal-type hypotheses contradict with empirical reality. In case analysis, however, important causal factors might be unnecessarily rejected if no effort is made to consider possible conditioned causation adaptations of apparently ‘falsified’ causal arguments. When valid, moreover, allowance for conditioned causation (on the part either of the theorists themselves, or else analysts applying a theory to a specific case) can potentially relocate the rejection threshold, and extend (or salvage) the explanatory power of a theory.

Prospective analysis

Critical realism argues that the scope for reliable prediction of the course of events in open systems is narrow in the immediate term, and unviable beyond this. Yet, with its concept of causation based on the determinate or finite tendencies of relatively permanent structures, critical realism points the way to an alternative and legitimate means of future projection.
In this thesis, I demonstrated the viability and merits of qualitative rational simulation. In Chapters 7 and 8, I used closed- and open-system variants of this method respectively. The closed-system variant (CSRS; developed in section 3.6) aims to draw out and demonstrate the real possible effects of particular causal structures motivating an agent through a logical simulation of how they would affect behaviour in the absence of inhibiting or conditioning variables.

As a surrogate for experimentation, the credibility of any such ideal-type simulations depends on the establishment of a sound and falsifiable empirical justification for the existence of the relevant motive structure in the present. In regard to the subject of international power transitions, this means being able to demonstrate the connection of any causal claims to real state interest structures. The validity of claims about interest structures in turn depends on the accuracy and verifiability of (a) the analyst’s definition of their ideational content, and (b) their account of the reasons and socio-political forces that underpin a given interest structure’s motivational robustness, stability or fragility. In Chapter 6, arguments about contemporary Chinese interest structures were developed according to these latter criteria.

CSRS is especially useful for analysing conflict logic and the potential future effects of as-yet unrealised goals. In situations where conflicting interests and values are evident (however major or trivial), and where material and social obstacles inhibit an agent’s goals, the expression of the latter will, at least temporarily, often remain indirect and strategic (that is, embody ‘conditioned’ rather than ‘ideal-type’ causation). In such situations, CSRS is useful for anticipating and clarifying terms of potential conflict, and possibilities for future change (including accommodative outcomes), well before they really manifest and/or reach crisis point (that is, if they ever do in an open-system world). In Chapter 7, the simulation of interacting geopolitical interests conducted via CSRS was further enhanced by the guidance and structure supplied by my generic power transition model.

As a closed-system form of analysis, CSRS does not predict the incidence and timing of events, but rather explains the possibilities embedded in particular causal structures. The predictive/non-predictive status of the rational simulation method
when applied to the more open-system analysis of Chapter 8, however, is admittedly more ambiguous. The latter analysis is more inclusive, and indeed purports to account for all major variables that have been hypothesised in the mainstream literature as relevant to the explanation of East Asia’s contemporary security order. As such, it might seem predictive in the sense that so long as no major exogenous shocks occur (such as a pandemic or meteor strike that ends the prospects of an ‘Asian century’, or the economic and socio-political collapse and/or fragmentation of the PRC); then at least one of the projected pathways, and its associated explanation(s), ought to be vindicated if the analysis as a whole is to avoid falsification and being revealed as purely speculative.

I would tend to agree with this view in cases where such methods are used to map the possible trajectories and options for an immediate-term crisis or negotiational process that has already begun to emerge in reality. However, the fact that the projections in this study presume the possibility of a longer time scale undermines, at present, the viability for them to be treated as predictive in this sense also. Qualitative rational simulation is necessarily conducted on the basis of existing trends at the time of a given study. In open systems, however, the causal underpinnings of such trends, including for interest structures, can potentially evolve in unanticipated ways and transform over time. As such, the analysis and projections may need to be periodically updated to account for any consequential shifts in the overall configuration or balance of variables. Until or unless this happens, though, the projections in this study are nonetheless viewed here as revealing real tendencies and potential implications of existing evidence-based trends.

9.2: Implications for policy analysis

In applying a presently non-mainstream social-scientific paradigm in IR (critical realism) to the study of mainstream IR subjects (power transitions; the rise of China), this thesis pre-occupied itself quite extensively with complex theoretical and philosophical issues – both for purposes of critique, and theory/methodology building. Nonetheless, the underlying objective of these endeavours remains practical in orientation; that is, a desire to help advance the quality and reliability of the explanatory basis for policy debate and deliberation on the rise of China.
In Chapter 1, I argued in paradoxical terms that the initial increase in analytical complexity and abstraction involved in employing critical realism would, once applied to case analysis, have the payoff of significantly raising the level of clarification and de-mystification of real-world causal complexity. My innovations fulfil this promise on two fronts. First, my theory, in clarifying the causal sources and finite (yet variable) mechanics of the power transition process, brings greater order and coherence to our understanding of the range of possibilities, and accordingly the generic options, in power transitions. Second, I have demonstrated my method of inter-theoretical evaluation to be capable of substantially clarifying the terms of inter-relationship between diverse causal variables that are usually treated in a separate modular fashion rather than interactively. Both of these tools, if accepted as sound, help the analyst to efficiently order and evaluate the plethora of case-specific empirical information, and, as I shall argue, to more reliably anticipate and define the policy options and choices implied in existing trends.

The possibility for policy choice arises from the open-system perspective embedded in my theory and methodology. Such a framework would not frequently be expected to generate singular predictive pathways, and certainly not beyond an immediate- or near-term time scale. More specifically, however, I argued that certain details of the interests of the great powers in East Asia remain sufficiently ambiguous and under-determined to allow for meaningful deliberation on the possibilities, or otherwise, for a compromise accommodation on the region’s future military-security order.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the process of prospective analysis, policy deliberation, and adjustment of priorities that states undertake on an ongoing basis is itself a key variable in the causal equation that determines the direction of events. In the remainder of this section, I insert my analytical framework, and the findings of its application to the rise of China in Part II, hypothetically into this process. I do so to demonstrate first-hand how the use of my framework can potentially improve upon existing conceptions of the policy choices (dilemmas, trade-offs, and opportunities) confronting China and the US in particular as they lead and negotiate the much anticipated power transition in East Asia.
China

Chapters 6 and 7 highlighted some conflicts between the way China defines its core interest of sovereignty and territorial integrity, and its ‘peaceful rise’ and ‘harmonious world’ doctrines. In light of the escalation in regional maritime sovereignty disputes during recent years, the potential for conflict could be deduced from an examination of issue-specific variables alone. The Chinese government is itself aware of such potential, and has long prepared its own rationalisations for justifying any future resort to arms over these issues (see section 6.3). What my theory does is provide a means for placing particular issues within an integrative analysis of regional military-security order as a whole.

A key finding of the simulations that deployed my theoretical indicators in Chapter 7, and one not immediately obvious, was that maximal realisation of China’s existing suite of irredentist and maritime jurisdiction claims in East Asia would require a radical revision of the regional military-security hierarchy to Chinese unipolarity for its fulfilment. In light of the existing interests of other states, moreover, it is most likely that such an outcome would need to be facilitated by a major great power war. This raises an issue for China about the relative priority that it places on particular components of its territorial agenda.

The regime appears prepared to forgo a purity in its peaceful rise pledge if competing claimants on sovereignty disputes do not eventually defer to China’s standpoints any other way. In regard to the future upholding of pledges within the peaceful development paradigm (PD) beyond ‘peaceful rise’ itself, however, the key issue is China’s policy on maritime jurisdiction. Indeed, this is an issue upon which the integrity of China’s ‘harmonious world’ and ‘never pursue hegemony’ policies may stand or fall.

In regard to jurisdiction delineation: China’s claims to EEZs extending from Spratly/Nansha and Paracel/Xisha, its potential ‘historic rights’ claim in the South China Sea, and assertion of a maximal continental shelf claim in the East China Sea are not only opposed by many other regional states; they are also all in varying ways contestable under international law. China’s current interpretation of the military transit rights of other states in EEZs also lacks unambiguous backing from
international law in counter to America’s opposing policy. According to the ‘harmonious world’ doctrine, we would expect these issues to be amenable to the types of compromise indicated in Chapter 7. Analysis in Chapter 6 indicated why the regime takes an uncompromising stance on all its outstanding sovereignty claims. The regime’s imperative to sustain the vulnerable credibility of its ‘One China’ doctrine need not, however, encompass the PRC’s jurisdiction claims as well.

In more positive terms, abandonment of legally dubious ‘historic rights’ and ‘island’ EEZ rights claims in the South China Sea, as well as willingness to compromise in the East China Sea, could provide an opportunity for China to better signal benign long-term intentions. As Chapter 8 demonstrated, it would also be a means to signal the credibility of its broader internalisation of ‘ASEAN way’ norms, despite the potential for breaches of the latter over sovereignty disputes.

Other resources within my theoretical framework illustrate how China could adjust its regional geopolitical policy so as to more tangibly signal a commitment to the values of PD, and better reassure other states. According to my third hypothesis about war and peace in power transitions, for instance, an ultimately stable and peaceful outcome in Maritime East Asia (MEA) will require recognition of the legitimacy of other great power poles in the region. Chapter 7 showed that prosecution of an exclusive maritime security policy within the ‘first island chain’ would imply a desire to render American power and alliances in the region ineffectual and redundant. Such a prospect, moreover, conflicts with the aversion of numerous other states in the region towards the idea of unbalanced, and potentially hegemonic, Chinese power (given the coercive economic leverage it would enable).

If China’s leaders are serious about the values embodied in PD then, they will need to start promoting, domestically at first, the idea of a bipolar structure of deterrence as the outer limiting objective for China’s military rise in East Asia. At present, there are reasons (see discussion on arms control below) why it might be premature to use this formulation diplomatically. The reverse formulation, however – that is, explicitly ruling out a future bid for unipolarity in MEA – or perhaps simply the concept of an order based on a ‘balance of power’, may not bring the same complications, and could be useful for the time being.
Note that, according to my simulations, bipolarity in MEA is only feasible on the basis of an inclusive Chinese security policy within the ‘first island chain’ that provides some recognition of the right of free military transit for other regional powers, as well as joint security cooperation in legally overlapping jurisdictional zones such as the eastern section of the East China Sea. ‘Bipolarity’ based on exclusive spheres of interest inside (China) and outside (US) the ‘first island chain’ would be neither a peaceful nor genuine bipolar policy, given that, in practice, it would most likely require a removal of the US as a contending pole in the West Pacific.

**United States**

Despite America’s existing hard- and soft-power advantages in the region, and its resolve to reinforce these advantages through its ‘return to Asia’ and ‘60-40’ policies, China’s gradually rising military power means that the US too faces the prospect of some difficult future strategic choices or trade-offs.

If China’s current development trajectory is sustained, the capacity to, at least, prolong a military stalemate against the US and its allies within the ‘first island chain’ will be in reach over the next decade. Attainment of such a capability will dramatically shift the cost-benefit ratio, in particular, of US intervention in conflicts over territorial disputes (see Chapter 8). US involvement would mean a geographically wider conflict and, most likely, a disruption of sea-borne commerce that, if sustained, could trigger a regional and/or global economic downturn. The US also faces some peculiar dangers of escalation in a Taiwan conflict due to its asymmetry in motivation on this issue vis-à-vis China.

As Chinese power grows then, the US will likely increasingly be faced with an incentive to stake the credibility of its regional power more decisively on conflict localisation, and freedom of passage, rather than direct intervention in sovereignty conflicts where China would be motivated to fight hard against the US despite serious economic risks. Given the association China makes between its irredentist sovereignty interests and fundamental regime stability, moreover (see Chapter 6), US willingness to directly fight China on these issues would be perceived as a greatly hostile act. As such, intervention on these issues might also risk jeopardising the prospects for an
enduring compromise settlement on, and longer-term pacification of, military-security order in East Asia.

Arms Control
According to my theory, for geopolitical regions that are not unipolar to be genuinely stable and peaceful, there needs to be an enduring consensus on the structure of deterrence amongst the great power poles. My theory thus identifies conventional arms control as the ultimate task for a peaceful power transition that revises the status quo towards a new bipolar or multipolar order.

In regard to existing discourses and deliberations on the rise of China, the issue of arms control has been off the radar, primarily due to the shrouding effect of numerous nearer-term and unresolved conflicts of interest. From the US perspective, there is evidently a consensus towards sustaining deterrence of conflict over territorial disputes involving China as long as possible. Delaying the day of reckoning in this way has the function of holding out for the, at present, unlikely prospect that major political change might occur in the PRC and cause China to reconsider these issues. As a policy that requires reinforcement or extension of existing military advantage, however, it is not commensurable with arms control. Conversely, any Chinese diplomatic advocacy of bipolar arms control (which, at present, would mean a legitimised period of catch-up for China, or a US scale down) would be threatening to the US and most other regional states so long as China continues to advance interests that imply a potentially exclusive security policy within the ‘first island chain’.

In practical terms, the issue of arms control cannot be broached diplomatically until such time as the above issues are resolved between China and the US. Despite existing impediments to this, however, if the leaders of these powers do aspire to a longer-term peaceful co-existence, the effects of existing policies in enabling or inhibiting any future efforts at arms control can nevertheless be factored into contemporary policy debate and planning.

I anticipate at least three potential challenges in regard to arms control that are worthy of consideration in the present. The latter two of these derive directly from my theoretically informed analysis in Part II.
First, any viable arms control agreements or legitimation of gradual Chinese catch-up will require agreement on, and cooperation with, some extraordinary procedures of international inspection and verification. Second, if China simultaneously is gradually extending its navy into the Indian Ocean, the arms control regime will need to establish a consensus and include provisions for cooperation beyond East Asia. One possibility might be to negotiate separate (yet inter-locking) phased parity targets for (a) permanently deployed forces in MEA (based on the two poles of China and the US-Japan alliance), and (b) forces that are flexibly deployable between MEA and the Indian Ocean (US and China only). A subsequent third consensus (involving India) on permanently deployed forces in the Indian Ocean might emerge at a later date.

The third challenge is the most formidable of all: such schemes will only be possible if the other negotiating parties trust that China will not capitalise on any legitimised catch-up targets and challenge the US when stronger. This is the problem of tactical versus genuine consent anticipated within the discussion of my third hypothesis in Chapter 5.

According to my theory, the latter problem does not arise simply because any state in China’s position would be expected to renege on the terms of an arms control regime once it has caught up, and then pursue dominance (as MOR would assume). Rather, the problem arises in this particular case from the way China defines aspects of its geopolitical interests (namely, those relating to maritime jurisdiction), as well as the deep ambivalence expressed in the Chinese national discourse towards the legitimacy of America’s strategic presence in MEA. On this basis, my analysis in Chapter 7 both identified, and took seriously, the possibility that achievement of deterrence parity (or limited revisionism) first in MEA, then in the Indian Ocean, would be the most viable pre-requisite for China to mount a later challenge for unipolar dominance in MEA.

The trust barrier that this could produce vis-à-vis the ultimate prospects for regional arms control is potentially great. According to my theory, however, there is a way to differentiate between tactical and genuine consent to geopolitical agreements. This does not involve simply relying on diplomatic rhetoric and the terms of agreements, which states can adhere to duplicitously and are thus potentially misleading. Rather, it
involves assessing the consistency and durability of the friendly or hostile attitudes expressed towards particular states within a national discourse, both officially and unofficially. This suggests that one of the most significant steps China can take in the present, as part of a longer-term preparation of conditions conducive to the building of a ‘harmonious Asia’, would be to explicitly and consistently promote the idea, in its internal foreign policy narrative and discourse, that the US is a legitimate constituent element of the *regional* strategic order. In making such a resolution, China would not only reduce the scope for potential conflict, and endless strategic rivalry, with the US. It would also allay the security anxieties of most other states in the region, a development without which the notion of a future ‘harmonious Asia’ is unthinkable.
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