

China's Self-perception of Its Security Situation: The Nexus of the Internalities and Externalities

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Abstract. The objectives of this article are, firstly, to provide a framework for understanding the nexus between the studies of the rise of China and international security issues in a combination of both internal and external perspectives; secondly to show how internal and external environments are having an impact on the official formulation of China's security understanding and policy; and thirdly to conceptualize the "Chinese self-perceptions" of its security concerns from the perspectives of its historical memories and legacies of security experiences, its political debates on national power and status, and its justified international role. The article especially emphasizes the importance of studying the Chinese concept of national and international security, and examining how China perceives itself, the world, and China's place within the existing international order. The article's methodological approach is to explore China's increasing awareness of the interplay between *unconventional* and *conventional* security relationships and how the understanding of the nexus between the internalities and externalities plays an indispensable role in China's formation of its security perceptions. One of its key methods is to analyze the official Chinese formulations of its security policy, as reflected in a series of policy papers, called white papers, during the first decade of the new century.

Introduction

Currently, if one searches online information for China-related literature, one would be surprised to find that there are dramatic numbers of publications on the "security implications" around topics such as "China rise", "China threat", "China challenge", and so on. However, much of this literature tends to take a similar analytical path: the way of thinking and the logic of reasoning regarding how observers *outside* of China interpret the security implications of China's rise. Their commonality is an attempt to reply to or focus on outsiders' speculations regarding China's outward intentions. Hence, there is an imbalance between the massive production of writings about the external security perception of China and the comparatively limited literature on how the *Chinese themselves* understand their security environment in the nexus between China's rising and the world order.

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Another limitation in the studies of the rise of China and the international security implications is the fact that the mainstream international relation theories, especially the theories of international security such as realism, are the products of a certain historical period and circumstances. They are the reflections from a particular social and political order. To apply the assumptions and premises of these conventional theories to China studies in today's new circumstances of globalization and transnational capitalism, which reflect a transformed social and political order, is to neglect the limitation of their application.

The objectives of this article are to 1) provide a framework of understanding the nexus between the studies of the rise of China and international security issues in a combination of both internal and external perspectives; 2) show how internal and external environments are having an impact on the official formulation of China's security understanding and policy; and 3) conceptualize the "Chinese perceptions" of its security concerns from the perspectives of its historical memories and legacies of security understanding, its political debates on national power and status, and its justified international role. The article especially emphasizes the importance of studying the Chinese conception of national and international security, and examining how China perceives itself, the world, and China's place within the existing international order. The article's methodological approach is to explore China's increasing awareness of the interplay between *unconventional* and *conventional* security relationships and how the understanding of the nexus between the internalities and externalities plays an indispensable role in China's formation of its security perceptions.

The official view of China's security situation is affected by the last decades of change in the country's place in the global economy on the one hand; and on the other hand by the different assessments among political leaders and opinion-makers on how the country's security situation is affected by these changes. This process includes a widespread popular national pride arising from China's thousand-year old history as a cultural, economic, and political power. Internationally, the Chinese government is met with new expectations and demands from the outside world as to how the political leadership in China handles its recovered position as a world power. All these factors come into play when the Chinese government is formulating its view of China's security situation in light of global economic and political developments. In the following sections we will analyze the official Chinese formulations of the security situation of the country, as reflected in a series of white papers (policy papers), authored by the Chinese government in the first decade of the new century,

and furthermore we will try to compare these formulations with the changes in China's political and economic position in the global world occurring in the same period, and include a description of reactions from the Chinese media and intellectual opinion-leaders on the changes in the official formulations which can be observed during this period.

Historical Evolution of China's Self-Understanding of its Security Situation

One of fundamental reasons for the constant failure of the West in interpreting China's security understanding and predicting its transformation is the failure to understand and interpret China's past and present. Unlike Western nation-states, China's sense of "national identity" including its "nationalism"¹ – a term not familiar to most Chinese – comes from its long history as a "civilization-state"² (Pye, 1990, 1993). That is to say, to apply the unit of analysis of "nation-state" (a term that has its historical root in the formation of the modern nation-state system in Europe) to China is paradoxical.

The Opium Wars in the mid-19th Century, when Western powers forced the Chinese empire to its knees and opened its market to foreign commercial interests, was a historical turning point that gave the Chinese national feeling a serious blow that has characterized the Chinese view of the relationship between China and the rest of the world up to the present day. Declining from its previous hegemonic "Middle Kingdom" status, whose size and strength gave the Chinese empire a position as a natural political and cultural center of the world, dominating and protecting the surrounding "barbarian" nations and kingdoms, and receiving respect and tributes in return, China was then reduced to a semi-colonial empire with reduced autonomy and little impact on its immediate surroundings. The Chinese empire was divided into foreign concessions such as Taiwan, a war concession to Japan following its further defeat in the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, and parts of the kingdom such as Tibet slipped completely out of the central government's control. The hundred years between the Opium Wars and the inception of the People's Republic in 1949 are perceived in China as "a century of humiliations"³ where the basis for the Chinese "victim mentality"⁴ was founded, and it has been influencing the perceptions and worldviews of generations of Chinese, both ordinary Chinese and the ruling elite alike.

With the revolution of 1949, which created hope for building a new Chinese national self-awareness, China, alongside the rest of the Soviet-dominated Communist bloc, saw themselves as representatives of global progress, and this was further emphasized as China –

after the break with the Soviet Union in 1960 and during the Cultural Revolution – proclaimed itself to be the world's socialist vanguard. Its relative material poverty meant little in comparison to the pride of being a frontrunner in the global struggle for a better society. At the same time the humiliation after the Opium Wars put a special emphasis on national unity and defense of national sovereignty. This perception has meant that the People's Republic of China after its founding in 1949 identified with post-colonial countries and together with these countries at the Bandung Conference in 1954 formulated principles of international relations ensuring sovereignty and non-interference. These principles have their justification in the loss of national independence during the colonial period and are at the same time closely linked to the Western European view of international relations from the Treaty of Westphalia.

During the early 1970s the Chinese perception of its security was associated with its understanding of its position in the world system. Such an understanding was conceptualized by the Maoist “Three World” concept, which was one of the first Chinese contributions to the general debates at the UN in 1972 after the People's Republic overtook Taiwan's seats both in the General Assembly and the Security Council. According to Mao's “Three World Theory”, 1) the First World, the superpowers, refers to the United States and the former Soviet Union. They were considered to be imperialist and China's primary enemies, and the USSR was regarded as the most aggressive of the two superpowers because it was a newcomer and a rising superpower; 2) The Second World, the superpowers' allies, refers to those middle-range powers including Western imperialists and Japan. They were the political forces that could be allied with as part of an international united front against the superpowers; 3) the Third World, refers to the vast number of developing countries and nations of the Non-Aligned Movement. They shared with China a fundamental interest, and they were the most reliable revolutionary force in opposing the superpowers. Ironically and interestingly, this “Three World Theory” has returned like a boomerang today, directed at China itself, because China is in some ways seen as the new emerging and thus most “aggressive” superpower in many parts of the world.

In the 1960s and 70s China faced a dual security crisis: internally, the Cultural Revolution movement which split the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through the “two-line struggle” and politically fractionalized the entire population, caused grave internal instabilities; externally, the Chinese government perceived the primary security threat to come

from the USSR, considered to be the most dangerous of the two superpowers due to a number of reasons such as the USSR's expansionist aggressiveness, its occupation of Afghanistan, and especially its support to the Vietnamese regime in its conflicts with China, which led to the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979. Therefore, an alliance with the United States was sought, and the success of the China-US rapprochement led to the "invitation" to China to be a part of the US-led capitalist world order. The Chinese open-door reform since the end of 1970s further integrated the country into the capitalist world system especially in the global division of labor.

The economic reform and the transformation of China's security understanding

China's feeling of being the spearhead of the socialist world revolution disappeared abruptly after Mao's death, when his heirs characterized the late Chairman's national and international policies as a failure which had left the Chinese people stuck deep in poverty. The Chinese could no longer feel that they constituted the world's political avant-garde, and had only their low standard of living left over. From the late 1970s, driven by economic reforms and foreign investments, China's economy grew explosively, and this gave new force to the pride of the Chinese nation. All statistical forecasts predict that China's rapid economic growth within a few years will make it the world's strongest economy. China's ascent to economic and political greatness seems inevitable, but the Chinese government, in its own words, does not strive to achieve hegemony, only to regain its "historical place" in the world, as its size, population and millennial culture justifies for it.

Thus, the turning point in the post-Mao regime's understanding of China's security was the transformative change in the worldview of Chinese ruling elites with regard to both internal and external security conceptualizations. Rather than the danger of "external invasion", internal underdevelopment and poverty was the most serious national security threat. The CCP's ruling status was in serious crisis, which might have been remedied by the rapid implementation of reforms aimed at speeding up economic development and the "four modernizations".⁵ The possibility of world war was less likely, and the main global desire was for peace and development. The prevailing opinion was that China should give up its revolutionary policy and be part of the global "third wave" of industrial revolution. In the following three decades, the entire paradigm of Chinese domestic and foreign policies have

been based on Deng Xiaoping's advice of "Tao Guang Yang Hui"⁶. The focus of China's security concern has been internally oriented.

However, ironically, after three decades of reform and development, the side effects of China's economic achievements have begun to manifest themselves as grave security concerns for the entire nation. Each generation of post-Mao leadership had to swallow and adjust the problems inherited from the previous ones, such as from Deng Xiaoping's "Cat Theory"⁷, to Jiang Zemin's "Three Represents"⁸ theory, and to Hu Jintao's "Harmonious Society" and "Scientific Development Concept"⁹.

Now, after the CCP's 18th Congress in 2012, Xi Jinping, as the new leader of China, is facing tremendous socio-economic, socio-political and cultural-ideological problems, termed the "Ten Grave Problems":¹⁰

1. No breakthroughs in economic restructuring and the construction of a consumer-driven economy.
2. Failure to nurture and grow a middle class.
3. The rural-urban gap has increased.
4. Population policy lags behind reality.
5. The bureaucratization and profit-incentivization of educational and scientific research institutions shows no indication of being ameliorated and this continues to stifle creativity.
6. Environmental pollution continues to worsen.
7. The government has failed to establish a stable energy-supply system.
8. Moral lapses and the collapse of ideology. The government has failed to build an effective and convincing value system that can be accepted by the majority of its people.
9. "Firefighting" and "stability-maintenance" style diplomacy lacks vision, strategic thinking and specific measures.
10. Insufficient efforts in pushing political reform and promoting democracy.

The above list of social, economic and political problems is seen, as demonstrated by the own words of the new CCP leader Xi Jinping, as threatening the "survival of the Party and the state", i.e. the highest national security concern. These concerns, ironically, come from within, not from without. It is expected that in the years to come the new government under Xi Jinping will have to take measures to address these internal problems.

Policy Analysis of Chinese Security Conceptualization

From “peaceful ascent” to “peaceful development”

In the first decade of the 21st century, the Chinese government presented two concepts that summarize the prospects of China's domestic and international political developments. First it introduced the concept of "peaceful ascent" (*heping jueqi*), which for a few years had a prominent position in official statements from the Chinese government, but after extensive public debate was replaced by “peaceful development” (*heping fazhan*). This concept had been the official choice since 2005, when the Chinese State Council Information Office published the white paper, *China's Peaceful Development Road* (2005), until 2011, when the State Council introduced a new white paper with the almost identical title, *China's Peaceful Development* (2011). Although the concept of "peaceful development" in the period 2005 to 2011 remained unchanged, the official interpretation changed in light of the global financial crisis which in the meantime has struck the global economy, and the more-strained relations between the U.S. and China emerging in the wake of this crisis.

“Peaceful ascent”

The concept of “peaceful ascent” was formulated by Zheng Bijian from 2002 onwards in a series of speeches and articles in which he functioned as a spokesman for Chinese government viewpoints. That Zheng Bijian could play this role is no coincidence. As Hu Jintao, Secretary General of the Communist Party of China from 2002 to 2012, had the post of Director of the Communist Party's Central Party School in Beijing, Zheng was assistant principal of the school, and he has maintained the close ties to President Hu Jintao and the party leadership even after he resigned as assistant principal to take over as chairman of the “China Reform Forum”.

Zheng says that in 2002 he formulated the concept of “peaceful ascent” as a counterweight to the two perceptions which, at that time, were widespread in the West: the fear of a “threat from China” and the notion of “China's coming collapse”. It was feared in the West on the one hand, that China's growing economic power and international influence would make the Chinese leadership act in a “revisionist” manner in relation to the international order, and that this would require major changes in the international balance of power. On the other hand, it was feared (and according to some Western scholars seen as

inevitable) that Chinese economic and social disruption could have a significant negative impact on the rest of the world. Faced with these notions Zheng now argued that the fear of China was unjustified because the Chinese government since the start of economic reforms in the late 1970s had based its economic development on a desire for a peaceful world and therefore was in no way interested in challenging the existing world order or creating conflicts. The word “ascension” signaled, on the other hand, an expectation that economic growth in China would continue in the coming years and lead to a continued improvement in the country's place in the international economic hierarchy.

Since the start of economic reforms and opening to the outside world in the late 1970s, China has, according to Zheng Bijian, benefited from globalization. The combination of market-oriented reforms and its voluntary entry into the global division of labor, where China has assumed the role of “workshop of the world”, i.e. a place whereto production based on manual, not particularly skilled work has flowed. This has created the basis for the impressive growth of China's economy since the beginning of the reform period. Continued economic development must, according to the plans set by the Chinese government, lead to a situation where China in 2050 – one hundred years after the Chinese revolution in 1949 and 70 years after the start of economic reforms – must have evolved into a modern, industrialized state with a socialist democracy on its own merits. If these development perspectives are to be fulfilled, a world characterized by peace and stability is a precondition. The state's growing interdependence of which China is a part creates a growing interest in joint solutions to common problems. Zheng Bijian stresses that China, unlike previous emerging powers, will not base its ascent on colonization, hegemony or wars of aggression. When Western powers were no longer able to find necessary resources within their own borders, they occupied colonies and based their continued industrialization on the looting of these colonies. Germany and Japan were trying to achieve superpower status by launching large-scale aggressive wars, and the Soviet Union based its status as a superpower on military hegemony. The basis for the US economy is still a use of energy by far exceeding the global average. In contrast, China will base its industrialization on its own strengths and will try to solve resource problems caused by China's new role as the "workshop of the world" through equitable agreements on import and extraction of raw materials and energy resources with resource-rich countries, increased efficiency in energy consumption and technical development. According to Zheng Bijian, Chinese development's need for international stability is matched by a corresponding

need for internal stability in the country. A harmonious society where the significant social and regional disparities in living conditions of the Chinese population are remedied is an equally important prerequisite for continued economic growth in China. The concept of “peaceful ascent” in this way summarizes the international and domestic political conditions for Chinese development to succeed.

In relation to Taiwan, Zheng Bijian will not rule out the use of military power to enforce a reunion. Zheng, like the Chinese leadership and the majority of the Chinese population, perceives Taiwan as an inseparable part of China, and any claim for independence for Taiwan may, in his view, legitimately be countered by military means. In this context he refers to the American Civil War which primarily aimed to keep the American Union together and supports this with a reference to a famous quote by Lincoln where he stresses that civil war for him not was about abolishing slavery, but was aimed at maintaining the rebellious southern states in the union and thus securing national unity.

Zheng Bijian’s concept worked for a few years as the officially recognized summary of the Chinese leadership’s perception of international politics, and the concept was used on several occasions by the two most senior members of the new Chinese leadership, General Secretary and President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao.

It may be said (Su Jianguo, 2006) that Zheng Bijian’s very liberal-minded belief in globalization at this time distanced him from the realistic idea of multipolarity which had been prevalent during the previous Chinese leadership with Jiang Zemin at the head. With their demand for the recognition of multipolarity, the Chinese government at that time challenged the unipolar position that the United States had achieved at the end of the Cold War when bipolarity collapsed, and it signaled a desire for change in the existing international order. With the concept of “peaceful ascent” the Chinese leadership, fed into the fears that could be found in the West that an ever-stronger China with increased strength could require changes in the global distribution of power.

Behind the discussion of the concept of “peaceful ascent”

Zheng Bijian’s presentation of the concept of “peaceful ascent” and the Chinese leadership’s use of the concept soon gave rise to extensive discussions in China (Glaser and Medeiros, 2007).

The left wing of the political spectrum criticized the concept for being devoid of ideological substance, and critics on the far left pointed out a missing awareness of the role of “imperialism”, “U.S. imperialism” or “neo-imperialism” in international politics. Within the Chinese military there was a fear that the idea of "peaceful ascent" would weaken the will to continue the ongoing modernization and strengthening of the Chinese military. Some intellectual opinion-leaders believed that it was impossible to imagine that China would implement a peaceful ascent when such a thing was without historical precedent, and that it was unfair that China should renounce its “ascent” if it could not be implemented by peaceful means. In addition the concept and theory of "peaceful ascent" was criticized for weakening China's ability to use military force in connection with the future reunification with Taiwan, and some intellectuals described the idea of implementing reunification with Taiwan by peaceful means as naïve.

On the liberal side of the political spectrum, concerns were expressed that the concept could promote nationalist attitudes in the population, and the very concept of "ascension" gave rise to criticism because the use of this image would serve to reinforce the fear of China's rising power which already existed in the world. This latter criticism has probably been the reason why “peaceful ascent” was replaced by the concept “peaceful development” in 2005.

However, the discussion about the ascent of great powers did not disappear from the Chinese media. In November 2006 the central Chinese TV channel CCTV aired a documentary series of 12 episodes entitled *Great Power's Ascension* (Daguo Jueqi). The series described how Portugal, Spain, Holland, England, France, Germany, the USA, Japan and Russia had succeeded in establishing themselves as major global powers, and based on this series the discussion about the possibilities and prospects of China's ascension was continued, even though the concept had been removed from the official discourse.

Basically, there are three aspects of “ascent” in relation to China's self-understanding of its security policy. The term can have negative connotations in the direction of threats to the existing international order. At the same time, it refers to the notion of “Middle Kingdom”, China's historical position as regional hegemon. Furthermore, the term “ascension” underscores that China's five principles of international relations, according to the Chinese government must be respected without compromise.¹¹

“The Peaceful Development Road” (2005) and “Peaceful Development” (2011)

The 2005 version of the white paper - *The Peaceful Development Road* - continued the arguments about the relationship between the strategy for China's internal development and its international position, which was previously presented under the heading of “peaceful ascent”, but now, as a consequence of the extensive discussion, the concept “ascent” had been replaced by “development”.

Six years later the same Information Office again published a white paper in 2011 on the subject and with the almost identical title of *Peaceful Development*. What is the difference between the two versions of the policy papers? The international situation was fundamentally different in 2011 from the situation when the former white paper was released in 2005. The Chinese leadership could in the first years of the new century look back at its role as a lifeline for the other Asian countries during the Asian financial crisis in 1997-98. China, with its currency policy and financial support to the Asian countries, accomplished what IMF had failed to do i.e. to rescue the other East Asian countries from the crisis. China's role as savior gave the country a positive image in most Asian countries. In 2011 a number of years had passed by, marked by the much more extensive global financial crisis which started in 2008 and gradually developed into a genuine economic crisis. This new crisis placed China in a position somewhat different from its position during the Asian financial crisis. China was one of the countries that fared best through 2008, the first year of the crisis; but during the further development of the crisis, a growing criticism of China's currency policy has been formulated, primarily by the United States and Europe, but some Asian countries that compete with China on the world market are also accusing China of manipulating its currency and thus achieving competitive advantages for Chinese products. The Chinese currency policy is seen as making it more difficult for these countries to work their way out of the economic crisis. The new white paper is formulated in a new international situation, and therefore in many areas some changes in the policy formulations can be found.

The positive impact of globalization on the world and China is emphasized in language similar to the liberal-oriented tone of the previous white paper. China is defensive against criticism for its role in the resolution of the 2008 crisis; the white paper emphasizes China's efforts to establish a “global economic governance mechanism, reform the international financial system, and participate in multilateral coordination of macroeconomic policies” through international organizations such as the G20, to put the global economy back onto its

feet. The white paper also stresses that the Chinese government is striving to change its economic structure from dependence on exports and investment as economic growth engines, towards an economy which is also based on growth in domestic consumption. Growing demand from Chinese consumers would lead to increasing needs for imports to China, thereby improving export opportunities for the rest of the world.

The strengthening of the US position and the new Chinese position of strength as one of the main emerging countries, the BRICS, has led the white paper to stress the requirements for a “new and more just world order” with multipolarity, in which the emerging economies in particular may have a more important role, but where the situation of developing countries in general is also improved (Khanna, 2009). Today’s world is moving towards multipolarity and economic globalization progresses. There is a growing need for changes in the international system and the world is facing historic challenges. Especially the emerging economies, but also growth regions and new non-governmental organizations are benefiting from globalization, but the globalization praised by the white paper is not a globalization where national sovereignty becomes less important and, as in the EU case, transferred to supranational institutions. Nor is it a globalization where national sovereignty can be overridden to implement “humanitarian intervention”. China will continue to defend its core interests: sovereignty, security, territorial integrity and reunification.

China’s Security and the World Security: Two Sides of the Same Coin

China’s remarkable economic growth in the past three decades has already made its security concerns and the world security matters more and more intertwined: the Chinese currency (Chinese *Yuan*) has become a subject of contention; China's trade has raised concerns for workers and firms in both developed and developing countries; its demand for energy has led to competition and conflict; and the effects of its own overseas investments especially in the former colonies of Europe have begun to be felt painfully by the West. Beijing’s policies on finance, currency, trade, military security, environmental issues, resource management, food security, raw material and product prices are increasingly seen as having consequences for the economies of millions of people outside China’s boundary because China’s shifts in supply and demand cause price changes leading to adjustments in other countries. Some scholars and opinion-makers argue that China is increasingly becoming an “indispensable country”, similar

to the position of the United States as an engine of global economic growth in the post-War decades.

The transition from “peaceful ascent” to “peaceful development” expresses a fundamental change in Beijing’s self-understanding of its security policy; both the content and the extent of the interdependence are emphasized. China's security must be understood in the context of the new “multipolar” world order, where the old hegemon declines and the ascent of new emerging powers gives China more leeway in the international arena (Khanna, 2012; Li, 2010; Li and Christensen, 2012). China's security becomes less focused on the past and more on present and future security problems, perceived as associated with the capitalist world order. The notion of “development” is seen as referring to “mutual benefits” and “interdependence”, while the connotation of “ascent” can be misperceived as “one-sided” and “self-centered”. China is also burdened, however, at the same time by the fact that the country's economic security especially its energy security is increasingly global and interdependent (Pan and Zhu, 2006). According to a survey study on the Chinese public’s security perceptions (Jung, 2012), the top security concerns for the majority of Chinese are not economic and military threats from the outside, but internal energy shortage. On the one hand, the country gains prosperity and competitive advantages for its development, but on the other hand the room for “independent” maneuvering is becoming more and more constrained.

The new white paper is thus characterized by a much more assertive tone than the former. Although it still maintains the need for globalization, interdependence and the need for international cooperation, the desire for change in international power relations is underlined, based on the knowledge that the global economic crisis has weakened the developed world, while the emerging economies, the BRICS, have gained strength and influence, a development which had already started before the economic crisis, but apparently has been reinforced by it.

The new white paper gave rise to various reactions. Zheng Bijian was not slow to point out that for many years he has been emphasizing the importance of the "interest convergence" the white paper mentions, and thereby underline the continued emphasis on the positive impact of globalization on China.

Shortly after the publication of the white paper, territorial disputes in the South China Sea were growing, and as a consequence, reports appeared in parts of the official Chinese press, suggesting a less “peaceful” attitude towards the outside world would be more

appropriate. In October 2011 the journal *Global Times* published an article entitled, “*Do not take peace for granted*”. Vietnamese and Philippine naval vessels had seized Chinese fishing vessels in the South China Sea. According to the article, the other states advancing territorial claims in the area had misunderstood the welcoming attitude and willingness to negotiate expressed by the Chinese government. According to the author of the article, demands on a more consistent position of the Chinese Government have been articulated from various sectors of society. If the conflict develops and becomes serious, the Chinese government will not be able to ignore these demands, and some form of military response might be necessary. Also the *People’s Liberation Army Daily* (Jiefangjun Bao) responded to the white paper. On the last day of 2011 it published an article which has attracted a lot of attention in China, in which it stated: “Now peaceful development has become state reasoning in China, but to take the peaceful development path should never mean sacrificing China’s core interests. Sovereignty, security and territorial integrity will always be the state’s core interests” (Zheng and Fei, 2011). This is a clear indication that the domestic division in the understanding of security in China is growing, demonstrating nationalist, internationalist, realistic or liberal attitudes, and showing the growing importance of various interests stemming from political, economic and social spheres of society.

The externalities of China’s security understanding

China’s economic growth in recent years seems to have prompted Western powers – primarily the United States – to adopt a strategy based on realpolitik (Mearsheimer, 2006, 2010), that is what China perceives as a containment strategy, whose main elements are: continued military support for Taiwan; continued security alliances with South Korea, Japan, Australia and the Southeast Asian countries, all of which participate in the Southeast Asian territorial dispute with China: a partial alliance with India; criticism of China’s growing influence in Africa and Latin America; as well as condemnation of Chinese policy in Tibet particular and the human rights situation in the country in general.

Although distrust in and opposition to the US-led liberal world order do exist among Chinese politicians, intellectuals and students, the Chinese leadership is not clear about what the consequences of its full integration into the Western-dominated world order may be. Both the West and China are caught in a difficult situation where they, as they say in China, are “riding a tiger”¹² and it is by no means clear how they can descend from the tiger. Many

Chinese feel that their security is now controlled by market forces, and that they no longer have any choice but to accept and follow the market's basic logic. But the evolution and the logic of the market is shaped by Western cultural and religious norms and values which in turn promotes specific forms of social relations between people, which is very different from Chinese traditions. Many of the Chinese concerns over the liberal world order are caused by the contradictions between internal market forces and deeply rooted Chinese nationalism and cultural norms. China is now faced by two conflicting priorities: to benefit from the capitalist world, and at the same time maintain its own political and national identity. There is an important contrast between, on the one hand, the Chinese distrust of the West and Japan which is rooted in historical experience, and on the other hand, the country's intense desire to join the club of advanced Western countries and revitalize the "Middle Kingdom". With its continued economic growth and growing military power, China will force the West to recognize its "Chinese characteristics", while joining the existing capitalist world system.

For the West China's ascent is perceived by some to be one of the most important economic forces in rescuing the capitalist world system from further decline, and it is hoped that China's integration into this system will fundamentally change the country and its political system while increasing the Chinese government's sense of responsibility for the solution of international problems. But an unforeseen consequence is that China's continued success is increasingly recognized as an alternative model to modernization. Chris Patten, the former British governor of Hong Kong, has stressed that China is "the first example of a country that has fared surprisingly well in the international system, while challenging the basis of this system" (as quoted in *BBC News* 2008). The rise of China and its increasing demand for internal security (resources and growth) and for external recognition (rule-settler, not just rule-follower) have additional unforeseen consequences affecting the security of the surrounding world (Jacques, 2009).

The "Chinese model", termed the "Beijing Consensus" (Ramo, 2004), is often interpreted by Western opinion-makers as Beijing's attempt to gather as much influence as possible so that it can change the rules in the direction it wants. The "Beijing Consensus", especially with its emerging "soft power" impact in the semi-periphery and periphery parts of the world, is perceived by some as a great challenge to US hegemony (Kurlantzick, 2007; Nye, 2004). Here, the security implications are not just economic and military, but ideological and political. However, Chinese public opinion has a pluralistic understanding of the world

order, a multipolar international system; and according to a survey study, most Chinese do not support an alternative China-led world order and institutions, but would prefer to become a mediator of conflicts between nations (Jung, 2012). This indicates that the Chinese public supports the status quo of the existing world order as long as China's rising status and its national security concern is recognized and respected.

Conclusion

Chinese modern history is crucial for understanding the country's security situation, as is reflected in official formulations and in debates among the country's intellectuals. China's initial position as the "Middle Kingdom" gives rise to a desire to regain past status and respect. Meanwhile, "the century of humiliations" after the Opium Wars and hostility from the West throughout the Cold War created a profound skepticism towards the outside world. This contradictory picture of China's position in the world: on the one hand a thousand-year kingdom that deserves respect and recognition, and on the other hand a nation subjected to constant pressure from an unfriendly environment, shines through in the official formulations, as expressed through the above-mentioned white papers published by the Chinese government. The global economic crisis has underscored the interdependence of the global economy, of which China through its economic reforms has become an integrated part, and has strengthened the Chinese aspirations for a position as an equal partner, and has at the same time sharpened some of the conflicts caused by fear in the surrounding world of what the fast growth of China's economy will mean for international economy and politics. The Chinese government experiences a growing power in the international system, and at the same time a growing pressure on its economic performance, energy security and the political legitimacy of the regime itself.

The Chinese government describes the country's development in relation to the international order as a peaceful process, and underlines the global interdependence that the openings to the outside world and the invitation of foreign investments have been important parts of. This interdependence requires, according to the Chinese leadership, mutual respect for each country's integrity and security needs. Experiencing semi-colonial history with the above-mentioned historical trauma, the Chinese government is not yet willing to sacrifice its historical national integrity, and this may be one of the main reasons for the apparently irreconcilable Chinese position in the current disputes in the South and East China Seas. In

these current conflicts, it is also obvious that the Chinese perception of the country's security situation is not as clear as it may appear in official statements. Behind it loom a number of different views and interests which influence Chinese foreign policy, but are all rooted in the same history and cultural tradition.

The dilemma China is facing at the moment is serious. China has not yet developed its own vision and own values in relation to a world order where its perception of security is shared by the rest of the world. The old imperial order based on “great unity and harmony” (*Tian Xia*) (Callahan, 2008; He, 2003; Wang, Feiling, 2011; Wang, Mingming, 2012) creates several problems with its neighboring countries, because an order like that presupposes an indisputable China-based historical and cultural hegemony. This will create skepticism in both the USA and the countries in the East and Southeast Asian region.

China and the Western powers both have an interest in a stable world order, and China definitely has an interest in a more harmonious society. However, there is a discrepancy between China's own security perceptions and what the external world has imagined China's security ambitions to be. At the moment it is important for the US-governed international order to recognize that China's internal transformation inevitably will lead to a change of the global order and that the liberal world order will have to accommodate the possibilities and limitations caused by the ascent of China, but also accept the fact that when China has “mounted the tiger”, the country will be doomed to either stick to its course and stay mounted or fall off.

Notes

¹ The concept “nationalism” is very often misinterpreted and misrepresented. In many situations it is intertwined with another related notion of “patriotism”. Sometimes the official doctrines of patriotism and the public opinions of nationalism converge, but at other times they are pointing to different issues.

² Pye's notion of “civilization-state” is purposefully meant to point out the fact that the logic and premises of “nation-state” are not entirely applicable to China. The historical emergence of the “nation-state” as a concept and a unit of international relations is a relatively contemporary phenomenon, and was formally derived from the Treaty of Westphalia. The political and cultural legitimacy of a nation-state is based on sovereignty and ethnic identity within a defined territorial unit. Historically and culturally, China was not familiar with, and was not shaped by the nation-state framework of understanding.

³ The notion of a “century of humiliation” refers to the period between the first Sino-British Opium War (1839) and the end of the Chinese Civil War (1949), during which the political incursions, economic exploitation, and military aggression by foreign imperialist countries are regarded as the key factor that undermined the historical glory of the Chinese civilization and humiliated the Chinese nation.

⁴ The notion of “victim mentality” is connected with China’s painful experience of the “century of humiliation”, and it has dominated the Chinese consciousness of its relations with the Western world. It is one of the central factors that instigated Chinese revolutions in the 20th century, including the communist revolution, and has shaped China’s foreign policy and international relations since the founding the People’s Republic in 1949.

⁵ “Four modernizations” refers to modernizations in the four areas: agriculture, industry, science and technology and defense.

⁶ “Tao Huang Yang Hui” is a Chinese idiomatic expression. It is literally translated as “hiding brightness, while nourishing obscurity.” The connotation of this expression has been used to describe Deng Xiaoping’s reform policy in the 1980s and 1990s, during which he advised China “to bide its time and focus on building itself”, i.e. to focus on China’s internal development without extending its time and resource to external affairs.

⁷ It refers to Deng Xiaoping’s internationally famous saying, “it doesn’t matter whether the cat is white or black, as long as it can catch the mouse.” This quotation denotes a strong sense of pragmatism. It was seen as playing an emancipatory role in the early reform period when China was deeply involved in ideological debate about “socialism” vis-à-vis “capitalism”.

⁸ The “Three Represents” is part of the ideological reconstruction of the CCP in the critical period of dramatic societal transformations during the period of the former President Jiang Zemin. It refers to the three areas which the CCP represents 1) the requirement to develop advanced productive forces, 2) an orientation towards advanced culture, and 3) the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China.

⁹ The term first came out in 2006 in a speech by President Hu Jintao, who had the political agenda to carry out a new vision for China’s development direction at a time when Chinese society was highly imbalanced and polarized due to huge social injustice and inequality. The current version of “Harmonious Society” has been incorporated into a broader development concept called the “Scientific Development Concept” that has been ratified into the Party’s Constitution by the 18th CCP Congress.

¹⁰ For a detailed description of the Ten Grave Problems, please refer to “The Ten Grave Problems Facing China”, post by Geremie R. Barme. Available at <http://www.thechinastory.org/2012/09/the-ten-grave-problems-facing-china/>

¹¹ The official term is “The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, which was originally formulated as part of an agreement between China and India in 1954. The five principles are: 1) Mutual respect of territorial integrity and sovereignty; 2) Non-aggression; 3) Non-interference in internal affairs; 4) Equality and mutual benefit; 5) Peaceful coexistence.

¹² “Riding a tiger” is a Chinese expression describing the dilemma of the unfortunate situation of sitting on the back of a tiger, and at the same time have difficulties in stepping down from the tiger.

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