

Chinese and Western Interpretations of China's "Peaceful Development" Discourse: A Rule-Oriented Constructivist Perspective

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Abstract: This paper offers a rule-oriented constructivist perspective on understanding the distinct Chinese and western interpretations of China's "peaceful development" discourse framework. It takes the correlations of discourse, rules and rule initiated by Nicolas Onuf as an analytical tool to identify the discrepancies between and within the Chinese and western patterns of discourse, rules and rule on this issue. Critical analyses of Chinese and western discourse are provided as a source for understanding the lack of trust between China and the West on China's "peaceful development". This methodology, which synthesizes the rule-oriented constructivist perspective and concrete discourse analysis, is an innovated attempt to implement the conventional positivist perspective on this issue.

Introduction

The ongoing emergence of China as one of the strongest economies in the world has constantly been accompanied by controversies and ambivalence. While some embrace China's increasing power, others feel insecure and regard China as a potential threat. This ambivalent feeling towards the rise of China has manifested itself in different areas. One is the constant debates between the West and China on whether China can stick to the "peaceful development" approach as claimed by the Chinese government. Since the end of the last century, many western academics and politicians have argued that China's rise is not likely to be peaceful (Munro, 1992; Huntington, 1996; Bernstein & Munro, 1997; Kagan, 2005). In response to this way of thinking, the Chinese government put forward the concept of "peaceful rise" in 2004 (*Xinhua News*, 2004). However, this term generated further debates and skepticisms partly due to the possible aggressive implications of the word "rise". In 2005, the term was officially revised into "peaceful development" through a white paper entitled "China's Peaceful Development Road" (Information

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Office of the State Council, 2005). These efforts, nevertheless, did not stop the fierce debates on China's developmental approach. The arguments on the topic last till today.

What on earth has led to the overwhelming criticism on the "peaceful development" discourse? Many have taken a positivist approach and looked into China's increasing military power and its disputes with neighboring countries to rationalize the disputes. What has been ignored, however, is the role of people in foreign policy-making, the thinking pattern and logics of Chinese authority, and the discrepancies between the external interpretations of China's intentions and the Chinese interpretations of China's policies.

This paper therefore takes a rule-oriented constructivist approach to investigating the disjunctions between and the contradictions within the western and Chinese interpretations of China's "peaceful development" discourse framework. Rule-oriented Constructivism regards the act of speaking as a purposeful action with the power of shaping social realities (Onuf, 2001: 77). Through repeated speech acts, rules are generated. Rules then determine the distribution of resources and yield rule (Kubalkova, 2001: 69). Rule refers to the pattern of a political society (Onuf, 1989: 196). The three basic types of rule identified by Onuf include hegemony, hierarchy, and heteronomy (Kubalkova, 2001: 66). By taking this approach, this paper attempts to offer an alternative perspective to explaining why there have been constant arguments and disputes over China's "peaceful development" discourse between China and the West. "The West" here has both geographical and cultural-bounded references. Specifically, the US and some major European countries are included as they established the "China Threat" and "China's Responsibilities" discourse frameworks. However, due to the limited range of the paper, most of the selected discourse samples from the western side are from the US.

This paper is largely methodologically driven. It adopts a synthesis of rule-oriented constructivist perspective and critical analysis of concrete discourses. The essential analytical tool applied in this paper relies on the correlations of discourse, rules and rule established by Nicolas Onuf (see Tables 1, 2 and 3). Critical analyses of the contradictions within the Chinese and western discourse frameworks are also made, offering further explanations of the two sides' lack of mutual trust on China's "peaceful development" policy. Specifically, discourse samples are selected and the lexical and semantic features in the sample discourses signifying a certain discourse pattern, namely commissive, directive or assertive discourse, are identified and the types of rules and rule they generate will be pointed out.

This paper consists of two sections. This first is an introduction of the theoretical and methodological framework used. The second, or the body of analysis, is divided into two parts: the western discourse and the Chinese discourse. As regards the western side, a discussion of the intrinsic patterns of its political discourse, rules and rule will be discussed firstly. Then the construction process of its discourse frameworks on the rise of China, namely “China Threat” and “China’s Responsibilities” will be presented. This is followed by an investigation of the types of rules and rule generated by the discourse frameworks. Finally, the patterns of rules and rule will be compared with the intrinsic political discourse and rule patterns of the western society so that the disjunctions can be identified. As regards the Chinese side, the procedure is similar. Intrinsic patterns of discourse, rules and rule in Chinese politics will be compared to those found in the “peaceful development” discourse so that disjunctions can be found.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Rule-oriented constructivism, as termed by Burch (Kubalkova, 2001: 10), is a branch of constructivism initiated by Nicholas Onuf and developed by the Miami International Relations Group (Kubalkova, et al., 1998: x-ix). This theoretical approach takes people instead of states as agents (Xiao, 2004: 239). People are seen as the initial constructors of social rules, mechanisms and national identities. Agents and structure, people and the social world, are in a perpetual process of mutual construction (Kubalkova, 2001: 58-62). The main assumptions of rule-oriented constructivism include the “intersubjective co-constitution of social reality”, the ontological status of speech acts and their constituting forces, “the crucial role of rules and rule in social construction process” and “cultural implication of constructivist approach” (Xiao, 2004: 24). The major arguments distinguishing rule-oriented constructivism from positivism, Marxism and other versions of moderate constructivism include “saying is doing”, “rules make rule”, and “rules put resources into play” (Kubalkova, et al., 1998: xi).

Speech Acts

Unlike realist, liberalist, and Marxist approaches, rule-oriented constructivists regard language as having an ontological status. They recognize a duality between the discourse and the realities. Onuf regards speaking as an activity with purpose and holds that “language makes things (including ourselves as agents) what they are by making the world (any world of social relations)

what it is” (Onuf, 2001: 77). In other words, languages are human actions which can evolve into rules. Rules generate rule, leading to a certain political paradigm of a society (Sun, 2006: 189). Rule-oriented constructivists categorize speech acts into three patterns. Each type of speech act has its way of shaping the realities. The following table is adapted from Kubalkova’s presentation of the three types of speech acts, their forms and effects.

Table 1. Patterns of Speech Acts¹

<i>Patterns of Speech Acts/Discourse</i>	<i>What is it</i>	<i>Typical Sentence Structure</i>
assertive	<i>Stating beliefs which the speaker wants the listener to accept or obey</i>	X counts as Y
directives	<i>Expressing intentions which the speaker hopes the listener will act in accordance with</i>	X person must do Y
commissive	<i>Making promises which have consequences if accepted by the listener</i>	I state I will do Y

The table is originally based on selected contents in the “Constructivist Synoptic Table” (Kubalkova, 2001: 67-69) with some of the author’s own wordings adopted – this is indicated by the use of *Italics*.

In the analysis section of this paper, the term discourse is used instead of speech acts when a series of speech acts on the same topic is referred to. Discourse in this paper means written texts and spoken words related to China’s “peaceful development” that have been produced by China and the Western countries, primarily the US.

Rules and Rule

The concept of “Rules” is essential to the understanding of Rule-oriented Constructivism. Rules refer to social rules instead of logic, laws or principles of nature (Onuf, 1989: 79). Onuf puts forward the concept of “rules” to link individuals to each other and people with the material world. Social structures and realities are completed through rules (Kubalkova, et al., 1998: x-xi). As social rules are omnipresent in human societies, Onuf denies a fundamental assumption of

mainstream international relations theories: the state of anarchy in the international system (Sun, 2006: 189). For Onuf, anarchy is also formed by sets of rules and is a hybrid of the rule of hegemony, heteronomy and a degree of hierarchy as well (Kubalkova, 2001: 66). Rules should be “stated or stable” instructions or directions which are capable of resulting in or regulating human performances. They are often formed through words such as “I must, must not; may, need not; should, and should not” and the formulation of “rules” can be generalized as “a description of a class of actions” (Max Black cited in Onuf, 1989: 79). In this way, rules are closely connected to discourse. “Rule” is another key concept. It refers to the ruling pattern of a society, or as Onuf puts it, “the paradigm of political society (Onuf, 1989: 196).” Onuf categorizes three types of rule: hegemony, hierarchy, and heteronomy. He correlates them to three types of speech acts and rules as shown in Table 2.

Correlations of Discourse, Rules and Rule

In this section, two tables are presented and explained as the essential analytical tool of the analysis of this paper.

Table 2. Classification and Correlations of Discourse, Rules and Rule²

Speech Acts	Rules	Rule
assertive	instruction-rules	hegemony
directives	directive-rules	hierarchy
commissive	commitment-rules	heteronomy

The table is originally based on the “Constructivist Synoptic Table” (Kubalkova, 2001: 67-69) with selected contents used in this article.

This table presents the categorization and correlations of discourse, rules and rule in rule-oriented constructivism. It shows that assertive discourse usually generates instructive rules and the rule of hegemony. Directive discourse can form directive-rules and the rule of hierarchy. Commissive discourse leads to commitments and the rule of heteronomy.

Table 3 below is adapted from the “rule-oriented synoptic table” in Kobalkova (2001: 69). It provides more detailed features of each type of rules and rule as well as those of the societies which generate them. As the original table is quite extensive, only elements relevant to this paper are presented.

Table 3: A Compact Version of the Constructivist Synoptic Table by Vendulka Kubalkova³

Speech Acts	Assertive	Directives	Commissive
Rules	instruction-rules	directive-rules	commitment-rules
<i>Typical phrases</i>	“I state”, “affirm”, “report”, “attribute”, “dissent”, “declare”	“I ask”, “command”, “demand”, “permit”	“I promise”, “offer”
Rule	Hegemony Ideas and beliefs seem to do the ruling	Hierarchy chain of command	Heteronomy <i>The agents’ roles are defined by the roles of others instead of those of itself.</i>
Cultures/ political systems	premodern <i>societies</i> religions totalitarian/authoritarian <i>nations</i> shame culture	<i>army</i> fear/dread culture	Western capitalist/democratic/liberal state individualism liberal culture commissive culture of capitalism

The table is originally based on selected contents of the “Constructivist Synoptic Table” (Kubalkova, 2001: 67-69) with some of the author’s own wordings adopted – this is indicated by the use of *Italics*.

As the table shows, each type of society has its own correspondent style of discourse, rules and rule. Premodern, authoritarian and totalitarian societies feature assertive discourse, instructive rules and the rule of hegemony. Warrior-type societies often have directive discourse and rules, and the rule of hierarchy. Western capitalized societies are usually dominated by commissive

discourse and rules and the rule of heteronomy (Kubalkova, 2001: 69). The following analysis largely relies on the correspondent relations shown in the three tables above.

Western Discourse: “China Threat” and “China’s Responsibilities”

This section investigates the patterns of discourse, rules and rule formulated in both the general western political discourse and their discourse on China’s “peaceful development”. Disjunctions and clashes of the rules and rule in this construction process are identified.

Intrinsic Rules and Rule of the West: Commissive Heteronomy

According to Onuf, the rule of “contemporary” international relations was “pervasively heteronomous” (Onuf, 1989: 282). The period he refers to is the 1980s when the dominant rule in the relationship of the two super powers, the Soviet Union and the US, was one of heteronomy, which means that the roles of the two countries were largely affected and determined by each other (Onuf, 1989: 282). The rule in international relations today still falls within the range of heteronomy in which “the agents’ roles are defined by roles of others” (see Table 3). The difference is that the current world is a world of multi-polarization. The US is now in a heteronomous relationship with multiple powers including the EU, Japan, and the BRICS countries. Each power is influenced and balanced by others. No one can really escape from this heteronomous rule. Based on Table 2, the correlate discourse and rules to the rule of heteronomy is commissive speech acts and commissive-rules. The main forms for this type of society are associations (see Table 3). This can be better understood when we think of international organizations. Take United Nations for example. The corresponding social objective of this kind of society is wealth and political practice, primarily focused on “rights”. The discourse pattern is largely commissive. Its members have to make pledges and commitments so that countries can reach consensus on issues.

Heteronomy is not, however, isolated from hegemony or hierarchy. Heteronomy, according to Onuf, “implies a dominance of internal comparison, with asymmetries in the resources available to free choosers yielding a stable pattern of asymmetric outcomes subject to hegemonial support” (Onuf, 1989: 282). Countries in the world are in a process of invisible competition. Asymmetrical relations exist between dominating countries and dominated countries. Therefore heteronomy also contains the rule of hegemony. What can be deduced then

is that even in heteronomous relations, the agents can resort to directive or even assertive speech acts when they want to rule the weaker agents.

“China Threat” Discourse: An Assertive Hegemony

In the beginning of the 21st century, a number of “theories” arose in the West claiming that China would be a threat to the rest of the world as a socialist country with growing economic and military capabilities. Among these countries, the US took the lead. In 1992, Munro Ross H. declared that, “the real danger in Asia is from China” as China is a hybrid of “Leninist Politics”, “Capitalist Economics”, “Mercantilist Trade Policy” and “Expansionist” military policies (Munro, 1992: 10). Huntington, in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993) and *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), holds that future clashes between nations will be clashes of civilizations instead of wars and clashes of economies (Huntington, 1993: 22). He argues that China’s economic growth increases the chances of China to seek “traditional hegemony” in East Asia (Huntington , 1996: 218). Bernstein & Munro declared that China and the US will be rivals and that China, being disrespectful to the international order, will threaten the US (Bernstein & Munro, 1997). In 2005, Kagan argued that “The Chinese leadership may already believe the United States is its enemy (...) The United States may not be able to avoid a policy of containing China; we are, in fact, already doing so” (Kagan, 2005). These remarks are all similar in particular ways: China takes the US as an enemy and the US has to contain or rebalance China as a way of protecting itself.

The assertive discourse refers to the statements of a belief which the speaker wants the listener to accept (see Table 1). In the case of the “China Threat” discourse, the speaker is trying to make others believe that “China is a threat”. This “China as a threat” statement is consistent with the “X counts as Y” pattern which is a typical form of the assertive discourse (see Table 1). One thing worth mentioning is that assertive discourse does not necessarily equal completely groundless sayings. The term “assertive” in the context of rule-oriented theory primarily refers to the manners and logics of expression. Assertive discourse generates instructive rules. By saying China is a threatening emerging country, the speaker is trying to make the listener aware of the “threats” of China and then adopt methods to curb China’s rise.

According to Onuf’s theory, the Western capitalist countries should originally fall into the realm of commissive discourse producers since they share a “commissive culture of capitalism”

(see Table 3). However, when the US repeatedly states that China tends to regard the US as an enemy, the directive rules are formed through the discourse which defines China as a rival, or an enemy of the US. From this point of view, a threatening China cannot be the result of China's actions but rather a constructed role defined by the US.

What makes the speaker switch from the commissive discourse pattern to an assertive one? One of the causes of this pattern switch is external stimulation. In other words, a speaker may give up the original discourse pattern he or she usually applied and takes another discourse pattern as a result of their stress reaction. The rapid and all-round development of China has made the US and other Western countries feel anxious and stressed. This external stimulation of China's rise has put the US on alert so that the US changes its discourse pattern to an assertive one which indicates a more or less hegemonic state of mind. The instant reaction of the speaker here is to express fear, call the other's attention to the potential rivals and try to contain the new power. This is a case where a capitalist country which usually takes the rule of heteronomy and the commissive discourse pattern switched to an assertive discourse pattern with the rule of hegemony under external pressures.

"China's Responsibilities" Discourse: A Directive Pitfall

Although the Chinese government has put forward the concept of "peaceful rise" as a response to this way of thinking which will be illustrated later, the skepticism and doubts on China have not stopped. It was upgraded into another discourse framework, the "China's Responsibilities" discourse as presented in the following section.

In 2005, Robert B. Zoellick, former US Deputy Secretary, applied the term "a responsible stakeholder" to describe China's role in international relations. In his speech entitled "Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?" he said, "It is time to take our policy beyond opening doors to China's membership into the international system: We need to urge China to become a responsible stakeholder [underline added] in that system" (Zoellick, 2005). In the 2006 US National Security Strategy, the role of China as a "responsible stake holder" was officially set (The White House, 2006). In the 2006 report of Princeton Project on National Security, which epitomizes the essential ideas of US political elites, it was once more emphasized that:

The rise of China is one of the seminal events of the early 21st century. America's goal should not be to block or contain China, but rather to help it achieve its

legitimate ambitions within the current international order and to become a responsible stakeholder [underline added] in Asian and international politics. (Ikenberry & Slaughter, 2006: 9)

Since then, the “China’s Responsibilities” discourse took the place of the “China Threat” discourse and became the main discourse framework of the West on the role of China. However, this seemingly rational, moral-bounded term upset China since China perceives it as another burden on its already heavily-burdened shoulders. Lofty and just as it seems, “China’s Responsibilities” is a political discourse framework constructed out of political purposes which reflects the US intention to balance the power of China. The “China’s Responsibilities” discourse is in nature similar to “China Threat”. It also aims at curbing China’s development. While “China Threat” discourse is straight forward, the “China’s Responsibilities” seeks to reach the goal in disguise by putting extra burdens on China’s not-yet-strong enough shoulders. The “China’s Responsibilities” discourse is a pitfall, trapping China in a dilemma of moral responsibility and practicalities. On one hand, China is a country with a population of 1.3 billion and a comparatively low GDP per capita. It therefore does not have the capability to shoulder as much global responsibilities as expected by the West. On the other hand, if China argues back and refuses to play the role of “responsible stakeholder”, its reputation will be undermined and the rest of the world will condemn China.

The discourse of “China’s Responsibilities” deviates from the commissive discourse pattern which is intrinsic for Western capitalist countries. This discourse framework is largely directive. Based on Table 1, directive speech acts refer to the speech acts in which the speaker presents intentions which he hopes the hearer will perform. The directive discourse often takes the grammatical form of “X person must do Y”. Words bearing directive implications include “I ask”, “command”, “demand”, “caution” and “permit” (see Table 3). The rule generated through directive discourse is hierarchy. Countries involved in this type of rule fall within a “train of command” (see Table 3).

The term “Directive Pitfall” is therefore used to illustrate the underlying purposes of the “China’s Responsibilities” discourse. By giving China commands and directions, the US has created the rule of hierarchy between China and itself. It makes the US the supervisor and China a supervisee. A look at the discourse interactions in Sino-US relations may better illustrate how

this Directive Pitfall works. China has in fact always been in a passive position in dialogues with the US. The US discourses follow the pattern of “China should”. The following examples may illustrate the directive nature of the discourse of China’s Responsibilities. In Zoellick’s speech in 2005, the directive features of speech acts have been more evident. A lot of his sentences are just in the form of “X must do Y” (see Table 1).

As China becomes a global player, it must [underline added] act as a responsible stakeholder that fulfills its obligations and works with the United States and others (...). (The White House, 2006: 41)

China needs [underline added] to recognize how its actions are perceived by others (...) China should [underline added] work with the United States and others to develop diverse sources of energy (...). (Zoellick, 2005: para. 22, line 1)

These are examples of explicit directive discourse demanding China to shoulder more responsibilities. While joining the international system and cooperating with other countries also benefits China, the US seems to have forgotten that China is not yet as developed as Western capitalist countries. China still has its own domestic issues to address. Poverty, corruption, and environmental pollution are all problems which will be more harmful to the world if proper actions are not taken. In Zoellick’s speech there are other types of directives. Some of them take the negative linguistic form of “X mustn’t/ should not do Y” as in the following sentence:

a responsible major global player⁴ [underline added] shouldn’t tolerate rampant theft of intellectual property and counterfeiting (...). (Zoellick, 2005: para. 27, line 1)

In fact “X shouldn’t do Y” has a stronger directive effect than “X should do Y” pattern since “should do” could be understood as strong suggestions but “shouldn’t do” is definitely a prohibition. Of course in this case intellectual property rights should not be violated and this is a problem China needs to fix, the emphasis here is that this “shouldn’t” pattern also indicates the strong hegemonic role of the US in the asymmetrical Sino-US relations. There are also examples of implicit directives such as in the following sentences:

China has a responsibility [underline added] to strengthen the international system that has enabled its success. (Zoellick, 2005: para. 10, line 1)

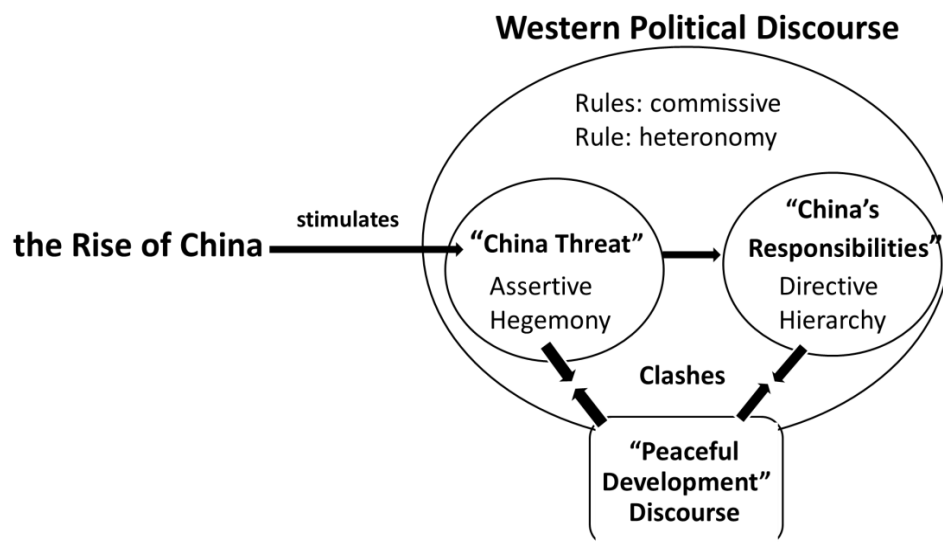
From China's perspective, it would seem that its national interest would be much better [underline added] served by working with us to shape the future international system. (Zoellick, 2005: para. 12, line 1)

In the first sentence, "has a responsibility" means "should" in nature. But the word responsibility makes the sentence sound more morally correct and persuasive. After all, western culture is predominantly a "guilt culture, sense of responsibility" as observed by Onuf (see Table 3). The directive rhetoric is more subtle in the second sentence. By saying that "its national interest would be much better..." he is actually saying that if China does not cooperate with the US, China will surely be in an unfavorable situation. This can even be perceived as a threat, though not an apparent one. Only the stronger party in asymmetrical relations can make these kinds of utterances.

While the assertiveness of the "China Threat" discourse is the result of unconscious US stress reactions, the discourse of "China's Responsibilities" can be termed as a "directive pitfall" which puts China in a dilemma. If China promises to accept the responsibilities, it is likely that China will fail to keep the promises since its national capability prevents it from acting like a mature developed country. On the other hand, if China refuses to accept the responsibilities, China's image and reputation will be affected negatively. The "directive pitfall" and asymmetrical relations between China and the West impair the reorganization of "peaceful development" in the West. The goal of the US and some of the other Western countries constructing the "China's Responsibilities" discourse is to let China be self-contradicted and pressured. This adds up to the tensions between China and the West, leading to the lack of trust on China's "peaceful development" discourse.

The above analysis reveals the nature of the discourse and correlated rules and ruling patterns of "China Threat" and "China's Responsibilities". The following graph shows the differences between the identified patterns of discourse, rules and rule of the western discourse on the rise of China and the intrinsic patterns of those of the western political discourse in general.

Table 5. Clashes of rules and rule in western discourse on China’s Peaceful Development



It has been argued that “China Threat” is discursively assertive which generates instructive rules and the rule of hegemony. The rules are also a result of western logics on the development path of a nation in which pre-modern societies develop into capitalist countries through modernization, and the “rise” of a country always brings wars and violence. The generated instructive rules and the hegemonic rule of the West prevent China’s “peaceful development” from being accepted. The judging and aggressive tones of assertive discourse make equal dialogue between China and the West hard to achieve. Meanwhile, “China’s Responsibilities” discourse is an upgraded version of “China Threat”. It generates directive rules and the ruling pattern of hierarchy, trapping China in the “chain of command” (see Table 3) made by the US-led Western world.

Chinese Discourse: from “Peaceful Rise” to “Peaceful Development”

This section reviews the construction process, and provides a critical analysis of China’s internal discourse framework. “Peaceful rise” is a concept firstly introduced by Zheng Bijian, former Vice Principal of the Central Party School and a top-rank think tank of Chinese government in 2003 (Zheng, 2003: 13-17). The term was later recognized and applied by Chinese officials and turned

into a national principle defining China's foreign policies (*Xinhua News*, 2004). However the application of the term "Peaceful Rise" by the Chinese government did not manage to reduce the concerns regarding the "China Threat" way of thinking. The term "rise" unexpectedly caused intensive fears and skepticisms due to the terms' association with the rise of Germany and Japan (*The Economist*, 2004). At the 2004 Bo'ao Forum, former Secretary General Hu Jintao applied the term "peaceful development" instead of "Peaceful Rise" (Hu, 2004). In 2005, the State Council issued a white paper on "China's Peaceful Development Road" in which the term "peaceful development" was officially settled (Information Office of the State Council, 2005). In 2011, a white paper on "China's Peaceful Development" was issued (Information Office of the State Council, 2010) and since then the term "Peaceful Rise" vanished from official discourse but was still adopted on official occasions. In March 2013, Secretary General Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang confirmed on different occasions that China will stick to the policy of "peaceful development" (*Xinhua News*, 2013). Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi also confirmed that China will stick to the path of peaceful development in his speech at the 68th UN General Assembly in 2013 (*Xinhua News*, 2013). It is apparent that China's "peaceful development" will continue to define China's strategy under the new leadership generation.

Intrinsic Rules and Rule in Chinese Political Discourse

China's domestic political discourse in general is deeply influenced by the remains of China's socialist revolution period (1949-1978). It contains elements from the Soviet style socialist speech acts due to historical reasons. Although these features are not common in everyday languages, their traces remain in the country's political discourse. Many Chinese political discourses are related to revolutions or the military. Words such as "fight" (Dou Zheng), "hold high the banners" (Gao Ju Qi Zhi), "march forward" (Qian Jin) can often be seen in political speeches and documents. The traditional style of China's political discourse contains a lot high flowing, flowery descriptions as well as meaningless political cliché. The following example is from a speech made by former Secretary General Hu Jintao in 2004:

China will follow a peaceful development path holding high the banners of peace, development and cooperation [underline added], join the other Asian countries in bringing about Asian rejuvenation, and making greater contribution to the lofty cause [underline added] of peace and development in the world. (Hu, 2004)

In this sample, “holding high the banners” actually means “advocate” or “adhere to”. This is a typical “socialist” refrain in political discourse influenced by Soviet Union-style political discourse. It is hard for the West to understand and appreciate without a Chinese political-cultural background. “The lofty cause” also sounds high flowing and redundant. It is meaningless and unnecessary to point out this cause as being “lofty”. This phenomenon in Chinese political discourse is also influenced by the fact that Chinese media was once a pure manifestation of political ideologies under strict constraints in the early years when People’s Republic of China was founded. Back then the media news was all about the leader’s speeches which contained a large amount of assertive expressions (Ran, 2009: 710-715).

According to Onuf, the discourse type of authoritarians and totalitarians are in general assertive. This brings a problem for the classification of Chinese discourse and rules since China can be viewed as a hybrid of a socialist political system with capitalist economic features. However, the Chinese discourse pattern within and outside of China is quite different. The rule within Chinese society is also different from that of China in the international arena. Within Chinese society, the political discourse pattern is a hybrid of assertive, directive and commissive discourse. The predominant type is, with social historical influences, assertive. Therefore, the rules within China are mostly instructive-rules and the rule of Chinese society is top-down. The Chinese political leaders and elites have a big say in making foreign policies. For a long period after the founding of PRC, China’s political discourse was largely assertive. A typical example is the “Two Whatevers” policy initiated by Hua Guofeng, who was designated leader of the Communist Party of China by Chairman Mao. The policy advocated that “China should uphold whatever [underline added] policies Mao Zedong has adopted and abide by whatever instructions the late chairman has given” (CRIENGLISH.com, 2008).

The assertiveness of China’s political discourse and the instructive-rules are the outcomes of China’s historical experiences and political system. The new generation of Chinese leaders is trying to bring freshness to China’s stiff political discourse. Xi Jinping, the current General Secretary of CPC, is trying to turn to a fresh, easy-going discourse style (Renmin Wang [People.com], 2013). When the new leaders greeted the public for the first time after the election, his words “Sorry for keeping you waiting” broke the solemn atmosphere of the meeting (Renmin Wang [People.com], 2013). In his speech at the Bo’ao Forum in 2013, he used a lot of metaphors,

making the speech easily understood. Sentences such as “Peace, like air and sunshine, is hardly noticed when people are benefiting from it” and “a single flower does not make spring, while one hundred flowers in full blossom bring spring to the garden” are metaphoric, vivid and easy to understand (Xi, 2013). It seems that the political discourse pattern in China is experiencing a reform as China more actively integrates into the global system. How far this reform can go, however, is still a question.

The problem with assertive discourse and instructive-rules is that they do not pertain to the discourse and rules accepted in the western-led international arena. The West and international arena share the commissive discourse pattern, which, according to Onuf, is the inherent discourse pattern of capitalist countries as a result of their culture and religion. Therefore the traditional assertiveness of China’s discourse has led to a poor foundation for the communication between China and the West. This also leads to the contradictions between China’s discourse in domestic and international contexts which will be further elaborated upon in the next section.

Peaceful Rise/Development: A Commissive Trap

China’s market economy in many ways resembles capitalist societies. This resemblance has extended to the country’s discourse and rules in its foreign relations. Contrary to China’s domestic political discourse, the “peaceful development” discourse contains a lot of promises and pledges and is primarily commissive. One may think that by applying the same discourse pattern within the international arena China can make its voice better received. However the negative effects of making promises is also neglected. By applying this type of discourse, China puts itself in a “commissive trap”. A “commissive trap” is another term innovated in this paper based on Onuf’s theory. According to Onuf’s theory, commissive discourse refers to the speaker’s commitments to “a course of action, promise/offer” and “if hearer accepts the speaker is stuck” (see Table 3). Commissive discourse is correspondent to commissive rules and the rule of heteronomy (see Table 3). This means that by promising and pledging, one is actually handing over to the listeners the rights to judge. Once the promises are made, one needs to fulfill them. To what degree they are fulfilled depends on the judgments of the listeners and readers instead of the speaker. The “commissive trap” puts the agents in the rule of heteronomy. China is not a capitalist country in the fullest sense of the word, so its application of commissive discourse is

not natural. It is a superficial commissive discourse which does help in building trust between China and the West. China's promises expose China to the judgments of the West.

The following examples show how this “commissive trap” worked. In some cases the commissive words are explicit in the “peaceful development” discourse, for example:

Here I'd like to point out: It's the destined mission [underline added] for the Chinese Communist Party to adhere to and unswervingly follow this new path [of peaceful development]. (Zheng, 2005: 18)

This statement was presented by Zheng Bijian in his speech entitled “New Path for China's Peaceful Rise and the Future of Asia” at the Bo'ao Forum for Asia in November, 2003. The underlined “the destined mission” is a phrase with strong commissive implications. The rule it generates is that the adherence of the path of peaceful development is a destiny, a mission of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and the rest of the world has the right to judge whether China fulfills its mission or not. In this way China puts itself in the rule of heteronomy and the rest of the world can judge whether China is an honest, promise-keeping country or a hypocritical liar. In the 2010 white paper on China's Peaceful Development, similar promises scatter throughout the text. For example:

China has declared to the rest of the world [underline added] on many occasions that it takes a path of peaceful development and is committed to upholding world peace (...) China declared solemnly again [underline added] to the world that peaceful development is a strategic choice made by China to realize modernization (...). (Information Office of the State Council, 2011)

By this declaration China exposes itself to the judgments of the rest of the world of which the supreme judge is the US—the country who currently owns the biggest discourse power. The new generation of Chinese leaders' discourse about “peaceful development” has not deviated from the previous commissive style. Chinese secretary general Xi Jinping said in a speech in January 2013:

We will [underline added] stick to the road of peaceful development, but will never give up our legitimate rights and will never [underline added] sacrifice our national core interests. (*Xinhua News*, 2013)

China will never [underline added] pursue development at the cost of sacrificing another country's interests. We will never [underline added] benefit ourselves at others' expense or do harm to any neighbor. (*Xinhua News*, 2013)

In March he said in an interview to the reporters of the BRICS countries that:

The Chinese government has made the promise [underline added] to the international community several times that China will stick to [underline added] the path of peaceful development, never [underline added] seek hegemony and never pursue military expansion. A word spoken is an arrow let fly [underline added]. (CRIENGLISH.com, 2013)

The underlined expressions indicate that the discourse of Xi's generation is not likely to escape from the "commissive trap" set by China itself. Rather, it seems that the promises are even more firm. These two examples of discourse are also consistent with the commissive speech act categorized by Onuf and Kubalkova. Based on Kubalkova's synoptic table of rule-oriented constructivism, the commissive speech acts are in the pattern of "I state I will do Y" and if hearer accepts the saying then the speaker is stuck (see Table 3). By saying that "China will..." and "will never..." China is once again stuck in the commissive trap. This is not saying that it is wrong to make promises, since it is understandable that China is eager to explain itself and to erase the fears and negative comments from the rest of the world about China's rise. But by continuously using the commissive speech acts, the rule of heteronomy is formed, thus putting China in an inferior position, more or less like a criminal who is subject to the judgments and accusations of others in its foreign relations with other countries.

China's defensive and commissive discourse is under judgmental pressure of the strong and directive discourse of the US. China has not yet developed to a stage at which it can apply commissive discourse in the full sense. The "peaceful development" discourse is only commissive in a linguistic sense, but behind the discourse is the assertive pattern of the general political discourse in China. This disjunction reduces the reliability of the "peaceful development" discourse. The West would not really accept the discourse of a socialist country with authoritarian rule only because it is making promises. After all, a commissive discourse pattern is a feature of democratic, capitalist countries and it requires the underlying support of western culture, according to Onuf's theory. Although every country can make promises, it is not

like every country has the capability to adopt a commissive discourse pattern with their promises taken seriously since this would require a shared culture and social backgrounds.

Conclusion

Significant disjunctions exist in the discourse patterns applied by China and the West on China's "peaceful development". Hidden behind these disjunctions are the mismatched rules and rule generated by China and the West. While the general western discourse and the rules are commissive within the ruling pattern of heteronomy, the West's discourse towards the rise of China, as exemplified by "China Threat" and "China's Responsibilities", switches to assertive and directive patterns, respectively. The "China Threat" discourse generates instructive rules and the rule of hegemony. This is, as stated in this paper, an assertive stress reaction of the West to the emergence of China. The "China's Responsibilities" discourse is a "directive pitfall", putting China into a dilemma. It generates directive rules and the rule of hierarchy, positions China in an inferior position and leads to an asymmetrical dialogue.

A disjunction between China's domestic discourse style and its discourse type in foreign diplomacy has also been identified. China's domestic political discourse is predominantly assertive. The "peaceful development" discourse, however, is largely commissive. This incoherence in discourse patterns leads to the low receptiveness of "peaceful development" in the West. "Peaceful development" itself is a "commissive trap", letting China's role be defined by others and makes China vulnerable to the judgments of the West. These discrepancies in the discourse pattern, rules and rule taken by China and the West have led to a situation where the two parties talk past each other, reaching different conclusions and thereafter distinct actions when responding to China's "peaceful development" discourse.

Notes

¹ The "Constructivist Synoptic Table" made by Vendulka Kubalkova (Kubalkova, 2001: 66-69) is based on Onuf's synoptic table of paradigms of experience and faculties (Onuf, 1989: 290).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Here refers to China

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