

China's "New Type of Great Power Relations": A G2 with Chinese Characteristics?

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Abstract

The rise of China has been reshaping how China sees its own role in the world. China has become increasingly willing to move from being a norm and system taker to a norm and system shaper (if not yet maker). One example is Xi Jinping's promotion of "a new type of great power relations" designed to create a strategic space in which to operate. By using content analysis, we analyze 141 Chinese articles titled with "new type of great power relations". We find that although Chinese analysts and policy makers rejected the idea of G2 in 2009, the mainstream discourse has rapidly shifted to what we call a "G2 with Chinese characteristics" which indicates a fundamental shift in Chinese evaluation of the power status of itself and others. While some Chinese scholars consider China to already have achieved the status as the world's "No.2" or even a superpower, the mainstream discourse views China as both a great power **AND** a rising power at the same time. This, we argue, moderates the expectations of what China can and should do to resolve global problems despite its great power status.

Introduction

When the idea of a G2 was first floated in the wake of the global financial crisis, it was met with considerable suspicion – and occasionally outright opposition – in China. In essence, there was a feeling that China was being expected to do things on a global scale that a country of China's level of development neither had the ability nor the responsibility to undertake. It was being "flattered" into prematurely taking on the provision of global public goods by being treated as a near competitor by the US. In response, sceptical Chinese analysts and officials argued that even though China had (at the time) the world's second largest economy, "large" was not the same thing as "rich" (let alone powerful). In per capita terms China was still a relatively poor country with around 150 million people living in poverty, and thus should be expected to behave on the global scene accordingly as a developing and/or emerging power.¹ This was compounded by a suspicion that countries in the West were in some ways trying to put the blame for the financial crisis on global imbalances (and thus countries like China) rather than undertaking painful structural financial reform themselves.² Why should China have to take on increased burdens in solving global

¹ Liu, Liping (2011) "China can hardly Rule the World", *Contemporary International Relations*, (1).

² Wei, Zonglei and Fu, Yu (2011) "China's Search for an Innovative Foreign Strategy", *Contemporary International Relations*, 21 (3) May/June 2011.

problems that were not of its making, instead of focusing its (more limited than appeared at first sight) resources on dealing with its own domestic development challenges?³

Moreover, the idea of forming a special alliance with the pre-existing superpower sat uneasily with Chinese analyses of (and hopes for) the changing nature of the global order. A combination of the decline in US power, the rise (though not to be exaggerated) of new powers, and the spread of a type of globalisation that undermined the authority of states to control economic activity meant that the world was entering a new era.⁴ As the then Premier Wen Jiabao put it in rejecting the G2 concept

“some say that world affairs will be managed solely by China and the United States. I think that view is baseless and wrong...It is impossible for a couple of countries or a group of big powers to resolve all global issues. Multipolarization and multilateralism represent the larger trend and the will of people.”⁵

Scroll forward four years and a very different understanding of China’s global power status (and relationship with the US) was evident when Xi Jinping proposed to establish a “new type of great power relations” (*xinxing daguo guanxi*) between the US and China during his trip to Washington in 2012. Xi Jinping subsequently reiterated the concept during high level meetings between the US and China. For example, during his meeting with Thomas Donilon, National Security Advisor to the U.S. President, Xi said that:

“Both sides should, from the fundamental interest of the people of the two countries and of the world, join the efforts to build up China-U.S. cooperative partnership, trying to find a completely new way for the **new type of great power relations**, which would be unprecedented in history and open up the future” (emphasis added).⁶

This new relationship was partly intended to provide a basis for solving bilateral problems between China and the USA – but from a *more* symmetrical position than before. To be sure, in the majority of China’s eyes, the US remains the predominant global power, and will continue to do so for some time to come. But this is now a relationship between two Great Powers rather than between one great power and one developing economy. It was also partly a signal of an acceptance that China has a special role and duty as a great power to work with other Great Powers/the US to solve global problems. Here it is perhaps worth noting that Xi’s Washington visit took place prior to the 2012 G8 meeting – a meeting which in 2012 was hosted by the US, and to which China was not invited.⁷ So perhaps the timing of Xi’s overture to Obama had something to do with reminding Washington of the new realities of global power configurations and the utility (or lack of it) of trying to solve global problems without China’s active participation.

³ Chen, Zhimin, "International Responsibility and China’s Foreign Policy," in *China’s Shift: Global Strategy of the Rising Power*, ed. Masafumi Iida (Tokyo: The National Institute for Defense Studies, 2009):26

⁴ For a representative example see Cui, Liru, "quanqiuhua shidai yu duojihua shijie (the Globalisation Era and the Multipolar World)," *xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)* 30th Anniversary commemorative issue (2010).

⁵Xinhua News, Chinese premier rejects allegation of China, U.S. monopolizing world affairs in future, available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/21/content_11409799.htm accessed on 27 June 2015 (2009)

⁶ People’s Daily, Xi Jinping huijian meiguo zongtong guojia anquan shiwu zhuli duonilun (Xi Jinping met National Security Advisor to the U.S. President Thomas Donilon), see http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2013-05/28/nw.D110000renmrb_20130528_4-01.htm accessed on 15 June 2015 (2013)

⁷ Non G8 members are normally invited to the summit to discuss issues that they have a stake in, but in 2012, no additional country representatives were invited at all.

Whilst not so apparent in 2012, as more time has passed, it has become clear that under Xi Jinping, China has abandoned its strategy of “keeping a low profile” and is instead proactively striving to establish “a favorable (global) environment for China’s national rejuvenation”.⁸ This is in part based on a re-assessment of what is often referred to in China as its comprehensive national strength relative to the strength of others, and the increasingly wide-spread belief that whilst China cannot challenge the US as the world’s predominant power just yet (or indeed, for some time to come), it has already attained “Great Power” status, and now has a strategic opportunity period in which to exercise this great power to serve Chinese interests. The strategic opportunity period was initially typically described as the first decade of the twenty first century. However, as we have moved into the second decade, some argue that the moment of opportunity is still there, but China must act quickly as the US is trying to create a new Washington-based global governance structure antithetical to Chinese interests – for example, through the creation of the Trans Pacific Partnership.⁹ And whilst China is only one of a number of rising powers that are increasingly prepared to challenge the legitimacy of the existing global order, the increasingly dominant position sees China as at least first amongst equals, and in many cases, as the global Number Two.

While the idea of China as Great Power is widely accepted within China, once you dig a little and try to discover what being a Great Power actually means (or put another way, what you need to be defined as a Great Power), then broad consensus is replaced by ambiguity and uncertainty. And it is exactly this lack of clarity that is the focus of this paper.¹⁰ By analysing 141 Chinese language articles, we open domestic “insider” debates - over the nature of China’s international identity, the nature of Chinese power, and the nature of the global order – to a wider non-Chinese-speaking community. As already noted, while some Chinese scholars even consider China to already have achieved the status as the world’s “No.2” or even a superpower, the mainstream discourse views China as *both* a Great Power and rising power at the same time. And it is this double identity (or perhaps identity confusion) that makes it hard to pin down what exactly is at the heart of a great power relationship (be it a new one or not). As the boundary between great power and non-great power is unclear, this conceptual vagueness has made China’s strategic intentions more difficult to predict.

There is also some disagreement over whether only the US qualifies as the Great Power that China needs to establish a new type of relationship with, or whether it applies to other countries as well (and if so, which ones). But only *some* disagreement – the vast majority of Chinese scholars build their analysis solely around Sino-US relations. As such, we might suggest that the mainstream discourse of this concept is moving towards what we might call a “G2 with Chinese characteristics”. This is a G2 relationship defined *by* and *for* China/Chinese interests on Chinese terms, rather than one established by outsiders to primarily serve the interests of others. In this respect, China can be seen as increasingly playing the role of a norm contestator and perhaps even a norm shaper, rather than just a norm taker.

⁸ Yan, Xuetong, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 2 (2014).

⁹ See, for example, Xu, Jian, “Rethinking China’s Period of Strategic Opportunity”, *China International Studies* March/April 2014 51-70.

¹⁰ We do not explore the origination and evolution of the new type of great power relations concept here – this was the focus of a separate study, please see Jinghan Zeng, Constructing a New Type of Great Power Relations: the State of Debate in China, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, forthcoming

Contextualising the Study: Methods, Theories and Strategic

This paper forms part of a broader study that has its roots in trying to understand how China's changing global role is understood within China itself, and how these debates translate into calls for a change in Chinese policy positions. It is important to say at the outset that this is a diverse debate with numerous different voices and opinions. Of course the nature of the Chinese politics places certain constraints on what can be discussed; it is not easy, for example, to find calls for Taiwanese independence. But as long as China's core interests are respected,¹¹ then there is considerable room for a spread of different views to be articulated about what China's place in the world is today, could be/should be in the future, and the best way of achieving a broadly agreed on national rejuvenation.

Nevertheless, there are some broad areas of consensus that provide a background context to the specific debate around China's great power status and the new type of great power relations.¹² The first is the belief that there really has been a significant shift in the distribution of power in the global order (particularly after the global financial crisis), and China has been one of the major recipients of this power shift. Importantly, this does not mean that China is on the verge of replacing the US as the world's dominant power any time soon, and that any changes China wants to push for will have to take place from within the existing structure of US predominance, which places considerable constraints on what China can achieve and how it can operate. A second emerging consensus is that China (or perhaps more correctly, China's leaders) were not prepared this rapid rise and relative change in power capabilities and are now struggling to learn how best to evaluate, exercise and use its newly found power in ways that lead to real influence and change. Or as Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Fu Ying put it, China "needs time" to "grow into the role as a world citizen".¹³

The third broad consensus is built around a recognition that the current international order has served China rather well since the end of the Cold War, and provided an international environment that has facilitated China's growth and re-emergence as a global power. To be sure, there are concerns about the distribution of power in the current institutions of global governance and some of the norms that underpin them. This is related to the belief that China's voice is not given as much weight as it should be in global politics, and a general but difficult to quantify feeling that China isn't given enough respect by others. What this means is that China is pushing a reform agenda rather than seeking to replace the current global order with a new sinocentric – and reform has to be achieved in ways that don't fracture the existing system and in the process harm China's own self interests. And for many Chinese analysts, this already complicated endeavour will be made more difficult by a perceived US turn away from multilateralism to putative governance institutions like the Trans Pacific Partnership that would once more place China as an outsider as new rules of economic governance are developed.

¹¹ Jinghan Zeng, Yuefan Xiao, and Shaun Breslin, "Securing China's Core Interests: The State of Debate in China," *International Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2015).

¹² The following four paragraphs are informed by discussions with Ren Xiao and Zhao Minghao in November 2015 and we are grateful for their agreement to include them here.

¹³ Fu Ying (2015) "Under the same roof: China's View of World Order", The Huffington Post, 11 November, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/fu-ying/china-global-order_b_8537918.html?utm_hp_ref=world accessed 16 November 2015.

While China may not have what Vice Premier Wang Yang calls “the ability nor the intent to challenge the United States” and overthrow the existing global order,¹⁴ the fourth consensus is that there is now a greater appetite to both assert China’s interests and objectives, and to take action to redress perceived inequities and governance gaps by increasing China’s “institutional voice” (zhiduxing huayuquan).¹⁵ This has in part taken the form of providing new forms of governance through, for example, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the BRICS New Development Bank. While it is too soon to know yet exactly how The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road initiatives will pan out, they are widely seen within China as manifestations of a new proactive China seeking to establish itself as a major global actor.

This proactivity is also seen in the establishment of a wide range of different types of relationships with other states depending on the partners’ levels of development and/or alignment with China on major policy issue areas. The aim is to establish a network of global hub-and-spoke partnerships with China at the centre. Here we can point to the example of a partnership based on a shared dissatisfaction with reform of global governance with the rest of the BRICs. At the same time China has developed a more paternalistic (shared) development partnership with African states as epitomised by the Forum on China Africa Cooperation. And in China’s own neighbourhood, it has built a separate partnership built on shared trade and financial futures with Southeast Asian states (and ASEAN as an organisation), and another set of relationships with neighbours to the north and northwest through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. It also entails building different sorts of relationships with (other) great powers - and this, of course is where the new type of great power relations comes back to the centre of attention.

Methods

In order to study the Chinese discourse of new type of great power relations, we used the term “new type of great power relations” (xinxing daguo guanxi or xinxing de daguo guanxi) to search Chinese academic articles from China’s largest journal database, China National Knowledge Infrastructure. This helped us to identify 141 articles with the term in the title. We then developed a code manual in order to best undertake content analyses of these articles. We divided our data analysis into two: “new type of relations” and “great power”. This article will focus on the “great power” dimension – it builds on a previous paper that has considered the “new type of relations”.¹⁶ In order to validate and contextualise our findings, we conducted two sets of interviews with representative academics in Beijing in April and June 2015, with final adjustments made after further discussions with Chinese academics at the

¹⁴ Wang, Yang, Comments made at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and World Business, December 2014, available at <http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/event/us-china-shared-vision-global-economic-partnership>, accessed 14th January 2015

¹⁵ For details on the evolution of the concept of institutional voice, see the discussion on “expanding China’s role in global governance” on the China Policy website, available at <http://us2.campaign-archive2.com/?u=3fd756a9629015f7becc6e127&id=822399aaaa&e=a045660cf1>, accessed 18 November 2015.

¹⁶ Jinghan Zeng, Constructing a New Type of Great Power Relations: the State of Debate in China, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, forthcoming

Beijing Forum in November 2015. All data including our coding manual, codebook, online-appendix and other replication materials are available online from our research page.¹⁷

This methodological approach allows us to cover a wide range of material, which contrasts with studies that instead choose to focus on the arguments of a small selected number of key participants in the debate.¹⁸ Its main advantage over this more selective method is to provide a comprehensive overview of the breadth of the debate in general and take the temperature of the national debate as a whole, including the voices of those not often heard in analyses of Chinese debates. What it doesn't allow for very easily is to consider which voices are more authoritative and influential – both in the debate itself and in translating the academic debates into actual policy. In terms of the quantitative analysis in the paper, this approach is rather “democratic” as it treats all publications equally irrespective of the weight and importance of either the journal or the author. To adjust for this, our analysis is supported by examples of representative positions and understandings, which draw wherever possible from those writings identified as the most significant by colleagues in China.

China's call for new type of great power relations has an important theoretical context; or more correctly, two theoretical contexts. The first is ours as observers and analysts of Chinese debates, and shifting Chinese policy. The second is the theoretical context of the debates within China itself. And it is important in a paper like this to point out that the two are not the same. For example, many analysts have argued that realism remains the dominant theoretical approach used in Chinese international relations academia. But identifying a realist predilection does not mean that those analysts are themselves starting from the same realist position; indeed, as they are trying to identify different domestic discourses, it is rather likely that they start from alternative competing positions. In our case, as we are interested in the way that different identities co-exist, how they emerge evolve and change, and how these identities influence the policy arena, then it goes without saying that we do not think that national interests are systemically or otherwise simply “given”. While this specific study only concerns itself with the manifestation of identity politics in the specific form of great power relations, it is built on a wider interest in the way that these identities are formed in the first place. Moreover, we argue that many of the core terms that are associated with international politics and great power relations lack intersubjective meaning – including the term great power itself. We thus need to parse what these terms mean to different people in different settings to ensure that we do not simply impose our meaning and understanding on what others are saying. We are *not* suggesting that the way that academics and policy analysts debate key concepts is the *only* determinant of Chinese foreign policy – far from it. But we do suggest that these debates shed some light onto how China might act in the future.

Although this is primarily a study of academic discourses, there is a close connection between academic research and policy analysis in China, and these debates have important policy implications. The policy community is well represented in our selection of papers with 24.1% articles written by scholars at Chinese state-affiliated think tanks, and 4% written by senior officials. This latter group includes a number of high profile officials including Wang Yi, the minister of foreign affairs, Cui Tiankai, the Chinese ambassador to the US, Yu Hongjun, the vice minister of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) International Department, He Yafei, the Deputy director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the

¹⁷ Please see <https://sites.google.com/site/zengjinghan/data>

¹⁸ Qi Hao, China Debates the New Type of Great Power Relations, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, (2015). Qi Hao's paper also provides an interesting counterpart to this one by focussing on the ways that a new relationship might be realised and the challenges and obstacles that lie in the way.

State Council (and the former vice-minister of foreign affairs), and Ma Zhengang, the former Chinese ambassador to the UK. Moreover, making policy suggestions is a key objective of Chinese academic writings on politics – perhaps even the principal purpose. It is not uncommon for China's leaders to introduce new policy initiatives (or concepts) in a top down manner without the concept being fully fleshed out or understood. Once announced, scholarly debate (noting the blurred lines between academic and policy-based research) gradually and incrementally fills the concept with substance and meaning in a subsequent and incremental manner. The need to do so is sometimes made more urgent by outsiders' attempts to impose their (rather than Chinese) meanings on the concept, as they try to interpret Chinese objectives and intentions in ways that serve others' interests, rather than China's. Thus, to become a system shaper, it is important for Chinese thinkers to develop China's discursive power and ability to define and operationalise core concepts themselves to lay a foundation for articulating Chinese interests and objectives to others.

Which brings us to the theoretical context of the studies within China themselves. There remains some suspicion in China that there is an attempt by some in the west to deliberately misinterpret Chinese intentions. But even when there is no nefarious deliberate attempt to misrepresent China's future, such a misrepresentation can still emerge, so the argument goes, through the use of theories and historical precedents that are simply not appropriate for studying China's rise today. Western theories are just that – Western; they are built on the study of Western (and mostly European) experiences in a very different historical epoch. For those who hold this view, chief amongst these misguided theoretical starting points are power transition understandings built on neorealist assumptions. Here there is a particular focus on the work of John Mearsheimer, who argues that history has shown us that a rising power and the existing hegemon are unlikely to come to peaceful accommodation. The most obvious result of contemporary power shifts is US-China security competition in East Asia, with a great potential for war.¹⁹

Whilst this might sound like a wholly academic endeavour, Chinese leaders have also noted the pessimistic prediction of this theory, and called for a Chinese response. In the words of Xi Jinping,²⁰ “we all to need to work together to avoid the so-called Thucydides trap -- destructive tensions between an emerging power and established powers.” And the initiative of promoting the idea of new type of great power relations is part of the solution to avoiding this Thucydides trap. As the rest of this paper will make clear, while China has not yet explicitly elaborated what new type of great power relations *is*, China does make it very clear on what it *is not*; it is not the old type of great power relations as envisaged by power transition theory, that involves power struggles, conflict, and a zero-sum game.

While the starting point of this Chinese-coined concept might be to disprove power transition theory, we suggest that its implications do not necessarily lead to the optimistic and peaceful future that its originators seem to envisage. As we elaborate below, this concept is underpinned by a shifting Chinese identity – an identity that considers China as deserving of a greater voice and greater respect in global politics. It reflects China's rising expectations on not just its own role in the world, but also how others should respond to and treat China as a great power. However, the extent to which others – and particularly, of course, the US - will accept this position and the Chinese version of G2 remains open for debate. Simply stating

¹⁹ John Mearsheimer, "Can China Rise Peacefully?," *The National Interest* available at <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/can-china-rise-peacefully-10204>, accessed on January 14, 2015 (2014).

²⁰ Xi, Jinping, "A Conversation with President Xi at Big's "Understanding China" Conference," (2014).

that things will be different doesn't necessarily mean that they will be. The key is how others respond, and how they change their own positions (and identities) as China changes its.

The Strategic Importance of Defining “Great Power”

Given that relations with other great power are often described as “the core” of Chinese diplomacy,²¹ understanding the concept of “great power” is the key to deconstructing the real meaning of the “new type of great power relations”. Of course the concept of Great Powers is not new, and has a long academic tradition spanning back to the early nineteenth century and analyses of the changing balance of power in Europe. These historical precedents, and the idea that European experiences are the “cradle” of the study of Great Powers are reflected in the Chinese literature; but only in a limited fashion. The focus here is typically on the Napoleonic Wars as an example of what can happen when a dissatisfied rising great power confronts the established status quo one. However, it is notable that only five of the articles considered these European precedents, and only four discuss more recent non-Chinese theoretical debates by addressing the work of Kenneth Waltz.

So while it may well be the case that current Chinese thinking is *informed* by previous historical experiences and theories, it generally does not specifically *engage* with them in the literature, which instead tends to focus on the specifics of China’s current circumstances. The primary context here is the attempt to establish a discourse that is accepted and shared outside China. The promotion of the idea of China as “great power” as predominantly used by Chinese scholars, implies that China expect the world – and the world is sometimes just a shorthand reference to the US – to recognize China’s status as a great power and treat it as such. For Shi Yinhong, if successful, this would establish a “strategic space” where China can pursue its interests and objectives in a way that is not possible for “normal” (non-Great Power) states.²² But this desire to be seen as a great power is somewhat tempered by a desire not to be expected to take on the burdens associated with global predominance and/or leadership. Hence the need to balance the new understanding of China’s new global status – great but still developing and rising.

There is also a domestic context. This Chinese discourse of great power is strongly related to the (changing) nature of one party rule. Over the past three decades, the CCP has been promoting itself as the only vehicle that can deliver China’s national rejuvenation as one part of its strategy to maintain regime legitimacy.²³ In this discourse, it is only under CCP leadership that China has gradually won back the great power status that it enjoyed before a hostile and rapacious West (combined with corrupt and ineffective pre-CCP leaders) took China into a “century of humiliation”. The brilliant leadership of the party has won hard fought gains, and only the party can maintain China’s new found great power status in the face of hostile Western forces.

But once more we see the need to balance, and the need to temper some of the expectations of what China as a great power can and/or should do. The promotion of the CCP

²¹ Zhao, Kejing and Yin, Xiting, "meiguo zhanlve tiaozheng yu zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi (American Strategic Adjustment and Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations)," *guoji guanxi xueyuan xuebao (Journal of University of International Relations)*, no. 6 (2012):81

²² Shi, Yinhong, "Goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de hongguan de sikao (Macro Thinking of Establishing New Type of Great Power Relations)," *qianxian (Front)* (2014).

²³ Jinghan Zeng, *The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule: Ideology, Legitimacy and Party Cohesion* (Palgrave Macmillan 2015).

as a means to attain national(ist) ends has helped the party win popular support in the short term. The danger is that the popular acceptance of China as a great power (or world power, No.2) might generate high, unrealistic and/or expensive expectations of what China could and should be doing in international affairs. If Chinese diplomacy fails to meet rising expectations, then the leadership and the regime might appear to be ineffective. Thus, China's international identity needs find a balance between promoting the idea of China as a great power on the one hand, and power capabilities and global leadership commitments (international diplomatic reality) on the other hand. Once more, we see an incentive to moderate the "great power" discourse by combining it with "rising power" capabilities and expectations.

The identity of China in world politics

If China needs to establish a new type of great power relations, then it stands to reason that China must already be a great power. But while the idea that China is a great power might be taken as given, what it actually means to be a great power remains contested and debated.²⁴ Some argue that "great power" should be strong power, which can be measured by such factors as population size, range of territory, economic scale, technological potential and military power. Others argue that it should not be decided by those factors but its capacity to make and implement international rules²⁵ or its global political and economic influence more broadly.²⁶ However, the dominant position is not to define the term at all, with very few articles actually providing a clear definition. When it comes to considering China as a great power, this lack of definition is not so important (as long as everybody accepts that it is). But it is important when we switch the focus to identifying other (potential) great powers for China to have a relationship with. For example, according to Pan Wei, a prominent pro-left scholar, a great power is a country with "exceptional strength".²⁷ A consequent question is which countries could be considered as having "exceptional strength"? As we will discussed later, this remains somewhat open to question.

In addition to "great power", the academic discourse of new type of great power relations also includes other identities of China. Figure 1 shows the frequency of China's international identity in the debate. The second most frequently mentioned identity is "rising power" (jueqiguo) and/or "emerging power" (xinxing daguo). Fully 87% of articles consider China to be a rising power. This is quite understandable given that the concept is primarily proposed to manage the potential conflicts with the existing hegemonic power – China might be a great power but not one that is a peer competitor of the United States which will remain the world's predominant power for some time to come. Accordingly, the global responsibilities that fall on China and the USA should reflect this asymmetry in great power statuses. Furthermore, this identity of China as a rising power can be further sub-divided into two: a unique rising power and a universal rising power. The former suggests that China is unique –

²⁴ Niu, Haibin and Song, Qing, "'goujian xinxing daguo guanxi" xuesu yantaohui zongshu (Conference Review Of "Establishing New Type of Great Power Relations")," *Guoji zhanwang (International Review)* 4 (2013); Zheng, Xuefei, "xinxing daguo guanxi goujian yu guoji zhixu zhuanxing' yantaohui zongshu (Conference Review of Establishing New Type of Great Power Relations and Transition of International Order)," *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)* 11 (2013).

²⁵ Zheng, "xinxing daguo guanxi goujian yu guoji zhixu zhuanxing' yantaohui zongshu (Conference Review of Establishing New Type of Great Power Relations and Transition of International Order)."

²⁶ Zhao, Gancheng, "Zhongyin guanxi: xinxing daguo guanxi de qianzhi yu yansheng (China and India: A Corollary to New Great Power Relations)," *Nanya yanjiu (South Asia Studies)* 2 (2014):52

²⁷ Pan, Wei, "Zhengzai jueqi de 'xinxing daguo guanxi'" (the on-Going Rise of New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Xuesu qianyan (Frontiers)* 6 (2013):28

it is THE rising contemporary great power. The latter suggests that China is one of a group of emerging powers as manifest, as one example, in the BRICS. As we shall see in more detail below, this has important consequences for thinking about how China should act, and with what partners, to achieve its aims.

We also find an article that critically evaluates China's position as "emerging power". It is argued that from the perspective of history, the US is still a "young emerging power" and far away from senescence.²⁸ On the contrary, China is more like a "traditional power" instead of "emerging power" because China has just been gradually reviving to its rightful great power status in the history.²⁹ This discourse goes back to the Chinese narrative of history that China had always been a leading power in the history before the humiliations of the 19th century. Thus, in the Chinese discourse, the revival of China is much more appropriate than the rise of China as China is just getting back to the rightful position that it had before.

"World power" (shijie daguo) is the third most mentioned identity (11.34%). To many Chinese scholars, China has always been a world power. However, some also argue that the goal of China's rise is to become a world power, suggesting that it has not become one yet.³⁰ This confusion might simply be explained by the fact that the concept of World Power isn't actually defined in any of the writings, and means different things to different people.

China as No.2 (lao er) is the fourth most frequently mentioned identity (9.21%).³¹ In the Chinese academic discourse, it is widely argued that China is the second most powerful country and the new type of great power relationship is introduced to manage the potential conflicts between No. 1 (i.e. the US) and No.2 (i.e. China). In the relevant discourse, China is considered as No.2 not only in terms of economic size but also "comprehensive national strength". This identity partly matches the identity of "rising power" that China could be both No.2 and a rising power; however, it also explicitly suggests that China is a unique rising power instead of a "normal" rising power within the group of BRICS.

The most controversial identity is perhaps China as "superpower". In the Chinese literature, superpower usually refers to the US and the Soviet Union. In the debate on new type of great power relations, a few (1.42%) consider China as a superpower.³² For example, Jia Qingguo, the dean of school of international studies at Peking University, argues that

"China is a normal great power as well as a superpower..... it has the interests of a normal power and that of a superpower. As these two identities and interests are often

²⁸ Xu, Jian, "Goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de lishi tiaojian yu zhuyao wenti (Historical Conditions and Major Problems of Establishing Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Guoji wenti yanjiu (International Studies)* 2 (2013):19

²⁹ Ibid.:19

³⁰ Yang, Yongfeng, "Daxiyang xianzhang zaixian yingmei lunzhan—pingshu lishi dui zhongmei goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de qishi (the Reflection of Dispute between Great Britain and the U.S. In the Atlantic Charter---Enlightenment on Building the New Sino-US Relationship in the Asia-Pacific Region)," *Taipingyang xuebao (Pacific Journal)* 6 (2014):69

³¹ Notably, in the debate, Chinese scholars use the word "lao er" rather than "shijie di er(the second most powerful)" here. Lao er literally means the second child in the family, but the translation of lao er as no. 2 seems to be more appropriate here.

³² E.g. Wu, Xinbo, "Goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de lujing xuanze (Path Selection in Constructing Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relationship)," *Zhongguo pudong ganbu xueyuan xuebao (Journal of China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong)* 8, no. 2 (2014):38

contradictory or conflicting, it has been increasingly difficult for China to identify its interests and maintain the stability and continuity of its foreign policy.”³³

The view that China as a superpower is no doubt a minority opinion. In the debate, it is widely argued that the US is the only contemporary superpower, suggesting that China is not.

Notably, in the Chinese academic discourse, the above identities are quite vague to some extent. China as No. 2 and superpower are perhaps the least vague identities. In addition, Chinese scholars often add adjective (e.g. developing) before those terms such as developing great power and developing world power. Sometimes, those adjectives will change the meaning of the term. For example, Zhao Gancheng considers India as “a developing great power and emerging power” but not a real “great power”.³⁴ Yu Lei and Shamsul Khan consider China as “emerging superpower” but not the real “superpower”.³⁵ Those adjectives make the use of those identities more complex and vague.

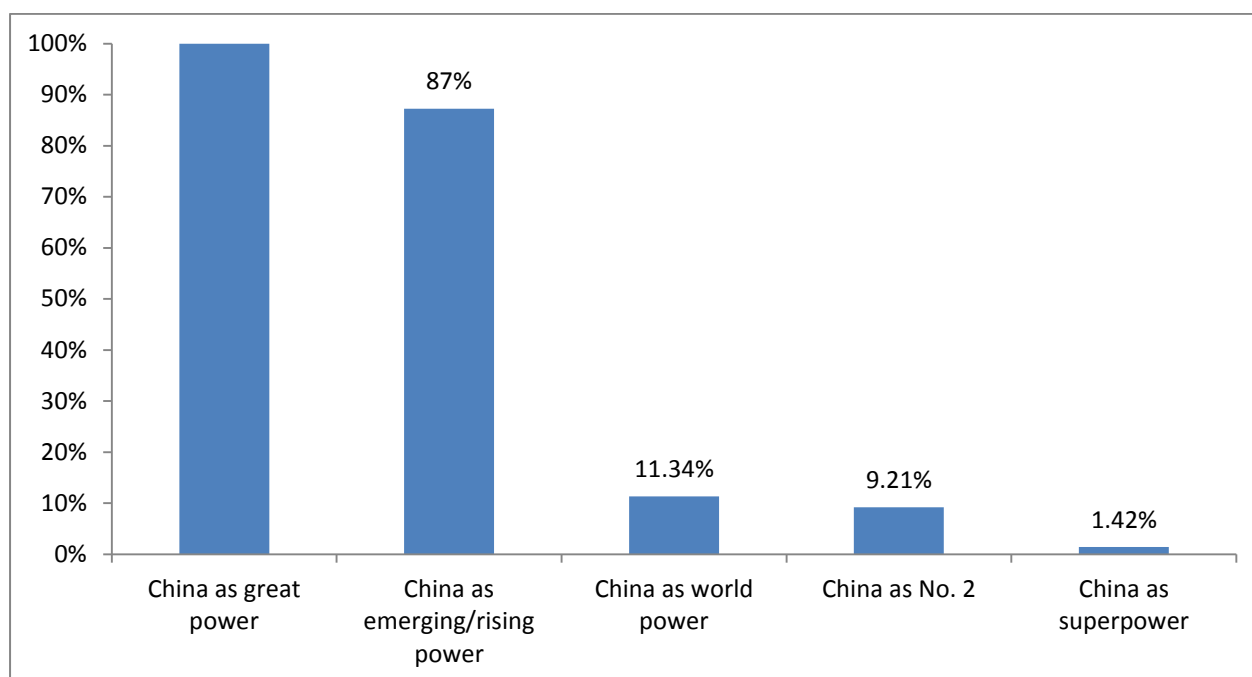
This vagueness and the diverse understanding of those power identities have also led to disagreement over which countries are great power, as we will discuss below. Here, the key is to reiterate that with some exceptions, and in different ways, the identification of China as a great power is modified, qualified and perhaps moderated by insisting that China is still on an upward trajectory; and by implication, not yet at the point where it should be expected to take on all the obligations and responsibilities of a fully-fledged global superpower.

³³ Jia, Qingguo, "Bingchi zhizheng zhaoxi jingshen: jiji goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi (Uphold The "Seize the Day" Spirit: Actively Construct Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu (International Politics Study)* 1 (2014).

³⁴ Zhao, "Zhongyin guanxi: xinxing daguo guanxi de qianzhi yu yansheng (China and India: A Corollary to New Great Power Relations)."

³⁵ Yu, Lei and Khan, Shamsul "Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi: quaniu tixi yu liliang zhuanhuan lilun de tanjiu (China-US New Type of Great Power Relationship: Theoretical Analysis of Global Systemic Transformation and Power Shift)," *Zhanlve juece yanjiu (Journal of Strategy and Decision-Making)* 6 (2014).

Figure 1: Frequency of China’s international identity in the Chinese discourse of new type of great power relations (1998-2014)



Great Powers in the Eye of China

Great powers in Chinese discourses traditionally referred to two types of states: superpowers and historical major countries such as German and the UK.³⁶ More recently, a third category has been added with the rise of emerging powers as well. So from this increasingly broad set of countries, which are now qualified as contemporary great powers in China’s “new type of great power relations” framework? Figure 2 provides the answer. It shows the frequency of countries that are referred as great powers in the Chinese literature. The most frequently mentioned great powers are the US (93.6%), Russia (15.6%), India (10.6%), and Japan (9.2%).

A G2 with Chinese Characteristics?

At the risk of oversimplification, we can identify two broad strands of argument here.³⁷ The first, and most dominant strand is where the only relationship that is specifically referred to in discussions of great power relations is the one between China and the US (72.3% of articles). In this strand, it is widely believed that China entered a new historical epoch at

³⁶ Zhao, Bole, "Zhongyin guanxi - xinxing de daguo guanxi (Sino-India Relations: New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Dangdai yatai (Contemporary Asia-pacific Studies)* 8 (2005). Sometimes it also includes Russia as the heir apparent of the Soviet Union but it is also considered as an emerging power. The Russian identity is overlapped in this discourse.

³⁷ This is not to say, there are only two views. Indeed, there are a great amount of diversity and vagueness in the Chinese academic discourse. We only use this simplified division to introduce our findings although there are slightly overlaps as we will explain later.

some point during the global financial crisis. From the end of the Cold War, the Sino-US relationship was characterised as a relationship between the unipolar superpower (the US) and a normal power (China). Now, China has risen out of the ranks of other normal powers in the previous multi-power international system (for example, Japan and Russia)³⁸ to take a special role of No.2 in the world.³⁹ Some even argue that the US should accept China as an equal status great power.⁴⁰ But whether No.2 or joint first, the underlying message is the same; the new type of great power relationship is only about relations with the US,⁴¹ and cannot be generalized to study China's relations with other major countries.⁴²

This strand of thinking results in a conception of China's place in the global order that has much in common with the previous G2 idea. And indeed some writers are explicit in arguing that the new type of great power relations is a modification of the G2 concept.⁴³ But crucially, it is a modification on China's terms taking China's world view and interests into account rather than just accepting the American G2 concept (built on American world views and interests). If it implies a G2, it is a "sinicised G2".

There are differences of opinion over how best to build this new type of Sino-US relationship. For some, the key is to establish the vision first, and then gradually fill it with substance.⁴⁴ Others argue that because of insufficient strategic mutual trust and structural contradictions between the two, to establish this relationship needs to manage the interaction between US and China and then gradually form effective management mechanism. Wang Jisi and Wu Shengqi argue that these two different approaches are reflected in the two different strategies that each country deploys: China emphasizes the principles of this concept, while the US insists on its function i.e. how to use it to solve specific concerned problems.⁴⁵

³⁸ Yuan, Peng, "Guanyu goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de zhanlv sikao (Strategic Thoughts on Establishing Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)* 5 (2012):6

³⁹ e.g. Yang, Luhui, "Zhongguo jueqi beijing xia de zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi (a New Type of Major Power Relationship between China and the US in the Context of China's Rise: From the Perspective of International Security Public Goods Supply)," *Shandong daxue xuebao (Journal of Shandong University)* 6 (2013):4; Dong, Chunling, "Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi: xin zai hechu? (Sino-China New Type of Great Power Relationship: What Is New?)," *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)* 8 (2013); Yuan, "Guanyu goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de zhanlv sikao (Strategic Thoughts on Establishing Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations).":6

⁴⁰ Xue, Litai Xue and Feng, Zheng, "Lishi guaiquan de dapo weishenme shi zai jintian? zhongmei goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de bage furenzhili" (Why Did the Historical Cycle Break Today? Eight Convincing Reasons of New Type of Great Power Relationship between the US and China)," *Xueshu qiantan (Frontiers)* 6 (2013):47

⁴¹ Wang, Jisi, "Zhongmei dui xinxing daguo guanxi de renzhi chayi ji zhongguo duimei zhengce (Cognitive Differences between the US and China and China's American Policy)," *Dangdai shijie (Contemporary World)* 10 (2014).

⁴² Niu and Song, "'Goujian xinxing daguo guanxi' xuesu yantaohui zongshu (Conference Review Of 'Establishing New Type of Great Power Relations').":135; Zheng, "'Xinxing daguo guanxi goujian yu guoji zhixu zhuanxing' yantaohui zongshu (Conference Review of Establishing New Type of Great Power Relations and Transition of International Order)."

⁴³ Zhang, Jiadong and Jing, Xin, "Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi: lishi, lilun yu xianshi (New Type of Great Power Relationship between the US and China: History, Theory and the Reality)," *Guoji guanqian (International Review)* 5 (2013):25

⁴⁴ Zhang, Jian, "Shilun zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de goujian (Discuss the Establishment of Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relationship)," *Guoji guanxi yanjiu (International Relations Studies)* 3 (2013).

⁴⁵ Wang, Jisi and Wu, Shengqi, "Zhongmei dui xinxing daguo guanxi de renzhi chayi ji zhongguo dui mei zhengce (Cognitive Differences between the US and China and China's American Policy)," *Dangdai shijie (Contemporary World)* 10 (2014).

It is also argued that the US should adapt the rise of China. The US should face the reality that the US and China as two world great power stand side by side in the Asia-pacific.⁴⁶ Some also argue that China is a world great power rather than the so-called “East Asia great power” in the American discourse and thus Sino-US relations should not be limited in Asia-pacific regions.⁴⁷ Su Changhe argues that China’s peaceful rise has proven American allies system obsolete, and thus “it is time for the US to change itself and adapt to the world”.⁴⁸ However, there is also a recognition that China needs to change too and that the establishment of new type of great power relations needs a process of “re-normalization”. In this “re-normalization”, China should avoid being too overconfident and impatient, and the US should not be too anxious and overly sensitive when facing its declining power and influence.⁴⁹

Great Powers Beyond the US

By contrast, the second strand of writing and thinking, while acknowledging the significance of Sino-US relations, focuses on a broader range and set of relationships with other great powers.⁵⁰ This is partly because the world is too complex and diverse to be ruled by just two countries, and Sino-US cooperation alone is simply not able to “achieve world peace, stability, and prosperity”.⁵¹ It is also argued that the rise of China is not an isolated but a group phenomenon, and thus China is only one of a number of rising powers that is challenging US supremacy.⁵² In this sense, the identity of great power is quite diverse.⁵³ Furthermore, there is more to the world than just the US, so it is important to build new types of relationships with a range of other great powers (and not just the US).⁵⁴

Within this broad strand of writing there remains considerable disagreement over the definition of great power. We roughly divide them into three groups, although we recognise some overlaps between views of the first and second groups.⁵⁵ The first group tend to focus

⁴⁶ Xiao, An, "Shiguan zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi qianjing de liuge jiaodianxing wenti(Six Focal Issues Of sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations Prospect)," *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)* 12 (2013):27

⁴⁷ Niu and Song, ""Goujian xinxing daguo guanxi" xueshu yantaohui zongshu (Conference Review Of "Establishing New Type of Great Power Relations").":137

⁴⁸ Su, Changhe, "Gongshengxing guoji tixi de keneng - zai yige duoji shijie zhong ruhe goujian xinxing daguo guanxi (the Possibility of Gongsheng International System: How to Build a New Type of Big Countries Relations in a Multi-Polar World)," *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)* 9 (2013):18

⁴⁹ Li, Yonghui, ""Zai zhengchanghua": zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi jianshezong de guanli wenti ("Re-Normalization": The Management Problems of Establishing Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)* 4 (2013).

⁵⁰ Zhao, Xiaochun, "Weilai zhongmei guanxi he guoji zhixu de kenengxing miaohui - goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de sange zhongda lilun wenti (on the Possibilities of the Future Sino-US Relations and International Order -- Three Important Theoretical Problems in Building a New Great Power Relationship)," *Xueshu qianyan (Frontiers)* 6 (2013).

⁵¹ Ibid.:11-12

⁵² Dong, Chunling, "Lengzhan fansi yu zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de goujian (Reflection on Cold War and the Construction of Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)* 6 (2014):54

⁵³ Chou, Huafei and Zhang, Bangdi, "Quanli zhuanbian he zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi goujian(the Building of New Type Sino-US Major Countries Relations in International Power Transition)," *Tongji daxue xuebao shehui kexueban (Tongji University Journal Social Science Section)* 24, no. 6 (2013):40

⁵⁴ Zhao, "Weilai zhongmei guanxi he guoji zhixu de kenengxing miaohui - goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de sange zhongda lilun wenti (on the Possibilities of the Future Sino-US Relations and International Order -- Three Important Theoretical Problems in Building a New Great Power Relationship).":12

⁵⁵ Some focus on both traditional major countries and emerging power. For example, Li Zhifei divides new type of great power relations into three levels: Sino-US relations; Sino-Russia and Sino-EU relations; and China’s relations with developing powers, please see Li, Zhifei, "Fei chuantong anquan zhili yu xinxing daguo guanxi

on the US and traditional major countries. It includes Russia (15.6%), Japan (9.2%), Canada, German, the UK, France and the EU more broadly.⁵⁶

The second group focuses on the US and emerging powers - especially the BRIC/BRICS, with Russia and India the most frequently identified rising great powers (so Russia is considered varyingly as both a rising power and a traditional “risen” one). The rise of China is not an isolated case, but representative of a broader shift in the global balance of power towards emerging powers.⁵⁷ The Sino-US relationship is thus best seen as just one example of how to establish a workable relationship between a rising and an existing interests, rather than one that can dominate the international order on its own.⁵⁸ For example, Zhang Xiaoming argues that the primary content of new type of great power relations is the relationship between non-Western and Western great powers.⁵⁹ Thus, the advocacy of new type of great power relations is not only the strategic demand of China, but all emerging powers. China is a representative of emerging power and an important participant of BRICS; however, it is not their “leader”.⁶⁰ It has been suggested (in interviews in Beijing) that expanding the number of challenger rising powers is a useful strategic tool, as it might turn some of the attention that is typically focused on China towards other powers as well.

The third group extends the definition of great powers into a wider range of developing countries. For example, for Pan Wei, new type of great power relations includes China’s relations with a group of developing countries including Bangladesh, Nigeria, Mexico, Philippines, and Indonesia.⁶¹ However, as we can see in Figure 2, this is a very minor view in the literature.

goujian (Non-Traditional Security Governance and Construction of New Relations between the Big Powers)," *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu (Teaching and Research)* 6 (2014).

⁵⁶ Ni, Shixiong, "Fazhan changqi jiankang de xinxing daguo guanxi (Develop New Type of Great Power Relations That Is Long-Term Stable)," *Dangdai shijie yu shehui zhuyi (Contemporary World and Socialism)* 3 (2013).

⁵⁷ Zhang and Jing, "Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi: lishi, lilun yu xianshi (New Type of Great Power Relationship between the Us and China: History, Theory and the Reality).":25

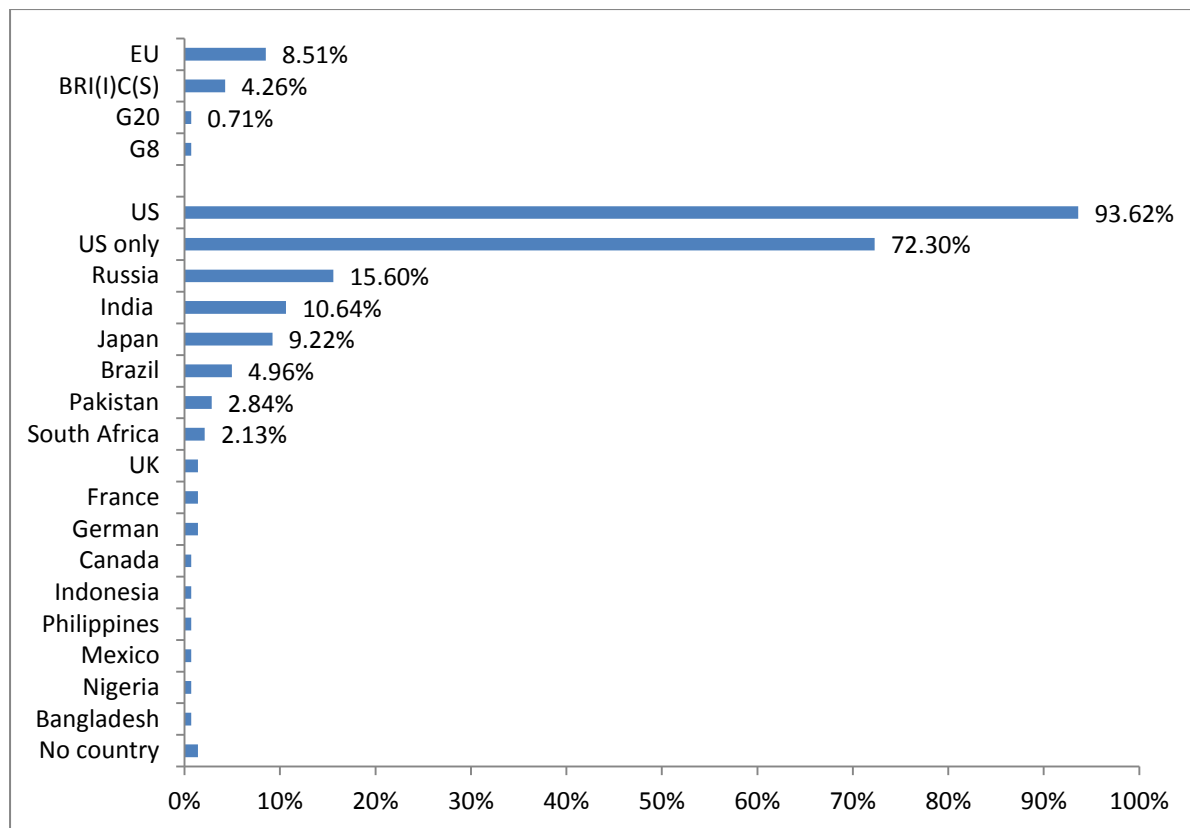
⁵⁸ Ibid.:25

⁵⁹ Zhang, Xiaoming, "Dui xinxing daguo guanxi de yizhong jiedu (an Interpretation of New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu (International Politics Studies)* 1 (2014):51

⁶⁰ Dong, Chunling, "Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi: dongli hezai? (Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relationship: Where Is the Motivation?)," *Shijie zhishi (World Affairs)* 9 (2013):50

⁶¹ Pan, "Zhengzai jueqi de xinxing daguo guanxi (the on-Going Rise of New Type of Great Power Relations).":28

Figure 2: Frequency of countries that are referred as great power in Chinese academic discourse of new type of great power relations (1998-2014)



Debating world order: bipolar versus multipolar world

Table 1 briefly summarizes the difference in the Chinese discourse of new type of great power relations. We find that 39.71% articles explicitly argue that we are in, or moving towards, a multipolar world. However, this new world order might take considerable time to emerge and there is a strong school of thought that suggests the current one single superpower and multi-power system is not going to change in the next 5-10 years⁶² or might even be strengthened (in the sort run at least)⁶³. Some argue that the world might become an unbalanced multi-polar structure in which American power will lie at the first level, with other powers occupying lesser tiers of polar power. Within this fragmented system, China is likely to be closer to the first level than any other country.⁶⁴

Using a Pearson's chi-square test, we find that articles that refer only to Sino-US relationship are less likely to mention a multipolar world than the second strand of thinking.⁶⁵

⁶² Tang, Jing, "Hou weiwei shidai de shijie xinxing daguo guanxi ji zhongguo waijiao yingdui zhanlve (New Type of Great Power Relations in the Post-Crisis Era and Chinese Foreign Diplomatic Strategy)," *Renzi sheke (Human Resources & Social Science)* 3 (2014).

⁶³ Yang, Zhu, "Zhongmei goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de zhanlve sikao (Strategic Conceptions of Structuring Innovational Nation Relationship between China and USA)," *Beihua daxue xuebao shehui kexue ban (Journal of Beihua University Social Science)* 14, no. 3 (2013):103

⁶⁴ Xu, "Goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de lishi tiaojian yu zhuyao wenti (Historical Conditions and Major Problems of Establishing Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations).":18

⁶⁵ Pearson Chi-square Test: $X^2(1, N = 141) = 13.391, p = .000$

But here the water gets rather muddied and it is not easy to identify clear schools of thought. This seems to be in part at least because there is confusion over the nature of bipolarity, and its relationship with a G2-type understanding of the future world. There are some very loud proponents of bipolarity. For example, Wu Xinbo argues that it does, and the new type of relationship is a “new type of bi-polar relationship” which provides a foundation for “the US and China to co-govern the world”.⁶⁶ He acknowledges, though, that this might not be a very palatable idea for much of the rest of the world, and suggest first working together to co-govern regional affairs, and then gradually move to the global level.⁶⁷

But on reflection, the system that he is describing does not sound like bipolarity as it is normally understood; a system where two competing power centres oppose each other and attract allies and partners into competing camps or blocs. Rather, it sounds like a system where, whether they like it or not, China and the US have some sort of special responsibility to try and provide global public goods and provide global governance due to their individual and collective power statuses. For example, Yuan Peng argues that the US, as the most developed country and the representative of Western developed countries, and China, as the largest developing country and the representative of emerging powers, can work together to represent “the demand of overwhelming majority and reshape the international order”.⁶⁸ Jiang Lingfei argues that when facing challenge of global governance, the US and China as two world powers have an unshirkable leadership responsibility.⁶⁹ Similarly, Da Wei argues that “as the two most important power centers in the world, China and the US could together become the defender, reformer, and builder of the international system”.⁷⁰

This might be a system where two powers share global predominance, and have the most important bilateral relationship in the world that plays a key role in deciding the future of the international system.⁷¹ But this is not the same thing as bipolarity. Indeed, in some respects, the emphasis on cooperation and shared leadership is the antithesis of bipolarity.

Finally, there is a group of scholars who do not even see this movement towards shared leadership as either possible or desirable (or both). For example, Yu Hongjun argues that the US and China simply “do not seek global co-governance” and “bipolarity” and to interpret the new type of relationship as a revised G2 is simply “ignorant”.⁷² For Zhang Zhengwen, the only way that China and the US could assume this position of shared leadership is for China

⁶⁶ Wu, "Goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de lujing xuanze (Path Selection in Constructing Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relationship).":37

⁶⁷ Ibid.:37

⁶⁸ Yuan, "Guanyu goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de zhanlve sikao (Strategic Thoughts on Establishing Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations).":7

⁶⁹ Jiang, Lingfei, "Guanyu zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de jidian renzhi (Some Thoughts on Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Dangdai shijie (Contemporary World)* 2 (2014):13

⁷⁰ Da, Wei, "Goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de lujing xuanze (Approaches to Building a New Type of Major Power Relationship between China and the US)," *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)* 7 (2013):71

⁷¹ Chen, Weiguang and Zeng, Cuhong, "Xinxing daguo guanxi yu quanqiu zhili jiegou (New Power Relation and the Structure of Global Governance)," *Guoji jinmao tansuo (International Economics and Trade Research)* 30, no. 3 (2014):97

⁷² Yu, Hongjun, "Zhongmei goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de yi yi yu qianjing (Implications and Prospect of Building New Type of Great Power Relationship between China and the Us)," *Guoji wenti yanjiu (International Studies)* 5 (2013):7; Chen, Zhimin, "Xinxing daguo guanxi de xingtai fenxi (Morphological Analysis of New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Guoji guan cha (International Review)* 5 (2013):18

as No.2 to fall under some form of leadership from the American No.1 and become a willing agent of US strategic intentions. Quite simple, “this is impossible for China to accept.”⁷³

Table 1 Brief summary of difference in the Chinese discourse of new type of great power relations

	G2	Non-G2
Great power	US and China	US, China, traditional Western power emerging power
Conception of global order	Potentially bi-polar world/ shared or co-governance with US	Multi-polar world
Understand the rise of China	The rise of China is a unique phenomenon.	The rise of emerging power including China is a group phenomena
Comparison countries	More focus on traditional major countries such as Japan, German and Russia and that China has come to the fore of traditional major countries	More focus on Emerging developing countries (e.g. BRICS) and that China is one of those emerging power
American hegemony	Challenged by one single rising power i.e. China	Challenged by a group of emerging power including China
Governance model	The US and China can co-govern the world	The world cannot be well-governed by only two countries

New Type of Great Power Relations with Russia, India, Japan, and the EU

The heavy focus on the US leaves little room for other countries in this Chinese-coined concept. Nonetheless, there is some discussion of relations with the EU, Russia, Japan and India. As Figure 2 shows, 15.6% articles refer to Russia as a great power that is second only to the US as the world’s other great powers (China excepted – i.e. in third place behind the US and China). Sino-Russian relations are perhaps the second most important and the oldest new type of great power relations. As we have shown elsewhere, Chinese writers have been referring to the search for a new type of great power relationship with Russia since the 1990s.⁷⁴ Indeed, it was in relation to Russia that the term was first used – though its current iteration seems to have been developed independently rather than explicitly and deliberately building on this earlier articulation.

⁷³ Zhang, Zhengwen, "Meiguo zhanlve tiaozheng yu zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de goujian (American Strategic Adjustment and the Establishment of Sino-US New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Weishi (Truths and Facts)* 2 (2014):90

⁷⁴ Jinghan Zeng, Constructing a New Type of Great Power Relations: the State of Debate in China, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, forthcoming

Many consider the way that China and Russia have built a new relationship (despite previous intense hostility and a number of residual points of disagreement) as a “model” for how to build a new type of great power relations with others.⁷⁵ Though once more we find no common position and there are also pessimistic views on Sino-Russian relations. Some argue that the importance of Sino-Russian relations is overvalued. Sino-Russian relations are not sustainable because its current close tie is a necessary consequence of American pressure.⁷⁶ Thus, China should “properly and rationally” assess Sino-Russia relations and do not have too “high expectations”.⁷⁷ As one article elaborates, “although the strategic mutual trust between China and the Russia has reached a quite high level, we still belong to two ‘families’. In many areas, we have very different or even confrontational interests”.⁷⁸ One of the reasons to the development of mutual trust is the existence of shared mutual distrust of the USA. So here, Sino-Russian relations are largely a secondary consequence of the primary Sino-US relationship. For example, Chen Jian notes that “in the context of US returning to the Asia, some argue that China should abandon the non-alignment policy and form an alliance with Russia to against the US”.⁷⁹ Thus, if China reassesses its relationship with the US, it might then avoid the strategic tendency of “alliance with Russia to against the US”.⁸⁰

Next to Russia, India is the third most mentioned great power in the debate (10.64%), with three articles specifically focussing on building Sino-India great power relations. The earliest academic discussion on Sino-India new type of great power relations can be found in 2005. It is argued that the Sino-US relations are a typical example of China’s relations with developed great power, and Sino-India relations are a typical representative of China’s relations with developing great powers.⁸¹ Some argue that although China does not consider India as a great power, China could use the similar principles of new type of great power relations to deal with Sino-India relations.⁸²

Of all the potential new relationships, the most controversial is with Japan, which is referred to as a great power in 9.22% of articles (the fourth most mentioned great power). Sino-Japan new type of great power relations is perhaps the most controversial bilateral relationship. Given the at times rather fevered discussion about Japan in parts of the Chinese media and amongst some online communities, it is notable that there are some rather positive analyses. Many argue that China should use new mentality to deal with Japan in order to secure its peaceful rise. Here, China could learn from the US, which made decisions based on strategic interests instead of historical issues when developing its relationship with Japan

⁷⁵ Niu, Jusheng and Du, Gang, "Hezuo gongying de xinxing daguo guanxi qianzhan (Preview of Cooperation and Win-Win New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Weishi (Truths and Facts)* 12 (2013).

⁷⁶ Zheng, ""Xinxing daguo guanxi goujian yu guoji zhixu zhuanxing yantaohui zongshu (Conference Review of Establishing New Type of Great Power Relations and Transition of International Order)."

⁷⁷ Wang, Sheng and Luo, Xiao, "Goujian zhong e xinxing daguo guanxi de jichu yu lujing (Foundation and Path to Build Sino-Russian New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Ibid.*7.:49

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*:49

⁷⁹ Chen, Jian, "Shilun xinxing daguo guanxi (Discuss New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Guoji wenti yanjiu (International Studies)* (2012):16

⁸⁰ Li, Yongcheng, ""Xinxing daguo guanxi de goujian: lilun, shijian he wenti yantaohui zongshu (Conference Review: "The Building of New Type of Great Power Relations: Theory, Practice and Problem")," *Waijiao pinglun (Diplomatic Review)* 1 (2013):155

⁸¹ Li, "Feichuantong anquan zhili yu xinxing daguo guanxi goujian (Non-Traditional Security Governance and Construction of New Relations between the Big Powers).":65

⁸² Zhao, "Zhongyin guanxi : xinxing daguo guanxi de qianzhi yu yansheng (China and India: A Corollary to New Great Power Relations)."

after WWII.⁸³ But of course, this is not the only view. Some argue that it is too early to talk about Sino-Japan new type of great power relationship because Sino-Japan relations are not even a normal relationship.⁸⁴ Some also doubt whether Japan deserves to be a great power as the Abe administration does not have any sense of responsibility and justice that a great power should have.⁸⁵ Indeed, during our interview in Beijing, some scholars explicitly told us that Japan does not fit into this concept at all, no matter how loosely it is defined.⁸⁶

The last notable great power is the EU. 8.51% articles refer the EU as a great power. The new type of great power relationship between China and the EU is no doubt special. It is argued that the EU as a supra-national entity is a great power although it does not speak in one single voice. Thus, China should not only develop relationship with the EU but also its constituent member states.⁸⁷ The debate also refers some specific European countries including France, the UK, and Germany as great powers. There is one article that specifically focuses on Sino-France relations in this way. But Germany and the UK are only briefly mentioned as great powers in broader studies of groups of great powers. Chinese ambassador to the UK, Liu Xiaoming, has argued that new type of great power relations should be used in the UK-China relations,⁸⁸ but Liu's argument seems to have found few supporters in the academic world in China at least.

Conclusions

For understandable reasons, the outside world has tended to concentrate on what the rise of China means for the international order. But in doing so it often – not always – ignores the internal dimension of this change; how this rise is changing conceptions of Chinese views of the nature of the rise itself, of China's new global status and power, and of the character of the global order. These internal discourses and debates, we argue, will play an important role in shaping what key Chinese actors think that they can achieve on the global scale, and how they can go about doing it.

When examining the case of new type of great power relations, we find that this Chinese-coined concept indicates a fundamental shift of China's evaluation of the power status of itself and others. Within China, there is a diverse understanding of China's identity including rising power, world power, No. 2, and superpower. But if we try and identify dominant trends we would argue that there is a clear and broad consensus that China really is a Great Power. However, we also suggest that while there is an increasing confidence to assert China's global status (in ways that were not evident before the global financial crisis) it is less clear how understandings of "power" link with understandings of global leadership, and the provision of global public goods. While there does seem to be an acceptance that China's power status gives it some obligation to do things on the global scale (that other "normal"

⁸³ Liu, Jingqian and Shu, Biquan, "Guoji guanxi yanjiu fakanshi ji goujian xinxing daguo guanxi yantaohui zongshu (First Issue Ceremony of International Relations Studies and Conference Review of Establishing New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Guoji guanxi yanjiu (International Relations Studies)* 3 (2013):153

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*:153

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*:153

⁸⁶ Interview conducted in Beijing in June 2015

⁸⁷ Niu and Du, "Hezuo gongying de xinxing daguo guanxi qianzhan (Preview of Cooperation and Win-Win New Type of Great Power Relations).":93

⁸⁸ Liu, Xiaoming, Dazao zhongying guanxi jingcai xiayiji (to create the 'next season' of brilliant Sino-UK relations), *People's Daily*, also available at http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2013-08/12/nw.D110000renmrb_20130812_2-03.htm accessed on 16 November 2015 (2013)

states don't have to do), the moderation of China's great power status by the widespread insistence that it is still emerging and not yet fully risen. In general, it seems that the whole point about China being considered to be a great power – perhaps in a G2 with Chinese characteristics – is to do things that are good for China. This might have consequences that are good for others too, but China's primary responsibility is still to itself.

In general (again), there is an acceptance that the US is going to remain the world's most important power for some time to come. And while building new relations with other countries remains important, it is the relationship with the US that is the key for China as it attempts to find its new place in the global order (and thus, in consequence, for the global order itself). Changing the world as No.1 is a hard enough task. Changing the world as No.2 – particularly when the No.1 doesn't seem very keen to ease your path to further global power – is even harder. Hence the perceived need to both build alliances with sets of countries to balance the power of the No.1, and also to try to persuade it to accept your legitimate interests and goals as a responsible global great power.

Collectively, the Chinese literature suggests something of a hierarchy in the type of relationships that China is building (or attempting to build) with others, and how far we have got to seeing this new relationship building come to fruition. The most successful and developed new relationship is with Russia. Relations with India and other emerging powers are proceeding well and moving in the right direction. Relations with Europe are also developing, and occupy an important role in terms of establishing a differentiated strategy for dealing with Western powers (rather than perceiving of and treating the West as a single hole). And although some people suggest that the relationship with the US has already changed to a new model, most suggest that it is very much a work in progress – and is the key for creating a new strategic space for China to operate in.⁸⁹ Or as more elegantly put by Yang Jiemian:

“the model of new type of great power relations is Sino-Russia relations, its emphasis is Sino-US relations, its growing point is Sino-BRICS relations, its focal point is Sino-Europe Relations, and its difficulty is Sino-Japan relations”.⁹⁰

While we reassert the importance of studying domestic debates in China as a means of trying to understand how China might behave as a Great Power in the future, we finish by pointing to two reasons why studying these discourses on their own is not enough. The first is that the world is not just of China's own making – and neither is China's place within it. For Chinese generated conceptions of world order and great power relations to translate into real power politics in the ways envisaged by Chinese thinkers, others will have to be persuaded to accept and buy into them. This might prove to be a rather difficult task. The second is that it is important for these debates to remain connected to reality. By this we mean that what is said and argued within China about the nature of China as a great power will be viewed by others alongside the track record of how key Chinese actors utilise Chinese power in international politics. In particular, the way that this power is articulated in China's regional relations might make the already difficult task of persuading others to accept Chinese views of China as great power even more problematical.

⁸⁹ Ren, Xiao, "Suzao xinxing daguo guanxi (to Establish New Type of Great Power Relations)," *Guoji shiye (Theoretical horizon)* 12 (2013):62

⁹⁰ Yang, Jiemian, "Xinxing daguo guanxi: lilun, zhanlve yu zhengce jiangou (New Type of Great Power Relations: Theory, Strategy and Policy-Making)," *Guoji wenti yanjiu (International Studies)* 3 (2013):11