
China's Role in International Relations: Facing the US Hegemony

Talk given at Tsinghua University, Beijing
Department of International Relations

YAN XUETONG ON CHINESE REALISM, THE TSINGHUA SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF HARMONY

- I think the most important debate in IR today is about the relationship between China and the US, that is, the main question is whether the competition between China and the US will result in a disaster—a repetition of the many examples throughout history when two great powers collide—meaning explicitly whether China’s rise will lead to wars between the major powers; the second issue is whether it’s possible for China to become a new superpower peacefully.



YAN XUETONG

Outline

1. The argument
2. Role theory: between IR + Foreign Policy Analysis
 1. Roles are, well, roles, not identities
 2. Roles are, well, social constructions
 3. Roles are, well, historically charged
 4. Roles, are well, contested domestically (and int'lly)
3. China's role in international relations
 1. The PRC's changing attitude towards peacekeeping
 2. The PRC's changing policy towards North Korea
 3. The PPR's changing role in Int'l Financial Policy
4. Conclusion

The argument

1. International Roles are social positions in a group which are formed by ego and alter expectations of the functional tasks of the role for the group.
2. China's role in IR is thus determined by the Chinese people and the international society. The respective expectations may clash, but they regularly do not.
3. China's role behavior towards the US based international order has been more supportive than most scholars (both Chinese and American) have acknowledged.
4. China's historical self-conception is a powerful explanatory tool to explain when China's own (ego) role expectations will clash with int'l (alter) role expectations.
5. Evidence from three policy areas (Human rights, welfare and security) support these theoretical claims.

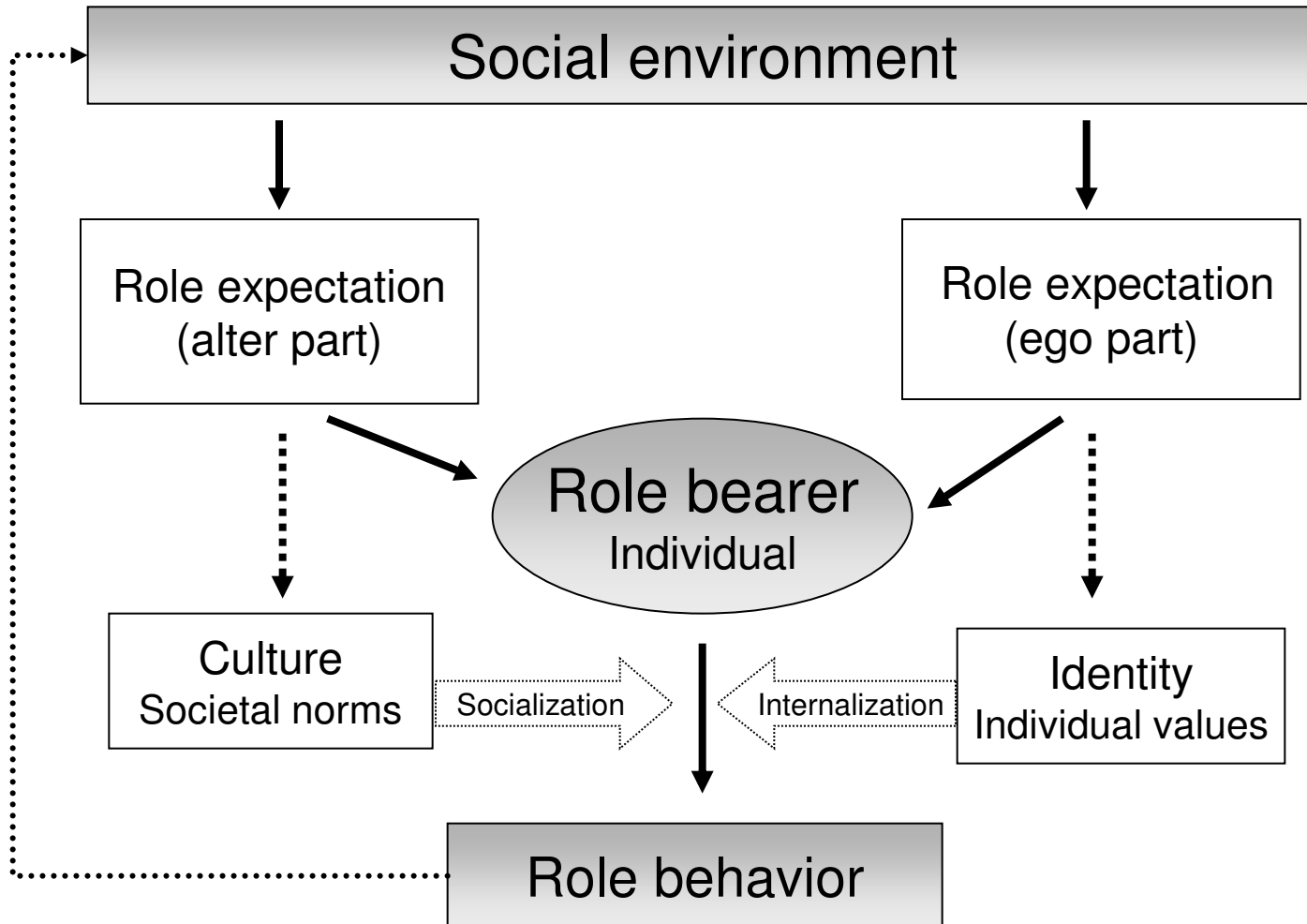
Role theory

In-between International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis

The theoretical argument

1. International roles are not „national identities“. Identities are
 1. Self descriptions
 2. They are not formed by alter expectations
 3. They have no functional connotation for a social group
2. The position's function in the group is limited in time and scope and it is dependent upon the group's structure and purpose. Whereas some roles are constitutive to the group as such, e.g. a recognized member of the international community, other roles or role sets are functionally specific, e.g. balancer, initiator etc.
3. International roles belong to the group of immaterial social constructions. They give meaning to international interaction and structures. As such, roles do not only cause behavior but they also constitute actors (Leader–Follower).

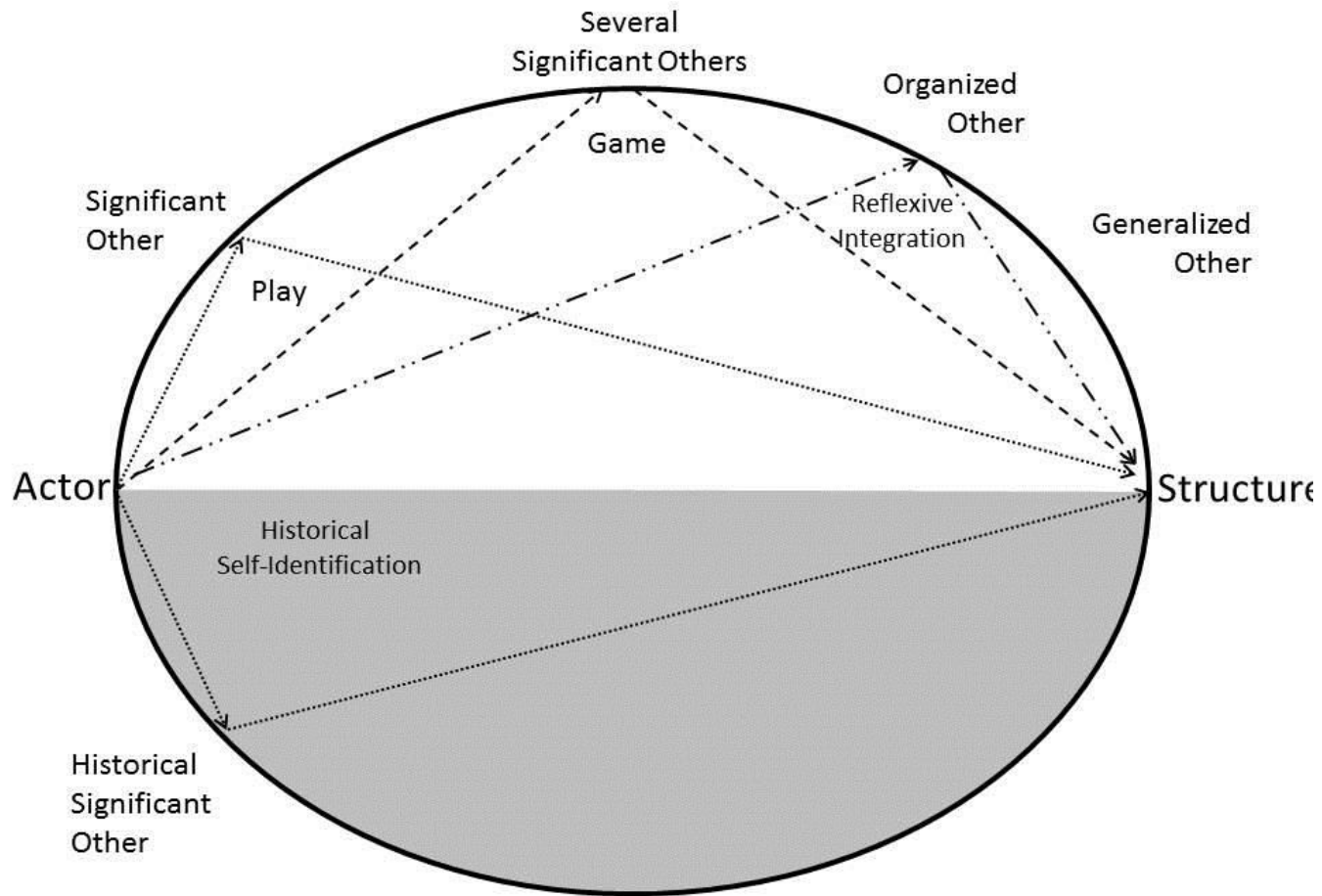
“Roles” in International Relations



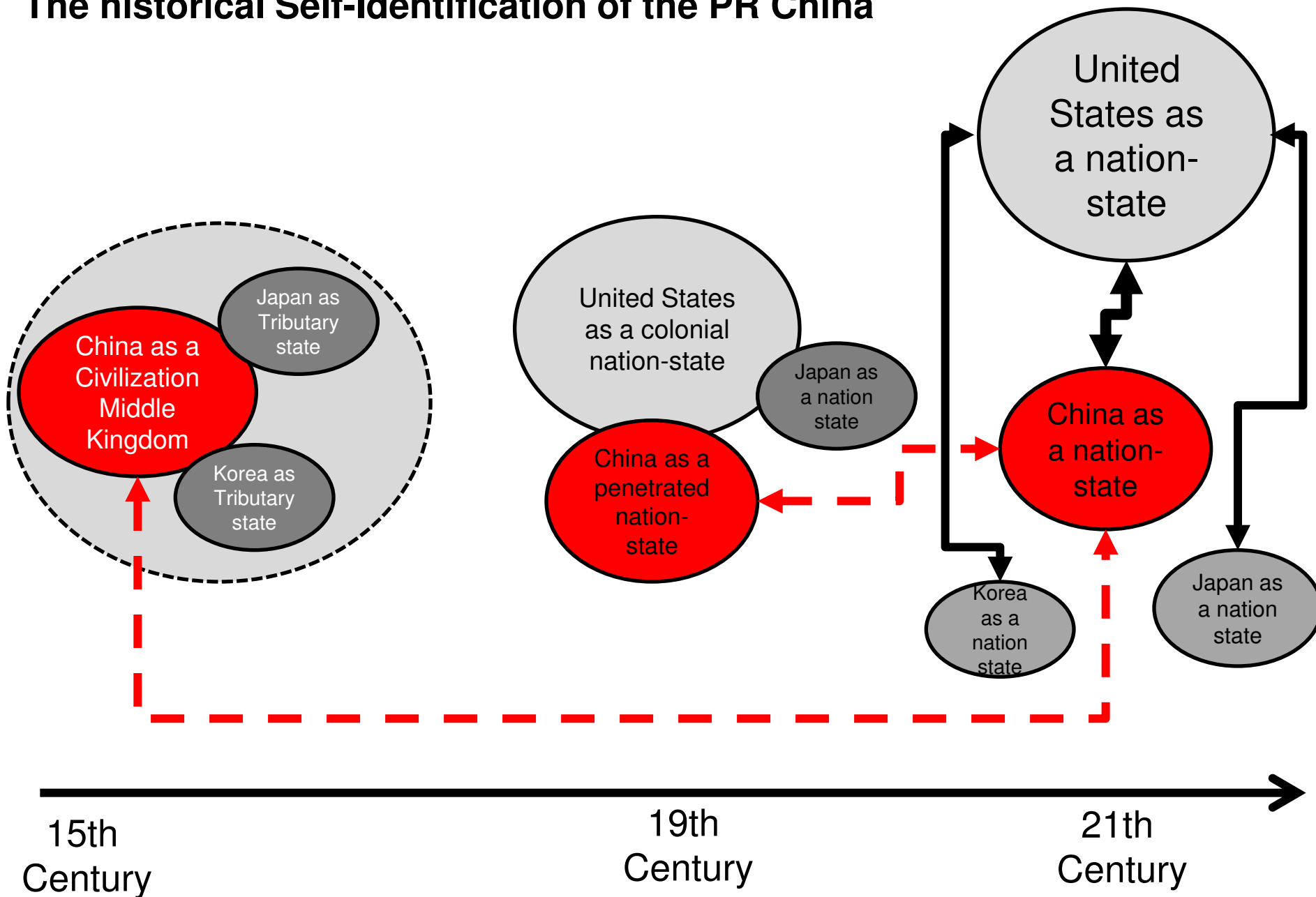
The Other: constitutive for the „Self“

- the generalized “other”: An imagined “other” which serves the “I” as a reference point to identify with a special identity (Chinese) or a social category (human being).
- The significant “other”: A concrete “other” in the process of “primary socialization” (in the family), i.e. parents or siblings. Attributes: small number, high degree of role casting by the “Other” (“ascribed role”).
- The organized “other”: is an institutionalized other, the functional specification of which demands a high degree of role expectations which are regulated and based on division of labor.

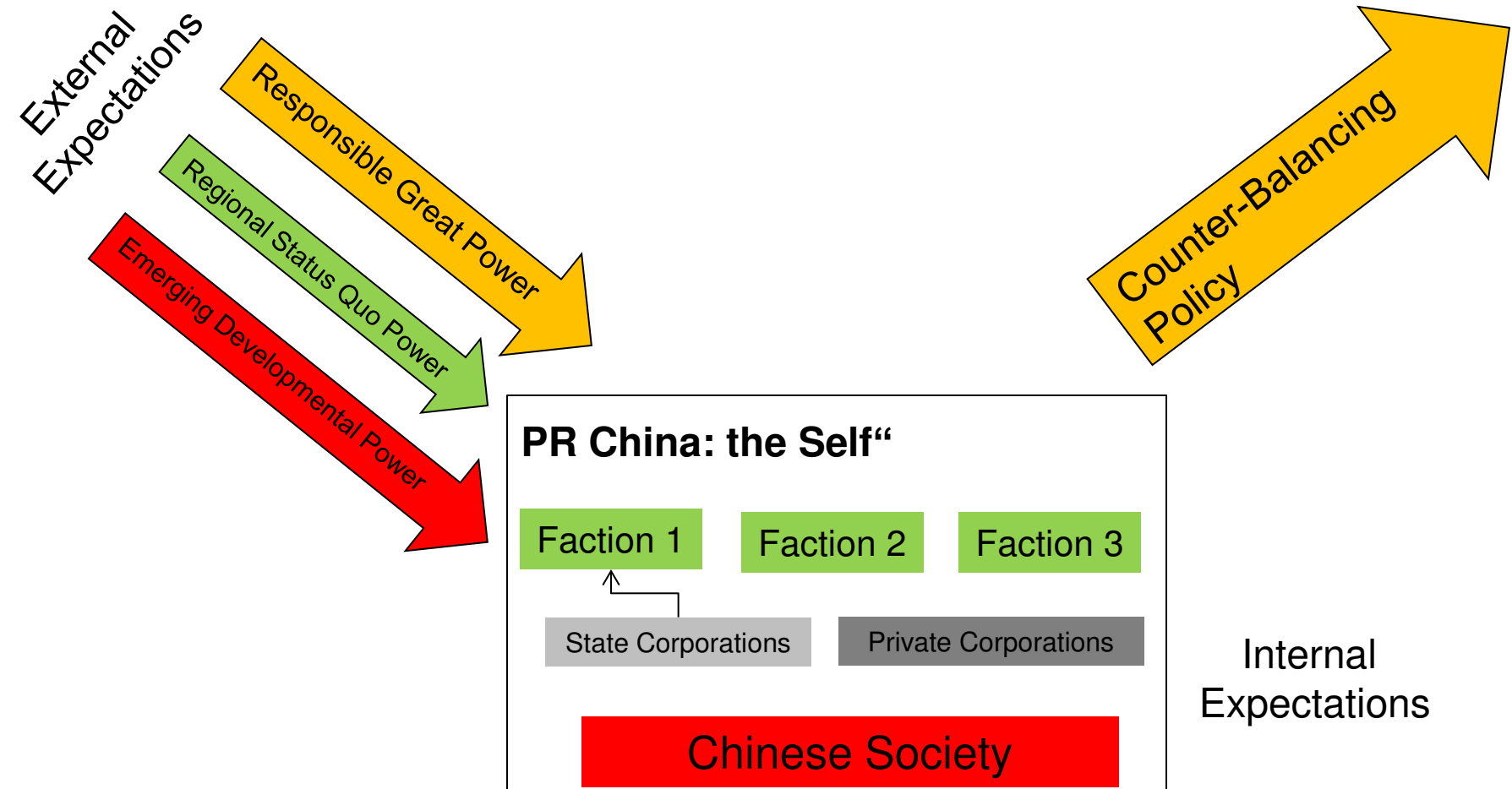
The historical „Self“: reference point of the „Self“ to establish „ontological security“



The historical Self-Identification of the PR China



The institutional structure of the „Self“: Integrating Comparative Politics and Role theory



China's role in international relations:

A reform-minded status-quo power

Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the PRC's UN-Peacekeeping conduct 1971-1990

1. mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity,
2. mutual non-aggression,
3. non-interference in each other's internal affairs,
4. equality and mutual benefit,
5. peaceful coexistence.

- Based on its historical self-identification as a victim of colonial occupation, the PR China rejected UN peacekeeping until the 1980s.
- The PRC viewed the UN as dominated by Western powers, perceiving UN-Peacekeeping as a form of hegemonial intervention;
- During the Korean War (1950-54) China had fought against US forces operating under a UN mandate.

PR China's expanding role in UN-Peacekeeping Operations

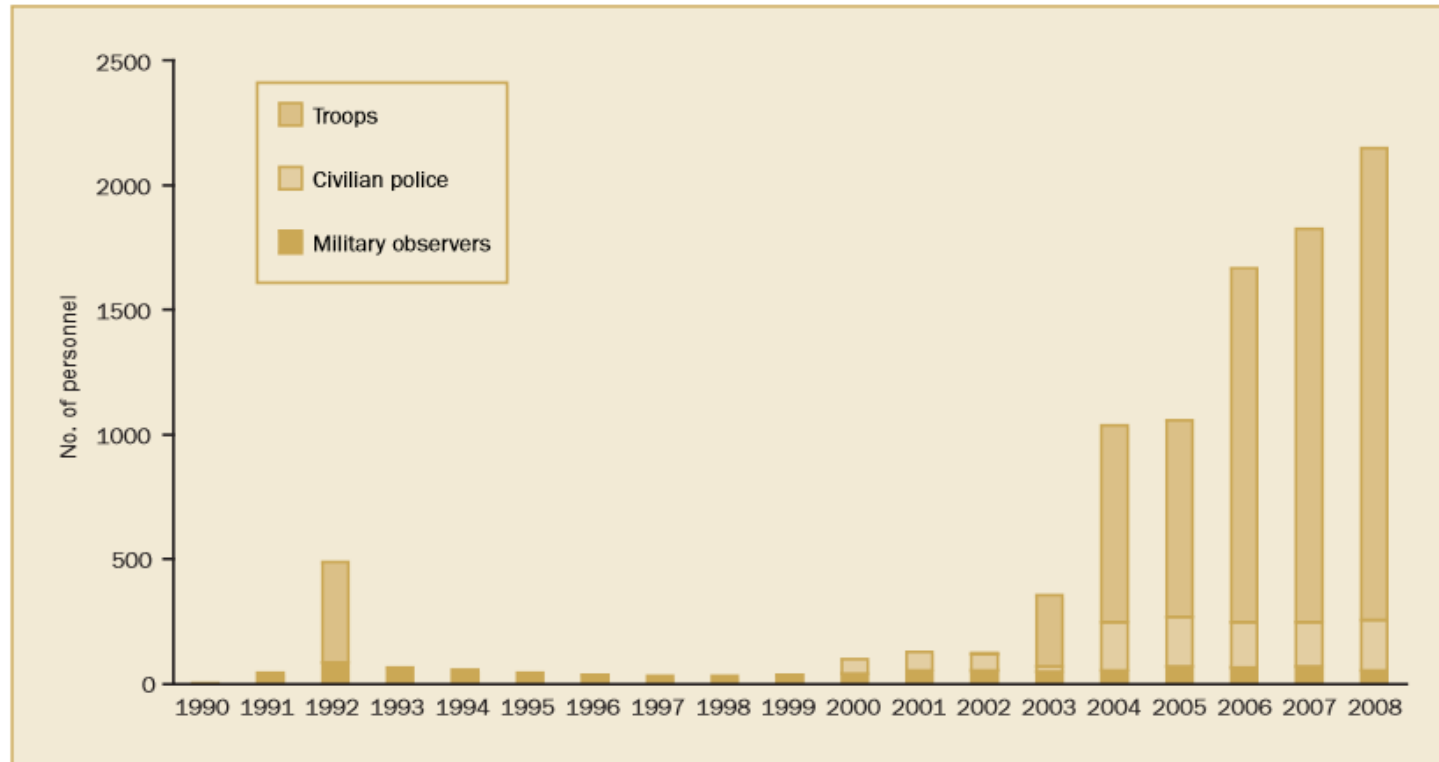


Figure 2. Chinese troop contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, 1990–2008

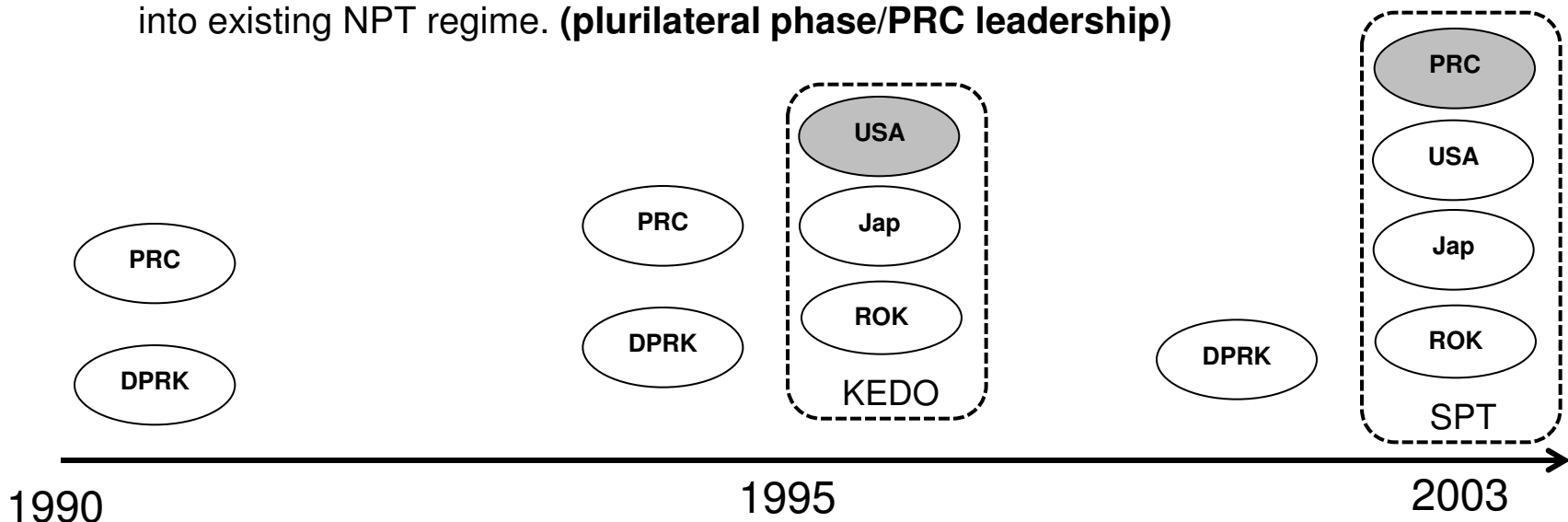
Sources: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, <<http://conflict.sipri.org/>>; and UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 'UN mission's summary detailed by country', <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/>>.

Explaining the PRC's shifting role behavior on UN-Peacekeeping missions

- In 2005, the PR China cast its vote in favor of the Responsibility-to-Protect norm at World-Summit on R2P.
- The PRC's peacekeeping behavior is not based on a R2P norm-internalization process, since China's recent voting behavior signals shifting positions (Libya vs. Syria).
- Since the late 1980s the PRC has voted with the majority in the UNSC. While issuing its normative objections it has sided with the developing states in SC and abstained from a national veto.
- Benin lectured China in the UN that the „collective responsibility to protect is the basis for the creation of the African Union“ (UN-Doc. S/PV.5158, 31.3.05).
- When the SC unanimously adopted Resolution 1679, China accordingly stated that „on the basis of our political support for the AU we have not pressed our objections“ (S/PV.5439, 16.05.06).

Three phases in China's North Korea policy in the 1990s

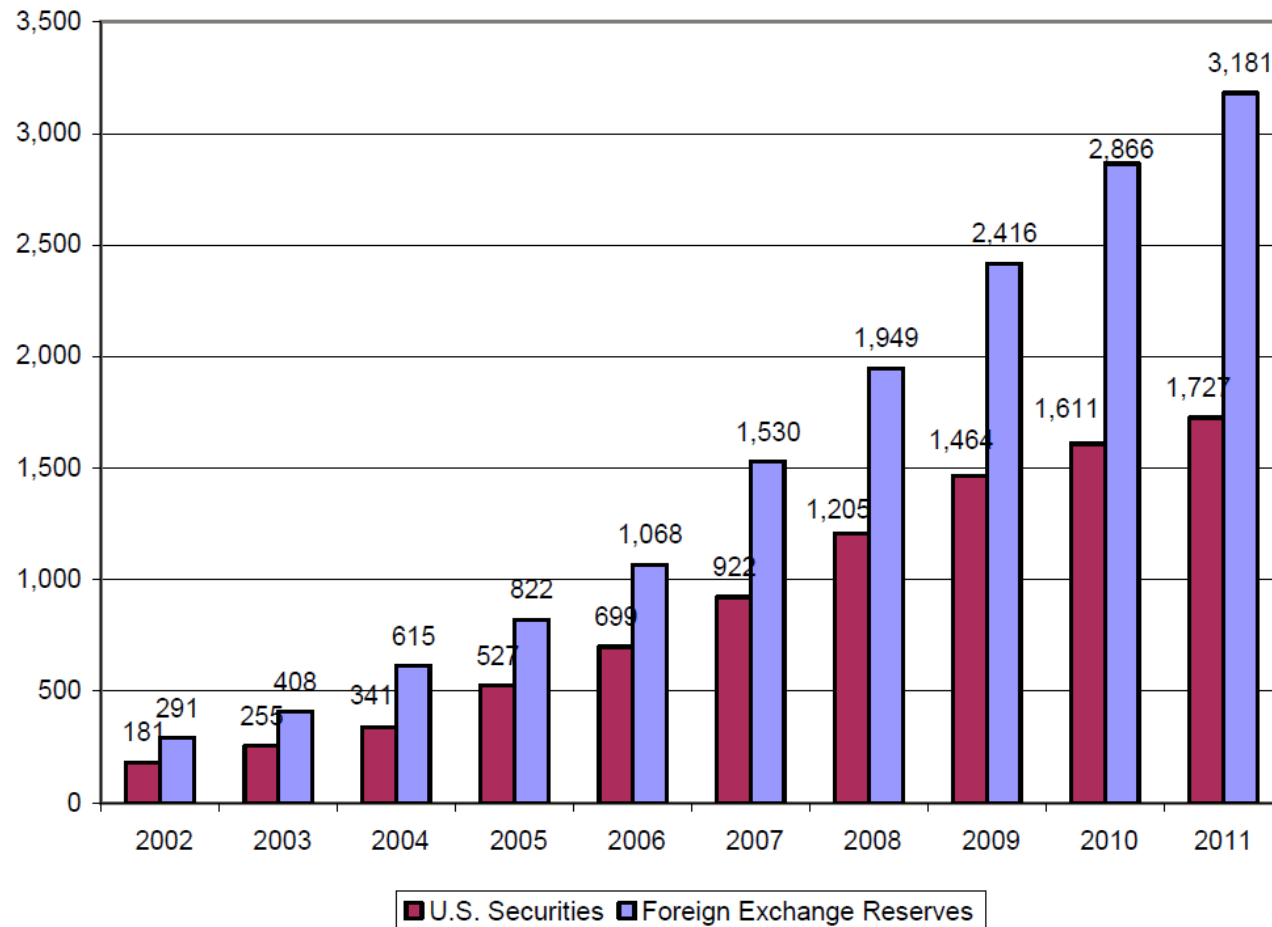
- In first phase PRC's approach was animated by China's traditional role as an ally during the Korean War. It lasted until 1993/94 when the PRC began to support IAEA and UN Security Council Resolutions (UN SC 825). **(bilateral phase)**
- In the second phase China recognized the US, IAEA, Japan and ROK as legitimate member's in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) to implement the Geneva Agreed Framework (AF). **(multilateral phase/US leadership)**
- In the third phase China tried to prevent US military action against DPRK by engaging for first time in regional leadership, hosting the Six-Party-Talks to reintegrate DPRK into existing NPT regime. **(plurilateral phase/PRC leadership)**



“Never before has a country as poor as China provided so much financing to a country as rich as the United States.” (Brad Setser and Arpana Pandey, CFR)

- It is estimated that U.S. interest rate payments to China on its holdings of U.S. Treasury securities were \$38.9 billion in FY2011, or about \$107 million per day
- China’s holdings of U.S. Treasury debt in FY2011 was roughly equal to
 - \$4,073 for every American and
 - \$961 for every Chinese.

China's Holdings of Foreign Exchange Reserves and Public and Private U.S. Securities: 2002-2011 (in US\$ Bio.)



Depending on Category of U.S. Security Holding, China's holds a substantial amount of US Public debt

Table 3. China's Year-End Holdings of U.S. Treasury Securities: 2003-2011 and Holdings as of September 2012

(\$ billions and as a percent of total foreign holdings)

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	Sept 2012
China's Holdings (\$billions)	159.0	310.0	477.6	894.8	1,160.1	1,151.9	1,155.6
Holdings as a % of Total Foreign Holdings	10.4%	15.2%	20.3%	24.2%	26.1%	23.0%	21.8%

Source: Department of Treasury, Major Foreign Holders of Treasury Securities Holdings, November 16, 2012.

Conclusion

Despite Public Scepticism, responsible PRC government officials have spoken considerate about the China-US debt relationship (2009-2013)

- On March 13, 2009, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at a news conference stated: “We’ve lent a huge amount of capital to the United States, and of course we’re concerned about the security of our assets. And to speak truthfully, I am a little bit worried. I would like to call on the United States to honor its words, stay a credible nation and ensure the safety of Chinese assets.
- On March 24, 2009, the governor of the People’s Bank of China, Zhou Xiaochuan, published a paper calling for replacing the U.S. dollar as the international reserve currency with a new global system controlled by the IMF.
- A Xinhua editorial on August 8, 2011, stated: “The days when the debt-ridden Uncle Sam could leisurely squander unlimited overseas borrowing appeared to be numbered as its triple A-credit rating was slashed by Standard & Poor’s (S&P) for the first time on Friday. China, the largest creditor of the world’s sole superpower, has every right now to demand the United States to address its structural debt problems and ensure the safety of China’s dollar assets.”

Conclusion

1. China's role in the world – if understood scientifically – will not be determined by China alone, but by the international society too. Other states will have to take the respective counter-roles to create a stable international social order. Thus, if China should aspire to be a leader, there need to be others willing to follow.
2. At this time, more often than not reform-minded status quo power that supports the US led international order. It does so out of self-interest because the current order serves China's people well.
3. The longer China engages itself in the current order, the more China's domestic order and the preferences of its people becomes locked-in the stability of this order. So-called „compliance constituencies“ will press the PRC government to stick to international rules/institutions, because they serve the people's interest.

<http://www.uni-hd.de/harnisch>

YAN XUETONG ON CHINESE REALISM, THE TSINGHUA SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF HARMONY

- China should behave differently from the US, by providing a different type of international leadership for the world. I am advocating for China to be a humane authority. Humane authority is based on both material power and political power. Humane authority needs to have an efficient political system to mobilize both domestic and international resources. Humane means a superpower has more friends and receives more international support than others. China should have more allies than the US, but unfortunately at this moment, we fall far short. Being humane not only requires having an ample number of allies but also being moral and having strong leadership, or as people nowadays like to say, undertaking more international responsibility.



YAN XUETONG

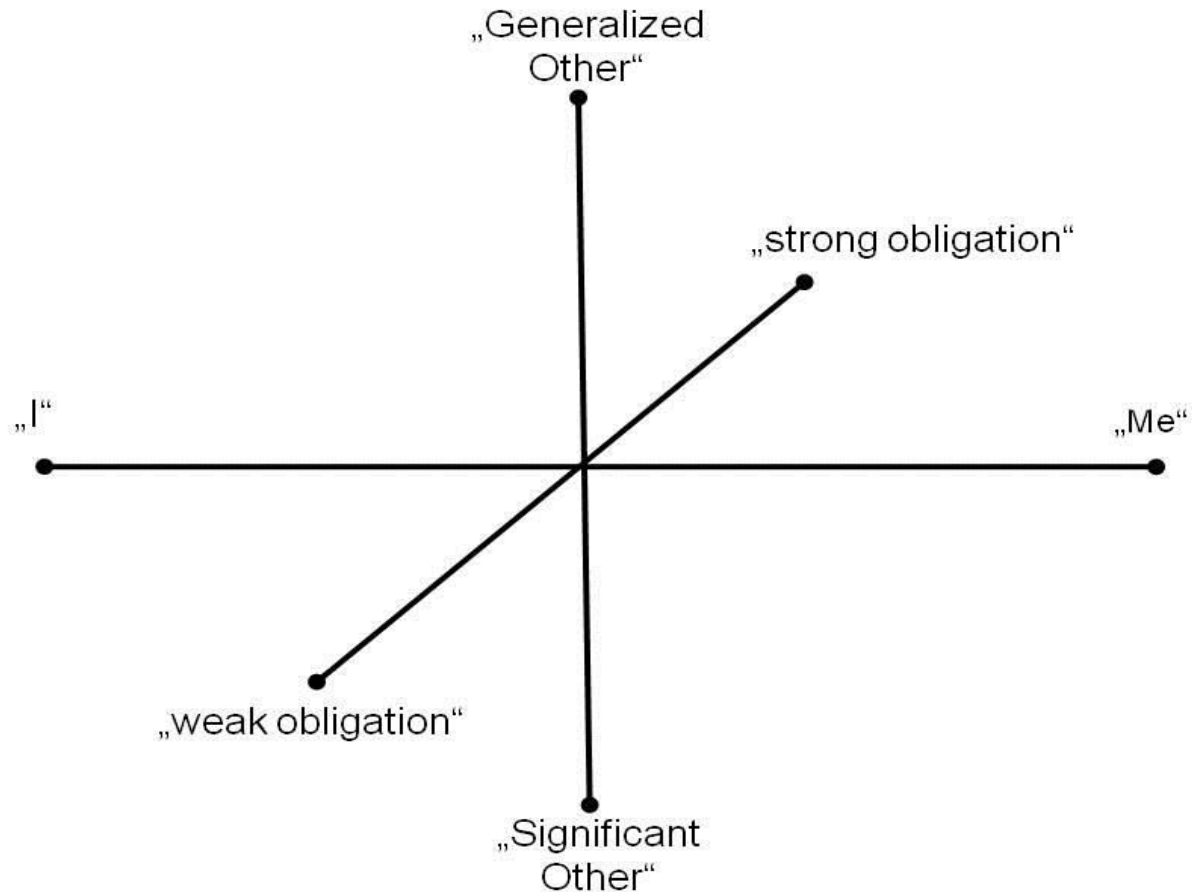
International Leadership: definition and explanation

- International leadership may be defined as a social role consisting of expectations of a group of states towards one or more group members to enhance the group's goals by means at the leaders disposal and compliance by following states. This regularly includes the partial transfer of national policy competences and power resources to the group leader (Harnisch 2013).

Leadership thus requires both hard and soft power, that is leadership through representing the interests of the group (input legitimacy of leadership) and effectively achieving the goals of the group (output legitimacy).

To pursue leadership functions, the role holder needs social capital among which trust is the most important one.

Dimensions of role change and learning



Post World War II Role taking process by PR China

The „Other“	Soviet Union Primary Socializer	Bandung Group (77) Primary Socializers	Soviet Union Primary negative Socializer	Soviet Union / USA Primary negative Socializers
Post WW II Period	1949-1954	1954-1957	1958-1965	1966-1970
The Historical „Self“	China as a Victim (of capitalist domination)	China as a Victim (of capitalist domination)	China as a Victim (of colonial domination)	China as a Victim (of colonial domination)

Post World War II Role taking process by PR China

The „Other“	United Nations Primary „Organized Other“	USA / Soviet Union	USA / Soviet Union	ASEAN USA / EU / Japan
Post WW II Period	1971-1978	1979-1982	1983-1989	1989-1997
The Historical „Self“	??	??	??	China as a „Self-made“ nation

Post World War II Role taking process by PR China

The „Other“	UN / Arab League / African Union USA / EU	ASEAN / USA / EU		
Post WW II Period	1998-2008	2009-		
The Historical „Self“	China as Victim and China As Middle Kingdom	China as Victim and China As Middle Kingdom		

The Self: the process of self-identification

