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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

DISPUTED THEORY AND SECURITY POLICY:

RESPONDING TO "THE RISE OF CHINA"

SUBMITTED TO

PROFESSOR JENNIFER TAW

AND

DEAN GREGORY HESS

BY

JOSEPH KELLY CLIFTON

FOR

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Chapter I: Introduction

The rise of China could have an enormous impact on the security of the U.S. and East Asian states, but it is unclear how policymakers should respond. The complexity and importance of China's rise has generated a large volume of scholarship including explanations, predictions, and policy prescriptions. What it has not produced much of is consensus. The events of the last fifteen years have not definitively confirmed or invalidated different understandings, and the debates of today mimic those of the past. While much scholarship may be interesting from a theoretical standpoint, the amount of definitive theoretical knowledge available from a policymaker's point of view is fairly low.

I contend that the relative lack of knowledge useful for policy is a result of a lack of substantive engagement of contextual analyses at a theoretical level. Analysts sometimes entertain different theoretical positions, but often decisively choose a favored position somewhat arbitrarily, or by claiming that the favored theory better describes a particular set of evidence. While this approach is useful for a policymaker sharing this theoretical approach, it does little to counter competing policy prescriptions.

Coherent analysis from one theoretical position can often coexist with analysis from another position for two main reasons. First, the meanings of facts are disputed. For example, some find that the lack of large-scale Chinese militarization is evidence that a wealthy China will be a status quo power, and will not generate security problems. For others, the lack of

militarization is only an effective buildup of latent power that will inevitably lead to militarization when China is wealthier. Second, the standards for relevant evidence vary across theoretical positions. Idealists claim that ideas are a relevant (if not the only) variable for analysis, while materialists reject their importance. The result is that analyses of the same issue, the security implications of China's rise, are competitive only in their outcomes, such as predictions and policy prescriptions, not in their substance. The only way to resolve these disputes is at the theoretical level, because the claims are only effectively competing at the theoretical level.

For scholars, leaving theoretical debates to theorists may be preferable, because it enables applied and empirical work. Scholars can assume a theoretical position and work within that position, knowing that the relevance of their work is contingent on a side in an unresolved theoretical debate. This contingency, however, can pose a serious problem for policymakers. Policymakers are faced with contradictory policy prescriptions that require resolution at a complex theoretical level, often involving literature found in a different set of publications.

Consequently, policymakers have two options. First, they can take a position in a theoretical debate and focus on specific analysis from that position. Decisively theoretical foreign policies are not unheard of, such as Nixon and Kissinger's realism and the Bush administration's neoconservativism linked to Project for a New American Century. Taking sides in a theoretical debate is useful for policymakers since it provides a clear guide to policy, but it can also lead to substantial problems if the theory itself is poor. For example, optimistic expectations of the Iraq War were apparently based in part on a particularly broad version of democratic peace theory, which is controversial largely because of its questionable methodology

(a fairly technical concern).[1] Policymakers may be generally aware of theoretical debates and may prefer a particular side, but fully understanding and correctly using theory takes a level of technical expertise often at odds with the skills and concerns of the policymaker.

Second, policymakers can avoid explicitly theoretical positions. Several works have identified a tendency among policymakers to reject the usefulness of theory in practice.[2] Rejecting theory altogether is not possible. Policymakers act as they do because they expect certain outcomes from their actions, and the expectation and the value of the outcome result from some understanding about the nature of international politics. Policymakers who reject the usefulness of theory are actually taking theoretical positions, although they may be subconscious and inconsistent. In his study of the theory-policy relationship, Alexander George found that although policymakers generally disliked "theory," they recognized the importance of "generic knowledge."[3] The two terms are functionally very similar (if not identical), yet the negative connotation of "theory" among policymakers limits careful and systematic examination of this "generic knowledge." This approach may also lead to poor policy, because the implicit theoretical positions may be inconsistent with each other, creating an incoherent foreign policy, or the theoretical assumptions themselves may be of poor quality. Closed to explicit reflection on the role of theory in analysis and practice, the use of theoretical knowledge and theory-laden contextual analyses is minimal.

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[1] John M. Owen IV, "Iraq and the Democratic Peace: Who says Democracies Don't Fight?" review of *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War,* by Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 6 (November-December 2005): 122-127.

[2] For example: Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1993); Joseph Lepgold and Miroslave Nincic, ed., *Being Useful: Policy Relevance and International Relations Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Joseph Lepgold and Miroslav Nincic, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: International Relations Theory and the Issue of Policy Relevance* (New York: Columbia UP, 2001).

[3] Alexander George, xviii-xix.

This paper demonstrates the importance of this general theory-practice problem in the context of American China policy, and attempts to find a solution. The particular concern is extremely pessimistic views of China, especially John Mearsheimer's offensive realist assessment, because these views prescribe competitive policies that would likely lead to undesirable outcomes. Of course, these "China threat" theories consider the outcomes of competitive policies to be preferable to the predicted outcomes of (initially) non-competitive policies. Yet the need for complete assessment, including an assessment at the theoretical level, is prudent before competitive policies are adopted.

Organization

Chapter II explains the pessimistic view of China's rise from Mearsheimer's offensive realist perspective. I give a brief overview of the realist tradition from which offensive realism originates. In particular, I focus on Kenneth Waltz's structural realism because Mearsheimer's theory shares most of its epistemic status with Waltz's theory. I indicate the relevant differences between Waltz's realism and offensive realism, most notably in the expected behavior of states (power maximizing as opposed to balance-seeking). Lastly, I demonstrate how Mearsheimer has applied his theory to the rise of China, and highlight his prescriptions for American policymakers.

Chapter III explains the difficulty of policymakers using an offensive realist response to the rise of China. It identifies two specific problems with offensive realism in this case. First, offensive realism's policy prescriptions will lead to only marginally better outcomes in the long-term, while they will lead to suboptimal outcomes in the short-term. Second, offensive realist

claims about the rise of China conflict with claims from other theoretical positions, and these conflicts can only be resolved with great sensitivity toward theoretical debates. The conclusion is not that offensive realism ought to be abandoned outright, since its claims are important and possibly true, but that greater theoretical sensitivity from a policymaker's standpoint must be employed to craft optimal policy.

Chapter IV evaluates several of the major applications of theory to the rise of China, highlighting some of the major debates. The theoretical applications are evaluated on their suitability to the context and their utility in policymaking. The chapter's organization is necessarily somewhat arbitrary, since different theoretical positions are nuanced and not easily grouped, yet it begins with positions closer to offensive realism and moves outward. I find that although offensive realism's "China threat" interpretation cannot be definitively disproved, other theoretical positions, especially constructivist positions, can more accurately analyze the rise of China.

Chapter V then concludes by assessing the proper positions for a policymaker. My argument is that although it is necessary to attempt to resolve the theoretical debate, policymakers cannot expect to find a "correct" theoretical position and proper subsequent contextual application. Instead, they must acknowledge some theoretical uncertainty and take positions based on the two factors of relative accuracy of analysis and expected payoff/risk from any particular prescription. In the case of the rise of China, I argue that American policymakers should not pursue the "containment" strategy recommended by offensive realism because of both weaknesses in offensive realist analysis in this context, and because the expected payoff of the strategy is low relative to other strategies.

Chapter II: Offensive Realism and the "China Threat"

There are many reasons why people believe that China is a threat, and some of these reasons are shallow and unsophisticated. For example, some American commentators on the Christian- or far-right seem to have a China threat theory based on China's theological/ideological status. As one such Internet-based publication articulates, "China has been a communist country for 60 years. Not only is Marxist philosophy at odds with the American way of life, Marxism is hostile toward every other way of life than its own."[4] It is fairly easy to argue against this particular theory by proving that the Chinese state no longer espouses a Marxist ideology, or by proving that ideology is not a good predictor of foreign policy. Attempting to address every different reason, however, would be an interminable task.

My starting point is the "China threat" of offensive realism, as portrayed in Mearsheimer's *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.[5] I pick this threat articulation for three admittedly somewhat subjective reasons. First, it is arguably the most popular and visible China threat theory, aided by Mearsheimer's popularity and his frequent publishing on the matter. Second, offensive realism portrays the "threat" in some of the most pessimistic terms, both in terms of the degree of conflict and the certainty of it occurring, and Mearsheimer has been fairly specific in the theory's application in this manner. Lastly, offensive realism claims the threat on the basis of its relation to a more general theory of international politics, not a reductionist

[4] Bob Ellis, "Communist China: An Increasingly Imperialistic Threat," *Dakota Voice,* 3 June 2010, http://www.dakotavoice.com/2010/06/communist-china-an-increasingly-imperialistic-threat/ (Accessed April 17, 2011).
[5] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

analysis of the Chinese case specifically. This allows for the testing of theories using China as a case study, enabling conclusions about the relative merits of theories as well as the status of the "China threat." Of course not all other IR theoretical positions are completely optimistic about the rise of China. I also consider several other positions that espouse some concern, but none are as clear in their pessimism as offensive realism.

Realism

Realism is not a theory; it is a paradigm or a philosophical position.[6] Realist theories often disagree on foundational elements, yet this does not invalidate realism as an approach to international politics because realism itself is non-falsifiable.[7] Despite some disputes, realism gains some coherence as a paradigm from shared assumptions, methods, and conclusions. Some theories have an ambiguous relationship to realism, or may count as realist theories in certain contexts but not others. Realist theories in a strict sense, theories that are unquestionably realist, have at least four commonalities. First, realism is state-centric. The state is both the actor in international politics and the referent for all matters of security. In other words, states are both those affecting international politics, and those (relevantly) affected by international politics.[8] Realists disagree about what causes states to act in certain ways, but that states are the only relevant actors is not seriously contested.[9] Second, realism claims that states exist in anarchy. There is no power that governs the relations among states, meaning that states have to rely on

[6] Yuan-Kang Wang, "Offensive Realism and the Rise of China," *Issues and Studies* 40, no. 1 (March 2004): 175.
[7] Stephen M. Walt, "The Progressive Power of Realism," *The American Political Science Review* 91, no. 4, (1997): 933.
[8] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 17.
[9] Realism may be applicable to non-state actors in situations other than international politics if similar conditions are met (anarchy, self-interested rational actors, etc.), but states are the relevant actor in international politics: Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 121.

"self-help" for protection and prosperity.[10] While realism demonstrates that states have strategies available to achieve some measure of security in anarchy, the ever-present danger creates what Mearsheimer calls "a gloomy view of international relations."[11] While realist theories generally accept this conclusion, they may disagree on the extent to which conflict and violence can be managed. Third, realism focuses on relative power as the currency of international politics. Given the anarchic system, the relationships between states are defined primarily through the power differential of those states and other states relevant to the balance of power.[12] Realists may disagree about the definition of power, or whether political calculations are based on power alone or on a different variable largely determined by power (such as Walt's "balance of threat" theory),[13] but relative power is always central to a realist understanding of international relations.

The realist paradigm must be embodied in theory for it to become a meaningful tool of policy analysis. Realist theories can be divided into three main camps. A division can be made based on the causes of state action in the international system, with the two main types being classical realism and structural realism. Structural realism can be further divided between defensive and offensive realism. I summarize several theories that meet these divisions below to give a sense of the context of offensive realism and its "China threat." The theories presented do not account for all theories or theoretical stances under their general categories, but are central or typical representations of them.

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[10] Ibid., 111.
[11] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, 17.
[12] Ibid., 18.
[13] Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987), 22.

Classical realism

Also known as "human nature realism,"[14] classical realism posits that conflict between states is primarily a product of the aggressiveness of human nature. Hans J. Morgenthau is the canonical author of classical realism with his work *Politics Among Nations*, which was influential after World War II.[15] As Morgenthau argues, "political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature."[16] That nature in the international arena translates to a state's "interest defined in terms of power."[17] In other words, states seek as much political power as possible because they are social institutions, and therefore follow the drives of human nature. Given the premise that people (and states) will experience a conflict of interest in their pursuit of power, the goal of politics is to achieve "the realization of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good."[18] This "lesser evil" is pursued through the balance of power, in which states try to maintain an existing equilibrium or construct a new equilibrium.[19]

Structural realism and its defensive strains

Defensive realism is the original of the two main branches of structural realism (which is also called "neorealism"). Structural realism is most directly an innovation of Kenneth Waltz in his 1979 book *Theory of International Politics*, building on his 1954 book *Man, the State, and*

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[14] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 19.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace,* sixth edition, brief edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 4.
[17] Ibid., 5.
[18] Ibid., 4.
[19] Ibid., 184.

War.[20] Waltz rejects other international political theories of the time, including classical realism, primarily because of methodological concerns that he claims limit the utility of the theory. Waltz consequently begins *Theory of International Politics* with an explanation of his concept of a theory and its epistemic status. To some extent, Waltz seems rejects the objective status of theory and reality with the limits he places on induction. While he does claim that induction can objectively accumulate data and make causal claims between variables, induction alone cannot explain anything. As Waltz puts it, "reality emerges from our selection and organization of materials that are available in infinite quantity."[21] With respect to theory, "theories do construct *a* reality, but no one can ever say that it is *the* reality."[22] By this it appears that Waltz means that there is an objective reality (*the* reality), and theories can only echo images of it (*a* reality). This image, the theoretical conception of reality, emerges from a "creative idea" of the theorist.[23] Following the position of Karl Popper, Waltz argues that theory is then tested by rationally (objectively) deducing hypotheses from the theory, and testing them against data. The theory itself cannot be true or false (according to Waltz, this is the realm of law, the causal connection between variables), but better or less able to explain the truth or falsity of deduced empirical tests.[24] These tests should use the scientific method, objectively collecting data and assessing it in relation to expectations deduced from the theoretical understanding of the structure of reality. The assumption seems to be that the theory and theorist are not *part of* reality (*the* reality), but

[20] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man the State and War: a theoretical analysis* (New York: Columbia UP, 1954).
[21] Waltz, *Theory,* 5.
[22] Ibid., 9.
[23] Ibid., 11.
[24] Ibid., 9.

are able to stand back and objectively analyze it in the way that the natural sciences claim to operate, using essentially the same methods (unity of science).[25]

Using this theoretical stance as a contrast, Waltz criticizes existing international relations theories because they are *reductionist*, meaning that they cannot explain any given phenomena without looking at the particulars of that given phenomena. Morgenthau, he argues, cannot properly explain *why* the international system has a realist character, so he must attribute "causes arbitrarily to the level of interacting units."[26] For a rigorous and useful social science, theory must be able to explain recurring outcomes without relying on the character of the actors (in this case states), especially since actors seem to vary and change considerably.[27] Instead of explanation at the level of states (based on the "human nature" of those controlling them), explanation must originate at the level of the (anarchic) structure to be able to explain the actions of the units of the system (states in this case) in a non-reductionist way. Hence Waltz's embrace of third-level, structural analysis, which enables the theorist to disregard the content of each particular state, and instead explain and predict based on the behavior that the structure itself requires (at least for continued existence of the unit). Structural realism, therefore, relies on structure to explain recurrence in international politics despite different actors. The anarchic system necessitates that states act to ensure their security through strategies of power. This creates similar sorts of realist patterns observed by Morgenthau and previous realists, but the explanation for why these patterns occur is different. This difference is not arbitrary because the theoretical stance of structural realism supposedly allows more consistent and accurate explanations and predictions.

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[25] Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 123.
[26] Waltz, *Theory,* 62.
[27] Ibid., 63-66.

Structural realism as a broad category only posits a cause for power competition, not specific characteristics of that power competition, and indeed various classical realist and structural realist analyses may seem very similar. Specific structural realist theories, however, expound upon the manner in which the international structure influences state behavior. Defensive realism is the first of such structural realist theories, promoted by Waltz and his followers. Since states are motivated by security, they will not typically seek broadly expansionary goals and will attempt to preserve the balance of power. Bandwagoning, where a state allies with the stronger power, is unlikely to occur because the threat to security comes from the stronger power. Should a state (or coalition) begin to create a power imbalance through either its internal development (increasing domestic sources of power) or alliance-forming with other states, the expected behavior of other states is to balance against the rising power by forming a counter-coalition and increasing domestic sources of power. Importantly, this also means that achieving a balance of power is the goal of states, not maximization of power. Bandwagoning and other power-seeking policies increase instability, creating an incentive for preventive war, and are therefore largely inconsistent with a goal of security. Of course states will seek power, but only for the ends of security through the balance of power, not as an ends in itself.[28]

Offensive realism

Offensive realism, a creation of John Mearsheimer, takes the structural formulation from Waltz and uses it to argue for a different expectation of state behavior and international

[28] Ibid., 126.

outcomes. While defensive realism claim that states only pursue power to the extent that it creates a balance, offensive realism claims that the state's appetite for power is insatiable. As Mearsheimer puts it, "A state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system."[29] In the offensive realist understanding, states are also motivated by security, but have little reason to believe that maintaining the balance of power alone will provide this. Because states have the ability to attack each other, and there is no way to ensure benign intention of other states, states are potential dangers to each other. The only way for a state to maximize its chance of survival (Mearsheimer tends to use "survival" instead of "security") is to maximize its power because a powerful state is less likely to be attacked and more likely to win if attacked.[30]

Moreover, there is no apparent limit to how much power, either relative or absolute, is sufficient to ensure security, because it is never clear how much relative power is necessary for security. Additionally, relative power changes, meaning that states ought to constantly maximize their power to guarantee their security in the long-term. A state can only be truly secure, therefore, in a position of unchallenged hegemony, so hegemony is the goal of all states. The consequence, as Mearsheimer puts it, is that "great powers have aggressive intentions," because they constantly try to increase their power at the expense of others.[31]

Great powers are not constantly at war, of course, so there are some limits to the aggression of states, but these limits are imperfect. A state is only likely to start a war when it makes the calculation that its relative power will be increased at the conclusion of the conflict. If there were reason to believe that a conflict will result in either a loss or a Pyrrhic victory for a

[29] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 21.
[30] Ibid., 33.
[31] Ibid., 34.

state, the state would rationally forgo conflict initiation.[32] Yet the information available to decision-makers is deficient, so great powers may miscalculate and initiate conflicts that they end up losing.[33] Mearsheimer also agrees that balancing behavior, defensive realism's potential guarantor of security and stability, sometimes occurs. Yet this too is only a mitigating factor. As even defensive realists would concede, a balance of power is no guarantee of conflict prevention when information is imperfect and miscalculation possible. Decision-makers could mistakenly see an opportunity to enhance the power of their state through aggression when no such opportunity exists, creating disastrous results. Since offensive realism argues that states seek power maximization instead of a balance of power, a perceived imbalance will be met with aggression rather than counter-balancing or non-action (on the part of the greater power). Moreover, Mearsheimer contests that balancing is the most alluring strategy for states faced with a rising power, arguing instead that "buck-passing" is more likely. "A buck-passer," according to Mearsheimer, "attempts to get another state to bear the burden of deterring or possibly fighting an aggressor, while it remains on the sidelines."[34] Buck-passing is an attractive option for states because deterrence and war are costly, but it is likely to check potential aggressors because the state tasked with countering the aggressor might fail. This likelihood of imbalance is increased when multiple states are trying to buck-pass, creating confusion and uncertainty that is likely to hinder effective balancing behavior.[35]

Offensive realism, therefore, paints the darkest picture of a rising power. A rising power will not simply wish to create a new, stable balance of power somewhat more in its favor. Instead, it will actively seek to accumulate as much power as possible at the expense of potential

[32] Ibid., 37.
[33] Ibid., 38.
[34] Ibid., 157-158.
[35] Ibid., 161.

rivals. Other great powers will see the potential for a peer challenger or even a hegemon, and will wish to halt the rising power while they still have the chance. Great power conflict in these situations is likely, and at the very least one would expect the undesirable results associated with significant power competition, such as proxy wars, arms races, and economic losses. For Mearsheimer and other offensive realists, China currently fits this role as the dangerous rising power.

Offensive realism and the "China threat"

To apply the universal claims (theoretical claims) of offensive realism to the particular case of the rise of China, Mearsheimer first clarifies his understanding of the existing balance of power. The United States is a regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere, but not a global hegemon. Mearsheimer claims that Germany could also become a potential regional hegemon in Europe if the U.S. removes its security presence from Europe, forcing Germany to secure itself.[36] For now, however, Germany remains under the security umbrella of the U.S., and the biggest potential for great power rivalry is in East Asia. The U.S. remains a strong force in East Asia, but it is not hegemonic. Russia and China are the other two poles in the multipolar system, and both qualify as great powers because of "nuclear arsenals, the capability to contest and probably thwart a U.S. invasion of their homeland, and limited power-projection capability."[37] Japan is also of great importance due to its wealth, but it is dismissed as a possible regional hegemon because of its relatively small population. Russia is dismissed for the same reason, as well as its

[36] Ibid., 394.
[37] Ibid., 381.

much weaker economy and need to secure its non-Asian borders.[38] China, according to Mearsheimer, is the only potential hegemon.

Writing in 2001, Mearsheimer claimed that the power dynamic could take basically two routes depending on Chinese economic growth. At the time, the Japanese economy was still substantially larger than the Chinese economy, so not wanting to make economic predictions, Mearsheimer acknowledged that Chinese economic growth might slow substantially. Were this to have happened, the U.S. would probably reduce its military presence in East Asia, creating a multipolarity of China, Japan, and Russia, with no country able to claim hegemony. While this would be potentially unstable, the possibility for a peaceful balance of power would remain.[39] The criterion set for this first route was that Japan would have to remain the largest economy in the region, but China passed Japan in 2010 and it does not appear that Japan will make up the difference any time soon.[40]

The other route is that China's economy continues to grow causing China to become by far the most powerful state in the region. Even if all other states in the region ally in an attempt to balance China (not an easy task since buck-passing may be tempting), they will likely not be able to equal the vast power of China given its enormous population and economy.[41] China will try to maximize its power like any state, so it will take advantage of its demographic and economic advantages and militarize in a bid for regional hegemony.

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[38] Ibid., 397.
[39] Ibid., 399.
[40] Clifford Coonan, "China overtakes Japan to become second largest economy in the world," *The Irish Times,* 17 August 2010, http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/finance/2010/0817/1224276972874.html (accessed April 17, 2011).
[41] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 400.

Regional hegemony in this case could take the form of either conquest similar to Japan's pre-WWII attempt, or the form of dominance through threat, as the U.S. has been able to control the behavior of states in the Western Hemisphere. Mearsheimer thinks that the latter is more likely, but acknowledges that both are possible.[42] Intense, unbalanced power competition will occur, with great power war a strong possibility. Other states in the region will try to stop Chinese hegemony, tempting preventive war. The existence of several potential flashpoints such as Taiwan, North Korea, and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands will make conflict initiation easier. Tensions will escalate with the U.S., since China will have to push the U.S. out of East Asia to achieve hegemony.[43] The U.S. will also strongly oppose the possibility of a peer competitor in a Chinese regional hegemon, especially because China's economy and population could possibly become much more powerful than any rival faced in the 20th century.[44] The U.S. will treat China like it did the Soviet Union in the Cold War, but of course there is no guarantee that the U.S. and China will not directly engage in war.[45] In fact, Mearsheimer thinks that war is more likely because geographic differences put less at stake for both sides than would have a European conflict in the Cold War. Reducing the cost of war increases the chance that one side will see war as a rational choice, an acceptable risk.[46]

Can anything be done to avoid this terrible fate? Mearsheimer does not think so: "The picture I have painted of what is likely to happen if China continues its rise is not a pretty one. I actually find it categorically depressing and wish that I could tell a more optimistic story about

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[42] John J. Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise," *Current History* 105 (April 2006): 163.
[43] John J. Mearsheimer, "Trouble brewing in the 'hood,'" *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 3 August 2010, http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/contributors/trouble-brewing-in-the-hood-20100802-113ab.html (accessed April 17, 2011).
[44] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 401.
[45] John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3 (2010): 390.
[46] Ibid., 392.

the future."[47] This sense of fatalistic determinism is echoed in the scarcity of policy advice Mearsheimer provides. As far as is discernable, he has suggested only two possible policy modifications, both in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* in 2001. First, he argues that the U.S. (and presumably other states facing a threat from China) should switch to a policy of containment in place of engagement. Engagement in whatever form, be it through trade, international organizations, or democracy promotion, will not mitigate China's ambitions and can only enhance China's power. Particularly, the U.S. should try to harm China's economy to reduce (or at least slow the growth of) its major source of power.[48] He does not propose any specific policies for how the U.S. could do this, and it would likely be difficult without harming the American economy substantially. Second, he implies that the U.S. should consider withdrawing its forces from East Asia. The U.S. could return to its classic role as an offshore balancer, and only intervene when necessary. Withdrawal would prevent regional allies from buck-passing, requiring them to build up their own deterrent. Japan in particular would substantially increase its military might. The U.S. could possibly allow other states to do the all of the fighting should a conflict occur, although Mearsheimer seems skeptical that this would be sufficient. At the very least, the U.S. could involve itself later in a war so that it suffers less and emerges in a better position. Mearsheimer does acknowledge that removing American forces may actually increase the likelihood of war because of its destabilizing effect, but claims that the risk is worthwhile from an American perspective.[49] Presumably his policy advice for other

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[47] John J. Mearsheimer, "The rise of China will not be peaceful at all," *The Australian,* 18 November 2005, http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/P0014.pdf (accessed April 17, 2011).
[48] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 402.
[49] Ibid., 388-389. Note that it is unclear whether Mearsheimer believes that this prescription should apply to a case where China's power continues to grow (present case). He speaks of withdrawing the U.S.'s military presence as "good strategic sense" in response to the argument that the U.S. should be a global peacekeeper, but later argues that if China's power were to continue to grow, the U.S. "would keep forces in the region to contain China." Ibid., 400.

countries in the region would be the opposite: try to keep a strong American military presence in the region.

Chapter III: Evaluating Applied Theory

For a claim about the future of security in East Asia, Mearsheimer says very little about East Asian security of the present. He makes general observations about the relative powers of states in the region, but says virtually nothing specific about history, regime types, diplomatic signals, existing tactical capabilities, security-related incidents, or size or growth of defense budgets. This is not to say that offensive realism is incompatible with an explanation of the present in East Asia or that offensive realism cannot itself explain the present, although some scholars do make this claim.[50] Regardless, the point is that data not required by the causal mechanism of offensive realism is considered irrelevant and possibly misleading. Theory, following the role specified by Waltz, is a way of making sense of otherwise senseless data. Infinite data necessitates simplification in theory, including variable isolation.[51] Simplification means that occasionally hypotheses deduced from theory (such as predictions) will be incorrect because other variables that are usually negligible were important in a particular case for some reason. Even though theories are not perfect, they are still required to understand anything. Theories ought to be judged on their utility, which includes their ability to deduce accurate hypotheses.[52]

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[50] For example, David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (Spring 2003): 57-85. More specifically, Kang contends that offensive realist explanations for the present in East Asia are non-falsifiable, and that other explanations can explain more.
[51] Waltz, *Theory,* 10.
[52] Ibid., 8.

Mearsheimer therefore, picks out the important systemic variable, the distribution of power (and probably geography, although Mearsheimer is somewhat vague on geography's role), and provides a clear, empirically backed description (in this case primarily of the predictive type) and consequent prescription.[53] Of course, Mearsheimer's analysis is contingent on the distribution of power changing as predicted, meaning that China's rise must not come to an end. Some have criticized Mearsheimer for not sufficiently accounting for the possibility of future economic problems in China, arguing that the enormous "rise" predicted by Mearsheimer and others fearful of China will likely not materialize, voiding pessimistic predictions.[54] As mentioned earlier, Mearsheimer is not exacting in the necessary distribution of power to cause the instability necessary to meet his prediction, but China's current economic status seems to have met his criterion. I also assume that China's GNP will continue to rise at a fairly rapid rate over the next few decades, eventually passing that of the United States, although the timeline is necessarily somewhat unclear. This assumption could be wrong, and some scholars clearly think that China's long-term growth is overhyped.[55] At the very least, uncertainty inherent in economic forecasts ought bring a similar level of uncertainty to the predictions of offensive realism.

Even with this caveat in mind, Mearsheimer recognizes that he may be *theoretically* wrong so he "should therefore proceed with humility, tak[ing] care not to exhibit unwarranted confidence." Nevertheless, the claimed success rate of his theory (he finds only one anomaly) certainly demonstrates at least some (perhaps warranted) confidence. Moreover, Mearsheimer

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[53] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 11.
[54] For example: Ho-fung Hung, ed., *China and the Transformation of Global Capitalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009); Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, "A Critique of the China Threat Theory: A Systemic Analysis," *Asian Perspective* 31, no. 3 (2007): 41-66; and Minxin Pei, *China's Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006).
[55] Wing Thye Woo, "China's Short-term and Long-term Economic Goals and Prospects," *Brookings*, 17 February 2009, http://www.brookings.edu/testimony/2009/0217_chinas_economy_woo.aspx, (accessed April 17, 2011).

argues that predictions are still important for theorists to "inform policy discourse," indicating enough confidence to desire that his policy prescriptions be followed.[56] This goal is reflected in his attempts to publicize his "China threat" claim outside of academia with public debates, speeches to politicians, and newspaper op-eds.[57]

Yet if utility is the standard by which to judge theory, then offensive realism does not seem to be very useful in the case of a rising China. Its prediction that East Asia will become the site of the next "tragedy of great power politics" is disturbing. The best case would be a Cold War-like scenario, which would likely include proxy wars, large economic costs, and widespread fear. At worst, the region (or the entire world) will erupt in great power war, including possible nuclear war. Policy choices will do little to avoid these catastrophes, since Mearsheimer thinks that they are more determinate of who will suffer or a small change in the degree of suffering instead of if suffering will happen at all. Offensive realism is therefore not very useful in avoiding this tragedy.

Moreover, offensive realist policy prescriptions would seem to hasten the tragedy. Without adopting a particular theoretical stance, it would seem reasonable to claim that a policy of containment directed at China would have two results. First, containment would result in a loss of absolute gains, at least in non-security measures. Even if it were possible for the U.S. and other states to hamper China's economic growth, it would come at the cost of the quality of life in China and likely in other states too (such as in the case of sanctions, where the sanctioning

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[56] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 8.

[57] For example: Mearsheimer, "Trouble"; Mearsheimer, "will not be peaceful"; Zbigniew Brzezinski and John J. Mearsheimer, "Clash of the Titans," *Foreign Policy* 146 (January/February 2005): 46-49; John J. Mearsheimer, "Australians should fear the rise of China," *The Spectator: Australia,* 2 October 2010, http://www.spectator.co.uk/australia/6320273/australians-should-fear-the-rise-of-china.thtml (accessed April 17, 2011); Shane McLeod, "Professor predicts China Clash," The World Today, ABC News Radio (Australia), 2 August 2010, http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2010/s2970768.htm (accessed April 17, 2011); Intelligence Squared, "Beware the Dragon: a Booming China Spells Trouble for America," Debate, mod. James Harding, 16 May 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWYRO-HFkbA (accessed April 17, 2011).

state's economy is also damaged). Second, containment would worsen the security dilemma and other competition in the short-term. The idea of containment is that even if competition does not exist at present or exists at a low level, it will necessarily exist in the future. It is therefore better to initiate or amplify that competition now when the balance of power is more favorable to the falling power. Yet initiating competitive behaviors hastens and ensures their existence. The specific policies used in a containment strategy are open to debate within the offensive realist paradigm, but further tension would seem to result from all of them. A 2005 article gives a sense of the possible options including sanctions, bloc formation, further arming Taiwan, fomenting ethnic uprising, or "harsher measures."[58] Consequently, following offensive realist prescriptions reduces doubt of offensive realist predictions.

Offensive realism's inutility in avoiding tragedy enhances the appeal of other, less gloomy theories. Yet according to Waltz and Mearsheimer, the usefulness of a theory should be judged by its explanatory power, not the normative appeal of its claimed outcomes.[59] Realists deride more rosy theories as "idealist" and unable to explain much of international politics. Moreover, not only are idealist positions considered delusional, they are also considered dangerous because they lead to poor policy choices. For example, one of the more famous and disastrous cases of the failure of policy based on idealism was the inability of the League of Nations to prevent several wars including World War II.[60] In the case of Sino-American relations, Mearsheimer claims that the U.S.'s policy of engagement with China is based on liberal theories such as economic interdependence. However, these theories are weak in their

[58] Bradley A. Thayer, "Confronting China: An Evaluation of Options for the United States," *Comparative Strategy* 24 (2005): 71-98.
[59] Waltz, *Theory,* 6 and Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 8.
[60] John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994): 49.

explanatory power (according to realists), so they misrepresent the effect of a policy of engagement. Instead, engagement will only worsen the outcomes of great power competition.[61]

Yet offensive realism is far from international relations dogma. A multitude of criticisms are directed at either offensive realism specifically or at various assumptions that it shares with other theories (e.g., comparative gains, systemic theory, or positivism). Likewise, a multitude of competing theoretical positions claim to be better (on various criteria) than offensive realism and its theoretical brethren. In fact, the "China threat" claim of offensive realism necessitates at least implicitly taking a position on most of the major debates in IR theory. Definitively proving the superiority of the offensive realist approach to the rise of China would therefore entail definitively winning most of the major debates in IR theory. But "winning" is not practically possible because of the enormous quantity of argument and data, and the continued existence of some debates suggests that they may be conceptually irresolvable as well.

Such complex and deep divisions pose a significant problem for policymakers and other actors concerned with affecting "the real world," and may lead to an indifference to or misunderstanding of theory.[62] Yet these complex, technical debates are far from trivial to policymaking. Sino-American policy today is no different, as competing theories suggest different policies and expect radically different outcomes. Policymakers must use knowledge to do their job, but what counts as relevant knowledge can be unclear.

The rest of this paper attempts to sort out the theory-policy problem in the context of the rise of China. The next chapter reviews possible contributions of several theoretical positions to understanding and acting on the rise of China. The review is necessarily incomplete, so the

[61] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 402.
[62] Lepgold and Nincic, *Ivory Tower,* 2-3.

focus is on prominent and divisive views. The chapter should achieve three main goals. First, it highlights the importance of apparently trivial theoretical issues in terms of policymaking, specifically in the context of China. Second, it clarifies how different theories are applicable to China. Third, it assesses the theories in terms of their usefulness for explanation and policy in the context of China. The assessment of these theoretical applications is contrasted with offensive realism's application for comparative evaluation of their utility.

Chapter IV: IR Theory and the Rise of China

Will Mearsheimer's prediction come true? His confidence is clear in the bluntness of his claim: "Can China rise peacefully? My answer is no."[63] Predictions of this certainty are not commonly found in international relations, especially not in contexts of such complexity and importance as the next few decades of East Asian security. Of course only time will tell, and Mearsheimer himself admits that the nature of social science does not allow for perfect predictive power.[64] Yet one can still assess the strength of the claim in terms of both the substance of the prediction and the ability of theories to make such predictions more generally. This chapter makes that assessment, evaluating several other theoretical positions and the strengths and weaknesses they have relative to offensive realism.

The organization of this chapter proceeds along the rough divisions of realist, liberal, and sociological. Theoretical claims do not always fit neatly under these different labels, so grouping risks essentializing a theoretical claim when it is actually nuanced. Theoretical claims under these different headings can be quite diverse, resulting in very different applications to China's rise. Moreover, theoreticians from different paradigms often respond to (and sometimes incorporate) innovations from different paradigms, meaning that development of different paradigms cannot be easily broken into distinct paths of development amenable to groupings

[63] Mearsheimer, "Unpeaceful": 160.
[64] John J. Mearsheimer, "Reckless States and Realism," *International Relations* 23, no. 2 (2009): 246.

under a single heading. Nevertheless, the grouping is useful inasmuch as it allows for some coherent distinction between different theoretical claims.

Realism

Realists as a whole probably have the most pessimistic view of China's rise, but few share the certainty and absolute pessimism of Mearsheimer. The primary dispute between Mearsheimer and other realists is over the question of power maximization as a state goal, with defensive realists arguing that power maximization is not (or should not be) a state goal, and neoclassical realists arguing that power maximization is one of several possible state goals. I do not directly address a possible classical realist analysis of the rise of China because classical realism is rarely employed by theorists today, but much of the sentiment of classical realism is preserved in neoclassical realism, which includes some classical realist variables in a structural analysis. None of these positions seem to offer a prediction as rosy as those of some liberals, but they are more guarded and nuanced in their analyses than offensive realism.

Waltz's structural realism

The realism of Kenneth Waltz is theoretically similar to Mearsheimer's, since offensive realism is a modification of Waltz's structural realism, yet the expected outcomes and prescribed behaviors are strikingly different. Waltz's realism has a "status quo bias" since there is little incentive for states to try to revise the balance of power, leading to the expectation (or at least

possibility) of a relatively peaceful world.[65] Waltz and Mearsheimer agree that the anarchic structure of international politics forces states to act primarily in their security interests. Yet while Mearsheimer claims that the only way for a state to seek security is to maximize its power, Waltz argues that states ought instead seek a balance of power. In Waltz's view, maximizing power may actually decrease security by causing instability and creating incentive for states to wage preventive war.[66] Interstate war is rarely rational, especially costly great power war, so the expected outcomes of a unit change in the system, such as the rise of China, would not necessarily lead to tragic outcomes.

Nevertheless, Waltz recognizes that wars have happened, and that many international political decisions simply cannot be explained by his theory. He is left claiming that structural realism can only explain the results of international politics, not why decisions were made. Waltz argues that a theory of foreign policy is necessary to explain why or why not states make decisions consistent with realist logic, since apparently they often make irrational decisions.[67] This inability to explain foreign policy decisions hamstrings Waltz's ability to make predictions since outcomes are contingent on policy choices exogenous to the theory.[68] Some theories reviewed later in this section attempt to add an explanation of foreign policy choices (domestic politics), but Waltz's theory alone is not truly predictive.

Waltz's realism can nevertheless analyze balances of power as more or less stable, and therefore determine if conflict is more or less likely to occur. Although this is not predictive *per se*, since it does not claim that any particular outcome will occur, it does allow for some

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[65] Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's status-quo bias: What security dilemma?" *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (1996): 90-121.
[66] Waltz, *Theory,* 126.
[67] Ibid., 121-123.
[68] Mearsheimer, "Reckless": 242.

expectations given a particular balance of power. Applying this sort of analysis to China, Waltz's position gives several reasons to be pessimistic, although perhaps less pessimistic than Mearsheimer.

First, U.S. dominance results in an imbalance of power globally and in East Asia, creating instability. Other states wish to resist U.S. power to ensure their security, and will therefore pursue power maximization policies that could possibly lead to conflict.[69] Likewise, the lack of an effective balance against the U.S. means that the U.S. is relatively free to pursue aggressive policies threatening the security of other states, although this effect may be more notable with threatened minor and middle powers like Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Iran, and North Korea.

Second, the U.S. appears to be set on its desire to remain the premier power, meaning that the U.S. will be unlikely to allow a balance of power with China as a peer competitor or the premier power. Strictly speaking this is not analysis endogenous to Waltz's structural realism, but an assessment that the U.S. will fail to follow structural realism's prescriptions, damaging its security. Waltz argues that U.S. foreign policy choices since the Cold War have not followed balance of power logic, and that existing liberal values and interest in American preponderance leave the impression that the U.S. is unlikely to change its foreign policy to bring it in line with balance of power logic.[70]

Third, even if the U.S. decided to pursue a foreign policy more consistent with the balance of power, Waltz argues that the balance of power in East Asia is necessarily unstable because it is multipolar. Waltz recognizes that although proper balancing coalitions should form

[69] Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 36.
[70] Kenneth N. Waltz, "Globalization and American Power," *The National Interest* 59 (Spring 2000): 55.

regardless of the distribution of power, a multipolar distribution of power is more associated with failures of proper coalition formation. Multipolarity is more complex than a bipolar balance of power, so the possibility for miscalculation is higher.[71] Moreover, just as in any collective action problem, states may find an incentive to cheat a balancing coalition, leading to an imbalance of power.[72] The distribution of power in East Asia fits the characteristics of multipolarity because states like Japan and Russia (and arguably several other states) could decisively change the balance of power. The danger of this multipolarity is enhanced by territorial disputes between several of the major regional powers, including the Korean conflict, the Taiwan issue, and the dispute between Japan and China over the Senkaku/Diaouyu Islands.[73] In structural realist terms, this would mean that states in the region overlap in their definitions of the domain of their security (their territory), meaning that there is necessary insecurity in the region that cannot be overcome by the balance of power. For example, regardless of the balance of power, the PRC will always view the existence of the ROC on Taiwan as a threat to its security because the relevant territory that China is supposed to secure includes Taiwan.

Fourth, even if a balance of power were to form between great powers, the effects of balancing would still likely be somewhat "tragic." Great power rivalry would likely lead to suboptimal outcomes similar to those of the Cold War, including arms races, lost economic activity, and a general lack of cooperation on important global issues like climate change. For example, the failure of the Copenhagen climate change conference resulted primarily from a disagreement between the U.S. and China.[74] Although it cannot be definitively proved that the disagreement was a result of power rivalry, it may be an indication of a pattern of rivalry to

[71] Waltz, *Theory,* 168.
[72] Ibid., 196-197.
[73] Waltz, "Structural Realism": 33.
[74] John M. Broder and James Kanter, "China and U.S. Hit Strident Impasse at Climate Talks," *The New York Times*, 14 December 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/15/science/earth/15climate.html (accessed April 17, 2011).

come. Furthermore, while a balance of power can better ensure the security of great powers, lesser powers often suffer greatly to maintain the balance. For example, while the Kissinger/Nixon détente may have resulted in a more stable balance of power between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the people of Chile, Cambodia, Angola, and East Timor suffered greatly.

Nevertheless, Waltz's structural realism does not exude the fatalism of offensive realism, since it maintains the possibility that a proper balance of power will be formed, and significant competition and great power war will not result. Waltz, like Mearsheimer, also contends that the U.S. should end its costly military presence in Europe and East Asia, and require Japan and South Korea to provide for their own security, at least in the short-term.[75] However Waltz's positions would maintain the possibility for a new, stable balance of power in East Asia, possibly with a coalition led by Japan balancing a rising China. In any case, this would be better than the U.S. preventing proper balance formation when it lacks the long-term resources to ensure stability in East Asia. Moreover, Waltz does not seem to agree with Mearsheimer's prescription of trying to undermine China's rise. Such a policy would likely enhance the security dilemma, creating greater instability. Instead of worrying about relative power, American foreign policy ought to focus on creating an appropriate balance of power.

While Waltz's more defensive realism is an attractive alternative to offensive realism, Mearsheimer argues that it is not a rational means of prediction and policymaking. He argues that Waltz's inability to explain the origins of conflict reduces not only the utility of Waltz's theory, since it cannot make predictions or explain the past, but also the theory's accuracy, since it misunderstands the systemic pressure on security needs. Given that balances often fail, uncertainty about future balance formation and the distribution of power drives states to

[75] Waltz, "Globalization": 37.

maximize their power in order to maximize their security. Waltz's approach may be interesting as a "normative theory" in that it describes how the world would work if all states could accurately assess each other's power and intentions, but it is not useful for describing or acting in the real world. China will be expected to maximize its power instead of creating a stable balance of power, and other potential rivals will also maximize their power instead of counting on a balancing coalition. A coming conflict is much more likely than Waltz is willing to acknowledge. [76]

Mearsheimer's criticism identifies some notable gaps in Waltz's theory, but his solutions are controversial. While there are many differences between offensive realism and other contemporary realisms more in line with that of Waltz, there are two main areas of controversy I wish to highlight because of their pertinence to the rise of China. The first is the extent to which power equates with security, where defensive realists argue that power maximization is not always the optimal strategy. The second is the extent to which the international structure determines state behavior, where neoclassical realists argue that other variables such as perception and motive must be considered.

Power as security?

Even Mearsheimer does not consider relative power to be the sole determinate of a state's security. He acknowledges the importance of geography when explaining the stopping power of water, where water limits the ability of states to operate necessary ground troops.[77] More generally, this recognizes that power is geographically contingent, since the power of a state

[76] Mearsheimer, "Reckless": 252.
[77] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 114-125.

depends on the location of power's exercise. This recognition is not exactly groundbreaking, but Mearsheimer does not go far enough in considering geography's effects. Simply put, if water is so effective a stopping power, why should the U.S. be concerned with the rise of China? There have been no significant attacks on the U.S. homeland by non-regional powers since the War of 1812,[78] so why should the rise of China be seen as a threat? One possible explanation is that a state's concerns extend beyond security (particularly structural realism's strict definition of security as state survival), and this is considered in the next section. Within this consideration of security, Mearsheimer offers two possible explanations.

The first possible reason Mearsheimer provides for the U.S. to expect conflict with China is because it is part of American character to use offshore balancing to prevent the rise of a peer competitor. Mearsheimer repeatedly claims that Americans will not tolerate a peer competitor, so the U.S. will always intervene in the conflicts of other regions to prevent the rise of a hegemon.[79] The belief that this will happen again with the rise of China is echoed in Mearsheimer's prescription that the U.S. should decide whether to abandon or fortify its East Asian military presence based on China's potential for regional hegemony.[80] If China's rise puts it on track to become a regional hegemon, and the U.S. is determined to prevent Chinese hegemony in East Asia through offshore balancing, then China's rise ought to elicit fear in the U.S. because the U.S. and China will likely engage in war or at least intense competition. Mearsheimer's claims about the characteristic American demand for primacy might have been meant as only a narrative element, with survival through power maximization as outlined above

[78] Hawaii was not a state at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. Also, Japanese goals were likely limited to destroying the military that prevented its rise to complete hegemony in East Asia (the oil embargo and the Philippines being the proximate concerns). Conquering the United States was not a realistic goal, as acknowledged by Mearsheimer. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 136.
[79] For example: John J. Mearsheimer, "The Future of the American Pacifier," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 5 (Sep.-Oct. 2001): 46.
[80] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 388-389.

being the real reason for American offshore balancing. If Mearsheimer is arguing that American primacy will always be a requirement of American foreign policy (some element of American exceptionalism), then Mearsheimer is contradicting his own theory by using a reductionist explanation for foreign policy behavior. Conflict in this case would only be a product of domestic factors (belief in American exceptionalism), not structural factors. Moreover, it opens the possibility that policymakers could simply pursue a policy other than primacy, therefore avoiding conflict.

The second (and more substantive) explanation is a reiteration of the importance of relative power for the purposes of security. Mearsheimer argues that states can never be completely secure until they become a global hegemon, which is practically impossible, so states will always have to be concerned with the rise of other great powers. A state's ability to project power outside of its region will be seriously hampered until it becomes a regional hegemon, so the goal of hegemons in other regions is to prevent the rise of another regional hegemon, which would become a peer competitor. If China were to become a regional hegemon in Asia, it would be able to project power to the Western Hemisphere, endangering the United States. The problem is that it is not at all clear how such a scenario would play out.

Would China itself threaten to conquer the U.S. or overthrow the U.S. government? Even making the enormous assumption that China would want to do such a thing, it would take an astronomical power imbalance to allow it to overcome the stopping power of water. Although he does not state it explicitly, perhaps Mearsheimer believes that technological innovation may reduce the importance of geography. Mearsheimer continually emphasizes the importance of preparing for worst-case scenarios, so the possibility of future technological development could remove the geographical advantage of the U.S. Certainly technology has greatly increased

projection power over the last several centuries, but it is hard to conceive of a technology that would allow China to overcome the geographic limitations. Power that can be projected, such as naval power, air power, nuclear weapons, cyber warfare, and economic power are all ineffective at controlling territory. And as the "surges" in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated, even the most high-tech military in the world still requires adequate deployment of ground troops.

Would China help build up Mexico or some other regional rival to threaten U.S. territory? Perhaps it is possible that other regional states such as Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina could exercise more power outside of the control of the U.S., curtailing American regional hegemony. Hugo Chavez's attempt at creating a "Bolivarian" alliance against the U.S. could be seen as one such challenge, but the limited extent of its regional spread and its uncertain future do not seem to bode well for this sort of scenario. Venezuela was unable to convince any regional power greater than itself to align against the U.S., with Argentina and Brazil uncomfortable with Venezuelan leadership. Chinese support was notably absent as well, despite Chavez's calls for greater political support at resisting "imperialism." China was unwilling to sacrifice its relations with the U.S. for strengthening potential regional enemies.[81] Of course the lack of Chinese support could be the product of China's relative power deficit at the moment, and there may be greater support for regional challengers after China has become more powerful. But even with the fervent support of a powerful China and several decades of development, it is still basically inconceivable that any of these regional states could pose an existential threat to the U.S. Consequently, the view of China as a threat requires one to assume a worst case scenario that is nearly impossible to imagine. There would have to be some enormous shift in the balance of power or some completely surprising technological development. Yet these

[81] William Ratliff, "Beijing's Pragmatism meets Hugo Chavez," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 12, no. 2 (Winter/Spring 2006).

possibilities are so remote and unpredictable that power maximization is actually indeterminately useful at meeting these challenges. For example, power maximization for centuries meant colonialism, but by the mid-20th Century, colonies provided no benefit in terms of power and may have even been a hindrance.

These problems of geography and technology are part of a greater realist debate about the effect of the offense-defense balance, a debate in which offensive realism take the position that the offense-defense balance has little effect on the nature of international politics. Proponents of the importance of the offense-defense balance argue that power can only be understood in terms of what it can accomplish, so considering the relative balance of offensive and defensive capabilities is necessary to assess security.[82] To some extent, Mearsheimer concedes the importance of the offense-defense balance by recognizing the stopping power of water and the defensive nature of nuclear weapons.[83] The latter is particularly important because very little of Mearsheimer's evidence comes from the nuclear era, so offensive realism may be obsolete in modern international politics.

But while Mearsheimer recognizes the uncertain applicability of his evidence, he contends that the apparently defensive nature of contemporary IR does not change expected outcomes because it is difficult to distinguish between offensive and defensive abilities. For example, missile defense technologies can be used defensively to intercept an enemy's attacking missiles, or they can be used offensively to allow a country to attack without fear of a retaliatory

[82] Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010), 43.
[83] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 114-137.

missile strike. Consequently, the offensive-defense balance is not a meaningful addition to balance of power theory.[84]

The controversy over offense-defense balance is extensive and highly technical, including additional criticisms of the ability to calculate the balance, the degree to which the balance changes over time, and how relevant the balance is to explaining the behavior of states.[85] While the entirety of the debate is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that Charles Glaser offers a powerful defensive realist critique of Mearsheimer's position on the debate. Glaser argues that distinguishing between the offensive and defensive capabilities of any particular weapon or tactic is not important, especially because the offense-defense balance of any weapon or tactic can vary depending on other contextual factors. Instead, all that is required is that one be able to assess the probability of success in an offensive mission and the probability of success in a defensive mission against an attacking opponent. While such an assessment could be complicated, military strategists do this all the time when they make military net assessments.[86] Acknowledging the possibility that offensive capabilities will be inferior to defensive capabilities is cause for greater optimism in the case of future Sino-American relations. The offense-defense variable could result in little ability for either side to pose a threat to the other, ensuring security and reducing the need for competition. Even though the possibility of a future change in the offense-defense variable could lead to a greater likelihood of conflict,[87] both sides can pursue strategies that focus on defensive capabilities and increase transparency to reduce the risk of miscalculation.

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[84] Ibid., 417.
[85] Glaser., 137-143.
[86] Ibid., 139-140.
[87] Ibid., 110.

Ultimately, equating power and security ignores too much. Considerations of the offense-defense balance (both in terms of weapons and geographic constraints) are necessary for good analysis. They allow for more detailed explanation by accounting for relevant factors that the most barebones of structural realisms (Waltz's and Mearsheimer's) reject, and they can allow for more *correct* analysis by taking these relevant factors into consideration. This has an enormous impact on policy because it empowers policymakers to use their knowledge to pursue policies that result in less intense competition. In the end, these policies possibly avoid the "tragic" outcomes of offensive realism.

International structure determines state behavior?

The assumption thus far has been that international politics can be analyzed through a strictly "third-image" perspective, with only material factors determining international behavior. More specifically, the agreement is that the independent variable is the international structure, which demands that states seek security if they are to survive, and the disagreement is on the importance of possible intervening material variables like geography and offense-defense balance of military capabilities. Yet these variables still cannot adequately explain foreign policy behavior, such as why states start wars that they ultimately lose, or why certain states seem to pursue conquest not only for the sake of security. To these problems, further realist scholarship adds that the human elements need to be reincorporated into understandings of international politics. While material factors may determine outcomes, decisions are made by people with ideas, so ideas must play an important role in IR. Strictly speaking, this is not inconsistent with Waltz's structural realism in that Waltz agrees that he cannot explain foreign

policy decisions, yet it does contradict offensive realism and some materialist defensive realist approaches since these contend that materialism alone can be understood to determine the behavior of states.

The inclusion of ideational as well as material variables is similar to classical realism, which gives these theories the label "neoclassical" realism. Carr and Morgenthau included considerations of human nature and the character of individual states, such as Morgenthau observing the "undogmatic common sense of the British."[88] Contemporary theorists are more sensitive to such broad and timeless generalizations, but the gist of these variables remains. The distinction between classical and neoclassical realists is that the latter retain the structural conditions posited by Waltz, arguing that structure exerts an influence on foreign policy behavior.

However, the relationship between ideational variables and structural/materialist variables is contested. One possibility is to posit that non-material variables are additional independent variables. Stephen M. Walt's "balance of threat" theory is a prominent example of this type. Responding to Waltz, Walt argues that states do not make policy decisions on straightforward calculations of relative power. As Walt puts it, "Although power is an important part of the equation, it is not the only one. It is more accurate to say that states tend to ally with or against the foreign power that poses the greatest threat."[89] Balance of threat therefore adds that aggressive intention joins aggregate power, geographic proximity, and offensive power (offense-defense balance) as independent variables.[90] Because the foreign policy of a state is based on a multivariable calculation, it is impossible to predict "which sources of threat will be the most

[88] Morgenthau, *Politics,* 143-149.
[89] Walt, *Origins,* 21.
[90] Ibid., 22-26.

important in any given case."[91] For example, faced with a power with aggressive intentions but little aggregate power, different decision-makers may assess the threat differently and create different policies in response.

Walt's analysis does add seemingly important considerations with the inclusion of the aggressive intention variable, but it differs from most neoclassical theories in two important ways. First, Walt still assumes that states are always security-seeking, which means that he cannot always explain where aggressive intentions would come from. Most neoclassical realists argue that states can have different motives, although constrained by the international structure, including aggressive motives. Second, Walt's separation of perceived aggressive intention from other variables precludes analyses in which these variables are related. Consequently, neoclassical realists usually argue that the international structure is still the only independent variable, and ideational variables are intervening variables.[92] This provides the ability to explain that ideational variables are contingent on the reality within which they exist, that reality being the international structure.[93]

The possibility of non-material intervening variables is not new, and certainly pre-dates the label "neoclassical realism."[94] Robert Jervis, for example, famously argued that perception is a vital intervening variable.[95] Perhaps what is distinctive of neoclassical realism is recognition of the possibility of many different ideational intervening variables and a reaffirmation of their importance.[96] Of course, the plethora (and complexity) of ideational variables is extremely

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[91] Ibid, p. 26.
[92] Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 146.
[93] Nicholas Kitchen, "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy," *Review of International Studies* 36 no., 1 (2010): 130.
[94] Perhaps indicating that the label is not particularly meaningful.
[95] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976).
[96] Randall L. Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism," in *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field,* ed. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 316.

reductionist, as any event can be explained by several different variables in several different ways.[97] Yet these variables are still important, since they allow for analysis that can be much more nuanced and contextually useful than simple materialist explanations. I focus here on the variable of a state's motive, which largely determines a state's "grand strategy."

Motive is similar to intention in Walt's threat calculation, since a state with aggressive motives will likely display more threatening intention. Conversely, states only motivated by security might display less threatening intention.[98] Yet motives and intentions are different. Motives refer to the ultimate goal of a state's policy, its while intentions refer to the way in which states plan to achieve these goals in relation to the international environment. Similar intentions can be shared by states with different motives. For example, a state can display aggressive intention toward another state (attack or plans of doing so) either because it believes that an attack will enhance its security (security motive) or because it believes that an attack will satisfy its greediness. Glaser points out that many scholars use motive and intention interchangeably, so claims under the term "intention" should be assessed on their content, not their terminology (such as Mearsheimer's use of intention with respect to China's motives).[99] Moreover, motives are characterized in many different ways, from Glaser's simple dichotomy of security-seeking or greedy,[100] to Schweller's variety of combinations of power and motive in animal form,[101] to more common terms such as "revisionist" or "status-quo." I use some of these terms interchangeably, and I do not think that it is important for the purposes of this paper to take

[97] Kitchen, 118-119.
[98] Although a security-seeking state may appear to have aggressive or ambiguous intention due to the security dilemma, the previous arguments suggest that there are instances in which the security dilemma is less salient. A state with clearly aggressive intentions, however, will be more likely to exacerbate the security dilemma.
[99] Glaser, 38.
[100] Ibid., 4.
[101] Schweller lists Lion, Lamb, Jackal, and Wolf as the possible types. Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist States Back In," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 72-107.

a position on the possible categories of state motivation. All that I claim is that states may strictly seek their security, or they may seek goals beyond their immediate security needs. These latter goals are still relevant to security studies inasmuch as they have an impact on the security of other states, such as in cases of aggressive conquest of another, or for the aggressive state itself if security is ultimately sacrificed for an aggressive goal.

Understanding motives would seem to be important in the case of a rising power, but Mearsheimer is quite clear in his reasoning for why motives cannot be used as a variable. First, assessing motives is difficult, especially because leaders often lie.[102] Second, even if motives can be discerned in the present, it is indeterminate in the future.[103] Threat assessments, therefore, cannot rely on motivational information to form a proper balance. Uncertainty of motives means that states should prepare for the worst. There are, however, two main reasons to think motives are worth assessing.

First, motives can be known. Mearsheimer is correct in observing that assessing motives can be difficult, but this does not mean that the task is impossible. There clearly are ways of finding out information about the goals of states and the means with which they plan to achieve them. One of the most important roles of intelligence analysts, for example, is to determine state interests and expected behavior based on obtained information. The possibility that information may be flawed should not lead to a rejection of all information. People make decisions based on less than perfect knowledge all of the time. This ability to know motives extends to future motives, because an analyst can use information such as historical trends to observe

[102] John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011).
[103] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 31.

consistencies or constant evolutions of motives. Prediction of the future is necessarily less certain in its accuracy, but the prediction can still be made.[104]

Second, even if there is still some uncertainty of motives, the rational response is not to assume absolute aggression. Assuming aggressive motive in a situation of uncertainty ignites the security dilemma, which could actually decrease a state's security. Mearsheimer calls this tragic, but it is not necessary. An illustrative example is Mearsheimer's analysis of the German security situation were the United States to withdraw its military protection. Mearsheimer argues that it would be rational for Germany to develop nuclear weapons, since these weapons would provide a deterrent, and it would also be rational for nuclear European powers to wage a preemptive war against Germany to prevent it from developing a nuclear deterrent.[105] This scenario is not rational for either side because it ignores motives. If Germany knows that other states will attack if it were to develop nuclear weapons, then it would not be rational for it to develop nuclear weapons. And if other states know that Germany's development of nuclear weapons is only as a deterrent, then it would not be rational to prevent German nuclear development. The point is that the security dilemma exists because of a lack of motivational knowledge, so the proper response is to try to enhance understanding of motives, not discard motivational knowledge altogether. Misperception is certainly a problem in international politics, but reducing misperception would allow states to better conform to defensive realist logic, which results in preferable outcomes relative to offensive realism.[106]

Assessing motives is vital in the case of the rise of China, because mutually preferable outcomes can be achieved if China is not an aggressive power, as offensive realism would have

[104] Glaser, 201.
[105] John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1990).
[106] Schweller, "Progressiveness": 337.

to assume, but is actually a status quo power with aims that have limited effect on the security of the U.S. and other potentially affected countries. I do not mean here to claim with certainty that China is and will always be a status quo power, and policymakers likely have access to more intentional information than what is publicly known. At the very least, valuing motivational assessments empowers policymakers to act on this knowledge, which is preferable because of the possibility of reducing competition and conflict.

Nevertheless, there is reason to think that China is not completely aggressive. Taiwan has the most reason to worry about aggression because the PRC clearly does intend to govern Taiwan at some point in the future, and PRC military buildup has focused on capabilities that can be used to conquer Taiwan and limit American access to the island.[107] Nevertheless, Beijing has continually reasserted that unification ought to happen through peaceful means, and has displayed patience in achieving its goal.[108] The problem from an American policymaking standpoint is that if motivational knowledge is ignored, then the PRC's potential belligerence against Taiwan is then framed in the larger context of an aggressive rising power requiring some sort of greater containment strategy. Yet save for the island disputes, Chinese goals for Taiwan do not seem to reflect consistent Chinese intention for conquest. This observation is consistent with constant Chinese assertions of "sovereignty" as the primary value in international politics, which would seem to be completely antithetical to aggression outside of the bounds of claimed territory (such as Taiwan).[109] The better and more nuanced understanding, therefore, characterizes China as an aggressive, "greedy" state but its greed is limited to only Taiwan. It is

[107] United States Department of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2010," www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010_CMPR_Final.pdf (accessed April 17, 2010): 1-7.
[108] Thomas J. Christensen, "Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and U.S. Policy toward East Asia," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 107.
[109] Bates Gill, *Rising Star: China's New Security Diplomacy* (Washington: Brookings, 2005), 105.

otherwise a security-seeking power. From a standpoint of American security, defending Taiwan is not in the vital national interest because Chinese intentions for Taiwan would not extend to Chinese intentions for the United States once China becomes more powerful. Moreover, it may be rational for a state to concede the demands of a "limited-aims greedy state," since the concession would reduce the security competition that could lead to a wider conflict inherent in trying to contain the greedy state's aims.[110]

Moreover, if China were to be considered an aggressive state, one would expect to find most states in the region responding to China's rise by taking additional measures to ensure their own security, but this is not incontrovertibly occurring. Because the U.S. commitment to the region has not increased in terms of troops or spending, the expectation is that states would have less faith in the assurance of buck-passing strategies and would be balancing either internally (which in this case would be power-maximization) or externally. Such competition can possibly be observed with Japan, which, for example, recently redirected their defense forces against a Chinese threat instead of a Russian one.[111] The Japanese situation can be explained by the territorial dispute between China and Japan, especially since there have recently been several high-profile incidents involving the islands. Until the dispute is resolved, there will inevitably be at least a low-level of competition between China and Japan over the islands. But there is no reason why this competition should necessarily escalate since neither state has yet made a serious attempt to change the status quo.[112] Additionally, Japan and most other East Asian states seem to experience little fear from the rise of China that has resulted in ambivalent or bandwagoning behavior, contrary to expectations of realism without a motivational variable. For example,

[110] Glaser, 104-105.
[111] Simon Tisdall, "Japan's era of postwar pacifism may be coming to an end," *The Guardian,* 13 December 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/dec/13/japan-era-pacifism-china-threat (Accessed April 17, 2010).
[112] Min Gyo Koo, "The Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute and Sino-Japanese political-economic relations: cold politics and hot economics?" *The Pacific Review* 22, no. 2 (May 2009): 222.

David Kang finds that in South Korea, policymakers basically agree that China has no intention of aggression, and that therefore the rise of China ought not be regarded as a security issue. And Vietnam, a country that experienced conflict with China in the last forty years and is not within the U.S. alliance structure, resolved its contentious border dispute with China and cut its defense spending while increasing military cooperation with China.[113] An alternative explanation is that these states are simply misperceiving the threat, causing them to underbalance. This also may be true, but the point is that these sorts of assessments cannot be made without some sort of ideational variable, whether it is perception or motivation. And at least policy can try to minimize misperception. For example, a policy of engagement allows greater access to motivational information.[114]

Ultimately, considering ideational variables like intention can drastically increase the explanatory power of realism and substantively change expectations of state behavior in ways that can be of great benefit to policymakers. Policymakers do not have to assume that states desire to be global hegemons, as offensive realism would dictate, but can discover and work with a distinct state preferences. Of course the strength of offensive realism is also neoclassical realism's weakness; offensive realism's simplicity offers extensive predictive power, and neoclassical realism does not. Neoclassical realism's predictive power fails for two principle reasons. First, the potential for many different variables means that analyses will be more complicated and possibly indeterminate. Indeterminacy will necessarily occur if there is no agreement on the set of variables, but even if there is agreement on several variables, their interaction may also be indeterminate. Second, the content of the variables can be more difficult

[113] David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007), 55-56.
[114] Randall L. Schweller, "Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and theory," in *Engaging China: the management of an emerging power*, ed. Alastair Ian Johnston and Robert S. Ross (New York: Routledge, 1999), 14.

to determine. For example, how policymakers will perceive a certain event depends largely on the character of the policymakers and their given frameworks for understanding reality. These variables are basically impossible to quantify, meaning that neoclassical realism has to work outside of the positivist methodology of material realism and therefore cannot make "clocklike" predictions in the short- and medium-term. What it can do, however, is emphasize which variables that are likely to be important, and how these variables generally play out over the long-term.[115] To policymakers, this sort of theory is not only more accurate and detailed than offensive realism in describing emerging phenomena, but also enables them to work with relevant variables in shaping foreign policy outcomes. Under neoclassical realism, China's rise may be a cause for concern because of the historical record and existing tensions, but the "tragic" outcome is not inevitable. There are good reasons to believe that China's economic development will not translate into aggression because China's foreign policy aims are limited.[116] Yet the future can depend on U.S. foreign policy choices, and poor policy choices will nonetheless lead to the tragedy predicted by Mearsheimer.

Liberalism

The label of "liberalism" encompasses a wide array of different theoretical positions that share more in goals than in substance. It includes the almost purely normative positions of idealists, the structural and rationalist concerns of neoliberals, and the social awareness of more constructivist positions. In substance, many of these positions are contradictory, or at least address distinct phenomena. Yet they all share a belief in the possibility of progression toward

[115] Rose, 167.
[116] Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005), 177.

normatively preferable outcomes. If realists follow Thucydides in claiming that international politics will always be viscously competitive, then liberals follow Kant in claiming that the power of reason can lead to progress in international politics. The defining difference between realists and liberals, therefore, is that liberals reject the zero-sum character posited by realism, instead contending that absolute gains are possible.[117]

This section addresses the relevance of liberal theoretical positions to policymaking in response to the rise of China. Specifically, I focus on more rationalist theoretical positions generally grouped under "neoliberalism." These positions posit that relevant actors have determinate interests that they rationally seek to maximize, and that various processes will allow actors to cooperate and seek absolute gains.[118] This obvious similarity to neorealism means that neoliberalism shares many of the advantages and problems with neorealism, and the two positions can be criticized as one from an alternative epistemological or ontological position.[119] Yet neorealism and neoliberalism differ substantially in expected outcomes and policy prescriptions, so a separate assessment is necessary. The two liberal phenomena examined here are international institutions and economic interdependence. Constructivist positions considered later in this chapter provide alternative explanations for these phenomena.

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[117] Perhaps some of the realist positions in the previous section do not seem to be strictly zero-sum. Both strictly materialist defensive realism and neoclassical realism acknowledge the possibility that certain scenarios, such as a more defense-oriented offense-defense balance, will allow for greater net achievements of interests (security or otherwise) by competitors. For materialists, the world is still zero-sum in that security is still relative to competitors for any given strategic environment. See Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167-214. Neoclassical realists vary in their understanding of cooperation, but may allow the possibility for absolute gains depending on ideational variables. Nevertheless, competition will still be the norm because of realism's structural constrains. See Glaser, 14-15 and Kitchen, 139-140.

[118] Peter J. Katzenstein and Rudra Sil, "Rethinking Asian Security: A Case for Analytical Eclecticism," in *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency,* ed. J. J. Suh, Peter J. Katzenstein, and Allen Carleson (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004), 10.

[119] Jim George, 129-134.

International Institutions

Liberals also argue that international institutions can reduce the negative effects of competition and allow states to achieve absolute gains. Generally speaking, institutions are social elements that are at least somewhat permanent. While recognizing that there are other things that are considered institutions, Robert Keohane narrows the definition to "institutions that can be identified as related complexes of rules and norms, identifiable in space and time." Examples in international behavior include international organizations like the United Nations, treaties, and unwritten expectations of behavior. Institutions are stronger or weaker depending on how strongly and consistently they shape the behavior of actors.

From a rationalist perspective, institutions facilitate rational, materially driven actors in achieving their goals. More specifically, institutions reduce transaction costs incurred by actors by reducing uncertainty through information and clear expectations. Institutions provide disincentives to defect from an agreement with collective punishment or disadvantages in later iterations of interaction. This strict rational neoliberal institutionalism is similar to rationalist structural realism (Waltz, et al.), since it makes the same assumptions about the international structure and the relevant actors, but argues for different possible outcomes. So while actors are still self-interested and competitive, cooperation is possible with institutions. Although institutions are social, rationalists limit the social conception of institutions to rational elements such as information sharing and the formation of expectations based on previous behavior.[120] A limited social conception is also posited by Waltz when he argues that successful states "will imitate each other and become socialized to their system," as in following the norms of

[120] Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (December 1988): 382-383.

diplomacy.[121] A deeper, "sociological" perspective sees institutions as fluid, discursive limits on identity and practice.[122] This perspective is considered in the section on constructivism.

If institutions were highly effective, then there would be little reason to worry about the rise of China. States could simply create a rule to outlaw war, and no war would occur. Of course, this has been attempted several times, yet wars still occur. The neoliberal position here is that wars occur because large transaction costs prevent effective institutions from forming. In the case of security agreements, punishment for defection is difficult to achieve because the defector is likely very powerful, and other states will see an incentive to buck-pass and defect from their enforcement obligation. Strong institutions are only allowed by powerful states inasmuch as the interests of powerful states are given preference, so the scope of institutions is also limited by this transaction cost. [123]

With this problem, realists argue that the celebration of institutions is misguided. Mearsheimer delivers the most severe criticism of neoliberalism when he argues that it almost completely overlooks the importance of relative gains. If a gap in power grows between states, the weaker state's security is not ensured because the more powerful state could easily defect from the security agreement without suffering much punishment from the weaker enforcers. And although much institutionalism was designed with non-security interactions in mind, it will usually fail there as well both because many interactions like relative economic capacity constitute a state's power (and therefore security), and because states seem to pursue relative interests in trade policy as well. Of course Mearsheimer does not deny that institutions exist, but

[121] Waltz, *Theory*, 127-128.
[122] Keohane, "Two Approaches": 384.
[123] Ibid., 387.

he claims that existing institutions reflect convergences of power maximization among states (relative to other states).[124]

Mearsheimer's critique assumes his position that absolute competition is always inherent in security matters. Defensive realists take a position more amenable to neoliberalism on the use of institutions. In a scenario where relevant states are status quo powers, institutions that decrease transaction costs associated with balancing can help prevent conflict. Unlike neoliberals, however, they recognize that the possibility of aggressive states (and therefore cheating), seriously limits the instances in which institutions are useful. States can bind themselves to an institution such that they will pay a penalty if they defect, but that penalty is only as strong as the willingness and ability of other states to enforce it. Institutions do not exert influence independently.[125]

Yet given my previous analysis on defensive realism, there is a good possibility that the East Asian security dynamic is extremely defensively oriented, which would allow for more cooperation. Ikenberry suggests that China, with the U.S.'s encouragement, should try to bind its use of force so as to not appear threatening and worsen the security dilemma. This would follow the model of Germany's reunification in 1989, when Chancellor Helmut Kohl reduced the apparent threat of a resurgent Germany by committing itself to European integration.[126] To some extent, China already seems interested in pursuing this sort of binding by its enormously increased participation in regional and global institutions. Offensive realism would not predict that a rising power would bind itself to international institutions where it must conform to rules

[124] Mearsheimer, "False Promise": 15-24.
[125] Robert Jervis, "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 51-56.
[126] G. John Ikenberry, "A New Order in East Asia?" in *East Asian Multilateralism: Prospects for Regional Stability*, ed. Kent E. Calder and Francis Fukuyama (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), 224-226.

created by the existing powers. For example, Chinese accession to the WTO required substantial and difficult domestic political and economic changes, and requires compromises in the strict view of sovereignty favored by Beijing.[127] Cooperation on security matters is less prominent, but China has expressed interest in binding through cooperation with the ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asian Summit. Yet these existing regional organizations are too weak to constitute a substantial commitment, so an additional organization is needed. Alliances or true collective security organizations are probably impossible, but an institutionalized forum to increase transparency and clarify expectations would be useful.[128]

Pessimists would respond that China is only maximizing its power given the conditions created by the U.S. and other regional actors, and that institutions will do little to bind China once it becomes very powerful. Great power security competition is not a forgotten concern, as demonstrated by a Chinese Ministry of Defense white paper claiming that "international military competition remains fierce" in East Asia.[129] Moreover, Chinese participation in organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization indicates possibly malicious and exclusive intentions.[130] Ultimately the evidence is inconclusive, posing a significant policy problem.

Economic Interdependence

While Mearsheimer predicts that the Sino-American rivalry will mimic the Soviet-American rivalry during the Cold War, the Sino-American economic relationship is a striking

[127] Marc Lanteigne, *China and International Institutions: Alternate paths to global power* (London: Routledge, 2005), 168-171.
[128] Ikenberry, "New Order": 224-226.
[129] Information Office of the State Council, "China's National Defense in 2010," http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-03/31/c_13806851.htm (accessed April 17, 2011).
[130] Marcel De Haas, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Momentum Towards a Mature Security Alliance," *Scientia Militaria* 36, no. 1 (2009): 14-30.

difference between the two scenarios. In terms of trade partners, the U.S. is China's largest trading partner (unless the EU is considered as a whole, then the EU is first), Japan is China's third largest trading partner, and Taiwan is China's seventh largest trading partner.[131] From the U.S. perspective, China is the second largest trading partner after Canada, with China representing fourteen percent of total U.S. trade in 2009.[132] Foreign exchange reserves are also important in terms of economic interdependence. China has the largest holding of foreign exchange reserves in the world, almost $2.5 trillion in June 2010.[133] Slightly over sixty percent of the PRC's foreign exchange reserves are in U.S. dollars, and another sizable portion are in Japanese Yen. These economic relationships bear little resemblance to the bloc-based system of trade during the Cold War.

Liberals claim that this difference is hugely important for security because trade mitigates security concerns. The basic theory is that if states are economically interdependent, then war will rarely be a rational choice because it would cause enormous economic damage to the aggressor. A simple version of this claim is consistent with structural realist calculations of security-seeking states. If aggression in an economically interdependent world will almost always reduce the aggressor's power (through economic damage), then aggression will be less common. Yet there would still be cases where a state would become an aggressor to increase its relative power at the expense of its absolute power. But positive views of economic interdependence generally consider state interests to be more than zero-sum security concerns. Richard Rosecrance, for example, argues that a states "aim to improve their position in world

[131] Ministry of Commerce: The People's Republic of China, "Top Ten Trading Partners," 2009, http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/statistic/ie/200901/20090105999698.html (accessed April 17, 2011).
[132] United States Census Bureau: Foreign Trade Statistics, "Top Trading Partners – total Trade, Exports, Imports," 2009, http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/highlights/top/top0912yr.html (accessed April 17, 2011).
[133] Chinability, "China's foreign exchange reserves, 1977-2010," 2010, http://www.chinability.com/Reserves.htm (accessed April 17, 2010).

politics," which they can do through "acquisition of new territory" or "economic development and trade."[134] If conquest becomes a relatively less attractive option because of the limited value of the territory acquired and the high cost (in spent national resources and lost international trade) in obtaining it, states will tend toward trade goals.[135] Competitive power politics and security concerns will never be completely obviated since states will still have to ensure a base level of security, but they will be given a low priority relative to trade.[136]

China seems to be a good fit for this description of the "trading state." China's "rise" is first and foremost an economic rise. Mearsheimer acknowledges that China's power is mostly "latent," meaning that it will have the capability to create a strong military, but has not yet done so.[137] For example, China's military spending as a percentage of GDP has remained relatively low, fluctuating between 1.7 and 2.5 percent between 1989 and 2009.[138] Furthermore, while Mearsheimer, Robert Gilpin, and Paul Kennedy all observe an economic rise as a component of violent power transitions, virtually all of their historical cases include some element of conquest, such as Napoleonic France, American Manifest Destiny, the unification of Germany, and Nazi expansionism.[139] While aggressive intent toward Taiwan my indicate that the PRC will ultimately follow the violent path of these great powers, Beijing's détente with Taiwan and emphasis on cross-strait economic relations are indications of a "trading state" foreign policy.[140]

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[134] Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 43.
[135] Ibid., 32-38.
[136] Ibid., 62.
[137] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy,* 65.
[138] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Military Expenditure Database*, http://www.sipri.org/databases/milex (accessed April 6, 2011).
[139] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981); Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).
[140] Daniel H. Rosen and Zhi Wang, "Deepening China-Taiwan Relations through the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement," *Peterson Institute for International Economics* PB10-16 (June 2010): 3.

Lastly, the PRC leadership has continually stated its belief that economics ought to guide international relations, and that trade can lead to greater security.[141]

If trade with China will lead to peace, then there is little reason to worry about China's rise. Moreover, the policy prescription is to increase economic interdependence and trade, contrary to Mearsheimer's recommendation. Yet there is little consensus on the security effects of trade. Alternative views hold that economic interdependence has little effect on occurrence of conflict, increases the likelihood of conflict, or has more nuanced effects depending on the type of economic relationship. Empirically proving any of these positions is problematic due to difficulties in establishing causality, difficulties defining economic interdependence and conflict, and the possibility that contemporary international economic relationships are functionally different from past relationships.[142] This situation is a perfect example of the difficulty of the use of theory by policymakers, because the anticipated outcomes of economic interdependence are highly complex and controversial but nevertheless extremely important. Ultimately, Sino-American economic interdependence will result in neutral, positive, or negative security outcomes, and policymakers have to pursue policies that increase interdependence or not, as well as determine the extent and type of interdependence.[143] A full assessment of the debate is beyond the scope of this paper, but for the sake of comparison to offensive realism, I consider Mearsheimer's objections (which are typical of realist objections) to optimism about economic interdependence and a possible response.

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[141] Yong Deng and Thomas G. Moore, "China Views Globalization: Toward a New Great-Power Politics?" *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 121.
[142] Edward D. Mansfield and Brian M. Pollins, "Interdependence and Conflict: An Introduction," in *Economic Interdependence and International Conflict: New Perspectives on an Enduring Debate*, ed. Edward D. Mansfield and Brian M. Pollins (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 1-28.
[143] Katherine Barbieri, "Economic Interdependence: A Path to Peace or a Source of Interstate Conflict?" *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 29 (1996): 44.

Mearsheimer's objection reasserts that states are concerned about relative instead of absolute gains because of security concerns inherent in international anarchy. States will worry that interdependence reduces their relative power either because the economic benefits may accrue unevenly (for example, although the rise of China has arguably helped the U.S. economy at least in the short term, China has clearly gained relative to the U.S.), or because dependence will be distributed unevenly such one state will gain a strategic advantage. An example of the latter phenomenon is increased Chinese reliance on oil imports, which is problematic for China in a possible Sino-American confrontation, because the U.S. and its allies control key oil shipping lanes.[144] This concern also motivates China's plans to build a blue water navy to keep shipping lanes open, fueling the security dilemma.[145] Another recent example of where asymmetric interdependence was exploited was the brief Chinese ban on exporting rare earth minerals to Japan because of Japan's arrest of a Chinese fisherman who rammed a Japanese naval vessel near the Senkaku/Diaoyou Islands. Since Japan relies on rare earth minerals to manufacture many high-tech goods, and China has a virtual monopoly on rare earth mineral production, there was little Japan could do other than protest in the short term and try to decrease their dependence in the long term through an alternative supply chain.[146] Economic interdependence can therefore leads to strategic imbalances, encouraging conflict. Mearsheimer also claims support for his position on the basis of historical data, notably European economic interdependence leading up to World War I.[147]

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[144] Sam Bateman, "Maritime security: regional concerns and global implications," in *Security Politics in the Asia-Pacific: A Regional-Global Nexus?* ed. William T. Tow (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 247-264.
[145] Hugh White and Brendan Taylor, "A rising China and American perturbations," in *Security Politics in the Asia-Pacific: A Regional-Global Nexus?* ed. William T. Tow (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 96-97.
[146] Keith Bradsher, "Amid Tension, China Blocks Vital Exports to Japan," *The New York Times*, 22 September 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/24/business/global/24rare.html (accessed April 17, 2011).
[147] Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future": 44-48.

A higher level of interdependence in the global economy, however, might mitigate the problems claimed by Mearsheimer. John Ravenhill argues that recent trade developments limit the ability of states to use trade strategically. Two particular developments stand out. First, the enormous growth in currency markets mean that strategic use of trade is more likely to backfire. China's holding of U.S. Treasury bonds is a good example of this interdependence. While the U.S. debt may be problematic in the long run, concerns that China can use T-bonds strategically are unfounded.[148] Any attempt to dump the bonds will plummet their value, destroying the value of Chinese capital reserves.[149]

Additionally, transnational production networks reduce the ability of a state to use trade strategically. While many resources and some goods can be produced as a finished product within one country, goods are increasingly produced in part by many different countries. For example, the production of a car involves investment, design, resource acquisition, material production, parts production, and assembly. In the past, all of these elements would exist in one or two countries, so a Ford car would be a completely American product. Now the production network for a car (and many other products) can easily involve a dozen or more countries. This means that exploiting trade for strategic advantage is much more difficult because countries that exist within many of the same transnational production networks will suffer larger and more equal economic loss if they were to go to war. This creates "genuine interdependence, [not] uneven relationships of asymmetrical vulnerabilities."[150] Mearsheimer's objections, therefore, apply to fewer and fewer elements of trade, and his empirical data are less relevant because they

[148] For example, Representative Michelle Bachmann's line "Hu's your daddy" at the 2011 Conservative Political Action Conference. Jim Newell, "Michele Bachmann on China's President: 'Hu's Your Daddy,'" *Gawker*, 10 February 2011, http://gawker.com/#!5757071/michele-bachmann-on-chinas-president-hus-your-daddy (accessed April 17, 2010).
[149] John Ravenhill, "The economics-security nexus in the Asia-Pacific region," in *Security Politics in the Asia-Pacific: A Regional-Global Nexus?* ed. William T. Tow (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) 201-202.
[150] Ibid., 191-192.

come from a time when these sorts of trade relationships did not exist. Nevertheless, oil and rare earth minerals are examples of potentially strategic trade items that have at best limited inclusion in transnational production networks.

Since some trade can be used strategically, economic interdependence is not a panacea. If policymakers do wish to pursue economic interdependence, they should try to create relationships with high expectations of future trade instead of relying on existing trade. If a state expects beneficial and interdependent trade to develop or continue, it will be less willing to engage in conflict with its trade partner than if prospects of future trade are lower.[151] The importance of expectations adds another dimension to the need for market confidence and stability. Policymakers ought to try to avoid exploiting trade issues for short-term political gain, such as in China's treatment of rare earth mineral exports, and the populist bashing of Chinese trade policies before the 2010 American elections.[152] Of course, a state's ability to dictate patterns of international economic activity is limited, but one way that it can promote stable trading relationships is through international institutions encouraging economic interdependence, like the WTO.

Economic interdependence and international institutions more broadly are parts of an eclectic liberal tradition, but they well represent the broader issues associated with rationalist attempts to provide positive-sum security outcomes. Neoliberals cannot claim that the security dilemma can be altogether overcome, because they still recognize that mistrust and the potential for aggression will remain. Additionally, if offensive realism is correct that China will exploit neoliberal carrots to accelerate its rise without ultimately improving the security dynamic, then

[151] Dale C. Copeland, "Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations," *International Security* 20, no. 4 (Spring, 1996): 5-41.
[152] David W. Chen, "China Emerges as a Scapegoat in Campaign Ads," *The New York Times*, 9 October 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/10/us/politics/10outsource.html (accessed April 17, 2011).

neoliberal engagement is the exact opposite policy that ought be pursued. But if neoliberals are right that institutions and trade can prevent otherwise likely conflict, then the failure to engage is truly tragic. The assessment is complicated by heated controversies over empirical data, especially since institutions and trade are quantitatively greater and qualitatively different than in the past. Yet again, policymakers are in the quandary of making important decisions with contradictory recommendations of indeterminate quality.

Sociological Positions

Despite the highly contentious disagreements between the different theoretical positions considered thus far, all of them have very similar philosophical underpinnings. They have all had the same rationalist ontological stance, which identifies international politics as driven by actors pursuing fixed materialist desires.[153] The positions also all claim the same positivist epistemological view, which claims that subjects are distinct from the "outside world" of objective reality, and that this reality can be accessed and understood in terms of causal claims.[154] These twin assumptions fundamentally shape our understanding of IR by determining what international politics *is* and how we can know about it. For example, a structural realist understanding of the statement that "states maximize power to ensure security" assumes at least that "states," "power," and "security" are real, static, and objectively knowable things. The reason for developing theory on these bases is not elusive; rationalism and positivism enable theorists to make relatively certain claims about reality. Under these conditions, theory is simply a matter of identifying the proper variables, determining the content of these variables from

[153] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 116.
[154] Richard K. Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism," in *Neorealism and its Critics*, ed. Robert Keohane (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 280-286.

objective facts, and calculating outcomes that can then be tested against the real world. These assumptions are far from trivial, however, because theorizing from different ontological and epistemological claims result in very different, and possibly more useful understandings of international politics.

In ontological terms, the primary alternative to rationalism is constructivism, a sociological view of IR. In short, constructivism posits that the identities and motives of actors are constructed through a social process, and that they are minimally or not at all materially determined. Instead of material factors, fluid ideas are what drive international relations. This insight is important because it opens the possibility of ideational change as a possible solution to international conflict. For example, neoliberalism struggles to overcome relative power calculations and the security dilemma, because the international structure gives states certain fixed interests. But if interests, the structure-agent relationship, and "security" are only ideas, then ideational change could lead to a less conflictual culture.[155] I more fully explain constructivism and its importance to policymaking in the context of the rise of China after addressing epistemological dissent from critical theory

Critical Approaches

Criticism also exists for the epistemological basis of mainstream IR theory, positivism, resulting in provocative theoretical positions. The basic claim of post-positivists is that mainstream theory claims that knowledge as objective and immutable when all knowledge is actually subjective and contingent. A theorist cannot have objective knowledge because reality

[155] Wendt, *Social*, 135-137.

can only be observed by a subject, the theorist. Knowledge, therefore, is articulated in terms of inherently subjective discourses.[156]

Recognizing the subjectivity of mainstream IR's supposedly objective knowledge leads to two main conclusions. First, mainstream IR is inaccurate in its understanding of the world, so awareness of subjectivity will allow for greater explanation and engagement with reality. Second, mainstream IR knowledge hides the value judgments inherent in subjective claims by positing their objectivity. This places them beyond question, elevating their power. The reproduction of dominant IR discourses oppresses the less powerful by marginalizing their discourses.[157] For example, critical theorists argue that mainstream IR discourse is implicitly masculinized, excluding women from positions of power and from consideration of the effects of theory and policy.[158] Critical theorists attribute many if not all of negative outcomes in international politics to exclusive, dominant discourses. War, for example, often results from the reproduction of dominant discourses of statist power.[159] Consequently, the goal of critical theory is "emancipatory," a normative attempt to resist power. Resistance is attempted through exposing subjectivity, promoting the discourses of the oppressed, and otherwise attempting to change the discursive climate to loosen the grip of dominant discourses.[160]

While purely critical approaches may be interesting or even more correct, they are basically useless for policymakers. Robert Cox distinguishes critical theory from problem-solving theory, where the latter does not question dominant discourses and institutions but tries

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[156] Some critical theorists seem to hold out the possibility that objective knowledge can be obtained about non-social facts.
[157] Ken Booth, "Critical Explorations," in *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, ed. Ken Booth (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 11-14.
[158] Jim George, 27.
[159] Ibid., 100.
[160] Andrew Linklater, "The achievements of critical theory," in *International theory: positivism and beyond*, ed. Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewsi (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 279-280.

to get them to "work smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble." Mainstream IR theory fits this description. Critical theory tries to affect the real world as well, but it tries to enact broad social change instead of focusing on specific problems.[161] This will not do for policymakers, who have to craft responses to specific issues like the rise of China.[162] As Waltz argues in a response to Ashley and Cox, problem-solving theory needs to make assumptions regardless of their objectivity: "The alternative is simply to eschew such [problem-solving] theories altogether. Would we then know more or less about the social and the natural worlds?"[163]

Waltz is correct that problem-solving theory needs to make assumptions, but *which* assumptions are preferable is a question resolved by neither Waltz nor his critics. Depending on one's assessment of the accuracy of the post-positivist epistemology, it could be a mistake to completely reject the discursive approach. A broad, determinate, and ahistorical theory like offensive realism is likely to be particularly ignorant to non-rational political dynamics.[164] As an alternative, constructivism is promising in its ability to combine some sensitivity to non-rational processes while maintaining enough structure to be useful for policy analysis.[165] Although this necessarily sacrifices some of the progressive value of theory, it is preferable relative to other problem-solving alternatives.

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[161] Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory," in *Neorealism and its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 207-210.
[162] Moreover, critical theory identifies the state as one of the oppressive, dominant institutions, which puts policymakers in an awkward position. See Booth, 11.
[163] Kenneth N. Waltz, "Reflections on *Theory of International Politics:* A Response to My Critics," in *Neorealism and its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 339.
[164] John A. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 341.
[165] Vendulka Kubalkova, "A Constructivist Primer," in *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*, ed. Vendulka Kubalkova (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 60-62.

Constructivism

Like any grouping of theories in a paradigm, constructivist approaches differ. Alexander Wendt's structural/statist theory is probably the most famous, but Nicholas Onuf's rule-based approach and Richard Ned Lebow's human nature version are also prominent.[166] Direct comparisons between various constructivist theories would be exhaustive and not particularly productive because the theories are so different, but often in a marginal sense. For example, neorealism, neoliberalism, and neoclassical realism are incredibly similar in structure and terminology, but differ on a few issues in a way that radically changes expected outcomes. In contrast, constructivist theories often use different terminology, focus on different elements of interaction, but do not necessarily contradict. Nevertheless, there are a few areas of disagreement. The most notable split is between conventional constructivists and critical constructivists, mimicking the debate between Waltz and Ashley. However, this constructivist split is much less severe because the difference between the sides is limited.[167]

Because constructivist approaches are so open, they are applicable to basically every phenomenon. For example, the security dilemma, a stereotypically realist scenario, can be explained as the product of the realist ("Hobbesian" in Wendt's terms) strategic culture instead of material interests.[168] This flexibility can be useful, but much of the excitement about constructivism has been the potential for it to add explanation or even produce outcomes preferable to those allowed by rationalist models. In particular, constructivists look at the possibility of ideational elements to overcome apparent materialist barriers. The ominous realist

[166] Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008).
[167] Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 181-185.
[168] Wendt, *Social,* 269.

predictions of a rising China have been the prefect targets for more optimistic constructivism. For the sake of comparison, I briefly consider possible constructivist explanations to international institutions and economic interdependence, indicating how a social explanation offers a possible means of overcoming realist constrains.

With international institutions, realism allows only instances in which institutions are compatible with the relative power interests of participating states. Although neoliberalism hopes that states will pursue absolute gains, it has a hard time explaining how states can forgo relative power calculations. Moreover, even in cases where states attempt to cooperate through binding commitments, the assurance is weak. This is especially true in East Asia, where institutions have relatively little codified binding ability. Amitav Acharya notes that no Asian institutions have "OSCE-like constraining measures," and that even perhaps the most successful regional organization, ASEAN, is highly decentralized. Yet despite the absence of binding behavior, regional security organizations seem to be making at least some progress in forging a regional security identity and regularizing behavior of the actors.[169] Similarly, in an extensive empirical analysis of the security policy choices of Chinese leaders in international institutions between 1980 and 2000, Alastair Iain Johnston finds that policy choices cannot be explained as realpolitik, despite the leaders' backgrounds in a realpolitik strategic culture. Instead, he finds that participation in institutions likely socialized the leaders to adopt the less realpolitik values of the institutions.[170]

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[169] Amitav Acharya, "Regional Institutions and Asian Security Order: Norms, Power, and Prospects for Peaceful Change," in *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 228-236.
[170] Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008), 208.

Similarly, constructivists believe that international trade has the ability to socialize actors, achieving security goals beyond simple changes in rational cost/benefit analyses of aggression. Ming Wan notes that most East Asian states began to trade internationally for realist reasons, but the practice of trade shifted state identity. Now most East Asian states articulate their national goals in terms of trade and economic development. Security competition has not vanished, but the development of shared identities and values has allowed security to be relegated to a second-tier interest under economic development.[171]

Constructivism offers great promise to guide cooperative outcomes, but its limits must be known. Much of the evidence proclaiming changes in values is questionably meaningful, so the extent to which institutions and trade can positively shape values is unclear. The temptation of constructivism is to think that because interactions are non-material, changing them is easy. Many social constructions are deeply engrained, and policymakers have limited tools at their disposal to shape identities.[172] Nevertheless, the potential for positive outcomes requires that policymakers take constructivism seriously.

[171] Ming Wan, "Economic Interdependence and Economic Cooperation: Mitigating Conflict and Transforming Security Order in Asia," in *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 298-299.
[172] Wendt, *Social,* 190.

Chapter V: Conclusion: Theory and Policy

This brief overview of some of the different theoretical positions applied to the rise of China should give an idea of the quandary of the policymaker. The debates between different theoretical positions are complex and obscure, but the differences in prescribed policy can be enormous. For example, should the U.S. pursue economically independent trade policies with China? Isolating all other competing theoretical factors, the decision can come down to technical methodological agreements. A policymaker has to make a choice, and she has little way of knowing which choice is correct. And the problem is all the more serious when theorists claim that the wrong choice could lead to great power war.

One possible option is to choose a theory and stick with it. This would make analysis and decisions straightforward. Additionally, it would establish predictability in policy behavior, reducing security concerns stemming from uncertainty. But there are two major drawbacks. First, the theory could be wrong. Dogmatically pursuing an incorrect theory would be much more disastrous than tentatively wavering between different theories. Second, some theories do not apply to every aspect of a relationship, creating indeterminate decisions.

Perhaps the most sophisticated attempt to solve this problem is Peter J. Katzenstein's case for "analytical eclecticism."[173] Analytical eclecticism attempts to abandon the deep theoretical backing behind different theoretical positions, and combine relevant elements of implemented

[173] For example, see Katzenstein and Sil; Charles J. Hammer and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Why is there No NATO in Asia?: Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism," *International Organization* 56 (2002): 575-607.

theory in "explanatory sketches."[174] The benefit of the approach is that is allows flexible access to a large amount of relevant knowledge without having to take sides in the theoretical debates. Analytical eclecticism could be the best option, but there are four potential problems. First, it assumes complementary theoretical combinations, but the real problems are when different theories are contradictory.[175] Promoting deep economic interdependence is either a good idea or a terrible one, and combining realist and liberal understandings on trade is probably impossible. Second, it artificially elevates constructivism because constructivism's greater compatibility with other theories. Third, it discounts theories that make few contextual claims. In particular, offensive realism's long-term forecast of conflict between China and the U.S. will not necessarily manifest itself with any signs at this stage. Consequently, policymakers might be tempted to ignore its warnings for greater descriptive ability. My point is that this creates a systemically arbitrary criterion for theory selection, not that offensive realism ought to be followed. Fourth, it allows policymakers to pick and choose theoretical elements that fit their personal preference. This could be seen as a good way to empower policymakers, but it is also arbitrary.

Nevertheless, I think an eclectic approach is the only possibility for scenarios of contradictory, limited knowledge. However instead of arbitrarily picking and choosing, policies should be selected based on the policymaker's assessment of their utility. This assessment would be made by comparing risks of not following a policy, benefits from following the policy, and the policymaker's relative faith in the policy. Consequently, a policymaker would be easily justified in rejected offensive realism's policy prescriptions toward China. The relative benefit from following the policies is uncertain and small, but the cost is certain and large. Under any

[174] Katzenstein and Sil, 13.
[175] Ibid., 16.

consideration except that of the hardened offensive realist, Mearsheimer's policy prescriptions for China's rise are clearly misguided.

Ultimately, the theory-policy gap is impossible to completely bridge. Theory is disputed and decontextualized, and therefore not amenable to the necessities of policy. Yet theory can still provide generalized guidance to policymakers, pointing them toward potentially relevant factors in understanding the international environment. Theory must therefore facilitate policy, not constrain it. In the case of the rise of China, fatalistic theory is of no help. But theory that empowers policymakers may suggest solutions to this complex problem.

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