

China and non-alignment

**An intertextual discourse analysis of relationality within China's
official statements on military alliances**

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Abstract

Conventional realist expectations on great power behaviour in a perceived threatening security environment calls on these nations to balance against the threats in the form of military alliances with other states. China is perceiving security policies by USA and its allies to constitute threats to its national sovereignty, yet has chosen to adhere to a policy of non-alignment, making it an outlier among other great powers and calling into question positivist inspired inferences on Chinese security cooperation. This posture calls for an attempt at reaching a contextual understanding of China's negative view of alliances, rather than assuming pre-given intentions of state behaviour. Against this background and within an epistemological and ontological framework of constructivism, I have applied an intertextual discourse analysis between the works of Chinese international relations theorist Qin Yaqing, and official policy discourse on alliances from the Chinese political leadership. By this method and theoretical framework, I have explored the possibility of Chinese cultural and philosophical ideas, as interpreted by Qin, correlating with and influencing the official policy discourse, which in turn reflects the view of alliances. The results show that there is a meaning-making within the official Chinese discourse that is drawing on concepts and ideas derived from Qin Yaqing's presented concept of Confucian relationality. Together they serve to construct an ideational structure and corresponding Chinese identity that precludes military alliances as an option for Chinese security policy making. This in turn reveals the need to move away from realist and positivist assumptions of inherent state reasoning, and instead pay greater attention to contextual and ideational factors when analysing the Chinese non-alignment policy, with implications for how we understand China and Chinese security policy making in general.

Key words: China, alliances, Confucian relationality, discourse, context, ideas

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Problem

China is a great power state that in recent years have expressed increased assertiveness concerning perceived security threats to its “core national interests”, such as territorial claims in the South China Sea and the ever-contentious issue of Taiwan reunification with the mainland (Mastro 2021). According to the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP), these threats to what is considered as violations of China’s territorial sovereignty, are mainly coming from the US and its alliance network, spanning from the bilateral and multilateral treaties between US and nations in South and South Eastern Asia as well as NATO (Liff 2017 p. 139, Almén, & Englund & Ottosson 2021 p.7). China’s remarks regarding US and its allied security policy shift toward East Asia, which includes military exercises and freedom of navigation operations in the region, points to an interpretation from CCP that these are shows of force directed at China and that threats to regional security comes externally from them. For instance, as response to NATO’s recent public label given to China as a “constant security challenge”, China responded it will “never give up the right to maintain peace but unswervingly defend our sovereignty, security and development interests” (AP News 2021), and accused NATO countries of “sending their aircraft carriers all over the place to display their military might” (9News 2021). Another response was regarding NATO members’ increasing freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, moves that China claimed were “stirring up troubles in the South China Sea”, and heightening security risks in the region (Xinhua 2021). This situation of heightened security tension and competition between the US alliances and China has prompted researchers to ponder over the expected Chinese response to its perceived security threats, particularly concerning alliance formation (Zhong & Yang 2020 p.63).

According to conventional assumptions on strategic behavior in the dominating alliance and corresponding realist theory literature, for a great power state that perceives either another state or group of states posing a threat to its own security through aggregate power and resources (balance of threat logic), or a major power deficit in relation to oneself, mainly in terms of material capabilities (balance of power logic), the natural course of action is to balance against this threat through allying with other states who share the same or similar concerns (Walt 1987 p.265). These assumptions are largely based on the expected value in increased security benefits alliances creates in an anarchical system, such as increased

deterrence and military defense abilities as well as the prevention of the ally's alliance with one's adversary (Snyder 1990 p.110). This thesis defines "alliances" in a conventional and traditional sense in line with the dominating literature on the subject, in terms of a formal agreement between two or more states, by which they agree to the use (or non-use) of military force under certain defined circumstances and against states outside their own membership (Snyder 1990 p.104, Lai & Reiter 2000 p.205, Han & Papa 2021). "External balancing", or alliance formation in this sense, has been described as the central mode of cooperation in the area of security affairs with political significance in the international community (Lai & Reiter 2000 p.205), as well as one of the pillars of realpolitik in interstate politics dating back to the time of Thucydides (Trigkas 2014).

Chinese perceptions of the US and its allies arguably fulfill the criteria for both balancing logics mentioned above, judging from the cited official statements above as well as the combined military capabilities of US and its allies compared with China (Isaacs 2021). The assumption that China, due to these conditions will indeed form an alliance network like the Soviet Warsaw Pact to balance the US alliances has also recently been confirmed by the influential realist John Mearsheimer (Mearsheimer 2019 p.44). Yet China has not chosen to walk down the path of traditional allied balancing. In fact, the country only has one treaty ally in North Korea, with whom a security pact was signed in 1961. While it is still in effect today, the exact substance is subject to debate, with some researchers arguing it only exist on paper (Liu & Liu 2017 p.169). These ties notwithstanding, the official position of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has since 1982 been a consistent position of non-alignment, when the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping announced that the nation would adhere to an "independent diplomatic strategy" with the principle of not forming alliances with any country or group of countries and not joining any military bloc (Zhong & Yang 2020 p.65, Liu & Liu 2017 p.153). The policy has since then been reiterated by successive Chinese leaders Jiang Zemin in 1992, Hu Jintao in 2011 and Xi Jinping in 2014 as well as by several white papers in more recent years (Liu & Liu 2017 p.152-153).

The fact that China does indeed not favor military alliances has also been confirmed in the academic literature on the subject (Zhong & Yang 2020 p.62-63, Han & Papa 202 p.158-159, Liu & Liu 2017 p.152-153), as well as in the official Chinese discourse: "The world is increasingly aware that diversity and inclusiveness are the core that promotes the world development – forming aggressive alliances is outdated" (Su 2020).

This statement on alliances stands in stark contrast to that of the main proponent of alliances;

USA, as the following quote by president Biden in his first foreign policy address illustrate: “America’s alliances are our greatest assets...When we strengthen our alliances, we amplify our power as well as our ability to disrupt threats before they reach our shores” (Biden 2021).

When looking at the current alliance affiliations of USA and Russia, two other great powers with strong military and economic capabilities and influence abroad, as well as taking into account the numerous other great powers included in these groups, it becomes evident that China stands out as an “outlier”. Not counting the several bilateral and multilateral treaties in South East and East Asia, the US has alliances with 29 states through NATO. Russia has six through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and two more with the self-proclaimed republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia respectively (Yegerov 2019). This situation in where China has only one formal ally in its rise and strategic competition with the US, has caused some researchers to describe China as “the most isolated rising country in modern history” (Sun & Huang 2013 p.23). Senior Defense analyst at RAND Derek Grossman has made similar remarks when comparing US and China’s security partners: “...compared to the U.S., China’s friends are certainly not as numerous, nor are they as reliable. That is a major challenge for Beijing as great power competition continues to ramp up.” (Grossman 2020). The persistent policy of non-alignment despite perceived pressure from external forces suggests a different reasoning and logic than what is derived from conventional assumptions on state behavior in a threatening environment. Not only is China critical towards the US alliance network due to the perceived threats it poses to China’s national security, but there also seems to be critique towards the idea of forming alliances itself.

While there is a general agreement within the literature that Chinese leaders have a negative view on this type of security cooperation, the attempts of understanding the non-alignment stance largely follows conventional assumptions on Great power behavior according to relative material capabilities. For instance, Liu Ruonan and Liu Feng argues that Chinese leaders perceive the present security environment as stable in military capability terms, with low probability of conflict (Liu & Liu 2017 p.169). Or Sun Xuefeng and Huang Yuxing who argues in terms of large military power imbalance in favor of the US in the East Asian region being a major reason why China experience difficulty in turning into a regional strategic center, necessary for alliance formation (Sun & Huang 2013 p.27).

Economic factors also play a role according to other researchers; alliances are simply

considered too expensive to justify another policy course, in that it would negatively affect trade volumes with nonaligned states (Zhong & Yang 2020 p.68, Han & Papa 2021 p.160). A more complete elaboration on this previous research will follow below.

However, simply looking at material capabilities seems not to be sufficient in this case, since China's security reasoning on alliances seems to differ from the positivist implied logic of treating every great power's intention as pre-given, depending on their material situation. Instead, this thesis aims to approach the topic from another angle, arguing that we need to pay attention to discourse, with its corresponding cultural and philosophical contextuality. Instead of axiomatically assuming that inherent intentions can be derived from material capabilities, we ought to from a constructivist viewpoint look closer at concepts based on cultural ideas and values that guide the Chinese political discourse, which in turn creates the perceptions and international security outlook of Chinese political elites that prohibits military alliances. More specifically, this angle is motivated by research explaining that "Confucian relationality", i.e., the Chinese perception of itself in relation to other states, and the subsequent relationship management grounded in the Chinese philosopher Confucius's ideas of power, order and international statecraft - often has a dominant role in foreign policy making compared with static national interests (Ye 2014 p.4). More specifically, this concept entails an ontological view of interrelatedness between actors, highlighting how their identities and corresponding interests are defined and given meaning through complex webs of entanglements and encounters with other actors. This informs a contrasting perspective on alliances compared to what the conventional atomistic one applies. It also ties into research stating that Chinese elites tend to have a specific world view, ontologically and normatively (Mokry 2018), which often exceeds the scope of positivist and realist explanatory power (Kavalski 2016 p.558, Uemura 2015 p.345, 361). Evidence of this can be seen in the quotes on alliances mentioned above, which points to a Chinese understanding of international relations that is rather different from other great powers.

This thesis maintains that we need a grasp of the relevant discourse in order to comprehend a state's policy decisions and actions, since discourse reflects the cultural repertoire of available meanings in policy makers worldview (Weldes 2014 p.230).

Analyzing Chinese official discourse can then allow us to get a grasp of the continued stance of non-alignment, through examining how Confucian relationality may reflect in and influence the official CCP discourse on alliances.

1.2 Aim and research question

Against this background, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to the literature on China and military alliances by producing an enhanced understanding of the Chinese negative view on alliances; which meanings are attached to the term “alliance” and how it can be understood through relationality-based concepts. This will be done based on theoretical constructivist assumptions on state behavior, and by providing in-depth analysis of the official discourse on alliances in primary sources derived from government, state ministries and main institutions of the CCP. The official CCP discourse will be analyzed against the background of a more theoretically oriented discourse on Confucian relationality in Chinese international relations (IR), in a process of exploring intertextuality between the two. The theoretical discourse is written by professor Qin Yaqing, a dominating voice in the contemporary Chinese IR theory project and frequently cited in CCP media on IR issues.

The analysis will be focused around the three central concepts *Co-existence*, *Harmony* and *Relational power*. These are both major pieces in Qin’s relationality discourse, as well as dominating themes in the official CCP discourse, hence it is important to understand their meaning and how they help frame the arguments against alliances. By conducting the research in this way, the thesis can hopefully fill gaps of missing cultural context and agency that currently shapes previous research.

A more thorough explanation of the three central concepts will follow below in the analysis section.

Research Question:

- How can relational concepts from Qin Yaqing’s Chinese international relations theory enhance our understanding of the CCP’s negative view of military alliances?

2. Previous research

In order to place the thesis within an academic research context and provide the reader an insight into the state of art so far, I will below present the main themes within the field of China and alliances, that focuses on the Chinese view of military alliances and reasons why it does not favour this type of security cooperation.

The chapter is structured around the following key themes: realist standpoints, economic factors, historical and cultural factors, Sino-Russian relations and Sino-North Korean relations. It ends with a summery and discussion around the literature's merits and limits.

2.1 Realist standpoints

Zhong Zhenming and Yang Yanqi draws on realist reasoning when describing China's wish to avoid the risk of "entrapment" within an alliance. This is described by Glenn Snyder as being dragged into a military conflict due to an ally's interests that one does not share, or only shares partially (Snyder 1984 p.467). It is a result of an actor valuing the preservation of the alliance more than the cost of fighting for the ally's interests, thus the stronger confidence of the ally in one's support combined with stronger commitment of oneself to the alliance, the higher the risk of entrapment (ibid.). Thus, in Zhong and Yang's view, the CCP leadership believes that if China would form alliances, it would significantly increase the risk of unnecessary conflicts and confrontations due to the "entrapment logic rooted in alliance politics" (Zhong & Yang 2020 p.63, 64). Liu Ruonan and Liu Feng seems to agree with this statement, when they claim that the Chinese government generally views alliances as an archaic and "entangling system" that only results in increased risks of costly military conflict (Liu & Liu 2017 p.153). Although Chinese leaders have no instinctual resistance to the path of alliance formation, the perceived low probability of war simply do not justify the abandonment of this long-standing policy (Liu & Liu 2017 p.169). This conclusion is fascinating, since it seems to contradict other recent research on Chinese threat perceptions by the above-mentioned Adam P. Liff and the FOI report. It also makes China's increased military spending in recent years puzzling, especially considering the prevailing sensitive Taiwan issue, where Chinese legislation compels military intervention in the event of official Taiwanese secession (Yew 2020). Liu and Liu continue to conclude that China will likely not change its policy of non-alignment in the near future, but this may change if the balance of power and threats would shift and pose sever challenges to its security interest (Ibid. p.170-171). The logic of entrapment is further echoed in an article by Zhang Tiejun, in where he

states that contemporary Chinese leaders maintains that China needs to stay away from “entangling alliances” that limit the freedom and autonomy of the Chinese state (Zhang 2002 p.84). Zhang even goes further and believes that contemporary Chinese strategic culture is expressed in the form of “defensive realism”, which pays attention to the importance of material strength rather than cultural and ideational preferences in policy making (Zhang 2002 p.73).

Zhong and Yang also frequently in their article refer to the key realist concept of “security dilemma”, which explains why security-seeking states could end up in armed conflict due to security maximization motivated by international anarchy, being a major deterrent for Chinese alliance formation. They elaborate that a Chinese led military alliance would likely “deepen the competition between China and the United States and exacerbate the security dilemma in the Asia-Pacific region” (Zhong & Yang 2020 p.66), and compares the situation today with alliance confrontation that aggravated the security dilemma in the prelude of the First World War (ibid.). This argument around the security dilemma is also repeated by Zhang Tiejun, in where he equates alliance formation with a desire for regional hegemony, describing that pursuing this path would certainly lead to containment and encirclement from the US and China’s neighboring countries, which would be a worst-case scenario for China (Zhang 2002 p.84). In a realist ontology of the security dilemma being the main motivator for increase of one’s own security relative others, alliance formation and management is seen as a zero-sum game where only relative gains count. Adam P. Liff argues that CCP leaders traditionally hold to realism and *realpolitik* when analyzing world events, with threat perceptions shaped by concepts of balancing and deterrence. Particularly they view security alliances as inherently “zero-sum” Cold War relics and exclusively negative, as “their assumed (sole) purpose is the containment of threatening states” (Liff 2017 p.140). This is in contrast to the US more comprehensive contemporary perspective, which regards alliances as having deterrent value but also as “positive-sum” public goods, in that they serve as guarantors of regional security and stability (ibid.). Liff finds it strange that Beijing conspicuously has eschewed new formal security alliances after the 1960s, despite the assumed realist perspective and clear threat perceptions (ibid. p.141). In light of this he also finds it ironic that the Chinese conceptualization and interpretation of international security fails in recognizing widespread insecurity and mistrust in the Asia-Pacific region (ibid. p.156), the anarchical nature of international politics and that the alliance balancing against it by large is a result of China’s own policies (ibid.). These contradictions make a

reexamination of Chinese leaders reasoning on alliances from another theoretical viewpoint even more relevant, which is the mission of this thesis.

In similar reasoning around the connection between hegemonic aspirations and alliances as drawn by Zhang Tiejun, Sun Xuefeng and Huang Yuxing describes that a huge gap in the military strength between China and USA has resulted in China experiencing difficulty in turning into the strategic center of the region and lacking the capabilities to provide security protection for potential allies (Sun & Huang 2013 p.27). Here we witness another argument based on the realist concept of balance of power, but rather than framing it as a logical motivator for pursuing alliance in line with Liff's, Liu Ruonan and Liu Feng's reasoning, here it is portrayed as a massive obstacle preventing China to compete with the US on the same terms. The conclusions might be different, but still remains within the same theoretical framework.

2.2 Economic factors

Aside from purely military capabilities, economic factors are also frequently mentioned as influential aspects on China's attitude towards alliances. For example, Zhong and Yang writes about how alliance formations were regarded in the 1980s onward as jeopardizing the relatively stable and peaceful international environment that China needed to support its economic development (Zhong & Yang 2020 p.65). This view is also shared by Liu Ruonan and Liu Feng, who writes that China's non-alliance policy has brought a "relatively benign regional environment, so allowing the government to focus on the central task of economic development and power accumulation" (Liu & Liu 2017 p.153). Even in more recent times, when China's economy has reached new unprecedented heights, the cost of an alliance formation is presumed to be too high, as China due to its great power status would have to bear the lion's share of defense costs. Since US is still regarded as the incumbent hegemon, playing a dominant role in providing international public goods, for China it makes more sense to attempt a cooperative relationship, rather than alliance balancing, with the US in order to fulfill its supposed main national objective of stable economic development (Zhong & Yang 2020 p.68). In order to avoid direct confrontation then, and achieve the above-mentioned economic objective, China has chosen a path creating partnerships, spanning a wide range of economic and security related matters instead of alliances with various countries. These partnership networks supposedly benefit China in that it gains economic and to some extent political influence as well as solving the problem of "competing" with the US

over military allies (ibid. p.75). Zhen Han and Mihaela Papa also write about China's policy of non-alignment in favor of partnerships, that this has been viewed as more effective in improving the country's economic gains, especially since it transitioned from operating in a bipolar world into a multipolar one in the 1990s (Han & Papa 2021 p.160). They highlight the official CCP definition of the preferred alternative of partnership in international cooperation: "a flexible form of international cooperation by independent states which have some shared interests and are willing to take coordinated actions to achieve some common goals" (ibid. p.163). Compared to traditional alliances, partnerships are seen as informal, unstructured and can be formed to pursue security interests but also non-security ones, especially economic cooperation.

Alliances has for decades been regarded by CCP as leading to economic costs by reducing trade volumes with nonaligned states, a severe issue for an economy as dependent on export-led growth as China's (Han & Papa 2021 p.160). Like Zhong and Yang, the authors also echo the argument that China, in the position of leading state within a potential alliance, will need to spend vast economic resources on maintaining its effectiveness (Ibid. p.160).

Another interesting point is the supposed influence of domestic communities in avoiding alliances, as the political and business elites from the manufacturing industry and coastal regions in China are greatly concerned about the cost of military competition with the United States (ibid.). This domestic focus adds a holistic dimension to the discussion rarely seen in other literature.

2.3 Historical and cultural factors

Zhong and Yang writes about negative historical experiences in allying with the Soviet Union in the 1950s. The overdependence on the Soviet Union during this decade resulted in high political, economic and security consequences for China when the two nation's relations deteriorated (Zhong & Yang 2020 p.64-65). In line with Zhong and Yang's argument, Zhang Tiejun explains that lessons learned from the failed formal alliance with USSR in the 1950s, together with Mao Zedong's ideas contributed to the policy of self-reliance combined with foreign cooperation to be an influential feature of Chinese strategic culture since the 1980s (Zhang 2002 p.83). At the beginning of the 21th century, this feature was maintained due to fear of overreliance on Western countries and a continuing suspicion of the Chinese state towards foreign powers (ibid. p.87). This in turn made mutual international knowledge exchange in military domains necessary for defense development, but precluded any "entanglement" that risked limit the freedom and autonomy of the Chinese state. Continuing

on China's strategic culture, Thomas G. Mahnken explains that the European state system was historically characterized by a series of shifting alliances between, at least formally, equal states. China's historical worldview was by contrast characterized by a perception of cultural superiority, seeing itself as the core of a hierarchical international system with tributary states positioned around its periphery, representing the natural order of states (Mahnken 2011 p.11). As long as this order was maintained there would be no need for war or alliances. To Mahnken it appears this Sino centric worldview is still reflected in modern Chinese foreign policy in where the country, while integrated in the existing world order, still often plays by its own rules and norms (ibid. p.12).

Philip C Saunders argues that the focus on form over substance in Chinese culture in general combined with CCP's tight control over the military contributes to a strategic culture that is averse towards binding security agreements (Saunders 2020 p.203). The resulting lack of external transparency and tight control of political messaging prevents deeper strategic trust and candid military cooperation that are fundamental for alliances.

2.4 Sino-Russian relations

In the literature on China and alliances, a frequent topic concerns whether Russia and China are moving towards a formal alliance, since Russia so far is one of the closest security partners to China. Zhao Huasheng uses the case of Sino-Russian relations as an example in suggesting the view that closer cooperation on an alliance level would have realistic benefits in some circumstances, but the current path of pursuing a flexible "strategic partnership" without mutual defence guarantees better fits the two countries' political systems and is easily accepted by both elite and the common people (Zhao 2015 p.238). This view is also found in Han and Papa's article, in that due to domestic factional politics, a Sino-Russian security alliance would produce high audience costs for both sides' leadership. Flexible partnerships may instead achieve practical collaboration without triggering domestic objections (Han & Papa 2021 p.167). The partnership entails broad cooperation in political, economic and security areas. Zhao contends that Beijing and Moscow through this arrangement has been able to find the "golden mean" between the two countries, a mean that creates space rarely found within formal alliances for both partners to tolerate diverging issues in their bilateral relationship, and thus reduces the likelihood that such problems are politicized or emotionalized (Zhao 2015 p. 238).

Stephen Blank argues that this partnership, judging from the ability it gives Moscow and

Beijing to coordinate their actions globally, is de facto an alliance, albeit perhaps an informal one (Blank 2019 p.212). This line of argument follows a general trend in recent Western scholarship around Sino-Russian relations, in where the two are believed to have “an alliance in all but name”, drawing on theoretical assumptions of balance of threat and balance of power perspectives combined with overlapping interest in global governance and cooperation (Han & Papa 2021 p.166). Continuing on the same topic, Alexander Korolev explains that Russia and China have created strong institutional foundations for an alliance and that “only minor steps are necessary for a formal and functioning military alliance to materialize” (Korolev 2019 p.235). Yet even if the two are on the verge of forming an alliance, this prediction is far from deterministic. As exemplified by China’s ambivalent stance towards Russian actions in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, Beijing’s view of state sovereignty as well as its own regional interests may not fully correspond to Moscow’s (ibid p.248). This observation combined with Russia’s own ambivalence, as exemplified in a clash between Chinese coast guard and Russian top petroleum companies helping Vietnam in the contested South China Sea (Han & Papa 2021 p.167) poses a challenge to the alliance in all but name-argument.

2.5 Sino-North Korean relations

As illustrated by Li Wenxin and Kim Young Ji, China’s stance of political ambivalence and ambiguity towards its security partner’s is not limited to Russia but also applies towards its sole treaty ally North Korea. While traditionally acting as the North Korean protector from international condemnation and pressure, ever since North Korea’s increasingly aggressive foreign policy and repeated nuclear tests after 2006, China has gradually recognized a necessity to endorse tough UNSC sanctions as punishment (Li & Kim 2020 p.3, 624) In fact, in 2006 China’s foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao even denied that North Korea was China’s military ally and insisted that the two states had developed a “normal relationship based on international norms” (ibid. p.615). Looking at more recent times, Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un exchanged congratulatory messages to celebrate the alliance treaty’s 55th anniversary, however beyond this and similar symbolic gestures, meaningful security cooperation between the two states has long been absent (Liu & Liu 2017 p.169). When also accounting for China’s sanctioning policy, Liu Ruonan and Liu Feng states that the treaty’s continuing existence should not be regarded as a contradiction of China’s non-alignment policy, since it remains only in the strictly legal sense (ibid.).

To summarize, there are certain common themes in the literature on how China's view military alliances. Some apparent ones are theoretical and based in the realist camp within IR theory, with emphasis put on concepts of power- and threat balancing, security dilemma and entrapment logics. Other arguments are based on supposed Chinese focus on trade and economy, in part that alliances would harm trade relations and the "benign" regional environment that has been conducive of domestic development, and partly due to the allegedly high maintenance costs that a large country like China would have to bear in leading an alliance. Instead we see that a more flexible approach of international security and non-security cooperation in the shape of so called partnerships is preferred.

Even though these are relevant points to consider, the majority of the underlying reasoning deterministically suggests that Chinese leaders sees the world within the realist ontology, and itself in the form of an independent state unit within the anarchic system, or "impenetrable billiard ball" to borrow common realist vocabulary, distinguished only by its relative hard power. Since realist IR theory is largely based on Western historical experiences (Acharya & Buzan 2010 p.1, 2), the subsequent conclusions drawn from this ontology downplays the possible influential role of culture in constructing actors' world outlook and corresponding policy decisions. By only relying on the universal assumptions on state behavior based on geographically limited experiences, there is a risk of engaging in "strategic ethnocentrism", something even the influential realist Stephen M. Walt has warned about (Walt 2009).

To compensate for this, though still outnumbered by the realist and economic explanations, there are as mentioned studies made on strategic culture, which focuses on culturally based perceptions on a country's role in international politics and the use of military force to achieve political ends (Neumann & Heikka 2005 p.6, 7). In China's case, this strategic culture seems to emphasize autonomy and flexibility, influenced by historical experiences of failed alliances and a Sino centric worldview. Although its addition gives much needed context to the case, this literature seemingly merely scratches the surface of the rich cultural and philosophical repertoire of Confucianism, and how this reasoning influences strategic state behavior. Moreover, an overarching issue that concerns both categories of research regard the material used to claim certain positions and perceptions of Chinese leaders. This is by a large degree based on secondary sources, without any further confirming connection between them and the official CCP line. Hence, they do not necessarily correspond to the CCP perspective.

To fill this gap in subjectivity, context and agency, this thesis aims to contribute with a more comprehensive analysis of first-hand material from official CCP sources with the help of constructivism as theoretical background, and Confucian relationality based Chinese IR discourse, to achieve a clearer understanding of the CCP view of alliances and its motivation for non-alignment. As will be shown below, Chinese geopolitical thinking is far from only a product of Western inspired ideas of international relations, but to a large degree a reflection of its own distinct cultural history and philosophy.

3. Theoretical framework

In line with the already mentioned claims that Chinese foreign policy can be understood by analyzing underlying cultural and contextual features, this thesis will use a theoretical framework inspired by constructivism, which is presented below. Constructivism is used to illustrate the basic ontological and epistemological assumptions that the thesis is based on. The argument for this theoretical choice is that the research question requires a different approach than positivist inspired IR theories can provide.

3.1 Constructivist ontological and epistemological foundation

Mainstream international relations theories of realism and liberalism assumes that states have enduring interests such as power and wealth, and are limited in their ability to advance those interests due to material forces such as geography and distribution of hard power (Barnett 2014: 156). The anarchical structure of the international realm constrains and allows certain behavior based on these hard-wired interests. Constructivist critique towards this individualistic and materialistic approach lies in that the material focus misses the influential forces of ideas, norms, culture and relating discourse which all serve to impact state's identities and corresponding interests. In this view, the claim of existing universal, culturally autonomous and contextually disembodied ideas and identities is therefore not convincing. Thus, rather than the material capabilities themselves, it is the collective and intersubjective understandings states have that provides them with indications as how to use these capabilities (Adler 1997 p.322). Positivist approaches to social sciences are generally based on atomistic views derived from natural science. Humans however, and in the end state leaders, reflect on their experiences which in turn informs their reasons of behavior. Therefore, social sciences require methods that can capture the interpretations that actors bring to their activities, as summarized in Max Weber's concept of "verstehen", that advocates recreation of collective understanding of the world (Barnett 2014 p.162). Drawing on the idea that although there is indeed a material reality, humans collectively held ideas as language and knowledge produces meaning making and interpretations of this reality that differs across different contexts (ibid. p.158). Much of the world and what we know about it in this sense is then socially constructed. For instance, instead of treating the "balance of power" concept as an objectively existing material structure, waiting to be discovered in a positivist sense, we should consider that states tend to debate on what its exact meaning is and how best to respond to it (ibid.). In a similar way, we can regard

“anarchy” as a cultural or ideational creation, and once understood in this way it is possible to accept that the supposedly inherent structural logic of the anarchy concept can vary. For example, according to Alexander Wendt (1999, cited in Barnett 2014 p.160), its interpretation can depend on different state identities and corresponding roles; how one state defines the self and the other in terms of enemy, rival or friend. Foreign policies then naturally constitute the identity of the Self through the construction of threats, dangers, and challenges, or in other words: its Other(s). How we represent others affects the representation of ourselves, and this representation is decisive for which foreign policies we choose, as described by Michael J. Shapiro (1988, cited in Hansen 2014 p.179). Being reflections of an actor’s understanding of who they are, identities constitute their interests and actions. States that attune to a certain identity are expected to comply with the norms associated with that identity, which springs from the “logic of appropriateness”, that some actions are more acceptable than others in accordance with the identity’s preferences, according to Peter J. Katzenstein (1996, cited in Theys 2017 p.37-38). Alexander Wendt offers an illustrating example of this socially constructed dynamic by pointing to that 500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons (Wendt 1995, cited in Theys 2017: 36). These perceptions are not created by the weapons themselves, i.e., the material structure, but instead by the meaning attached to the material structure, which is the ideational structure. (ibid.). Therefore, to the extent that structures can be claimed to shape the actions of social and political actors, normative and ideational structures are often more important to look at compared to material ones. They affect what actors can imagine as possible actions and strategies to achieve their objectives. In addition, institutionalized norms and ideas within these structures condition which actions are deemed necessary and viable, both in ethical and practical terms (Reus-Smit 2005 p.198). Institutionalized norms and ideas define the meaning and identity of the actor and the following ways of appropriate political and cultural actions engaged in by those actors, they can function as justifications for behavior since they possess moral force in the given social context.

This structural angle notwithstanding, it is important to mention that Constructivism often is categorized as taking a middle ground between social structures and individual agency, i.e., the capacity to change or reinforce these structures (Adler 1997 p.326). Therefore, agency and structure are mutually influential and constituted. A major factor that allows for this middle-ground position is the notion of intersubjective knowledge, that is the shared beliefs

and understandings between social actors. Even though intersubjective meanings have structural and constraining attributes, as for example in shaping states behavior based on their shared understanding of international anarchy, they can also empower actors, based on the assumption that the social structure is after all founded on changeable ideas (Adler 1997 p.327 s. 37).

Actors are not born outside of and prior to the society, as the foundational individualism of IR theory mainstream claims. Instead, actors and their knowledge can be viewed as created and shaped by their cultural and historical environment, which highlights the importance of the aforementioned concept of identity and social construction of interest (ibid.).

Drawing on the importance attached to culture in social meaning making, as highlighted by Max Weber: “we are cultural beings with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude toward the world and to lend it significance” (1949, cited in Barnett 2014 p.161), constructivists often attempt to recover the meanings that actors attach to their practices, claiming that these are based on culture. This focus on culture, combined with the above-mentioned assumption of actors’ behavior being shaped by their historical, ideational and normative environment is appropriate for the thesis since Qin’s theoretical Chinese IR discourse by large is built around intersubjective and cultural meanings, based both on historical and normative ideas. In line with the above-mentioned attempts of constructivists, this thesis’s aim also corresponds to the process of recover, or rather *uncover* the meanings that CCP attaches to their practice, which in this case is pursuing a policy of military non-alignment. A further justification for the choice of constructivism can be found in the claims by Emanuel Adler, who writes that “the constructivist approach to international relations can be highly useful in explaining the normative underpinnings of national security, especially security cooperation” (Adler 1997 p.345). He further explains the constructivist applicability in that it is often the intersubjective understandings based on historical experience, epistemic criteria that dictates the view of proper action on national security matters (Adler 1997 p.345, 346).

4. Research Design

Continuing on the theoretical assumptions from above, the methodology is guided by the view of discourse as constitutive and vital to the creation and maintenance of social reality. This chapter has the purpose of presenting and explaining the corresponding research design. It begins with an explanation of the key concept within the chosen version of discourse analysis; intertextuality. Then follows a chronological outline of the data collection and analysis process with a step-by-step presentation. Lastly, I present and motivate the choice of empirical material. The first part consists of the background “pretext” discourse of Qin Yaqing’s IR theory, on which the other official CCP discourse text is analysed against.

4.1 Methodology of discourses

In order capture the CCP’s negative perceptions of alliances and achieve an understanding of the reasoning behind the continued policy of non-alignment, discourse analysis will be applied as a method in analyzing the material. As an interpretive approach to research, this thesis shares the assumption that political and cultural contexts frame social actors’ possibilities for thought and action, and that the motivation that animates these activities is *meaning*, both its expression and its communication to others (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012 p.46). Epistemologically then, to understand meaning, context and action, one must examine their core determinant; language. (ibid.). A discourse is a set of socio-cultural language resources, or system of representations that has grown socially in order to produce and circulate a coherent set of meanings (Weldes 2014 p.230). To analyze world politics as discourse means to study the linguistic structures through which materiality is given meaning (Hansen 2014 p.175). Being comprised of language in different forms, discourse can by extension be seen as a narrative that reflects a worldview or perspective, consisting of implicit explanations and assumptions about causality, consequences and value (Haste, Helen & Jones 2018 p.317). As such, discourses both frame and prescribe the agenda for meaning making in different situations. To narrow down this rather wide definition of discourse, while keeping in mind its socio-cultural and systemic characteristics, it should be noted that this thesis will use discourse as in written text, transcribed speeches and statements.

One underlying methodological assumption of discourse analysis is the treatment of language as a social system with its own relational logic, which in turn produces social meaning for humans. (Neumann 2008 p.61). What actors regard as reality then rests on an understanding of language as producing meaning rather than being a neutral transmitter (Hansen 2014

p.172). Instead, the reality is maintained by the frequent repetition and confirmation of these meanings (Neumann 2008 p.66). Because discourse usually upholds a degree of regularity in social relations, it produces preconditions for action and is therefore useful in explaining state perceptions, reasoning behind a chosen political path and why other options were shunted aside (ibid p.62). Discourse constrains to a large degree how people order and categorize their thinking about the world, what is regarded possible or natural to do in a given situation, or in other words, what meanings, interactions and actions are made conceivable or precluded due to a particular existing discourse (Haste, Helen & Jones 2018 p.317).

The aim of discourse analysis therefore can be seen as identifying the social meanings that comprise the discourse, possible asymmetries between them and specifying the bandwidth of subsequent possible outcomes. These factors, with a focus on the restrictive and permissive abilities that discourses have on action in line with aforementioned ideational structure, arguably makes the method useful in answering the research question of this thesis.

Discursive acts and its corresponding meaning making cannot be reduced to a matter just of rational choices, neither to an individual action in isolation (ibid p.318). Instead, these acts are to a large degree embedded in cultural and historical context, and it is vital to understand these contexts in order to apprehend how each discursive act is manifested (ibid.).

The concept of culture is defined as the “social knowledge which is distinctive to a particular society as a whole, or to groups within it, and is therefore a source of identity”, (Taylor 2013 p.20). The shared body of knowledge then has epistemological implications in that it confers a specific worldview.

By extending this idea to international relations, Jutta Weldes explains that international policies by states have an essential cultural foundation, thus state and other international actions are made commonsensical through cultural meanings (Weldes 2014 p.230). This means that policy decisions and actions cannot be comprehended without a corresponding grasp of the field of discourses, i.e., the cultural repertoire of available meanings through which policy makers make sense of world politics and their own place in it (ibid.). Official representations depend upon the cultural resources of a society in their communication, and are therefore themselves necessarily cultural.

4.2 Intertextuality

An important concept in applying discourse analysis is that of *intertextuality*. This concept entails that texts are not read in isolation but in relation to others, allowing us to illustrate and explain “the way world politics are officially narrated, the way academics represent world politics, and the way stories are told in popular media” (Weldes 2014 p.232). We can regard this as an “interdependency” of the discourse practices of a society, where texts are bound to draw upon and transform other contemporary and historically prior texts. Therefore, any discourse is defined by its relationship to other discourses (Fairclough 1992 p.39, 40). In connecting with our aforementioned theoretical perspective, we can in this sense regard every discourse as constructing its social meanings against the background of other discourses (Salloum 2021 p.2817). Or as Marjolein Hogenbirk put it: “The earlier texts, the intertexts (or, more accurately, pretexts), resound like other voices in the new text as a result of which the cultural life of the older texts is extended” (Hogenbirk 2017 p.183).

Since texts are connected to other texts, forming the “intertext” in an epistemologically intersubjective way, we are able to understand the social world and therefore world politics by analyzing relevant texts. Intertextuality can be “manifest” or in other words explicit, as in containing quotes or exact phrases and concepts of other texts in a text, or it can be implicit, as in a text drawing upon themes or elements identified by other texts but framed in different wording and in different situations (Fairclough 1992 p.10, 104). “All utterances are populated, and indeed constituted, by snatches of others’ utterances, more or less explicit or complete” (ibid. p.102). This thesis will make use of both types of intertextualities. Yet since official policy documents and state media likely are aiming for a relatively simplified language towards a general and international audience, it will appear in a less intellectual and abstract fashion than the theoretical discourse. Therefore, one is more likely to come across implicit references to theoretical themes than explicit quotes direct from Qin’s writings.

4.3 Outline of data collection and analysis process

Although intertextuality has been described as a method for analyzing the interdependency of texts, there are remarkably few concrete guidelines or attempts at explaining how this kind of analysis is done. Some general descriptions include searching for thematic echoes of earlier texts, for quotations, citations and relating situations in order to clarify the meaning of a textual work within its specific cultural context (Hogenbirk 2017 p.184). While this is helpful as a starting point, it is not particularly instructive or pedagogic in an operationalization

sense. In order to simplify for the reader and control and check my own sense-making, I will therefore attempt to in a transparent and systematic way chronologically outline the steps taken during the process of data collection and analysis. Hopefully this can also alleviate often given concerns about qualitative research methods being too unstructured and vague (Bryman 2012 p.406).

Step 1: with a departure point in the thesis research problem, a general overview of the official CCP textual discourse around military alliances was done through three different official white papers in order to get a sense of key words and arguments that were used.

Step 2: based on the result of the overview, I started looking into theoretical discourses around international relations within Chinese academia with a focus on works that could be found both in English and Chinese rather than only Chinese, to see if there were any resonating themes with the first sample of official discourse. Even though I do understand and to a certain extent can translate written Chinese, focusing on the English versions makes the research process smoother and time saving. This focus is also based on the assumption that theorists that have published their writings in English and in international journals, are the ones most successful in getting the endorsement from CCP in “telling China’s story” so well that it should be spread to foreign audiences.

Step 3: After finding that Confucianist based relationality seemed to be an overarching theme resonating between the official discourse and certain theorists, I started a more thorough process of “coding”. Coding entails breaking down data into fragments or categories that are labeled according to their theoretical significance and/or that appear to be especially salient within the social worlds of those being studied (Bryman 2012 p.568).

In its opening stages, the coding involved a frequent abductive movement back and forth between mapping, comparing the discourses and conceptualize the data according to the most commonly found themes.

Step 4: The pretext discourse of choice was eventually narrowed down to Qin Yaqing’s, due to the seemingly extensive use of his ideas in the CCP arguments on alliances and his authority within Chinese IR research. The data collection of CCP discourse material was then expanded both to create a larger sample of material, both in English and Chinese, but also to widen the sources from mainly white papers to also include official party news articles,

official statements and ideologically argumentative articles.

The Chinese articles were translated by the myself, before further coding proceeded.

Step 5: Thereafter the coding moved into a stage of “selective coding”.

This firstly involves the procedure of highlighting the most common codes and those that are regarded as most revealing about the data, while also dropping initial codes that are less relevant. Thereafter, the researcher selects a “core category”, described as “the central issue or focus around which all other categories are integrated” (ibid p.569), from the data and systematically relates this to other categories.

In this thesis case the core category was chosen to be *Confucian relationality*, which was then used as a conceptual springboard to further categorize the CCP discourse data.

Step 6: The analysis was then structured by breaking the core category down into three sub-categories drawn from Qin’s discourse: *Co-existence*, *Harmony* as well as *Relational Power*.

Text quotes and passages from the CCP discourse pointing to an underlying reasoning that resonates with in an implicit intertextual sense and/or explicitly in a manifest intertextual sense equals that of Qin Yaqing, were then positioned and presented within each of the three sub-categories. Finally, a summery was written which applied the constructivist lens.

Outlined in this way, the analysis gives an overview of the relational social meanings constructed and maintained in the CCP discourse around alliances. It is important to point out that this method’s aim is to explore intertextual *correlation* between the official CCP discourse on alliances and Qin’s IR theory discourse, in order to enhance the contextual understanding of the topic by highlighting the possible usage by CCP of Qin’s, and by extension Chinese cultural discursive resources in its own texts. There are therefore no claims of any direct causality between Qin’s theory and official statements. This point will also be discussed in the conclusion.

4.4 Material

4.4.1 Pretext relationality discourse

The pretext in the study consists of the academic works of Qin Yaqing from between 2014 to 2018 on a Chinese IR theory labeled A Relational Theory of World Politics. Qin is a major contributor and advocator of the Chinese IR theory movement, which has grown substantially in line with the rising international power and influence of China. The aim of this enterprise is to “de-peripheralize” China in the world of IR theory, by drawing inspiration from the country’s historical experiences and traditional philosophical ideas, and thereby explain and interpret world politics in a distinctively Chinese way (Hwang 2021 p.312). The Chinese IR theorists justify their enterprise by the claim that the development of mainstream IR theories is centered around Western values and philosophy based on a special collective memory of Western/European history and culture (ibid p.312). Qin’s theoretical concepts are instead inspired by the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius’s ideas around relationality, i.e., how humans relate to each other, the subsequent relationship management and how this translates in state-to-state relations on the international stage. The resulting reasoning provides an attempt at explaining international relations through a distinct Chinese approach, but also offers a normative framework in how leaders should work to sustain order, peace and stability, all three important traits of Confucianism.

It can arguably be considered a narrow choice to use only one theorist’s ideas presumably based on Chinese culture and philosophy as the sole pretext for the official CCP discourse. Especially considering that the Chinese culture and value system, just as any others, are not monolithic but rather in a state of constant intersubjective development (Pan 2013 p.18). This fact notwithstanding, and while not claiming any existence of pure cultural essentialism, a substantive amount of research shows that Chinese elites tend to interact with other states with what can be called a unique “conceptual and cognitive portfolio”, colored by deep historical and cultural roots (Ljunggren 2017 p.37, 41, 59; Ye 2014 p.23; Zhao 2018 p.321). These roots have for instance ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century served as an essential base for Chinese rulers, in where the slogan of “learning from the West” was watered down to technical and instrumental development, while disregarding political and liberal reform (Ljunggren 2017 p.37). Moreover, in parallel with figures like Hobbes, Kant and Locke’s impact on Western political thinking, the influence of Confucius’s ideas on power, order and statecraft can be distilled from China’s contemporary identity as

international stakeholder, which affects its modern foreign policy (Yeophantong 2017 p.120). Zhao Quansheng continues with this line of thought in explaining that judging from Chinese leaders' speeches on the anniversary of Confucius' birth, combined with increasing references to Confucian teachings featured in a number of reports and internal guidelines for the behavior of party members in recent years, it is clear that Confucian principles has great influence on modern Chinese domestic as well as foreign policies (Zhao 2018 p.322, 327). Considering that Qin Yaqing's IR theory is based on Confucian ideas, his texts can then be considered a medium by which we can understand IR in a Chinese cultural context. Although there are several theorists within the field Chinese IR, Qin Yaqing is one of the pioneers, and a main successful advocate for the need of constructing IR theory based on Chinese cultural traditions. In addition, Qin has gotten frequent exposure for his ideas on the official CCP media platforms of People's Daily (Yang & Chang 2016) and CPC News (Peng & Lei 2016). This exposure combined with his position as Chancellor of China Diplomatic Academy, and president at China Foreign Affairs University, a university frequently identified as one of the most influential on Chinese foreign policy (Almén & Englund & Ottosson 2021 p.17), points to a high degree of official influence, recognition and endorsement of his theoretical ideas. These ideas are also being referred to by several Western researchers when attempting to understand Chinese leadership reasoning, as shown in the recently published project *The Decoding China Dictionary* (Rudyak 2021 p.11). This shows Qin's relevance by being recognized both officially by CCP and academically abroad.

With specific regard to alliances and its making, it is arguably about transferring security concerns into a relational commitment, which affects not only the relationship between alliance members but also between members and outsiders. Qin's focus on relationality thus creates a valuable contextual background. He has himself also stated that "An alliance with any major or minor power is simply impossible for both China and the relevant foreign country" (Qin 2014 p.308), which further indicates alignment of his ideas with Chinese foreign policy. In conclusion, Qin Yaqing's work is a natural source of discourse material to turn to when wanting to better understand official CCP foreign policy discourse around alliances.

4.4.2 Official CCP discourse text

Material for the official CCP discourse consists of primary and official political sources. It includes transcribed speeches by ambassadors and Xi Jinping, military officials as well as CCP officials high positioned in relevant committees within the Communist party. The data were collected using key words of “alliance”, “alliances” and “military alliances” in the search engines on the websites of the relevant platforms, and sorted according to the need of relating to *military* alliances. Since certain material are longer than others (for example each White Paper being around 50 pages compared to the articles spanning from 1 – 9 pages), there is some variation in number of materials between the sources. The focus has been on the relevance of the data and the quality of what can be extracted from it, rather than a previously set quantity of articles needed. Consequently, the final number of articles used should be seen as reflecting a point of empirical saturation.

More specifically, the material sources and motivations for choosing them will be listed below:

Three white papers on China’s security policies and world outlook. They are derived from the official website of China’s State Council, i.e., the chief administrative authority of the country, which gives the papers a high degree of authenticity. Their lengthy and detailed writing used to express the government’s position on relevant policy matters also adds more contextuality and depth to the sample.

Nine articles from People’s Daily. While Chinese media landscape is diverse with varying degrees of government control and censorship, People’s Daily is often regarded to be the official mouthpiece of the CCP, and an article published here has been described as “indisputably the government’s voice” (SCMP 2011).

Three articles from Global Times. While also being controlled by the CCP, Global Times is often regarded as more of a tabloid, that gives room for expression of opinions that cannot be expressed in more official outlets (Almén & Englund & Ottosson 2021 p.16), often in an assertive and aggressive rhetoric. While not necessarily reflecting Chinese foreign policy, it can be regarded as representative of the sentiments that many Chinese policymakers share (ibid.).

Three articles from PLA Daily, sometimes referred to as China Military Online. This is the only official English news website of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), that although officially being a separate entity within the state, is still under CCP control. PLA Daily is claimed to speak for the Central Military Commission (Swaine 2012), which is the highest national defense organization in the country, resulting in extensive coverage of international security related affairs.

Five articles from Qiushi. Described as the leading official theoretical journal of the CCP. Published by the Central Committee, i.e., the political organization comprising the top leadership of the CCP, including Xi Jinping, it “serves as an important ideological and theoretical medium for guiding the work of the entire Party and the country as a whole” (Qiushi 2020). Here one can find most speeches by Xi transcribed, along with ideological articles authored in his name. Considering recent years power consolidation that has made Xi Jinping the most influential figure within the party since Mao Zedong, this journal is an important inclusion whenever one wants insight into contemporary CCP perceptions.

The temporal span of all empirical material lies between 2014 and 2021, since this corresponds well with the years when Qin Yaqing published his work. It is also during this period the debate and speculation on Chinese alliance formation has been most prominent, due to the heightened mutual security assertiveness of the US and China. It should be noted that I am not attempting a longitudinal study to trace discursive changes during the years, but to trace the intertextual similarities inside the discourses within this time-span.

5. Analysis

This section starts with an introduction to Qin Yaqing's relational IR theory, to give a clear overview of the pretext before moving ahead with the intertextual presentation. In order to connect with the ontological and epistemological base as outlined in the theory section, the analysis ends with a summery using a constructivist lens.

5.1 A Relational Theory of World Politics

Qin Yaqing describes relationality as the metaphysical hard core in societies shaped by Confucianism, and argues that relationality in East Asian societies comes from the practice of Confucian communities and incorporates an indispensable part of their background cultural knowledge (Qin 2018: Preface IV). Even though Confucianism and its interpretation of relationality dates back thousands of years ago, its influence on the understanding and behavior of Chinese and other East Asian communities continue to this day (ibid p.170). This is in contrast to its counterpart in Western societies, which has due to ideas from Enlightenment has a metaphysical hard core of individualistic rationality (ibid p. Preface III). This in turn has shaped the theoretical foundation for mainstream IR theories of neoliberal institutionalism and neorealism. Taking this relational standpoint, the theoretical framework Qin suggests for IR rests on the ontological assumption that the IR world is a universe of interrelatedness (Qin 2016 p.35); actors are related to each other and also to the context and the totality of their relations, or in other words their relational circles. Their identities and actions depend largely upon the context and interactions given by these circles, therefore there is no absolute rational mind that transcends the human relational complexity, as claimed by the mainstream IR (Qin 2018 p.108). Instead of an ontological substantialism composed of discrete and self-subsistent actors, relationality suggests that actors are “actors-in-relations”, meaning that their identities are constructed and reconstructed in relations with others and with the relational totality as a whole. An actor takes different actions for different relationships, depending on the degree of intimacy and/or importance attached to this bond, which in turn defines other actors in terms of friends, rivals or enemies etc. in relation to oneself.

The major epistemological tool used in the theory to understand the nature of relationships in a Confucian sense is called the “Middle-mean”, or as it is usually referred to in Chinese: “Zhongyong” dialectics, and is used as guidance in understanding the necessary conditions for harmonizing polarities. Instead of Western prominent Hegelian dialectics of us vs them

and self-other which is present in mainstream realism and liberalism, Zhongyong suggest a worldview with interrelated polarity of self-in-other and the other-in-self, with neither pole completely independent of the other and both depending upon each other for existence (Qin 2018 p. Preface II). This state is referred to by Qin as “co-embedded inclusivity”, which is a main feature of Zhongyong. It describes a world different from the realist “Hobbesian jungle” where everyone fights everyone for survival, but instead a world where differences generate harmony, and self-existence coincides with other-existence in a condition of “*co-existence*” (ibid. p.122, 189).

Relations may also be used to achieve and maintain order, and the ultimate and ideal order of society is one of “*harmony*”. This concept does not imply a convergence of all members of a society into a homogenous one, but to manage relations between these members so that their differences will not lead to conflict and disorder, but instead add to a state of stability, or “harmony in diversity” (Qin 2016 p.39). Harmony is considered a basic natural state of all social relations, but needs human agency for its materialization and maintenance (Qin 2018 p.193). The greater the distance between polarities, the greater the risk for cemented interests, extremity and ultimately confrontation. Thus, in order for a harmonious relationship to prevail with minimum conflict, the general principle for the above-mentioned human agency is for the relevant actors in the relationship to transfer toward the “due middle” to find common ground. This is done through a prioritization given to collective and shared interests and compromise on self-interests, where centrality produces harmony (ibid. p.183).

Qin’s theory still suggests that actor’s relational circles can and often are used in an instrumental way to achieve self-interests, but that in this context intangible and nonmaterial gains are just as important and sometimes more so, than material ones (Qin 2016 p.38). The larger relational circles, the better an actor is positioned to wield *relational power*, meaning the process of manipulating and managing one’s relations to one’s advantage. Payoffs are in this context valued in long terms and often in social capital such as reputation and prestige (ibid. p.42). An example of relational power gains lifted by Qin is from the 1960s, when China provided material aid to African countries despite itself being in an economically poor state. The expected gain as reputation of a friend in need was later reaped when numerous African countries supported China’s UN membership in the 1970s (ibid.). Despite this, in a socially interrelated world with relational identities, one’s self-interest also coincides with others’ interests and collective interests in the international realm, without a prior hierarchical

order between them. This notion differs from the conventional IR theory perspective on national interests, which gives primacy to pre-given independent self-interest in its definition (Qin & Nordin 2019 p.607).

5.2 Co-existence

In the white paper labeled “China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation”, from 2017, China’s policies and political positions regarding Asia-Pacific security cooperation is being outlined. Within the text Asia-Pacific countries are being portrayed as possessing “unique diversities”, and that a precondition for building security partnerships may be shared values and ideals, yet countries can also become partners “if they seek common ground while reserving differences” (The State Council 2017 p.2).

This position is also explained in PLA Daily from 2021:

China emphasizes seeking common ground while putting aside differences in realizing the shared values of humanity. In this way, China strives to explore the common interests for the whole of mankind beyond disparities and clashes, while respecting cultural diversity and different levels of development. (Wang 2021)

Furthermore, we see statements proclaiming that small and medium-sized countries “need not and should not take sides among big countries” (The State Council 2017 p.2). This argument is also echoed in PLA Daily with the inclusion of European nations: “Yet neither the European or Asian allies want to take sides between the two major countries... We are living in the era of globalization today when everyone’s interests are closely intertwined, with the existence other-in-self and self-in-other...” (Sun & Dong 2021), using Qin’s rhetoric of interrelated polarities. The white paper also contains a framing of alliances that positions the concept as a clear contrast to those of “dialogue”, “partnership”, “mutual trust” and “inclusiveness”: “All countries should make joint efforts in pursue a new path of dialogue instead of confrontation and pursue partnerships rather than alliances, and build Asia-Pacific partnership featuring mutual trust, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation” (The State Council 2017 p.2). Regarding “partnerships”, it is also emphasized that these come in different shapes and forms with “all countries and regional organizations” (ibid.).

These lines of thought largely resonates with Qin Yaqing’s conceptualization of “co-embedded inclusivity”. We can firstly consider the references to diversity within the region and that this does not preclude security cooperation. Matching values and ideals are but one

possible condition for closer security relationships, but in an interrelated world, “seeking common ground while reserving differences” implies having differences not as an obstacle but as a necessary precondition for co-existence in the form of a security partnership. In further connection with inclusivity, we see the notion that cooperation and partnerships should be open to all countries and that other countries should not take sides in major power competition.

We can also look at how the term “mutual trust” is emphasized above. According to Qin, the Confucian model of good and moral governance of a society is based exactly on a “fiduciary community based on mutual trust” (Qin 2018 p.345), as opposed to “an adversary system consisting of pressure groups” (ibid). The latter quote largely resonates with how present alliances are portrayed in the official discourse, for example as depicted by former Chinese ambassador to the US, Cui Tiankai: “We don’t think any attempt to divide the world into different camps or even build a confrontational military approach, we don’t think this kind of approach is a solution. Actually, this is a problem in itself” (Cui 2021). Another example is from the Chinese ambassador to Cyprus, Liu Yantao, in where he describes using military alliances in terms of “using group interests to force the subjugation of weaker countries” (Liu 2021).

The notion of not taking sides presumably comes from a desire to avoid bipolarity in what is assumed as an alliance based and bipolar Cold War system. The white paper from 2017 makes implicit confirmation of this thinking in stating that “Old security concepts based on the Cold War mentality, zero-sum game, and stress on force are outdated given the dynamic development of regional integration”, (The State Council 2017 p.6) echoing the analysis made by Adam P. Liff mentioned above. There is also similar wording in The Global Times from 2020: “The world is increasingly aware that diversity and inclusiveness are the core that promotes the world development – forming aggressive alliances is outdated” (Su 2020). A running theme throughout the discourse, as touched upon above, suggests the idea of alliances as polarizing, dividing and excluding, in contrast to what is regarded as the approach by China of inclusiveness and openness to diversity. This dichotomization can be illustrated in elaboration of what CCP labels “common security”:

Common security means respecting and ensuring the security of each and every country involved. We cannot just have the security of one or some countries while leaving the rest insecure, still less should we seek

“absolute security” of oneself at the expense of the security of others. We should respect and accommodate the legitimate security concerns of all parties. To beef up a military alliance targeted at a third party is not conducive to maintaining common security (The State Council 2017 p.6).

“Absolute security” is further connected in negative terms with US foreign policy:

“The US is seeking an unfair and unreasonable absolute security, which means the US’ security is more important than others’... This kind of view on security is truly dangerous and unrealistic, which reflects the US’ hegemonic and arrogant mindset”. (People’s Daily 2021a). “Washington will find that consolidating its leadership via its alliance system is a short-sighted approach. The clique will become more and more exclusive, and its allies will find that Washington cannot provide what they really need.” (Su 2021). By contrast, China’s way is described as supporting security in a “inclusive”, “universal” and “equal” way, in order to “...oppose the provocation and escalation of tensions for self-interest...” (Xi 2014), that are associated with military alliances. The same wording is frequently found in one of President Xi Jinping’s flagship ideas of “building a community with a shared future for mankind”, that is often used by CCP in framing responses to global security challenges:

This vision embodies the ideas of building an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity. It emphasizes respecting each other, discussing issues as equals, resolutely rejecting Cold War mentality and power politics, and taking a new approach to developing state-to-state relations with communication, not confrontation, and with partnership, not alliance. It stresses respecting the diversity of civilizations and replacing estrangement with exchange, clashes with mutual learning, and superiority with coexistence in handling relations among civilizations (Qiushi 2020).

The concept is further explained in PLA Daily:

Different from the values-based diplomacy that Western countries adopt to build an alliance structure, China advocates the shared values of humanity which aim to build a community with a shared future for mankind, as countries, with different histories, cultures and systems and in different development levels, all pursue peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom (Wang 2021).

It is also used in the white paper “China and the World in the New Era” from 2019 to frame a contrast to what CCP regards as outdated Cold War mentality with zero-sum games. This is done with a seeming reference to what Qin labels the Hobbesian jungle, by claiming the Cold War mentality belongs to “The law of the jungle”, in contrast to what the Zhongyong worldview of inclusivity and universality can embody in “the community of shared future for

mankind” (The State Council 2019a).

In the same white paper, there are several attempts to include China’s armed forces into the building of this community and in relation to common security. First the armed forces are described as faithfully responding to the call of building the community, they are also credited with fulfilling “international obligations of a major country”, promoting “military cooperation for the new era, and striving for a better world of lasting peace and common security” (The State Council 2019b p.31).

Although it is not explicitly stated here, judging from an extensive part covering China’s contributions to UN peacekeeping further down in the next section of the paper, it is reasonable that CCP attempts to tie the concept of a shared future community and military cooperative obligations of major countries to UN principles. Since there is little room for traditional alliance ideas within the framework of a global and multilateral organization like UN, which advocates single authority over international security issues, this connection fits well in the preferred narrative of CCP on alliances. In fact, CCP usually refers to the UN when advocating what is perceived as “true multilateralism” and a preferred strengthening of “democracy of international relations” (The State Council 2019a p.37 46, Liu 2021). Judging from the aforementioned discursive focus on terms as “universal and inclusive security” and a respect for different political systems and cultures, it might not be surprising that the reference to UN is made, with the General Assembly but also Security Council arguably embodying these elements within their memberships. The idea of UN also matches the contrast that CCP wants to draw between the “law of the jungle” which presumably refers to international anarchy without any ruling authority, and the relational understanding of a global collective working towards the aforementioned “common security”, instead of pursuing the absolute security of an outdated bipolar Cold War environment. By observing that Confucian ideas are attached to the UN and China’s participation in the organization, we can relate to Yeophantong’s claim that these ideas inform China’s contemporary identity as an international stakeholder.

Apart from the already above-mentioned concept of co-embedded inclusivity, Qin’s ideas can further be traced in the idea of “co-existence”. Qin states that “Things, persons and events coexist in the complex relational context, without which none of them would exist at all” (Qin 2016 p.36). We find resonating terms in the official discourse which tend to lift terms as “universal security”, “common”, “community” as well as “coexistence” itself, in a more

explicit intertextual sense. “Absolute security” by contrast is in the CCP discourse being framed as a selfish state, in putting one’s national security interests above others, and by extension, alliance formation is the embodiment of absolute security in that it aims at increasing one’s own security at the expense of others. This description, arguably putting security on an exclusive, limited or individual state level, is portrayed as a goal to be avoided. In line with Qin’s relationality discourse, CCP instead claims a position from an interrelated and multilateral state in where China’s security interests are connected with others in the “community of shared future”, and even related to all of humankind. Or following phrasing from Qin; “the totality of all relational circles” is taken into account:

The existence of the self simultaneously involves and implies the participation of others. Thus the ontology of coexistence decides that egoistic rationality based upon the ontology of isolated self-existence is likely to be irrational once it is put in a coexistent context...coexistence or relational existence presumes emphatically the shared nature of interest and at the same time stresses joint efforts of the self and other as a most reliable way to the realization of interest. (Qin 2018 p.139).

We can further see the intertextual connection between the discourses when looking at the following CCP paragraph from the white paper “China and the World in the New Era”:

The idea of building a global community of shared future draws from the essence of traditional Chinese culture and the achievements of human society, and reflects the interdependence among all countries and the close interconnection of all humanity. The idea demonstrates the values shared by Chinese and other cultures and by all humanity, and the greatest common ground for building a better world (The State Council 2019a p.33).

5.3 Harmony

We see in the rhetoric of “common security” and “shared future for mankind” features of “finding common ground while respecting differences,” as also discussed above, which can be seen as preconditions for functioning partnership relations. In Qin’s reasoning in line with the Zhongyong dialectics, one can also regard the state of working towards common goals and simultaneously respecting each other’s differing views as a process of different actors moving toward the “due-middle”, as in striving towards the natural state of harmonious coexistence. As explained in the section on Qin’s theoretical discourse, the state of harmony does not imply convergence of different actors’ interests into a homogeneous one, but rather suggests the management of relations among actors in “such a way that their differences will not lead to conflict and disorder, but on the contrary, can add up to stability” (Qin 2016 p.39).

Evidence of this meaning can be found in an article in People's Daily by the vice-chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of China's National People's Congress, Fu Ying. Here she writes about the Russian-Sino relationship describing that they both "understand that they must join hands to achieve national security and development" (Fu 2015) and that "they are able to acknowledge and manage their disagreements while continuing to expand areas of consensus" (ibid.).

As speculated in the literature and mentioned by Stephen Blank and Alexander Korolev, there is a common assumption that China and Russia are about to, (or indeed already has formed), form a military alliance in the same way as US has done and Russia also has with other neighboring countries. Contrary to this belief, Fu Ying declares that "China has no interest in a formal alliance with Russia, nor in forming an anti-U.S. or anti-Western bloc of any kind" (ibid). Instead, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership agreement offers "a model for how major countries can manage their differences and cooperate in ways that strengthen the international system." (ibid.). This conclusion resonates with the positive notion Zhao Huasheng has expressed as the "golden mean" between Beijing and Moscow.

In a description that seemingly draws on Qin's interpretation of an interrelated world, in where actor's actions depend on their relational context, she continues to explain that the relations among China, Russia and the United States are "intertwined", therefore one must analyze the relationship between China and the US in order to complete the analysis of Chinese-Russian ties. The three states mutual relationships are likened to a scalene triangle, in which the greatest distance between the three points lies between Moscow and Washington, while the Chinese-Russian relations are the closest, most positive and stable (ibid). Here we can draw intertextual parallels between Fu Ying and Qin, in that the latter writes about two actors within a relationship ideally moves towards the center regarding their interests, i.e., managing their differences so that the existential state of harmony and stability can be produced, which in this case can resemble the Sino-Russian ties. The triangle points (or "polarities" in Qin's vocabulary) between Moscow and Washington and between Beijing and Washington respectively are however much further apart, creating possible risks of conflict.

Even though Washington and Beijing might be far apart in this relational sense, the official discourse in white papers tend to use similar wording in describing their bilateral relationship, as what is used regarding Russia and other nations. This includes the necessity to "shoulder shared responsibilities", "expand cooperation and stability" and constructively "manage

differences based on mutual respect” (The State Council 2019a p.45).

Drawing again from the discursive meanings of the concept of a “shared community for mankind” from the 2019 white paper on China’s world outlook, we can witness a logic that echoes Qin’s description of the process of creating and maintaining harmony not implying homogeneity of actors but moving towards a compromised center that is not obstructed by differences. “Building a community of shared future does not mean conformity to the same values by all countries...” (ibid p.33) but rather that “All countries should reach consensus that transcends ethnicity, beliefs, culture and location” (ibid.). Within the same white paper there is another intertextual connection relating to the concept of shared future: “The proposal pursues the goal of universal harmony...embraces a new approach to state-to-state relations, one that features dialogue rather than confrontation...” (ibid p.31, 32). “Since it (a pluralistic world, author’s emphasis) believes in the nonconflictual nature of the meta-relationship, harmony is then the state of nature and the universal principle of order” (Qin 2016 p.41). As also elaborated on by Qin mentioned above, an actor’s self-interest coincides with collective interests, without a necessary prior hierarchical order between them. This reasoning is found in the CCP discourse as well: “State-to-state relations should uphold the greater good and pursue shared interests, with priority given to the former, properly balancing their national interests and their contribution to the international community” (The State Council 2019a p.34).

Apart from the more concrete examples of Russia-Sino relations above, there are frequent references in the official discourse to “harmony” being the natural and desirable goal of states, as opposed to “hegemony” and “confrontation” which are associated with alliances: “Harmony among all countries brings universal peace while confrontation causes chaos. History shows that the pursuit of hegemony, alliance and confrontation and the abuse of power in international relations will induce chaos or even war” (ibid. p.33).

In relation to the often-mentioned CCP claim of peaceful development, used in contrast to the foreign policy of hegemony and alliance making, harmony is again a frequently used concept. In the passage below, we even see Qin’s exact wording of “harmony in diversity” being used by CCP in an example of manifest intertextuality:

Chinese culture contains the cosmological view of the unity of man and nature, the international view of

harmony between all countries, the social view of harmony in diversity, and the moral view of kindness and benevolence (ibid. p.27).

In a transcribed speech by Xi Jinping at the UN summit in Geneva 2017, there are similar references: “**First, China remains unchanged in its commitment to world peace.** Amity with neighbors, harmony without uniformity, and peace are values cherished in Chinese culture.” (Xi 2017).

With regards to US-Sino relations, the CCP urges the US to “live in harmony with the rest of the world, which is the principle major countries should always follow. The Thucydides trap is not an unbreakable law.” (The State Council 2019a p.44).

5.4 Relational Power

The discourse on relational theory of world politics by Qin suggests as specified above that nonmaterial gains through relationship management such as social capital, reputation and prestige are important factors on par with material ones. Payoffs are not valued by their possibility of immediate returns, but rather around the benefits they can bring to the country, regardless of short- or long-term results. The wider and larger “relational circles” with close relationships defined as friendships, the more potential the country has to realize its self-interests and collective interests. This rhetoric is seen in the following extract from the 2019 white paper on China’s world outlook, The Global Times from 2015, as well as in Xi Jinping’s speech at UN office Geneva in 2017: “Guided by the principle of upholding greater good and pursuing shared interests, China will expand the convergence of interests with other countries, add more value to partnerships, and enlarge its circle of friends worldwide.” (The State Council 2019a p.44). “It (China, author’s emphasis) has formed partnerships of various forms with over 90 countries and regional organizations, and will build a circle for friends across the world.” (Xi 2017).

Forming partnerships is a cooperative mutually beneficial way of “making friends”, while forming alliances means “finding enemies” in lines of confrontational Cold War thinking.

In the 21st century, the competition between major powers focuses on the speed of forming partnerships rather than “finding enemies”. Alliance politics has ruined international political culture. (Su 2015, author’s translation).

Qin exemplifies the idea of using “relational power” in that African countries helped China in

reaching UN membership in the 1970s, in return for development aid received a decade before. What enabled this power to be exercised lies to a large extent in the attempt by the CCP to maintain a common identity with the Global South and other developing countries, out of which a key element lies in a shared history of colonialism. The CCP discourse frequently communicates the term “Western powers” in connection with imperialism, hegemony and a Cold War mentality of encirclement and confrontation through alliances. This seemingly resonates with the descriptions of CCP alliance perception by Adam P. Liff and Zhang Tiejun. China instead sticks to its own path, both in economic development and security affairs. In addition, there seems to be an attempt in CCP discourse to draw a clear line between the major power China and other Western major powers, especially emphasizing the violent history of colonial aspirations (in China’s case this usually refers to the mainly Western Eight-Nation Alliance invasion of the country during the 19th and 20th century (People’s Daily 2021c)): “From the mid-19th century, China was abused by the Western powers and left with indelible memories of the suffering brought about by war and instability. It will never impose the suffering it has endured on other nations.” (The State Council 2019a p.27) We witness how the CCP discourse portray China in the identity of a colonial victim, which in turn likely is viewed as building a shared and relational identity with other developing countries with similar experiences, and thereby solidifying this relational circle and relational power capabilities: “One of the most notable changes (in this century, author’s remark) is that the rise of China and other emerging and developing countries is fundamentally altering the international structures of power.” (ibid. p.29). “We should accommodate the interests of all countries and in particular those of the developing countries. It is unfair to apply the standards and security rules of developed countries or individual countries to all the other countries.” (ibid. p.37).

China and other developing countries share the same aspiration for peace and development. Guided by the principle of upholding the greater good and pursuing shared interests, China strengthens solidarity and cooperation with other developing countries in a spirit of sincerity, affinity and good faith (ibid. p.46).

According to The Decoding China Dictionary, an academic project aiming to decipher official Chinese narratives, the rhetoric of solidarity through common development is generally found within developing countries in the Global South and has been central to China’s foreign policy discourse ever since the founding of the communist rule (Rydyak 2021 p.11). In other pushes to speak on behalf of developing countries is the expressed with

of a democratization of the UN system, which entails a bigger say for the Global South, while simultaneously widening the acceptance of authoritarian regimes and values (Drinhausen 2021 p.20). In this way, the relational power that comes with aligning with developing countries can be enhanced and the discourse further points toward the relational idea of increased diversity instead of forced homogeneity. Regarding the frequently occurring term “cooperation”, it is according to Qin to be understood as a means to find “common interests” that might in turn lead to relational power (Qin 2018 p.258), which further ties into the relational understanding of securing “self-interests” while also taking “other-interests” into account that CCP could have in this case.

The traditional US alliance system is being cast as unsuitable and unfavorable to developing countries: “...the exclusive alliance system led by the United States cannot accommodate the security needs of emerging powers and developing countries, and cannot provide a secure environment for the world” (Wang 2014, author’s translation). Instead, China refers both to its ambition of creating strategic, “cooperative and open” partnerships with other countries within the framework of “shared community for mankind”: “In fact, not taking sides between China and the US gives them (developing countries, author’s emphasis) more freedom of choice. They can cooperate with China and the US more freely and flexibly.” (Su 2020). As shown in People’s Daily, CCP also attempts at framing the use of alliance systems as opposed to engaging in multilateralism, and again by highlighting US policy as a bad example of foreign policy:

Since the new U.S. administration took office, it has re-enhanced its control of the alliance system under the pretext of returning to multilateralism. The fact, however, is that the U.S. government aims to build “small circles” and “group politics” to divide the world by forcing others to choose sides between different ideological camps (People’s Daily 2021b).

Against the background context of relational power, the terms of relational circles are recurring. Yet one can interpret the add-ons of “small” and “group politics” aiming for a negative connotation, in where alliances not only exclude and divides the international community, but also disallows relational power, in that the assumed small and isolated circles obstruct engagement with wider relational circles through multilateralism.

Perhaps the closest China comes to having a conventional multilateral alliance like NATO, is The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the two are often compared regarding

international security cooperation, with China often referring to the former in its definition of alliances (Zhang 2021, Yang 2021, Kou & Zhao 2019). The organization consists of eight members, namely India, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. It functions as a platform for cooperation in political and economic areas, but with a strong focus on security affairs such as joint military exercises and exchanges. In a summary of its internal and external policy guidelines, there are clear strands of Chinese relational discourse within the text, clearly framing it as a different entity than an alliance, using terminology such as “respect for cultural diversity”, “common development”, “openness” and “non-alignment”:

Proceeding from the Shanghai Spirit, the SCO pursues its internal policy based on the principles of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultations, respect for cultural diversity, and a desire for common development, while its external policy is conducted in accordance with the principles of non-alignment, non-targeting any third country, and openness (SCO 2021).

The same rhetoric and phrases are found describing SCO in the 2019 white paper on national defense, describing the organization as “a new type of comprehensive regional cooperation organization covering the largest area and population in the world” (The State Council 2019b p.34) The fact that the SCO covers the world’s “largest area and population” is emphasized in other places within the CCP discourse (He 2021), again revealing the belief that there is relational power to be gain from a vast network of partners. Another proof of Chinese influence of the organization and illustrating a possible CCP idea of a relational and multilateral alliance substitute, is the fact that all members, following the Qingdao summit of 2018, agreed to include Xi Jinping’s concept of “building a community with a shared future for humanity” in the Qingdao Declaration, which guides SCO’s continuing operations (Qiushi 2021).

The SCO can in many ways can be considered a politically and ideologically guided organization, in that most of its members have been classified by human rights groups as authoritarian states (HRW 2007). However, a striking addition to the membership came in 2017 when India joined. Not only is India’s political system positioned far from the prevalent authoritarian and one party dominated ones of the other members, but it was also by that time, and still is involved in violent border disputes and standoffs with other members China and Pakistan. This situation suggests that the often-repeated Chinese rhetoric of “pragmatic partnership cooperation”, “inclusivity” and “pursuing common goals while managing

differences” can also reflect to some degree in policy practice. It can furthermore point towards an attempt to tie into shared identity traits of being colonial victims, major Asian civilizations and developing countries. The case of India’s membership is also fascinating given the country’s ambition to take a more assertive stance toward China together with the US through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which might lead one to believe that China and India are on opposite sides in security politics. This situation implies that both China and India are major powers that prefer a certain informality and flexibility within their interstate relations in dealing with security issues, contrary to static alliance balancing. India’s membership in SCO also makes China successful to some degree in avoiding what Zhong and Yang called “competing” with the US over allies.

Apart from the relational arguments, alliance systems are also seen as negative assets in a material sense, in that the formal and explicit agreements the US has with alliance partners, especially concerning the US-Japan alliance, risks dragging it into costly regional conflicts. Pursuing alliances is thus seen as “a mistake in major power foreign policy that China should not imitate”, as argued by retired senior Colonel Wang Xiangsui in People’s Daily (Wang 2014, author’s translation). This statement largely resonates with the realist reasoning of entrapment logic that is discussed by Zhong and Yang as well as Liu Ruonan and Liu Feng.

Summery

We may summarize the findings by applying the Constructivist lens and take a closer look at how the ideational structure can be mapped. This requires a clearer identification of the uncovered intertextual and relational meanings that CCP use in the alliance discourse. The discourse suggests that CCP socially constructs the international realm as one of *intertwined* and *co-existing* relationships between states, which means in turn that they have natural shared interests that require cooperation to solve. This does however not indicate that there are no differing national interests, as we see in the texts there are many examples with positive meaning attached to terms as *diversity* in a political and cultural sense. Yet as can be observed from the emphasis on meanings of *common*, *inclusive* and even *universal*, the discursive focal point instead lies on what can unite while accepting these differences, in order to achieve the state of *harmony in diversity*. These are the meanings attached to China’s advocated way of security cooperation. The prime cases lifted by CCP as successful examples of this type of balanced and harmonious interstate security relationship, is that of Russia and China as well as the SCO. The UN is also given relational meanings of *true*

multilateralism, and framed as a forum for China to practice *common security* through peacekeeping operations.

While in regards to the US, the discourse seems to reveal an ongoing competition of meaning-making around world order in general and security cooperation in particular. The frequent statements and insinuations that the US alliance system represents a bipolar Cold War order, and the Chinese discursive responses to this can be seen as an attempt by China to use its constructivist agency in order to shape the ideational and normative structure around what can be considered ethical security cooperation internationally. To do this China firstly lashes out at the US alliance system and simultaneously strengthens the normative meaning of its identity, by contrasting it to that of the US which constitutes “the other”, in the implied role of a rival. Yet instead of tying this “other” into the process of socially consolidating one’s identity through the construction of threats that need to be balanced against with allies, it is instead the idea and concept of alliance itself that is given the meanings of danger and threat. Secondly, China turns to other developing countries in the attempt to strengthen a common intersubjective identity, through presumably shared perceptions of colonial trauma and Western hegemonism. And subsequently to market its own preferred flexible and open approach of strategic security partnerships. By contrast to the positive meaning-making around these partnerships, the meanings attached to military alliances carry negative connotations and relate to *exclusivity*, *selfishness*, *dividing* and *confrontation*. Framed in this way, CCP has contributed to a discourse that is constructed by large in dichotomic and absolute terms, which produces a narrative in which an international security cooperation policy can be either inclusive and open, as in the Chinese advocated approach, or otherwise it is by definition dividing and excluding when adhering to alliances. China’s social construction of the US and the relating alliance system is illustrative of this dichotomic representation, in where China can only represent the opposite of what the US is made to stand for. The discourse displays this clearly when CCP is positioning China on the same side as the Global South, which naturally demands an approach to security cooperation that is different from alliances, since this is what the opposing Western side is using. In this sense the ideational structure within the CCP discourse can be seen as consisting of several intersubjective and institutionalized Confucian relational norms and ideas that conforms with CCP’s China identity, how it views and represent itself in relation to other states. Following this identity’s preferences and the “logic of appropriateness”, adhering to alliances is simply not acceptable. These norms and ideas constrain the concept of alliances to an inherently negative one, which precludes it as viable option for China to pursue.

6. Concluding discussion

This concluding section provides a discussion on the findings of the analysis, their significance and usage in answering the research question as well as certain discrepancies and limitations with corresponding suggestions for future research.

The meaning-making outlined in the intertextual analysis above points toward a shared identity within the CCP elite that ties into cultural and philosophical ideas of Confucian relationality, as expressed and summarised by the three concepts from Qin Yaqing's international relations theory: *Coexistence*, *Harmony* and *Relational Power*. The meanings relating to these concepts and construction of this identity does not provide room for military alliances, as these are perceived as directly conflicting what the discourse normatively defines as Chinese. And herein lies the answer to the research question posed in the introduction. Qin's culturally inspired concepts and ideas provides the necessary contextual background in order to better understand CCP's and by extension China's negativity towards military alliance, as reflected in discourse. It does so by breaking down the vast philosophical portfolio that is Confucianism into parts that are applicable to international relations, forming a distinct Chinese perspective and a window into the corresponding world outlook. This outlook gives primacy to state relations, the interactions and interrelatedness between them, which differs from the Western inspired realist and liberal one viewing states in an atomistic and individual sense in their international relations.

Given the assumption that this identity and following policy making is shaped by an ideational structure containing these ideas, one can assume that other security and international policies are also affected by this relational understanding of the world. It is however beyond this research's qualitative scope and purpose to make any certain claim of generalizations beyond the case of the non-alignment policy. It could instead be held as a recommendation for further research in exploring how this claimed connection holds water in other cases of Chinese security and IR policies. Here one could use a more quantitative approach of policy analysis, looking at regularities in how relational norms are followed by certain policy practices.

A surprising finding during the analysis concerns China's only treaty ally, North Korea. Having a binding alliance agreement with a country like North Korea is arguably of

significance for China's foreign and security policy framework. Yet, there is a remarkable silence on this bond within the official discourse. In fact, the only times North Korea is even mentioned in the material is when China in their white papers describes the Korean Peninsula as a "regional hotspot" requiring increased stability, and highlighting how North Korean nuclear tests violates UN Security Council resolutions and "the wishes of the international community" (The State Council 2017 p.12). Given that North Korea is often labelled a "pariah state", one can interpret China's wish to downplay their relationship internationally as a recognition of the lack of social capital that can be extracted from it. We can also regard it as a "Wendtian" example of the alliance concept being an ideational creation, which meaning depends on the states' social identities, rather than its material treaty. This also ties into the claim by Liu Ruonan and Liu Feng mentioned above, that the treaty only exists in a strictly legal sense.

There is discursive evidence pointing towards China aspiring to be in a leading position in multilateral organizations such as the SCO, as shown in the analysis, shaping rules and guidelines with its own normative concepts and ideas. China clearly believes in its own specific path of security cooperation, in a bilateral- and multilateral sense. Yet only judging from this would not be sufficient to agree with Thomas G. Mahnken on his claims of a guiding hierarchic Sino-centric worldview of cultural superiority in this case. Attempts to use relational power might point in this direction, with the Chinese way of security cooperation depicted as superior to a Western or US alternative. On the other hand, the meaning-making within the categories of Co-existence and Harmony contradicts this argument with their increased focus on equality and celebration of diversity.

Since the thesis's material has a temporal focus close to present times, it has limited ability to make claims of specific historical experiences influencing modern policy-making on alliances, in line with previous research on cultural and historical factors. A way to circumvent this could be to use a narrative analysis, to capture experiences that has shaped the collective memorability of CCP regarding alliances. And to grasp possible influential individual agency by leaders like Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping, in creating the narrative of a non-aligned China.

The thesis, largely due to its interpretivist theoretical and methodological foundation, is centred around *correlation* and *understanding* rather than positivist informed aims of *causality* and *explaining*. To that end it is admittedly difficult to know exactly to what extent

these meanings uncovered in the discourse actually reflect real beliefs guiding policy making, or perhaps reflecting purely instrumental tools to convince the reader of a preferred narrative, while in fact having different reasons for non-alignment. The results here arguably point to relational ideas and meanings being reasons why China does not favour alliances, but it cannot be proven here in a causal way. Another suggestion for future research could then be an in-depth study of process tracing, perhaps in a longitudinal fashion starting from Deng's announcement in 1982, to trace causal mechanisms explaining why the non-alignment policy was chosen and continue to this day. This could be a useful approach since the method of process tracing is often claimed to be well suited in explaining and answering why-questions.

Yet axiomatically assuming that official political discourse is created out of pure instrumental and rational reasoning leads to another important question. One can wonder if there would not exist a more digestible way for China to convey the official standpoint on a security issue toward an international audience in English, than using ideas deeply embedded in ancient indigenous philosophy? Especially considering that the Chinese discourse concerning security issues has found limited success in convincing abroad, particularly in the West. The results of this thesis instead point toward the need for contextual insights before drawing conclusions based on purely instrumental assumptions. They have shown that there exists a clear correlation between Chinese intellectual and cultural sources and official policy discourse, which suggests that the CCP indeed draws heavily on its own context specific meaning making in its attempts at communicating with the world. Confucian and relational ontological ideas, much like they appear in Qin Yaqing's writings, seem to be intersubjectively existing in the political elite's minds, as they can be seen recurring as discursive expressions at different levels in the official media landscape and between different levels of the CCP hierarchy. Given the consistent prevalence of these concepts over recent years and in different situations, it is likely that the corresponding ideas influence the socially constructed worldview of Chinese policymakers. This in turn can be assumed to have guided and still be guiding their decision making in a specific direction that sometimes contradict conventional assumptions on state behaviour, which is evident in the case of China's non-alignment policy.

Despite the numerous meanings relating to Qin's conceptualization of relationality in the CCP discourse, there are also interestingly a few references to a realist understanding of

security politics. For example, one can regard the concept of “absolute security”, defined by CCP in terms of seeking security for oneself at the expense of others, as associated with the security “competition” of a security dilemma. Relating to this logic is also the mention of the “Thucydides trap” and “zero-sum games”, which gives credit to the arguments by Zhang Tiejun and Adam P. Liff in where they claim that CCP looks at alliances through a realist lens. As touched upon previously in the thesis, no society has a monolithic and isolated culture. The Chinese political elite is part of intersubjective knowledge production and maintenance on an international level as well as a domestic level, hence these realist findings should not be surprising. It is however important to note, that while there are indeed references to a realist interpretation of alliances, their meanings are still framed within an overarching relational framework. Thus, both the CCP’s perceptions of what alliances represent in an exclusively negative sense, and its own preferred way of security partnership cooperation and corresponding identity are both dominated by the Confucian and relational ideational structure, leading to a specific worldview. This worldview also limits the Chinese repertoire of available discursive tools that can be used in political communication, which often results in misinterpretations from outside observers based on their differing socially constructed worldview. Understanding this is key to grasp why China’s international relations and security policies might differ from conventional assumptions of state behaviour within the field. This contextuality is highly relevant if we wish to understand and predict how this ever more influential nation will act in the future.

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