Strategic Culture in the Current Foreign Policy Thinking of the People's Republic of China

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Abstract

The paper presents an application of the concept of strategic culture as a possible way to analyse the foreign policy of a state by stressing its uniqueness and beliefs in contrast to commonality and rationality. The goal is to find out whether the strategic culture approach is a useful method to understand the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China. In the paper it is firstly discovered that Chinese strategic culture is perhaps not just belligerent or peaceful alone, but both at the same time in a distinct manner. Furthermore, it is argued that exactly this knowledge helps us to understand foreign policy discourse at various levels within the country: government, academia, media, and public opinion. Analysing each of the levels shows that with the exception of the media, all three remaining actors share similar belief patterns with the 'dualist' strategic culture, thus holding peaceful self-perception and keenness to use pro-active practical solutions.

Key words: People's Republic of China; strategic culture; Chinese foreign policy thinking; Chinese strategic culture; Chinese foreign policy; Chinese media; Chinese public opinion

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1. Introduction

There is an important debate in the study of international politics between 'uniqueness' and 'commonality', i.e. whether different (state) actors within the international system behave in the same 'rational' ways or whether each has its own 'unique' behaviour. The concept of strategic culture which is the starting point of the presented research can be perceived through this distinction as the one standing on the side of uniqueness and emphasising a role of commonly held beliefs within an actor, while opposite are rational approaches such as neorealism and other systemic theories, including the world-systems theory at the macro level; and game theory at the micro level. This paper examines foreign policy from the strategic culture perspective and uses the case of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to assess the importance of the concept to help us understand the foreign policy of this newly-rising great power.

China has increasingly become an object of interest for many scholars of International Relations especially after its opening up and consequent rapid rise in importance, which hap-

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pened in the post-Mao Zedong era. Since then, many have claimed that China is expansionist and its rise will inevitably lead to a conflict with the global superpower – the United States. While a certain group of scholars do not use cultural explanation and base their arguments on the 'commonality' approach (i.e. Mearsheimer 2006; 2010), a significant number of scholars use some kind of 'unique' explanation in their work. Just to cite one example, Aaron Friedberg, a famous proponent of the so-called "China threat theory", claims that the conflict between the USA and growing China will come not as the result of misperceptions or a lack of effort to cooperate but because of the ideological gap between the powers (Friedberg 2012). While not in a position to decide whether China is a case of a common or a unique actor, this paper will present an application of the concept of strategic culture to the PRC's foreign policy thinking within the framework of its current decision-making process including the actors not taking the actual decision yet holding significant influence on their shape. The paper will assess whether there exist certain shared patterns of belief among these actors, and what these patterns are.

A couple of theoretical explanations must be outlined here regarding the central concept of the paper. The concept of strategic culture was formulated during the 1970s and was used primarily to improve the explanation of the two nuclear superpowers' behaviour during the Cold War era. Among the first authors were Jack Snyder (1977), the inventor of the term, who saw Soviet nuclear behaviour of the time as not just policy-oriented but coming from a semi-permanent *culture* of attitude; Colin Gray (1971; 1986), who criticized American nuclear policies as being ethnocentric and not readable enough to other state actors; or Ken Booth (1979), who viewed every strategic analysis as culturally biased. Relatively shortly after introducing the concept, it however became clear that it would have far broader utility than just its primer goal of nuclear strategy explanation, which is well visible from the articles (and surprise) of some of the original users of the concept (see Snyder 1990; Booth 1990). Various authors pushed forward their own understanding of the concept, so in the years following the collapse of the USSR we had those applying the concept from the perspective of Gramscian hegemonic discourse (see Klein 1988), there were constructivists (see Katzenstein 1996) as well as those trying to apply more rigorous and verifiable theories (see Johnston 1995b). For the purpose of this paper it is essential to note that after the end of the Cold War the concept was increasingly applied to other actors and one of the most popular cases became China.

The understanding of the concept in this paper is chiefly inspired by Colin Gray (1999; 2007), who is one of its main practitioners and who asserts that it is not important that we cannot agree on a single definition, as long as we understand what the concept can tell us about the behaviour of an actor. Such an 'open-minded' stance is welcomed for the purpose of this work, as it would not reject any of the results of previous research on Chinese strategic culture, and it would therefore allow us even to take into account the findings of authors who do not necessarily agree with Gray's understanding of the concept. Also together with Gray, strategic culture is perceived from an interpretative perspective as mostly permitting *understanding* rather than *explanation* of certain behaviour, thus it is not believed in a strong ability to be positively tested *vis-à-vis* rational approaches such as, for example, neorealism on the basis of differentiating between the ideas and behaviour, as another important proponent of strategic culture research and Colin Gray's main opponent, Alastair Johnston does (see Johnston

1995b; 1999). Another of Gray's assertions, which fits with the necessities of this paper, is the rationalization to use the concept for wider areas of situations and actors, in this case for the whole foreign policy of a state and more (intra)state actors, thus not as the "inventor" of the term Jack Snyder (1977) did. This will allow us to consider different actors as relevant, even though they are not directly involved in actual strategic decision-making but still having huge impact on the decisions taken. This approach allows taking them also as the 'keepers' of strategic culture.

Hence, for the purpose of this paper, strategic culture will be understood as a set of semi-permanent (i.e. stable, but not unchangeable) beliefs coming from common determinants to which a nation (or another group, for that matter) has been displayed and which influences, yet not necessarily determines, strategic decisions taken by its leaders.

The paper will proceed as follows. Firstly, a review of the literature on Chinese strategic culture will be presented and analysed, and some conclusions will be drawn from what we can learn from the research. Subsequently, four domestic actors which form the basic scheme of foreign policy shaping in today's China (see e.g. Jakobson and Knox 2010) will be considered and their foreign policy discourse will be analysed and put into context. The government,[1] academia, media, and public opinion have been identified as the actors which are becoming increasingly important in the process of foreign policy shaping, especially as the process of reforms has proceeded. On this basis, the actual foreign policy thinking of each of the actors will be discussed and they will be approached from the position of strategic culture as presented in the first chapter. It should be noted that for methodological purposes we will consider strategic culture and actual foreign policy thinking as separate entities with the first standing for a specific academic concept and comprising all the foreign policy behaviour during the times, while the foreign policy thinking of the actors will, on one hand, be broader in the way that it will take into account all the ideas about foreign policy, but narrower on the other hand, as it will focus predominantly on the presence.

For obvious limitations, this paper cannot provide exhaustive discourse analyses of the individual actors based on the primary research, rather it will present useful insights into the discourse at each level and base its conclusions on the exemplary primary materials in combination with rich secondary sources dealing with the issue, both Chinese and foreign. This way maximizes the chance of not letting a significant voice out of the scope.

Eventually, in the conclusion we will answer the question of whether strategic culture research finds its reflection in the foreign policy thinking of the respective domestic actors and thus to what extent the belief patterns of the included actors relate to the beliefs coming from the strategic culture concept.

2. Chinese Strategic Culture: What the Literature Says

There has been an abundance of literature trying to solve what Chinese strategic culture is like. Among the very first, and still hugely influential, was Alastair Johnston (1995a) with his book *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*. Johnston acknowledges the existence of two schools of strategic culture in China – the so-called "Confucian" and that of *Realpolitik*. Subsequently, however, on the basis of his own research he

moves to claim that in reality the strategic culture of China has been that of *Realpolitik*, or, using his words, *parabellum*.

To present another argument supporting this opinion, we cite Victoria Hui (2005: 31) who studied the use of military means throughout Chinese history. Using the People's Liberation Army Press data, the author lists a total of 3,756 military campaigns from 770 BC to 1911 AD, averaging 1.4 campaigns per year. Additionally, as Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis show (2000: 46), these campaigns comprised an average of 100,000 soldiers per battle while, in comparison, in feudal Europe there rarely exceeded 50,000 soldiers per battle.

The *parabellum* view of Chinese strategic culture, and more particularly Johnston, became the subject of wide criticism among many China scholars. One oft-cited work was published by US-based Huiyun Feng (2005) who criticized Johnston for incorrect presumptions and thus distorted findings in his book. The author then presents her own conclusion, using the same methodology, and claims that Chinese strategic culture is much more complex, though inclining towards defensive realism. In this author's view, the actual behaviour of the Chinese leaders has showed a strong influence from traditional Confucian thinking.

It is worth noting that the Chinese themselves hold a strong pacifist, defensive and non-expansionist self-image, which is well demonstrated by a leading Chinese IR scholar, Yan Xuetong (2011), in his book *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Interestingly enough for someone being labelled in the West as *neo-comm* (see Leonard 2008: 90), Yan presents here a picture of Chinese strategic culture based on Confucius's thinking and following the way of *human authority* (王 *wang*).

Even though there are calls that these ideas are somewhat removed from today's reality in China, according to Victoria Hui (2012: 126) the majority of works dealing with Chinese strategic culture, especially from Chinese authors, actually focus on Confucius as a prime source of Chinese strategic culture. Hui cites a number of examples, such as the perception of Chinese strategic culture being moral, virtuous, benevolent and just (Yan Xuetong), harmonious (Ren Xiao), compassionate and respectful towards individuals (Wang Huaiyu), peaceful and harmonious (Feng Huiyun) and emphasising rule by morality, kind rule and persuasion by virtue (Xin Li and Verner Worm). However, and quite importantly, Hui does not stay with these, but moves on and discusses the mixed nature of Confucian and *parabellum* cultures, and at the end emphasises the existence of the two distinct traditions in Chinese strategic culture (Hui 2012: 139).

Joseph Cheng (2012: 170–171) also agrees with the notion of two distinct strategic cultures in China, one being pro-active militarist and the other peaceful in nature and inclining toward the current international order. Twomey (2006) follows suit with pointing out that there are indeed two exactly opposite strategic traditions in China – one being defensive and peaceful in nature and the other being offensive and pro-active.

Finding the way out of a pluralist trap may be easier after looking at Scobell's work (2002), in which it is asserted that Chinese strategic culture cannot be described as predominantly peaceful or belligerent, as it has the dualist nature of Confucius/Mencius/Sun Zi non-violent moral preferences and *Realpolitik*/*parabellum* tradition which prefers military and offensive solutions in practice. The result is a situation which the author calls the *cult of defence*, when Chinese leaders in reality would opt for offensive solutions, but portray them as defensive in nature. A similar conclusion is presented by Richardson (2009), when he shows

how Chinese leaders hold the self-image of being moral, peaceful, and defensive Confucian rulers, yet it is often the underlying *Realpolitik* approach which influences their actions. In general, as the author claims, the Confucian acceptance of "righteous war" can be applied to a great number of situations which would normally fall into the group of mere offensive attack.

Yet another way to understand the seemingly different sources of Chinese strategic culture is presented by Xia Liping (2009: 116–117), who studies Chinese strategic culture at three levels: philosophy, national strategic culture, and military and foreign strategic culture. According to Xia, the first is inherently peacefully oriented; the second level prefers peace, but accepts defensive wars. However, the third level is the one of *realism*. It is on this level, therefore, where Johnston was correct in describing Chinese strategic culture as *parabellum*, yet also here the preference for non-violent solutions is preserved.

To conclude this section, it has to be admitted that no simple answer can be easily found in the literature about what Chinese strategic culture is like, with different authors presenting seemingly opposite answers. Yet after closer examination we can find some regularity, with the peaceful self-image and *parabellum* behaviour as being the two limitations, and actual foreign policy drawing from both cultural/ideological sources.

It is clear that there is much more to be labelled and included within the "strategic culture of China." We could talk further about the century of humiliation (see Shen 2012), as well as the continental nature of Chinese culture as opposed to the maritime nature of Anglo-Saxon culture (see Fairbank 1998). We could elaborate on the more recent impact of communist ideology (see Hunt 1995), as well the impact of geography and the tradition of agriculture throughout Chinese history (see Fairbank 1998). However, it is not the purpose of this part to contribute to the research on what Chinese strategic culture is, but to provide the analyses of what strategic culture research holds it is. Thus with the outlined picture of this section, let us proceed to other parts of the paper in which the foreign policy thinking in the domestic actors in the PRC will be examined.

3. Foreign Policy Thinking in the PRC

3.1 Government and Official Position

The doctrinal equipment of Chinese foreign policy is an important exposition into its highest leaders' thinking, as R. L. Kuhn (2010) – a person with close contacts in the highest Chinese leadership, asserts in his book *How China's Leaders Think*. In the subsequent section we will therefore discuss major doctrines which are currently present in the official discourse and we will analyse their relevance and further meaning. Moreover, we will combine the primary material with the secondary literature.

In his book, Kuhn presents four principles which, according to him, summarize the belief patterns of Chinese leaders. The first two – the most important ones, are *pride* and *stability*, symbolizing that Chinese leaders are foremost motivated in their actions by providing glory for their mother nation, while at the same time critically struggling to avoid conflicts. In the second row of the guiding principles come *responsibility* and *vision*, showing the paternalistic nature of the Chinese leadership system and its long term liability coming from the security

of the regime, unlike the situations in other countries, where leaders are perhaps mostly concerned with struggling to achieve the best possible election results (Ibid.).

According to a publication by the state's Foreign Language Press (Zhou et al. 2011), China establishes foreign relations with countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, these being the mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, non-interference with each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. Another concept cited as a foreign policy principle is Hu Jintao's political, economic, security, cultural, and environmental "harmonious world." The publication also acknowledges Deng Xiaoping for the political, economic and cultural reform process and opening-up. What is missing, interestingly, is any mention of the previous Mao Zedong doctrines.

An important concept of Chinese foreign policy which has come to predominate in its foreign policy discourse – the "peaceful rise" – was presented by Zheng Bijian in 2003 just to be shortly afterwards corrected to "peaceful development," purposely for sounding too harsh (Leonard 2008: 92). Two white papers were published by the State Council on this issue in the years 2005 and 2011. While both of them aspire towards the same, there is a remarkable change to be noticed in the more recent one. After restating and elaborating what had already been stated, it also says that the Chinese people "will never allow any external forces to interfere in China's internal affairs" and continues with saying that "China is firm in upholding its core interests which include the following: state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development" (The State Council Information Office 2011). Additionally, State Councillor Dai Bingguo (2010) mentioned core interests in his famous essay defending the peaceful development thesis, where he states that "no development path should be chosen at the expense of major national interests."

Michael Swaine (2011: 3–5) provides research of the usage of the concept of 'core interests' and he finds that the concept was virtually non-existent before 2003, when it started to be mentioned on a number of occasions, with the frequency skyrocketing from 2008 onwards. He concludes with saying that this rapid rise in the usage by PRC officials is arguably a sign of a more assertive China willing to stand stronger in the international arena. However, this activity may have also been provoked by a growing US presence in the region, adding to the Chinese perception that its positions are being threatened.

Currently, we are in the era which was famously branded by Jiang in 2002 as a "strategic opportunity for China," meaning that during the first two decades of the new century, the PRC will operate in a peaceful international environment, which will allow her to solve internal problems (Wang, 2011). Right now we should already be well into the second half of this period and it may be a question of what is in store for Chinese official strategy after the period is over. Kissinger (2012) presented the dilemma of whether Deng's 24-character statement was intended as guidance for the time of weakness or a permanent maxim. There are indeed visible trends that today's Chinese foreign policy is decoupling from Deng's advice (for more see Baker – Zhang 2012).

It can be proposed that the official thinking and its recent development fit into the 'duality' culture scheme presented in the previous section, with the strong peaceful rhetoric and

non-conflict preference, but increasingly assertive behaviour and a pro-active stance when dealing with national (core) interests perceived as being linked to national pride.

3.2 Academia, Research Institutions, and Intellectuals

The Chinese IR debate has become much more diversified and pluralist since the reforms started in the late 1970s, and IR scholars are gaining influence as being increasingly approached by the government or media to present their opinions. As time has passed, a number of studies have emerged which deal with the discourse within the community.[2]

Among the most well-known is Chinese scholar Qin Yaqing (2009), who studies the development of IR theory in the PRC in the post-Mao era. After having examined the published articles in five major Chinese IR journals he asserts that liberalism has been the most popular paradigm used by Chinese scholars during the whole era. Realism comes in second place, which during 1978 – 1990 scored second after Marxism, during the 1990s after liberalism and just losing second place to constructivism in the 2001–2007 era. As the author states, constructivism witnessed a steep rise in popularity in the 2000s due to more factors such as its coincidence with the peaceful rise debate and its resemblance with traditional Chinese philosophy which, unlike both liberalism and realism, considers identity and behaviour as interchangeable factors.

Zhu Liqun (2010: 57–58), writing for the EU Institute for Security Studies, agrees that liberalism is the most important IR theory in post-Mao China based on her analyses of the three levels of overall configuration of power, identity and strategy according to publications of Chinese IR and diplomacy scholars. Furthermore, according to the author, the majority of Chinese scholars now perceive the world as dominated by peace and cooperation and see China as a responsible member of international society. Ren Xiao (2010) and his work also shows the clear move in the Chinese IR discourse from "war and revolution" to "peace and development". Another point which should support this view is the alleged reaction of most Chinese intellectuals to the famous nationalist "Say No" books, which were either ignored or criticized (Li 2005: 55).

Yet, however, there is a group of authors who claim otherwise. Nathan and Scobell (2012: 36) present their view of Chinese IR discourse and suppose that offensive realism is the most popular theory in China with other schools of thoughts such as Marxists and 'culturalists' seem to agree that conflict with the US is natural.

The famous China scholar David Shambaugh (2011) presents his perception of IR discourse in China and labels six schools of thoughts, varied from the school of nativism comprising Marxists, xenophobic nationalists and populists; to the school of globalism which is the equivalent of liberal institutionalism in the West. It is the Realist school of thought based on principles of state sovereignty and power and an anarchic international environment which is the most popular school in China IR discourse nowadays and has perhaps always been. Shambaugh admits that there are various forms of realism such as offensive and defensive or hard and soft versions. What puzzles realists, however, is the way in which China could use its newly acquired power and escape from interdependence with the external world. As according to the globalist school, the author claims that while it used to be heard in the discourse, since 2008 it has been quite silent and apparently lost its place in the debates.

We can look at the responses of the Mainland intellectuals towards 9/11 and subsequent military campaign in Iraq in order to better comprehend the scope of domestic IR debate. As Simon Shen (2007) shows, these events turned into a major battle of the Chinese schools of thought, which he labels as liberals versus non-liberals. According to the author it is the non-liberals, comprising neo-Confucianists, new leftists and authentic nationalists, who control most of the academic space. Interestingly, after 9/11 the fighting between the camps moved from the pages of scholarly journals towards building public support.

Rozman (2011: 299) also shows how political development influences domestic discourse and states that the intelligentsia has predominantly followed the more assertive Chinese foreign policy behaviour since 2010. Rozman (2012: 112–114), himself, presents elsewhere his three schools of thought within Chinese foreign policy discourse as the East Asian school, the universalist school and the Chinese 'exceptionalist' school, with the last one placing emphasis on the prevailing legacy of imperial China. Moreover, Rozman argues that while realism and liberalism were both used during various occasions in Chinese history, it has been constructivism and the role of ideas and perceptions which rule China's foreign policy thinking.

Eventually, it has to be admitted that the discourse in academia has become increasingly diversified with perhaps equal numbers of authors claiming to be prevailingly liberal or realist. While these schools could be likened to the strategic cultures of *parabellum* and Confucian, the rising position of constructivism, which seems to be perceived as sharing some patterns with traditional Chinese thinking, may be the closest IR school of thought to the 'dualist' strategic culture as presented in the first chapter of this paper. Thus, while strategic culture research itself is quite ambiguous, it finds its counterpart image on the level of academic discourse.

3.3 Media

By no means is China a country with press freedom and it is regularly placed at the very bottom in the major rankings in the world (see Freedom House 2012; Reporters Without Borders 2012).Yet the situation is more complex ever since the process of media reform started in 1980s and accelerated in 1990s, which created a unique media structure and its position within the political system. The media has been increasingly taken as a specific actor in the foreign policy shaping process, often distinct from the official position, although technically all media in China, and especially the more traditional ones, are under tight government control.[3]

Analysing the media content, it is important to distinguish between the varieties of sources. Most basically we can divide media into two broad groups as official and non-official, with the former being represented foremost by the People's Daily and Xinhua, but also other publications of different state agencies; and the latter consisting of a wide list of media differing in the degree of authority, privatization, control and sometimes being further subdivided into semi-official and commercialized. Yet the picture is not as clear with some newspapers following the dual-track strategy and providing both, the official position of the respective institution and less authorized content aimed at attracting readers (Ke 2010). As Swaine (2012) shows in his research, the level of authority of certain information may indeed vary within a single title.

For the purpose of this paper, it is mostly relevant to take into account 'traditional' media and their content. Furthermore, assuming that official media is the mouthpiece of its respective institutions, it makes sense to focus on semi-official and commercial media. The

two best examples are the Global Times (*Huanqiu Shibao*) and the Southern Weekend (*Nanfang Zhoumo*).

The Global Times is the newspaper which has been repeatedly labelled as the most popular and important international news source within China. The Global Times was established in the early 1990s by the People's Daily and has been functioning as an 'authoritative tabloid' specializing in international news. It asserts that its stories show not only international news, but Chinese interpretation of it. The Global Times publishes almost always on relations with the US, Japan, and Taiwan and takes a strong nationalistic position. Its editors claim that they promote Chinese patriotism and want China to develop and be stronger; thus their goal is not to cause any problems for the government, which they believe shares the same goal. Intellectuals sometimes criticize the Global Times for its sensationalist news, yet they follow it for its informative purpose, as do government officials (Ke 2010, 52, 57–58; Shirk 2010: 227–229).

The Southern Weekend is published under the Guangdong Communist Party Committee as a weekly newspaper and it often takes critical positions towards the government from liberal positions. Primarily a provincial newspaper, it now attracts more readers in Beijing, Shanghai and other cities with larger numbers of intellectuals and it also claims to be highly influential among scholars and the number one weekly paper (Shirk 2010: 10–11). As Susan Shirk writes, it has not happened that an editor of the Global Times has been sacked, while that does happen with the Southern Weekend.

Yu Yanmin's (2005) research on Chinese media reporting on the war in Iraq gives some impression about the positions these two media take in practice. Apart from the war analysis and amazement of the US's effective victory shared among all the Chinese newspapers, the Global Times reported more on world opinion and lack of support from other world powers, as well as the absence of a United Nations resolution. On the other hand, the Southern Weekend reports on these topics less often and leans more positively towards the war and the US. Interestingly, 27.3 % of articles in the Southern Weekly were found positive, while still 21.5 % of those in the Global Time can be regarded positive (Ibid.: 77).

In a more recent event, the Arab Spring and subsequent events, including the intervention in Libya and the crisis in Syria; these were considered important issues for China as it appears that there were strict official guidelines on how to report the events (Freedom House 2012; Polack 2011). Unfortunately, no comprehensive research on the Chinese media coverage of these events has been published yet, thus it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the subtle differences between single reports in different media.

Daniela Stockmann (2011a) introduces the term 'public opinion crises' for a situation when public opinion differs significantly from the official position and she studies these situations from the perspective of media as a link between the government and the people. In this regard, the most typical reaction of government has been to order the media to follow the report line of the official sources. As Stockmann (2011b) shows elsewhere, the research demonstrates that in contrast to common Western perception of "Chinese government nationalist propaganda", since about the year 2000 it has been the commercialized media which has constantly reported in harsher ways in the field of foreign affairs in an endeavour to obtain an advantage over the competition and attract higher advertisement revenues. Thus in many cases commercialized media covered a topic in a more nationalistic way which has even become an item for criticism for some Chinese intellectuals.

Before making too quick a judgement on "good government and the bad media", let us just bring in one more example. In 2010 there was a case with Google standing up for freedom of expression, which the government perceived as a direct threat towards bringing up a major information crisis. Internet forums became packed at this time with sympathetic views towards "Western" values. The government reacted promptly and during one night using its '50-cents party' it managed to change public discourse into the 'usual' anti-Western one (Shirk 2011: 4).

It can be thus concluded here that government hopes for media which would earn money and help to keep public opinion close to that of the government. This requires sometimes letting the media speaking more freely in order to appeal to the public and become more popular; sometimes to "soften" their language and make more room for internationally friendly policy; while other times to step in and protect the regime security from too liberal views. Hence – the often mentioned government "schizophrenia" and "back and forth" strategy of controlling the media (see Bennett 2011) may be actually a natural way of behaving in the current reality. The media content in China with regard to foreign policy seems, in general, to be fluctuating between the limits defined by the official position and censorship, with media trying to reach the nearest possible to public opinion. While it is possible to find two main positions taken by the media – liberal and nationalistic, political influence is still critical in determining media content.

3.4 Public Opinion

No country can ignore public opinion, no matter what its political system and this is also the case of China, especially since the reform process has accelerated. Let us discuss some examples of public opinion surveys questioning Chinese people on what they think about certain foreign affairs issues.

Perhaps not too surprisingly, according to the 2005 survey of the South Korean Dong-A Ilbo newspaper, the US is viewed as the country posing by far the major security threat to China with 73% of respondents agreeing, with Japan second with 19% and no other country getting above 1% (see World Public Opinion 2006). However, the situation is different when the perception of the countries is considered, with Japan having the worst perception in China with 50% of people holding a negative perception, and the second being the USA with 44% (Globe Scan – PIPA 2006). According to Hao and Su (2005: 29), as many as 80% of respondents named Japan in a 2003–2004 university survey as the single most disliked country and no other country being disliked by more than 10%. This is a good example of what P. H. Gries (2005) explains, that the predominant narrative of heroic victory over foreign powers used during the early decades of the communist regime began to shift later on towards self-victimization due to Japanese occupation, which led to the growth of anger among Chinese people towards Japan.

Another interesting fact is the perception of France with 50% of respondents naming it the most liked country according to Hao and Su (2005). In the survey carried out during July-September 2008 the perception of France was however worse than that of the UK, the US or Russia (World Public Opinion 2009). This drop can be explained by widespread Chinese anger against protests which occurred during the Olympic torch rallies in Paris shortly before. Yet according to the online survey of 2011, France was again viewed as "romantic, beautiful

and fashionable", with no mention of negative perceptions such as anti-China sentiments, which were on the other hand typical for Japan, India, the US and other surveyed countries (Global Times 2012).

Taking into consideration the role China plays in the world, it is interesting to note that Chinese people feel the most positive from the surveyed countries about the moral aspects of its own country's foreign policy (Globe Scan – PIPO 2006). A similar picture proposes another survey which shows Chinese people as extraordinarily respectful towards international law and the UN, as compared with other countries (Council on Foreign Relations 2009). When asked about the major goals of foreign policy, while about 90 % of respondents support China's rise economically and militarily, they nonetheless place goals such as protecting jobs, promoting economic growth, securing energy policy and growing influence in international affairs above building a strong military (The Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2006).

A Global Times (2010) online survey about the role China should play during the islands' territorial disputes shows, however, also a somewhat different picture. The majority (53 %) of Chinese people agree that China should avoid being encroached by its islands from neighbouring countries. Still the majority (59 %) also insist on resolving the disputes through bilateral negotiations, yet 36 % of respondents think that China should use force if necessary. Interestingly, the vast majority of respondents perceived the US (48 %) and Japan (40 %) to be those countries that China should be most concerned about, with only about 4 % naming Vietnam and only 0.3 % the Philippines.

A more recent phone survey conducted by the East Asia Institute (in Jung 2012) in the year 2011 asked randomly-picked Chinese citizens in major cities a set of questions connected to Chinese security and foreign affairs. The results show, perhaps surprisingly, that the Chinese perceive the disrupting of energy supplies as a major security threat, ahead of global warming and the spread of pandemics, with all three receiving about a 90 % positive response on labelling as threatening. Japan's remilitarization, unilateral US foreign policy, international terrorism and US military presence in Asia followed with the positive response of between 70 and 80 % respondents. Another interesting aspect of the survey is the perception of the US, where Chinese are predominantly friendly, however, they think that the other side looks down upon them and they do not enjoy the treatment they deserve from international organizations. On the issue of China's active intervention in international issues, more than 90 % of respondents see it as positive, yet, almost half of the respondents at the same time think China should stand for either reforming the current established world order or create a new China-led one. Furthermore, a roughly equal number of respondents oppose each other on whether China should or should not follow the decisions of international organizations if they differ from China's perspective. It can be taken as a little worrisome to link the views of energy security with the perceived undermined position of China in international affairs and the confidence of its abilities to challenge this position, which is also present.

Some basic patterns about Chinese public opinion can be detected from the presented surveys. Firstly, Chinese public opinion follows the flow of actual events and it reacts to the official policy and media coverage. This was the case with the radical deterioration in the perception of France; the impact of official policies towards territorial disputes; or long term media and governmental campaigns with respect to Japan and leading to self-victimization during the 1990s. Secondly, similarly to the prevailing peaceful self-perception of Chinese

scholars, the public tends to think of China as also being a peaceful and moral nation, yet the latest information shows that there might be a decreasing trend in this aspect. Thirdly, the public thinks that China should also stand stronger and protect its position and certain goals considered being at the core of its national interest, if necessary in disputes with other nations. Moreover, people seem to be becoming more and more confident about the capabilities China poses. From the perspective of strategic culture, it can be concluded that there are some shared schemes of thinking to be found in the public opinion and the 'dualist' Chinese strategic culture as was presented in the first chapter of this paper, with the peaceful general preferences, yet increasingly confident and pro-active stance in topical foreign policy issues.

4. Conclusion

So is there any point in knowing what the Chinese strategic culture is for analysing the foreign policy thinking in China? The answer is not so clear. As a good alibi, the literature of strategic culture presents no clear answer on what the strategic culture of China is and with some exaggeration it may be asserted that all behaviour from pacifist non-action to an active military strike is possibly fitting to the explanations of some strategic culture authors. Yet, it is claimed that exactly this knowledge of ambiguity is important and useful.

Let us first conclude the findings of the previous chapters. Initially, after having examined the literature we found that authors present strikingly diversifying answers on what Chinese strategic culture is. It is, however, assumed that this could be labelled as a 'dualist strategic culture', with peaceful self-image and pro-active realist behaviour as the main characteristics. With this knowledge we proceeded to analyse current foreign policy thinking within the four domestic actors of Chinese foreign policy shaping – the government, academia, media and public. Here it is suggested that at least three actors share certain belief patters in their foreign policy thinking as for what strategic culture literature tells us about China. Official policy, academia and the public hold, to some degree, the perception of China as essentially a moral country with peaceful behaviour in the international arena, yet at the same time, it should stick to its national interests and protect them if necessary. The fourth actor – the media, was found to follow, restate, and mirror the beliefs of the other actors and fluctuate between them mostly according to its own interest rather than its own belief. From the perspective presented in the introduction of this paper, it may be interesting to analyse this behaviour using the micro level models such as game theory. Using such research might be further helpful in order to shed a little more light on whether current Chinese foreign policy in general is more influenced by the beliefs of certain actors or by their self-interests, respectively the position and power they enjoy within the decision-making process.

While this paper did not try to answer this question, it proposes that the concept of strategic culture itself may be useful to understand better the shapes of Chinese foreign policy and foreign policy thinking of the domestic actors within the PRC. The main reservation which, however, can be put forward, is the ambiguity of the concept itself, and subsequently of the findings of the literature which vary to a large extent. While in the strict sense this can be interpreted as an inability to tell precisely what the Chinese cultural preference is, in the broader context we can restate that it is exactly the knowledge of ambiguity that should be

praised and consequently used to make sense of current foreign policy thinking of the various Chinese domestic actors, which follow the patterns found by the strategic culture research. In practical life this knowledge could preclude us from taking too quickly an extreme opinion of China being either only pacifist or belligerent, with the correct answer being perhaps that it is indeed and truly both at the same time. In other words, knowledge of the strategic culture would teach us not to be too sure about Chinese non-action, yet not to discard the pacifist language as mere "propaganda" either.

Notes:

1. The term is meant in the broad sense as the official position of the state, thus comprising also the military and the Party.
2. For similar reasons as in the previous section, we will take into account here both Chinese authors' ideas, as well as foreign experts' findings regarding Chinese foreign policy thinking within its IR community. It should be noted that the scope of this section differs from that presenting the findings of the Chinese strategic culture in both subject and approach.
3. It is important to keep in mind that according to Chinese laws, the state must control at least 51 % of ownership of all media.

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