

China's peaceful rise in East Asia and strategic management of identities and interests.

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the extent to which China has stabilized its communist regime and defended or pursued its crucial nationalist interests while maintaining a relatively peaceful environment in East Asia. This research question is relatively new and important because many analysts assumed that only through changing these two identities, can China achieve its peace rise.

By innovatively combining Social Identity Theory's (SIT) recategorization strategy and its emphasis on the actor's rational choice, and using the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) United Front Strategy as an example of SIT, this thesis deduces principles of what I call as China's strategic management of identities and interests. By doing so, this thesis also makes several theoretical contributions to the literature. First, this combination is a new approach to analyze the puzzle that contrary to some pessimistic classical, neo-classical and offensive realists' expectation, China has not faced a hard-balancing coalition in East Asia although it is consolidating communist regime and sovereignty claims. Second, this thesis also makes contribution SIT's application in international relations (IR) because IR scholars using SIT often underplay the theory's emphasis on the actor's rational choice and did not use recategorization to examine how Sino-US competition can be ameliorated.

This thesis argues that by forming shared identities/interests with relevant actors and downplaying conflicting ones, China has to a certain degree maintained a relatively benign environment without seriously destabilizing its communist regime and damaging crucial nationalist interests. However, this strategy also has limitations. First, the shared identities/interests approach often fails because CCP is unwilling to loosening political control or concede important nationalist interests. Second, China's strategy of pursuing crucial interests in a restrained way to downplay conflicting identity may not always keep frictions under control.

TABLE OF CONTENT

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.	6
PART 2, ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK	34
CHAPTER 2: SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY	34
CHAPTER 3. UNITED FRONT STRATEGY (UFS).....	57
PART 3. COMPETITION BETWEEN CHINA AND THE US/REGIONAL COUNTRIES IS INEVITABLE	81
CHAPTER 4: CHINA’S NATIONALISM AND COMMUNIST IDENTITY	81
PART 4. CCP/CHINA’S HISTORICAL APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF IDENTITIES/INTERESTS (1944-2009)	102
CHAPTER 5: CCP/CHINA’S STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS IN MAO’S TIME (1944–1976).....	102
CHAPTER 6 CHINA’S STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS IN THE DEFENSIVE PERIOD (1978-2009).	119
PART 5. CHINA’S STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN THE STALEMATE PERIOD (2009–PRESENT)	136
CHAPTER 7. THE STALEMATE PERIOD (1): RECENTRALIZING THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN THE STALEMATE PERIOD.	136
CHAPTER 8: THE STALEMATE PERIOD (2): CHINA’S EFFORTS TO SEEK SHARED INTERESTS AND IDENTITY WITH REGIONAL COUNTRIES THROUGH BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI).	161
CHAPTER 9: THE STALEMATE PERIOD (3)—CHINA’S EFFORT TO PURSUE ITS NATIONALIST GOALS IN A RESTRAINED WAY	186
PART 6. CASE STUDIES	217
CHAPTER 10: CHINA AND THE SCS DISPUTE	217
CHAPTER 11: RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN	253
CHAPTER 12 CONCLUSION	290

Chapter 1 Introduction.

In the past decades, China has developed rapidly and impressively, transforming itself from a poor and backward country to the world's second-largest economy. It has also managed to quickly develop its military. While successive Chinese leaders are at pains to reassure the rest of the world that China's rise will be peaceful and beneficial to all (Jiang, 1999, cited in China News, 1999; Hu, 2007, cited in China Daily, 2007; CCTV News, 2018), many scholars and elites outside China are concerned about frictions that stem from China's rise (Roy, 2013, pp.2-3; Holslag, 2015, p.16; Campbell and Ratner, 2018, p.61).

Among their concerns are two focal points bound by China's communist and nationalist identities, which have drawn a lot of scholarly attention, including by many realists who use them as important variables to explain or predict China's actions (Roy, 2013, p.14; Holslag, 2015). The first point is the friction between the rising communist China and the US-championed liberal internationalism. This includes irreconcilable values between democratic and non-democratic countries, democratic countries' inherent mistrust towards non-democratic countries, and rising authoritarian China's challenge to the liberal order (Friedberg, 2011; Boyle, 2016, p.37; Mounk and Foa, 2018, pp.30-31). Ideological frictions often heat up when liberal democratic countries criticize China for illiberal behaviors but China views the criticism as unfair treatments. For instance, in 2019, the then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed that China was "in a league of its own when it comes to human rights violation", a remark China perceived as being full of "ideological prejudice" (Martina and Blanchard, 2019). Moreover, many analysts and politicians in the US view ideological competition between communist China and liberal democracy as zero-sum (Weiss, 2019, p.92; Swanson, 2019). Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] suspects that liberal democratic countries, especially the US, are aiming to overthrow its regime. In 2019, for example, Beijing did not view the violent protests

in Hong Kong (HK) against the law allowing extradition to mainland China as popular opposition but as a plot by the US to destabilize the mainland's central authority (Reuters, 2019).

The Second focal point is that China's nationalist identity is the "potent driver" for its increasingly hardline regional policies (Ratner, 2013, Zhao, 2013, p.545, Schweller, 2018, p.35), which raise geopolitical tension in East Asia. These muscular policies include China's irredentist actions of consolidating its sovereign claim over perceived lost territories in the region, such as land features in the South China Sea [SCS] (Buszynski, 2012, p.140, Amer, 2014, p.17, Ba and Kuik, 2018, p.346). Also, China's strategic expansion in East Asia, which aims to break the perceived US-led island chain encirclement on China's rise, causes frictions and intensifies Sino-US strategic competition in the region. Some scholars and elites outside China criticized these actions for the destabilization in the region (Lee, 2014, Lim et al, 2017, p.189).

China's communist and nationalist identities seem to conflict with its peaceful rise rhetoric because they are major sources of ideological and East Asian geopolitical frictions. Indeed, many scholars and politicians argue or indicate that as long as the two identities remain, China's rise will not be peaceful (Friedberg, 2011; Campbell and Ratner, 2018, p.61; Pence, 2018). The thesis wishes to square the circle by raising the question: Can China rise peacefully in East Asia without substantially transforming the two identities?

Literature review

This question is under-developed in the existing literature, which has assumed that China's communist and nationalist identities are irreconcilable with its peaceful rise. For many optimists, China can realize a peaceful rise by transforming its identities or conforming to the norms of the existing orders. Earlier works by optimists often argued that the peaceful rise is possible because, through engagement, China's two

identities and related illiberal or threatening behaviors can be transformed into socially acceptable ones in the international community (Johnston, 2008; Qin and Wei, 2008; Campbell and Ratner, 2018, p.61). This optimistic belief is one of the major reasons that have underpinned the US and East Asian countries' decades-long China engagement policy (Border, 1997; Pence, 2018). Through engagement, the US wishes that China could become more politically democratic and open (The Economist, 2018) and many East Asian countries hope China could transform its coercive actions into cooperative behaviors (Acharya, 2005, p.133; Ba and Kuik, 2018, p.241). Other optimists has tried to prove that China is more of a status quo power, norm taker, or responsible stakeholder than a revisionist power (Johnston, 2003; Chin and Thakur 2010; Etzioni, 2011, p.549). By proving that China is a status quo power, the belief that the country can be socialized is strengthened.

However, the arguments of optimists are flawed because it has been proven that the two identities can hardly be transformed. China's regime has remained authoritarian despite the US' engagement. Moreover, although China has actively participated in regional institutions led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN], the country has never given up on nationalist goals, which many East Asian states view as threatening. To name a few, in 1985, China has set up a naval strategy of near sea defense to increase its naval presence and deterrent capability in the first island chain (Liu, 2004, p.437). It has since incrementally developed its military power according to the strategy. Since China first declared it would become a maritime great power in 2012, it has substantially strengthened its navy, which has begun to patrol in the second island chain (Yang and Yang, 2019). Thus, scholars who view China as a status quo power often underestimate the country's assertiveness in the past, which Johnston (2013, p.7) convincingly demonstrated in his seminal work.

In recent years, many optimists have become frustrated, as China's two identities remain unchanged amid the continuous rise of its power. For instance, Campbell and Ratner (2018, pp.60-61) stated that "the United States has always had an outsize

sense of its ability to determine China's course" because China has neither become democratic, nor refrained from pursuing strategic goals in the region. Likewise, John Pomfret (2018) argued that "engagement with China is failing". Moreover, in 2018, then US Vice-President, Mike Pence (2018) strongly criticized an illiberal and aggressive China that violates US-upheld liberal norms and challenges US strategic interests despite US engagement.

Moreover, it seems that pessimists have dominated the once-heated debate over whether China is a status quo or revisionist power in recent years. They mainly view China as a revisionist power that challenges the interests of many regional countries and US domination in East Asia (Goldstein, 2007, p.640; Christensen, 2015, p.2). An increasing number of analysts has viewed China's military actions in East Asia as threatening, assertive, and anti-status quo (Swaine, 2010, p.1; Friedberg, 2018; Roy, 2019, p.52). Many analysts or western politicians also view the US and China as strategic competitors (Allison, 2017, p. xvii; Zhou, 2019, p.2).

The frustration of optimists and domination of pessimists make this thesis question new and increasingly important. As noted earlier, many optimists have countered the arguments made by pessimists. They assumed that China's communist and nationalist identities and related illiberal or threatening actions can be changed through an engagement policy (Johnston, 2008; Campbell and Ratner, 2018, p.61), or that China is more of a status quo power than revisionist power (Johnston, 2003; Etzioni, 2011, p549). However, even in their open letter calling for continuing engagement with China, many scholars do not believe that changing the two identities is possible in the near future (Fravel et al, 2019). They propose engagement for constraining China's revisionist actions, not for changing China's identities (Fravel et al, 2019). As a result, the argument that China can be changed or is a status quo power does not fully support optimism in China's peaceful rise and counter the pessimists' argument that China is a revisionist power in East Asia. Thus, the next question that will have a profound influence on the international community is: Can

China rise by preserving its communist identity and pursuing nationalist interests while maintaining peace in the East Asia?

This thesis focuses on East Asia, which is the hard case of China's peaceful rise as many scholars argue that the great power competition between the US and China will most likely occur in this region (Friedberg, 2011; Christensen, 2015, p.2). Moreover, Because the US is the leading power in East Asia and promotes liberal values, China's rise in East Asia does not free itself from the pressure of political liberalization.

Currently, in English language literature, there is a growing number of publications discussing the US standpoint and talking about how to secure the hegemon's interests in the US-China competition (Allison, 2017, p.221-231, Friedberg, 2018, p.39-51, Leung and Depp, 2019, Erickson, 2019). However, Publications that are based on China's standpoint and that examine how illiberal and nationalist China copes with the challenges of the hegemon are still lacking.

This main thesis question also remains underexplored in Chinese literature. Some Chinese scholars noted that the emergence of China-US strategic competition, but they not analyze how the former copes with the latter. Wang and Hu (2019) argued that China and the US will probably become "long-term strategic rivals", but they did not mention how China will handle the rivalry. Likewise, Yang (2020, p.34) argues that the Sino-US competition will intensify if the US seriously violates China's core interests, such as Taiwan. Thus, Yang (2020, p.34) believes that the next critical issue Chinese scholars must analyze is China's strategy to cope with the competition.

Other Chinese scholars noted the ways in which China could handle the competition. Liu (2011) argues that China needs to provide regional countries with security protection to win their support. However, many of them seek the US's security guarantee to constrain China. Thus, Liu's suggestion (2011) may not be applicable

in East Asian context because China cannot provide the security protection that some regional states may use to balance against China. Moreover, others have provided more general suggestions. Sun (2018, pp.36-38) argues that to assuage strategic pressure from the US, China should prevent formation of a rivalry bloc, deepen cooperation with strategic partners and prevent ASEAN from choosing a side. While somewhat similar to some of the arguments made in this thesis, Sun (2018) did not discuss his suggestions in details. Gao (2018, p.25) generally argues that China should face up to Sino-US competition and focus on increasing influence in East Asia.

Contribution to the literature

As noted, this thesis question can China peacefully rise in East Asia without changing the two identities? is a relatively new and important in the current context of international relations (IR). Moreover, China's standpoint on the matter is underexplored in Western and Chinese literature. This thesis, thus, fills this gap by making initial progress in this regard. Besides this contribution, it makes several theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature.

Theoretical contribution.

As will be demonstrated by Chapter 2, regarding China's rise in the region, many optimistic defensive realists, liberal institutionalists, and constructivists underestimate the importance of nationalist and communist identities to China and their influence on the country's goals and actions. Thus, defensive realist Glaser (2015) argued that mainland China only focuses on its control over Taiwan. However, China has gradually expanded its military presence in the East China sea (ECS) and SCS mainly due to Chinese nationalist's goal of deterring possible foreign intervention coming from the sea (Liu, 2004). Liberal institutionalist Ikenberry (2008, 2014, p.8) falsely argues that China will yield to an enlarged coalition of democratic

countries' pressure and have to accept liberal norms. However, CCP has fortified its control over other systems and society of China, especially since the Chinese President Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, demonstrating CCP's unwillingness to soften political control. Constructivists' socialization argument also did not consider the significant psychological costs that the socializee will suffer in the socialization process (Johnston, 2008). Some pessimistic offensive, classical or neo-classical realists argue that China's communist identity and nationalist actions in the region will lead to a hard-balancing coalition against China, thereby increasing the possibility of conflicts between China and established powers (Goldstein, 2007, p.641). Hard-balancing means a strategy among "states engaging in intense rivalry" and that states confronts opponents by engaging in arms race, forming formal military alliance (Paul, 2019, p.22, Han and Paul, 2020, p.3) and giving up any attempt to construct partnerships or shared interests with the opponents (Kuik, 2013, p.5). However, contrary to their expectation, thus far, China does not face a hard-balancing coalition while consolidating its communist identity and nationalist claims. Because neither of these aspects of the existing literature is satisfactory, a new approach to understanding China's relationship with the region and the US is necessary.

This thesis argues that the social identity theory (SIT) opens up the possibility of tackling the puzzle that China's communist identity and nationalist actions do not necessarily lead to a hard balancing coalition against China. Specifically, the thesis uses SIT's recategorization strategy and its emphasis on the actor's rational choice to tackle this puzzle. The recategorization strategy refers to attempts that increase "the number of categories which simultaneously define a target...to reduce ingroup-outgroup differentiation" (Prati, et al, 2021, p. 50). One of recategorization strategies is the construction of the cross-cutting identities/interests of actors. That is, while an actor has identities/interests that conflict with others on some dimensions, it also shares identities/ interests with others on other dimensions (Hogg, 2016, p.8). For instance, China and Vietnam share economic interests and communist identity while having conflicting nationalist identities and maritime disputes. The recategorization

strategy postulates that shared identity/interests offset distrusts and negative effects derived from competing ones. SIT's emphasis on the rational choice of the actor tells us that although China cannot abandon its communist and nationalist identities due to their importance on China's self-image, it can manage consequences caused by actions derived from these identities. For instance, China could pursue crucial nationalist interests in a restrained manner to avoid overt escalation. Also, an actor can rationally pursue interests defined by the identities, such as adjusting recategorization strategies (Saguy, et al, 2008, p.433). Thus, in terms of the principles, a relatively peaceful environment may be maintained if China could form and increase the salience of shared identities and interests, as well as pursue or defend interests derived from identities that conflict with those of others in a restrained manner.

Salience here means "the identity that came into play in a specific situation" (Pondent, 2017). Forming or increasing the salience of shared identities and interests means making other countries prioritize the shared identities and interests over conflicting ones when managing relationships with China. Also, in this thesis, making the conflicting identities or interests less salient to others means controlling the identities related actions to prevent other countries from prioritizing the conflicting identities/interests over the shared ones. Also, this thesis uses phrases, such as downplaying conflicting identities, interests, frictions, or competition, similar to making the identities less salient to others.

Moreover, it is worth noting that forming shared identities in SIT is somewhat different from the constructivists' concept collective identity. The threshold of forming a shared identity in SIT is much lower than that for constructing constructivists' collective identity. According to some constructivists, forming a collective identity is hard because "interdependence", "common fate", and "homogeneity" are only variables that can lead to formation of collective identity (Adler and Barnett, 1998, p.50-51; Wendt, 1999, p.343). Also, a relatively long period of interaction is needed to foster

shared dominant beliefs, values, and expectation about the future (Alder and Barnett, 1998, p.54). In contrast, in SIT, a sense of ingroup/shared identity can be formed by just randomly assigning people into two distinctive groups, which is named as “the minimal group paradigm” (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, p. 48; Brown, 2000, p.36). Common fate, interdependence or shared interests enhance ingroup cohesion (Brown, 2000, pp.36-37).

By applying SIT’s recategorization and emphasis on the actor’s rational choice to China’s relationship with other actors, this thesis also contributes to the application of SIT in IR. The current dominant SIT framework in IR established by Larson (2015) focuses on social mobility (abandoning the disadvantageous or lower status social identity to get socially approved ones), social creativity (changing the negative traits into positive ones, or finding another dimension/group for comparison), and social competition (reversing the current status relationship) (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p103; Larson, 2015). However, SIT, as it is currently used in IR, falsely regards ‘social creativity as a viable strategy to avoid competition between China and the US (Gries, 2005, Larson, 2015). As Chapter 4 demonstrates, there are limits to the applicability of the “social creativity” strategy. I argue that combining SIT’s emphasis on the actor’s rational choice with recategorization strategy, which is currently underused in IR, provides crucial insight for analyzing how a communist and nationalistic China can possibly prevent a US-led hard-balancing coalition in a competition scenario. Moreover, SIT has not been used to analyze the regional flashpoints, which I do in the latter part of the thesis.

Also, the current dominant SIT framework ignores or downplays the importance of the actor’s rational choice even if the social psychology’s version of SIT puts equal emphasis on the actor’s rational choice as its identity (Gries, 2005; Larson, 2015). Unlike the scholars that separate SIT from the rationalism (Gries, 2005; Lee, 2016), this thesis argues that SIT is an eclectic approach that combines some principles of rational choice theory and constructivism. Rational choice theory refers to actors,

“with fixed preferences and identities, who rationally adjust their beliefs and strategies in response to the information they receive and the strategies pursued by other actors” (Kydd, 2008, p. 438). Constructivists view that identities are socially constructed, differentiate the self and the other, and define interests and preference (Hopf, 1998, p.175. p.182). Some IR scholars suggest that as analytical approaches, rationalism and constructivism can be complementary rather than competitive in answering research questions (Fearon and Wendt, 2002; Hurd, 2008, p.311-2). Hurd (2008, p.312) proposes the “division of labors” between rationalism and constructivism. That is, “constructivism is suited to answering questions about how actors acquire their interests and identities and rationalism specializes in explaining the pursuit of interests by already constituted actors” (Hurd, 2008, p.312). This division of labors is reflected in SIT, which postulates that actor defines interests and acts according to the social identities (Brewer, 2011, p.125) but could rationally pursue the interests by managing the consequences of actions derived from identities that conflict with others (Van Zomeren, et, al, 2012, p188)

Another contribution to the literature is that the thesis regards CCP’s united front strategy (UFS) as an example that SIT highlights. The current dominant application of UFS treats the strategy as a revolutionary one, reflecting irreconcilable competition between authoritarian and democratic states (Brady, 2017). However, in this thesis, UFS is a practice of SIT that aims to manage the competition and cultivate shared identities and interests that enable trust and compromise between conflicting parties. Moreover, many Chinese scholars use traditional Chinese thoughts as frameworks to prove that China’s peaceful rise is possible (Qin, 2014; Yan, 2016). However, UFS, which plays a significant role in CCP’s history, has not previously been used to analyze China’s peaceful rise in East Asia. This thesis fills the gap in this regard.

Another originality of this thesis is the application of CCP’s UFS during the Anti-Japanese War as an analytical framework to examine CCP/ People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) interaction with the US or regional countries from 1944, the year that

the US observation team went to Yan'an, CCP's capital at the time, up to the present. The thesis views CCP's relationship with Kuo Min Tang's [KMT] dominant Chiang Kai-shek faction and warlords during China's Anti-Japanese War (1931-1945) as a comparable case with PRC's relationship with the US and East Asian countries. The first similarity between CCP-KMT's Chiang and PRC-US relationships is their conflicting identities. Like the US and PRC, KMT and CCP viewed each other as ideological and strategic competitors. Second, the relationships between the US and regional countries are similar to those between Chiang faction and warlords. The Chiang faction was the ruling party of China, but it was far away from CCP, which was surrounded by warlords. Thus, the effectiveness of Chiang's constraints on CCP would diminish if warlords halfheartedly supported Chiang's policy. Likewise, while the US is the leading power of East Asia, it is far away from the region. Thus, support from regional countries is important if the US is to have a check on China's rise. Third, CCP defined two stages in terms of power distribution between the lower status CCP and the higher status Chiang faction, which is suitable for analyzing the Sino-US relations. During the defensive period, the lower status group (e.g. CCP/PRC) is weak while the higher status group (e.g. Chiang faction/US) surpasses it on all dimensions. During the stalemate period, while the lower status group's power grows, it does not surpass that of the higher status group but threatens the latter the leading status. During the Anti-Japanese War, CCP implemented the UFS to preserve its communist identity and pursue strategic goals while preventing Chiang's formation of an anti-CCP coalition. It attempted to maintain a relatively peaceful surrounding environment between itself and the KMT during the two stages of the Anti-Japanese War period. How the CCP implemented the UFS in this way can help explain the PRC's foreign policy concerning the US and regional countries.

A point that the thesis details in Chapter 3, but is also worth noting here, is that the CCP made a distinction between domestic and international UFS. Domestic UFS has revolutionary goals, while international UFS does not. Also, in this thesis, UFS is an

example of SIT, thus the strategy's revolutionary aspect is beyond the scope of the discussion.

Empirical Contribution.

First, this thesis makes an empirical contribution to the literature concerning China's assertiveness. Many analysts argued that regarding regional disputes, China has been increasingly assertive in consolidating its sovereignty claims (Hoang, 2016, p.188; Do, 2018, pp.213-214). Other scholars argue that China has been restrained when consolidating sovereignty (Wu and You, 2019, p.54; Zhang, 2019, p,119)

The findings of the thesis demonstrate the partial validity of scholars' argument about China's restraints in consolidating sovereignty claims. First, compared to the most assertive options that China had before taking actions, China did always show restraints. Second, in many cases, such as Chinese Coastguards' regulating of foreign fishermen in disputed waters, China's actions are of similar strength with or even less assertive than other states' actions. However, in some cases, such as its de facto control over the Scarborough Shoal, China is more assertive than other states. Third, China's restraints may not always avoid overt escalation of the incident. China's actions may not be able to compensate for other states' perceived significant loss of sovereignty interests, as demonstrated by the case study on the Philippines' loss of Scarborough shoal in the SCS Chapter. Moreover, while China shows restraints, incrementally increasing the intensity of its actions may heighten regional tension, which this thesis demonstrates through its case study on Taiwan.

Second, the existing literature is mainly concerned with the implication of China's rise on the China-US relationship and international order or China's relationship with specific regional states (Boon and Ardy, 2017, p. 117; Smith, 2021, p.57). However, there is a dearth of a more holistic analysis of the general pattern of China's relationship with regional states (Boon and Ardy, 2017, p. 117; Smith, 2021, p.57).

SIT categorizes actors into a limited number of groups to simplify and order the social world (Larson, 2015, p. 326). The shared identities and interests between China and the regional states accentuate the similarities between them. Analyzing China's attempts to create or increase the salience of shared interests and identities with regional states can contribute to a more holistic analysis of the general pattern of the relationship between them.

Main arguments

To answer the research question of whether China can rise peacefully in East Asia without changing communist and nationalist identities, this thesis divides the question into two in terms of a Sino-centric view. First, how does China preserve its communist identity under the pressures of political liberalization and ideological competition from the US? Second, how does China pursue its nationalist goals and preserve a relatively peaceful environment in East Asia?

Peace in the thesis first means that a new cold war or world war between the US and China will not occur. Second, it means relative peace, which means that tension in varying degrees exists in the region but a generally peaceful environment has been maintained. Relative peace is consistent with the reality of East Asia because even without China, regional tensions or frictions often occur. This is evidenced by Japan and South Korea's spat over historical issues in 2018 (Denyer, 2019), and the collision between the Indonesian warship and Vietnamese coast guard vessel in SCS in 2019 (Anya and Septiari, 2019). In a relatively peaceful environment, China's nationalist moves can to some degree be accommodated as long as frictions caused by such moves are not detrimental to China's relationship with regional countries.

The main arguments are as follows: First, competition between China and the US (or many regional countries) in several dimensions is inevitable. As CCP is unwilling to transform China's communist identity, China will continue confronting political

liberalization. Because of its nationalist identity, China is a revisionist power in the East Asian geostrategic context because it is determined to reverse its perceived disadvantages regarding territorial disputes and the US-led island chains. China's effort to defend sovereignty claims will also cause frictions with other claimant states. Moreover, as China's hard power is rising, China will threaten the US' leadership in the region.

Second, however, while the competition is inevitable, SIT's recategorization strategy and emphasis on an actor's rational choice open up the possibility that China can strike a balance between its goals of stabilizing the communist regime or pursuing nationalist interests and maintaining a relatively peaceful environment by strategically managing identities and interests. This means that, based on perceived security of its communist and nationalist identities, China may maintain a relatively peaceful regional environment by forming or increasing the salience of its shared identities or interests with other countries and making the communist and nationalist identities and related interests less salient to others.

Third, CCP has used this strategic management strategy for decades. To a certain degree, this strategy has contributed to China's attainment of the three goals simultaneously because currently CCP has stabilized its control over the Chinese nation and secured or even advanced important nationalist interests. Meanwhile, China has maintained a relatively benign regional environment because it has not faced a regional hard-balancing coalition. China's territorial disputes with regional countries, such as the SCS and Diaoyu island disputes, often aroused frictions but they were kept under control in many cases.

Fourth, however, this strategy has limitations. Because China always seeks shared identities/interests when it views communist identity and important nationalist interests as secure, the shared identity/interests strategy may fail. This is because CCP does not want to soften its domestic political control or concede important

nationalist interests, such as its emphasis on PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan, in exchange for forming the shared identity/interests.

Also, although China always demonstrates restraints when pursuing or defending important nationalist interests when compared with its most assertive options, it has not always been less assertive than other regional countries. Also, China's restraint may not help the country achieve its goal of keeping frictions under control. China's restraints may not be able to compensate for other regional states' perceived damage to their interests. Moreover, despite its restraints, China may incrementally increase the intensity of the actions, thereby leading to escalation of the tensions.

Methodology

This thesis utilizes documentary research and case studies as the research methods.

Documentary research is "the analysis of documents that contain information about the phenomenon we wish to study" (Bailey, 1994, cited in Mogalakwe, 2009, p. 44). This thesis wishes to study how China's strategic management of identities/interests could help it attain the three goals simultaneously. This includes how China defines its identities and interests, interprets events and other countries' strategies, seeks shared identities/interests, and acts to strike a balance between conflicting interests. The thesis also needs to assess how other states or organizations respond to China's actions. Since many documents are available in the public domain, documentary research is an efficient method because a large quantity of data can be collected to meet the needs of this thesis (Bowen, 2009, p. 31).

Moreover, the thesis draws on many primary documents, including official and semi-official Chinese and English language documents, elites' writing and speeches, and news coverages from countries and organizations. These primary documents are representative of the countries' definitions of identities and interests and

interpretation of events. When they are unavailable, the thesis refers to secondary resources that could have a certain degree of credibility, as they have been widely cited in scholars' works. For instance, when analyzing the CCP's strategic management during Mao's time (1944–1976), many official documents were not easy to obtain. Thus, the thesis selected works from Gong Li, Yang Kuisong, and Tao Wenzhao, which are often cited by scholars who analyzed CCP history.

The common criticism of documentary research is the bias of both authors and researchers when selecting data and interpreting events due to social context and identity (Ahmed, 2010, p. 9). To mitigate the problem of bias and obtain a more balanced view, this thesis chooses sources from other countries that describe or interpret the same event when possible. Also, the thesis will also provide counter-evidence or interpretation from international and regional academic works. For instance, when using Chinese sources stating how the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is equal to all to support its argument that China seeks a shared pluralist identity with regional countries, the thesis provides a counter-argument that China wishes to dominate other countries through the BRI. Moreover, the thesis will engage academic debates to remain critical. For instance, it critically assesses the evidence of the debate over whether or not the BRI is China's dominant plan.

This thesis also uses case studies, which provide in-depth analyses of an issue. The thesis studies how China seeks to form shared interests and identities with regional countries through the BRI. Moreover, it examines the SCS dispute and the Taiwan issue. Both of the cases are flashpoints in East Asia and hard cases for China's rise because regarding the two issues, China and relevant parties' conflicting identities and interests are salient, causing frictions to easily arise. This thesis aims to test the extent to which China's strategic management of identities and interests could help it simultaneously preserve a relatively peaceful environment and attain important nationalist interests regarding these disputes.

Outline of the chapters.

The rest of the thesis is divided into five parts.

Part 1, which includes Chapters 2 and 3, presents the analytical framework.

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework on which the thesis is built. The first part is a literature review of theories used by scholars to analyze China's rise. This review aims to show the reasons why this thesis chose SIT as its theoretical framework. First, regarding China's rise in the region, the review discovers that some optimistic defensive realists, liberal institutionalists, and constructivists underestimate the important influence of China's communist and nationalist identities on the country's definition of interests and actions. Also, contrary to some pessimistic offensive or neo-classical realists' expectation, China's rise does not necessarily lead to a hard-balancing coalition of established powers. Neither of these two aspects in the existing literature is satisfactory; thus, a new approach to understanding China's relationship with the region and the US is necessary. The second part offers a brief introduction of SIT and presents the reasons why it could address the flaws in the existing literature. The third part is a critical review of the literature that used SIT to analyze China's relationship with other actors. This part aims to show the originality of the theoretical framework of the thesis. The main point is that the current dominant SIT framework in IR works, despite criticism that it is somewhat dissimilar to social psychology's version of SIT. However, SIT, as it is currently used in IR, falsely regards social creativity as a viable strategy for preventing competition between China and the US. As I demonstrate, there are limits to the applicability of social creativity strategies. Yet, there is potential in another concept derived from SIT, which has been underused in IR, and that is what is being used as the recategorization strategy. I argue that this can be used to analyze how a communist and nationalistic China avoids the formation of a hard-balancing coalition in a competition scenario. In addition, this is an original application of SIT in IR because that framework has not

been used to analyze the flashpoints in the region, which I do in the latter part of the thesis. The fourth part of this chapter is about how SIT will be applied to the thesis to analyze how China can thwart a hard-balancing coalition, and maintain a relatively peaceful environment without abandoning its nationalist and communist identities and related crucial interests.

Chapter 3 focuses on the UFS. The first part shows originality because the use of UFS in this thesis is different from the dominant view of UFS. Specifically, unlike the dominant view of UFS that reflects competitive interests between China and liberal states, the thesis regards UFS as a practice of SIT, a theory that aims to find remedies for the competing parties. Also, this thesis focuses on China's relationship with East Asian states. Unlike the dominant view that focuses on China's relationship with sub-national actors, this thesis focuses on the inter-state relationship and cross-cutting identities/interests of the states. The thesis does look at the relationship between Beijing and KMT/ Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan. However, the focus is on their cross-cutting identities or interests. Moreover, unlike the dominant view that regards UFS as a revolutionary strategy, this thesis highlights the distinction between revolutionary domestic and unrevolutionary international UFS. Also, as an example of SIT, a theory that aims to ameliorate intergroup conflicts, this thesis does not discuss the revolutionary aspect of UFS. Finally, this thesis will not engage in the never-ending debate over whether China's UFS is genuine or propaganda. The second part is CCP's UFS in the anti-Japanese war period. This part looks at how CCP's UFS could be an example of SIT and applied to China's relationships with other countries/organizations. In the anti-Japanese war, the CCP adjusted its UFS according to changes in power distribution between itself and the KMT's Chiang faction. It strived to form and maintain shared identities/interests with Chiang during the defensive period when its power was much weaker than Chiang's on all dimensions. However, during the stalemate period, Chiang, who feared losing dominant status in China, began to prioritize conflicting identities and contained the CCP due to its rise in power. In response, the CCP fortified the centralized regime

and sought shared identities/interests with warlords, while downplaying conflicting interests to prevent the formation of an anti-CCP coalition. This thesis applies these CCP strategies to the context of China's rise in the region.

Part 2 is comprised of Chapter 4, which analyzes China's nationalist and communist identities, and the reasons that the competition between China and the US/ regional countries on some dimensions is inevitable. Unlike IR scholars using SIT that view social creativity as the viable means for China to achieve a peaceful rise, the chapter argues that because the two identities are important parts of China's self-identification, it can hardly abandon (social mobility) or neglect them through changing other dimensions for comparison (social creativity). After proving that social mobility and creativity are not viable methods, the thesis analyzes the reasons that China will meet the three conditions that cause social competition (unstable power relationship, dissatisfaction to the current status quo, and a cognitive alternative). Thus, China is determined to reverse the perceived disadvantageous position regarding territorial disputes and the East Asian geostrategic environment. It will also promote pluralism in the face of pressure from the US-led liberal internationalism. As important parts of China's self-identification, the two identities play a critical role in the country's definition of great power. From China's perspective, it cannot declare the completion of national rejuvenation without achieving important nationalist goals, such as recovering Taiwan. This definition of great power has made competition between China and some regional countries or the US on territorial disputes and geopolitical environment inevitable. Also, China will work hard to preserve its communist identity since it wishes to rise as a "socialist great power" (Xi, 2019).

After arguing the inevitability of the competition between China and the US/regional countries on geostrategic and ideological dimensions, Parts 3 and 4 draw on the CCP's UFS with the KMT's Chiang and warlords during the Anti-Japanese War. This is the practice that combines SIT's recategorization strategy and the emphasis on

the actor's rational choice to examine the interaction of the CCP, and later the PRC (beginning 1949), with the US or regional countries from 1944 to date.

Specifically, these parts analyze the extent to which the CCP, and later the PRC, could possibly maintain its communist identity and pursue or defend crucial nationalist interests without confronting a US-led hard-balancing coalition in East Asia by strategically managing identities and interests. In other words, I analyze to what extent the CCP, and later the PRC, could achieve the three goals by seeking shared identities or interests while downplaying conflicting ones.

By examining China's structural position in terms of a united front (UF) framework, the thesis divided the time periods from 1944 to date based on two criteria. The first is whether or not China had successfully formed shared identities or interests with others, and the second is the power distribution between China and the US. This is because successfully forming shared identities or interests is the start of a united front, while power distribution between the two sides set boundaries between the defensive and stalemate periods. Thus, the thesis views the CCP's, and later the PRC's, foreign policies during Mao's time (1944–1976) as an attempt to use the strategic management of identities and interests to unblock the US-led military and economic blockade without compromising core nationalist interests, such as the Taiwan issue, and destabilizing the CCP's absolute control over China. In this thesis, the period from 1978 to 2009 is referred to as the defensive period, when China's power lagged far behind that of the US.

In this thesis, the year 2009 is referred to as the start of the stalemate period because it was then that China and the US became aware of the changing distribution of power between them and gradually adjusted policies. In the same year, then US Defense Secretary Robert Gates (2009, p. 33) suggested that, while US power remains to have a greater advantage over China's, the country should adjust its defense policy to constrain the rise of the latter, whose development of defense could prevent the

US from supporting allies in the Asia-Pacific region. This remark was the prelude for the substantive policy adjustments of the US that aimed to maintain the country's leading position in the region. One example of a policy adjustment is the formal announcement of the rebalancing policy of the US towards Asia in 2011 (Carter, 2016, p. 68). In 2009, the CCP Central Committee (CCPCC) issued a political document entitled, "Decision of Improving and Consolidating Party Building Under the New Situation" (CCPCC, 2009). The CCP perceived that China is at a "new historical starting point" because its power and status have increased substantially, but industrialized countries still possess advantages over it (CCPCC, 2009). In this new situation, Chinese elites believed that China's rising power will inevitably threaten established powers that will resist China's rise (Han, 2014). Because the US could not easily constrain China, and China could not get rid of these constraints easily, a stalemate has been formed since 2009.

Moreover, according to the CCP's UFS during the Anti-Japanese War, the CCP's main target for seeking shared identities/interests changed prior to the defensive period and in the stalemate period. Before the defensive period, the CCP regarded the dominant Chiang faction as the main target for the successful formation of the shared identity/interests, with Chiang being the key to breaking the KMT's encirclement. In the stalemate period, the CCP's main target changed from Chiang to warlords because the former attached less importance to the anti-Japanese alliance. This thesis also applies the change in the main targets to the CCP's strategic management of identities and interests during Mao's time and in the stalemate period. The CCP's main target for constructing shared identities/interests was the US during Mao's time, and it was the regional countries during the stalemate period. During the defensive period, the CCP strived to seek shared interests/identities with both the US and regional countries.

The change in the target does not mean that China will no longer seek shared identities/interests with the US during the stalemate period. However, this change

came about because their shared interests, such as environmental protection, are unlikely to be important enough to reduce the salience of the strategic competition between China and the US.

Part 3 includes Chapter 5, which discusses the CCP's, and later the PRC's, historical application of its strategic management of identities or interests during Mao's time (1944–1976), and Chapter 6, which I refer to as the defensive period (1978–2009). Both chapters demonstrate the viability and limitations of China's strategic management in breaking or preventing the formation of CCP/China perceived US-led hard-balancing coalition respectively without substantially changing CCP/China's communist and nationalist identities. First, in Chapter 5, the shared identity/interests approach did break the US-led military and economic blockade on China even if China did not change its political system and concede important nationalist interests, such as disobeying treaties signed between the US and the Chiang government, during the last few years of Mao's chairmanship (1972–1976). Second, the strategic partnership reduced the salience of China's communist identity and made the US compromise on conflicting interests related to China's nationalist identity, such as Taiwan's status. Third, the CCP intentionally downplayed its communist identity by proposing ideological armistice and its nationalist identity by conceding less important interests relating to the Taiwan at that time, such as its de facto independence.

However, this strategy had limitations. First, the CCP was unwilling to concede when it perceived the communist regime and crucial nationalist interests, such as preventing Taiwan's independence, as insecure; thus, the shared identity/interests approach may fail. For instance, CCP's unwillingness to loosen its control over CCP regime or later the whole China led to the CCP's failure to form an anti-Japanese alliance with the US in 1944 and receive US recognition in 1949. Second, the shared identities/interests may not be important enough to ameliorate frictions deriving from conflicting identities. This is evidenced by China's failure of using shared interests of

easing the tension in the Taiwan Strait in 1955 to pave way for establishing Sino–US diplomatic relationship.

Chapter 6 argues that the strategic management of identities and interests to a certain degree succeeded in achieving the three goals during the defensive period. China and the US had an amicable relationship from 1979 to 1989 and from 2002 to 2008 due to the salience of a shared strategic partnership and anti-terrorist colleague respectively. Also, shared economic interests helped China gain the most favored nation status from the US since 1994. The shared strategic partnership and anti-terrorist colleague identity also helped reduce the salience of China's communist identity. Moreover, by discontinuing support for communist movement in regional countries, keeping a low-profile policy, and behaving as a status quo power, China attempted to downplay communist and nationalist identities to alleviate regional countries' fear and ideological competition. Further, CCP maintained authoritarian control over the nation. Frictions occurred when China consolidated and defended important nationalist interests but China attempted to use controlled military actions and diplomatic means to avoid unduly escalation. In some cases, such as the 1988 seizure of land features in the Spratly Islands and 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, China succeeded.

However, in others, China's restraints in using offensive means failed to prevent the escalation of frictions, as demonstrated by ASEAN's strong criticism after China's seizure of Mischief Reef in 1995. Moreover, because the CCP will not concede its authoritarian control over the Chinese nation, the ideological frictions had been salient until China constructed another shared identity/interest to which the US attached importance. For instance, ideological frictions between China and the US were salient after the end of a strategic partnership in 1991. China's effort to construct shared economic interests with the US smoothed the frictions in 1994.

Part 4 is about the extent to which China could preserve its communist identity and pursue important nationalist goals, while thwarting a hard-balancing coalition in East Asia to preserve a relatively peaceful environment in the stalemate period (Chapters 7-9).

Specifically, chapter 7 is about how CCP stabilized its control over Chinese nation while avoiding an anti-communist coalition in East Asia in the stalemate period. Chapters 8 to 9 analyze how China sought shared identity and interests with regional countries while pursuing or defending nationalist interests in a restrained way to prevent a formation of a regional hard-balancing coalition against China.

Chapter 8 argues that, based on an already close economic partnership, China is increasing salience of economic interests and constructing shared pluralist identity through BRI despite conflicting interests between China and regional states. The shared economic interest or pluralist identity could cancel out negative effects of the conflicting interests and thus could possibly preventing regional countries from joining a hard-balancing coalition.

Chapter 9 looks at how China pursued nationalist interests with restraint. China has made a lot of effort to seek shared interests and identities with regional countries to preserve the peaceful environment. However, if uncontrolled, its nationalist actions will probably make regional countries prioritize conflicting identities and interests over shared ones and join a rivalry bloc to constrain China. To systematically analyze China's restraint in pursuing offensive actions, this chapter provides three criteria. First, China's actual actions are compared with those that it could have taken before the incident. Second, China's actual actions are compared with the similar actions of regional states. Third, the chapter classifies the responses of regional countries into five categories to analyze the effectiveness of China's strategy and whether its restraints could prevent the breakdown of its relationship with regional countries. The first category is the declarative response, which means the verbal assertion of

sovereignty rights, such as protests (Chubb, 2021, p. 88). The second is the demonstrative response, which means regional states' actions that demonstrate their claimed sovereignty without directly confronting China physically (Chubb, 2021, p. 89). The third is low intensity confrontation, wherein regional states use limited means to directly confront China, but cautiously avoid overt escalation while preparing for de-escalation. The fourth is medium intensity confrontation, wherein regional states use stronger means than the low intensity confrontation to directly confront China, but also cautiously avoid overt-escalation while preparing for de-escalation. The fifth is high intensity confrontation, wherein regional states use forceful means to confront China with little to no consideration for de-escalation. If regional states choose high intensity confrontation, China and its relationships will break down.

This chapter argues that regarding its gray zone operations, such as patrolling the first island chain and Chinese Coast Guards' actions towards fishing and oil exploration, China demonstrates restraints when its actions are compared with its most assertive options. Also, in these cases, China's actions are generally of similar strength or even less assertive than other regional states' similar actions. In general, regional states' responses to China's actions range from a declarative response to a medium intensity response. Thus, China's strategy of pursuing or defending nationalist interests with restraint does mitigate threatening potential of its nationalist actions. The one exception is the Scarborough Shoal incident of 2012, which will be discussed in Chapter 10. Moreover, China's upper limits of not occupying other claimants occupied land features further reduce threatening potential of its gray zone actions. Finally, China's response to Japan's nationalization of disputed Diaoyu islands simultaneously kept frictions under control and consolidated China's claims over the islands

Part 5 is the case studies, including chapters 10 and 11. Chapter 10 is the SCS disputes. It specifically analyzes to what extent China could find a balance between pursuing critical nationalist interests and avoiding overtly escalating frictions and the

breakdown of its relationship with regional countries through a strategic management of interests. Chapter 10 presents the case study of the SCS dispute. Similarly, in Chapter 10, China's restraints in pursuing or defending its nationalist interests is examined by comparing its actual actions and available options before the incidents, its actual actions and those of other regional states, and the five categories of response. This chapter looks at the two cases that have a profound impact on China's sovereignty claims and its relationships with regional countries or the ASEAN: the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident, and the international arbitral tribunal concerning disputes between China and the Philippines from 2013 to 2016. This chapter argues that while China's strategic management of interests was effective in striking the balance, it also had its limitations. First, China's shared interests in the de-escalation with the Philippines did manage the tension in the SCS in the first phase (April 11–14) and the first half of the third phase of the Scarborough Shoal incident of 2012. The shared interests in de-escalation between China and ASEAN also managed the tensions aroused by the arbitral tribunal from 2013 to 2016. China's acknowledgement of ASEAN's shared interests in managing the disputes helped the former alleviate pressure from the latter. Second, China's strategy of defending interests in a restrained manner maintained the space for reconciliation. However, China's unwillingness to concede to the Philippines' demand for international arbitration in the Scarborough Shoal incident led to its failure to construct shared interests in de-escalating tension from April to May. Moreover, although China did not occupy the shoal to show restraint, its restraint could not make up for the Philippines' loss, which directly led to the breakdown of the relationship between the two countries from July 2012 to 2016.

Chapter 11 presents the case study of the Taiwan issue. This Chapter investigates how mainland China strikes a balance between achieving its nationalist will of reunion with Taiwan and the One China principle and preserving a relatively stable environment for development by strategically managing identities and interests. The Chapter discovers that the mainland formed a shared One China identity with the

KMT through the 1992 consensus from 2008 to 2016 to preserve a stable cross-strait environment for accumulating power. Meanwhile, the mainland made its nationalist identity less salient to the Taiwanese by tolerating the KMT's interpretation of one China as the Republic of China (ROC) and giving the KMT space to participate in international organizations. By doing so, the mainland preserved the core interests of the One China principle and bought time to accumulate power from 2008 to 2016. However, because it was reluctant to recognize the ROC's sovereignty status, the KMT was stigmatized as a traitor of the ROC and was unable to start political talks with Beijing, thereby making non-coercive unification impossible. Due to this reluctance, Beijing's effort to seek a shared one China identity with the DPP failed. Thus, it increasingly relied on conducting military actions in a restrained way to address the DPP's disobedience to the one China principle and maintain a relatively stable Taiwan Strait. Although Beijing demonstrated restraint, the cross-strait tension was escalating, especially in 2020. The shrinking of shared interests between the mainland and the US also led to the latter being less tolerant of Beijing's interpretation of one China that stresses PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan. This resulted in Beijing's more escalatory military actions in 2020. Thus, Beijing's strategic management of identities/interests with the KMT, DPP, and the US failed to a large degree. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for Beijing to strike a balance between maintaining a relatively peaceful Taiwan Strait and pursuing or defending its crucial interests in Taiwan, such as the one China principle. In other words, the heightened tension or even conflict over the Taiwan Strait is likely to happen.

Before concluding the outline of the chapters, it is worth noting that the thesis uses communist identity and communist regime interchangeably because according to CCP, the essence of China's communist identity is the "CCP's leadership" (Xi, 2020). That is, CCP views its political domination in China as the core interests related to China's communist identity. Moreover, this thesis generally refers to China as the PRC. However, because it uses Chinese history to explain the PRC's nationalist identity formation, China is referred to as the Chinese nation in some parts of Chapter

4. Additionally, the distinction between PRC and ROC in Chapter 11 is important for analyzing the Taiwan issue. Thus, China is referred to as the Chinese nation in this chapter.

Part 2, Analytical Framework

Chapter 2: Social Identity Theory

This chapter focuses on the main theoretical framework the thesis is built on. The first part of the chapter is a literature review of theoretical frameworks used by scholars to analyze China's rise. This review aims to show the reasons the thesis chooses SIT as the theoretical framework. First, regarding China's rise in the region, the literature review shows that some optimistic defensive realists, liberal institutionalists, and constructivists underestimate the important influence of China's communist and nationalist identities on its definition of interests and actions. Also, contrary to some pessimistic offensive, classical and neo-classical realists' expectation, China's rise does not necessarily lead to a hard-balancing coalition of established powers. Neither of these two aspects of the existing literature is satisfactory, and thus, we need a new approach to understand China's relationship with the region and the US. The second part offers a brief introduction of SIT and presents the reasons it could address the flaws in the existing literature. The third part is a critical review of the literature that uses SIT to analyze China's relationship with other actors. This part aims to show the originality of the thesis' theoretical framework. The main point is that the current dominant SIT framework in IR works despite criticism that it is somewhat dissimilar to social psychology's version of SIT. However, SIT, as it is currently used in IR, falsely regards "social creativity" as a viable strategy to avoid competition between China and the US. As I demonstrate, there are limits to the applicability of "social creativity" strategies. Yet there is promise in another concept derived from SIT, which has been underused in IR and that is what is used as "recategorization strategy." I argue that this can be used to analyze how a communist and nationalistic China prevents the formation of a hard-balancing coalition in a competition scenario. In addition, this is an original application of SIT in IR because that framework has not been used to analyze the flash points in the region,

which I do in the later part of the thesis. The fourth part of this chapter is about how SIT will be applied to the thesis to analyze how China maintains a relatively peaceful environment without abandoning its nationalist and communist identities and related crucial interests.

Theoretical debate regarding China's rise

To begin, most realists are pessimists when viewing the debate concerning China's peaceful rise. Some classical and neo-classical realists who stress the influence of a state's attributes on its behaviors argue that China's nationalist and communist identities cause clashes of interests between China and the US and make the former a dissatisfied power to the US-led order (Friedberg, 2011; Kirshner, 2012, pp. 57-58; Allison, 2017). Even some structural realists who regard states as unitary actors note the two identities cause China's revisionist ambition and Sino-US competition (Tunsjø, 2018, p. 3; Holslag, 2015, p. 4). Pessimistic realists further argue that, as the power distribution between the two countries is changing, a hubristic and revisionist China will challenge the US-led order to seek or maximize security (Waltz, 2000, pp. 36-37; Mearshimer, 2010, 2014), pursue status, or shape the international environment (Shambaugh, 2013; Kirshner, 2017, p. 60). To pessimistic realists, China's rise will not be peaceful because of the growing likelihood of conflict between the rising revisionist China and the US-led status quo power coalition (Goldstein, 2007; Mearshimer, 2014). Goldstein (2007, p. 641) argued that the power transition theory expects "a growing probability of conflicts between a more demanding China and those, most importantly... the US, who will resist changes Beijing demands." Likewise, Friedberg (2011) stated that the "resulting clash of interests" between the rising power and established powers "has seldom been solved peacefully."

Some optimistic realists and scholars of other theoretical perspectives counter the arguments of pessimist realists and view peace as something that can be maintained. Defensive realist Charles Glaser (2015) suggested a Sino-US grand bargain to settle

the conflicts of interests, including the Taiwan issue, disputes in the SCS and East China Sea (ECS), and the US military presence in East Asia. He (Glaser, 2015) assumes that China is generally a security seeker. Thus, it is safe for the US to abandon its commitment to Taiwan to obtain China's concession on its sovereignty and maritime claims in the SCS and ECS and acknowledgement of US presence in the region (Glaser, 2015). Liberal institutionalists argue that while China is somewhat dissatisfied with the US-led order, it is a rational actor and, thus, will choose integration, which is essential in its pursuit of power (Goldstein, 2007, p. 651). For instance, Ikenberry (2008, 2014) argued that the liberal order provides China with abundant interests and advantages, such as "club benefits" and rules of equal access, and is hard to overturn. Constructivists look at whether China can be socialized into the liberal order (Johnston, 2008). They also analyze how narratives, such as a rule-based order, have strengthened the "master narrative" that China is a revisionist power and will "crowd out" opposing narratives (Breuer and Johnston, 2019, p. 447).

However, many optimistic arguments are flawed for underestimating the significant influence of communist and nationalist identities on China's goals and actions. For instance, Glaser (2015, p. 79) assumes that China is generally a security seeker because of the limited revisionist goal that only focused on recovering Taiwan. However, while Chinese officials have reiterated that China will not seek hegemony, they believed that its security is guaranteed by gaining a certain degree of control over the sea lanes of communication within the first island chain. This view is a product of the nationalist experience that China was invaded by imperial powers coming from the sea in the past (Liu, 2004, p. 438). This security goal may probably make Glaser view China as a "greedy state" because it shows that the country aims at "expanding its control and influence beyond Taiwan" (Glaser, 2015, p. 79). If China is viewed as a greedy state, Glaser would recommend a containment or balancing strategy as many pessimistic realists do (Glaser, 2015, p. 85).

Also, while China is satisfied with some norms or areas of liberal international order as Ikenberry (2008, 2014) argued, such as free trade, it is dissatisfied with others, such as liberal values like democracy and human rights. According to Ikenberry (2014, p. 8), China's dissatisfaction can be suppressed, and it will have to accept liberal norms due to the enormous pressure of liberal democratic countries and other rising and satisfied powers. However, it values its communist identity more than is implied by Ikenberry. If Chinese leaders feel the communist regime is threatened, they will not follow the liberal norms of human and civil rights and liberal democracy. For instance, despite decades-long Western criticism for suppressing human and civil rights, China built and has continued fortifying "a great firewall" to preserve the stability of the communist regime by preventing the perceived infiltration of Western ideas into Chinese society through the Internet since 2002.

The argument that China can be socialized also underestimates the importance that it attaches to its nationalist and communist identities. As Epstein (2012, pp. 140-141) criticized, IR scholars generally view socialization as a unidirectional process that "infantilizes the socializee" and simply ignores the identities' importance for the socializee, which leads to the resistance of the socializee and failure of socialization. In the case of China, it is not uncommon that Chinese leaders emphasize the importance of the two identities by stating that China will not give up its nationalist goals and change the one-party dominated political system. It is also not uncommon that the leaders criticize Western countries' ideological bias and others' violation of China's sovereignty regarding disputed land features, which demonstrate their resistance to socialization. Rather than socializing into the US-led order in the process of reform and opening up, China is likely to remain an authoritarian state that achieves nationalist goals incrementally. Also, while arguing that the master narrative that China is a revisionist state is exaggerated (Breuer and Johnston, 2019, p. 445), Breuer and Johnston (2019, p. 445) noted that there are multiple orders; China is satisfied with some orders but dissatisfied with others (Breuer and Johnston, 2019,

p. 446; Johnston, 2019, p. 12), such as “distributions of territory” (Johnston, 2019, p. 30). This demonstrates that China’s revisionism exists to some degree.

This chapter, thus, agrees with the pessimists that China’s nationalist and communist identities are major drivers of competition between itself and the US. Many pessimist realists expect that China’s rise will not be peaceful because revisionist China will conflict with a US-led coalition that aims to balance against or even contain its revisionist goals (Shambaugh, 2013; Mearshimer, 2014; Glaser, 2015, p. 83; Mandelbaum, 2019, pp. 126-127). However, in contrast to their expectation, China has managed to stabilize and even strengthened its communist regime, and steadily obtained its crucial nationalist goals. It currently has relatively benign relationships with its neighbors and has not faced a rivalry bloc in East Asia. Thus, the thesis views that China has maintained a relatively peaceful environment to a certain degree, while not sacrificing crucial interests that are defined by the two identities. This raises the central question in this thesis: How has this been done?

Realists may view that this is because East Asian countries are using the strategy of “buck-passing” wherein they stay on the sidelines and let the US shoulder the main responsibility of balancing against China. Thus, realists may suggest that the US should become an offshore balancer and let the regional countries shoulder the main responsibility to contain China (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p. 74). However, this argument is not consistent with the reality. The US has engaged with regional countries less when former President Trump came to power in 2016, even withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2017, which aims to balance against China’s economic influence in the region. But as we have seen, East Asian states have not followed that lead and are not hard balancing China by forming a rival bloc.

From the literature review, the chapter claims that the arguments of optimistic and pessimistic scholars are flawed. Optimistic scholars underestimate the importance of

nationalist and communist identities to China and their influence on China's goals and actions. Thus, Glaser (2015) made a false argument that China only focuses on control over Taiwan. Ikenberry (2008, 2014) falsely argues that China will have to accept norms it dislikes. The socialization argument of constructivists also failed to account for the significant costs that the socializee will suffer in the socialization process. The pessimistic realists are also flawed because contrary to their expectation, the communist identity and nationalist claims in the region have not led to war or intense rivalry between China and the East Asian states. Neither of these two aspects of the existing literature are satisfactory, making a new approach to understand China's relationship with the region and the US necessary.

The next section proposes SIT as an approach that enables us to better understand how that relationship has evolved and how it may develop in the future.

Social identity theory

Social identity refers to "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, cited in Turner, 1982, p. 18). SIT postulates that actors who strongly identify with social identity differentiate in and out groups and act (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, pp. 14-15) and define interests according to the identity (Brewer, 2011, p. 125). Status here refers to a group's relative position within the hierarchy in a social system. As status is an effective means to gain social prestige (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p. 98; Fiske et al, 2016, p. 11), obtaining a higher group status can satisfy the members' need for "positive self-esteem," such as "feeling good about themselves" (Crisp and Turner, 2010, p. 220).

One group's status is obtained through "evaluative comparisons" between its attributes or achievements and those of other relevant outgroups on important dimensions (Hinkle and Brown, 1990, p. 84; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014, p. 37). The more dimensions or attributes the group compares with relevant outgroups

positively, the higher the status and more favorable the image it can obtain for itself (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p. 101; Hogg, 2016, p. 7). Unfavorable comparisons with the outgroup lead to the group's low status and negative self-image (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p. 101; Hogg, 2016, p. 7). Further, the higher status group advocates that its significant attributes or values be supported across group, by establishing them as standards for social categorization and comparison (Deng, 2008, pp. 22-24). This leads to the delimitation of intergroup boundaries and the preservation of the higher status group's positive self-image and the social stigma of lower status group members (Deng, 2008, pp. 22-24). Because the lower status group is often disadvantaged on the dimension that it compares unfavorably with the higher status group, the thesis regards that lower and higher status groups are interchangeable with disadvantaged and advantaged groups.

Besides social comparison, SIT postulates that disadvantaged groups have three identity management strategies for getting rid of a negative self-image (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, pp. 103-104; Hogg, 2016, p. 7). They are social mobility, social creativity, and social competition.

Social mobility refers to the status seeker's attempt to acquire membership in the higher status group by abandoning negatively attributed identities or making achievements to improve unfavorable comparisons when intergroup boundaries are permeable (Brown, 2000, p. 326; Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p. 103; Wright et al, 2001, p. 224; Hogg, 2016, p. 7). Social creativity refers to the status seeker's attempt to change the evaluation of its attributes from negative to positive, or find new dimensions that compare favorably with other groups and do not threaten the status or interests of the higher status outgroup (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p. 103; Larson, 2015, p. 327).

Social competition refers to the status seeker's attempt to change its unequal status entirely or its relationship with the higher status group on important dimensions

valued by both sides (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, p. 58). It occurs when the status seeker views the current relationship as unfair and unstable and has a cognitive alternative to the current unequal relationship (Brown, 2000, pp. 329-330; Hogg, 2016, p. 7). The cognitive alternative is defined as “an alternative social world—a sense of somewhere different that we want to go” and a plan “of how we might get there” (Reicher and Haslam, 2012, p. 55; Lye et al, 2017, p. 751).

According to SIT, tension can be reduced through a recategorization strategy even if they are engaged in social competition (Hogg, 2016, p. 8). The recategorization strategy refers to attempts that increase “the number of categories which simultaneously define a target...to reduce ingroup-outgroup differentiation” (Prati, et al, 2021, p. 50). Recategorization includes creating an overarching identity inclusive of competing groups (Crisp and Turner, 2010, p. 228; Gaertner and Dovidio, 2012, p. 33; Hogg, 2016, p. 8), a dual identity wherein the competing groups’ respective identities are preserved but an inclusive overarching identity is created and recognized (Krochik and Jost, 2011, pp. 159-160; Dovidio et al, 2016, p. 17), or cross-cutting identities that the groups have distinct identities and “share identity on other dimensions” (Brewer, 2011, p. 137; Crisp and Hewstone, 2007, pp. 181-182; Hogg, 2016, p. 8). The cross-cutting identity ameliorates conflict and contributes to peace because the effects of ingroup membership/shared identity on the other dimensions and outgroup membership/conflicting identities “cancel each other out” (Brown, 2000, p. 345). The thesis argues that by the same token, shared interests may have a similar cancel out influence on frictions deriving from conflicting interests.

In SIT, identity plays an important role in the group’s choice of identity management strategy or the effects of the strategies. As many scholars (Tajfel, 1978, p. 54; Brewer, 2011, p. 137; Krochik and Jost, 2011, pp. 159-160; Hogg, 2016, p. 8) have argued, all strategies but social competition are flawed if the groups strongly identify with their distinctive identities. The status seeker that pursues social mobility may find out that the stigmatized identity is an important part of the self, thus making its entry into the

higher status group extremely difficult because it is unwilling or unable to abandon the identity (Tajfel, 1978, p. 64). Status seekers pursuing social creativity may learn that it cannot sidestep the negative effect of a stigmatized identity by comparing favorably on new dimensions. Likewise, the shared identity will not effectively ameliorate conflicts if the competing groups prioritize mutually exclusive identities rather than the shared identity (Brewer, 2011, p. 137; Hogg, 2016, p. 8).

However, while acknowledging the importance of identities, SIT puts equal emphasis on the group's rational choice and its legitimacy or identity in dealing with intergroup relationships. This means that although the groups strongly identify with and are unwilling to abandon the identities, they are rational actors that, to some degree, are able to rationally pursue identity-related interests and control preferences derived from the stigmatized or disadvantaged identities. For instance, lower status groups do not often fiercely react to perceived unfair treatment from higher status groups when they feel such move is infeasible and costly (Van Zomeren et al, 2012, p. 188; Saguy and Dovidio, 2013, p. 1032; Shi et al, 2015, p. 45). In addition, status seekers will not directly conflict with the higher status group even if social mobility fails (Hogg, 2016, p.7). Instead, they will pursue social creativity to reduce the negative self-image derived from the identities, because reversing the current status relationship is costly (Hogg, 2016, p. 7).

Moreover, the rational choice dominates the groups' choice of identity recategorization strategies. For instance, to realize its material interests, the lower status group may prefer to form a dual identity than a superordinate one with the higher status group (Saguy et al, 2008, p. 433; Dovidio et al, 2016, p. 17). The superordinate identity part of the dual identity is inclusive to both lower and higher status groups; thus, the ingroup favoritism of higher status group members can extend to former lower status outgroup members (Dovidio et al, 2009, p. 9). This ingroup favoritism can help the lower status group make the higher status group

sensitive to issues of intergroup inequality, even though the former may value a distinctive group identity more than a superordinate one (Dovidio et al, 2009, p. 9).

Rational choice also plays an important role in the higher status group's interaction with the lower status group. The higher status group is not willing to concede material interests to the lower status group if it feels that its status is threatened by the latter (Saguy and Dovidio, 2013, p. 1031; Fiske et al, 2016, p. 46) on the dimensions that it values most. A study finds that the advantaged group shows more willingness to cooperate and share non-vital interests with the lower status group if the intergroup power relationship is insecure (Ng, 1982, p. 203). For instance, the lower status group has an external alternative to balance against the higher status group's power (Ng, 1982, p. 203). The higher status group may probably also feel constrained if the lower status group is more powerful on another important dimension. For instance, while China has hard power advantages over ASEAN, many Chinese scholars argue that it has been constrained by ASEAN's agenda setting power (Zhang, 2016, p. 4; Zhao, 2013, p. 86).

To recap, SIT postulates that a group strives to maintain a positive self-image through favorable comparisons of traits and achievements with outgroups on important dimensions (Hinkle and Brown, 1990, p. 84; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014, p. 37). To preserve a positive self-image, the higher status group is able to define its values as standards for comparison (Deng, 2008, pp. 22-24). Thus, the lower status group's identity is stigmatized if its values conflict with those of the higher status group (Deng, 2008, pp. 22-24). To gain positive self-image, the lower status group that compares unfavorably with the higher status group on several dimensions will choose social mobility, social creativity, and social competition (Larson, 2015). All strategies but social competition are flawed if the lower status group strongly identifies with its disadvantaged identities. Moreover, SIT views the actor's rational choice as being equally important as identity in explaining intergroup behaviors. Identity recategorization is used to reduce tension and foster peace between two conflicting

groups in a competition, such as cross-cutting identities (Hogg, 2016, p. 8). The shared identity/ingroup membership of a cross-cutting identity ameliorates intergroup conflict and contributes to peace (Hogg, 2016, p. 8) because the effects of an ingroup membership/shared identity on other dimensions and the outgroup membership/conflicting identities “cancel each other out” (Brown, 2000, p. 345).

SIT provides crucial insights for us to address the gap in the current literature. As noted, optimistic scholars underestimate the importance of China’s nationalist and communist identities. They make a flawed argument that China is either exclusively focused on controlling Taiwan or will adapt to liberal norms due to pressure from liberal countries or after years of socialization into the liberal order. The flaws of the social mobility and social creativity strategies give us reasons why social competition between China and the US is inevitable. It is hard for China to abandon its two identities (social mobility) or sidestep its negative self-image caused by these identities (social creativity) because it strongly identifies with them (see forthcoming Chapter 4).

Further, as noted, pessimistic realists are flawed because China has stabilized its communist identity and steadily pursued or defended crucial nationalist interests to date, but does not face a rivalry regional bloc to contain its rise. SIT’s recategorization strategy and emphasis on the actor’s rational choice can potentially help in addressing the gap in the literature. Specifically, it provides insight by explaining how war can be avoided in the context of clashing values and interests. The recategorization strategy suggests that shared identities/interests will offset distrusts and negative effects derived from competing identities, such as China and many regional states’ nationalist identities that view disputed territories as mutually exclusive. SIT’s emphasis on the actor’s rational choice tells us that China can control actions derived from the identities that conflict with those of others. For instance, it could pursue its crucial nationalist interests in a restrained manner to avoid overt provocation and escalation. Thus, drawing from SIT, this thesis argues that by

forming an increasing salience of the shared identity or interests and downplaying actions derived from the identities conflicting with others, China could maintain a relatively peaceful environment without radically changing its political system or losing its crucial nationalist interests.

Critical Review of application of SIT in IR and China's rise

SIT is useful in analyzing domestic politics, especially between minority and majority groups or higher and lower status social groups. However, while the thesis analyzes Chinese domestic politics, it will not examine this aspect by investigating intergroup conflicts within China. As a theory that mainly focuses on analyzing intergroup conflict and cooperation (Hogg, 2016, p. 7), SIT is also applicable in analyzing IR, because a state is a "group self" (Kohut, 1985, cited in Wendt, 1999, p. 225).

In IR, because of many similarities between constructivism and SIT regarding identity, some constructivists have used SIT to analyze identity formation, that is, how in-groups and outgroups are formed. For instance, Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, and Mcdermott (2009), and Brady and Kaplan (2009) provided a measurement for identity analysis and borrowed concepts from SIT, such as social comparison and social categorization (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, and Mcdermott, 2009, pp. 24-25, Brady and Kaplan 2009, pp. 34-35). This approach was used by Acharya and Layug (2012, p. 6) in their analysis of ASEAN. Rumelili (2016, p. 24) views that SIT has a profound influence in IR literature, making contributions about how the self and the other have been formed.

Further, many scholars use SIT to analyze inter-state relations, especially that between the rising dissatisfied power and dominant status quo power. This may be because SIT provides an applicable theoretical framework for the analysis. Through social categorization and comparison, it is clear which categories the two powers belong to, and the dimensions that the rising lower status state dissatisfies and the

dominant higher status state enjoys positive self-image. For instance, Deng (2008, pp. 22-24) used social categorization and comparison to analyze the US's use of liberal value to set up intergroup boundaries between higher liberal and lower status illiberal states, and reasons that communist China has been negatively evaluated in the US-led liberal order. Also, SIT's identity management strategies, social mobility, social creativity, and social competition, provide a useful framework for analyzing how conflicts between rising and established powers can be managed. This has been demonstrated in the works of many scholars (Gries, 2005; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014; Wolf, 2014; Clunan, 2014; Evans, 2015; Larson, 2015; Lee, 2016). Among these works, the theoretical framework of Larson and Shevchenko (2014) that adjusts SIT into IR has been widely used (Ward, 2015). The main principle of their framework is that the failure of rising powers to attain peaceful social mobility and creativity will increase the likelihood of social competition between rising and established powers.

These scholars' applications of SIT in IR are somewhat similar to its application in this thesis. The identities of states define interests and goals, the self and the other, and the understanding of the external environment (Abdelal, et al, 2009, pp. 24-25; Brady and Kaplan 2009, pp. 34-35). This tells us how China's nationalist and communist identities define its goals and interests, as well as the self and the other. Social categorization and comparison give us reasons why China feels disadvantaged on ideological and geostrategic dimensions. Also, the thesis uses the main principle of Larson and Shevchenko (2014) to explain the reasons behind the inevitability of the competition between China and the established powers on some dimensions.

However, Ward (2015, 2017, p. 827) argues that Larson and Shevchenko's main principle, that the state's failure of peaceful social mobility and social creativity will cause social competition, lacks a "firm foundation" when applied to IR. First, Ward (2017, p. 825) argues that Larson and Shevchenko (2014) neglect the distinction

between social competition and social mobility. Social competition is a collective response strategy where the status seeker aims to mobilize the whole disadvantaged group to raise status, while social mobility is an individual response strategy where the status seeker disidentifies with the disadvantaged group (e.g., a citizen in a poor country) and changes the disadvantaged identity (e.g., the citizen obtains the nationality of a developed country) (Hogg, 2016, pp7-8). Also, it is wrong to argue that the status seeker's failure to pursue a peaceful social mobility strategy will result in conflictual social competition (Ward, 2015, p. 13, 2017, p. 830). Ward argues that in social psychology's version of SIT, social mobility can be conflictual and social competition can be peaceful (Ward, 2017, p. 830). For instance, geopolitical competition is conflictual but can be regarded as a social mobility strategy if seizing a territory from another country is a requirement for the dominant group's membership (Ward, 2017, p. 826). Ward (2017, p. 826) also claims that becoming more democratic is peaceful social competition if democratic values are status markers, because social competition aims at improving the status seekers' "position along consensually valued dimensions of comparison."

Contrary to Larson and Shevchenko's (2014) view that the state will first choose social mobility and creativity before social competition, Barnhart (2016, p. 396) argues that the status seeker will prefer social competition over social mobility and social creativity. First, this is because "a single instance of disrespect" will make states choose competitive actions (Barnhart, 2016, p. 396). Second, social competition is less risky than social creativity because it relies upon an "established base of status" and the status seeker may fail to establish a new dimension to claim superiority (Barnhart, 2016, p. 396).

This thesis holds a similar view with Larson and Shevchenko (2014) that the failure to attain peaceful social mobility and creativity will increase the likelihood that the disadvantaged state chooses social competition. Thus, the criticisms of Ward (2017)

and Barnhart (2016, p. 396) will also cast doubt on the validity of the theoretical framework of the thesis. Thus, this section critically examines their views in detail.

Ward's (2017) argument that social mobility is an individual response strategy and social competition is a collective response strategy in social psychology's version of SIT is valid. However, like Larson and Shevchenko (2014) and many other scholars (Wolf, 2014; Barnhart, 2016, p. 396; Lee, 2016), this thesis argues that blurring the distinction makes SIT more applicable in IR. First, there is a different dynamic to individual and state behaviors. However, to the extent the state (or the individuals acting on its behalf and influencing its behavior) care about identity—and IR constructivism has proven that they do—then it seems appropriate to apply the concepts in IR. Moreover, treating the state as the social agent makes social mobility similar to the constructivists' concept of socialization. This is because the state, rather than its citizens, needs to abandon its identity/social category (e.g., illiberal state) to obtain membership in the advantaged group (e.g., liberal states group) if it wishes to succeed in socialization or social mobility. As constructivists often use socialization to support China's peaceful rise, the reasons that cause social mobility to fail help the thesis explain why the socialization argument is flawed. Further, if social competition is not a collective response strategy, it is more flexible when this concept is applied to the rising and established powers' relationship. This is because the rising power does not need to always cooperate with other states that share the same disadvantaged identity to compete with the advantaged power or group in the flexible model.

Ward's (2017, p. 826) distinction between "conflicting social mobility" and "peaceful social competition" is flawed. In social psychology's version of SIT, the distinction between social mobility and competition is based on changes in the advantaged group's status. In this version, the advantaged group's status will not lose if the status seeker pursues social mobility because the goal of the latter is to gain acceptance in the former (Larson, 2015, pp. 328-329; Ward, 2017, p. 826). For instance, if China

abandons its illiberal state identity and becomes a liberal state, its status will rise in the US-led order because it meets the requirement of entering the dominant liberal states group. Accepting China into the group will not make liberal states lose their leading position because liberal ideology still dominates the order. However, social competition means changes in position between the lower and higher status groups (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p. 104), that is, the lower status group becomes the higher status group after the successful social competition (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p. 104). This means that illiberal states become a dominant group, while liberal states become a lower status group if China wins the ideological competition. Thus, Ward's (2017, p. 826) view that the status seeker's strategy for becoming more democratic is a peaceful social competition is wrong because democratic states will not lose their dominant position after the status seeker's democratization.

Moreover, the occupation of territory is not a social mobility strategy as Ward (2017, p. 826) suggested because one country's occupation of a territory will make the other country lose its status or interests. For instance, in 1931, Japan's occupation of the Chinese province Manchuria increased its status as an imperial power. However, it threatened the status of Britain, the once dominant colonial power that had "exercised an informal empire in China" (The Cabinet Papers, no date). Moreover, because social competition means reversing the status on important dimensions (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p. 104) and ranges from "protests to revolution and war" (Hogg, 2016, p. 8), it will hardly be peaceful as Ward (2017, p.826) argued.

Besides disagreeing with Ward's (2017) views, this chapter counters Barnhart's (2016, p. 396) claim that states will prefer social competition over social mobility because a single case of dissatisfaction will make the status seeker choose competitive strategies. In SIT, a dissatisfaction or feeling of unfairness towards the higher status group is not enough for the status seeker to pursue competitive strategy because the instability of hierarchy where the status seeker is capable to challenge the higher status group is also an important factor that leads to social competition

(Brown, 2000, p. 330; Hogg, 2016, p.7). The second argument of Barnhart (2016, p. 396) somewhat proves this point by indicating that due to the feeling of unfairness, the status seeker with the sufficient capability will choose social competition. Further, the thesis counters Barnhart's (2016, p. 396) argument that social creativity is riskier than social competition. While the status seeker that pursues social creativity wishes to establish a new dimension for comparison, this dimension may not be valued by the higher status group (e.g., China's leading position in table tennis matches). However, social competition would mean reversing the group's disadvantaged status on salient dimensions valued by higher and lower status groups (Tajefel and Turner, 2001, p. 104) (e.g., technological competition). Under such circumstance, winning social competition is riskier than achieving social creativity; thus, it is unlikely that a state will choose social competition before social mobility and social creativity.

To recap, the criticisms of Ward (2017) and Barnhart (2016) will not prevent the thesis from using the principle that a failed peaceful social mobility and social creativity will make disadvantaged states choose social competition, which is also highlighted by the current dominant SIT framework (Larson, 2015), to address the optimistic scholars' flaws. This is because treating the state as an agent makes the social mobility strategy similar to the socialization concept of constructivists. The causes of the failure of social mobility help the thesis explain the reasons why the socialization argument of optimistic constructivists is flawed. Also, Ward's (2017, p. 286) distinction between conflictual social mobility and peaceful social competition ignores the change of status between the lower and higher status groups as an important criterion in the social psychological version of SIT. Additionally, Barnhart's (2016) argument that a state will prefer social competition to social creativity conflicts with SIT's emphasis on the actor's rational choice because social competition is the costliest strategy. Thus, the principle of the current dominant SIT framework in IR, which indicates that a failed peaceful social mobility and creativity will make the state choose social competition is still valid. This helps the thesis explain the reasons why

competition between China and established powers on some dimensions is likely to happen.

When the current dominant IR SIT framework is used to analyze China's rise, the academic works have four major weaknesses.

First, scholars who use SIT to analyze China's rise generally argue that Sino–US competition is avoidable. Most scholars argue that social mobility will not work because China strongly identifies with nationalist and communist identities and is unwilling to abandon them (Gries, 2005, p. 250; Larson and Shevchenoko, 2010; Larson, 2015; Lee, 2016). However, they view social creativity as a useful path that can allow China to raise its status and preserve its two identities without conflicting with the US (Gries, 2005; Larson and Shevchenoko, 2010; Larson, 2015, 2020; Lee, 2016). However, China's strong identification with its nationalist and communist identities, which makes social mobility infeasible in preventing Sino–US competition, has the same effects on social creativity. This is because the new dimension that the status seeker finds for favorable comparison cannot make up for its dissatisfaction derived from its disadvantaged identity, or the unfavorable comparison with the outgroup on dimensions it values most. For instance, Chinese nationalists care about national security and, consequently, military power. Therefore, China may feel disadvantaged because of unfavorable comparisons between its military power and that of other states, even if it compares favorably with them on other dimensions, such as economic growth.

Second, scholars generally believe that the social competition between China and the US can be avoided through a successful social creativity strategy. Therefore, none of them have considered how China could preserve a peaceful environment and the crucial interests defined by its two identities without conflicting with the US in a competition scenario (Wolf, 2014; Gries, 2005; Larson, 2015; Lee, 2016). Thus, recategorization, which is SIT's strategy of managing social competition, has never

been mentioned in academic works that use SIT to analyze China's rise. Among scholars that use SIT to analyze IR, three have mentioned the recategorization strategy. Mercer (1995, p. 250) mentioned that the European Union (EU) can ameliorate conflicts between France and Germany. However, Mercer (1995, p. 250) indicates that this superordinate identity will not change the self and other distinction because the EU also has the other, such as Japan. Ward (2015, p. 21) noted the recategorization strategy and used it to explain how the shared Anglo-Saxon identity fosters a relatively peaceful power transition from the UK to the US in the 20th century. However, his case study lacked depth (Ward, 2015, p. 29). Wendt (1999, p. 229) argued that collective identity is social identity. However, as noted in the introduction, the constructivists' definition of collective identity formation is largely dissimilar to that of SIT. Thus, using the recategorization to analyze China's relations with regional countries and the US can fill the gap in academic works that have used SIT to investigate China's rise and IR.

Third, the actor's rational choice has been underplayed or ignored by scholars that use SIT to analyze China's rise. Gries (2005) separated SIT from rationalism, arguing that "symbolic and rationalist approaches" are complementary in the analysis of China's rise. Likewise, Lee (2016, p. 30) criticized IR realists and liberal institutionalists for focusing on a rationalist view to analyze China's rise. Larson (2015, p. 348) seems to note that China is a rational actor, using one sentence to argue that China did not choose to compete for dominance in East Asia because such move will be balanced by regional powers and the US. Underplaying the rational choice of the actor in the framework is striking because, as noted in the preceding section, SIT regards the rational choice as being equally important as legitimacy or identity in dealing with intergroup relationships.

Fourth, scholars using SIT to analyze China's rise focus on the Sino-US power transition (Gries, 2005; Larson, 2015; Lee, 2016). SIT has rarely been used to explain

China's actions in the SCS or Taiwan, although China specialists generally agree that the country's actions in SCS and Taiwan are a hard case of its peaceful rise.

The application of SIT in analyzing the research question

Because the thesis views SIT theoretical framework of Larson (2015) as workable despite criticism, it will first use the framework to analyze important and valued dimensions for the social categorization and comparison between China and the US or regional countries. Social categorization and comparison define the disadvantaged ingroup and advantaged outgroup based on such dimensions (e.g., disadvantaged China and the advantaged US on ideological dimension). Intergroup relationships on these dimensions are competitive and mutually exclusive. In IR, states are rated according to valued and important dimensions, such as economic power, "coercive capability" (Larson, 2015, p. 327), and geopolitical position (Brzezinski, 1997/1998, p. 48). As the leading power in the international community, the US has set up liberal values as an important dimension of evaluation (Deng, 2008, p. 26; Khong, 2013, pp. 1-2). In the context of East Asia, many countries value their claimed sovereignty over disputed territories. Thus, consolidating sovereign claim is an important dimension East Asian states compare because successful consolidation will enhance their positive self-image as defenders of sovereignty integrity. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, China's nationalist and communist identities have led to its view that it is disadvantaged on the ideological, territorial disputes, and East Asian geostrategic dimensions.

This thesis agrees with other scholars that use SIT that social mobility is ineffective for China to gain positive feeling on these dimensions because China is unwilling to abandon the two identities (Gries, 2005, Larson, 2015). However, it argues that social creativity strategy is also ineffective, which will be further detailed in Chapter 4. Therefore, competitions between China and regional countries or the US are inevitable on these dimensions.

By arguing that the competitions are inevitable, this thesis adds two elements to the current dominant SIT framework in IR. First, it analyzes how China could preserve its communist identity and advance crucial nationalist interests, while maintaining a relatively peaceful environment by thwarting a hard-balancing coalition through recategorization strategies. Also, unlike IR theorists who generally focus on collective identity formation (Wendt, 1999; Ward, 2015), this thesis is centered on China's cross-cutting identities/interests with other actors, that is, while China has identities that conflict with other actors on some dimensions, it also shares identities and interests with others on other dimensions. For instance, while China and many regional countries' nationalist identities and interests are mutually exclusive on dimensions of territorial disputes, they share pluralist identity and economic interests. These shared identities and interests can offset the negative effects of conflicting ones (Brewer, 2011, p. 138).

Second, this thesis brings the actor's rational choice back to SIT when applying it to IR. SIT postulates that the group, as a rational actor, is able to manage preferences derived from disadvantaged identities to some degree (Van Zomeren et al, 2012, p. 188; Fiske et al, 2016, p. 46). Thus, while China's conflicting identities or interests cause frictions between itself and other actors, it might be able to manage them to reduce others' threat perception towards itself and prevent a complete breakdown of its relationship with others.

Finally, rational choice in SIT, like the rational choice theory, means that a rational actor adjusts its policy to pursue interests in accordance with power comparison with others and their strategies (Kydd, 2008, p. 438). For instance, the higher status group shows more willingness to cooperate when the lower status group has external force to counter its advantageous power (Ng, 1982, p. 203).

This thesis argues that combining the feature of a cross-cutting identity/interests in the recategorization strategy with emphasis on the actor's rational choice in SIT will

pave the theoretical foundation for China's use of its strategic management of interests and identities to possibly prevent a hard-balancing coalition and maintain a relatively peaceful external environment. Because the shared identities/interests contribute to peace and conflicting identities/interests lead to frictions, China can form or increase the salience of shared identities/interests with other actors, while downplaying conflicting ones to thwart a hard-balancing coalition and preserve a relatively peaceful regional environment. This thesis also uses the combination of recategorization and rational choice to analyze how China adjusted its strategic management to achieve its goals in accordance with its power contribution to others and their response to it.

When applied to IR, the emphasis of SIT on the actor's rational choice is similar to the assumptions of realists because states will calculate power distributions with others and adjust their strategies accordingly. However, contrary to many realists' assumption that China's rising power will lead to formation of a hard-balancing coalition (Han and Paul, 2019, p. 4), SIT provides insights on how China's strategic management of identities and interests could prevent the formation of such coalition.

Conclusion

This chapter is about the main theoretical framework the thesis is built on. The first part of the chapter is a literature review of the theoretical frameworks used by scholars to analyze China's rise. First, the review finds out that regarding China's rise in the region, some optimistic defensive realists, liberal institutionalists, and constructivists underestimate the important influence of China's communist and nationalist identities on China's definition of interests and actions. Also, contrary to some pessimistic offensive, classical and neo-classical realists' expectation, China's rise does not necessarily lead to a hard-balancing coalition of established powers. Because the current theoretical frameworks used in the existing literature are not satisfactory when applying them to analyze China's rise, this thesis proposes a new

approach to understand China's relationship with other regional countries and the US. The second part offers a brief introduction of SIT and presents reasons for SIT to address flaws of the existing literature. The third part is a critical review of literature that uses SIT to analyze China's relationship with other actors. This section argues that the current dominant SIT framework in IR works despite the criticism that it is somewhat dissimilar to the social psychology's SIT version. However, SIT, as it is currently used in IR, falsely regards "social creativity" as a viable strategy to avoid competition between China and the US. As I demonstrate, there are limits to the applicability of "social creativity" strategies. The recategorization strategy, which is an SIT concept on ameliorating competitions, has not been applied to analyze China's rise. Also, the emphasis of SIT on an actor's rational choice has been ignored when scholars use it to analyze China's rise. I argue that combining the recategorization strategy with SIT's emphasis on rational choice can be applied to analyze how a communist and nationalist China prevents the formation of a hard-balancing coalition in a competition scenario. This thesis will also fill the gap of application of SIT in IR by using SIT framework to analyze the flash points in the region. The fourth part of this chapter discusses how SIT will be applied to the thesis to analyze how China maintains a relatively peaceful environment without abandoning its nationalist and communist identities and related crucial interests. By constructing or increasing the salience of its shared identities or interests with other relevant actors, while pursuing interests that conflict with others in a restrained manner, China could maintain a relatively peaceful environment without compromising the CCP's control over the nation and damaging important nationalist interests.

Chapter 3. United Front Strategy (UFS)

SIT provides the general idea that China can pursue crucial nationalist interests, preserve its communist identity, and maintain a relatively peaceful regional environment by thwarting the formation of a hard-balancing coalition through a recategorization strategy and rational choice. China might be able to achieve the three tasks simultaneously by strategically managing identities and interests. First, it can seek shared identities and interests with other relevant actors that could cancel out the negative effects of competition derived from conflicting identities (recategorization strategy). Second, it can pursue interests related to conflicting identities with restraint to manage frictions (rational choice). China can also adjust its strategic management of identities and interests according to the others' response and distribution of power among relevant actors (rational choice) to achieve the aforementioned tasks. However, when applied in the context of China's rise, SIT is not specific about how China constructs its shared identities or interests and controls conflicting ones. It is also not specific about how China could adjust its strategic management of them.

The UFS is an example of an SIT by providing concrete ways on how China can put SIT into practice. It provides a practical framework for how a rising but disadvantaged actor adjusts its strategic management of identities and interests in accordance with the changing power distribution with advantaged actors and the response of others. It is also specific about how China could pursue or preserve crucial interests that conflict with others' interests while controlling its actions to maintain a relatively peaceful surrounding environment. Finally, it specifies how China could construct shared identities and interests with relevant actors.

The novelty of this chapter is twofold. First, many Chinese scholars use traditional Chinese thought to explore how China can achieve a peaceful rise (Yan, 2014; Qin, 2014; Acharya, 2019). The UFS, which is a significant part of the CCP's "ideology"

(Slyke, 1970, p. 134; Armstrong, 1977, p. 1) has rarely been used to analyze China's peaceful rise. Second, the use of the UFS in the thesis is different from the current dominant view of the strategy as one that is revolutionary, reflecting irreconcilable competition between authoritarian and democratic states. In this thesis, UFS is a practice of SIT that aims to manage the competition and cultivate shared identities and interests that enable trust and compromise between conflicting parties by cancelling out the negative effects of competition.

The first part of the chapter explains how the UFS used in the thesis is different from the dominant view. In the second part, using the CCP's UFS during the Anti-Japanese War as an example, this chapter aims to show how SIT can be applied in the context of power transition. It also aims to deduce the specific principles of what I call as China's strategic management of identities and interests that can help the country prevent the formation of a hard-balancing coalition, while pursuing crucial and conflicting interests.

Difference between UFS used in this thesis and current dominant view of UFS

The dominant view of UFS (Brady, 2017; Groot, 2017; Kynge et al, 2017; Dreyer, 2018; Garnaut, 2018; Gill and Schreer, 2018; Bowe, 2018; Suzuki, 2019) claims that China is using UFS to quietly subvert the Western democratic society. Scholars argue that China's united front activities often include its covert, and sometimes illegal, interactions with sub-national actors within the democratic countries, such as manipulating overseas Chinese communities, bribing the elites of political parties, and cultivating agents in democratic countries (Brady, 2017; Suzuki, 2019). From their perspective, united front work also includes China's political propaganda and espionage activities (Brady, 2017, p. 3). Some scholars also look at China's economic engagement with other countries (Brady, 2017; Gill and Schreer, 2018). According to them, these UFS activities are subversive because they undermine democracy or target countries' sovereign independence, divide the US and its allies,

and challenge fundamental liberal norms, such as freedom of speech (Brady, 2017; Gill and Scheer, 2018; Garnaut, 2018). The scholars' view of the UFS is similar to the concept of sharp power, which refers to China's use of many similar subversive tactics to pursue its own political agenda at the expense of the crucial interests of democratic countries (The Economist, 2017; Suzuki, 2019).

The first feature of the dominant view of the UFS implies that it is a revolutionary strategy that aims to defeat Western democracy. According to Brady (2017, pp. 2-3), this view is derived from the origin of the UFS as a Leninist strategy that seeks to exploit even the smallest frictions among enemies, form a temporary alliance with former enemies, and lead a revolutionary force to defeat capitalists (Armstrong, 1977, pp. 16-17).

However, this interpretation of UFS overlooks the fact that CCP made a distinction between domestic and international UFS. During the Anti-Japanese War, the UFS was a revolutionary strategy used by CCP to struggle for power and control. However, CCP stated that it abandons the revolutionary objective in international UFS that is mainly about China's relationship with other states (Mao, 1971, cited in Xiong, 2006, pp. 373-374). As Mao (1971, cited in Xiong, pp.373-374) stated, "the fundamental difference between domestic UFS and international UFS is [that]... CCP must obtain leadership in domestic UFS while regarding international UFS... there is no issue of leadership." The leadership in domestic UFS means the CCP's revolutionary goal aimed at making it the ruling party in China. Having stated that China should "never think about leading others [in international UFS]" (Mao, 1971, cited in Xiong, 2006, pp. 373-384), CCP conveys that its international UFS has no revolutionary goals of seeking hegemony, defeating rival ideology, and controlling others. However, it aims to maintain a benign relationship with other countries.

Two historical pieces of evidence of China's diplomacy may counter CCP's statement that its international UFS does not mean a constant struggle for power and control.

First, from the late 1950s to 1970, China adopted a revolutionary UFS that attempted to help it achieve its revolutionary goals of defeating capitalism and exported revolutions to many Third World countries. This demonstrates the zero-sum ideological struggle between socialism and capitalism at the time. However, while this evidence did reflect China's revolutionary strategy then, Chinese scholars have generally viewed the strategy as a betrayal of the principles of international UFS that aimed to construct a peaceful environment and promote coexistence among states. Yang Gongsu and Zhang Zhirong (2009, p. 189), a senior Chinese diplomat from 1949 to 1983 and a professor of politics from Peking University, respectively, argued that the "international UFS that was established since the founding of New China and that has stressed peaceful co-existence" was distorted as a "surrender to imperialism, revisionism and reactionaries." Likewise, Yang Kuisong (2010, p. 74), a professor of Peking University renowned for his research on CCP history, argued that, since 1958, the CCP's denial of international UFS that had promoted a peaceful co-existence has seriously tarnished China's national image and isolated it from the rest of the world. Similarly, Wei and Wei (2010, p. 132) argued that revolutionary diplomacy in the 1960s was a failure because it threatened other countries and betrayed China's peaceful diplomatic principle.

Semi-official and official documents have also demonstrated that CCP recognized that revolutionary diplomacy was wrong. According to Wu Jianming (2009, p. 10), the top Chinese diplomat from 1959 to 2003, Zhou Enlai, then Premier and Foreign Minister of China, was angered by revolutionary diplomacy, stating, "I am not sure whether you guys [revolutionary diplomats] are revolutionists or not, you are happy because you damaged [China's] relationship with other countries." In 1968, Mao (1968, cited in Gong, 1998, p. 181) admitted that China's revolutionary diplomacy failed because "we had been isolated...no one recognized us." In 1979, the International Department of CCPCC issued an announcement that exonerated senior CCP official Wang Jiaxiang's re-proposal of international UFS principles to CCPCC in 1962 calling on China to preserve a peaceful external environment, be less

revolutionary, and ameliorate relationships with the Soviet Union and the US (Luo, 2009). The announcement demonstrates that the CCP had indirectly admitted that revolutionary diplomacy in the 1960s was wrong and damaging.

Some scholars may argue that even if CCP stated that revolutionary goal did not exist in the international UFS and has admitted that revolutionary diplomacy was wrong, the party could bring revolutionary element back to the UFS in the future. This thesis acknowledges that this uncertainty exists. However, in this thesis, UFS is viewed as a practice of SIT, a theory that aims to find the cause of and remedy for intergroup conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2011; Brewer, 2011). Thus, discussing the revolutionary goal of UFS is beyond the scope of the thesis.

The second historical evidence is that China broke up its alliance with the former Soviet Union and formed a strategic partnership with the US to balance against the Soviets in 1972, thereby turning the former ally into a new enemy. Some scholars may argue that the change of policies was consistent with the view that UFS was a temporary tactic and the breakup was a proof of China's competition for leadership and control over the socialist bloc with the Soviet Union. However, the argument's reasoning is wrong. First, while the two countries did have a spat over the rightful path of the socialist movement from the late 1950s to 1960s, Chinese officials believed that the breakup was much less due to the competition than the Soviet Union's paternalism, which seriously violated China's sovereign independence (Wu, 1999; Mao, 1971, cited in Xiong, 2006, p. 373; Deng, 1989, cited in Xu, 2014, p. 57). Second, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 5, China's strategic partnership with the US in 1972 was in line with the thesis's view of international UFS. This is because the partnership was less a temporary tactic to contain the Soviet Union as a new enemy, and more a long-term goal of breaking the US-led encirclement. The partnership was the key to China's establishment of diplomatic relationships with most of the Western and East Asian allies of the US, and its creation of a relatively peaceful external environment.

The second feature of the dominant view is that treating UFS as a revolutionary strategy (Brady, 2017) reflects the constant and irreconcilable competition between authoritarian and democratic states. Similarly, this thesis views the competition as irreconcilable; however, it treats UFS as an example of SIT. Through the lens of SIT, it demonstrates how the UFS may help China control competition and cultivate shared identities and interests that enable trust by cancelling out the negative effects of competition.

Some scholars may disagree with the use of UFS in this thesis and point out the negative effect of shared identities/interests. First, they may argue that the shared identity/interests between China and other member states effectively cause disunity in a certain state group and prevent it from realizing its important values or interests (Gill and Schreer, 2018, p. 162). The frequently cited example supporting this argument is Greece's opposition to the EU's condemnation of China's human rights records in 2017 because Greece needed China's investment (Gill and Schreer, 2018, p. 162). To many scholars, another solid evidence of the argument is that China successfully prevented ASEAN from reaching consensus on the SCS policy by pressuring Cambodia to veto against Vietnam and the Philippines' proposal of specifying disputed SCS areas in the 2012 ASEAN Foreign Minister meeting's (AMM) joint communique (Murphy, 2017, p. 64; Gill and Schreer, 2018, p. 162).

First, China's influence on individual group member is not as strong as these scholars argued because the group itself had shared but contradictory interests regarding disputes. Cambodia's case demonstrated this point. To be sure, at the meeting to draft the 2012 AMM communiqué, Cambodia's stubborn rejection of Vietnam and the Philippines' proposal did reflect China's position regarding the disputes (Thayer, 2012). However, ASEAN members shared but contradictory interests regarding SCS disputes caused their disunity as well. As I demonstrated in my article (Hu, 2021), all of them endorse an ASEAN-led approach and share

interests in deescalating tension. However, these interests are contradictory because using ASEAN-led forums or strong wording in the forums' statements may antagonize China and further escalate tension. At the meeting, Cambodia used ASEAN's shared interest in de-escalating tensions, noting that the wording in the communiqué draft was so strong as to be unhelpful in realizing this interest (Thayer, 2012). Some ASEAN states also mentioned this interest. Thailand highlighted the need to de-escalate tensions and preserve a benign relationship with China (Thayer, 2012). Brunei, Laos, and Myanmar stressed the need to promote regional peace and engage with China (Thayer, 2012). Also, Malaysia and Indonesia proposed the less confrontational phrase 'disputed area', which Cambodia went on to endorse (Thayer, 2012). This demonstrates a compromise on the part of a mild claimant like Malaysia. However, the Philippines and Vietnam rejected this proposal and used another ASEAN interest to support their argument. They insisted that ASEAN-led forums must stress the tension in the specific area (Thayer, 2012). Thus, examining the meeting in detail did not show that ASEAN was divided into two, with Cambodia representing China's interests and the other ASEAN members wishing to address concerns by specifying the area of tension. In addition to the China factor, ASEAN's disunity occurred because of its members' insistence on realizing ASEAN's contradictory interests. Hayton (2014) indicated that most ASEAN countries stressed the importance of ASEAN's unity and that Cambodia's rejection caused the disunity. However, ASEAN's unity could also have been achieved if Vietnam and the Philippines had accepted the wording of 'disputed area' proposed by Malaysia and Indonesia and endorsed by Cambodia.

Second, in some cases, it is the group members' division over other crucial policies unrelated to China that leads to or strengthens shared identities or interests between China and some group members, rather than the other way around. Take Greece's case for example. From 2009 to 2017, Greece's sovereign debt crisis created a division over the austerity policy between wealthy creditors led by Germany and Greece, the poor debtor. For many creditors, especially Germany, the harsh austerity

policies could ensure that Greece did not use a new loan to repay the old one (Amadeo, 2020). However, the policies made Greece feel as if it were being treated like “medieval leeches,” according to Costas Douzinas, Head of Greek Parliament’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee (Horowitz and Alderman, 2017). The perceived hostile attitude of many wealthy EU creditors and harsh measures imposed by them towards Greece were two of the main reasons that caused frictions within the EU. Feeling desperate, Greece then attached greater importance to Chinese investments and considered China a valued partner (Douzinas, 2017, cited in Horowitz and Alderman, 2017). Greece in turn voluntarily reciprocated China’s aid by supporting China’s position when disputes concerning the latter arose (Douzinas, 2017, cited in Horowitz and Alderman, 2017). Therefore, it was not China that divided the EU, but it was the division of the EU that strengthened China’s partnership with Greece.

Some scholars may also argue that economic interdependence, one form of shared interests between China and other countries, increases others’ dependence on China. This provides China with the leverage to pressure other countries to soften their position when disputes happen. This is evidenced by China’s ban on banana imports from the Philippines when the Scarborough Shoal incident escalated in 2012 (West, 2012). China also implemented an economic sanction on Australia in 2020 when the latter called for an international independent investigation on the origin of the coronavirus (Dziedzic, 2020). Beijing believed that the demand was based on a presumption of guilt and was aimed at stigmatizing China (Xinhua Net, 2020).

This thesis acknowledges that economic interdependence will increase other countries’ dependence on China and give it the leverage to put pressure on them. It also acknowledges that a state group’s degree of cohesion that is exclusive and competitive to China on some dimensions will be decreased by China’s shared identities and interests with its member states on other dimensions. As noted in the theoretical chapter, the thesis aims to use SIT’s recategorization strategy to explore

how China attempts to preserve a relatively peaceful environment by thwarting a US-led hard balance coalition.

However, unlike scholars who call for enhancing unity between the US and its allies to “comprehensively” balance against China (Gill and Schreer, 2018, p. 164), this thesis views the effects of shared identities/interests as largely positive. This is because despite the negativities of shared identities/interests, the world can be better off and more peaceful when most states cooperate with each other through them. With shared identities/interests, states cooperating with each other can ameliorate frictions derived from conflicting identities/interests, compared to those divided by two mutually exclusive rivalry blocs with clear-cut boundaries that can only trigger hatred and frictions. Some senior politicians in many countries have already opposed the formation of a rivalry bloc. For instance, in 2018, Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsieh Loong showed his disapproval of such a formation (Wore, 2018). Likewise, in 2020, Germany’s Foreign Minister Heiko Mass stated that the EU does not wish for the world to be split into “two spheres of influence” and that the organization would not benefit if the interests of China and the US become irreconcilable (DW News, 2020).

The third feature of the dominant view of the UFS focuses on China’s “corrosive” networking with subnational actors, especially influential foreigners and overseas Chinese in other countries (Brady, 2017; Suzuki, 2019). However, the focus of the thesis is on the inter-state relationship, because this thesis treats UFS as an example of SIT, a theory of intergroup relations (Hogg, 2016, p. 7). To be sure, the CCP could form a shared identity with political parties/groups within East Asian countries. However, it is hard for the thesis to analyze the relationships due to language barriers and the lack of public information regarding CCP’s relationship with sub-national actors within these countries.

The fourth feature of the dominant view of the UFS is that it treats the strategy as deceptive propaganda (Brady, 2017; Groot, 2018, cited in Kuo, 2018). However, this thesis will not engage in the unproductive and unending debate of identifying which of China's action or discourse is propaganda. It will also not engage in the normative debate of whether labelling the works of China's united front, which include almost all tracks of Chinese diplomacy (Brady, 2017; Suzuki, 2019), as deceptive propaganda or sharp power is derived from ideological bias (Shi, 2018), the fear of losing American supremacy (Sachs, 2020), or genuine worry about the demise of democratic ideology.

UFS during the Anti-Japanese War (1935–1945)

This section explores how the idea of SIT can be put into practice through CCP's implementation of the UFS during the Anti-Japanese War, thereby deducing principles of China's strategic management of identities and interests. The section first looks at how the disadvantaged CCP strategically managed its identities and interests to simultaneously preserve its communist identity, pursue strategic interests, and maintain a relatively benign surrounding environment by thwarting the Chiang-led KMT coalition during the war period. First, I look at how the CCP adjusted its strategic management in accordance with the calculation of the changing distribution of power between the CCP and Chiang. Second, I examine how it sought shared identities/interests with Chiang and KMT warlords to thwart the latter's encirclement and create a benign surrounding environment. Third, I investigate how CCP preserved its communist identity and pursued strategic interests while controlling ideological and strategic competition to avoid a breakdown of its relationship with other actors.

This section will not analyze the CCP's effort to defeat Japan during this period. Instead, it will focus on the CCP–KMT relationship, in which Japan is treated as a

common threat. Moreover, because this thesis will not discuss the revolutionary aspect of domestic UFS, it focuses on the CCP's effort to construct shared identities and interests with other counterparts while downplaying conflicting ones, rather than its preparation to defeat the KMT. Third, although the Soviet Union had a profound influence on the CCP's united front with the KMT from 1935 to 1939, this section will instead analyze the CCP's efforts to construct a united front with the KMT, to be more aligned with the focus of this thesis.

To begin with, UFS is consistent with SIT, which views the intergroup relationship as essentially competitive; groups have "profound differences in ideology, value, and beliefs" (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, p. 15). During the Anti-Japanese War, the disadvantaged group, CCP, viewed the advantaged group, the KMT's Chiang faction, as the ideological and strategic competitor.

Mao (1938) compared China's power with that of the Japanese army and concluded the two stages of relationship between CCP and the Japanese army according to the changing distribution of power and Japan's possible response to the CCP's development. In the first stage, referred to as strategic defensive period, the CCP compared unfavorably with Japan on every dimension (Mao, 1938). The second stage was a stalemate period caused by the change in power distribution between the CCP and Japan (Mao, 1938). During this period, the CCP's power was growing but did not surpass Japan's power. It reached a point that began to threaten Japan's dominant status and vital interests (Mao, 1938). Due to its fear of further damaging interests and losing status, Japan began to constrain the CCP's development (Mao, 1938). Because the CCP had substantially increased its power, a declining Japan could not easily constrain the CCP. However, the CCP's power still lagged behind Japan's power. Thus, CCP could not get rid of Japan's constraints. A stalemate between the CCP and Japan was thus formed.

Because the CCP compared unfavorably with Japan and KMT's Chiang faction on all dimensions at the start of the Anti-Japanese War, the two stages can also be applied to the CCP-Chiang strategic and ideological competition during this period.

To begin, the CCP had been badly defeated by the KMT in 1935 (People's Net, 2001) and lost nearly all its base areas. It just completed the long march aimed at escaping from the KMT's military encirclement, and only had over 10,000 soldiers (Yang, 2010, p. 322). During this year, the CCP was nearing its demise, while the KMT was at the peak of its power.

Under such circumstance, the CCP tried to form a shared anti-Japanese identity with the KMT to improve the CCP-KMT relationship while viewing the KMT as the ideological and strategic competitor. In August of 1935, the CCP first declared in its official newspaper that all Chinese parties must be aware that "while having disagreements, brothers should unite together to defend humiliation and intervention of the external enemy" (CCP, 1935). This discourse intentionally downplayed the ideological divide within China and stressed the CCP's shared Chinese identity with the KMT. Moreover, despite insisting on simultaneously resisting the Japanese and the Chiang in the declaration and many other public statements, the CCP has gradually and subtly signaled its willingness to construct a shared anti-Japanese identity with the Chiang since 1935. For instance, Mao stated in January 1936 that "as long as Chiang was willing to fight against Japanese, CCP of course could cooperate with him hand in hand" (Mao, 1936, cited in Yang, 2010, p. 329). On December 12, 1936, KMT warlords Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng arrested their commander Chiang in Xi'an City for compelling him to change the anti-communist policy into a united resistance against the Japanese. While scholars hold divergent views over whether the CCP, Soviet Union, or Chiang's patriotism played an important role in peacefully solving the Xi'an incident, they held the consensus that the incident marked the very beginning of the CCP-KMT anti-Japanese united front because of Chiang's verbal promise to construct it (Sheng, 1992, p. 165. Taylor, 2009,

Yang, 2010, p. 336, Tsang, 2015). The CCP's efforts to form the shared anti-Japanese identity with the KMT was certainly derived from the urgency of resisting Japanese invasion. However, the CCP also wished to make time to reorganize from its near demise by using the shared identity to substantially offset the KMT's view that the CCP was an ideological and strategic enemy.

Scholars like Shen (1992, p. 158) and Garver (1988, p. 40) argued that the inclusion of Chiang in the united front was insincere because the CCP, especially the Mao-led faction, still aimed to overturn him from late 1935 to early 1937. However, some Chinese scholars argue that although the CCP resisted Chiang during this period, its focus was not to overturn him but to unite with him without conceding its bottom-line interests (Zhang, 1988, pp. 59-60; Yang, 1989, pp. 52-53). This is because the CCP wanted to compel Chiang to accept its absolute control over the red army in the anti-Japanese united front (Zhang, 1988, pp. 59-60; Yang, 1989, pp. 52-53; Zhang, 2014, p. 32; Xu, 2016, p. 17). If the CCP were determined to be revolutionary, it would not have secretly negotiated a possible anti-Japanese united front with Chiang since the autumn of 1935 (Garver, 1991, p. 46; Yang, 2010, p. 329).

In the same year, the CCP also abandoned its oversimplified perception that KMT warlords are homogenous anti-CCP group members led by Chiang (Mao, 1935). Instead, the CCP began to realize the warlords' cross-cutting identities/interests with the CCP. While they were the CCP's ideological and strategic competitors, the CCP could form shared identities/interests with them on other dimensions and seek their limited alignment (Mao, 1935, 1940b). To gain alignment, the CCP sought to provide interests and form a shared identity/ingroup membership by exhibiting shared values (Mao, 1940b). The effectiveness of these two means was proven during the Anti-Japanese War. The belief that the CCP could obtain assistance from the Soviet Union and the shared anti-Japanese alliance identity were two major reasons that warlords, such as Zhang Xueliang, somewhat aligned with the CCP and disobeyed Chiang's command of eliminating the party in 1936 (Yang, 2010, p. 336). Although the Chiang

administration was the central government of China at that time, its control over warlords who were at the frontline of combating the CCP was loose. Thus, its containment on the CCP's expansion would not achieve the ideal result if warlords halfheartedly obeyed its commands. The CCP was well aware that the warlords' support was not staunch due to their conflicting interests and identities with the CCP. However, the CCP believed that, as long as it "continued to develop, was open to all and had methods to attract them, while some warlords may abandon CCP, others may cooperate with it" (Mao, 1935).

To create a relatively peaceful environment with the KMT for development, seeking a shared identity with KMT leader Chiang was the key. This is because without Chiang's acknowledgement of a shared identity/interests with the CCP, it would continue to be besieged by KMT warlords even if they halfheartedly obeyed Chiang's demand. This has been demonstrated by the CCP's situation in the spring of 1936. Although warlord Zhang Xueliang had formed an anti-Japanese alliance with the CCP and gave the latter breathing space, Chiang greatly compelled Zhang to exterminate the CCP (People's Net-CCP News, 2014). Thus, though halfheartedly, Zhang could hardly disobey Chiang's command (People's net-CCP news, 2014) and was forced to combat against the CCP from September to early December 1936, which seriously threatened the CCP's survival (Yang, 1995, p. 260, 2010, p. 336). However, after the Xi'an incident, the CCP was relieved from the KMT military's encirclement to a certain degree due to Chiang's recognition of shared anti-Japanese identity with the CCP. Just as Mao stated, the Xi'an incident "saved us from devil" (Mao, no date, cited in Yang, 1995, p. 428)

Besides seeking shared identities with the KMT, the CCP downplayed conflicting identities and interests during the Anti-Japanese War. To gain Chiang's acknowledgement of the shared anti-Japanese ally identity, the CCP made its communist and strategic competitor identities less salient to Chiang. As Skyle (1970, pp. 128-129) rightly argued, when the CCP implements the UFS, its policies are

supported by actions, which often include “real concessions” on conflicting dimensions. This was evident in the CCP’s anti-Japanese UFS. First, instead of stressing ideological and class divide within China, the CCP has begun to emphasize the shared Chinese national identity and urgency of forming a shared anti-Japanese identity with the KMT in its official newspapers and slogans since 1935. Although it had mixed signals and discourse regarding its relationship with Chiang from 1935 to 1936 (e.g., “anti-Chiang”, “force Chiang to resist the Japanese”), it officially abandoned the revolutionary policy and established its main policy of cooperating with Chiang to resist the Japanese in 1937 (Yang, 1989, p. 58; Zhang, 1988, p. 60). Second, the policy was supported by actions. For instance, in 1937, the CCP first publicly promised the KMT to give up its revolutionary policy of violently overturning the KMT-led central government (CCPCC, 1937, pp. 157-158). Second, it changed its regime name from the Chinese Soviet Republic into the Special Administration of the ROC, and was willing to obey the KMT central government’s commands (CCPCC, 1937, pp. 157-158). Third, it recognized Chiang as the leader of the CCP’s army (Xinhua Net, 2012). These actions were the CCP’s big concession to Chiang on the ideological dimension because they minimized its revolutionary trait. Moreover, it almost met Chiang’s demands for merging the CCP and its army under his central government and the KMT’s central army respectively (KMT, 1937, pp. 433-436).

However, for CCP, forming a shared identity and downplaying the conflicting identity by making concessions must be based on the preservation of its communist identity and important strategic interests. CCP was very cautious to preserve its regime’s existence and independence (Xinhua Net, 2012). For example, its reluctance to satisfy Chiang’s demands mentioned above was the reason that its negotiation with and Chiang on the united front from August 1935 to September 1936 failed (Garver, 1988, p. 54). Even when CCP had to accept Chiang’s demands in 1937, its bottom-line was to preserve its occupied areas and have absolute control over the red army (Sheng, 1992, p. 163; Yang, 2010, p. 329). Thus, to avoid assimilation of the red army into KMT because of CCP’s recognition of Chiang as commander, CCP formed

a new central military committee to strengthen its direct control over the army (Zhou, 2015, p. 441).

CCP's efforts in forming a united front with the KMT was a strategy of upward mobility. From 1937 to 1940, the period that this thesis defined as the CCP's strategic defensive period, the CCP's power compared unfavorably with that of Chiang on all dimensions but the party strived to re-organize party institutions and develop after the establishment of the united front. First, CCP enlarged its base areas, set up a military region in these areas, and quickly and effectively expanded its army (Zhou, 2015, p. 443). Second, CCP established a centralized system. Third, CCP developed its economy in its base areas (Yu, 2005, pp. 43-44). As a result of the successful completion of these policies, CCP's power dramatically developed in this period. The party built a regime that had many base areas and had absolute control over a strong army.

CCP's development in the defensive period narrowed its power disparity with Chiang and threatened the Chiang faction's status as the ruling party of China. Thus, from 1939 to 1945, the Chiang faction shifted its policy from fighting with the Japanese to constraining CCP's expansion and tightening its economic and military blockade on the CCP's base areas (Garver, 1988, p. 239; Yang, 2010, p. 428). Conflicts between the KMT and CCP consequently increased (War Annals Office of Japanese Defence Ministry, 1982, p. 204). During this period, Chiang initiated the CCP-named "anti-communist high tides" (Garver, 1988, p. 239) where it focused its economic, political, and military power on the containment of the CCP. This thesis characterizes this time as a stalemate period between the CCP and Chiang. Because the CCP's power had dramatically increased in the defensive period, Chiang could not easily constrain the CCP. However, because the CCP's power had not yet surpassed that of the Chiang faction, CCP could not get rid of Chiang's constraints. Facing changes in power distribution and Chiang's response to the CCP's rise, the latter adjusted its strategic management of identities and interests.

Perceiving that its communist identity was endangered by Chiang's constraints, the CCP increasingly tightened its control over its regime to preserve its existence and stability. First, the CCP fortified its centralized leading system and established core leadership (Mao, 1943). "Party, regime and the army were under unified leadership" (Mao, 1943). Second, the CCP unified elites and ordinary party members. In 1941, it began its rectification movement, which aimed at eliminating factional conflicts within the party through self- and peer criticism (Ju, 1996, p. 119; Shi, 2012, p. 17). The movement also prevented the party from decentralization, wherein many elites acted in terms of their own experiences or based on the Soviet Union's demand, instead of that of the CCPCC (Shi, 2012, pp. 12-13). The central task of the movement was to band the party, especially the elites' group, together under the guidance of Mao's beliefs by unifying their ideas about the CCP's goals and policy making. The central committee's control over grassroots party organizations was also tightened through a "purifying party" movement that censored the loyalty of the members (Wang, 2000, p. 17). As a result of these measures, the CCP maximized the unity of the regime and ensured the stability and effectiveness of the centralized regime to balance against Chiang.

During the stalemate period, the CCP rationally adjusted its strategy of seeking a shared identity and interests in accordance with others' strategy regarding the CCP. During this period, CCP focused on maintaining a shared identity/interests with centrists while attempting to do the same with Chiang (Mao et al, 1940). The CCP may have perceived Chiang's determination to prioritize conflictual identity and interests over shared ones, and contain the CCP through an economic and military blockade. Thus, it was much harder to seek a shared identity with Chiang than with centrists. For instance, while Chiang began to concentrate his forces to constrain the CCP in 1939, Mao (1939, p. 221) stated in his speech that "as long as Chiang was anti-Japanese, we should still insist on supporting Commander Chiang." in 1938, CCP formally advised Chiang to enhance anti-Japanese alliance cooperation (Chen,

1938). These advices included setting up a committee to coordinate and discuss military, party and political affairs between the two parties, and reaching substantive compromises to ameliorate military frictions (Law, 2011, p.38). This indicated that the CCP would continue seeking a shared anti-Japanese identity with Chiang as long as the latter recognized that the KMT and CCP had a common enemy. However, in the same year, Chiang (1939, cited in Zhou, 1939, pp. 192-193) told Zhou Enlai, “to me, [merging CCP into KMT] was a matter of life and death, if this goal couldn’t be achieved, I would not rest in peace when I died [and] winning anti-Japanese war was not meaningful.” This showed that he prioritized eliminating the CCP over sharing an anti-Japanese identity with them. In 1939, KMT commanded CCP to hand over its absolute control of the Eighth-Route Army and New Four Army to KMT central committee and to disband CCP regimes in Shanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia regions (Chen, 2001, p.338). Therefore, CCP could hardly maintain a shared identity with Chiang without giving up CCP regime. In contrast, CCP was optimistic regarding seeking a shared identity with warlords. For instance, in Mao Zedong, Zhu De, and Zhou Enlai’s telegram to other party members in 1940, they asked the members to “mobilize all resources” to win over “friend armies,” which was “very meaningful and possible” (Mao et al, 1940).

As the centrists were surrounding the CCP, preserving a shared identity and interests with them could substantially reduce the effectiveness of Chiang’s blockade, thus helping the CCP maintain a relatively stable surrounding environment. For instance, in 1940, the CCP was militarily blockaded by Tang Enbo and Li Pingxian from the Chiang faction (Mao et al, 1940). However, it wished that its effort to win over the “sympathy” and “neutrality” of the centrist warlords accompanying Tang and Li would make the central army’s military blockade on them less effective and help them counter the “anti-communist movement” (Mao et al, 1940). According to the telegram, shared anti-Japanese identity was proved to be effective for CCP to win over centrist warlords and cancel out negative effects caused by warlords’ anti-CCP identity (Mao, et al, 1940). For instance, in 1940, the CCP commander Chen Yi’s success in

constructing shared anti-Japanese identity with Li Mingyang and Li Changjiang, two local warlords in Subei district, prevented them from containing the Eighth-Route Army passing their garrison areas and thus caused Chiang's subordinate Han Deqing's failure to defeat CCP (Qin and Wu, 2007, Benton, 1999, p.523). These warlords' halfhearted support for Chiang's blockade indirectly but greatly reduced the pressure Chiang put on the CCP (Mao et al, 1940).

Besides maintaining shared identities/interests with warlords on strategic dimensions that were sensitive to and valued by all relevant parties, the CCP intentionally conducted development in a restrained manner to avoid making strategic conflicts salient enough to completely break down its relationship with other parties. For instance, the expansion of the CCP's base areas did not cover those occupied by warlords to show the CCP's accommodation of their interests and prevent the breakup of the relationship (Wei, 2010, p. 11). Moreover, as long as critical strategic interests were secured, the CCP would concede less important strategic interests to show compromise and alleviate frictions (Mao, 1940a). For instance, through a telegram sent in 1940, Mao asked Peng Dehuai, then Deputy Commander of the CCP army, to stop expanding base areas in Northern China because "over-expansion would make centrists view the CCP as over-offensive", thereby making the CCP lose their "sympathy" (Mao, 1940a). Under the circumstance that the CCP's crucial strategic interests were secured, such as its successful occupation of lanes or counties that were of strategic significance, Mao (1940a) asked Peng to concede less important strategic interests, such as the withdrawal of troops from lanes and counties occupied by the CCP, but were of less strategic importance. This move was intended to ameliorate the tense relationship with warlords.

Finally, the CCP reacted when KMT warlords or Chiang's actions evoked conflictual identities and triggered irritants with them, but they cautiously kept these incidents in check. While the CCP must react when an incident occurs, it also attempted to avoid escalating the incident to an uncontrollable level (Mao, 1940b). This is known as "self-

defense” and “being restrained” in the CCP’s active defense principle (Mao, 1940b). When responding to incidents, the CCP would cautiously exclude counterattack strategies that were viewed as too offensive and consequently destructive to its relationships with Chiang or warlords. Reacting through non-military means was more preferred over military means because they are less destructive to CCP-warlords/Chiang’s relationships (Mao, 1941b). For instance, the Chiang faction almost eliminated the CCP’s New Four Army in Wan’nan in January 1941 (Lv, 2011). The CCP was deeply angered about the Wan’nan incident but excluded military options to counter-attack Chiang because its power lagged behind his. Moreover, using force to take revenge could also lead to a “comprehensive breakup” between the CCP and Chiang (Mao, 1941a), which would be devastating for the former. Instead of reacting through military means, the CCP used political means, such as negotiation and protest, to react to Chiang’s elimination of the New Fourth Army (Zeng, 2014, p. 11)

However, when the CCP’s critical strategic interests were involved in incidents such as KMT’s blockade of its expansion of base areas, it would use military means to secure its strategic interests (Mao, 1940a). However, military actions were conducted with restraint to avoid a complete breakdown of the relationship. Moreover, to prevent an escalation of the incident, the CCP expressed willingness to negotiate a peaceful solution with other relevant parties (Mao, 1940b). In addition, when they softened their attitude and actions, the CCP would de-escalate tension correspondingly (Mao, 1940b). For instance, the warlord Yan Xishan occupied the Lvliang and Zhongtiao mountains in Shanxi Province in 1940 (Mao, 1940a), which threatened the CCP’s important strategic interests by blocking all the main communication lines between the CCP capital Yan’an and its base areas in Northern China (Yang, 2019, p. 89). Thus, Mao commanded Eight Route Army’s Deputy General Peng Dehuai to “at least restore a communication line and base area” (Mao, 1940a). Mao, however, also stressed that “upon the completion of the mission, CCP could stop and let Yan occupy most areas in Lvliang mountain” to control the strategic conflict between the

CCP and Yan and avoid completely destroying the relationship between the two (Mao, 1940a). CCP sent delegations to Yan to express its willingness to peacefully solve the conflicts and restore the relationship with Yan (Mao, 1940a).

As the thesis demonstrated above, the CCP chose non-military means to react to the Wan'nan incident in 1941 and military means to counter Yan's occupation of Lvliang mountain in 1940, although both Yan and the Chiang faction were more powerful than the CCP at the time. This may be because Although the CCP suffered a huge loss due to Chiang faction's elimination of the New Fourth Army in Wan'nan in 1941, its crucial strategic interests, such as base areas, remained secure, but Yan's occupation of the mountain blocked all communication lines and seriously threatened the CCP's crucial strategic interests.

To sum up, this part of the thesis aims to use the CCP's UFS during the Anti-Japanese War to demonstrate how SIT can be applied in the context of power transition and deduce the principles of China's strategic management of identities and interests.

First, the disadvantaged actor, the CCP, manages identities and interests strategically in accordance with its power comparison with other relevant parties and their strategies concerning the CCP. For instance, because of the large power gap between the CCP and KMT during the Anti-Japanese War, the former sought a shared identity and shared interests with the latter to alleviate frictions and buy time for development. Before the defensive period between the CCP and KMT, the former mainly aimed to develop a shared identity or interests with the dominant Chiang faction. This is because only through Chiang's acknowledgement of the shared identity/interests could the CCP break the Chiang-led economic and military blockade and preserve a relatively peaceful environment between the CCP and KMT. However, in the stalemate period, while attempting to preserve a shared identity and interests with Chiang, the CCP focused on maintaining the salience of its shared identity and

interests with KMT warlords. This was because Chiang was determined to contain the CCP's rising power during this period, it is hard for CCP to maintain shared identity/interests with Chiang. Moreover, because the warlords were surrounding the CCP, preserving a shared identity and interests with them could substantially reduce the effectiveness of Chiang's blockade and help the CCP maintain a relatively stable surrounding environment.

Second, the CCP forms a benign relationship with other actors and preserves a relatively peaceful surrounding environment by seeking shared identities and interests and downplaying conflicting ones. For instance, it formed a shared anti-Japanese ally identity with the Chiang faction during the anti-Japanese war.

Moreover, the CCP makes the conflicting identity/interests less salient in six ways. First, forming a shared identity and interests with others will offset frictions derived from conflicting ones. Second, the CCP made concessions on less critical interests. For instance, the CCP recognized the ideological competitor Chiang as its commander to reduce salience of strategic and ideological competition between the two side. Third, the CCP pursued strategic interests in an incremental and restrained manner to avoid overt escalation and a complete breakdown of relationships between itself and others to preserve a relative peace. For instance, the CCP's base areas during the Japanese War did not expand into areas occupied by warlords to prevent the CCP-warlords relationship from deteriorating. Fourth, when others raise an incident that makes conflicting identities salient, the CCP reacts with restraint to avoid a total breakdown of its relationship with others. It will choose less confrontational means to react to control its reaction. Fifth, even when the CCP acts offensively to prevent losing its critical interests, it acted with restraint and always showed a cooperative attitude for negotiation. Sixth, when the CCP feels that its critical interests or identities are secured, it will avoid escalating frictions to uncontrollable levels that are destructive to its relationships with others. The CCP does this by showing

restraint, seeks a shared identity or interests to offset frictions, or concedes less important interests defined by the conflicting identities.

However, although UFS helped CCP preserve its communist identity and achieve its strategic goals while thwarting the Chiang-led anti-CCP coalition, this strategy also had its limitations. Because the CCP strongly identified with the conflicting identities, it will not abandon them or sacrifice the important interests they define in exchange for forming shared identities or interests with others. Thus, a shared identity approach may fail when the CCP feels that its communist and nationalist identity is threatened. For instance, from 1935 to 1936, the CCP's reluctance to be assimilated into the KMT was the major reason that it could not form a shared anti-Japanese united front with Chiang. Further, frictions between the CCP and the warlord Yan Xishan were salient when the latter blocked all communication lines between Yan'an and the base areas in Northern China and threatened the CCP's crucial strategic interests.

Conclusion

SIT presents the general idea that China can simultaneously maintain a communist identity, pursue crucial nationalist interests, and preserve a relatively peaceful surrounding environment even if it could not transform its communist and nationalist identities. This can be done by thwarting a hard-balancing coalition through the recategorization strategy and China's rational choice. First, it can seek shared identities and interests with other relevant actors that could cancel out the negative effects of competition derived from conflicting identities (recategorization strategy). Second, it could maintain the conflicting identities and interests and control the competition (rational choice). Further, China can adjust its strategic management of identities and interests according to the others' response, as well as the distribution of power among relevant actors (rational choice) to achieve these tasks. This thesis refers to the combination of China's recategorization strategy and rational choice in

its pursuit of the three tasks as its strategic management of identities and interests. However, SIT is not specific about how China achieves the three tasks simultaneously. Therefore, this thesis uses the CCP's UFS during the Anti-Japanese War as an example of SIT to show how it could construct shared identities or interests and pursue conflicting interests defined by these identities, while controlling competitions in the context of power transition. This chapter first mapped out how the thesis uses UFS, which is different from its dominant view. It argues that the prevailing interpretation of UFS as a revolutionary strategy fails to take the domestic and international divide in its application. Moreover, the thesis uses the UFS as an example of SIT, a theory which aims to provide remedies for intergroup conflicts, could provide a practical framework for ameliorating the conflicts. Thus, its revolutionary aspect is beyond the scope of the thesis. Moreover, unlike the prevailing interpretation, this thesis focuses on shared identities/interests between states rather than individuals. Also, it will not engage in the unproductive debate over which of CCP's actions are genuine or propaganda.

Finally, this chapter has deduced the specific principles of China's strategic management of identities and interests through the CCP's UFS during the Anti-Japanese War. These specific principles, such as CCP's definition of strategic defensive and stalemate periods as well as how it sought shared identities/interests while downplaying conflicting ones with other relevant actors, are applied to the empirical chapters of the thesis that discuss how China attempts to maintain a relatively peaceful environment without changing its communist and nationalist identities.

Part 3. competition between China and the US/regional countries is inevitable

Chapter 4: China's nationalism and communist identity

This chapter examines whether competition between China and the US or other regional countries on some important dimensions (e.g., territorial disputes or ideology) is inevitable. As noted, some IR scholars use SIT's identity management strategies (social mobility, social creativity, and social competition) to analyze whether the competition is avoidable and if China's peaceful rise is possible. First, they argue that social mobility is not a viable strategy to avoid competition because China's strong identification with nationalist and communist identities lead to its inability to abandon these two identities (Gries, 2005, p. 250; Larson, 2015, p. 334; Krickovic and Zhang, 2020). Instead, they argue that China pursued a social creativity strategy by finding other dimensions or traits for comparison with the US (Gries, 2005; Larson, 2015, p. 334; Lee, 2016, p. 45; Krickovic and Zhang, 2020). They also claim that China can realize its peaceful rise without abandoning its identities through social creativity (Gries, 2005; Larson, 2015, p. 334, 2020; Lee, 2016, p. 46; Krickovic and Zhang, 2020). Because they view competition between China and the US or other regional countries as avoidable, they did not analyze whether China's view of the current regional status quo meets SIT's three conditions that lead to competitions (unstable power relationship between China and established powers, especially the US, China's dissatisfaction towards the current regional status quo, a cognitive alternative to the status quo) (Gries, 2005; Larson, 2015, p. 334; Lee, 2016).

Within Chinese literature, many Chinese scholars seem to agree that competition between China and the US or other regional countries is avoidable. They also agree that China's peaceful rise is possible because of harmonious traditional Chinese thoughts' important influence on China. The "co-existing theory of international society" (*guoji gongsheng lilun*), which was developed by the Shanghai school, a faction of the Chinese school of IR theories, argued that China's traditional thought

of respecting and tolerating each other's bottom-line interests should be promoted in the globalized world to create "co-existing" peace (Jin, 2011, pp. 16-21; Ren, 2019). The theory of integrating difference (*heyi*) developed by Wang Fan, a Professor of Chinese Foreign Affairs University, claims that by respecting, coordinating, and even integrating difference, states can have a long-lasting cooperative relationship with each other—this is the main theme of China's foreign policy (Wang, 2018). Likewise, using traditional Chinese thought, Ye Zicheng (2007), a Professor of Peking University, asserted that the main theme of Chinese diplomacy attaches great importance on friendship on the basis of mutual respect and equality. Yan Xuotong (2014, pp. 126-127), a professor at Tsinghua University, believed that, to withstand Sino-US competition, China should distinguish friends and enemies, protect the interests of weak states, and increase strategic credibility by promoting Chinese values, such as justice, and civility.

These theories or arguments downplay China's strong identification with nationalism. The scholars of the Shanghai school neglect that the two countries' bottom-line interests may be mutually exclusive, such as territorial disputes between regional countries and China (Jin, 2011, p. 16; Ren, 2019). Wang Fan (2018, p. 12) claimed that China's policy of shelving sovereignty and pursuing joint development is a good example of the integrating difference theory because it respects differences and finds an effective solution in pursuit of mutual interests. However, in fact, this policy failed to "integrate difference" because many regional countries view it as a reflection of the nationalist pursuit of the Chinese because they need to recognize China's sovereignty over the disputed area before the joint development. Ye (2007, p. 28) argued that China assisted Vietnam from 1960 to the 1970s mainly due to the brotherhood of communist states, as demonstrated by Zhou Enlai's talk with Vietnamese leaders in 1974. However, Ye neglects that China and Vietnam clashed over Paracel islands in the same year of Zhou's talk. Yan (2014) downplays that weak states may have conflicting interests with China and that many of them do not believe that China's assertive actions in the SCS reflect justice.

Moreover, while the scholars aim to create Chinese theories that can construct harmonious relationships among states, they explicitly or implicitly express dissatisfactions towards Western culture that “disrespects” diversity and “suppresses” China’s culture or political system (Jin, 2011, p. 16, p. 21; Wang, 2018; Ren, 2019). Thus, they ironically demonstrate ideological competition between China and Western countries.

Using SIT, the findings of this chapter disagree with these scholars’ argument that the competition is avoidable. In contrast, this thesis agrees with the argument of IR scholars who use SIT that China is unwilling to abandon the two identities through social mobility because of its strong identification with them (Larson, 2015; Lee, 2016). However, this thesis does not agree with their argument that social creativity (finding new dimensions or traits for comparison) is a feasible strategy for China to rise peacefully without transforming its communist and nationalist identities (Larson, 2015; Lee, 2016). First, China cannot neglect the negative emotions or self-image caused by the nationalist identity by addressing other dimensions for comparison. Nationalism could be easily activated by and applied to present events, which could not be offset by China’s favorable comparison on a new dimension, such as its strong capability of infrastructure building. Second, China’s effort to find positive traits of its communist identity for comparison is unrecognized by the advantaged democratic states, which exacerbate China’s feeling of unfairness. Thus, social creativity is not a feasible strategy for China to avoid competition with the US nor other regional countries on strategic, territorial arrangements, or ideological dimensions. The thesis then analyzes the reasons why China meets the three conditions of social competition in detail.

By concluding that the competition is inevitable, this chapter serves as the starting point for China’s strategic management of identities and interests, which is an example of SIT’s recategorization strategy and emphasis on the actor’s rational choice. This is because only through identifying competitive dimensions between

China and other countries, can the thesis identify other dimensions that are useful for China to construct shared identities or interests with them. In addition, by identifying the dimensions where competitions between China and other countries are inevitable, the thesis can analyze how China attempted to manage consequences derived from its actions that conflict with others' interests.

The chapter will analyze the two identities through SIT's identity management strategies one by one. In the first part, the chapter will examine China's interpretation of the century of humiliation (1840-1949) featured by an unfavorable comparison between weak China and strong imperial powers. The suffering of the Chinese nation and the unfavorable comparison in the century have deeply influenced the ordinary Chinese and the party state. Thus, social mobility and creativity strategies cannot improve China's self-esteem that stemmed from unfavorable comparisons. Additionally, as will be explained in the first part, in terms of the three conditions that cause social competition (the disadvantageous group's perception of having an unstable and illegitimate status relationship with the advantaged group and a cognitive alternative) (Larson, 2015; Hogg, 2016, p. 7), competitions between China and the US or some regional countries are inevitable with regard to territorial dispute and strategic dimension in East Asia, as China's power continues to grow. The second part of the chapter will analyze how China uses social creativity to redefine the stigmatized traits of its communist identity, but is continuously subjected to a negative self-image because of an unfavorable comparison with liberal countries on the ideological dimension. Also, as a staunch pluralist, China's rise will challenge the US-led promotion of liberal internationalism.

The chapter recognizes that there is a debate about the meaning of China. Qin (2006, p. 13) argues that China has an "identity dilemma," and is necessary to answer the question, "Who is China?" when the country integrates into the international order. Likewise, Xu (2010, p. 80) lamented that contemporary China lacks its own values and only relies on the notion of sovereignty to define itself. Xu (2010, p. 80) also

argues that China should not define itself by relying heavily on the other, but as a civilization that could provide more universal values that ameliorate the self and other distinction. As noted earlier, many Chinese scholars define China as a country with a long tradition of benevolence and civility (Ye, 2007, p. 25; Wang, 2020).

Despite the debate, this chapter focuses on the nationalist and communist identities of China because they constitute important parts of contemporary China's meaning. When Qin (2006, p. 13) questioned who China is, he already somewhat defined China by differentiating it from other Western countries. He also argued that "the development of nationalism makes China feel pressurized by the international order" (Qin, 2006, p.13). In fact, the major theme of Qin's (2006) article is less about the loss of China's identities, and more about the incompatibility between its identities and the Western-led international order, as well as the need to find a way to help China integrate into the Western-led order with comfort. Xu's (2010, p. 80) argument that China can define itself as a civilization that promotes universal value is somewhat idealistic. Based on conflicting identities, the definition of universal values can be conflicting. For instance, peace is a universal value. Chinese scholars promote co-existing peace based on pluralism and aims to accommodate China's communist identity in the liberal order (Jin, 2011, pp. 16-21; Ren, 2019). In contrast, Western scholars may support democratic peace that is based on solidarism and promotes democratization of authoritarian states. Thus, the Chinese "civilization" (Xu, 2010) cannot be detached from China's identities, and can draw boundaries between the self and other. Likewise, as noted above, scholars who define China through its traditions neglect the important influence of the nationalist and communist identity on contemporary China.

This chapter also recognizes that the dominant official narrative of Chinese nationalism is often challenged by alternative discourses (Callahan, 2006). However, the chapter focuses on the official construction of nationalism because the official view has a more profound impact on ordinary Chinese and Chinese elites' actions

than the alternative views. Most Chinese people gain knowledge about nationalism through national education and propaganda systems. As will be noted in the section on nationalism below, the official narrative on the century of humiliation guided China's policies.

Nationalism

Social identity refers to an "individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, cited in Turner, 1982, p. 18). SIT assumes that people develop a positive/negative image of the self in terms of favorable/unfavorable comparisons with other groups (Hogg, 2016, p. 7). Groups that unfavorably compare themselves with other groups on many dimensions strive to "shrug off" the negative emotions about the self and enhance their positivity through identity management strategies (social mobility, social creativity, and social competition) (Hogg, 2016, p. 7).

Nationality is the common social group to which people categorize, attach emotional and value importance, and compare with other states. In the case of China, the most prominent feature of its nationalism is the interpretation of the century of humiliation (1840–1949). The main theme of the century of humiliation is the unfavorable comparison of power between weak China and strong imperial powers. In the interpretation, the late Qing Dynasty and ROC were unable to prevent strong imperial powers from invading and bullying China from 1840 to 1949 because these two governments were backward and corrupted. During this period, China was forced to cede territories to and sign unequal treaties with imperial powers. Thus, China viewed the unfavorable comparison of power between itself and imperial powers as the root cause of the nation's suffering in the century of national humiliation. Also, through a patriotic education system, the CCP reminded the nation to never forget the unfavorable comparison between China and imperial powers and the humiliating

experience in the century of humiliation. As a result, the experience and comparison between disadvantaged China and advantaged imperial powers in the century of humiliation ingrained the negative feelings of being weak and bullied in the Chinese people.

Many scholars who discuss China's nationalism tend to regard it as a tool of the CCP. They often argue that the CCP constructed nationalism to strengthen the legitimacy of the party (Zhao, 1998, p. 293; Callahan, 2010, p. 33; Roy, 2013, p. 14; Dickson, 2016, pp. 35-36). For instance, the state-run patriotic education and propaganda system made great efforts to educate the Chinese on the great sacrifice of the CCP in saving the nation from the century of humiliation (1840-1949) (Zhao, 1998, p. 297; Callahan, 2010, p. 46; Roy, 2013, p. 14; Dickson, 2016, pp. 35-36). Other discussions on Chinese nationalism were centered on the communist party's utilization of nationalism to pursue its domestic and foreign objectives. Guo (2012, cited in Zhao, 2013, p. 537) suggested that through making the state become the key for nationalist aspiration and politically controlling nationalists' anger and remarks, the CCP makes nationalism subordinate to its interests. Weiss (2013, p. 30) pointed out that, on the one hand, Chinese elites permit nationalist protests to signal their determination and difficulty in reaching a compromise in an international bargain. On the other hand, they stop these protests to reassure foreign partners of their willingness to cooperate (Weiss, 2013, p.30). Likewise, Steinberg and O'Hanlon (2014, p. 43) argued that Chinese leaders "have rallied nationalist sentiment when it is seen to serve national and party's interests... and sought to turn it off when the leadership wished to create a more positive atmosphere."

These views are somewhat convincing. It is true that the CCP constructed nationalism and increased the Chinese people's identification with the party through binding the party with national survival. The Chinese are immersed in patriotic activities, such as television episodes about the Anti-Japanese War, almost every day.

However, just regarding nationalism as the party's construction to gain leverage in an international bargain or avoid color revolution simplifies the relationship between Chinese nationalism and the party. This also weakens the significance of nationalism for the party state PRC. In essence, the CCP has been a nationalist party since Mao's leadership and the PRC has been a nationalist country, rather than a pure communist state since its founding. Communism is the means for the state or party to achieve nationalist goals. CCP elites like Mao chose communism because of the view that the Chinese had made great efforts to learn Western ideology and science since the first Opium War in 1840, but failed, which led the imperial powers to continue to bully China (Mao, 1949). They believed that China was in a poor socio-economic condition (e.g., unbalanced regional development, being divided by imperial powers) (Mao, 1965, cited in Li, 2013) and that the imperial power had enormous advantages over the country in nearly all aspects (Mao, 1965, cited in Li, 2013). If China pursued capitalism under such circumstances, it would inevitably become a vassal of imperial powers instead of finding independence and power (Mao, 1965, cited in Li, 2013). Hence, only communism can save China (Deng, 1989). Likewise, the lyrics and theme of the PRC national anthem is not about communism. It calls on the Chinese people to fight against enemies because the Chinese nation is in great danger. Since the founding of the PRC, the CCP has continued promising the Chinese people to make China an independent and great power and keep oppressors away. Viewing the party state as a nationalist and official historical books as its interpretation of history rather than its tool for maintaining legitimacy after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident enhances the understanding of the party state's thought, goal, and preference.

This chapter argues that as a nationalist state, the unfavorable comparison with imperial powers in the century of humiliation and related negative feelings about the self cannot be managed through the social mobility and social creativity strategies of SIT. Social mobility refers to the abandonment of nationalism. Some scholars have

already voiced the need for China to abandon nationalism. Hu (2020, p. 39) argued that Chinese nationalism based on the century of humiliation is exclusive, offensive, and self-defeating and should be replaced with more universal values. Likewise, Xu (2010, p. 74) believed that it is a tragedy that the awareness of nation states and sovereignty dominate “Chinese subjectivity,” which must conflict with the West to preserve the existence of the self. Thus, Xu (2010, p. 77) argued that China should promote more universal values to control the “evil” of nationalism. Additionally, Chen (2015) asserted that Chinese nationalism is emotional and exclusive and will not be helpful for China’s peaceful rise.

From a SIT perspective, these scholars falsely regard many negative but universal impacts of nationalism as unique traits of Chinese nationalism. SIT views that just random categorization is enough for the group to define the self and other and have in-group favoritism and outgroup hostility (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p. 99). Like gender, nationality is the most common social category, to which people attach values and emotional importance. Thus, in terms of SIT, the distinction between the self and other, ingroup favoritism, and outgroup hostility are naturally high when people strongly identify with their states. The CCP’s nationalist narrative, therefore, does not lead to, but increases ingroup favoritism and outgroup hostility.

Despite the scholars’ wish for abandonment, the PRC is reluctant to use the social mobility strategy to abandon nationalism and shrug off the negative self-image that stems from it. For instance, in his statement on China’s memorial day for the Nanjing Massacre in 2014, President Xi (2014, cited in People’s Net, 2014) stated that “forgetting history means betrayal.” Instead of promoting another national narrative to decrease outgroup hostility, the PRC strengthened its current nationalist narrative. Since 2017, history textbooks and Chinese literature have been adding more official narratives on the sufferings of the Chinese during the Anti-Japanese War (Li and Zhang, 2017).

Callahan (2006, pp. 185-186) argued that the discourse and textbooks on national humiliation have been revived since the 1990s to redirect the attention of the Chinese from domestic issues to foreign enemies. It seems that the PRC did not attach importance to its nationalist identity from 1947 to 1990 because “no new textbooks about national humiliation were published in China” (Callahan, 2006, p. 185) in this period. However, although no new textbooks about the humiliation were published, patriotic education about the century of humiliation did not weaken, which showed that the PRC did attach importance to its nationalist identity during this period. This is because the main content in history textbooks that were published by the People’s Education Press and were commonly used in Chinese schools during this period was about the struggles of the Chinese in the century of humiliation (People’s Education Press, 1960).

Even if the century of humiliation was downplayed in textbooks from 1947 to 1989, it played an important role when Chinese leaders devised national policies during this time. This has been demonstrated by the leaders’ conceptualization of China’s grand naval strategy of near sea defense. In 1953, Mao stated that because China was bullied by imperial powers coming from the sea in the past, it should build a strong navy to resist possible interventions from the sea (Mao, 1953, cited in Wen and Zhang, 2018). Likewise, in 1985, Liu Huaqing, then Chinese Navy General, argued that because many imperial powers invaded China from the sea in the 19th and 20th centuries, Chinese navy must have the sufficient capability to deter military intervention from the first island chain (Liu, 2004, p. 439). In 1988, then Admiral Zhang Lianzhong (1988, cited in Dutta, 2005, p. 281) argued that “the nation’s suffering from lack of sea defense still remains fresh in our minds and the history should not repeat itself.”

Besides the infeasibility of the social mobility strategy, it is hard for China to sidestep negative feelings derived from the century of humiliation through the social creativity strategy by finding new dimensions or other countries for comparison. This is

because these feelings can easily be activated by and applied to present events. For instance, having felt oppressed and humiliated, many Chinese associated the US bombing of China's Belgrade Embassy in 1999 with the century of humiliation and reasoned that the bombing was caused by the unfavorable comparison of power between China and the US (Gries, 2001, pp. 36-37). Likewise, China quickly associated the "unequal" trade negotiation between itself and the US in 2019 (Trump, 2019, cited in Lawder and Bose, 2019) with unequal treaties it signed with imperial powers (People's Daily, 2019). It also associated feelings of being bullied during the negotiation with its experiences during the century of humiliation (People's Daily, 2019). The strong and negative emotions of nationalists activated by the events that occurred at present can hardly be offset by social creativity strategies, such as China's favorable comparison with other countries like Laos, or on other dimensions, such as, a strong capability for infrastructure building.

As social mobility and creativity are infeasible for managing China's nationalist identity and transforming its negative self-image into positive one, the chapter argues that the competition between China and the US or regional countries with regard to strategic dimension or territorial disputes is inevitable as China's power grows. As noted in the second chapter, social competition occurs under three conditions. The first is that the status relationship between the advantaged and disadvantaged group is unstable (able to be changed) (Larson, 2015, p. 329; Hogg, 2016, p. 7). Second, the disadvantaged group deems the status relationship illegitimate (Larson, 2015, p. 329; Hogg, 2016, p. 7). Third, the disadvantaged group has a cognitive alternative that refers to "an alternative social world-a sense of somewhere different that we want to go" and a plan "of how we might get there" (Reicher and Haslam, 2012, p. 55; Lyster et al, 2017, p. 751). All three conditions are met by China's nationalism.

First, while China's power still lags behind the US, as many scholars have suggested, (Larson, 2015, p. 337; Christensen, 2015, p. 3; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016), the country is determined to increase its power, which will inevitably lead to the instability

of its status relationship with the US. China believes that it must strive to change the unfavorable comparison of power and improve its capabilities on all dimensions where it compares unfavorably with developed countries to prevent the century of humiliation from happening again. Among all capabilities that China wishes to improve, economic and military power are of priority. The century of humiliation has ingrained in China the view that only by becoming militarily and economically strong, can the weak deter their oppressors and maintain peace. Thus, Chinese elites do not deem national defense buildup as a betrayal of China's promise of a peaceful rise, but believe it is a necessity to defend peace. For instance, after the US bombing of the Chinese Belgrade embassy in 1999, then Chinese President Jiang Zemin (1999) pointed out that the priority was to make China economically and militarily strong; otherwise, it would never be secure and have a peaceful environment since it was incapable of preventing aggressions. Likewise, the current Chinese President Xi Jinping (2018, cited in Gong and Hou, 2018) pointed out that China will stick to the path of peaceful development, but should clearly be aware that peace must be defended by the strong army.

Second, in East Asia, China feels disadvantaged in the territorial disputes in varying degrees because its claims over sovereignty of the disputed territories or Taiwan do not meet reality. The Diaoyu islets are claimed by China and Japan, but are de facto controlled by the latter. Taiwan remains to have a de facto independence. Many of China's claimed land features in the SCS are occupied by some Southeast Asian states in varying degrees.

China views that the status quo of the Taiwan Strait and regional countries' stance on their territorial disputes with China violate its sovereignty and are, therefore, illegitimate. This feeling of illegitimacy is one of the major reasons why China wishes to change its disadvantageous position on territorial disputes. This will result in frictions between China and regional countries. As some regional countries and

Taiwan rely on the US to counter China's military actions regarding the disputes, frictions between China and the US will also likely occur.

Moreover, China feels that it is in a strategically disadvantaged and unfair position in East Asia. While the US and East Asian partners and allies view that the bilateral security system is positive-sum and maintains regional stability, China has often criticized that the US-led bilateral security alliance system is a relic of the Cold War and aims to contain China's rise (Xue, 2016; Liff, 2018, p. 141). The fact that the US-led hub-and-spoke security system is situated in the island chains opposite China's long coastline has given China a sense of being besieged. China believes that the US is utilizing Taiwan as an unsinkable aircraft carrier to contain China (Zhu, 2000, cited in CCTV.com, 2000). Senior officers of the Chinese navy referred to the US-led island chains as the "shackles" of China (Mei, 2013).

Finally, China has a clear cognitive alternative to its current position in East Asia. Chinese leaders talk about national rejuvenation. An article published by *People's Daily* has called for the resumption of China's status that is consistent with historical memory of it being a great power in Asia (Cao, 2013). National rejuvenation is, thus, an alternative future that China wishes to achieve. China also has a clear plan of achieving national rejuvenation. Many Chinese elites and scholars define national rejuvenation as "becoming a rich country and building a strong army" (*fuguo qiangjun*) (Xi, 2012, cited in Xinhua Net, 2012; Sun, 2018). In the context of East Asia, recovering lost territories is an important status marker of national rejuvenation. For instance, in his 2019 speech, Xi (2019) stated that the Taiwan issue is caused by China's weakness and will, thus, be solved as China becomes powerful. Recovering Taiwan is, therefore, an indispensable step in achieving national rejuvenation. Breaking the perceived US-led encirclement is another important status marker of national rejuvenation because it demonstrates the capability of preventing China from being invaded or militarily blockaded by the US-led encirclement.

China's communist identity

While China has been integrating itself into the liberal economic order and opening its market for decades, its Leninist and authoritarian regime remains. This regime has been negatively evaluated in the US-led order. The first criticism of China's political system is that the CCP elites lack "legal-electoral legitimacy," which refers to "laws as binding principle for all social groups... and top leaders are popularly elected on regular basis" (Zhao, 2009, p. 418). In Chinese society, whether or not the party is more powerful than law is a never-ending debate. Although the party denies this, it acknowledges that many government officials or leaders of party organizations do not obey the law (Xi, 2015, cited in People's Daily, 2015). Moreover, top leaders and senior officials of the state are appointed by party organizations rather than through a national election. The second criticism is the state's over-penetration to society (Economy, 2018, p. 62) or suppression of civil society's development. The freedom of speech in Chinese society is suppressed. Domestically, online conversations, comments, or literature are censored. China also restricts the development of non-governmental and party affiliated organizations. The third criticism is the state's strict control over the spread of liberal ideas, such as China's "great firewall," which has prevented domestic netizens from connecting with many international websites and using social networking apps.

Despite criticism from democratic countries, China has no intention to use the social mobility strategy by transforming into a liberal democracy. In many occasions, Chinese leaders have stated that they oppose the transformation of its communist identity. For instance, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping (1986, cited in Zhang, 2018) stated in 1986 that he would never give up the CCP's leadership and change the political system of the country. Likewise, Deng's successors Jiang Zemin (1998, cited in People's Net, 2001) and Hu Jintao (2008, cited in Nanfang Net, 2008) often stated their uncompromising attitude towards political liberalization and the transformation

of the communist identity. In 2019, President Xi (2019, cited in People's Daily-CPC News, 2019) clearly stated that the "PRC is red and we must not lighten the color."

Shambaugh (2016, p. 99) argued that China's policy is not unchanged, but has been dynamic since the 1950s; it has been in a cycle of "political tightening and loosening." Shambaugh (2016, pp. 100-111) claimed that this is because political power has been periodically controlled by divergent political factions, which include "conservatives" that do not view political liberalization as a necessity and "political reformers" that favor "measured political liberalization." In terms of the divergent views, China has shifted from a liberal neo-Authoritarianism that introduced political reforms (1980–1989) to neo-totalitarianism wherein the party substantially strengthened its control over all levels of the society (1989–1992), then to soft authoritarianism that loosened the party's control over other systems such as the government (1998-2008), and eventually to hard authoritarianism (2009–2015) (Shambaugh, 2016, pp. 100-111).

China does have the cycle of "political tightening and loosening" (Shambaugh, 2016, pp. 100-111). However, more than factional competition, this is due to the CCP's perception of whether or not the party's domination over other systems is secure. To the CCP, the core of the Chinese communist identity is the CCP's domination over other systems in China since Mao's leadership. This was reflected by the General Secretary's report in the 19th CCP National Congress that "the most essential trait of socialism with Chinese characteristics is CCP's leadership" (Xi, 2020). Since Mao's leadership, the CCP has sometimes conducted political loosening measures, but never tolerated political reforms that would seriously threaten the party's domination. In the political loosening period, the CCP strengthened the party's domination if the leaders felt that its status was being threatened. For instance, Deng publicized an article in 1978 calling for emancipating thoughts and reforming polity (Deng, 1978). This article marked the starting point of the political reform period from 1980 to 1989. However, this article led to a strong criticism against the CCP's leadership within the

party and in society in 1979 (People's daily-CPC News Net, 2014). For instance, some CCP elites criticized that it was inappropriate that the constitution guarantees the CCP's leadership over the country (People's Daily-CPC News Net, 2014). Many Chinese also strongly criticized the CCP's leadership (People's Daily-CPC News Net, 2014). Having felt that the party's domination was being seriously threatened, Deng ordered the suppression of the social democratic movement and set up the four basic principles that stressed the unchallengeable position of the CCP's leadership (People's Daily-CPC News Net, 2014). In 1984, CCP senior leader Chen Yun opposed the reform that would allow the Special Economic Zone Shenzhen to have its own currency for fear that it will threaten the CCPCC's power by challenging the dominance of the Renminbi in China (Zhu, 2016, p. 29). The change from soft to hard authoritarian from 2008 to 2019 is not so much because political reformers lost the competition with conservatives, but rather because the party views that the CCP's leadership was being threatened. In 2011, then Chinese President Hu Jintao stated in his report that after years of political loosening, the party faces trials concerning the decentralization of its power because members sacrifice the party's collectivism to pursue individualistic interests, and people become less dependent on the party (Gong, 2011). These trials have been reiterated by CCP documents and leaders since 2011 (Zhou et al, 2012). As a result, the party introduced numerous measures to recentralize, such as increasing party members' obedience to the party's leadership through educational campaigns and strengthening grassroots party branches to reinforce its control over individual Chinese. Thus, while the CCP has been conducting several political loosening measures since 1950, the core of China's communist identity remains unchanged because the CCP has never tolerated any reform that would seriously threaten the party's domination over other systems since Mao's ruling.

Because the CCP is unwilling to abandon its communist identity, the social mobility strategy is ineffective in ameliorating people's negative self-image towards the communist regime. The CCP had used the social creativity strategy to enhance the

Chinese people's positive attitudes towards the regime. The social creativity strategy postulates that to enhance its positive self-image, an actor can find new traits or dimensions for comparison (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p. 104). This method is used by the CCP to sidestep negative attributes that democratic countries designate to its communist identity and emphasize the new and positive traits of the communist regime.

First, the CCP has tried to convince the Chinese that, despite the communist regime's limits on freedom of speech, it is good for the nation's stability and development. CCP elites have often argued that maintaining the centralized political system is vital for the stability and unity of the country, which are prerequisites for national development. In 1989, Deng (1989) stated that "China must not be in chaos...we must let Chinese... understand, increasing control [over the society] is to maintain stability, facilitate reform and opening up, and national modernization." Likewise, in 2000, Jiang (2000) stated that "through a combination of history and the reality, we should make people understand reasons that only socialism can save and develop China." Jiang's statement echoed the historical textbook narrative that, among political parties in the century of humiliation, only the CCP succeeded in putting an end to the partition of China and the imperial power's unequal treatment of the Chinese people (Jiang, 2001). Also, Xi Jinping (2016, cited in Xinhua Agency, 2016d) stated in 2016 that political education must "let students understand the historical inevitability of socialism with Chinese characteristics." This echoed Jiang's statement that "only socialism can save and develop China."

The second argument of the CCP is that despite the communist regime's lack of electoral legitimacy, it is effective. As some scholars (Zhao, 2009, p. 416; Yang and Zhao, 2015, p. 65; Allison, 2017, p. 143) have rightly pointed out, the communist regime depends on performance legitimacy to win popular support, such as economic development. Chinese leaders often highlight that "the biggest advantage of Chinese communist regime is the ability to concentrating power to make big things"

(Xi, no date, cited in Renping, 2019). That is, the centralized political system ensures a “strong state capacity,” which refers to the capability to maximize the state’s effectiveness in extracting natural, socio-economic, and human resources for power accumulation and national development (Tellis, 2013, p. 78). In 2018, a film produced by China Central Television (CCTV) titled “Amazing China” was released. This movie aimed to show the domestic audience the national accomplishments under the CCP’s leadership since 2012, the 18th National Congress of the CCP (CCTV, 2018). One accomplishment listed by the film was that China completed the construction of several bridges connecting the mountainous regions, which are among the top 10 highest bridges in the world (CCTV, 2018), from 2012 to 2018.

The CCP not only views the communist identity as stable and effective, but it also compares favorably with democratic countries on these new dimensions. First, the CCP views that the communist regime is much more stable than emerging democratic countries. In 2013, Xi (2013) compared China with many developing countries that have democratized after the Cold War. He argued that after democratization for more than a decade, these countries have still been embroiled in social unrest and can hardly restore stability. Second, the CCP stated that the communist regime is more effective than established democratic countries. In 2016, an official commentary (Zhongsheng, 2016) argued that the 2016 US Presidential election has revealed the shortcoming of a democratic political system. From the article’s perspective, Presidential candidates were busy speaking ill of each other rather than competing for policies that aimed to solve political polarization and the socio-economic problems of the US (Zhongsheng, 2016). The election also became a game of political contributions and the Presidential candidates served the interests of vested interests’ groups that donated to their campaigns rather than those of ordinary citizens (Zhongsheng, 2016). While the article did not mention the communist regime, it is reasonable to assume that by pointing out the shortcomings of the election, it indicated that the CCP’s performance legitimacy compares favorably with the electoral legitimacy of the democratic political system. This is

because, from the CCP's view, the communist regime is more effective than democratic countries in solving deep-rooted social issues and implementing policies without constraints from interests groups.

However, the CCP's social creativity strategy is ineffective to a certain degree because the positive traits of the communist regime are not acknowledged, and the regime is still subjected to the negative evaluation of democratic countries. As a result, Chinese elites often feel of being unfairly treated when negative evaluation of the CCP regime is mentioned. In 2016, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was angry about a Canadian journalist's question concerning China's human rights record (Buckley, 2016). He condemned the reporter for being biased and asked her whether she knew that China has lifted above six hundred million Chinese out of poverty and transformed the once backward country into the second largest economy in the world (Buckley, 2016). This is not the first time that a top rank Chinese official was irritated by questions regarding China's achievement of liberal democratic values. In 2009, during his meeting with Mexican Chinese, Xi Jinping, then Chinese Vice President, argued that the contribution of China to the world is that "in the midst of international financial turmoil, China was still able to solve the problem of feeding its 1.3 billion people" (Blanchard, 2013). He also expressed anger that "some foreigners with full bellies and nothing better to do engage in finger-pointing at us" (Blanchard, 2013). Xi and Wang's reply to negative evaluations of the communist regime have stressed its performance legitimacy as they pointed out China's success in growing the economy and lifting the country out of poverty. However, they felt that the performance legitimacy had not been acknowledged and the regime is still subjected to negative evaluations. Xi's remarks also demonstrate how he felt it was unfair that democratic countries occupy a higher status on the ideological dimension and lecture China on rightful actions. According to SIT, the disadvantageous group's feeling of unfairness towards negative evaluations is the major reason that the group wishes to change the existing status relationship with the advantaged

Besides the feeling of unfairness, China has a cognitive alternative to the current status relationship between itself and the US on the ideological dimension, another sufficient condition for competition to occur. Some scholars (Boyle, 2016, pp. 35-36; Economy, 2018, p. 69; Friedberg, 2018, p. 50) argued that China's rise will lead to the export of illiberal values and preservation of illiberal states. However, although China recognizes that its rise provides developing countries an alternative model of modernization (Xi, 2017), it promotes pluralism in the international community. For instance, when introducing his most important diplomatic concept community of common destiny, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that countries "need to make sure that all countries respect one another and treat each other as equals" and "respect other countries' social systems and development paths of their own choice" (Xi, 2015). Also, to build the community of common destiny, Xi (2015) called for managing collective problems, such as climate change, and seeking a "win-win cooperation and common development." The remarks of Xi (2015) clearly demonstrate the features of pluralism that respect sovereign equality and cultural diversity and set up a framework for seeking shared interests and handling collective problems on the basis of coexistence. By showing respect for cultural diversity and opposing "interference to others internal affairs" (Xi, 2015), China demonstrates its resistance to liberal internationalism, which often pressures non-democratic countries into accepting ideological convergence on liberal ideas (Buzan, 2014, p.114).

Conclusion

Scholars using SIT to analyze China's rise generally argue that social creativity is a viable strategy for China to achieve a peaceful rise and help the country avoid competition with the US or other regional countries without having to abandon communist and nationalist identities. This chapter disagrees with their argument and argues that competition between China and the US or regional countries on several dimensions is inevitable. Because China strongly identifies with nationalism and

communist identities, it could not shrug off the negative self-concept derived from the two identities through social mobility and creativity. Also, China's rise satisfies three conditions (unstable status relationship, feeling of unfairness, alternative future) that enable social competition (Larson, 2015). First, since the unfavorable comparison of power between China and the imperial powers during the century of humiliation has been ingrained in China's mind, it is determined to improve its capabilities on nearly all dimensions with unfavorable comparisons to developed countries, especially economic and military power. This makes the status relationship between China and the US unstable. Second, nationalism makes China feel disadvantaged in territorial disputes and the geostrategic status quo of East Asia. China also feels of being treated unfairly when its communist identity is negatively judged by democratic countries. Third, the two identities have a profound influence on China definition of an alternative future to the current status. Consolidating sovereign claim and reversing disadvantageous geostrategic status regarded by China as a must for national rejuvenation. China also wishes to rise as a "modernized socialist great power" (Xi, 2019). Thus, it will continue to confront democratic countries on ideological dimension. It has promoted pluralist values as an alternative to the US' promotion of liberal democracy. Finally, the unstable Sino-US status caused by China's rise will threaten US leadership and make the latter constrain China's rising power, thereby making Sino-US competition inevitable.

Part 4. CCP/China's historical application of strategic management of identities/interests (1944-2009)

Chapter 5: CCP/China's strategic management of identities and interests in Mao's time (1944–1976)

Chapter 4 challenged the argument of scholars that Sino–US competition can be avoided through social creativity wherein China chooses other dimensions for comparison. The chapter further argues that competition between China and the US or some regional countries on geostrategic and ideological dimensions is inevitable. Many realists may argue that China will face a US-led hard-balancing coalition in East Asia, which will probably result in war, due to the inevitability of the competition.

However, the CCP's UFS during the Anti-Japanese War, which is the practice that combines SIT's recategorization strategy with its emphasis on the actor's rational choice, provides insight that China could maintain its communist identity and crucial nationalist interests while thwarting a hard-balancing coalition to create a benign environment by strategically managing identities and interests. In other words, based on the view that the communist regime and crucial nationalist interests are secure, China could thwart a hard-balancing coalition by seeking shared identities/interests with other actors and downplaying conflicting ones. This chapter applies the UFS in the Sino–US/regional countries' relations. It examines the extent to which the CCP, and later the PRC, could preserve its communist identity and protected crucial nationalist interests while breaking the US-led military and economic blockade to create a relatively peaceful environment during Mao's time (1944–1976) through the strategic management of identities/interests. Drawing on the CCP's UF framework, the main target the CCP sought shared identities or interests with during this period was the US. This is because, as will be demonstrated later, the CCP believed that it

could only lift the blockade by bettering its relationship with the commander of the blockading forces.

The main arguments of the chapter are as follows. First, the shared identity/interests approach did break the US-led military and economic blockade on China even if China did not change the political system and concede important nationalist interests, such as those related to the Taiwan issue. During the last few years of Mao's chairmanship (1972–1976), China successfully broke the blockades by forming a strategic partnership with the US. Second, the strategic partnership reduced the salience of China's communist identity and made the US compromise on conflicting interests related to China's nationalist identity, such as withdrawing the US army from Taiwan. Third, the CCP downplayed the communist and nationalist identities to bettering the US-China relationship, such as proposing ideological armistice and tolerating Taiwan's de facto independence.

However, this strategy had limitations. First, the CCP was unwilling to concede when it perceived the communist regime and crucial nationalist interests were insecure; thus, the shared identity/interests approach may fail. This is the reason that led to the CCP's failure to form an anti-Japanese alliance with the US in 1944 and receive US recognition in 1949. Second, the shared interests/identity may not be important enough to ameliorate frictions derived from conflicting identities. This was evidenced by China's failure to use shared interests of easing the Taiwan Strait tension in 1955 to pave the way for establishing a Sino-US diplomatic relationship.

To begin, some scholars argued that the US and PRC had lost a chance for mutual accommodation from 1949 to 1950 (Cohen, 1997, p. 71; Chen, 2001, p. 39). They argued that US anti-communist and pro-KMT policies made the PRC an enemy because the CCP had sincerely wished to receive assistance from the US on economic reconstruction and balance against the Soviet Union in this period (Chen, 2001, p. 39). Others did not believe the chance had existed. Sheng (1994, p. 478)

and Chen (2001, p. 3) doubted the sincerity of the CCP's overtures for US friendship in this period. Garver (1997, pp. 89-90) stressed that the CCP's ideological distrust and internationalist revolutionary goal of defeating capitalism made the accommodation impossible.

This chapter agrees with the skeptics that the chance did not exist in this period, but disagrees that the CCP's overtures was insincere because the CCP had attached great importance to developing a benign relationship with the US for the most part during Mao's time. Also, the chapter does not view that the CCP's ideological distrust towards the US prevented it from pursuing a benign relationship with the US. The distrust persisted when the US and China reconciled in 1972. The 1972 rapprochement demonstrates that the SIT is right; shared identities, in this instance, the Sino-US strategic partnership against the Soviet Union, would cancel out the negative effects of conflicting ones and enable conflicting parties to compromise with each other. As will be demonstrated later, the internationalist revolutionary interests might not matter too much in the CCP's consideration of seeking a benign relationship with the US because they were not core interests related to its communist identity, even when it was under Mao's ruling. Thus, Mao might not suffer such heavy psychological costs of abandoning internationalist revolutionary interests and pursuing accommodation with the US, as Garver argues (1997, p. 94)

The chapter argues that the CCP attempted to unblock the US-led military and economic blockade during Mao's time by establishing a benign relationship with the US without compromising core nationalist interests, such as the Taiwan issue, and destabilizing the CCP's control of China. Although the US and the CCP, and later the PRC, did have some contacts to develop an amicable relationship from 1944 to 1945 and from 1949 to 1950, the CCP failed to achieve the three goals simultaneously, mainly due to its reluctance to reach compromises regarding the core ideological and nationalist interests. In 1970s. the CCP had consolidated control over Chinese society and began to form the strategic partnership with the US, which finally helped

it achieve the three goals simultaneously. The following section will present these arguments.

While the CCP, and later the PRC, and the US have competitive identities, it has viewed the importance of having a benign relationship with the US since 1944. First, it wished to gain economic and technological assistance from the US. During the anti-Japanese War, Mao stated that the CCP could gain US military and economic support by cooperating with the US (Hu, 2003). According to Huang Hua, a senior CCP leader from 1941 to 1990s, Mao expressed his anticipation of cooperating with the US in 1944 to improve China's post-war industrialization (Huang, 2007, p. 85). After the founding of the PRC in 1949, the CCP continued to perceive the importance of trading with and learning from the US-led capitalist camp for China's development, despite Mao's revolutionary rhetoric. In the 1956 speech that established guidelines for the PRC's development, Mao (1956) pointed out that "enterprises of industrialized countries were...highly efficient and good at doing businesses, [we] should learn from them without compromising principles."

Due to the need to trade with capitalist countries, Mao stopped the People's Liberation Army (PLA) from "liberating" HK in 1949. He argued that the city is located at an important trading route and was occupied by the UK. Thus, HK could be used as the PRC's foreign trade port, allowing it to connect with capitalist countries when the country was blockaded by the West (Mao, 1963). By using HK's special position for international trade, the CCP had many secret businesses with enterprises of Western countries, importing many embargoed resources and exporting many agricultural goods from 1949 to 1970 (Party history research group of CCPCC, 2010, p. 78). From the 1972 Sino-US rapprochement to 1974, the CCP seized the opportunity to implement "the four three projects," which imported technological equipment from capitalist countries and expanded China's foreign trade with them (Hua, 2012). This project was viewed by Deng Xiaoping as a pilot test for China's opening up (Deng, no date, cited in Hua, 2012).

Moreover, during Mao's time, China viewed a benign relationship with the US as the key to establishing diplomatic relationships with many East Asian countries, which will enable them to have a relatively stable regional environment. China saw that many East Asian countries have cross-cutting identities with the PRC. They had shared identities/interests with China, such as resident powers of East Asia, and wished to reduce regional tension. However, one of their main identities at that time was the anti-communist allies or partners of the US. From China's perspective, these countries might wish to establish diplomatic relationships with China because of the shared identity or interests, but they would not dare to do so under US pressure (Zhou, 1954; Mao, 1955, 1958). Thus, according to Mao (1972, cited in Lin et al, 1998, p. 255), "once the problem [of starting a benign US-China relationship] was solved, other problems [such as establishing diplomatic relationship with many East Asian countries] would be solved readily." This view proved to be true. After the Sino-US rapprochement in 1972, China established diplomatic relationships with many East Asia countries, which created a relatively peaceful environment between itself and the US East Asian allies and partners. For instance, it established diplomatic relationships with Japan in 1972, and the Philippines and Thailand in 1975.

To develop a benign relationship with the US, the CCP begun its strategic management of identities and interests. First, in the anti-Japanese War period, the CCP tried to form a better relationship with the US by seeking a shared anti-fascist partner identity with the US. In 1944, the CCP enthusiastically welcomed the US military observation group in Yan'an, the capital of the CCP regime at that time (Huang, 2007; Yang, 2010, p. 668). The CCPCC issued a directive to all party organizations in the base areas, calling the CCP's contact with the observation group as the beginning of the party's "diplomatic work" and asking party members to be "good at cooperating with the US group" (Huang, 2007, p. 58). In a welcome article, Mao (1944) wished "the US comrade in arms" to "intimately cooperate with CCP to defeat Japanese army." In the first two months after the group's arrival, major CCP

commanders, such as Lin Biao and Chen Yi, made 10 reports to the group to explain the CCP's anti-Japanese policies (Tao, 2016, p. 152). Mao created a detailed plan to demonstrate that the CCP could be a reliable anti-Japanese ally of the US. For example, he commanded the CCP's army in Shandong to provide the observation group with information on Japanese troops stationed in Qingdao and Lian Yungang (Hu, 2003, p. 341). He also required party organizations in Taihang, Shandong, and Huazhong to build landing areas for US aircrafts (Hu, 2003, p. 341). In January 1945, Mao and Zhou wrote a letter to then US President Roosevelt, saying that the CCP wished to dispatch an unofficial team to the US to explain issues concerning China's Anti-Japanese War (Yang and Zhang, 2009, p. 62).

However, the CCP's effort to form the shared anti-Japanese ally identity with the US failed because of its reluctance to sacrifice core interests related to the communist identity in exchange for forming the shared identity. From 1944 to 1945, the CCP and KMT had two major essential disagreements when the US mediated between them. The CCP had two core interests related to its communist identity. First, it insisted on forming a coalition government consisting of the CCP, KMT, and other political parties (Hu, 2003, p. 356). In other words, the KMT should recognize CCP as an equal political entity and the CCP must retain independent control of its occupied areas. Second, the CCP insisted on maintaining absolute control over its army (Hu, 2003, p. 356). However, the KMT insisted that the CCP must hand over its army to the KMT central committee and that KMT must remain to be the central government of China (Tao, 2016, pp. 168-169). From the CCP's view, the US sided with the KMT to accelerate the formation of a trilateral anti-Japanese alliance and prevent China's civil war, (Hu, 2003, p. 356). Then US representative Patrick Hurley had asked the CCP to accept the KMT's requirements in exchange for US economic and military assistance (Hu, 2003, p. 356). He told Zhou that "we were about to help you, [we prepared] hundreds of thousands stuffs... to help you. but without this deal, I cannot help you" (Hurley, 1945, cited in Hu, 2003, p. 356). In January 1945, CCP sources revealed that the US was providing more military supplies to the KMT (Hu, 2003, p.

356). Further, in April 1945, Hurley stated that the US only supported the KMT government out of all the other armed Chinese parties (Hu, 2003, p. 363). Consequently, the CCP sensed that simultaneously cooperating with the US and preserving its core interests was impossible (Yang, 2010, p. 459; Tao, 2016, p. 117). As a result, at the seventh party congress in July 1945, Mao stated that “we opposed the US government’s policy of supporting Chiang and opposing communist” (Tao, 2016, p. 117).

Chen (2001, p. 24) may view that CCP’s rejection of the US’ suggestion is not because of its unwillingness to sacrifice core-interests related to its communist identity. Chen (2001, p. 24) argued that in early 1945, the CCP changed its attitude towards the US because the Soviet Union’s advancement in Europe made the CCP believe that it could play its Soviet Union card against the US. However, Chen’s information is incorrect. CCP changed its attitude and formally rejected the US proposal on December 2, 1944 (Hu, 2003, p. 357). Second, Chen’s (2001, p. 24) argument indicated that the CCP would accept the suggestion of the US if it did not believe that the Soviet Union would engage in China’s Anti-Japanese War. However, the CCP would never hand over its army and base areas to the KMT in exchange for US assistance. This is demonstrated by the CCP’s formation of an anti-Japanese alliance with the KMT in 1936. As noted in Chapter 3, the CCP was nearing its demise in 1936, but still rejected to hand over its army to the KMT. If the CCP had not handed over its fragile army in the most difficult times, it is unreasonable to conclude that it would do so to receive US assistance. This is because the CCP had more leverage than it did in 1936. In November 1944, the CCP intended to make some compromise, but finally fully rejected the US proposal in December (Hu, 2003, p.357). However, even in the draft demonstrating its compromise, the CCP did not concede its two core interests. Although it stated that its army would be “included” in the national army in the draft, the CCP army was independent from the KMT army because the former proposed the establishment of a military coalition committee (Hu, 2003, p. 357). Moreover, the CCP did not mention the coalition government in the draft, but insisted

on reforming the defense committee and legislative Yuan to allow it, together with the KMT and other political parties, to have equal decision power (Hu, 2003, p. 357). This indicated that the CCP required the KMT to recognize the CCP regime legality in base areas.

The failure of the CCP's engagement with the US in 1945 led to its leaning to one side policy. In April 1945, Mao (1945, cited in Yang, 2010, p. 459) stated that "the US major policy was supporting Chiang...only Soviet Union was the major source of assistance for Chinese people." The CCP also felt that it had a long way to go to develop a benign relationship with the US if the party wished to preserve its communist identity, and later its nationalist identity. Mao (1945, cited in Yang, 2010, p. 459) stated that the "CCP's relationship with the US was ending... without being at the end of its rope, the US would not cooperate with us." Likewise, in 1949, Deng Xiaoping (1949) argued that "imperial powers... wished us to yield to their demands...and we wished them to yield to our demands... we would definitely not yield to their demands but...getting them to yield to our demands was very difficult." Thus, Deng (1949) concluded that "to avoid imperial powers' blockade... we implemented lean to one side policy."

Deng's argument reflected irreconcilable interests between the CCP and the US in 1949. The CCP implemented the cleaning the house policy in 1949. First, the policy meant that the CCP would eradicate all imperial powers' influence and networks in China (Garver, 1997, p. 70). By eradicating this influence, the party could prevent Western powers from mobilizing economic, social, and cultural resources to destabilize or even overturn the CCP government. Second, this policy meant that the CCP would not recognize any treaties signed by the Chiang government and imperial powers that guaranteed the imperial powers, especially the US, privileges in China (Gong, 1998, p. 32). This demonstrated nationalist interests by showing that the CCP founded a new China that freed the Chinese from unequal treatment. Besides this policy, the CCP required imperial powers to shift diplomatic recognition from the ROC

to the PRC (Huang, 2007, p. 81). This was related to the Taiwan issue. These three were bottom-lines that PRC would not concede to the US when establishing a diplomatic relationship.

However, the three bottom-lines were irreconcilable with the US conditions of establishing a diplomatic relationship with the CCP government. In 1949, then US ambassador to China, Leighton Stuart, made clear that the CCP must demonstrate “accepted international practice with respect to treaties” to get US recognition (FRUS, 1949, cited in Sheng, 1994, p. 490). In other words, it must obey the treaties signed by the US and KMT government. Another precondition was that the new PRC government must “extensively involve pro-democracy figures’ participation” (Stuart, 1949, cited in Huang, 2007, p. 81). The CCP viewed most of these figures as US sources that would seriously destabilize its regime. At the meeting of the CCPC politburo in January 1949, Mao (1949) argued that the US “began to dispatch its running dogs...[and] organize so-called opposition party to undermine our revolution inside [CCP regime].” Moreover, regarding the Taiwan issue, Christensen (1995, p. 261) and Garver (1997, p. 92) argued that the US administration had considered abandoning Taiwan in 1949 and early 1950; however, it proved to be a difficult consideration to put into practice. The Sino–US dialogue concerning the Taiwan issue began in 1955. However, the dialogue did not bear anything substantial and ended in 1970. Also, the Taiwan issue was the sticking point in the Sino–US negotiation of establishing a diplomatic relationship in the 1970s.

Sheng (1994, p. 483) argued that the CCP confiscated radios and detained the US consul Ward in Shengyang in 1948 to compel the US to exit China; thus, it was insincere in seeking US recognition. However, one main reason for the CCP’s confiscation of radios and the detainment of Ward was the Soviet Union’s demand. From 1948 to 1949, the CCP wanted to seek US recognition, but did not believe that it could without compromising the bottom-lines that were previously discussed. Thus, while seeking US diplomatic recognition, the CCP wanted to have a good relationship

with the Soviet Union. Deng Xiaoping's article (1949) demonstrated this point. Stating that "getting imperial powers to concede to our demands is very difficult," Deng (1949) argued that "the earlier we lean to one side through actions, the more advantageous we will be." In 1948, the general Consul of the Soviet Union in Shengyang directly demanded the CCP's Northeast Bureau Party Secretary Gao Gang to confiscate all radios from the US, UK, and France Consular (Yang, 1994, p.107). The Soviet Union also made it clear that it opposed the presence of any Western Consular in Northeast China (CCP Northeast Bureau, 1948). To show loyalty to the Soviet Union through actions, Mao sent a directive to Gao Gang that "regarding any foreign affairs concerning Northeast China or the nation, we must consult with the Soviet Union" (Mao, 1948a). However, Mao (1948b) later argued that "even in the Northeast China, the US's withdrawal must be decided by CCPCC, and even if the US withdrew, this did not mean that we will never establish diplomatic relationship with the US in the future."

Kissinger (2012, p. 118) argued that Mao once stated that the leaning to one side policy came about because the US would not give China a "full meal." However, even if the US was ready to give China a full meal in 1949, such as US diplomatic recognition on the PRC, the PRC would be unwilling to pay the price for the meal by conceding its bottom-lines, such as giving up the one party rule political system. When the US offered the full meal in 1972, the CCP had almost eradicated the US "foundation" in China (Mao, 1949). Therefore, it was ready to accept the full meal without compromising the party's control over the Chinese nation.

Although recognizing divergent essential interests between the PRC and the US, Garver (1997, p. 92) argued that the CCP's strong ideological belief, such as supporting the international socialist movement, made US accommodation in 1949 impossible. However, although the CCP did support international revolutionary movements, it did not regard international revolution as a core interest related to its communist identity. The CCP's support for the Korean War (1950–1954) and

Vietnam War (1961–1975) could be viewed as its effort to meet internationalist obligations. For instance, Mao argued that Stalin began to view the CCP as a genuine internationalist rather than a nationalist after the PRC had sent troops to support Kim Il Sung in 1950 (Wu, 1999, p. 327). However, the CCP's decision to join the two wars was in fact due to its need to secure regime survival, more than international obligations. Although speaking of the CCP's internationalist obligation, Peng Dehuai (1981, p. 258), the commander of the Chinese army that assisted Kim, stressed that "if the US stationed troops near Yalu river, it would directly threaten Northeast China and invade China whenever it wanted." Likewise, Mao (1950, cited in Yang, 2020) argued that "if we ignored Korean issue... the US would follow Japan's old path of invading China... assisting North Korea was to prevent the US from achieving its plan." During the Vietnamese War from 1961 to March 1965, China mainly demonstrated its internationalist obligation through non-combat support to the Vietnamese communist party, such as public statements and material supplies (Kissinger, 2012, p. 204). Mao explicitly stated that "the Chinese were very busy with their internal affairs...the Vietnamese could cope with their situation." (Kissinger, 2012, p. 204). China joined the Vietnam War in April 1965 due to the view that the US troop began to threaten South China since March 1965. For instance, the US began to bomb Northern Vietnam in March. In April, US air fighters intruded into China's Hainan Island (Gong, 1998, p. 166). In April 12, Mao (1965, cited in Gong, 1998, p. 166) issued a directive that required CCP party organizations at all levels to "pay close attention to the situation in Vietnam" and "be aware of an adventurous enemy." As demonstrated by the example of the Vietnam and Korean Wars, internationalist obligation was not a sufficient condition that led to the CCP's decision of entering into war, but regime security was.

The failure to accommodate the US in 1949 did not prevent the PRC from continuing its effort to seek shared interests with the US. This had been demonstrated by the 1954-1955 and 1958 cross-strait crises. Chen (2001, p. 167) mainly analyzed the crisis through ideological lenses that were about Mao's intention to heat up

continuous revolution at home. Kissinger (2012, pp. 150-158) mainly analyzed how China and the US managed the crisis under control. Likewise, Chang and Di (1993) examined the interaction between the US and China during the crisis. Unlike their studies, this chapter focuses on how China attempted to construct a shared interest of easing cross-strait tension with the US to establish a relationship between the two sides. The two major results of the two crises were the beginning and resumption of Sino-US ambassadorial talks, respectively, which were the only means of direct official dialogue between the two countries from 1955 to 1970.

Chang and Di (1993, p. 1509) rightly argued that Mao was adept at “using controlled military actions for discrete political purposes.” This argument is evidenced by the CCP’s actions during the two crises. Although the CCP claimed to have liberated Taiwan during both crises, many scholars agreed that it did not intend to do so because its actions were measured (Gong, 1998, p. 88; Chang and Di, 1993, p. 1512; Kissinger, 2012, pp. 154-155). The CCP was cautious to avoid even accidental skirmish with the US (Chang and Di, 1993, p. 1512). Although the CCP was determined to seize the Dachen and Yijiangshan Islands from the KMT during the 1954–1955 crisis, Mao commanded PLA to wait because the US had military drills in waters near Yijiangshan (Mao, 1954, cited in Gong, 1998, p. 89). The CCP also delayed the military operation of seizing Dachen to reduce tension caused by its seizure of Yijiangshan. It did not attack the KMT when the US helped them evacuate personnel in Dachen (Gong, 1998, p. 90). The PLA was prohibited from opening fire at US vessels during the 1958 crisis. If the US fired at the PLA, the latter must not fire back without directives (Ye, 1993, pp. 192-193). By using measured military actions, one major goal of the CCP was to compel the US to negotiate the Taiwan issue. As Mao (1958) explained, due to the US–Taiwan security treaty, Taiwan acted as the PRC’s “noose on the US’s neck.” Thus, if the PRC gave Taiwan a kick, the US must respond because it was constrained by the “noose” (Mao, 1958).

After occupying Dachen in January 1955, the PRC immediately attempted to create shared interests of easing cross-strait crisis tension with the US. In February 1955, then Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai (1955, cited in Yang and Zhang, 2007, p. 111) asked Sweden's ambassador to China to tell then United Nations (UN) Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld that neither the UN nor any other country had the right to discuss a cross-strait ceasefire with the PRC and KMT because it was China's internal affair. However, Zhou (1955, cited in Yang and Zhang, 2007, p. 111) argued that the US was the relevant party of the cross-strait tension and should manage the crisis with China. Zhou (1955, cited in Yang and Zhang, 2007, p. 111) advocated that "the real solution to the tension was that the US must sit down and negotiate with PRC face to face." Hammarskjöld felt that Zhou "was very eager to directly negotiate with the US" and "this was not to the Soviet Union's taste" (FRUS, 1955-1957, cited in Tao, 2016, p. 372). The official commentary of *People's Daily* in March (1955, cited in Gong, 1998, p. 96) stated that the PRC was willing to participate in an international conference including the US, UK, and Soviet Union to discuss the alleviation of the crisis. Moreover, Zhou made an announcement in April that "the Chinese government was willing to sit down to negotiate and discuss about... alleviation of the tense tension of Taiwan district with the US" (*People's Daily*, 1955, cited in Tao, 2016, p. 372). In May, Zhou replied to the UK and Indonesian representatives that mediated between China and the US that China was willing to "alleviate tense cross-strait tension" by directly negotiating with the US (Gong, 1998, p. 97).

Chang and Di (1993, p. 1517) argued that Beijing's signal of alleviating tension did not always obtain the desired results. This was because when Beijing did not take any military actions in the Strait to show sincerity for its bilateral negotiation in March 1955, the US saw it as preparations for another round of aggression (Chang and Di, 1993, p.1517). Tao (2016, p. 372) argued that the US did not consider Zhou's suggestion of a bilateral negotiation in February 1955. It was Zhou's public statement at Bandung conference in May that had finally received a positive response from the US (Chang and Di, 1993, p. 1521). However, after reviewing Beijing's actions through

a result-oriented judgement, the chapter views that it had achieved one of its main goals despite the deficiencies. It tactically pulled the Taiwan “noose” and sought shared interests of easing cross-strait tension with the US, which successfully resulted in the ambassadorial talks between China and the US.

The PRC had successfully formed a shared interest of easing cross-strait tension and began negotiations with the US; however, because it wished to gain more than the shared interest could offer since 1955, it did not get the desired results. Instead of just easing the tension, the PRC mainly aimed to require the US to endorse the PRC position regarding the Taiwan issue and pave way for the establishment of a diplomatic relationship between the two countries. For instance, in the 1955 talks, Chinese delegates asked the US to upgrade the ambassadorial talks to talks between Zhou and then US Secretary of State Dulles, and to withdraw its force from Taiwan (Gong, 1998, p. 100). However, the US refused to do this (Tao, 2016, p. 373) and required China to promise that it would not use force to recover Taiwan first (Kissinger, 2012, p. 159). In addition, in the 1958 talks, the US required China to discuss an “immediate ceasefire” before talking about any other issues (Beam, 1958, cited in Chen, 2001, p. 194). In consequence, Chinese leaders were pessimistic about the talks’ results. They privately argued that “it was not a mature time to establish diplomatic relationship with the US, [because] the US would not accept our conditions, such as withdrawing force from Taiwan, and we could not accept their conditions” (Wu, 1999, p. 247).

The US and China finally developed a benign relationship with the US in the 1972 Sino–US rapprochement. That year, China and the US became the strategic partners that balanced against the Soviet Union. While it is true that China became the strategic partner of the US due to military confrontation with the former Soviet Union as many scholars have observed, it should be noted that the CCP realized its long-term goal of forming a shared identity/interests to develop a benign relationship with the US. CCP leaders at that time often viewed the rapprochement less as a

temporary alliance than a promising step of breaking the Sino–US deadlock that the CCP had long strived for. Just as Mao (1972, cited in Lin et al, 1998, p. 252) argued in 1972, “the Sino–US ambassadorial talks [that had ended at 1970] was a Marathon that had lasted 15 years and talked 136 times, but was superficial and had no effect in breaking Sino–US deadlock.” Thus, the rapprochement gave the CCP a chance of finding “someone who was in charge to solve Sino–US problems” (Mao, 1972, cited in Lin et al, 1998, p. 252). Likewise, CCP senior leader, Chen Yi (1970, cited in Xiong, 2006, p. 200) argued that “the ambassadorial talks lasted 15 years but did not get any result concerning establishing Sino–US relationship... Now, the situation changed, Nixon was eager to use China to balance against the Soviet Union, we must utilize the US-Soviet competition to establish the Sino–US relationship.”

Besides seeking to form a shared identity/interests with the US, the CCP tried to downplay the conflicting ones to preserve a benign relationship with the US. To build this benign relationship, the CCP tried to make its communist identity less salient to the US by creating a more nationalist than communist image for itself in 1944. According to John Service (2004, p. 266), a US officer of the US observation team in Yan’an, besides speeches at formal meetings, leaders of Marxism or socialism were rarely mentioned. Decorations that represented the Soviet Union or socialism, such as the hammer and sickle, were rare (Service, 2004, p. 266). Instead of showing connection between the CCP and socialism, the CCP stressed that it constructed a Chinese system and behaved in a Chinese way (Service, 2004, p. 266). Moreover, to make the CCP’s communist identity less salient, the CCP had a heated discussion about whether or not the party should change its name in the seventh Plenary session of the sixth CCPCC congress in 1944 (Yang, 2010, p. 449). This was confirmed by Mao who told Service that the CCP had discussed about changing the party’s name in 1944 (Service, 2004, p. 260). According to the CCP’s southern Bureau’s advice to the CCPCC (1944, cited in Yang, 2010, p. 448), changing the name was meant to ameliorate the ideological distrust of the US towards the CCP by showing that it “was in fact a progressive democratic party that represented interests of peasants.”

However, the CCP had felt that it could not simultaneously cooperate with the US and maintain absolute control of the regime and army since January 1945 (Hu, 2003, pp. 361-362). Thus, it began to put greater emphasis on the Soviet's assistance and readdress communist identity. For instance, Mao stated in March 1945 that the CCP must mainly rely on the Soviet Union for assistance (Yang, 2010, p. 458). He re-addressed China's communist identity and formally rejected the suggestion of changing the CCP's name because "the name was good... we should frankly emphasize that socialism was very beautiful" (Mao, 1945, cited in Yang, 2010, p. 458).

In 1970, the formation of a strategic partnership between the US and China made China's communist identity less salient to the US because the US regarded competition with the Soviet Union as the priority. China's communist identity consequently became less important during this period. Utilizing the importance of a strategic partnership, Mao attempted to downplay the communist identity by proposing "ideological armistice" with Kissinger (2012, p. 284). This meant that the US and China could preserve their distinctive ideologies, but put aside ideological competition and focus on the most important shared goal of resisting threat from the Soviet Union (Kissinger, 2012, p. 284). Further, on the basis that core nationalist principles were preserved, China downplayed its nationalist identity by suppressing nationalist ambition and conceding less important nationalist interests at the time. It knew that the Taiwan issue was the major obstacle in forming a benign relationship with the US. In the 1972 US-China negotiation, China's core interests regarding Taiwan were recognized because the US acknowledged one China and promised to withdraw the US military from Taiwan (Kissinger, 2012, p. 273). On that basis, China suppressed its nationalist will that favors cross-strait formal unification and stated its tolerance to Taiwan's long-term de facto independence (Mao, 1975, cited in Kissinger, 2012, p. 307). China's tolerance was probably derived from pragmatic considerations. First, it was nearly impossible that the mainland could recover Taiwan in the 1970s because Taiwan and the US' military powers were much stronger. Thus, recovering

Taiwan was a less important nationalist interest for the mainland at the time. Second, bettering the Sino–US relationship could create a benign environment for China to develop. Thus, because China’s core interests over the Taiwan issue were recognized by the US, the cost of making it a sticking point of the Sino–US benign relationship exceeded the benefits.

To sum up, this chapter examined the extent to which the CCP, and later the PRC, developed a benign relationship with the US to break the US-led military and economic blockade without sacrificing core nationalist interests, such as Taiwan’s sovereignty status, and destabilizing the CCP regime through a strategic management of identities and interests. The findings are as follows. First, seeking shared identities/interests and downplaying conflicting ones did help China break the US-led military and economic blockade without sacrificing core nationalist interests and losing the CCP’s control over the Chinese nation in 1972. In this year, China formed a shared strategic partnership with the US and downplayed nationalist interests regarding the Taiwan issue to reconcile with the US.

Second, the CCP’s strategic management of identities and interests during this period demonstrated limitations. Failure to strike a balance among those goals was mainly due to CCP’s reluctance to concede important interests associated with communist and nationalist identities. The CCP’s reluctance to concede control over the army and base areas led to the failed shared identity approach, such as the CCP–US anti-Japanese alliance. CCP’s reluctance to loosen control over the Chinese nation and obey US-KMT treaties led to its failure to get the US’s recognition in 1949. Moreover, the shared interest of easing the Taiwan Strait tension was not important enough to offset frictions caused by conflicting interests between China and the US and pave way for establishing a diplomatic relationship between them. Finally, the CCP joined the Korean and Vietnam Wars when regime survival was at stake, which increased the salience of conflicting interests between the US and PRC.

Chapter 6 China's Strategic Management of Identities and Interests in the defensive period (1978-2009).

The previous chapter studies the CCP's, and later the PRC's, effort to break the US-led military and economic blockade without losing control over the communist regime and conceding crucial nationalist interests, such as those related to Taiwan. Because China had successfully lifted the US-led military and economic blockade in 1972, the main mission for Chinese leaders in the defensive period was to maintain this relatively benign environment without compromising important nationalist interests and the CCP's regime security. This chapter examines to what extent China achieved the three goals simultaneously through the strategic management of identities and interests in the defensive period. Specifically, it examines to what extent China's shared identity/interests with the US or regional countries, and effort to downplay conflicting ones could ameliorate frictions deriving from communist and nationalist identities. It also examines to what extent China's strategy of pursuing or defending important nationalist interests with restraint prevented unduly escalating frictions.

To begin, China sought to continuously form shared identities or interests with the US or its allies to maintain a relatively peaceful environment in the defensive period. From 1978 to 1982, China sought shared identities as partners of the anti-Soviet hegemony with the US and its East Asian allies. First, China's geographic location, territorial size, and large population gave it self-evident importance of being the strategic partner of the US. Just as the former National Security Adviser of the US Zbigniew Brzezinski (no date, cited in Sullivan, 1992, p. 4) said during the Cold War, China could be an important strategic partner for the US "simply by being China." Likewise, in 1981, Deng Xiaoping (1981) asked US officials not to underestimate China's importance in the global balance of power because, although China was "poor," it has "a vast territory and large population." Second, China often highlighted the common threat of Soviet expansion when talking with the US to stress the need to form the anti-Soviet strategic partnership. For instance, when meeting with

Brzezinski in 1978, then Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua argued that “the Soviet Union is the most dangerous source of war” but coordinated pressure from China and the US could compete with the Soviet because the Soviet “bullies the weak and fears the strong” (JCPL, 1978, cited in Kissinger, 2012, pp. 251-252). Likewise, on his visit to the US in 1979, placing emphasis on China’s concern about the Soviet’s expansion, Deng (1979, cited in Kissinger, 2012, p. 362) proposed the formation of a de facto Sino–US strategic partnership to compete with the Soviet Union.

From 1982 to 1989, China had tried to add weight to and increase the salience of the balancer role in the Sino–US relationship by gradually normalizing the Sino–Soviet relationship. By always reassuring the US that China would not lean to the Soviet Union (Kissinger, 2012, p. 390), Chinese leaders probably wished to show the US that China had an alternative and, thus, more leverage in the strategic partnership. Yahuda (1993, pp. 562-563) noted that China was oblivious that the US had also reconciled with the Soviet Union since 1983 and, thus, did not oppose the improvement of the Sino–Soviet relationship. However, despite improvement in the US–Soviet relationship since 1983, the Soviet factor increased the importance of the Sino–US strategic partnership and had effectively facilitated cooperation between the two countries. For instance, in 1983, the US allowed the transfer of some military technologies to China and extended the China–US trade deal period (Tao, 2016, p. 654). The US also allowed the sale of non-lethal weapons to China (Xinhua Net, 2014). In January 1985, the US admitted to discussing strengthening China’s defense system with them (Tao, 2016, p. 671). According to then US Defense Minister Weinberger (1983, cited in Tao, 2016, p. 654), through strengthening China’s economic and military independence, the US aimed to increase China’s capability to resist the Soviet threat and consolidate Sino–US shared interests. China often refers to the period from 1979 to 1989 as the honeymoon of the US–China relationship (Xinhua Net, 2014)

Also, the strategic partnership led to the US' compromise and reconciliation with China in late 1989 after Beijing suppressed student protestors. While imposing sanctions on China, US President Bush tried to restore cooperation with China due to his recognition of the importance of the Sino–US relationship in the Cold War era (Kissinger, 2012, p. 415). As special envoys of then President Bush, National Security adviser Brent Scowcroft and Under Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, secretly went to Beijing to reconcile (Ross, 2002, p. 104). Then Bush administration allowed the US–China military transfer program to continue and discussed China accession to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (Ross, 2002, p. 104). When meeting with Scowcroft in July, Deng (1989c) stressed “China’s special importance in stabilizing global balance of power” and argued that “the improved Sino-US relationship was one major contributing factor to global peace in decades.” Deng’s argument hinted the two countries’ strategic partnership and China’s importance in helping the US deter Soviet expansion. Deng (1989c) used the partnership as a leverage to ask the US to “restore the Sino–US relationship.”

The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of the Sino–US strategic partnership. Under such circumstance, China tried hard to form new shared interests with the US on other dimensions, especially economic cooperation. When Deng’s successor Jiang was interviewed by an American journalist in March 1992, he warned that the US would lose over a lot of job opportunities if it did not value its shared economic interests with China (Tao, 2016, p. 712). In May 1992, a group of Chinese senior officials and entrepreneurs went to the US and signed trade deals worth two billion dollars (Tao, 2016, p. 712). In November 1993, Jiang went to Seattle to attend the APEC conference (Kuhn, 2004, p. 241). Upon landing in San Francisco for a stopover, Jiang met with US business leaders and encouraged that “American business community... will not let opportunities slip through its fingers” (Kuhn, 2004, p. 242). Jiang also argued that the huge Chinese market would provide enormous profits for the US, whose economy was highly complementary with that of China (Jiang, 1993, cited in Wu, 2007). After arriving at Seattle, Jiang directly went to

Boeing's Everett factory, emphasized China was the largest consumer of Boeing aircrafts outside the US, and promised to sign nine billion worth of contracts with the company (Kuhn, 2004, p. 242).

Just as China expected, Sino-US shared economic interests were proven to be effective in softening the US government's punitive actions against China. For instance, in May 1992, 298 US companies and economic groups sent a letter to then US President Clinton, requiring the US government to extend China's most favored nation status without the conditionality that it must improve its human rights record (Tao, 2016, p. 712). In May 1993, the US extended the most favored nation status for one year without any Chinese improvement on human rights records (Kissinger, 2012, p. 466). Also, the Clinton administration finally abandoned the conditionality in 1994 due to pressure from American enterprises that were doing business in China (Kissinger, 2012, p. 468). The shared economic interests have also been one of the most important shared interests between China and East Asian countries. For instance, China has become an increasingly important trading partner of East Asian countries since 1978.

China also sought to form a shared identity with the US as an anti-terrorist colleague. After the 911 incident in 2001, when airplanes hijacked by terrorists from an Islamic extremist group crashed into the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Chinese President Jiang Zemin called US President Bush and expressed China's willingness to support them in combatting terrorists (Xinhua Net, 2008a). Moreover, in 2001, Beijing voted for the UN 1373 resolution that endorsed the use of force by the US in defeating terrorists in Afghanistan for the first time since its entrance into the UN in 1971 (Malik, 2002, p. 257; Wang, 2009, p. 45). The US, which focused its "war on terror" after the terrorist attack, acknowledged this shared anti-terrorist colleague identity. President Bush, who once categorized China as a strategic competitor in March that year (The Guardian, 2001), substantially softened his tone. He stated that the US would seek "a relationship that is candid, constructive and cooperative" with

China (Kuhn, 2004, p. 473). According to a quantitative study regarding the Sino–US relationship conducted by Tsinghua University’s Institute of International Relations (2019), 2002 to 2008 ranked as the second most amicable period in the Sino–US relations since 1950, with the first being the Sino–US honeymoon from 1979 to 1989. This demonstrates that the anti-terrorist colleague identity did help ameliorate frictions in the Sino–US relationship.

In addition to continuously seeking a shared identity and interests with the US and East Asian countries, China made its communist and nationalist identities less salient to them during the Cold War. Some analysts argue that China’s keeping a low-profile was a response to Western criticism and sanctions after the 1989 Tiananmen event and the collapse of the Eastern bloc and Soviet Union (Chen and Wang, 2011, p. 197; Cheng and Zhang, 1999, p. 101). However, this chapter argues that keeping a low-profile was a guiding policy in the defensive period. First, the strategic partnership from 1978 to 1990 had made China’s communist identity appear less salient to the US. For instance, in 1978, to form the strategic partnership, the Carter administration that viewed commitment to protect human rights as the essence of foreign policy gave a muted response to China’s political executions in 1977 (Hilton, 2009, p. 602). However, the Carter administration justified normalization with China, not through the importance of the strategic partnership, but through its aim of encouraging China’s human rights achievement through engagement after normalization (Hilton, 2009, p. 602). This justification was somewhat consistent with constructivists’ concept of socialization wherein the socializee will gradually conform to and endorse “expected ways of thinking, feeling and acting” through interaction with the socializer (Johnston, 2008, p. 20). To facilitate successful socialization, the socializer needed to pressurize or punish the socializee to change behaviors (Johnston, 2008, pp. 24-25; Yuzawa, 2013, p. 83). However, the response of the US to Beijing’s human rights violation demonstrated tolerance rather than punishment or pressure from 1978 to 1990. Thus, the argument that the US aimed to socialize China through engagement was not applicable in US–China interactions from 1978 to 1990. For instance, when

interacting with its Chinese counterpart, the Carter administration's main concern was resisting Soviet expansion rather than criticizing China's laogai system, which treated prisoners harshly (Edwards, p. 1999, p. 721). Moreover, although China did not significantly improve its human rights record, the Reagan administration had enhanced cooperation with them, which resulted in the Sino-US honeymoon period. Moreover, although he had imposed sanctions on China, Bush feared that the overreaction of the US would "throw China back into the hands of the Soviet Union" (New York Times, 1989, cited in Harding, 1992, p. 227).

Second, China substantially downplayed the communist identity through substantive actions in the Cold War era. During this time, many Southeast Asian leaders witnessed that local communist parties supported by China seriously destabilized their regimes (Murphy, 2017, p. 54). Thus, they viewed China's communist identity as salient and a major source of frictions. When Chinese leaders visited Southeast Asian countries from 1978 to 1979, they aimed to reduce the countries' threat perception by reducing the salience of China's communist identity. First, instead of building China's image as a communist country, they often "presented China as a developing country" (Kallgren, 1979, p. 4) that would shift its focus from ideological expansion to inward-looking and national development (Liang, 2011). Also, during his visit to Southeast Asian countries in 1978, Deng publicly recognized that revolutionary diplomacy was wrong (Liang, 2011). To support Deng's statement, China has stopped supporting radio channels of local communist parties in Malaysia and Indonesia since 1978 (Liang, 2011). When Deng visited Malaysia in 1978, he publicly stated that the CCP viewed its relationship with the Malaysian communist party as one it must forget (Deng, 1978, cited in Qianlong Net, 2010). All these actions marked China's retreat from ideological competition and made its communist identity less salient and threatening to regional countries. Analysts often viewed these actions as China's way of forming an anti-Soviet coalition and preparing for the fight against Vietnam (Kallgren, 1979; Kissinger, 2012, p. 360). This was the immediate concern of China at the time. However, as then Chinese Foreign Minister

Huang Hua (2007, p. 208) argued, the long-term aim was to create a benign external environment for the country's national development.

To establish a benign relationship with the US and its allies, China downplayed its nationalist identity during the Cold War. It stated that sovereign disputes between itself and Japan could be set aside when Deng visited Japan in 1978 (Lungu, 2018). In this way, China made its nationalist identity less salient to Japan because it suppressed its nationalist ambition of recovering the islands and shelved one of the most conflicting issues between the two sides to better Sino–Japan relationship. Also, after the US had acknowledged China's core nationalist interests regarding the Taiwan issue, such as shifting diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to mainland China, China conceded less important nationalist interests at the time. For instance, it acquiesced to some of the US' defensive arm sale to Taiwan to accelerate the establishment of the Sino–US diplomatic relationship in 1979 (Luo, 2010, pp. 16-17). In 1984, after finding out about the Reagan administration's private assurances to Taiwan that the US would increase its arms sale to them if the mainland became offensive, the mainland tolerated the assurance (Huang, 2007, p. 97).

In late 1989, the disarmament talks between the Soviet Union and the US and the collapse of the Eastern bloc led to Deng's fear that the Sino–US strategic partnership might not last long and China might once again face a US-led ideological rivalry coalition. Deng (1989a) feared "the new cold wars begun, one directed at... the third world, another one directed at the socialist world." In 1991, China's communist identity became highly salient because the Soviet Union's demise had dissolved the strategic partnership. Thus, China tried to downplay the salience of its communist identity to the lowest level. In 1989, Deng mentioned his famous doctrine *taoguang yanghui* (TGYH), which means to "observe carefully, secure our position, cope with affairs calmly, hide our capacity and bide our time, be good at maintaining a low profile, and never claim leadership" (Kissinger, 2012, p. 438). This doctrine has been deemed as China's long-term national strategic guideline during the tenure of Deng's

successor, Jiang Zemin, and the first term (2004–2009) of Chinese President Hu Jintao. In 1990, China rejected the suggestions of some developing countries about leading the Third World and international socialist movement (Deng, 1990). Some senior Chinese officials' proposal of directly confronting the US and the West had also been turned down (Wang, 2011, p. 6). Moreover, Deng (no date, cited in Yang, 2004, p. 9) asked his colleagues to cooperate with the West and "not criticize or blame others at will, not make excessive comments or act excessively." By doing so, China aimed to show restraint regarding ideological issues and, thus, avoid making the ideological competition with liberal countries salient.

Moreover, China made the communist and nationalist identities less salient to other countries by behaving more as a status quo power than a revisionist to the liberal order during this period. By acting more as a norm taker than breaker, China made a lot of adjustments to meet the requirements for participating in the liberal order. For instance, in the mid-1990s, it adjusted domestic institutions to meet the requirements for participation in international disarmament conferences (Johnston, 2008, p. 62). Additionally, to get access to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, it agreed to comply an unprecedented amount of international commitments required by the organization (Lardy, 2002, cited in Chin and Thakur, 2010, p. 126). China "showed considerable determination" in changing the legal infrastructure in terms of the organization's requirements (General Accounting Office, 2002, cited in Johnston, 2003, p. 16). Acting more as a status quo power than a revisionist power, China not only wanted to gain benefits, but also downplay ideological competition by demonstrating that it was integrating, rather than challenging the liberal order.

China intended to make its nationalist identity less salient to regional countries by showing a sense of responsibility on preserving East Asia's stability and prosperity. For instance, during the 1997–1998 Asian Financial Crisis, China stabilized the collapse of the East Asian region by withstanding the pressure of a devaluing currency and pledging 1 billion USD to the International Monetary Fund's initiative to

save Thailand, the center of the crisis (Kuhn, 2004, p. 350). China's action showed a sense of responsibility to the East Asian regional society because the devaluing Chinese currency would have enhanced China's export competitiveness, but cause a "domino effect devaluation throughout the region" (Kuhn, 2004, p. 350). Also, from 1990 to the early 2000s, China actively participated in ASEAN-led institutions, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum. It also signed a framework of a multilateral trade agreement with ASEAN in 2002 (Foot, 2006, p. 85). By doing so, China wished to assuage many regional countries' fear of its nationalist goals to downplay the frictions caused by its nationalist identity.

However, like Mao, CCP top leaders during this period demonstrated firmness on ensuring regime security in the face of potential liberal democratization in China. In 1986, Deng (1986) felt that student protests promoting liberalization had gained momentum. Thus, he commanded party members to "show the flag" and "ignore Western criticism," as well as ordered the suppression of student protestors (Deng, 1986). Likewise, Deng's successor, Jiang, was cautious about the potential liberal democratization of the regime, stressing that China should "unswervingly oppose and resist any false actions and discourse that betray the four basic principles" (Jiang, 1995). In 1999, regarding the three dissidents' attempt to establish the Chinese democratic party, Jiang stated these subversive actions would be "nipped in the bud" and China would never tolerate Western-style democracy (Jiang, 1999, cited in Kuhn, 2004, p. 376). Similarly, in 2008, Chinese President Hu Jintao stressed his determination in maintaining the communist regime and resisting political liberalization (Xinhua Net, 2008b).

Maintaining a relatively peaceful regional environment does not mean that China will concede important nationalist goals that conflict with other countries' interests. As noted in Chapter 3, Chinese nationalists first wished for China to become economically and militarily strong. Second, in the context of East Asia, the nationalist identity makes China feel like it is in a disadvantaged geostrategic position being

encircled by the US-led island chains. Thus, it is determined to reverse this position to deter possible military blockade or challenges from the US-led island chains. Third, the nationalist identity makes China feel that it was disadvantaged regarding maritime territorial disputes in the region. During this period, China pursued these nationalist interests incrementally and steadily.

First, a relatively peaceful environment helped China increase its economic power, which has paved a solid foundation for the modernization of its military. Since 1972, a benign Sino–US relationship has gradually removed the economic blockade on China. Deng (no date, cited in Wang, 2006, p. 41) viewed this as an opportunity that must be seized to attract investment and develop the economy. He, therefore (Deng, no date, cited in Wang, 2006, p. 41), required the whole nation to focus on economic development. For Chinese leaders who were deeply aware of a strong army's importance for national defense, the primary task was also to pave the economic foundation for modernizing the Chinese army. Deng (1984) required the army to tolerate underdevelopment because “a good national economy is the foundation of true national defence modernization.” Boosting China's economy must, therefore, be prioritized as the central national task. Likewise, Jiang (1998) pointed out that the “deepening reform and opening up and developing socialist market economy would definitely create a sufficient economic foundation for the army's modernization.”

This view proved to be true. According to the statistics of the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, the growth of China's annual gross domestic product (GDP) generally remained above 7.5% from 1999 to 2009 and rose to above 10% from 2004 to 2008 (China Economic Net, 2013). This contributed to the annual rise of the military budget, which sped up national defense modernization. For instance, according to the statistics of the State Council Information Office (2009), the annual military budget grew by 12%–20% annually from 1999 to 2009.

A relatively peaceful external environment has also helped the strategic reform of the Chinese army. For instance, while China was eager to build a strong navy during Mao's time (Mao, 1953, cited in People's Net, 2016), the Chinese navy played a subordinate role to the Chinese ground, missile, and air forces due to China's poor economy and fear of being caught in an imminent war. The major mission of the Chinese navy was to rely on China's seashore and islands to resist the enemy's landing operations and harassment (People's Net, 2014). This situation changed after the reform and opening up because a relatively peaceful environment decreased the tension surrounding China's borders. It enabled China to adjust the relationship among different Chinese forces and formulate new strategic requirements and guidelines for them. Specifically, the Chinese navy became equal with other forces during this period, and a new and independent naval strategy was established (Liu, 2004, p. 437).

The navy strategy clearly reflects nationalist goals. It states that the main strategic missions of the navy are to "realize and protect national unification, sovereign and maritime rights and interests, deter and contain potential interventions of hegemon coming from the sea, and resist local war that is at sea and directs against China" (Liu, 2004, p. 438). Achieving these missions require them to be able to reverse the disadvantaged geostrategic status and break the US-led island chains encirclement by "seizing and keeping the command of the sea in major operational directions and effectively controlling several important sea lanes in the first island chain in the wartime" (Liu, 2004, p. 438). Based on these missions, then Navy General Liu Huaqing changed the navy's mission from a nearshore to near sea defense, which shifted the Chinese navy's operational zone from near China's seashore to within the whole first island chain (Liu, 2004, p. 437). Liu also conceptualized that with China's economic and technological development, the navy's operational zone would gradually extend to the second island chain (Liu, 2004, p. 437). The setup of the navy strategy has been a milestone for China's achievement of its nationalist goals

because it is the roadmap for China's reversal of its perceived disadvantaged geostrategic position in East Asia.

Under the guidance of the strategy, the Chinese navy began its geostrategic development in East Asia in 1983. For the first time, it strengthened presence in the island chains by organizing an ocean cruise fleet that arrived at the James Shoal, which is deemed as China's southernmost territorial seas (Shi, 2013, p. 963). It also conducted long voyages encircling the first island chain, and cruised in and out of major sea lanes within the island chain (Shi, 2013, p. 963).

With the enlargement of the navy's operational zone, China consolidated sovereignty over disputed land features and geostrategic outposts in the SCS. In 1988, after the Sino-Vietnam skirmish over unoccupied reefs, China recovered six reefs in the Spratly Islands (Liu, 2004, p. 540). This consolidated China's sovereign claim over disputed land features and ended China's lack of de facto controlled reefs and, thus, its strategic outposts in the Spratly Islands (Liu, 2004, p. 540).

While making progress on reversing its perceived geostrategic disadvantages, China's geostrategic development was restrained. In 1988, China attempted to avoid overt-escalation by choosing to control unoccupied reefs in the SCS rather than seizing the occupied reefs of other claimants. In 1988, the superpower competition with the Soviet Union dominated US strategic thinking. Thus, for the US, China's identity as an important strategic partner against the Soviet Union was more important than a revisionist power that conflicted over tiny reefs. This made the US' response to the incident moderate (Liu, 2004, p. 541).

Foot (2006, p. 85) argued that China's TGYH did not achieve ideal results from 1990 to 1995 because its assertive actions in the SCS alarmed its neighbors. One of these assertive actions may refer to China's seizure of the Mischief Reef in 1995. As the chapter argues, China would not sacrifice core nationalist interests to achieve TGYH

and always took offensive actions to secure its interests. The 1995 seizure of Mischief Reef was a necessary step for China to realize important nationalist interests because the occupation enabled it to get a strategic foothold in the Southern part of Spratly and cut off connection between Vietnam and the Philippines' outposts in the Spratly (Fravel, 2008, p. 297).

However, Foot's argument that the Mischief Reef incident alarmed regional countries was flawed. First, all claimants but Brunei were in a competition of seizing land features in the Spratly from 1970 to 2000, and regional frictions existed throughout these years. In fact, China was more restrained compared with other claimant states. Vietnam seized 27 land features in the Spratly and China had seven. Moreover, Mischief Reef was the last land feature that China occupied in the Spratly. After it stopped seizing land features in 1995, other claimants continued. Investigator Reef and Erica Reef were occupied by Malaysia in 1998 (Chung, 2009, pp. 100-101). The Second Thomas Shoal's sovereignty has been marked by the Philippines by grounding an antique warship since 1999 (Mogato, 2015).

Second, although China was restrained when compared with other regional claimant's actions, it underestimated the consequence of seizing Mischief Reef because it was surprised by ASEAN's strong criticism (Emmers, 2009, p. 131). To ameliorate frictions, China moderated by making important concessions. For instance, instead of the country's previous insistence on bilateral talks, it told ASEAN that it had planned to hold multilateral talks with them to discuss the disputes (Emmers, 2009, p. 131)

From the discussion above, the chapter argues that by using controlled offensive actions, China did consider striking a balance between TGYH and the frictions caused by the seizure of Mischief Reef in 1995. However, it did not attain the goal of

avoiding escalation because of strong criticism from ASEAN, which demonstrated limits of China's strategy.

While China was cautiously preserving a stable external environment for national development in this period, it resorted to military means if it perceived that its nationalist interests were being seriously violated when incidents caused by other countries occurred, and that such trends had to be reversed. This perception was illustrated by China's actions during the 1995–1996 Cross-Strait Crisis.

Some analysts view that Beijing used offensive means during the crisis because the PLA had forced moderate civilian officials, such as Jiang and Qian, to take harsh actions (Suettinger, 2003, p. 3310; Swaine, 2001, p. 4143). However, the chapter agrees with other scholars' argument that China took hard-line actions to prevent its core nationalist interests from being violated (You, 1997, p. 288; Ross, 2000, p. 87). As demonstrated in the memoir of then Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, like military leaders, civilian leaders felt the urgent need to resort to tough actions to prevent Taiwan from becoming independent and the US from withdrawing its support of the One China policy. First, China viewed that the US failed to keep its promise that it would not allow Lee to visit before the announcement of the approval of his visa in May 1995 (Qian, 2005). Second, China was not convinced that permission was granted to prevent congress from establishing binding laws regarding the US–Taiwan relationship. This was expressed in the explanatory letter of then US Secretary of State Warren Christopher's in June 7, 1995 (Qian, 2005). Moreover, China felt that the US wished to let China "swallow the bitter fruit" after taking some symbolic actions to assuage its concern (Qian, 2005). Thus, China had to "take strong actions" to make the US "really aware the issue's seriousness" (Qian, 2005).

Once decisions of taking offensive actions was made, Chinese leaders tried to strike a balance between securing important nationalist interests and preventing the incident from getting out of control. To achieve balance, China planned its military

actions with restraint. During the 1995–1996 Crisis, it deployed over 100,000 troops to Fujian province, fired missiles to target areas very close to Taiwan, and continued missile firings and military exercises despite warnings from the US (Ross, 2000, pp. 106-108). However, most scholars agreed that China had controlled the strength of its military actions (You, 1997; Scobell, 2000, p. 233; Ross, 2000; Kuhn, 2004, p. 279); for example, the missiles were of dummy warheads (Kissinger, 2012, p. 474). Jiang also refused the proposal of deploying the entire main force of the PLA first army to Fujian province, thinking that “too much action” would lead to overt escalation (Jiang, 1996, cited in Kuhn, 2004, p. 279). The location of the 1995 military drills, duration, and scope were also strictly controlled to prevent escalation (Scobell, 2000, pp. 236-237).

Diplomatic means were used by China to avoid escalation. When Kissinger visited Beijing in July 1995, Jiang reassured him that China would not seize Taiwan (Kissinger, 2012, p. 475). The PLA also privately reassured the US that it would confine military exercises to waters within the mainland controlled Pingtan Islands (Suettinger, 2003, p. 3879). Suettinger (2003, p. 3310) noted that after the 1996 missile test by China, US senior officials, such as Secretary of State Christopher and Defense Minister Perry, and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Huaqing, exchanged harsh words in Washington. However, the main mission of Liu’s visit to the US was to reassure that China would not cross the US redline and change the cross-strait status quo (Tayler, 1996, cited in Ross, 2000, p. 108).

Suettinger (2003, p. 3936) pointed out the costs of China’s military actions in the crisis, arguing that although Beijing successfully prevented the US from supporting Taiwan independence, it prevented the Taiwanese from moving toward unification and strengthened the US’s security commitment to Taiwan. This chapter recognizes the costs of Beijing’s actions. However, Beijing may perceive the costs outweighed by the benefits. Chinese officials often argued that the US regarded Taiwan as an unsinkable aircraft carrier to contain China (Deng, no date, cited in Ying, 2016). Thus,

the cost of the US war against China's forceful reunification with Taiwan had always existed in Chinese leaders' minds. Second, as will be demonstrated by this thesis' chapter on Taiwan, even most pro-unification Taiwanese do not accept Beijing's unification proposal of one country two systems. Thus, whether Beijing acted or not will not affect the feelings of the Taiwanese towards unification on Beijing's term. As Ross (2000, p. 118) rightly argued, from Beijing's perspective, its coercive actions did not "hurt the prospects of unification... but did reduce the momentum towards independence."

Conclusion

This chapter examines to what extent China stabilized its communist identity, pursued or defended crucial nationalist interests, and maintained a relatively peaceful surrounding environment in the defensive period through a strategic management of identities/interests. The chapter argues that the strategic management succeeded in achieving the three goals to a certain degree in the defensive period. China and the US had an amicable relationship from 1979 to 1989 and from 2002 to 2008 due to the salience of the shared strategic partnership and anti-terrorist colleague, respectively. Shared economic interests have also helped China gain the most favored nation status from and ameliorate ideological frictions with the US since 1994. Moreover, the shared strategic partnership and anti-terrorist colleague identity helped reduce the salience of China's communist identity. In an attempt to downplay its communist and nationalist identities to alleviate the fear of regional countries and ideological competition, China discontinued support for the communist movement in regional countries, kept a low profile, and behaved as a status quo power. Further, the CCP maintained authoritarian control over the nation.

Frictions occurred when China consolidated and defended important nationalist interests. However, China attempted to use controlled military actions and diplomatic means to avoid unduly escalation. It succeeded in some cases, such as the 1988 seizure of land features in the Spratly Islands and the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis.

However, China's restraints in using offensive means failed to prevent escalating frictions in other cases, as demonstrated by ASEAN's strong criticism after China's seizure of Mischief Reef in 1995.

Moreover, because the CCP did not concede its authoritarian control over the Chinese nation, ideological frictions had been salient until China constructed another shared identity/interest to which the US attached importance. For instance, although Deng proposed the TGYH, ideological frictions between China and the US were salient after the end of their strategic partnership in 1991. China's efforts to construct shared economic interests with the US smoothed the frictions in 1994.

These findings reinforce the overall argument of the thesis that China's strategic management was to a certain degree effective in striking the balance through seeking shared identity/interests and downplaying conflicting ones. However, it also has limitations. China's shared identity/interests approach may fail because the CCP did not want to concede its authoritarian control over the Chinese nation. Also, China's restraints in actions did not always get the desired result.

Part 5. China's strategic management in the stalemate period (2009–present)

Chapter 7. The stalemate period (1): Recentralizing the communist regime in the stalemate period.

Drawing on the UF framework, the previous chapter studied China's attempt to maintain a relatively benign regional environment without conceding the CCP's authoritarian control over the Chinese nation and important nationalist interests, such as those related to Taiwan, through a strategic management of identities and interests. From the current chapter to Chapter 9, this thesis studies China's strategic management in the stalemate period. Specifically, the main research objective is to identify the extent to which China consolidated the communist regime and pursued important nationalist interests while thwarting the formation of a US-led hard-balancing coalition in East Asia during this period through the strategic management.

This chapter answers the question regarding the extent to which China could stabilize the communist regime and prevent the formation of an anti-communist China coalition in East Asia during the stalemate period. According to the CCP's UF framework in the Anti-Japanese War period, the stalemate period was featured by salient ideological and strategic competition between the CCP and Chiang. Facing the competition, the CCP's priority was the consolidation of its control over base areas to ensure the communist regime's survival. By applying the CCP's UF framework during the Anti-Japanese War in the current Sino–US relationship, this chapter analyzes the CCP's consolidation of its regime in the current Sino–US stalemate period.

The CCP's consolidation of its regime has already increased salient ideological competition with the US. However, the consolidation does not necessarily lead to a US-led hard-balancing coalition against Communist China in East Asia because other states' choices of joining the coalition mattered. After analyzing the CCP's consolidation of the communist regime, this chapter examines how the shared Asian

and pluralist identities between China and regional countries could prevent the formation of the coalition.

This chapter will be divided into four parts. The first part is about the CCP's recentralization of power in this period. The second and third parts engage in the debates of whether recentralization will increase the stability of the CCP regime. The fourth part looks at how the shared pluralist identity between China and regional countries could reduce the salience of China's communist identity in East Asia.

CCP's effort to recentralize power

Like the CCP in the stalemate period during the Anti-Japanese War, the current leaders view the stabilization of the communist regime as fundamental to ensure regime survival and cope with the challenges in the current Sino–US stalemate period. According to an article published by *People's Daily* (2019), CCP members should “unswervingly” defend the party's leadership and communist regime to cope with “any risks and challenges that threaten the leadership... and China's sovereignty, security and developmental interests.” Likewise, the Party committee of the Ministry of State Security of PRC (2020) stated in 2020 that “the more risks and challenges [China faces], the more [the nation] needs the party's leadership.”

Based on this belief, especially since the current President Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, the CCPCC has substantially recentralized power horizontally and vertically. First, at the top level, Chinese President Xi Jinping's status as the core leader of the central committee has been established to avoid factionalism. Second, vertically, the CCP conducts political education campaigns that aim to raise the awareness of local cadres, party organizations, and the ordinary Chinese of the center's status as the core of China's political system. Since Xi came to power, he has advocated “managing the party strictly” (Li, 2016), which not only means an anti-corruption campaign, but also an anti-decentralization tendency of party members and organizations. Since 2012, political education activities of “managing the party strictly”

were conducted at every level of the political structure. The education activity centers on the “two study and one action” campaign, which stresses obedience to the party leadership (Xinhua Net, 2019). In 2016, the CCP issued regulations, named new inner-party supervision rules, under the new situation that requires party members to “safeguard the Central Committee’s leadership” and “stick to principles that all party members must be obedient to the Central Committee” (CCPCC, 2016).

Third, horizontally, the party re-establishes the party committee’s dominant status through a political arrangement by retrieving power from the government. In the work report of the 19th party congress, Xi (2017) stated that China will try to merge or combine provincial, county, and city levels’ party and political organs with overlapping functions. Doing so devolves power from government to the party committee and increases the difficulty of the government’s disobedience to the committee’s commands. First, the merger of party and political organs will probably be the mode of the “one institution with two names.” The newly merged organ will not have a new name, but keep its old names. While the newly merged organ will simultaneously be party and political organs, in terms of the “one institution with two names” model at the central level, it is highly possible that the new organ will be directly managed by the party committee. Thus, the government’s control over the old political organ before the merger will be lost. For instance, the State Council’s Information Office and Foreign Propaganda Office of the Central Committee are “one institution with two names,” and the institution is under the direct control of the central committee. Second, the combination of party and political organs does not mean they are merged into one new organ, but they share offices, the majority of staff, and resources. After the combination, the party organ will always be the leader of the political organ because its Deputy Secretary or Secretary will be the leader of the latter. For instance, the Deputy Secretary of the Central Committee’s Discipline Inspection Commission will become the Minister of the National Supervision Ministry after the two organs are combined. Consequently, the political organ that was once accountable to the government before the combination is now under the dual leadership of the

government and party organ. As the local government's control over some political organs has either been shared with or passed to the corresponding party committee, its disobedience to the committee will be increasingly difficult.

The institutionalization debate

Many scholars disagree with the CCP's view that recentralization will enhance its regime's stability and resilience. They argue that the CCP's resilience in the face of "democratization waves" is due to the deepening institutionalization at the top, horizontal, and vertical levels (Nathan, 2003; Shambaugh, 2008, p. 176; Schubert, 2008, p. 203; Brown, 2009). The arguments of authoritarian resilience are as follows. First, at the top level, the peaceful and stable succession of top leaders is institutionalized by setting up age limits for presidential term limits (Nathan, 2003, pp. 7-8; Zeng, 2014, pp. 129-130). Collective leadership is also institutionalized, which weakens the over-centralization of power and ensures that the party is ruled by consensus (Fisher, 2018). These two institutionalizations substantially decrease the power struggle at the top level and greatly stabilize the power center of the regime. Second, horizontally, the party reduces interference to the works of the non-party organizations, such as the government and National People's Congress (Nathan, 2003, pp. 12-13). According to Nathan (2003, p. 13, p. 16), the political loosening of non-party organizations increases bureaucratic specialization, and "equips the regime to adapt more successfully to the challenges." Third, vertically, the promotion of party cadres is much more based on their professional knowledges and capabilities (Nathan, 2003, p. 13; Zeng, 2014, pp. 134-136).

The CCP's recentralization of the regime has challenged these dominant arguments of authoritarian resilience since 2012. First, at the top level, Xi's core leader establishment and removal of presidential term limits in 2018 seem to conflict with collective leadership (Lee, 2017; Fewsmith and Nathan, 2019) and the institutionalization of succession. Second, at the horizontal level, the strengthening

of the party's role seems to weaken the autonomy of other non-party organizations. Third, vertically, loyalty to the party's leadership has once again become the major dimension for cadres' promotion.

This section will assess whether recentralization will be more effective in stabilizing the CCP regime than the policies underpinned by the arguments on authoritarian resilience.

First, removing the presidential term limit may be more effective in stabilizing the centralized power at the top level than retaining it. This is because the CCP General Secretary and Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the other two important posts of China's top 1 leader, do not have term limits. Thus, if the top 1 leader obeys the presidential term limits, but does not hand over the other two posts to his/her successor, the power struggle will be tense at the top level. Some scholars argue that the leadership succession from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao in 2002 proved that its institutionalization led to a peaceful power transfer (Nathan, 2003; Li, 2012, p. 598). However, the leadership succession was not as stable as it appeared. Although Jiang obeyed the presidential term limits in 2002, he did not hand over the Chairman post of CMC to Hu, and instead retained it for two years. This was one main reason that prevented Hu from fully consolidating his leadership and constrained him from introducing substantive reform (Zheng and Weng, 2016, p. 39). The constraining effects on Hu's leadership was indicated by Xi's praise for Hu's simultaneous transfer of the three posts to Xi in 2012. Xi praised Hu for "being decent and exemplar" and "sufficiently considering the holistic development of the party, nation, and the army" (Xinhua Net, 2012). Thus, if Xi retains the CMC chairman or General Secretary posts when his 10-year Presidency ends, this will not only show disunity at the top level, but also increase the likelihood of a power struggle between the new Chinese President and Xi. To be sure, if Xi transfers all posts and obeys the term limits, leadership succession will be the most stable and the institution of succession will be substantially consolidated. However, because it appears that he does not plan to

transfer power after his 10-years Presidency, the CCP regime will be more stable by removing the term limit, rather than retaining it.

Fewsmith and Nathan (2019, pp. 175-176, p. 179) argued that Xi's recentralization intensifies the power struggle and is destabilizing because if he dies or steps down, the power struggle for succession will be tense. Also, Gilley (2019, p. 52) argued that provincial leaders are unsatisfied with Xi's removal of term limits and will force him to retire when his term ends, which will be "a possible opening for democratic transition."

First, if Xi passes away while he is President, his successor will be Wang Qishan, who is the Vice President and a staunch supporter of Xi. The Vice Chairman of the CMC is Xu Qiliang, who is also a staunch supporter of Xi. Thus, Xi faction's dominant status within the party will be to a large extent stable because the faction controls military power and the presidential post. Moreover, according to the party rule, if Xi plans to hand over his posts, his heir, who will be the Vice President and Vice Chairman of the CMC in the last term of Xi's Presidency, will be decided by the Central Committee (Hu, 2012, p. 83; Zeng, 2014, p. 136). Thus, factional competition will be almost settled five years before Xi's handover. Some scholars view that the 2012 Bo Xilai case wherein the Party Secretary of Chongqing Bo Xilai challenged Xi's status as Hu Jintao's successor proved the existence of a power struggle among senior party members. However, instead of viewing Bo's case as a factional power struggle, this section agrees with Nathan (2019, cited in Fewsmith and Nathan, 2019, p. 177) that it was Bo that challenged the party's rule of leadership selection. Bo (2013, cited in Cao, 2013) recognized this rule but denied that he had attempted to violate it. He (2013, cited in Cao, 2013) said that he did not "want to be Chinese Putin" because the Central Committee had already made decisions about the leadership succession in the 2007 Party Congress. Bo's lack of legitimacy to be the President was probably the main reason the majority of the CCPCC political Bureau reportedly endorsed to remove him from his post (Ansfield and Johnson, 2012). Further, because Xi will still stay in power before his handover, he is probably able to ensure

a stable leadership transition. Finally, it is unlikely that provincial leaders are capable of forcing Xi to step down in 2022 because he has absolute control over the PLA, which has been the most important sign of power throughout CCP history.

Besides the issue of leadership succession, some scholars view that Xi's core leadership violate the mechanism of collective leadership and make the regime unstable due to the lack of limits on Xi's power (Lee, 2017; Wang and Zeng, 2016; Fewsmith and Nathan, 2019; Baranovitch, 2020). However, although collective leadership may have check and balance effects at the top level, it has caused regime instability due to the lack of coordination and unity among ministries or top leaders (Miller, 2015, p.10; Zheng and Weng, 2016, p. 35; Hu and Yang, 2017, p. 12). Since 2008, many CCP elites and scholars have voiced this concern. In 2008, Chi Fulin (2008, cited in Hainan Daily, 2008), the delegate of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, called for establishing an organ that coordinates the different interests of ministries under the Central Committee's unified leadership to manage conflicting interests between central and local governments, or among different ministries. Likewise, an article published by the official *Qiushi* magazine in 2012, argued that although collective leadership improves intra-party democracy, members of the Political Bureau lack coordination, have conflicting interests, and often shirk responsibilities when carrying out substantive reforms and making difficult decisions (Zheng, 2012). Wang Changjiang (2012), a professor of the Party School of the CCPCC, also argued that many ministries prioritized their own interests over national interests and utilized the reform to strengthen power, which caused social instability and power struggle among ministries.

Unlike many observers who perceive the relationship between the core leader and collective leadership as zero-sum (Lee, 2017; Fewsmith and Nathan, 2019; Baranovitch, 2020), CCP leaders view the core leader as complementary to the collective leadership due to the defects of the latter. In 1983, Deng (1983) warned about the over-concentration of power. However, in 1989, he (1989) pointed out that

“every collective leadership needs a core...[because] the core of the first generation’s collective leadership was Mao... cultural revolution did not defeat us...I am the core of the second generation’s collective leadership...thus...despite purges of the two leaders...the party’s leadership is stable.” Likewise, in 1999, Jiang (1999) stated that “leading such a big party, ruling such a big country...must have a...core leader.” Deng and Jiang viewed the core leader as an important means to reduce the defects of collective leadership, such as suppressing factionalism, accountability for making tough decisions, and implementing important policies (Deng, 1989; Jiang, 1999). For instance, in 1936, the establishment of Mao as the core leader marked the dominant status of his guidance within the CCP and suppressed Wang Ming’s leftism that wished to defend base areas through positional warfare. Likewise, since 1978, Deng has set up a reform, opening up as China’s national policy, and suppressed party members that supported the Cultural Revolution. Feeling the need to integrate into the US-led order, Jiang was able to insist on China’s entry into the WTO despite strong opposition from the conservative faction within the party and state-owned enterprises (Jiang, 1999, cited in Kuhn, 2004, p. 392). Xi also made tough decisions, such as reclaiming land features in 2013 and locking down Wuhan province to prevent the spread of the coronavirus during the 2020 Spring Festival.

According to Hu and Yang (2016, p. 12), the combination of a collective leadership and the core leader is the democratic centralism mechanism of the CCP. Ideally, the core leader is able to reduce the defects of a collective leadership, while the collective leadership can enhance intra-party democracy where members communicate information and opinions openly and thoroughly and constrain the core leader from excessively using his/her power.

However, one major problem of this mechanism is that the collective leadership’s effective constraints on the core leader depends on the latter’s self-discipline. This is because, in practice, other members of the political bureau of the CCPC have less power than the core leader, and it is difficult to punish his/her disobedience to the

collective leadership. Mao's conduct during the Cultural Revolution demonstrate that the core leader can ignore the collective leadership and cause social chaos. In 1981, the CCPCC's authoritative resolution about issues after the founding of the PRC criticized Mao for "placing himself above the Central Committee [and] continuing weakening and even breaking party and nation's principle of collective leadership and mechanism of democratic centralism" (CCPCC, 1981). Jiang (2000) stated that the core leader must self-consciously obey the principle of collective leadership. He (Jiang, 2000) stated that "as the core of the third generation's collective leadership...I always highlight the importance of handling relationship between individual and collective leadership, [our] work needs to rely on everyone's wisdom."

Some scholars have pointed out the possible negative consequences stemming from Xi's core leader. Fewsmith and Nathan (2019, p. 179) warned that Xi has fewer constraints than his predecessors and cannot be informed of wide views because most people are afraid of speaking the truth. The party committee's retrieval of power from other non-party systems conflict with the scholars' argument of "institutional differentiation within the regime" (Nathan, 2003, p. 12; Wang and Zeng, 2016, p.477). This, according to Wang and Zeng (2016, p.477), will cause social chaos due to the problematic policies caused by Xi's personalistic dictatorship. Shambaugh (2016, pp. 102-103) argued that "separating the party from the government" policy was the liberal approach to the CCP's political reform that was killed due to events in 1989. Shambaugh (2016) may view this policy as the CCP's transfer of political power to the government and, thus, proves that it was once somewhat open to the liberalization of the communist political regime. He also believed that liberalization will enhance the CCP regime's authoritarian resilience (Shambaugh, 2016, p. 128).

This section acknowledges that these are major concerns of Xi's core leadership. However, the main point concerning with the CCP regime's stability is not whether the recentralization of power strengthens Xi's intervention in nearly all policy areas. This is because, as noted above, many senior CCP elites and scholars stress the

instability caused by a collective leadership's disunity as well as the importance of reducing factional competition and making tough decisions. From the perspective of the CCP, the non-party systems' autonomy should always be limited. Shambaugh (2016, p. 102) seems to misunderstand that the policy of "separating party from the government" is a liberal approach. However, while this policy means that the CCP gives independent executive power to the government, the latter should not disobey CCP's command (Beijing Daily, 2013). To the CCP, the ideal relationship between the party and non-party systems may be demonstrated by the National People's Congress' Standing Committee's rejection of the national road law modification draft. In 1999, the Standing Committee meeting did not pass the State Council's draft of modifying the national road law that changed monthly road maintenance fees into oil taxes because it did not offer a practical solution to potential problems, such as increased tax burden for peasants who rely heavily on oil for agricultural production (Tang, 1999, pp. 7-8). This case first illustrates that the Congress Committee independently exercised the power of establishing and revising laws. Second, the Congress' autonomy is limited by the party's leadership. Changing the maintenance fee into an oil tax was the major task of China's tax reform at that time (Tang, 1999, p. 8). The congress did not oppose this task and was not expected by the CCPC to do so. However, the congress had freedom to deliberate the law proposal's technical issues, such as the methods of law implementation. In 2017, then Secretary of Central Discipline Committee, Wang Qishan (2017, cited in Xinhua agency, 2017a), in an attempt to correct the misunderstanding with the policy, declared that "under the party's leadership, China does not have a separation of party and government but has division of labours between party and government." This statement stresses the leadership-executive relationship between the party and other non-systems and reflects that institutional differentiation and autonomy must be based on the party's guidance.

As many CCP elites view recentralization as necessary and that non-party systems' autonomy should be controlled, the main point concerning the CCP regime stability

is to examine whether Xi obeys the principles of collective leadership or intra-party democracy. If Xi obeys the principle, his decision will be less dictatorial and can be better implemented by other non-party systems because other top leaders may oppose his views and openly communicate information. While it is hard to get internal information on how the Political Bureau or CCPCC works during the Xi era, Hu and Yang (2017, pp. 13-16) highlighted two important indicators. The first is the party documents and Xi's speeches or directives since he came to power, which could show his willingness to obey the collective leadership principle. Even if he pays lip service to the principles, he may somewhat abide by them to convince his colleagues that his actions are in line with his words. The second is the numbers and themes of meetings in which major or all members of the CCPCC participated. The great numbers and important themes of the meetings at least demonstrate that participants communicate with each other and discuss major issues.

First, examining the party documents and Xi's speeches and directives show that Xi does demonstrate a willingness to obey intra-party democracy. In 2015, Xi (2015, cited in 12371 Net, 2016) gave a speech that emphasized avoiding the over-centralization of power and obedience to intra-party democracy. In 2016, Xi commanded party committees at all levels to learn Mao's article that stressed importance of frank communication among committee members at committee meetings, as well as the avoidance of the one man rule (Xinhua Net, 2016). In the same year, the CCPCC (2016) issues principles of managing intra-party political life, which state that the party "must resolutely prevent and overcome [the phenomenon that] nominally, the party committee is led collectively but in fact one person or a small number of people determine everything."

Second, the CCPCC has held a number of meetings to discuss major national issues since 2012. For instance, the CCPCC political bureau held a meeting nearly every month from 2012 to 2020 (Hu and Yang, 2017; Shixizhi, 2020) where important national issues were discussed. Take the meetings in 2020 for example. In January

meetings, members of the political bureau usually discuss annual reports from party groups of the National People's Congress, State Council, National Supreme Court (Shixizhi, 2020). From February to May, the main topic of discussion was the management of the coronavirus (Shixizhi, 2020). In June, the meetings analyzed and discussed the issue of managing the PLA. In July, the CCPCC mainly discussed the 14th national five-year plan and goals of 2035. The CCPCC also set up institutions for holding meetings in which all members of the Political Bureau focus on analyzing and discussing a single major issue (Hu and Yang, 2017, p. 16). For instance, every year, the CCPCC holds a specialized meeting that analyzes national economic conditions and plans for the next year's national economic policies (Hu and Yang, 2017, p.16). Since 2013, it has held an annual central meeting on works relating to foreign policies (Hu and Yang, 2017, p. 16). While some members may be afraid to speak the truth in meetings, some discussions may depend on statistics, which is less subjective than storytelling. Every year, members of the political bureau have at least six collective learning sessions where they learn, discuss, and make reports with Chinese experts that specialize in major national issues (Hu and Yang, 2017, p. 16). This will also improve Xi's policy making process by providing more balanced views about these issues.

Zhang (2019, pp. 19-20) argued that Xi's did not inform Premier Li Keqiang and Ministry of Foreign Affairs about his decision to reclaim land features in the SCS in 2013 because, when the PLA was reclaiming land features, the Foreign Ministry and Premier were trying hard to ameliorate the tense relationship with neighboring countries. According to Zhang (3029, pp. 19-20), this reflects disarray in China's decision-making. However, the section argues that the actions of the PLA and the Premier or Foreign Ministry were not contradictory. First, the amelioration of the relationship can help Beijing reduce the pressure being placed on it by ASEAN regarding the land reclamation. Second, the establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs claims that because the Philippines' relationship with China was already bad in 2013, the reclamation would not cost China much and could help it create a fait

accompli to reverse the perceived strategic disadvantage brought about by the Philippines' arbitration tribunal (Zhang, 2019, p. 19). According to some scholars, the Foreign Ministry in fact helped the PLA create the *fait accompli* from 2013 to 2015 by delaying the process of Code of Conduct for SCS (COC) negotiation and bearing with the criticism of land reclamation (Panda, 2015). Thus, it seems that the PLA and Foreign Ministry were coordinated when handling the issue of the reclamation.

In addition to Xi's attempt to retrieve power from non-party systems, his emphasis on party cadres' obedience to the party's leadership seems to contradict with the institution that cadres' promotion is based on "meritocracy" (Zeng, 2014, p. 116). Nathan (2003, p. 11) argued that cadres promotion based on performance would increase the neutrality of staff and reduce factional competition. However, as Pang, Keng, and Zhong (2018, p. 91) indicated, "if every cadre gets promoted for spurring local GDP growth rate, who would care about CCP." The rise of local protectionism proves that the concern of increasing GDP growth of their administrative regions to get a promotion will make local officials disobey the party center's leadership. For instance, local party committees and governments utilize their managerial and political powers to create a preferential environment for local industries and products while constraining, and even blocking, those from other parts of China from participating in local markets (Xu, 2002, p. 84; Zhang, 2012, p. 51; Xing and Li, 2012, p. 58). This has resulted in provincial economic separation and prevents the center from creating a unified market (Xu, 2002, p. 85; Zhang, 2012, p. 51). Moreover, a lot of the center's commands that conflict with its subnational counterparts' fever of developing the economy have been passively or selectively executed. For instance, senior governors of Gansu province passively executed the center's commands of environmental protection in 2017 for fear that it will harm economic development, which heavily relies on coal (CCTV news, 2017).

Zhou (2011, p. 80) argued that the party center's requirement of cadres' loyalty to any of its commands are essential for an authoritarian and mobilization system, but

will decrease local government's effectiveness in managing local affairs because the party's command may not adapt to the local's specific conditions. However, this may be the cost that the CCP is willing to pay. As noted in the introduction, CCP senior officials generally view a centralized system as essential in coping with struggles on ideological and geostrategic dimensions; thus, local cadres' responsiveness and accountability to the center's commands must be increased.

To sum up, some scholars argued that the CCP regime's resilience is due to deepening institutionalization. First, the institutionalization of leadership succession has greatly reduced the power struggle at the top level. Second, collective leadership has a check and balance effect on top leaders and improves intra-party democracy. Third, the non-party systems have more autonomy than before. Fourth, elites' promotion is mainly based on capabilities and achievements. However, Xi's recentralization of power since 2012 has challenged these arguments. Thus, scholars like Nathan (2019, cited in Fewsmith and Nathan, 2019) hold the pessimistic view that Xi's recentralization will lead to the CCP regime's instability.

Contrary to Nathan's view, this section argues that, although recentralization has defects, it could consolidate the CCP regime. First, although Xi's removal of the presidential term limits increases the instability of leadership succession at the top level, the removal can stabilize power at the top level better than retention of the term limits if Xi does not plan to transfer his leadership to others after his 10-year presidency. Moreover, instead of viewing the relationship between collective leadership and core leader as zero-sum, the section views it as complementary because the core leader can reduce the defects of a collective leadership, such as increased factional competition and inability to make hard decisions. Xi's centralization of power reduces the autonomy of non-party systems, but enhances the regime's stability by increasing coordination among different systems and the CCP's capability of making hard decisions. A major defect of the mechanism that combines the core leader with collective leadership is that, although ideally the

collective leadership can enhance intra-party democracy and constrain the core leader, these constraints depend on the latter's self-discipline. However, by examining Xi's speech and actions, the section argues that he somewhat obeys the principle of collective leadership. Third, although stressing cadres' loyalty will reduce effectiveness in managing regional affairs, CCP seems to be willing to pay the price to increase party cadres' responsiveness and accountability to the party center.

The legitimacy of CCP

Some analysts argue that the CCP's recentralization since 2009 will decrease its popular legitimacy and cause regime instability, or even demise. Fewsmith (2019, cited in Nathan and Fewsmith, 2019, p. 176) contended that an increasingly centralized regime will find it hard to govern a diverse society. Also, Shambaugh (2016, p. 128) argued that Chinese people and cadres are tired of the CCP's propaganda and pretend to conform to the party education campaign, which is a telltale sign of the CCP regime's collapse. Likewise, Gilley (2019, p. 54) indicated that the fearless Chinese youth who are tired of the CCP regime's paternalistic control will gang up against its repression and pursue freedom and regime change.

The observation of Fewsmith (2018, cited in Fewsmith and Nathan, 2018) is right; a diverse Chinese society conflicts with a system that is centralized. Moreover, China's opening up has enhanced the Chinese people's understanding of liberal values. The widespread use of the internet also facilitates the spread of liberal ideas at a societal level. For instance, the Chinese have been getting familiar with liberal ideology by watching movies that convey liberal ideas or visiting liberal countries. The state may probably deepen their worries about ideological competition when many mass incidents in the cities occur. This is because words and phrases that are of liberal origin like "civil participation, democracy and rights" are becoming tools for protestors to legitimize their collective protests (Wu and Yang, 2013, p. 81). Those deplorables (Gilley, 2019, p. 54) may also harbor deep grievances to the party's rule.

However, the point is not whether the Chinese are somewhat dissatisfied with the party's ruling, but whether this dissatisfaction will lead to a national wide bottom-up violent rebellion, which will eventually result in the collapse of the CCP. The section argues that the chance of such a scenario occurring is slim in the Xi era.

First, while the Chinese who are influenced by liberal ideas and dissatisfied with the communist regime do pose threat to CCP's domination, the masses should at least meet the four basic conditions to become a strong political force and compel the party to make substantive concession. In terms of experience from the CCP's rise in China, the first and basic condition is that the political force needs to have economic sources that can at least be used to maintain its survival. This is why the CCP had an urgent need to seek assistance from the Soviet Union when it was nearing its demise in 1935. The second condition is that there should be someone responsible for organizing and mobilizing the dissatisfied masses on a long-term basis. Without organization, power is scattered. If their strategies are not carried out for the long term, the political forces cannot gain enough influence and will not become sustainable. Third, like the CCP, which taught peasants why they should fight in the Anti-Japanese War, the political force needs to at least have a clear goal that can convince people to join. Fourth, the existing power relationship between the political force and the one they wish to resist is unstable. In the Anti-Japanese War period, KMT's Chiang never fully controlled China. Thus, the CCP viewed that challenging Chiang was possible when it accumulated enough power.

These four conditions can explain the reasons why the increasing number of mass incidents in China has not developed into long-term nationwide protests and rebellion since the 1990s. The mass incidents in China mainly pursue environmental protection, labor disputes, land acquisition and the demolition of buildings, educational inequality, and healthcare disputes (Zhang and Liu, 2015; Zhang and Liu, 2016; Zhang and Zhu, 2017). All these causes have aroused mass incidents.

However, although the number of mass incidents is rising, they are short term, do not link up, and have no or few organizations to offer long-term economic support and mobilization. For instance, land acquisitions and the demolition of buildings have been the major cause of mass incidents since the 2000s. In April 2016, over 1,200 law enforcement officers from a district in Haikou City demolished 104 “illegally constructed” buildings in a village (Zhang and Liu, 2016, p. 4). The demolition triggered violence between villagers and the officers, heated up online discussion and protests, and gained wide media coverage (Zhang and Liu, 2016, p. 4). However, the mass incident only lasted fewer than 10 days (Zhang and Liu, 2016, p. 4). It was also confined to the village and did not develop into a district- or city-wide protest against the demolition policy even if violent demolitions have been the major cause of mass incidents for years. One main reason is that few organizations in China are responsible for linking a single incident with a deep social or political root cause (Feng, 2015, p. 78), providing long-term economic assistance to protestors, and mobilizing people that have suffered a similar incident in other cities to support the villagers through demonstrations. Without the linkage, protestors may feel anger towards the officers’ misconducts rather than the CCP’s regime. People who participate in online protests may also share the protestors’ concern and emotions, but they do not view the issue as immediately related to their interests because the incident happened in another city. Without economic assistance and the organizers who mobilize other cities’ potential protestors, the protests may not last long, and potential protestors may not have the courage to take to the streets.

The Internet provides fertile soil for the emergence of such organizations in China because it reduces the costs of mobilizing the masses, facilitates relatively secret coordination between protestors and organizers, and helps organizers easily spread information and linkage between the incident and regime defects to the whole nation. According to an article published by *Xinhua Net* in 2015, an organization consisting of lawyers, executors, internet opinion leaders, and paid professional protestors initiated over 40 mass incidents in different Chinese cities from 2012 to 2015 by

combining actions online and offline (Huang and Zou, 2015). First, a law firm in Beijing served as the headquarter of the organizers (Huang and Zou, 2015). When an incident happened, the lawyers of the law firm organized a WeChat group. They used the group to secretly coordinate different organs within the organizations, offer personnel training, and post some videos, pictures, and descriptions of the incidents to agitate people and link the cases with political issues, such as the regime's suppression of civilians (Huang and Zou, 2015). Then, internet opinion leaders posted/reposted and commented on the pictures or videos, raising public concern and anger towards the government and exerting enormous social pressure on them (Huang and Zou, 2015). After the incident flared up, cooperating with online commentaries and protests, the organizers would pay professional protestors to lead the demonstration on the streets or in front of the government buildings (Huang and Zou, 2015).

While these incidents put enormous pressure on the government, they still do not develop into long-term nation-wide protests and demonstrations, or even violence. First and foremost, this is because China's power is centralized at the top level. A unified Central Committee can ensure power is controlled by the center and stabilizes the power relationship between the dissatisfied masses and the party. Deng (1989b) argued that "as long as CCPCC is united...any unrest can be resisted...but if the center is itself in disarray, the result would be hard to tell." Also, as noted earlier, Deng (1989b) argued that Mao and his unchallengeable power was the major reason that the Cultural Revolution and 1989 nationwide student protests did not lead to the collapse of the CCP. Xi's core leadership is also an important indicator that factional competition at the CCPCC is suppressed and centralized power is stable.

Because the unequal power relationship between the party and the organizations is stable, the former is able to use coercive means to suppress the latter and prevent organized long-term mass incidents, but the latter are difficult to resist effectively. For instance, regarding coercive measures, the party has started numerous campaigns

to control the flow of information on the Internet since 2015, including permanently suspending the Chinese Twitter Weibo accounts of many internet opinion leaders (Zhang and Liu, 2015). This greatly decreases the ability of opinion leaders to amplify the incidents, evoke public sentiments, and rally people by linking the incidents with political issues. Also, the police and intelligence officers disbanded many organizations and arrested the organizers who have economic and personnel resources to mobilize people to achieve certain goals (Huang and Zou, 2015). Thus, although young deplorables mentioned in the article of Gilley (2019, p. 54) hate the CCP regime, it is hard for them to gather together and challenge the regime's dominance without organizers' economic assistance, training, and mobilization. Also, police officers have beaten and suppressed protestors who called for the cancellation of the construction of waste incineration power plants in mass incidents in Luoding and Wuhan cities in 2015 and 2019, respectively (BBC News, 2019).

The CCP also uses non-coercive means to prevent further escalation of local incidents to the national level. First, in many cases, the local governments conceded to the protestors' demands. For instance, regarding the Haikou mass incident mentioned above, officers who have violently beaten women were arrested and the governor in charge was forced to resign (Zhang and Liu, 2016). The local governments also halted the construction of plants that were not environment-friendly, which were also protested about in several mass incidents (BBC News, 2019). These concessions responded to the direct causes of the incidents and prevented them from cumulation and spillover. For instance, after the resignation of the governors and arrest of the violent officers, the heat surrounding the discussion on the Haikou mass incident reduced dramatically in 2016 (Zhang and Liu, 2016). The protests also stopped after the government cancelled the construction of plants that are not environment-friendly. Second, some policies have been established to tackle the root causes of the incidents. For instance, the central government issued a new national policy governing land acquisition in 2011, which aims to prevent forceful land acquisition and give more compensation to households whose homes needed to be

relocated (The State Council, 2011). Additionally, the central government has sent inspection teams to appraise local governments' environmental protection records since 2015 and directly receive and solve mass complaints about the local governments' poor performance on environmental protection (Xinhua Daily Telegraph, 2019). Third, although the CCP may lose its legitimacy on some issues, the legitimacy deficit may be cancelled out if the CCP obtains legitimacy from other issues, such as crisis management. As Schubert (2008, p. 194) argues, "deficits in legitimacy which might occur at one point within this system can be compensated by gains in legitimacy at another point resulting in overall regime support." For instance, the CCP gained a high satisfaction rate because of its high effectiveness in containing the coronavirus in 2020.

Finally, compared with the organizations, the CCP had a more complete system for increasing the ability of mobilization and cultivating the masses' habit of obedience. As noted earlier, it has conducted a nation-wide party education and building campaigns since 2012. While these political education activities may result in the "feigned compliance" of party members as Shambaugh (2016, p. 128) argued, they are important for consolidating the center's power and increase the masses obedience to the party's commands. First, they deliver information about the center's policies, goals, and political path to party members. Citizens will also be notified through political campaigns, banners, media, and slogans. Thus, nearly every Chinese has been aware of the political campaign calling for respecting the center's commands. Second, like the military's routine training, these political activities strengthen or cultivate people's habit of obeying commands, which is critical for effective political mobilization (Zhou, 2011, p. 77). The frequent educational activities maintain and increase people's awareness of the center's authority and their participation in the activities is in itself an act of recognition and obedience (Zhou, 2011, p. 77).

To sum up, this section explains the reasons why the CCP's recentralization of power will not collapse due to the development of a diverse society. The section argues that, although the rising awareness on civil participation, democratic values, and social and economic problems increase the number of mass incidents in China, the incidents are unlikely to develop into nation-wide unrest and challenge the CCP's domination in the Xi era. This is because values and ideas are not enough to escalate a single mass incident to a nationwide level. The three other conditions also matter. First, few organizations in China can support the protestors through demonstrations by linking a single incident to a deep social or political root cause, providing long-term economic assistance to protestors, and mobilizing other people that have suffered a similar incident in other cities. Although the internet does provide fertile soil for the emergence of such organization, the CCP's centralized power is stable and the party uses mixed strategies to prevent several incidents from developing into nationwide unrest. First, regarding potential organizers or opinion leaders, the party uses coercive measures to prevent opinion leaders from linking several cases with regime defects and suppressing the emergence of organizations that are able to mobilize people for the long-term. Also, the party often suppressed the protests. Second, the party often uses soft measures to placate the masses. For example, it forces violent officers and governors in charge to resign and adjust policies. Third, party education is important for cultivating the masses' obedience to the party's leadership (Zhou, 2011, p. 77).

Shared Asian and pluralist identities reduce pressure of ideological competition on China

The CCP's recentralization of power will increase ideological competition between China and the US. However, Sino-US ideological competition does not necessarily lead to an anti-communist China coalition in East Asia. China is located in a region where states generally share values, such as the importance of "authority," "non-confrontational" and "the supremacy of the state over society and of society over

individuals” (Huntington, 1996, p. 225). These shared values underpin Asian identity and do not prioritize liberal values, such as limited government rights. They also reduce the pressure of ideological challenges on China, which feels more pressure from extra-regional countries than regional countries. For instance, in contrast to international pressure on Beijing’s approach to the HK protest, ASEAN countries in general remain silent. At a 2020 meeting between South Korea and China, President Mun Jae-in acquiesced to President Xi Jinping’s statement that HK is China’s internal affairs (Rfi, 2020).

Second, China’s promotion of pluralism in East Asia may downplay ideological competition by transforming the ideological competition between communism and anti-communism into that between pluralism and solidarism. During the Cold War, many East Asian countries were the US’s anti-communist allies or partners. While they were not liberal countries, such as Malaysia, they viewed China as an enemy because China threatened their regime security by supporting the communist movement in their countries. Thus, China communist identity was conflicting and salient to them. Resisting communism is one main reason that underpinned the foundation of ASEAN in 1967. However, by promoting pluralist norms, China can become an ally to most countries that support pluralist norms, such as coexistence, and resist the US-led liberal internationalism that imposes liberal values on others (Hurrel, 2007, cited in Buzan, 2014, p. 114). Since East Asian countries surround China, a pluralist East Asia, to some degree, becomes a buffer zone for resisting ideological challenges from liberal countries.

Some analysts argue that Japan is increasingly hardline in preventing China from challenging the existing rule-based liberal order (Brown, 2018, p. 862; Koga, 2020). Tamaki (2020, p. 385) even claimed that the liberal order for Japan is “ontological” rather than “transactional.” However, this argument neglects that one main reason of Japan’s economic rise is the strategy of developmental state, which stresses the government’s role in guiding the economy’s development, and contradicts the US’

free market and individualism model (Foot, 2017, p. 832). Japan was under strong criticism of its protectionist measures and was pressurized by the US to open up its domestic market from the 1980s to 1990s (Foot, 2017, p. 832). The modifications of its economic model have been viewed by many in the West as its willingness to integrate into and raise its status in the liberal economic order (Foot, 2017, p. 839). However, the Japanese have not accepted these modifications without deep anger and frustration. Many of them also do not view the modification as Japan's integration into the US liberal order. For instance, Teo (2019, p. 122) viewed the changes as US suppression of Japan's rise. The former Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo (2018) blamed the 1985 plaza accord that brought about the dramatic appreciation of the Yen in a short time for causing "huge negative impacts on Japanese market, industries, and economy." Japanese conservative elite, Masahiko Hosokawa (2018), interprets the Japanese concession as a sign of the country's weakness by saying that the reason for the concession was that Japan, whose security has relied on the US, had no power to retaliate at that time. Moreover, in 2012, Japan's dominant Liberal Democratic Party's draft of a revised constitution removed individualism and norms of liberal democracy from the existing constitution and added a "Japanese communitarian vision of democracy that significantly strengthened the role of state" (Pyle, 2018, p. 366).

As many of Japan's values diverge with those of the US, its support of the US-led liberal order is not staunch. The content of Japan's Indo-pacific strategy lacks the promotion of democratic values and improvement of human rights records (Tamaki, 2020, p. 394). In June 7, 2020, Japan refused to participate in the joint statement of the US, UK, Canada, and Australia, which condemned China's passage of the national security law on Hong Kong (Xiaoshan, 2020). In June 30, 2020, Japan joined the G7 countries' statement that had asked China to reconsider the passage of the law (Kasai, 2020), but refused to sanction the country (Ou, 2020). In 2021, Japan is the only G7 country that does not impose sanctions on China "over the alleged human rights violations in Xinjiang" (Kato, 2021). Japan often argues that its

deepening economic relationship with China is keeping it from imposing the sanction (CNA, 2021). However, this also demonstrates that Japan does not regard liberal norms as the most important value that must be firmly defended.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzes the CCP's stabilization of its regime in the stalemate period. Specifically, it is about to what extent the CCP recentralized its power and prevented an anti-communist coalition in East Asia. The first part analyzes how the CCP attempted to stabilize its communist regime through the recentralization of power. The next two sections assess the two major arguments of the pessimists who argue that, instead of consolidating the regime, recentralization will lead to the collapse of the CCP. The first argument is that the decreasing institutionalization of the authoritarian regime will lead to the collapse of the CCP. The second is that an authoritarian regime is not suitable for an increasingly diverse society. Contrary to the pessimists' opinions, the chapter argues that despite defects, the CCP's recentralization has stabilized the communist regime to a large degree. First, Xi's removal of presidential term limit increases the uncertainty of leadership succession, but the removal is better than retention of the term limits for stabilizing the regime if Xi does not plan to retire after his 10-year presidency. Moreover, although Xi increases intervention in other non-party systems, which may result in his dictatorship, he still obeys the collective leadership principle to a certain degree. Additionally, while the center's command will increase local governments' management costs, the party center is willing to pay them in order to cope with the perceived great ideological and geostrategic challenges. Second, although the Chinese people are somewhat dissatisfied with the party's ruling, the mass incidents are unlikely to develop into nationwide unrest during the Xi era. China has a shortage of organizations with sufficient economic resources and that are able to mobilize the dissatisfied groups on a long-term basis. Moreover, the unequal power relationship between the party and the organizations is stable. Third, the party uses a mixed strategy to suppress

the emergence of such organization, placate the dissatisfied masses, and cultivate their habits of obedience.

After analyzing the CCP's recentralization of power, the chapter argues that China's shared Asian identity with regional countries and promotion of pluralist values relieves the pressure of ideological challenges on China. This chapter contributes to the overall argument of the thesis that in the East Asian context, the CCP had successfully stabilized its centralized control over the communist regime and prevented the formation of an anti-communist coalition by seeking shared Asian or pluralist identities with regional countries.

Chapter 8: the stalemate period (2): China's efforts to seek shared interests and identity with regional countries through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The preceding chapter analyzed the extent to which China stabilized its communist identity and prevented an anti-communist coalition from forming in East Asia. From this Chapter to the next, this thesis examines the extent to which Beijing realized important nationalist interests and prevented the formation of a US-led hard-balancing coalition during the stalemate period through the strategic management of identities and interests. Specifically, this Chapter examines to what extent BRI has helped Beijing prevent the formation of the coalition through increasing the salience of shared economic interests or constructing pluralist identity with regional countries. Although many scholars note that one important function of BRI is to maintain a relatively peaceful environment by preventing the US from forming a coalition against China (Rolland, 2017, p. 135; Zhou and Esteban, 2018, p. 487; Gong, 2019, p. 637; Paul, 2019), they do not analyze this function in detail (Paul, 2019). Thus, the thesis also makes a contribution in this regard.

According to SIT's recategorization strategy, shared identities contribute to a peaceful relationship (Hogg, 2016, p. 8) and cancel out the negative effects of frictions derived from conflicting identities (Brown, 2000, p. 345). As shared interests, such as interdependence, enhance the cohesion of in-group or shared identities (Brown, 2000, p. 35), they may also have a similar effect on China's relationship with regional countries as the shared identity does.

The main argument of this chapter is as follows; First, based on shared interests including regional economic integration and cooperation, China has attempted to increase salience of the shared economic interests through BRI. BRI is a feasible way to help China increase this salience because many regional countries regard BRI as more of an opportunity to exploit rather than a risk to avoid. BRI offers huge

economic benefits through infrastructure investments and domestic consumption in the Chinese market. While costs will be incurred, such as over-reliance on China's investments, they are manageable, as many regional countries are not passively accepting Beijing's dictate and actively control and balance the inflows of these investments. Second, China has sought to form a shared identity with regional countries through shared pluralist values. These findings reinforce the thesis' overall argument that shared identity/interests could help Beijing construct benign relationships with regional countries, even if there continue to be frictions caused by China and regional countries' conflicting nationalist identities. Furthermore, these benign relationships may cancel out the negative effects of such frictions, thereby helping Beijing thwart the formation of a hard-balancing regional coalition.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section analyses Beijing's attempt to use BRI to increase the salience of shared interests with regional countries. The second section analyses China's attempt to seek a shared pluralist identity with regional countries.

Increased salience of shared economic interests through BRI

Regional countries will gain benefits and pay costs by joining BRI. If the cost exceeds the benefits, they are unlikely join BRI. However, if they can gain a lot of benefits and manage costs, they will probably view BRI as an attractive option. Based on this hypothesis, this section is divided into three parts. The first part looks at how China attempts to use BRI to increase the salience of shared interests by further enhancing economic integration and cooperation with regional countries. The second part looks at the costs that regional countries will pay to join BRI. The third part looks at whether these costs are manageable.

To begin with, China shares interests of economic integration and cooperation with other regional countries. These shared interests meet the needs of regional states and are, thus, effective tools for China to foster benign relationships with them.

Enhancing economic development is one of the most important objectives of many East Asian countries because their regime legitimacy is derived from good economic performance (Foot, 2014, p. 191). This important objective makes regional states' economic cooperation with China highly necessary. The rise of China's economic power has been accompanied by a growing need for resources and a rise in domestic consumption, thereby attracting intra-regional trade and foreign business investors (Ueda, 2017, cited in Liu, 2017; Nehru, 2017, p. 22). Since 2009, China has been the largest trading partner of ASEAN (Department of Asian Affairs of Ministry of Commerce of PRC, 2016). Similarly, China has also been Japan's largest trading partner for many years. According to China's Ministry of Commerce, Japan and South Korea were among China's top ten sources of foreign direct investment in 2017 (Li, 2017). For most Southeast Asian countries, which are relatively under-developed and wish to attract foreign investment to develop their economy, China's investments have contributed significantly to their economic growth and employment. For instance, until 2018, China invested more than 4000 enterprises in ASEAN countries and employed more than 300 thousand local people (Gao, 2018, cited in Sina economics, 2018).

In addition, the East Asian regional production network has also become increasingly integrated. According to a report from the WTO, East Asian countries have formed a system of "tri-polar trade through China" (Inomata, 2011, p. 76). Under the tri-polar trade system, the materials and components of products are produced by regional states and exported to China (Inomata, 2011, p. 76). China then assembles these components into final products and exports them to the US (Inomata, 2011, p. 76). This network has made it very difficult to isolate China, as it binds together many of the export-oriented East Asian countries (Beeson and Breslin, 2014, p. 107). Moreover, as China has well-functioning infrastructure, sufficient human resources, high productivity, and mature business supply chains (Liu, 2016, p. 37; Bloomenthal, 2019), it has become an indispensable node that connects imports and exports within the network. Because of increasingly integrated regional production networks, China

and most East Asian countries are forming a community of interests, as a hit to China's economy would have negative spillover effects on other regional economies. For instance, most East Asian countries or business groups were deeply worried about Trump's 2018 trade war with China, because tariffs would have hurt the integrated regional supply chain and done significant harm to their export-oriented economies (Nikkei Chinese, 2018; Geddie, 2018). This is because the trade war would increase costs of production, cause a decline in their exports to China, and decrease price competitiveness of goods that are assembled in China (Nikkei Chinese, 2018; Geddie, 2018).

Against this backdrop, BRI, which was announced by Xi in 2013, aims to further deepen the economic cooperation and integration with regional countries. The BRI consists of "the Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road," which aims to "promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas" (The National Development and Reform Commission [NDRC], Ministry of Foreign Affairs [FMPRC], and Ministry of Commerce of the PRC [MOFCOM], 2015). Due to the focus of this research, this chapter analyzes how China increased the salience of shared interests with East Asian countries through the economic components of BRI. For example, China aims to increase economic integration through enhancing intra-regional connectivity, such as railways, ports, and a cross-border power network (NDRC, FMPRC, and MOFCOM, 2015). These infrastructure constructions are supported by China's huge investment in these developing countries, which have poor infrastructure that requires significant investments. In 2010, ASEAN adopted the Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) to facilitate ASEAN countries' integration. In this initiative, 15 priority infrastructure projects were envisioned, but ASEAN countries have since faced serious funding challenges (Das, 2015). The maximum lending (\$50 billion per year) from established economic organizations, such as the Asian Investment Bank and the World Bank (Rosales, 2017), is far from enough to satisfy ASEAN's needs (around \$ 2.7 trillion) if they are to close the infrastructure gap by 2030 (Asian

Development Bank [ADB], 2017, cited in Rosales, 2017). China's BRI has, thus, provided another attractive opportunity for ASEAN to finance its projects (Das, 2015). Testament to this is that all ASEAN countries participated as founding members of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which is a part of BRI, in 2015 (Xinhua, 2017). In the Philippines, China has already built 11 infrastructures and is currently negotiating an additional 10 (Beijing Daily, 2021). Similarly, in 2021, China is building Vietnam's first light rail transit in Hanoi (One Belt One Road [OBOR] net, 2021). Likewise, in September 2020, China completed the construction of Batang Rajang Bridge, which is the biggest infrastructure building project in Eastern Malaysia thus far (Liu, 2020). China's investment in the infrastructure of ASEAN countries also expands Chinese investments, which were previously focused on manufacturing, mining, and retail in ASEAN countries (Gao, 2018, cited in Sina economics, 2018). Expanding Chinese investments in different areas will not only increase China's presence in the region, but it will also further tie regional countries to China.

Also, the BRI aims to increase salience of regional countries' shared economic interests with China through enhancing intra-regional economic cooperation and trade (NDRC, FMPCRC, and MOFCOM, 2015). To do this, China first attempted to reduce tariffs and non-tariffs barriers through signing or upgrading Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with regional countries and improving the regional business environment to facilitate trade and investment (NDRC, FMPCRC, and MOFCOM, 2015). For instance, China has been continuously upgrading the FTA between China and ASEAN, which was signed in 2010, and pushing for a trilateral FTA among China, Japan, and South Korea (China News Net, 2019). It also accelerates intra-regional trade and exports by measures such as further reducing trade barriers and improving customs clearance procedures in 2019 (People's Net, 2019). In addition, BRI enhances intra-regional trade and economic integration by proposing a network of "cross-border e-commerce" among countries along Belt and Road (NDRC, FMPCRC, and MOFCOM, 2015). The Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba is vigorously turning

this proposal into a reality by promising to help small and medium size enterprises from regional countries enter and exploit the Chinese market. In 2016, Alibaba signed a strategic agreement with the Thai government (Nation Thailand, 2016). In 2018, Alibaba planned to substantially increase sales of Japanese goods through its online shop and retail outlets in China (Cho et al, 2018). In 2019, Alibaba signed contract with Vietnam's e-commerce giant Fado to promote products of Vietnamese small and medium size enterprises in China (Vietnam Investment Review, 2019). Also, in 2020, Alibaba planned to "onboard 5000 Indonesian merchants to its platform by 2025" (Eloksari, 2020). By doing so, China clearly wishes to further tie the Chinese market with both regional governments and subnational actors within the regional countries, such as enterprises and even individuals who do business through e-commerce.

China's huge domestic consumption market facilitate China's cooperation with regional countries in developing emerging technologies because they wish to start or expand business in China. This helps China thwart the possible formation of a "China-free" tech supply chain by the US, particularly in the cases of semi-conductors, electric-vehicle batteries, and medical products (Huyama and Nakamura, 2021). In August 2018, China and Japan have agreed to cooperate in standardizing the next generation of fast chargers for electrical cars to gain easier access to the Chinese market (Kimura, 2018). Furthermore, to satisfy rising consumption in China, Japan's Hitachi High-tech is producing medical reagent and automatic medical analysis devices in China in 2021 (Nikkei Chinese, 2021b). In the case of semi-conductors, Japanese companies that are producing non-cutting edge wafer products, such as Ferrotec Holdings, have substantially increased their investments and production in China in 2021 (Nikkei Chinese, 2021a).

Taken together, East Asian countries share economic interests with China because of the deep economic cooperation and integration that already exists. This economic cooperation and integration form a community of interests within the region, because an external threat to China's economy or China's economic downturn will inevitably

have negative spillover effects on these countries. Against this backdrop, China seeks to increase the salience of shared interests by directly targeting regional countries' need to develop economy. China's national foreign policy strategy BRI (NDRC, FMPRC, and MOFCOM, 2015) aims to increase intra-regional business investment and exports, the two most important means for a country to develop economy. Through BRI, China substantially increases outbound investments to regional countries, which satisfies their needs to attract foreign investment in infrastructure building. Also, China's further opening up of the domestic consumption market provides incentives for regional countries to strengthen economic ties with China by promising to import more from neighboring countries. Moreover, China's huge consumption market can help the country thwart the formation of a China free supply chain.

In the long run, the ideal achievement of BRI is to make the regional production network more China-centered and create closer ties in the community of interests between China and regional countries by making China both a regional manufacture hub and a main consumption market of regional exports. This aim is demonstrated by Chinese Vice Premier Liu He's article of constructing "internal and external big circulations" in 2020 (Liu, 2020). In this article, Liu (2020) states that "the most prominent feature of a great power's economy is to realize internal circulation, which provides huge domestic market and supply capacity, and supports and drives external circulation." By exploiting China's huge domestic market and supply chain, Liu (2020) argues that China can "attract worldwide commodity and resources...enhance international division of labors and cooperation...and increase economic interdependence."

However, despite China's efforts to increase the salience of shared interests with regional countries through BRI, many analysts have observed regional countries' fears about the costs of endorsing the Chinese proposal. The first concern of regional countries is the possibility of losing autonomy if they wholeheartedly support BRI

(Chaturvedy, 2014, p. 17; Arase, 2015, p. 41; Chung and Voon, 2017, p. 427; Chen, 2017, p. 352; Brown, 2018, p. 107). Regional states that have maritime territorial disputes with China fear that if they fully support BRI, they will be entrapped by China and let the latter use its economic power to either attract or punish them in exchange for their concession on territorial claims (Chen, 2017, p. 352). Also, they do not trust Beijing's claim that BRI represents friendship as this claim is in contrast with China's assertiveness in the SCS and ECS (Arase, 2015, p. 41; Brown, 2018, p. 107). Second, by endorsing China's infrastructural projects, regional states need to agree to have a Chinese presence in their country and, to some degree, involvement in their internal affairs (Chung and Voon, 2017, p. 420). Thus, many people in countries like Myanmar are increasingly warning against sovereignty erosion by external powers' involvement (Malik, 2018, p. 375) and Chinese "economic colonialism" that "plunders into not just forests, but their resources in general" (Manthorpe, 2015). Third, another concern regarding BRI is about the quality and process of constructing China-backed infrastructures that are often not environmentally friendly, are indifferent to local communities' interests and culture, lack technological transfer and local employment, and disobey local rules (Brown, 2018, p. 112; Malik, 2018, p. 376).

Finally, some analysts have expressed concerns about the "debt trap" of BRI. Their arguments are as follows: China has "extended grace periods and longer term loans than other institutions" to developing countries, which in fact are not able to afford these loans; when the countries cannot repay such debts, they are forced to use "strategic equities" or to somewhat accept China's "political influence" in order to obtain China's forgiveness (Parker and Chefitz, 2018, pp. 4-5). It seems that this argument has been proven in the case of Malaysia, as the newly-elected Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad canceled the China-backed East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) railway in 2018 because his administration believed that the project was unaffordable and the "unequal treaties" were substantially increasing Malaysia's national debt (Palma, 2018).

The first observation of the analysts is right, as many Southeast Asian countries that are concerned with policy autonomy and sovereignty will not completely support China's grand infrastructure plan. However, as their usual practice, Southeast Asian states that are investment driven and eager to improve infrastructures will show a certain degree of support to China's grand plan, as they wish to maximize their interests through the infrastructure investment competition among great powers. For instance, commenting on the competition between the World Bank, in which Japan backed ADB and China backed AIIB, Cambodian elite Dr. Sok Siphana (2015, cited in Miller, 2017, p. 47), who had led talks for his country's entrance to the WTO, said that "competition is good, because now we can shop around." Likewise, Indonesia's main Political Minister, Luhut Panjaitan (2015, cited in Rondonuwu, 2015), commented on China–Japan's competition of constructing high-speed railways (HSR) in Indonesia in 2015 saying, "Let them race to invest [in] Indonesia. It's good for us. It's like a girl wanted by many guys, the girl then can pick whoever she likes." One senior Thai leader (2017, cited in Lampton et al, 2020, p. 99) made a similar argument by saying "Thailand is like a beautiful lady who will wait and see." In other words, Thailand stated that it would cautiously "keep its options open and create a space for [great powers'] courtship" (Kuik, 2015, cited in Lampton et al, 2020, p. 99).

With regard to the second observation that the regional states' concern of China's indifference to local environment, rules, and culture hinders the progress of BRI, it is right that Chinese enterprises do have these problems, which need to be alleviated or solved. These problems have already caused negative consequences on some of China's mega projects. For instance, Myanmar's Letpadaung copper mine project was suspended from late 2012 to 2013 because of local protests against the environmental damage and local dissatisfaction about land-grabs (Ei Ei Toe Lwin, 2013). Another kind of evidence was China's slow progress in building the Jakarta-Bandung high speed railway in Indonesia from 2016 to 2018 due to problems of land acquisition (Dorimulu, 2018). Nonetheless, problems including local protests of environmental damage and land acquisition, are common when a country is building

new mega infrastructures in a third country because building the infrastructure will inevitably violate established interests of some sub-national actors (such as local landowners, farmers, and villagers). For instance, like China, Japan, who is another big investor in the region, faced protests of 3500 Indonesians for building a coal-fired plant in 2016 because of local concern for environmental damage and public health deterioration (Kyodo, 2016). Also, in 2018, Japan stopped funding the construction of India's first bullet train project because of Indian farmers' protests regarding land acquisition (Vishwadeepak, 2018). Thus, on the one hand, countries that are building infrastructures should address local concerns and enhance communication with local communities. On the other hand, the governments of host countries probably need to make a trade-off between different interests, such as improvement in national transportation versus the interests of landowners or farmers. In many cases, the host countries choose to bear the costs of local dissatisfaction in exchange for achieving greater national objectives. For instance, the major reason for Myanmar leader Aung Sann Suu Kyi (2013, cited in Lawi Weng and Thet Swe Aye, 2013) to resume construction of the China-backed copper mine in 2013 is that the country was underdeveloped and needed foreign investments to develop its economy and create job opportunities. She (Aung Sann Suu Kyi, 2012, cited in Global Times, 2012) asked local people to put the interests of the nation first. Furthermore, under her administration, which took power in 2016, a lot of China-backed projects that were strongly resisted by local communities have quietly resumed because of the need to increase economic growth (Wan, 2018).

Third, the argument of China's debt trap diplomacy (Parker and Chefitz, 2018, pp. 4-5) seems to underestimate regional developing states' bargaining power in the formal negotiation process of building infrastructures with China. This argument assumes that regional developing countries have no other choice but to "give in to" China's debt trap and make concessions on sovereignty once it accepts unaffordable loans from China (Parker and Chefitz, 2018).

The basic fact is that regional developing states that intend to build infrastructures or attract foreign investments, but are in shortage of funding or advanced technologies, have to bear a debt burden and, to some degree, they have to be under the political or strategic influence of foreign countries. In other words, accepting foreign influence is the price that they must pay. Although it is true that BRI has political or strategic intentions, using investments to achieve political and strategic influence is not a unique Chinese practice. Every country or external institution uses soft loans to do the same. Soft loans from Western countries or institutions have conditions, like improving human rights and political reform in developing countries. Japan has long been adept to using developmental aid to secure political, economic, or strategic interests (Reilly, 2013, p. 141). For instance, one main aim of Japan's aid to China in the 1980s was to enhance Japanese firms' access to the Chinese market and secure China's raw material exports to Japan (Reilly, 2013, p. 144). Since 2010, Japan resumed funding infrastructure construction in Myanmar's Thilawa Special Economic Zone to deepen economic and diplomatic engagement with Myanmar (Reilly, 2013, p. 153). Also, the US' infrastructure agreement with Japan and Australia in 2018 clearly has the strategic aim of countering BRI (Pearlman, 2018). Just as the Philippines' Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III (2018, cited in Rivas, 2018b) said, "We are not naïve, we know all Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects of all countries are designed to influence." Thus, for regional developing states, the issue here is not whether they should borrow loans from other countries rather than from China, because borrowing other countries' loans may also make them overtly and strategically reliant on countries. Also, they may shoulder more and more debt if the loans cannot be repaid. For regional countries, the crucial point is how to maximize their interests through reducing the debt burden and avoiding over-reliance on a single power's influence, while also utilizing external powers to build infrastructures. Like Carlos Dominguez III (2018, cited in Rivas, 2018b) said, "while countries use ODA to influence, it is up to the government how to take advantages of opportunities."

With regard to utilizing Chinese loans and avoiding over-reliance on one country, regional countries are not passive recipients that obey China's demands, but they are rather active players.

One major strategy used by many regional countries is to balance the investments of external powers. Avoiding over-reliance on Japanese loans is a major reason why the Philippines chooses China, whose interests rate (2%–3%) is much higher than Japanese loans (0.25%–0.75%) (Pernia, 2018, cited in Interaksyon, 2018), to build some infrastructure in the Philippines (Pernia, 2018, cited in Rivas, 2018a; Padin, 2018). Malaysia's Mahathir welcomed Japan's investments to reduce Malaysia's overt support for China's infrastructure projects in 2018 (Menon and Daga, 2018). Likewise, in 2018, Myanmar permitted Japan and India to construct its east-west route, while China was building its north and south route (Malik, 2018, p. 373). Also, in 2018, while negotiating with China over the Bangkok-Nong Khai HSR, Thailand permitted Japan to construct a 672 km Bangkok-Chiang Mai railway (Lampton et al, 2020, p. 103).

Second, regional developing countries are actively seeking to reduce costs of building infrastructures in the negotiations with China. For instance, the major reason that China defeated Japan in the bidding for Jakarta-Bandung HSR in 2015 was that the Chinese proposal required neither Indonesian state funding nor a governmental guarantee (Kyodo, 2015). This means that the Indonesian government shoulders no responsibility if the country cannot repay the loan in the future. Thus, no debt trap exists in this HSR project. Also, in 2016, Thailand decided to fund the Bangkok-Nakhon Ratchasima railway on its own, but would utilize Chinese equipment, and construction firms because Thailand's government had not gotten China's concession of reducing loan interest rate from 2.5 percent to 2.0 percent (Lampton et al, 2020, p. 98). Likewise, in 2016, Myanmar successfully reduced the cost of Chinese investment in Kyaukpyu deep water from 7.3 billion to 1.3 billion US dollars (Li, 2018). To avoid the debt trap concern, Myanmar did not give sovereignty

guarantee to the project (Li, 2018). Likewise, in 2019, Malaysia has successfully reduced the substantial cost of the ECRL through bargaining with China (Mahathir, 2019 cited in Rekhi, 2019). After the re-negotiation, ECRL's cost was substantially reduced from 65.5 billion Malaysia Ringgit (RM) to 44 billion RM (Lampton et al, 2020, p. 113).

Moreover, the new Mahathir Malaysian government claimed that the country had fallen into China's debt trap in 2018 because Najib's government used lucrative projects to reciprocate China's help of bailing out the debts of 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) (Lampton et al, 2020, p. 124). However, Malaysia's debt was in fact manageable since existing evidence does not support Mathathir's claim. First, the annual average Malaysia's federal government debt to GDP ratio is 50.1% from 1978 to 2018 (CEIC data, cited in Zhang, 2020, p. 134). According to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report in 2020, the ration in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 was 53.6%, 51.9%, 50.1%, 51.2%, 52.7%, and 52.6%, respectively (IMF, 2020). In other words, Malaysia's federal government debt to GDP ratio in these years were slightly higher than the annual average debt ratio of the country. Thus, the country's debt did not substantially increase due to Chinese loans. Second, in principle, the higher federal government guaranteed debt to the national debt, the more likely the country would have debt risk (Zhang, 2020, p. 134). According to statistics from the Malaysian government in 2019, in 2018, the year that the new government made the debt trap claim, Malaysia's government guaranteed debt was 266.5 billion RM, and the total national debt was 741 billion RM (Daim and Teoh, 2019). Thus, the government's guaranteed debt accounted for approximately 30% of the total national debt in 2018. This ratio demonstrates that Malaysia's debt risk was low in 2018. Because China's funding was part of, rather than all of the government's guaranteed debt, it is unlikely that Malaysia would have fallen into a China's debt trap. Third, according to an IMF report from 2018, Malaysia's external debt to GDP ratio had, in fact, declined since 2016 (IMF, 2018, p. 50). To be sure, the short-term debt share of the external debt increased and accounted for 44% of

the total external debt as of September 2017 (IMF, 2018, p. 50), which may increase the risk of Malaysia not being able to repay the loans (Zhang, 2020, p.137). However, the same IMF report (2018, p. 51) expected the short-term debt share to steadily decline. Moreover, according to experts of Malaysia's central bank, until January 2019, Malaysia's international reserves were US \$102,1 billion and, thus, ensured the state's capability to repay short-term external loans (The Star, 2019). Furthermore, Malaysia's debt service ratio from 2013 to 2019 was 17.3%, 17.9%, 21.4%, 23.5%, 22.7%, 23.0%, and 23.1%, respectively (IMF, 2020). According to established international practice, if a developing country's debt service ratio is above 25%, it will probably be unable to repay the debt (Baidu Baike, no date). The debt service ratio of Malaysia from 2013 to 2019 did not cross this red line.

In light of the discussion above, this chapter argues that the economic plan of BRI is feasible to help China increase the salience of shared economic interests with regional countries by deepening economic ties with them on the basis of existing regional economic integration and cooperation. This is because many regional countries regard BRI as more of an opportunity to exploit than a risk to avoid. BRI offers huge economic benefits through infrastructure investments and access to the Chinese domestic market. Although there may be costs, such as over-reliance on Chinese investments, they are manageable as many regional countries have bargaining power and are able to control and balance the inflows of investments. This validates the principle of the strategic management of identities/interests, which is set out by SIT and holds that shared identity/interests would contribute to a peaceful relationship between conflicting parties.

This also reinforces the overall argument of the thesis that shared economic interests would help China construct benign relationships with regional countries on economic dimension, even if there are other points of friction such as territorial disputes. Additionally, these benign relationships would help cancel out the negative effects caused by conflicting identities/interests. As demonstrated, the claimant states, such

as Japan, the Philippines, and even Vietnam, are deepening their economic ties with China despite ongoing territorial disputes.

Constructing a shared pluralist identity between China and regional countries through BRI

In addition to shared material interests, BRI, as China's grand national strategy, has an ideational element that helps China seek a shared identity with regional countries. According to SIT, one way to form such a shared identity with others is through exhibiting shared values, ideas, or visions (Hogg, 1992, cited in Brown, 2000, p. 27). This is an important detail for this thesis' main argument because, if China can manage identity in this way, the shared identity could enhance in-group feeling between China and regional states, thereby canceling out frictions caused by conflicting identities and preventing them from joining a hard-balancing coalition against China.

With regard to the ideas and values exhibited through BRI initiatives, analysts' arguments can be divided into two categories. The first is that China wishes to use BRI to reconstruct Sino-centric tribute regional order or "empire" that China is at the center of the order while the neighboring states are at the fringes (Wu, 2015, cited in Clover and Hornby, 2015; Blanchard, 2017, p. 250; Callahan, 2018, p. 6; Pompeo, 2018, cited in Gehrke, 2018). Speaking of a tribute system or empire, these authors indicate that China aims to build a Chinese hegemonic regional order through BRI. This is because the essence of the tribute system is Chinese hegemonic superiority and authority over neighboring states, although many Chinese analysts argue that regional states were ruled in a benevolent manner through this system (Jian, 2009, pp. 133-137; Shang, 2009, p. 30; Wang, 2017, p. 93). However, this type of argument is refuted by Chinese officials. Indeed, China has very cautiously implemented BRI in an attempt to avoid such an interpretation. For example, China has named Belt and Road not as a grand strategy, but as an initiative, to avoid sounding intrusive. By

treating Belt and Road as Chinese initiatives, China aims to connect the Chinese initiative with national plans and initiatives of regional countries or institutions (duijie), such as connecting BRI with Indonesian president Jokowi's Global Maritime Fulcrum doctrine or ASEAN connectivity 2025 (Wang, 2015, cited in People's Net, 2015). China also wishes to connect BRI with Japan's freedom and open Indo-Pacific (Wang, 2015, cited in People's Net, 2015), and the two countries have begun to discuss cooperation on infrastructure building in the third country in 2018 (Kyodo, 2019). In this way, China aims to show that it considers other countries or institutions' initiatives to be equally important as BRI.

Callahan (2018, p. 7) argued that, although China claimed that BRI is inclusive, BRI reminded the regional states about the "sphere of influence" logic or Japan's East Asia co-Prosperty Sphere. Likewise, Allison (2020, p. 30) argued that China is creating a regional sphere of influence in which it demands other regional states' deference or exerts predominant control over the region. If China aimed to create a sphere of influence or an East Asia co-Prosperty sphere through BRI, it would have been able to deeply influence internal affairs of regional countries to ensure their obedience to BRI. For instance, in 1938, the year Japan declared that it would create the co-prosperty sphere of East Asia, Japan was invading China to ensure that its demands would be fully obeyed. However, up to now, China demonstrates limited capability to influence regional states' BRI participation decisions. For instance, it is not uncommon that after leadership transitions in regional states, China has to significantly renegotiate BRI arrangements that were endorsed by previous governments (Lampton et al, 2020, p. 97), rather than forcing the new government to obey to the negotiated arrangements. In some instances, the new governments have turned down some of the previously negotiated BRI agreements. For example, in 2014, the Thai military government turned down the previous government's (Yingluck, 2011–2014) agreement with China, which held that Thailand would barter rice to use China's equipment and technology to construct HSR (Meyer, 2014). Also, the military government dismissed the Bangkok-Padang Besar HSR route that had

been negotiated with China by Thailand's Abhisit administration in 2010 (Lampton et al, 2020, p. 97). Likewise, as noted earlier, after Mahathir came to power in 2018, key terms of the ECRL building contract have been significantly renegotiated and two pipelines had been suspended. Also, since 2015, China had tried to cultivate good ties with Aung San Suu Kyi government and resumed many previously stalled projects in Myanmar (Myers and Beech, 2021). However, the military coup that overthrew the Aung San government in 2021 made the fate of those projects uncertain again. Some analysts may argue that due to sanctions on democratic countries on Myanmar, the military junta would be increasingly dependent on China's investments and, thus, may endorse more BRI projects. However, it is worth noting that many BRI projects had been stalled by the military government (2010–2015), such as Myitsone Hydropower Dam. In 2019, Aung San government began to renegotiate the key terms of the Dam construction deal with China (Global Times, 2019). Thus, to China, Aung San seems to be a more cooperative partner than military junta.

Moreover, even if China pressures regional countries to accept its desires in BRI negotiations, regional states can withstand if they think that China's demands are in conflict with their highly valued national interests. For instance, when negotiating the construction of HSR with China, Thai negotiators refused to permit China to develop land surrounding the HSR route because Thailand thought that land rights are "the greatest asset" of the worker union and the King (Lampton et al, 2020, p. 101). Also, from 2017 to 2018, China pressured Malaysian leaders, including Prime Minister Najib, to help China win the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore HSR project (Liu and Lim, 2019, p. 225). However, Malaysia thought that China's wish to own terminus of the HSR was against its national interests and, thus, did not yield to China's demand, even if then Prime Minister Najib was accused of asking China to bailout 1MDB's debts (Liu and Lim, 2019, p. 225). Likewise, when negotiating HSR in 2015, Indonesia successfully persuaded China to establish a business to business model between

Chinese and Indonesian state-owned enterprises rather than the government-to-government model, which China preferred (Pavličević and Kratz, 2019, p. 162).

Smith (2021, p. 75) noted that regional states have bargaining power and China has often made concessions. However, Smith (2021, p. 75) also reported that China wished to use concessions in exchange for regional states' formal recognition of its dominant status and order. This is the "formal inequality, but informal equality structure" of the hierarchical Sino-centric benevolent order claimed by many Chinese scholars, whereby China needs regional states' recognition of and deference to its superior status in return for China's tolerance and concession (Smith, 2021, p. 73). Smith (2021, p. 75) supported this argument by using evidence that China conceded to Malaysia's demand to substantially reduce costs of ECRL in exchange for getting Mahathir's public endorsement to Xi's BRI at 2019 Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, which demonstrates Malaysia's submission to Xi's Sino-centric order. However, contrary to Smith's (2021, p. 75) argument, at the press conference after the meetings of the forum, Mahathir (2019, cited in Wong, 2019) explained that he supported BRI because he corrected his misunderstanding that BRI is China's "domination plan." Mahathir (2019, cited in Wong, 2019) said that "at the beginning, we thought that the BRI was for China to dominate in ASEAN and Asia." However, at the forum, he (Mahathir, 2019, cited in Wong, 2019) realized that "this initiative is not being dominated by China. This will be a creation by all involved nations" because "suggestions from small countries...were being considered" and they were treated equally as developed countries. Thus, the Mahathir case supports China's claim that BRI is equal and weakens Smith's (2021, p. 75) view that China uses concession to get other states to submit to its domination.

As the discussion above demonstrates, first, creating a Sino-centric order through BRI is not feasible because China demonstrates a limited capability to influence the internal affairs of regional countries, and regional countries are often able to withstand China's pressure when their highly valued national interests' conflict with

China's preferences. Second, China attempts to show equality through BRI rather than a hierarchical but benevolent Sino-centric order.

Although China is unable to create an exclusive Sino-centric order through BRI, it can form a shared identity with regional countries based on shared values. As noted in the introductory section, forming a shared identity can cancel out the negative effects of conflicting identities and, thus, deter regional states from joining an "anyone but China club" that aims to contain China (Zhou and Esteban, 2018, p. 494). This reinforces the main argument of the thesis that a shared identity approach is a viable means for China to thwart the formation of a regional hard-balancing coalition.

However, the second category of scholars' observation is that China lacks the capability to promote new shared ideas, values, or vision in the region and, thus, will find difficulties to further ally with regional states, although BRI may successfully enhance economic cooperation between regional states and China (Xue, 2014; Yale, 2015; Malik, 2018, p. 378). However, China does not need to promote new shared ideas, values, and visions because the ideas and values that China promotes already exist and have sincere supporters in the region.

Since the end of the Cold War, two types of regionalism have coexisted in the East Asian region. The first is the US-centric regional order that promotes economic or political liberalization. This type of regionalism visualizes a totally liberalized regional economy through multi-lateral institutions that consist of "formally negotiated, legally binding, and comprehensive agreements" (Stubbs, 2018, p. 141) and provides strong support for democracy (Alcaro, 2018, p. 4). This type of regionalism also has a solidarist feature because of the view that international society should have more rights to inspect or even intervene in the domestic politics of states that do not respect the human rights of their people (Ikenberry, 2009, pp. 80-81). The second type of regionalism is ASEAN-led regionalism. It strictly adheres to the Westphalian notion of sovereignty and non-interference, informal ways to prevent conflicts, an emphasis

on avoiding embarrassment and confrontation among regional countries and a “nonbinding, voluntary approach to liberalization which emphasized tackling the easiest issues first” (Stubbs, 2018, p. 142). While China is not the founding member of the first regionalism, it has been deeply engaged in the establishment of the second regionalisms’ values and norms.

The values and norms of the ASEAN-led regionalism originated from the 1955 Bandung conference in which China was one of major participants. In this conference, official representatives from 29 Asian and African countries formally met for the first time to discuss issues (Office of The Historian, no date). In terms of the topics, the main theme of their discussion was to provide the world the way, vision, and values by which these newly emerged states present themselves and deal with IR. It was in this conference that China’s five principles of peaceful coexistence were shared, which stress sovereign equality, non-aggression, non-interference to internal affairs, mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty, cooperation on mutual interests, and peaceful coexistence (Office of The Historian, no date); these principles were fully included in the 10 principles of the Bandung conference (Xinhua, 2005). Also, influenced by previous regional gatherings, such as the Asian relation conference in 1947 and the Bogor summit in 1949, the conference procedure was not rigid or legally binding (Acharya, 2009, pp. 79-81). Additionally, any issue that could cause a confrontation or disagreement was avoided in the conference agenda; instead, differences were tolerated and decision making was based on consensus, rather than majority voting, to avoid hurting participants’ feelings and enhance a sense of unity (Acharya, 2009, pp. 79-81).

The principles and procedures of the Bandung conference continue to have a profound influence on the values and norms that China and ASEAN promote. Indeed, striking commonalities can be found in China’s and ASEAN’s statements and policies. The pluralist norms of respecting sovereign equality and territorial integrity and adhering to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states

have been enshrined in the ASEAN charter (2007). The Bandung conference's procedures have been adopted by ASEAN as the ASEAN way, which promotes these ideas and norms in the ASEAN-led regionalism. ASEAN has become a hub and bridging node of various ASEAN-led institutions, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (1994), ASEAN Plus Three (APT; 1997), East Asia Summit (EAS; 2005) (Caballero-Anthony, 2014, p. 568).

These pluralist values and procedures are also demonstrated in China's promotion of the principles of BRI. In this initiative, China calls for peaceful coexistence among different types of political regimes and cultures, as well as tolerance of differences between cultures (NDRC, FMPRC, and MOFCOM, 2015). As Xi's major foreign policy, BRI is tied with Xi's new Asian security concept that puts emphasis on one of China's five principles of peaceful coexistence, solving disputes through negotiations, and building mutual trust incrementally (Xi, 2014). Because of these commonalities, China does not need to destroy ASEAN-led regionalism and construct another one. Instead, China can seek a shared pluralist identity with ASEAN on the basis of their shared values.

Despite the possibility of forming a shared pluralist identity with ASEAN, conflicts between China and ASEAN may arise if the former were to replace the latter and lead the pluralist regionalism because the most important interest of ASEAN in the region is to preserve its centrality. However, this is not the case, as Chinese senior officials have repeatedly praised the central role that ASEAN plays in leading regional cooperation, and they have reiterated their strong support for ASEAN-led regionalism (Wen, 2011, cited in China News, 2011; Xi, 2015, cited in Zheng, 2015). For China, it is reasonable to back ASEAN-led regionalism because supporting it can help China gain more benefits. First, taking part in ASEAN-led regionalism can enable China to alleviate regional fear about China's domination in the region, whereas attempting to lead this identity could raise such a fear. Second, by joining the multilateral institutions that are led by regional middle and smaller powers' institution, China is

also free from the fear of being dominated by other great powers because of ASEAN's relative lower national strength (Stubbs, 2014, p. 533). Also, during decades of participation, China has found that ASEAN multilateralism is an effective political means to balance the US' bilateral alliance system in the region (He, 2015, p. 215). Finally, in the process of institutional design and building, ASEAN has cautiously and skillfully secured its central role and ASEAN-led mechanism in the institutions through deciding membership, entry requirements, decision-making procedures, and agenda setting of institutions (Caballero-Anthony, 2014, pp. 571-572). Furthermore, the organization has established institutions to ensure that ASEAN is the indispensable node that connects them (Caballero-Anthony, 2014, pp. 571-572). Thus, it is hard for China to replace ASEAN within the current institutional settings and arrangements.

Analysts often argue that China pays lip service to ASEAN-led regionalism. However, China's obedience to ASEAN-led regionalism should not be examined in an either-or manner, but in terms of the extent because, as a "nascent security community" (Acharya, 1998, p. 202), ASEAN-led regionalism loosely constrains its member states and external regional powers. Regarding the shared interests of ASEAN and China, China does strongly support ASEAN-led pluralist values. For example, in 2003, China was the first non-ASEAN country to sign ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) (Stubbs, 2018, p. 145). Official approval of the treaty has become a pre-requisite for countries that wish to enter the ASEAN-led EAS (Stubbs, 2018, p. 145). In TAC, the norms that govern inter-state relations are very similar to China's five principles of peaceful coexistence (Severino, 2006, p. 279). Likewise, China's support of ASEAN-led informal and consensus driven approach increases the US's challenges in terms of promoting liberal regionalism (Stubbs, 2018, p. 144). As Yuzawa (2012, p. 83) noted, in 2012, China's support of the "ASEAN way of dialogue and consultation" prevented the US from making the Annual Security Outlook of ARF substantive, such as containing information of regional countries' military programs. Also, in 2021, China supported ASEAN's handling of Myanmar crisis, which stresses

non-interference to Myanmar's internal affairs (Jaipragas and Yuniar, 2021). Additionally, China strongly supported the ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Moreover, ASEAN does have a constraining effect on China's actions, although China does not fully endorse ASEAN's leadership when it comes to managing SCS disputes. In 1995, under pressure from ASEAN, China for the first time reluctantly agreed to discuss SCS disputes at an informal meeting between senior officials of ASEAN and China, despite its preference of dealing SCS disputes bi-laterally (Lee, 1999, p. 35). Also, China signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS (DOC) with ASEAN in 2002, which is an ASEAN-led approach to SCS. I demonstrated in my article, although China made DOC vague in 2002, it did to a certain degree obey the DOC from 2002 to 2008 (Hu, 2021, p.21). Likewise, in 2013, due to ASEAN's strong insistence on starting the COC talks, China reluctantly but officially recognized ASEAN's role as the legitimate manager of SCS disputes by endorsing ASEAN's COC approach (Xinhua, 2016).

Some analysts may argue that China just pay lip service to ASEAN's leadership in managing the SCS disputes because China would ensure its own COC version rather than making substantive concessions to ASEAN in the COC negotiation. To be sure, China will probably not concede to ASEAN's every demand. However, existing evidence suggests that China has made several substantive concessions in the COC negotiation. Some scholars suspected that China would ensure a non-binding COC (Castro, 2020; Storey, 2017). However, although China did not accept a legally binding COC, it conceded to ASEAN's demand for a binding COC (CGTV, 2019). Moreover, according to the Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin, Jr (2019, as cited in Santos, 2019) in 2019, in the COC negotiation, China "softened its insistence on controversial provisions", such as giving up "provisions excluding the western military presence". This is also a concession that some scholars suspected

that China would not make (Castro, 2020; Hoang, 2020). These examples demonstrate that ASEAN does somewhat constrain China.

Conclusion

Throughout this Chapter and the following one, the thesis looks at the extent to which Beijing has realized important nationalist interests, such as sovereignty related rights in the SCS, and preventing the formation of a US-led hard balancing coalition in the stalemate period through the strategic management of identities. This chapter looks at the extent to which BRI has helped Beijing achieve this goal through forming or increasing the salience of shared economic interests and a pluralist identity with regional countries. According to SIT, shared identity and interests create a benign relationship among conflicting groups. China increases the salience of shared economic interests with regional countries through BRI, which is attractive to many regional countries that wish to use investments and exports to boost GDP. BRI further binds regional countries' economies with China, such as boosting intra-regional connection, upgrading FTA, and tying middle and small companies of regional countries with the Chinese market. China also increases salience of shared economic interests through substantially increasing investment on infrastructure building in regional countries. The costs may incur when regional countries attempt to deepen their economic ties with China (i.e. environmental degradation, over-reliance on China, and the debt trap). However, as this chapter demonstrates, regional countries do have bargaining power and are capable of managing the costs. Also, China sought a shared pluralist identity with regional countries, which is the prevailing ideology in East Asia and underpins the ASEAN-led regionalism. Some analysts argue that China's obedience to ASEAN's leadership is insincere. However, this chapter argues that China does strongly support ASEAN-led regionalism when the two sides' interests converge. Although China does not fully obey ASEAN's leadership in managing SCS disputes, ASEAN does have constraining effect on China in this regard.

The findings of this chapter reinforce the overall argument of this thesis that shared interests and identities would help China construct benign relationships with regional countries even if other frictions like territorial disputes continue to exist. Additionally, these benign relationships would help cancel out negative effects caused by conflicting identities/interests. However, although China tried hard to maintain these benign relationships by seeking shared pluralist identities/interests, China's uncontrolled actions in the SCS or ECS could make regional countries prioritize conflicting identities and interests over the shared ones and join a rivalry bloc to contain China, and lead to China's unpeaceful rise. The next chapter will explore the extent to which China has prevented such a scenario by pursuing nationalist interests in a restrained way to mitigate the potential threat of such actions during the stalemate period.

Chapter 9: The stalemate period (3)—China’s effort to pursue its nationalist goals in a restrained way

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that, in the stalemate period, China has attempted to prevent a hard balancing coalition and, thus, maintain a relatively peaceful external environment by increasing the salience of shared interests through BRI and seeking a shared pluralist identity with regional countries. This supports the overall argument of the thesis, which is that shared identities/interests could contribute to benign relationships between China and regional countries. However, although China has made a lot of effort to seek shared interests and identities with regional countries to preserve a peaceful environment, its nationalist actions, if uncontrolled, will probably make regional countries prioritize conflicting identities and interests over shared ones, and join a rivalry bloc to contain China, and lead to China’s unpeaceful rise. This chapter then analyze how China strikes a balance between its goals of pursuing or consolidating nationalist interests and preserving a relatively peaceful regional environment in this period. I argue that through a strategy of pursuing the nationalist interests in a restrained manner, which is part of the strategic management of interests and identity, this is possible.

Ba and Kuik (2018, pp. 232-236) viewed China’s effort to seek shared identities/interests with regional countries and actions of pursuing nationalist interests as China’s “push and pull.” That is, China proactively engages with regional states through economic ties, while undermining China’s relationship with regional states through military actions in the SCS (Ba and Kuik, 2018, pp. 232-236). Boon (2017, p. 640) argued that China’s regional strategy is “hardening the hard while softening the soft,” meaning that China is vigorously enhancing attractiveness by pulling the regional states into its political and economic influence while being increasingly assertive and uncompromising when others violate these core interests.

In contrast, over recent years, an increasing number of scholars have noticed China's restraint in pursuing nationalist interests. That is, while China is hardening the hard, it has acted in a restrained manner that mitigates the threatening potential of that. Wu and You (2019, p. 54) argued that "assertiveness" has become a blanket term that is used in a non-nuanced manner to blur the larger picture." They further argued that scholars highlighting China's assertiveness fail to recognize China's effort to avoid conflicts when conducting coercive actions (Wu and You, 2019, p. 54). Likewise, Zhang (2019, p. 119) pointed out China's restraint when it strengthens sovereignty claims. He (Zhang, 2019, p. 119) argued that, contrary to the dominant argument that China acts as a bully in SCS disputes, China not only "employs coercion infrequently," but also "less often uses military means" and mainly relies on non-military means to defend sovereignty when its power grows. Also, some scholars apply the concept of gray zone operations to analyze China's military actions in the region. Despite different definitions, many scholars agree that gray zone activities refer to a state's actions to gradually alter the status quo by conducting low-intensity military activities and avoiding "escalation" to the "phases dominated by military actions" (Green et al, 2017, p. 21; Mazaar, cited in Erickson and Matinson, 2019, p. 3). Petersen (2019, pp. 17-19) argued that China aims to gradually alter the status quo by "keeping the cost of asserting...rights as low as possible."

The argument of China's increasing assertiveness stresses its actions of consolidating sovereignty, but seems to pay rare attention to China's restraints in its actions (Hoang, 2016, p. 188; Do, 2018, pp. 213-214). However, the argument of China's restraint does not consider its effectiveness in conducting these actions. Here, effectiveness refers to whether China has achieved its goals of pursuing nationalist interests and preserving a relatively peaceful environment by not overtly escalating conflicts and seriously deteriorating its relationship with other states (Wu and You, 2019; Zhang, 2019).

To systematically analyze China's restraint in pursuing or defending important nationalist interests, this chapter provides three criteria for examining China's restraints. First, China's actual actions are compared with the available options that it could have taken before the incidents. Second, China's actions are compared with other claimant states' similar actions when such incidents happen. Third, the chapter specifies regional countries' response to China's actions. They are declarative responses, demonstrative responses, low intensity confrontations, medium intensity confrontations, and high intensity confrontations, which will be explained in the first part of this chapter.

The main flaw of the gray zone thesis is that it holds that China aims to challenge the regional status quo, but does not specify the status quo. If status quo is defined as the US-hub and system that China views as encirclement, it is right that China aims to challenge the status quo. However, if the status quo is defined as regional disputes, many of China's actions, which have been viewed by scholars as gray zone operations, are responses to other disputants' behaviors and have no prior intention to change the status quo (Zhang, 2019, p. 24). For instance, China has used the coast guard to escort Chinese fishermen in the SCS since 2009 because Chinese fishermen were detained and shot by other claimant countries' para naval forces or navy in disputed waters (Swanie and Fravel, 2012, p. 7). Also, as will be noted in the last section of this chapter, China began to patrol the territorial waters of Diaoyu Islands because Japan had planned to purchase the islands and, thus, alter the status quo in 2012. Thus, these actions could not be explained as "gray zone activities," but rather as China's effort to realize "rights and stability balance" (Zhang, 2019, p. 2). Although these actions will increase China's deterrent capabilities in the first island chain, the increased deterrent capability is a consequence rather than a direct pursuit of China's goals.

The chapter will be divided into three parts; the first part is the regional countries' response to China's actions. The second part will analyze cases of China's gray zone

operations in the region. In this part, it will analyze China's actions, which are regarded by many scholars as being assertive, such as Chinese coast guards' regulation of foreign fishermen operating in disputed waters or Chinese coast guards' interference in other states' oil drilling activities. The third part will analyze how China strikes a right and stability balance through the example of Japan's nationalization of the Diaoyu islands.

The chapter argues that, in the stalemate period, China has pursued nationalist interests in a restrained way to avoid unduly escalating frictions caused by its nationalist actions and, thus, breaking up China's relationship with regional countries. Regarding China's gray zone operations, China's actions were restrained compared to its most assertive options. Also, these actions are often of a similar intensity or even less assertive than other claimant countries' actions in similar situations. China also set upper limits to manage the consequences arising from its nationalist actions. Moreover, when others' actions make China believe that its important nationalist interests have been damaged, China will use offensive means to respond, but will attempt to manage the consequence of its response to avoid a complete breakdown of its relationship with the other relevant parties. For instance, it will use offensive means in a restrained way and diplomatic means to show a willingness to negotiate. Regional countries' responses to China's gray zone actions or its efforts to strike a right and stability balance generally range from declarative response to medium intensity confrontation, which demonstrates that China did manage tension with relative success. This supports the overall argument of the thesis that China's restraint when pursuing or defending important nationalist interests can possibly maintain a relatively benign environment and prevent the formation of a hard-balancing coalition by mitigating the threatening potential of such actions.

Regional countries' possible responses to China's actions

Other states' responses to China's actions are classified into five categories. The first category of response is the declarative response that is about "verbal assertions via non-coercive statements," such as protests, "diplomatic notes, domestic legislation and administrative measures" (Chubb, 2021, p. 88). The declarative response is the least escalatory response because it often uses diplomatic means and does not involve physical presence in the disputed area or seriously threaten China's sovereignty claims (Chubb, 2021, p. 88). When states use declarative response, tension often ends after several rounds of tit for tat protests.

The second is a demonstrative response, which refers to regional states' actions of demonstrating sovereignty claims without directly confronting China (Chubb, 2021, p. 88) or seriously threatening its sovereignty claims, such as domestic protests, building on land features, and official visits to land features. A demonstrative response is more escalatory than a declarative response because it involves more physical assertion or consolidation of regional states' claimed sovereignty and compromises China's sovereignty claims more than a declarative response does (Chubb, 2021, p. 89). However, because regional countries use such responses to avoid direct confront China or do not seriously threaten China's claims, they cautiously reduce the potential for escalation and will not cause heightened tension in the region. For instance, in 2012, to challenge China's plan of devising a tourist route around the waters of Paracel Islands, the navies of Vietnam and the Philippines held football matches on their controlled disputed land features (Zhou, 2012). Also, in 2021, to keep up with other claimant states' build-up of outposts in the disputed land features and to monitor China's presence in the Spratly Islands, the Philippines decided to further fortify its occupied Thitu Island in the Spratly (Heydarian, 2021). These two actions physically demonstrated the two countries' claimed sovereignty and challenged China's claims. However, the football match was a non-military means to defend the two countries' claimed sovereignty and, thus, did not seriously threaten China's sovereignty claims. Also, as building on land features is a normal practice of claimant states and does not physically engage China (Chubb, 2021, p.

89), China's response was declarative. The Chinese Defense Ministry stated a firm opposition to the Philippines' plan to further fortify the Thitu Island in 2021 (Pengpai News, 2021). China may continue developing outposts in the SCS to respond to the Philippines' plan. However, as both sides built up the land features without physically engaging with each other, the tensions are generally controllable.

The third is low intensity confrontation, which refers to regional states' actions of directly confronting China, but cautiously avoiding overtly provoking China and escalating the incidents by using limited confrontational means. For instance, they may "internationalize" the disputes by using ASEAN-led forums or international media to "enlist support from other major powers to counter China" (Thayer, 2016, p. 209). Also, they may use one or a few warships or airplanes to patrol the disputed water, be in a standoff with China, or attempt to compel Chinese coast guards or fishing vessels to leave the claimed area (Thayer, 2016, p. 210). Also, they may conduct military drills on their own. For instance, in 2021, to challenge China's sovereignty claim in the Scarborough Shoal, the Philippines conducted a military drill near the shoal (AFP, 2021). Alternatively, they may enhance limited military or diplomatic cooperation with the US or other extra-regional powers. China is sensitive to these actions because these actions "internationalize" the disputes, involve external powers. Moreover, they challenge China's sovereignty claims by using limited application of military or para-military forces in a more substantive manner than declarative and demonstrative responses do. Thus, these actions may make China feel more pressure to moderate or stop and ameliorate its relationships with regional countries.

When regional states choose to respond through low-intensity confrontation, the tension in the sea and frictions in their relationship with China escalate. However, the frictions are still manageable because they cautiously avoid overtly provoking China. For instance, they may simultaneously enhance cooperation with and keep distance from external powers. For instance, in 2011, Vietnam had its military training exercise

with the US for the first time, but the military drill was non-combat (Parta, 2011). Under Duterte administration, the Philippines has conducted hundreds of military trainings and drills with the US every year, while publicly downplaying the strategic relationship between the two countries (Heydarain, 2021). Meanwhile, regional countries may be ready for de-escalation. For instance, in 2010, SCS disputes were on the agenda of the ARF (Murphy, 2017, p. 61). At the meeting, delegates representing some ASEAN countries directly confronted Chinese delegates and raised concerns over the SCS disputes (Emmerson, 2010). Moreover, Chinese delegate Yang Jiechi reacted angrily to then US Secretary Hilary Clinton's statements, such as that "the US would play an active role in facilitating COC completion and DOC implementation" (Clinton, 2010, cited in Emmerson, 2010). Fearing the disputes' escalation, ASEAN tried to keep its distance from the US. After the meeting, then Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said "it's between ASEAN and China [regarding the DOC]" (Baveria, 2014, p. 94). Likewise, to de-escalate tension, the Director of ASEAN's Political and Security Directorate, Termsak Chalermphanupap (2010, cited in Baveria, 2014, p. 94), said "as far as the DOC is concerned...ASEAN and China can handle their differences without involvement of a third party."

The fourth is medium intensity confrontation. As with low intensity confrontation, regional states choose medium intensity confrontation to directly confront China, while also not overt provoking China and escalating the incident. However, their actions are stronger than those of low intensity confrontation. For example, they may use ASEAN-led forums or international media to not only express concerns, but also to protest against China's actions. Also, they may send many, rather than a few, para-military vessels to directly confront China's operation or presence in the disputed waters. Alternatively, they may deepen their cooperation with external powers in response to China's action. However, at the same time, they will hold space for a potential dialogue and control the intensity of their actions to avoid further escalation. Vietnam's actions regarding China's oil rig operation in disputed waters in 2014 is an example of this category and will be explained in more depth in the next section.

The fifth is high-intensity confrontation, which refers to states' use of strong means to directly confront with China with little, if not no, consideration of de-escalation and amelioration. For example, they may directly call China a threat or use similar words or phrases (Kuik, 2013, p. 433). They may also use political measures that would seriously threaten China's sovereignty claims, such as submitting the disputes to an international tribunal despite China's resistance. They may send strong signals of hard-balancing measures, such as the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) signed by the Philippines and the US in 2014. More importantly, they may refuse to reconcile with China. For instance, after China got de facto control over the Scarborough Shoal in 2012, the Philippines rejected China's proposal to withdraw its remaining vessels from the shoal and de-escalate tension so long as the Philippines did not mention the disputes at the 2012 ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (Green et al, 2017, p. 120). When regional states choose actions of high intensity confrontation, their relationships with China breaks down.

China's gray zone operations in the region

This section will analyze cases of China's gray zone operations in the region. This will include examination of China's actions, which are regarded as being assertive by many scholars. These cases include China's enhanced presence in the region, CCG' regulation of foreign fishermen operating in disputed waters, and its interference in other states' oil drilling activities. In all these cases, China's restraints will be examined by comparing the actual actions that China took with other available options, and with regional states' actions in similar situations. Regional states' responses will also be examined to test effectiveness of China's restraints.

China's enhanced presence in the region

To begin with, as noted in chapter 3, the two main nationalist interests for China are the consolidation of sovereignty and geo-strategic development in East Asia.

Chinese nationalists have long considered China to be at a disadvantage in terms of its regional geostrategic position and sovereign disputes because the country is surrounded by US-led island chains, and its disputed land features are controlled by others to varying degrees. Thus, China has determined to change this disadvantaged status, which is reflected by maritime active defense strategy contemplated by the then People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) Commander Liu Huaqing in 1985. While this content has been mentioned in chapter 6, it is worth recapping here. The first phase of this strategy is called offshore active defense, whereby the PLA navy's operational zone is in the first island chain and aims to have enough deterrence capability to deter others moves that are viewed by China as seriously violating its sovereignty (Liu, 2004, p.438). In his book, Liu states that the navy's mission is to "protect sovereignty...seize and keep the command of the near sea in major operational directions, effectively control several important sea lanes of communication in China's sea area when necessary" (Liu, 2004, p. 438). Liu (2004, p. 437) did not confine the navy's operations to the first island chain, but rather expected the operation to extend to the second and third island chains, as the navy's capability grows. The mission that has been listed by Liu, if completed, would substantially increase the navy's capability of anti-access and area-denial, which "restrict the access and deny the freedom of movement to US forward forces operating in" the first island chain (Johnson, 2017, p. 274). While offshore active defense is the strategy of PLAN, it is reasonable to infer that the strategic goals of protecting sovereignty, deterring the US-led encirclement that is based on the first island chain and operating in the second or third island chains are also applied to PLA Airforce and Rocket Force. This is because China is balancing its security focus of protecting China's landmass with ensuring maritime sovereignty and security, as well as securing strategic sea lanes (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2015).

In line with Liu's strategy, the continued geostrategic development from offshore to distant water has been publicly and officially demonstrated through official

documents since 2009. While offshore active defense was set up by Liu Huaqing in 1985, building a “maritime great power” was first officially publicized by the CCP General Secretary’s report at the 18th national congress of CCP in 2012, as part of the national plan (Hu, 2012). This official statement indicates that active defense in China’s offshore and distant water is transferred from a strategy of a single PLA force to a national plan that requires cooperation among the PLA Airforce, Rocket Force and Navy. The statement also demonstrates that China officially began maritime expansion. The 2015 Defense White Paper (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2015) clearly shows the development of China’s maritime active defense and continued realization of Liu’s plan by articulating that the mission of the Chinese navy was changing from active offshore defense to the “combination of ‘offshore water defense’ and ‘open sea protection.’” This means that China is confident that PLAN is able to exert a certain degree of deterrent capability in the first island chain and begins to operate in the second island chain. The white paper also states that the PLA Airforce will “shift its focus from territorial air defense” to both defense and offense and build an air-space defense force structure” (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2015), demonstrating China’s attempt to enhance the Airforce’s presence and actual combat training in the first island chain (Shen, 2018, cited in CCTV News, 2018).

In line with the defense paper, China uses domestic policies and its military to increase its presence in the first island chain. In 2012, with regard to the first island chain, China replaced the three agencies that administer Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands, and Sand Islands, as well as the waters surrounding the islands, with the establishment of Sansha City, which functions the same as the three offices (The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2012). In 2013, China announced the establishment of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in ECS, which covers disputed Diaoyu Islands, and asked all aircrafts that fly into the zone to identify themselves with China beforehand (Nakayama, 2014). China also warns that those who do not abide by the requirement will be countered by

emergency military measures (Nakayama, 2014). The setup of ADIZ demonstrates that the PLA Airforce is expanding its defense area from territorial air defense to China's offshore waters. Since 2016, in line with the mission of active defense in China's offshore waters, the air force regularizes its combat air patrol in the SCS (PLA Airforce, 2016). Also, since 2010, China has increased the frequency and scale of navy exercises in the SCS (Swaine and Fravel, 2012, p. 35). Moreover, China has sought to realize the mission of "open sea protection." The PLA Airforce has gradually regularized patrols and training that go beyond the first island chain since 2015 (Huang, 2015), and the navy has begun to do so since 2010 (Shi, 2013, p. 1).

However, China has pursued these actions in a restrained manner compared to the most assertive measures it could have taken. The establishment of Sansha City is a domestic political action. This action did not directly confront other states and is just a demonstration of China's claimed sovereignty. Moreover, instead of announcing the plan of abruptly establishing ADIZ, China informed Japan in 2010 and South Korea in early November 2013 about this plan (Green et al, 2017). Also, despite its claim, China has not enforced the ADIZ by using military forces to prevent others military or civilian airplanes that had not sent flight plans from entering into the ADIZ (Green et al, 2017, p. 160). For instance, in November 2013, 10 Japanese aircrafts entered China's ADIZ without submitting flight plans to China, but they were not confronted with Chinese air fighters (Yoshida, 2013). Also, in 2013, a South Korean reconnaissance airplane entered into China's ADIZ without prior notification, but it was also not prevented by Chinese air fighters (Green et al, 2017). To reduce Southeast Asian countries' threat perception, China has refrained from establishing ADIZ in the Spratly Islands. Regarding China's patrol within the island chains, according to the testimony of the US Pacific Command Commander Admiral Locklear (2014), the Chinese navy and air force mostly conduct actions "safely" and "professionally." Additionally, most of China's navy exercises are conducted in undisputed water (usually in the waters near the south of Guang Zhou and Hainan islands) (Swaine and Fravel, 2012, p. 6).

Compared with other states' actions, China's actions are of a similar intensity level. The announcement of Sansha City is similar to the Philippines' announcement that renamed the SCS the Western Philippine Sea in 2011 (Bordadora, 2011). It is also similar to Vietnam's inclusion of Spratly and Paracel islands in the country's national maritime law in 2012 (China News Net, 2012). Second, China's ADIZ, according to the then US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel (2014, cited in Nakayama, 2014), was "neither new nor unique," as many countries had established their own ADIZ long before China's establishment of the zone. Third, PLA Navy and Airforce's exercises and combat patrols operations in the first island chain or beyond are not unique, as military drills of regional countries are often conducted in the region. For instance, in 2011, Vietnam held live fire navy exercise in the SCS (Swaine and Fravel, 2012, p. 16). Also, in 2020, US and Japan conducted military drills in the SCS (Kelly, 2020).

Regional countries' response to China's increased presence in the first island chains or beyond has ranged from a declarative response to low intensity confrontation. Regarding China's set up of Sansha City, Vietnam and the Philippines protested against the city's establishment, which represent declarative responses. Regarding China's ADIZ, regional countries used limited confrontational means towards China, but avoided overt-escalation; therefore, their actions constitute a low-intensity confrontation response. South Korea and Japan publicly protested China's establishment of ADIZ (Green et al, 2017). Also, they used limited military means to counter it. On December 3, 2013, South Korea conducted naval exercises within China's ADIZ (Green et al, 2017, p. 164). On December 13, 2013, Japan and South Korea conducted military drills inside China's claimed ADIZ (Green et al, 2017, p. 165). However, after 2013, the frictions caused by China's ADIZ subsided. This demonstrated that these two countries intentionally de-escalated the tension.

Moreover, regarding China's patrol and military exercises, regional states' responses were categorized as low intensity confrontations, as they mainly used limited military

means to monitor or intercept China's patrols but avoided overt-escalation. For instance, in 2021, Japan sent a destroyer and two aircrafts to monitor China's Liaoning aircraft carrier Liaoning passing the waterway between Okinawa and Miyako Island (Lo, 2021). Also, Japan always scrambles several aircraft to intercept Chinese aircrafts flying near its territory (Reuters Staff, 2019). To be sure, there were incidents that increased frictions. For instance, Also, in June 2014, Japan claimed that Chinese Su-27 fighters flew within 30 meters of Japan's military airplanes (Fackler, 2014). in August 2014, China claimed that Japan's aircraft flew very close to a Chinese aircraft that was patrolling the ECS (Reuters Staff, 2014). However, such frictions often subside after a round of arguments between the two countries, as both eventually tone down their strong rhetoric to de-escalate the situation.

Some analysts point out that Japan have chosen a hard-balancing approach against China's strategic development in the region because China's increased military presence in the SCS could threaten the trade flows that Japan heavily depends on (Brown, 2018, p. 867). The chapter recognizes that this is a concern for Japan. However, Japan's response is not hard-balancing but still low-intensity, if not medium intensity confrontation, that uses limited or stronger military means to counter China's actions while also avoiding overt-escalation. Japan did not view China's actions as being overtly provocative. In the 2020 Defense White Paper, the Japanese Defense Ministry (2020, p. 217) defined China's activities and related impact on the region as "gray zone situations." Japan views frictions caused by these actions as being manageable, although Japan also acknowledge that these actions "harbor the risk of rapidly developing into graver situations" (Japanese Defense Ministry, 2020, p. 41). In response, Japan enhances strategic communication and uses flexible counter-measures to prevent the "occurrence and escalation of emergencies" (Japanese Defense Ministry, 2020, p. 217), while also using limited hard-balancing measures such as ordering "SDF...immediately [to] take appropriate measures" and cooperating with other countries to respond (Japanese Defense Ministry, 2020, p. 217). However, Japan tries to control this tension by showing restraint in its actions

when responding to China's increased presence in the region. So far, Japan declined to participate in the US Freedom of Navigation Operations, although it has increased its military presence and sent helicopter destroyers to conduct naval exercises with the US in the SCS (Hughes, 2018, p. 93; Valencia, 2021). Furthermore, Japan does not allow its navy vessels to enter into the territorial seas of China's reclaimed islands, as such moves are seen as overtly provoking China (Wang, 2020). Also, Japan tried to maintain a constructive relationship with China to manage disputes. For instance, in 2020, the Chinese and Japanese Defense Ministries agreed to set up a direct hotline to manage tensions caused by the Diaoyu island disputes (Kyodo news, 2020).

The CCG's actions related to fishing within the first island chain

Some analysts point out that there could be backlash from regional states because the CCG are increasingly asserting China's sovereignty rights in the SCS and solidifying China's presence in the region, especially its assertiveness in regulating foreign fishermen (Glaser and Funaiolo, 2019, p. 193).

To analyze this issue, this chapter first listed the options available to coast guards in terms of regulating foreign fishermen, with escalatory levels ranging from 0 to 10. These actions are inaction (Level 0), following fishermen (Level 1), chasing fishermen (Level 2), expelling fishing vessels (Level 3), using water cannons or firing warning shots (Level 4), confiscating catches or seizing equipment (Level 5), harassing fishermen (Level 6), arresting fishermen and confiscating fishing vessels (Level 7), sinking fishing vessels (Level 8), arresting fishermen, confiscating fishing ships, and using law court to charge them (Level 9), and shooting at the fishing vessels, causing death or injuries of fishermen (Level 10). This sequence is arranged through the degree that the coast guards cause material costs or physical threat to fishermen. Thus, chasing fishermen is less of an escalation than arresting them because it constitutes a lower physical threat.

The common actions of CCG in waters surrounding Paracel Islands range from level 2 (chasing fishermen) to level 7 (arresting fishermen). For instance, in 2009, China expelled 147 Vietnamese fishing boats, and detained 33 fishing boats and more than 400 Vietnamese fishermen that were fishing in the waters of the Chinese-controlled Paracel Islands (Fravel, 2011, p. 305). In July 2014, China arrested 6 Vietnamese fishermen operating in waters of Paracel Islands (BBC News, 2014). On some occasions, China's actions would reach level 8 (sinking fishing vessels) (Fravel, 2011, p. 305). In 2014, China reportedly sunk a Vietnamese fishing boat in the waters of Paracel Islands (Glaser and Funaiole, 2019, p. 193). In 2020, China reportedly sunk a Vietnamese fishing boat in the waters of Paracel Islands (Vu, 2020).

CCG's actions in Scarborough Shoal have been more restrained than those in the waters of Paracel Islands. In general, China's actions have been level 2 (chasing fishermen) and level 5 (confiscating catches) since 2012, the year China's de facto control of the shoal established (Rauhala, 2016). On occasions, there were reports that China used water cannons, fired warning shots (Level 4), or rammed fishermen's boats (Level 8) (Thayer, 2011; Reuters Staff, 2015). Although there were reports that the CCG confiscated the fishermen's catches (Level 5), officials from the Philippines denied that the CCG's actions classified as harassment (Level 6) (Reuters Staff, 2018). To date, there were no reports that China arrested fishermen or confiscated their ships. Some analysts may say that the CCG's actions were more assertive than its actions in the Paracel Islands because, although the CCG did not arrest the fishermen, the CCG prevented them from fishing in the waters of the shoal from 2012 to 2016. However, in the waters of Paracel, Vietnamese fishermen could operate even if CCG arrested them. However, this was due to the degree of difficulties in preventing fishermen's access to the shoal and to the waters of the Paracel Islands. Fishermen generally operate in the lagoon of the shoal (Fu, 2021), and thus, the CCG could simply place their vessels at the mouth of the lagoon to prevent fishermen from

accessing it. The Paracel Islands are surrounded by open waters. Thus, the CCG could not prevent Vietnamese fishermen from accessing the water.

In the waters surrounding Senkaku, the CCG only followed (Level 1) or occasionally expelled fishermen by using a warning (level 2), and China officially promised Japan that the CCG is only allowed to do these two activities (RFA, 2021). Also, to date, in the waters of Spratly Islands, the CCG has not been reacting to foreign fishermen operating in waters claimed by China.

Compared with other countries' Coast Guards or Navies, the CCG's actions in the waters of Paracel Islands are of similar intensity or even less assertive. First, expelling foreign fishing boats (Level 3), confiscating their catches (Level 5), confiscating the boats and arresting fishermen (Level 7), and sinking the boats (Level 8) are common maritime jurisdiction methods used within disputed waters. For instance, according to official statistics from the Chinese Agriculture and Rural Affairs Ministry (MOARA), there were over 380 incidents of Chinese fishermen being attacked, detained, or shot by neighboring countries between 1989 and 2010; this involved 750 fishing vessels and over 11300 Chinese fishermen (Beijing Youth Daily, 2014). Also, before China's de facto control of the Scarborough Shoal, the Philippines' navy and coast guard's usual practice towards Chinese fishermen operating in waters near the shoal was to arrest them and confiscate their catches and ships (Level 5 and 7) (Green et al, 2017). Moreover, Indonesia often blows up confiscated foreign fishing vessels that were operated within the waters of Natuna Islands (Chan, 2017). When it detains fishermen, besides confiscating catches and fishing ships, the Philippines usually publicly puts them on trial, even if they were arrested in the disputed waters (Level 9) (AP News, 2014).

Second, several maritime jurisdiction activities in the disputed waters involved excessive use of force. According to statistics from the Chinese MOARA, 25 Chinese fishermen died or went missing, and 24 fishermen were wounded due to neighboring

countries' gunshots from 1989 to 2010 (Beijing Youth Daily, 2014). In 2009, Vietnamese vessels shot at Chinese fishing vessels three times, resulting in three wounded fishermen (Fravel, 2011, p. 305). In 2011, according to a report, two Vietnamese fishermen operating in Spratly Islands were wounded due to gunshot wounds caused by armed officials of the Philippines (Zhang, 2011). In 2013, the Philippines Coastal Guard shot at a Taiwanese fishing boat operating in the overlapping area of the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) between the Philippines and Taiwan, which resulted in one death (Chung, 2013).

In contrast, China has refrained from putting the detained fishermen on trial. Also, since 2009, there have been no reports of foreign fishermen dying or being wounded due to the CCG's gunshots. Moreover, as noted earlier, apart from arresting Vietnamese fishermen operating in the waters of Parcel, China has not arrested fishermen from other countries that were operating in waters claimed by China. Some analysts may argue that China is more assertive than other countries because it detained more Vietnamese fishermen in Parcel than other claimant states did in disputed waters. However, this should take into account the fact that Vietnam's fishing activities in the SCS have been rampant (Valencia, 2020). For instance, from June 24 to August 18 in 2020, Malaysia detained 487 Vietnamese fishermen that were allegedly fishing in their waters illegally (AP News, 2020), which could include Vietnamese fishermen operating in the disputed waters between the two countries. Also, China detained more than 400 Vietnamese fishermen in disputed waters in 2009 because there were substantially more Vietnamese fishing boats in the waters of the Chinese controlled Parcel Islands (Fravel, 2011, p. 43).

In general, regional countries' responses to the CCG's regulation of foreign vessels have been declarative. In other words, they often protest against China's arrest of fishermen, confiscation of catches, or sinking fishing boats. For instance, in 2010, Vietnam demanded that China release Vietnamese fishermen (Tran, 2010). In 2020, they protested against the CCG's sinking of a Vietnamese fishing vessel (Vu, 2020).

Also, in 2018, the Philippines demanded China to stop confiscating catches from their fishermen (Reuters Staff, 2018). Some analysts may say that regional countries' responses were due to their fear of China's power. However, Southeast Asian states use this type of response to react to each other's arrests or killing of fishermen. For instance, in 2016, Vietnam protested against the Indonesian navy's killing of a Vietnamese fisherman in the SCS (Murray, 2016). Also, in 2020, Vietnam demanded that Malaysia investigate the Malaysian coastguard's killing of a Vietnamese fisherman (AP News, 2020).

China's activities regarding oil exploration

China's activities regarding oil exploration have long been regarded as an example of China's assertiveness in the SCS. China prevented other states' survey ships or oil rig from operating in waters that China considers to be disputed. For instance, in May 2011, one of the three Chinese vessels cut the cables of a Vietnamese survey ship that was operating in waters that is claimed by Vietnam, but also claimed by China as EEZ of Spratly Islands (BBC News, 2011). In March 2011, China forced a survey ship from the Philippines to leave the area surrounding the Reed Bank, which was within the Philippines' EEZ but overlapped with China's claimed EEZ (Storey, 2012, p. 58).

Compared to the other actions that China could have taken, cutting the cables is more assertive than protesting the survey ships/oil drilling and threatening foreign companies to cancel contracts with claimant states. However, when compared with the most assertive option, China's actions were restrained. For instance, China did not send a lot of CCG vessels to confront other countries' oil exploration activities. Also, China did not put any oil well drilling in disputed waters, even in the waters of the Paracel Islands (Wu and You, 2019, p. 55).

Compared with other states' actions when China deployed oil rigs in disputed waters, China's actions are of similar intensity. In 1994, when China deployed oil survey ships in disputed water, three Vietnamese naval vessels appeared and opened fire on the Chinese ships (Hayton, 2014, p. 127). In 2007, Vietnamese naval vessels forcefully prevented a Chinese oil exploration ship from operating in Spratly Islands (Wu and You, 2019, p. 66). In 2014, Chinese and Vietnamese coastguards were in a tense confrontation because the Vietnamese tried to prevent the Chinese oil rig from operating in the waters near the Chinese controlled Paracel Islands, but within Vietnam's EEZ (Fravel, 2017, p. 255). Some analysts may argue that China is more assertive than other claimant states because China more frequently prevents other countries' oil survey ships or wells from operating. However, this is because, unlike other claimant states, China has not had an oil well operating in the disputed waters and has only deployed oil survey ships or rigs four times from 1992 to now (in 1992, 2007, 2014, and 2019) (Wu and You, 2019, p. 66). If China has oil wells or frequently sends survey ships operating in disputed waters, it will no doubt be fiercely confronted by other claimant states' coast guards or navies.

Regional states' response to China's actions regarding oil exploration are of a medium intensity. That is, they use stronger political or military means to confront China while also avoiding overt escalation. For instance, in 2014, Vietnam deployed 29 coast guards and fishing vessels to confront China's deployment of Haiyang Shiyu (981 oil rig operating in the area of Vietnam claimed EEZ) (Ross, 2020, p. 54). Also, Vietnam successfully initiated an "international propaganda war" against China by placing foreign journalists on the vessels (Thayer, 2016, p. 213). Moreover, Vietnam enhanced its military cooperation with the US. Amid the tension, the US General Martin Dempsey became the highest-ranking US military officer to visit Vietnam since the Vietnam war (Fravel, 2017, p. 255). On this visit, he mainly discussed maritime cooperation with Vietnamese officials (Fravel, 2017, p. 255).

However, to avoid escalation and overt provocation, Vietnam kept “its navy out of area” when confronting China and did not involve the US in the dispute settlement (Thayer, 2016, p. 212). Also, Vietnam was reconciling by sending an envoy to Beijing to ameliorate frictions and to reconcile with Beijing (Thayer, 2016, p. 212). When other states react strongly to China’s deployment of oil rigs, China often makes concession to de-escalate tension. For example, Beijing withdrew its oil vessels four times to de-escalate tension with Vietnam (in 1994, 2007, 2014, and 2019) (Wu and You, 2019). Furthermore, China promised the Duterte administration that it would not unilaterally exploit oil in the waters of the Reed Bank (Viray, 2018).

China’s upper limits to the military presence in the first island chain

This chapter also argues that China has set up upper limits on its military presence in the first island chain. Among all three of China’s flashpoints across East Asia, China states that it wishes to solve the sovereign disputes of Diaoyu Islands and SCS land features through negotiation (FMPRC, 2012; PLA News, 2016). This statement indicates that China will not forcefully occupy the Diaoyu Islands and land features in the SCS that are occupied by other claimants. As East Asian countries value sovereignty highly, China’s seizure of their occupied or de facto controlled land features may make them see China as using military force to compel them to concede their territories. As a result, they may view China as a threatening enemy and join a hard balancing coalition to confront China. However, China’s setup of the upper limits means that it will never cross regional countries’ bottom line, thereby reducing the likelihood that other countries will view China as a major enemy and they will be willing to abandon the shared interests or identity with China.

The perception that China will not invade the homeland of regional countries has already led scholars to argue that regional countries will not choose sides due to limited threat perception. Zhen and Paul (2020, p. 7) argued that China’s military strategy prevented regional states from forming a hard balancing coalition because

other states do not perceive China's military strategy to pose an existential threat to them. Likewise, Ross (2020, p. 55) argued that regional states will "avoid taking sides in US-China relations because they do not fear either the US or China's occupation of their countries." Also, Nguyen (2020, p. 5) argued that Vietnam will keep engaging with China because China had not yet posed an "existential threat to Vietnam's independence and sovereignty."

These observations have been validated by the official analysis or the elites' remarks of regional countries. A 2012 report from the Vietnam Academy of Social Science argues that China does not pose a "lethal threat" to Vietnam's sovereignty and independence and will not threaten Vietnam's sovereignty beyond the disputed area (Nguyễn, 2012, cited in Zhao, 2020, p. 107). It views the SCS disputes as a "partial dispute" between the two countries ((Nguyễn, 2012, cited in Zhao, 2020, p. 107). This view is endorsed by Vietnamese President Nguyễn Phú Trọng (2019, cited in Zhao, 2020, p. 107), who argued that "for the first time in history, we have a stable external environment, which needs to be cautiously protected." This remark compares Vietnam's current relatively stable environment with the historical wars between Vietnam and China or the US, which had seriously threatened Vietnam's survival. Likewise, in 2016, when explaining the reason that he reconciled with China, the Philippines' President Duterte stated that China "has never invaded a piece of my country all these generations" (TRT World, 2016). Also, in 2019, Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir (2019, cited in Jaipragas, 2019) stated that his country will work with China because "we have had China as a neighbor for 2000 years, we were never conquered by them."

China's indication that it would not occupy the disputed land features that were controlled by other states will further reduce their threat perception. Liff (2019, p. 208) argued that Japan's worst-case scenario and redline hypothesis of the Diaoyu Islands is that Chinese paramilitary forces landed on the islands and forced Japan to recognize *fait accompli* or to restore the status quo through military clashes with

China. However, this is unlikely to happen because, according to the spokesman of the Chinese Ministry of National Defense, Wu Gang, seizing the islands is not the responsibility of CCG (Wu, 2018, cited in Ministry of National Defense of People's Republic of China, 2018). Also, in 2017, the China school of Vietnam Academy of Social Science's former Director Nguyen Huy Quy (2017, cited in Zhao, 2019, p. 26) argued that "if China could promise that it would not use force to seize Vietnam's occupied land features before peaceful settlement of Spratly disputes, Vietnam could promise not to... utilize the US to intervene in disputes between Vietnam and China." Although China has not made a public promise, it has never seized Vietnamese occupied land features in Spratly Islands. Even in the 1988 skirmish between China and Vietnam, China did not attack features occupied by Vietnam after it defeated the latter's forces at the unoccupied Johnson Reef (Fravel, 2008, p. 296).

An exception was China's de facto control over Scarborough Shoal after the Philippines retreated in 2012. Although the shoal had not been occupied by the Philippines or China before, China's de facto control of the shoal resulted in a high intensity confrontation from the Philippines. In other words, the Philippines strongly reacted to China's control of the shoal without considering de-escalation. The Aquino administration submitted the disputes to an international arbitration tribunal and its relationship with China broke down in 2013. This is proof that seizing land features will immediately and substantially increase regional countries' threat perception towards China, pushing them to choose more hardline measures to balance against it. Also, the redline that the Philippines set when the Duterte administration de-escalated tension with China is that China should not violate the Philippines' sovereignty by reclaiming Scarborough Shoal and removing the Philippines warship BRP Sierra Madre that anchored in the second Thomas Shoal (Viray, 2018).

Conclusion

To sum up the whole section, in the stalemate period, China increased its presence in the first island chain and beyond to deter the perceived US encirclement. When

using force, China pursues its objective in a gradual and restrained way, which is consistent with many scholars' definitions of gray zone activities. Also, regional responses to such actions were generally of low intensity, as they used limited military means to confront China while also avoiding escalation. Second, by looking at the two most often cited examples of China's assertiveness, this chapter found that the CCG's actions regarding foreign fishing or oil exploration activities in disputed waters were restrained compared to the most assertive courses of action they could have taken. Furthermore, their actions were of a similar degree of intensity to those of claimant states. Sometimes, China's actions are less assertive than those of regional countries, such as in the case of the CCG's regulation of fishing activities. Regarding the CCG's actions towards foreign fishing, regional countries' responses are generally declarative. In terms of China's deployment of oil rigs or survey vessels, regional countries' responses were generally of medium intensity confrontation, which means that they used stronger actions to confront China, but were also ready for de-escalation. Third, China sets upper limits whereby it would not occupy other claimant states' land features, which substantially reduces others' perception that China is a pure enemy that needs to be contained through a hard-balancing coalition. One exception was China's de facto control of the Scarborough Shoal in 2012, which led to the lowest point of the relationship between China and the Philippines. The importance of these findings to my overall argument is that this section demonstrates that China did pursue nationalist interests in a restrained way and most of these gray zone activities managed frictions. The most assertive response to China was Vietnam's medium intensity confrontation in the 2014 oil rig drilling disputes, yet both China and Vietnam prevented this from escalating.

The section recognizes that China's hard power is a reason that regional states choose de-escalation with China. However, China's restraints were also an important contributing factor to the de-escalation. For instance, if China occupied the Diaoyu Island, Japan would have probably not chosen to deescalate tension with China, as Japan states clearly that it will conflict with China if such scenario happens (Japanese

Defense Ministry, 2020). Also, in the 2014 incident, China's moderation by withdrawing from the oil rig is the reason that Vietnam de-escalated tension. Also, one reason that China and the Philippines' relationship ameliorated was China's adherence to the Duterte administration's red lines, which stresses the Philippines' sovereignty over the disputed land features, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

China strikes right and stability balance

Frictions between China and regional countries are caused not only by China's consolidation of claimed sovereignty and geostrategic development, but also by regional countries' actions that make China believe that its important nationalist interests are being damaged. The arguments of this section are as follows. First, when important nationalist interests regarding sensitive issues are involved in the incidents, China will use military means to react, but in a restrained way to avoid undue escalation of the incidents, which could result in completely breaking down China's relationship with other relevant parties. Moreover, while using offensive tools, such as economic sanctions, diplomatic protests, or military means, China will signal its willingness to negotiate with the other party in an effort to mediate the tension.

Here, this chapter takes Japan's nationalization of the Diaoyu Islands in 2012 as a case study. The nationalization aroused the anger of Chinese nationalists and created tension between Japan and China during this year. This case is a typical illustration of how China responds to incidents that are considered a violation of its important nationalist interests. Moreover, what makes this case worth studying is that, after the incident, China's nationalist goals were advanced because China utilized this crisis to improve its presence in the ECS and created a new status quo after the crisis.

To begin, the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands has been disputed by mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan since 1971 when the US returned the administrative right of the islands to Japan as part of Okinawa through the Ryukyu Reversion Agreement (Pan, 2007, p. 73). The dispute could easily get on the nerves of both Japanese and Chinese nationalists. Thus, regarding the dispute, China and Japan's nationalist identities are mutually exclusive and conflicting.

Japan, who has de facto control over the islands, insists that they are Japan's territory, and thus, no sovereign dispute over the island exists (Togo, 2015, p. 83). China's position on the island's sovereignty is that the islands belong to China, but Japan and China have sovereign dispute over them (FMPRC, 2015a). China also argued that, to cultivate a peaceful relationship between China and Japan, the two sides would have to agree to leave the dispute aside. This has been the case since 1978, the year that China and Japan signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship (FMPRC, 2015a). As Japanese leaders acquiesced China's approach of putting aside sovereign disputes in order to normalize the relationship between the two countries in 1978 (Togo, 2015, p.83), China views this approach as establishing a consensus between the two sides (FMPRC, 2015a). Overall, from 1978 to 2010, an acquiesced status quo over the disputed Diaoyu Islands was formed between the two sides. Japan maintained de facto control over the islands, while China kept criticizing Japan for violating its sovereignty but suppressed domestic nationalists' protests and did not use force to challenge Japan's de facto control (Reilly, 2014, p. 203; Togo, 2015, p. 83; Fravel, 2016, p. 26).

On September 10, 2012, then Japanese Prime Minister Noda announced the government's decision to purchase and, thus, nationalize the three isles of Diaoyu Islands (Reilly, 2014, p. 209). The announcement made the sensitive Diaoyu dispute salient in Sino-Japanese relationship and evoked Chinese nationalist anger. Also, China viewed the announcement as a serious violation of China's important nationalist interest. First, China believed that Japan seriously violated the established

consensus of leaving aside the dispute, which is deemed by China as the foundation of the Sino–Japan relationship (FMPRC, 2015a). Second, Prime Minister Noda’s public stance that there is no dispute over the sovereignty of Diaoyu Islands on July 7, 2012 (Reilly, 2014, p. 209), is in stark contrast with China’s assertion that a sovereign dispute over the Diaoyu Islands exists (FMPRC, 2015a).

In response, China strongly countered Japan’s nationalization of the Diaoyu Islands to reverse the perceived damage of important nationalist interests through offensive means. On the diplomatic front, then Chinese President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao, Chairman of Chinese National People’s Congress’ standing committee Wu Bangguo, and Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi publicly expressed that Japan’s nationalization of the Diaoyu Islands was illegal and China firmly opposed it (China News Net, 2012). China also required Japan to recognize that sovereign disputes over Diaoyu Islands exist between the two countries (Togo, 2015, p. 87; Fravel, 2016, p. 33). On the economic front, China tightened the inspection of Japanese imports and slowed down the approval of Japanese workers’ visas (Daily Yomuri, 2012, cited in Reilly, 2014). Also, thousands of Chinese protestors went to the streets, attacked Japanese cars and smashed windows of Japanese restaurants and shopping malls (Reilly, 2014, p. 209). Regarding coercive means, Chinese vessels started to regularize or dramatically increase patrols within the 12 nautical miles and contiguous zone of the Diaoyu Islands, respectively, to defend China’s sovereign claim over them (Fravel, 2016, p. 33).

These are the two ways that China consolidated its sovereign claim over the islands and challenged the previous status quo that lasted from 1978 to 2010. First, it breaks the ambiguity that maintained the old status quo. While Japan’s position that no dispute exists over the island has remained unchanged since it gained *de facto* control over the islands in 1971 (Togo, 2015, p. 87), China asserted its sovereign claim over Diaoyu Islands but did not require Japan to acknowledge China’s position. Thus, from 1978 to 2010, China has implicitly recognized that the two nations have

different interpretations of the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands. In 2012, by requiring Japan to acknowledge that a sovereign dispute over the islands exists between the two countries, China sought to compel Japan to have the same interpretation of the Diaoyu Islands' sovereign status as China. Second, since 2012, Chinese vessels have regularly patrolled the territorial water of the Diaoyu Islands and has, thus, challenged Japan's de facto control over them (Fravel, 2016, p. 32). This contrasts the old status quo of the dispute before 2010 that China did not use force against Japan's control over the islands.

While China strongly counters Japan's nationalization, it cautiously demonstrated restraints in the actions to avoid a complete breakdown of the Sino–Japan relationship. While firmly opposing Japan's nationalization, then President Hu Jintao (2012, cited in China News Net, 2012) stated that the door for negotiation remained open. Additionally, the Spokesman of the Foreign Ministry, Hong Lei (China Economic Net, 2012), stated that China negotiated with Japanese counterparts at all levels. Also, when the anti-Japanese protests got out of control, the central government began to reign in the protests, requiring local governments to maintain social order, substantially increasing the number of police officers in these areas, and asking Chinese people to be rational patriotists (Wan, 2012). With regard to the Chinese vessels entering the territorial waters of Diaoyu Islands, China deployed vessels from the CCG rather than the PLAN because deploying vessels from the PLAN could be seen as an escalation. As noted earlier, China wishes to show that its intention is to defend its sovereign claim rather than seize the islands by force (Wu, 2018, cited in Ministry of National Defense of People's Republic of China, 2018).

To date, the main missions of the Coast Guard has been to patrol within waters of the Diaoyu Islands and occasionally follow and expel Japanese fishermen (Zaobao, 2021). Also, in 2021, even though it issued the Coast Guard Law, China promised Japan that only the CCG would be allowed to do these missions (Zaobao, 2021). Also, China is cautious to prevent the disputes for overt-escalating. In 2020, Japan

stated that China must not allow Chinese fishermen to operate within the territorial waters of Diaoyu Islands (12 nautical miles) (Zaobao, 2020). China obeyed Japan's demand and further asked fishermen to operate 30 nautical miles away from the Diaoyu islands (Zaobao, 2020).

Compared to the Japanese coastguard's actions, China's actions are more restrained. For instance, Japanese coastguards often use forceful means to regulate Taiwanese fishing boats operating in disputed waters, such as forcefully detaining or colliding with Taiwanese vessels (Zheng, 2016; Liao, 2020). Moreover, the Japanese coastguard's arrest of Chinese fishermen and plans to charge them through court led to heightened tension between China and Japan in 2010.

Japan's reaction to China's "assertive actions" regarding the Diaoyu islands has been viewed by some scholars as a strong signal that Japan is alerted by the China threat and will join the US-led hard balancing coalition against it (Lim and Cooper, 2015, p. 715; Liff, 2019, p. 468). For instance, in 2014, Japan relaxed restrictions of its collective self-defense in response to China's actions in the Diaoyu Islands dispute (Liff, 2019). Also, in 2014, Japan secured the US' commitment to the Diaoyu Islands dispute for the first time (Hughes, 2015, pp. 75-76).

However, this chapter argues that China's threat regarding the Diaoyu Islands is not as strong as some analysts have argued. It should be noted that Japan has territorial disputes with all its Northeast Asian neighbors and the Diaoyu Islands disputes is the least threatening to Japan. First, among all the territorial disputes, Japan has de facto control over the Diaoyu Islands, while Russia occupies Northern territories and South Korea occupies the Dokdo Islands. Second, comparing other claimant states' actions regarding the disputes, China's actions are the mildest. The most assertive actions of China regarding the Diaoyu Islands to date is periodically deploying coastal guard vessels to patrol the territorial sea (Liff, 2019, p. 207), or to follow or expel Japanese fishermen (Zaobao, 2021). In contrast, in 2012, 2015, and 2019, Russian Prime

Minister Medvedev visited Northern territories despite Japan's call to cancel the trips (Sakhalinski, 2019). In 2020, Russia deployed S-300 missiles to Iturup Island, one of the Northern territories (Reuters Staff, 2020). In regards to the Dokdo Islands disputes, South Korea conducted large scale military drills on and around the islands twice a year (The Straits Times, 2019). If the Diaoyu Islands disputes led to Japan's hard balancing against China, Japan would react more fiercely to Russia and South Korea, as their use more assertive behaviors to violate Japan's sovereignty rights. However, in 2017, Japanese Prime Minister Abe actively engaged with Russia despite Russia's lukewarm attitude towards solving the disputes (Brown, 2017). Also, Japan often fiercely protested South Korea's military drills. Japan's reactions demonstrate that, although territorial disputes are of Japan's concerns, Diaoyu Islands disputes are not sufficient to cause Japan's pure-hard balancing actions against China. This is because Japan has chosen a more conciliatory stance in the face of more serious territorial disputes.

Japan's response to China's "assertive actions" within the waters of Diaoyu Islands is, thus, still of medium intensity confrontation. That is, it used stronger military means to confront China, while avoiding further escalation. For instance, while relaxing its restrictions of collective self-defense, Japan preserved autonomy by establishing three conditions of triggering collective self-defense (Hughes, 2020, p. 32). The three conditions are empty and, thus, give the Japanese government more flexibility to define the need of military actions (Hughes, 2020, p. 32). Hughes (2020, p. 32) argued that the empty conditions facilitate Japan and the US' military cooperation. However, they may give Japan an excuse to decline the US' request for assistance if it considers it to not be aligned with Japanese interests. Also, in 2014, while getting the US security commitment to Diaoyu Islands, Abe held an ice-breaking meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping and reached a four-point consensus (Kaiman, 2014), which ameliorated the tense relationship between the two sides.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzes how China balances its goals of fulfilling nationalist interests that aim to break the US-led island chains and consolidate the sovereign claim, while also maintaining a relatively peaceful regional environment in the stalemate period. The chapter argues that China has, thus far, struck the balance with some success by pursuing nationalist interests with restraint. To systematically analyze China's restraints in pursuing these actions, this chapter compared China's actual actions with alternative courses of action it could have taken, as well as regional states' similar actions, and specified regional states' responses to China's actions. These responses are declarative, demonstrative, low intensity confrontations, medium intensity confrontations, or high intensity confrontations. Through three case studies of gray zone activities, such as China's increased presence in the first island chain or beyond, the CCG's regulation of foreign fishermen in the disputed waters, and China's activities regarding oil exploration, this chapter concluded that China did show restraint compared with the most assertive actions that it could have taken. Also, China's actions were of similar intensity or even less assertive than those of the claimant states. Moreover, regional states' responses range from declarative to medium intensity confrontations, which demonstrate their willingness to de-escalate tension with China. Although China's hard power is one reason that regional states do not want to overtly provoke China, China's restraints were also a contributing factor that led to their willingness to de-escalate tension. Further, China has set upper limits for its consolidation of sovereign claims, which indicate that it will not occupy others' de facto controlled land features. Thus, it will not cross the bottom line of regional states and make them prioritize conflicting identities and interests over shared ones. The one exception was China's de facto control of the Scarborough Shoal in 2012, which will be a case study in the next SCS chapter. China's control of the shoal clearly demonstrated that its occupation or de facto control of the disputed land features led to the breakdown of relationship between China and regional countries. China's restoration of this relationship in 2016 was also based on its promise of no longer threatening the Philippines' control over land features such as the second Thomas Shoal.

When an incident that is caused by others happens and makes China believe that its important nationalist interests are being threatened, China has used offensive means in response. However, at the same time, it will avoid escalating the situation to an uncontrollable level so as not to risk completely breaking down its relationship with the other countries.

The findings of this chapter demonstrate that China's nationalist goals will be managed strategically in the interests of regional peace. This chapter contributes to the overall argument of the thesis by further demonstrating that China's strategy of pursuing or defending nationalist interests in a restrained way can possibly mitigate threatening potential of its nationalist actions.

Part 6. Case studies

Chapter 10: China and the SCS dispute

This chapter looks at China's approach to the SCS dispute, which has been widely recognized as an important test for its peaceful rise. Specifically, this chapter examines the extent to which China pursues or defends its nationalist interests without overtly escalating the tension and breaking down its relationship with neighboring countries through the strategic management of its interests, which is set out by SIT. In other words, this chapter explores to what extent China defends/pursues important nationalist interests, such as defending sovereignty claims, in a restrained way to strike a balance between its two goals. This chapter also explores whether China could seek to establish shared interests with regional countries or ASEAN to ameliorate frictions. As such, this chapter contributes to the overall argument of the thesis by examining the limitations and effectiveness of China's strategic management of interests regarding SCS disputes. This chapter will focus on China's strategic management of its interests, whereas the next chapter will focus more on China's strategic management of identities.

Regarding China's actions in the sea, some scholars argue that China's increasingly assertive actions over the past decade aim to overturn the regional status quo (Hoang, 2016, p. 190; Friedberg, 2018, p. 28). Also, many scholars argue that China's increasingly assertive actions in the sea hinder further improvement in the relationship between China and Southeast Asian countries or ASEAN (Goh, 2011; Goldstein, 2013, p. 267; Hoang, 2016, p. 187; Ba, 2016, pp. 113-116; Ba and Kuik, 2018, p. 236). These scholars probably believe that the more China assertively pursues its nationalist interests in the SCS, the more unpeaceful its rise will be.

In contrast, some scholars argue that China has done so in a gradual and incremental way that allows it to "leverage its national power without rising armed conflict" (Mazarr,

2015, p. 4; Erickson and Martinson, 2019). Some analysts name China's actions as "creeping assertiveness" (Storey, 1999, p. 95; Lim et al, 2017, p. 212). Other scholars also argue that China has always employed force in a restrained way, albeit for different reasons. Fravel (2017, pp. 234-259) argued that China often uses assertive action to strengthen its strategic interests and position in the disputes when it feels its claims being seriously challenged by neighbors, but it is meticulously restrained when it comes to managing frictions and avoiding greater US involvement in a dispute. This type of argument seems to indicate that China has attempted to strike a balance between the pursuit or defense of crucial nationalist interests and the maintenance of benign relationships with others.

The findings of this chapter first disagree with the scholars that consider China to be aiming to revise the status quo in the SCS (Mazarr, 2015, p. 4). In the SCS, every claimant state has flawed sovereignty claims, except Brunei, but they have been competing to strengthen their respective claims for decades. Thus, there is no established status quo in the SCS for China to revise or overturn.

Second, the chapter agrees with the scholars (Zhang, 2019, pp. 135-140; Fravel, 2017, p. 234) who argue that China has always pursued crucial strategic interests to defend its claims in a restrained way to avoid a complete breakdown of its relationship with other states. However, the findings of this chapter's case studies demonstrate that, although China has sometimes succeeded in striking this balance, it has also failed in other cases, such as China's de facto control over the Scarborough Shoal, which resulted in a breakdown of the relationship between China and the Philippines from 2012 to early 2016.

Third, many scholars often focus on the contesting views of China and other regional countries over territorial disputes (Hoang, 2016, p. 187; Friedberg, 2018), but they neglect the fact that China and regional countries/ASEAN also have shared interests in said disputes, such as avoiding over-escalation and maintaining a benign

relationship with each other. These shared interests helped China de-escalate tension. ASEAN also wishes for China to acknowledge the bloc's shared interests in regards to managing the disputes. However, the shared interest strategy may fail because of China's unwillingness to concede the conflicting interests in exchange for the formation of shared interests.

These findings reinforce the overall argument of the thesis that China's strategic management of interests are helpful for China to pursue or defend important nationalist interests without overt escalation or breaking down its relationship with regional states. However, the strategy also has some limitations because China's restraints may not be enough to compensate for other states' perceived losses, and the shared interests may fail because of China's unwillingness to put aside its important nationalist interests.

Third, this chapter agrees with Fravel's (2017, p. 259) argument that China often uses offensive actions to pursue or defend its crucial strategic interests when it feels that it is at a disadvantage in terms of ongoing disputes. However, in contrast to his focus on Sino-US relations, this chapter's focus is on China-claimant states/ASEAN relations. China and claimant states' actions of consolidating or defending their respective sovereignty claims are the major cause of tension in the sea. Thus, how China manages these conflicting relations is important for de-escalation in the sea.

The chapter will be divided into four parts. The first part uses SIT's three conditions (feeling of being at a disadvantage, unstable power relationship, cognitive alternative) that trigger competitions to explain why China has determined to reverse its perceived disadvantage regarding the disputes. The second part will examine China's strategic management of its interests through two case studies that have a profound impact on China's sovereignty claims, as well as its relationship with regional states and ASEAN. They are the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident and the Philippines' submission of SCS disputes to the PCA and related awards from 2013

to 2016. Specifically, this chapter explores the extent to which China could possibly defend/pursue important nationalist interests in a restrained way to avoid undue escalation and a breakdown in its relationship with regional states. As in the preceding chapter, China's restraints will first be examined through comparisons between its actual actions and other courses of action that it could have taken, as well as between its actual actions and regional states' similar actions, and regional countries' response to China's actions in the incident. Also, as in the preceding chapter, the regional countries' response will be specified into five categories comprising declarative and demonstrative responses as well as low intensity, medium intensity, and high intensity confrontations. This chapter also explores whether China could seek shared interests with regional countries or ASEAN to ameliorate such frictions.

Inevitable competitions regarding SCS disputes between China and other claimant countries

In SIT, social competition occurs when the status seeker thinks that the current relationship is unfair or unstable and has a cognitive alternative to the current unequal relationship (Brown, 2000, pp. 329-330; Hogg, 2016, p. 7). The cognitive alternative is defined as "an alternative social world - a sense of somewhere different that we want to go" (Reicher and Haslam, 2012, p. 55; Lyer et al, 2017, p. 751). All these conditions have been demonstrated by China's perception regarding the unsettled status quo of SCS disputes, which has led to inevitable competition.

To begin, among all claimants of disputed land features in the SCS, China makes the most expansive claim. Among all land features in the SCS, the sovereignty of Paracel (*xisha qundao*) is asserted by mainland China, Taiwan, and Vietnam (Raine and Mière, 2013, p. 13). The Spratly Islands' (*nansha qundao*) land features are entirely claimed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam and partly claimed by the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei (Raine and Mière, 2013, p. 13). The Pratas Islands (*zhongsha*

qundao) are claimed by Taiwan and China (Raine and Mière, 2013, p. 13). Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Reef (*zhongsha qundao*) are entirely claimed by mainland China and Taiwan, while sovereignty of the Reef is also asserted by the Philippines (Raine and Mière, 2013, p. 13). Thus, in terms of the claims made by disputants over the land features in the sea, China claims all of them while others claim parts of them.

The pieces of evidence that underpin all of these claims have weaknesses in terms of international law; first, this is because no state can prove exclusive, effective, and continuous control over land features without some protest from other states (Dyke and Valencia, 2000, p. 50; Storey, 2012a, p. 54). Second, China, Vietnam, and the Philippines use historical evidence to support the sovereignty claims on the disputed islands, but other historical evidence may undermine these same claims. A 1928 Chinese commission report wrote that the Paracel archipelago is the southernmost part of China (Dzurek, 1996, cited in Roy, 2016, p. 4). From 1956 to 1974, Vietnam officially recognized China's sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly islands through official meetings with the Chinese ambassador to Vietnam, official newspaper and textbook (FMPRC, 2014). Then Prime Minister of North Vietnam, Pham Van Dong, made an official statement in 1958 that endorsed China's definition of its territorial sea being 12 miles from Chinese territories, including the islands in the SCS (FMPRC, 2014; Buzynski, 2015, p. 8). One piece of evidence that is used by the Philippines to support sovereignty claim over the disputed land features is that an adventurer from the Philippines, Tomas Clomas, visited the islands and declared ownership over them in 1956. However, the declaration of Tomas Clomas was protested by mainland China, Taiwan, and South Vietnam immediately after it had been made (Buszynski, 2015, p. 9; Hayton, 2014, p. 68). This means the declaration cannot be used as valid evidence to claim sovereignty in terms of international law, which requires acquiescence from other claimants. In 2009, the Philippines amended maritime law stating its sovereign jurisdiction and control over the disputed features "shall be determined as 'regime of islands' under the Republic of Philippines consistent with article 121 of

United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea [UNCLOS]" (Republic Act 9522, 2009, cited in Inquirer.net, 2012). While the amendment of law is perceived by the Philippines as a move to make its sovereign claim more consistent with UNCLOS (Inquirer.net, 2012), Article 121 of UNCLOS (1994) is mainly about determining whether rocks are entitled to an EEZ and continental shelf rather than determining which state is entitled to own the rocks. Malaysia and Brunei claim sovereignty on the land features through the assertion that the land features were within their continental shelves or EEZs (Roy, 2016, p. 5, p. 7), but states are eligible to obtain exclusive ownership of resources, rather than sovereignty of land features, through EEZs and continental shelves in accordance with UNCLOS (1994).

Despite the weakness in China's claim, the expansive claim on land features details expansive maritime interests that China claims that it is entitled for. In accordance with UNCLOS (1994), states have jurisdiction and exclusive rights of "exploring, exploiting, conserving and managing natural resources," such as fisheries and oil, within their EEZ (that is usually 200 nautical miles from its baseline) and their continental shelves. Also, according to Article 121 (3) of UNCLOS (1994), "rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no EEZ and continental shelf." China states that all the land features it claims are islands; hence, they are fully entitled to the territorial sea, contiguous zone, EEZ, and continental shelf (FMPRC, 2016a). Thus, China claims to have expansive maritime rights and jurisdiction within EEZs and continental shelves that include the disputed islands.

The expansiveness of China's claim is further extended by its historical right claim to the nine-dashed line that encircles almost 80 percent of the SCS. Some scholars and elites from Southeast Asian countries question whether the line means that China claims exclusive ownership over the entire SCS (Storey, 2012a, pp. 54-55; Raine and Mièrè, 2013, p. 33). Official Chinese documents and speeches suggest that it does not. First, Chinese officials always state that China respects the freedom of

navigation in the high sea of the SCS (Geng, 2018, cited in Li, 2018). This statement demonstrates that China does not claim sovereignty or jurisdiction over the entire SCS except disputed land features and related rights. Second, the historical rights that China claims within the nine-dashed line are non-exclusive, as demonstrated by China's paper on the SCS dispute between the Philippines and China (FMPRC, 2016b), which denounced the Philippines' argument that China claims exclusive rights over the entire SCS.

Hayton (2014, pp. 249-251) argued that while the Chinese Foreign Ministry may recognize that it is illegal to claim exclusive ownership of the entire SCS through the nine-dashed line, the CCG and National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) have acted as if the line means China's territorial claims extend to almost all of the SCS. This is because these actions "took place far from any China claimed features and therefore seemed incompatible with any claims based on UNCLOS" (Hayton, 2014, p. 146). Also, although Hayton (2014, p. 99) agreed with this thesis that all states' claims were not fully unconvincing, he argued that all Southeast Asian claimants have somewhat and broadly staked their claims to the disputed land features and related right in accordance with UNCLOS, but China still insisted on the illegal nine-dashed line (Hayton, 2014, p. 119, p. 263).

This chapter disagrees with Hayton (2014, p. 263) because China has, in reality, like other claimant states, gradually interpreted disputes or its claims in line with UNCLOS, while still maintaining the nine-dashed line claim. Many cases that Hayton (2014, pp. 249-251) considered to be the Coastal Guard and CNOOC's realization of the nine-dashed line claim were interpreted by Chinese officials in accordance with articles of UNCLOS rather than through the historical right of the nine-dashed line, except traditional fishing ground claims over some parts of the EEZ in Natuna Island. China appears to interpret the Paracel and Spratly islands as archipelagos, which could entitle China more EEZ and internal water than several land features could. Thus, while the disputes between China and other claimants happened far from where

China claimed land features (Hayton, 2014, p. 146), it may still claim that the incidents happened in the overlapping areas between the islands' EEZ and those of other claimant countries. For instance, in 2012, Vietnam claimed that the Chinese Marine Surveillance (CMS) cut off cables of Vietnam's oil survey ship operating in its EEZ; China argued that the ship was in fact operating in the EEZ of Spratly Islands, over which China has sovereignty rights (FMPRC, 2012). China also indicated this official interpretation to justify the 2012 case when the CNOOC opened a bid for oil exploration in Vietnam's EEZ (Hong, 2012, cited in Hou, 2012). Likewise, in 2012, China protested against the Philippines' bid for oil exploration in its EEZ by arguing that China has sovereignty rights over Spratly Islands (Ji, 2012).

Scholars may argue that China's interpretation of UNCLOS constitutes a violation rather than an alignment. Ngo (2020, cited in Yingxuan, 2020), the Vietnamese Professor, noted that China has increasingly interpreted its sovereignty claims from UNCLOS rather than from the nine-dashed line. But he (Ngo, 2020, cited in Yingxuan, 2020) argued that China's expansive claims, which are based on the interpretation that the land features form an archipelago, is more illegal than the nine-dashed line because it "uses UNCLOS terms to revise UNCLOS." Likewise, Vu (2019, p. 102) argued that China's claim of drawing a baseline or EEZ from the two island groups' archipelago status is weak and unlawful in terms of UNCLOS because only an archipelago state is eligible to draw archipelagic baseline.

However, other scholars may view these criticisms as being somewhat hypocritical, because states often broadly interpret, ignore, or use international law/tribunal awards to strengthen their sovereignty claims and pursue their self-interest (Bateman, 2016). For instance, the US claims to be the staunch defender of UNCLOS, but has not ratified the convention yet as this ratification would harm its sovereignty interests (Hayton, 2014). Also, Japan uses Okinotorishima to claim EEZ and continental shelf rights even though the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf ruling

in 2012 states that Okinotorishima is not entitled an island status and, thus EEZ and continental shelf rights (Hughes, 2018, p. 87).

This section will not engage in this normative debate. The main aim here is to use SIT as framework to analyze the reasons why competition of land features and related sovereignty rights between China and claimant countries is inevitable.

The three conditions that cause competition (the disadvantaged actor's feeling of illegitimacy towards the current status quo, unstable status relationship between the disadvantaged and advantaged actor, and the cognitive alternative to the status quo) are all reflected in China's perception towards the disputes. This makes competition in the sea inevitable.

First, China's expansive claims to the sea can be viewed as China's cognitive alternative to the unsettled status quo of the disputes because the claims are in stark contrast with the reality in the sea. First, while China claims most land features in the sea, it is not the country that occupies most of them. This unfavorable comparison makes China feel disadvantaged in the disputes. Thus far, all of the land features have been occupied by other claimants to varying degrees (Fravel, 2012, p. 34). Vietnam occupies 27 land features of the Islands and ranks top among all claimants (Fravel, 2012, p. 34). The Philippines, mainland China, Malaysia, and Taiwan occupy 8, 7, 5 and 1, respectively (Fravel, 2012, p. 34). Thus, China's occupation of land features are not only far less than it claims, but also pale in comparison to those of Vietnam and the Philippines. This unfavorable comparison has resulted in successive Chinese leaders' perception that China has been in a disadvantaged position regarding the Spratly Islands (Liu, 2004, p. 53). They have thought that China has been disadvantaged in terms of the consolidation of sovereignty over land features. Also, they have thought that China has been at a disadvantaged geo-strategic position in the sea because it does not have enough geo-strategic outposts in Spratly to project its power (Liu, 2014, p. 534; Shi, 2013, p. 298).

In addition, China thinks that other states' occupations violate China's sovereignty and maritime interests and are, thus, illegitimate (Liu, 2004, p. 535). Moreover, China views others' attempts of consolidating sovereignty and related maritime rights over land features as a continuous challenge to China's legitimate claim to the SCS. For instance, in 2014, Vietnam protested against China's deployment of an oil rig in its EEZ, while China contended that the oil rig was deployed in the EEZ of Paracel Islands, a part of which overlaps with that of Vietnam (FMPRC, 2014). China also frequently protests Vietnam's "illegal actions" when Vietnam fishermen fishing within waters surrounding the Paracel Islands, whose sovereignty is also claimed by Vietnam (Hua, 2014, cited in People's Net-Global times, 2014).

Finally, besides having a cognitive alternative to the unsettled status quo and feelings of unfairness and disadvantage, another reason that China is determined to reverse its disadvantaged status is that power relations between Southeast Asian claimant states are unstable. As China's power grows, it is capable of doing more than other claimants with regard to advancing its strategic or maritime interests in the SCS. This was acknowledged by the then US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter (2015, cited in Pincus, 2015) in 2015 when he stated that "It's true that almost all nations that claim parts of South China Sea have developed outposts over the years...of different scope and degree... [but China is] one country [that] has gone much further and much faster than any other."

To sum up, in terms of SIT, China is highly likely to reverse its perceived disadvantaged position in the sea. This is because it views the current status relationship as being unfair and putting it at a disadvantage and has a cognitive alternative to the current status quo.

First, China's expansive sovereign claim over the land features and maritime rights is a demonstration of China's cognitive alternative to the current unsettled status quo.

Second, China's occupation of seven land features in the Spratly Islands is in stark contrast with its claim over sovereignty of the entire island group and Vietnam's occupation. Successive Chinese leaders feel that China is disadvantaged in terms of consolidating sovereignty and related rights and geostrategic position in the SCS. Thus, China has two critical nationalist goals regarding disputes in the sea. It wishes to consolidate sovereign claims over the disputed waters and reverse the disadvantaged geostrategic status. Third, China feels that other states' attempt to strengthen their geostrategic positions and sovereign claim in the sea is an illegitimate challenge to its sovereignty claims. Fourth, the status relationship between advantaged land features of Southeast Asian occupiers and China becomes more unstable as China's hard power grows. Drawing on the strategic management principle deduced from SIT, the next section shows how China aims to manage interests to pursue these goals without escalating the incidents to larger conflicts and breaking up China's relationship with other countries.

China's strategic management of interests regarding two important SCS dispute incidents

This section looks at the extent to which China has struck a balance between pursuing nationalist interests and avoiding the over-escalation of disputes and breakdown its relationship with regional states by strategically managing its interests or identities. That is, to what extent can China strike this balance through seeking shared interests or identities with ASEAN or claimant countries and pursuing or defending the crucial nationalist interests in a restrained way. This section recognizes that, from 2009 to 2016, the tension and frictions between China and other claimant states in SCS have resurged and heightened because all claimant states, except Brunei, were actively consolidating their sovereignty claims (Romero and Lee-Brago, 2009; Fravel, 2012, p. 44; Raine and Mièrè, 2013, p. 120). Some frictions were caused by China's actions and others were not. This section chooses two cases in this period to study the extent to which China struck this balance. These cases are

the Scarborough Shoal incident in 2012, and the Philippines' submission of SCS disputes to the international arbitration tribunal and related awards (2013–2016). The two cases have a profound impact on China's relationship with regional countries and China's sovereignty claims in the SCS. The Scarborough Shoal incident led to the breakdown of the relationship between China and the Philippines from 2012 to the first half of 2016. Also, the Philippines' submission in 2013 was the direct cause of China's reclamation of land features in Spratly and had a negative impact on China's sovereignty claims. To what extent China struck this balance through strategic management in these two cases is illustrative of the management's limitations and effectiveness.

Like the preceding chapter, to systematically examine China's actions of consolidating sovereignty in SCS, China's restraints are measured in three ways throughout this chapter. First, China's actual actions are compared with the alternative options that it could have used before the incidents. Second, China's actions are compared with other claimant states' similar actions. The third criterion is regional countries' responses, which are declarative response, demonstrative response, low intensity confrontation, medium intensity confrontation and high intensity confrontation. The meanings of the responses are comprehensively explained in the previous chapter.

The following will present case studies to analyze the extent to which China has struck the balance between avoidance of overtly escalating the incident and breaking down relationships with regional states, and consolidation of crucial nationalist interests, such as defending sovereign claims over disputed waters and land features.

Through the case studies, the chapter argues that China's strategic management of interests did demonstrate effectiveness in managing tension in the sea, while defending China's perceived important nationalist interests by defending the interests in a restrained way and constructing shared interests in de-escalation or managing

crises with ASEAN or claimant countries. However, this strategy also has some limitations. For example, although China may demonstrate restraint when compared with the most assertive options it has at its disposal, it is not always more restrained than other claimant states. Also, its restraints may not be able to compensate for other's perceived damage of their sovereignty interests. Also, China's effort to construct shared interests has failed to ameliorate frictions because China's unwillingness to concede important nationalist interests in exchange for the formation of the shared interests

Case Study 1: 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident

Phase 1 (April 10–13)

On April 10, the Philippines deployed its largest navy vessel BRP *Gregorio del Pilar* to arrest Chinese fishermen that had been operating in the lagoon of the Scarborough Shoal (Fravel, 2017, p. 243). On April 10, two unarmed CMS Vessels (CMS 75 and CMS 84) gained calls from the fishermen and prevented the Philippines from arresting them, as well as confiscating catches and the fishing ships by positioning themselves at the Lagoon's mouth (Green et al, 2017, p. 100). A standoff, thus, began between the two CMS Vessels and the Philippines Navy ship.

On this day, China attempted to strike a balance between defending nationalist interests and avoiding overt-escalation of the incident by acting in a restrained way. The Chinese government ships stayed in the shoal and prevented fishermen from being arrested, which was a demonstration of China's claimed sovereignty and maritime right over the shoal. However, compared with China's most assertive options that it could have taken before the incident, its actual actions were restrained; for example, China could have sent the armed navy or government vessels to the shoal. Also, China could attempt to forcefully compel the Philippines to stop arresting the fishermen. Moreover, compared with the Philippines' actions, China's actions were moderate because its CMS Vessels were unarmed government ships.

The Philippines' response to China's actions was categorized as low intensity confrontation in that it directly confronted China through limited means, while still avoiding overt escalation, and was ready for de-escalation. First, it maintained the status of standoff with China. Second, it sought to de-escalate tensions. On April 12, the Philippines replaced the navy vessel with an armed coast guard vessel to demilitarize its presence at the shoal (Green et al, 2017, p. 102). Moreover, to avoid overtly provoking China, the Philippines indicated that it would solve the incident bilaterally with China and not involve the US in the dispute settlement. On April 12, when being asked whether the Philippines would ask the US for help to solve the incident, the spokesperson of the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Raul Hernandez, stated that the country's Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario was already communicating with the Chinese Ambassador, Malian Ma Keqing, to find a diplomatic solution that would be "acceptable to both sides" (GMA News, 2012a). Finally, the Philippines sought shared interests with China in de-escalating the tension. On April 12, Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario was optimistic about China and the Philippines' mutual goal of finding a "win-win solution" (Green et al, 2017, p. 102).

Like the Philippines, China sought shared interests to de-escalate the situation, and demonstrated restraint in its actions. On 11 April, while declaring China's sovereignty over the shoal, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Liu Weiming, stated that China hoped to work with the Philippines to de-escalate the tension based on the need to maintain peace and stability in the SCS (Liu, 2012, Cited in FMPRC, 2012). To be sure, China sent another armed Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC) vessel 330 on April 12 after the navy vessel left (Jamandre, 2012), which was viewed by some as Chinese provocation (Green et al, 2017, p. 102; Castro, 2016, p. 170). However, this move may have been pre-planned (Green et al, 2017, p. 102) because China may not have known that the Philippines had decided to withdraw the navy vessel beforehand. Moreover, after China found that the Philippines' navy vessel left, it ordered the unarmed CMS 75 to withdraw (Green et al, 2017, p. 102; GMA news,

2012b). This may have been an attempt to reciprocate the Philippine's withdrawal. On April 13, to de-escalate tension, all Chinese fishing vessels and the armed FLEC 300 withdrew from the shoal (Yap, 2012). Only CMS 84 was at the shoal (Yap, 2012). Many elites from the Philippines acknowledged that this move was positive for easing the tension (Yap, 2012; Green et al, 2017, p. 103).

However, on this day, negotiation between the two countries failed because China asked the Philippines to withdraw its last vessel first to reciprocate China's withdrawal of all fishing vessels and two government vessels, but the Philippines refused to withdraw first (Green et al, 2017, p. 103).

In summary, during Phase 1, in the Scarborough Shoal incident, China's strategic management of interests did manage the crisis and avoided the breakdown of its relationship with the Philippines, even though the negotiation failed. In this crisis, due to the shared interest of de-escalating the tension, China and the Philippines attempted to calm down and solve the crisis through cooperation. Also, China prevented fishermen from being arrested by the Filipino navy, but still acted with restraint to avoid escalation, which balanced China's need to simultaneously defend sovereignty interests and avoid over-escalating the incident.

Phase 2 (April 14–April 26)

From April 14 to April 16, compared with its available options, China continued to demonstrate restraint to strike a balance between defending nationalist interests and managing tension. First, the last Chinese vessel remained in the shoal to demonstrate China's sovereignty claims related to the shoal. Second, China demonstrated restraint compared with its most assertive options. Despite failing to negotiate a mutual withdrawal, China did not allow its fishermen to go back to the shoal (Fu, 2021; Green et al, 2017). Also, China did not increase the number of government ships staying at the shoal. From April 14 to April 16, only one Chinese

unarmed government vessel, CMS 84, remained at the shoal (Green et al, 2017, p. 103). Although China dispatched unarmed CMS 75 to return to the shoal on 14 April, CMS 75 did not arrive until April 16, although the distance between the shoal and the vessel was only 200 miles (Green et al, 2017, p. 103). This may be because China wished to de-escalate the tension before the second round of negotiation on April 16 by delaying the vessel's arrival. Moreover, China did not prevent Filipino fishermen from operating "in and out" of the shoal's lagoon (Calonzo, 2012).

Compared with the Philippines' actions from April 14 to April 16, China's actions showed more restraint. As noted, the Filipino fishermen were still operating at the shoal after Chinese fishermen had left (Calonzon, 2012). Second, on April 16, the day that the second negotiation was held between the two countries, the Philippines sent an archeological ship to operate in the lagoon of the shoal, which was considered to be a provocation by China (Fu, 2021). There were reports that the Chinese vessel attempted to "harass" the archeological ship (Green et al, 2017, p. 103). However, the Chinese Foreign Ministry did not confirm the reports, but asked the ship to leave the lagoon (Liu, 2012, cited in Xinhua Net, 2012). On April 18, the Filipino Northern Luzon Command chief Lieutenant General Anthony Alcantara confirmed that the ship left the shoal, but denied that the ship had been under Chinese threat (Evangelista, 2012).

Despite these frictions, both China and the Philippines reported that the tension at the shoal was not high during this time. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Liu Jianming stated on 16 April that "the situation at the Scarborough Shoal was somewhat eased" (Liu, 2012, cited in Xinhua Net, 2012). Similarly, on 16 April, the Filipino Lieutenant General Alcantara (2012, cited in Calonzo, 2012) stated that they were "continuing monitoring the situation in the area, as of this time, very stable and very normal."

However, although the situation at the shoal was relatively stable, after the second negotiation over the dispute settlement failed on April 16 similarly to the first negotiation (Green et al, 2017, p. 105), the Philippines began to escalate its response going from low intensity to medium or even high intensity confrontations. In other words, it directly confronted China in the diplomatic dimension with little consideration of amelioration. First, since April 17, the Philippines began to internationalize the disputes, which dissatisfied China. On April 17, the Philippines declared that it would pursue international arbitration to solve the Scarborough Shoal dispute (Green et al, 2017, p. 105). On April 19, the Philippines announced that it would unilaterally pursue the arbitration despite China's resistance (Green et al, 2017, p. 106). On April 21, the Filipino Secretary del Rosario publicly asked ASEAN states to stand up to China's "new aggressiveness" (Agence France-Presse, 2012).

Second, China failed to construct the shared interest in de-escalation with the Philippines in Phase 2. According to then Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying, from 15 April to Mid-May, she summoned the Philippines chargé d'affaires to Beijing several times to discuss de-escalation, but the latter chose to "just listen and did not reply" (Fu, 2021). Also, Fu claimed that China tried hard to contact the Philippines through diplomatic channels to solve the incident, but the DFA "totally ignored" "any" request to hold bilateral talks and the Secretary del Rosario favored using international media to "send harsh messages" to China (Fu, 2021).

Some studies outside China seemed to verify Fu's claim. Regarding the stalled talks between Beijing and the Philippines, the report from the International Crisis Group (ICG) (2012, p. 9) in 2012 noted that bilateral talks between the DFA and the Chinese embassy in Manila "broke off" for almost a month, and discussions of the incident were "hamstrung" due to "the prolonged absence of the Filipino ambassador to Beijing," which was viewed by China as the Philippines' lack of interests in "finding a diplomatic solution." Ratner (2013) and Green et al. (2017, p. 106) argued that the lack of diplomatic communication was due to the ineffectiveness of the Chinese

ambassador to the Philippines in communicating its position with Beijing. However, even so, the Philippines could still have directly corrected any perceived misunderstandings through its chargé d'affaires in Beijing, or at least kept communication channels open instead of unilaterally breaking off talks between the Chinese embassy in Manila and the DFA.

Regarding Fu's claim that the Philippines preferred to internationalize the disputes, Fravel (2015, p. 107) argued that the Philippines "appeared to challenge Beijing" in an "especially public way," such as "actively appealing to ASEAN or the US for support in the early days of the standoff." Castro (2016, p. 170) argued that the Philippines wanted to pursue international arbitration but China insisted on "quiet bilateral diplomatic negotiations to end the deadlock." Also, the ICG report noted that some ASEAN countries believed that the Philippines overplayed its hand and privately suggested the country "tone down its rhetoric" (ICG, 2012, p. 27). Likewise, Thayer (2012) noted that "some ASEAN members...have expressed misgivings about how Manila confronted Beijing."

Probably responding to the Philippines' statement of pursuing international arbitration from April 18 to April 19, China dispatched its fastest FLEC vessel 310, which was heavily armed to replace CMS 84 at the shoal on 20 April (Green et al, 2017, p. 106). Also, there were reports that some Chinese fishing vessels had returned to the shoal (Green et al, 2017, p. 106). Moreover, the standoff between China and the Philippines intensified because both placed navy vessels near their respective coast guards (Green et al, 2017, p. 106).

However, on April 23, China withdrew two of its three coast guard vessels at the shoal (China Daily, 2012; Green et al, 2017, p. 106) to strike a balance between de-escalating tension and defending sovereignty claims. The last ship and fishing boats in the Shoal were a demonstration of China's sovereignty and maritime claims over the Shoal. The withdrawal of the government ships aimed to manage tension.

Although there were reports that the Chinese vessels did not go far, they at least withdrew over the horizon because even Filipino officials who insisted that the vessels did not leave admitted that they could not see the vessels from the shoal (Green et al, 2017, p. 107).

However, on the same day, the Philippines continued escalating tension. It sent another armed vessel to the shoal and monitored Chinese fishermen in the lagoon (China Daily, 2012; Green et al, 2017, p. 106). President Aquino III reiterated that the deployment served to realize the Philippines' sovereign right (Avendano and Yap, 2012). The Foreign Secretary del Rosario publicly warned that this incident showed that China was "a larger threat" (Dizon, 2012). On April 26, del Rosario stated that he would ask the US for help and "maximize benefits" from the US-Philippines mutual defense treaty (Green et al, 2017, p. 108).

In summary, China's strategic management of interests almost failed to manage the crisis in this phase, except from April 14 to April 16. On these days, the restraints in China and the Philippines' actions and shared interests in ameliorating tension still played an important role in maintaining a relatively stable situation at the shoal. However, from April 16 to April 26, China and the Philippines had not only conflicting interests regarding the sovereignty of the shoal, but also essentially conflicting approaches of solving the deadlock. Thus, due to these essential differences, China failed to construct shared interests in de-escalating tension with the Philippines. Also, China's unilateral de-escalation on April 23 did not make up for the divergences between the two sides.

Phase 3 (April 26–July)

In this phase, China dramatically hardened its actions in the shoal and became tougher in its relationship with the Philippines (Green et al, 2017). According to Fu Ying (2021) and Zhang's (2019, p. 15) interviews with officials from the Foreign Ministry, this was because China believed that the Philippines did not just wish to

ease the tension, but it wanted to take full control of the shoal by internationalizing the disputes. Also, the Chinese elites made the judgement that if China did not take harsher measures to prevent the Philippines from unduly challenging China's sovereignty, China would lose the shoal (Zhang, 2019, p. 15).

In this period, China took some harsh measures to prevent the Philippines from continuing to damage China's important nationalist interests, such as losing the shoal. Among China's actions, two actions had the most significant impact on its sovereignty claims and relationships with relevant actors, such as the Philippines and ASEAN.

The first is China's application of the "cabbage strategy" from May 9. The Chinese fishermen or the utility boats of coast guards operating in the lagoon were the first layer. The second layer was the large coast guard vessels staying at the mouth of the lagoon. The third layer was the Chinese navy vessels positioned over the horizon that were "close enough for their presence to be known to the Manila and far enough for Beijing to manage the crisis without militarizing it" (Taffer, 2015, p. 95). These layers were like a cabbage enclosing the disputed area, thereby preventing other claimants from entering the area (Glaser and Funaiole, 2019, p. 192) or from their vessels operating in the area (Zhang, 2013, cited in Global Times, 2013). On May 21, the Chinese maritime presence reached its peak because approximately 97 Chinese ships were staying in and around the shoal, including 5 government ships, 16 fishing vessels, and 76 utility boats (Green et al, 2017, p. 115).

Many Chinese scholars were satisfied with this strategy for successfully striking a balance between defending China's sovereignty rights and avoiding overtly escalating frictions. According to Zhang Zhaozhong, the retired PLA Rear Admiral, this strategy first successfully defended China's sovereignty by ensuring a stable fishing ground for Chinese fishermen (Zhang, 2013, cited in Global Times, 2013). Second, this strategy demonstrated China's restraints because it did not militarize the shoal and just compelled the Philippines to retreat by exhausting the personnel

of the Philippines vessels (Zhang, 2013, cited in Global Times, 2013). Likewise, Zhang (2013, p. 29) argued that China was restrained because it used government ships to deter the Philippines from challenging China's sovereignty rather than using military force to initiate a war or fully seize the shoal.

However, although China may demonstrate restraint compared with its most assertive options, such as militarization of the shoal, China was more assertive than the Philippines during this phase. When China escalated, the Philippines decreased its response level from the high intensity confrontation to low intensity confrontation in this phase. In other words, it confronted China in a moderate way and sought de-escalation. First, on May 16, although the Philippines did not withdraw its government ship, it announced a fishing ban to forbid its fishermen from operating in the shoal to de-escalate tension (Green et al, 2017, p. 114). In contrast, although China had a fishing ban in May, China allowed its fishermen to continue operating in the area (Fu, 2021). Second, in May, the Philippines sent special envoys to China and met with high-level Chinese officials to discuss de-escalation (Green et al, 2017, pp. 115-116). Third, on June 6, Aquino softened his tone and stated that he would not seek international support at this time to "provide the best environment for solution to the entire issue" (Esmaguél II, 2012).

From May to 15 June, China continued seeking shared interests of de-escalation with the Philippines. Between May and July, Fu Ying and the Philippines' special envoy Senator Trillanes met 16 times to discuss de-escalation and a sequential withdrawal (Green et al, 2017, pp. 116-117). Since May 26, the number of Chinese ships operating at the shoal was reduced, although most of the boats that China withdrew were utility boats rather than coast guard vessels (Green et al, 2017, p. 116). After June 6, China reciprocated the Philippines' unilateral withdrawal of vessels in the lagoon by removing all its government ships or boats from the lagoon (Fu, 2021; Green et al, 2017, p. 117).

However, the Philippines fully withdrew from the shoal on 15 June due to US mediation of a mutual retreat from the shoal, although Chinese ships remained (Fravel, 2017, p. 243). Fu denied that she promised anything to the US because she did not get authorization to make the promise (Fu, 2021). Nevertheless, the result was that China changed the status quo and got de facto control of the shoal.

Regarding its actions, compared with available options, China was assertive because the government ships could leave the shoal but still get de facto control of it. However, China had not chosen the most assertive option to demonstrate restraint. For instance, China neither occupied nor militarized the shoal. However, this restraint could not alleviate the Philippines' anger towards China's de facto control over the disputed area.

Second, although the incident was triggered because the Filipino navy had tried to arrest Chinese fishermen operating in the disputed waters, the Philippines de-escalated tension by withdrawing all vessels, which makes the Chinese presence in the disputed area more assertive than that of the Philippines.

As a result, China's relationship with the Philippines broke down and the Philippines resorted to using high intensity confrontation responses through which it directly confronted China without considering de-escalation. For instance, the Philippines sought ASEAN's unified criticism of China's control over the shoal in 2012, at the 45th AMM meeting (Storey, 2016, p. 141). This incident was one of the main reasons that the Philippines pursued the arbitration tribunal in 2013.

Also, China failed to achieve shared interests in its de-escalation with the Philippines. In July, China asked the Philippines to downplay the disputes at the AMM meeting in exchange for removing the remaining three coast guard vessels from the shoal (Green et al, 2017, p. 118). However, the Philippines rejected China's lobby (Green et al, 2017, p. 118).

To sum up, before June 15, China's strategic management of interests seemed to be effective. China's cabbage strategy successfully compelled the Philippines to de-escalate tension and retreat from internationalization of the disputes without conflicts between the two sides. Also, China successfully sought shared interests with the Philippines in de-escalating the tension through bilateral talks. However, after June 15, although China's de facto control of the shoal demonstrated restraint in comparison with the most assertive options China had, such as militarizing the shoal, this restraint could not compensate for the Philippines' perceived loss of the shoal. China's approach of seeking shared interests also failed because China's de facto control of the shoal led the Philippines to prioritize the disputes over the shared interests. As a result, China's relationship with the Philippines broke down. Furthermore, contrary to China's preference, the SCS disputes became internationalized due to the Philippines' submission of the disputes to the international tribunal. The reason that China succeeded before June 15 and failed after that day may be because it had crossed the Philippine's bottom line by controlling the shoal.

Conclusion

This case study finds that China's strategic management of interests successfully ameliorated tensions in the Scarborough Shoal incident and defending its nationalist interests simultaneously in Phase one and the first half of Phase 3. However, the management of interests failed to achieve these goals during Phase 2 and the later part of Phase 3. In all the phases, compared with the most assertive options China had, it demonstrated restraint when defending its nationalist interests. For instance, it used unarmed coast guards to prevent the Philippines' navy vessel from arresting Chinese fishermen. In Phases 1 and 2, China's actions at the shoal were restrained compared with the Philippines' response. In the first half of Phase 3, although China was more assertive than the Philippines, China's cabbage strategy did not take control of the shoal and, thus, did not cross the Philippines' red line. Therefore, there

was some room for reconciliation. However, as China's de facto control over the shoal crosses the Philippines' red line, its restraint could not make up for the Philippines' perceived loss of the shoal after June 15.

Second, China successfully sought shared interests in its de-escalation with the Philippines in Phase 1 and the first half of Phase 3. However, in most of Phase 2, this strategy failed because China refused to holding bilateral negotiations. Also, in Phase 3, because of China's de facto control of the shoal, the shared interests could not ameliorate the Philippines' perceived loss of the shoal. As a result, China's relationship with the Philippines broke down.

Case Study 2: China's strategic management of interests in response to the Philippines' submission of SCS disputes to the arbitral tribunal

In 2013, the Philippines submitted its SCS disputes with China to an international arbitral tribunal. They sought to delegitimize China's major claims, such as arguing that the EEZs from the disputed land features and the nine dashed line were unlawful according to UNCLOS (DFA, 2013). The Philippines also demonstrated staunchness in pursuing this arbitration despite China's call to manage these disputes bilaterally in 2013 (Fravel, 2017, p. 251). Moreover, the tribunal began its process despite China's repeated warnings (Fravel, 2017, p. 251). Thus, China was unable to stop the tribunal process that would undermine many of its important claims over the SCS (Fravel, 2017, p. 251). The decision of the arbitral tribunal came out in 2016, and it was a landslide victory for the Philippines. To list a few, the tribunal ruled that China's historical maritime claims within the nine-dashed lines were invalid (PH v. PRC, 2016). Second, it ruled that all the Spratly land features and the Scarborough Shoal were not islands; as such, they could not fall under the scope of EEZs (PH v. PRC, 2016).

This arbitration activated China's nationalist identity, as China considered this an unfair delegitimization of its sovereignty claims. Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi

argued that the Philippines distorted the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to pursue its self-interests and harm China's legal sovereignty right (Yang, 2016, as cited in Xinhua Agency, 2016c). China's view of the arbitration is also linked to its belief that it was disadvantaged in the SCS disputes. As noted in the introduction, Chinese elites believe that other claimants occupy most of the land features in Spratly Islands, which strategically and militarily disadvantages China (Liu, 2004, p. 334). Due to this perception, some Chinese scholars argue that some ASEAN claimants wish to use a so-called legal approach to unfairly compel China to recognize its disadvantaged position in the SCS (An, 2017). The arbitration served to solidify this view. This chapter will not judge China's view or engage in a normative debate about whether China should have accepted the awards or not. The focus here is to empirically analyze whether China could defend its sovereignty claims while simultaneously managing tension in the sea and maintaining a benign relationship with the neighboring countries.

To prevent serious damage of China's nationalist interests, Chinese President Xi decided to reclaim the land features in Spratly to "fundamentally reverse the strategic trend in the SCS" (Xuexi Shibao, 2017). Also, from 2 July to 11 July 2016, China conducted large-scale military drills to show its rejection of the tribunal awards, which would be issued on 12 July. Moreover, at the 2016 meeting between Duterte and Xi Jinping, Xi reportedly threatened to go to war if the Philippines tried to enforce the tribunal's decisions (Mogato, 2017).

China's response to the arbitral awards has been regarded by some scholars as a demonstration of China's overt offensiveness. Zhao (2018, pp. 8-9) characterized the Chinese response as a "forceful rejection" and "military muscle flexing." Likewise, Babbage (2016, p. 34) considered China's statement "strident," and viewed the military and para-military actions as "belligerent." However, contrary to the argument of these scholars, when applying these offensive means, China tried to strike a balance between avoiding overt-escalation of the tension and defending its important

nationalist interests by exercising restraint. First, China's actions were restrained compared with the most assertive alternative courses of action it could have taken. Regarding land reclamation, China only reclaimed its controlled land features rather than seizing other claimants' occupied land features. Additionally, it did not reclaim the Scarborough Shoal or seize other claimants' land features during this process. This was probably because Beijing considered these moves to be too provocative and potentially destructive to China's relationship with ASEAN countries. Since China's de facto control of the shoal seriously deteriorated its relationship with the Philippines, its reclamation of the shoal could have led to the total destruction of the relationship.

Also, China was less assertive than other claimant states in terms of duration of reclamation. This is because the Philippines and Vietnam reclaimed land features first (Wu and You, 2019, p. 54) and continued reclaiming and building on the land features when China was reclaiming them. For instance, from 2013 to 2015, Vietnam reclaimed several land features and built military facilities on them, such as Sandy Cay and the West London Reef (Pincus, 2015). In 2014, the Philippines allocated money to upgrade airfields and navy ports in the occupied Thitu Island (Pincus, 2015). Additionally, after China stopped reclaiming land features in Spratly in mid-2015, Vietnam continued its land reclamation in the Spratly and ignored ASEAN's 2016 statement that expressed "serious concern" over land reclamation activities (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2017). Some analysts argued that, compared with China's reclamation, other claimant states' actions were just "a drop in a bucket" because China's reclamation was much bigger and faster (Poling, 2015). This chapter recognizes this fact. However, as Chubb (2021) argued, land reclamation is a "demonstrative action," which does not physically engage with other claimants and, thus, the escalatory probability of such actions is not high.

Second, the drills were restrained compared to what China could have done before the drill. First, China conducted drills near the waters of the Paracel Islands rather

than Spratly Islands, the area of which maritime disputes were deliberated by the tribunal. Although some analysts say that China's H-6K bomber patrolled the Scarborough Shoal in 2016 (Zhao, 2018, p. 9), the bomber was not equipped with missiles, and it is unknown whether the patrol occurred when the drills were conducted (The Observer, 2016). Second, the drills ended on July 11, one day before the tribunal issued its decision. This could be interpreted as China's attempt to not directly use military force to confront the awards. Third, China did not occupy the Scarborough Shoal. Occupying the shoal would have been the strongest rejection of the tribunal because the Scarborough Shoal incident triggered the Philippines' pursuit of the tribunal. Fourth, China did not pull out of UNCLOS despite the fact that the tribunal delegitimized nearly all of China's claims over the SCS. Compared with claimant states' actions, China was more assertive because no claimant states had military drills at the time.

Third, at the 2016 meeting, while Xi threatened Duterte to go to war if the Philippines enforced the tribunal's decisions, Duterte also established red lines and told Xi that he would go to war with China if China disobeyed them (Associate Press, 2018), which will be discussed later. Thus, when Xi's threat is contextualized in this way, it appears to be less like a powerful state coercing a weak state; instead, it seems to be more of a negotiation in which both sides established red lines to facilitate reconciliation.

Regarding land reclamation, ASEAN's response was of medium intensity in that they strongly condemned China's actions but were willing to de-escalate. For instance, the 2015 AMM statement expressed concern over China's land reclamation and stated that the reclamation work "eroded trust...undermined peace, security and stability in the SCS" (ASEAN, 2015). The 2016 statement also noted a "serious concern" over land reclamations in the SCS (ASEAN, 2016). The wordings of these two statements were the strongest since ASEAN's intervention in the disputes

(Storey, 2018, p. 118). However, ASEAN also demonstrated restraint by not directly calling out or shaming China to maintain a space for dialogue.

Regarding China's drills and responses to the tribunal and the related decisions, all Southeast Asian states responded in a restrained manner to de-escalate the situation (Storey, 2016, p. 3). For instance, on July 12, the day that the awards were issued, the Philippines issued a statement that merely "welcomed the awards" and asked Filipinos to "exercise restraint and sobriety" (Storey, 2016, p. 2). Indonesia's statement asked the parties to "exercise self-restraint" and "avoid activities that could undermine peace and stability in East Asia" (Storey, 2016, p. 3). Likewise, Vietnam's statement merely stated that the country "welcomes...the ruling" and that it "strongly supports the settlement of disputes...in peaceful means, including legal and diplomatic process" (Reuters, 2016).

Moreover, many ASEAN members tolerated the slow progress of the COC for the SCS from 2013 to 2016 (Thayer, 2017, p. 6). Some scholars argue that the slow progress was because China "dragged its feet" (Panda, 2015; Zhang, 2018).

ASEAN and ASEAN countries' tolerance of the slow COC progress have been regarded by many scholars as their weakness in the face of China's advantageous hard power. Panda argued that only after China was "satisfied with its position in the SCS disputes," such as completing land reclamation and rejecting the awards, could the ASEAN-driven approach progress. Likewise, Zhang (2018, p. 78) argued that ASEAN managed the SCS disputes by "making a pragmatic compromise under the principles." In other words, facing China's advantageous hard power, ASEAN made pragmatic compromises by tolerating China's change to the status quo in order to proceed with the COC negotiations (Zhang, 2018).

This chapter recognizes ASEAN's tolerance was because of their power disparity with China. Regarding SCS disputes, China is the most powerful disputant and

makes the most maritime claims. Thus, China's approval is a must if any dispute management mechanism is to be effective. Thus, China had the leverage to compel ASEAN to tolerate the country's land reclamation and delay the COC talks.

However, the chapter argues that China's restraint when conducting offensive actions also maintained space for dialogue and reconciliation with ASEAN. For instance, in 2016, the Duterte administration reconciled with China and put aside the tribunal's decisions on the condition that China did not cross the red lines set out by the Duterte administration. For instance, Duterte warned that if China reclaimed the Scarborough Shoal or removed the Philippines' rusty warship from the second Thomas Shoal, the Philippines would break down its relationship with China and go to war (Associate Press, 2018). Also, Duterte did not allow China to extract resources on its own in the waters the claimed by the Philippines (Associate Press, 2018). China obeyed all these demands to reconcile with the Duterte administration. Moreover, as noted earlier, land reclamation is a "demonstrative action" (Chubb, 2021), and thus, this helped China keep the tension at a moderate level. Also, China was refrained from taking more assertive actions that would escalate tension, such as attacking other countries navies or coast guards (Fravel, 2017, p.259). These actions demonstrate that China attempted to act within ASEAN states' limits to maintain a space for reconciliation.

Moreover, ASEAN members' cautious response was also due to their common interest of de-escalating and ameliorating the relationship. Non-claimant ASEAN states' interests in this regard have also been widely noted, as well as those of assertive claimant states. Thayer (2016, p. 201) argued that Vietnam had its "cooperation and struggle" strategy when dealing with SCS disputes. That is, while deterring China from challenging Vietnam's sovereignty claims, Vietnam continued to engage with China to reconcile and manage the tensions at sea (Thayer, 2016). Vietnam's goal of striking a balance between maintaining a stable relationship with China and pursuing nationalist interests has also been demonstrated by Vietnamese

leaders' remarks. For instance, in October 2019, when Vietnamese citizens expressed their concern about China's challenges to Vietnam's sovereignty claims in the SCS, Nguyễn Phú Trọng, the Vietnamese General Secretary, answered that Vietnam needs to preserve a stable external environment for development, while protecting its territorial entirety (Vietnam News Agency [VNA], 2019). Likewise, in December 2020, Vietnam's Vice Minister of Defence Nguyen Chi Vinh (2020, cited in VNA, 2020) highlighted the importance of ensuring Vietnam's sovereignty rights in the SCS, while also maintaining an amicable relationship with China.

Also, China was lucky that the Duterte administration came to power in 2016, as the administration stressed de-escalation and amelioration. In 2018, then Philippines' Foreign Secretary Cayetano (2018, as cited in Jaipragas, 2018) explained the decision: "If you want development...you have to have peace...we focus first on stop bleeding." Also, Cayetano (2018, as cited in Jaipragas, 2018) stated that "we don't allow this dispute to define the overall relationship of China and the Philippines." Some observers may argue that the Philippines does not always adopt a de-escalation and amelioration strategy when handling the disputes because Duterte's predecessor, Aquino III, was more confrontational in this regard. However, compared to other predecessors, aside from Aquino III, Duterte's handling of the Philippines–China SCS disputes represented continuity. For instance, after China seized the Mischief Reef in 1995, while strengthening military ties with the US, the Philippines' then President Ramos continued engaging with China to de-escalate tensions and maintain a benign relationship (Heydarian, 2017). Also, in 2009, to maintain a stable relationship with China and avoid escalating the disputes, the Arroyo administration did not participate in Vietnam and Malaysia's joint submission of extended continental shelf claims in the SCS to the UN (Heydarian, 2017).

China actively sought shared interests in its de-escalation with the Philippines. On 16 May, China congratulated Duterte's victory of the Presidential election and "placed high hope" that the new administration would cooperate with China to "solve

divergences through friendly talks” (Xinhua Agency, 2016a). On the same day, the Chinese ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua met with Duterte to express China’s hope of promoting a traditional friendship and solving divergencies between the two countries (Xinhua Agency, 2016b). In August 2016, Fu Ying met with Duterte’s special envoy Ramos to discuss de-escalating the SCS disputes (Fu, 2021).

Zhao (2018, p. 9) may disagree with this chapter’s argument that ASEAN sought to de-escalate tension with China. Instead, he (Zhao, 2018, p. 9) argued that ASEAN’s restraint was because China used its economic might to maneuver ASEAN members, asked Cambodia for a favor, and successfully prevented ASEAN from denouncing China and directly mentioning the awards in its 2016 AMM statement. However, it seems unlikely that ASEAN would issue a statement that highlighted the Philippine’s victory or publicly criticized China in 2016, even without Cambodia’s rejection. As noted earlier, all ASEAN members’ statements regarding the awards were restrained and aimed at de-escalation (Storey, 2016). Thus, even without Cambodia’s rejection, many ASEAN members probably did not wish to directly mention the awards and denounce China in the statement so as not to escalate tension. As the former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib said at the September 2016 AMM, ASEAN must deal with disputes “delicately with healthy dose of sensitivity” and “in a harmonious manner” (Abas, 2016). Also, when discussing the wording of the statement, then Philippine Foreign Secretary Yasay did not strongly insist on including the awards’ name in the joint statement (Torres, 2016), which reflected the country’s preference for de-escalating tension over enforcing the tribunal’s decisions.

However, although Southeast Asian states shared this interest in de-escalating tensions with China, they had different approaches to managing such disputes. ASEAN states preferred to manage SCS disputes through an ASEAN-led approach. As a grouping of Southeast Asian states built for promoting “regional peace and stability” (ASEAN, 1967), ASEAN has interests in managing the disputes that deeply affect regional peace. Moreover, claimant states are more inclined to seek ASEAN’s

help to constrain China's assertive actions at sea than to bilaterally negotiate with China (Odgaard, 2003). Non-claimant members also endorse the ASEAN-led approach. In 1999, Thailand's Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan (1999, as cited in Chung, 2009, p. 102) said that SCS issues must be discussed at the AMM because conflicts at sea "would be adverse to all of us." Similarly, although Cambodia opposed the "internationalization of the disputes," it stated that they must be managed within the ASEAN–China framework (Tan, 2012). Based on this preference, ASEAN worked to create a COC for managing SCS disputes. However, China was reluctant to acknowledge ASEAN's interests of managing the SCS disputes and insisted on managing the disputes through bilateral talks. Thus, from 2011 to 2013, China refused to participate in the talks of the ASEAN-led COC (Zhang, 2018).

However, in 2013, China adjusted its policy and went from resisting COC talks to formally acknowledging ASEAN's shared interests in managing the crisis in SCS. In 2013, China formally supported Brunei's suggestion of a "two track approach" whereby sovereign and maritime disputes would be solved directly by claimants and "China and ASEAN countries should work together to maintain peace...in the Sea" (Xinhua, 2016). In September 2017, China and ASEAN formally held COC talks (Thayer, 2017). By emphasizing its willingness to work with ASEAN to maintain peace (Xinhua, 2016), China formally acknowledged that ASEAN's shared interests with China in terms of co-managing the crisis of SCS disputes. Through the endorsement, China could have wished to reduce frictions, and ameliorate China's tense relationship with ASEAN countries that was caused by the Scarborough Shoal incident and China's subsequent reclamation in the SCS.

Once China felt that its national interests were secure, it worked to actively construct shared interests with ASEAN in managing crisis in the SCS by actively participating in ASEAN-driven COC negotiation to alleviate friction and maintain benign relationships with ASEAN states. By 2016, China believed that its nationalist interests had been secured. It first reversed its perceived disadvantaged geostrategic status

in Spratly and consolidated the sovereignty of disputed land features by finishing the reclamation in 2015 (BBC news, 2015). Second, it asked the Philippines to put aside the arbitration award (Villamor, 2017). Once nationalist interests were considered to be secured, China worked hard to alleviate regional tension with the help of ASEAN by accelerating COC talks. In 2017, China and ASEAN finalized the framework of the COC (Dancel, 2017) and adopted a “single draft COC negotiating text” (Geddie and Shepherd, 2018). In 2018, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang affirmed that China wished to complete the COC within three years (Xinhua, 2018).

To sum up, this case study found that China’s strategic management of interests were effective in terms of ameliorating tension in the sea, while also defending China’s important nationalist interests, such as reversing China’s perception of having a disadvantaged geostrategic position and defending its sovereignty claims. China used offensive means to defend its perceived disadvantage or serious damage of nationalist interests, such as reclaiming its occupied land features, conducting military drills, and threatening the Philippines with war. However, China also sought to strike a balance between overtly escalating the incident and defending the important nationalist interests. Compared with the most assertive available options that China could have taken, the country’s actual actions demonstrated restraint. First, the land reclamations activities were restrained because China only reclaimed its occupied land features and did not reclaim the Scarborough Shoal. Also, the military drills were conducted in the waters near Paracel Islands rather than Spratly Islands to avoid over-escalation. China’s threat to the Philippines was less of a powerful country’s coercion of a weaker state than a negotiation where both sides established red lines to facilitate reconciliation. Compared with other claimant states’ actions, China’s land reclamation was not more assertive than other claimants’ similar actions in terms of the duration of the reclamation, as other claimants reclaimed land features much earlier than China and continued even after China stopped. Even if China’s land feature reclamation was faster and bigger than those of other states, the reclamation was “demonstrative” (Chubb, 2021), which did not physically engage

with other claimants and overt-escalate tension. China's hard power was one of the main reasons that ASEAN states tolerated slow progress of the COC negotiation. However, China's restraint also served to maintain some space for dialogue and reconciliation.

ASEAN states' shared interests with China in de-escalating and ameliorating the relationship also helped China manage the tension. Moreover, China was lucky that the Duterte administration reconciled with China and reconstructed shared interests in the de-escalation of the tension. Thus, ASEAN countries' reaction to China's response to the arbitral tribunal was restrained. Moreover, China conceded to ASEAN's demand for the COC negotiation and acknowledged ASEAN's shared interests in managing SCS disputes. When China felt that its important sovereignty interests were secure, China actively constructed shared interests in managing the disputes through the COC to maintain a benign relationship with ASEAN countries.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the extent to which China pursued its nationalist interests, while also managing tension in the sea and maintaining a benign relationship with regional countries by strategically managing interests. In other words, to what extent did China strike this balance through pursuing or defending important nationalist interests in a restrained way, while seeking shared interests with other relevant actors?

The main argument is that China attempted to strike a delicate balance through strategic management; although it succeeded in the case of the 2013-2016 arbitral tribunal regarding the SCS disputes, it also failed in the case of Scarborough Shoal incident.

First, through the case studies of the Scarborough Shoal incident in 2012 and the Philippines' 2013 submission of the SCS disputes to an international arbitral tribunal (as well as the tribunal's decisions in 2016), this chapter found that China did show

restraint when using offensive means to defend its sovereignty claims compared to the most assertive courses of action it could have taken. China did not always act with more restraint than other claimant states in these incidents. However, if China demonstrated restraint to avoid overt escalation and did not occupy or control other claimants' claimed land features, the space for reconciliation could be maintained. This has been demonstrated through the case of the Scarborough Shoal incident. China's cabbage strategy did not aim to gain de facto control of the shoal, and thus, even the most confrontational Philippine President Aquino sought de-escalation with China by sending envoys to the country. However, after June 15, China had de facto control over the Shoal. While China did not occupy the shoal in an attempt to show restraint, this restraint could not compensate for the Philippines' perceived loss of the disputed area. Thus, the Philippines further escalated tension and broke down its relationship with China because it directly and fiercely confronted China without considering de-escalation. China's reconciliation with the Duterte administration was based on China's promise that it would not further infringe on the Philippines' sovereignty, such as occupying the shoal or getting de facto control of other land features that the Philippines claimed, such as the second Thomas Shoal. To be sure, in the case study on China's response to the arbitral tribunal, China's hard power was one of the main reasons that ASEAN states tolerated the slow progress of the COC negotiations and China's land reclamation activities and that the Philippines put aside the arbitration award. However, China's restraint maintained a space for dialogue and reconciliation because China acted in accordance with ASEAN states' red lines.

Second, in both case studies, China's effort to seek shared identities/interests with ASEAN/ the Philippines was effective for de-escalation. In Phase 1 and the first half of Phase 3, the shared interests of de-escalation helped China ease the tension in the sea. Also, in the case study of China's response to the arbitral tribunal, China endorsed ASEAN as the manager of SCS disputes and sought shared interests in de-escalating tension. The shared interests in de-escalating tension is one of the reasons why ASEAN states' response to the arbitral tribunal was cautious and

restrained. However, this approach also had some limitations. For instance, China's unwillingness to soften its insistence on bilateral negotiations led the Philippines to further escalate the disputes in phase two of the Scarborough Shoal incident. Furthermore, because China maintained de-facto control over the shoal, it failed to establish shared interests with the Philippines.

The findings of this chapter contribute to the overall argument of the thesis that China's strategic management of interests helped alleviate frictions and maintain a benign relationship with regional countries, even in regional flashpoints. However, this strategy also has some limitations. Although China may have demonstrated restraint compared to the most assertive alternatives at its disposal, it was not always more restrained than other claimant states. Also, its restraint may not have been sufficient to compensate for other states' sovereignty interests. Also, China's unwillingness to concede important nationalist interests in exchange for the formation of shared interests led to China's failure to construct shared interests with other countries.

Chapter 11: Relations with Taiwan

The preceding Chapter examined China's strategic management of interests regarding SCS disputes. This chapter examines China's management of identity and related interests regarding the Taiwan issue. Compared with SCS disputes that China promised to solve through negotiations, the Taiwan issue is a more prominent flashpoint in the region because PRC has never excluded the option of forcefully recover Taiwan since ROC retreated to the latter in 1949. Thus, it is important to examine the Taiwan issue in order to address the research question of the thesis, that is, can China simultaneously maintain a relatively benign environment and pursue crucial national interests?

Specifically, this chapter examines this question through Beijing's strategic management of identities and interests. In other words, to what extent has China deterred Taiwanese independence and facilitated unification, the two crucial nationalist interests, while also preserving a relatively stable Taiwan Strait by seeking shared interests/identities and downplaying conflicting ones. Additionally, to what extent has China defended or pursued these two goals through using offensive actions in a restrained way.

Some scholars view coercion, including deterrence and compellence, as the means for Beijing to achieve peaceful unification, but disagree over whether Beijing could successfully attain the goals through this method. Schreer (2017) and Roy (2016) argued that the mainland has successfully deterred Taiwan's de jure independence, but will not succeed in pushing Taiwan into unification because Taiwanese people strongly identify with ROC/Taiwan's sovereign identity. Others are certain that the mainland will succeed in pushing Taiwan into the unification process. According to Sutter (2011, p. 4), "China's economic, military, and diplomatic leverage over Taiwan increasingly constrains Taipei to follow a path leading to accommodation of and

eventual reunification with China.” Tan (2020, p. 23) argued that the reality is that “all Taiwan can really do is...achieve the limited objective of deterring open war and to buy enough time to somehow arrive at a peaceful accommodation of ...China.”

Other scholars have explored whether the mainland could win the hearts and minds of Taiwanese people, thereby deterring Taiwan’s de jure independence or promoting peaceful unification. Yang (2019, p. 21) argued that the mainland could choose to win over the Taiwanese public through engagement and integration, thereby creating an environment that is conducive to unification. Tang (2019, pp. 6-7) argued that through economic engagement and interpersonal communication, Beijing could construct one China identity with ordinary Taiwanese and thus consolidate foundation for unification.

This chapter’s findings disagree with scholars who argued that Beijing could seek unification with Taiwan through engagement. The chapter instead argues that, Beijing’s unwillingness to soften its insistence on the PRC’s sovereignty over Taiwan, leads to Beijing’s failure to construct one China identity with Taiwanese, makes a non-coercive unification nearly impossible, and increases costs deterring Taiwan independence.

Also, this chapter agrees with scholars who argued that Beijing could successfully push Taiwan into unification talks through coercion. However, this chapter argues that Beijing may not be able to wait until it perceives that it is able to compel Taiwan to accept unification talks. In other words, Beijing may not be able to strike a balance between maintaining a stable Taiwan Strait and defending or pursuing its crucial interests regarding Taiwan. First, as Beijing’s shared Chinese identity approach failed, Beijing is heavily reliant on using offensive means in a restrained way to strike a balance between defending the one China principle and maintaining a relatively stable strait. However, despite Beijing demonstrating restraint, the cross-strait tension is heightened and may reach a tipping point as it is using increasingly strong

actions to defend the principle. Also, due to shrinking shared interests and salient strategic competition between the mainland and the US, the US is less tolerant of Beijing's emphasis on the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan. Beijing will probably recover Taiwan by force if the US clarifies its commitment to Taiwan or allows Taiwan to enter international organizations without Beijing's permission.

These findings are important for the thesis' examination of the extent to which China could possibly strike a balance between maintaining a relatively peaceful environment and defending or pursuing important nationalist interests through the strategic management of identities/interests because the limitations of the strategy have been demonstrated. First, the shared identity/interests approach will fail because of Beijing's unwillingness to concede crucial nationalist interests. In this case, Beijing's shared a One China identity approach failed to pursue formal unification with KMT and decreased the costs of deterring Taiwan's de jure independence due to its unwillingness to soften insistence on PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan. Second, Beijing's restraint in offensive actions may not always achieve the balance as Beijing is using increasingly strong actions to defend the one China principle, thus heightening tension in the strait. As a result, war in the cross-strait is not inevitable but likely to happen.

This chapter will be divided into four parts. The first part clarifies the interests that Beijing would not concede and Beijing' conflicting interests/identities with Taiwan and the US. The second, third, and fourth parts present Beijing's strategic management with KMT from 2008 to 2016, the DPP from 2016 to 2020, and the US from 2016 to 2020, respectively.

Conflicting interests between Beijing and Taiwan/the US

To start the strategic management, the first step is to clarify the interests that the actor would not concede and its conflicting interests/identity with other relevant actors.

With regard to the mainland's view of the Taiwan issue, the nationalist interest towards the Taiwan Strait is the one China principle (Deng, 1983; Jiang, 1995; Hu, 2008; Xi, 2019). The one China principle first means that there is one China in the world and Taiwan is part of it. Preserving the one China principle means that Taiwan's pro-independence movement needs to be deterred. This principle also means that the Taiwanese government must acknowledge that Taiwan belongs to China. Moreover, the principle means that PRC is the sole legal government of China in international society. This is the main manifestation of PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan, because Taiwan will not have international sovereignty and can only be recognized as being part of China, which to a large degree defaults to the PRC. Taiwan's participation in international organizations as a sovereign country (under the name of ROC or Taiwan) is categorized by Beijing as a pro-independence move since this implies that there are two Chinas or one China and one Taiwan (Jiang, 1995; Hu, 2008). Furthermore, one China principle means that Beijing, as the central government, enjoys the right to decide whether the local government in Taiwan is allowed to participate in international organization or sign treaties with other states.

Moreover, the second bottom line nationalist interest for the mainland is unification, whereby Taiwan formally becomes a province or Special Administrative Region of the PRC. Because of the CCP's self-identification as the guardian of a nation, the mainland views the current status quo as a reminder of China's disadvantaged and fragile position in the face of imperial power and external forces in the century of humiliation. Xi's (2019) speech regarding the Taiwan issue reflects this position. In this speech (Xi, 2019), Xi has traced Taiwan issue back to 1840, the year that imperial powers began to invade China, and argued that the Taiwan issue was caused by an impotent Chinese nation that failed to defend against imperial powers' invasions. Thus, the mainland has attached value and emotional significance to Taiwan's formal unification. For the mainland, recovering Taiwan means national rejuvenation, healing from historical trauma, and regaining national pride (Xi, 2019).

However, Beijing's one China principle and unification goal conflict with Taiwan's strong identification of its sovereignty state status. KMT, one of the two major political parties in Taiwan, views the current status quo as being unfair because it does not acknowledge ROC's representation as a sovereign state in international society. Since KMT retreated to Taiwan in 1949, the ROC maintained its status as a sovereign state that gained diplomatic recognition from 70 states by 1969 and represented China in the UN until 1971. Since 1971, although the ROC has been gradually losing diplomatic recognition, its self-identification as a sovereign state has never been weakened. KMT adheres to the ROC's constitution, which stipulates that the mainland and Taiwan belong to one China (Zhu, 2015, cited in Taiwan People news, 2015; Ma, 2018, cited in Liu, 2018). However, it defines one China as the ROC (Zhu, 2015, cited in Taiwan People news, 2015; Ma, 2018, cited in Liu, 2018,) and thinks that the ROC's sovereign status in international society is of vital importance for ROC's existence and Taiwan's self-esteem. This is in conflict with the mainland's preference that one China is PRC, which also functions as the central government of Taiwan. Furthermore, regarding cross-strait relations, KMT's major concern is to preserve the ROC's existence and self-esteem by maintaining the ROC's diplomatic recognition from foreign countries, and participating in international organizations rather than unifying.

KMT's dissatisfaction towards Taiwan's shrinking international space and strong identification of Taiwan's sovereignty is shared by the DPP, another major political party in Taiwan. The DPP is more dissatisfied with the status quo than KMT, as it actively pursues de jure independence of Taiwan. DPP members view China as the mainland or PRC and see Taiwan as another country. Extremist DPP members wish to declare Taiwanese independence, which includes changing its national name ROC into the Republic of Taiwan (ROT) and revising the current ROC constitution from covering "mainland" and "Taiwan" to Taiwan only. DPP members are staunch supporters of Taiwanese independence, and they have taken the lead in seeking international recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty. In 2018, they held a referendum

about using the official name Taiwan rather than the Chinese name Taipei when participating in international sports competitions, such as the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo (ETtoday, 2018b). Another DPP faction pursues two Chinas and claims that Taiwan does not need to declare de jure independence because it is already an independent country whose name is ROC (Taiwan) (Lai, 2019, cited in Udn, 2019).

The One China principle also conflicts with Taiwan's identification as a liberal state. As liberal democratic values are the major standard for comparison in the US-led order, Taiwan derives a positive self-image from being a democratic regime and consider this to be superior to the mainland's authoritarian political system. The DPP derogates the mainland's political system and interprets the current status quo as Beijing preventing Taiwan from using its state membership to participate in international organizations. This is considered by them to be proof of the authoritarian mainland's abusive attempts to dictate Taiwan's future as a liberal democratic state (Chen, 2018).

Besides the conflicting interests between Taiwan and Beijing, Beijing's unification goal conflicts with US interests, another relevant actor in the Taiwan issue. First, it is almost a scholarly consensus that the US' mutual deterrence policy has successfully preserved the status quo of the cross-strait by deterring the mainland from pursuing formal unification, and preventing Taiwan from pursuing de jure independence (Lin, 2009, p. 84; Bush, 2013, p. 18; Womack, 2016, p. 9). Beijing has felt that it is constrained by the US, as it "stands by" Taiwan when it acts coercively to contain the movement or compel Taiwan to go in supporting unification or the One China principle (Jiang, 1998, cited in Lampton, 2014, p. 126). This feeling is not unwarranted as many Taiwanese politicians from different political parties have expressed that Taiwan's security reliance on the US has protected the island from Beijing's growing military and diplomatic pressure (Chen, 2018; Wang, 2019, cited in Lin, 2018).

Also, Beijing's one China principle somewhat conflicts with the US' One China policy. In terms of the Taiwan issue, the US recognizes the "PRC as the sole legal government of China" and opposes two Chinas or one China and one Taiwan (Glaser and Green, 2017). However, the US only acknowledges Taiwan as being part of China/the PRC (Glaser and Green, 2017). Thus, the US's one China policy is ambiguous in regards to PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan, which contrasts the one China principle that stresses the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan.

The mainland's strategic management of identities and interests with KMT (2008 to 2016)

The mainland's approach to the Taiwan issue has been consistent with its principles of strategically managing identities and interests. That is, on the basis that important interests derived from conflicting identities are preserved, China can maintain a relatively peaceful environment by seeking shared identities or interests with other relevant actors, while also downplaying conflicting ones. In this period, the mainland has tried to maintain a relatively peaceful cross-strait relationship by forming shared identity/interests with KMT while preserving its bottom line of the one China principle. Downplaying conflicting identity was operationalized through conceding less important conflicting interests, such as Beijing's tolerance to the KMT's reiteration that one China is ROC in private settings.

First, the mainland has formed a shared identity with KMT through the 1992 consensus. The former General Secretary of the National Security Council in Taiwan, Su Qi (no date, cited in Xiao, 2018, p. 122), rightly stated that with regard to the one China principle, "KMT said 'yes, but [one China is ROC]' while the DPP said 'no'." The mainland definitely opposes the DPP's position, whereas it has shared the one China identity with KMT. This shared identity is reflected in the consensus that has been reached by Taiwan's Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the mainland's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) that were authorized

by the governments of both sides in 1992. The 1992 consensus states that both the mainland and Taiwan adhere to the one China principle and strive for national unification (SEF, 1992, cited in SEF, 2016; ARATS, 1992, cited in Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council PRC, 2016).

The mainland gets what it wants from sharing the one China identity with the KMT through the 1992 consensus. When the KMT governs Taiwan, the mainland has been able to preserve its bottom-line interests of one China principle. This is evidenced by the KMT administration's acknowledgement of the 1992 consensus from 2008 to 2016. Ma Ying-jeou, who was the Taiwanese President during this period, reiterated that his administration "adhered to the 1992 consensus and did not seek two Chinas, one China one Taiwan and Taiwan independence" (Xiao, 2018).

As the mainland's bottom line interests were secured through the one China identity, it intentionally downplayed the nationalist interests that conflicted with the KMT's interests. First, regarding the sensitive debate of whether China is PRC or ROC, the mainland downplayed its nationalist interests by tolerating Taiwan's interpretation that China is ROC in cross-strait exchanges between the two sides. For instance, in the closed-door meeting between Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou and the mainland's President Xi Jinping in Singapore 2016, Ma reiterated the ROC's position on the one China principle (Xiao, 2018, p. 345). Also, the mainland side acquiesced Ma's statement that he was the ROC President and Xi asked Ma about the origin of his "President office" at the dinner between the two sides (Xiao, 2018, p. 368).

Besides tolerating Taiwan's interpretation of one China between 2008 and 2016, on the basis that the KMT government had acknowledged the 1992 consensus, the mainland made the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan less salient by helping Taiwan preserve its international sovereignty. For example, it stopped switching other countries' diplomatic recognition from ROC to PRC (Xiao, 2018, p. 166) and relaxed its control over Taiwan's international space (Hu, 2008). For instance, during Ma's

Presidency, Taiwan only lost diplomatic ties with Gambia in 2013 and Beijing publicly stated that it had not had any contact with Gambia and learned about this from the news (Hong, 2013, cited in China Daily, 2013). Also, as a breakthrough of Taiwan's expansion into international space, Taiwan returned to the UN System and participated in the World Health Assembly (WHA) as an observer in 2009, 38 years after its UN membership was replaced by the PRC in 1971 (Chan, 2013, p. 102; Xiao, 2018, p. 164). As sovereignty of ROC/Taiwan is strongly identified by most Taiwanese (Tsai, 2019; KMT, 2019), successive Taiwanese governments have consistently worked to avoid losing Taiwan's diplomatic recognition or participate in international organizations to maintain ROC's existence as a sovereign state. The mainland's actions made its nationalist identity less salient to Taiwan by helping it preserve international sovereignty, thereby alleviating another cross-strait friction.

Finally, the mainland attempted to make communist identity less salient by trying to assuage Taiwanese people's negative feelings about the mainland's political system. The mainland first attempted to do this by relieving Taiwan's suspicion that their political system would be tarnished after unification by reiterating that it would "take good care of Taiwanese emotions, interests and political system" in the negotiations (Deng, 1983; Jiang, 1995; Hu, 2008; Xi, 2019). The mainland also tried to reduce Taiwan's negative evaluation of its political system. For instance, Xi (2014, cited in Xinhua net, 2014) requested "Taiwanese compatriots to understand the mainland compatriots' choice of political system" when he met a delegation led by the KMT's senior leader Lien Chan in 2014. By attempting to assuage Taiwan's concerns and asking for their understanding, the mainland wished to downplay ideological friction and deactivate Taiwan's identity as a democratic regime

While downplaying the identities or interests that conflict with Taiwan's preferences, the mainland has not sacrificed its bottom-line nationalist interests, including its commitment to the one China principle. First, while stating that they would take care of Taiwan's distinctive political system, the leaders often put greater emphasis on the

shared one China identity (Deng, 1983; Jiang, 1995; Hu, 2008; Xi, 2019). Also, although the mainland tolerated the KMT's interpretation of the 1992 consensus in the cross-strait exchanges, it never recognized this interpretation (SEF, 2016) and refused to tolerate Taiwan's attempt to publicly demonstrate the ROC's sovereignty in the presence of third parties. For instance, in 2016, when Ma met Xi in Singapore, Taiwan insisted that it planned to state the ROC in the public speech to demonstrate its sovereign status (Xiao, 2018, p. 345). The mainland strongly rejected Taiwan's plan, despite Taiwan's insistence (Xiao, 2018, p. 345).

Finally, under Ma's Presidency, when Taiwan's international space expanded, the mainland insisted on the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan in international society. For instance, Taiwan's participation as an observer in the name of Chinese Taipei in the WHA in 2009 was a breakthrough for Taiwan. However, a leaked document from within the World Health Organization (WHO) reflected Beijing's preference to Taiwan's status in international society by stating that Taiwan "is considered, within the United Nations system, as a province of China, under the jurisdiction of the Chinese government in Beijing" (Romberg, 2012, p. 8). Moreover, the mainland attempted to act as the central government that enjoys the right to determine Taiwan's participation in international organizations. This is demonstrated by the statement in a leaked WHO memo (Mo, 2011), which reported that "procedures used by the WHO to facilitate relations with Taiwan and how these relations operate were subject to Chinese approval."

Discussion

The period from 2008 to 2016 has been widely recognized as a period of relative peace in the Taiwan Strait. Also, by seeking a shared one China identity with the KMT and downplaying interests that conflict with Taiwan's preference, such as tolerating the KMT's interpretation that one China is ROC, the mainland successfully deterred the Taiwanese independence movement without using explicit force.

Meanwhile, Beijing maintained the one China principle, which stressed the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan. However, no progress was made on unification under Beijing's terms, because the conflicting identity and related interests represent the very problems that formal unification ought to solve. Downplaying them will not only stall progress in terms of formal unification, it will also increase the cost of deterring Taiwan from seeking independence.

The major problem is the status of ROC, as ROC supporters wish to have equality between the ROC and the PRC. Even most pro-unification Taiwanese figures have stressed the equality. This has been demonstrated by the proposal made by Hung Hsiu-Chu, who is generally viewed as a pro-unification KMT member. The proposal conceived the ROC and PRC as two equal and legal states under one China, which required the PRC to acknowledge the ROC's equality and legality of fostering government to government relationships with other countries (Hung, 2017, cited in Xu, 2017). Likewise, Shao Zonghai (2010, p. 201) argued that, if the mainland is a country, Taiwan must also be a country, and if the mainland is a central government, Taiwan must also be a central government. Huang Nian (2013), the Editor in Chief of Taiwan's united daily news, argued that the PRC and ROC could equally share China's sovereignty, whereby the PRC would be the socialist China and the ROC would be the democratic China.

While the PRC tolerates the KMT's interpretation that China is the ROC to downplay conflicting identities, it has never publicly recognized this interpretation. Some mainland scholars argue that the PRC should recognize the ROC, thereby making unification possible. Zhang Nianchi (2010), the Director of the Shanghai school of East Asian studies, acknowledges that peaceful unification must start from Beijing's recognition of the ROC and argues that "mutual respecting political reality [many Taiwanese strong identification with ROC] should be on the negotiation table" if the PRC wishes to conclude a peace accord. Likewise, Liu Guoshen (2008, p. 4) argued that the mainland should "face up to the reality" that no matter if it recognizes this or

not, the ROC represents China in international society on some occasions. Also, Chen Kongli (2011) indicated that, if the mainland was courageous enough to make concessions on the ROC's status, Taiwan may make concessions in return.

However, despite these scholars' calls, the PRC has never abandoned its nationalist goal of being the central government of China. Thus, Beijing is unlikely to recognize the ROC as another equal government. In 1963, Zhou Enlai proposed that Taiwan could retain almost everything, including its army, on the condition that it recognized Beijing as the central government and handed over diplomatic rights to Beijing (China Taiwan Net, 2007). That is, the PRC could concede nearly everything except that Taiwan is a local government and gives up its international sovereignty. This has been Beijing's basic template regarding Taiwan's future, which has not dramatically changed for decades. According to Zhou's proposal, it seems that to Beijing, the status quo based on 1992 consensus that Taiwan remains *de facto* independence but almost loses international recognition somewhat equals to Taiwan's *de facto* unification. While the KMT does not recognize Beijing as the central government, it recognizes that Taiwan belongs to China through the 1992 consensus. China defaults to the PRC in international society. Also, to a large degree, the PRC enjoys the right of being the central government of Taiwan in international society by permitting Taiwan's participation in international organizations no matter whether Taiwan recognizes it or not. Thus, the DPP's argument that the 1992 consensus is one country two systems is somewhat reasonable.

However, ignoring the ROC makes Beijing's non-coercive formal unification nearly impossible. Because of the mainland's ignorance, the KMT was vulnerable to criticism for its inability to protect Taiwan's sovereignty. For instance, the DPP's senior member Huang Chuangxia (2014) argued that Ma "belittled the ROC." Likewise, Lai Chin-te (2020, cited in Lin, 2020), a DPP leader, stated that the KMT sticks to the 1992 consensus but ROC does not exist in the consensus. This criticism was an important reason that the KMT could not start peace accord talks with Beijing.

In 2009, the Ma administration refused the mainland's push for political talks (Zhang, 2012, p. 119). The primary reason of Ma's refusal was his insistence that Beijing must "face up to the reality", which indicates the existence of the ROC (Shao, 2010; Rfi, 2012). For the KMT, the mainland's public recognition of the ROC would erase its stigma of selling out Taiwan's sovereignty to the PRC. Under such circumstances, the KMT might be able to convince Taiwanese that starting political talks would not damage the ROC's sovereignty because the PRC and ROC are equal sovereign entities.

Also, derecognition of the ROC increases the mainland's cost of deterring Taiwan's independence movement and promoting non-coercive unification. As the KMT was vulnerable to criticism of losing Taiwan's sovereignty, Ma was very cautious about moves that could lead to this criticism. When Ma was first elected as Taiwanese President in 2008, the KMT occupied the majority of the Legislative and Executive Yuan, but it promised not to correct the DPP revised textbook guidelines, which promote de-Sinification (China Times. 2019). When Ma made some minor revisions to the textbook guidelines in his second term, he was strongly criticized for "selling Taiwan to the PRC" (Li, 2014), thus forcing Ma to give up (China Times, 2019). Ma's failure to revise the guidelines resulted in a surge of young Taiwanese people that strongly identify with Taiwanese sovereignty. This increases Beijing's difficulty of constructing a one China identity with young Taiwanese people and, thus, the costs of deterring Taiwanese independence or promoting non-coercive unification.

In summary, from 2008 to 2016, Beijing sought a shared one China identity with the KMT and downplaying its conflicting interests, which included tolerating the KMT's interpretation that one China is the ROC in private settings, not competing to shift other countries' diplomatic recognition from ROC to the PRC, and allowing Taiwan to participate in international organizations. Meanwhile, Beijing defended the one China principle through KMT's endorsement of the 1992 consensus, resistance to the KMT's public statement concerning the ROC, and permission of Taiwan's

participation in international organizations as the central government. Through its strategic management of identities and interests, Beijing defended the one China principle and maintained a relatively peaceful Taiwan Strait without explicit use of force during this period. However, because Beijing has never softened its insistence on the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan and recognized the existence of ROC, the KMT, which has been stigmatized as the traitor of ROC/Taiwan, was neither courageous enough to start political talks nor to revise textbook guidelines. Thus, non-coercive unification was nearly impossible, and the costs of deterring Taiwanese independence increased.

These findings reinforce the main arguments of the thesis that the strategic management of identities/interests did help Beijing strike a balance between maintaining a benign environment and defending crucial nationalist interest, which is deterring Taiwan independence without using explicit force. However, the shared identity strategy fails due to Beijing's unwillingness to concede its conflicting interests, which is PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan.

The mainland's strategic management with the DPP from 2016 to 2020

This section is divided into two parts. The first part analyses the strategic management from 2016 to 2019, and the second part analyses the strategic management in 2020. This is because cross-strait relations underwent a lot of changes in 2020.

At the start of 2016, Beijing attempted to construct a one China identity with the DPP. In February 2016, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi expressed hope that the DPP government would promote cross-strait peace in terms of "their constitution" (BBC News, 2016) that stipulates that the mainland and Taiwan belong to one China. This remark has been reciprocated by the DPP. The DPP's Spokesman Yang Jialiang (2016, cited in BBC news, 2016) stated that the DPP would conduct a cross-

strait policy in terms of current constitution. In May 2016, Tsai made the biggest concession as a DPP President to Beijing by promising that she would respect the ROC constitution in her inauguration speech (Tsai, 2016).

However, Beijing pushed the DPP further by asking Tsai to complete the “unfinished answer sheet” (Zhang, 2016). This meant that, to start official contact with Beijing, Tsai needed to publicly state her support of the 1992 consensus rather than the ROC’s constitution. The reason that Beijing backtracked from Wang’s earlier statement was probably its unwillingness to recognize the ROC. Wang’s statement aroused Taiwan’s anticipation that the PRC started to recognize the ROC’s existence and legitimacy (Zhong, 2016). Beijing denied that Wang’s statement means recognition of the ROC’s constitution and stated that his central point is the one China principle (Feng, 2016).

Beijing’s shared one China approach failed, as Tsai was unwilling to endorse the 1992 consensus. Instead, her stance became hardened and reiterated that the DPP was willing to start official contact with Beijing if the latter did not set preconditions (DW, 2018). Also, the DPP began to reiterate its one China, one Taiwan or two Chinas policy. In October 2016, Tsai stated that “Taiwan is a sovereign independent state” (Hutzler and Hsu, 2016). In 2018, Tsai stated in her speech that her administration would defend sovereignty of the “ROC Taiwan” despite enormous pressure of “China” (Zheng, 2018). In 2019, Tsai (2019, cited in Chung, 2019) reiterated that “the mainland should respect that ROC Taiwan has existed for a long time.”

On the one hand, although one China identity approach failed, Beijing has continued deepening ties with Taiwan. First, although mainlander tourists and Taiwan’s agricultural product exports to the mainland have decreased since the DPP came to power in 2016, Beijing continues the Cross-straits Economic Cooperation Framework (ECFA), the cross-strait FTA. Second, in 2018, the central government of the

mainland issued 31 preferential policies and provinces issued specific policies in accordance with the 31 policies, which facilitated Taiwan's integration into the mainland in areas ranging from civil exchanges, economy, education, and culture industry (China Youth Net, 2019). Third, in 2019, the mainland issued 26 preferential policies that further deepened the integration, such as encouraging Taiwan's participation in the mainland's technological development and industrialization (China Youth Net, 2019).

On the other hand, because of Tsai's unwillingness to endorse the 1992 consensus, both sides' conflicting interests became more pronounced in the cross-strait relationship. First, from 2016 to 2019, Taiwan lost diplomatic recognition from six countries (Li, 2019). Second, since 2017, Taiwan has been excluded from the international organizations that it entered during Ma's presidency, such as the WHA and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Third, Beijing prevented Taiwan from concluding FTAs with other countries (Xiao, 2018). All of these actions weakened ROC/Taiwan's international sovereignty and strengthened the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan. First, shifting recognition from the ROC to the PRC demonstrates that Taiwan is part of the PRC. Second, it is the central government's right to decide whether a local government should enter an international organization and sign the FTA or not.

Moreover, from 2016 to 2019, Beijing conducted several military actions to show resolve in deterring Taiwan's independence movement. Since November 2016, the PLA Airforce began island patrols and increased the frequency, quantity, and variety of the aircrafts used, including H-6k bombers and Su-30 fighters (Xin, 2020, p. 539). In December 2016, China's aircraft carrier Liaoning patrolled the outer sea of the Taiwanese island for the first time (Haiwai Net, 2016). In 2018, the Liaoning carrier fleet conducted live fire drills in the sea near the east of Taiwan (PLA News, 2018). This demonstrates Beijing's enhanced capability of deterring Taiwanese

independence because the east of Taiwan is a mountainous region and was, thus, considered a secure place in wartime when the PLA could not disembark on it.

However, while becoming more assertive, Beijing also tried to not provoke conflicts in the strait from 2016 to 2019. Beijing tightened control over Taiwan's international space on diplomatic dimension, which would not result in armed conflict. Before 2019, the aircrafts that patrolled Taiwan never crossed the medium line between the mainland and Taiwan, which was believed to be the maritime border-line between the two sides (Sun, 2020). Instead, the Liaoning aircraft carrier fleet patrolled the outer sea area of Taiwan (Haiwai net, 2018). Moreover, in 2016, Beijing had a chance to justify its actions if it intended to conquer Taiwan, but it did not do so. In 2016, Taiwan mistakenly fired a missile targeting the mainland that hit a Taiwanese fishing boat (Chen, 2016). Beijing's response was mild. It requested Taiwan to explain the situation (Sina, 2016) and downplayed the incident on the mainland's social media channels. However, if Beijing intended to forcefully conquer Taiwan, this could have been an opportunity for justification because Taiwan fired the first shot, despite the fact that it was unintentional. A comparable example was Beijing's seizure of land features in Spratly Islands after a skirmish with Vietnam in 1988. Beijing argued that the skirmish happened because Vietnam fired an initial shot. Whether or not Vietnam fired this first shot deliberately was probably unimportant in that moment. What was important was that Beijing could use the first shot as justification to recover the land features.

From 2016 to 2019, the Tsai administration was probably aware of Beijing's intention of making the tension manageable. In this period, the Tsai administration condemned Beijing for suppressing Taiwan, but was not nervous about the cross-strait conflicts. In 2017, although Tsai expressed her concern about "mainland China's military expansion in the region," she (Tsai, 2017, cited in DW News, 2017) was confident that the "cross-strait relationship would not become uncontrollable." Also, Tsai (2017, cited in DW News, 2017) argued that mainland leaders were "rational decision

makers” who “cannot exclude the idea that cross-strait problem cannot be solved through force but through peaceful means.” In 2018, Tsai reiterated her judgement that “the cross-strait relationship would not become uncontrollable” (Zhou, 2018). She believed in Taiwan’s ability to maintain the status quo and argued that “in this changing regional environment, maintaining the status quo would help Taiwan utilize this time to deepen its reforms” (Zhou, 2018).

In this period, Beijing was content with its management of the cross-strait relationship, especially its capability of balancing its nationalist interests of defending the one China principle with preserving a relatively peaceful cross-strait environment. In 2017, an article written by the Taiwan Work Office of CCPCC (TWOCCPCC) (2017) reported that in the face of complex challenges brought about by the DPP administration, Beijing had “maintained the one China principle, preserved a generally peaceful cross-strait environment...and taken firm control of cross-strait relations.” Likewise, in 2018, a central research group of TWOCCPCC (2018) wrote that the mainland had “properly dealt with the changing political situation of Taiwan...firmly deterred Taiwan’s pro-independence movement, and vigorously maintained peace and stability in the cross-strait.” Also, in 2019, Liu Jieyi, the Director of the TWOCCPCC, made a similar judgement, stating that “since May, 2016, we...firmly contained various forms of Taiwan’s pro-independence movements...and ensured peace and stability in the cross-strait.”

According to the statement above, one theme of Beijing’s content was derived from its ability to maintain one China principle. As noted earlier, the one China principle includes two sub-principles; the first is the PRC’s representation as China in international society, which means that Taiwan should not be internationally recognized as a sovereign state or other countries should not have high-level government to government contact with Taiwan. The second is that Beijing acts as the central government of Taiwan in international society. That is, Beijing would maintain the exclusive right to decide whether Taiwan should participate in

international organizations or economic pacts. However, in 2020, both sub-principles were violated. First, in May 2020, US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex M Azar II made a visit to Taiwan and met with Tsai (Qin, 2020a). In September, the US Under Secretary of State Keith Krach visited Taiwan (Qin, 2020b) and became the highest-level official to have visited Taiwan in decades. All of these actions challenge the first sub-principle of one China principle. Second, Beijing's power of containing Taiwan's international space has been weakened. In 2020, Beijing was angered by Taiwan's attempt to enter the WHO by advocating for its capability to contain the coronavirus or shaming Beijing for suppressing Taiwan's right to obtain information about the virus (China News Net, 2020). Also, in September 2020, the US ambassador to the UN, Kelly Craft, had lunch with the director of Taipei Economic and Cultural office in New York and expressed her support for Taiwan's participation in the UN (Lederer, 2020).

Beijing views all these actions as serious violations of its crucial nationalist interests and warned that "any neglect, challenge, or denial of the one China principle will be doomed to fail" (Cankao Xiaoxi, 2020). Since Beijing believes that its important nationalist interests had been seriously damaged, it took on more assertive actions in 2020 to respond. In August 2020, the PLA conducted live fire drills near North and South of Taiwan twice (Xiaoshan, 2020b). On September 9 and 10, PLA conducted large scale drills within the Southwest of Taiwan's ADIZ and the nearest drill area was 90 nautical miles away from Taiwan (You, 2020). On September 18, 18 PLA aircrafts entered Taiwan's west, southwest, north, northwest airspace, some of which were near Taiwan's territorial airspace (Zaobao, 2020).

Beijing measured the strength of these actions. First, these actions are less assertive than seizing the Taiwan controlled Pratas Island, which was a PLA plan that was leaked by Japanese Kyodo news (Xiaoshan, 2020a). Second, according to the Taiwanese Defense Ministry, the PLA Rocket Force and Landing Force did not

participate in the military drills on September 10 and 11 (You, 2020). Third, the PLA navy did not participate in the military drills on September 18.

However, these actions made the cross-strait an increasingly contentious area. Unlike the reaction from 2016 to 2019, the Tsai administration was increasingly worried about conflicts in the cross-strait throughout 2020. In August 2020, Tsai explicitly admitted that she was worried about accidental conflicts in the cross-strait (CNA, 2020). In the evening of September 11, Taiwan's Defense and Foreign Ministries held urgent press conferences and warned that the mainland's actions could seriously deteriorate regional peace (RFA, 2020). In September 18, the Defense Ministry asked the mainland to "show restraint" and "not escalate cross-strait tension" in order to "cherish peace" (DW News, 2020). However, it is likely that escalation will continue if Beijing have believed that the one China principle has been violated by the DPP's actions.

Discussion

From 2016 to 2019, although its shared identity approach failed, Beijing managed to maintain a relatively peaceful cross-strait environment without compromising its crucial nationalist interests of preserving the one China principle. Beijing consolidated one China principle through coercion, but refrained from provoking conflicts in the cross-straits. Also, Beijing tried to ameliorate frictions by strengthening Taiwan's integration into the mainland.

Regarding unification, Xin (2020, p. 550) argued that Beijing's "dual track strategy" in this period, which combined coercion with engagement, had counterproductive effects. The effects included alienating Taiwan's heart and mind, weakening "identity foundation for unification" and increasing the challenge of making Taiwan favor unification (Xin, 2020, p. 551).

Xin's argument is based on the assumption that if Beijing promotes engagement with Taiwan and does not use coercion to cause tension, the former will strengthen Taiwan's "identity foundation for unification" (Xin, 2020, p. 551). However, this assumption has proved to be invalid. This is because, when Beijing unilaterally offered enormous economic interests to Ma administration and did not provoke any tension from 2008 to 2016, KMT did not wish to start political talks and Taiwan did not lean towards unification. As noted earlier, as long as Beijing was unwilling to acknowledge the existence of ROC, it would weaken the identity foundation and would even alienate pro-unity KMT members, let alone those supporting Taiwan/ROC (Taiwan) independence.

Also, although Beijing's strategic management from 2016 to 2019 did not entice Taiwan to favor unification, it did help the mainland preserve a relatively peaceful environment to increase its power advantages over Taiwan and thus ability to compel Taiwan to accept unification talks. Chen Xiancai (2020), the Director of Taiwan research center at Xiamen University, argued that, because neither the DPP nor the KMT was willing to start unification talks with Beijing and a forceful reunion would cause casualties, Beijing could consider compelling Taiwan to accept unification. The mainland officials do not publicly support this idea of compelling Taiwan. However, when they are confident about Beijing's capability of handling the Taiwan issue, one of their major arguments is the mainland's increasingly advantageous power over Taiwan. For instance, in 2018, the research group of TWOCPC (2018) wrote that, as the mainland's power grows, "the strategic advantage that our power compared more favorably with Taiwan will continue increasing...[thus] when dealing with relations with Taiwan, we have more favorable conditions and stronger capability." The "favorable conditions and strong capability" means that Beijing has more instruments at its disposal to pursue unification, and compelling Taiwan is one such option.

Beijing could compel Taiwan into unification by increasing the latter's cost of rejecting unification talks. This is because Taiwan has always prioritized cost and benefit calculations over identities. One prominent evidence of Taiwanese pragmatism is that most pro-independence Taiwanese prefer the status quo due to the high cost of achieving *de jure* independence (Schreer, 2017, p. 54). In the most recent survey that was published by Taiwan's National Chengchi University, which was commissioned by the Taiwan Foundation of Democracy in 2020, 67% of the respondents regard themselves as Taiwanese (BBC news, 2020). However, the strong sense of Taiwanese identity does not mean that Taiwanese will pursue *de jure* Taiwan independence. In terms of the survey, the majority of Taiwanese people (52%) wished to maintain the status quo (BBC news, 2020). According to many surveys and scholars' analysis, their preference of the status quo is due to fear that Beijing will forcefully recover Taiwan if it were to declare *de jure* independence ((Kastner, 2015/2016, p. 79; Hsieh, 2017, p. 10; Schreer, 2017, p. 54).

This pragmatism has also been demonstrated in their view of the future cross-strait relationship based on surveys conducted by the National Chengchi University and Duke University from 2002 to 2019. These surveys can be regarded as the most impartial surveys of Taiwanese opinions on Taiwan–mainland relationship because they are only for research purposes and do not have political orientations. These surveys show that most Taiwanese prefer *de jure* independence, but more Taiwanese think that unification is likely to happen in the future than those who think that Taiwan will become independent (Niu, 2019, cited in Han, 2019). As the mainland's power has grown in recent years, the number of Taiwanese that think unification is likely to happen is rising accordingly (Niu, 2019, cited in Han, 2019). In the 2019 survey, only 23.3% respondents said that they will resist the mainland if the war between the mainland and Taiwan begins, including those who only choose to protest the mainland or donate money (National Chengchi University, 2019); 50.8% of respondents would choose to not resist the mainland and 23% chose to not respond to the question, including those who wished to act according to the result of

war (National Chengchi University, 2019). These results demonstrate that, if the mainland pushes for unification and the cost of maintaining the status quo exceeds the benefits, the majority of Taiwanese people will accept unification talks. Also, because the majority of Taiwanese people will not resist the mainland's push for unification if the cost of resistance is too high, they view unification as the most likely outcome in the cross-strait's future.

Many scholars may argue against the idea that Taiwan would be compelled to accept unification talk if the cost of resistance would exceed the benefits. The often-cited evidence is the 2014 sun flower movement that a great number of Taiwanese opposed a service trade deal between the KMT administration and the mainland out of fear that deepening economic ties between them would seriously undermine Taiwan's sovereignty and democracy and increase the mainland's penetration into Taiwan (Rowen, 2015, pp. 5-6). This movement resulted in the KMT's suspension of the trade deal and the DPP's landslide victory over the KMT in the 2016 Presidential election. Likewise, in the 2020 election, the DPP once again had a landslide victory over the KMT; one of the main reasons for this was that the Hong Kong protests in 2020 raised Taiwan's deep fear of losing its sovereignty and democracy. Scholars may argue that these events demonstrate Taiwan's willingness to sacrifice its economic interests and dependence on the mainland to preserve Taiwan's sovereignty and democratic system.

First, contrary to these scholars' arguments, the sunflower movement was more of an DPP's attempt to mobilize popular movement and regain power, as opposed to the genuine Taiwanese nationalist protests that aimed to preserve Taiwan's sovereignty through sacrificing economic interests. This is because the DPP abandoned sunflower movement's goals once it regained power. First, in 2014, the protestors required the government to withdraw from the deal (DW, 2014). However, in the inauguration address in 2016, Tsai (2016) stated that "over twenty years of interactions and negotiations across the Strait have enabled and accumulated

outcomes, which both sides must collectively cherish and sustain.” The outcomes included trade deals between Beijing and Taiwan. After the DPP won the election in 2016, it called to restart negotiations of the service trade deal (Ke, 2016, cited in Cui, 2016), but Beijing rejected this call (Ma, 2016, cited in Qi and Hui, 2016). In 2020, the DPP called to continue ECFA, the FTA that the service trade deal is based on, which the DPP had previously called “sugar coated shells” when it was the opposition party in 2010 (Ding, 2020). Also, the establishment of a supervisory mechanism over the Taiwan–mainland deals, which was the sunflower movement’s main goal, has been delayed up to now, although the DPP has been the majority party in the Legislative Yuan for 5 years (Li, 2019). Moreover, contrary to sunflower movement’s goal, Taiwan’s dependence on the mainland’s economy has increased during Tsai’s Presidency from 2016 to 2020. In 2020, Taiwan’s exports to the mainland and Hong Kong reached new high, accounting for 43.9 of Taiwan’s total exports (Fu and Wu, 2021). These examples demonstrate that except that DPP regained power in 2016, thus far none of Sunflower movement’s goals has been realized. The DPP did not truly resist the trade deal or economic dependence on the mainland, but instead wished to mobilize citizens in order to regain its political power through the movement.

Regarding the 2020 election, Taiwan’s nationalist concern was not the only reason for the DPP’s victory and, thus, may not prove the argument that the DPP won because Taiwan was willing to sacrifice its economic interests to preserve sovereignty and democracy. A counter example of this is that Han Kuo-yu, a KMT member that publicly endorsed the 1992 consensus, won the 2018 Taiwan mayoral election in Kaohsiung, which had been a stronghold of the DPP for decades, by highlighting the economic benefits provided by the mainland (Chen, 2018). In both the 2018 and 2020 elections, the same cause led to different outcomes. Although the Taiwanese people highly valued Taiwan’s sovereignty and the KMT endorsed the 1992 consensus in both elections, the KMT won the former and lost the latter. Thus, Taiwan’s nationalist concern is not a sufficient condition of the DPP’s landslide victory in the 2020 election. Another equally important reason is the KMT’s disunity and

eagerness for an overnight success. The KMT Presidential candidate Han Kuo-yu lacked legitimacy when competing for the presidency. He won the mayor election in late 2018 and became the mayor for half a year. As a result, his Presidential campaign in 2019 led many Taiwanese people to distrust him (KMT, 2020, cited in Guo, 2020). Also, Han's abrupt announcement that he would run for president angered leaders of different KMT factions, as they had also wished compete for KMT's Presidential candidate position. This directly resulted in the KMT's disunity and ineffectiveness of mobilizing human, social, and capital resources to support Han (KMT, 2020, cited in Guo, 2020). If Han had not joined the Presidential election, he would have remained the most popular political figure in Taiwan in 2019, and a united KMT would at least have been able to compete with the DPP.

Moreover, even if strong identification with Taiwan's sovereign status and democratic system is the only reason for the sunflower movement and the KMT's failure in the Presidential election, this chapter still argues that Taiwan would be pushed into unification talks with the mainland once the cost of resistance would exceed the benefits. This is because protests or elections are not costly, Taiwanese people can oppose certain policies because they just need to take them to the streets or vote. To be sure, the protestors occupied the legislative Yuan and Executive Yuan in the 2014 sunflower movement. This may have resulted in them being sentenced to jail, thereby increasing their cost of protest. However, they probably were not afraid of this because of DPP's backing. In fact, when the Tsai government came to power in 2016, the administration immediately revoked the criminal charges against 126 protestors (Taiwan Today, 2016). Also, to be sure, the sunflower movement in 2014 and the DPP's Presidency from 2016 to 2020 changed Taiwan's mainland's policies. However, they did not change the essence of the status quo that Taiwan is in general excluded from the international community, which is the root cause of Taiwanese nationalists' grievance.

The costliest way for the Taiwanese to prove their strong identification with Taiwan's sovereignty is to voluntarily join the army, through which they can show that they are willing to be trained tough or sacrifice their lives to resist unification or bear the enormous cost of declaring *de jure* independence. However, this is the cost that many young Taiwanese people do not wish to bear. It is not a secret that most young Taiwanese do not want to join the army (Sima, 2020). Even the leaders of the sunflower movement shirked responsibility of protecting Taiwan's sovereignty and democracy when they were required to join the military service. For instance, Lin Feifan, the leader of the sunflower movement and the DPP's Vice Secretary, joined the alternative civilian service that only worked in civilian institutions rather than the military organ (Cheng, 2015). Chen Weiting, another leader of the sunflower movement, also joined the alternative civilian service (ETtoday, 2016). Lin Xuzuo, the major organizer of the sunflower movement, did not join the army because he claimed to have serious anxiety (Zhou, 2016).

Second, many young Taiwanese people are opposed to changing the voluntary military service into full conscription, reflecting the limits of their determination to defend Taiwan. For instance, many young people vigorously participated in the sunflower movement in 2014 and were in favor of voting for the DPP in 2016, which shows a strong determination to defend Taiwan's sovereignty and democracy. However, their determination to defend Taiwan dramatically reduced, and they threatened to vote against the DPP when DPP considered introducing full conscription before the 2016 election (Zhang and Chen, 2016). As a result, the DPP swept the issue under the rug to win young Taiwanese people's votes. This is a solid piece of evidence that shows that, for young Taiwanese citizens, the cost of protest and voting is much lower than joining the army; therefore, they are willing to bear the cost of the former but not the latter.

This also shows that, while Taiwanese people strongly identify with Taiwan's sovereign state identity, rational choice still dominates their thinking because many

of them are reluctant to be trained tough or sacrifice their lives to defend Taiwan. Thus, when the cost of resisting unification becomes too high, they may be more inclined to accept unification talks.

Kastner (2015/2016, pp. 61-62) argued that Taiwan's growing identification with sovereignty would make Beijing pessimistic about the future of unification and, thus, initiate conflicts. However, Beijing's confidence that it could push Taiwan into unification increases Beijing's willingness to maintain the status quo and wait until the time is ripe. As demonstrated in the preceding section, even if Taiwanese citizens strongly identify with Taiwan's sovereignty, Beijing remained confident in its ability to deter the independence movement and maintain a relatively peaceful environment from 2016 to 2019. In 2019, Xi (2019) called for unification. However, there were no substantive changes in the mainland's interaction with the DPP in 2019.

Although Beijing is willing to wait until it can successfully compel Taiwan to accept unification talks, Taiwan's increasingly courageous attempt to challenge the one China principle may escalate cross-strait frictions. This has been demonstrated by Beijing's increasingly strong military actions in 2020, which aimed to deter the DPP's violation of the one China principle, in regards to high-level official contact between Taiwan and the US, and Beijing's authority as the central government of Taiwan in international society. While Beijing showed restraint in these actions, they have also aroused Taiwan's fear of cross-strait conflicts and increased tension in 2020.

In summary, in the DPP era, because of the failed one China approach, Beijing increasingly relied on using offensive measures in a restrained way, to strike a balance between maintaining a stable Taiwan strait and defending the one China principle. This strategy worked from 2016 to 2019. Maintaining a stable strait could help Beijing increase power to compel Taiwan to unification. However, in 2020, this strategy failed to strike a balance. Although Beijing demonstrated restraint in its response to the DPP's challenge of the one China principle, its increasingly strong

military actions also heightened tension, which could reach a tipping point. These findings reinforce the overall argument of the thesis that China's strategy of defending its crucial nationalist interests in a restrained way has limitations and may not always succeed in striking the right balance.

The mainland's strategic management with the US from 2016 to 2020

This section is divided into two parts. The first part analyses the strategic management from 2016 to 2019, whereas the second part analyses the strategic management in 2020.

In order to deter Taiwanese independence, the mainland has sought shared interests with the US to preserve the current status quo and downplayed its ambition of recovering Taiwan. As noted earlier, the mainland's strong nationalist will of reversing the status quo conflicts with the US' preference of maintaining it. However, as the mainland has been well aware that it is not able to reunite with Taiwan easily, it needs to preserve the status quo, which constrains Taiwan's de jure independence movement. Thus, Beijing downplayed its nationalist identity, which prefers reversing the status quo. First, Beijing changed the rhetoric of its policy from liberating Taiwan to peaceful unification since 1978, although the option of forcefully recovering Taiwan has not been excluded. This change signals that the mainland's use of force mainly aims to deter Taiwan's pro-independence movement (Xi, 2019). This change downplayed the mainland's nationalist identity because it made the mainland's cross-strait policy less offensive and more aligned with the status quo. Since 1978, Beijing has not attempted to use force to conquer Taiwan, as it had done in the 1950s.

From 2016 to 2019, this change helped Beijing have more shared interests with the US, because both oppose Taiwan's de jure independence, albeit for different reasons (the US wishes to maintain cross-strait stability, whereas Beijing wants to defend the one China principle). In 2018, the Chairman of the America Institute in Taiwan, James

Moriarty, told Tsai that, if Taiwan insisted on a referendum to change the Taiwanese Olympic team's name from Chinese Taipei to Taiwan, the US would not help, and Beijing may kick Taiwan out from International Olympic Committee (Cui, 2018). Also, the US publicly opposed Taiwanese pro-independence extremists' movement, which aimed to pave the way for Taiwan's independence referendum in 2019 (Li, 2019).

Also, from 2016 to 2019, while the US has gradually changed its China policy from engagement to competition (Green, 2017; Hsiao and An, 2018), it generally attached greater value on maintaining China–US cooperation in other dimensions and, thus, refrained from posing great challenges to Beijing's one China principle. For instance, in 2019, President Trump once halted the sale of a F16v to Taiwan in order to conclude a trade deal with the mainland (Walcott and Worland, 2019). Also, in 2018, the US, passed the Taiwan Travel Act, which permitted senior US government officials to meet with their Taiwanese counterparts (Lai, 2018). This move effectively eliminated the unwritten restrictions that the Taiwanese President, Vice President, and Defense Minister were not allowed to visit Washington D.C. (Zheng, 2019). However, the US made an unofficial visit to Taiwan to participate in events celebrating the US–Taiwan relationship in 2019 (Focus Taiwan, 2019). Likewise, Tsai was not allowed to visit Washington when she transited from the US to countries with which Taiwan had diplomatic ties in 2019 (Strong, 2019).

Also, during this period, the US challenged Beijing's one China principle and China responded, but the two sides were able to keep frictions under control. For instance, in 2016, as President elect Trump received a congratulations call from Tsai, making him the first President elect of the US to speak with a Taiwanese President since 1979 (Phillips, et al, 2016), China requested Trump to state his commitment to the one China principle when Trump and Xi had their first phone call in 2017 (Blanchard and Holland, 2017). When Trump promised to “honor the One China policy” (Blanchard and Holland, 2017), the relationship went back to normal. In this instance, China walked a fine line between defending the one China principle and maintaining

a good relationship with the US. Although it requested Trump to publicly support the one China policy, China downplayed the importance of the call, as the Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that it was “just a small trick” of Taiwan (Phillips, et al , 2016).

Likewise, in response to the US’ arms sale to Taiwan and the sail of warships across the strait in 2019, PLA air fighters crossed the middle line of the cross strait (Global Times, 2019). However, the action only targeted Taiwan and was for deterrence purposes only because the air fighters did not confront the US vessels and chose to cross the southwest of the cross-strait rather than Taiwan’s capital Taipei. In this way, China aimed to show its resolve in defending its sovereignty over Taiwan, while simultaneously maintaining a stable relationship with the US.

As noted earlier, from 2016 to 2019, Taiwan and Beijing did not worry that the frictions of the cross-strait would get out of control. This also demonstrates that the US and China managed the Taiwan issue because, in the past decades, cross-strait crises were related to frictions between the two countries in regards to the Taiwan issue. This was evidenced by the 1995–1996 crisis that was caused by the Clinton administration granting Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui permission to visit the US in 1995 (Ross, 2000, p. 87).

However, in 2020, the US government was less restrained in its handling of the Taiwan issue compared with its actions from 2016 to 2019. According to the US Assistant Secretary of State, David Stilwell, the US would not change its one China policy, but rather make “adjustments” to “restore the balance” in response to China’s aggression, which included depriving Taiwan’s diplomatic allies (Maginer, 2020). Although the congress has passed several bills to “restore the balance” since 2018 (Maginer, 2020), the US government has been measured in implementing these bills from 2018 to 2019. In contrast, the US government subtaintively implemented the bills in 2020. As noted above, unlike in 2019 when the US paid an unofficial visit to Taiwan to celebrate the establishment of the US–Taiwan relationship, two high level

US governors, the Health Secretary Alex Azar (Qin, 2020a) and the US Under Secretary of State Keith Krach, officially visited Taiwan in 2020 (Qin, 2020b). Also, in 2020, the US was active in its support of Taiwan's participation in the WHO as an observer, which included the Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, calling for the WHO's Director-General Tedros to invite Taiwan (Fletcher, 2020).

Although the US argued that this readjustment is because of China's increasingly assertive policy towards Taiwan, this argument is not convincing because Beijing's policies regarding the DPP administration are not new. The competition between the mainland and Taiwan over other countries' diplomatic recognition was tense when the DPP governed Taiwan from 2000 to 2008. In this period, 6 countries shifted diplomatic recognition from the ROC to the PRC (Nan, 2019). Also, from 2000 to 2008, the mainland suppressed the DPP's efforts to extend Taiwan's international space by preventing Taiwan from participating in international organizations even in the name of Chinese Taipei. However, unlike in 2020, the US' actions during the 2000s demonstrated a tolerance towards Beijing's suppression of Taiwan (Sutter, 2019). Some observers argue that the US' tolerance in the 2000s was because the DPP's Chen administration in the 2000s was a revisionist government, whereas the Tsai administration from 2016 to 2019 was status quo oriented. However, although the Tsai administration was less assertive than the Chen administration in terms of pursuing Taiwan's de jure independence, it still pursues a salami slicing strategy that gradually separates Taiwan from the mainland (Roy, 2017, p. 1137). For instance, in 2018, Taiwan abolished the Taiwan and Fujian provincial governments, which were representations of Taiwan being a part of China (BBC News, 2018). Also, in 2020, some DPP members proposed replacing "to meet the needs before unification" in the additional articles of the ROC's constitution with "to meet the needs for national development" (Wang, 2020). Although this action did not declare Taiwan's de jure independence, it attempted to revise Taiwan's one China constitution.

Therefore, the root cause of the US' readjustments was not China's assertiveness, but the shrinking shared interests and less salient shared identity between both sides, which makes the conflicting interests salient. The economic interdependence between China and the US made Trump downplay the Taiwan issue from 2016 to 2019 despite the congress' bills (such as asking China to buy more US' agricultural products) (Bolton, 2020, cited in Everington, 2020). However, the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 intensified frictions between the two countries and made economic interdependence less of a US priority. Trump (2020, cited in itv, 2020) stated that "100 trade deals wouldn't make up for" the losses caused to the US by the pandemic. Moreover, Trump once said that China is the "desk in the oval office" and Taiwan is the "tip" of his marker (Bolton, 2020, cited in Everington, 2020) to stress the importance of maintaining a stable major power relationship with China. However, when the major power relationship became increasingly competitive, the US was less ambiguous about the difference between the One China principle and its One China policy. Beijing's one China principle emphasizes on the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan but the US's one China policy does not recognize this. As noted earlier, in 2020, the US was less tolerant of the PRC's claimed sovereignty over Taiwan by supporting Taiwan's participation as an observer in the WHO and in the name of Chinese Taipei. This does not contradict the US' one China policy because this action does not result in two Chinas or one China, one Taiwan. However, this does conflict with the one China principle because Taiwan may enter international organizations without PRC's permission.

As demonstrated in the preceding section, China views the US' readjustment as a serious violation of its one China principle and escalates tension through military actions to show its resolve in defending the principle. If the US's readjustment continues, Beijing and the US may slide into the game of chicken, whereby both sides wish the other would concede. To respond the US' readjustments, Beijing has already been less restrained in its actions in 2020 compared to how it acted in 2019. For instance, as noted earlier, in 2019, only a few PLA air fighters crossed the medium

line and were in the Southwest of Taiwan, far from Taiwan's capital of Taipei. However, in 2020, more air fighters frequently crossed the medium line and some air fighters were in the north of Taiwan, which is near to Taipei (BBC News, 2020). Also, in 2020, Beijing denied the existence of the medium line for the first time (BBC News, 2020). The official commentary of the mainland's state television declared that these actions were aimed at compelling the DPP to stop "colluding with external forces" and warned that if the DPP does not backtrack, it will "definitely receive a devastating blow" (CCTV news, 2020). If the US continues restoring the balance to compel Beijing to stop pressurizing Taiwan, such as the Secretary of the State's visit to Taiwan or Taiwan's participation in international organizations without Beijing's permission, Beijing may initiate more assertive military actions to compel the US to backtrack. Although Beijing may try to show that its intention is to deter rather than to conquer, thus avoiding an over escalation of tension, the cross-strait will become highly contentious.

In fact, this almost happened. According to Taiwanese media, the US had planned to send its Ambassador to the UN, Kelly Craft, to visit Taiwan in January 2021, but cancelled this visit because the mainland warned the US that PLA air fighters would follow Craft's airplane, enter Taiwan's territorial airspace, and open fire if Taiwanese air fighters resisted the PLA Airforce (Renran, 2021). In this case, Beijing demonstrated that its resolve to deter US support to Taiwan, thereby avoiding the US's miscalculation whereby Beijing would forcefully conquer Taiwan by entering Taiwan's territorial airspace. However, the tension was heightened because of the warning.

Also, although the status quo did not change from 2016 to 2019, the changing distribution of power between Beijing and the US destabilized the US's mutual deterrence policy. The mutual deterrent policy is based on the US' absolute hard power advantages over the mainland. Since the establishment of diplomatic relationship between the mainland and the US in 1979, Beijing has felt that it is

constrained by the US which “stands by” Taiwan (Jiang, 1998, cited in Lampton, 2014, p. 126). Based on its absolute advantage, the US has maintained its “strategic ambiguity” in the mutual deterrence policy, that is, the US does not explicitly say whether it would intervene if Beijing used force to reunify Taiwan (Hsu, 2010, p. 142). This strategic ambiguity prevents Beijing from pursuing forceful unification due to its fearing of the US’s possible intervention (Hass and Sacks, 2020). However, as Beijing’s power has grown, US scholars have begun to question whether this strategic ambiguity is enough for the US to help Taiwan deter Beijing.

Hass and Sacks (2020) argued that the US should “make explicit claims that the United States would respond to any Chinese use of force against Taiwan,” because “ambiguity is unlikely to deter an increasingly assertive China.” Also, the US Captain of the Marine Corps, Mills (2020) argued that, in preventing Beijing from forcefully conquering Taiwan, the US should reconsider basing its army in Taiwan.

The scholars or military officers’ suggestions are based on the assumption that clarifying the US’ security commitment on Taiwan will send a clear signal to Beijing and prevent it from taking the risk of forcefully reunifying Taiwan. However, if their suggestion is put into practice, Beijing will begin to forcefully recover Taiwan regardless of its disadvantaged power in comparison to the US. These authors may forget the history in which the US and China established the diplomatic relationship. In the 1970s, to defend Beijing’s sovereignty over Taiwan, Beijing insisted on three bottom line requirements of establishing the diplomatic relationship with the US: the US shifting diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the mainland, withdrawing its troops from Taiwan, and stopping its official security commitment/treaty to Taiwan (FMPRC, 2000). These were requirements that the US must meet if it wished to establish a diplomatic relationship with Beijing, and these are still valid today. This has been demonstrated by the Chinese Deputy Chief of Mission to the US Li Kexin’s statement that “The day that a U.S. Navy vessel arrives in Kaohsiung is the day that our PLA unifies Taiwan with military force” (Blanchard and Yu, 2017). Li’s statement

reflects the requirement that the US must not base its military force in Taiwan. It can be deduced from Li's statement that the other two requirements are also red lines of Beijing's use of force to reunify Taiwan. In other words, if the US clarifies its security commitment to Taiwan or diplomatically recognizes Taiwan, Beijing will use force to recover Taiwan.

Discussion

From 2016 to 2019, Beijing has sought to construct shared interests to oppose Taiwan's de jure independence with the US, although the two sides share this interest for different reasons (i.e. the US wishes to maintain regional stability and Beijing wishes to defend the one China principle). Beijing and the US' shared interests on other dimensions constrained the US from seriously challenging the one China principle. Beijing has also downplayed its ambition of unification through making its Taiwan policy more status quo oriented. Also, when the US challenged Beijing's one China principle, Beijing reacted in a restrained way to strike a balance between defending the principle and preserving a relatively stable relationship with the US. The cross-strait status quo was relatively peaceful because neither Taiwan nor Beijing felt that armed conflicts would happen. Thus, throughout this period, China has managed to maintain a relatively peaceful cross-strait, while simultaneously defending the one China principle.

However, in 2020, the shrinking shared interests between China and the US made strategic competition increasingly apparent. Thus, the US is less tolerant of Beijing's emphasis on the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan. As a result, the cost of defending the one China principle is increasing because China is using more coercive tools to defend the principle in response to the US's high-level government to government contact with Taiwan and support of Taiwan's participation in the international organization. This has substantially escalated tension in the cross-strait. China and the US may slide into the game of chicken because both sides wish for the other to

change their assertive policy. Although China may exercise restraint to avoid escalating the situation, the cross-strait tension is still rising.

Also, if the US abandons its strategic ambiguity and clarifies its security commitment to Taiwan, PRC will view this as an event that separates Taiwan from the mainland. China will use force to recover Taiwan, which will cause conflicts in Taiwan strait.

These findings demonstrate the viability and limitations of the strategic management of identities/interests, which contributes to the overall arguments of the thesis. First, shared interests did help China strike a balance between maintaining a relatively stable environment and defending the one China principle. The importance of shared economic interests and shared major power identity reduce the salience of the conflicting interests between China and the US, particularly in terms of the Taiwan issue. This has effectively constrained the US from challenging Beijing's one China principle despite its differences from the US's one China policy from 2016 to 2019. Second, in 2020, the shrinking shared interests between China and the US made their major power relationship competitive. Consequently, China overtly relied on pursuing its nationalist interests in a restrained way to strike the balance. China was escalating the tension in the strait, which may have reached its tipping point, despite its restraint. This demonstrates the limitations of Beijing's strategic management.

Conclusion

This case study contributes to the overall arguments of the thesis by demonstrating the viability and limitations of Beijing's strategic management of identities/interests in striking the balance between maintaining a relatively peaceful environment and defending/pursuing crucial nationalist interests. First, Beijing's strategic management from 2008 to 2019 was relatively successful. Beijing's shared one China identity and its ability to downplay its conflicting interests with the KMT from 2008 to 2016 helped to maintain a relatively stable Taiwan Strait and defend the one China principle

without Beijing's explicit use of force. Second, the importance of shared interests and major power identities between China and the US from 2016 to 2019 reduced the salience of conflicting interests between China and the US regarding Taiwan. Third, Beijing's reliance on using offensive means in a restrained way effectively struck this balance from 2016 to 2019. However, limitations of the strategy are prominent. Beijing's reluctance to recognize the ROC's status resulted in the failure of its shared One China identity approach, which makes non-coercive unification impossible. Beijing's over-reliance on using offensive means in a restrained way also failed to strike the balance in 2020, because despite Beijing's restraint, the tension in the Taiwan strait heightened. Also, the shrinking shared interests made the US less tolerant of Beijing's one China principle, which stresses the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan. If Taiwan would enter international organizations without Beijing's permission or if the US would explicitly state its commitment to Taiwan, a war in the cross-strait is likely to happen.

Chapter 12 Conclusion

Many optimists that have believed that China's peaceful rise is possible often argued that through engagement, China's communist and nationalist identities and related illiberal or threatening behaviors can be socialized or transformed into behaviors that are more socially acceptable in the international community (Johnston, 2008; Campbell and Ratner, 2018, p.61). Other optimists argued that China is more of a status quo power, norm taker, or responsible stakeholder than a revisionist power (Johnston, 2003, Chin and Thakur, 2010, Etzioni, 2011, p.549). However, as China's power rises while its two identities remain unchanged, many such optimists have become frustrated (Campbell and Ratner, 2018, p.60-61; Pomfret, 2018). Moreover, it appears that pessimists that have viewed China as a revisionist power that challenges the interests of many regional countries and US leadership in East Asia (Goldstein, 2007, p.640, Christensen, 2015, p.2) have dominated the once-heated debate over whether China is a status quo or revisionist power.

Consequently, a new and important question arises, that is, can China peacefully rise in East Asia without changing its communist and nationalist identities? As demonstrated in the introduction, answers to this question from China's perspective are underexplored within the Chinese and Western literature. This thesis makes initial progress in this regard.

Theoretical Contribution.

Part 1 details the analytical framework of this thesis, which includes Chapter 2 on SIT and Chapter 3 on UFS, and demonstrates the thesis's theoretical contribution to the literature. In Chapter 2, the thesis highlights that the current theoretical frameworks used by scholars have weaknesses when analyzing China's actions and their related impact. First, some optimistic defensive realists, liberal institutionalists, and constructivists underestimated the important influence of the two identities on China. Defensive realist Glaser (2015) falsely believes that China solely focuses on

recovering Taiwan and neglects to acknowledge that China attaches importance to other nationalist goals. China views that preventing other countries' potential intervention from the first island chain is vital for national survival due to its experiences in the century of humiliation in which imperial powers invaded China from the sea (Liu, 2004). This view underpins the Chinese navy's expansion in the SCS. Liberal institutionalist Ikenberry (2014, p.8) falsely regards that China will yield to the pressure of a coalition of democratic countries and change its illiberal behavior. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, when perceiving itself to be facing great ideological challenges, the CCP conducted a vigorous top-down approach to recentralize its power and ensure the party's domination over other non-party systems. Further, some constructivists that have argued that China could possibly be socialized have underestimated the identity costs that China would suffer in the process of such socialization (Johnston, 2008, Epstein, 2013). Second, thus far, pessimistic neo-classical and offensive realists' expectations that China's rise would not be peaceful because it would face a hard-balancing coalition from established powers (Goldstein, 2007, p.641) has also not been realized. Thus, since the current theoretical frameworks used by scholars in the extant literature have not been completely satisfactory for examining China's rise in East Asia, we need a new approach to understand China's relationship with East Asian states and the US.

As such, this thesis proposes an SIT-based approach to explore the puzzle in which China has not changed its communist and nationalist identities but has managed to maintain a relatively benign regional environment and has not yet been confronted by a hard-balancing coalition. First, this SIT-based approach uses SIT's recategorization strategy, which comprises attempts that increase "the number of categories which simultaneously define a target ... to reduce ingroup-outgroup differentiation" (Prati, et al, 2021, p. 50). One of the recategorization strategies is the creation of cross-cutting identities/interests (Hogg, 2016); that is, although China has conflicting identities and related interests with other states in some dimensions, they have shared identities and related interests in others. SIT postulates that these

shared identities/interests could cancel out the negative effects of the conflicting identities/interests (Brown, 2000). The cross-cutting identities/interests open up the possibility that even if China does not change its communist and nationalist identities, it could still preserve a relatively peaceful environment and prevent the formation of a hard-balancing coalition by forming shared identities/interests with other states on non-conflicting dimensions. Second, this thesis uses SIT's emphasis on the rational choice of the actor to explore how China manages the consequences of actions deriving from its conflicting identities. While stressing that an actor cannot change its important identity, SIT also postulates that the actor could pursue their identity-related interests in a rational manner (Van Zomeren, et al, 2012, p.188, Hogg, 2016). According to this principle, China could manage these consequences by pursuing its nationalist actions in a restrained manner. Based on these two principles, to maintain a relatively peaceful environment, China could form and increase the salience of its shared identities and interests and pursue or defend the interests deriving from identities that conflict with those of others in a restrained manner.

The thesis's approach also makes a contribution to the application of SIT in IR and the analysis of China's rise. The current dominant SIT framework in IR, established by Larson (2015), focuses on its three identity management strategies: social mobility (abandoning a disadvantageous or lower status social identity to gain higher status identities), social creativity (changing negative traits into positive ones or finding another dimension/group for comparison), and social competition (reversing the current status of the relationship) (Tajfel and Turner, 2001, p103, Larson, 2015). Scholars that have used SIT to analyze China's rise have erroneously viewed social creativity as a feasible strategy to realize China's peaceful rise (Gries, 2005, Larson, 2015). As I demonstrate in Chapter 4, this view has weaknesses because China cannot sidestep the negative sentiments deriving from these two identities by finding another dimension for comparison. Since these scholars regard social creativity as a viable means for China to achieve a peaceful rise, they have failed to discuss how China could possibly achieve a peaceful rise in a competition scenario. Thus,

recategorization strategy, which is SIT's method of ameliorating competition, has not been used within existing studies. In the IR literature, three scholars have addressed recategorization strategy. Mercer (1995, p.250) notes that the EU can ameliorate conflicts between France and Germany; however, his focus is on the fact that this superordinate identity will not change the "self" or "other" distinction because the EU also has "the other," such as Japan (Mercer, 1995, p.250). Ward (2015, p.21) used recategorization to explain how a shared Anglo-Saxon identity fostered a relatively peaceful power transition from the UK to the US in the 20th century; however, his case study is short and lacks depth (Ward, 2015, p.29). Finally, Wendt (1999, p.229) argues that collective identity is social identity; however, as noted in the introduction of this thesis, constructivists' definition of collective identity formation is to a large extent dissimilar to that of SIT. Thus, using recategorization to analyze China's relations with regional countries and the US can fill the gap left by previous academic works that have used SIT to analyze China's rise and IR.

Another of this thesis's contributions to SIT's application in IR is bringing its emphasis on actors' rational choice back to IR's SIT framework. Scholars that have employed SIT to analyze China's rise have often underplayed SIT's emphasis on rational choice in their frameworks (Gries, 2005, Lee, 2016, Larson, 2015). Moreover, thus far, SIT has not been applied to analyze regional flashpoints, such as the SCS disputes and the Taiwan issue. This thesis also fills this gap.

Chapter 3 focuses on UFS. The current dominant application of UFS, treats the strategy as a revolutionary one, reflecting the irreconcilable competition between authoritarian and democratic states (Brady, 2017). However, in this thesis, UFS is a practice of SIT that aims to manage competition and cultivate shared identities and interests that enable trust and compromise between conflicting parties. Moreover, many Chinese scholars have used traditional Chinese thoughts as frameworks to prove that China's peaceful rise is possible (Qin, 2014, Yan, 2016). However, UFS, which plays a significant role in the CCP's history, has not previously been used to

analyze China's peaceful rise in East Asia, and this thesis fills the gap. Moreover, unlike the predominant analysis of UFS, which has mainly examined China's relationship with sub-national actors, this thesis examines the shared identities/interests among China's state counterparts. In the Taiwan chapter, the thesis does examine Beijing's relationship with the KMT and the DPP. However, it focus on whether Beijing has successfully constructed a shared "one China" identity with the KMT and the DPP.

SIT offers a general idea about how China could possibly maintain a relatively peaceful environment without changing its communist and nationalist identities. UFS, as an example of SIT, demonstrates concrete ways in which China can put SIT into practice. In Chapter 3, through an exploration of how the CCP attempted to form shared identities/interests with Chiang/warlords and downplay conflicting ones, this thesis deduced principles of what I call the strategic management of identities and interests. First, China could maintain a relatively benign relationship with other actors by seeking shared identities and interests in important dimensions. Second, these shared identities and interests could offset the negative effects that derive from conflicting identities/interests and, thus, help China downplay them. Third, China could pursue conflicting interests in a restrained manner to downplay conflicting identities and interests. Fourth, when others raise an incident that makes conflicting identities salient, China can again react in a restrained manner to avoid a total breakdown of its relationship with others. To control this reaction, it may choose less confrontational means of response. Fifth, even if China acts offensively to prevent the perceived serious damage to its critical interests, it can behave with restraint and always maintain a cooperative attitude for negotiation. Sixth, when China feels that its critical interests or identities are secured, it will avoid overtly escalating frictions that are destructive to its relationships with others. China does this by showing restraint when it develops strategies or reacts to others' assertive actions, seeking shared identities or interests to offset frictions or conceding less important interests defined by the conflicting identities.

Another original contribution of this thesis is its application of the CCP's UFS in the anti-Japanese war period as a framework to analyze the CCP's, and later the PRC's, interaction with regional countries and the US from 1944, when the US military observation team visited Yan'an, to the present. This framework has not been used in the literature before. As noted in the introduction, this thesis uses the UF framework due to the many similarities between the CCP's relationship with Chiang/warlords and the PRC's relationship with the US/regional countries.

In Chapter 3, the thesis explains the CCP's division of the two periods based on its power distribution with the KMT's Chiang and its adjustment of its recategorization strategy in these two periods. In the defensive period, the CCP's power lagged behind that of the KMT's Chiang in all dimensions. In the stalemate period, because the CCP's power rose to a point that began to threaten Chiang's leading status, Chiang began to constrain the CCP's rise. However, because Chiang's power was declining and the CCP's power was rising, Chiang could not easily constrain the CCP. Moreover, since the CCP's power did not exceed that of Chiang, the CCP could not easily expel Chiang's containment. A stalemate was, thus, formed between Chiang and the CCP. The CCP adjusted its recategorization strategy according to the power distribution and Chiang's responses. In the defensive period, the CCP's main target for recategorization was Chiang as only through successfully forming shared identities/interests with Chiang could the CCP break through the KMT's encirclement. In the stalemate period, the CCP's main target for recategorization was the KMT warlords; since Chiang prioritized conflicting identities/interests and was determined to contain the CCP, it was difficult for the CCP to form a shared identity/interests with Chiang. This thesis applies this UF framework, mainly focusing on the CCP's adjustments and the definition of the two periods, to analyze the CCP, and later the PRC's, relationship with the US/regional countries from 1944 to today.

Main Arguments.

By applying the above analytical framework, this thesis makes several main arguments.

First, competition between China and the US (or many regional countries) in several dimensions is inevitable. As the CCP is unwilling to transform China's communist identity, China will continue to resist political liberalization. Further, due to its nationalist identity, China represents a revisionist power in the East Asian geostrategic context because it is determined to reverse its perceived disadvantages regarding territorial disputes and the US-led island chains encirclement. China's efforts to defend its sovereignty claims will also cause frictions with other claimant states. Moreover, as China's hard power is rising, it will threaten the US's leadership in the region, forewarning the latter to constrain its rising power.

Second, while this competition is inevitable, SIT's recategorization strategy and emphasis on actors' rational choice open up the possibility that China can strike a balance between its goals of stabilizing the communist regime and pursuing nationalist interests and maintaining a relatively peaceful environment by strategically managing its identities and interests. That is, based on the security of its communist and nationalist identities, China can possibly maintain a relatively peaceful regional environment by forming or increasing the salience of shared identities or interests with other countries and making the communist and nationalist identities and related interests less salient to others.

Third, the CCP has used this strategic management strategy for decades, which is reflected by its international UFS. To a certain degree, this strategy has contributed to China's simultaneous attainment of its three goals because the CCP has currently stabilized its control over the Chinese nation and secured or even advanced important nationalist interests while maintaining a relatively benign regional environment. China has not faced a regional hard-balancing coalition, and though its

territorial disputes with regional countries, such as the SCS and Diaoyu island disputes, arouse frictions, they are under control in many cases.

Nevertheless, this strategy has some limitations. Since China always seeks shared identities/interests when it perceives that its communist identity and key nationalist interests are secure, the shared identity/interests strategy may fail because the CCP does not want to concede its domination over the Chinese nation or its nationalist interests, such as unification with Taiwan on Beijing's "one country, two systems" terms, in exchange for forming shared identities/interests.

Furthermore, although China always demonstrates restraint when pursuing or defending important nationalist interests when compared with its most assertive options, it does not always achieve the intended result. For instance, China's restraint may not be able to compensate for other regional states' perceptions of the damage to their interests. Also, despite its restraint, China may incrementally increase the intensity of its actions, thereby leading to the escalation of tensions.

Empirical Chapters.

Parts 2 to 5 comprise the empirical chapters of this thesis. Part 2 includes Chapter 4, which contributes to the thesis's main arguments by demonstrating that competition between China and regional countries or the US in several dimensions is inevitable. Unlike IR scholars using SIT that have viewed social creativity as a viable means for China to achieve a peaceful rise, Chapter 4 argues that because both of its identities are important for China's self-identification, it can hardly abandon them (social mobility) or neglect them by finding other dimensions for comparison (social creativity). After proving social mobility and creativity are not viable methods, the thesis analyzes the reasons that China will meet the three conditions that cause social competition (an unstable power relationship, dissatisfaction with the current status quo, and a cognitive alternative). First, as its power rises, the power relationship between China and the US is destabilizing. Second, China is determined

to reverse its perceived disadvantageous position regarding its territorial disputes and the East Asian geostrategic environment. China will also promote pluralism in the face of pressure from US-led liberal internationalism. From China's perspective, it cannot declare the completion of national rejuvenation without achieving its key nationalist goals, such as recovering Taiwan. Moreover, China wishes to rise as a socialist great power and, thus, will work hard to preserve its communist identity.

Based on the argument that competition between China and regional countries or the US is inevitable in some dimensions, Parts 3 and 4 analyze to what extent China has preserved a relatively peaceful environment through its strategic management of identities and interests by breaking or preventing a perceived US-led hard-balancing coalition in East Asia without changing its communist and nationalist identities from 1944 to today. Drawing on the UF framework, this thesis denoted the period from 1944 to 1976 as that in which the CCP, and later the PRC, strived to form a shared identity/interests with the US to break the US-led economic and military blockade on China (Chapter 5). The period from 1978 to 2009 is defined by this thesis as the defensive period, in which China's power lagged behind that of the US in all dimensions (Chapter 6). China's strategic management of its identities and interests in these two periods is the major theme of Part 3, which covers China's historical application of this strategic management. The thesis defines the period from 2009 to today as the period of stalemate between China and the US (Part 4). During this stalemate period, the target of China's strategic management of identities and interests has shifted from the US to regional countries. However, this does not mean that China will not try to construct a shared identity or interests with the US. This change occurred because during the stalemate period, the strategic competition between China and the US has been tense, and the nations' shared interests, such as environmental protection, are unlikely to be salient enough to ameliorate frictions deriving from their competition.

Within Part 3, which focused on China's historical application of the strategic management of its identities and interests, Chapter 5 examines this strategic management between 1944 and 1976. The arguments presented in this chapter are as follows. First, China's shared identity and interest approach broke the US-led military and economic blockade, even if the PRC was not politically liberalized and did not concede important nationalist interests, such as those related to the ROC's status since the 1972 US-China rapprochement. Second, the strategic partnership reduced the salience of China's communist identity within the Sino-US relationship and encouraged the US to concede to conflicting interests related to China's nationalist identity, such as the issue of Taiwan. Third, to establish an amicable Sino-US relationship, the CCP downplayed China's communist identity by proposing ideological armistice and minimized its nationalist identity by conceding less important interests relating to Taiwan, such as tolerating Taiwan's de facto independence.

However, this strategy had some limitations. First, the shared identity/interests approach failed to help the CCP ameliorate the relationship with the US before 1970 because the CCP was reluctant to concede when it perceived that China's communist regime and crucial nationalist interests were insecure. For instance, one reason that CCP failed to form an anti-Japanese alliance with the US in 1944 and gain US recognition in 1949 was that the CCP was unwilling to loosen its control over its base area in 1944 or the Chinese nation in 1949. Second, the shared interests/identity approach may not be effective enough to ameliorate frictions deriving from conflicting identities, as evidenced by China's failure to use the shared interest of easing the Taiwan Strait tension in 1955 to pave way for the establishment of a Sino-US diplomatic relationship.

Chapter 6 argues that, to a certain degree, the strategic management of identities and interests succeeded in helping China maintain a relatively benign regional environment without changing its communist and nationalist identities in the

defensive period. The relationship between China and the US was good from 1979 to 1989 and from 2002 to 2008, respectively, due to the salience of their shared strategic partnership and anti-terrorist colleague identity. Moreover, shared economic interests helped China gain “most favored nation status” from the US in 1994. Their shared strategic partnership and anti-terrorist collaborator identity also reduced the salience of China’s communist identity despite China’s suppression of the student protests in 1989 and failure to improve its human rights record in the 2000s. China also attempted to downplay its communist and nationalist identities to alleviate regional countries’ fear and ideological competition. For instance, it discontinued its support for the communist movements in regional countries from the late 1970s, maintaining a low-profile policy from 1990 to the 2000s. Meanwhile, the CCP maintained political control over the Chinese nation. Frictions occurred when China consolidated or defended its key nationalist interests; however, it attempted to use controlled military actions and diplomatic means to avoid undue escalation. In some cases, it succeeded, such as the 1988 seizure of land in the Spratly Islands and the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crisis.

However, in some cases, China’s restraint in using offensive means failed to prevent these frictions from overt escalation. For instance, China underestimated ASEAN’s strong criticism after its seizure of Mischief Reef in 1995. Moreover, because the CCP would not concede its authoritarian control over the Chinese nation, the ideological frictions had been salient until China constructed another shared identity/interest to which the US attached significance. For instance, the ideological frictions between China and the US were highly salient after the end of their strategic partnership in 1991, although China’s efforts to construct shared economic interests with the US smoothed these frictions in 1994.

Part 4 discusses to what extent China has preserved its communist identity and pursued important nationalist goals while thwarting a hard-balancing coalition in East

Asia in order to preserve a relatively benign regional environment in the stalemate period (Chapters 7–9).

Specifically, Chapter 7 examines how the CCP ensured its control over the Chinese nation while avoiding an anti-communist coalition in East Asia during the stalemate period. Chapters 8 to 9 analyze how China sought shared identities and interests with regional countries while pursuing or defending its own nationalist interests in a restrained manner to prevent the formation of a regional hard-balancing coalition operating against it.

Chapter 8 argues that based on economic partnerships, China is increasing the salience of its economic interests and constructing a shared pluralist identity with regional countries through BRI, despite their conflicting interests. The shared economic interests and pluralist identity could offset the negative effects of the nations' conflicting interests and, thus, could possibly prevent regional countries from joining a hard-balancing coalition.

Chapter 9 investigates how China pursued nationalist interests in a restrained manner. This is because although China has made significant efforts to seek shared interests and identities with regional countries and, thus, preserve the peaceful environment, its nationalist actions, if uncontrolled, will likely cause regional countries to prioritize conflicting identities and interests over shared ones and join a rival bloc to contain it. To systematically analyze China's restraint in pursuing offensive actions, this chapter presents three criteria. First, China's actual actions are compared with the actions that it could have taken before the incident. Second, China's actual actions are also compared with similar actions of regional states. Third, the chapter classifies regional countries' responses into five categories to analyze the effectiveness of China's strategy, that is, whether its restraint could avoid the breakdown of its relationships with regional countries. The first category is declarative response, which means the verbal assertion of sovereignty rights, such as protests

(Chubb, 2021, p.88). The second is demonstrative response, which means actions by regional states demonstrating their claimed sovereignty without directly or physically confronting China (Chubb, 2021, p.89). The third is low-intensity confrontation, in which regional states use limited means to directly confront China while cautiously avoiding overt escalation and remaining ready for de-escalation. The fourth is medium-intensity confrontation, in which regional states use stronger means than those of low-intensity confrontation to directly confront China but still also cautiously avoid over-escalation and remain ready for de-escalation. The fifth is high-intensity confrontation; here, regional states use forceful means to confront China with little if not no consideration for de-escalation. If the regional states choose high-intensity confrontation, their relationships with China will break down.

By examining China's gray zone operations, such as its patrolling of the first island chain and the China Coast Guards' actions regarding fishing and oil exploration, this chapter argues that in these operations, China has demonstrated restraint when compared with its most assertive options. China's actions in these gray zone operations have generally been of similar strength or even less assertive than other regional states' similar actions. In general, regional states' responses to China's actions have ranged from declarative response to medium-intensity response. Thus, China's strategy of pursuing or defending its nationalist interests in a restrained manner does manage the consequences of its nationalist actions. Moreover, China's upper limit of not occupying land features held by other claimants reduces the threatening potential of its gray zone actions. China's response to Japan's nationalization of the Diaoyu Islands also prevented tension from unduly escalating while consolidating China's sovereignty claims over this island chain. The one exception is the Scarborough Shoal incident of 2012, which is discussed in Chapter 10 as a case study of the SCS disputes.

Part 5 presents the thesis's case studies, including Chapters 10 and 11. These case studies survey regional flashpoints to analyze to what extent China has defended or

pursued important nationalist interests and maintained a relatively benign regional environment through its strategic management of identities and interests.

Chapter 10 covers the SCS disputes. Specifically, this chapter analyzes to what extent China has maintained a balance between pursuing critical nationalist interests and avoiding overtly escalating frictions and breaking down its relationship with regional countries through the strategic management of its interests. Like Chapter 9, Chapter 10 analyzes China's restraint in pursuing or defending its nationalist interests through a comparison between its actual actions and the available options before the incidents, a comparison between its actual actions and other regional states' similar actions, and the five categories of response specified in the preceding chapter. This chapter explores the two cases that have had a significant influence on China's sovereignty claims and relationships with regional countries/ASEAN: the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident and the Philippines' 2013 submission of arbitral awards to the PCA and its subsequent impact.

This chapter argues that China's strategic management of its interests was effective in striking a balance but had limitations. First, China's shared interests in the de-escalation with the Philippines or ASEAN did manage the tension in the SCS in the first phase (April 11–14), the first half of the third phase of the Scarborough Shoal incident in 2012, and the tensions aroused by the arbitral tribunal from 2013 to 2016. China's endorsement of ASEAN's shared interests in managing the disputes helped it alleviate ASEAN's pressure. Second, China's strategy of defending its interests in a restrained manner ensured space for dialogue, especially in the case of the arbitral tribunal.

However, in the Scarborough Shoal incident, China's reluctance to accept the Philippines' proposal for international arbitration led to its failure to construct shared interests in de-escalating the tensions from April to May. Further, although China showed restraint in not seizing the Shoal, this restraint could not compensate for the

Philippines' perceived loss and directly resulted in the breakdown of the relationship between the two countries from July 2012 to 2016.

Chapter 11 features a case study of the Taiwan issue. In this chapter, the thesis examines how Beijing attempted to strike a balance between achieving its nationalist goal to reunite with Taiwan, defending the one China principle, and maintaining a relatively stable Taiwan Strait through strategically managing identities and interests. This chapter reveals that, to a large extent, Beijing's strategic management of identities and interests failed in the context of the Taiwan issue. First, Beijing formed a shared one-China identity with the KMT through the 1992 consensus from 2008 to 2016. Meanwhile, Beijing downplayed its nationalist identity to the Taiwanese by tolerating the KMT's interpretation of China as the ROC and giving the KMT space to participate in international organizations. By doing so, the mainland defended the one China principle and a relatively peaceful Taiwan Strait without explicitly using force from 2008 to 2016. However, since Beijing was reluctant to recognize the ROC's legitimacy, the KMT was stigmatized as a traitor of the ROC and was unable to commence political talks with Beijing or revise textbook guidelines that promote de-Sinification. Consequently, non-coercive unification was impossible. Due to this reluctance, Beijing's effort to seek a shared one-China identity with the DPP also failed. Thus, Beijing increasingly relied on conducting military actions in a restrained manner to address the DPP's disobedience of the one China principle and maintain a relatively stable Taiwan Strait. Beijing succeeded in striking this balance from 2016 to 2019; however, although Beijing demonstrated restraint, the cross-strait tension escalated, particularly in 2020. The shrinking shared interests between Beijing and the US also led the US to become less tolerant of Beijing's emphasis on the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan, which resulted in Beijing's more escalatory military actions in 2020. As a result, Beijing is finding it increasingly difficult to strike a balance between maintaining a relatively peaceful Taiwan Strait and pursuing or defending the one China principle. As such, heightened tension or even conflict in the Taiwan Strait is likely to occur.

Empirical Contribution.

Besides reinforcing the main arguments of the thesis, the empirical chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 also make novel empirical contributions to the literature.

First, this thesis contributes to the literature with findings concerning China's assertiveness. Some analysts have argued that China has been increasingly assertive in consolidating its sovereignty claims (Hoang, 2016, p.188, Do, 2018, p.213-214), while other scholars have held that China has been restrained when consolidating these claims (Wu and You, 2019, p.54, Zhang, 2019, p.119)

The findings of this thesis demonstrate that China does show restraint when compared with its most assertive options. In many cases, China's actions are of similar strength or even less assertive than other claimant states, such as the CCG's governing of fishing activities. However, in some cases, China is more assertive than other claimants even if it is restrained when compared with its most assertive options. Nevertheless, China's restraint may not be able to compensate for other states' perceived significant damage to their sovereignty interests, as demonstrated by the case study of the Philippines' loss of the Scarborough Shoal in the SCS chapter. Moreover, while China shows restraint, it may heighten regional tension by increasing the strength of its actions, as demonstrated by this thesis's case study of Taiwan.

Second, the current literature has mainly focused on the China-US relationship or China's relationship with specific regional states (Boon and Ardy, 2017, p. 117, Smith, 2021, p.57), and a more holistic analysis of the general pattern of China's relationships with regional states is lacking (Boon and Ardy, 2017, p. 117, Smith, 2021, p.57). SIT categorizes actors into a limited number of groups to simplify the social world (Larson, 2015, p.326). The identities and interests that China shares with regional states accentuate the similarities between them. Analyzing China's attempts to create or increase the salience of its shared interests and identities with regional

states can contribute to a more holistic analysis of the general pattern of China's relationships with these regional states.

Limitations and Future application.

This thesis proceeded on the basis of the assumption that China will not experience a severe economic downturn. However, it should be recognized that any such severe economic downturn would have a negative influence on China's strategic management. A possible economic downturn would first decrease China's performance legitimacy and, thus, destabilize the communist regime. Second, China mainly uses its economic interests or partnerships to attract regional countries, and a severe economic downturn would substantially reduce this attractiveness. Third, a severe economic downturn would also hinder China's achievement of its nationalist goals because its military modernization would not have sufficient economic support.

Second, in Chapter 6, the thesis analyzes China's use of shared Asian and pluralist identities to downplay its communist identity in East Asia and prevent the formation of a regional anti-communist coalition. Downplaying its communist identity in East Asia is relatively easy because most regional countries do not value or prioritize democratic values. However, ideological competition is salient in international society, especially between China and Western countries. Currently, ideological divergences between Xinjiang and Hong Kong have already hindered the cooperation between China and European countries in important dimensions. For instance, in 2021, the European Union suspended its trade deal with China due to China's sanctions on a member of the European Union parliament, which was a tit-for-tat response to the EU's sanction on Chinese officials over China's Xinjiang policy (Ni, 2021). The trade deal has been regarded by many as China's attempt to prevent the US consolidation of a transatlantic partnership with the EU (Lau, 2020). Thus, the EU's suspension of the trade deal reflects how China's shared interests approach may fail to ameliorate ideological frictions. Thus, to what extent China's strategic management is effective in international society presents an interesting future research question.

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