

A Struggle for Leadership Recognition: The AIIB, Reactive Chinese Assertiveness, and Regional Order⁺

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the ongoing debate about “Chinese assertiveness”. The paper dissects the central articles on the topic and evaluates their conceptual and theoretical insights. It ascertains that the concept of assertiveness is poorly substantiated; that proponents of “Chinese assertiveness” largely claim that it derives from structural factors that produced effects in Chinese foreign policy behavior *prior to* the US pivot to Asia; and ultimately, that critical accounts, since they reject the very concept, lack theories that can explain Chinese assertiveness. This article attempts to address these shortcomings. First, the article reconceptualizes assertiveness and connects it to grand strategy change. Second, this change is reactive and occurs *after*, not prior to the US pivot. Third, in order to provide greater theoretical adequacy, this article combines material factors with institutional factors and show how they dialectically interact with status aspiration, as part of the struggle for the positional good of leadership. To show the

conceptual and theoretical plausibility of the argument, the paper outlines the dialectical interplay between positional barriers in the ADB and the US pivot to Asia, on the one hand, and reactive Chinese assertiveness and the AIIB, on the other.

Keywords: *US pivot, rebalancing strategy, TPP, Chinese assertiveness, AIIB, US-China relations, positional competition*

1. Introduction

In 2009-2010, “assertive” became the central signifier in the narrative about China’s rise (Swaine, 2010; Johnston, 2013; Jerdén, 2014). Despite attacks against its analytical usefulness and pleas for other concepts to be used in the analysis of Chinese foreign policy (Chen, Pu and Johnston, 2014: 180-183), the notion of “Chinese assertiveness” is still flourishing. In fact, significant developments in Chinese foreign policy continue to provide a fertile environment for its continued use. Recent studies claim that China indeed is *more* assertive now, but that it started to take shape *after*, not prior to the US pivot to Asia, and especially *after* Xi Jinping 习近平’s assumption of power (Yan, 2014; Deng, 2014: 156-158.). Hence, while Chinese assertiveness is questionable as a new empirical phenomenon from 2009 up until Xi Jinping’s entrance on the central political stage (Johnston, 2013; Jerdén, 2014), the real assertive turn occurred around 2013. Thus, instead of rejecting Chinese assertiveness, we should turn the causal arrow on its head – it was not Chinese assertiveness that prompted the US pivot, as is commonly understood; it was the US pivot that prompted Chinese assertiveness. Moreover, the debate about Chinese assertiveness connects to the question of whether China has abandoned the strategy of “keeping a low profile” (KLP) in favor of the strategy of “striving for achievement” (SFA) (Yan, 2014). I argue that China certainly has done

so, and the clearest empirical example we can see of this new activism and leadership is the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

The concept of assertiveness is poorly defined and is still tossed around by journalists, think-tank experts, and IR-scholars without careful consideration as to its meaning. The theoretical accounts of previous studies that explain either the presence or the absence of Chinese assertiveness offer little relevance when confronted with new empirical facts. There is thus a need to make two argument heuristics: reconceptualization and theoretical reversal (Abbott, 2004). In order to make the concept more precise, I define assertiveness as “standing up for one’s needs, wants, and rights”. In order to provide greater theoretical adequacy, I combine two structural factors – structural-material and structural-institutional factors – and show how they dialectically interact with the teleological cause of status aspiration, and the efficient cause of the US pivot to Asia. This is essentially an account of structural contradiction combined with the domestic intentional driver and the strategic move that prompts Chinese assertiveness.

China’s rise and the institutional underrepresentation in the Asian Development Bank (ADB) engender a disequilibrium or a regional influence deficit that has China’s punching below its weight. Yet reforms are stalled, and faced with fundamental structural change, Washington launches the US pivot to Asia to maintain its sole superpower status and global leadership. The US pivot “locks out” China and challenges its long-standing restorationist status ambition as Washington updates its vision for an Americancentric world order apt for the 21st century. This strategic move prompts China’s reactive assertiveness; it pushes China to “stand up” for its status aspiration by assuming regional leadership and performing the role of a responsible great power, clearly manifested in the creation of the AIIB.

The article is structured as follows. After the introduction follows two sections where I tap into the IR-debate about Chinese assertiveness both conceptually and theoretically. I then further explore the roots of the concept of assertiveness in order to provide a solid ground for my reconceptualization. Then the theoretical section follows. In the subsequent empirical sections, I outline the dialectical interplay between positional barriers in the ADB and the US pivot to Asia, on the one hand, and reactive Chinese assertiveness and the AIIB, on the other.

2. Tapping into the Chinese Assertiveness Debate – The Conceptual Problem

Even though several articles have tried to make sense of assertiveness, significant conceptual problems remain. Alastair Johnston highlights that “there is still no consensus definition of ‘assertive’ in the international relations literature”, neither is there any “international relations theory that employs a typology of state behavior that includes ‘assertive’ as a category”. Johnston proposes his own definition, stating that assertive diplomacy “explicitly threatens to impose costs on another actor that are clearly higher than before.” (Johnston, 2013: 9-10) He justifies this definition by emphasizing that it emerges “from usage” and connects to the standard suppositions among analysts and commentators. The definition is problematic in that it closely resembles coercive diplomacy and the concepts of compellence and deterrence, depending on the active or inactive nature of the threat. These are already accepted IR-concepts, which makes Johnston’s definition superfluous.

Thomas Christensen accentuates the advantages of assertive Chinese foreign policies as he juxtaposes “creative, constructive, and assertive policies” with “reactive, conservative, and aggressive ones”

(Christensen, 2011: 65). Christensen offers conceptual insights by departing from the treatment of assertiveness as synonymous to aggressiveness and territorial revisionism, and shows how assertiveness connects to the multilateral role China plays. However, he only associates assertiveness with system-supportive roles, or roles that does not challenge the incumbent, something the concept does not necessarily have to imply; neither does reactive have to stand in juxtaposition to creative and assertive.

Remarkably, both Johnston and Christensen conclude that China is not more assertive, yet the same conclusion is imbued with diametrically opposed meanings. For Johnston, China is *not* more assertive now than compared to the past, thus *less* aggressive or less coercive than assumed. For Christensen, China is not assertive, or not embracing a more active and constructive role, thus *more* aggressive or more abrasive than before. Such a large span between two definitions of the same concept is untenable.

Walter Lee makes another important contribution by introducing the psychological usage of the concept of assertiveness. Yet his reconceptualization is too broad and he fails to provide a precise definition of assertiveness. The many and multifaceted meanings of assertiveness that Lee brings forth makes the definition ambiguous in how it exactly relates to the term (Lee, 2013: 515-517.). Lee also seems to imply that reactivity is a disqualifier for assertiveness, or at least indicating that reactive assertiveness is not real assertiveness. However, assertiveness often arises in the face of opposition and can indeed make perfect sense as reactive.

Björn Jerdén conceptualizes Chinese assertiveness in terms of foreign policy change and makes a significant contribution to the definitional parameters of assertiveness (Jerdén, 2014). Even so, his scrutiny of various foreign policy issue-areas fails to see the forest for

the trees – he misses the bigger picture. More than just foreign policy change, assertiveness is about *grand strategy change*.

3. Tapping into the Chinese Assertiveness Debate – The Theoretical Problem

Although claims of Chinese assertiveness display a tremendous selection on the dependent variable, with Chinese assertiveness encompassing many different types of foreign policy behavior in various diplomatic stages, the independent variable allegedly explaining Chinese assertiveness is starkly consistent: the redistribution of power in the international system serves as the primary cause behind China's assertive behavior.

Michael Yahuda argues that four related developments account for China's new assertiveness: a sense of a shifting balance of power, expanding national interests, growing military capabilities, and heightening nationalism (Yahuda, 2013). The first factor, the change in the balance of power essentially explains the second factor: "China's emergence as a global and regional player of increasing significance has also had the effect of expanding its interests beyond the narrow confines of the immediate defense of its land mass." (*ibid.*: 449) The third factor, increasing military capabilities, explains China's new maritime assertiveness, whereas the fourth factor, nationalism, albeit standing on a somewhat more independent ground, relates to the other stated developments.

Suisheng Zhao argues that the "narrowing" of the "power gap" and China's successful "weathering the 2009 global financial crisis" lead the Chinese leadership to "see a shift in the world balance of power in China's favor", which caused a "notable turn" in China's foreign policy behavior (Zhao, 2015: 379). Aaron Friedberg argues that as China's

relative power grows so does its rational calculations of how far it can push forward. What explains China's assertive behavior from 2009 and onwards is the "increasingly favorable leadership assessments of the nation's relative power and of the threats and opportunities that it confronts." (Friedberg, 2014: 143) Similarly, He Kai and Feng Huiyun argue that as China's power expands so does its national interests, and it is nothing unusual if China adopts a more assertive posture in the process (He and Feng, 2012).

The redistribution of power thus serves as the primary cause behind Chinese assertiveness, which, in turn, triggered the American response – the US "pivot" to Asia.¹ This scenario fits well with mainstream formulations of rise and decline realism: the rising great power acts to revise, the declining hegemon reacts to preserve. While I do not neglect the importance of fundamental structural change, the standard account of Chinese assertiveness is questionable.

Both Alastair Johnston and Björn Jerdén provide empirically rigorous accounts that, nonetheless, are theoretically Janus-faced. They are theoretically rich in explaining the *presence* of the Chinese assertiveness narrative despite the empirical *absence* of new assertive behavior, yet theoretically thin, for obvious reasons, in explaining China's actual assertive behavior. Since they reject it, or rather could not observe it at the time of their studies, there is no need in developing a theory that explains Chinese assertiveness. Jerdén convincingly argues that "China's new assertiveness existed only as a social fact within the bounds of the intersubjective knowledge of a particular discourse, and not as an objectively true phenomenon external to this discourse" (Jerdén, 2014: 87). Significantly, Jerdén claims that it was not China, but the US pivot, that broke the regional status quo (*ibid.*). As such, if contemporary state of affairs displays such a thing as Chinese assertiveness it was either initiated or exacerbated *after* the United States

launched its grand strategy of rebalancing to Asia. This connects to recent studies that claim that China indeed is *more* assertive now, but that it started to take shape *after* the US pivot to Asia, and in particular *after* Xi Jinping's assumption of power (Deng, 2014: 156-158; Yan, 2014: 128-129).

Walter Lee develops a psychocultural theoretical framework to explain the *absence* of Chinese assertive behavior, despite the *presence* of the Chinese assertiveness narrative. Lee claims that "China is not assertive", but rather an insecure and anxious state. He hints of a possible assertive turn with the inauguration of Xi Jinping, but rejects it for not being a true form of assertiveness as it is merely "reactive" (Lee, 2013: 531-532). However, in contrast to Lee, I disagree that reactive Chinese assertiveness is indicative of an "insecure" or "anxious" China; instead, Chinese assertiveness is part of a goal-driven, cohesive and confident grand strategy that pushes China to "strive for achievement" and affirms that it is ready to assume the responsibilities of a true great power, despite US opposition. Even Barack Obama seems to agree. In an interview with the famous television talk show host Charlie Rose, Obama mentioned that Xi Jinping "is younger and more forceful and more robust and more confident perhaps than some leaders of the past."²

In sum, while Chinese assertiveness is questionable as a new empirical phenomenon from 2009 up until Xi Jinping's entrance on the central political stage, the real assertive turn occurred around 2013. Thus, instead of rejecting Chinese assertiveness, we should turn the causal arrow on its head – it was not Chinese assertiveness that prompted the US pivot; it was the US pivot that prompted Chinese assertiveness.³

Certainly, the primary material cause is fundamental structural change or redistribution of power in the international system. However, in combination with sluggish institutions in a certain domain of the

international order, rapid structural change gives rise to a disequilibrium, or a disjuncture between material and institutional factors. At the same time, faced with the rise and growing influence of China, Washington projected a new blueprint for regional order unto the political stage that largely denies China a leading position and threatens its status identity as a returning power. As the United States seeks to “lock in” the Asia-Pacific to an Americancentric world order, it simultaneously “locks out” states that do not buy into the framework, prompting a Chinese response. I will develop the theoretical framework further below and then apply it empirically, but first we have to dig deeper into the concept of assertiveness.

4. From a Reciprocal Logic to a Dialectical Logic of Assertiveness

The popularity of the concept of assertiveness increased in the 1970s and 1980s as it was disseminated among a wider public in the United States. Through widespread books, “assertiveness training” was launched as a technique by which diffident persons could train to behave more assuredly (Smith, 1975; Galassi, 1977; Alberti, 1986). To adopt an assertive posture is advocated as useful in the workplace (Paterson, 2000) or more generally in standing up for one’s rights, and is promoted by professionals in the field of psychology and psychotherapy as well as by a wide array of personal development coaches, readily available on the Internet in more or less unprofessional forms. According to the Counseling and Mental Health Center of University of Texas (CMHC), assertiveness is communicating needs and wants clearly; expressing your feelings and opinions; and “standing up for your rights when they are threatened”.⁴ Importantly, assertiveness focuses on the pronouncement of these needs, wants, and rights in a way that does not give room for submission, neither for aggressive behavior (Bloom, Coburn and

Pearlman, 1975: 6).

What follows is a tripartite division of behavior into passive, assertive, and aggressive (Lee, 2013). Being passive relates to a conflict-avoidant posture where needs and wants are unspoken, which compels others to decide in your place and take advantage of you; whereas being aggressive is threatening and dominating, with needs and wants articulated in a hostile manner. Conversely, being assertive is expressing your stance while simultaneously respecting the positions of others. It is about drawing clear lines for acceptable conduct, which is deemed necessary, and possible, without infringing on the boundaries of others (Katherine, 2000). In other words, being assertive is to take a *middle ground* position, located between passive and aggressive stances:

Assertive communication of personal opinions, needs, and boundaries has been defined as communication that diminishes none of the individuals involved in the interaction (...) Assertiveness is conceptualized as the behavioral middle ground, lying between ineffective passive and aggressive responses.

(Duckworth, 2003: 16)

In view of this, assertiveness is conceived as positive-sum behavior: needs, wants, and rights are stated clearly without disrespecting those of others. We can connect this view of assertiveness to what Charles Taylor outlines as the egalitarian principle of sociality of the modern ideal of moral order, which takes the form of a society of mutual benefit whose members are fundamentally equal (Taylor, 2004: 19-22). For instance, by standing up for your rights or the “justified demands we make on others”, middle ground assertiveness implies that demands are respected and that the “correlative duties” associated with rights (Lang, 2015: 74-75) are accepted. In other words, it assumes reciprocity. The middle

ground notion thus imbues assertiveness with a benign logic as it implies coexistence with differences.

However, conflicts that ensue because of incompatible stances are not problematized as the middle ground conception overlooks the struggle about “who gets to draw the line”. Problematically, the middle ground notion assumes a contextual setting with clearly drawn lines of needs, wants, and rights that do not infringe on others. It excludes points of disputation where power cannot be transcended.

If we dig a little deeper, we find that the middle ground notion does not reverberate well with the etymological roots of assertive. “Assert” stems from the Latin word *asserere*, which means “to put one’s hand on the head of a slave” – either to free him or to appropriate him for servitude – or “to join to oneself”.⁵ In the 16th and 17th century, “assert” was introduced to the English language and its definition relates to its original dual and relational ontology: to claim and appropriate (for example a slave, a piece of land or property); to maintain the cause of (for example to defend or to protect); or to set free, to ensure liberty (for example from sin or from slavery).⁶ To assert is then to claim some-“thing”, or to insist upon one’s right to or possession of some-“thing”. Being assertive is not merely communicative, it is performative: to insist upon one’s needs, wants, and rights is to “take means to secure them” and “to maintain practically a potentially disputed claim to anything”.⁷ In the case of this article, the thing to be claimed is the “positional good” of regional leadership.⁸

Needs, wants, and rights always stand in relation to someone or something. By asserting something one is simultaneously breathing life into its opposite, into its counterassertion. Hence within the definitional parameters of assertiveness enters a dialectical logic, which opens up a glade for the departure of the middle ground conception.

G.W.F. Hegel views the struggle for recognition as productive and transformational. As put forward by Alexandre Kojève:

Man, to be really, truly “man,” and to know that he is such, must, therefore, *impose* the idea that he has of himself on beings other than himself: he must be recognized by the others (...) he must *transform* the (natural and human) world in which he is not recognized into a world in which this recognition takes place.

(Kojève, 1980: 11, emphasis added)

In Hegel’s classic account, the struggle for recognition involves a “life-and-death struggle” that ends when the Slave, by choosing life, succumbs himself to the domination of the Master. The fear of death sets in motion a “humanizing”, progressive process through which the Slave “overcomes” himself and improves himself, through labor, to the point that universal recognition is finally granted. That is why “History is the history of the working Slave.”⁹ Hegel essentially views the struggle for recognition as part of a process where the productive course of history is steered towards a romantic, universal, and harmonious end. It is questionable if the dialectical process, in which the struggle for recognition assumes its historical linearity, ever reaches its universal telos. In one sense, however, we can argue that it has – today man is institutionally recognized as man no matter if he is, superficially speaking, black, white, yellow or red, or rather, the universal declaration of human rights encompasses all mankind. However, the struggle continues.

Theodor Adorno rejects the positive character of Hegel’s dialectic, instead he views it as repressive, a process whereby the Self is seeking to conquer the Other by negating it, imposing identity by subduing difference (Adorno, 2004). This is a colonial process writ large. The

historical process of internal pacification, national homogenization, and the growth of the administrative power of the nation-state, through which nations and borders became “commensurate” and ethnically “purified”, illustrates this negative dialectical logic well. Externally, the nation-state exercised absolute sovereign rights, while internally, the dominant culture suppressed difference and denied rights to people that “deviated” from the national standard. The concept of internal colonialism emerged to capture this process (Gonzalez Casanova, 1965).

The point here is that negating forces give rise to resistance, as elucidated by Aimé Césaire in his appraisal of Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture:

A false universalism has accustomed us to so many excuses and pretexts, the rights of man have so often been reduced to no more than the rights of European man (...) In history and in the domain of the rights of man, [Toussaint Louverture] was for blacks the architect. [He] fought for *the transformation of formal rights into real rights*; his was a combat for the recognition of man.

(Quoted in Nesbitt, 2004: 29, emphasis added)

Simply put, assertiveness arises out of contradictions. We are “called upon” to assert our political claims in the face of opposition, to “stand up” for our needs, wants, and rights when they are negated.

5. Reconceptualizing Assertiveness

In order to make the concept more precise, I define assertiveness as “standing up for one’s needs, wants, and rights”. I define needs as foundational, in that they pertain to necessities such as security, whereas I define wants as aspirational, in that they pertain to ambition and status. Rights relates to both, as well as it stands by itself.

Needs can be understood in relation to the natural right of self-preservation, and by extension sovereign rights and regime survival; wants can be understood in relation to rights and responsibilities associated with a particular status. Standing by itself, rights relate to a struggle for recognition. Yet once entities are recognized as sovereign, the struggle for recognition either ends or takes on a different form. In the first instance, states instead start to assert their *needs* as sovereign entities, primarily the need for security. For example, after the decolonization process, the newly independent states started to struggle to secure their borders and regimes. Here we are dealing with a “*struggle for existence*”. In the second instance, certain states continue to strive for recognition, not for recognition as states *per se*, but as *certain kinds* of states, which relates assertiveness to aspirational *wants*, to positional ambitions, and the specific rights and responsibilities that come with a certain status. Such is the struggle for great power status and regional leadership.¹⁰ Here we are dealing with a “*contest for distinction*”.¹¹ These struggles are not mutually exclusive; a state can be engaged in both struggles simultaneously, and China is a good example of this.

Significantly, in the struggle for recognition as an entity – for manhood or statehood – recognition becomes the end, yet in the struggle for recognition as a certain kind of entity – for great power status and regional leadership – recognition becomes a means to an end; a means to the end of positional attainment and international influence. Certainly, a powerful, wealthy, and advanced nation cannot ride solo – it needs a “circle of recognition” that draws to its leadership (Ringmar, 2002). In this sense, assertiveness is prosocial.¹² Even so, it does not remove the central telos of influence and power.

In terms of standing up for one’s “needs”, China’s “core interests” becomes the object of assertiveness as they “have more to do with China’s regime survival and national security than with its great power

aspirations” (Zhao, 2013: 34). This is not a new phenomenon; it has rather been a longstanding and necessary priority for China. However, in terms of standing up for one’s “wants”, China’s great power aspirations become the object of assertiveness – clearly symbolized by the “Chinese Dream” of “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”; clearly teleological in the two centennial goals and the grand goal of gaining “wealth, strength, and honor” (Schell and Delury, 2013: 8); and clearly empirical in the establishment of the AIIB.

The debate about Chinese assertiveness specifically concerns three things: its meaning, its novelty, and “what China is being assertive about” (Zeng, Xiao and Breslin, 2015: 245). The aforementioned briefly outlined the meaning of Chinese assertiveness, which, however, will be further justified and discussed below. Regarding its novelty, Chinese assertiveness, in terms of pursuing leadership, is new, albeit reactive, and China’s assertive behavior particularly concerns this status aspiration. This connects to another aspect of Chinese assertiveness, namely whether China has abandoned Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平’s famous grand strategic “lying low” dictum and his specific instruction “do not seek leadership”.¹³ The China 2020 Research Team, spearheaded by Zhou Qiren 周其仁 of the National School of Development at Peking University, claims that given the changing global context and the expansion of Chinese interests “China will no longer be able to continue with such a passive policy”, yet argues that it still remains the guiding principle for Chinese foreign conduct (China 2020 Research Team, 2014: 90). Yan Xuetong 閻學通, on the other hand, argues that China has abandoned the strategy of “keeping a low profile” (KLP) and now put emphasis on the strategy of “striving for achievement” (SFA) (Yan, 2014). Yan’s argument is largely supported by interviews I conducted with international relations scholars and think-tank experts from several universities and institutes in Beijing and Shanghai during 2-18 July

2016. For instance, one Chinese international relations scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences made use of an illustrative analogy to illustrate the point:

You can compare it to a bird in a cage. The cage is the principle of keeping a low profile, and the bird is striving for achievement. Before, although the bird could not flee from the cage, the cage could be enlarged or reduced. Today the cage does not exist anymore, and the bird is free. Before, keeping a low profile was the grand strategic position of China, but now keeping a low profile is only tactical, and striving for achievement is at the core of China's grand strategy. I think this is the mainstream view by now.¹⁴

The clearest empirical example we can see of this new activism and leadership is the creation of the AIIB. The importance of “making friends” (Yan, 2014) and providing international public goods makes it faulty, however, to denote China as a “post-responsible power” (Deng, 2014); neither is China a “responsible stakeholder” that passively accepts the US characterization of responsibility. What is rather at stake is a “clash of responsibilities”, as part of the positional struggle for regional leadership.

6. Assertiveness in the Contemporary International Realm

In one sense, assertiveness could be regarded as a central realist concept: in a self-help world, states struggle to assert their foundational needs. Yet the atomistic realist self overlooks the relational nature of man, and by extension the relational ontology of the state (Ringmar, 1996b, 2002)¹⁵, which is necessary to incorporate in order to make sense of assertiveness as a struggle for aspirational wants. A great power desiring to play a regional leadership role cannot assert its wants in isolation –

it must build its “reputational capital” (Stinchcombe, 1998: 293) through “honorable deeds” (Lebow, 2016: 90-91), in particular by providing public goods, and to do so it needs a “circle of recognition” that defer to its leadership (Ringmar, 2002). At the same time, the logic of positional competition still applies to the struggle between leadership contenders for the acquiescence of secondary states.

In terms of standing up for one’s aspirational wants, assertiveness becomes intertwined with the concepts of status and role. Status is a set of rights and responsibilities integral to a *social position* (Linton, 1936). It is a structural concept manifested as membership in a specific grouping as well as an actor’s relative standing within the grouping (Larson, Paul and Wohlforth, 2014: 7). The institutional hallmark of the present international system turns status into a formal institutional position (Pouliot, 2014). Yet “every status has its ‘dynamic aspect’ – a role” (Linton, 1936; Martin, 2009: 6). While status locates actors hierarchically within social orders, roles specify the expected and appropriate behaviors associated with a particular social position. When actors put the rights and responsibilities that explicitly or implicitly constitute statuses into effect, they perform roles. The role is “what the status calls on one to do” (*ibid.*). In particular, three types of leadership roles stand out: structural, entrepreneurial, and intellectual leadership roles. Structural leadership is a matter of translating material capabilities into leverage in the bargaining process; entrepreneurial leadership is about agenda setting, policy innovation, and institutional brokerage; and intellectual leadership concerns the production of ideas and shared understandings that come to shape the institutions (Young, 1991).

A superpower should play a global leadership role, whereas a great power should play a regional leadership role. A world without superpowers implies a “world of regions” with coexisting great powers (Buzan, 2011), “multiple modernities” and “varieties of capitalism”

(Hobson, 2012; Bobbitt, 2002). Conversely, a world with a sole superpower implies one global security hierarchy (full-spectrum dominance, command of the global commons), one mode of liberal capitalist modernity (global market access), and global intracivilizational relations (the End of History). The *chief issue of contestation* between the superpower and aspiring great powers “is the former’s intervention to limit, counter, or shape the actions of the latter” (Huntington, 1999: 46).

The particular type of contradiction that forms the dialectical foundation of my argument is the discrepancy between *status aspiration* and the institutional environment that prevents the materialization of that aspiration, an institutional condition I term *status disavowal*. Status disavowal either takes the form of a ceiling to positional enhancement that freezes the relative standing or social exclusion that denies membership. The discrepancy between status aspiration and status disavowal gives rise to a sense of *aspiration strain*. The specific type of aspiration strain we are dealing with is the feeling of being unable to reach a desired status goal within the status quo. The relationship between status disavowal, status aspiration, and aspiration strain becomes salient with fundamental structural change. The disjuncture between material and institutional factors must interact with status ambition and a sense of aspiration strain to make empirical sense. Yet what triggers assertiveness?

First of all, status concerns apply to both rising and declining actors (Lipset, 2008: 309). Max Weber accentuates that vested interests “react with special sharpness” when they feel threatened by the rise of new actors.¹⁶ This reaction particularly takes the form of exclusionary social closure. Social closure occurs when “one group of competitors takes some externally identifiable characteristic of another group ... as a pretext for attempting their exclusion.”¹⁷ A specific “quality” is expected

from all those who wish to belong to the circle.¹⁸ When competitors make use of certain characteristics for exclusionary purposes they are essentially engaging in practices of delegitimation and relegitimation (Hurd, 2007; Schweller and Pu, 2011). Social closure is a significant exclusionary mechanism in the struggle for the positional good of leadership.

Fundamental structural change leads the relatively declining superpower to reassess the institutional environment of the regional order most important for future progress – the region of the rising challenger. Realists stress that concerns about relative gains and distributive matters make states more reluctant to cooperate than liberals assume (Grieco, 1988). This becomes particularly evident in times of fundamental structural change when entrenched stakeholders or the dominant powers try to either block institutional change by maintaining a ceiling to positional enhancement, or create new institutions that maintain their special status and “lock out” competitors through exclusionary social closure.

This exclusionary mechanism of positional appropriation through social closure is transformational; it triggers strategic rivalry and positional competition. It brings about a sense of aspiration strain in the rising state who experiences the declining power to be disavowing its status aspiration. Tudor Onea aptly elucidates this aspect:

In relation to the dominant state, rising powers prefer adopting a conciliatory approach, which would allow them to consolidate their position without triggering a clash. When rising powers accept the risk of a rivalry pitting them against the dominant state, they do so only *after* the latter blocks their further advancement.

(Onea, 2014: 127, emphasis in original)

To enhance status, the rising power seeks to relieve its frustration by carving out a parallel institutional arrangement that can satisfy its national desire for status. When institutional reality contradicts aspirational wants, assertiveness becomes part of a struggle to release the strain by striving for the realization of one's aspirations. Assertiveness thus involves a relationship between actuality and potentiality. It turns into a matter of becoming something you want to be, and to fulfill your potential you have to assume the role and *insist* on playing it in front of others. The role must be played in a convincing manner in front of a significant audience that recognizes the performance (Ringmar, 1996a; Ringmar, 2012). With the establishment of the AIIB, China successfully performs the role of a responsible great power and assembles a significant circle of recognition that defers to its leadership.

What follows is the empirical section, which roughly outlines the dialectical logic and the interplay between status disavowal (the ceiling to positional enhancement in the ADB and the exclusion from America's blueprint for regional order manifested by the US pivot) and China's status aspiration, which gives rise to China's reactive assertiveness (exemplified by the establishment of the AIIB).

7. The Ceiling to Positional Enhancement in the Asian Development Bank

China is in fact facing a positional barrier or a ceiling to status enhancement in the Asian Development Bank (ADB), led by Japan and the United States. The president of the ADB is by tradition Japanese, and in terms of subscribed capital and voting power, Japan and the United States widely exceed the influence of China. They lead the organization and have no plans on giving up their positions to an ascendant China.

Whereas Japan and the United States account for 15.68% and 15.57% of the subscribed capital and 12.84% and 12.75% of the voting rights respectively, China merely accounts for 6.47 % of the subscribed capital and 5.48 % of the voting rights.¹⁹

In contrast to the metaphor of the “glass ceiling” used to describe the barriers to social mobility women and minorities are facing in the domestic sphere, the ceiling that prevents China’s status enhancement is better compared to a thick titanium wall impossible to shatter in thousand pieces since dominant states do not allow for free international political competition within the organizations they control. This is evidenced by the fact that the ADB has not yet heeded the 2009 G20 declaration stating that the president of an international institution should be appointed through an “open, transparent and merit-based process”.²⁰ Instead, the head position of the ABD is still reserved for Japanese candidates and the selection process is conducted in secrecy.

Moreover, in a study on donor influence in the ADB, Christopher Kilby finds that humanitarian factors do not affect lending decisions; rather donor interests decide the allocation of lending. More specifically, the American influence in the ADB is generally directed toward deciding over issues of access (i.e. denying funding for certain countries, such as China); whereas Japan has had greater say over the level of lending. Kirby concludes that the merits of ADB is questionable on humanitarian and economic grounds, instead the existence of the ADB is political in nature (Kilby, 2006).

In essence, “institutions are fraught with tensions because they inevitably raise resource considerations and invariably have distributional consequences. Any given set of rules or expectations, formal or informal, that patterns action will have unequal implications for resource allocation.” (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010: 8) Institutions are not mere neutral problem-solving arenas, but configurations of privilege

and sites of power and contestation (Hurrell, 2007: 11). Hence, within the ADB the ceiling is unbreakable. To enhance status and influence the direction of development finance, the only option is to erect a parallel structure.

8. The US Pivot and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP): The Dialectics of “Locking In” and “Locking Out”

Against the background of Asia-Pacific emerging as the new world center, and China on its way to becoming the second largest economy in the world,²¹ the material logic of relative decline finally became noticeable through the efficient cause of the 2008 Financial Crisis. Only then did the contradiction between the US sole superpower status and the absence of an American economic leadership role in the world’s most significant strategic space become fully perceptible. Consequently, “the rise of China”, which has “permanently changed the geopolitical landscape”, arose as “the major geostrategic challenge” in the consciousness of American foreign policy elites (Bader, 2013: 2-3). Faced with this challenge, it was necessary for the United States to act.

The representational force of Barack Obama’s famous speech to the Australian parliament in November 2011 vividly outlined America’s vision for regional and world order:

The currents of history may ebb and flow, but over time they move – decidedly, decisively – in a single direction. History is on the side of the free – free societies, free governments, free economies, free people. And the future belongs to those who stand firm for those ideals, in this region and around the world....This is the future we seek in the Asia-Pacific – security, prosperity and dignity for all. That’s what we stand for. That’s who we are. That’s the future we will

pursue, in partnership with allies and friends, and with every element of American power.²²

Therefore, as stressed by Hillary Clinton in her “America’s Pacific Century” article, “one of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will ... be to *lock in* a substantially increased investment – diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise – in the Asia-Pacific region.”²³ Similarly, Jeffrey Bader stated that the intention behind joining the East Asian Summit (EAS) was to “[beat] back proposals for regional integration that would have excluded the United States” and set “the basis for US leadership in the new emerging regional architecture of the Asia-Pacific region.” (Bader, 2013: 144) Yet the TPP is of far greater importance in the struggle for leadership as there is nothing that guarantees that the EAS does not become another watered-down regional institution that loses relevance subsequent to US efforts to control its trajectory. That is why the pivot will be “on the rocks” if the TPP fails,²⁴ it would leave, as Larry Summers plainly states, “the grand strategy of rebalancing US foreign policy toward Asia with no meaningful nonmilitary component.”²⁵ Instead, competitors would be setting the rules and “undermining” US global leadership.²⁶ The stakes are high; America’s prestige and influence “are on the line”.²⁷ Hence, the rebalancing strategy to Asia “cannot be based on political and military initiatives alone”, it must “be backed by rejuvenated American leadership in trade and investment” (Solís and Vaïsse, 2013).

Through the TPP the United States sets down the civilizational markers for the twenty-first century, counters state capitalism, updates its “Open Door” policy²⁸ by targeting behind-the-border regulatory barriers, and offers to free East Asia from its outdated neo-mercantilist trade rules. Despite East Asia’s impressive economic development, higher standards and new rules for the twenty-first century are necessary

to “create not just more growth, but better growth”.²⁹ Barack Obama’s message is unequivocal: “[Y]ou have to meet higher standards. If you don’t, you’re out.”³⁰ As America “locks in” it simultaneously “locks out”. Yet as much as the TPP is about keeping China out or getting it to accept subordination and a ready-made ruleset, it is about keeping Japan in. For without Japan’s participation in the TPP, as Kurt Campbell makes clear, the US-Japan relationship “is going to wither”,³¹ and the fight for the liberal cause would be utterly weakened. Japan’s decision to join the TPP has rightly been labelled a “game changer”,³² given that it is the most advanced economy in the region and effectively serves as America’s Trojan horse in the fight against an exclusive East Asian bloc.³³

In sum, the TPP is designed to *change* the scope, the rules of the game and the normative underpinnings of the regional economic order; to *counter* the emerging economic centrality of China; and to put the material forces of history under American institutional subduance so as to *steer* economic development, *ensure* American leadership, and *maintain* US sole superpower status. The TPP warns those that neither adjust to US rules and standards nor embrace US values that they will “locked out” from an Americancentric world order.

9. China’s Understanding of the US Pivot to Asia

China’s self-conception, embodied by the political elite, is that of being a returning power, not a rising one; a country preordained to restore its past glory. In view of that, China is pervaded by one predominant state telos: to amass wealth and power and regain global respect so as to restore its former position atop the global hierarchy (Schell and Delury, 2013; Pillsbury, 2015; Liu, 2015; Yan, 2001; Callahan, 2008). Imbued with this self-understanding and sense of mission, the US pivot

was experienced as a hostile move threatening China's grand restorationist aspiration.

The high-profile speeches, declarations, and diplomatic performances of the Obama administration were seen as simulacra of a Cold War mentality still dominating American strategic thinking. The Chinese elite perceived the US pivot to be going against the prevailing regional trend toward peace, stability, and cooperation. The pivot was widely viewed as an antagonistic move that stepped up military encirclement and economic containment of a rising China (Swaine, 2012). In 2014, the views of the Chinese leadership about US strategic intentions were summarized in a five-point consensus, namely that the United States is seeking to contain China; to isolate China; to diminish China; to sabotage China's leadership; and to internally divide China (Rudd, 2015: 14). In other words, the US pivot was experienced as an attempt to "lock out" China.

After three decades of continuous increase in China's power status, the US pivot signposted that China would not be awarded the status and influence it so desires and feels it deserves. In view of this, China is punching below its weight. Yan Xuetong makes this sentiment clear: "China's economic status has risen, but the country has yet to garner commensurate respect from the international community."³⁴ Wang Jisi 王緝思 makes a similar argument: "China deserves more respect as first-class power," which means that the "the United States should take China's interests and aspirations more seriously than before, and should change its international behavior."³⁵ However, the US pivot to Asia indicated the very opposite.

In the American blueprint for regional order, China is sidelined and denied a leadership position, signifying a challenge to China's grand aspirational want. Chinese assertiveness arose out of this contradiction; "lying low" was no longer tenable. As China "stands up" for its

aspiration, it needs to assemble a significant circle of recognition that approves of its leadership. With Xi Jinping in the top position, China started to “strive for achievement”.

10. Standing Up for China’s Grand Aspiration

With the inauguration of Xi Jinping, China adopted a more assertive grand strategic approach. At the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012, the “two centennial goals” were set: by 2021, China is poised to become a moderately prosperous society, and by 2049, a prosperous, strong, culturally advanced, harmonious, democratic, and modern socialist country. Less than two weeks after Xi’s assumption of power, he issued his first slogan – the China Dream. While visiting the “The Road Toward Renewal” exhibition at the National Museum of China, Xi professed, “to realize the great renewal of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream for the Chinese nation in modern history.”³⁶ This long-standing restorationist ethos was now placed at the very center of China’s official discourse.

The China Dream has an implicit grand strategic element, which is not spelled out directly in official discourses. A distinguished Professor from Shanghai used an amusing analogy to illustrate what is at stake: “Xi Jinping launched the China Dream when China is number two in the world. Do you think when he wakes up from his dream that he wants to be number three? Of course not, he wants to be number one.”³⁷ Another Professor from Beijing made a similar statement: “Internationally, it means that China should eventually become a superpower. China should have decisive influence in Asia and the Western Pacific at American cost.”³⁸ America’s project for regional order stands in direct contradiction to this positional telos.

At the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, Xi Jinping expressed that China is engaged in a long-drawn-out “contest over the international order”. With a mixture of caution and confidence, Xi outlines a progressive trajectory nonetheless:

While being keenly aware of the protracted nature of contest over the international order, we need to recognize that the direction of reform of the international system will remain unchanged. While fully recognizing the uncertainty in China’s neighboring environment, we should realize that the general trend of prosperity and stability in the Asia-Pacific region will not change.³⁹

Nevertheless, Xi believes that the passive approach of his predecessors is no longer tenable, as it “would eventually back Beijing in a corner.” (You Ji, 2013: 148) According to Xi, the “current circumstances” require China to “be ever more active” and to “be bold in assuming responsibilities.”⁴⁰ Or as stated by a Chinese foreign policy expert, “when the US is closing the door, we have to react.”⁴¹ With the reevaluation of China’s grand strategic outlook, leadership becomes crucial.

When “striving for achievement” is conceptualized as “making friends” (Yan, 2014), it connects to the significance of assembling a “circle of recognition” that approves of Chinese leadership. In fact, “it moves the definition of achievement from the direct attainment of objects of gratification, such as money or socio-economic development, to the intersubjective – achievement becomes measured in terms of recognition. By this definition, previously, if China made money, China achieved; now, if China makes friends, China achieves.” (Åberg, 2016) The most important friends are found in China’s neighborhood, and the

AIIB is an important device to attract long-lasting friends that approves of Chinese leadership.

11. China's Regional Strategy

As Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang assumed office, they quickly took the opportunity to launch a new regional strategy. In Xi's state visit to Indonesia in 3 October 2013, he announced the establishment of the AIIB, a pledge reiterated by Li in his trip to South East Asia a week after. In these trips, Xi and Li simultaneously also unveiled the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. The same month, in 24-25 October, at the Conference on the Diplomatic Work with Neighboring Countries, intended to "identify the strategic goals, fundamental policies, and general diplomatic work with neighboring countries in the coming 5 to 10 years," Xi reiterated the pledges and expressed his desire of letting a Community of Common Destiny take "deep root" in the neighboring countries.⁴² Xi stressed that "China needs to make neighbouring countries more friendly, stay closer to China, more recognizing and more supportive, and increase China's affinity, magnetism and influence."⁴³ Moreover, Xi urged to "speed up the implementation of the free trade zone strategy, *on the basis of* neighboring countries, to build a *new pattern* of regional economic integration."⁴⁴ Significantly, Xi made clear that "[g]ood diplomacy with neighboring countries is a *requirement* for realizing the Two Centenary Goals, and the Chinese Dream of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."⁴⁵

The Community of Common Destiny serves as the overarching vision of regional togetherness, and the OBOR initiative of boosting regional and intercontinental connectivity by reviving the ancient trade routes of the Silk Road, introduces a new tangible dimension to China's leadership aspirations. Moreover, China's desire is that the RCEP will

create a new pattern of regional integration centered on China as it gradually climbs the global value chain. Instead of just being a hub for intermediate goods ready to be assembled and shipped to advanced markets, the aspiration is to become a true regional center, a center of consumption, innovation and services. Even though China's alternative project for the regional economic order covers the AIIB, OBOR, and the RCEP, the establishment of the AIIB is to date the clearest, most successful empirical example of China's new assertive grand strategy.

12. Chinese Leadership and the AIIB

The challenge of the US pivot to Asia called on China to perform a more active and leading role, of which the AIIB is a great example. In terms of infrastructure, China has long been a key player and is the number one investor in the world (Chen, Matzinger and Woetzel, 2013). By "setting status in stone" through "institutional privileges" (Pouliot, 2014), the AIIB now institutionalizes this leading position. China's structural leadership is reflected in the fact that it holds 30.34% of the stakes and 26.06% of the voting rights, which equips China with veto power over major decisions that require a minimum of 75% of the votes.⁴⁶ At the initial stage, AIIB is set to provide 100 billion dollars for infrastructure funding. How much that eventually will be dispersed, and to what good, is still uncertain, yet there is money to be invested, and China will certainly try to translate its large contribution into concrete leverage in the bidding processes.

The AIIB is also a testimony to China's agenda-setting power. China has long been pushing for a development approach that pays greater attention to critical infrastructure provision, which it not only sees as the foundation for growth, but as a core requirement for economic advancement, as modern connectivity facilitates operations and

transactions at all stages of development (Lin, 2011). AIIB also bases its credibility on alleged voice opportunities for developing countries. Chinese Finance Minister Lou Jiwei made it clear that since AIIB is “mainly led by developing countries, the AIIB must consider their appeals.”⁴⁷ The extent and influence of such appeals is uncertain, yet it ties the appraisal of the AIIB to an innovative institutional approach that favors regional countries and where China allegedly intervenes for the sake of developing countries in negotiations with other established multilateral development banks.

China’s disdain for political conditionalities embedded into multilateral development lending, and its approach to economic development without ideological straitjackets, also charms countries in need of investments. Then development capital “makes friends” and contributes to the portrayal of China as a benevolent nation bent on undertaking the onerous task of modernization without intrusive yardsticks. China has long been pushing this idea, yet with the AIIB, it enters the mainstream and testifies to China’s intellectual leadership role. The appeal of the AIIB is significant, with more than 50 countries joining, many of them US allies who the United States unsuccessfully tried to dissuade from joining.⁴⁸ As China successfully performs the role of a responsible great power and assembles a significant circle of recognition, it boosts its international prestige.

The AIIB does not imply a radical change of the rules of the game. This is evident from the fact that four out of AIIB’s first six approved projects are co-financed by the ADB, World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank group (IFC), and out of the other seven proposed projects still pending approval four are proposed to be co-financed by the World Bank.⁴⁹ However, the AIIB unequivocally marks China’s status ascendance and represents a positional change to

the multilateral order. Hence, China's push for global governance reform is essentially about status and representation.

In this light, it is wrongheaded to characterize Washington's refusal to join as "irrational" (Economy, 2015). For a superpower bent on ensuring leadership in the Asia-Pacific it makes perfect sense. A rational decisionmaking process is not necessarily governed by utility calculations based on wealth maximization, in this case by getting access to "bidding opportunities" for US corporations; rather, the goal that determines US rationality is positional. In a China-created organization, the United States would at very best be an equal, yet more likely; it would have to accept the humiliating position of second fiddle. Since regional member-countries are favored over non-regional ones, the United States would perhaps play an even more marginalized role. For instance, the Board of Directors (BoD) is comprised of nine Asian members and only three non-Asian members,⁵⁰ which can be compared with ADB's ratio of eight Asian members and four non-Asian members in the BoD.⁵¹

In a world characterized by competition and struggle for positional goods such as leadership, a subordinate position for the United States in the AIIB would be a thorn too painful to withstand. By extension, the AIIB, the OBOR, and the RCEP all challenge US leadership, and thus America's blueprint for regional order. The AIIB has proven to be complementary to the Bretton Woods institutions, and China's regional project might indeed be good for capitalist development and economic growth. Yet capitalist system maintenance endures irrespective of who is in charge. The refusal of the United States and Japan to join, and Washington's ham-fisted efforts to dissuade its allies from joining, is not about complementarity, but about positional indivisibility; it is not so much about rules, but about leadership. In this sense, China's push for institutional reform is essentially about status and representation. "Best

governance practices” and “bidding opportunities” in all its glory, but joining the AIIB would not be worth it for Washington. The strain would be too painful – unless the United States gives up its desire for sole superpower status and global leadership.

13. Conclusion

China is assertive because it knows exactly what it wants. Its restorationist ambition has been rigid since the time of Sun Yat-sen, yet what has shifted is the means of how to achieve this grand goal, reflecting changes in both ideas and power (Schell and Delury, 2013). Chinese assertiveness pertains to grand strategic change, of not lying low any more, of not renouncing leadership any longer. With Xi Jinping in the top position, China now actively strives to perform a leadership role. The assertiveness we are witnessing relates to a shift from self-restraint towards a more active pursuance of leadership.

China, under Mao Zedong 毛澤東, was after all the self-proclaimed leader of the Third World. Deng Xiaoping’s realization, however, was that without a solid economic base neither China’s rise nor its true leadership would ever materialize, and China’s economic “backwardness” would continue to “incur beatings by others”. Now, as China’s capabilities have increased dramatically, it is equipped for leadership. Yet its assertiveness arises in response to the antagonistic nature of the US pivot and the conviction that the United States will never accept Chinese leadership no matter how powerful it becomes. Thus, China’s assertive behavior is indeed reactive; it is a response to changes in its external environment uncondusive for the materialization of its grand goal. Remaining passive in the face of the US pivot would mean renouncing its longstanding aspiration.

Whereas China faces severe strategic mistrust in the regional security domain, it might very well continue to be the economic protagonist in the “Tale of Two Asias” (Feigenbaum and Manning, 2012), at least as long as the TPP is stuck in the American Congress. Even so, it remains to be seen if regional security issues will affect China’s economic strategy negatively. Another concern is how China’s recent economic downturn will affect the viability of its regional economic projects. In the meantime, China confidently marches on southwards and westwards (Wang, 2014), economically at least.

At the 2013 Boao Forum, while disseminating his vision for the region coated with a solid veneer of “Asianess”, Xi certainly acknowledged China’s daunting economic challenges, yet still proclaimed: “looking ahead, we are full of confidence in China’s future.”⁵² More than a year later, at the 2014 APEC meeting, Xi assured the audience anew: “As its overall national strength grows, China will be both capable and willing to provide more public goods for the Asia-Pacific and the world, especially new initiatives and visions for enhancing regional cooperation.”⁵³ The AIIB testifies to this new Chinese assertiveness. In other words, China is ready to perform the role of a responsible great power, standing up for its desire to take the lead and provide regional public goods.

Notes

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1. That the US “pivot” was a response to counter an “assertive China” has developed into a truism among China watchers. As described by Robert Ross: “Worried that a newly assertive China was becoming a destabilizing force, the White House moved to counter any perceptions of its own weakness by strengthening the US presence in the region.” According to Kevin Rudd: the pivot was “Washington’s response” to “a more assertive Chinese foreign and security policy”. In addition, as stated by Elizabeth Economy: “For most observers outside China, it was Chinese assertiveness that was the action, while the US pivot was, in large measure, the reaction.” (Ross, 2012; Rudd, 2013; Economy, 2013).
 2. Barrack Obama, Interview by Charlie Rose, 17 June 2013. <<https://charlierose.com/videos/17754>>
 3. One area of potential disagreement with this reversal relates to China’s maritime assertiveness. However, one reason for looking beyond the commonplace employment of Chinese assertiveness even in the maritime domain is that the empirical nuances of the security situation and the competition for maritime rights seem to tell a different story. Taylor Fravel shows that some occurrences (read China’s) are noted more than others are, and that the situation in the South China Sea stems from an increasing readiness among all the littoral states to secure their claims. China becomes part of a game played by sovereigns in dispute where it has to defend its position. Beijing views it “as a logical and necessary response, in order to defend its policies and prevent an adverse change in the status quo.” As

such, China's behavior in the South China Sea is more part of a routinized response, not only in relation to other claimants' actions but also in relation to the requirements of the international regime of UNCLOS, more than it was part of an intentional and assertive game plan. See, Fravel (2012); Swaine and Fravel (2011: 15).

4. CMHC. Learning to be assertive. <<http://cmhc.utexas.edu/assertiveness.html>>
5. John A. Simpson and Edmund S.C. Weiner (eds). *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. I. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 708.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. On positional competition, see Schweller (1999).
9. Kojève (1980: 20, 20-26, 31-70); G.W.F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 111-119.
10. Cf. Ringmar (1996a), Ringmar (2002), Ringmar (2014).
11. Jeremy Bentham first made the differentiation between a "struggle for existence" and a "contest for distinction" in reference to elections. See, Jeremy Bentham. *Draught of a New Plan for the Organization of the Judicial Establishment in France: proposed as a Succedaneum to the Draught presented, for the same purpose, by the Committee of Constitution, to the National Assembly, December 21st, 1789*. Printed in London, 1790, p. 131.
12. Cf. Philip C. Saunders who puts "assertive" in juxtaposition to "attractive" (Saunders, 2014).
13. Concerning this debate, see, for instance, Chen and Wang (2011), Zhang (2012), Zhang (2014), China 2020 Research Team (2014), Yan (2014).
14. Interview with international relations scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Science, 7th July 2016, in Beijing.
15. See also Ringmar (1996b); for more sophisticated realist accounts, see Gilpin (1984) and Williams (2005).

16. Max Weber. *Economy and society*, Vol. II. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978, p. 936.
17. Max Weber. *Economy and society*, Vol. I. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978, p. 342. See also Baehr (2015).
18. Max Weber. *Economy and society*, Vol. II. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978, p. 932.
19. Asian Development Bank. *Annual Report 2014* (accessed 12th August 2016). <<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/158032/oi-appendix1.pdf>>
20. G20 Leaders Statement: The Pittsburgh Summit (G20, Pittsburgh, 24th September 2009) (accessed 29th September 2016). <<http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2009/2009communique0925.html>>
21. That fundamental structural change was ongoing was widely acknowledged and informed Washington's decision to pivot to Asia. See, for instance: Hillary Clinton (10th November 2011). America's Pacific Century. <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/11/176999.htm>>; Bader (2013).
22. Barack Obama (17th November 2011). Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament. <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>>
23. Hillary Clinton (2011). America's Pacific Century. Foreign Policy. <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>>
24. Richard McGregor and Geoff Dyer (31st January 2014). Trade backlash leaves US "pivot" to Asia on the rocks. *Financial Times*. <<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/6063f074-8a94-11e3-9c29-00144feab7de.html#axzz36b0cDXJp>>
25. Larry Summers (14th June 2015). Rescuing the free-trade deals. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/rescuing-the-free-trade-deals/2015/06/14/f10d82c2-1119-11e5-9726-49d6fa26a8c6_story.html>

26. Office of the United States Trade Representative. The Trans-Pacific Partnership. <<https://ustr.gov/tpp/#strategic-importance>>
27. John F. Kerry (28th September 2016). A conversation with US Secretary of State. Webcast, Woodrow Wilson Center. <<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/conversation-us-secretary-state-john-f-kerry>>
28. On the American “Open Door” policy, see van Apeldoorn and de Graaff (2015).
29. Hillary Clinton (2011). America’s Pacific Century.
30. Barack Obama (8th May 2015). Remarks by the President on trade. <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/08/remarks-president-trade>>
31. Quoted in: Yoichi Kato (9th February 2013). Interview with Kurt Campbell: China should accept U.S. enduring leadership role in Asia. *Asahi Shimbun* 朝日新聞 .
32. American Enterprise Institute (15th May 2013). Game changer: Japan and the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (accessed 2nd September 2014). <<https://www.aei.org/events/game-changer-japan-and-the-trans-pacific-partnership-agreement/>>
33. That this is the case is evident from Washington’s view of Yukio Hatoyama 鳩山由紀夫’s proposal for a Japanese foreign policy reversal in 2009. Among the several “disturbing developments” of the Hatoyama cabinet – ranging from the desire to remove all US Marines from Okinawa to a more balanced relationship with China – the support for the East Asian Community was the “most troubling” and “astonishing” proposal to the Obama administration. See, Bader (2013: 42-44).
34. Quoted in: Koichi Furuya (14th May 2014). Interview with Yan Xuetong: “Conflict control” is key to U.S.-China relations in a bipolar world. *Asahi Shimbun*.
35. Quoted in: Yoichi Kato (5th October 2012). Interview with Wang Jisi: China deserves more respect as a first class power. *Asahi Shimbun*.

36. Xi Jinping (29th November 2012). Xi pledges “great renewal of Chinese nation” <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/29/c_132008231.htm> (Xinhua News Agency (新華社)).
37. Interview with professor and Chinese foreign policy expert, 15th July 2016, in Shanghai.
38. Interview with professor and Chinese foreign policy expert, 3rd July 2016, in Beijing.
39. Xi Jinping (29th November 2014). The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was held in Beijing <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml> (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China).
40. Xi Jinping (2014). *The governance of China*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, p. 326, p. 329.
41. Interview with professor and Chinese foreign policy expert, 2nd July 2016, in Beijing.
42. Xi Jinping (25th October 2013). Xi Jinping: Let the sense of community of common destiny take deep root in neighbouring countries <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1093870.shtml> (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China).
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
45. Xi Jinping (2014). *The governance of China*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, p. 325, emphasis added.
46. AIIB, Articles of agreement <<http://euweb.aiib.org/uploadfile/2016/0202/20160202043950310.pdf>>; AIIB, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank subscriptions and voting power of member countries <<http://euweb.aiib.org/uploadfile/2016/0715/20160715113539537.pdf>>.
47. Quoted in: *Bloomberg* (29th April 2015). Defector to Communist China revolutionizes development lending. <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/ar>

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48. Bob Davis (2nd November 2014). U.S. blocks China efforts to promote Asia trade pact. *The Wall Street Journal*. <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-blocks-china-efforts-to-promote-asia-trade-pact-1414965150>>
49. AIIB. Projects. <<http://euweb.aiib.org/html/PROJECTS/>>
50. AIIB. Governance. <http://euweb.aiib.org/html/aboutus/governance/Board_of_Governors/?show=1>
51. ADB. Board of directors. <<https://www.adb.org/about/board-directors>>
52. Xi Jinping (7th April 2013). Working together toward a better future for Asia and the world. <<http://english.boaoforum.org/mtzxxwz xen/7379.jhtml>>
53. Xi Jinping (9th November 2014). Seek sustained development and fulfill the Asia-Pacific Dream. <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/ytjhzzdrscldrfzshyjxghd/t1210456.shtml>

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