Redefining Pragmatic Engagement: The “New Model” of U.S.-China Relations and the Opportunity of Shared Consequences

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Abstract

Since the 2013 meeting of Presidents Barack Obama and Xi Jinping in Sunnylands, California, one phrase has come to define both the vast potential for bilateral cooperation and the failure to realize that potential: the Chinese proposal for a “new model of major country relations” (新型大国关系). While China has presented the concept in terms of “win-win” cooperation, U.S. skepticism has broadly centered on two critiques. First, U.S. policy makers are concerned that associated language regarding “respect for core interests” represents an attempt to procure concessions regarding longstanding differences of opinion on Taiwan, Tibet, and similarly fraught topics. Secondly, the United States has made clear its position that bilateral ties “should be based not on slogans but on the quality of the cooperation”: pragmatic, concrete results should come before rhetoric.

This article compares three different ways of understanding this “concrete” dimension of political engagement: 1) Policy “realism,” as manifested in dominant strains of policy analysis in both the United States and China that, while distinct, share many
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important common premises; 2) the “empiricist” positions of those who argue the need to take into account various underlying trends which counterbalance realist considerations; and 3) the more thickly “pragmatic” model proposed here, in which rhetorical factors rejected in the above models are themselves regarded as empirically significant in the conscious development of “public, objective and shared consequences.” Embracing China’s “new model” language may, itself, thus enable otherwise unlikely pragmatic achievements.

Introduction

What “liberté, égalité, fraternité” meant to the French Revolution and to the making of modernity in the West, “wealth, strength, and honor” have meant to the forging of modern China.¹

That statement comes early in Wealth and Power, Orville Schell and John Delury’s account of China’s nearly two-centuries of reform and “self-strengthening” (自强) efforts aimed at restoring the nation’s historical greatness.² As they go on to write, this underlying difference in political values between China and its Western observers has meant, “Chinese reformers tended to inhabit what looks to Western eyes like a pragmatic kingdom of means, rather than an idealistic world of ends.”³

This basic difference in perspective recurs throughout the bilateral relationship between the United States and China. Most recently, the debate and controversy surrounding Chinese President Xi Jinping’s call for a “new model of major country relations” (新型大国关系) has brought the difference into especially sharp relief.⁴ The Xi administration first rolled out the phrase in domestic speeches outlining its foreign relations agenda, and Xi directly presented it for U.S. consideration during his 2013 “informal” meeting in Sunnylands, California.

Chinese diplomats have continuously presented the concept as the key to establishing a win-win bilateral relationship and to avoiding the
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cooperation in China throughout the country’s long history, with pithy phrases such as “restoring the ancient” or “self-strengthening” serving to unite disparate individuals and groups into situational alliances. For example, Communist Party leaders’ periodically use nationalist slogans such as “never forget national humiliation” (勿忘国耻) to great effect to harden ties and build up popular animosity against former colonial powers such as Japan.\textsuperscript{8} By contrast, however, Party leaders have at other times used conciliatory or non-confrontational slogans like the “new model” to propose periods of renewed openness and diplomatic engagement.\textsuperscript{9}

First, this paper will outline in further detail the evolution of the new model platform and the realist concerns, particularly the divisive topic of core interests that are preventing U.S. endorsement. Second, it will critique this position of realist reluctance through the lens of empirical trends of ongoing Chinese integration. Third, it will explain in further detail the rhetorical innovation’s potential value in affecting Chinese political realities. Finally, it will suggest that this disparity between policy and facts results from an overly narrow account of pragmatism, and that reevaluating pragmatism may promote bilateral progress.

**Realism in the New Model Debate**

Few U.S. or Chinese policymakers explicitly advocate confrontation as a desirable objective. Yet U.S.-China bilateral relations feature several fundamental disagreements. On the U.S. side, for example, many foreign policy analysts characterize China as an expansionist power seeking territorial and economic hegemony in Asia. This has given rise to both direct advocacy of Cold War-style containment policies by some U.S. security analysts,\textsuperscript{10} as well as arguments that U.S.-China competition might be stabilized into, for example, the less volatile form of a “Cool War” featuring both competition and cooperation.\textsuperscript{11} To the degree that advocates of either view hold that China is contemplating a new “Asian Monroe Doctrine” or something similar, they emphasize that this is inimical to U.S. values and interests and recommend a proactive American response.\textsuperscript{12}
As Suisheng Zhao notes in a recent article outlining this context of “strategic rivalry” and its relation to the Xi administration’s “new model” initiative, one of the primary topics of contention between the two powers is the Chinese term “core interest” (核心利益). The Chinese media have defined core interests as constituting “the bottom-line of national survival” and being “essentially non-negotiable.” The term, which was rarer before the current decade, was “[o]bviously chosen with intent to signal the resolve in China’s sovereignty and territorial claims that it deems important enough to go to war over,” and Chinese leaders have applied it with special emphasis to China’s ongoing contested maritime claims.

In the context of China’s ongoing territorial disputes, Obama administration officials have seen deployment of the phrase as a form of escalation. Indeed, when China’s foreign ministry first openly applied the term to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in April 2013, U.S. observers considered the language to be “raising new tensions in [the] region.” Meanwhile, the United States and its regional allies continue to express concern that China may apply the term to its territorial claims in the South China Sea. This anxiety is supported by the fact that some Chinese foreign policy hardliners have associated U.S. opposition to China’s core interests with calls for regional “de-Americanization” (去美国化), verging on the “Monroe Doctrine” analogies noted above.

The above developments underlie what Zhao calls his “realist reading of the new model of big power relations” (an alternate translation of新型大国关系). Although it is a matter of debate whether full-scale de-Americanization is really a long term goal for Chinese policymakers (the term is seldom discussed by authoritative official outlets), it is far clearer that the foreign policy debate in China has settled on a general consensus that “denying regional hegemony of other powers” is desirable. Zhao ties this aim to common realist analyses of international power relations, which hold that if a state cannot attain hegemony, it can at least deny it to strategic rivals.
Based on this realist analysis, Xi Jinping’s 2013 presentation to the Obama administration about the “new model of major country relations” platform appears to constitute “a challenge to U.S. primacy in the Asia–Pacific based on China’s rising capacities and deeply rooted suspicion of the US containment.” The U.S. foreign policy establishment has widely shared this view, which was reinforced both by the announcement’s timing—coming as it did in the midst of a tense stand-off between China and Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands—and by the fact that one of three principles constituting the “new model” was respect for core interests.

As noted, this term then and now has constituted the greatest stumbling block to U.S. embrace of the new model. In Xi’s first presentation, the three principles listed in full were “no conflict and no confrontation; mutual respect, including for both countries’ core interests and major concerns; and win-win cooperation.” Interestingly, “core interests” appears to be the only term in the list that could be seen as constituting a diplomatic term of art. Although China’s foreign policy establishment revised the principles that make up the new model of major country relations in November 2014 to replace these three with six specific areas of potential cooperation, the continued inclusion of “core interests” has been perhaps the most important factor preventing serious consideration of the language by the United States.

Stephen Hadley and Paul Haenle argue in Foreign Affairs that if “Chinese leaders are willing to remove the references to core interests, U.S. leaders should not dismiss the proposal out of hand.” As Hadley and Haenle note approvingly, President Obama was initially willing to consider the new model despite establishment skepticism “both because [the model] came directly from the Chinese leader and because it aimed to address the historical tendency of destabilizing competition and war between rising and status quo powers.” Hadley and Haenle contrast Obama’s open-minded first reaction with the United States’ later refusal to adopt the new language without clarification of its exact practical ramifications. This reservation, however, goes beyond the term “core interests” by itself; as this paper will go on to argue, the general United States reluctance to sign onto seemingly vague agreements risks forfeiting the chance to determine
the meaning of such agreements, up to and including their most problematic provisions (such as “core interests”). Instead of waiting for the unlikely abandonment of specific terms, the United States should rethink with greater haste its refusal to commit to the “new model” idea.

In the context of China’s own demands, this U.S. refusal poses a serious challenge to bilateral relations. Hadley and Haenle portray the two countries’ contrasting objectives as a catch-22: The Chinese desire a new official language of “strategic partnership” before embarking on specific cooperative ventures, whereas the U.S. demands clarity over the scope and content of the partnership before making any broad official commitments. That the two sides have these opposite approaches in formulating new policies risks exacerbating the historical tendency towards confrontation.

That “historical tendency,” otherwise known as Thucydides’ trap, has itself become a rhetorical mainstay of U.S.-Chinese relations. Indeed, Chinese official media have taken to explicitly portraying the current “new model” platform as an attempt to evade the pattern of confrontation associated with such historical conflicts as that between Athens and Sparta, Britain and Habsburg Spain, or imperial Germany and the Western European colonial powers. Xi himself mentioned the “trap” by name in his comments at Sunnylands, where he presented the “new model” language.

This, however, presents a puzzle that has so far been under-explored. Why is it that, while most U.S. and (non-governmental) Chinese policy analysts have adopted a straightforward realist reading of the new model of major country relations, the Chinese side officially presents the new model as an alternative to policymaking based on realist assumptions? In the following section, this paper argues that “realism” itself fails to explain real processes of existing cooperation: the new model can thus potentially be viewed as a development from observable, positive trends of engagement. China’s ongoing integration into global institutions and acclimation to the international system demonstrate that its foreign policy is not primarily based on the narrowly-defined interests that so concern the U.S. side.
Empirical Integration

The empirical trends of the U.S.-Chinese relationship challenge some key realist assumptions. International relations realists since Hans Morgenthau (who considered his theory of political interaction to have originated with the Greek historian Thucydides) have tended to argue that all state behavior is intended to secure “interest defined in terms of power.”\(^{29}\) Thucydides’ trap invokes this basic conceptual framework. Yet, China has not always pursued “power” per se. Rather, the Chinese foreign policy establishment’s official statements and policies have tended to construe China as *already* in the process of carrying out a historic “power transition,” while focusing on securing desirable changes to the international status quo to address sources of “dissatisfaction.”\(^ {30}\)

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Though foreign policy analysts often consider such dissatisfaction to be more nebulous than realist conceptions of power, it in fact has many empirical dimensions and applications. In particular, the variable of satisfaction in power transition theory is useful for characterizing the significance of formal hierarchical relationships that affect state behavior, even when they do not translate into practical economic or political power dynamics. For example, China’s refusal to integrate into a U.S.-led Asia-Pacific free trade area – it has opted instead to found a rival Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) grouping whose reception has so far been lukewarm – can be seen as dissatisfaction with being relegated to a non-central regional role.\(^ {31}\) The same is also true of China’s far more successful efforts to set up an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, to the considerable embarrassment of the Obama Administration.\(^ {32}\)

At the same time, general status quo dissatisfaction does not necessarily cause non-cooperation in particular settings. China has made increasingly
extensive use of international institutions that offer it the ability to pursue interests on an equal footing with all other participants. When there is no perceived center to an institution (as is the case with the World Trade Organization, for example), or where China perceives itself as indisputably part of the institutional center (as is true of most U.N. bodies), Chinese engagement has steadily increased and shows no sign of slowing. In contexts where further integration poses no perceived hierarchical disadvantages and thus does not effectively subordinate China in other ways, non-cooperative behavior prompted by status quo dissatisfaction has been rare.

Scott Kennedy, the Chairman of the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) has described China’s relationship to the status quo of international institutions, in language reminiscent of power transition theory, as a search for “a greater voice (huayuquan) internationally.” The Chinese term Kennedy translates as “voice” might be more literally rendered as “right to speak” (话语权), and official commentary on the international system frequently invokes the term. In light of process-based theories of individual state compliance with and integration into the international system, China’s pursuit of a right to speak should lead to increased institutional interactions and, thus, increased integration. Participation as a WTO litigant, for example, both puts China on an equal footing with other members (thus avoiding a priori status quo dissatisfactions) and leads directly to increased Chinese engagement with and socialization into the WTO as an institution.

Indeed, more recent and nuanced versions of realism, even, tend to acknowledge that power-based interests do not best describe patterns of cooperative behavior, as per Morgenthau’s model. Kenneth Waltz, one of the most influential neorealist international relations theorists of recent decades, reframed the traditional realist emphasis on relations of power into a more nuanced focus on dependence. As he wrote in 1979, “[s]tates do not willingly place themselves in situations of increased dependence. In a self-help system, considerations of security subordinate economic gain to political interest.” Some international relations theorists have held this
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formula, which focuses on avoiding dependence upon other states, to be more apt in describing Chinese behavior than traditional realism.38

Importantly, it is not necessary to choose any of the above-described alternatives to the traditional realist view in order to appreciate how they deepen analysis of Xi’s new model of major country relations. More nuanced considerations of hierarchy-satisfaction, the right to speak, or independence all indicate that the “new model” more closely resembles successful integrationist initiatives such as the WTO than disfavored efforts such as the United States-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) or attempted hierarchical reversals like China’s FTAAP and the increasingly promising Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. As a China-proposed initiative premised upon status equality, the new model does not raise hierarchical, expressive, or dependency concerns, and it would promote active engagement. The following section will examine the political practices and circumstances that may determine China’s actual goals in pursuing the new model of major country relations, and in particular the crucial issue of its definition of “core interests.”

...ASIDE FROM ITS CONCERN OVER CORE INTERESTS, THE UNITED STATES’ AVERSION TO VAGUE SLOGANS HAS BEEN ONE OF THE OTHER MAIN REASONS FOR UNITED STATES’ RELUCTANCE TO EMBRACE THE NEW MODEL OF MAJOR COUNTRY RELATIONS.

The Importance of Rhetorical Innovations

Arguably, something like a hierarchical “right to speak” also plays a determining role in the Chinese Communist Party’s internal development of official policies and foreign relations platforms, in a manner that those who doubt the new model’s political significance seemingly underestimate. As Hadley and Haenle note, the “United States has long reiterated that the relationship [with China] should be based not on slogans but on the quality of the cooperation.”39 Indeed, aside from its concern over core interests, the United States’ aversion to vague slogans has been one of the other main reasons for United States’ reluctance to embrace the
new model of major country relations. This position, however, ignores the extent to which slogans and rhetorical shifts have not just reflected but actually preceded and contributed to previous cooperation patterns.

To give perhaps the most famous example of the impact of rhetorical shifts on cooperation, former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping promoted China’s rapprochement with the United States and other foreign states on an avowed policy of “hiding our capacities, biding our time, and accomplishing things where possible” (韬光养晦，有所作为).\textsuperscript{40} Deng invoked this phrase, borrowed from ancient Chinese literature, as a strategic justification for decisively avoiding confrontational Mao-era policies.\textsuperscript{41} Deng’s phrase provided a firm internal political basis for pragmatic cooperative behavior between China and bourgeois powers. His evident success in thus establishing a dominant intra-Party ideological position – a “new predominant practice consciousness” – demonstrates the potential importance of specific political terminology and its effect in mobilizing practical results.\textsuperscript{42} It is important to note, as well, that Deng did not initially intend this phrase for mass consumption. Deng consciously phrased the directive (implying as it did China’s momentary weakness) in a “cultivated” classical idiom and in reference to Three Kingdoms-era strategy, in order to appeal to sophisticated and informed Party leaders.\textsuperscript{43} In short, Deng’s ability to convincingly persuade the Party leadership to follow the new strategy of engagement in large part depended on coordinated acceptance of the “hiding our capacities” concept – vague though it was.

Two primary factors support the importance of specific innovative language. The first is the general importance of unifying “hegemonic” terminology in establishing the intra-Party consensuses that lead to political action. Following Michael Schoenhals’ theorization of this phenomenon, sinological literature has frequently explored the importance of “doing things with words in Chinese politics.”\textsuperscript{44} Under this understanding, much Chinese political action depends on the assertion of innovative language which, though not fully defined, requires a yes or no
vote from leaders and indications of compliance from the entire Party hierarchy.45

The second factor that suggests the potential importance of the new model of major country relations in establishing the conditions for increased Chinese cooperativeness has to do with the multiplicity of voices in Chinese foreign policy debates. Indeed, Chinese foreign policy is characterized by far less unanimity than almost any other major political arena. In one now-famous example of this lack of unanimity, former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates remarked on the Chinese military’s launch of a stealth fighter test-flight during his 2011 meeting with President Hu Jintao – only to find that Hu was unaware of the provocative military maneuver.46 Military independence in the arena of foreign affairs, along with the presence of influential “hardliner” political constituencies in political circles and the population at large, mean that leaders’ attempts to facilitate diplomatic engagement meet with internal resistance.47 Xi Jinping and his administration thus face significant obstacles to uniting the Chinese Communist Party, state bureaucracies, and other major social interest groups behind a single definitive platform, just as they face challenges from other international actors.48 On the other hand, however, a significant precedent exists for Chinese political actors successfully pushing agendas of both domestic reform and diplomatic engagement when given major international cooperative opportunities such as WTO membership and hosting the Olympics.49 If Chinese leaders really put stock in their statements that the new model affords the chance to avoid Thucydides’ trap, they could use the language of the new model to rally support for engagement.

With regards to the stumbling block of China’s “core interests” language, the above discussion also indicates the degree to which such apparently formalized terminology is open to redefinition. Indeed, as Schell and Delury note in Wealth and Power, “self-strengthening” reformers like Deng Xiaoping have often managed to effect political changes throughout Chinese history by means of contextual redefinitions of key ideological terminology.50 One useful analogy for analyzing potential future development of the “core interests” concept is the process by which
Beijing’s propaganda authorities have defined the concept of “socialist core values.” The very process of situationally redefining “core” values, in this case, has allowed a great deal of pragmatic leeway.\(^{51}\)

It may thus be shortsighted for the United States to view the uncertain content of the new model proposal as a sign that it conceals hidden power-seeking motivations. Rather, the United States should take note of the degree to which, in order to affect anything like a Deng-style reformulation of Chinese foreign policy, Xi Jinping will have to reenact his feat of uniting disparate interests behind a single new rhetorical platform. Just as ongoing processes of integration into international institutions have been based upon Deng’s call for “biding our time, and accomplishing things where possible” – in other words, accepting opportunities for cooperation as long as they do not produce undesirable status quo consequences – so too might future cooperative progress depend on similar success for Xi’s vaunted new model of major country relations. U.S. embrace of the new model would considerably aid this process, while excessive reservation risks producing additional resistance within Chinese policy circles.

**Reevaluating Foreign Policy Pragmatism**

As noted above, Scott Kennedy has pointed to the importance of “voice,” or the “right to speak,” as a factor in determining Chinese approaches to institutional relationships. Taking this factor into account, Kennedy calls for the United States to adopt a “pragmatic response” to China’s pursuit of interests that are not always aligned with American ones. Similar to the commonly-accepted dictum that China has, since Deng, itself adopted a generally pragmatic approach to domestic reform, Kennedy seeks to assert the potential bilateral benefits of a similar ethos in the U.S.-Chinese
relationship. The final section of this paper supports and deepens this call for a pragmatic approach to U.S.-Chinese relations, in light of the theoretical and practical considerations noted above, and especially in reference to the potential for pragmatic cooperation offered by defining the new model of major country relations.

The first step in articulating a coherent pragmatic approach should be attempting a fuller theoretical explication of how it differs from interest-driven realism. As a philosophical movement, pragmatism originated especially in the thought of the American philosophers Charles Sanders Peirce and William James. Peirce coined the term to describe what he called “[t]he method…to trace out in the imagination the conceivable practical consequences, – that is, the consequences for deliberate, self-controlled conduct, – of the affirmation or denial of [any] concept.” Those consequences, according to Peirce, constitute “the whole of the purport of the word, the entire concept.” Ideas only have meanings inasmuch as they decide acts. Though James later popularized and expanded the idea of pragmatism as a philosophical method, he and Peirce were later to part ways over the latter’s view that James had departed from the method’s original formulation. Though scholars are divided about how justified (or meaningful) this split actually was, they treat the respective philosophical oeuvres of Peirce, James, and the American philosopher John Dewey as related but distinctive interpretations of the basic pragmatic enterprise that enjoy roughly equivalent legitimacy.

In particular, Dewey’s attempt to articulate a vision of Chinese-Western rapprochement based on the specific insights of philosophical pragmatism contains untapped and invaluable critical potential. Dewey’s variant of pragmatism is distinguished by a focus on the socially-situated, contextual nature of all ideas about “values.” Indeed, he confronts the difficult problem of elucidating the political and social implications of pragmatism in a way seldom attempted by Peirce (who focused more on the concept’s metaphysical implications) or James (who tended to stress individual experiences). By contrast, Dewey devoted significant effort to the exploration of the notion that “political action has an aesthetic element.”
Arriving for a two-year stay in China in 1919, during which he had a profound and lasting influence on Chinese political and educational thought, Dewey wrote that in order for any of the country’s Westernizing political reforms to succeed, it “must be a transforming growth from within, rather than either an external superimposition or a borrowing from foreign sources.”\textsuperscript{58} Going on to counter what he called (in language closely approximating China’s later anti-realist justifications of the “new model” platform) “the fatalistic belief that conflict…is predestined,” he further advocated that Western countries and China seek to “really understand each other, [and find] some way of cooperation for common ends.”\textsuperscript{59}

Dewey’s concepts thus suggest a reevaluation is warranted of the relative importance of values and interests in foreign policy. While a traditional realist view assumes that these are distinct but occasionally overlapping categories, a Deweyan pragmatic approach instead views the creation of values (or, in other words, shared principles guiding cooperation) as a dynamic social process. Because in all political action “there runs a sense of growing meaning,” the interlocking dialectic of action and reflection generates values themselves.\textsuperscript{60} This perspective, in tandem with a post-realist focus on the dynamic structure of international institutions explored in the second section above, should inform future policy.

It is precisely the uncertain character of political platforms such as Xi Jinping’s “new model” initiative that, despite being so troubling to realists who suspect uncertainty masks hidden interests, makes them capable of spawning genuinely new and beneficial consequences. As political theorist David Pan writes, for Dewey, “[a]n aesthetic resolution can only result when there is a situation of uncertainty that still offers elements of order.”\textsuperscript{61} In the context of political actions, this means that no genuine politics is ever completely reducible to its explicit goals; an excess aesthetic value of “experience” always allows those goals to be dynamically redefined. In a way, this theoretical position articulates something resembling the power of rhetorical innovation in Chinese politics: the process of defining new language can create new possibilities for practical action.
Certainly, Dewey does not hold that political action is free from self-interest or coercion. But his key insight is that in order to be effective, political acts continuously implicate a process of persuasion whereby their “qualities as perceived have controlled the question of production.”\textsuperscript{62} To the extent that modern politics has made direct, brute-force coercion difficult, all polities, even those that disavow the formalities of electoral democracy, engage in aesthetic/persuasive acts.

Thus, according to the tenets of Deweyan pragmatism, the indeterminacy or uncertainty of the “new model” platform is one of its greatest strengths. Rather than raising alarms over possible hidden meanings underlying the text, the United States and China should adopt the language and focus on the now-shared problem of managing the initiative’s aesthetic “qualities as perceived” by the U.S. and Chinese people. Both sides would be equally invested in making the model appear to be working, and in making it a coherent and meaningful concept. Uncertainty would create space for pragmatic innovations.

The difference between mutually embracing an unknown variable and signing formal treaty agreements on a more specific range of issues is the difference that Dewey explores between “absolute values” and reversible moral judgments in \textit{The Quest for Certainty}.\textsuperscript{63} There, he links “the spirit of cooperation” with discursive judgments made “on the basis of public, objective and shared consequences,” without any pretensions to eternal legal or moral validity.\textsuperscript{64} To the extent that China and the United States embrace these shared consequences by agreeing on a less-than-fully-detailed plan for “new model” relations, they actually bind themselves before the U.S. and Chinese publics to give this “new model” a compelling and broadly acceptable meaning. Though both countries contain elements that see conflict as inevitable, it behooves U.S. policymakers to recognize that affording recognition to apparent reform efforts can further enable cooperation-minded Chinese political interest groups and individuals “to find new openings for reform”: a process highly dependent upon internal political maneuvering and one which the U.S. can influence only indirectly.\textsuperscript{65}
Although U.S. embrace of the new model would open it up to Chinese criticism if, for example, it were to counteract new Chinese expansionist moves in the South China Sea, uncertainty over the importance and definition of “core interests” in the platform would allow the United States to provide its own interpretation of this provision. Depending on both sides’ image management processes and mutual willingness to compromise, the new model’s consequences for practical conduct could include redefinition of such terms as “core interests” based on the exigencies of practical cooperation. Indeed, the fact that the second version of the new model greatly reduced the apparent importance of core interests greatly supports this possibility. Because definitions arise from practice, practical interaction changes definitions.

Conclusion

No political action takes place against a backdrop of unmitigated self-interest. Game theory-inflected realist analyses at times run the risk of portraying just such a virtual or game-like scenario of pure competition. Increasingly, however, new developments in U.S.-Chinese bilateral relations take place in an environment of diverse international and transnational institutional activity. New forms of engagement between the United States and China will necessarily take the form of re-definitions of their relationship, rather than ex nihilo acts of creation. That the “new model” language is so important to the Chinese side while seeming so vague to the U.S. side is, while not ideal, simply one of many existing facts that both sides must work with.

Certainly, China’s own pragmatic focus on consequences rather than first principles such as liberty has deterred its progress towards U.S.-style constitutionalism. This characteristic feature of China’s internal ordering has understandably provoked skepticism among foreign policy analysts over the extent to which China can commit to international institutions in a permanent or quasi-legalized manner. At the same time, the situational reform ethos that has limited consolidation of the Chinese legal system actually appears well suited to the polyphonic realm of international relations. Thus, it may actually be the case that other states have
something to learn from China regarding the pragmatic management of a fundamentally anarchic system. Rather than attempting to determine the exact content of Xi’s proposed “new model” and its principles, as if these were already-existing entities, the United States should instead accept that all such content will only come later, as part of a discursive process actively establishing shared consequences and facts.

Endnotes

2 Ibid.
4 See, e.g., “Interview: New model of major-country relations no abstract theory”, Xinhuanet, December 28, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-12/28/c_133883096.htm. Various other subtly-nuanced English translations have been suggested, including “new type of great power relations” and “new model of big country relations,” etc. It should be noted that, while prominent official state endorsement is new to the Xi administration, the phrase itself has been used for decades (without a single consistent definition) in Chinese international affairs studies. See, e.g. 杨成绪 [Yang Chengxu], “世界更迭与大国关系变化” [“Global change and the transformation of major-country relations”], 国际问题研究 [International Studies] 1 (1999): 2-10.
7 Ibid. (“ambiguity in the Obama administration’s stance offered China an opening”). [ibid to Rice or Yomiuri?] [Yomiuri, newspaper].


12 John J. Mearsheimer, “China’s unpeaceful rise,” The Realism Reader 105, no. 690 (2014): 464-467 at 466. (“We should expect China to come up with its own version of the Monroe Doctrine…”).


14 Ibid.

15 Ibid. Previously, this phrase was used to refer primarily to Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang in the context of refuting local dissidents’ calls for increased political autonomy.


18 Ibid.


21 Zhao, “A New Model of Big Power Relations?” 378.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 The expanded list of six factors included managing Iran’s development of nuclear capabilities, overseeing North Korean denuclearization, cooperating to stabilize...
Afghanistan, undertaking counterterrorism initiatives, working to stop climate change, and preventing or controlling major public health crises.


26 Ibid.


34 Ibid.


38 Cf. the discussion in Derek McDougall, “Responses to ‘Rising China’ in the East Asian Region: soft balancing with accommodation,” Journal of Contemporary China 21, no. 73 (2012): 1-17 at 3.

39 Hadley and Haenle.

Interestingly, some U.S. analysts have persisted, even into the 21st century, in interpreting Deng’s “hiding our capacities” language as “concealing” a coherent strategy of eventual anti-U.S. aggression. Yet most Chinese and foreign analysts agree that no such hidden strategy exists, and that this “persistent anxiety” ill reflects reality. See discussion in: James Steinberg and Michael E. O’Hanlon, Strategic Reassurance and Resolve: US-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 5. In this sense, anxious U.S. interpretations of Xi’s “new model” have resembled some reactions to Deng’s “hiding and biding.”


As Schoenhals’ emphasis on “doing things” shows, these uses of official language are often condensed summaries of, and starting points for, massive policy undertakings and acts of political organization. They should thus be seen as going beyond what David Shambaugh has described as efforts to “force uniformity of thought and language.” See: David Shambaugh, China Goes Global: The Partial Power (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).


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49 See discussions in: Xiaoxiao Li, “Adaptation to WTO Standards”, in Modern Chinese Legal Reform: New Perspectives eds. Xiaobing Li and Qiang Fang (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 151-170; and, generally, China’s great leap: The Beijing Games and Olympian human rights challenges ed. Minky Worden (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008). Though most scholars writing in the latter argue that the Olympics did not lead to significant domestic reforms, they do note the existence of internal and external pressures associated with hosting the Games, and that these presented new opportunities for reformers.

50 For a description of Deng’s reappropriation of the wartime concept of “special zones” (特区) in order to launch major economic reforms: Schell and Delury, 293.


53 See, e.g. ibid at 430.


55 For a fascinating and wide-ranging account of Dewey’s relationship with China, see Jessica Ching-Sze, John Dewey in China: To Teach and To Learn (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).


58 See Ching-Sze, John Dewey in China.


61 Pan, 138.

62 Ibid, 139, citing Dewey, Art as Experience, 48. The aesthetic dimensions of political action are taking on increasing importance in theoretical debates over the role of publicly perceived legitimacy in politics and law. See, for example, Paul W. Kahn, Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 130 (describing the exercise of political sovereignty as a form of “[c]reative—that is, aesthetic—production [that] is always unique”). Citing Kahn, David Pan describes the process of such aesthetic production as succeeding if “a sufficient unity among the people can be created so that the decision can take hold and establish the metaphysical basis for existence.” Pan, “Political Theology for Democracy” at 130. The present article can also be seen as attempting to infer some international conclusions from the above understandings of political decision making: If “a sufficient unity among the people[s]” of two countries can be created, perhaps via successful persuasion towards the
genuine mutual endorsement of a broadly-defined program of iterative cooperation and integration such as the “new model”, it may then also be the case that this “decision can take hold and establish the metaphysical basis for [co]existence.”


64 Ibid.