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Slogan Politics

Understanding Chinese Foreign Policy Concepts

Jinghan Zeng

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To Emma and Lina

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- Jinghan Zeng, Narrating China's Belt and Road Initiative, *Global Policy*, 2019, Vol. 10, No. 2, May 2019, 207–216.
- Jinghan Zeng, Constructing New Type of Great Power Relations: The State of Debate in China (1998–2014), *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 2, May 2016, 422–442.
- Jinghan Zeng, Does Europe Matter? The Role of Europe in Chinese Narratives of One Belt One Road and New Type of Great Power

Relations, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 5, September 2017, 1162–1176.
- Jinghan Zeng, Chinese Views of Global Economic Governance, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3, April 2019, 578–594.

Most importantly, this book is dedicated to Emma and Lina. I'd like to thank Emma and Lina for their support and love. The final push of completing the book was done during the UK coronavirus lockdown, which would not have been possible without Emma's presence and encouragement.

Contents

Abbreviations

BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Science
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CNKI	China National Knowledge Infrastructure
EU	European Union
PRC	People's Republic of China
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has put forward a series of foreign policy concepts—most notably "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind". Generally speaking, they represent China's visions for China–United States (US) relations, globalization and a globalized world, respectively. This book studies these three concepts. Many international analysts interpret these concepts as Beijing's calculated strategic moves to build a Sino-centric world order. In the relevant analyses, these concepts are often considered as coherent, consistent strategic plans, reflecting Beijing's or Xi Jinping's concrete geopolitical visions. The relevant arguments assume that China's highly centralized authoritarian system can be easily mobilized to achieve Beijing's or Xi Jinping's geopolitical goals. Interestingly, while not directly responding to their international counterparts, similar arguments are made within China. Some Chinese academic and media analysts interpret those concepts as part of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) strategy to lead China's national rejuvenation. They are "top-level designed" products of the central government or the top leader, so, the argument goes, those diplomatic concepts reflect the wisdom of Chinese leaders to make China great again.

This book, however, argues that the above views are mistaken. It develops a slogan politics approach to study Chinese foreign policy concepts. The main argument is that those Chinese foreign policy concepts should be understood as political slogans rather than concrete

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strategic plans. In this book, slogans refer to short and striking political phrases used "as a means of focusing attention and exhorting to action" (Urdang and Robbins 1984: 17). The use of political slogans has a long history in China. This book argues that political slogans are not completely empty or rhetorical, but have several major functions in political communication: (1) declarations of intent, (2) power assertion and a test of domestic and international support, (3) state propaganda as a means of mass persuasion, and (4) a call for intellectual support.

The primary function of a foreign policy concept is to serve as a slogan to declare intention in order to attract attention and urge to action. Many international analyses focus on this part and tend to over-interpret the strategic rationale of those Chinese concepts, considering them as coherent, well-thought-out strategic plans. However, the nature of slogans decides that they are short political phrases and thus broad and vague ideas. As this book will show, when "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" were put forward by Xi Jinping, they were very vague ideas that lacked clear definition or blueprint. The process of filling those ideas with meanings often occurred in a subsequent and incremental manner (Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin 2015). Their introduction and subsequent development follow a "soft" opening approach. As Ian Johnson describes, they are not "envisioned and planned thoroughly, then completed according to that design", as many see in the West (Johnson 2017: 79). Rather, they "are first announced to big fanfare, structures erected as declarations of intent, and only then filled with content" (Johnson 2017: 79).

When it comes to signature concepts, this declaration of intent signals two levels of power relations: (a) personal vision of the top leader and (b) China's vision as a regional (if not global) leader. In this regard, the introduction of the concept is not only about communicating the vision but also about its attached power relations. In other words, it is much more than a declaration of intent. This brings in the second function of slogans: assert power and test support. When a critical slogan is put forward by a top leader, it does not only signal his vision but also expects to establish his personal authority. For example, in the first few years when a new leader takes power, he will introduce new slogans to signal his own leadership vision, representing a gesture of walking out from the shadow of his predecessors and thus asserting his power.

In this regard, domestic actors' response to this slogan does not only represent their feedback to the vision but also political support to this

leader. The leader expects domestic actors to echo his slogan in written and oral forms to demonstrate their loyalty. In other words, slogan politics sometimes contains a component of loyalty testing and thus is related to factional and elite politics. Despite foreign policy slogans being mainly external facing, signature ones including "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" perform a similar function of loyalty testing in the domestic arena, in which political actors are expected to repeat those slogans in written and oral forms in order to signal loyalties to the "owner" of those slogans, i.e. Xi Jinping. This sloganization of policy concepts associates the outcome of the concepts with Xi and thus makes them Xi's political legacy, defining his character and leadership for better or for worse.

In the global arena, Chinese slogans also function in similar ways. Key foreign policy concepts function as slogans to signal not only China's new vision but also their implied power relations; in other words, the latter is a political gesture to assert China's regional (if not global) leadership. Many in China believe that only when China becomes powerful enough will its ideas receive global attention.[1] This is also about agenda-setting power that is usually owned by great powers on the global stage. Clearly, if China is insignificant, its ideas are less likely to draw global attention and hence there will be mild or no response to its slogans. Thus, the Chinese government highly welcomes international actors to repeat and adopt those concepts in their speeches and writings, and such actions are often perceived as not only support to the concepts per se but also acknowledgment of China's rising global status if not leadership. In short, the introduction of those concepts is an assertion of China's power and functions like a radar to discern international support to China. Thus, the concept and its declared intention are sometimes deliberately kept vague to accommodate the interests of the relevant stakeholders in order to maximize their support.

A positive global response to Chinese slogans would be translated into convincing materials for domestic propaganda, which links with the third function of slogans: state propaganda as a means of mass persuasion. In the Chinese domestic arena, enthusiastic global response can be easily interpreted as evidence of China's rising global significance and leadership. It helps to enrich the propaganda narrative about the revival

[1] This is related to the so-called "discursive power" (话语权) referring to an idea that the more powerful your country is, the bigger say and influence that you have.

of China brought about by the CCP leadership. The message is quite powerful when linking it with China's historical education of "century of humiliation" in which the weak Qing dynasty let China be invaded and humiliated by Western powers, and now the CCP has led China on the trajectory of national rejuvenation and back to its "rightful" position in the world.

In other words, the positive global response to Chinese slogans provides concrete examples to support the CCP's narratives about China's national rejuvenation and thus significantly enhances its domestic political legitimacy. Though performing differently, these three Chinese concepts that this book examines—"New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind"—have attracted considerable attention on the global stage and thus helped the CCP to achieve a domestic propaganda win. This global attention also grants both the top leader and the Chinese government greater international legitimacy to consolidate their power domestically.

Despite the domestic propaganda win, their international impact is a different picture. This book argues that the international communication of those concepts is not very effective. The Chinese government has invested enormous intellectual and financial resources in promoting those concepts on the global stage. Despite the attention those concepts have attracted, their impact in mass persuasion towards a global, non-Chinese audience has not matched up with China's promotion investment. In this regard, for external-facing foreign policy concepts, their effectiveness of state propaganda as a means of mass persuasion mainly lies within the domestic instead of the international arena. This problem of international communication is not only a branding matter—such as those Chinese-coined concepts lacking key qualities of popular slogans, i.e. being catchy and simple.[2]

More importantly, it is also a result of the very shifting and vague nature of how those conceptual meanings are constructed within and without China, which brings in the fourth function of slogans: call for intellectual support. The development of Chinese foreign policy concepts often follows a "soft" opening approach, as previously mentioned. When

[2] Indeed, those slogans are not easy to remember even for the ordinary Chinese people. However, China's political context allows the state to conduct a massive propaganda campaign to promote those concepts and thus make them known. The same scale of propaganda is simply not possible for the CCP to conduct outside China.

they are put forward, they are often vague and undefined ideas that are subject to change. This is to say, they are immature ideas that need to be developed and improved. Thus, their introduction is also a call for intellectual support. Vague foreign policy slogans require intellectual power to translate them into more thoughtful ideas. Chinese leaders expect China's intellectual and policy community to develop those vague concepts into something more concrete after their "soft" opening. In other words, the introduction of a concept serves as a slogan to mobilize domestic actors for intellectual support. As such, the introduction of a key foreign policy concept often stimulates an (semi-)open academic and policy discussion within China. During this process, the Chinese academic and policy community gradually fill those concepts with concrete meanings.

While this process allows the state to make use of intellectual power, it invites the participation of a large number of actors who often bring complexity. The vague nature of Chinese foreign policy concepts means that they are open to interpretation. This allows Chinese academics and policy actors to load those concepts with meanings in their preferred ways. This often produces a variety of narratives that sometimes conflict with each other. In some cases, this phenomenon will be intensified when a foreign policy concept involves substantial economic interests, in which various political and economic actors will actively participate in this process to seek influence.

Those powerful actors will employ their political and intellectual resources to interpret the policy concept in their preferred ways in order to maximize their interests. This often invites a difficult coordination problem that the Chinese central government is struggling to deal with. When it comes to international communication, this makes it impossible for the Chinese central government to forge coherent foreign policy narratives or unify the use of its concepts. It also means that Chinese leaders do not have full control of their concepts even in the domestic arena. In some cases, the academic and policy discussions about the concept may even depart from the leaders' original intentions. When mixed with factional politics, this further muddies the water of slogan politics and makes it difficult to discern the actual intention of slogan manipulation.

In this regard, the slogan politics approach argues that, during this slogan communication process, it is not only about how top leaders or the central government use the slogan to signal messages to domestic

and international actors, but also how those actors react to it. This two-way communication process shapes its conceptual meanings and the level of attention that the concept can focus and the action that it can exhort.

1.1 The Slogan Politics Approach to Understanding Chinese Foreign Policy Concepts

The slogan politics approach offers a series of different perspectives for understanding Chinese foreign policy concepts. First, this approach suggests that China's foreign policy concepts are best understood as multifunctional political slogans instead of well-envisioned and clearly defined geopolitical strategies. When discussing Chinese diplomatic concepts, many international and Chinese analysts often point to concrete foreign policies backed by carefully calculated strategic plans, as previously mentioned. For example, the "Belt and Road Initiative" has been widely interpreted as a "well-thought-out" "clearly defined" grand strategy of Beijing, reflecting its global ambition to build a Sino-centric world order, as Chapter 4 will discuss. The relevant analyses suggest that the introduction of the "Belt and Road Initiative" was an announcement of Beijing's carefully crafted masterplan that would be unfolded thoroughly according to the design. The slogan politics approach, however, suggests that the concept of the "Belt and Road Initiative" is a multifunctional political slogan to mobilize domestic and international actors. At its first inception, the "Belt and Road Initiative" contained no concrete meaning and was kept vague to accommodate the interests of domestic and international actors and thus secure their support. It was also an immature idea that needed to be further developed. Since its first inception, this concept has been constantly evolving according to domestic and international responses. In this regard, the introduction of the "Belt and Road Initiative" is a declaration of vague intent and call for intellectual support rather than an announcement of a concrete Chinese plan.

Second, related to the above point, the slogan politics approach focuses on domestic politics logic to explain Chinese foreign policy concepts—in other words, the *domestic* consumption of Chinese *foreign* policy ideas—and thus provides new angles to observe internal dynamics. It does not only examine how the top leader signals a slogan, but also how other political actors respond to this slogan. The slogan politics approach argues

that the latter is equally (if not more) important than the former. In this regard, it highlights the role of local, subnational actors in shaping Chinese foreign policy concepts. As Chapter 2 will discuss, slogans in China are used to mobilize the political system to follow the leaders' call as a form of governance. The top leader expects active response and participation from local actors to put his ideas into practice. Many international analyses simply take it for granted that this process is automatic in the authoritarian context. Yet, the reality is not so simple, as to what extent the idea will be received domestically depends on the power relations between the message sender and the receiver. When facing policy slogans from a weak or unfavourable leader, for example, local actors can choose to ignore the slogan from the top.

Not surprisingly, signature slogans are often associated with top leaders' personal authority and considered their personal stamp on the CCP and the country, and thus this interaction between top leaders and other actors is highly politized and often goes beyond the content of the slogan per se. Take the then top leader of China Jiang Zemin's "Three Represents" slogan as an example. This ideological slogan was highly controversial as it allowed private business entrepreneurs to join the CCP. When Jiang put forward this slogan, it immediately led to an ideological debate within the CCP. As this slogan was considered Jiang's political legacy, the debate went far beyond the ideological and quickly became a factional struggle, as Chapter 2 will discuss. Similarly, Xi's banner concept "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" is directly associated with Xi's personal authority,[3] and thus discussions about the concept are not only about its content but also its owner Xi.

In comparison with these ideological slogans, most foreign policy concepts are relatively less political and sensitive regarding elite politics. However, for signature concepts defining the top leaders' political legacy, they perform a similar function of power assertion. For example, "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" as Xi's signature slogans are enshrined in the CCP's and the People's Republic of China's (PRC) constitutions and thus represent Xi's personal stamp on the CCP and the PRC. The concepts "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared

[3] Although Xi's power is much more consolidated than Jiang's and thus his slogans have not met the similar level of resistance.

Future for Mankind" have helped Xi to strengthen his power in different ways. For example, these three concepts representing Xi's new visions were put forward at the early stage of Xi's first term to signal his distinct leadership vision about China and the world, and thus walk out from the shadow of his predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin.

Precisely because of this power-signalling function, domestic and global responses to those concepts are personal to Xi. As such, in the domestic arena, when those concepts are introduced by Xi, local political actors are expected to support those concepts in order to demonstrate their political loyalty. Once this loyalty test is passed, those concepts need their support to be further developed. This leaves room for domestic actors to discuss the content of the concept where various tactics of slogan manipulation can be tolerated without necessarily offending Xi. Bringing this power-signalling function into the analysis is critical to develop an accurate understanding of China's foreign policy concepts. Many international analyses often take China's nationwide support of Xi's slogans at face value without examining the internal tricks of slogan politics and thus misguidedly assume that Xi's ideas would be uncritically accepted and faithfully implemented by domestic actors.

The slogan politics approach, however, interprets such nationwide support of a signature slogan as the art of political correctness. Underneath this national support, there are some wholeheartedly loyal supporters, some who have done more than pay lip service, others who are after individual gains, or a mix of both. Chinese history shows that the gesture of supporting a slogan is just a political tactic, hiding different strategies of slogan manipulation. In this regard, no Chinese leader ever truly has full control of their signature concept. As Chapter 2 will discuss, in Mao Zedong's China, even if Mao was worshipped as a living God, different political actors had interpreted Mao's slogans in radically different ways to advance their own interests or even go against Mao in the name of supporting his slogans. Therefore, when it comes to unchallengeable signature slogans, a key battle of slogan politics is to defend the "truthful" vision and fend off dissenters' interpretations. While the three concepts examined in this book are much less dramatic, the modest academic and policy discussion can still produce interpretations that depart from the original intentions of Xi.

In this regard, the slogan politics approach points to the crucial role of academic and local/subnational actors in deciding the development of Chinese foreign policy concepts. The slogan politics approach examines

the role of Chinese academic, media and policy analysts in responding to the concepts introduced by the top leader. The top leader only offers broad ideas and that leaves room for academic and policy analysts to fill these concepts with concrete content. As such, those analysts are crucial in deciding the evolving direction of the relevant ideas. Shaped by their personal expertise and world views, they often interpret those concepts in their own ways thus producing a heated debate with a wide range of different views.

This process cannot be separated from the politics of expertise, in which Chinese specialists tend to drag policy concepts into their specialized areas in order to stay relevant. In the case of "New Type of Great Power Relations", for example, despite Xi Jinping referring this concept to US–China relations, China's European Union (EU) experts argued that Europe also had many great powers and thus this concept could apply to China's relations with European countries. Similar arguments were made by China's other regional experts and thus the relevant discussion produced a long list of countries to be included in this concept, as Chapter 3 will discuss.

When it comes to a foreign policy concept involving enormous economic and political interests, the relevant policy and academic discussion will be further complicated as it will attract the participation of various state and non-state actors. Those actors will actively shape the relevant concept in order to advance their own interests. In the case of the "Belt and Road Initiative", for example, in order to maximize individual gains, many local actors have actively put forward and disseminated their preferred interpretations of the "Belt and Road Initiative", making the central coordination difficult to achieve (Jones and Zeng 2019; Zeng 2019). As a result, the "Belt and Road Initiative" has been unfolding via the struggle among the competing interests of local and subnational actors instead of Beijing's masterplan (Jones and Zeng 2019). It shows that foreign policy ideas can be loaded by local and subnational actors with various policy goals and thus not fully under the central government's control.

The role of local and subnational actors in China's foreign policymaking is often neglected by the literature of international politics, as the latter considers China as a single monolithic political entity, in which there is a unified and "highly centralized" system for Beijing to mobilize in order to attain centrally established objectives (Hill 2016: 243). A sizeable literature of China studies, however, has pointed to

the features of fragmentation and decentralization within the authoritarian system (Schurmann 1966; Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988). The rise of globalization has also contributed to this phenomenon and thus led to internationalization of China's party-state (Jones and Zeng 2019; Hameiri and Zeng 2019; Hameiri and Jones 2016; Jones 2019; Hameiri, Jones, and Heathershaw 2019). All of these features mean that China's foreign relations are no longer controlled by a few top elites in Beijing, if they ever were. This book demonstrates the increasingly important role of local states and academic actors in forging Chinese foreign policy ideas.

This critical role played by local and academic actors also challenges the international media and academic discussions over Chinese policy-making under Xi (Jones and Zeng 2019). In the relevant discussions, Xi is often described as a strong man concentrating power in his own hand as evidenced by his "core leader" status and amendment of the term limit. As the most powerful Chinese leader since Deng Xiaoping if not Mao Zedong, he is China's "new Mao". So, the argument goes, the foreign policy concepts including "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" are under Xi's command and reflect his ambitious personal vision to change China and the world.[4]

This kind of narrative works in concert with those in China—though without direct conversation. As previously mentioned, some Chinese media and academic analysts have praised Xi's personal wisdom in crafting those policy slogans. These Chinese propaganda narratives are understandable in the context of the aforementioned slogans' functions in domestic propaganda and power assertion; however, it is problematic to take them at their face value. This is not about how powerful Xi is, but the nature of slogan politics. The formation of a signature slogan is usually conducted by a group of academic and policy analysts along with the top leader. When this is done, it can only produce a vague vision and broad framework, waiting for the leader to publicly introduce this slogan to call for more intellectual support, as previously discussed. During this process,

[4] For example, He Baogang argues that "Xi Jinping is in command" of the "Belt and Road Initiative". According to He (2019: 182), "while it is well known that in all political systems the role of political leaders is paramount, this is especially so in the authoritarian system in China, as embodied in and epitomised by Xi Jinping's command. The 'Belt and Road Initiative' is an ambitious project reflecting his ambitious style of leadership, his China Dream and his vision of new Sino-empire building."

the slogan can be interpreted in radically different ways to serve the interests of local and subnational actors. In this regard, no Chinese top leader has full control of his slogans—not even Mao, as previously mentioned.

As such, even when it comes to significant national projects, such as the "Belt and Road Initiative", which are associated with the top leader Xi's personal authority and introduced into the CCP's constitution, Beijing's central agencies are not fully capable of coordinating political actors within China and producing a more unified Chinese narrative, as Chapter 4 will discuss. It is particularly notable that all of this happened under Xi's leadership, during which period various significant reform projects had already been launched to centralize power and strengthen the authority of the central government (Wang and Zeng 2016). During the era of Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, who was famous for power-sharing and consensus-building, the fragmentation of authority and diverse policy narratives were even more prevalent in China. In short, the slogan politics approach suggests that Chinese academic and policy actors play a critical role in shaping the formation and evolution of China's foreign policy concepts.

Third, related to the above point, the aforementioned domestic consumption of Chinese foreign policy concepts sheds light on understanding Chinese strategic narratives on the global stage, i.e. international consumption of Chinese foreign policy concepts. As the slogan politics approach shows, when a new policy concept is put forward, it will often stimulate policy discussion and thus produces a variety of competing Chinese narratives—which are often inconsistent, ambiguous and self-conflicting. Some Chinese political actors also deliberately make use of their resources to selectively project their preferred narratives to the global audience. All of these have made it very difficult for Beijing to forge more coherent foreign policy narratives and thus undermine the effective communication of Chinese foreign policy concepts on the global stage.

Needless to say, the phenomenon of diverse domestic policy debates and conflicting narratives from within is not unique to China. It is much more common in democracies. The EU, for example, is always struggling to find a unified narrative due to its governance mechanism (Miskimmon 2017). As a normative power, the EU is proud of and famous for its diversity, multinational identity and democratic process, while this is hardly the case for China. Because of the limited understanding of the Chinese political system and the obvious language barrier, the conflicting messages sent out from China (especially the Chinese governmental entities) are more

damaging to Beijing's international relations than conflicting communications from democracies are to their international relationships. Generally speaking, international actors have a more advanced understanding of, and are more familiar with, democracies such as the EU. People simply get used to open and conflicting policy debates and thus take them for granted. As a result, there is a slightly more advanced understanding of the difference between those diverse views and, for example, the official line of Brussels. The different policy stances among political parties and leaders are also much more open and transparent in democracies than in China.

Yet, when it comes to the more opaque authoritarian system in China, it often leads to confusion and (un)conscious misinterpretation. Certain views from the Chinese local governments/ministries or prominent scholars are more likely to be taken seriously and sometimes misguidedly considered by international actors to be the official line of Beijing, due to the limited understanding of China's authoritarian system. This is particularly notable when some Chinese domestic actors deliberately attempt to misguide the international actors for political purposes. By eliciting external responses from international actors, they can influence Chinese foreign policy indirectly. This kind of endeavour will no doubt undermine Beijing's attempt to coordinate the international communication of Chinese foreign policy ideas.

In addition, on the international stage, it is not uncommon for some media, academic and policy analysts to have pre-existing views and then selectively look for Chinese literature to support those views. This has also been used by political leaders to promote certain policy stances. An obvious example is given by Trump's former chief strategist Steve Bannon who uses Chinese literature to justify his "economic war" theory. According to Bannon (Kuttner 2017),

> We're at economic war with China. It's in all their literature. They're not shy about saying what they're doing. One of us is going to be a hegemon in 25 or 30 years and it's gonna be them if we go down this path.

The diverse Chinese discourse means that Chinese literature can always be found to support Bannon's arguments; however, this does not mean that this literature is representative. When combined with the public's limited understanding of China, Chinese narratives and views can be easily misrepresented on the international stage. As such, many Chinese scholars

and policy analysts are seriously concerned about minority Chinese views—especially those hard-line, hawkish nationalist ones—intentionally or unintentionally being presented as mainstream views of Chinese foreign policy on the international stage. This will no doubt mislead international actors and harm China's own interests—to some Chinese scholars, this is a "kidnap" of China's national interests (Liu 2012: 44).

One example of this is the US-China narrative battle over the coronavirus. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Zhao Lijian's outspoken comments that the coronavirus could have been brought to China by the US army have been widely interpreted by international media and policy analysts as China's state effort to promote conspiracy theory (Barnes, Rosenberg, and Wong 2020). Zhao's comments angered many in the US and led to Trump's countermeasure by calling the coronavirus a "Chinese virus", which further harmed US–China relations. The Chinese ambassador to the US Cui Tiankai's open dismissal of Zhao's conspiracy theory shows that Zhao's views hardly represent the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs let alone the entire Chinese government (Swan and Allen-Ebrahimian 2020). Nonetheless, Zhao's hawkish views have clearly damaged US–China relations and put the modest and silent majority of Chinese diplomats into shadow.

This kind of misrepresentation is more complicated when driven by state actors. Take the introduction of "core interests" as an example, "core interests" is a policy concept that China imported to refer to specific items that represent the non-negotiable bottom line of China's foreign policy. When it was adopted in the Chinese official discourses, it was not clearly defined. Driven by its significance, various actors/departments within China's political system tried to interpret and define their own interests as being "core" in order to gain more resources and power (Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin 2015). This led to various irrelevant interpretations that went against the original policy goal. China's forestry sector, for example, made an effort to promote the "grain for green" project—designed to retire farmland in order to address environmental problems such as soil erosion and flooding—as a national core interest (Zhang 2011). This interpretation, based on its departmental interests, was a fundamental departure from the original intentions of Beijing, which wanted to use "core interests" to publicize the bottom line of China's foreign policy to an external audience.

Sometimes, Beijing cannot openly acknowledge its position that a particular case is not considered to be a core interest; if Beijing were to do

so, it would have to face the anger of domestic nationalist sentiment. One such example is the South China Sea, on which Beijing must maintain an ambiguous position in order to prevent domestic criticism and maintain flexibility for diplomacy at the same time (Campbell et al. 2013); however, this comes at the expense of a coherent and effective foreign policy narrative. As Beijing is incapable of openly disapproving certain narratives and interpretations that go against its will, these conflicting and ambiguous messages continue to confuse and misguide both domestic and international actors.

In addition, the Chinese central government is neither capable nor willing to eliminate differing opinions within the system. In many cases, the central government has allowed local actors to participate in the decision-making process, and it allows some level of contestation and openness, sometimes making necessary concessions to legitimize the system and reach consensus. As previously mentioned, in order to consolidate domestic support, the relevant central policy concepts and guidelines are deliberately kept vague to accommodate domestic stakeholders' interests. Although this level of tolerance may reinforce the authoritarian system and the legitimacy of its decision-making processes, this book shows how the tolerance has also been exploited by domestic actors to advance their own agendas. In this regard, the authoritarian system is reinforced at the expense of central coordination as well as coherent and consistent foreign policy narratives.

Those diverse and conflicting domestic narratives would not be automatically translated into Beijing's policy. However, when powerful Chinese actors aim to exert their influence and voice their views on the domestic and global stages in order to influence policy agenda and debate, those views deserve in-depth analyses. The slogan politics approach sheds light on understanding their production mechanism and political functions.

Lastly, the slogan politics approach shows that the construction of Chinese foreign policy concepts does not only lie in domestic but also international arenas. It is not only about how China signals its slogan but also how international actors react to this slogan. As previously mentioned, those concepts are introduced as vague ideas to accommodate the interests of international actors, leaving rooms for international actors to influence those concepts. Similar to Chinese domestic actors, international actors can interpret those Chinese concepts in their preferred ways to advance their interests. Indeed, as Chapter 3 will discuss, some Chinese

scholars are concerned that if the Chinese intellectual community fails to provide concrete ideas to fill up Chinese-coined concepts, international actors may take advantage of their vagueness and interpret them for their own interests.

In fact, international participation is welcomed by the Chinese government not only in helping to secure a domestic propaganda win, but also providing useful feedback to adjust its policies. As Chapter 4 will discuss, the "Belt and Road Initiative" was originally put forward as peripheral diplomacy in 2013. Yet, the enthusiastic response from the international state and business actors had pushed China to further expand this peripheral diplomacy into a global initiative. When the list of 65 "Belt and Road Initiative" countries was widely circulated, many countries not on the list asked for their role in the "Belt and Road Initiative". The then Ireland Ambassador to China John Paul Kavanagh, for example, expressed his confusion over the vagueness of the "Belt and Road Initiative" and wondered what Ireland's role was in this "Belt and Road Initiative" as Ireland was not included on the list (Dong 2015; NewChinaTV 2017). The then "Belt and Road Initiative's" specific geographic focus had also led to criticism accusing it being an exclusive bloc.

All these external responses feed back into China's domestic policy discussion for reflection. Some Chinese policy analysts pushed to promote the "Belt and Road Initiative" as a global initiative that was not limited to 65 countries. As a direct response to accommodate international demands and fend off critics, China later positioned "the Belt and Road Initiative" as a global initiative open to all countries interested. So, the point to emphasize is that, similar to Chinese domestic actors, international actors can play an important role in shaping the meaning and development of China's diplomatic concepts.

1.2 Three Case Studies: "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind"

This book demonstrates the above arguments by using three case studies: "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind". All of these cases are timely and among the most important diplomatic concepts put forward by Chinese top leader Xi Jinping. "New Type of Great Power Relations"

is Xi's first major diplomatic initiative. As Xi's political legacies, "Belt and Road Initiative" is incorporated into the constitution of the CCP, and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" is enshrined in both the CCP's and the PRC's constitutions. Together, these three concepts reflect China's new thinking about its relations with the world under Xi's leadership. As ongoing policy concepts, this book mainly examines these concepts from their first inception to 2019 under Xi Jinping as well as their historical roots in the previous leadership. As this book will show, they serve as multifunctional slogans to communicate with domestic and international audiences.

During the CCP's power transition in 2012, "New Type of Great Power Relations" was put forward by Xi as a major diplomatic concept. It was Xi's first foreign policy slogan to assert his power as the then new leader of China. When Xi Jinping put forward this concept, Xi clearly intended to use it to describe Sino-US relations with the hope to elevate China's role in these bilateral relations. The introduction of this concept was thus a declaration of intent to expect the US to take China more seriously. Beyond this vague intent, however, Xi had neither clearly defined this concept nor developed a clear plan of action. China's academic and policy community was expected to develop this concept into concrete ideas. While the intellectual support helped to make some progress, it failed to get rid of the conceptual vagueness.

Fundamental disagreements within the intellectual community had generated a variety of diverse and competing narratives to further strengthen this conceptual vagueness. Some policy discussions also complicated the concept by introducing a wide range of other bilateral relations that clearly departed from Xi's original focus on US–China relations. This vague, undefined "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept aroused little American interest to engage, despite that China had made considerable efforts in promoting it for years. As a result, China eventually demotivated and shifted its promotion efforts to new slogans like the "Belt and Road Initiative".

The "Belt and Road Initiative" has attracted unprecedented global attention. This has granted Xi Jinping and the CCP international legitimacy to consolidate their power domestically. In order to maximize international support, the "Belt and Road Initiative" was introduced as a vague idea of regional economic cooperation in peripheral diplomacy in 2013. The active international response has gradually pushed it into

a global initiative. In the domestic arena, as the "Belt and Road Initiative" involves enormous economic interests, Chinese domestic actors have actively jumped on the bandwagon of this "Belt and Road Initiative" to advance their own interests. This has led to intense domestic competition for state resources that the central government is struggling to coordinate. Those self-serving political actors are driven by individual, departmental and regional interests, in which the larger national and international geopolitical picture is irrelevant. All of these point to a highly inconsistent, incoherent and ambiguous "Belt and Road Initiative" that contradicts the existing mainstream analyses that consider it a "clearly defined" and "well-thought-out" grand strategy of Beijing.

In order to influence the "Belt and Road Initiative", local and subnational actors have employed their media and policy resources to exploit the "Belt and Road Initiative's" conceptual vagueness and craft and disseminate their preferred interpretations. All of these have produced a variety of diverse and competing Chinese narratives of the "Belt and Road Initiative", leading to confusion and complexity of its international communication and undermining Beijing's promotion efforts. It has also made the "Belt and Road Initiative" concept end up as an all-encompassing slogan.

The aforementioned conceptual vagueness is perhaps most obvious in the case of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind". Generally speaking, this concept represents China's vision for a globalized world in which China should play a larger role. Designed as an overarching concept to integrate all other key foreign policy concepts including "New Type of Great Power Relations" and "Belt and Road Initiative", this concept is the most symbolically significant foreign policy slogan under Xi Jinping. On a personal level, it represents Xi Jinping's theoretical contribution to the CCP and the PRC. On the global stage, it represents Chinese wisdom or solution to global governance and international relations.

Yet, beyond this symbolic significance, it consists of few practical policy ideas. Building on other ambiguous and vague concepts including the previous two, this overarching concept suffers the similar conceptual problems to a greater extent. In addition, China's loose and convenient use of the concept and its derivatives has further strengthened the confusion and ambiguity, showing that the use of significant slogans is not always behind carefully designed strategic calculations.

1.3 Book Outline

This book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 elaborates the rationale of slogan politics and its different forms in the eras of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. It also discusses how political actors and Chinese intellectuals participate in China's slogan politics and exert their influence. Chapters 3–5 present the case studies of "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind", respectively. Each chapter shows how each respective concept is gradually established in China and how it serves as a multifunctional slogan to communicate with China's domestic and international actors. Chapter 6 summarizes the key arguments of the book and the common conceptual development patterns. It also briefly discusses the wider implications of the slogan politics approach in understanding Chinese foreign policy.

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CHAPTER 2

Rationale for Slogan Politics

This chapter analyses the rationale for China's slogan politics. It is divided into three sections. The first two sections study different forms of slogan politics in the eras of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. It shows how slogans can be deployed to test the loyalty of political actors but can also be subject to their manipulation. As it will show, when a slogan is put forward, there are multiple ways to respond to and manipulate the slogan including but not limited to (a) crafting and promoting alternative slogans to compete with it, (b) using the slogan's owner's other slogans to go against it, (c) reinterpreting this slogan by inserting a new agenda and (d) highlighting one element of the slogan while downplaying others to distort it. These kinds of tactics used in slogan politics occur from the lowest to the highest levels of the Chinese political system.

The third section of this chapter focuses on the role of the Chinese intellectual and policy community in contemporary Chinese slogan politics. It analyses the state mechanism that steers intellectual participation in policy discussion. While this participation helps to inform policymakers, it often produces a variety of interpretations and narratives that cannot be fully regulated by the state.

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2.1 Traditions of China's Slogan Politics

This book focuses on slogan politics in Xi Jinping's era as all three selected foreign policy concepts were put forward by Xi after he took power in 2012. Nonetheless, it is important to review the historical context of slogan politics in order to understand its form under Xi. In fact, slogan politics has always played an important role in the PRC. Relevant slogan politics can be traced back to as early as Mao Zedong's era. During Mao's communist China, the society was so highly politicized that slogans played an important role not only in state affairs but also ordinary people's lives. Average people were expected to repeat those slogans on a regular basis as a measurement of political correctness (Lu 1999). The CCP had intensively deployed slogans to achieve political goals including condemning traditional Chinese cultural values, promoting awareness of class struggle and establishing Mao's personal charisma (Lu 1999).

For example, in order to eulogize Mao's character and his contribution to the PRC and the CCP, a large number of political slogans such as "long live Chairman Mao", "wish Chairman Mao a long life", and "let Mao Zedong's thought control everything" were produced and disseminated nationwide (Lu 1999). In those state propagandas in the form of slogans, Mao was exalted to divine status—the so-called "red sun" and "the greatest teacher, the greatest leader, the greatest commander and the greatest helmsman". The relevant propaganda had successfully established Mao as a god-like figure in Chinese people's beliefs, and those Mao-related slogans became part of people's private conversations and letters.

Nonetheless, despite such high authority and nationwide support, Mao never managed to fully coordinate domestic actors to coherently implement his ideas. For example, during the Cultural Revolution, *Selected Work of Mao Zedong* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* (known as *Little Red Book*) were widely distributed for the masses to follow Mao's instructions. The *Little Red Book* in particular was considered the "bible" in China that people were expected to read on a daily basis. However, Mao's slogans from those writings were interpreted in radically different ways within China that seriously bothered the top leadership. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is important to briefly review the mechanism of slogan dissemination. How did Mao pass on his ideas to the grassroots party branches and ordinary people? In order to achieve mass persuasion, political slogans were designed to be catchy and memorable in

Mao's era in order to disseminate through the official media such as TV, newspapers and radio. While being catchy and memorable helped their political marketing, those slogans—expressed in short political phrases to simplify complicated ideas—could be open for interpretation.

Here, the CCP relied on a barrage of state instructions, a long series of political study sessions and meetings and many articles, pamphlets and textbooks to reinforce and elaborate its political slogans through various levels of government to reach the local party branches and grassroots work units (Lu 1999; Shih 2008). However, this process of information dissemination via multi-levels of party-state organizations would inevitably lead to information loss and distortion along the way—not only because of the impact of the individual and organizational interests as many saw this information flow as opportunities to insert their own agendas. Thus, the same information passing from the central state to the grassroots level may end up with very different ideas across the nation.[1]

During Mao's China, different political factions took advantage of Mao's vague slogans to interpret them in their own ways in order to advance their local and personal interests (Wang 1995). Under the name of unquestioned allegiance to Mao, those factions fought against each other, which even led to nationwide small-scale civil wars (Wang 1995). While they claimed that they were guided by Mao's instructions, what they really followed was their own (preferred) interpretations of Mao. In this regard, while Mao and his ideas were hailed, they were betrayed at almost every critical stage of China's Cultural Revolution (Wang 1995). This is one of the key reasons why Mao's Cultural Revolution evolved in a way that got out of his control.

So, the point to emphasize is that even for supreme leaders like Mao, his unchallenged personal authority had not prevented his slogans from being manipulated by domestic actors. This historical context puts many contemporary analyses of China's policymaking under Xi into perspective. As mentioned in Chapter 1, when it comes to analyses of Xi's signature slogans including "Belt and Road Initiative", many assume

[1] This central–local interaction in slogan politics has historical roots in ancient China. During Chinese imperial times, it had never been easy for Chinese central regimes to completely direct local states and get their instructions fully implemented at the local level. Chinese emperors neither had the interest nor ability to fully eliminate the phenomena that local and other political actors manipulated their instructions to serve for personal and private interests.

that Xi's ideas would be faithfully implemented by domestic actors given Xi's "new Mao" status and the nationwide support of his slogans. The above example of slogan politics in Mao's era suggests that this is simply impossible. The following section further explores why.

2.2 Political Loyalty and the Logic of Power Assertion in Slogans

The fundamental function of political slogans is to pass information and exhort action. When Chinese leaders put forward a slogan, they expect local and subnational actors to actively echo this slogan and act accordingly. The level of response and action that it can exhort depends on not only the popularity of this information but also the power of the slogan's owner. Thus, the response can sometimes become an indicator of political support to the slogan's owner—usually top leaders.

For example, when it comes to critical slogans associated with the leaders' personal authority, slogan politics is closely involved with political loyalty and leadership credentials. This is most obvious when it comes to grand ideological slogans; almost every Chinese top leader has their own distinct tags—"Mao Zedong Thought", "Deng Xiaoping Theory", "Three Represents", "Scientific Outlook of Development" and "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era". For some slogans, it is very easy to identify their owners as the leaders' names are embedded into the slogans, while others are not. This again reflects different levels of Chinese top leaders' personal authority and power status within the CCP.

Despite the personal ownership of these slogans, their formation was more than one person's work. They were produced by a group of leaders with the support and input of the Chinese intellectual community. For example, Wang Huning, a top advisor with an academic background as a political theorist who used to work at Fudan University, played a very important role in serving Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping to formulate their respective slogans "Three Represents", "Scientific Outlook of Development" and "China Dream" (Patapan and Wang 2017). Generally speaking, Chinese intellectuals play important and complicated roles in crafting, developing and elaborating those slogans, as this chapter will discuss later.

When those slogans are put forward, the response of domestic political actors is often complicated and diverse, and this response carries

very important political signals. Take Jiang Zemin's "Three Represents" slogan as an example. "Three Represents" stands for (1) "represents advanced social productive forces", (2) "represents the progressive course of China's advanced culture", and (3) "represents the fundamental interests of the majority". It is considered Jiang Zemin's theoretical contribution to the CCP and his political legacy.

"Three Represents" follows Zhao Ziyang's slogan of "Primary Stage of Socialism" to further redefine the CCP's commitments towards socialism (Zeng 2015). The first "represent"—"represents advanced social productive forces"—was very controversial as it provided a theoretical basis to welcome private business entrepreneurs to join the communist party. While this was an attempt by the CCP to form an alliance with China's growing business elites, it challenged the fundamental basis of a communist party, i.e. being the vehicle to deliver a communist society. During Mao's era, in order to realize this mission, the CCP had launched a series of campaigns to eliminate social classes, oppose private ownership and become the vanguard of the proletariat—all of those seemed to go against "Three Represents".

Not surprisingly, the introduction of "Three Represents" immediately led to intense criticism within and without the CCP. According to a senior CCP leader Zhang Dejiang (2000), for example,

> Three Represents "will make indistinct the party's nature and its standard as vanguard fighter of the working class and mislead people into thinking that 'he who is rich has the qualification to join the party'. The basic masses of workers and peasants who knew just too well the pains of what it was like in the old society when people fawned on the rich and looked down on the poor would be led to misunderstand the party ideologically and distance themselves from the party emotionally. This will affect and weaken the mass basis of the party". (English Translation: Holbig 2009)

The importance of "Three Represents" had inevitably politicized the ideological debate over whether it was appropriate for the CCP to allow membership to private entrepreneurs. In order to defend his slogan, Jiang had to fend off leftists, including shutting down some CCP journals such as *Search for Truth (真理的追求)* that were critical of his "Three Represents" slogan (Rennie 2001).

While the relevant discussion was a debate over ideology, it was embedded in the then factional politics. In this context, standing by

Jiang's "Three Represents" slogan was an indicator of factional loyalties in the political climate. At the time, ideological campaigns to promote Jiang's "Three Represents" slogan functioned as a "radar" for Jiang to "discern loyalties of faction members" (Shih 2008: 1177).[2] While a few remained sceptical over Jiang's slogan, many local leaders chose to publicly praise Jiang's slogan and his personal wisdom in oral and written forms in order to win Jiang's favour. Provinces more financially dependent on the central government were also more likely to openly praise Jiang's slogans in order to please Jiang and thus receive additional subsidies (Shih 2008).

In order to settle the intra-party ideological dispute over "Three Represents", Jiang Zemin's successor Hu Jintao chose to reinterpret this "Three Represents" as "Three for People" (三为民) and downplay the first and most controversial "represent", i.e. "the advanced social productive forces" by emphasizing the last "represent", i.e. the interests of the masses. In this new interpretation, "Three Represents" was less about the controversial idea of inviting private entrepreneurs to join the CCP, and more about standing for the interests of the masses. While continuing to endorse Jiang's slogan, Hu changed its essence by introducing this reinterpretation.

In short, the above example of "Three Represents" shows that political slogans, especially important ones, often go beyond the slogans per se as they are too highly politicized to mix with factional politics. This means that most of the discussions including opposition to the implied policy content per se have to be conducted in the name of supporting this policy slogan, otherwise it can be easily interpreted as opposing the top leadership or even supporting a coup. In addition, even top leaders such as Hu Jintao chose to use the strategy of reinterpretation to quietly change the essence of Jiang's slogan without offending its introducer, i.e. Jiang. This indicates that such a reinterpretation strategy exists at not only the local but also the highest level of China's political system.

In the Chinese context, slogan politics is closely involved with the culture of "biaotai" (表态), i.e. to make a known position. When a top leader puts forward an important slogan, other political actors are expected to make a known position about whether they support it or not. Common options include (a) directly oppose, (b) keep silent and quiet

[2] Similarly, during Hu Jintao's era, the promotion of ideological slogans including Hu's "Scientific Outlook of Development" and Jiang's "Three Represents" had the similar function of discerning factional loyalties (Zeng 2016).

resistance, and (c) endorse the slogan. Direct opposition is a straightforward challenge to the slogan and thus the top leader. As such, it is not only about challenging the slogan per se and its implied policy content but also the leadership of the slogan's owner, i.e. the top leader. Direct opposition to a leader's slogan within the CCP has become increasingly rare since Jiang Zemin's era but was not uncommon during the eras of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

In the late 1970s, for example, after Mao Zedong passed away and the Gang of Four were arrested, the then party leader Hua Guofeng decided to shift the party's focus away from Mao's "class struggle" approach and focus on economic development instead. However, as Mao's handpicked successor, Hua could not openly acknowledge that Mao's "class struggle" approach was wrong and that China needed a new road (Weatherley 2006, 2010). Thus, Hua chose to highlight some of Mao's ideas (i.e. "economic reform") while downplaying others (i.e. "class struggle"). In order to suit this agenda, Mao's words were redefined and reinterpreted at the time. Chinese newspapers started to publish Mao's words about economic problems that were not available to the public before (Chen 1995). So, while the actual practice was to tailor Mao's words to fit Hua's new agenda, the propaganda machine told a story of how this agenda was Mao's ideas. In this way, a radical shift from Mao's original "class struggle" agenda did not appear like a betrayal of Mao. All of these were done under the name of absolute loyalty to Mao.

When it comes to Mao's political legacy and historical status, Hua put forward his famous "two whatevers" slogan—"we firmly uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made and we unswervingly adhere to whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave". This slogan was widely supported by Hua's followers; however, it was challenged by his political opponent Deng Xiaoping. While Deng shared the vision about economic development, he disagreed with Hua's approach to dealing with Mao's legacy and historical status. Deng and his supporters believed that, before the CCP moved to a new agenda, the CCP should acknowledge the hard fact that Mao's policies failed in the past decades. Deng argued that Mao should be at least partially responsible for the problematic policies made under his rule.

In order to challenge Hua and his "two whatevers" slogan, Deng put forward a competing slogan "seek truth from facts", which was a quote from Mao Zedong. The underlying message of this slogan was that we should accept facts as truth; if the facts showed that Mao was wrong,

then we should acknowledge it instead of distorting those facts. Ironically, Deng also claimed that his approach was "holding high the banner of Mao Zedong Thought". By using Mao's own words "seek truth from facts" as the slogan, Deng claimed that it was Mao's own idea to accept facts as truth and thus the CCP should accept Mao's wrongdoing.

So, while Deng and Hua were taking a very different approach from Mao, they both tried to tailor Mao's words to fit their own agendas and took advantage of Mao's slogans to justify those agendas. The competition between Deng's "seek truth from facts" and Hua's "two whatevers" slogans represented not only different approaches to dealing with Mao's legacy but also a factional struggle within the CCP leadership. Chinese domestic actors were expected to make a known position on which one to support. Deng's loyal supporters in the Chinese army, for example, took a lead by using its military newspapers to promote Deng's slogan and became a power base to support Deng's agenda. In the end, Deng's slogan dominated the discussion of the CCP and the PRC, which helped Deng to eventually defeat Hua Guofeng.

Thanks to China's three-decade institutionalization of its leadership transition system, in contemporary times, Chinese elite politics has become much more stable and thus slogan politics is far less dramatic (Zeng 2014, 2015). We can hardly see such open competition of political slogans nowadays. The former head of Chongqing city Bo Xilai's slogan of "striking black and singing red" (唱红打黑) between 2008 and 2012 is perhaps one of a very few examples that openly contested the CCP's political direction and thus leadership in recent times. However, Bo's method by way of a populist campaign to compete for leadership is very unusual, and the level of competition is relatively mild in comparison with slogan politics in Deng's and Mao's eras.

While most foreign policy concepts are less relevant to factional politics, some signature ones such as "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" contain the elements of factional politics and perform the same function of representing a leader's political legacy. An open attack on the slogan "Belt and Road Initiative" within the CCP, for example, can be considered a signal of opposition to Xi Jinping given that the "Belt and Road Initiative" is Xi's legacy. This is clearly uncommon in today's political climate. When it comes to opposition, a more common stance of resistance nowadays is option (b) "keep silent and quiet resistance" rather than openly challenging or promoting competing slogans. This is also called "make no position" (不表态). In

China's academic community, for example, a group of university scholars who are critical of Xi's foreign policy and "Belt and Road Initiative" have not actively engaged with the discussion of the "Belt and Road Initiative". As previously mentioned, the introduction of key policy concepts functions as slogans to call for intellectual support. Those scholars chose to quietly resist the "Belt and Road Initiative" by not answering the call. This is made at the expense of losing relevance in the government, funding opportunities and media exposure. Some are also very critical of those scholars who immediately touted "Belt and Road Initiative". They despised those scholars for shameless extolling "Belt and Road Initiative" and serving as a propaganda tool without any academic independence.[3]

Notably, not every "keep silent" position means quiet resistance, and there is a position in between. For opportunists, for example, it is a safe option to observe and evaluate risks and benefits for a period of time. Especially when a new slogan is just put forward, there are a lot of uncertainties including its vague content, political implications and popularities. Thus, some may choose to "keep silent" for a while and make a known position later when more information is available. This is a relatively safe strategy when facing a divided party leadership. For example, during the aforementioned competition between Deng Xiaoping and Hua Guofeng, many chose to "keep silent" when Deng's "seek truth from facts" slogan was just introduced as they were not sure whether Deng might be defeated. Some only started to openly endorse Deng's slogan when Deng won an upper hand.

Since 2012, Xi Jinping has put forward a series of reforms and campaigns to consolidate his power. In comparison with his predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, Xi is in a much more powerful position. In this context, his slogans have met relatively less resistance. However, this does not mean that his slogans would be faithfully implemented at the local level. While there is nationwide endorsement and support for Xi's slogans,—as a part of the political correctness test, the key patterns of slogan politics including manipulation for individual gains have not changed.

After introducing a major policy slogan, Xi needs to rely on Beijing's central agencies such as the National Development and Reform Commission to issue guidelines to coordinate local actors. When facing those

[3] Interview conducted in Beijing on 16 and 17 June 2016.

central guidelines, some local actors will have their own political tactics—including "ignore", "re-interpret" or even "challenge"—to respond to the decisions made by those central agencies (Jones 2019). "Ignore" means that while actively praising the leaders' slogans, local actors can selectively neglect the instructions issued by Beijing's central agencies. "Re-interpret" involves consciously and unconsciously reinterpreting the slogan and central guidelines, as the aforementioned examples showed. In very undesirable situations, local actors can even choose to "challenge" the instructions issued by central agencies in the name of supporting the leaders' slogans. They can, for example, justify their uncooperative attitude by arguing that the central agencies' policy guidelines fail to reflect the spirit of the top leader's slogans. When the "Belt and Road Initiative's" central guidelines were released by Beijing's central agencies, Jiangsu Province believed that these guidelines did not fairly reflect its provincial interests and thus chose to challenge its legitimacy while highlighting other national documents in favour of Jiangsu. In other words, in the name of actively supporting Xi's "Belt and Road Initiative", the province selectively challenged and obeyed Beijing's central agencies. Chinese local provinces have widely used these tactics to maximize their interests in the name of supporting the "Belt and Road Initiative", as Chapter 4 will discuss.

In addition to bureaucratic interests, ideological orientation also produces different interpretations of leadership slogans. A notable example to mention is Xi's "China Dream". When Xi Jinping just took power in 2012, he put forward a slogan of the "China Dream" that involved an aspiration of China's future (Callahan 2013). At the time, as he had just assumed power and not had the chance to elaborate and implement his policy directions, the slogan "China Dream" led to a wide range of radically different interpretations. Pro-liberal forces, for example, tried to drag the slogan towards their preferred liberal direction. In the name of supporting Xi's "China Dream", they hoped to set the liberal agenda for this slogan and underlying policies. For example, in January 2013, a group of *Southern Weekly* editors planned to publish an editorial putting forward their interpretation of "China Dream" (Taylor 2013). In their planned version, "China Dream" was a dream of constitutional governance that heavily emphasized on rule of law, freedom and civil rights. This met the local propaganda department's unusual censorship and editing without informing the editorial team. In response, the newspaper's staff revealed the incident online and went on street protests,

leading a public demonstration against press censorship. Their constitutional governance interpretation was not the kind of "China Dream" that Xi Jinping wanted; however, at the time, no one really knew which interpretation fitted Xi's taste—perhaps Xi himself had not made up his mind yet.

A few months later, in May 2013, the Chinese media put forward the official interpretation, in which the "China Dream" was described as a collective dream of Chinese people—a dream of China's national rejuvenation (Li 2013). This interpretation and Xi's subsequent policies clearly indicate that Xi's "China Dream" slogan is quite opposite to the sort of liberal "constitutional governance" vision that those *Southern Weekly* editors hoped for. This case also shows that, unlike open competition among different slogans during Mao's and Deng's eras, the battle of slogan politics in Xi's China is mostly about competing alternative interpretations of the slogans.

The aforementioned slogan politics mainly focuses on the domestic dimension as it involves a process to mobilize domestic actors. There is also an international dimension as well, as Chapter 1 discussed. With its rise, China has become increasingly interested in playing this slogan politics on the international stage. This is to say, international actors are also expected to echo China's slogans as a way to show their support to China and demonstrate their good relations. Chinese media and policy analysts are in favour of stories showing foreign leaders praising or adopting Chinese slogans. When the "New Type of Great Power Relations" was put forward, for example, China had high expectations that the Obama administration might adopt this concept in oral and written forms, as Chapter 3 will discuss. American diplomats' lack of interest in accommodating this Chinese expectation eventually demotivated China in promoting this concept.

In comparison, the international response to the "Belt and Road Initiative" is more enthusiastic as it involves enormous business benefits. As Chapter 4 will show, many countries joined the bandwagon campaigns to support the "Belt and Road Initiative" despite the vague content and ambiguous blueprint. Italy, for example, openly endorsed the "Belt and Road Initiative", which was described as a major diplomatic victory by Chinese media. Others, however, remain sceptical and cautiously observe its development. The US has also exercised considerable pressure to contain China's "Belt and Road Initiative". In this context, a position towards the "Belt and Road Initiative" is highly politized on the global

stage; the major states' responses are more than their attitudes towards the policy content of the "Belt and Road Initiative" per se, almost becoming a signal of which side they choose to stand with, the US or China.

Yet, beyond the above symbolic meanings, we shall not uncritically accept the practical values of adopting Chinese slogans in political language. After all, adopting those slogans in a political actor's language does not mean that this actor will fully support the content of those slogans as they can be interpreted in very different ways. There is no doubt that when international actors such as national governments, international organizations, corporations and media adopt those Chinese-coined concepts in their speeches and documents, it is valuable to the CCP's domestic propaganda. As Chapter 5 will discuss, when the United Nations (UN) documents adopted the concept of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind", Chinese media hailed it as a big diplomatic win for China. It is considered by many Chinese that the UN has made a known position to support the Chinese vision of the future world. This story helped to boost the domestic legitimacy of the CCP and the concept's owner Xi.

Beyond this domestic propaganda win, however, to what extent those slogans are helpful to China's diplomacy on the global stage remains unclear despite China's enormous promotion efforts. Those foreign policy slogans—that are supposed to be externally facing—are neither catchy nor memorable and thus lack key qualities of popular slogans. The lack of coherent and unified foreign policy narratives is also not helpful to foster an effective international understanding of Chinese concepts, as the following section will explore further.

2.3 Slogans' Role in Mobilizing Intellectual Power

While political actors are the key audience of slogans regarding political loyalties and support, Chinese intellectuals have their part to play in slogan politics. This section tries to analyse the role of the Chinese intellectual community and how they participate in policy discussions. In this book, intellectual community mainly refers to two groups: (1) policy analysts based in governmental organizations and state-affiliated think tanks and (2) university academics. The line between these two groups is not completely clear as some university academics may have formal and informal roles in governmental organizations.

As Chapter 1 discussed, a key function of a policy slogan is to mobilize Chinese intellectuals for support. Chinese scholars are clearly expected to devote their intellectual power to develop those concepts into more concrete policy guidelines. They are encouraged to conduct the relevant research and thus help to elaborate and develop the concepts. Obviously, intellectual power is useful to inform Chinese policymakers and thus improve decision-making. In addition, intellectual participation is considered helpful to make Chinese concepts more attractive and appealing to a non-Chinese audience. As Xi Jinping elaborates in a propaganda and ideological work meeting,

> In order to tell a good Chinese story and disseminate Chinese voice well, we need to do a good job of public outreach towards international society, innovate our propaganda means and strive to develop new concepts and discourses. (Cai 2013)

In other words, the government expects the support of Chinese intellectuals to improve its global propaganda.[4] Indeed, many Chinese foreign policy concepts were invented by Chinese intellectuals before being officially adopted by the government. The concept of "peaceful rise", for example, was created by Zheng Bijian, a scholar based in China's central party school, before it was widely adopted into the Chinese official discourse under Hu Jintao's leadership (Pathak 2015). Similarly, Xi's concepts of "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" are not crafted by Xi solely but a group of his top advisors and other CCP intellectuals.[5] So, the point to emphasize is that Chinese intellectuals play an important role in crafting those foreign policy concepts and supporting their international propaganda.

At the domestic level, Chinese intellectuals help to foster intra-party communication. In order to mobilize the entire political system, central leaders cannot rely on abstract and vague concepts. Those concepts need to be developed into more concrete policy ideas. Given the size of China's

[4] For example, the relevant academic research can brief the government by examining experiences of other countries' international outreach and its implications for China as well as the effectiveness of China's outreach and how to improve it.

[5] As Chapters 3–5 will discuss, some ideas of those concepts are recycled from those of the previous leadership of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao.

governance mechanism and regional differences, the central government is unable to provide specific guidelines for every province. After all, a successful policy that works in one region may fail badly in another. In other words, a "one size fits all" principle just does not work. Thus, the central state always relies on vague guidelines for local actors to adopt and develop into local practices. At this point, local actors will employ their intellectual resources—including university academics and local think tanks based in their regions—to help interpret central guidelines and develop their own local policies that can reflect their interests. This process inevitably leads to the same central policy guidelines being laid out in different forms at the local level.[6]

If intellectual support is so critical to develop policy concepts in China, what are the state mechanisms to steer and regulate this intellectual participation? When the central government puts forward a new policy concept, it will ask its policy analysis offices and state-affiliated think tanks—such as the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS)—to conduct the relevant research to develop the concept. Different ministries have their own affiliated think tanks for their use—for example, the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations owned by the Ministry of State Security and the China Institute of International Studies owned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Similarly, local governments have their own policy analysis offices and affiliated think tanks—for example, the Chongqing government may assign the relevant work to the Chongqing

[6] Indeed, this is a natural phenomenon of China's political system. As Chapter 4 will discuss, since China's market reforms in the late 1970s, China's governance model has moved towards a Chinese style of federalism (Zheng 2007; Montinola, Qian, and Weingast 1996; Qian and Weingast 1995), in which the central government has restricted authority while the local states have a high level of discretion. This division of power allows local states considerable space and power to promote regional economic growth. In this context, there is a high level of local–central bargaining and regional competition driven by local interests in which the larger geopolitical picture is irrelevant. In this context, the simplified understanding of China as a highly unified political entity in the relevant international relations literature is quite problematic. It misguidedly takes a national Chinese concerted effort to achieve Beijing's geopolitical goals for granted. While China's federalism governance model is arguably the key to China's economic success in the past few decades (Qian and Weingast 1995), it sometimes bothers Beijing by creating high levels of tension between the central and local states and among local states. When it comes to foreign relations where a more coherent approach is required to achieve certain foreign policy objectives, this Chinese style of federalism makes central coordination so difficult that it may even undermine China's key foreign policy objectives, as Chapter 4 will discuss.

Academy of Social Science to help develop Chongqing's "Belt and Road Initiative" strategy. Those state-affiliated think tanks often reflect diverse departmental interests and can sometimes promote very different policy lines.

In addition to those intellectual resources directly managed by the state, university academics also play an important role in this policy formation process. In recent years, a large number of university-affiliated think tanks have been created and now represent a vital force to shape governmental policies including foreign policy (Li 2017a; Zhu 2012). In order to stimulate knowledge transfer to inform policy sectors, Chinese governments and funding organizations provide research grants to support policy-related research. When a new policy concept is introduced by the Chinese leader, research funding will be usually prioritized to study and develop this concept. For example, China's National Social Science Foundation, the most authoritative social science foundation in China, funded over 17, 561 and 64 projects to study the concepts of "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind", respectively, after they were introduced by Xi Jinping.[7] Besides national funding, Chinese ministries and local governments have their own funding schemes to encourage intellectual participation.[8] In addition to those funding schemes, policy impact has become an increasingly important indicator in scholars' performance reviews and thus motivates Chinese scholars to participate in policy-related research.[9]

[7] The author's brief search on research projects with the respective concept in their titles from the foundation's website on 21 April 2020. http://fz.people.com.cn/skygb/sk/index.php/Index/seach.

[8] Similar to American and British universities, research grants have become increasingly important—sometimes mandatory—in Chinese universities' decisions on the academic's job interviews, probation, promotion and annual performance reviews. There is also a quantitative calculation system to count the weight of national, provincial and city research projects.

[9] In addition, if the central or local leaders find policy reports provided by academics useful, they will write one or two words—such as "read", "agree"—and perhaps circle some key sentences as a kind of recognition. This is similar to the impact exercise put forward by the British Universities' Research Excellence Framework Assessment, in which recognition letters from political leaders can be used as evidence of policy impact. In many Chinese universities, there is a quantitative calculation system to count the weight of these recognition letters. For example, if a policy paper is recognized by a central leader, it will

While systematic incentives are provided to encourage intellectual participation, how can the Chinese government regulate this participation? This is indeed much more difficult and complicated than expected. The government has less influence to regulate university academics than that on state-affiliated think tanks. The rise of the Internet has undermined the state control in regulating public influence by university academics. Nowadays, Chinese university academics have various ways to disseminate their views and interpretations of government policies. Many are very outspoken on social media and active in writing op-eds. The marketization of Chinese media has also driven official and digital media to work with China's international relations experts in order to improve the quality of their news coverage on international affairs. In the meanwhile, China's international relations community has gained increasing international influence. Many active international relations scholars have received Western education and speak excellent English. Some frequently comment on not only Chinese but also international media. There is also an increasing number of Chinese scholars who participate in international conferences and publish their work in English to disseminate their research and engage with the international academic community.

Most times, their personal views do not represent the official line at all, but their international influence will have an indirect impact within China. According to one of my interviewees at Tsinghua University,[10] policy analysts in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs have to constantly check a prominent Chinese scholar's views as their international counterparts frequently refer to that person's views during their meetings.

In addition, China has become increasingly open in policy debates of, at least some parts of, international affairs. Take China's North Korea policy as an example. In 2004, a leading Chinese journal on foreign affairs *Strategy and Management* (战略与管理)—considered by some as China's version of *Foreign Affairs*—was ordered by the government to cease publication as one of its articles crossed the line (RFA 2004). That article was critical of North Korea's domestic and foreign policy, which led to North Korea's protest. Nowadays, however, it is common to see

be equivalent to a leading journal article in the annual performance review. Additional material and spiritual rewards also apply according to the university regulations.

[10] Interview conducted in London in September 2016.

a fierce debate on China's North Korea policy in social media, newspapers and academic journals. Many such as Jia Qingguo (2016, 2017), a prominent Chinese international relations scholar based at Peking University, openly call for a more harsh policy towards North Korea. So, the point to emphasize here is that there is a growing number of channels for Chinese intellectuals to exert their international and domestic influence that can shape China's policy discussion. Their participation in the policy discussion often leads to a variety of views that are relevant to but do not represent the official line.

Those views can sometimes confuse and misguide domestic and international actors. Not all international analysts can identify which specific view represents the official line of Beijing—sometimes, neither can Chinese analysts. Take the debate on whether the "Belt and Road" is a geopolitical strategy or economic initiative as an example. Li Kaisheng (2017b), a research fellow at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, argues that the "Belt and Road" is an economic initiative and should not be associated with too many security and strategic meanings, or it will increase international tensions with China and the "Belt and Road Initiative". Xue Li, a research fellow at the CASS, however, argues that the "Belt and Road" is a top-design product and grand strategy (Xue 2015). To Xue, the interpretation of the "Belt and Road" as an economic initiative is only a deception strategy in order to help its promotion. It is argued that even most Chinese do not believe that the "Belt and Road" is an initiative, let alone foreigners. As such, Xue argues that China should speak out about the strategic nature of the "Belt and Road" instead of hiding its strategic intentions.

Both sides found evidence in official documents to claim that their interpretations represent the official line. According to Li Kaisheng (2017b), various Chinese official documents adopting the wording "Belt and Road Initiative" are clear evidence that the official line considers it an "initiative". While acknowledging the fact that most official documents use the word "initiative", Xue Li argues that this is a result of a translation in the Two Sessions press release in March 2015, which has been followed by most official documents (Xue 2015). Thus, it is a translation rather than a policy issue and thus does not represent the official line. Xue also points out the document of the State Council published in *People's Daily* "Accelerate the implementation of the 'One Belt, One Road' ***strategy***" that explicitly uses the wording "strategy" (Xue 2015).

Clearly, both can find convincing evidence from policy documents to support their interpretations. In this regard, it is confusing which one truly represents the official line to even many Chinese experts let alone international ones. As Chapter 4 will discuss, this debate happened in the context that a group of Chinese central agencies have already published an official document to regulate the translation as "initiative" not "strategy". The existence of the debate questions the authority of those central agencies to enforce their official lines even within China.

When the central government decides to intervene in policy discussions in order to steer the development of the discussion, the most straightforward way is to issue instructions to the state-affiliated think tanks. For example, according to my interview with a CASS scholar in 2017,[11] their institute was told by the central government not to conduct research on the conceptual connotation of the "Belt and Road Initiative" anymore as the relevant decision had already been made and further discussion would only lead to confusion about the "Belt and Road Initiative". There were too many discussions on the risks and problems of the "Belt and Road Initiative" and thus the central government now wanted them to shift the focus to the positive aspects. However, this instruction had not been effectively implemented as there were multiple articles published by scholars based at that institute to debate the conceptual meaning of the "Belt and Road Initiative". It was because either the instruction was ignored, changed later on or non-binding.

When it comes to regulating university intellectuals, it is more difficult. In very rare and extreme cases, if a scholar openly advocates for regime change or opposes the top leader, his or her personal freedom may be restricted by the government. For example, Tsinghua's law professor—who openly criticized Xi Jinping and his policy—was suspended. This rarely applies in cases when a scholar participates in foreign policy discussions where the topic is less sensitive and the participation is encouraged by the government. It is also impossible to draw a clear line in this kind of academic discussion. If the propaganda department dislikes a scholar's view, it can issue instructions to its controlled media not to publish this scholar's op-ed or quote him or her. However, he or she can still disseminate his or her views through other channels such as social media, international media, and academic conferences and publications.

[11] Interview conducted online on April 2017.

According to one of my interviewees at Tsinghua University,[12] the CCP propaganda department had instructed its media not to spotlight a prominent Chinese international relations scholar because his views—that China should focus on security interests and develop a strong army—are unhelpful to promote the official position on peaceful development. Nonetheless, this does not prevent this scholar from disseminating his views in other ways. As previously mentioned, China's rise has produced a growing community of university scholars with a high level of international influence. They can exert their influence in various ways that the CCP propaganda department cannot control—including international media, international conferences and op-eds/articles in global outlets. In addition, as the propaganda department does not always—or take a while to—know the line itself, it is not easy to regulate the relevant foreign policy discussion.

Apparently, the regulation of intellectual participation can be more complicated when it involves an intra-governmental struggle. When certain academic views are backed by powerful state actors within the system, it is even more difficult for the propaganda department to control. As Chapter 4 will discuss, in the case of the "Belt and Road Initiative", many local states use their academic and policy analysts and media channels to produce and disseminate their preferred policy narratives, which can be hardly regulated.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter shows that political slogans have multiple functions. They serve as a test to discern supporters. However, the nature of slogans makes them subject to manipulation. At the very top level, political actors can intentionally or unintentionally interpret those slogans in ways that distort them. At the middle level, policy actors can interpret those slogans in their preferred ways to advance their own departmental and regional interests. At the intellectual level, while the participation of China's academic and policy community helps to inform policymakers and improve decision-making, it has often led to a variety of competing interpretations and narratives that cannot be fully regulated by the state. This may drive the policy discussion in a different direction to that hoped for by Chinese

[12] Interview conducted in London in September 2016.

leaders. The next chapter uses "New Type of Great Power Relations" as a case study to show how Xi's concept is interpreted in different ways that depart from his original intentions.

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CHAPTER 3

Slogan of "New Type of Great Power Relations"

The Chinese-coined concept "New Type of Great Power Relations" (新型大国关系)—also translated as "New Model of Major Power Relations"[1]—came to the public attention when Xi Jinping introduced it in 2012. It is the first major diplomatic initiative proposed by Xi. This chapter argues that this concept is a political slogan with multiple functions including (1) declaration of intent, (2) power assertion and a test of support, (3) state propaganda, and (4) a call for intellectual support. In order to understand how the concept was gradually established in China, the chapter systematically examines Chinese language documents.

It shows that Xi's introduction of this concept was not only a political gesture to assert his power as the then-new top leader of China but also China's new vision for its elevated role in the world. At the time, this new vision lay firmly in the context of US–China relations as it was a declaration of China's intent to explore a mutually beneficial US–China relationship in order to avoid potential conflicts between rising China and the existing dominating power: the US. China's underlying message was to hope the US would take China more seriously in this bilateral relationship. In this regard, this concept served as a slogan to signal China's desire to be acknowledged by the US as a great power or even near

[1] During the author's fieldwork in China, some Chinese scholars mentioned that "Major Power Relations" was a more appropriate translation. "Major power" suggested a big power (大国), while "great power" meant a strong power (强国). To them, China was—and still is—a big power (大国) given its size but not a strong power (强国).

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competitor. This acknowledgement would bring enormous value to the CCP's domestic propaganda and thus China had high expectations on the US response.

Yet, beyond the intent of hoping to be taken more seriously, the concept was very vague and lacked definition, and the Chinese academic and policy community was expected to develop it into concrete action plans. While considerable academic interests were generated in this regard, it had not saved this concept from being vague. It was clearer what "New Type of Great Power Relations" was *not* than what this concept was. Within China's policy discussion, it was frequently argued that the rise of China was not repeating the history of great power politics as China was different from the previous great powers. This is to say, it was *not* the "old or traditional" type of great power relations discussed by the literature of great power politics and security dilemma (Mearsheimer 2014b; Kirshner 2012; Liff and Ikenberry 2014; Holslag 2015). However, the Chinese academic and policy community was not able to clearly elaborate on what the "new" type of great power relations was. This was partly due to the huge amount of disagreements within China.

Generally speaking, there was a lack of consensus over the concept and its use within China's academic and policy community. Chinese academic and policy analysts put forward a variety of diverse and competing interpretations, and some had made the water muddier by pushing this concept out of the US–China context. It was later argued that the US was not the only great power, and the concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations" could also be applied to China's relations with other great powers. In other words, some developed this concept away from Xi's original reference to the bilateral US–China relations. This is clearly not what Xi intended to achieve when he first introduced this concept.

In the end, the intellectual support had not generated concrete ideas to clarify the concept. The concept remained vague with little actionable ideas despite China's self-aware warning about the associated consequences. This conceptual vagueness was one of (if not) the most important reasons why the US chose to disengage with this concept, and this lack of positive response from the US then later led to decreased Chinese interest in promoting this concept. This chapter proceeds in the subsequent three parts. The first part describes the original US-China context of this concept. The second part presents the state of debate on this concept, followed by the third part of concluding remarks.

3.1 US–China Context

The timing of Xi's "New Type of Great Power Relations" introduction in 2012 lay in the wider context of global power transition. China's continuing rise and the 2008 financial crisis had significantly changed the power relations between the US and China, triggering a heated debate on their future relations. Power transition theory suggested that the rising power and the exiting hegemon were unlikely to settle with peace. John Mearsheimer, for example, argued that a declining US and a rising China would be engaged in security competition, with a considerable potential for war (Mearsheimer 2014a). However, others argued that given its economic and political openness, the current international order was able to accommodate China's peaceful rise (Ikenberry 2008). Given that China was a status quo power who had significantly benefited from the existing liberal international order, it was not in China's interests to overthrow the current order. As such, if the US and China could better manage their complicated bilateral relationship, large-scale military conflicts between them might be avoided.

In this global context, Xi Jinping believed that it was important to establish a new type of US–China bilateral relations. In 2012, during his trip to Washington, Xi Jinping called for a "New Type of Great Power Relations in the 21st Century". This concept represented a high-profile Chinese initiative to avoid confrontation between the rising power and the existing hegemony. In subsequent high-level meetings between China and the US, Xi Jinping repeatedly insisted on this Chinese-coined concept to signal his new leadership vision. For example, during Xi Jinping's meeting with Thomas Donilon, the then National Security Advisor to the US President, Xi said that

> Both sides should, from the fundamental interest of the people of the two countries and of the world, join the efforts to build up China-US cooperative partnership, trying to find a completely new way for the ***'New Type of Great Power Relations'***, which would be unprecedented in history and open up the future. (Zhao 2013a: emphasis added)

The potential conflicts between a rising power and exiting hegemony can also be summarized as the "Thucydides trap"—a story derived from the Athenian historian Thucydides about a rising Athens challenging the ruling power of Sparta in ancient Greece. Some argue that China and the

US may fall into this "Thucydides trap" (Allison 2015). This pessimistic view of China's rise is not only germane to academic domains; it is so influential that Xi Jinping directly responded to it. According to Xi Jinping,

> We all need to work together to avoid the Thucydides trap—destructive tensions between an emerging power and established powers, or between established powers themselves. (Berggruen and Gardels 2014)

The concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations" was built precisely on this basis, with the will to avoid the "inevitable" conflict between China and the US.

To some Chinese scholars, this Chinese initiative was a continued exploration of Sino-US relations in the context of China's rise (Zhang and Jing 2013: 25). This dated to the 2008 financial crisis when the ideas of "G2" and "Chimerica" were introduced by some US-based analysts to manage Sino-US relations. Those ideas suggested that China and the US could work together to manage global affairs. While China was "flattered" to be treated as a near competitor of the US, the Chinese leadership under Hu Jintao clearly rejected these ideas. As the then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao put it,

> Some say that world affairs will be managed solely by China and the United States. I think that view is baseless and wrong… It is impossible for a couple of countries or a group of big powers to resolve all global issues. Multipolarization and multilateralism represent the larger trend and the will of people. (Xinhua 2009)

It was believed that China was not ready to take the corresponding global responsibilities associated with this leadership. After all, China's level of development decided that it was neither capable nor responsible for solving global problems and providing public goods on the global stage.

Scroll forward three years to 2012, however, along with the CCP leadership transition, a very different understanding of China's global power status became evident. Xi Jinping's introduction of "New Type of Great Power Relations" signalled a very different leadership vision about China's global status and its relations with the US. In this regard, this "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept was more about its

content; it was a slogan to send a political message. In the context that Xi took power from his predecessor Hu Jintao in late 2012, it was a message of "new leader, new visions". In other words, it was Xi's immediate political gesture to walk out from the shadow of his predecessor Hu Jintao and assert his power as the then-new top leader of China to both domestic and international audiences.

When it comes to China as a whole, this slogan also signalled rising China's global status and hence global response to this slogan was interpreted as support to and acknowledgement of China's great power status. Thus, when China actively promoted this concept on the global stage, it had very high hopes of a positive global response especially from the US. According to some Chinese scholars, once the US accepted this concept, it meant that the US recognized China's status as a "great power" and thus China would win the commensurate strategic space (Shi 2014b). In addition, it would be interpreted as a victory of Chinese diplomacy under Xi's leadership. As Zhou Fangyin, who worked at the CASS at the time, further stated,

> In the current unequal power balance between the US and China, the establishment of 'New Type of Great Power Relations' means that the US has made relative important strategic compromise to China or at least the US has decided to make significant and substantive strategic tolerance on China. As the US is the global hegemony and the only superpower, the Sino-US new type of great power relationship means that the US indirectly accepts that China enjoys the similar international status with the US. In other words, this is to acknowledge that American unique status in the world has been shaken or lost to some extent. If the US and China establish a real meaningful 'New Type of Great Power Relations', its international implications are that the rise of China has become a fact. If the US and China form an equal great power status, then it means that the US has made a relatively significant compromise – at least, other countries will think in this way. (Zhou 2013: 19)

In other words, as this concept was a political slogan to assert China's great power status, American endorsement of this Chinese slogan could be interpreted as a recognition and support of China's global leadership.

In addition, this recognition of China's global status would also bring enormous value to the CCP's domestic propaganda. As Chapter 1 discussed, when international actors adopt Chinese slogans in their languages, it will help the CCP to enhance its domestic mass persuasion

and thus legitimacy. In the case of "New Type of Great Power Relations", the US's positive response to this slogan would be interpreted by Chinese media as American acceptance of China's near-competitor status and thus a milestone in China's great rejuvenation under the CCP's brilliant leadership.

Driven by its propaganda value, Chinese official media went a step further to explicitly and implicitly suggest that the US had already accepted this slogan and looked for any evidence to support this claim. The then National Security Advisor Susan Rice's use of this concept was a propaganda opportunity that they could not miss. According to Rice at her George Washington University speech, "When it comes to China, we seek to operationalize a 'New Model of Major Power Relations'. That means managing inevitable competition while forging deeper cooperation on issues where our interests converge—in Asia and beyond" (Rice 2013). This speech was widely interpreted by Chinese media as "the American government has officially recognized the 'New Type of Great Power Relations' for the first time" (Mu 2015). The propaganda narrative that the US had already endorsed the concept convinced many in China including scholars.[2] Some Chinese scholars even argued that this concept was very popular in American political and academic circles, as well as with the American public (Dong 2013) and had already become an American official concept of its China policy (Jin and Zhao 2014: 52).

On the contrary to the above Chinese propaganda narrative, the actual US attitude towards "New Type of Great Power Relations" was very ambiguous. Some US analysts considered it an opportunity to "seek a durable foundation for US-China ties" (Lampton 2013) and to integrate a rising China into the established world order. Others, however, argued that this concept was a "bad" idea for the US (Mattis 2013) or even a "trap" for the US set by the rising China (Erickson and Liff 2014). The "New Type of Great Power Relations" was in essence "G2 with Chinese characteristics"—a G2 relationship "defined by and for China/Chinese interests on Chinese terms" (Zeng and Breslin 2016). In this regard, the US was clearly not ready to accept this kind of G2 relations and treat China as its global near competitor at the time.

[2] Although a few noted that the US was reluctant to accept it. For example, please see (Zhang 2014: 56; Pang 2013; Shi 2014b: 28) and that they knew that the US might have a different interpretation of this concept (Li 2013a).

More importantly, the concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations" was too vague for the Obama administration to engage with. A key reason for this conceptual vagueness was the lack of domestic consensus within China. As a slogan to call for intellectual support, Xi's introduction of "New Type of Great Power Relations" immediately stimulated a hot policy discussion within China. In order to show their support to the then-new leader Xi, China's policy and academic community was highly motivated to develop the then-new leader's new vision. While there was a broad consensus that China had already been a Great Power, little had been agreed beyond this point. Different understandings of what a Great Power meant and evaluation of China's role in the global power transition had led to a variety of interpretations about the concept (Zeng and Breslin 2016). As Qi Hao pointed out, the domestic disagreements over "New Type of Great Power Relations" were "far more than" those between the US and China (Qi 2015). The following part of the chapter will look into this academic and policy discussion in China.

3.2 The State of the Debate in China

3.2.1 Research Methods and Authors in the Debate[3]

In order to systematically examine the Chinese domestic debate on "New Type of Great Power Relations", this chapter employs content analysis and interviews as research methods. The author first identified 141 Chinese articles titled with "New Type of Great Power Relations" as the research object and then developed a coding scheme to study those articles.[4] The coding manual is included in the Appendix of this book. Other

[3] In the case of multiple authors, only the first author's institution is counted.

[4] More specifically, in this project, I used the official concept "New Type of Great Power Relations" (新型大国关系 in Chinese) as the search term during the data collection. I searched for the China National Knowledge Infrastructure's (CNKI) "journal articles" database. All journal articles with "New Type of Great Power Relations" in the title in the CNKI were collected. This included 184 articles covering the period from 1998 to 2014. In order to test the robustness of my search result, I conducted the second round of searching by using two similar terms "新型的大国关系" and "新型大国的关系"—whose literal meanings were exactly the same as the official concept. In the second round of searching, I found another article published in 2005 titled with "新型的大国关系" (Zhao 2005)—this article was included in my dataset because the author used both "新型的大国关系" and "新型大国关系" in the main text and referred them to the same meaning. After removing irrelevant results such as leaders' talks, conference reviews, news

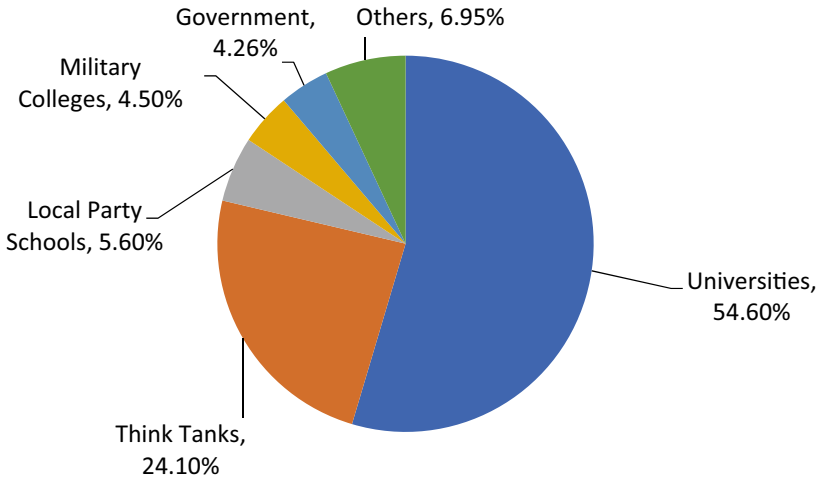

Fig. 3.1 Home institutions of authors in the debate on "New Type of Great Power Relations" (1998–2014) (*Source* Zeng [2016])

data including codebook and replication materials are available from the author's research page.[5] In order to support the coding findings, the author also conducted interviews with some influential Chinese scholars in the debate.

Among the selected 141 articles, Chinese universities contributed 77 articles (54.6%), as Fig. 3.1 shows. The most active ones were Renmin University (12 articles), Fudan University (9), University of Foreign Studies (7) and Peking University (6). These academic contributions were

reports and duplicate articles, I identified 141 articles as my research object. Because of the large amount of data that I collected, my data analysis was divided into two stages. The first stage mainly focused on what this "New Type of Great Power Relations" was and why it was new. The relevant findings were reported in this chapter. The second stage analysed the Chinese definition of "great power", and more specifically which countries were considered as great powers in this "New Type of Great Power Relations". The relevant findings can be found from (Zeng and Breslin 2016).

[5] https://sites.google.com/site/zengjinghan/data.

policy related as they were direct responses to the state's call to develop the concept.[6]

The other half of the debate was produced by China's policy community. Chinese state-affiliated think tanks contributed 34 articles (24.1%). The authors were mainly based in four state-affiliated institutions: China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (11, affiliated with the Ministry of State Security), CASS (10, affiliated with the State Council), China Institute of International Studies (7, affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Shanghai Institute of International Studies (4, affiliated with Shanghai Municipal Government). Local party schools and military colleges also contributed 8 and 5 articles, respectively. In addition, 6 articles were written by senior officials including Cui Tiankai, the Chinese Ambassador to the US, Yu Hongjun, the then Vice Minister of the CCP's International Department, He Yafei, the then Deputy Director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council and the former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Ma Zhengang, the former Chinese Ambassador to the United Kingdom (UK).

3.2.2 *Historical Context: How New Was This "New Type of Great Power Relations"?*

The concept "New Type of Great Power Relations" came to public attention mainly after Xi Jinping officially introduced it in 2012. Thus, many considered it a new concept (Niu 2013: 2; Yang 2013a). For example, Niu Xinchun argued that "'New Type of Great Power Relations' is a brand-new concept. There is no textbook or existing model for us to follow" (Niu 2013: 2). Zhao Xiaochun, a professor at the University of International Relations, argued that "to build 'New Type of Great Power

[6]It has important policy implications. Chinese academic writings of politics and international relations are very different from the English academic literature; the principal purpose of many Chinese academic writings is to provide policy recommendations. This kind of writing style is called a "challenge-response" mode (Zhu and Pearson 2013). In this mode, the article usually starts by describing a problem and then suggests a solution to solve this problem. This writing style is confirmed by my (co-) previous studies on core interests (Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin 2015; Zeng 2017b) and regime legitimacy (Zeng 2014). In the Chinese debate on core interests, for example, many articles start with a problem such as how China's core interests are harmed by foreign governments, and this is followed by a set of policy suggestions on what China should do (Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin 2015; Zeng 2017b). This pattern is very similar to when they were debating "New Type of Great Power Relations", as the following section will discuss.

Relations' was first proposed by comrade Xi Jinping during his American visit in February 2012" (Zhao 2013b: 6).

Xi Jinping, however, was not the first Chinese leader to use this concept. His predecessor Hu Jintao used it to describe the future Sino-US relationship towards the end of his term. According to Hu, the US and China should "strive to develop a 'New Type of Great Power Relations' that is reassuring to the peoples of both nations and giving the peoples of other countries peace of mind" (Glaser 2012). Earlier than Hu, the then State Councillor, Dai Bingguo, mentioned this concept in May 2010 during the US-China Strategic Economic Dialogue (Dai 2010). At the time, Dai referred this concept to "mutual respect, living in harmony, cooperation and win-win" which was similar to but slightly different from Xi's version that consisted of "mutual respect, no confrontation and win-win", as will be discussed later.

The historical origins of this concept can be traced further back to Hu's predecessor Jiang Zemin's era. Back in 2000, Jiang Zemin pointed out in a Politburo conference that

> in the past decade, we have been actively developing ***'New Type of Great Power Relations'*** that mainly focus on non-alignment, no confrontation, no direct action against a third country. We have established a fundamental framework of the 21st century bilateral relations with the US, Russia, France, the UK, Canada, and Japan one after another. (Jiang 2006: 546 emphasis added)

Jiang's speech clearly indicated that both the content of the concept and its targeted countries in Jiang's version were different from Xi's version. "Non-alignment, no confrontation, no direct action against a third country" was its three major principles in Jiang's version, which was similar to but different from Xi's. In addition, in Jiang's version, "great power" referred to a group of traditional Western powers. However, the mainstream use of this concept in Xi's era either referred "great power" to the US alone, or extended it to include emerging non-western powers, while traditional Western powers except the US were not the focus (Zeng and Breslin 2016), as will be discussed later.

Notably, the concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations" in Jiang's era was very similar to another concept—"New Type of State Relations" (新型国家关系), which also consisted of the above three principles. In Jiang's speech in Moscow, "New Type of State Relations" was

mentioned three times (Jiang 2001). At that time, it mainly targeted Russia (Zhong 2014). Given the high similarities between these two concepts, it is possible that the original target of "New Type of Great Power Relations" under Jiang was Sino-Russia relations instead of Sino-US relations. The previous discussion about the "New Type of Great Power Relations" clearly focused more on "New Type of State Relations", while the use of "New Type of Great Power Relations" in Xi's era was built on China's new identity as a rising power and great power, and thus relations among great powers were the key.

The above historical context shows that "New Type of Great Power Relations" was not a brand-new invention of Xi's. While some of its ideas had shown new development, others can be traced back to Hu's and Jiang's eras. So, the point to emphasize is that Xi's introduction of "New Type of Great Power Relations" did not represent a fundamental shift in China's strategic thinking but a continuing development. While both of his predecessors had used this concept before, Xi's highly frequent use of this concept and considerable efforts in promoting it had marked his personal stamp on it. Thus, this concept was largely considered as belonging to Xi, reflecting his new vision.

Consequently, the trend of academic discussions on "New Type of Great Power Relations" coincided with the above historical context. Fig. 3.2 shows the number of Chinese academic articles with "New Type of Great Power Relations" in the title. As Fig. 3.2 shows, the Chinese academic discussion of this concept can be traced back to as early as the late 1990s. In 1998, for example, Yu Cheng argued that the strategic collaboration between China and Russia—including border negotiations, military talks, and a joint statement on a multipolar world—under the leadership of the then Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Russian President Boris Yeltsin provided a firm basis for establishing "New Type of Great Power Relations" (Yu 1998). In this article, the concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations" was very similar to (if not the same as) the then official discourse of "New Type of State Relations".

In 1999, Li Yihu, a professor at Peking University, argued that the world would become multipolar—formed by the US, China, Russian, Japan and the EU—in the 21st century (Li 1999). In this multipolar world, the strategic partnership would replace the old "group politics and alliance politics" and thus form "New Type of Great Power Relations in the 21st Century"—exactly the same wording to what Xi said during his aforementioned trip to Washington in 2012. According to Li, this "New

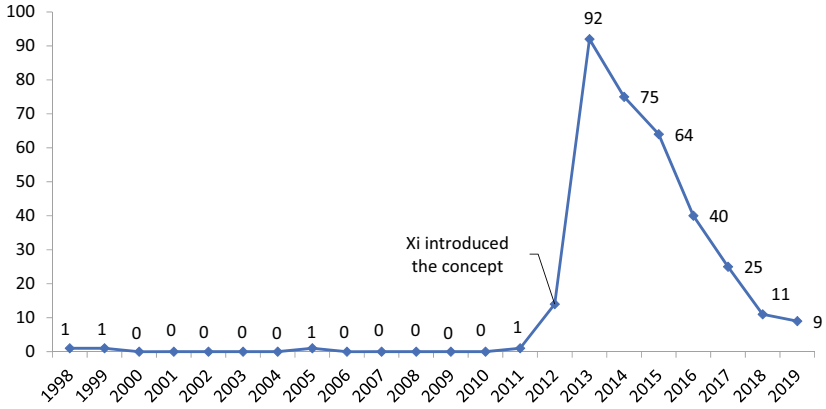

Fig. 3.2 Number of Chinese academic articles with "New Type of Great Power Relations" in the title (1998–2019) (Search word "新型大国关系" or "新型的大国关系" in Chinese; the state of the debate was draw from data between 1998 and 2014. The search for the period between 2015 and 2019 was conducted by the author on 1 April 2020)

Type of Great Power Relations in the 21st Century" reflected a new type of security concept, which was opposite to the alliance politics based on the cold war mentality.

In 2005, Zhao Bole, a professor at Yunnan University, argued that China, India and Brazil had become "emerging power" because of their rapid development (Zhao 2005). Contrary to the prediction of some realists, the rise of China and India had not attempted to challenge the hegemony and undermine the existing international system. Thus, Zhao concluded that Sino-India relations were a "New Type of Great Power Relations". This relationship was new because (1) China and India were both developing countries and thus had different standpoints with traditional great powers, (2) they both considered economic development as the most important goal and preferred a peaceful international environment, and (3) they both pursued highly independent foreign policies. Coincidentally, a few years later, Zhao's use of "New Type of Great Power Relations" in Sino-India relations was echoed by some policy discussions in Xi's era, as will be discussed later.

Figure 3.2 also shows that the number of articles on "New Type of Great Power Relations" grew rapidly after Xi used this concept in 2012

and then gradually faded away after reaching its peak in 2014. This trend coincided with the state's political need for intellectual support. Xi's introduction of the concept was a slogan to call for intellectual support to develop this idea, which immediately generated considerable academic writings on this topic. However, as previously mentioned, this intellectual support failed to save this concept from being vague, partly contributing to the US's lack of enthusiasm to respond to this slogan. As such, China shifted its attention to other slogans, which led to the decreasing academic interest in the concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations". The following sections will look into China's policy discussion during the peak period.

3.2.3 Why Did the World Need "New Type of Great Power Relations" at the Time?

As previously mentioned, Xi's introduction of "New Type of Great Power Relations" immediately evoked enormous academic interest within China. For example, a large number of workshops/seminars/conferences on "New Type of Great Power Relations" were organized in China. In early 2015, Fudan University established the Collaborative Innovation Centre for New Type of Sino-US Great Power Relations. In this context, growing academic interest had produced a large number of articles on "New Type of Great Power Relations".

Articles published in 2012 and 2013 usually started with why "New Type of Great Power Relations" was needed for China and the world. The most frequently mentioned reason (68%) by Chinese scholars was to avoid the "Thucydides trap", by which a rising China and a declining US may lead to conflicts. It was widely argued that this "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept could help to avoid this trap; however, there was a lack of explanation on how.

In addition, some also argued that this concept provided a new identity for both the US and China that could accommodate the "great revival of China" without challenging the American belief that "the US will never accept to be No.2" (Wang 2013: 59). It was also a Chinese attempt to defend itself. As Zhang Xiaoming argued, China wanted to use the concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations" to replace the widely believed "Thucydides trap" narrative in order to undermine American pressure (Zhang 2014). A new type of Sino-US great power relationship would also help China to "maintain and extend the period of strategic opportunities" (Chen 2013b: 4). This period of strategic

opportunities referred to the current peaceful international environment by which China could focus on economic development. In this sense, this "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept was a part of China's peaceful development strategy (Li 2013a).

Nonetheless, there was no consensus as to the prospect of Sino-US relations. Optimists argued that the US and China had already broken the "Thucydides trap" (Yang 2013b: 102). Thus, the "New Type of Great Power Relations" between the US and China "had already taken place" (Chou and Zhang 2013: 41; Yu 2013: 5). As Da Wei further explained, "to establish Sino-US new type of great power relations is not to build from scratch. Sino-US relations in the past 20 year have actually been certain kinds of new type of great power relationship" (Da 2013: 64). Pessimists, however, argued that it was questionable whether a "New Type of Great Power Relations" existed (Zhang 2014: 51, Footnote 2). It was argued that the then Sino-US relationship was neither a really new type of relationship, nor a great power relationship because the US had not treated China as a great power (Li 2014: 9; Shi 2014a: 28). To some extent, this pessimistic view echoed the realist perspective about the inevitable conflict between a rising China and an existing power: the US—although it did not directly endorse the literature written in English on the theme.

To many, the introduction of "New Type of Great Power Relations" was a Chinese attempt to set new agendas. It was argued that China had been passively accepting the American definition of Sino-US relations (Ruan 2012: 27; Pang 2013: 15)—such as "3Cs – constructive, cooperative and candid" and "responsible stakeholder" (Pang 2013: 15). Proposing the "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept was thus an attempt to change China's passive position and exercise China's power to set new agendas. Others, however, emphasized that it was a response to American ideas. Some argued that it was the Americans that first started to explore future Sino-US relations and proposed ideas like "G2" and "Chimerica". In this regard, the "New Type of Great Power Relations" was a "continuation of this exploration" (Zhang and Jing 2013: 25).

3.2.4 "New Type of Great Power Relations" in Chinese Grand Strategic Thinking

Disagreements also lay in how this concept fitted China's grand strategic thinking. Over the past few decades, China's foreign policy had been

largely guided by Deng Xiaoping's "keeping a low profile and never seek for leadership" principle; however, this principle had been increasingly challenged due to the shifting international political landscape. Some argued that this principle had damaged China's security interests, and thus should be changed, while others argued that China was not ready to do so. This was—and still is—arguably the most important contemporary debate in Chinese foreign policy. After Xi Jinping took power, this debate became more intensified and expanded into almost all areas of Chinese foreign policy. With the debate on core interests, for example, a group of scholars argued that with the rising tension of territorial disputes in the South and East China seas, "keeping a low profile" had been increasingly incapable of protecting China's core interests, especially its security interests (Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin 2015; Zeng 2017b). Others, however, argued that this view exaggerated the threat of territorial disputes on China's core interests and "keeping a low profile" was still the right thing to do (Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin 2015; Zeng 2017b).

Similarly, the relevant debate expanded into the discussion over "New Type of Great Power Relations". On the one hand, a few Chinese scholars considered Deng's "keeping a low profile" principle obsolete. It was argued that China's growing strength had made it harder to keep a low profile than before (Chen 2013a). Nor had this strategy been effective in improving China's international image and maintaining its own security (Zou and Li 2013). As such, China needed a new grand strategic thinking, and "New Type of Great Power Relations" was one step to develop this new thinking. This view, however, was heavily criticized by many supporters of Deng's "keeping a low profile". For example, as Cui Lei elaborated, "with the growth of China's strength, many people become complacent and have hallucinations. They think that China is strong enough to challenge the US and could abandon 'keeping a low profile' strategy. Thus, they sometimes inadvertently show arrogance in foreign exchange and policy statements" (Cui 2014: 43).

To some Chinese scholars, the idea of "New Type of Great Power Relations" was consistent with China's peaceful development strategy, because it was claimed that China would become a new great power that would rise peacefully (Yuan 2012; Li 2013b: 35; Li and Bi 2013: 74; He 2014; Cui 2014). This view was also shaped by their evaluation of the US's future role in the world. As Li Yongcheng elaborated, "Chinese leaders should objectively assess the US and avoid exaggerating its decline and underestimating its international leadership—or even having

wrong judgement on its future trend and thus abandon Deng Xiaoping's 'keeping a low profile' too early" (Li 2013b: 35). In the "New Type of Great Power Relations" debate, there seemed to be more supporters of "keeping a low profile" than opponents.

3.2.5 "New Type of Relations" vs "Great Power"

Literally speaking, the concept "New Type of Great Power Relations" was formed by two key phrases: "new type of relations" (新型关系) and "great power" (大国). Chinese scholars had different emphases on these two key phrases. On the one hand, some prioritized the key phrase "new type of relations" over "great power" (Liu 2013a: 154; Wang 2014a: 77). It was argued that Chinese diplomacy should have a broader focus. China should develop a comprehensive new type of international relations that focus on not only big countries, but also on small countries, international organizations and trans-national enterprises (Chen 2013c: 19–20). Thus, the primary focus should be on "new type of relations" (Zheng 2013). This view implied that "New Type of Great Power Relations" was only one of several Chinese-coined diplomatic concepts, and other similar concepts including the aforementioned "New Type of State Relations" and "new type of international relations" also mattered (Su 2013).

On the other hand, while acknowledging the importance of "new type of relations", others emphasized "great power" because this related to China's global status (Shi 2014b). As mentioned before, to many Chinese scholars, once the US accepted this concept, it would mean the US recognized China's great power status and thus would share power with China (Shi 2014b). It was argued that establishing China's relations with great powers had gradually become a "core" of Chinese diplomacy (Zhao and Yin 2012: 81). In this sense, "New Type of Great Power Relations" could be interpreted as a significant (if not the core) part of Xi Jinping's "big country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics" that enjoyed higher status than other diplomatic concepts.

In addition to different views on whether "new type of relations" or "great power" should be prioritized, debates also lay within each of these two multiple-meaning phrases, as the following two sections will explore, respectively.

3.2.5.1 What Was "New" in This "New Type of Great Power Relations"?

As previously mentioned, when the concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations" was introduced by China, it was criticized by many in the US. In particular, the rhetoric of "new type of relations" was called into question. To many international analysts, there was nothing new about Xi's "New Type of Great Power Relations". In Daniel Blumenthal's analysis, this was an "old type of great power relations" because Sino-US relations would be as competitive as the relationship between a rising power and the existing hegemony historically (Blumenthal 2015). To Andrew Erickson and Adam Liff, it represented "old type of values and order" (Erickson and Liff 2014). Peter Mattis argued that it was a "new facade on the old rhetoric of peaceful coexistence" (Mattis 2013). Interestingly, similar views were also shared by their counterparts in China. As previously mentioned, some Chinese scholars questioned the existence of "New Type of Great Power Relations" (Zhang 2014: 51, Footnote 2), and others argued that US–China relations were neither a new type of relations, nor a great power relations in practice as the US did not take China seriously (Li 2014: 9; Shi 2014a: 28).

In this regard, it was crucial to elaborate on what "new type of relations" meant in order to fend off those critics. China's academic and policy community had done a good job in elaborating what this "New Type of Great Power Relations" specifically was ***not***. It was most frequently mentioned that this "New Type of Great Power Relations" was very different from traditional great power relations where a rising power would inevitably challenge the existing hegemonic power such as German–UK relations before the First and Second World Wars and Japan–US relations in the early 1940s. As such, it was argued that the "New Type of Great Power Relations" was a "new" answer to an "old" question on how to deal with potential conflicts between a rising power and the existing hegemonic power. It was also different from US–Soviet Union relations that were based on a cold war and a zero-sum mentality.

In addition to contrasting this "New Type of Great Power Relations" with traditional great power relations in history, it was also argued that this concept was new because the current Sino-US relations was different from the previous one (Yuan 2012). In the past, Sino-US relations were considered the relationship between the only superpower (i.e. the US) and a normal major country (i.e. China). As such, they were

was similar to US–Japan or US–Russia relations. However, Sino-US relations had changed to become the relationship between No. 1 and No. 2, or the rising power and the hegemonic power, which was fundamentally different from before.

While it was clear what "New Type of Great Power Relations" was not, China's academic and policy community had not clarified what the concept was. The relevant Chinese discourse mainly reiterated the broad, vague diplomatic principles with little specific substance. The debate focused on three key principles highlighted by Xi Jinping: "no confrontation", "mutual respect" and "win-win". While these principles expressed good expectations for US–China relations, they did not help to clarify the concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations" as they suffered from the same problem of conceptual vagueness.

The first principle "no confrontation" was not new as it was one of three principles of "New Type of Great Power Relations" in the late 1990s. As mentioned, it aimed to promote a sort of peaceful coexistence between China (a normal power) and other major countries. However, while its meaning remained the same, the relevant discussion under Xi was related to managing the relations between China (a rising power) and the US (the existing hegemon). It appealed that the US and China should objectively understand each other's strategic intentions and manage disagreements in a non-confrontational way. Yet, the discussion had not provided much guidance on how to put this principle into practice, and thus its use for practical matters—for example, how to ease the tension between the US and China in the South China Sea—was limited.

The second principle "mutual respect" was vaguer than "no confrontation". A key message of "mutual respect" was that the US and China should respect each other's core interests. Within the Chinese debate on "New Type of Great Power Relations", 41.8% of articles argued that the US should respect China's core interests. Many Chinese scholars argued that it was unfair that China never attempted to challenge US core interests, while the US often challenged China's; thus, the Chinese request of "mutual respect" was completely legitimate (Qian 2013: 14). To many international analysts, however, this was perhaps the most problematic part of the entire "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept, because China's "core interests" were no less problematic (Yamaguchi 2014). As Chapter 1 discussed, it was not entirely clear what China's "core interests" specifically were. China's White Paper defined it as "state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's

political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development" (China 2011). When it came to specifics, however, the boundaries of these core interests remained blurred and open for interpretation (Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin 2015). "Territorial integrity and national reunification", for example, could refer to a wide range of territorial disputes including the South and East China seas that the US simply could not agree with the Chinese position.

In this regard, if the US accepted the "mutual respect" principle of China's "New Type of Great Power Relations", it meant that the US would accept the long wish list that China defined. Take China's political system as another example, which was one of a few clearly stated core interests in both Chinese official and academic discourses. A key—or perhaps the most important—message of the "mutual respect" principle was that the US should respect—rather than attempt to overthrow—China's one-party system. As Wang Jisi, a leading scholar in China, and Wu Shengqi elaborated, this principle meant that China would respect—and not challenge—the US's global leadership only if the US would respect China's current political system (Wang and Wu 2014: 7). However, to respect China's political system might mean that the US needed to stop its attempt to promote human rights and democracy in China. This could be extended to a series of issues including freedom of speech, religious and internet freedom, and labour and ethnic minorities rights, all of which were considered by the CCP as attempts to overthrow its rule. This was a position that the US government was unlikely to accept, and it required a fundamental shift in the American approach to dealing with China.

As such, some international analysts suggested the Obama administration accept Xi's "New Type of Great Power Relations" if China was willing to remove reference to core interests from this concept (Hadley and Haenle 2015). This was a position that China was reluctant to take as the conceptual vagueness of its core interests allowed more flexibility for Chinese diplomacy while avoiding potential domestic (nationalistic) criticism (Campbell et al. 2013). However, keeping this conceptual vagueness was counterproductive to the promotion of "New Type of Great Power Relations". By building the already vague "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept on another equally if not vaguer concept of "core interests", this simply made it more difficult for the US to endorse "New Type of Great Power Relations".

The third and last principle is "win-win". This principle was used to contrast with the zero-sum game in the old type of great power relations, as I will discuss later. In China's "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept, "win-win" stood for a new framework of bilateral relations that would benefit both sides. It focused on shared interests and common development instead of competition and struggle. By highlighting this principle, China also wanted to send the message that the rise of China was not a threat but an opportunity in which the international society would benefit from.

In short, while the three principles of "no confrontation", "mutual respect" and "win-win" indicated China's positive visions, they were too broad to provide any practical value. The Chinese academic and policy community failed to make sound progress in clarifying these principles and thus "New Type of Great Power Relations". As Da Wei elaborated,

> Currently, the Chinese government and academia are stuck in statement of principles such as enhancing strategic mutual trust, making good use of the current mechanism, and strengthening cooperation in issues like North Korea's nuclear weapon and climate change. These statements are no doubt correct but too vague. Their elaborations on how and why 'New Type of Great Power Relations' is 'new' are not sufficiently specific and clear. If this tendency continues, China might gradually lose its real control over this concept. This is a problem that the academia should focus. (Da 2013: 60)

Da's warning clearly indicates China's self-awareness of the downside of its conceptual vagueness. This view was shared by many, and there were various calls urging the development of a convincing theory of "New Type of Great Power Relations" (Niu and Song 2013: 135). As Qi Hao pointed out, if China failed to make this vague concept clearer, it might let the international society misunderstand China's strategic intentions (Qi 2015). It was also argued that the US had tried to fill this concept with their preferred meanings (Niu and Song 2013: 135). Thus, if China could not produce a sound explanation, it would lose the agenda-setting power and rights of interpretation. In other words, China may even be constrained by its own concept.

3.2.5.2 "Great Power" Beyond Sino-US Relations

In comparison with the first vague key phrase "new type of relations", the second key phrase "great power" was no clearer. China's academic and policy community had reached little agreements on what a great power was and which countries qualified as a great power. As previously discussed, when Xi put forward "New Type of Great Power Relations", he clearly referred it to US–China relations. Many Chinese scholars interpreted this concept as a revised version of "G2" or "G2 with Chinese characteristics" (Zeng and Breslin 2016). Some Chinese scholars implicitly and explicitly suggested a Chinese version of a bipolar system in which the international system was mainly governed by the US and China. According to Wu Xinbo, for example, China's "New Type of Great Power Relations" was a "new type of bi-polar relationship" that provided a foundation for "the US and China to co-govern the world" (Wu 2014: 37).

While many scholars' use of this concept strictly followed Xi's US-China context, some had gradually diversified its usage. It was argued that the US and China were not the only great powers in the world. There were many other great powers, which could also be included in this great power relations concept (Zhao 2013b: 12). In this school of thought, the term "great power" referred to the US and three different groups of countries (Zeng and Breslin 2016). The first group referred "great power" to the US and traditional major countries. This echoed the usage of this concept in Jiang Zemin's era, which included Russia, Japan, Canada and European countries such as the UK, France and Germany. It represented the traditional Chinese thinking of great power. Although the mainstream view argued that only the US could be considered a great power in China's "New Type of Great Power Relations", a few insisted that the EU may fit in (Cui 2015)—around 8.51% of 141 articles argued that this concept should be used in China–EU relations (Zeng and Breslin 2016). This emphasis on the EU was less notable when compared with individual countries such as Russia, Japan and India (Zeng and Breslin 2016).

A distinct feature of the discussion was to move from traditional Western powers, especially the European countries, towards emerging powers such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). These belonged to the second group that pointed to the US and emerging powers. It was argued that China's rise was not an isolated but a group phenomenon (Zhang and Jing 2013: 25). As such, other rising

powers such as BRICS were also great powers and thus fitted this concept. The rise of BRICS in the Chinese discourse of great power was made at the expense of "traditional Western power", especially Europe. There was far less attention on individual European countries. The UK, France and Germany—which were the principal focus of China's "New Type of Great Power Relations" in Jiang Zemin's era—were hardly noticed in the more recent debate under Xi. Among the 141 articles examined, less than 2% mentioned each of them (the UK, France and Germany) as a "great power", which was less notable than Pakistan and South Africa (Zeng and Breslin 2016). This was perhaps because Pakistan lay in China's peripheral strategy and South Africa was a member of BRICS.

The third group further expanded the definition of this concept to include a wide range of developing countries, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and the Philippines (Pan 2013: 28). It was no longer only about US–China relations but China's relations with the US, a group of traditional Western and emerging powers as well as developing countries.

The above divisions of thought partly reflect the politics of intellectual expertise. China's US watchers represent the mainstream and most influential group in China's strategic studies. In comparison, the number and influence of other regional experts are much smaller. In the case of "New Type of Great Power Relations", like Xi Jinping, many of China's US experts exclusively referred to it as US–China relations. Chinese non-US regional experts, however, disagreed with this position, and they took considerable effort in finding their relevance. Those EU policy analysts and diplomats whose work was close to Europe, for example, sought to insert Europe into this concept. While acknowledging the US's importance, many argued that the EU was no less important. A similar tendency of finding policy relevance can be found among China's Russia, India and Japan scholars. In addition to different insights, this is perhaps partly because policy relevance would bring in academic and non-academic resources, such as research funding, publication opportunities, media attention and government support. This explains why "New Type of Great Power Relations" was developed away from Xi's US–China context to refer to a wide range of countries.

This search for policy relevance existed not only within the intellectual community but also by senior officials. The Chinese Ambassador to the UK Liu Xiaoming (2013b), for example, actively proposed establishing a "New Type of Great Power Relations" between China and the UK. Liu

Xiaoming was clearly doing his job to find the relevance of the UK in the context of this concept. Similarly, the former Minister Counsellor of the political section at the Chinese Embassy to France openly called to "reflect the Sino-France new type of great power relations to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Sino-France diplomatic relations" (Wang 2014b). The underlying message was that their work-related countries deserved attention in Chinese diplomacy.

In addition, the "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept had also been used as a convenient cover to boost diplomatic ties. For example, during his visit to India in 2013—one year after Xi proposed this concept—Chinese Premier Li Keqiang referred to Sino-India relations as "New Type of Great Power Relations" (Guo 2013). This was an attempt to flatter India by describing India's very important role in China's strategic thinking. While it may help to boost India–China ties and Li's India visit, this reference of "New Type of Great Power Relations" made the use of this concept muddier. It confused not only the international but also the domestic audience. It was entirely unclear whether Li's use of this concept was accidental or deliberate, and whether this reflected Xi's position. Regardless, it gave China's Indian scholars concrete evidence to promote "New Type of Sino-India Great Power Relations". It had made the unified use of "New Type of Great Power Relations" more difficult. So, the point to emphasize is that politics of expertise mattered here, and China's academic and policy community had taken advantage of this conceptual vagueness to add their preferred agendas into this concept. This caused this concept to be developed away from Xi Jinping's original reference to Sino-US relations.

Table 3.1 summarizes the evolution process of the concept. This chapter argues that there were three stages of China's "New Type of Great Power Relations". The first stage was around the 1990s when Jiang Zemin used this concept to refer to China's relations with all major powers—mainly traditional Western powers. Afterwards, this concept became quiet in China's official and scholarly discussions for almost a decade until the second stage, in which Xi Jinping referred to Sino-US relations in 2012. Xi's call for "New Type of Great Power Relations" immediately evoked enormous academic interest in this topic within China. By then, its focus was to avoid the so-called "Thucydides trap" about the potential conflict between a rising China and a declining US.

The hot debate about this concept soon brought it into the third stage, in which it was generalized within China's relations with all great powers.

Table 3.1 The evolution process of "New Type of Great Power Relations"[a]

New type of great power relations	*Stage 1*	*Stage 2*	*Stage 3*
Time period	Late 1990s and early 2000s	2010–2013	2013–2019
Leadership	Jiang Zemin	The later term of Hu Jintao—early term of Xi Jinping	Xi Jinping
Target	China's relations with all great powers; mainly traditional Western powers including the US, UK, France, Germany, Russia and Japan	Sino-US relations only	Mainly Sino-US relations but also China's relations with all great powers; traditional Western powers, the EU and Russia; rising powers mainly BRICS
China's own international identity	A normal power	No. 2 power (second only to the US)	A leading rising power

[a] *Source* Zeng (2017a)

To some extent, this was quite similar to the first stage, as both were about China's relations with all great powers in the world. However, they were based on very different Chinese evaluations of China's own role and others'. At the first stage, the discourse of this concept was based on China's identity as a normal power who wished to improve relations with the similar (if not more) powerful traditional Western powers. On the contrary, at the third stage, the mainstream discourse was based on China's identity as a global power or perhaps the No. 2 power (second only to the US). In addition to China's shifting international identity, its assessment of great power had also changed. At the first stage, "great power" mainly referred to traditional Western powers, and traditional European powers were the largest audience. However, by the third stage, the Chinese view of great powers started to shift away from traditional Western powers (especially Europe) to emerging powers such as BRICS.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

This chapter explores how China's "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept was gradually established. It argues that this concept is a multifunctioning political slogan. The introduction of this concept by Xi in 2012 represented his new leadership vision about US-China relations and thus was a political slogan to assert Xi's power as the then-new top leader. On the global stage, it was also a slogan to assert China's elevated global status. Thus, China expected the US to acknowledge this status by actively engaging with this concept. When some US politicians adopted this concept in their speeches, the CCP immediately made use of it to secure propaganda wins to enhance domestic legitimacy.

Despite the high Chinese expectations, the US was largely uninterested in playing this slogan politics game with China. The Obama administration remained ambiguous towards this Chinese-coined concept. A key reason for this ambiguity was the conceptual vagueness of "New Type of Great Power Relations". By introducing this concept, Xi aimed to declare his intention to explore a new type of US–China relations. However, there was neither a concrete proposal nor actionable plans. While the participation of China's intellectual community helped to develop this concept, it had not saved this concept from being vague. There was broad agreement on its importance; however, no consensus was reached on what "New Type of Great Power Relations" was and how China was going to put it into practice. The use of "New Type of Great Power Relations" was neither clear nor unified. The subsequent academic and policy discussion also shifted the concept from Xi's original focus on Sino-US relations to China's relations with all major powers.

There was also a strong fear that China would lose the rights of interpretation if Chinese academics and analysts failed to provide a specific substance for this concept. In particular, many were concerned that the US may take advantage of this conceptual vagueness to use this concept to serve its own interests. This concern reflected the Chinese logic of slogan politics—competing visions of slogans, and who controls those visions. Instead of adopting and using it to serve American interests, the US government chose not to actively engage with the concept.

The lack of American response was a clear embarrassment to Xi personally and the Chinese government, who had high expectations of the US response and had already used its propaganda machine to tell its people that the US had accepted the concept and its implied power status of

China. In the end, China has gradually lost enthusiasm in promoting this concept on diplomatic occasions and shifted its energy to boosting other new slogans. The "Belt and Road Initiative" and the "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" are the most notable ones, as the following two chapters will explore, respectively.

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CHAPTER 4

Slogan of "Belt and Road Initiative"

This chapter studies the concept of "Belt and Road Initiative" (一带一路).[1] Many international analyses consider it as Beijing's grand strategy to achieve regional dominance, reflecting China's geopolitical ambition. This view, however, neglects the transformation of China's party-state. Using the state transformation theory, Jones and Zeng (2019: 1415) show that the "Belt and Road Initiative" is not a grand strategy but "an extremely loose, indeterminate scheme, driven primarily by competing domestic interests, particularly state capitalist interests, whose struggle for power and resources are already shaping 'Belt and Road Initiative's' design and implementation". Built upon the study of Jones and Zeng (2019), this chapter employs a slogan politics approach to examine how this concept is used as a political slogan.

As this chapter will show, the "Belt and Road Initiative" contains three key features: conceptual vagueness, inconsistency and incoherence. By studying how the concept is gradually established in China and how other actors respond to this establishment, the slogan politics approach provides critical insights to make sense of these features. It argues that the "Belt and Road Initiative" concept is a multifunctional political slogan communicating with Chinese domestic and international actors. This concept was put forward as a slogan to assert the leadership status of Xi Jinping and

[1] This chapter benefits from my collaborative research with Lee Jones on the "Belt and Road Initiative"; please see Jones and Zeng (2019).

J. Zeng, *Slogan Politics*, Critical Studies of the Asia-Pacific,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-6683-7_4

China. In this regard, power assertion was primary, while the idea per se was secondary. Thus, it was introduced and kept as an extremely vague idea that was subject to change in order to accommodate the interests of key domestic and international stakeholders.

In order to win domestic and international support, the "Belt and Road Initiative" has gradually evolved from its original design of peripheral diplomacy to a global initiative, making it highly inconsistent at different times. In the domestic arena, the development of the "Belt and Road Initiative" has produced a high level of domestic contestations. While most Chinese domestic actors enthusiastically support the "Belt and Road Initiative", those actors have taken advantage of its conceptual vagueness to advance their own interests. In the name of supporting the "Belt and Road Initiative", they have employed their own academic and media resources to interpret the concept in their preferred ways. This has produced intense competition among domestic actors including a variety of diverse and competing "Belt and Road Initiative" interpretations that the central agencies in Beijing have struggled to coordinate. This chapter argues that all of these have added complication and confusion to the concept of the "Belt and Road Initiative" and undermined Beijing's relevant propaganda campaign on the global stage.

4.1 "Belt and Road Initiative": Beijing's Masterplan to Achieve China's Geopolitical Dominance?

The "Belt and Road Initiative" comprises the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which was first proposed by Xi during his state visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in September and October of 2013, respectively—translated as "One Belt, One Road" at the time. Following the "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept, it is the second signature foreign policy concept introduced by Xi since he took power in 2012. At the time, it stood for Xi's other major political attempt to signal his distinct leadership vision in comparison with his predecessors.

The birth of the "Belt and Road Initiative" reflected a fundamental departure of China's foreign policy thinking especially Deng Xiaoping's "keep a low profile and never seek for leadership" principle that had been practised by Xi's predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin for decades

(Zhou and Chen 2019). At the time, the "Belt and Road Initiative" concept functioned as a slogan to assert Xi's power as the then-new top leader. The responses from Chinese political actors reflected not only their attitudes towards the concept per se but also the then-new leader. In other words, this was a national test for political loyalty to Xi. The subsequent nationwide support within China showed that Xi had succeeded in using this concept as a slogan to establish his personal authority.

Yet, this political sloganization of the "Belt and Road Initiative" is a double-edged sword as it has associated Xi's leadership credentials with the outcome of the "Belt and Road Initiative". Xi will get credit if this "Belt and Road Initiative" becomes a success. And vice versa. In other words, the "Belt and Road Initiative" is Xi's political legacy, defining his historical status for better or for worse. Xi further strengthened his association with the "Belt and Road Initiative" by incorporating it into the CCP's constitution in 2018—a gesture to put his stamp on the CCP.

The "Belt and Road Initiative" also strengthened Xi's power by helping to remove the three-decades-long CCP rule—two-term limit for Chinese presidents (He 2019). The establishment of this rule traces back to Mao Zedong's China, in which an uninstitutionalized power-succession system had led to endless brutal power struggles and thus undermined the CCP's legitimacy. Learning from Mao's mistakes, the CCP under Deng Xiaoping has taken considerable efforts in institutionalizing its power succession since the early 1980s (Zeng 2014, 2015). In 1982, the PRC constitution incorporated this two-term limit rule and stipulated that the President of the PRC could not serve continuously for more than two terms. This was specifically designed to avoid another president for life like Mao. Arguably, this three-decade institutionalization project has been very successful in making China's elite politics more stable, smooth and predictable than ever before (Zeng 2014, 2015).

Not surprisingly, it was not easy for Xi to get rid of the established and successful rule; the "Belt and Road Initiative" helped to achieve this end (He 2019). It is argued that the "Belt and Road Initiative" is a long-term project—the so-called China's "project of the century"—and its success requires consistency and stability in the top leadership. Thus, Xi needs to stay in power to ensure the success of this "project of the century" (He 2019). The international support that the "Belt and Road Initiative" received also helps the propaganda narrative about Xi's achievement in leading China's national revival. As previous chapters discussed, the positive global response always provides rich material for the CCP's domestic

propaganda. Arguably, the "Belt and Road Initiative" is one of (if not) the most followed Chinese foreign policy concepts in contemporary times. From the number of national leaders participating in China's Belt and Road Forums for International Cooperation to the frequency of global corporate and government actors talking about the "Belt and Road Initiative", all of these are interpreted by Chinese media as a sign of the rise of Chinese global leadership. In this regard, the "Belt and Road Initiative" further established Xi's personal authority by granting him greater international legitimacy (He 2019).

To this end, many analyses point to a "Belt and Road Initiative" under Xi's command as reflecting his personal vision (He 2019). While the power consolidation aspect of the "Belt and Road Initiative" is obvious, this does not mean that the development of the "Belt and Road Initiative" is completely following Xi's design. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, no top leaders have full control of their signature concepts. After all, the communication of a slogan is not only about how a top leader uses it to signal a message but also how others react to it. As this chapter will discuss, the "Belt and Road Initiative's" conceptual vagueness and the participation of a large number of actors have allowed considerably more room for other political actors to shape the "Belt and Road Initiative" than many expected.

When it comes to China as a whole, the "Belt and Road Initiative" also functions as a slogan to (a) assert China's great power status and test international support by (b) declaring a vague intention of regional economic cooperation. This declaration of intent has attracted considerable attention on the global stage. Many international analysts interpret it as China's ambitious "grand strategy" to build a Sino-centric world order (Callahan 2016; Miller 2017; Leverett and Wu 2017). Many also call the "Belt and Road Initiative" China's Marshall Plan—or perhaps more ambitious (Shen 2016; Chen 2014). It is argued that, by promoting the "Belt and Road Initiative", China can leverage its economic strength to achieve geopolitical dominance. Some also revisit the historical origins of the Silk Road and Chinese history to argue that the "Belt and Road Initiative" reflects China's vision of reviving the ancient tributary system in which the Middle Kingdom dominates (Durani 2016).

Collectively, those analyses point to a "clearly defined" and "well-thought-out" masterplan of Beijing to advance its geopolitical goals. These arguments are not completely groundless. The birth of the "Belt and Road Initiative" happened in the context of US–China geopolitical

competition. To some, the "Belt and Road Initiative" was launched as a counter strategy to the Obama administration's "rebalancing in Asia" and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (Zhang 2016; Li 2015). In this regard, the "Belt and Road Initiative" was put forward as a slogan to discern international support to China's leadership. Accepting the "Belt and Road Initiative" means an endorsement of its implied power relations in which China is a regional (if not global) leader. This function is further strengthened by the increasing US pressure to ask other countries not to endorse the "Belt and Road Initiative". It almost makes whether to endorse the "Belt and Road Initiative" or not a testing point on which side international actors would like to stand: China or the US.

While the "Belt and Road Initiative" lies in this geopolitical context, the relevant grand strategy arguments over-interpret its declared intent as some kind of "clearly defined" and "well-thought-out" strategic plan. As previous chapters discussed, in China, when a new policy concept is put forward, it is often not clearly defined. The process of giving it meanings occurs in a subsequent and incremental manner. This chapter argues that the development of the "Belt and Road Initiative" also follows this "soft" opening approach. When first proposed by Xi Jinping in 2013, it was an extremely vague idea with neither a clear definition nor a blueprint. Since then, the concept of the "Belt and Road Initiative" has been constantly shifting, as the following section will explore.

4.2 The Evolving "Belt and Road": From Peripheral Diplomacy to Global Initiative

This chapter argues that, as a slogan to test international support, the "Belt and Road Initiative" was deliberately kept vague in order to accommodate the interests of key international stakeholders and secure their support. By declaring a vague idea of regional economic cooperation, China wanted to assert its power on the global stage. In order to achieve its primary goal of securing international support and asserting power, China has constantly adjusted its "Belt and Road Initiative", leading to its three-stage evolution: (1) peripheral diplomacy, (2) Asia + Eastern Europe + Africa cooperation and (3) global initiative.

At first, the then called "One Belt One Road" was put forward as a regional economic cooperation idea for China's peripheral diplomacy.[2] During China's first-ever "work forum on diplomacy to China's periphery" in October 2013, Xi Jinping noted that since the 18th Party Congress in 2012, the Chinese government had highlighted the importance of periphery in China's overall development and diplomacy. As Xi elaborated,

> China "should focus on maintaining the peace and stability of its ***periphery*** and promote win-win and mutual benefits. It should actively participate in regional economic cooperation, accelerate interconnectivity of infrastructure and establish ***'Silk Road Economic Belt'*** and ***'the 21st Century Maritime Silk Route Economic Belt'***". (Xinhua 2013: emphasis added)

Following Xi's tone, the report of the CCP's "major issues concerning comprehensively deepening reforms" noted that China "should establish financial institutions for development, accelerate interconnectivity of infrastructure with *periphery* countries, advance the establishment of *Silk Road Economic Belt* and *Maritime Silk Route Economic Belt*" (CCP 2013: emphasis added).

The above speech and document demonstrate that the "Belt and Road Initiative" was clearly proposed for China's peripheral diplomacy. The then strategic goal of the "Belt and Road Initiative" was to put peripheral diplomacy into practice. At the time, regions like Europe, for example, had no role to play in this initiative. This is further demonstrated by EU–China exchange at the time. The "Belt and Road Initiative" was not mentioned at all during the 16th EU-China Summit held in Beijing in November 2013 (and its subsequent "EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation") as well as the Meeting of Heads of Government of China and Central and Eastern European Countries held in Bucharest at the end of November 2013 (and its subsequent "the Bucharest Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries"). The "Belt and Road Initiative" would be mentioned in those

[2] As Tim Summers (2016) points out, the basic ideas of "Belt and Road Initiative" can be traced back to China's regional policy of "Go West" initiative (西部大开发) in the early 2000s if not 1980s. The "Belt and Road Initiative" framework was actually aggregated from these pre-existing provincial-level strategies.

Europe-related meetings or documents if Europe was part of the "Belt and Road Initiative" at the time.

With the development of the "Belt and Road Initiative", this concept had been filled with more substance. This led it to evolve into the second stage. It was during this process that Africa and Eastern Europe gradually took root in the plan. This became obvious in early 2014. In March 2014, the Chinese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zhang Yesui, publicly stated that the purpose of the "Belt and Road Initiative" was to connect Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Western Asia and even a part of Europe (Li 2014). In June 2014, the Joint Document of China-Central and Eastern European Countries Ministerial Meeting on Promoting Trade and Economic Cooperation stated that China and the relevant European countries should "seize the opportunities in the development of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" (China-CEEC 2014). All of these show the gradual expansion of the "Belt and Road Initiative's" geographic focus.

In March 2015—a year and a half after the "Belt and Road Initiative" was first introduced in 2013—the Chinese central government finally released relatively more concrete "Belt and Road Initiative" central guidelines—*Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road* (*V&A*) (China 2015). In this joint document published by three central agencies in Beijing—the National Reform and Development Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce, it stated that

> the Silk Road Economic Belt focuses on bringing together China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe (the Baltic); linking China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central Asia and West Asia; and connecting China with Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is designed to go from China's coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China's coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other. (China 2015)

This confirms that Europe and Africa had gradually emerged in China's "Belt and Road Initiative" agenda.

By early 2015, the expanding "Belt and Road Initiative" at the second stage including Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe had become different from its original design as peripheral diplomacy at stage one. At this stage,

the "Belt and Road Initiative" led to much confusion and criticism. At the time, there was a widely circulated list of 65 "Belt and Road Initiative" countries, leading to criticism of the "Belt and Road Initiative" as being an exclusive bloc or China club. In Europe, the focus of the "Belt and Road Initiative" was mainly about the eastern European countries. Many were confused about whether the entire EU was included or not—if not, how would China bypass the EU and directly negotiate with individual European countries? This led to criticism that the development of the "Belt and Road Initiative" might undermine European cohesion.

Some western European countries were also interested in the economic opportunity of the "Belt and Road Initiative". The then Irish Ambassador to China John Paul Kavanagh, for example, was confused with the vagueness of the "Belt and Road Initiative". He asked the Chinese government whether the exclusion of Ireland in the aforementioned list of 65 "Belt and Road Initiative" countries meant that Ireland could not participate (Dong 2015; NewChinaTV 2017). The above confusion and criticism immediately pushed China to expand its "Belt and Road Initiative" into the third stage. As a direct response to this Irish enquiry, in April 2015, during an official "Belt and Road Initiative" event, Ou Xiaoli from the National Development and Reform Commission's Department of Western Region Development explained that

> 'I don't know if we are a country covered by the Belt and Road Initiative', Ireland ambassador to China John Paul Kavanagh raised this most basic confusion. The construction of the 'Belt and Road' is open; everyone can participate in it as long as interested… we hope to have more friends to participate. (Dong 2015)

This explanation was further confirmed by Xi Jinping. During his visit to the UK in October 2015, many in the UK were interested in whether the UK could participate in the "Belt and Road Initiative" as the UK was also not one of those 65 partner countries in the aforementioned "Belt and Road Initiative" list. Xi Jinping publicly stated that the "Belt and Road Initiative" was open and all countries that were interested in it could join (Hou 2015). After Xi's statement, the "Belt and Road Initiative" has essentially included all countries—for example, Australia, Brazil and Peru that had nothing to do with China's ancient Silk Road (Wang 2016). Since then, China has largely kept this position. In this context, the original translation of "One Belt One Road" became confusing as there was

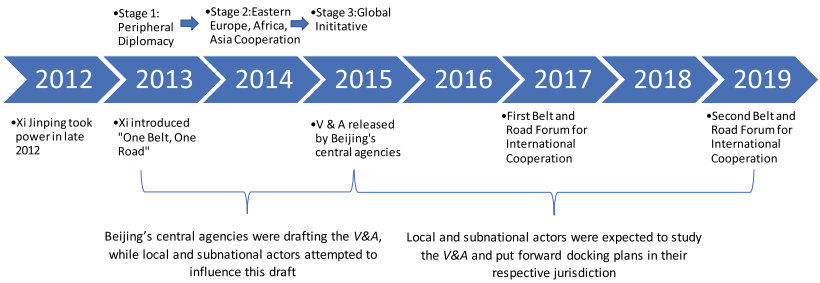

Fig. 4.1 Timeline of the "Belt and Road Initiative" development (2012–2019)

more than *one* belt and *one* road, and thus the Chinese government has changed the official translation into "Belt and Road Initiative".

Figure 4.1 shows the timeline of the "Belt and Road Initiative's" development. Its original plan in late 2013 was about peripheral diplomacy. Afterwards, in early 2014, it started to include Africa and parts of Europe. In late 2015, China opened the membership of the "Belt and Road Initiative" to all countries. This rapidly expanding "Belt and Road Initiative" has shifted from a peripheral diplomacy idea to a rather all-encompassing slogan without geographic focus. It suggests that the "Belt and Road Initiative" was introduced as a vague and immature—instead of "well-thought-out" or "clearly defined"—idea. Its shifting nature also shows that the concept is not as "consistent" as the grand strategy interpretations implied.

This evolving process has been driven by a mix of factors. First of all, there has been a deliberate policy adjustment to accommodate international actors. As previously discussed, the "Belt and Road Initiative" was kept vague to accommodate the interests of key international stakeholders in order to maximize their support at its first introduction in 2013. The enormous economic benefits involved in this "Belt and Road Initiative" have attracted "unexpected enthusiastic" feedback from international actors.[3] Their strong interest in the "Belt and Road Initiative" and their demand to join it have encouraged China to expand its "Belt and Road Initiative" rapidly. Ireland, for example, was not included in the original circulated list of 65 "Belt and Road Initiative" countries;

[3] Interview with a Director of a private Chinese think tank on 24 May 2017.

however, its pro-active pursuit of its "Belt and Road Initiative" membership pushed the Chinese government to revise its plan (Dong 2015; NewChinaTV 2017).

The enthusiastic international response surprised many in China. As previously mentioned, the high volume of global attention on the "Belt and Road Initiative" has granted Xi and China much international legitimacy. China is open to consolidating this international legitimacy in order to maximize the function of the concept as a slogan to assert China's leadership and achieve the CCP's domestic propaganda win. As such, the global response has further driven this periphery-focused idea into a grander and more open one.

This evolution was also influenced by the shifting geopolitical landscapes. As previously mentioned, the "Belt and Road Initiative" was launched in the context of countering the US's "rebalancing in Asia" and the Trans-Pacific Partnership under the Obama administration. This context no longer existed due to the leadership transition in the US in late 2016/early 2017, and these strategies were unexpectedly abandoned by the Trump administration at the time. In this new circumstance, both "imagined enemies" of the "Belt and Road Initiative", Japan and the US, are now welcomed to be a part of it. Although this was after the aforementioned three-step evolution process, this dramatic change has altered Beijing's policy since 2016. The global focus of the "Belt and Road Initiative" also helps China to fend off critics about the "Belt and Road Initiative" being an exclusive bloc, as will be discussed later.

Moreover, this evolution has been driven by intellectual input. Like other foreign policy concepts, the "Belt and Road Initiative" was put forward as an immature idea to be developed, requiring substantial intellectual support. It functions as a slogan to invite China's academic and policy community to devote their expertise to produce concrete, actionable plans. In this regard, the evolution was deliberate by its design. Soon after Xi introduced the "Belt and Road Initiative", many Chinese university scholars and policy analysts in state-affiliated think tanks began to shift their research focus to it. A large number of research projects on this topic have been funded, and many academic articles and research reports have since been produced. As Chapter 2 mentioned, China's National Social Science Foundation has funded 561 projects to study the "Belt and Road Initiative"; in comparison, only 17 and 64 projects were funded to study "New Type of Great Power Relations" and "Community of Shared

Future for Mankind" respectively.[4] The "Belt and Road Initiative" studies have become so hot in China that some Chinese scholars even suggest that it should be established as an independent academic discipline (Wang 2017), similar to, for example, political science or economics. Dozens of "Belt and Road" institutes and centres have been founded at Chinese universities.

This intellectual support is crucial in many aspects. As the "Belt and Road Initiative" involves many regions, the Chinese government needs tremendous intellectual expertise to inform its policymaking. The development of the "Belt and Road Initiative" has stimulated the demand for regional experts in China, especially those who specialize in Africa and the Middle East. Their input lies not only in operational and technical but also in strategic levels. It has intertwined with the aforementioned international factors affecting the "Belt and Road Initiative". For example, when facing international confusion over which countries were included in the "Belt and Road Initiative" and the criticism over the exclusive bloc, many Chinese policy analysts pushed for the expansion of the "Belt and Road Initiative". The Central Party School's Zhao Lei, for example, actively exerted his influence in the policy and media community and advised removing the exclusiveness of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (Zhao 2015b). The position of a non-exclusive "Belt and Road Initiative" was eventually adopted by the Chinese government. While the role of individuals is unclear during this policy adjustment process, the participation of China's academic and policy community as a whole has played a key role in driving the development of the "Belt and Road".

4.3 State Propaganda and Politics of Expertise

Previous sections mentioned how the "Belt and Road Initiative" helps to win international legitimacy and thus secure a domestic propaganda win. As an external foreign policy concept, the "Belt and Road Initiative" also has a function of propaganda towards an international audience. In order to build a more favourable international environment to promote the "Belt and Road Initiative", China has deployed substantial resources to conduct international propaganda. *China Daily*, for example, even

[4] The author's brief search on research projects with the respective concept in their titles from the foundation's website on 21 April 2020, http://fz.people.com.cn/skygb/sk/index.php/Index/seach.

published a series of online videos, in which the "Belt and Road Initiative" has become a bedtime story for foreign children (China 2017).

As previously mentioned, the "Belt and Road Initiative" has been very successful in attracting global attention. This global attention is helpful to China's domestic propaganda and consolidation of its leadership on the global stage. However, the high level of global attention is no equal to effective communication. This chapter argues that the international communication of the "Belt and Road Initiative" has been quite ineffective. This political marketing of the "Belt and Road Initiative" is doomed to be a hard sell. Two essential qualities for a popular slogan is catchy and simple; on the contrary, the "Belt and Road Initiative" including both its Chinese original name and English translations is the exact opposite. The name of the concept is quite confusing.

The aforementioned evolutionary nature of the "Belt and Road Initiative" has further complicated China's promotion campaign by making it very difficult for Beijing to maintain a consistent policy narrative. The propaganda narrative has to be constantly changed as a result of the shifting "Belt and Road Initiative" idea. The narrative of the "Belt and Road" as a "global initiative", for example, is different from that of "peripheral diplomacy"; the former's global focus has less Silk Road historical relevance than the latter. This constant rebranding process means that any concrete ideas may become quickly outdated and that only broad, universal ideas will last. This partly explains why Chinese official propaganda sticks with vague positive connotations such as "win-win" and "common development" when publicizing its "Belt and Road Initiative".

Moreover, those Chinese propaganda narratives have been challenged by many international analyses that point to the geopolitical and unilateral nature of the "Belt and Road Initiative". In order to fend off those critics, China has chosen to downplay the "Belt and Road Initiative's" geopolitical and unilateral colour. For example, as a direct response to those geopolitical interpretations, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi commented that the "Belt and Road Initiative" "is a product of inclusive cooperation, not a tool of geopolitics, and must not be viewed with the outdated Cold War mentality" (MFA 2015).

Similarly, in 2015, Beijing's three central agencies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly published a document to regulate the Chinese official English translation of the "Belt and Road", in which

it specifically asked to translate the "Belt and Road" as "initiative" *not* "'strategy', 'project', 'program', and 'agenda'" (NDRC 2015); in other words, the official English translation should be "Belt and Road Initiative" not "Belt and Road Strategy", "Belt and Road Project", "Belt and Road Program" or "Belt and Road Agenda". By doing this, they aim to send a message that the "Belt and Road" is an open "win-win" based global "initiative" without pre-set agendas implied in other wordings. This explains the changing translation from "One Belt One Road *Strategy*" to "Belt and Road *Initiative*". This propaganda move reflects the wider and ongoing debate within China over whether China should position the "Belt and Road" as a strategy or an initiative, as Chapter 2 discussed. The announcement of the official line from Beijing's three central agencies, however, has not settled the debate, and many Chinese scholars disagree with the "initiative" and non-geopolitical position. This debate lies in the wider context of China's domestic contestation over the "Belt and Road Initiative". Lack of coordination has produced many problems for China's international propaganda campaign, as will be discussed later.

In order to assist in the challenging tasks of international propaganda, China's academic and intellectual community has been assembled to support. Under the state's call to "tell a good 'Belt and Road Initiative' story", a large number of conferences have been organized and various delegations have been sent abroad. There have been various reflections on how to make the "Belt and Road Initiative" more convincing and attractive. For example, some Chinese scholars argue that the Chinese government should not embed too many historical elements into their narratives of the "Belt and Road Initiative", as this would lead to concerns over the revival of the ancient tributary system (Zhao 2015a). Others suggest that Chinese local governments should avoid using the term "bridgehead" to refer to their role in the "Belt and Road Initiative", as this kind of military terminology may increase other countries' concerns over the "Belt and Road Initiative's" geopolitical and military ambition (Zhao 2015b). However, this sober advice has been almost completely ignored by Chinese local governments, which are driven by their own interests. In order to highlight their critical roles in the "Belt and Road Initiative", many Chinese provinces have frequently employed the term "bridgehead" to brand their cities, as this chapter will discuss later.

This intellectual support has been a great help to advance the idea of the "Belt and Road Initiative". Arguably, it has successfully helped China

to identify the global needs and develop the "Belt and Road Initiative" accordingly. Some ideas of the "Belt and Road Initiative" such as regional economic cooperation by enhancing "connectivity" have received considerable global support that the EU and Australia have to launch their "connectivity" and infrastructure plans in order to counterbalance the "Belt and Road Initiative". In this regard, at the bare minimum, the "Belt and Road Initiative" has successfully raised global awareness of "connectivity".

While this intellectual support is critically helpful, it also complicates China's "Belt and Road Initiative". Given the politics of expertise, scholars in different fields have tried to drag the "Belt and Road Initiative" into their specialized fields and load it with their preferred meanings, producing many competing interpretations. For example, some argue that the "Belt and Road Initiative" is China's diplomatic initiative towards developing countries (Zheng and Zhang 2016), suggesting its goal is to strengthen China's strategic ties with developing countries. Others consider it "the largest and the most influential economic cooperation initiative in world history" (Jiang 2015), arguing that its focus is on regional economic integration. To Chinese military scholars, it is a call to develop the Chinese army, without which China would be unable to secure the growing overseas interests brought about by the "Belt and Road Initiative" (Ghiselli 2015).

Given their expertise, many Chinese international relations scholars tend to interpret the "Belt and Road Initiative" through a geopolitical lens (Sidaway and Woon 2017). This apparently contradicts the aforementioned official stance that aims to downplay the geopolitical nature of the "Belt and Road Initiative". In order to forge more coherent narratives and reduce noise, the central government has also tried to maintain discipline. According to a CASS scholar, her institute was not "allowed" to openly discuss the "connotation or the grand implications" of the "Belt and Road Initiative" after 2015, when the *V&A* was released; they are now asked to focus on its specific implementations, such as in the economic and financial industries.[5] It is questionable to what extent this instruction has been effectively implemented. As Chapter 2 discussed, Xue Li from the CASS and Li Kaisheng from the Shanghai Academy of Social Science had an open debate on whether the "Belt and Road Initiative" is a strategy or

[5] Interview conducted online on 17 April 2017.

initiative in 2017, and both sides can find official documents to support their arguments. This shows that there is still no consensus yet, and it is not easy for even insiders to discern which side reflects the official line if there is any—let alone many international actors.

These diverse and competing academic interpretations of the "Belt and Road Initiative" produced by politics of expertise is not special. However, what makes the "Belt and Road Initiative" case more unique is the enormous economic interests involved. This has attracted powerful state actors to participate in the policy discussions. In order to influence the development of the "Belt and Road Initiative", they have deployed their academic and policy resources to interpret the concept in their preferred ways and load it with their preferred policy goals. In the name of supporting the "Belt and Road Initiative" slogan, they have played various political tactics to advance their interests, as the following section will discuss.

4.4 Domestic Contestation Under the Nationwide Support of the Slogan

Previous sections showed that the "Belt and Road Initiative" was introduced as a vague and shifting idea. This lack of consistency and conceptual clarity disproves the "clearly defined" "well-thought-out" grand strategy interpretation of the "Belt and Road Initiative". The other major flaw of the grand strategy interpretation is the misguided assumption of domestic coherence, considering China or the Chinese state as a single, coherent political entity. Many either pay no attention to Chinese domestic politics or take a top-down translation of Beijing's idea to local practices as granted. In the latter, it is assumed that, in China's authoritarian system, the central government can easily mobilize a national concerted effort to achieve its goals. This assumption overestimates Beijing's coordination capacity and neglects the high level of domestic contestation that is driving the development of the "Belt and Road Initiative".

This section examines this domestic contestation from a slogan politics perspective. As previously discussed, the introduction of the "Belt and Road Initiative" was an attempt for Xi to signal his distinct vision and thus assert his power. Chinese domestic actors were expected to demonstrate their loyalty to Xi by actively echoing this concept. In other words, it was a loyalty check. This partly explains the nationwide support that the "Belt and Road Initiative" enjoys. However, this does not mean that there would be a national concerted effort to faithfully implement Xi's

vision—as previously discussed, there was no concrete vision to begin with. On the contrary, under the cover of the "Belt and Road Initiative's" nationwide support, the high level of domestic contestation and self-serving political actors have made Beijing's central agencies struggle to coordinate its "Belt and Road Initiative", producing outcomes different from top leaders' intentions and undermining key foreign policy objectives (Jones and Zeng 2019). It again suggests that the political use of the "Belt and Road Initiative" as a slogan is a two-way communication—not only about how the top leader uses it to mobilize domestic actors but also how domestic actors react to it.

4.4.1 "Belt and Road Initiative" in the Context of a Chinese Style of Federalism

In order to understand this domestic contestation, it is important to review the transformation of China's political system. Thirty years of scholarship in China's political economy has detailed how China's market reform and fiscal decentralization have transformed the central–local relations by allowing greater local fiscal autonomy and significantly weakened the control of the central state in local economic activities (Wong 1991; Breslin 1996). As a result, since the late 1970s, China's governance model has moved towards a Chinese style of federalism (Zheng 2007; Blanchard and Shleifer 2001; Montinola, Qian, and Weingast 1996; Qian and Weingast 1995), in which the central government has restricted authority while the local states have a high level of discretion. This division of power allows local states considerable space and power to promote regional economic growth (Zheng 2007; Blanchard and Shleifer 2001; Montinola, Qian, and Weingast 1996; Qian and Weingast 1995).

This Chinese style of federalism has always allowed (a) the same type of public policy to exist in different forms across China, (b) a high level of regional competition over factors of production, (c) regional economic interests to become a key incentive to motivate local states in which the national, geopolitical picture is largely irrelevant, and (d) a bottom-up growth and innovation model. This governance model has significant implications for central–local interaction as the central government has to skilfully regulate and motivate rather than command local actors (Jones 2019).

This Chinese style of federalism lays out the context for the "Belt and Road Initiative" development. As previously mentioned, the central

government had deliberately kept the "Belt and Road Initiative" vague in order to accommodate the interests of key domestic stakeholders and consolidate their support. This left plenty of room for local and subnational actors to insert their agendas into the "Belt and Road Initiative". As the "Belt and Road Initiative" involves enormous economic interests, local provinces have been very enthusiastic in echoing the central government's call for the "Belt and Road Initiative", and they have made considerable efforts in exerting their influence to maximize their interests, leading fierce regional competition immediately after (if not before) Xi's announcement of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in 2013.

As mentioned above, it took the Chinese central government a year and a half to release the "Belt and Road Initiative" central guidelines—the *V&A*—after Xi first introduced the vague idea of the "Belt and Road Initiative". As Fig. 4.1 shows, during this period, Chinese provinces took advantage of the "Belt and Road Initiative's" conceptual vagueness to inject their own interests and visions into the *V&A*—a process of arguing their relevance with little similarity among their visions except that their specific province was *particularly* important to the "Belt and Road Initiative" and, thus, deserved *more* support from the central government. In order to influence and (re)shape the "Belt and Road Initiative" in their favour, Chinese provinces have carefully constructed and disseminated policy narratives to support their political requests for the "Belt and Road Initiative". Various academic and media resources in their control have been intensively used for this purpose.

On the one hand, local university academics and policy analysts in local state-affiliated think tanks were encouraged to conduct research and provide reasoning to support their provinces' requests. This led to the aforementioned massive number of academic articles and research reports on the "Belt and Road Initiative". On the other hand, local provinces used their media resources, such as local newspapers, to launch public relations campaigns to disseminate their preferred policy narratives regarding the "Belt and Road Initiative". All official provincial newspapers actively engaged with the topic of the "Belt and Road Initiative".[6]

The public campaigns launched by Chinese provinces had produced many competing narratives. For example, they further complicated the existing academic debate among Chinese historians over the historical

[6] Confirmed by the author's brief search on CNKI, http://www.cnki.net/, accessed on 26 December 2018.

origins of the ancient Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road. Even before the introduction of the "Belt and Road Initiative", this academic debate was already complicated by pragmatic business interests because cities with richer historical origins were more likely to win heritage funds and develop their tourism industries. The announcement of the "Belt and Road Initiative" further increased the economic stakes and thus politicized this academic debate.

Taking the origination point of the Silk Road as an example, both Shaanxi and Henan provinces claimed their own cities Xi'an and Luoyang, respectively, as the origination point of the ancient Silk Road (Zhang and Li 2014). Both provincial governments spent considerable resources funding research projects supporting their claims and constructing policy narratives in their favour. The competition over the origination point of the Maritime Silk Road was even more intense. Competitors in the south-eastern coastal provinces included Fujian, Jiangsu and Guangdong.

Fujian Province, for example, used the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's recognition to claim that its city Quanzhou was the origination point (Shi 2014). As Quanzhou "had always been a key port of the maritime Silk Road since the Song Dynasty", the head of Quanzhou city requested that the central government provide more policy support for Quanzhou's Maritime Silk Road activities (Shi 2014). Instead of Quanzhou, Jiangsu Province's Deputy Director of the Department of Culture and Museum Director of Nanjing, Gong Liang, argued that "the real origination point should be in Jiangsu" (Lu 2015). According to Gong, it was Jiangsu that connected the onshore Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road, and the rise of the Maritime Silk Road in Jiangsu led to the gradual decline of the onshore Silk Road (Lu 2015). The Governor of Guangdong Province, Zhu Xiaodan, argued that the capital city of Guangdong Province, Guangzhou, was also one of the origination points (Zhu, Wu, and Fu 2016). Similarly, Guangxi Province saw its city, Beihai, as the origination point.[7]

Those who were not so historically connected to the Silk Road also wanted to stay relevant. As a result, they attempted to redefine and expand the definition of "Silk Road" and its origination point. New concepts such as the "southern origination point", "northern origination point", "porcelain origination point" and "tea origination point" were

[7] Meeting with the delegation of Guangxi's foreign office in November 2017 in London.

invented and put forth by various provinces to prove their relevance in this Maritime Silk Road plan. For example, China's north-eastern provinces, Shandong and Hebei, claimed their own cities Qingdao (Qiao 2015) and Huanghua (Cui 2014), respectively, as the so-called "north origination point".

Chinese provinces had also actively disseminated their "Belt and Road Initiative" narratives to the international audience. For example, they had funded and organized numerous international seminars and conferences to discuss their critical roles in the "Belt and Road Initiative". International delegations were invited to these meetings, which often became opportunities for local provinces to disseminate their narratives. Similarly, the Chinese delegations from Sichuan and Guangxi were keen to highlight the unique, key roles of their respective provinces in the "Belt and Road Initiative" at international occasions.[8] While the larger impact of public relations campaigns served the interests of local provinces, such campaigns had been carried out at the expense of the central government's efforts to project its preferred narratives to the international audience. As will be discussed later, this remains the case, even after the release of the *V&A*.

In the end, some provinces' lobbying strategies were quite successful in injecting their agendas and interests into the *V&A*. Others, however, failed. After a year and a half of lobbying and public relations campaigns, the competition was concluded in the official "Belt and Road Initiative" central guidelines—the *V&A*—and released on 28 March 2015. A total of 18 provinces were highlighted in this official document (China 2015). This final version of the *V&A* was quite different from previous versions. For example, in late 2013, 15 provinces were invited to the "Belt and Road Initiative" symposium organized by China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC 2013); this indicates that only those 15 provinces were part of the original "Belt and Road Initiative" blueprint at that time. Later, some provinces that did not appear in this symposium, such as Inner Mongolia (NDRC 2013), managed to win places in the final version of the *V&A*. Others, such as Shandong, which engaged in a high-profile lobbying campaign, failed to be included in its entirety, although two of its cities were included (China 2015). In this regard, Shandong

[8] Meeting with the delegation of Guangxi's foreign office in November 2017 in London and that of Sichuan University in September 2018 in Lancaster.

was not completely excluded from the *V&A*, indicating a compromise between the central and local governments.

4.4.2 The Case of Jiangsu Province

The exclusion of Jiangsu Province was more surprising and embarrassing, as it was universally considered to play a key role in the "Belt and Road Initiative". Unlike Shandong, Jiangsu was invited to the aforementioned symposium in December 2013 (NDRC 2013). During his visit to Jiangsu in December 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping pointed out that Jiangsu was the "intersection point" of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road and that it should actively participate in the "Belt and Road Initiative" (Jiangsu 2015). Xi's words further raised public and internal expectations about Jiangsu's role in the "Belt and Road Initiative". Thus, Jiangsu claimed itself as the "intersection point" of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in its public relations campaign.

The Jiangsu provincial government also highlighted its city, Lianyungang, as the "east bridgehead" of the "Belt and Road Initiative". On 10 January 2015, the Lianyungang municipal government discussed and approved a specific implementation plan to construct itself as the intersection point of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (Yang 2015). On 13 January 2015, a journalist from *Shanghai Securities* claimed that the draft version of the *V&A* had confirmed Lianyungang as the "node city" (Zhu 2015). On 25 March 2015, *Shanghai Securities* again confirmed this information, claiming that the port of Lianyungang was listed in the "only" coastal port construction project of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (CNSTOCK 2015). All of these news reports were proven wrong.

Even more embarrassing, two hours before the *V&A* was released by the central government, Jiangsu's governor, Li Xueyong, delivered a speech on Jiangsu's contribution to the "Belt and Road Initiative" at the Bo'ao Forum—an important policy forum that was considered to be an indicator of China's policy direction. In that specific year, the Bo'ao Forum gave Jiangsu some publicity spotlight by organizing an exchange meeting exclusively for Jiangsu to promote itself. Contrary to all these media and public expectations, Jiangsu went completely unmentioned in the *V&A*, and not one of its cities, even Lianyungang, was mentioned. At the time, the failure of Jiangsu immediately hit the headlines of the Chinese official and social media (Xiaodan 2015). It was considered to

be the "saddest" province in this round of the "Belt and Road Initiative" competition (Xiao 2015).

While the *V&A* concluded the central government's plan for the "Belt and Road Initiative", it did not serve as the means of ending the debate and reaching consensus. Instead, its exclusion of certain provincial actors led to some counter-effects—the *V&A* was implicitly and explicitly reinterpreted by local actors. The most extreme case is that of Jiangsu, which was unexpectedly excluded from the *V&A*. Some Jiangsu officials openly said that they were struck by the fact that Jiangsu went unmentioned in the *V&A* and "their enthusiasm towards work is still in the process of slow adjustment" (Ding 2015b). Some prefecture-level cities even considered appealing jointly to the central government (Ding 2015b).

In addition, a few officials and scholars openly questioned the *V&A* and challenged the fact that Jiangsu was not included. According to the Deputy Director of the Jiangsu provincial government's counselling office, Liu Zhibiao, the exclusion of Lianyungang in the *V&A* was "mismatched, unwise and unusual" (Xiaodan 2015). Liu also quoted the comment of Zhang Bujia, a consultant to Jiangsu's System Reform Society and President of the Provincial Association of Shareholding Enterprises, who said that "if there is no Longhai (traffic artery starting from Jiangsu linking Eastern and Western China) line, how come there is a silk road?" (Xiaodan 2015). These comments were also openly endorsed by Gu Longgao, the Deputy Director of the Centre for Coastal Development and Bridge Studies at Jiangsu Academy of Social Science, who considered the exclusion of Jiangsu in the *V&A* "very odd" (Wang 2015).

The Jiangsu government had also downplayed the fact that neither the province nor any of its cities were mentioned in the *V&A*. According to the head of Jiangsu, to implement the "Belt and Road strategy" was not "a simple geographical concept", and thus, "there is no outsider in this national strategy" (Wang 2015). During its working meeting, the Jiangsu provincial leadership also used the aforementioned endorsement of Xi Jinping during his visit to Jiangsu to legitimize the importance of Jiangsu in the "Belt and Road Initiative". It was argued that Jiangsu, as an "intersection point" of the "Belt and Road Initiative", was in an explicit position given by the paramount leader Xi Jinping (Jiangsu 2015). As a result, Jiangsu Province continued to insist on its importance in the "Belt and Road Initiative", thus retaining its relevant projects and plans.

The reinterpretation process also happened simultaneously. In facing the widely discussed fact that Jiangsu went unmentioned, Jiangsu immediately put forth its interpretations of the *V&A* in its favour. On 29 March 2015, one day after the *V&A* was released, the Lianyungang newspaper media group published an article in which a few Jiangsu officials were invited to give their interpretations of the role of Lianyungang in the *V&A* (Zhou 2015). In this article, Gu Longgao argued that Lianyungang was still important in both the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road. According to Gu:

> … the central guidelines explicitly pointed that 'New Eurasian Continental Bridge is the first channel of Silk Road Economic Belt'. So far, at least four national documents explicitly mentioned Lianyungang as 'the East Bridgehead of New Eurasian Continental Bridge'. Thus, Lianyungang is a well-deserved bridgehead city on the Silk Road. (Zhou 2015)

With regard to the Maritime Silk Road, although Lianyungang was not one of the many port cities mentioned in the *V&A*, Gu argued that this did not mean unmentioned port cities "have nothing to do with the Maritime Silk Road. It is because other port cities have their own Port trade circle and influence, and Lianyungang is no exception. With Lianyungang's increasing influence in Central Asia and Shanghai Cooperation Organization, it will become an indispensable transport hub city of Maritime Silk Road" (Zhou 2015).

In other words, the above narrative of the *V&A* highlighted other national documents, as well as Xi Jinping's personal words, to support Jiangsu's importance in the "Belt and Road Initiative", suggesting that the *V&A* was not the only authoritative source. So, the argument goes, even if Jiangsu was unmentioned in the *V&A*, this did not mean that Jiangsu had no role in the "Belt and Road Initiative" as Jiangsu's geographic importance spoke for itself. This interpretation represented an obvious and open challenge to the authority and legitimacy of the *V&A* released by central agencies in Beijing.

Not surprisingly, although the *V&A* was not what Jiangsu expected, it had not significantly changed Jiangsu's "Belt and Road" plans. Jiangsu stuck to its original "Belt and Road" plans and narratives with minor modifications. This was clearly demonstrated in Jiangsu's docking implementation plan to respond to the *V&A*. In this plan, Jiangsu continued to claim itself as the intersection point of the "Belt and Road Initiative",

and its cities—Lianyungang and Xuzhou—were put forth as the major node cities of the New Eurasian Continental Bridge Economic Corridor (Ding 2015b). After the *V&A* was released in March 2015, Lianyungang's implementation plan, for example, only changed slightly from the previous version drafted on 10 January 2015. According to Gu Longgao, "no significant change would be made" (Ding 2015a).

In the meanwhile, Jiangsu Province has started its post-*V&A* public campaign to rebuild momentum for its critical role in the "Belt and Road Initiative". For example, Jiangsu Province has continued its previous media campaign to publicize Lianyungang as an "intersection point" of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (Ge et al. 2019). In 2019, Jiangsu further upgraded its positioning for Lianyungang from an "intersection point" to a "strong pivot" point in its media narratives (Wang and Yu 2019). At the same time, Jiangsu has supported various academic and policy research to support its new "strong pivot" positioning for its Lianyungang (Jian 2020).[9]

A consequent question here is if Jiangsu's role in the "Belt and Road Initiative" has Xi Jinping's open endorsement and it was in the original draft of the *V&A*, why did the final version of the *V&A* kick Jiangsu out? To some, Jiangsu's Lianyungang was simply not competitive enough when many other provinces also branded their cities as the new bridgeheads and nodes of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (Shiju 2015). Others point to the fact that Jiangsu does not possess decent coastal cities and harbours, despite its long coastline (Shiju 2015). Despite no available evidence to prove or disprove these speculations so far, the intense regional competition over the "Belt and Road Initiative" was no doubt one of the key defining factors.[10]

[9] Jiangsu's response was exceptional. After all, only 4 out of 34 provincial units went completely unmentioned in the *V&A* (i.e. neither its province nor any of its cities was included). The response of the other three provinces (Hebei, Shanxi and Guizhou) were quieter than Jiangsu as they had not been invited to the symposium in December 2013 and thus had lower expectations of their role in the *V&A*. In addition, compared with Jiangsu, their lower level of economic development and globalization had also made them less competitive in fighting for the central government's favour.

[10] During my fieldwork in China in 2019, one interviewee suggested that it was also caused by the bureaucratic dispute between Jiangsu Province and the National Development Reform Commission—one of three central agencies who crafted the *V&A*. Before the release of the *V&A* in 2015, Jiangsu Province used local protests in Jiangsu to shut

The above regional competition and central–local interaction reflect the key patterns of the Chinese style of federalism: a restricted central state versus autonomous local states with a high level of regional competition. Similar patterns of the interplay of economic interests within the Chinese style of federalism were found, for example, in the case of the "Go West" campaign, a broad strategic initiative to develop western China put forth by Jiang Zemin's leadership in 2000 (Goodman 2004). As Jiang Zemin's political slogan, this initiative represents his political legacy and defines his historical status. The "Belt and Road Initiative" has evolved from many ideas of this "Go West" initiative (Summers 2016; Ferdinand 2016). Both emphasize on infrastructure development to improve regional connectivity in the western part of China in order to achieve economic prosperity. The "Go West" initiative was also a vague political slogan to mobilize domestic actors to promote regional connectivity, in which Chinese local provinces and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) took advantage of the loose central guidelines to compete for resources and advance their agendas (Jones and Zeng 2019).

Compared with this initiative, the "Belt and Road Initiative" offers much greater international stakes; this is also why some call it the international version of the "Go West" initiative (Zhao 2016). Precisely because of those historical roots, China's National Development and Reform Commission's Department of Western Region Development—established to coordinate the "Go West" initiative—has been managing some aspects of the "Belt and Road Initiative".

4.4.3 State Transformation and Domestic Contestation on the Global Stage

The above section only examines how those domestic actors contest the "Belt and Road Initiative" within the *domestic* arena. Their overseas competition is no less fierce, and this exposes China's domestic coordination problem on the global stage. With China's globalization, this Chinese style of federalism has a growing impact on China's foreign relations. As the state transformation analysis observes (Hameiri and Jones 2016; Jones 2019), the "internationalization" of local states has allowed it greater

off environmental projects that the National Development Reform Commission advocated. Thus, the exclusion of Jiangsu in the *V&A* was the National Development Reform Commission's revenge.

access to international society, and thus higher international influence and greater transnational economic interests. This often provides local states more capacity and motivation to conduct economic activities to advance their interests on the international stage. As a result, Chinese provincial actors have played an increasing role in shaping China's foreign relations (Wong 2018; Jian, Chen, and Chen 2010).

This phenomenon has inevitable consequences for the central government's monopoly on China's foreign policy and does not necessarily serve China's national interests at the macro level. This is demonstrated by the case of SOEs, which massively expanded overseas as a result of China's rise. As a majority of those SOEs are provincial-level SOEs and heavily influenced by local provinces, provincial governments become key players in China's overseas corporate engagement strategy. However, their interests often conflict with other relevant central agencies in Beijing including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce and the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (Gill and Reilly 2007). These conflicting interests combined with the SOEs' profit-seeking nature contribute in part to the vicious competition among Chinese SOEs in bidding on overseas infrastructure projects, which seriously damage China's national image and interests.

The state transformation has also brought increased autonomy to SOEs, thereby reducing the central agencies' control over SOEs' overseas activities. As the study of Jones and Zou (2017) on Chinese SOEs in Myanmar shows, Chinese SOEs "clearly defied and subverted central regulations" for the sake of corporate profit, leading to the damage of the official Sino-Myanmar relations, while central agencies in Beijing are struggling to deal with the situation. So, the points to emphasize are: (a) due to their own interests, like Chinese provinces, Chinese SOEs are not always under the full command of Beijing's central agencies, and (b) as provincial-level SOEs partly reflect the interests of provincial governments, their overseas actions can conflict with the goals of other SOEs' managing agencies in Beijing.

Moreover, the domestic bureaucratic setting has also made China's coordination on the global stage very difficult. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, is a relatively weak ministry in China's power architecture and thus can hardly regulate and coordinate other Chinese actors. When facing powerful actors such as local provinces and minister-level SOEs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is incapable of steering those actors in line not only because there is no direct line management but

also because they are at the same rank in the hierarchy. As the "Belt and Road Initiative" involves a large amount of powerful domestic actors, this weak institutional setting of China's foreign policy agency makes China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs struggle to enforce coordination. In this context, there is a reflection in China over whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its leaders should be elevated to a more important status. Without a powerful foreign relations agency to coordinate the "Belt and Road Initiative", a coherent Chinese approach on the global stage is not possible.

4.5 How Should China Position Its "Belt and Road Initiative"?

The previous section on domestic contestation of the "Belt and Road Initiative" has discussed the problems of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in its current form. When powerful domestic (and international) actors attempt to insert their agendas in the "Belt and Road Initiative", it loads the "Belt and Road Initiative" with excessive policy goals. This has made the "Belt and Road Initiative" a catch-all slogan that is abused in China. As many Chinese scholars have warned, when the "Belt and Road Initiative" includes everything, it becomes nothing (Yan 2015). The conflicting use of the "Belt and Road Initiative" concept has not only undermined China's propaganda campaign but also confused international actors, making effective international communication of the "Belt and Road Initiative" very difficult.

As this concept has been constantly changing, the "Belt and Road Initiative" is never clearly defined; there is not even a correct, official map of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (Shepard 2017). With regard to a list of approved "Belt and Road Initiative" projects, countries involved, the amount and sources of the "Belt and Road Initiative" funding and the agencies that run the "Belt and Road Initiative", there is either nothing available or information that is full of problems and contradictions (Shepard 2017). All of these have added additional confusion and complexity. In addition, the lack of central–local coordination also looks remarkably confusing to international actors who have no clear idea about the exact Chinese agencies in charge of the "Belt and Road Initiative" and with whom to negotiate about the "Belt and Road Initiative" project (Yu 2017).

In addition to the international communication problem, the high level of domestic contestation risks the "Belt and Road Initiative" unfolding like "a plate of loose sand". The current lack of central coordination makes it difficult (if not impossible) for the central government to achieve its geopolitical goals. As Jones and Zeng (2019: 1415) argue, the "Belt and Road Initiative" driven by the domestic competition over resources may "generate outcomes that often diverge from top leaders' intentions and may even undermine key foreign policy goals".

This is not to say that the domestic competitive dynamic is purely negative for the Chinese government and its "Belt and Road Initiative" projects. As has been widely examined in the literature on Chinese political economy, the competition among local governments induced by China's fiscal decentralization or Chinese style of federalism, is considered by some to be the key to China's market success and economic miracle (Qian and Weingast 1995; Montinola, Qian, and Weingast 1996). To some extent, this Chinese style of federalism is a kind of democratic participation process, which helps to reinforce the legitimacy of the decision-making process within the one-party system, as Chapter 2 discussed. Nevertheless, when this Chinese style of federalism meets foreign relations, it does undermine the Chinese central government's capacity to coordinate Chinese actions on the global stage.

In this regard, the problems of the current form of the "Belt and Road Initiative" are clear and obvious. In this context, many Chinese scholars and policy analysts suggest that the Chinese government should enforce more coordination and perhaps introduce institutionalized mechanisms to operate the "Belt and Road Initiative". For example, by setting up a dedicated powerful governmental organization to manage the "Belt and Road Initiative",[11] the Chinese approach towards the "Belt and Road Initiative" will be much more organized and coherent. The information on the "Belt and Road Initiative" can also be provided by one single portal in order to avoid international confusion. This will help to enhance the central government's capacity to deliver its preferred outcomes.

Others, however, argue that this organized and coherent central coordination will be counterproductive to China's promotion of the "Belt and Road Initiative". Currently, there is already a lot of international

[11] It should be a more powerful agency than the current National Development and Reform Commission's Department of Western Region Development.

criticism towards the "Belt and Road Initiative" as it is seen as a China-led geopolitical tool to build a Sino-centric world order. As such, many countries are quite vigilant about the "Belt and Road Initiative". As previously mentioned, in order to fend off those critics and maximize international support, the central government has downplayed the geopolitical and unilateral nature of the "Belt and Road" and claimed it as an open "win-win" initiative and platform for cooperation. It is argued that any substantial effort to promote the central coordination will only weaken the credibility of the Chinese government and enhance the global resistance towards the "Belt and Road Initiative".[12]

This debate points to a dilemma that China is facing. To some extent, this is closely related to the debate over whether the "Belt and Road" is—or, perhaps more accurately, should be—a "strategy" or an "initiative", as previously mentioned and Chapter 2 discussed. If China eventually positions it as a "strategy", then it does require more central coordination. If it remains an "initiative", then a coherent Chinese approach is unnecessary. In the middle of this dilemma, some scholars suggest that China should emphasize that it is a "strategy" on the domestic stage while publicizing it as an "initiative" on the global stage.[13] In other words, on the one hand, China should enforce central coordination domestically and put its domestic actors in line. On the other hand, it should continue to tell international actors that the "Belt and Road Initiative" is a non-geopolitical initiative. With the increasingly blurring line between domestic and international, this strategy's effectiveness is questionable. As Xue Li points out:

> very few Chinese believe that it is an initiative. If it is a saying that Chinese people generally do not believe, how can you expect foreigners to believe? Thus, to interpret 'Belt and Road' as an initiative is largely ineffective and difficult to reduce doubts and weaken its unilateral colour. Some claim that there should be a 'difference between inside and outside'. This does not fit in 'Belt and Road' strategy. Insist on doing so will only let foreigners to feel that the Chinese government is not honest or even say one thing and do another. (Xue 2015)

[12] According to my fieldwork in China in April 2019.

[13] According to my fieldwork in China in April 2019.

4.6 Concluding Remarks

Instead of a "well-thought-out" and "clearly defined" grand strategy that is envisioned and planned thoroughly, this chapter shows that the "Belt and Road Initiative" was put forward as a broad, vague slogan without a specific blueprint at its inception. The relatively concrete policy content was subsequently added in order to accommodate the needs of domestic and international actors. This has resulted in a "Belt and Road Initiative" that is constantly evolving from a peripheral strategy targeting China's neighbouring countries to its current form as an extremely inclusive global initiative. While this move helps China to fend off critics over the "Belt and Road Initiative" as being an exclusive bloc, it has made the "Belt and Road Initiative" lose its geographic focus.

On the domestic stage, in order to advance their own interests, powerful Chinese domestic actors have taken advantage of the "Belt and Road Initiative's" conceptual vagueness to actively produce and disseminate their preferred "Belt and Road Initiative" narratives. As a result, the "Belt and Road Initiative" has been overloaded as an all-encompassing slogan to justify almost all relevant planned projects and economic plans put forward by various domestic actors. This has made it difficult for Beijing to coordinate a coherent Chinese approach. Contrary to the grand strategy analysis that focuses on Beijing's central agencies, all of these point to the critical role played by China's academic and local actors in shaping the development of the "Belt and Road Initiative". It shows how domestic and international actors respond to the "Belt and Road Initiative" slogan is equally (if not more) important to how Xi and the central government use this slogan.

It is important to note the point in time. After all, the "Belt and Road Initiative" means different things at different times. The answers are different to the questions of "what the 'Belt and Road Initiative' was", "what the 'Belt and Road Initiative' is", "what the 'Belt and Road Initiative' should be" and "what the "Belt and Road Initiative' will be". The rapidly evolving meaning of the "Belt and Road Initiative" also means that it might be a different slogan at the time of reading this book from that at the time of my writing. At the time of writing, the book endorses the study of Jones and Zeng (2019: 1419) that the "Belt and Road Initiative" in its current form *is* not the grand strategy as it does not fit the definition of a grand strategy that implies a "long-term vision, the holistic devotion of state resources, and the prioritisation of key interests and goals".

It is possible that China may adjust its plans for the "Belt and Road Initiative" in the future including centralization and institutionalization of the "Belt and Road Initiative" operation, introduction of clearly defined strategic priorities for the "Belt and Road Initiative", and stricter enforcement to discipline its domestic actors to achieve certain geopolitical goals. All of those moves may make the "Belt and Road Initiative" more like—not necessarily equivalent to—a coherent, clear and consistent grand strategy. At the time of writing, this does not seem to be the direction that China aims to go or at least what its rhetoric is suggesting. In the 2nd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in April 2019, much of the focus was to further highlight the "Belt and Road Initiative" as an open multilateral platform for cooperation and downplay the unilateral and geopolitical nature of the "Belt and Road Initiative". Xi's opening speeches did not only focus on broad principles of cooperation and consultation but also address international concerns over the "Belt and Road Initiative's" sustainability, corruption, and standards issues. In this regard, the next phase of the "Belt and Road Initiative" seems to be to strengthen multilateralism, and its outcomes are likely to define the fate of the "Belt and Road Initiative". Ultimately, the future of the "Belt and Road Initiative" is decided by not only China but also how the world responds to it. As a political slogan, its use for political communication goes both ways.

According to the Chinese official media, the ultimate goal of the "Belt and Road Initiative" is to build a "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (Globe 2017). If the "Belt and Road Initiative" is already an all-encompassing slogan, what is a "Community of Shared Future for Mankind"? The next chapter will explore it in detail.

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CHAPTER 5

Slogan of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind"

This chapter studies the concept of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (人类命运共同体). "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" is a critical foreign policy concept advocated by Xi Jinping's leadership. Generally speaking, it represents China's vision for a better world, in which China plays a larger role. This chapter argues that the concept should be understood as a symbolic political slogan instead of concrete policy ideas. The symbolic significance of this concept is demonstrated by the fact that it has been enshrined in both the CCP's and the PRC's constitutions. In comparison, the "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept is not included in any of these constitutions, while the "Belt and Road Initiative" is only incorporated into the CCP's constitution.

The concept of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" has a theoretical high ground in the CCP's diplomacy under Xi Jinping. It is designed to integrate all other diplomatic concepts advocated under Xi—including but not limited to "New Type of Great Power Relations" and "Belt and Road Initiative"—into a coherent and rigorous theoretical system. In this regard, it is an overarching concept covering a group of important concepts. It represents Xi's theoretical contribution to the CCP and the PRC. In this regard, it is Xi's theoretical legacy to the party and China.

When it comes to China as a whole, it represents China's theoretical contribution to the world. In the past few years, China has always been

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looking for a kind of Chinese solution to global governance and international relations. The advocacy of a "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" is considered by China as Chinese wisdom to "enlighten" the world, as this chapter will discuss. In this regard, if international actors adopt this concept in written and oral forms, China will interpret it as an acknowledgement of Chinese wisdom and solutions.

Nonetheless, beyond the symbolic significance, it consists of little practical, concrete policy solutions. As previous chapters discussed, the "New Type of Great Power Relations" is a vague and ambiguous concept that China fails to clearly elaborate, while the "Belt and Road" is loaded as a catch-all term. Built on a group of foreign policy concepts including these two, a "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" as an overarching concept suffers from the problem of conceptual vagueness to a greater extent. When first introduced by Xi, it was a broad and empty slogan that required considerable intellectual input to clarify and develop. China's academic and policy community has provided strong support to develop this concept, leading to its gradual evolution.

This evolving process has led to the changing official translation of the concept. Chinese official and media reports have adopted three different versions of translations regarding the concept *mingyun gongtongti* (命运共同体): a "community of common destiny", a "community of shared future" and a "community of shared destiny". A "community of common destiny" was the most popular and original translation, leading to the full translation of *renlei mingyun gongtongti* (人类命运共同体) as a "community of common destiny" or a "community of common destiny for mankind". Some Chinese scholars and policy analysts, however, argue that this translation contains negative connotations as "common destiny" refers to the fate of death that humans cannot escape from. The Chinese government has eventually replaced it with "a community of shared future" as "shared future" contains much more positive connotations than "common destiny" (Feng 2017).

Moreover, this evolving process of the concept has also led to the production of a series of derivatives. Similar to "Community of Shared Future for Mankind", those derivatives are put forward as universal slogans for convenience, and lack concrete meanings. The relatively random and sometimes conflicting use of this concept indicates that neither the concept per se nor its use is well-thought-out or strategically calculated. All of these have added additional complexity and

confusion to its conceptual vagueness and thus undermined an effective communication of the concept on the global stage.

5.1 Not so Empty Talk?

In English language academic literature, unlike the concepts of "New Type of Great Power Relations" and "Belt and Road Initiative", "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" has not generated many academic studies specifically studying this concept. Many consider it as either the CCP's empty propaganda that is not worth dedicated attention or a confusing Chinese idea that is difficult to understand. Tobin (2018: 155), however, argues that the concept is not "vague or empty propaganda"; instead, it reflects "Xi's vision for transforming global governance" and thus represents "a strategic challenge for Washington and its allies".

According to Tobin (2018: 155), "as one of the party's banner terms, it sheds light on Beijing's strategic intentions and plays an important role in China's approach to foreign policy issues as diverse as trade, climate change, cyber operations, and security cooperation". In this sense, "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" is a strategically calculated concept consisting of concrete policy ideas. This view over-interprets the strategic rationale of the concept and its policy relevance. As Zhang (2018: 196) correctly pointed out, "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" is "vague in meaning and loosely used by China".

On the contrary to the English language literature, Chinese literature has shown enormous interest in studying this concept. As Fig. 5.1 shows, there are over 2180 academic articles published with the title "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" between 2013 and 2019. It clearly indicates a sudden rise of academic interest on this topic since Xi Jinping's active advocacy in 2013. In this regard, Xi Jinping has successfully used this concept as a slogan to mobilize the academic community to discuss and develop the concept. As previous chapters discussed, when a new policy concept is put forward, it is often an undefined and immature idea that requires intellectual support. Given "Community of Shared Future for Mankind's" symbolic significance and theoretical high ground, academics and the CCP's theorists are expected to devote their expertise to support it. The expectation is very high as this concept is supposed to be able to "organically integrate new values, thoughts and strategies and thus form a structurally comprehensive, multilayer, scientific and logically rigorous theoretical system" (Wang 2017).

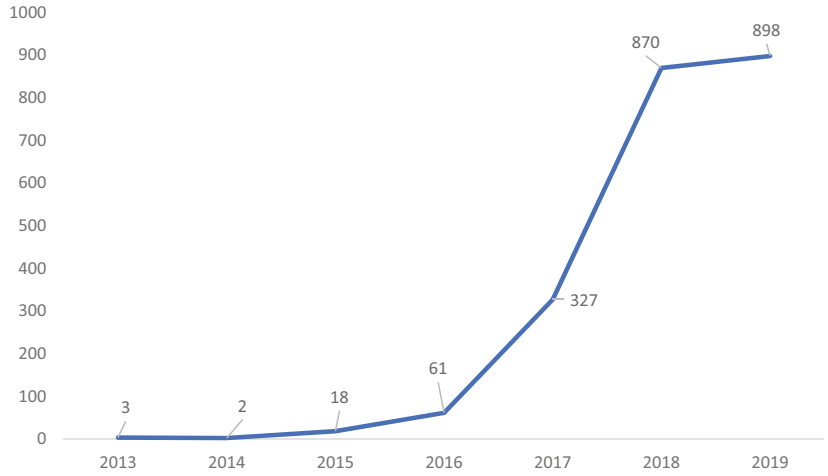

Fig. 5.1 Number of Chinese academic articles with "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" in the title (2013–2019) (*Source* Data collected by the author from CNKI's database on academic journals https://www.cnki.net/ on 12 April 2020)

The current academic discussion in China has echoed the CCP propaganda narrative to point out the strategic significance of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind". Some argue that it is a "Chinese strategy of human future and the CCP's new understanding and development in the 21st Century" (Yang 2017: 67). Others argue that it has "already evolved into a comprehensive international strategic thought system" (Liu 2019). It is "an overarching goal of great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in new era" (Li 2019: 12).

Yet, beyond this propaganda language, little theoretical breakthrough has been made. When some move beyond broad, politically correct principles to reach concrete policy-relevant ideas, controversy follows. For example, Yan Xuetong, a leading Chinese international relations scholar, interprets the strategic nature of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" as military cooperation. According to Yan (2014: 169 emphasis added),

> It is obvious that a ***Community of Common Destiny*** differs from military alliance, but it is unclear whether it is a closer or looser international body

> than alliance. Anyhow, ***community of common destiny*** includes military cooperation, which was avoided by the keeping a low-profile strategy.

While Yan's interpretation helps to clarify the concept and provide more concrete ideas, it is unclear whether this interpretation represents the official line. Adopting this interpretation into the official line may also invite critics over the expansion of Chinese military influence and its security threat.

5.2 Historical Origins of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind"

In order to fully understand the loose use of this concept, it is important to review its historical origins. Despite being a key advocate, Xi is not the leader who coined it. The historical origin of this concept can be traced back to Hu's era with different meanings. In 2007, Xi Jinping's immediate predecessor Hu Jintao used a very similar concept "community of shared future" (命运共同体)—translated as "community of common destiny" in English at the time—in his 17th Party Congress report. According to Hu,

> China is the common homeland for the compatriots on both sides of the Straits, who have every reason to join hands to safeguard and develop this homeland. We are ready to conduct exchanges, dialogues, consultations and negotiations with any political party in Taiwan on any issue as long as it recognizes that both sides of the Straits belong to one and the same China. Here we would like to make a solemn appeal: On the basis of the one-China principle, let us discuss a formal end to the state of hostility between the two sides, reach a peace agreement, construct a framework for peaceful development of cross-Straits relations, and thus usher in a new phase of peaceful development. The 1.3 billion people on the mainland and the 23 million people in Taiwan are of the same blood and ***share a common destiny***. (Hu 2007: emphasis added)

This reference was clearly made to describe cross-Straits relations. At the time, the concept was used to show that Taiwan and Mainland China belonged to one family and sent a signal of Beijing's goodwill of building close Mainland China–Taiwan relations despite political differences. Given that Beijing considered Taiwan a part of China, this concept at the time was purely about Chinese domestic affairs.

Four years later, however, this term was used beyond domestic matters. In 2011, China's White Paper on peaceful development changed its usage from cross-Straits relations to international relations. According to this Paper,

> Economic globalization has become an important trend in the evolution of international relations. Countries of different systems and different types and at various development stages are in a state of mutual dependence, with their interests intertwined. This has turned the world into a ***community of common destiny*** in which the members are closely interconnected. Another world war would be disastrous for the whole of mankind, and no one would emerge victorious in an all-out conflict between big powers…The international community should reject the zero-sum game which was a product of the old international relations, the dangerous cold and hot war mentality, and all those beaten tracks which repeatedly led mankind to confrontation and war. It should find new perspectives from the angle of the ***community of common destiny***—sharing weal and woe and pursuing mutually beneficial cooperation, exploring new ways to enhance exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations, identifying new dimensions in the common interests and values of mankind, and looking for new ways to handle multiple challenges through cooperation among countries and realize inclusive development. (China 2011: emphasis added)

In this context, this concept was used to highlight that the world was one family and to call for harmonious coexistence on the global stage. This clearly shifted the original domestic focus to a new one that was not restricted by any geographic focus.

Both of these two different uses of the concept appeared in Hu Jintao's 18th Party Congress report in 2012. In the section of "X. Enriching the Practice of 'One Country, Two Systems' and Advancing China's Reunification", it stated,

> we should encourage the compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Straits to unite and pursue a common endeavor. The compatriots on both sides belong to the same Chinese nation and form a ***community of common destiny*** bound by blood ties; and we have every reason to care about and trust each other, jointly advance cross-Straits relations, and share in the fruits of development. (Hu 2012: emphasis added)

This clearly echoed the reference in Hu's speech in 2007 that focused on cross-Straits relations. Yet, in the same report's section of "XI. Continuing

to Promote the Noble Cause of Peace and Development of Mankind", it stated,

> In promoting mutually beneficial cooperation, we should raise awareness about ***human beings sharing a community of common destiny***. A country should accommodate the legitimate concerns of others when pursuing its own interests; and it should promote common development of all countries when advancing its own development. (Hu 2012: emphasis added)

This reference matched the use of that in China's White Paper in 2011 and fully spelled the concept *renlei mingyun gongtongti* (人类命运共同体), which developed into today's form—though the reference to cross-Straits relations is retained, as will be explained below.

5.3 The Evolution of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" Under Xi Jinping

Since Xi Jinping took power in 2012, he has become a key advocate for the concept of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind". In order to mobilize international actors to echo this concept, Xi has actively promoted it at over 100 international events including the Bo'Ao Forum, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference, G20 Summit, Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and UN General Assembly. Yet, what Xi actively promoted has never been a well-developed and consistent concept but an undefined, vague idea that is subject to change. Since its first introduction by Xi, the concept has been constantly enriched and improved—the aforementioned changed translation from "community of common destiny" to "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" also took place during this process.

This shifting trend has been widely discussed by Chinese scholars (Ma and Cao 2017; Chen 2016). For example, according to Rao and Lin, the development of Xi Jinping's "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" went through an evolving process from "community", "community of common destiny" to "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (Rao and Lin 2016). They argue that this process has three stages. The first stage is to explain the relations between peaceful development and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" in 2012. It soon entered the second stage that started in 2013, which was to promote values and ideas of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" to an international

audience. The third stage is to link "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" with shared values of human society during Xi's remarks at the UN in 2015—an important talk that will be discussed soon.

According to Rao and Lin, there are two important signs to indicate that Xi's "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" has become mature: (1) "to form the value basis of 'Community of Shared Future for Mankind' by linking it with common values", i.e. "peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, freedom" and (2) "to propose realistic approach and concrete plans to achieve a 'Community of Shared Future for Mankind'"—for example, the international society should work together to solve common problems such as economic inequality, environmental pollution and terrorism (Rao and Lin 2016).

Chen also put forward a three-stage categorization of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind's" development (Chen 2016). According to Chen, the first stage is to put forward the concept and raise it to the height of diplomatic affairs during the 18th Party Congress in 2012. At the time, this concept was mainly about "win-win", and it was not very clear what "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" was and how it should be. It is argued that these two questions were answered at stage two, during which Xi Jinping elaborated this concept on various international stages (Chen 2016).

According to Chen, Xi's efforts to put forward a "community of shared future for China and Africa", a "community of shared future for China and Latin America" and a "community of shared future for China and Arab states" have helped to refine "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" and made it more practical (Chen 2016). Chen argues that Xi's remarks at the UN in 2015 brought "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" to the third stage. Those remarks have integrated a series of China's new diplomatic concepts since 2012—such as "new type of international relations", "New Type of Great Power Relations" and "new type of view on justice and interests"—into a system. Despite the claimed progress, Chen argues that "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" still needs further improvement and enrichment.

The above categorizations of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind's" evolution are debatable, and their conclusions over the conceptual rigorousness and its practical use are questionable. However, the evolving process of the concept is obvious and clear. This again shows the incremental and subsequent developmental manner of Chinese concepts after their introduction. While some progress has been made,

the intellectual support has not developed substantially rigorous, concrete meanings for the concept.

For example, the above scholars put crucial emphases on Xi's remarks at the UN General Assembly in 2015 and consider it as a milestone of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind's" development because it is *the most informative* explanation of the concept given by the Chinese government at the time of writing. During this speech—titled "Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a 'Community of Shared Future for Mankind'"—Xi argues that the following efforts need to be taken in order to achieve the goal of creating a "Community of Shared Future for Mankind":

- We should build partnerships in which countries treat each other as equals, engage in mutual consultation and show mutual understanding.
- We should create a security architecture featuring fairness, justice, joint contribution and shared benefits.
- We should promote open, innovative and inclusive development that benefits all.
- We should increase inter-civilization exchanges to promote harmony, inclusiveness and respect for differences.
- We should build an ecosystem that puts mother nature and green development first.

Clearly, it expressed positive Chinese expectations about global cooperation; however, they are "no more than hollow principles", as Zhang (2018: 198) correctly points out.

Moreover, during the above evolving process, a series of derivatives in relation to "a community of shared future" (命运共同体) was announced by Xi that referred to a wide range of matters from bilateral, regional, global, cross-Straits to even cyberspace. Table 5.1 summarizes Xi's usage of the "community of shared future" in addition to "Community of Shared Future for Mankind".

As Table 5.1 shows, Xi uses the concept and its derivatives to refer to a wide range of topics from organizations (including Shanghai Cooperation Organization, G20 and ASEAN), regions (including Africa, Asia, Latin

Table 5.1 Xi Jinping's usage of "Community of Shared Future" in addition to "Community of Shared Future for Mankind"

Category	*Xi Jinping's remarks/writings*
Organization (Shanghai Cooperation Organization)	"The Shanghai Spirit is our shared asset, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is our shared home. We should, guided by the Shanghai Spirit, work closely to build ***a community of shared future for Shanghai Cooperation Organization***, move toward a new type of international relations, and build an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity" —Xi's remarks in a Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting in Qingdao, 10 June 2018 (Xinhua 2018: emphasis added)
Organization (ASEAN) + Region (Asia)	"China is dedicated to protect and develop good relations with neighbouring countries based on friendship, good faith, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness. It will further promote Belt and Road construction, and build a closer ***community of shared future for China-ASEAN*** and ***community of shared future for Asia***" —Xi's article in Singaporean media during his state visit to Singapore, 6 November 2015 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)
Region (Africa)	"China and Africa have always been ***a community of shared future*** that shares their joys and sorrows. It is a win-win ***community of interests***" —Xi's meeting with President of Liberia in Beijing, 3 November 2015 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)

Category	*Xi Jinping's remarks/writings*
Organization (G20)	"When facing various risks and challenges of the global economy, G20 members should have an awareness of building ***a community of interests*** and ***a community of shared future***" —Xi's remarks in Session I of G20 Summit in Brisbane, 15 November 2014 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)
Region (Latin America)	"The pursuit of a common dream has pulled China and Latin America closely together. Let us seize the opportunity and strive to build ***a community of shared future***" —Xi's remarks in China-Latin America and the Caribbean Summit titled "strive to build a ***community of shared future***", 7 July 2014 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)
Region (Arab states)	"Sharing is to make the achievements better and fairer to benefit the people of China and the Arab States in order to build a ***community of interests*** and ***community of shared future for China and the Arab States***" —Xi's remarks in China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, 5 June 2014 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)
Domestic relations (Mainland China–Taiwan relations)	"The two sides of the strait are a ***community of shared future***. The cross-strait economy belongs to the Chinese economy. It is the common aspiration of compatriots on both sides of the strait to enhance the well-being and affection of their compatriots and firmly hold the national destiny in their hands" —Xi's congratulatory letter to the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the National Taiwan Compatriots Investment Association, 24 May 2017 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

Category	*Xi Jinping's remarks/writings*
Domestic relations (Mainland China–Taiwan relations)	"The compatriots on both sides of the strait are brothers and sisters connected by blood. The two sides of the strait are a ***community of shared future*** that cannot be separated. The peaceful development of cross-strait relations is the right way to maintain cross-strait peace, promote common development, and benefit the compatriots on both sides of the strait" —Xi's speech at the 150th anniversary of Mr. Sun Yat-sen's birth, 11 November 2016 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)
Bilateral relations (China–Kazakhstan relations)	"During this quarter century, China-Kazakhstan relations have withstood the test of time and international turmoil. From building good neighbourly relations and constructing a comprehensive strategic partnership, to building ***a community of interests*** and ***a community of shared future***, China-Kazakhstan relations have achieved a leapfrog development and reached the best relations ever" —Xi's article in a Kazakhstan newspaper, 7 June 2017 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)
Bilateral relations (China–Uzbekistan relations)	"Uzbekistan is a big country in Central Asia. China has always viewed China- Uzbekistan relations from a strategic and long-term perspective, and has made a ***community of interests*** and ***community of shared future for China and Uzbekistan*** that creates equality, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation one of the diplomatic priorities" —Xi's remarks in Uzbekistan legislature, 22 June 2016 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)

Category	*Xi Jinping's remarks/writings*
Bilateral relations (China–Vietnam relations)	"At present, the international and regional situation is rapidly changing. Both communist parties and states of China and Vietnam are facing many similar and common problems. We are not only friendly neighbours linked by mountains and rivers, but also ***a community of shared future*** with the same interests and goals" —Xi's remarks at the Vietnamese National Assembly, 6 November 2015 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)
Bilateral relations (China–Belarus relations)	"The two sides should discuss strategic ideas, build a ***community of interests*** and ***shared future***, and work hard to achieve common dreams" —Xi's article published in the Belarusian media, 8 May 2015 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)
Bilateral relations (China–Pakistan relations) + Regions (Asia)	"We need to work closer more than ever. We need to take advantage of our traditional friendship, geographical proximity and economic complementarity, share opportunities and meet challenges together. We need to constantly enrich the connotation of ***community of shared future for China and Pakistan***, to better benefit the people in both countries and promote regional stability and prosperity, and play a model role in building a ***community of shared future for Asia***" —Xi's remarks in Pakistan parliament, 21 April 2015 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

Category	*Xi Jinping's remarks/writings*
Cyberspace	"The transformation of the global Internet governance system has entered a critical period, and the building of ***a community of shared future for cyberspace*** has increasingly become a broad consensus of the international community" —Xi's congratulatory letter to the 4th World Internet Conference, 4 December 2017 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)
Cyberspace	"The development of the Internet is borderless. In order to better use, develop and govern cyberspace, we must deepen international cooperation in cyberspace and work together to build ***a community of shared future for cyberspace***" —Xi's video speech at the opening ceremony of the 3rd World Internet Conference, 16 November 2016 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)
Nuclear security	"Under the premise of respecting the sovereignty of every country, all countries should participate in nuclear security affairs and strive to build a ***community of shared future for nuclear security*** in an open and inclusive spirit" —Xi's remarks at the Washington Nuclear Security Summit, 1 April 2016 (Wang and Shen 2018: emphasis added)

America and Arab states), domestic relations (including Mainland China–Taiwan relations), bilateral relations (including China–Pakistan, China–Belarus, China–Vietnam, China–Uzbekistan and China–Kazakhstan), to specific global issues (including cyberspace and nuclear security). It is difficult to discern the real intention behind every use of those concepts; however, it is clear that not every one of them is behind some sort of well-thought-out strategic calculations.

Moreover, this convenient and loose use of the concept has also invited additional problems of complexity and confusion to its conceptual vagueness, making a clear international understanding of this concept more difficult—even some Chinese scholars find it difficult to understand their actual meanings and official intentions behind it. In this regard, it shows the same problem with the concept of the "Belt and Road Initiative". As the previous chapter mentioned, if everything is the "Belt and Road Initiative", what is not it? Similarly, if every foreign relations matter is "Community of Shared Future for Mankind", what is not it?

Interestingly, while this concept is not so policy-relevant, some Chinese domestic actors still want to stay relevant. As Xi himself has creatively used this concept and its derivatives, Chinese domestic corporate and governmental actors have also conducted similar practices. A Chinese SOE China Taboo (Yunnan Wenshan Bureau), for example, put forward the concept of "community of shared future for industry, business and retails" (工商零命运共同体) (Wenshan 2017). It is a call for the Tobacco industry's three parties (i.e. industrial and commercial enterprises, and retail customers) to have better coordination and strive for common prosperity.

Similarly, Fujian Banking Insurance Bureau, Fujian Higher People's Court, Fujian Provincial Public Security Department, Fujian Financial Work Office and Fujian Federation of Industry and Commerce declared to build a "community of shared future for Fujian's banks, insurance and business enterprises" (福建银保企命运共同体) (Fujian 2019). It aims to build a new triangle relations among banks, insurance and business companies in order to "create a sound financial ecosystem and systematically solve the problem of financial resource allocation" (Fujian 2019). While these new creations are sending similar messages—i.e. different parties should work together to seek for common prosperity—they have nothing to do with Xi's "Community of Shared Future for Mankind". These local practices reflect that the use of the concept becomes a political correctness fashion within the political system in China.

5.4 Domestic Propaganda Win?

Despite the problems raised above, Chinese media and academic analyses seem—or at least appear—to be quite optimistic about the international popularity of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind". It is argued that "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" has now become a global consensus. Some argue that "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" is a major Chinese contribution/solution to global governance that has profound implications for the world (Xinhua 2017; An and Liu 2018). Many—Chinese scholars of Marxism in particular—argue that this concept draws wisdom from Marxism and that "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" inherits and further develops Marxism (Yang 2017; Ma and Cao 2017).

Lu (2014), for example, argues that "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" theoretically fits with Marx's concept of "free association of producers" as "it involves a global vision of protecting human interests and aims to coordinate internal conflicts of social development, focusing on the living conditions of modern individuals". Liu and Niu (2019) argues that "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" matches Marx's world history theory given "their shared historical materialism, holistic views, anti-Eurocentrism and advocate for national equality".

In addition to the wisdom of Marxism, many also point to the critical roles of Chinese traditional cultural values. For example, Zhang (2016) argues that "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" is a modern expression of traditional Chinese values such as "world harmony" (天下大同) and "knowledge and action are one" (知行合一). Shou (2017) argues that "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" originates from "harmony in diversity" (和而不同)—a traditional Chinese value. It is argued that Chinese cultural thought provides a new thinking of global governance and thus contributes "a unique Oriental wisdom to maintain world peace" (Zhao 2018: 56).

My quick search in China's CNKI shows a sizable Chinese literature to link "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" with Marxism and Chinese culture.[1] Given "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" is a broad slogan that is open for interpretation, it is not difficult to find and

[1] The search was conducted on https://www.cnki.net/ in December 2019 and April 2020.

justify various links with Marxist thoughts and Chinese traditional values, both of which are equally broad to allow a variety of interpretations.

A key evidence frequently cited by the Chinese propaganda machine to celebrate the success of "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" is the fact that this concept is adopted on the global stage. For example, it is incorporated into various UN documents including reports of UN Commission for Social Development, the UN Security Council, the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly (An and Liu 2018). The adoption of this short phrase in the UN documents is hardly noticed on the global stage. Neither does it contain any practical meaning. However, it is interpreted as a major diplomatic victory by Chinese media. It is argued that the world is paying attention to Chinese ideas now and this is a sign of China's bigger discursive power. The underlying message is the CCP's successful leadership in bringing about the revival of China. In this regard, the UN's adoption of this concept is useful for CCP's domestic propaganda. In other words, it grants international legitimacy to the CCP to strengthen its power domestically.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter shows how "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" was put forward as a vague concept and gradually filled with meanings in a subsequent and incremental manner. This process has produced a loose and sometimes conflicting use of the concept and its derivatives, not every one of which is behind the strategic calculation. Although the Chinese academic community has been actively mobilized to develop this concept, it has not given the concept substantial policy-relevant ideas. Despite this, the concept should not be easily dismissed. While not serving any practical guidance for action, it signals a Chinese aspiration for a globalized world and holds a sacred status in the CCP's theoretical system. In this regard, it is better to understand this concept as a symbolically significant slogan instead of any concrete, practical policy ideas.

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

6.1 Key Arguments of the Book

Previous chapters of this book studied the three most important foreign policy concepts advocated by Xi Jinping's leadership between 2012 and 2019—"New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind". Collectively, they show how these three concepts are political slogans performing the functions of declaring intent, asserting power, promoting state propaganda and calling for intellectual support. The key points are summarized in Table 6.1.

6.2 Conceptual Development: Path-Dependence and "Soft" Opening

The findings of this book point to two key common development patterns of these three concepts: path-dependence and "soft" opening. The first pattern is path-dependence. All three concepts reflect both Xi's new leadership vision and China's vision for its relations with the world. Both of Xi's predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin had largely practised Deng Xiaoping's "keeping a low profile and never seek for leadership" principle. These three concepts advocated by Xi, however, are based on a new—and arguably somewhat different—foreign policy thinking in which China could and should play a larger leadership role. To contrast with Deng's "keeping a low profile" principle, many Chinese scholars call it a "striving for achievement" principle. The underlying logic is that China can no

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Table 6.1 Key slogan functions of "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind"

Key functions of slogans	*"New Type of Great Power Relations"*	*"Belt and Road Initiative"*	*"Community of Shared Future for Mankind"*
Declaration of intent	Historical roots in Jiang Zemin's and Hu Jintao's use of the concept Xi reintroduced it to declare a vague vision for new US–China relations Evolved from US–China relations to China's relations with all great power	Historical roots in Jiang Zemin's "Go West" initiative Xi introduced it to declare a vague vision of regional economic cooperation with China's periphery Evolved from peripheral diplomacy, cooperation across Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe to global initiative	Historical roots in Hu Jintao's use of the concept and a similar concept "community of common destiny" Xi reintroduced it to declare a vague vision for a globalized world Evolved to an overarching concept to encompass other key foreign policy concepts
Power assertion	For Xi: • To walk out from the shadow of his predecessors • To assert his power as the then-new top leader of China to the US	For Xi: • To walk out from the shadow of his predecessors • To assert his power as the then new top leader of China to a domestic and global audience • To put his personal stamp on the CCP	For Xi: • To walk out from the shadow of his predecessors • To assert his power as the then new top leader of China to a global audience • To represent his theoretical contributions to the CCP and the PRC

Key functions of slogans	*"New Type of Great Power Relations"*	*"Belt and Road Initiative"*	*"Community of Shared Future for Mankind"*
	For China: • A new vision for US–China relations in which China plays a more important role • To assert China's elevated great power status	For China: • A new vision for regional economic cooperation in which China plays a larger role • To assert China's regional (if not global) leadership	For China: • A new vision for a globalized world in which China plays a larger role • To assert China's elevated global status
State propaganda	• The CCP's domestic propaganda raised very high expectation on the concept • After it failed to arouse US interest, China turned to other concepts	• A huge domestic propaganda win after this concept attracted unexpected global attention • Its international communication is full of confusion and misunderstanding	• Very limited global response to this propaganda slogan • Domestic propaganda win after this concept was adopted at certain international occasions

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

Key functions of slogans	*"New Type of Great Power Relations"*	*"Belt and Road Initiative"*	*"Community of Shared Future for Mankind"*
Call for intellectual support	• Expected to develop it into a concrete, actionable policy idea with the hope of achieving more equal and friendly US–China relations • Both domestic disagreements within China and divergences between China and the US were too wide to meet the expectation • Produced a variety of diverse and sometimes competing interpretations	• Expected to develop it into actionable plans but the process was hijacked by self-serving domestic actors • Produced a huge number of diverse and competing interpretations • Ended up as an all-encompassing slogan	• Expected to develop it into a systematic theoretical system to incorporate other key foreign policy concepts • Loosely used and produced a number of derivatives • Suffers from other concepts' vagueness and ambiguity • Ended up as a hollow and all-encompassing propaganda slogan

longer keep a low profile and shirk its global responsibility given the current size of the Chinese economy. As a result, they signalled China's new foreign policy thinking about its relations with the world in which China should play a larger role. On a personal level, Xi's introduction of those concepts signalled his political gesture to walk out from the shadow of his predecessors by asserting his new distinct leadership vision. In short, those concepts are used as slogans to assert power by emphasizing their distinct and new features.

Nonetheless, all three concepts have their historical roots in Hu Jintao's or even Jiang Zemin's eras, as previous chapters discussed and Table 6.1 summarized. The concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations" and its similar ideas were used by Jiang Zemin in the late 1990s. Many ideas of the "Belt and Road Initiative" concept also originated from Jiang's "Go West" initiative and thus it is called "international" or "upgraded" versions of the "Go West" initiative. Under Hu Jintao's leadership, both concepts of "New Type of Great Power Relations" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" had already existed. In this regard, neither these three concepts nor their key ideas are brand new; it can be even argued that there were some recycling efforts in their use. Therefore, these three concepts represent new development under Xi based on foreign policy thinking of the previous leadership, and thus their conceptual development is path-dependent.

Second, and more importantly, all three concepts' development follows a "soft" opening approach. When those three concepts were put forward by Xi, they were not clearly defined. The process of giving them meanings occurred in a subsequent and incremental manner. In other words, they were not mature ideas before their introduction. Instead, they were deliberately kept vague in order to accommodate the interests of key domestic and international stakeholders. Through this kind of "soft" opening, the concepts are put forward to call for support and catch attention, and then significant updates are rolled out as they are developed and tested.

Obviously, this "soft" opening is very helpful to get early international feedback to modify and refine—or even abandon—the concepts. For example, when the underperforming "New Type of Great Power Relations" concept failed to attract the expected attention from the US, it was abandoned early on for China to save resources and efforts to promote other concepts. The "Belt and Road Initiative" concept, on the contrary, received an unexpectedly enthusiastic global response and thus its geographic focus was expanded a couple of times into today's

form. International actors have played a very important role to provide feedback and advice to drive the development of the relevant concepts. By accommodating the interests of key international stakeholders, this "soft" opening can help to secure their support and thus translate it into a domestic propaganda win. It also allowed Beijing flexibility in adjusting the concept idea in order to reflect the rapidly shifting international landscapes such as the adjustment of the "Belt and Road Initiative" as a result of the US's sudden withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership due to its leadership transition.

Nonetheless, to hold a big fanfare to introduce an immature concept is to gamble on its success, putting considerable pressure on the subsequent stages to develop it. If they fail to deliver a logically rigorous idea that meets expectations, it is not good for the reputation of China and the top leader. As Chapter 3 discussed, when Chinese media significantly raised China's expectation of its "New Type of Great Power Relations", this concept's subsequent failure to win the expected American endorsement ended up as a big disappointment. It was mocked as China's "wishful thinking" by some international analyses (Yue 2015).

In addition to international feedback, this "soft" opening approach also helps to gather early domestic feedback in order to improve key ideas of the concepts and reinforce the legitimacy of the decision-making process within the Chinese authoritarian system. At the intellectual level, the relatively open participation process in constructing the meanings of these concepts has helped the Chinese government to maximize the use of China's intellectual power. As this book shows, the introduction of those concepts were open invitations to ask Chinese intellectuals to devote their expertise to support the government agenda. At the bureaucratic level, this "soft" opening approach invites key domestic stakeholders to participate in and contribute to those policy concepts. This helps to accommodate their interests by allowing their participation in the decision-making process.

Nonetheless, to release undefined policy concepts at the early stage will always invite more noise and thus complicate the coordination efforts. While China's academic and policy community provides critical support to develop the concepts, their participation has inevitably produced a variety of diverse and sometimes conflicting interpretations. This is further complicated by the participation of powerful domestic actors. As Chapter 4 discussed, China's local and subnational actors launched an intense public campaign to influence the drafting process of the "Belt and

Road Initiative's" central guidelines—the *V&A*—leading to a high level of domestic contestation. They had employed their media and academic resources to carefully craft their interpretations of the "Belt and Road Initiative" and actively promote those interpretations on the domestic and global stages. The eventual release of the *V&A* had neither settled the domestic contestation nor reached consensus. All of these made it more difficult for Beijing to coordinate the "Belt and Road Initiative". Their early participation had led to more loud noise—that sometimes could be hardly differentiated from the Chinese official line, if there was one—and thus strengthened confusion and misunderstanding about the relevant concepts on the global stage. In this regard, the "soft" opening approach has undermined Beijing's capacity to forge and promote coherent and preferred foreign policy narratives to a global audience and thus its heavily invested political marketing campaign.

Above all, this book shows that the slogan politics approach provides critical insights to understand Chinese foreign policy concepts. Those foreign policy concepts are better understood as multifunctional political slogans instead of well-envisioned and clearly defined policy ideas. The slogan politics approach highlights the critical role of China's academic and local actors as well as international actors in shaping the development of China's foreign policy concepts. In this regard, Beijing's capacity to coordinate domestic actors and forge coherent and consistent foreign policy ideas should not be overestimated. When China's powerful domestic actors voice their narratives to influence policy agenda, those views need to be carefully examined although they would not automatically translate into Beijing's policy. The slogan politics approach provides critical insights to understand the production mechanism of those narratives and their functions in political communication.

6.3 "External" vs Chinese-Coined Concepts

Although this book mainly examines the three most important foreign policy concepts under Xi Jinping, the slogan politics approach is helpful to understand other foreign policy concepts. For example, the author's previous (co-)work finds the similar conceptual development patterns of "soft" opening in other cases including "internet sovereignty" (Zeng, Stevens, and Chen 2017), "global economic governance" (Zeng 2019) and "core interests" (Zeng 2017; Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin 2015). All of them have produced a diverse, ambiguous and sometimes inconsistent

Chinese discourse of the relevant concepts. It is important to differentiate Chinese foreign policy concepts here. At the risk of oversimplification, the author divides Chinese policy concepts into two categories: (1) "external" concepts imported from abroad such as "core interests", "global governance" and "soft power", and (2) Chinese-coined concepts such as "New Type of Great Power Relations", "Belt and Road Initiative" and "Community of Shared Future for Mankind".

Both categories share key patterns of a "soft" opening approach but in different ways. In the first category, Chinese leaders adopt the concept from abroad and introduce it in the domestic context. When "external" concepts are adopted, they are often not clearly defined. It takes time for them to become "sinicized". This "sinicization" is a process to give a specific meaning and understanding—or in other words, adding in Chineseness—to the concept so that it can work in and for the Chinese political context. During this process, the academic and policy community is expected to study the origins of the concept and find ways to sinicize it in order to make it adapt to China's unique political context.

In other words, it requires Chinese intellectuals to redefine "external" concepts in Chinese terms. Most famous examples—although not foreign policy concepts—are "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and "Marxism with Chinese characteristics". "Marxism with Chinese characteristics", for example, is a Chinese reinvention of Marxism. The "Sinification of Marxism" is a national project that the CCP has invested enormous human capital to "combine Marxism with Chinese national condition" (Zeng 2015). The product of this reinvention is a Chinese version of Marxism very different from orthodox Marxism.

Take "global economic governance", a more relevant foreign policy-related concept, as another example. This concept was first adopted by China's policy discourse after the 2008 financial crisis (Pang and Wang 2013a: 1203). The Chinese academic and policy community was expected to fill this concept with specific meanings and understanding that work for the Chinese political system (Zeng 2019). In the Western context, "global economic governance" is often related to the rise of neoliberalism, non-governmental organization and civil society. In this context, a key theme is that of "governance without government" (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992; Held et al. 1999). In China, however, the state still plays an overwhelming role in socioeconomic affairs despite marketization. The one-party system is not in favour of non-governmental organizations and civil society, and thus their development has been increasingly restricted since 2012.

In this regard, it is argued that those Western theories that focus on "governance without government" are not applicable in China's political context (Pang and Wang 2013b). Thus, this concept needs to be sinicized in order to adapt to the Chinese political environment (Chen 2014: 59; Pang and Wang 2013b). It is argued that China needs to generate its own experiences of governance and develop its own theory, and this Chinese theory of "global governance" will be helpful in serving China's own national interests and in enhancing its discursive power. Thus, the "soft" opening of "external" concepts is a reinterpretation process to redefine this "external" concept of "global economic governance" in order to make it work in and for China's political context (Zeng 2019).

The second category of concepts is made in China. This book mainly focuses on the second category because all three selected cases are Chinese-coined concepts. Unlike those "external" concepts that require a process of studying those concepts and adding in "Chineseness", Chinese-coined concepts do not need to go through this "sinicization" process. Many of those Chinese-coined concepts are embedded in China's cultural-historical context. The concept of the "Belt and Road Initiative", for example, was built on its reference to the ancient Silk Road. The development of Chinese-coined concepts is about how to construct the meanings for those concepts. In other words, the "soft" opening of "external" concepts is about modification, i.e. to modify an existing concept for a Chinese version, while that of Chinese-coined concepts is about construction, i.e. to construct full meanings for a new concept.[1]

The production and use of Chinese-coined concepts has been increasingly favoured by China's policy and academic community given its "Chineseness". They are considered to be important for China to break the Western hegemonic monopoly on "discursive power" (Wei 2015). However, unlike those world-renowned "external" concepts, those Chinese-coined concepts built on the Chinese cultural-historical context cost more to promote to a non-Chinese audience on the global stage. As this book shows, despite China's enormous investment, how to foster an effective international communication of those Chinese-coined concepts remains a critical challenge for China. For the rest of the world,

[1] Although, given the path-dependence pattern of those Chinese-coined concepts, it can be argued that this is a modification process too. Instead of modifying the "external" concepts to Chinese versions, it involves modifying previous Chinese ideas into new ones.

understanding those concepts and their slogan functions is crucial to study what China wants in the emerging global order.

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Appendix: Coding Manual

Field letter	*Field name*	*Coding*	*Description*
A	Article		Names of articles
B	Author		Names of authors
C	Journal		Names of journals
D	Date	1998–2014	Date of publication
E	Type of institutions		Type of authors' institutions: university, think tanks, party school, government, others
F	Authors' institutions	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Name of authors' institution
G	Code date	Month/date/year	The date when this article was coded by this project
H	Note		Any interesting point raised by this author, please note here
I	New		According to the author, what is new in this "New Type of Great Power Relations"? Please note here
J	Topic		What is the topic of this article? E.g. Sino-US relations, Sino-Russia relations

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Field letter	*Field name*	*Coding*	*Description*
China's identity			
K	Superpower	1/0	The article refers China as a superpower (超级大国). If there is any adjective, it does not count such as 新兴超级大国, 经济特等超级大国, 正在崛起的超级大国. If the author only quotes others' words that refer China as a superpower, it does not count (yes = 1, no = 0)
L	No. 2	1/0	The article refers China as the second most powerful country (老二) (yes = 1, no = 0)
M	World power	1/0	The article refers China as a world power (世界大国). If there is any adjective, it does not count such as 发展中的世界大国. If the author only quotes others' words that consider China as a world power, it does not count (yes = 1, no = 0)
N	Rising power	1/0	The article refers China as a rising or emerging power (新兴大国/崛起国) or argues that China is rising. If there is any adjective, it does not count. If the author only quote others' words that refer to China as a rising power, it does not count (yes = 1, no = 0)
Definition of Great Power			

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Field letter	*Field name*	*Coding*	*Description*
O	US	1/0	The article refers "New Type of Great Power Relations" to the Sino-US relations but not solely or it specifically argues that this can be used to describe other bilateral relations (yes = 1, no = 0)
P	US/China	1/0	The article only refers to Sino-US relationship as "New Type of Great Power Relations" and does not specifically argue that this concept can be used to describe other bilateral relations (yes = 1, no = 0)
Q	Japan	1/0	The article refers great power to Japan (yes = 1, no = 0)
R	Russian	1/0	The article refers great power to Russia (yes = 1, no = 0) If the article only mentions BRICS or BRIC without naming a specific country, it does not count. The same applies to India and other BRICS countries
S	Germany	1/0	The article refers great power to Germany (yes = 1, no = 0)
T	EU	1/0	The article refers great power to the EU (yes = 1, no = 0)
U	Others		If there is any country the article refers as a great power and is not listed above, please note here
V	No country focus	1/0	The article does not refer great power to any specific country other than China (yes = 1, no = 0)

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Field letter	*Field name*	*Coding*	*Description*
W	Multi-polarity	1/0	The author mentions a multipolar world (多极化世界) (yes = 1, no = 0)
X	Thucydides trap	1/0	The article mentions the Thucydides trap or the potential conflict between the rising power and the existing hegemonic power such as 守成大国和新兴大国互动 (yes = 1, no = 0)
Y	Core Interests	1/0	The article mentions that China's core interests should be respected in this "New Type of Great Power Relations" such as 照顾,尊重,关切; but "妥善处理" does not count (yes = 1, no = 0)
Reference			
Z	Realism	1/0	The article mentions the theory of realism (yes = 1, no = 0)
AA	Liberalism	1/0	The article mentions the theory of liberalism (yes = 1, no = 0)
AB	Idealism	1/0	The article mentions the theory of idealism (理想主义) (yes = 1, no = 0)
AC	Constructivism	1/0	The article mentions the theory of constructivism (yes = 1, no = 0)
AD	Marxism	1/0	The article mentions Marxism (School of Marxism in universities does not count) (yes = 1, no = 0)
AE	English school	1/0	The article mentions English school (yes = 1, no = 0)
AF	Mention theory	1/0	The article mentions one of the above international relations theories (yes = 1, no = 0)

(continued)

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Field letter	*Field name*	*Coding*	*Description*
AG	Lieberthal	1/0	The article mentions Kenneth Lieberthal(李侃如) or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AH	Mearsheimer	1/0	The article mentions John Mearsheimer (米尔斯海默/ 约翰.米尔斯海默) or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AI	Huntington	1/0	The article mentions Samuel Huntington (亨廷顿) or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AJ	Joseph Nye	1/0	The article mentions Joseph Nye (约瑟夫.奈) or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AK	Brzezinski	1/0	The article mentions Zbigniew Brzezinski (布热津斯基) or cite his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AL	Buzan	1/0	The article mentions Barry Buzan (巴里.布赞) or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AM	Ross	1/0	The article mentions Robert Ross (罗伯特.罗斯) or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AN	Keohane	1/0	The article mentions Robert Keohane (罗伯特·基欧汉) or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AO	Shambaugh	1/0	The article mentions David Shambaugh (沈大伟) or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AP	Yan Xuetong	1/0	The article mentions Yan Xuetong or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AQ	Wang Jisi	1/0	The article mentions Wang Jisi or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AR	Yuan Peng	1/0	The article mentions Yuan Pengor cite his work (yes = 1, no = 0)

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(continued)

Field letter	*Field name*	*Coding*	*Description*
AS	Qin Yaqing	1/0	The article mentions Qin Yaqing or cites his work including translated work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AT	Yang Jiemian	1/0	The article mentions Yang Jiemian or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AU	Zhou Fangyin	1/0	The article mentions Zhou Fangyin or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
AV	Chen Jian	1/0	The article mentions Chen Jian or cites his work (yes = 1, no = 0)
	Note		Special note on article

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