The Multiple Audiences Dynamic of Status Dissatisfaction: Examining China's Shifting Response to the Emerging Global Environmental Regime, 1950-1972[1]

Zikun Yang[2]

Abstract

How does status dissatisfaction shape a state's behavior? Emerging accounts of role status—those that replace valued (material) traits with recurrent action/performance as the source of status—posit that status-sensitive states are more defiant against a regime's collective mobilization when their dominant roles are challenged by the audience. Yet, this unidimensional understanding of international audiences misses an important difference between two groups: those *superiorly* positioned above the state and those *subordinately* positioned below it on the status hierarchy. Focusing on two sources of role status—recognition from above and deference from below—I propose a two-dimensional framework of multiple audiences dynamic that generates four ideal types of role status scenarios. These include *systematic recognition* (high recognition and high deference); *unfair treatment* (low recognition and high deference); *bottom-up provocation* (high recognition and low deference); *systematic exclusion* (low recognition and low deference). I illustrate my framework by examining China's shifting response to the emerging global environmental regime from 1950 to 1972. Beijing's status concerns vis-à-vis the US, the USSR, and the Third World countries induced it to change from initial embracement (1950-52), challenge from within (1953-55); persistent objection (1956-70), to final participation (1971-72) in the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (UNCHE).

Keywords:

Status; Role Theory; China; Status Dissatisfaction

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[2] PhD candidate in Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge. Email: zy301@cam.ac.uk

In June 2022, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) condemned the US for "applying hypocritical double standard [of] human rights…[to] unscrupulously contain, suppress, and…block China from its role as a major power" (China, 2022). One year later, the US *Ending China's Developing Nation Status Act* received a similar reprimand. "The US is not labeling China a 'developed country' out of appreciation or recognition for China's development success," explained Beijing: "the real motive behind ending China's developing country status is to hold back China's development" (China, 2023). Chinese status concerns also extended beyond the Sino-US rivalry. Amidst the Sino-India border tension, President Xi Jinping was absent from the 2023 Group of 20 (G20) summit in New Delhi. Some perceived this move as a message of snub to a rising India, which paid insufficient deference to China's leadership role in the Global South (Davidson, 2023).

Epitomized in these episodes is China's salient dissatisfaction with its social standing in international audiences' eyes. Rather than contesting its position on a hierarchy of valued (material) traits (military might, economic prosperity, diplomatic network, and institutional membership), Beijing worries more about its competence, authority, and being assigned to a subaltern role vis-à-vis Washington and New Delhi in front of the international community. Amidst the "relational and behavioral turn" of International Relations (IR),[i] this role-oriented status concern has piqued scholars' interest. Pioneered by Reinhard Wolf (2019, 2022) and borrowing from role theory scholarship, it supplements a material attribute-based hierarchy with one of social deference, and identifies another source of status: a state's behavioral interactions between itself (ego) and other states (alter) (Duque, 2018; Wolf, 2019). Under an asymmetrical deference hierarchy, a state sensitive to "being altercasted into subaltern roles" by audiences would risk defying the collective mobilization, thereby "undercut[ing] this disconcerting pattern of deference" to preserve its superordinate role and international status (Wolf, 2022: 1; He and Feng, 2022).

I argue that this emerging role status account, while addressing material reductionism in status literature, derives from a narrow understanding of role theory and warrants further scrutiny. Specifically, the original role theory is not limited to asymmetrical dyadic interactions between two nation-states. Not only does it highlight a state's *various and even contradicting roles vis-à-vis multiple significant others* concurrently, but it also zooms in on individuals' heterogeneous conceptions of national roles and counter-roles at the domestic level. In other words, while being cast into a subaltern role can undermine a state's status in a binary relation, this negative

altercasting may cause little to no damage to its overall standing on the overall multilateral status hierarchy, and will not automatically trigger defiant status-seeking behaviors as some IR scholars posit. An effective translation of role theory into status literature requires us to delve into complex configurations and conflicts of roles "toward *multiple alters*" at both the domestic and the international levels (Walker, 2017, emphasis added).

Contra "binary role theory" underlined in emerging role status literature, I propose a multiple audiences dynamic framework to ascertain the status implication on a state's foreign policy. My framework here applies a social psychological perception of states as anthropomorphic actors in a stratified international society. This setup allows me to focus on *inter-role conflicts* faced by a status-sensitive state when dealing with conflicting expectations from multiple international audiences.[ii] I follow Lin (2021) to unpack multiple international audiences into two broad ideal categories: those superiorly positioned above a state and those inferiorly positioned below it on the international pecking order. While enacting a deference role towards great powers during dyadic upward interactions, the state enacts a dominant role vis-à-vis smaller states during dyadic downward interactions. It is the various degrees of recognition from above and deference from below—two types of role status markers—that lead to four possible role status scenarios: (1) *systematic recognition* (simultaneous appraisal and respect from both directions); (2) *unfair treatment* (little recognition from above with sufficient deference from below); (3) bottom-up provocation (top-down recognition accompanied by little deference from below); (4) *systematic exclusion* (simultaneous disapproval from both directions). Only the last scenario would trigger the state's provocative status-seeking response through defiance.

I illustrate this framework in the case of China's shifting response to the emerging global environmental regime in 1950-1972, a period when Western norm entrepreneurs advocated for a delicate balance between economic development and environmental protection. Despite its sovereigntist and anthropocentric worldview of "man conquering nature," Maoist China motivated by its role status concerns vis-à-vis the US, the USSR, and the Third World countries perceived this nascent regime as a new battlefield of normative legitimacy and resource distribution. My multinational and multilingual archival records reconstruct the process of complex recognition-deference interactions, which unfolded into systematic recognition (1950-52), bottom-up provocation (1953-55), systematic exclusion (1956-70), and unfair treatment (1971-72). These four scenarios induced a status-sensitive Beijing to shift from initial embracement, social closure,

persistent defiance, and final participation in the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (UNCHE). Although absent from the four preparatory meetings (1969-1972), China during the 12-days UNCHE successfully advocated for its development-first experience and pushed the final text of the Stockholm Declaration to prioritize states' sovereign rights to development over environmental obligation.

Theoretically, this article facilitates conversations among role theory in foreign policy analysis, status research, and norms studies in IR. By bringing in the original role theory with an emphasis on micro-foundations of state behaviors in social interactions, it enables status scholars to address material reductionism (in trait status) and fixation on great powers (within dyadic relations). It further theorizes the relational, interactive, and multilateral nature of status concerns. More importantly, my framework challenges the bellicist thesis of status dissatisfaction in the rising China story. Whether it would resort to provocative revisionism to address unmet role status demand under the Liberal International Order (LIO) depends on how it addresses this multivocality of role status towards various international audiences. Turning to norms literature, because role status dissatisfaction can now result in cooperation/compliance, norm-taking can no longer serve as a yardstick to distinguish submission from revision. This framework separates competitive socialization (challenging from within) from conventional cooperative socialization (we-feeling followership), and advances a new pathway to extrapolate the intention, tactics, and agency of China's norm contestation.

Empirically, this is the first article to my knowledge to utilize multinational and multilingual archival records to reconstruct China's process-level performance in environmental treaty negotiations. Responding to recent calls for "an increased emphasis on primary sources" (Reus-Smit, 2008: 414, 401; Kinsella and Mantilla, 2020), it encourages IR scholars to pay more attention to the rich primary sources in Cold War historical archives across the world and open the black box of Chinese foreign policymaking.

This article proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the existing literature on status dissatisfaction and defiance amidst a shift from a trait-based to a role-based approach to status conceptualization. Section two examines the extant binary role status concept in detail, and suggests the multiple audiences dynamic as a feasible corrective framework to understand how role status concerns shape a state's foreign policy. Section three compartmentalizes role status dissatisfaction according to this framework and investigates what frustrates a state in the upward

and downward social interactions. Section four demonstrates this framework with an archive-based process-tracing of China's environmental foreign policy's evolution between 1950 to June 1972. A discussion on the contribution of my arguments then concludes this article.

Status and Status Dissatisfaction: From Trait to Role

Though not a novel concept, status has only mushroomed in mainstream IR in the past two decades. Cognate semantically with prestige, honor, and reputation (Dafoe et al, 2014; Wolf, 2019), it is typically defined as the collectively believed standing of a (state) actor in the social hierarchy of "valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout)" (Larson et al., 2014: 7).

Conventionally, status literature is largely anchored to a positional-social psychological dichotomy for conceptualization (Macdonald and Parent, 2021; Götz; 2021). For the former strand, status is a state's relative ranking measured continuously by attribute possession, or a positional good instrumental for accumulating stratified privileges, voluntary deference, and other tangible benefits (Renshon, 2016; 2017; Greve and Levy, 2018). Material attributes, however, cannot directly translate into higher status without the collective belief of referent groups in a status community. For instance, Japan's material advantage after the Second World War did not guarantee a seat within the Big Five (Suzuki, 2008: 52-53); instead, American and Soviet invitations turned to materially weaker France (Heimann, 2014), China, and India[iii] (Harder, 2015; Heimann and Paikowsky, 2022. A state dissatisfied with the gap between its expected and socially recognized status can thus resort to status-quo-defying strategies.[iv] Principle among them are withdrawal from international organizations (Ward, 2013), geopolitical competition (Murray 2010; 2018; Fikenscher et al., 2015; Lin, 2021; Paikowsky, 2017), and military operations or war-making in the most intensive form (Lebow, 2010; Renshon, 2016; 2017; Barnhart, 2016; Murray, 2018; Røren, 2023).

For the latter strand, this positional reading is inadequate for its "material reductionism" (Duque, 2018). By erring too much on material attributes at the expense of social recognition, status can be conflated with relative power and loses its explanatory power and conceptual validity as an independent variable. Instead, this group interprets status as membership of defined groups (e.g., G20 or the UN Security Council, UNSC) with intrinsic values. Since individuals derive self-esteem, prestige, and pride from their ingroup identity vis-à-vis the outgroups (Frank, 1985; Tajfel

1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979), status becomes an intersubjective and affective identity validated by others based on shared criteria of evaluation during self-community interactions. According to the predominant Social Identity Theory (SIT), an impermissible elite group within an unfair status hierarchy can incite a dissatisfied state to hinder elites' collective mobilizations (Larson and Shevchenko, 2019).[v] These spoiler conducts range from relinquishing a group membership—as exemplified by Taisho Japan's 1933 exit from the League of the Nations to protest racial discrimination within the white-race dominant Washington system (Ward, 2013)—to defying elite clubs' rules, such as India's decision to oppose the 1970 Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Indira Gandhi saw as a discretionary rule denouncing India's great power status earned by its scientific achievements (NMML-1).

While disagreeing on types of status markers (material versus non-material) and how to obtain them, these two broad frameworks identify the same *source* of status: a social consensus on rules of valued attributes, which is predetermined by the structure of international hierarchy (Mattern and Zarakol, 2016). Both read status off a state's attributes and characteristics esteemed by society, or its *traits*. Yet, this shared structural and trait-based approach to status leaves several theoretical and empirical gaps. Neither can it account for individual leaders' and the domestic public's contestation and heterogeneous interpretation of valued attributes (Ward, 2019; Wang, 2021; Beaumont, 2021), as demonstrated by Chinese nationalists' and reformists' debates on whether LIO norms would reinforce its humiliating subordination towards the West (Clunan, 2014: 293; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014: 39). Nor can it explain why a status-seeking state chooses revisionist conducts deleterious to its attributes and achievement, a puzzle abounds in Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, contemporary Russia, China, and other rising powers (Ward, 2017; Murray, 2019; Mukherjee, 2022).

A search for non-trait and non-structural approach to status thus sprouts to address this lacuna.[vi] Material attributes are supplanted by recognition (Ringmar, 1996; Ong, 2012; Murray, 2018), moral authority (Wohlforth et al, 2018), and performance (Pouliot, 2016; Subotic and Vucetic, 2019). To better capture social/ideational dimensions of a state's status, which was previously examined in isolation, some scholars apply a Neo-Weberian approach to interpret international hierarchy as a social stratification process with multiple ranks to vertically order states into superordination-subordination (Keene, 2013; 2014; Zarakol, 2010; Shultz, 2019; Duque, 2018; Naylor, 2019; 2022). A state is no longer a self-subsistent entity that comes before social

interactions, a process from which it induces its social standing vis-à-vis others (Beaumont, 2021; Duque, 2018).

This relational logic of status politics and dissatisfaction is arguably best theoretically and conceptually advanced by Reinhard Wolf (2019; 2022). Wolf posited that a state's status dissatisfaction often stems from being *mistreated* rather than being *misperceived* by the referent groups. Just as China's and Russia's frustration towards the US reluctance to grant them higher status commensurate to their ascending material capability (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010; 2014), Wilhelmine Germany's "annoyance" resulted from "British high-handed behaviors…and insults" to treat it different from France during the Moroccan crises (Rathbun et al., 2021; Renshon, 2017; Barhart, 2016: 413). Wolf buttressed these IR empirical records with social psychologists' finding of two sources of status: peer recognition based on collective beliefs (trait perception); dominance and deference in interactions (behavioral treatment) (Anderson et al., 2012; Cheng et al., 2013; Halevy et al., 2012; Maner and Case, 2016). Thus, he broadened the conceptual scope to supplant a conventional *trait status* on a prestige hierarchy with a behavior-based *role status* on a deference hierarchy. Whereas the former requires at least three states to have a collective belief, the latter can exist among two actors in a pair of asymmetrical and co-constitutive roles and counter-roles, such as teacher-student and socializer-socializee (Wolf, 2022; Wendt, 1999; Cheng and Tracy, 2014: 5). This dyadic relation prepares Wolf to introduce role theory insights into the story of status dissatisfaction: a state prone to being altercasted into a subordinate counter-role would seek defiance to consolidate its superior role status vis-à-vis its counterpart for present and hopefully future interactions (Wolf, 2022: 4-5).

Though still a burgeoning concept, role status in a deference hierarchy is gradually gaining traction among IR scholars (e.g. He and Feng, 2022; Wood and Cox, 2021; Andornino, 2023; Wood, 2023). Contra trait status searching for proxies to measure collective belief of valued attributes, role status relies on deference patterns and behaviors that are directly observable in interstate and/or intrastate relations and interactions. This behavioral foundation of status—echoing insights of role theory[vii]—grants role status two more advantages. One, it emphasizes both states' and individual decision-makers' agency in understanding, enacting, and responding to their roles vis-à-vis the alters, thereby offering a potential solution to address the structure-agent problem (Thies, 2010; Breuning, 2011; 2017). Two, because role theory takes both material and

ideational factors into consideration (Breuning, 2018), role status can be more eclectic to capture a state's navigation through rational and social choices in complex interactions.

In short, status literature in the past two decades has experienced an incremental yet crucial transition. From a structural and trait-based approach to a relational and behavioral role-based approach, status has evolved from a function of material attributes to one of social roles with rational, ideational, and emotional-affective significance. Amidst growing interest in and application of role status, IR scholars ought to examine whether this conceptualization has effectively imported insights of original role theory in foreign policy analysis to the status research. The following section provides a closer examination of Wolf's binary role status framework and suggests critical and yet underexplored space for more conceptual refinements.

Revisiting Role Status: From Dyadic to Multilateral

Wolf's role status concept synthesizes his expertise on the politics of recognition/dignity (2011; 2016; 2018; 2019; 2020) and the implication of emotionalized status perception on foreign policy outcomes (2017; 2018a; 2018b; 2019). Specifically, to refute the SIT's emphasis on collective belief, Wolf borrowed from the "binary role theory" (Walker, 2011; Malici and Walker, 2017; Walker et al., 2021), and identified "dyadic contests for dominance" as the "most significant drivers of status competition." (Wolf, 2019: 1204) The implication is that, for a state contesting against its counterpart for exclusive rights and privileges entailed by a role on the deference hierarchy, beliefs and influence of the third-party audience can be arguably irrelevant (Wolf, 2022: 2).

However, this bilateral and unidimensional framework is less satisfactory in at least three ways. Most obviously, Wolf's framework did not expand much on the original role theory's emphasis on multiple and even conflictual roles induced from "different sets of established relationship in the world or within a region (probably both)" (Holsti, 1970: 277). To be fair, Wolf (2022) did explore in detail the ego-alter role divergences in a bilateral role conflict. However, contradictory role expectations in practice extend beyond a bilateral and interstate setting, and appear widely among dissonant international audiences (inter-role conflicts) and discordant domestic and international audiences (intra-role conflicts). Just as Indonesia swings between promoting democratization domestically and regionally and defending authoritarian regimes (e.g. Myanmar) on a global level, Vietnam needs to enact diverse roles expected by its population,

China, and Western allies (Karim, 2023; Huang, 2020). A narrow reading of the standard role theory could mislead scholars to reduce a single counterpart/alter into a homogenous entity, thereby repeating the same state-centrism that plagues the trait status framework. More importantly, this deference-dominance pattern could reinforce the same pathology of "fixation on major powers" in status literature (Renshon, 2017).

One possible justification for Wolf's (2022: 2; 2019: 1200) emphasis on dyads "at the expense of possible influence of third parties" comes from the findings of some social psychologists. They discovered that asymmetrical deference-dominance patterns can emerge in isolated and private face-to-face encounters regardless of the audiences' preferences or beliefs (Henrich and Gil-White, 2001; Gould, 2003; Mazur 2005, chap. 7; Fiske, 2010: 943). Wolf thus saw the third-party audiences as unnecessary to the outcome dyadic contest for dominance. In other words, role status depends primarily on a state's competent and unilateral acts (Wolf, 2022: 2).

However, this is arguably a mistranslation. Role theory researchers have long identified audiences as indispensable yet underexplored components for social interactions (Thies, 2010). Not only can the third parties provide cues for actors and influence actors' credibility, but they also shape, validate, and maintain roles and counter-roles over time (Sarbin and Allen 1968: 527–34; Walker, 1979; Breuning, 2011; Harnisch, 2011; Teles Faszendeiro, 2021). Echoing the significance of audiences are social psychologists, who discovered that an actor exposed to the public would experience a more intense level of humiliation (Klein, 1991; Hartling and Luchetta, 1999; Elison and Harter, 2007; Combs et al., 2010; Fernández et al., 2015; 2018; 2023; Mann et al., 2017). Because insults, humiliations, and stigmatization are negative altercasting strategies used by domineering actors to maintain the asymmetrical dyad, third-party audiences are too indispensable to be left out of the picture. Take the Sino-Philippines territorial dispute over the South China Sea as an example. The Philippines' pursuit of international arbitration—an "unilateral act of defiance"—did not overturn the dyadic relationship to make it superior vis-à-vis China, which saw that it "is just a fact…[that] China is a big country and other[s] are small countries" (Pomfret, 2010). Moreover, had the third-party audiences been irrelevant according to Wolf's belief, Beijing would have neither denounced the US as "the mastermind behind the arbitration [that] ropes in allies to…gang up against China and to exert pressure, and force China into accepting the award" (China, 2023), nor explicitly lamented that "the other established powers

are helping smaller states from the shadows, so that the smaller states can disrespect China" (Sun, 2016).

The final issue with Wolf's binary role status framework is its ambiguous and even contradictory account of the source of status dissatisfaction.[viii] Originally defined as "an actor's overall position within pertinent deference hierarchy" (Wolf, 2019: 1211), role status concept makes no explicit emphasis on the zero-sum nature of status pursuit. Roles are not mutually exclusive to each other, and one state can take "at least seventeen national role conceptions" simultaneously (Holsti, 1970: 273). A state's discontent with its role status thus concerns more about unequal treatments, lack of reciprocity, disrespect, and humiliation from other actors. Empirical evidence of this phenomenon is widely observed across time and space: Hitler's annoyance towards the League of Nations incapable of "grant[ing]…equity of rights…to present-day Germany" (DGFP-1); Russia's anger at being unjustly excluded from the G8 (Rathbun et al., 2021); China's frustration of border provocation by Vietnam in 1979 (FRUS-1). In essence, this source of dissatisfaction is best captured by the "perceived" incongruence between self-claimed deservingness and external treatments, or "unfairness" derived from this social stratification's unequal rank order (Rathbun et al., 2021: 5; Welch, 1995: 19).

In contrast, Wolf's binary role status (2022) implicitly incorporated exclusivity into a stratified dyad that sets up a zero-sum competition between two actors. Since a superior role is relative to an inferior counter-role in a binary relationship, role status dissatisfaction stems from "exclusive privileges" entitled to a superior social position according to the self-alter demarcation (Wolf, 2022: 4, 8). This zero-sum assumption raises several concerns. One, it cannot address the ideal scenario of balancing when two actors undertake the same role status (Goffman 1956, 479; Fragale et al. 2012). Two, if an actor is always motivated to maximize exclusive privileges granted by the superior position, it is hard to make sense of a superordinate state's willingness to elevate its counterpart's role status, as demonstrated by the US *Ending China's Developing Nation Status Act*. Even more puzzling is the subaltern state's deliberate selection and preservation of role status disproportionately lower than its self-perceived standing, such as China's refusal to renounce its developing state's status despite its achievements as the second largest economy. Similar role-status minimizing behaviors also manifested in the Copenhagen climate change negotiations in 2009, when Beijing stayed vigilant towards the West's "excessive praise" and refused to be

promoted into a responsible leader: "We have been elevated [in the eyes of others] against our will. We have no intention to compete for global leadership." (Shambaugh, 2013: 307)[ix]

Three, this competition for exclusive rank remains incongruent with Wolf's (2019; 2022) own interpretation of empirical records. Wolf identified the same trigger of Russia's and Greece's defiance respectively to the US and international creditors of sovereign debt: their perceived subjugation into a subordinate role. According to his binary role status framework, negative altercasting's draw is depriving an actor's exclusive privilege of dominance. Yet, when investigating the changing US-Russian dyad, Wolf made no explicit reference to Moscow's privilege-maximizing attempt to demote the US, but drew a lot from the Kremlin's demand for an "equal partnership of unequals" (Stent, 2019: 217): intolerance for humiliation, refusal of "bow[ing] our head down," lessons to the US on "role equality", and restoration of Western respect (Wolf, 2022; 2019). Similarly, in his account of Greece's rebellion against the international creditors, Athens was defending its unique role as the "cradle of western civilization" and its "deprived voice and agency that was due to every EU member (Wolf, 2018; 2020; 2022), rather than claiming superiority and exclusive privileges from the hand of its superordinate counterpart. Its materially costly confrontation was a face-saving attempt infused with "pride and anger" of its domestic audience and decision-makers: "The only thing I care about is not being humiliated by Schaeuble and the rest of them" (Kambas and Williams, 2015); "On Monday our humiliation will be over. We will finish with orders from abroad" after the referendum (Wolf, 2020; 2022).

Summarily, though parsimoniously addressing the underexamined dyadic status politics, Wolf's role status conceptualization and operationalization apply a narrow translation from the role theory and social psychology. Not only does it leave out role conflicts in a triad—an actor, its counterpart, and the third-party audiences on the international and/or domestic levels—but it also risks conflating two fundamental sources of status dissatisfaction: the zero-sum competition for exclusive privileges (determined by the prestige hierarchy), versus the non-exclusive strive for fair and respectful treatments (on the deference hierarchy). Without refinement, this framework's emphasis on dyadic competition for dominance would mislead scholars to view role status seeking as a frequent destabilizer in world politics. This bellicose thesis has been recently refuted by scholars examining how role status induces institutional cooperation, as exemplified by the ASEAN enlargement in early 2000 (He and Feng, 2022).

A potential way to increase role status' analytical rigor while preserving its distinct behavioral approach is to put a state back to its social interaction procedures with various alters, but simultaneously zoom in on its counterparts within pertinent dyads. Besides the structural-driven and ego-oriented individual role status, a state also obtains two more types of interactive role status: binary status conferred from bilateral transactions, and "third-party status" induced from multilateral encounters (Ferry and O'Brien-Udry, 2022). The question of how mixtures and/or conflicts among these role statuses impact a state's status-seeking response has sparked scholars' interest (Mattingly and Sundquist, 2021; Carnegie and Dolan 2020; Dietrich et al., 2018; Pu, 2019; Huang, 2020). In line with this discussion, I propose my multiple audiences dynamic framework in the following section.

Multiple Audiences Dynamic Framework and Role Status Dissatisfaction

My framework attempts to illustrate the process of a state reconciling its individual, bilateral, and multilateral role status vis-à-vis its multiple alters as audiences. Similar discussions have abounded in role theory scholarship on state interactions with international institutions (Barnett, 1993; Tewes, 1998; Harnish, 2011). Scholars in this vein categorize audiences in two broad ways: a horizontal differentiation between the domestic and international audiences; a vertical one between the regional and global audiences (Cantir and Kaarbo, 2016).

Given its anthropomorphic reading of states, my framework aligns more with the latter but introduces a different approach to unpack the audiences and social interactions proposed by the Neo-Weberian scholarship. Role status refers to a state's social standing in an international hierarchy— "vertical social ordering of super- and sub-ordination" (Weber, 1968: 927-934). In practice, except for the hegemons on the top or those peripheral states at the very bottom of the social ladder, a state could often find itself standing between the *superiors* above it and the *inferiors* below it (Lin, 2021). This position in the middle of the social hierarchy thus compartmentalizes the state's complex interactions into two types of asymmetrical relations with two referent groups.

In upward interactions, the state will appear both materially and socially subordinate to those with higher ranks within this asymmetrical dyad. It may involuntarily succumb to the superiors to avoid deleterious "collision of wills" (Gould, 2003), instrumentally embrace their domination in exchange for material benefits and services (Lake, 2009; Ikenberry, 2001), and even

voluntarily defer to their normative legitimacy and prestige (Hogg, 2001; Johnston, 2008). Regardless of the subaltern's intention, its routine pattern of deference can consolidate the superiors' domineering role as a social fact. This state is likely to articulate this relative inferiority in its role enactment, and comply with the expectations of the alter occupying a domineering counter-role. Such bottom-up mimicry and deference in exchange for the superiors' recognition are epitomized in the Sino-centric tributary system, which "invested in return with prestigious Chinese titles" to Korea, Japan, and other Asian states undergoing systematic Sinification "to buttress their positions" (Holcombe 2011, 87; Huang and Kang, 2022). Similarly, the Russian campaigns to conquer the "barbaric Mongols" were a deference to the imperial model set by the European civilized great powers to escape its periphery standing as a semi-civilized state in the 18th century (Neumann, 2011).

In downward interactions, the state will find a flipped asymmetrical dyad in which it occupies the superordinate position. As an ingroup member with exclusive rights and privileges to determine the validity of the outgroup's status claim, it enacts the dominant role and needs to induce consistent yielding and acquiescence of its counterparts. Thus, to protect this deference-dominance pattern from potential bottom-up defiance, the superior state is likely to engage in actions of social closure. On the one hand, it can choose to highlight outgroups' actions and beliefs incompatible with the social norms—an action of "collectivist stereotyping" (Naylor, 2022: 29-30). Stigmatizing stereotypes of civilizational difference (primordial rest/civilized rest), military defeat ("backward" and "inferior" conquered nations), and ideological antagonism (communist Cuba and Nazi Germany) can differentiate and marginalize the social inferiors to impede their claim for a higher social status (Suzuki, 2008; Zarakol, 2011; Adler-Nissen, 2014). On the other hand, this superior actor can engage in a more radical form of rejection— "collectivist exclusion" or "social closure" (Parkin, 1979: 68-69). By granting "all-encompassing negative status" to "a subordinate group of a common character" (Parkin, 1979: 68), it strips away the outgroups' claim to membership and social mobility. This is instantiated by the League of Nation's refusal to include in its Charter an equality clause proposed by Japan, whose racial difference relegated it as subordinate to other European members (Ward, 2017).

Reading social interactions through this multiple audiences dynamic framework, we can thus identify two social arrangements requisite to a state's role status vis-à-vis alters: *upward recognition-seeking* and *downward deference-seeking*. Importantly, these asymmetrical

relationships capture two different status logics mentioned in the previous section. The former highlights a state's quest for social appraisal and fair treatment of its fulfillment of social expectations (Darwall, 1977). The latter turns to its pursuit of exclusivity in power and resource distribution. In an ideal social stratification, top-down recognition should voluntarily impart bottom-up compliance. In practice, however, this recognition-deference incongruence persists widely and constitutes an important yet underexamined source of status dissatisfaction. Different degrees of top-down recognition and bottom-up deference thus constitute four possible role status scenarios—one pleasing and three dissatisfactory demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Four Scenarios of the Multiple Audience Status Dynamic

Deference Seeking / Recognition Seeking	**High Deference from Below**	**Low Deference from Below**
High Recognition from Above	***Satisfaction: Systematic Recognition*** No negative altercasting Maintain asymmetrical power relations via cooperative socialization Korea and Japan towards Tang China Eastern Europe towards the EU after the Cold War	***Dissatisfaction II: Bottom-up Provocation*** Negative altercasting by the social inferiors Restore asymmetrical power relations via social closure China towards Vietnam and the Philippines 19th-Century Europe towards the "uncivilized"
Low Recognition from Above	***Dissatisfaction I: Unfair Treatment*** Negative altercasting by the social superiors Equalize asymmetrical power relations via competitive socialization (or social competition in SIT) Meiji Japan and Qing China towards the West Imperial Russia towards France	***Dissatisfaction III: Systematic Exclusion*** Negative altercasting by both the social superiors and inferiors Challenge asymmetrical power relations via social creativity in SIT or defiance China's Non-Align Movement towards the US and USSR Militarist Japan towards the international community

Role Status Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction Reexamined

The upper-left quadrant describes a satisfactory scenario of a state enjoying high recognition from above and high deference from below. Relinquishing its individual identity to a collective identity, the state enacting a subaltern role vis-à-vis the counterparts can feel justly compensated with respectful and equal treatment by the elite clubs. Its exclusive privileges and rights from elite membership are reciprocated and recognized by the subordination of the social

inferiors who demonstrate a collective trust in its authority, competence, and leadership, thereby consolidating its enactment of a superior role. To preserve this social standing, the state is likely to cooperatively participate in the collective mobilization and support the deference-dominance patterns within each dyad. The more positive status remarks from above and below generated by social conformity, the more embedded it becomes within this social stratification. This integrative and status-quo-enforcing socialization is epitomized in former Soviet countries in Eastern Europe's democratization. Affective unease over their identity loss was redressed by their uncontested membership in the European family and normative superiority vis-à-vis Russia, which remains peripheral to if not expelled by Europe (Flockhart, 2005).

The lower-left quadrant depicts the first type of role status dissatisfaction scenario: *unfair treatment* in the state's asymmetrical dyad with its superiors. The discrepancy between the state's self-perceived entitlement and actual social appraisal undermines its "achievement and just rewards" and its upward social mobility (Rathbun et al., 2021; Mukherjee, 2022: 63), and tries to subjugate this state into an even more subaltern counter-role. This negative altercasting compels this state to question the rightfulness of this deference-dominance pattern advocated by the elite clubs. However, deference and respect from the smaller states indicate that the status quo hierarchy is still desirable in power and resource distribution. A total decoupling could induce conflicts with and retaliation from above and even lead to collective social opprobrium from both directions. Unable and unwilling to derive positive self-esteem from "we-feeling" when looking up, this state could resist the altercasting by equalizing with or outperforming "the dominant group in the area on which its claims to superior status rest" (Larson and Shevchenko, 2019: 2). Contra Wolf's prediction of defiance, the state would not terminate its subaltern role vis-à-vis its social superiors. Instead, it still participates in the collective mobilization to challenge the meaning, validity, and applicability of norms from within, thereby impeding the elite groups' role enactment and normative domination. This status-quo fragmenting response is epitomized in the macro-historical experience of non-western countries' interactions with their superior Western counterparts. Just as the 1868 Japanese Meiji Revolution aimed to "immerse our nation so deeply into this plague…[of] Western civilization… to ensure that our people are accustomed to it" (Watanabe, 2006), the Qing Dynasty explored a strategy of "learning merits from the foreign to conquer the foreign" after the Opium War (Hwang, 2021), so did the Russian imperial court that encouraged French fluency for better diplomatic performance in European conferences (Fuller, 1992).

Moving to the second column, we have first a quadrant where a state recognized as an elite member is disrespected by its social inferiors. This is the second type of role status dissatisfaction: *bottom-up provocation* in the state's asymmetrical dyad with its subalterns (Lin, 2021). Defiance and altercasting by the smaller states are problematic in two ways. One, it bluntly challenges this state's self-assumed and socially esteemed privileges and role to dominate, thereby triggering an ontological unease that compels this state to defend its superior standing as a social fact. For instance, in the face of a disconcerting Sino-Vietnamese border dispute, Deng Xiaoping called for US "punishment…to put a constraint on Vietnamese ambition" in his 1979 meeting with Jim Carter, who sensed "a change in international attitude" and "now s[aw] China as a peaceful country that is against aggression." "If Vietnam thought the PRC soft" and "is allowed to continue on its unbridled path… the situation will get worse…[and] China must still teach a lesson to…the now extremely arrogant…and very conceited Vietnamese" (FRUS-1). Two, the social superiors and inferiors all expect the state to tame the provocation and restore the distorted balance of power. Failure to extract a deferential response from below, as exemplified by Russia's defeat by a militarily weaker Japan during 1904-05 and China's loss to the Philippines in the South China Sea arbitration, leaves a humiliating impression in front of the third-party audiences, who might decide to demote the state's social rank. Consequently, the state as an ingroup member of the elite club is likely to choose social closure to restore the disrupted dominance-deference pattern. By upholding the collectively shared beliefs and socially prescribed code of conduct, it can claim normative superiority and project social opprobrium onto the alters in the outgroup, as exemplified by the "standard of civilization" that distinguished Europe from "the barbarians" in the 19th century (Keene, 2013). More importantly, social closure prepares this state to reframe the bottom-up provocation into a contingent and incidental event with little implication on its social standing. In the South China Sea arbitration example, the grundnorm of territorial sovereignty became Beijing's "deflective mechanism" to reinterpret China's ineffective subjugation as a US-supported scheme of territorial expansion for international audiences (Lin, 2021: 44).

Finally, the lower-right quadrant features the state with few recognitions from above and deference from below. This is the third type of role status dissatisfaction: *systematic exclusion*. Altercasting from both directions reveals to this state an illegitimate hierarchy with vexing normative and distributive problems that induce its "offensive reaction…to deter repeated humiliations in the future, restore power and status, [and] to return the situation to a desired state

of affairs" (Cooley et al., 2019: 690; Ward, 2017; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014: 271). Two possible pathways exist to manage its systematic exclusion. One, if this state obtains exclusive and alternative ties to other subgroups, it can reidentify with them for recognition, and derive alternative standards of status evaluation/attribution to counter the elite group's monopoly over norm-making and norm-application. This entrepreneurial move is observed in the non-aligned movements advocated by India and China, whose colonial past engendered a novel repertoire of Asian-African solidarity and appealed to the Third World as an audience group alternative to the USSR. Similarly, civilizational discourses about the Rest reclaiming agency from the West are also prevalent in Chinese and Russian foreign policy, which reinterprets cognitive dissonance as self-affirmation to mobilize collective challenge to the Western liberal norms (Bettiza and Lewis, 2020: 568-71). Two, if this state acquires neither entrepreneurial power nor external connections with alternative subgroups, it may decide to simply exit the system as an "outlaw"—a strategy of defiance in Wolf's term. This scenario is epitomized in 1930s Japan's recourse to imperialist expansion in the 1930s after the West denied its claim of Manchuria, and its thwarted attempt to promote "Pan-Asianism" ideology to dominate its Asian neighbors (Goddard, 2018: 789).

Illustrating the Framework: China and the Emerging Global Environmental Regime, 1950-1972

This section applies this framework of multiple audience status dynamic to China's shifting response to the emerging global environmental regime from 1950 to 1972. This interesting case is selected for two reasons. First, the Cold War featured two ideological camps' antagonistic competition over the exclusive role of dominance and corresponded to Wolf's dyadic contestation in a "most-likely" manner (Bennet and George, 2004: 120-21). Constrained by the ideological conformity within each bloc, China's diplomatic attitudes and behaviors ought to be mainly conditioned by US or Soviet treatment according to the binary role status framework. In contrast, this case unpacks the complex and dynamic configuration of social ties between and within the two major camps, and highlights the volatile superordinate-subordinate relations and varying composition of status audiences that do not fall squarely into Wolf's model. As shown later, the smaller states played an indispensable role in Beijing's shifting approach to the environmental regime.

Second, these two decades witnessed Maoist China waging battles against nature to alternate topography for grain production, poverty alleviation, and Third-Front facilities construction, three main sources of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) legitimacy (Qu and Li, 1994: 61; Shapiro, 2005: 72-86). Meanwhile, "ultra-leftist" sentiment continuously sidelined the ecologically conscious pragmatists (e.g. Zhou Enlai and Li Xiannian) and remained vigilant towards the environmental degradation: "environment is a problem of the rich, [which] tried to block our development under the guise of protecting the environment" (UNIHP-1). Therefore, Beijing's sovereigntist and militarized understanding of the environment can show the inadequacy of alternative explanations (rationalist calculation and domestic political struggle) and increase our confidence in this multiple audience status dynamic framework.

I apply single-case and longitudinal process tracing to extrapolate "evidence on process, sequence, and conjunctures of events within a case" (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 3-4). Besides the Chinese MFA documents compiled exclusively in *HuanJing JueXing* (hereafter HJJX), my primary sources came from national diplomatic archives of China, the US, and the UK, and institutional archives of the UN agencies and the Cold War History Archive of the Woodrow Wilson Center (WCDA). Within each archive, I targeted both day-to-day records on the environmental treaty negotiations and foreign diplomatic engagements with Beijing and their analyses of Chinese foreign policy. The result contained thousands of pages of conference preparatory documents, diplomatic cables, interagency reports, personal memoirs, and private letters.

In retrospect, the swinging pendulum of China's response features four stages that correspond to my framework: systematic respect (1950-1952), bottom-up provocation (1953-1955), systematic exclusion (1953-1970), and unfair treatment (1971-72). Each of these stages concentrates on China's relational dynamic, its status ambitions towards relevant audiences, and how audiences' reactions impacted China's attitude and behavior towards the emerging environmental regime.

A. Systematic Respect and Initial Embracement: 1950-52

China's first encounter with the budding global environmental and climate governance took place in 1950. Scientific interest in anthropogenic impact on the ecological and climate system started in the 19th century, and only began to gain public attention in the mid-20th century

due to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). In October 1947, the WMO evolved into a full UN agency upon ratification of the World Meteorological Convention by 30 states, one of which was the Republic of China (ROC) under the Kuomintang (KMT) regime.[x]

On May 7, 1950, the question of whether China should join the WMO officially reached the Chinese MFA. On May 12, then Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai telegrammed UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie requesting "the so-called 'delegates' of the Chinese KMT reactionary remanent clique…be[ing] driven out from WMO's various organs and meetings." Upon the MFA's request, this issue was then immediately dispatched to the Central Military Commission (CMC)'s Meteorological Bureau for inquiries (BAMFA-1). The Head of the CMC Tu Changwang suggested that because climate records' exchange and standardization were by nature a global issue, active participation of the WMO was of necessity and "enabled us to propose our opinions and was to our benefits; otherwise, we would have to follow suits and occupy a passive position" (BAMFA-2). Concurring these technical advantages, the MFA cautioned against this option:

> The WMO is a technical organization. The benefits of our participation include: 1. introducing our proposals and suggestions during meetings to strengthen the standard-setting; 2. learning some technical matters. The problem is that, if a state of war exists, using unencrypted codes for weather reports is *militarily disadvantaged*. Without participation, we would still receive unencrypted documents from other nations; however, we need to conform to the international orders on rules and standardization, and will be constrained under a passive position (BAMFA-2, my italics).
>
> The costs of participation would outweigh the gains (BAMFA-3). Exchanging meteorological intelligence with the WMO is disadvantageous for China's Air Force (BAMFA-4), and would make the enemy more ambitious and undermine our prestige. (WCDA-2)

Consequently, China disregarded the WMO's Secretary General Johnston's invitation to attend the First Congress in Paris as an observer in March 1951 (BAMFA-3; WMO-1); a subsequent telegram invitation from Indian Chairman V.V. Sohoni of the WMO's Regional Association II (Asia) (RA II) on December 24 was left unanswered (BAMFA-4).

However, this rational calculation was dwarfed by *Mao's role status concerns*. The beginning of the 1950s witnessed a newly established China gaining independence from imperialist Japan and the KMT regime. Victory against these two military stronger opponents and successful decolonization encouraged Mao to revitalize China's historical stature as a prominent international actor. Positioned between the established Soviet elites and the other actors repressed

by imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism, China perceived military revolution to liberate "the Communist parties and people in all oppressed nations in Asia" as an unshirkable "international obligation…[and] also one of the most important methods to consolidate the victory of the Chinese revolution in the international arena" (Zhai, 2000: 1). Thus, it held dear the Soviet Union, the People's Democratic Countries, and the proletariat and the broad masses of the people in all other countries" as the crucial status audiences, and identify them as one side that China "must lean to" (Mao, 1949: 1487-94).

Entering 1952, China's revolutionary obligations began to engender recognition from above and deference below. In addition to the Soviets that praised China as a credible and capable revolutionary power, US National Security Council (NSC) 166/1 documented that Beijing's "effectiveness in rendering propaganda support to the USSR" contributed to its "position of leadership among Asian Communist movements and regimes", "general international acceptance of the Chinese Communist regime…and an increase of Chinese Communist prestige" (FRUS-2). Meanwhile, China's military assistance in the Korean War and the Vietnamese revolution in Indochina impressed audiences greatly. Ho Chiming expressed his admiration of the Chinese revolutionary expertise in a letter to Mao: "The victory was a victory of the Maoist line of revolutionary internationalism…the biggest reason for this victory is that China and the Soviet Union gave us all our assistance" (Luo, 2002: 7). Similar recognition of Beijing's military and ideological prestige appeared both in the US national intelligence estimates (DDRS-1) and in NSC's 1952 examination:

> Successful overt Chinese Communist aggression in this area, especially if achieved without encountering more than token resistance on the part of the United States or the United Nations, would have critical psychological and political consequences which would probably include the relatively swift alignment of the rest of Asia and thereafter the Middle East to communism, thereby endangering the stability and security of Europe (NSC-1).

China's involvement in the settlement negotiation and eventually a seat at the 1954 Geneva Conference further exhibited a widespread recognition of its credible leadership in Asia by significant others (the USSR, the UK, and France) (Brazinsky, 2017: 83-4).

It was against this backdrop that China engaged in *cooperative socialization* and considered entering the WMO, an elite club now hosting various great powers. Within the first seven months of 1952, the MFA received two positive signals regarding the PRC's membership

of the RA II. One, contra its ambivalence in 1950, the USSR signed the World Meteorological Convention and officially recognized the WMO's mandate. On January 22nd, A. A Solotoukhine, the director of the USSR Hydro-meteorological Service and Vice Chairman of the RA II, informed Chinese officials that the Soviet delegation had passed a motion supported by Poland, Hungry, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and others in April 1951 to disqualify the ROC and replace Taipei with Beijing for the RA II and its subsequent first session (BAMFA-5). During the WMO First Congress, delegates of Norway, Sweden, India, and Byelorussian SSR had explicated recognized Beijing's legitimacy to represent China. Two, Indian Chairman Sohoni was eager to seek China's participation in his invitations on December 17, 1951, and July 7, 1952. India's urge to admit China to the WMO echoed its continuous "pressing for China's admission to the UNSC" (NMML-1). From claiming "recognition of a new China…with whom we have a history of almost immemorial friendship" as "not only inevitable but urgent (NMML-2), to its refusal of US offer of UNSC membership "at the cost of China" (NMML-3), Nehru's consistent deferential responses attracted Beijing to show solidarity in international actions. Consequently, understanding the substantial positive esteem from both above (the Soviet Union) and below (socialist countries in Eastern Europe and Asia), the MFA suggested a need to participate in this institution:

> The Regional Association's invitation for us to be a member state was a result of the Soviet effort during the previous meetings (BAMFA-6).
>
> Despite being one of the UN institutions, it remains a technical institution. Given the USSR as a member state, the completed eviction of Taipei, and invitations from the Indian chairman, we should seize this right moment to join (BAMFA-6).
>
> Other UN institutions usually took our disputed membership issue as an excuse and declined our participation. The Regional Association II was indeed unprecedented. If we obtain the *de facto* participation right, we might break the path dependency and open a precedent for the future (BAMFA-5).
>
> After consolidating these principles…[and] *given the newly independent democratic countries' enthusiasm* (BAMFA-7, my italics), we will *reply to the Soviet friends with whom we act in accordance*, and then inform India (BAMFA-6, my italics).

B. Social Closure to Expel Provocative Taipei: 1953-55

By the end of December 1952, Beijing started the quest for membership. However, the actual degree of recognition and deference was not as high and rosy as promised by the USSR and India. A new status dynamic thus unfolded in front of Beijing. On the one hand, Taipei was still

on the list of participants for the RA II meeting in New Delhi. This insufficient deference and respect from below undermined China's sovereignty and exclusive institutional privilege in the application process. As investigated by Chinese embassies in Switzerland and the USSR in July 1953, the motion by the USSR and Ukraine to grant Beijing membership within the WMO was rejected with 11 supports, 25 oppositions, and 7 abstentions (BAMF-8). After Sohoni resigned from the RA chairmanship in May 1953, the RA II repeatedly delayed the official meeting notification for Beijing and Moscow throughout 1954.

On the other hand, insufficient deference from below did not escalate into a systematic exclusion. Thanks to the USSR, India, Yugoslavia, India, and other key "comrades" inside the WMO, Beijing's right to participate was continuously emphasized and echoed by Norway and Sweden, which sponsored a motion supported by other 19 states to recognize China's observer status. Moreover, the MFA discovered that opponents to its membership application had little doubt in its sovereignty or legitimate ruling of the country. Instead, they were concerned about either the technical aspect of the rule of procedure or whether the WMO's integrity and the rule of procedure would be disrupted by this contentious China question. "Our overriding purpose must be to hold this Organization together," explained Britain: "Her Majesty's Government recognized the Government of the People's Republic of China…but did not consider it wise or timely to debate the question of Chinese representation at the present time." (WMO-2)

Consequently, the MFA decided to resort to the WMO's official regulations to tame this bottom-up provocation and resist Taipei's negative altercasting. Resolving this membership dispute through official channels could not only "expand China's political sphere of influence but also create a better environment for the Soviet's struggle from within." (BAMF-10) Thus, Tu Changwang in 1955 telegrammed China's protest of KMT's membership to Acting Secretary General G. Swoboda on January 26 and February 6 and demanded the WMO to replace Taipei with Beijing for the upcoming Second Congress. Importantly, the MFA decided not to follow the Soviet instruction of immediately ratifying the World Meteorological Convention in exchange for membership. A request for membership as a non-signatory state would cast China into an outgroup newcomer that needed support from the majority (two-thirds) of members, and "would both be ineffective and leave the impression of weakness" for the smaller socialist states (BAMF-11), which looked up to the PRC's sovereignty and influence within prestigious institutions. Thus, Beijing was "anxious to restore Chinese sovereignty over all historically Chinese areas…for both

security and *prestige* reasons" (FRUS-2, my italics) and found "it to our political detriment to have us in tandem with the KMT bandits" (BAMF-12). Consequently, when communicating with the WMO, the MFA specified China's action as a *restoration of legitimate membership* instead of an application for entrance into the WMO:

> Once the WMO expels the KMT bandits, we can immediately approve the Convention and join this institution. This move highlights the fact that *the institution is liable for* impeding the restoration of our legitimate membership; *it also supports the Soviet's struggle and clarifies our opposition to the two-China position* (BAMF-12, my italics).

C. Systematic Exclusion and Persistent Defiance: 1956-70

By April 1955, this attempted social closure turned out unfruitful when the Second Congress again kept the KMT's seat and postponed the discussion of Beijing's status. The WMO members' top-down countenancing of this bottom-up provocation compelled the MFA to pause its attempted entrance into the environmental regime, foreshadowing a sense of systematic exclusion. Status dissatisfaction continued to sprout since 1956 when a rift began to emerge between Beijing and Moscow. On March 31, 1956, Mao sharply criticized Stalin's mistake of "speaking about the subordination of the CCP to the KMT" and seizing the Changchun Railway and Port Arthur in a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador Pavel Yudin (WCDA-3). Discontent towards the "great power chauvinism" continued to ferment in 1958, when the Khrushchev administration in April proposed to establish a Sino-Soviet collaborative long-wave radio transmission center compatible with the Soviet submarines, followed by another suggestion of a collaborative submarine flotilla in July. In Beijing's eyes, the extension of Soviet naval forces to its coast was an absolute humiliation and a blunt denial of China's leadership role in the world communist revolution. "You never trusted the Chinese," outcried Mao in his meeting with Ambassador Yudin on July 22:

> [To you] the Russians are the first-class whereas the Chinese are among the inferior who are dumb and careless…You have never had faith in the Chinese people... The Chinese [Communists] were regarded as Tito the Second; [the Chinese people] were considered as a backward nation. You have often stated that the Europeans looked down upon the Russians. I believe that some Russians look down upon the Chinese people (WCDA-4).

Entering the 1960s, the unfair treatment underlying the Sino-Soviet split sowed the seeds for a fragmented audience of small socialist states. As the US observed, despite the prestige-boosting Bandung Conference and the wave of recognition in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East,

China's deference came mainly from "the illegal and militant Communist Parties of Southeast" compared with Moscow's dominance over the "orthodox parties of Europe and most of the Third World" (GRFPL-1). This limited deference was further hampered by sporadic provocations from the social inferiors, as instantiated by India's hosting of the Dalai Lama in 1956 and the 1962 Sino-India border dispute. Disobedience from a subaltern India was not a mere stain on China's peace-loving image. Rather, that India's provocation was condoned and assisted by adversarial Soviets was an existential threat and ontological insecurity for the MFA in 1963:

> It laid bare Nehru's true intention of interfering in China's internal affairs…It is extremely distressing to see that Soviet comrades believe in capitalist India rather than socialist China and ignore the fact that Indian troops engaged in aggression and launched armed attacks…They even go so far as to make the slanderous claim that the conflict stems from Chinese "nationalism." *By doing so, they are actually siding with Nehru and trying to obliterate the nature of the People's Republic of China as a socialist state and are turning the facts upside down and attempting to foist the responsibility for aggression onto China* (BAMFA-13, my italics).

This Indian episode painted a bleaker world for the Chinese. Striving to replace Moscow to be the center of the world revolution, Beijing found itself besieged by two hostile superpowers above and their proxies among the smaller states exemplified by India. "There were people who asked," addressed by Zhou in the fourth session of the second National People's Congress in November 1963: "given that we oppose imperialism [the US], reactionary nationalism [India], and modern revisionism [the USSR], whether we have too many enemies. We don't think so…We should always strike the main enemy [the US] so that we can isolate him and win over the broad masses of people who are waging revolution, about to wage revolution, or sympathetic to revolution" (Zhou, 1963). Aloft fighting spirit carried on the defiance during the Cultural Revolution since 1966. When receiving Zambia President Kaunda in 1967, Zhou reiterated China's distrust of the UN and its proposed revolutionary strategy: "The UN must correct its mistakes, be reorganized and reconstructed. Friendly Asian and African countries can initiate revolution from within, and China would stay outside the UN for revolution. If this objective could not be actualized, the possibility for establishing a new and revolutionary UN would continue to increase" (*People's Daily*, 1967).

From 1966 to 1969, Beijing evolved into an isolationist player. Besides continued antagonism with the US and the USSR, Beijing's revolutionary defiance also targeted the Third World countries. It denounced North Korea (Brazinsky, 2012: 164-165), Indonesia, Burman, and

India as reactionary forces (Barnounin and Yu, 2011: 128-133); conflicts broke out between Chinese diplomats and local authorities in Tunisia, Ghana, and other Asian-African comrade countries which raised even slight doubt on the radical Maoist thoughts (Brazinsky, 2017: 604-605). At this height of the ideological fever, China's absence from the four UNCHE preparatory meetings (1969-1972) was unsurprising. After all, "the UN remains the lecture forum of those capitalist politicians and the tool of the US and USSR, the two hegemons" (Qu, 2000: 318), and Mao believed that "revolutionary upheaval in Asia, Africa, and Latin America was sure to deal the old world a decisive and crushing blow" (*People's Daily*, 1967).

D. Competitive Socialization to Correct Unfair Treatment: 1971-72

From 1970 to 1971, three changes took place to halt China's systematic exclusion. One was the abatement of domestic ideological struggles. Replacing the Red Guards with career diplomats for decision-making, Beijing (re)established diplomatic ties with 25 states from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and even the Western camp (Turkey and Iran), gradually gaining back the broad audience below it (Xie, 1997: 265-66; Brazinsky, 2017: 610).

The second was the US deliberate recognition to "persuade China that it *must* change… [and be] back to into the world community…as a great and progressing nation not as an epicenter of world revolution" (Nixon, 1971: 121-23). Momentum for Sino-US rapprochement dated back to a State Defense Report prepared in June 1966, which instructed the US to "try to draw China's activities on the broader world scene where, through the exposition to outside reality, and the successful assumption of international responsibility, she might gain a degree of status and respect which could be substituted in part for her unattainable goals of regional domination and great power status" (FRUS-3). From February 1970 to Kissinger's clandestine visit to Beijing in July 1971, various high-level exchanges were made between the Nixon administration and Zhou. Importantly, Nixon and Kissinger were aware of China's obsession with its international stature:

> [Beijing was] very sensitive if the US were to show its belief that their willingness to conduct a meaningful dialogue with the US is a sign of Chinese weakness or fear of US-Soviet collaboration against China (FRUS-4).

Consequently, when Secretary of State William Rogers officially commented China as "fairly paranoic in their attitude toward the rest of the world" and criticized Mao's "fairly casually made…invitation" of Nixon to visit "whether as a President or as a tourist" on April 28, 1971,

Nixon and Kissinger recalled Zhou's April 27 note saying that "we [Chinese] needed to fear no humiliation," and corrected Rogers' view in an official press conference on April 29 because:

> [China would] misconstrue Rogers's statements as our reply to its message or conclude that we thought China was susceptible to pressure despite its warnings months earlier not to treat its opening toward us as a sign of weakness—a statement rarely made by countries that in fact feel themselves strong (Kissinger, 1979: 719-721).

That the recognition from above could elevate China's international standing was further reckoned in one NSC briefing report: Chinese would be willing to "pay a price" and "expecting to make political gains." The "prestige…[would] increase enormously" for the PRC, which ought to "unequivocally become one of the 'big five'" (RNL-1).

The final booster of China's stature was its admission to the UN in October 1971. Supporters of Beijing's membership doubled the number of opponents (76 to 35), and only 17 states abstained from voting. "The UK, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, and Italy had all became the 'Red Guard' in revolution against the US, and all except for 4 European countries (Malta voting no, and Luxembourg, Greece, and Spain abstaining) voted yes." Moreover, China successfully regained the respect of 19 Asian and 26 African supporters. Mao was particularly proud that 7 Latin American countries voted for China which only had ties with Chile and Cuba. "It was a major issue to see the fire in the US backyard," commented Mao: "It was the Black African brothers who carried us into the UN. China's refusal to enter would be decoupling from the crowd" (Xiong, 1997: 347).

By the end of 1971, Beijing faced a novel status dynamic vis-à-vis the two superpowers and the Third World. "Because China's membership of the UNSC brought her into an increasingly sharp confrontation on a whole range of issues with other 'super-powers'" that "humiliatingly exposed Chinese powerlessness" (UKTNA-1), observed the British, it would remain "especially radical on colonial and economic issues, placing ideology and propaganda ahead of predictability" (FRUS-5). Meanwhile, the PRC striving for reputation and influence as a prominent leader of the Third World "have to demonstrate that multilateral diplomacy can, with PRC participation, produce results and reach agreements more satisfactory to the Afro-Asian states than those reached prior to PRC entry into the UN" (FRUS-5). A pragmatic response was a tactical participation in a UN platform that would satisfy the subordinate Afro-Asian-Latin American followers while simultaneously "replacing…Western and Soviet influence in the Third World" (UKTNA-2)—a scenario of competitive socialization. During their first debut at the 26th GA session (November

11-December 2, 1971), the Chinese delegates observed by the US deliberately "diverted… the GA…planetary to narrow great power conflicts [and] apparently has had strong impacts on smaller delegations" (USDDO-1).

This anti-hegemonic united front with the Third World contributed to China's UNCHE participation. On December 12, 1971, then Secretary General Maurice Strong delivered the UN invitation to China's UN Permanent Representative Qiao Guanhua (Qu et al, 2022, 17). On December 15, the invitation letter was received by the MFA, which submitted a *Request for Instructions on Attending the UNCHE* to the State Council for comments:

> Prima facie, the environmental conference is one for technical expertise, and contains a facet of exchanging experience and seeking international cooperation. In reality, it necessarily reflects the present political struggle on the global stage: *a complex political struggle of control vis-à-vis anticontrol*. Lots of developing states *haven't foregone the daydream* of receiving technical and financial assistance. We need to firmly stand with the Third World, and strive to win over some medium and small developed countries to collectively strike the US and USSR (HJJX-1, my *italics*).

Retrospectively, the 12-days participation witnessed an adamant China targeting the prefabricated Stockholm Declaration and struggling against the US, UK, and Japan in three ways. First, unsatisfied with the conference secretariat unwilling to reopen the draft for revision and leaving only six hours for discussion before voting, China approached Algeria, Syria, Pakistan, Argentina, and Venezuela on June 5 regarding its attempt to set in a motion to establish a Working Group (WG) for the declaration. Criticizing the lack of representation and transparency in this draft during the informal meeting hosted by the Sweden delegation on June 6, Ambassador Bi Jilong on the next day raised an urgent motion for WG establishment, which passed on the next day and received praises from Sri Lanka and Mauritania (HJJX-2).

Second, after a successful institutional constraint, China took advantage of this South-friendly WG to engage in intensive discursive contestation since June 10. Rather than contesting the validity of environmental protection as a norm, it expanded this fluid concept to include the US's "ecological war" in Indochina, thereby subjecting the US to intense naming and shaming, and opprobrium by NGOs and other anti-Vietnam War countries. Despite the US delegates' response of "UNCHE is not the place to discuss Vietnam" and their attempts to pressure Sweden, the Swedish Prime Minister responded in solidary with China, whose struggle was heralded by various Asian and African states as "a firm representation and defense of the developing world" (HJJX-2).

Finally, when the WG successfully preserved an autonomous space dominated by the South, Ambassador Tang Ke applied normative supplementary to inject a Chinese input into the preamble of the new Declaration on June 15. Mao's Quotations were added to principles 3 and 5: "Man has constantly to sum up experience and go on discovering, inventing, creating and advancing; of all things in the world, people are the most precious." Whereas Beijing chose to finally step aside and not sign the Declaration due to its indecisiveness on a nuclear ban, its capacity and willingness to withstand the superpower's domination over the subaltern states on a prestigious international institution was widely acknowledged by the Third and even the Second World. As documented in a cable: "Western diplomats believe that China has expanded its influence for the first time in an international conference. Its position was to defend the smaller countries." The secretariats further confirmed Beijing's skillful competitive socialization: "China was not going to sabotage the passage of the draft Declaration. It just wanted this opportunity to express its opinions and exert its influence." (HJJX-3) In the end, the UNCHE turned out as a useful platform for Beijing to "create an informal, anti-[western]-hierarchical hierarchy, subtly promoting itself as the first among equals without commanding formal deference" (Brazinsky, 2017: 22-23).

Conclusion

Discussions on status dissatisfaction have fruitfully moved beyond the materialist conceptualization to focus on what aggravates a state in its social interactions with the alters. Yet, a unidimensional reading of the alters errs too much on the dyadic at the expense of the multilateral relations. This article proposes a framework for multiple audiences dynamic as a promising intervention. Identifying the social superiors and the inferiors as two critical referent groups, I locate upward recognition-seeking and downward deference-seeking are two social arrangements that induce status dissatisfaction, which is now compartmentalized into unfair treatment, bottom-up provocation, and systematic exclusion.

Theoretically, this granular reading of status dissatisfaction demonstrates how a state's reconciliation of individual, bilateral, and multilateral role status shapes its reaction to the normative and material foundation of the international hierarchy. Bridging IR and foreign policy analysis, it offers an angle to synthesize status literature, norm studies, and revisionism. Empirically, China's UNCHE case joins the recent environmental histography to reconstruct historical contexts and trajectories and give voices back to the oft-masked global south in

international governance. The temporal and attitudinal variation captured here epitomizes China's subsequent performance in the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, and the Conference of Parties in Copenhagen (2009) and in Paris (2015), thereby rendering this case a critical juncture of China's interaction with the liberal order. For policymakers striving to understand this rising power's intention, this article highlights multivocality in China's social interactions and sheds light on the smaller states as an underexamined facet in Beijing's calculation.

One caveat of my framework is its insufficient attention to the heterogeneous domestic audience looking up and down. While multiple audiences indeed leave room for domestic constituencies, my conceptual alignment with researchers on hierarchy prioritizes a systematic understanding of group relations over a unitary understanding of individual actors (Naylor, 2022; 24; Keene, 2012: 653). Future conceptual and theoretical inquiries may explore whether and/or how group relations, attitudes, and behaviors can be scaled down to capture configurations and ties between domestic social sites. Interactions among domestic constituents, individual decision-makers, bilateral counterparts, and third-party international audiences can further nuance status dissatisfaction scholarship.

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[i] The relational turn moves beyond trait-based conceptualization in status literature and pays attention to status' perceptual and social nature. See McCourt (2016), Jackson and Nexon (2019).
[ii] The domestic audiences left out in this article are critical for intra-role conflicts when the public and decision-makers disagree with their international audiences on what role should their state enact. See Cristian and Kaarbo (2012). This conceptual concept is also compatible with China's "duality of status struggle" as both a developing state and a rising great power. See Pu (2019).
[iii] Nehru unwilling to provoke China upheld a principle of non-alignment and turned down both the 1950 American offer and the 1955 Soviet offer, both inviting India to be the sixth member of the UNSC.
[iv] This is not to exclude the cooperative response to status dissatisfaction. Status-altering strategies can include norm compliance or do-godism to reinforce the status quo order. See Bezerra et al., (2015) and Miller et al., (2015).
[v] For a criticism of SIT's flattened understanding of status concerns and conflict initiations, see Ward S (2019).
[vi] Another response to this gap is refining the extant structural status theories, including refinement of SIT (Ward, 2017), zooming in on domestic contestation (Wang, 2022), treating status as a discursive practice in a social hierarchy (Beaumont, 2020), and focusing on a rising power's position between great powers and the smaller states (Lin, 2021).
[vii] Note that Wolf did not explicitly claim a translation of role theory into status literature, but instead cited scholarship by Holsti (1970) and Malici and Walker (2017: chapter 3) specifically for the binary role status argument.
[viii] For a comprehensive list of possible categories of status conflicts identified, see Wolf (2019).

[ix] The People's Daily echoed this point in one editorial: "To fulfill responsibility in a low-profile manner is to consider ourselves as one equal and ordinary member of the international society. We do not consider ourselves as the leader with primacy or an expert on this issue, and we would not take the leadership even when others invite us to do so." See Lai (2011).

[x] One interesting note is the central government's ideologically loaded language. Whenever referring to Taipei (台北), Chinese MFA used an ideologically-loaded term with a similar pronunciation, Taifei (台匪), with the literal translation as Taiwanese bandits to highlight the KMT regime's lack of legitimacy and qualification to represent China.