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Angela Poh

# Sanctions with Chinese Characteristics

## Rhetoric and Restraint in China's Diplomacy

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## Sanctions with Chinese Characteristics

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*Rhetoric and Restraint in China's Diplomacy*

*Angela Poh*

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# List of Abbreviations

AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CHINCOM	China Committee
COCOM	Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPLP	Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries)
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party (Taiwan)
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KMT	Kuomintang (Taiwan)
MES	Market Economy Status
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Non-Proliferation Treaty)
NSSM	National Security Study Memorandum
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SOE	State-Owned Enterprises
SPT	Six Party Talks
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defence
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

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*Angela Poh*

*Singapore, November 2020*

# 1. The Puzzle of Chinese Sanctions

## Abstract

Chapter 1 introduces the puzzle of this book: given the widespread perception of China as an assertive rising power as well as the conventional belief that economic sanctions are a middle ground between diplomatic and military/paramilitary action, why were Chinese decision-makers up until the end of Xi Jinping's first term as president in March 2018 restrained and reluctant in their use of sanctions? It provides a brief account of the main argument—that China's longstanding sanctions rhetoric has had a constraining effect on its behaviour—and explains the theoretical and policy significance of this book. It concludes by providing an overview of the chapters and research design.

**Keywords:** China's assertiveness, sanctions, rhetoric, Chinese characteristics

The implications of China's rise in world politics over the past few decades have become the central topic of discussion among scholars and practitioners of international relations. Following the 2008 global financial crisis, from which China emerged relatively unscathed, scholars and policymakers have debated whether China has shifted away from Deng Xiaoping's international strategy of 'lying low' (*taoguang yanghui*) in pursuit of a more assertive foreign policy that seeks to reshape the global and regional order in the nation's favour. Such debates have intensified since Xi Jinping assumed China's top leadership position in November 2012, and especially since Xi presented the strategy of 'striving for achievement' (*fenfa youwei*) at the foreign affairs conference of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in October 2013.

While a consensus has not been reached among scholars and analysts, most have acknowledged that China has since 2010 been more aggressive in defending what it perceives as its core interests, particularly over Taiwan

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and with respect to territorial disputes in the South China Sea.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the extent to which Chinese foreign policy has actually shifted, this ‘new assertiveness meme has “gone viral”’ in scholarly work as well as the international media.<sup>2</sup>

Despite heightened tensions between China and many other states over a wide range of issues, however, as well as the increasingly aggressive presence of Chinese maritime forces in disputed waters of the East and South China Seas, the extent to which China has employed coercive economic measures against countries with which it has had political and territorial disputes has remained unclear. Regardless of political tensions, China’s bilateral trade accounts with most of these countries have continued to expand. Beijing also appears reluctant to resort to the use of sanctions at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The use of United Nations (UN) sanctions as a political tool to manage challenges to international peace and security began to proliferate in the 1990s. While China, as a permanent member of the UNSC, rarely wielded its veto to quash UN sanctions, it has remained cautious and sceptical about such sanctions. Chinese representatives to the UNSC have frequently abstained from voting on sanctions-related resolutions and have repeatedly attempted to dilute various UN sanctions resolutions in order to reduce the effects of sanctions on target states. Outside of the UN, there have thus far been no signs of China employing sanctions against other parties through other multilateral or regional organisations.

Sceptics could argue that, in line with its overall foreign policy, China has since 2008 become more assertive in its use of unilateral economic sanctions as a tool to further its foreign policy objectives.<sup>3</sup> Beijing, however, has consistently denied allegations that it has employed non-UNSC-authorized economic sanctions against countries with which it has had disputes. And indeed, up until the end of Xi Jinping’s first term as president in March 2018, there had been no signs of formal Chinese unilateral sanctions, and any ‘informal sanctions’ appeared to be fairly limited in scope. As Kai Quek and Alastair I. Johnston note, ‘China has typically not employed economic sanctions at nearly the same frequency as the United States or Europe, often labelling sanctions as interference in internal affairs’.<sup>4</sup> Even among

1 While arguing that scholars and pundits have exaggerated the speed and magnitude of changes in Chinese foreign policy, Alastair I. Johnston admits that China has been more assertive in its responses to the South China Sea disputes. See Johnston 2013, pp. 45-46. For works suggesting a more assertive Chinese foreign policy, see, e.g. Friedberg 2015, pp. 133-150.

2 Johnston 2013, p. 7.

3 See, e.g. Friedberg 2015, pp. 133-150; Reilly 2012, pp. 121-133; and Friedberg 2018, pp. 7-40.

4 Quek and Johnston 2017/2018, p. 22.

scholars who have been sounding warning bells about China's 'mounting use of unilateral economic sanctions', James Reilly conceded that China's present use of such measures 'should not be overestimated'.<sup>5</sup>

A puzzle therefore arises, which this book seeks to unravel: *Given the widespread perception of China as an assertive rising power as well as the conventional belief that economic sanctions are a middle ground between diplomatic and military/paramilitary action, why had Chinese decision-makers up until the end of Xi Jinping's first term as president in March 2018 been restrained and reluctant in their use of sanctions?*

## 1.1 Arguments and implications

This book puts forward the following arguments. In terms of the *extent* of economic sanctions, the prevalent view of increasingly widespread Chinese sanctions is exaggerated and oversimplified. Despite its continued rise and increasingly assertive behaviour on the political and diplomatic fronts, China's use of unilateral economic sanctions up until the end of Xi Jinping's first term had remained ad hoc and limited in scope and duration. Since 1997, China's participation in sanctions-related resolutions at the UNSC has become more active and assertive. Shifting away from its historical preference for abstaining when in doubt, Beijing has started to send clearer signals over the nature, scope, and types of UNSC sanctions that it would support. This includes consenting to harsher sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) due to its nuclear programme on the one hand, and repeatedly vetoing sanctions against the Syrian regime on the other.

In terms of the *factors* contributing to China's multilateral and unilateral sanctions behaviour, China's longstanding rhetoric with respect to the use of sanctions as a foreign policy tool is an important element that has been neglected by both scholars and policymakers and has remained underexamined in the international relations literature. Specifically, China's sanctions rhetoric has its origins in Beijing's efforts to counter the stigma of Western sanctions against the People's Republic of China (PRC) after the latter's founding in 1949. China's sanctions rhetoric—such as its rhetoric concerning the conditions under which the use of sanctions can be appropriate—has evolved over the decades and will continue to evolve. However, this process has not kept pace with China's rapidly expanding material capabilities, interests, and desire to employ sanctions in an effective manner and has

5 Reilly 2012, pp. 130-131.

resulted in seemingly ambiguous, confusing, and contradictory behaviour. This is especially the case when China's potential targets or other third-party actors use rhetorical action such as shaming or flattery to draw international attention to China's sanctions behaviour that has deviated from its rhetoric.<sup>6</sup> Under such circumstances, the Chinese leadership perceives international audience costs to be triggered, potentially threatening China's credibility and international status. The Chinese leadership then frequently aligns behaviour more closely with rhetoric, as it remains keen to credibly redefine understandings outside China's borders regarding the circumstances and conditions under which sanctions can legitimately be employed—an objective that Beijing views as crucial for China's competition for influence on the world stage vis-à-vis the US and its key allies.

The findings presented in this book are important in three ways. First, they prompt a rethinking of the dynamics of sanctions imposition and implications on both the sender and target states. The existing sanctions literature, with its emphasis on whether sanctions are effective or how they could be made more effective in achieving policy outcomes, is too narrowly conceived.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the extent to which sanctions may prompt a behavioural change from the target(s) in favour of the sender(s), the mere act of sanctions imposition carries important signalling and stigmatising effects, which could have a long-lasting impact on both the sender and target states. In this case, China's experience as a target of Western sanctions has resulted in Beijing's deliberate attempts to distinguish its sanctions approach from that of the US and its allies. This has led to policy choices that may not necessarily result in the greatest material benefit for China. Through an in-depth study of Chinese sanctions, I also join a small group of scholars in their attempts to correct the US- and Eurocentric bias in the existing scholarship on sanctions.<sup>8</sup>

Second, my findings unpack the factors, circumstances, and conditions under which China's sanctions rhetoric affects its behaviour and adds to existing efforts in the international relations literature examining whether talk is cheap in international politics. By questioning scholars like Hans Morgenthau who essentially argue that the rhetoric of states merely serves to disguise or justify decisions reached on the basis of material factors, I use China's sanctions behaviour as an example of how talk is not cheap because

6 The concept of 'rhetorical action' is derived from Schimmelfennig 2003, pp. 194-228.

7 See Chapter 2 for details.

8 For some examples on existing works examining sanctions that are not US/Eurocentric, see Charron and Portela 2016, pp. 101-118; and Hellquist 2015, pp. 319-333.

political actors believe that it is costly to be perceived by international audiences as blatantly acting in contradiction to their professed commitments. This in turn alters the cost-benefit calculus of decision-makers, prompting them to more closely align their actions with words. Countries can be pressured to align their behaviour with their professed commitments when they perceive a real possibility of incurring international audience costs (e.g. when they are being publicly called out for 'bluffing'). This is primarily because countries are concerned about maintaining credibility, an attribute that allows them to conduct diplomacy more effectively in the future. Status-conscious countries are particularly concerned about incurring international audience costs, as repeated losses of credibility could bring into question a country's moral behaviour, result in a loss of 'face', and in turn reduce a country's international status.

Scholars such as Anne Sartori have discussed international audience costs in previous works.<sup>9</sup> However, this has remained an underdeveloped concept in the international relations literature. I suggest that two conditions must be present for the international audience cost mechanism to effectively link rhetoric with behaviour: the offending state (or 'offender') whose behaviour has contradicted its rhetoric must be concerned about international opinion; and at least one rhetorical actor must be present to publicly point out the difference between the offender's rhetoric and his behaviour. This is irrespective of the offender's regime type. The rhetorical actor can draw international attention to deviations between the offender's rhetoric and behaviour by employing rhetorical strategies such as shaming or flattery. While existing literature on shaming is extensive, this book further introduces flattery as a rhetorical strategy. It posits that the efficacy of the international audience cost mechanism is linked to the offender's sensitivity to international opinion and its desire to gain higher international status. The extent to which an offender is concerned about its status can be determined from its prior rhetoric and policies. For example, one can examine whether it has had a history of investing significant economic resources by undertaking projects that are widely viewed as 'prestigious' (e.g. hosting the Olympic Games).

Finally, this line of inquiry is extremely relevant for policy. Over the past decade, China has become the largest trading partner for most of the states in the Asia-Pacific region, even as it has continued to engage in frequent political disputes with many of them. China's economic influence is also rapidly expanding beyond Asia to the US, Europe, Africa, Latin America,

9 Sartori 2005, p. 50.

and the Middle East. China's continued rise could be a significant cause for concern among countries that are increasingly economically reliant on China, especially if it is expected to begin wielding its economic power more aggressively to further its political and strategic interests. It would therefore be of great value for policymakers to better understand China's approach to sanctions as they attempt to anticipate how China might employ such coercive economic tools as it continues to grow in economic and military strength. Importantly, this book also provides insights on how smaller states that are economically reliant on China can play active roles in prompting China to change its sanctions behaviour in directions more favourable to them.

## 1.2 Chapter overview

The seven remaining chapters in this book will cover the following ground. Chapter 2 discusses four existing explanations for the central puzzle: Why did Chinese decision-makers remain relatively restrained and reluctant in using sanctions up until the end of Xi Jinping's first term as president, despite China's rapidly expanding economic power and political ambitions? I briefly summarise these explanations here. First, one could argue that China was 'not yet powerful enough' to employ unilateral sanctions to any significant degree. Chinese decision-makers may have believed that the use of sanctions during the period under examination (i.e. up until the end of Xi Jinping's first term as president in March 2018) would not be very effective in achieving their foreign policy objectives and/or they may have felt that sanctions could hurt China as much as (or even more than) its potential targets. This view implies the expectation that China is more likely to employ sanctions as its relative power increases. Second, China did not rely on sanctions as much as it could have because the Chinese political leadership may not have been able to convince domestic actors to do its bidding. For example, China's commercial players may have either directly dissuaded or indirectly prevented its political elite from employing sanctions when such action was perceived as likely to compromise their commercial interests. This argument might be considered especially persuasive given that much of the CPC's legitimacy to rule relies on developing and sustaining China's economic growth, and China's growth rate has been steadily slowing down. Third, one could also argue that China's participation in international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) has shaped its sanctions behaviour and made it more costly for China to employ sanctions.

Finally, the Chinese political elite may have inherited certain cultural predispositions that have led China to favour inducement over sanctions.

Chapter 3 builds on existing literature surrounding the effects of rhetoric and audience costs on foreign policy behaviour and presents the argument that China's sanctions rhetoric has had a constraining effect on its behaviour, as its leaders are concerned about incurring international audience costs. I demonstrate why insights associated with these concepts can and should be integrated into the study of sanctions and discuss their application to the China case. Specifically, I clarify and develop the causal mechanism to explain the link—international audience costs—between China's sanctions rhetoric and behaviour. Reviewing debates in the international relations literature on audience costs, I show how the logic of costly signals—as developed in the literature with respect to domestic audiences—can be extended to encompass international audiences as well as to non-democratic regimes. I further unpack the conditions needed for this mechanism to function effectively and elaborate on the rhetorical strategies that actors can use to either coerce or induce a course change on the part of an offender. This concept is then applied empirically to show how the Chinese political elite's considerations of how other members of the international community might perceive contradictions between China's rhetoric and foreign policy behaviour could constrain its use of economic sanctions.

Chapter 4 explains the origins and evolution of China's sanctions rhetoric and examines the extent to which Chinese decision-makers care about their credibility and international status. I argue that Western sanctions against China since the latter's founding in 1949 had important stigmatisation effects. I unpack the substance of China's sanctions rhetoric and analyse the intentions of Chinese leaders in promulgating such rhetoric. I drew data from archives in Beijing as well as from online databases such as the *Foreign Relations of the United States* and the *Chinese Foreign Policy Database* from the Wilson Center Digital Archive, which comprise newspaper reports, memoirs, and records of public speeches by China's political leaders. This set of data is complemented by a detailed coding of 768 speeches delivered by Chinese representatives to the UNSC from 1997 to 2016. Based on archival research and content analysis, this chapter shows how Chinese decision-makers—in an attempt to gain international recognition and higher status—engaged in a counter-stigmatisation strategy throughout this period (i.e. 1949 to 2016), including through rhetorical confrontation with the US and its allies regarding the conditions under which sanctions could legitimately be employed. I then identify China's expressed sanctions legitimacy criteria.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 test the various competing explanations as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 against the empirical data. Chapter 5 examines the extent of China's support for proposed UNSC sanctions against three cases: the DPRK (2006-2016); Syria (2011-2016); and Guinea-Bissau (2012). The selection of these case studies was justified by a correlation analysis on a dataset of 153 sanctions-related resolutions tabled at the UNSC from 1971 to 2016. Thereafter, I draw on in-depth interviews, data from UN documents, as well as material and publications issued by independent think tanks such as the Security Council Report. While China's decisions regarding its support for UNSC sanctions-related resolutions were driven to some extent by material considerations, two other factors appeared to be of greater importance: whether the norms that these sanctions-related resolutions sought to reinforce were aligned with China's stated standards of sanctions legitimacy, and the extent of pressure brought to bear on China as a result of international attention on the issue.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn to China's alleged employment of unilateral sanctions (i.e. sanctions that have not been authorised by the UNSC) between 2008 and March 2018. I examine eight 'classic cases', i.e. those that have received substantial scholarly treatment and media attention as purported examples of China's use of sanctions or economic retaliation. These cases include: (1) the China-France dispute over French President Nicolas Sarkozy's meeting with the Dalai Lama (December 2008); (2) the China-US dispute over arms sales to Taiwan (January 2010); (3) the China-Japan dispute over a trawler collision in mutually claimed waters (September 2010); (4) the China-Norway dispute over the Nobel Peace Prize award to Liu Xiaobo (October 2010); (5) the China-Philippines dispute over the Scarborough Shoal (April 2012); (6) the China-Vietnam dispute over an oil rig (May 2014); (7) the China-Taiwan dispute over the then newly elected Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's refusal to explicitly endorse the '1992 Consensus' (January 2016); and (8) the China-South Korea dispute over the deployment of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system (March 2017). Given the conventional wisdom that China had used sanctions in these classic cases, these case studies also serve as an important set of 'least-likely cases' for my hypothesis. Chapter 6 establishes the extent to which China had used unilateral economic sanctions in these cases, and Chapter 7 analyses the five competing hypotheses as explanations of China's sanctions behaviour. The evidence in these chapters reveals that China had imposed political and diplomatic punishment on these states. But purported Chinese economic sanctions in these cases were ambiguous, ad hoc, and limited in scope and/or degree. Moreover, the evidence demonstrates that in most of these cases,

such sanctions were either reduced substantially or lifted entirely when the target states, through rhetorical action, drew international attention to China's behaviour.

The relative opacity of the Chinese political system limits access to both policymakers and policy documents. As a result, data on China's decision-making processes is frequently lacking. I have attempted to compensate for these challenges by conducting, between October 2015 and June 2018, 76 in-depth interviews with former and current politicians, officials, diplomats, and commercial actors from 12 different countries—all of whom have been involved, to varying degrees, in their respective countries' interactions with China. During the interview process, I triangulated the information by asking various interviewees from different locations and sectors to describe the same events and to share their internal assessments of what had happened. This allowed me to reconstruct the intricacies of specific events more accurately, including those for which official sources and documentation are lacking. Where available, I also employed a wide variety of other primary and secondary sources, including official memoranda, publications, speeches, and leaked diplomatic cables in English and Chinese to complement the information garnered from the interviews. In addition, for issues and events with respect to which available information from these sources remained insufficient to trace the causal process, I interrogated the data to determine whether the empirical observations and policy outcomes from the case studies match expectations based on my argument, or whether they might be better accounted for by one or more of the alternative explanations.

Finally, Chapter 8 discusses the empirical and theoretical implications of my findings. Until China modifies its longstanding sanctions rhetoric, its use of sanctions—though it may become more prevalent in the sense of proliferating across more cases or issues, as has been the case since March 2018—is likely to remain ambiguous, targeted at narrowly specific sectors, and limited in scope and duration. However, these ad hoc efforts by China may not be entirely futile, as they could potentially impose a psychological effect on its potential targets and even third-party actors who fear that they could become future targets, prompting them to align their policy preferences with China's even in the absence of sanctions or the explicit threat of sanctions.<sup>10</sup> They could also allow Beijing to appease its increasingly nationalistic and demanding domestic population. In addition, in predicting the extent or range of China's behaviour in this regard, I suggest that potential target states are not passive agents but that their

<sup>10</sup> Chong and Poh 2020, pp. 1-28.



rhetoric and policy responses play crucial roles in determining the extent of Chinese sanctions. This book concludes with a discussion of China's evolving approach towards its rhetoric on and use of economic sanctions, especially in light of developments during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It also offers a consideration of related lines of inquiry, primarily the role of economic inducement—such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—in China's grand strategy, i.e. the other side of the sanctions coin. In doing so, this book lays the foundation for a better understanding of how China practices economic statecraft with, in the words of Chinese leaders, 'distinctive Chinese characteristics'.

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## 2. On Sanctions and China

### Abstract

Chapter 2 clarifies the definition of sanctions and draws on the existing international relations literature to discuss four different expectations that speak to the central puzzle of this book. These expectations are based on structural, domestic, and cultural factors: China was simply 'not yet powerful enough' to employ sanctions in a wholehearted manner; the Chinese political leadership may have at times been constrained by its domestic actors; China's participation in international institutions shaped its sanctions behaviour; and the Chinese political elite may have inherited certain predispositions that led them to favour the use of 'carrots', like economic inducements, over 'sticks', such as punitive sanctions. It finds that none of these explanations provide a wholly satisfactory answer to the puzzle.

**Keywords:** Sanctions, realism, domestic factors, international institutions, constructivism

From 1971 when China became a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to March 2018 which marked the end of Xi Jinping's first term as president, Chinese leaders had continually insisted that they did not employ unilateral sanctions outside of the UNSC framework. Can we take the Chinese leaders at their word? What can be considered 'sanctions'? Key terms and assumptions need to be clarified before these questions can be addressed. This chapter first provides a definition of 'sanctions' before discussing four explanations for why China—a formidable economic power—had until the end of Xi Jinping's first presidential term in March 2018 remained restrained and reluctant in its use of economic sanctions to further its political objectives.

### 2.1 Thinking about sanctions

Sanctions can take many different forms. This includes individual/entity-targeted sanctions in the form of travel bans or asset freezes, political or

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diplomatic sanctions, arms embargoes, commodity sanctions (e.g. diamonds or timber), transportation sanctions, and sanctions on economic sectors (e.g. oil or financial sectors).<sup>1</sup> This book is primarily concerned about sanctions with an economic impact and not the employment of political or diplomatic punishments. This is because the employment—or threat—of political sanctions is extremely varied, ranging from the issuance of official protests to the suspension of bilateral interactions such as high-level visits and official dialogues. It would be methodologically challenging to deal with such diplomatic moves alongside economic ones, and doing so detracts from the central question of this book.

In the narrower realm of economic sanctions, David Baldwin draws a distinction between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ sanctions.<sup>2</sup> Positive sanctions refer to those that involve actual or promised rewards, such as lowered tariffs on trade, provision of aid, and investment guarantees. Negative sanctions, by contrast, consist of actual or threatened punishments, such as the imposition of trade and financial restrictions. The focus here is on negative sanctions—i.e. actual or threatened economic punishments by one or more states against another actor (or actors) intended to further specific political objectives—which, for the sake of convenience, will simply be referred to as ‘sanctions’ here. This book does not consider punishments or retaliation (even economic ones) imposed by one or more actor(s) over trade disputes. For example, China has regularly utilised economic retaliation against countries it perceives as engaging in unfair trade practices. As a European Commission report points out:

In 2012 China initiated a combined anti-dumping and anti-subsidy investigation against imports of polysilicon from the European Union (EU) after the EU had initiated an investigation against imports of Chinese solar panels. There were rumours that in reaction to the EU’s investigation concerning solar panels, China would also initiate a case against imports of EU wine. These rumours materialised when in 2013 China indeed initiated an anti-dumping and anti-subsidy investigation against imports of EU wine.<sup>3</sup>

However, sanctions scholars have generally agreed that the definition of economic sanctions should not be broadened to include measures employed

1 Biersteker, Tourinho, and Eckert 2016, pp. 26-27.

2 Baldwin 1971, pp. 19-38.

3 European Commission 2014.

over trade disputes such as the aforementioned example or trade wars that seek to influence international economic policies.<sup>4</sup> This book will abide by the narrower definition of economic sanctions (i.e. limited to those employed to further political objectives only) to eliminate any potential contention that the use of economic punishments for political purposes may well differ from those intended to further economic objectives.

There are also several reasons for dealing separately with positive and negative sanctions as well as for the focus here on negative sanctions. First, as Baldwin suggests, both the sender [i.e. the state that employs or threatens to employ sanctions] and the target [i.e. the state that has been threatened with or been the target of sanctions] react differently towards positive sanctions as compared to negative ones,<sup>5</sup> and it would be unwieldy to deal with both. Second, in stark contrast to the focus on negative sanctions observed in the broader sanctions literature,<sup>6</sup> studies of China's economic statecraft have primarily examined its aid programmes, i.e. China's use of economic inducements and its relationship to Cold War politics and third-world revolutions.<sup>7</sup> More recent works in this regard have focused on the intentions and efficacy of China's economic policies in developing regions such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, less attention has been paid—either in the English or Chinese academic literature—to China's use of negative sanctions.

Why do states employ sanctions? Dividing sanctions into three broad categories—coercive sanctions, constraining sanctions, and signalling sanctions—Francesco Giumelli suggested that states have 'multiple and differing purposes' when imposing sanctions.<sup>9</sup> The next three sections discuss a few main themes within the existing sanctions literature that relate to each of these categories, consider potential criticisms of such a typology, and suggest a number of ways to further differentiate these sanctions categories. This is to help provide greater clarity regarding the

4 See e.g. Pape 1997, pp. 93-94; Galtung 1967, pp. 378-416; and Hufbauer, Schott, Elliott, and Oegg 2008, p. 4.

5 Baldwin 1971, 20.

6 Scholars have observed that there are significantly more works on economic sanctions than inducement in the literature on economic statecraft. See e.g. Blanchard, Mansfield, and Ripsman 1999/2000, pp. 3-4.

7 See e.g. Bartke 1975; Copper 1976; and Zhang 1991.

8 See e.g. Brautigam 2009; Rotberg 2008; Woods 2008, pp. 1205-1221; and Brautigam 2011, pp. 752-764.

9 Giumelli 2016, p. 39.

concepts and terminology associated with sanctions that will be employed at various points in this book.

### 2.1.1 Coercive sanctions

Debates surrounding the use and efficacy of sanctions as a coercive tool to change the behaviour of target states have been central to the literature on sanctions for several decades. Writing from the late 1960s to the 1980s, scholars have arrived at the conclusion that economic tools do not tend to be very effective in coercing target states into changing their behaviour or in achieving ambitious foreign policy goals.<sup>10</sup> A key component of coercive sanctions is the ‘pain-gain formula’, i.e. the expectation that the higher the economic costs for the targets, the more likely it is for them to give in to the senders’ political demands.<sup>11</sup> It is because of such an expectation that a primary sender state would ideally want to maximise pressure by having its allies impose similar sanctions on its target. This expectation has also driven academic research as well as debates among practitioners on how to improve sanctions implementation.<sup>12</sup> In this context, China could be motivated to employ sanctions against a potential target when the latter is pursuing a line of action perceived as contrary to China’s political interests, as well as when China expects to successfully prompt a behavioural change in its target—either because it has significant influence over the target’s economy or because it has the ability to garner the support of other states to impose sanctions on the target collectively.

David Baldwin has objected to this focus on the coercive aspect of sanctions. Instead, he suggests that sanctions are ‘part of a larger set of policy instruments available to foreign policymakers, presumably including diplomacy, propaganda, and military statecraft’ that are available for the pursuit of a wide range of goals, not limited to modifying a target’s political behaviour.<sup>13</sup> Baldwin specifically states that ‘economic sanctions may have diplomatic, psychological, political, military, or other effects even when their economic effect is nil’.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, more than three decades after Baldwin first made this suggestion, sanctions scholars have continued to focus on the extent to which sanctions have been effective—or could have

10 Galtung 1975; Doxey 1972, pp. 527-551; Doxey 1980; and Porter 1978, pp. 93-110.

11 See e.g. Tostensen and Bull 2002, pp. 373-403; and Giumelli 2016, p. 8.

12 For more recent works on sanctions implementation, see Boucher and Clement 2016, pp. 119-149; and Carisch and Rickard-Martin 2016, pp. 150-171.

13 Baldwin and Pape 1998, p. 189. See also Baldwin 1985; and Baldwin 1999/2000, pp. 80-107.

14 Baldwin 1985, p. 63

been made more effective—through the lens of the traditional ‘behavioural change’ criterion.<sup>15</sup> Such a focus has resulted in the existing literature on sanctions remaining fairly narrowly conceived, particularly as it continues to neglect other important effects of sanctions imposition beyond that of behavioural change.

### 2.1.2 Constraining sanctions

Recognising that targets often cannot or will not change their behaviour—especially when sender states are making drastic demands such as regime change—some sanctions scholars have drawn a distinction between coercive sanctions and constraining ones.<sup>16</sup> Briefly, coercive sanctions seek to achieve policy concessions from targets through the employment of coercive economic measures, whereas constraining sanctions are expected to ‘deny a target access to essential resources needed to engage in a proscribed activity (e.g. financing, technical knowledge, or raw materials), and hence raising its costs or forcing a change in strategy’.<sup>17</sup> According to Giumelli, sender states impose constraining sanctions when the target is not expected to comply with coercive ones and when there is no room for negotiation: ‘[...] if coercive sanctions are successful, targets *do not* embark in unwanted behaviour despite having the capabilities to do so, while if constraining sanctions are successful, then targets *cannot* embark on unwanted behaviour because they do not have the capabilities any longer’ [emphasis added].<sup>18</sup>

Such a distinction, however, is not entirely clear. Both coercive and constraining sanctions, after all, have coercive intents. Why would sender states want to ‘deny a target access to essential resources’ if not ultimately to prompt a favourable change in the target’s behaviour? The important difference perhaps lies in the decision calculus that sender states employ. The imposition of sanctions carries economic costs for both sender and target states, albeit to different degrees. Therefore, a rational sender state using sanctions as a bargaining tool would seek to employ the least extreme measures necessary to convince its target(s) that the pursuit of a certain course of action is not worth its costs. Given Giumelli’s definition of constraining sanctions, i.e. sanctions that are employed when there is

15 See e.g. Pape 1997, pp. 90-136; Elliot 1998, pp. 50-65; Pape 1998, pp. 66-77; Baldwin and Pape 1998, pp. 189-198; and Baldwin 1999/2000, pp. 80-107.

16 Giumelli 2011, p. 9.

17 Biersteker, Tourinho, and Eckert 2016, p. 21.

18 Giumelli 2016, pp. 44-48.

no room for bargaining or negotiation,<sup>19</sup> the sender state must consider the objective sufficiently important to justify the high costs involved in unconditionally preventing the target from pursuing, or persisting in, a certain course of action. Constraining sanctions are also more likely to be used against adversaries rather than allies, as adversaries are less likely to concede to sanctions and offer policy concessions on their own accord.<sup>20</sup> This perspective, together with the greater material costs of constraining sanctions on target states than coercive ones, may well add up to a categorical difference between coercive and constraining sanctions. Nonetheless, both types share the characteristic that they are employed when sender states consider sanctions to be reasonably likely to prompt a behavioural change. For example, UNSC sanctions against the DPRK, which China has supported since 2006, could be considered a case of constraining sanctions. Especially since 2013, the UNSC's increasingly extensive sanction measures against the country appear to be targeted at denying the North Korean leadership funds and material to bolster its nuclear capability rather than at persuading the North Korean leadership to voluntarily comply with the UNSC's demands.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.1.3 Signalling sanctions

Signalling sanctions are sanctions imposed for the primary purpose of sending a message or signal either to the target state or to other third-party domestic or international audiences, even when sender states do not expect these sanctions to succeed in prompting a behavioural change in their targets. Few scholars acknowledge that signalling sanctions exist to any significant degree in the absence of a primary objective to coerce or constrain a target.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, three types of signalling sanctions can be identified from the literature. First, sanctions could be employed for domestic signalling purposes. Given that the employment of sanctions is frequently seen as the middle ground between diplomatic and military action, governments may employ sanctions when domestic pressure to 'do something' about the target state is significant, even absent the expectation that these sanctions are likely to be effective in generating concessions from the target.<sup>23</sup>

19 Ibid.

20 Drezner 1999, pp. 27-58.

21 The background and decisions on UNSC sanctions against the DPRK are further detailed in Chapter 5.

22 This observation is indicated in Biersteker, Tourinho, and Eckert 2016, p. 22.

23 See e.g. Baldwin 1999/2000, p. 102; and Giumelli 2011.

A second, less discussed aspect of signalling sanctions is the use of such measures to manipulate the ways in which policymakers from other states (i.e. apart from the target itself) perceive the sender state's capabilities and intentions.<sup>24</sup> As Baldwin, referencing Robert Jervis, points out, 'throughout history, and especially for the great powers since 1945, states have often cared about specific issues less for their intrinsic value than for the conclusions they felt others would draw from the way they dealt with them'.<sup>25</sup> The use of sanctions as a signal to non-domestic audiences is therefore a tactic for placing 'at the back of the [target or another potential target] statesman's mind [...] awareness of [the sender state's ability] to extend or withdraw economic cooperation'.<sup>26</sup> In such cases, the sender state does not need to employ sanctions in a very explicit or substantive manner. The objective is achieved as long as the target and potential targets perceive that the possibility of sanctions imposition by the sender is real.

Finally, the third signalling aspect refers primarily to sanctions that are employed in international institutions such as the UN, i.e. the use of sanctions to emphasise or reinforce international norms and/or to 'stigmatise a target or others about the violation' of such norms.<sup>27</sup> This 'communication aspect' of sanctions has been pointed out by sanctions scholars since the early 1970s.<sup>28</sup> However, sanctions of this kind continue to be routinely dismissed in the literature as merely 'serving symbolic purposes', without actually affecting foreign policy goals.<sup>29</sup> More recent works on sanctions have pointed out that the use of sanctions to reinforce international norms has frequently been impeded by differing notions within the international community regarding the legitimacy of sanctions and even the legitimacy of these norms.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, scholars have yet to further examine the reasons underlying such differences or the impact of these differing notions on countries' sanctions behaviour. Instead, conventional wisdom and the lion's share of scholarly attention have continued to focus on coercion as 'the principal purpose of sanctions imposed'.<sup>31</sup>

24 Chong and Poh 2020.

25 Robert Jervis cited in Baldwin 1985, p. 100.

26 Baldwin 1985, p. 100.

27 Biersteker, Tourinho, and Eckert 2016, p. 21; and Adler-Nissen 2014, pp. 143-176.

28 See e.g. Doxey 1972, p. 535.

29 This observation was pointed out in Baldwin 1999/2000, p. 102. See also Morgan and Schwebach 1997, p. 28.

30 Biersteker, Tourinho, and Eckert 2016, p. 23.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 22.



This book suggests that China's limited use of unilateral sanctions appears to serve primarily signalling purposes. They are employed in a narrowly targeted manner and are seemingly aimed at appeasing its domestic population and/or placing 'at the back of [the target and a third-party actor's] mind' the possibility and potential impact of Chinese sanctions.<sup>32</sup> China's approach towards UNSC sanctions also has important signalling aspects. Its supporting votes, abstentions, and vetoes serve to officially highlight which international norms China supports and which ones it disagrees with.

Several caveats need to be made. First, the categories identified above are descriptive and not necessarily mutually exclusive. Sender states often have multiple objectives in their employment of sanctions, such as wanting to change the behaviour of the target state(s) while at the same time desiring to signal to a broader audience that such behaviour is unacceptable.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, there are cases in which certain definitional categories or motivations for sanctions do not apply alongside others, such as when sanctions are used for signalling purposes only, with no real expectation of modifying target-state behaviour. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that there are economic costs associated with the imposition of sanctions. Instead of seeking to destroy its target's capabilities, as in the case of constraining sanctions, a state that chooses to employ sanctions for the mere purpose of communicating a message is likely to impose only measures sufficient for the signal to be perceived as credible by its target audience.

Table 2.1 summarises the range of target-state material impacts that can be reasonably anticipated for each of the three main types of sanctions discussed. At the lower end of the 'sanctions spectrum'—i.e. when sanctions imposed by the sender cause minimal to no material impact on targets—the objectives of coercion and constraint are less likely to be achieved. Sanctions nearer to this end of the spectrum are more likely to be primarily signalling sanctions, as any coercive intent is unlikely to be fulfilled. As we move up the sanctions spectrum—i.e. sanctions imposed by the sender causing limited to significant material impact on targets—the sanction types shift towards that of coercive and constraining ones. Similarly, there could also be a signalling element at the higher end of the sanctions spectrum. However, the primary purpose of the sender in imposing these sanctions—in which the sender also has to bear a much higher cost—is to cause a direct change in the target's behaviour and is less likely to be targeted *merely* at appeasing

32 See Chong and Poh 2020.

33 This 'multiple objectives' of sanctions was similarly noted in Biersteker, Tourinho, and Eckert 2016, pp. 11-37.

its domestic population, manipulating the ways in which policymakers from other states perceive its capabilities and intentions, or reinforcing certain norms.

**Table 2.1 Sanctions Spectrum and the Expected Material Impact of Sanctions on Target States**

		Types of Sanctions		
Sanctions Spectrum	Material Impact on Target States	Coercive	Constraining	Signalling
High	Significant (e.g. comprehensive/ near-comprehensive sanctions)	✓	✓	
↓	Limited			
Low	(e.g. sanctions limited to a specific sector)	✓		✓
	Minimal to no effect			✓

While these different categories of sanctions may overlap, they nevertheless provide a useful framework to analyse China’s sanctions behaviour. I will refer to them in the chapters to follow. Through my case studies, I also seek to show that the signalling aspect of sanctions—both in Western sanctions against China as well as in China’s sanctions against other states—is at least as important as, if not more important than, the elements of coercion and constraint.

**2.2 China and sanctions: existing explanations**

If we assume for now the accuracy of the characterisation that until the end of Xi Jinping’s first term in March 2018 China only employed economic sanctions to a limited extent, what could explain China’s restraint and reluctance towards the use of sanctions as a foreign policy tool? This section elaborates on four possible explanations derived from the existing international relations literature.

**2.2.1 Explanation 1: China was not yet powerful enough**

Within the realist research tradition, two bodies of literature—derived respectively from the theories of unipolarity and hegemonic transition—offer perspectives on why China may have limited its foreign policy options by

refraining from engaging in military or economic coercion against countries with which it found itself in dispute.<sup>34</sup> Based on structural analyses of the international system, these two research programmes share the basic assumption that states are the main actors and that systemic pressures drive their behaviour.<sup>35</sup> The main difference between them lies in their descriptions of the systemic distribution of power. The unipole in a unipolar system cannot control the policy preferences of other states. Its power is therefore limited. Hegemons, on the other hand, are expected to be able to do so. Therefore, unipolar systems are anarchical, and hegemonic ones are hierarchical.<sup>36</sup>

Scholars remain divided as to whether such theories of international politics can be applied to predict foreign policy behaviour.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, some have suggested that in a unipolar system, no other major power will undertake actions that might offend the single pole. As William Wohlforth notes:

The United States enjoys a much larger margin of superiority over the next most powerful state or, indeed, all other great powers combined than any leading state in the last two centuries. Moreover, the United States is the first leading state in modern international history with decisive preponderance in *all* the underlying components of power: economic, military, technological, and geopolitical [...] no other major power is in a position to follow any policy that depends for its success on prevailing against the United States in a war or an extended rivalry. None is likely to take any step that might invite the focused enmity of the United States.<sup>38</sup>

From this perspective, one can suggest that China had largely refrained from employing sanctions—especially against the US and its allies such as Japan and the Philippines—because after all, ‘once the sole pole takes sides, there can be little doubt about which party will prevail’.<sup>39</sup> China, however, can be expected to do so once it becomes stronger in both military and economic terms and once the international system changes from a

34 For theories of unipolarity, see e.g. Brooks and Wohlforth 2008; Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth 2009, pp. 1-27; and Monteiro 2014. For the hegemonic transition research programme, see Gilpin 1981.

35 Waltz 1979.

36 The distinction between a unipole and a hegemon is succinctly clarified in Monteiro 2011/2012, p. 13.

37 See e.g. Waltz 1996, pp. 54-57; Mearsheimer 2009, pp. 241-256; and Elman 1996, pp. 58-61.

38 Wohlforth 1999, p. 7.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

unipolar to a bipolar one. China can also be expected to employ sanctions more frequently against weaker states that are not aligned with the US.

More than two decades later, Wohlforth's arguments in this regard appear less convincing. Amidst the financial crisis and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Robert Pape notes that 'America's declining power means that the unipolar world is indeed coming to an end [and] China will soon have as much economic potential to balance the United States as did the Soviet Union during the Cold War'.<sup>40</sup> By 2014, while predicting that the world could still remain unipolar, Nuno Monteiro advised American policymakers to suitably accommodate China's security interests in its own region. A failure to do so, he warned, could 'foster a change in China's strategic thinking toward a more competitive stance vis-à-vis the United States'.<sup>41</sup> We already see this playing out in China's new international economic initiatives such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), following China's frustrations and claims that US-led international organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) have failed to take into account China's needs.<sup>42</sup> By the end of Xi Jinping's first term in March 2018, China had already become a formidable power and had exhibited an increasing willingness to challenge the US. It was therefore poised to employ sanctions in a way that would be better suited to its own political objectives rather than be overly concerned about the position and potential reactions of the US to the sanctions.

Another explanation is offered by power transition theory, which could become more relevant as China's military and economic power increases and approaches parity with that of the US. Power transition theorists suggest that great power conflicts require two components to be present: power parity between the dominant power and the rising challenger, and the challenger's dissatisfaction with the status quo.<sup>43</sup> While offering a different account, power transition theorists nevertheless arrive at similar predictions of China's foreign policy behaviour—that China is unlikely to initiate a conflict with the US until its military and economic capabilities overtake that of the US. In a related discussion, Robert Gilpin notes that states with different positions in the international system have different objectives. They do not employ military force or economic coercion at will but do so only if the expected benefits outweigh the expected costs. Such calculations

40 Pape 2009, pp. 22 and 29.

41 Monteiro 2014, p. 222.

42 Poh and Li 2016, p. 167.

43 Organski 1958.

of expected net gain are ‘profoundly influenced by objective factors in the material and international environment’.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, one can argue that while China has developed very rapidly, its military and economic capabilities during the period under examination were relatively limited when compared to the US. Furthermore, China’s smaller neighbours had yet to pose significant threats to it. It was therefore against China’s interests to overreact by pursuing coercive economic statecraft, which could have also hurt China’s economic interests and adversely affected its continued internal development. This is especially so if other countries become more reluctant to further economic ties with China should China gain a reputation of using sanctions for political benefits. However, China can be expected to undertake more coercive actions—including the use of sanctions—when it is overall more ‘profitable’ to do so. This would happen when China becomes more powerful and pays a correspondingly smaller cost in pursuing its political interests vis-à-vis other states and/or when it perceives a greater threat from the declining dominant power (i.e. the US) and its allies.

China may indeed be more tempted to wield its military and economic power as it continues to grow. There are, however, at least two points on which such an explanation can be criticised, and these points constitute an argument against the assumption that China was not yet powerful enough to impose significant sanctions against its targets. First, throughout history, states considerably weaker in economic terms than contemporary China have employed sanctions in their attempts to alter the behaviour of other states. For example, despite having a much smaller economy compared to France, Turkey announced sanctions against France in 2011, following a vote by the French National Assembly approving a bill banning anyone from denying that Ottoman Turkey committed genocide against Armenians during World War I.<sup>45</sup> A weaker India also imposed crippling sanctions against Nepal in the late 1980s. As Chapters 5, 6, and 7 will show, there is no evidence that the rapid growth in China’s political and economic power up until the end of Xi Jinping’s first term had led to fundamental changes in its sanctions behaviour. Second, sanctions are frequently seen as a middle ground between diplomatic and military/paramilitary action.<sup>46</sup> Countries resort to sanctions when they do not want to appear weak by simply engaging in diplomatic posturing while also wanting to avoid a

44 Gilpin 1981, p. 52.

45 See e.g. *Al Jazeera* 2011.

46 This point is frequently made by sanctions scholars. See e.g. Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliot 1990, p. 13.

costly military conflict. Despite strong criticism as well as other diplomatic and military efforts made by the US and its allies such as Japan, China has not shied away from escalating tensions in disputed waters in the East and South China Seas, potentially risking clashes in the air or at sea. Power transition theorists might find it challenging to address why China was not also employing more coercive forms of economic statecraft without at the same time contradicting their explanations as to why China was engaging in more assertive behaviour on the military and paramilitary fronts. Was China 'powerful enough' in the eyes of power transition theorists if it was willing to risk military conflict with the US and its allies over territorial disputes on the one hand but unwilling to employ sanctions to prompt a political resolution in its favour on the other? A further explanation is required to reconcile these apparent contradictions.

### **2.2.2 Explanation 2: The Chinese leadership was constrained by its domestic actors**

Scholars who have examined China's use of economic statecraft have made the argument that whether China chooses to employ sanctions against another party does not depend merely on the wishes of the Chinese political elite but also on other domestic actors, such as the respective bureaucratic agencies, local officials, and commercial interests.<sup>47</sup> This is especially true given that the Chinese leadership may want to refrain from insisting that its commercial actors behave in a way that maximises political (instead of economic) benefit, since the Communist Party of China's continued legitimacy depends on its ability to continue developing its economy and sustain a high growth rate.<sup>48</sup> William Norris, for example, argues that the Chinese leadership's 'ability to direct the activities' of its economic actors determines the success of its economic statecraft and that China has not always succeeded in doing so.<sup>49</sup> Elsewhere, in an examination of Chinese monetary diplomacy, Yang Jiang claims that 'the arrangements [of China's monetary diplomacy] are at best a compromise between domestic liberal and conservative actors [and] their trajectory depends on not only the position of the next-generation leadership but also to what extent such measures suit vested interests'.<sup>50</sup>

47 See e.g. Norris 2016; Reilly 2013; and Reilly 2012, p. 130.

48 For such arguments, see e.g. Perry 2008, pp. 37-50; and Laliberte and Lanteigne 2008, pp. 1-21.

49 Norris 2016, pp. 1-8.

50 Jiang 2014, p. 182.

Such interpretations align with expectations derived from neoclassical realism, which suggests that while states react to systemic pressures and opportunities, they may not always be able to mobilise their domestic resources to do so.<sup>51</sup> The state may not always emerge victorious in its competition with other domestic players. Putting forward the notion of state-centred realism, for example, Fareed Zakaria suggests that ‘the stronger the state, the greater its ability to extract national power for its ends’.<sup>52</sup>

Domestic variables are by no means inconsequential. However, it seems counter-intuitive that the Chinese state, with its control over a significant portion of firms across most of its strategic industries,<sup>53</sup> has been less able than the US or other Western democratic states to wield its economic power in pursuit of strategic objectives—particularly during periods when the Chinese leadership is perceived to be particularly strong vis-à-vis other domestic actors, such as under the Xi Jinping administration.<sup>54</sup> In fact, Chapters 6 and 7 demonstrate that it was the Chinese state’s strong control over other domestic actors that had offered the Chinese government the flexibility to employ symbolic forms of economic pressure against its targets through commercial channels while controlling the duration and scope of sanctions and at the same time avoid having to make explicit that it was employing such a tool of statecraft. Certainly, one could also make the argument that—regardless of the extent of intervention by Chinese domestic actors—China’s export-led growth model makes it difficult for Chinese policymakers to employ sanctions against other countries without incurring at least as much economic costs as its potential targets. However, given China’s economic power today, it is highly unlikely that it could not employ various forms of targeted sanctions against other states should it wishes to—particularly those that are more economically reliant on China and would incur heavier economic consequences than China in the event of targeted Chinese sanctions (e.g. Vietnam). More specifically, it seems unlikely that Chinese leaders would shy away from sacrificing some forms of economic interests should there be significant political gains, especially if the economic impact on China vis-à-vis its potential target(s) is highly asymmetric.

51 For a more detailed account of the neoclassical realist research programme, see Rose 1998, pp. 144-172.

52 Zakaria 1998, p. 38.

53 Norris 2016, p. 23.

54 Xi Jinping is widely perceived to have brought back ‘strongman politics’ since the Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong eras. See e.g. Lampton 2014; and Ross and Bekkevold eds. 2016.

### 2.2.3 Explanation 3: China's participation in the WTO shaped its sanctions behaviour

A third possible explanation suggests that China's participation in international institutions such as the WTO has had independent effects on China's foreign policy behaviour, including the ways in which it manipulates its economic power for political objectives. Such an expectation can be derived from rational institutionalism, which starts from the premise that states behave instrumentally and enter international organisations when the expected benefits of membership and cooperation outweigh expected costs.<sup>55</sup> Given that the international system is characterised by growing interdependence, states are not obsessed with maximising relative power and security but seek to achieve absolute gains. They therefore join international organisations when doing so allows them to pursue their own interests more efficiently, regardless of whether other states also gain in the process.<sup>56</sup> States may also enter commitments and compromise a certain degree of freedom of action in order to secure better cooperation for mutual benefit or to acquire more predictability and influence over the behaviour of other states.<sup>57</sup> Noting that international agreements are not typically centrally enforced, some scholars have suggested that the central mechanism prompting states to honour their commitments is that of reputational concerns.<sup>58</sup> Because international organisations have certain expectations in order to reduce members' uncertainty about each other's behaviour, the principle of reciprocity among member states is taken very seriously, and the long-term reputational costs for a member state to break agreements or renege on commitments significantly outweigh short-term gains.<sup>59</sup>

In this regard, China's sanctions behaviour could have been constrained by its participation in the WTO. China's entry into the WTO in 2001 brought a slew of economic benefits for China, including greater assurance of market access for its exports.<sup>60</sup> However, China had to commit to market liberalisation and accept a stringent set of terms and obligations as part of its accession

55 See e.g. Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001, pp. 761-799; and Martin and Simmons 1998, pp. 729-757.

56 Keohane and Nye 2011; and Keohane 1984.

57 Keohane 1993, pp. 91-107; and Simmons 1998, pp. 75-93.

58 Simmons 1998, pp. 75-93; Downs and Jones 2002, pp. S95-S114; Guzman 2002, pp. 1923-1997; and Stein 2005, pp. 611-622.

59 Keohane 1984, p. 52.

60 For details on China's accession into the WTO, see Yang and Jin 2001, pp. 297-328; and Messerlin 2004, pp. 105-130.



protocol. As China is also party to the WTO dispute settlement mechanisms, it cannot be perceived as manipulating its economic power at will to further its political interests, as this blatantly flouts WTO regulations and can be detrimental to China's long-term reputation.

Sociological approaches to institutionalism, on the other hand, suggest that the normative characteristics of international institutions shape the behaviour of member states. International organisations comprise 'interrelated rules and routines that define appropriate actions in terms of relations between roles and situations'.<sup>61</sup> There are, indeed, collective notions of what constitutes legitimate behaviour, and members of such organisations internalise these normative values, accept them as part of their identities and interests, and, as a result, act in accordance with 'the logic of appropriateness'.<sup>62</sup> In this regard, Alastair I. Johnston argues that China's involvement in international security institutions has resulted in it displaying more cooperative and self-constraining behaviour.<sup>63</sup> Johnston suggests that the events culminating in China's WTO accession was 'likely a story, initially, of a political leadership choosing to shore up its legitimacy through rapid economic development, [which] was then followed by a process of path-dependent commitments to marketisation reinforced by the socialisation of economic policy specialists in the ideology of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and now the WTO'.<sup>64</sup> Margaret Pearson also argues that Chinese officials who had interacted most frequently with officials from international economic institutions such as the World Bank and IMF were the most committed to transparency and accountability.<sup>65</sup> Contrary to rationalist approaches to the study of international institutions, proponents of sociological institutionalism expect China to refrain from employing sanctions at will not simply because of reputational considerations but because it has been socialised to the economic ideology of neoliberalism, which underpins the international economic institutions.

The hypothesis that China's sanctions behaviour has been shaped by its participation in the WTO, as derived from either rationalist or sociological institutionalism, is unsatisfactory on two counts. First, as alluded to above, while China had up until March 2018 largely refrained from employing

61 March and Olsen 1989, p. 160.

62 Checkel 2005, pp. 801-826. See also the discussion offered by Schimmelfennig 2003, pp. 68-73.

63 Johnston 2008.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 209.

65 Pearson 1999a, pp. 207-234; and Pearson 1999b, pp. 212-241.

sanctions over political disputes, it had retaliated or made direct threats to retaliate in cases involving trade disputes, such as those with Europe over anti-dumping measures.<sup>66</sup> In May 2016, China's Ambassador to the EU, Yang Yanyi, declared that China would retaliate should China not be granted Market Economy Status (MES), including by reconsidering ongoing modes of economic cooperation with various European countries.<sup>67</sup> This hypothesis cannot explain why China appeared open to employing sanctions in economic disputes but much less so in political ones, even though both responses would contradict WTO's norms and regulations. China had also violated other WTO rules, such as its non-compliance with the WTO's intellectual property rights requirements.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, as Chapter 7 shows, there is also room for countries to employ economic sanctions without having to violate WTO regulations. For example, countries can use the various exception clauses in WTO agreements to justify their restriction measures.

Second, the institutionalism perspectives also fail to account for the variance in China's support for proposed UN sanctions regimes. In an earlier study of China's behaviour in the United Nations (UN), Samuel Kim argues that China has over the years abandoned its system-transforming approach in favour of reforming and maintaining the existing UN system.<sup>69</sup> However, as Chapter 5 further details, China has increasingly wielded its veto at the UN Security Council (UNSC) with respect to issues on which it disagrees with other states. An example is China's repeated vetoes over proposed sanctions against the Syrian regime. Constraints imposed by international institutions such as the UN and WTO, either for instrumental or normative reasons, therefore provide at best only a partial answer to the puzzle under consideration.

#### **2.2.4 Explanation 4: History and culture shaped China's sanctions behaviour**

Finally, some would argue that China's political elite has inherited certain unique 'non-realist predispositions' and that this inheritance provides a plausible explanation as to why China may have favoured the use of

66 Interview with Joerg Wuttke, President of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China. Personal interview, Beijing, 19 March 2016.

67 Interview with staff from the European Commission Directorate-General for Trade. Personal interviews, Brussels, 25 May 2016.

68 See e.g. United States International Trade Commission 2010 and 2011.

69 Kim 1999, p. 45.

inducement over sanctions (both military and economic). As Alastair I. Johnston observes:

In contrast to international-security studies, within the China field there seems to be little controversy about the proposition that ‘deep’ history and culture are critical sources of strategic behaviour. Indeed, most students of Chinese strategic thought and practice could be placed safely in a strategic-culture school of analysis, though few use the term explicitly [...] most would argue that Chinese strategic culture uniquely stresses nonviolent political or diplomatic means to deal with adversaries, or—when force is absolutely necessary—the controlled, defensive use of violence. This has given Chinese strategic behaviour a distinctive minimally violent character.<sup>70</sup>

Referring to China’s relations with other countries since ancient times, for example, scholars such as Tingyang Zhao and David Kang argue that China maintains a notion of an ideal moral world order—one that is deeply embedded within the Confucian worldview—that favours cultural superiority.<sup>71</sup> Emphasising the importance of culture in foreign policy making, the influential Chinese scholar Yaqing Qin wrote the following in an editorial published by the Chinese Foreign Ministry-affiliated think tank, China Institute of International Studies:

Chinese believe that harmony is the state of nature. Chinese also believe that A and B coexist in a process in which they change toward each other. In the traditional Chinese thinking, nothing is essentially conflictual. This does not mean that there are no conflicts, contradictions, or struggles. Rather, it means that these contradictions, conflicts, and struggles can be coordinated and managed with human efforts. Failure in coordination and management is largely due to inadequacy of capacity and capabilities of human agency. John Fairbank believes that China’s most successful foreign policy has been non-violent: the use of diplomatic manoeuvring and other non-coercive means is often preferred over coercion. China’s diplomacy over the last 30 years has shown an important feature of sticking to the ‘no-enemy assumption’ and navigating along the ‘middle course’, even in the face of crises.<sup>72</sup>

70 Johnston 1995 p. 22.

71 See e.g. Zhao 2006, pp. 29-41; Kang 2007 and 2010.

72 Qin 2012.

From this perspective, as a great power superior in moral terms, China prefers the use of peaceful means—which include offering material wealth and status to those willing to participate on China's terms—over coercive military or economic measures.<sup>73</sup>

Whether or not made explicit by the authors, these arguments are essentially derived from the vast constructivist literature on the effects of strategic culture on foreign policy behaviour. While sociological institutionalism posits that normative values embedded within international institutions have independent effects on the behaviour of member states, this strategic culture perspective concerns ideas, identities, and culture at the national level. According to such a view, China's foreign policy behaviour is shaped not by its participation in international institutions but by its 'early or formative experiences [and] by the philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites'.<sup>74</sup>

However, there is no consensus on what constitutes 'Chinese strategic culture'. Some scholars suggest that China has historically displayed a preference for 'minimal violence'.<sup>75</sup> Others, however, argue that China has consistently exhibited a 'hard realpolitik or parabellum strategic culture' that predisposes Chinese elites to the offensive use of force.<sup>76</sup> Neither perspective adequately resolves the puzzle under consideration. Should the 'minimal violence' perspective hold true, it remains puzzling why China had on the one hand refrained from employing sanctions while at the same time being increasingly assertive on the paramilitary and military fronts, particularly over maritime disputes in the South China Sea. Conversely, if Chinese political elites do not shy away from the offensive use of force, military or otherwise—as the second group of scholars suggest—then the question of why China had refrained from using coercive tools of economic statecraft remains unaddressed.

Furthermore, given that recorded Chinese history spans more than five thousand years comprising many different dynasties as well as intellectual and cultural traditions, it is unclear whether and how one might systematically trace a coherent 'Chinese strategic culture'. As Mary McCauley notes, even if there were to be an 'existence of two

73 For other debates surrounding the role of Chinese history and historical thought on its foreign policy behaviour, see e.g. Gills 1993, pp. 186-212; Zhang 2015; Zhang and Buzan 2012, pp. 3-36; and Bell 2007.

74 Johnston 1995, p. 34.

75 See the literature review by Johnston 1995, p. 26.

76 Johnston 1995. See also, Johnston 1996, pp. 216-268.

similar sets of beliefs at different points of time, [one cannot take for granted that] they enjoy an unbroken existence; the “same” beliefs can sprout from different roots, at different periods’.<sup>77</sup> If we were to apply the ‘principle of charity’ and assume the possibility of tracing a ‘Chinese strategic culture’ coherently across time,<sup>78</sup> it would still be immensely challenging to establish that such thought has continued to influence policymakers in post-1949 China, particularly given the massive changes in the international system as well as in the Chinese state that took place in this period.

### 2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has defined the key terms for this study and reviewed four possible explanations to account for China’s relative restraint and reluctance in its employment of sanctions up until March 2018, particularly given the widespread perception of China as an assertive rising power. It suggests that none of these explanations have provided an entirely satisfactory answer. The next chapter therefore introduces an alternative answer to the puzzle under consideration, namely that China’s sanctions rhetoric—rather than structural, domestic, or cultural factors—constrained its sanctions behaviour. The mechanism connecting China’s sanctions rhetoric with its behaviour is international audience costs. Regardless of whether they are democracies or autocracies, states—especially status-conscious ones—are constrained by the standards of legitimacy to which they have publicly committed. This is because they do not want to be perceived by other members of the international community as lacking credibility, which could tarnish their reputation and compromise their ability to pursue their foreign policy strategies effectively. China’s hands are tied because the ways in which it approaches unilateral and multilateral sanctions cannot appear to be in blatant contradiction to its public rhetoric. The overall cost-benefit calculus for China has therefore been altered, i.e. the material benefits to be gained from deviating from its earlier stated standards of legitimacy must significantly outweigh the costs to the credibility of China’s positions and, in turn, its reputation and international status.

77 McCauley quoted in Johnston 1995, p. 40.

78 For a more detailed explanation of the ‘principle of charity’, see Davidson 2001, p. xix.

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### 3. When Does Talk Become Costly?

#### International Audience Costs and China's Sanctions Behaviour

##### Abstract

Chapter 3 provides the theoretical framework for the central argument of this book—that China's sanctions rhetoric has had a palpable impact on its behaviour. It shows how the fear of incurring 'international audience costs' drives certain aspects of states' foreign policy behaviour. It discusses the conditions that need to be in place for the international audience cost theory to work—i.e. the offending state needs to care about international opinion, and a rhetorical actor must be present to draw attention to the differences between an offending state's rhetoric and behaviour. It then applies this theoretical framework to China and examines why and how international audience costs is a crucial mechanism that provides the link between China's sanctions rhetoric and its behaviour.

**Keywords:** International audience costs, rhetoric, shaming, flattery

Is China's sanctions rhetoric mere talk, or does it have a palpable impact on China's sanctions behaviour? This question ties back to the broader debate among international relations scholars on the effects of rhetoric on foreign policy behaviour. For many scholars in the realist and rationalist traditions, the rhetoric of states merely serves to disguise or justify decisions reached on the basis of material factors.<sup>1</sup> In this view, rhetoric, while potentially a useful tool of political justification, ultimately does not independently affect behaviour. As Ronald Krebs and Patrick Jackson note, 'the dominant materialist tradition treats rhetoric as epiphenomenal'.<sup>2</sup> This chapter therefore

1 See e.g. Morgenthau 1948, p. 61-62; and Morgenthau 1951, p. 35.

2 Krebs and Jackson 2007, p. 36.

speaks to a broader theoretical question: When is talk 'epiphenomenal' in international politics, when does it become costly, and why?

Leaders convey messages and commitments in public for many reasons. They might be trying to deter a potential adversary, appease an ally, or fend off international criticisms by indicating support for certain principles or values. This book posits that talk has independent effects on behaviour when a mechanism is triggered—*international audience costs*. Scholars such as Anne Sartori, James Fearon, and Kenneth Schultz have discussed the notion of international audience costs.<sup>3</sup> However, this is an underdeveloped concept in the international relations literature. In particular, it remains unclear when and how international audience costs can be triggered. The term 'international audience costs' is closely related to 'international reputation'.<sup>4</sup> International reputation is fundamentally about the beliefs that states form concerning the intentions of other states based on these other states' past experiences and behaviours.<sup>5</sup> The notion of international audience costs is more directly related to how states become less likely to undertake certain actions, such as going back on their word, when they perceive a real threat that doing so could tarnish their credibility among international audiences and in turn compromise their ability to practice diplomacy effectively in the future. This chapter further contends that status-conscious countries are particularly susceptible to the international audience cost mechanism. This is because frequent losses to credibility could prompt other states to question a country's behaviour and moral code and potentially lead to a reduction of international status. This is akin to the literature on domestic audience costs, which suggests that governments—particularly those of democracies—become less likely to back down from their previously committed positions during times of crises for fear that their domestic audiences would vote them out of office.

Two conditions should be met for the international audience cost mechanism to effectively prompt an offender (i.e. a state that has deviated from its earlier commitments, such as its threats and promises) to more closely align its deeds with its words: the offender—irrespective of regime type—must be concerned about international opinion; and at least one rhetorical actor draws international attention—via rhetorical strategies such as shaming and flattery—to the difference between an offender's rhetoric and behaviour.

3 See e.g. Sartori 2005; Fearon 1994, p. 581; and Schultz 1999, p. 372.

4 For some key works, see, e.g. Jervis 1976; Leng 1983, pp. 379-419; Levy 1994, pp. 279-312; Crescenzi 2007, pp. 382-396; Mercer 1996; and Tingley and Walter 2011, pp. 343-365.

5 Crescenzi 2007, p. 384.

This chapter unfolds in two sections. First, it reviews the literature on audience costs and provides a definition of international audience costs. It discusses how the fear of incurring international audience costs drives certain aspects of states' behaviour and elaborates on the conditions needed for the international audience costs theory to work. Second, it applies this theoretical framework on the case of China and discusses why and how the international audience cost mechanism provides the link between China's sanctions rhetoric and behaviour. In this context, a hypothesis is developed to account for China's seemingly puzzling sanctions behaviour, which is tested against the evidence presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

### 3.1 International audience costs

#### 3.1.1 On audience costs

The idea of 'costly signalling' was introduced in international relations literature by Robert Jervis. Arguing that 'words also can be costly',<sup>6</sup> Jervis puts forward the following suggestion:

A related mechanism [of domestic restraints] can be brought into play by decision-maker's signals that lead the public to believe a certain settlement will probably be attained. If these expectations are not met the public may turn the leaders out of office. If both the decision-makers and the other side know this the former are more apt to live up to their signals and the latter more apt to believe them.<sup>7</sup>

Jervis, however, proceeds to suggest that the technique of sending credible signals to external parties through raising the expectations of the domestic public has its limitations due to three factors: foreign observers may not always understand the signal being sent; domestic audiences may not realise that they have been deceived; and the loss of credibility is frequently associated with outcomes rather than processes (i.e. credibility tends to be lost when there is a negative outcome, and domestic audiences may not overly react to being deceived if the final outcome is—from their perspective—a favourable one).<sup>8</sup>

6 Jervis 1970, p. 19.

7 Ibid., p. 76.

8 Ibid. See also the summary provided in Mercer 2013, pp. 65-66.

Initially, Jervis's argument did not garner significant attention in the field of international relations. As Jonathan Mercer notes, 'Jervis's rational approach to signalling appealed to economists [...] [but] did not catch on in political science'.<sup>9</sup> More than two decades after Jervis first introduced this concept, James Fearon developed and popularised the argument of 'audience costs'.<sup>10</sup> Rooted in rational choice theory, Fearon argues that despite incentives to bluff or misrepresent intentions during a crisis situation, leaders can increase the credibility of their signals by 'taking actions such as troop mobilisations and public threats that focus the attention of relevant political audiences'.<sup>11</sup> When they do so, they become less likely to back down from their threats or commitments for fear of 'unfavourable domestic political consequences', i.e. domestic audiences voting them out of office.<sup>12</sup> Recognising this threat to domestic political legitimacy, external parties can then be assured that the declared intentions are genuine. Fearon further puts forward the possibility that this audience cost mechanism applied particularly to democracies, as 'democratic leaders can more credibly jeopardise their tenure before domestic audiences than authoritarian leaders'.<sup>13</sup> While Fearon caveats this latter point (that the audience cost theory is democracy-centric) as merely a 'possible working hypothesis',<sup>14</sup> Marc Trachtenberg notes that 'the basic idea that the audience costs mechanism gives democracies a certain bargaining advantage, especially in crisis situations, is taken quite seriously in the international relations literature'.<sup>15</sup>

Fearon's argument can be distilled into two different lines of reasoning: one relating to *outcomes* and the other to *intentions*. In terms of outcomes, Fearon posits that leaders suffer audience costs when they make public threats or commitments in a crisis and then back down from these declarations when the situation escalates. He argues that leaders are concerned about both international (i.e. foreign governments) and domestic audiences but that 'domestic audience costs may be primary' in their cost calculus, since governments are 'far more likely to be deposed or to lose authority due to internal political developments than due to foreign conquest'.<sup>16</sup> With respect to intentions, Fearon argues that there is an incentive for leaders

9 Mercer 2013, p. 64.

10 Fearon 1994, pp. 577-638.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 586.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 566.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 586.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 582.

15 Trachtenberg 2012, p. 4.

16 Fearon 1994, p. 581.

(actor A) to *intentionally* tie their hands by going public with threats and demands during a crisis situation. This is because such a move reassures an adversary (actor B) that the signals or messages that it (actor A) sends are credible because actor B must be aware—regardless of whether actor A explicitly says so—that the political stakes have been raised for actor A due to domestic audience costs.<sup>17</sup>

Scholars have extensively debated the empirical validity of audience costs.<sup>18</sup> Objections raised by sceptics can be summarised in four points. First, leaders simply do not behave in the ways expected by the audience cost mechanism. Generally, they do not intentionally tie their hands simply because they think their adversaries would understand that domestic audience costs prevent them from going against their word. As Mercer argues, ‘audience cost arguments seem not to exist in practice because rational people do not think the way rational choice theorists think they should think’.<sup>19</sup>

It should not be controversial to suggest that leaders would indeed be reluctant to proactively ‘burn bridges’ and intentionally constrain their foreign policy options. Nonetheless, leaders do not have to *intentionally* tie their hands for the audience cost mechanism to work. Leaders make threats, promises, or commitments publicly for many different reasons. Regardless of their intentions behind making public threats or commitments, they run the risk of incurring domestic and/or international audience costs if they back down or deviate from these positions, compromising their ability to carry out effective policies in the future.

Second, scholars have drawn attention to the fact that leaders commonly couch public statements in vague terms, perhaps with the intention of retaining a broader scope for subsequent action, free from explicit contradiction. Marc Trachtenberg, for example, cites the case of British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli’s Guildhall Address of November 1876. He argues that Disraeli’s statement is reducible to the essentially meaningless claim that Britain’s resources were ‘inexhaustible’ and the assertion that it would not ‘terminate [its war efforts] till right [was] done’. Therefore, the speech gave no indication of what Britain would actually do. There was no way for audiences to determine whether Disraeli had subsequently backed down from his commitments.<sup>20</sup> Numerous such examples can be cited, and it

17 Ibid., p. 577-638.

18 See e.g. Fearon 1997, pp. 68-90; Smith 1998, pp. 623-638; Schultz 2001, pp. 32-60; Tomz 2007, pp. 821-840; Snyder and Borghard 2011, pp. 437-456; Downes and Sechser 2012, pp. 457-489; and Trachtenberg 2012, pp. 3-42.

19 Mercer 2012, p. 402.

20 Trachtenberg 2012, p. 12.



is reasonable to believe that political leaders often avoid tying their own hands by using vague rhetoric. Nevertheless, as Krebs and Jackson argue, 'public language [...] is never infinitely flexible'.<sup>21</sup> Leaders may not be able to talk their way out of every situation, and they can either incur audience costs when they are perceived as attempting to back down from their earlier commitments or be accused of being hypocritical for saying something contrary to their previously expressed beliefs. Furthermore, even if talking in vague terms can sometimes be effective in stirring nationalistic sentiment among domestic audiences, it is less likely to be effective in achieving foreign policy objectives. Seasoned political actors among international audiences are unlikely to be placated or convinced by 'vague tough talk', which may even backfire by provoking an undesired response.

Consider US President Barack Obama's comments on Syria's use of chemical weapons at a news conference in August 2012. Obama famously proclaimed a 'red line' against the Assad administration's use of a 'whole bunch of chemical weapons' and stated that this would 'change [his] calculus' on ordering military engagement.<sup>22</sup> The Assad administration did not appear to be intimidated by Obama's remarks. A year later, in August 2013, chemical weapons attacks were allegedly launched by the Syrian government against more than 1,400 civilians near Damascus.<sup>23</sup> In an interview with Obama several years later, Jeffrey Goldberg describes the situation after Obama decided not to follow through with his threat against Syria:

When the two men [i.e. Obama and his Chief of Staff, Denis McDonough] came back to the Oval Office, the president told his national-security aides that he planned to stand down [the planned strike against Syria]. There would be no attack the next day; he wanted to refer the matter to Congress for a vote. Aides in the room were shocked. Susan Rice, now Obama's national-security adviser, argued that the damage to America's credibility would be serious and lasting. Others had difficulty fathoming how the president could reverse himself the day before a planned strike [...] Obama knew his decision not to bomb Syria would likely upset America's allies. It did. [...] Obama's decision caused tremors across Washington as well. John McCain and Lindsey Graham, the two leading Republican hawks in the Senate, had met with Obama in the White House earlier in

21 Krebs and Jackson 2007, p. 48.

22 Obama 2012.

23 The White House 2013; UN General Assembly Security Council 2013; and Human Rights Watch 2013.

the week and had been promised an attack. They were angered by the about-face. Damage was done even inside the administration. Neither Chuck Hagel, then the Secretary of Defense, nor John Kerry was in the Oval Office when the president informed his team of his thinking. Kerry would not learn about the change until later that evening. 'I just got fucked over', he told a friend shortly after talking to the president that night.<sup>24</sup>

In this case, Obama's ultimatum was an attempt to send a signal to both domestic audiences (in the US) and international audiences (in Syria as well as Syria's supporters like Russia and Iran). In a May 2013 article, the *New York Times* quoted several senior officials admitting that 'the idea was to put a chill into the Assad regime without actually trapping the president into any predetermined action' and that 'what the president said in August [about the red line] was unscripted'.<sup>25</sup> Noting that Obama was 'thinking of a chemical attack that would cause mass fatalities, not relatively small-scale episodes like those now being investigated', US officials lamented that 'the nuance got completely dropped' as Obama engaged in his impromptu tough talk.<sup>26</sup> Although it might have appeased American audiences in the short term, Obama's threat in August 2012 did not achieve its foreign policy objective of deterring the Assad regime. It was also difficult for Obama to subsequently manoeuvre his way out of the earlier 'red-line' commitment.

Third, some scholars have suggested that audience costs do not exist because domestic audiences tend to pay little attention to foreign policy and, when they do, pay more attention to final outcomes than to prior threats or commitments. Even in the unlikely event that domestic audiences are aware of their political leaders backing down from previously committed positions, they are more concerned about whether the eventual outcome is in their favour rather than whether their leaders are consistent in their positions.<sup>27</sup> Michael Tomz responded to these criticisms by designing and carrying out a series of survey experiments to prove that 'the adverse reaction to empty commitments is evident throughout the population, and especially among politically active citizens who have the greatest potential to shape government policy'.<sup>28</sup>

24 Goldberg 2016.

25 Baker, Landler, Sanger, and Barnard 2013.

26 Baker, Landler, Sanger, and Barnard 2013.

27 See e.g. Brody 1994, p. 210; Gowa 1999, p. 26; Schultz 1999, p. 237; Desch 2002, pp. 29-32; Ramsay 2004; and Trachtenberg 2012, p. 37.

28 Tomz 2007, p. 836.

Nevertheless, many remain unconvinced. Jack Snyder and Erica Borghard suggest that 'domestic audiences understandably care more about policy substance than about consistency between a leader's words and deeds' and 'where these criteria are in conflict, punishment is more likely to be doled out for an unpopular policy than for a failure to carry out a threat'.<sup>29</sup> From such a perspective, domestic audiences may well forgive empty commitments so long as the policy being carried out is popular or is perceived as optimal.

Furthermore, domestic attention to foreign policy can be low, characterised by the assumption that 'non-crises can be put off for another day'.<sup>30</sup> However, this is no longer the case when one shifts the focus away from domestic audiences to international ones (i.e. foreign governments and officials). International audiences are much more likely than domestic ones to pay close attention to the implications of what a given ally or potential adversary says or does. As Mark Crescenzi notes, 'this claim that governments observe the behaviour of their peers is easy enough to make, and it would seem ridiculous to assume otherwise'.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, scholars have challenged the notion that leaders of democracies (as compared to authoritarian regimes) can more credibly signal their intentions by publicly committing themselves to certain positions. Referring to the Cuban Missile Crisis, Jack Snyder and Erica Borghard argue that the Kennedy administration had tried to *contain* audience costs rather than using them to 'lock into an irrevocable position'.<sup>32</sup> There was also no evidence to show that the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev backed down by withdrawing missiles from Cuba because he was aware of, or sensitive to, Kennedy's audience costs.<sup>33</sup> One cannot assume that leaders of democracies would be more willing than those of non-democracies to intentionally tie their hands or that authoritarian leaders would necessarily understand how audience costs work in democratic states.

Regardless of whether the audience cost mechanism is more applicable to leaders of democracies, however, Anne Sartori argues that the distinction between democracies and autocracies (if any existed in the first place) is erased when the emphasis with respect to audience costs shifts from domestic to international audiences. Both regime types are affected by international audience costs.<sup>34</sup> A state can be penalised by international audiences for 'bluffing'

29 Snyder and Borghard 2011, p. 455.

30 Knecht 2010, p. 45. See also Brody 1994, p. 210-227.

31 Crescenzi 2007, p. 382.

32 Snyder and Borghard 2011, p. 454.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 454-455.

34 Sartori 2005, p. 50.

or making empty commitments regardless of whether it is a democracy. This penalty comes in the form of costs to the offender's international credibility, which can render future diplomatic interactions less likely to succeed. Building on Sartori, this chapter argues that rather than regime type, the efficacy of the international audience cost mechanism is more related to the degree to which the offender values its international credibility and status.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.1.2 What are 'international audience costs' and why do they matter?

International audience costs can be understood as *the penalty to credibility and international status that states incur as a result of being perceived as acting at odds with their prior rhetorical commitments*. Such a penalty might occasionally lead to a loss of strategic or economic resources, for example due to a withdrawal of foreign aid or investment from other countries. But more often, a state that is publicly called out for 'bluffing' or not being credible suffers nothing more than a loss of 'face', with face referring to 'the various [...] benefits that an individual, once committed to a given role, accrues via successful performance [and loses] when [the individual] engage[s] in visible role-inconsistent actions or words'.<sup>36</sup> Gaining face is in itself an insufficient condition for a state to acquire higher international status. Conversely, losing face does not necessarily lead to an immediate reduction of international status. However, if a state suffers frequent losses to its credibility or face, it is likely that its international status would similarly be affected. Hence, states that are concerned with their international status tend to also be concerned about gaining credibility and face.

There are both intrinsic and extrinsic consequences to having incurred international audience costs. Deborah Larson, T.V. Paul, and William Wohlforth note that states care about 'respect, esteem, or the seeming fulfilment of one's cherished beliefs'<sup>37</sup> and 'want the approval of others as an intrinsic benefit'.<sup>38</sup> States also want to be perceived by other foreign governments as being credible. This is because states that are perceived as being credible tend to be more likely to convince others of the sincerity and validity of their ideas and beliefs. The extrinsic consequence to a state

35 For example, Larson and Shevchenko argue that rising powers such as China and Russia place significant emphasis on status. See Larson and Shevchenko 2010, pp. 63-95.

36 Carson 2016, p. 110.

37 Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, p. 19.

38 Ibid., p. 17.

incurring a reputation for bluffing is that other states may no longer find its threats and promises to be believable.<sup>39</sup>

Through a game-theoretic model as well as a case study of China's failure in using diplomacy to keep US forces away from its border during the Korean War due to its 'recent, unfulfilled threats vis-à-vis Taiwan', Anne Sartori argues that states that use threats honestly (i.e. of higher credibility) are able to conduct diplomacy more effectively in the future:

Diplomacy works because it is so valuable. When they have something to hide, states sometimes are tempted to bluff, but the possibility of acquiring a reputation for bluffing often keeps a state from doing so. A state that has a reputation for bluffing is less able to communicate and less likely to attain its goals. States' leaders and diplomats often speak honestly in order to maintain their ability to use diplomacy in future disputes or negotiations. They are more likely to concede less-important issues and to have those issues that they consider more important decided in their favour.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, improving—or at least maintaining—their credibility matters to states not simply because of the intrinsic benefits of gaining face or status but because their leaders believe that it is in their long-term interests to acquire a reputation for honesty. As Sartori suggests, 'a state that bluffs jeopardises something extremely valuable: the ability to threaten and to be believed'.<sup>41</sup>

Others have questioned such a line of argument, suggesting instead that reputation—or, in this context, the reputation of being credible—does not matter in international politics. In this view, states' leaders similarly do not need to worry about international audience costs. According to Mercer, 'policymakers should not think there is a direct correspondence between their behaviour and their reputation[;] they should recognise that they can get different reputations, or no reputation at all, based on the same behaviour'.<sup>42</sup>

Credibility and reputation, however, may not always be an illusion. For example, the historian Raymond Sontag, reflecting on the events of World War II, notes:

Over and over, through the spring and summer of 1939 the British and French Governments had said they would fight if Germany attacked

39 For a more thorough elaboration on this point, see Sartori 2002, pp. 121-149.

40 Sartori 2005, pp. 124-125.

41 Sartori 2005, p. 42.

42 Mercer 1996, p. 212.

Poland. These warnings went unheeded. In justification for his refusal to heed the warnings from London and Paris, Hitler invariably came back to the same arguments: Britain and France were militarily unprepared for war, and certainly for a war to protect Poland; they had threatened before, and had drawn back at the end; the men in power in 1939 were the same men whose will had collapsed in face of firm resistance.<sup>43</sup>

Sontag's account was corroborated by Ian Kershaw in his examination of whether some other course of action could have prevented Hitler from leading Europe into war when he was still relatively weak:

By mid-April [1939], Hitler had composed a preamble to a military directive for the destruction of Poland. Despite the continuance of the non-aggression pact with Poland, this foresaw the use of military force at any time after 1 September 1939. Hitler still believed that, despite the bravado of a futile guarantee, the western leaders—'puny worms', he was later to call them—would not fight. They had not done so over Czechoslovakia. Why should they now do so for Danzig, whose population was largely German? He was confident that Poland could be isolated, and destroyed. Britain and France would stand aside and let it happen.<sup>44</sup>

In another account, Kershaw notes, 'Hitler had been contemptuous of the western powers before the taking over of Prague. He correctly judged that *once more they would protest, but do nothing*' (emphasis added).<sup>45</sup> From this perspective, the failure of Britain and France to fulfil previous threats had reduced their credibility; they had gained a reputation for bluffing. There was therefore no reason for Hitler (or any other potential adversary) to believe that Britain and France would intervene since they had not done so in the past after making similar threats.

Shifting the focus away from the following through on threats to the honouring of promises, Gregory Miller uses the examples of Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, France, and Italy to show how 'states with reputations for being reliable allies will have greater autonomy in making their alliance choices than states with unreliable reputations'.<sup>46</sup> According to Miller, the more willing states are in abiding by their promises, the more

43 Sontag 1957, p. 524.

44 Kershaw 2004, pp. 275-276.

45 Kershaw 2001, p. 173.

46 Miller 2012, p. 182.

freedom they would have ‘in choosing their alliance partners and in the design of their alliances than states perceived to be unreliable allies’.<sup>47</sup> Taken together, these examples pose some challenge to Mercer’s argument that ‘our adversaries will rarely view us as irresolute and our allies will rarely view us as resolute’.<sup>48</sup>

Mercer is similarly sceptical that prestige—or by extension gaining face—has intrinsic value. Using the case of the 1899-1902 South African War (or the Second Boer War), Mercer argued that there is ‘little strategic value’ to prestige policies. This is because ‘if observers are adversaries, they will not attribute prestige to an actor; if observers are allies, they might attribute prestige to an actor but rarely show voluntary deference’.<sup>49</sup> He further predicted that ‘the more familiar decision-makers are with the psychology and politics of prestige (and the more research and analysis they conduct on the beliefs of others), the less likely that states will pursue prestige policies’.<sup>50</sup> Mercer may indeed be right in suggesting that the pursuit of prestige or face is futile from a strategic perspective. The US, for example, may never attribute prestige to the Russians regardless of what they do and may even seek to discount Russia’s achievements. However, it does not actually matter whether there is any inherent strategic value to prestige or face, i.e. whether these factors directly affect states’ power in international politics. They play a role in influencing foreign policy decision-making so long as the leaders of states *believe* in the value of acquiring them.

How do we know that states’ leaders care about prestige or face? Social psychologists have long argued that individuals enhance their self-esteem by associating themselves with groups and seeking positive distinctiveness, i.e. they strive, as groups, to be better than others in as many respects as possible.<sup>51</sup> Drawing on the psychology literature, Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko argue that states, like individuals, seek to improve their image and enhance their status vis-à-vis other states. As Larson and Shevchenko note, ‘the propensity toward upward competition is found in the choice of reference groups in international relations, where the Chinese compare their achievements to those of Japan, the United States, and Russia; Indians look at China; and Russians judge their accomplishments relative to those of the United States’.<sup>52</sup>

47 Ibid., p. 4.

48 Mercer 1996, p. 212.

49 Mercer 2017, p. 143.

50 Ibid., p. 168.

51 Tajfel and Turner, pp. 33-48.

52 Larson and Shevchenko 2010, p. 68.

Russian leaders are unlikely to stop pursuing their prestige policies or comparing their achievements with the US, regardless of whether US leaders attribute prestige to Russia. To further illustrate, states' leaders are unlikely to believe that the hosting of the Olympic Games would, in and of itself, directly influence the state's power in the international system. However, this has not stopped countries from competing to be chosen to host the Olympics and from expending significant amounts of resources to ensure success.

### **3.1.3 Condition 1: The offender needs to be concerned about international opinion**

The international audience cost mechanism may not always play an effective role. States' leaders care about the opinions and perceptions of international audiences (i.e. foreign governments and officials) to varying degrees. The international audience cost mechanism may be irrelevant if the offender does not care about how it is being perceived by other states. But even if it may not be the concern of every state to acquire higher international status, it is unlikely that a state does not care about how others perceive its credibility. This is because states want their diplomacy and deterrence efforts to remain effective in the future. In addition, it is also rare for states to completely disregard international opinion. Even rogue states frequently engage in diplomatic efforts to justify their actions to others. For example, at the 24<sup>th</sup> Regional Forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) held in Manila in August 2017, the Foreign Minister of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ri Yong Ho, condemned the sanctions newly imposed by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and provided justifications for the DPRK's right to own nuclear weapons. He stated that the DPRK's 'possession of nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles is a legitimate option for self-defence in the face of a clear and real nuclear threat posed by the US'.<sup>53</sup> In 2019, after firing projectiles from the area around the northeastern city of Hamhung, the DPRK Foreign Ministry's Director-General for American Affairs, Kwon Jong Gun, said that 'even the US president made a remark which in effect recognises the self-defensive rights of a sovereign state, saying that it is a small missile test which a lot of countries do'.<sup>54</sup> In the face of international condemnation over its nuclear programme, the DPRK leadership continued to maintain that its actions were politically acceptable as it was responding to the US's threat and that

53 Berlinger and Kwon 2017.

54 Korean Central News Agency of DRPK 2019.



the DPRK remained a 'responsible state' that would not threaten other countries if they stayed out of its dispute with the US.<sup>55</sup>

Status-conscious countries are even more likely to be sensitive to international opinion and, by extension, the international audience cost mechanism. As Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth suggest, 'for states, diplomatic agility, promotion of new international norms, or moral leadership can be sources of status'.<sup>56</sup> As such, in addition to being concerned about whether their diplomacy and deterrence efforts would remain effective in the future, status-conscious countries could also be concerned about how other states perceive their moral behaviour.

Whether a state is status-conscious could be determined by examining the state's prior rhetoric and policies. A state is more likely to be status-conscious when it frequently undertakes projects of 'conspicuous consumption' (e.g. spending extravagantly on the bid for, or hosting of, international events such as the Olympics).<sup>57</sup> Rising powers are also likely to be more status-conscious. This is because—as Iver Neumann, using the example of Russia in the eighteenth century, suggests—major powers with significant military and economic capabilities cannot attain great power status if their strategic intentions and moral principles are widely viewed as inappropriate or questionable.<sup>58</sup> Rising powers not only have more resources to 'conspicuously consume', they also have more incentive to pursue higher international status should they desire to become a great power. As Larson and Shevchenko explain, rising powers tend to 'pursue enhanced international standing when relative power distributions are shifting and they can conceive of occupying a higher position'.<sup>59</sup> From this perspective, Fearon's assertion that governments are necessarily much more sensitive to the views of domestic audiences than international ones is an oversimplification. While leaders are indeed 'far more likely to be deposed or to lose authority due to internal political developments than due to foreign conquest',<sup>60</sup> there are many more reasons why states can also be concerned about how they are being perceived by international audiences. This chapter, as well as Chapter 4, will examine the rhetoric and policies made by Chinese leaders to determine the extent to which they are concerned about international opinion and the gaining of higher international status.

55 Ho 2017.

56 Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, p. 14.

57 The concept of status signalling through 'conspicuous consumption' is from Pu and Schweller 2014, pp. 146-152.

58 Neumann 2014, pp. 101-106.

59 Larson and Shevchenko 2014, p. 56.

60 Fearon 1994, p. 581.

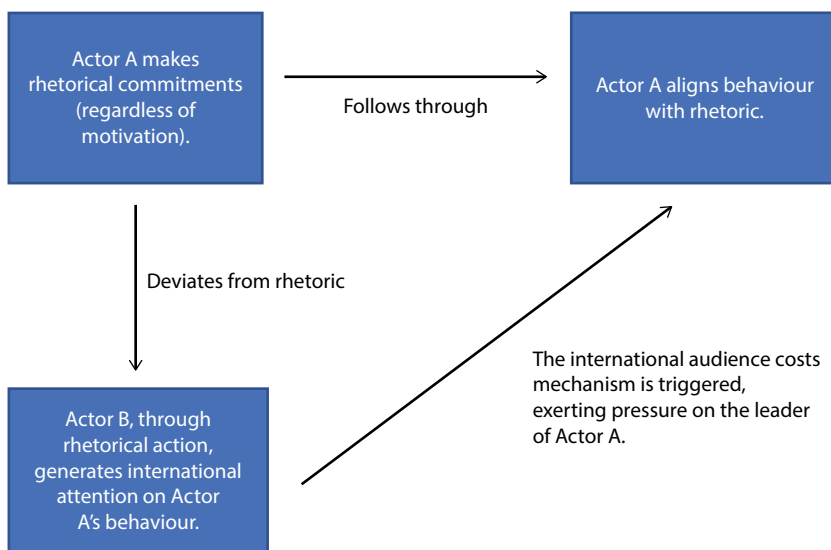
### 3.1.4 Condition 2: There must be at least one rhetorical actor present

The international audience cost mechanism shares with deterrence theory the assumption that credibility and commitments are inextricably linked and, hence, concerns about reputations and credibility inhibit states from defaulting on their commitments. Some scholars, however, have questioned this assumption. Jervis, for example, argues that ‘the world may not be as interconnected as [such a formulation] implies [and] statesmen may not draw such wide-ranging inferences from the way others behave in minor disputes’.<sup>61</sup> Applied to the present discussion, ‘international audiences’ as a factor determining the behaviour of a potential offender (Actor A) may in practice be less faithful, systematic, or infallible in tracking Actor A’s prior commitments than a rational model—such as that put forward by Fearon—would imply. We therefore cannot assume that international audience costs would be generated simply because one or more leaders have deviated from a previously committed course or value. Hence, a second condition is required for the international audience cost mechanism to be triggered: at least one rhetorical actor must be present to draw international attention to the difference between an offender’s rhetoric and behaviour (see Figure 3.1). Naturally, the higher the profile of the issue in question, the greater the likelihood that such a response will occur. Notably, rhetorical actors may not always be present because even the targets of the offending states may fear the wrath of the offenders as well as the expense of triggering the international audience cost mechanism and hence sometimes choose to self-censor. In such cases, an offender is less likely to incur international audience costs, especially if international attention on the issue is minimal.

As we see in Figure 3.1, Actor B (i.e. an external international actor) has to serve as the rhetorical actor to draw international attention to Actor A’s deviance from its earlier commitments. But what does being a rhetorical actor entail for Actor B? In what follows, I discuss the rhetorical tools of *shaming* and *flattery*, which actors can use in their efforts to coerce or induce, respectively, a retraction or course change on the part of the offenders. Assuming that Actor A is concerned about the opinions of other states, the rhetorical action of Actor B triggers the international audience cost mechanism and exerts pressure on Actor A, as the international attention that Actor B has generated on Actor A’s behaviour increases the likelihood of Actor A having to incur costs to its credibility (and potentially international status). Such a prospect then prompts Actor A to align its behaviour with

61 Jervis 1985, pp. 9–10.

**Figure 3.1 Effects of Rhetorical Action on Behaviour and the Triggering of International Audience Costs**



prior rhetorical commitments. Once again, the impact of this mechanism will vary according to the offender's sensitivity to international opinion.

*Shaming* constitutes the act of causing another party 'a feeling of humiliation or distress' by bringing to light 'wrong or foolish behaviour'.<sup>62</sup> A number of scholars have examined how public shaming can be used to compel offenders to align their preferences and behaviour with professed commitments.<sup>63</sup> For example, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink argue that shaming is effective because 'the behaviour of target actors is held up to the light of international scrutiny [and] governments value the good opinion of others'.<sup>64</sup> From this perspective, offenders can be compelled to change their behaviour if the rhetorical actor can sufficiently 'jeopardise [the offender's] credit' by pointing out the disingenuity of its current stance vis-à-vis its prior rhetorical commitments.<sup>65</sup>

Akin to the concept of coercion, the objective of shaming is to 'get the other to comply by threats of punishment'.<sup>66</sup> Here the punishment consists

62 Adapted from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1999.

63 See e.g. Schimmelfennig 2003, pp. 219-225; Hafner-Burton 2008, pp. 689-716; Keck and Sikkink 1998; and Petrova 2016, pp. 387-399.

64 Keck and Sikkink 1998, p. 23.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

66 Jervis 1979, p. 297.

of the international audience costs, i.e. the potential loss of credibility and status that the offender may incur should it persist in its actions. While offenders can try to manoeuvre their way out of the pressure created by shaming, there are 'limits to strategic manipulation'.<sup>67</sup> In particular, offenders may find it difficult to overtly manipulate their own professed commitments without further contradicting themselves, thereby risking further damage to their credibility.

Nonetheless, shaming may not always be impactful. As Frank Schimmelfennig suggests, shaming—which he categorises as a tool of social influence—tends to be effective 'inside the actor's in-group or community'.<sup>68</sup> An offender may be indifferent to the shaming attempts of rhetorical actors who do not share similar values or identities, as the offender may not desire out-group approval. There is, however, the possibility that out-group rhetorical actors may persuade members of the offender's in-group to join their cause, leading to pressure to which the offender may be more sensitive.

Shaming can, however, also backfire by prompting the offender to initiate a challenge or to escalate the situation.<sup>69</sup> For parallel insights, we can consider the input of scholars who have used prospect theory to explain circumstances under which deterrent threats provoke actions that they are meant to prevent. James Davis, for example, argues that 'deterrent threats tend to backfire [when states perceive themselves to be vulnerable] because they reinforce fears of loss, and the belief that the state is surrounded by a hostile environment'.<sup>70</sup> In this context, a reasonable extension of such a perspective would be that shaming is less likely to work when the relationship between the rhetorical actor and the offender is adversarial, as the offender is unlikely to trust the rhetorical actor to cease its shaming efforts even if the offender changes its behaviour. The offender may also simply perceive the efforts of the rhetorical actor as yet another act of hostility.

Alternatively, a rhetorical actor can attempt to induce an offender to change its course or stance by means of public *flattery*, a rhetorical tool that has yet to receive much attention in the existing international relations literature. Flattery refers to the act of 'lavishing compliments on [another actor], especially in order to further one's own interests'.<sup>71</sup> The psychology literature shows that flattery is effective interpersonally because of the

67 Schimmelfennig 2003, p. 220.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 218.

69 For a similar point on reactions to coercive actions, see Davis 2000, p. 31.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

71 *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1999, s.v. 'flatter', n.1.

target actor's self-enhancement motive.<sup>72</sup> The same logic can be applied to the international society where states care about their status, reputation, face, and self-esteem. A key difference between shaming and flattery lies in the impact on the status quo with respect to the offender's international credibility and status. A shamed offender is punished with possible damage to its credibility and the ways in which international audiences judge its behaviour, and even subsequent compliance may not fully mitigate these damages. A flattered offender, however, is rewarded with the prospect of 'gaining face' and hence earning more favourable international opinion, which could lead to an increase in international status. Of course, a flattered offender would similarly be punished with possible damage to its credibility should it persist in its original course of action (i.e. continued non-compliance).

To illustrate the dynamics of flattery, we can consider the US approach towards Iran following Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger's visit in 1972—a period in which the Nixon administration was attempting to consolidate US power in the Gulf. The historian Greg Grandin describes Kissinger's painstaking attempts at flattery:

It was Kissinger's job to pump up the shah's airs, to make the shah feel like he truly was the 'king of kings'. The only person Kissinger flattered more than Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was Richard Nixon. Reading the diplomatic record, one comes away with an impression that Kissinger must have felt an enormous weariness preparing for meetings with the shah, as he considered the precise gestures and words he would need to make it clear that his majesty mattered, that he was valued.<sup>73</sup>

Kissinger's efforts to flatter the shah was clearly a deliberate attempt to influence the shah's support for the US and its increasing political and economic interests in that region, including America's containment strategies against the Soviet Union.<sup>74</sup> Certainly, the Nixon administration offered much more to the shah than mere flattery (such as the sale of weapons), but the fact that Nixon and Kissinger felt compelled to 'give him what he wants',<sup>75</sup> including by 'treat[ing him] with the same respect Washington

72 See e.g. Chan and Sengupta 2010, pp. 122-133; and Vonk 2002, pp. 515-526.

73 Grandin 2015, p. 128.

74 Alvandi 2014, p. 174.

75 Former US CIA Director and Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger, quoted in Grandin 2015, p. 126.

showed West Germany and Great Britain<sup>76</sup> similarly reveals the importance of such a rhetorical strategy.

In the same vein, US President Donald Trump inadvertently adopted a similar flattery strategy. As *The Atlantic* puts it:

Here was the ruthless totalitarian (i.e. Kim Jong-un) whom the American president has professed to admire and trust ('we fell in love') and whose latest missile tests Trump has doggedly downplayed, despite the concerns of his allies in Asia and his own advisers [...] Trump once offered a utilitarian rationale for why he heaps flattery on North Korea's dictator, who operates gulags and assassinated his own half brother: 'Let it be whatever it is to get the job done', he said last fall, after a first meeting between both leaders ended a year of military brinkmanship over Kim's development of long-range nuclear weapons that could reach the United States. 'I have a good chemistry with him. Look at the horrible threats that were made. No more threats.'<sup>77</sup>

Unlike shaming, which may only be effective when used against in-group actors, flattery could work for both in-group and out-group actors. It may be an effective tool when the rhetorical actor is not inside the offender's in-group or community, especially when there is a lack of trust between the two parties, because the demonstration of willingness to offer rewards and provide concessions on the part of the rhetorical actor can generate some good will, potentially inducing the offender to reciprocate by adjusting its behaviour. Nonetheless, the use of flattery carries its own risks. *Domestic* audience costs might prevent rhetorical actors from publicly displaying signs of good will to an offender, particularly if it is also perceived as a potential adversary. For example, William Kaufman suggested during the Cold War that the US could consider making some concessions to the communist world, which might prompt reciprocal gestures. However, he warned that such an approach would be 'unpopular with Americans', noting that it 'immediately brings to mind Munich, Yalta, and perhaps even Geneva'.<sup>78</sup> In addition, the use of flattery may not be feasible under all circumstances. For example, while flattery can be used to induce an offender to take certain actions in order to fulfil its prior commitments, it is likely to be more difficult, or normatively inappropriate, to flatter

<sup>76</sup> Grandin 2015, p. 128.

<sup>77</sup> Friedman 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Kaufmann 1981, p. 16.

an offender that is already engaging in behaviour blatantly against its rhetorical commitments.

To summarise, a rhetorical actor who desires to draw attention to the deviation between an offender's actions and its prior commitments can choose to either shame or flatter, i.e. to coerce or induce the offender into changing its behaviour. Adjustments to offenders' positions resulting from the international audience cost mechanism, however, may not necessarily represent long-term changes in the offender's beliefs or scope of behaviour. The offender may well deviate from these prior commitments again on future occasions, whether to test the waters of changing international attention and opinion and/or because its leaders believe that the circumstances have changed in ways that impact the trade-off between self-interest and the pursuit of status.

Table 3.1 summarises the preceding discussion in terms of the ways in which rhetorical actors can generate international attention in order to trigger the international audience cost mechanism.

**Table 3.1 Rhetorical Tools and Their Impact on International Attention**

Rhetorical Tool	Objectives	Effects on the Offender's Credibility	Favourable Conditions for Use	Risks
Shaming	Coerce an offender into aligning its behaviour with professed commitments.	<i>Compliance:</i> Potential return to the status quo ante. <i>Non-compliance:</i> A decline from the status quo.	When rhetorical actor and offender belong to the same in-group and do not have very hostile relationships.	1) Could backfire and prompt the offender into initiating a challenge or escalating the situation.  2) Offender could perceive rhetorical actor as engaging in hostile acts.
Flattery	Induce an offender into aligning its behaviour with professed commitments.	<i>Compliance:</i> Validated or enhanced from the status quo. International status could also be increased. <i>Non-compliance:</i> A decline from the status quo.	Can also be used when the rhetorical actor and offender do not belong to the same in-group or share similar values.	1) Could be unpopular among domestic audiences.  2) Could be normatively inappropriate.

The following section elaborates on how the preceding discussion of international audience costs is relevant to the study of China's sanctions behaviour.

### **3.2 The effects of international audience costs on China's sanctions behaviour**

China is particularly susceptible to the international audience cost mechanism because it places significant value on gaining credibility, face, and international status. As part of its attempt to gain more international recognition and higher status vis-à-vis the US and its allies, Chinese leaders have—through their rhetoric—sought to challenge these states on the circumstances under which sanctions can legitimately be employed. As Chapter 4 will show, an example of China's sanctions rhetoric is its longstanding claim that the imposition of sanctions without the UNSC's authorisation—such as those imposed by the US and its allies against China—is 'illegal and illegitimate'. Chinese leaders are therefore reluctant to explicitly employ unilateral sanctions for fear of being perceived by other parties as acting in direct contradiction with their rhetoric and hence jeopardising their credibility. In the event that China's sanctions behaviour deviates from its rhetoric (e.g. by employing unilateral sanctions), it frequently changes its behaviour (at least to some extent) once its targets or other relevant parties call its bluff through rhetorical action.

#### **3.2.1 China's quest for recognition and higher international status**

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the Chinese political elite sought to enhance China's international status vis-à-vis the US and its allies by winning over the support of other states by means of diplomatic recognition. Thus, until the late 1960s, China provided rhetorical and financial support to anti-colonial and revolutionary movements around the world, despite considerable domestic poverty. The Chinese leadership during this period also seized upon international platforms such as the Geneva and Bandung Conferences to promote norms of international conduct that distinguished China from the West. As the Chinese historian Jian Chen argues, the Chinese political elite 'saw China's presence at the Geneva and Bandung Conferences as a valuable opportunity to boost the country's international prestige and reputation'.<sup>79</sup>

79 Chen 2008, p. 134.



And indeed, Beijing's motives for participating in the Bandung conference were made clear in a report prepared by the Chinese Foreign Ministry in December 1954:

In view of the invited countries [to the conference], although their background is very complicated, they are all colonial or semi-colonial states [...] they have, in varying ways, the common desire of developing their own economy, demanding peace and opposing colonialism. If the Asian-African Conference can play a positive role on these issues, it will be in favour of peace, but not in favour of the US imperialist war policy [...] if we can participate in the conference, play an active role and exercise our influence from inside and outside the conference, and strive to make the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence as the political basis of the Asian-African Conference, then the Asian-African Conference shall be pushed forward towards the direction of peace.<sup>80</sup>

Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai would ultimately play 'a leading role' at the Bandung Conference held in Indonesia in April 1955.<sup>81</sup> Amitav Acharya notes the apprehension felt by the Western powers towards China's participation. The US, in particular, was 'deeply anxious that the conference could dent the isolation of communist China, [...] "offer communist China an excellent propaganda opportunity" and "enhance communist prestige in the area and weaken that of the West".<sup>82</sup> While it remains debatable as to whether China's involvement in the Geneva and Bandung conferences significantly increased the PRC's stature and influence, it did limit the impact of the diplomatic isolation imposed by the US.

After a brief period of self-imposed isolation during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s, the early 1970s saw a major turning point in China's quest for international recognition.<sup>83</sup> China's entry into the United Nations (UN) in 1971 as well as US President Richard Nixon's visit to China in the following year were particularly significant events in this regard. For Beijing, this period marked the beginning of Washington's willingness to deal with China as a legitimate and important power. Having gained the recognition of the US as well as a permanent seat in the UNSC, China sought throughout the 1970s and 1980s to more fully integrate

80 PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1954.

81 Christensen 2011, p. 144.

82 United States Intelligence Report quoted in Acharya 2016, pp. 345-346.

83 Chen 2008, p. 142.

into the international system. Samuel Kim notes that China during this period began to shed its status as a challenger of the international system and turned to adopting a more cooperative approach in international institutions.<sup>84</sup> China also began to develop its economy—especially with the economic reforms that began in 1978—and normalised diplomatic relations with other states.

The rise in China's international status since the 1970s was not a linear process. International outcry over the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident provided a stark reminder to Beijing that even as China experienced significant economic growth and normalised relations with the US and its allies, it would always remain an outsider to the existing great power club unless it made significant political reforms to align itself more closely with 'Western-friendly policies'.<sup>85</sup> Such sentiments were made clear from a statement made by the State Council of the PRC in 1992, i.e. three years after the Tiananmen Square crisis:

As long as China remains a socialist country with the Communist Party in power and as long as China does not adopt the American style political system, no matter how much Chinese economy develops, how much democracy is introduced in politics, and how much human rights is improved [the US] will just look but not see and listen but not hear. As what people often said: prejudice is far worse than ignorance [...] [the US is just] using human rights [issue] to interfere in Chinese domestic politics and promote hegemonism and power politics.<sup>86</sup>

The adoption of an 'American style political system', however, is not a feasible political solution for the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC), whose political regime and legitimacy was not established on such a basis.<sup>87</sup> In addition, in the Chinese leadership's eyes, the adoption of 'Western-friendly policies' or 'Eurocentric values' could also relegate China to 'a humiliating relationship of tutelage' vis-à-vis these Western powers.<sup>88</sup>

In the early 1990s, therefore, Chinese leaders began once again to put forward a 'distinctively Chinese' foreign policy. At the UN Millennium summit meeting in September 2000, for example, Chinese President Jiang

84 Kim 1979.

85 The term 'Western-friendly policies' was adopted from Zarakol 2011, pp. 246-247.

86 Press Office of the State Council quoted in Wang 1999, p. 33.

87 Deng 2008, p. 25.

88 Larson and Shevchenko 2014, p. 39.

Zemin hinted that China would not simply adopt the value system and developmental model of the West: 'The world is diverse and colourful. Just as there should not be only one colour in the universe, so there should not be only one civilisation, one social system, one development model or one set of values in the world'.<sup>89</sup> Approximately a decade later, Kissinger made the observation that while China had insisted that it would pursue its goals within the existing UN framework, China was 'finally arriving at the vision cherished by reformers and revolutionaries over the past two centuries: a prosperous China wielding modern military capacities while preserving its distinctive values'.<sup>90</sup> In 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping proclaimed that China would 'develop a distinctive diplomatic approach befitting its role as a major country [and sum up] past practice and experience [in order to] conduct diplomacy with salient Chinese features and a Chinese vision'.<sup>91</sup> Xi again made clear that Beijing had no desire to emulate the West in its domestic or foreign policies in 2017, repeating the phrase 'with Chinese characteristics' (*zhongguo tese*) 71 times during his speech delivered at the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC.<sup>92</sup>

The Chinese political elite's campaign to put forward an alternative set of principles based on absolute respect for sovereignty and non-intervention to guide interstate relations, however, is a double-edged sword for Chinese foreign policy. On the one hand, it allows China a way out of the trap of pursuing the elusive target of Western superiority and desirability—which Ayse Zarakol refers to as a 'moving goal-post'.<sup>93</sup> Instead, this strategy challenges 'Western superiority, value dominance, and interventionism'.<sup>94</sup> If accepted as legitimate by the international community, it might allow China to gradually change the rules of the game and gain higher international status on its own terms. On the other hand, China cannot be perceived by other members of the international community as acting against its professed normative values when it suits its interests to do so, as it would lose credibility. In other words, China faces a constant dilemma regarding whether to prioritise its material interests or its attempts to put in place an alternative world order that

89 'Statement by President Jiang Zemin of the People's Republic of China at the Millenium Summit of the United Nations', 6 September 2000.

90 Kissinger 2012, pp. 500-504.

91 Xi Jinping 2014.

92 '*xijiping shijiuda baogao quanwen (shilu)* [Full Text of Xi Jinping 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report]', 19 October 2017.

93 Zarakol 2011, p. 248.

94 Deng 2008, p. 45.

might increase China's status in the international system. As Mingjiang Li notes:

While it is an understatement to say that all nation-states care about their international status, there is a stronger desire among the ruling elite in China to ensure that their nation ranks highly in the hierarchy of international order. In the Chinese strategic thinking, there is nothing more important than for China to reach a prominent comprehensive superpower position in the world, and it seems that no price is too high to pay for the attainment of this national aspiration.<sup>95</sup>

Larson and Shevchenko similarly observe that China's behaviour has consistently been 'motivated by a strong sense of grievance at past humiliations inflicted by external powers'. From this perspective, concerns over prestige, face, and dignity could 'override rational interests in improved economic ties or security considerations'.<sup>96</sup> Chinese leaders would also require the trust and support from other members of the international community in order to achieve its objective of putting forward its preferred set of values and change the rules of the game.

In sum, China fulfils the first condition for the international audience cost mechanism to function effectively—i.e. it places significant value on international opinion. China's quest for higher international status vis-à-vis the US and its allies makes it even more susceptible to the international audience cost mechanism. Whether Chinese leaders ultimately align their behaviour with rhetoric is therefore heavily dependent on whether the second condition (i.e. the presence of a rhetorical actor to draw international attention to any potential deviance) is in place.

### 3.2.2 Sanctions rhetoric as China's counter-stigmatisation strategy

China's sanctions rhetoric can be seen as part of its overall goal to put forward an alternative world order. As Chapter 4 will show, Chinese leaders have sought to gradually redefine the normative basis upon which sanctions can legitimately be employed and have put forward an alternative set of principles to guide the imposition of sanctions based on China's principles of upholding 'the independent foreign policy of peace, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, non-interference in the internal affairs of other

<sup>95</sup> Li 2012, pp. 43-44.

<sup>96</sup> Larson and Shevchenko 2010, p. 94.

countries and other fine traditions in China's diplomacy'.<sup>97</sup> The main themes of China's sanctions rhetoric suggest that 'Eurocentric values' that prioritise democracy and human rights over sovereignty cannot be used as a basis for sanctions. Sanctions also cannot be used to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states. In addition, China is opposed to the use of unilateral sanctions without the authorisation of the UN, such as those frequently imposed by the US and European states.<sup>98</sup>

This book therefore puts forward two arguments. First, Chinese leaders perceive sanctions imposed by the US and its allies against China from 1949 up to the present as their efforts to stigmatise China as a 'deviant state'<sup>99</sup> that should be convinced to change its political system and accept the values of liberal democracy. In an attempt to mitigate any losses to its international status as a result of Western stigmatisation, Chinese political elites have sought to counter-stigmatise the US and its allies by characterising these sanctions as 'imperialist and interventionist' and by further engaging in a rhetorical contestation with these countries to challenge the basis on which sanctions can be legitimately employed.

Second, China has attempted to win over the support of other sympathetic states and regional organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with respect to its sanctions rhetoric.<sup>100</sup> This is especially since China has frequently regarded itself as a leader and ardent supporter of the developing world's interests. Many developing countries have been targets of sanctions and are opposed to the use of unilateral sanctions. China therefore faces a dilemma regarding whether to pursue international and unilateral sanctions in ways that suit its more immediate political and material interests or to intentionally tie its hands by abiding by its sanctions rhetoric and maintaining a self-imposed moratorium on the use of unilateral sanctions. This dilemma has become more acute as China's economic power has grown rapidly. Given China's insistence that countries should not impose unilateral sanctions, Chinese leaders find it challenging to blatantly employ economic penalties to coerce a state that it has political disputes with without correspondingly losing credibility. Calculations of the international audience costs that China could incur therefore become part of Chinese decision-makers' cost-benefit calculus in deciding whether

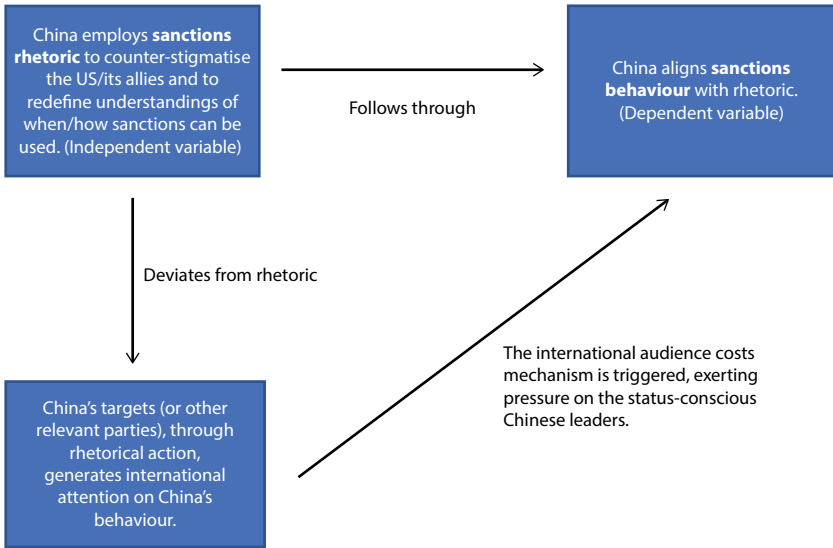
97 Wang 2014.

98 See Chapter 4 for a fuller discussion.

99 The concept of a 'deviant state' is developed in Epstein 2014, p. 296.

100 To date, ASEAN is the only regional organisation that has rejected any use of sanctions against either its own member states or external parties.

**Figure 3.2 Effects of International Audience Costs and Rhetorical Action on China’s Sanctions Behaviour**



it would be wise to impose sanctions on a potential target. This is especially the case if China’s potential targets employ rhetorical action (e.g. in the form of shaming or flattery as described above) to prompt Chinese leaders into acting in accordance with their sanctions rhetoric. Figure 3.2 illustrates how China’s sanctions rhetoric could constrain its behaviour. This model will be tested against the evidence presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Finally, it is worth noting that China’s rhetoric can shift over time and that Chinese leaders might attempt to finesse and better align their sanctions rhetoric with the state’s changing material capabilities and interests.<sup>101</sup> However, two challenges exist. First, political elites cannot deviate too significantly or too abruptly from their previous rhetoric. Therefore, credible shifts to China’s sanctions rhetoric are likely to lag behind its rapidly increasing material capabilities and interests. Second, China does not appear to have many other alternatives to its sanctions rhetoric, unless it is willing to emulate the manner in which the US and its allies have traditionally used sanctions as a political tool. Doing so, however, would undermine China’s counter-stigmatisation strategy and its efforts to redefine international understanding of how and when sanctions can legitimately be employed. Of course, existing Chinese rhetoric—with respect to sanctions

101 This will be addressed in Chapter 8.

or otherwise—may no longer matter in a hypothetical scenario in which the CPC loses power, as the new political administration would no longer be tied to earlier messages and commitments.

Given the above, the hypothesis to explain China's sanctions behaviour until the end of Xi Jinping's first-term administration in October 2017 can be summarised as follows: *China's sanctions rhetoric—aimed at counter-stigmatising the US and its allies and at redefining the normative basis upon which sanctions can legitimately be imposed—has constrained its sanctions behaviour.* Taking into consideration the other four possible explanations discussed in Chapter 2, the five competing hypotheses to be tested in the subsequent chapters are summarised in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2 The Five Competing Hypotheses**

Hypothesis No.	Hypothesis
Hypothesis 1 (H1)	China was not yet powerful enough to use sanctions effectively but can be expected to wield its economic power in more coercive ways as it continues to grow in material capabilities.
Hypothesis 2 (H2)	The Chinese leadership was at times constrained by its domestic actors and could not employ sanctions as and when it suited its purposes.
Hypothesis 3 (H3)	The use of unilateral sanctions flouts the World Trade Organization's regulations, and China's participation in the WTO shaped its sanctions behaviour (either due to reputational concerns or because Chinese leaders have been socialised to conform to WTO norms).
Hypothesis 4 (H4)	History and culture have shaped China's sanctions behaviour, and China's political elite favours inducement over coercive methods such as sanctions.
Hypothesis 5 (H5)	China's sanctions rhetoric has had a constraining effect on China's behaviour, as Chinese leaders did not wish to incur international audience costs by acting in ways that would be in blatant contradiction with its rhetoric.

### 3.3 Conclusion

This chapter provided a theoretical framework to account for why China's sanctions rhetoric should not be dismissed as 'mere cheap talk' but should instead be taken into more serious consideration as an important factor that constrains China's sanctions behaviour. China has to tread a very fine line between its material interests and its desire to *credibly* pursue a counter-stigmatisation strategy, i.e. challenging the US and its allies on the ways in which sanctions can legitimately be employed. China's sanctions behaviour

is likely to vary depending on its interests in the issues concerned as well as the larger international context at any particular point in time. Nevertheless, its sanctions rhetoric will—to varying degrees—play a constraining role on its behaviour, resulting in the inability of Chinese decision-makers to impose sanctions in a coherent manner.

The following chapter substantiates two related claims that this chapter has put forward. First, Chinese leaders perceive sanctions imposed by the US and its allies against China from 1949 up to the present as their continuous efforts to stigmatise China. Second, China is concerned about increasing its international status vis-à-vis the US and its allies. Its sanctions rhetoric is therefore an attempt to counter-stigmatise the US and its allies as well as to redefine how both UN and unilateral sanctions should legitimately be employed.

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## 4. Stigmatising Sanctions and China's Counter-Stigmatisation

### Abstract

Chapter 4 explains the Chinese leadership's impetus in using its sanctions rhetoric and elaborates on the substance of such rhetoric. It suggests that China's experience of being a target of Western sanctions since its establishment in 1949 had convinced its leaders that 'the West' was determined to stigmatise China through various forms of economic punishment, with the ultimate goal of undermining the Chinese government's political legitimacy. The Chinese political elite therefore engaged in a rhetorical counter-stigmatisation strategy that sought to delegitimise the sanctions strategy of the US and its allies by depicting them as imperialist and interventionist. China also sought to gradually redefine, in the understanding of United Nations Member States, the notion of when and how sanctions could legitimately be employed.

**Keywords:** Stigma, rhetoric, status, sanctions, United Nations

On 1 December 1989, almost half a year after the Tiananmen incident, Deng Xiaoping said the following in a private meeting with a high-level Japanese delegation:

The Group of Seven summit meeting held in Paris adopted a resolution imposing sanctions on China, which meant they thought they had supreme authority and could impose sanctions on any country and people not obedient to their wishes. They are not the United Nations. And even the resolutions of the United Nations have to be approved by a majority before they come into force. What grounds have they for interfering in the internal affairs of China? Who gave them power to do that? The Chinese people will never accept any action that violates the norms of international relations, and they will never yield to outside pressure.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Deng 1993, p. 348.

Drawing special attention to the Group of Seven, Deng rejected sanctions imposed by individual nations and alliances without the explicit mandate of a majority vote in the United Nations (UN) as illegitimate and lacking 'authority'. After examining the substance of such sanctions rhetoric by top Chinese leaders and the Chinese leaders' motivations in using it, this chapter advances two arguments. First, the Chinese leadership has perceived Western sanctions imposed on China since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 as repeated and concerted attempts by 'the West' to stigmatise the PRC as a 'deviant state' that must be convinced to accept the values of liberal democracy. Whether the US and its allies actually intended for their sanctions to fulfil such a purpose was immaterial. In an attempt to mitigate any losses to its international status as a result of Western stigmatisation, China pursued a counter-stigmatisation strategy, which sought to depict Western sanctions as imperialist and interventionist. Second, as part of its counter-stigmatisation strategy, China has attempted to use its participation as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to redefine understandings outside its own borders regarding the circumstances and conditions under which sanctions can legitimately be employed.

The chapter unfolds in three main sections. The first section discusses the concept of 'stigmatising sanctions'. Such sanctions are imposed by the sender state(s) with the primary purpose of associating the target (or the target's behaviour) with a set of negative characteristics and, in so doing, clearly separating itself from the target. It then examines how target states can respond to the stigma imposed. This discussion provides the basis for the argument that Chinese policymakers have adopted a counter-stigmatisation strategy in response to Western sanctions against the PRC and have for decades been engaged in a rhetorical confrontation with the US and its allies on when and how sanctions should be employed.

The second section draws on primary and secondary sources to show that despite the shifting historical context from 1949 to the present day, the Chinese perception of Western sanctions as a tool of stigmatisation has remained largely consistent. The history of Western sanctions against China can be divided into three distinct periods: from 1949 to 1971; from 1971 to 1989; and from 1989 to the present. In the first phase (1949-1971), the US—and, to a lesser extent, its allies—sought to stigmatise and isolate the newly established PRC through the imposition of unilateral and multilateral sanctions. China, motivated by a desire to consolidate domestic support for the Communist Party of China (CPC) and to break out of international isolation, responded by counter-stigmatising these Western sanctions as 'illegitimate' as well as by articulating an alternative set of principles to guide interstate relations. The second phase (1971-1989)

was marked by reconciliation. In 1971, the PRC was admitted into the UN and granted the status of a veto-wielding permanent member of the UNSC. US sanctions were also gradually lifted in the run-up to the US-China rapprochement in 1979. However, the Chinese leadership remained unconvinced that the 'Western-oriented world order' had truly accepted the PRC as a great power on equal terms. Instead, China's leaders construed its admission to the UN as a victory on the part of 'China and the Third World' against what they still characterised as the 'imperialist West'. The 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident was another watershed, marking the beginning of the third phase (1989 to the present). The US and its allies once again imposed sanctions and arms embargoes on China that have lasted to this day. While these sanctions were largely symbolic—i.e. most were lifted by 1993, and only some forms of arms embargoes remained in place thereafter—the Chinese leadership perceived them as sustained attempts by the US and its allies to label and stigmatise China as well as to undermine the political legitimacy of the CPC.

This chapter's third section covers the post-Deng Xiaoping decade from 1997 to 2016. This period is significant because China had largely recovered from the Tiananmen Square incident by the mid 1990s and could potentially devote more attention to furthering its agenda at the UN. Moreover, Deng's 'Southern Tour' in 1992, which energised China's market reforms and prompted phenomenal growth in China's economy, also provided China with more confidence to engage the international community on its own terms.<sup>2</sup> Based on content analysis of the 768 sanctions-related speeches delivered by Chinese representatives to the UNSC from 1997 to 2016, this section argues that China has sought to rhetorically contest and redefine the normative basis on which sanctions (including UN sanctions) can legitimately be employed.<sup>3</sup>

## 4.1 Stigmatising sanctions and stigma management strategies

### 4.1.1 Defining stigma and stigmatising sanctions

Stigma can be broadly defined as 'a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person'.<sup>4</sup> In this context, regardless of the actual material impact that sanctions have on a target or the extent of policy

<sup>2</sup> Deng 2008, pp. 97-127.

<sup>3</sup> This section relies on content analysis of open information rather than archival sources, as the latter remains classified for this period.

<sup>4</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. 'stigma', n.1.



concessions extracted, the mere act of sanctions imposition can be considered an attempt by the sender to formally categorise the target and/or the target's behaviour—either to an international or domestic audience—as ‘something unusual and bad’.<sup>5</sup> This stigmatising effect is the strongest when a critical mass of states imposes sanctions on a target collectively, such as in the case of UN sanctions. It is also significant when regional organisations impose sanctions on a member state, as states—like individuals—tend to be most concerned about their image and reputation within communities with which they identify.<sup>6</sup> The term ‘stigmatising sanctions’ therefore refers to sanctions that are imposed with the primary purpose of signalling the association of the target and/or its behaviour with a set of undesirable characteristics. Countries impose stigmatising sanctions with the hopes of clearly separating themselves from the target, and/or to reduce the international status of the target. If these objectives are achieved, then other elements typically considered as measures of sanctions effectiveness—such as the material impact of sanctions on the target and whether the sanctions contribute to compliant behaviour—become significantly less important than is typically the case.<sup>7</sup> Sceptics can argue that stigmatisation, while a possible by-product, is frequently not the main reason why states choose to employ sanctions. As shown later in this chapter, this is not necessarily the case. Sometimes, countries—such as the US in its use of sanctions against China during the Cold War—may opt to employ sanctions for stigmatising purposes even if they are fully aware that these sanctions would not be effective in prompting compliant behaviour from the target.

The targets of such sanctions—referred to here as ‘stigmatised states’—in turn have several ways in which to respond. Rebecca Adler-Nissen's typology of stigma management strategies provides a useful framework for classifying these responses: stigma recognition, stigma rejection, and counter-stigmatisation.<sup>8</sup> Stigmatised states' choices regarding stigma management strategies have implications for their national identity and international status.

#### 4.1.2 Stigma management strategies and their implications

When a stigmatised state chooses to recognise a stigma (i.e. ‘stigma recognition’), it can attempt to overcome the stigma by aligning its behaviour with

5 Goffman 1963, p. 1.

6 This is in line with expectations from the social psychological literature. For a succinct review, see Cialdini and Torst 1998, pp. 151-185.

7 See Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion on the various categories of sanctions.

8 Adler-Nissen 2014a, pp. 143-176; and Adler-Nissen 2014b, pp. 63-69.

the demands of the 'normal' (i.e. the sender) state(s).<sup>9</sup> This option is arguably the path of least resistance. Once the stigmatised state succeeds in doing so, it can potentially be accepted into the 'group of normal' as a 'rehabilitated state', and its stigma can be reduced over time and potentially even be gradually removed. However, two other consequences follow. First, having accepted and recognised the stigma, the rehabilitated state does not then acquire a 'fully normal status, but a transformation of self from someone with a particular blemish into someone with a record of having corrected a particular blemish'.<sup>10</sup> In practice, for example, this can mean that the state may be carefully monitored by the international community and its domestic audience for a sustained period of time. As Adler-Nissen states, 'upholding credibility requires continuous effort because the state must live up to the highest moral standards and even outperform the "normal", convincing them that they are "better-than-normal"'.<sup>11</sup> The relationship between the rehabilitated state and the normal states is therefore based on that of tutelage, i.e. the former as a 'deviant state' that has successfully been normalised through a process of socialisation by the latter. In this regard, 'one stigma is traded with another'.<sup>12</sup> Second, given that the newly adopted values and positions may not sit comfortably with the ways in which these stigmatised states have traditionally viewed themselves, this process of stigma recognition and rehabilitation can also further destabilise and/or redefine their national identities.

An alternative strategy is for the stigmatised state to reject the stigma. Stigma rejection refers to the process by which the stigmatised state 'accept[s] the overall categories of "normal" and "transgressive", [but offers] explanations for why it should not be labelled "transgressive" or "deviant"'.<sup>13</sup> For example, if sanctions have been imposed on a state because of alleged human rights violations, the state can claim that it subscribes to the principle of human rights and can further assert that its actions have not violated such a principle. The pursuit of such a strategy can lead to one of two outcomes. When a stigmatised state succeeds in convincing a significant number of other states that it has not engaged in transgressive behaviour, the sender states can lose moral legitimacy if they choose to sustain the sanctions. As a result, 'awkward situations [occur] involving mutual feelings of insecurity',

9 Adler-Nissen 2014a, 2014b.

10 Erving Goffman quoted in Zarakol 2014, p. 316.

11 Adler-Nissen 2014a, p. 160.

12 Zarakol 2014, p. 316.

13 Adler-Nissen 2014a, p. 160.

as the ways in which the normative order should be interpreted and upheld then come under dispute.<sup>14</sup> A second possibility is that the stigmatised state's efforts to reject the stigma can fail, i.e. members of its community remain convinced that it has engaged in transgressive behaviour. In such cases, the sanctions that have been imposed against it are upheld, and the stigmatised state may choose to either live with the stigma—and with the other consequences of sanctions—or turn to one of the other two management strategies.

Finally, a stigmatised state can attempt to counter the stigma, i.e. refute and challenge the legitimacy of the norms underpinning the sanctions and create a 'separate system of honour'.<sup>15</sup> It may also choose to employ counter-sanctions. However, sender states can resist such efforts and potentially apply even more pressure on the 'deviant state' by imposing further sanctions and/or other forms of stigmatisation. If a stigmatised state manages to convince other members of the international community that the sanctions that have been imposed on it—as well as the norms underpinning those sanctions—are unjust and illegitimate, the 'normal' states become the transgressors and they are compelled to either lift the sanctions or lose moral legitimacy. Under such circumstances, the formerly stigmatised state not only succeeds in protecting the integrity of its national identity, its political elite can also bolster its domestic legitimacy by chalking this up as a 'foreign policy victory'. Consider the case of UN sanctions against Libya in the early 1990s after Western intelligence accused Libya of masterminding the 1988 Lockerbie bombing. Ian Hurd shows how Libya's ability to reinterpret UNSC norms and the notion of 'liberal internationalism'—primarily by suggesting that the sanctions themselves were threats to international peace and security given that the resolutions did not garner significant support among members of the international community—delegitimised the sanctions and put pressure on the sanctions-sponsoring states (i.e. the US, the UK, and France) to eventually agree to a compromise that they had earlier rejected.<sup>16</sup>

For a stigmatised state, therefore, the easier option is to recognise the stigma and change its behaviour accordingly; but the more rewarding option, if it succeeds, is counter-stigmatisation. Two factors potentially influence which strategy a stigmatised state is likely to adopt: the likelihood

14 Adler-Nissen 2014a, p. 160.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 165-169. Adler-Nissen cited Cuba's strategy against the US as an example of counter-stigmatisation.

16 Hurd 2005, pp. 495-526.

of the strategy's success and the ability of the stigmatised state to conform. The first factor (i.e. the likelihood of the strategy's success) is, in turn, dependent upon two elements: the extent to which norms are shared among members of the international community, and the material resources of the stigmatised state. As Adler-Nissen argues, 'if norms are shared and the moral authority of the stigmatiser is recognised, [stigmatised states are likely to] want to become part of the "civilised group" and will try to overcome their stigma'.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, the incentives for a stigmatised state to engage in a counter-stigmatisation strategy are higher if there is no strong consensus on the normative values underpinning the sanctions in question. For example, while the use of nuclear weapons is now considered a taboo by most members of the international system,<sup>18</sup> newer norms such as the notion of 'the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)' remain contested and are therefore more susceptible to counter-stigmatisation strategies. Weaker states, moreover, are also more likely to conform than stronger ones, as the latter possess more material resources to endure prolonged pressure from the stigmatisers.<sup>19</sup>

The second factor to be considered is whether the stigmatised state has a real option to conform. For example, stigmatised states with irreconcilable differences from the normal states—e.g. states with regimes and legitimacy not established on the basis of normative values demanded by the sender states—may find the domestic political costs of stigma recognition significantly higher than any potential benefits to be gained from behavioural alignment. In such cases, we can expect to see stigma rejection or counter-stigmatisation as opposed to stigma recognition, even if the stigmatised state is weak or conflict-ridden.

The ability of a stigmatised state to employ language strategically is crucial to the success of its chosen strategy. Even if a state chooses to recognise the stigma, it is insufficient for the state to simply change its behaviour. It needs to convince the stigmatisers (i.e. the sender states) that its efforts to meet their demands are genuine and sufficient. If a stigmatised state opts to reject or counter the stigma, it then needs to contest and redefine the understanding of 'what is useful and what is harmful, and so what is just and what is unjust'.<sup>20</sup> As Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink suggest, 'new norms never enter a normative vacuum but instead emerge

17 Adler-Nissen 2014a, p. 154.

18 Tannenwald 2007; and Tannenwald 1999, pp. 433-468.

19 Adler-Nissen 2014a, p. 154.

20 Aristotle quoted in Krebs 2015, p. 7.

in a highly contested normative space where they must compete with other norms and perceptions of interest'.<sup>21</sup> This is especially true given the expectation that the stigmatisers will resist attempts by the 'deviant state' to counter-stigmatise. Therefore, whether the stigmatised state can succeed in rejecting or countering the stigma is dependent on its ability to 'out-talk' the stigmatisers. It can do so, for example, by persuading other members of the international community that its positions are indeed more legitimate than those adopted by the stigmatisers. It can also attempt to compel other members of the international community to endorse its positions, even if they are not entirely convinced by the merits of its claims. Alternatively, it can provide other members of the international community with legitimate reasons to support its normative claims, even if the actual motivations of their support are not driven by normative considerations (e.g. material factors driving other parties to support the stigmatised state).

Table 4.1 summarises the respective stigma management strategies and their implications for the stigmatised states. The factors affecting which strategy a stigmatised state would adopt include its assessment with respect to the likelihood of the strategy's success as well as the cost-benefit analysis of the stigmatised state (e.g. whether it has the political capacity to conform).

#### 4.1.3 China and stigmatising sanctions

As alluded to earlier, Chinese political elites perceive Western sanctions against China since the founding of the PRC in 1949 as continual attempts by the West to stigmatise China as a 'deviant state' that needs to be socialised to Western values of liberal democracy. In light of the framework outlined above, there are several reasons to expect China to opt for a counter-stigmatisation strategy. First, the CPC's political regime is at odds with the normative preferences and expectations of the stigmatisers (i.e. the US and its allies). Accepting and recognising the stigma would not only destabilise China's national identity, it would also severely undermine the political legitimacy of the Chinese elite. Therefore, regardless of potential material incentives, the political cost of stigma recognition and behavioural alignment is too substantial for the CPC to bear. Second, as China grows in military and economic power, the incentive for it to conform is reduced. Finally, given the widespread belief among the Chinese elite that existing norms in the international order are largely based on values that have been

21 Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, p. 897.

**Table 4.1 Stigma Management Strategies and Their Implications**

<b>Stigma Management Strategies</b>	<b>Responses of Stigmatised States</b>	<b>Success (i.e. sanctions lifted and/or sender states lose moral legitimacy)</b>	<b>Failure (i.e. sanctions remain and/or sender states retain moral legitimacy)</b>
<p>Option 1: Stigma Recognition</p> <p><i>Chances of success: high</i></p>	<p>Align behaviour with demands of sender states.</p>	<p><i>Gain:</i> (1) Potential acceptance into the 'group of normal' as the 'rehabilitated' state. (2) Stigma potentially reduced and/or removed over time.</p> <p><i>Loss:</i> (1) Relationship of tutelage vis-a-vis the 'group of normal'. (2) National identity potentially destabilised. (3) Some material interests could be jeopardised (e.g. leaders may have to give up things that they have acquired).</p>	<p><i>Gain:</i> Stigma may potentially still be reduced, as efforts have been made to overcome the stigma.</p> <p><i>Loss:</i> (1) National identity potentially destabilised. (2) Some material interests could be jeopardised (e.g. leaders may have to give up things that they have acquired).</p>
<p>Option 2: Stigma Rejection</p> <p><i>Chances of success: moderate</i></p>	<p>Rhetorically contest the legitimacy of sanctions by arguing that its behaviour is in line with normative principles.</p>	<p><i>Gain:</i> (1) Potential acceptance—albeit reluctantly—into the 'group of normal'. (2) National identity remains intact.</p> <p><i>Loss:</i> (1) Ways in which normative order should be upheld is being called into question. (2) May never be accepted as a 'genuine' member of the community.</p>	<p><i>Gain:</i> National identity remains intact.</p> <p><i>Loss:</i> Stigma reinforced.</p>
<p>Option 3: Counter-Stigmatisation</p> <p><i>Chances of success: low</i></p>	<p>(1) Rhetorically contest the legitimacy of the normative values underpinning the sanctions. (2) Create a 'separate system of honour'. (3) Potentially impose counter-sanctions.</p>	<p><i>Gain:</i> (1) Significant gains in international status as the 'stigmatisers' become the transgressors. (2) Political legitimacy is consolidated and national identity strengthened. (3) Potential increase in international status.</p> <p><i>Loss:</i> N.A.</p>	<p><i>Gain:</i> National identity remains intact.</p> <p><i>Loss:</i> Further stigmatised.</p>

entrenched by the leading Western powers in the post-war era,<sup>22</sup> China may also be reluctant to subject itself to what many perceive as ‘a humiliating relationship of tutelage’ vis-a-vis the US and its allies, which could also relegate it to a lower international status than these Western powers.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, while China may, depending on the situation, shift among these three stigma management strategies, counter-stigmatisation is likely to remain its default and most preferred option. China’s sanctions rhetoric serves this purpose of counter-stigmatisation.

The rest of the chapter draws on US archives and secondary literature to examine whether the US had indeed intended to stigmatise China through the imposition of unilateral sanctions as well as in lobbying for multilateral sanctions against China since the Cold War. It also describes how the Chinese political elite perceives these sanctions in order to substantiate the claims of the preceding paragraph. The chapter concludes by distilling the standards for sanctions legitimacy that China has put forward through its sanctions rhetoric.

## **4.2 US and Europe’s stigmatising sanctions against China, 1949 onwards**

### **4.2.1 The inception of sanctions against China, 1949-1971**

From 1945 to 1950, the US provided more than USD 1.9 billion in financial and military assistance to the Chinese Nationalist Party (or Kuomintang, KMT) led by Chiang Kai-shek in the hope that it would defeat the Chinese Communist Party in the Chinese civil war.<sup>24</sup> This policy continued even as US officials became aware of credible evidence that the KMT would soon be defeated.<sup>25</sup> In an internal report circulated in September 1948, the US State Department’s Policy Planning Staff explained that the US Government had favoured Chiang, as he was perceived to be ‘a strong leader who seemed to have a progressive, modern outlook, who became converted to Christianity and who seemed to be capable of unifying his country and defending its sovereignty’.<sup>26</sup> However, the report lamented that ‘the essentially unreligious

22 See Deng 2008, p. 25; and Xu 2005, pp. 74-80.

23 Larson and Shevchenko 2014, p. 39.

24 Westad 2012, p. 291.

25 US Policy Planning Staff, PPS/39, 1948, Vol. VIII, 148.

26 Ibid.

Chinese [had] proved to be comparatively indifferent to Christian proselytisation, [and that] the American way of life, with all that it ideologically and materially implied, never became comprehensible, desirable or attainable to more than a minute fraction of the Chinese population'.<sup>27</sup> The report argued, however, that as a result of the US's strong desire for a unified and non-Communist China, the US Government had no choice but to persist in its 'exclusive commitment' to Chiang in the civil war 'long after it was evident that he could not win it'.<sup>28</sup>

The US State Department's predictions of Chiang's imminent defeat soon came true. On 1 October 1949, the CPC Chairman Mao Zedong formally established the PRC at a mass rally in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. A few days earlier, he had declared at the first plenary session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference that 'the Chinese, who comprise one quarter of humanity, have begun to stand up'.<sup>29</sup> These two public gestures were clearly intended to send a message to the international community that China's 'Century of Humiliation' was officially over. The PRC was a new nation, ready to 'establish diplomatic relations with any foreign government that [was] willing to observe the principles of equality, mutual benefit, and mutual respect of territorial integrity and sovereignty'.<sup>30</sup>

US officials were frustrated and embarrassed by the CPC's victory. These sentiments were exacerbated by Mao's swift move to consolidate China's alliance with the Soviet Union by signing a Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance in February 1950.<sup>31</sup> Determined to send a signal to the newly established Chinese regime that it 'cannot get along without the West', the US declared partial sanctions against China. These sanctions meant that the US would trade with Communist China only in non-strategic commodities (e.g. goods used strictly for civilian purposes) and would prevent China from obtaining material and equipment of direct military utility.<sup>32</sup>

Tensions between China and the US peaked when China entered the Korean War in October 1950. An outraged Truman administration upgraded the existing sanctions against China to comprehensive ones (i.e. including even goods used for civilian purposes and the blocking of all bank accounts and assets in the US owned by China and its nationals), persuaded US

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Mao, 21 September 1949.

30 Mao, 1 October 1949.

31 Westad 2012, pp. 292-293.

32 US National Security Council 48/2 quoted in Zhang 2001, p. 28.



allies and partners to establish export controls against China within the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM) framework, and lobbied for further international sanctions against China.<sup>33</sup> On 1 February 1951, the US successfully convinced the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to adopt Resolution 498, which accused China of engaging in aggression in Korea and further recommended that ‘additional measures be employed to meet this aggression’.<sup>34</sup> The UNGA subsequently passed Resolution 500 on 18 May 1951, which ‘appl[ie]d an embargo on the shipment to areas under the control of the Central People’s Government of the PRC and of the North Korean authorities of arms, ammunition and implements of war, atomic energy materials, petroleum, transportation materials of strategic value, and items useful in the production of arms, ammunition and implements of war’.<sup>35</sup> In September 1952, a China Committee (CHINCOM) of the Consultative Group was established by the US, with the support of the UK, France, Canada, and Japan, to supervise the embargoes that had been imposed on China.<sup>36</sup> Even after the embargo lists against the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were liberalised in August 1954, CHINCOM maintained a list of some 200 additional items embargoed to China (such as trade in rubber, agricultural tractors, Land Rovers, and other transportation equipment). This was known as the ‘China Differential’. International sanctions against China only began to ease when the UK withdrew unilaterally from CHINCOM in May 1957 following futile attempts to persuade the US to lift these sanctions against China. Less than one month later, US Deputy Undersecretary of State C. Douglas Dillon, who was the chief US negotiator at the CHINCOM meeting in Paris, declared that the British action ‘force[d] other countries to follow suit’, effectively abolishing the China Differential.<sup>37</sup> The US, however, persisted in unilateral sanctions against China until the early 1970s.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Motivations behind US sanctions against China

Early in 1950, US officials realised that the sanctions imposed on China would not cause the Communist Party leadership to cede power to the defeated KMT. While US officials still retained hope that the sanctions would

33 Zhang 2001, pp. 30–39. See also Meijer 2016, pp. 35–36.

34 UN General Assembly Resolution 498, 1 February 1951.

35 UN General Assembly Resolution 500, 18 May 1951.

36 Cain 1995, p. 33. See also Zhang 2001, p. 48.

37 C. Douglas Dillon quoted in Zhang, 2001, p. 192.

38 Meijer 2016, p. 35.

'produce a measurable damaging effect upon the Chinese economy' and hence 'diminish the Chinese Communist potential for military aggression', it was equally apparent by the following year that the sanctions would similarly be ineffective in prompting China to withdraw from Korea.<sup>39</sup> Such sentiments can be glimpsed from a telegram delivered by the US Secretary of State Dean Acheson to the US Mission at the UN: 'We are under no illusions that such a [sanctions] programme will itself bring Chinese Commies to their knees or noticeably affect Chinese military operations in Korea in [the] near future. It is [however] important not to underestimate the moral effect of collective UN action to apply sanctions against Chinese Commies, either in China, in [the] rest of [the] Soviet bloc, or in [the] outside world'.<sup>40</sup>

Eventually, US officials seemed to conceive of sanctions more as an effective means to stigmatise China than to extract any substantial policy concessions. An April 1951 memorandum from the Acting Deputy Director of the Office of United Nations Political and Security Affairs of the US delegation to the UN made clear that coercion was neither the sole nor the primary objective behind his country's sanctions strategy. Rather, this internal document suggests that the key motivation behind US attempts to lobby the international community into participating in sanctions was a desire to stigmatise Communist China by imposing upon it 'the maximum weight of moral condemnation':<sup>41</sup>

The major significance of sanctions may be to give concrete emphasis to the United Nations' disapproval and condemnation of Chinese Communist aggression *rather than to accomplish important military or economic results*. The full effects of disapproval and condemnation will not be felt in China so long as the United States acts unilaterally. They would not be fully felt if only those countries generally regarded as susceptible to United States pressure applied sanctions. The moral effect of sanctions upon Communist China will be produced in a maximum degree only if substantially all of the non-Communist members of the United Nations agree to announce their intention to apply them. *Were this to occur, certain psychological and political effects might be produced in China, in the United States, and among all United Nations countries, which would equal and might surpass the economic or military value of sanctions*. Such sanctions would reinforce the existing condemnation of Chinese Communist aggression by making

39 Popper, 12 April 1951.

40 Telegram from Dean Acheson, 20 January 1951.

41 Ibid.

it clear that the free world will not indirectly support that aggression by supplying the Chinese Red Army with material necessary for prosecuting the Korean campaign.<sup>42</sup> [emphasis added]

This memorandum argued explicitly that the US should use the UN to label the Chinese Communists as 'aggressive' and to convince other nations to join the US in distinguishing themselves clearly from the PRC by targeting the latter with sanctions. The document further recommended that the US mobilise an 'audience of normals' by recruiting support not just from 'countries generally regarded as susceptible to US pressure' but also from 'all the non-Communist members of the UN' (i.e. 'the free world').<sup>43</sup> It also clearly stated that the 'effectiveness' of the sanctions in question, as measured by their impact on China's economy and on its scope of military latitude, was of secondary importance to the goal of stigmatisation.

This latter perspective is all the more striking because the memorandum noted that the UK had expressed strong reservations regarding the likely material impact of a full embargo against China. The UK's reluctance to participate in comprehensive sanctions might have stemmed from its close economic ties to China. However, in London's assessment, China was not heavily dependent on sea-borne imports and would therefore not be deflected from its military operations even if all UN countries were to participate in the sanctions.<sup>44</sup> The memorandum notes not only that multilateral sanctions might be ineffective in positively influencing China in favour of aspects of a Western agenda but also that such action might have the undesirable effect of influencing the CPC leadership to 'orient all their relationships toward the Kremlin'. Nevertheless, US State Department officials who had drafted this document maintained the position that 'this line of argument collapses [...] before the importance of denying an aggressor any material support in his aggression and *the political impact of a condemnation of his action*' [emphasis added].<sup>45</sup> The US emphasised the stigmatisation aspect of sanctions so strongly that it dismissed its staunchest and closest ally's reluctance to participate because the latter was making an argument of sanctions ineffectiveness based purely on coercive and constraining grounds.

One can argue that the positions put forward in this 1951 memorandum may not have reflected the opinion of the highest levels of US government.

42 Ibid.

43 For a discussion on the 'audience of normal', see Adler-Nissen 2014, pp. 152-153.

44 Popper, 12 April 1951.

45 Ibid.

Nonetheless, the fact that the US continued to pursue a policy of imposing sanctions and lobbying for sanctions against China, despite the high-level awareness that these sanctions were unlikely to prompt compliant behaviour, supports the view that stigmatising the PRC through moral condemnation was an important objective—and not merely a by-product—of US sanctions during this period.

#### 4.2.3 China's response to Cold War sanctions

As noted earlier, target states have three options in responding to stigmatising sanctions: stigma recognition, stigma rejection, and counter-stigmatisation.<sup>46</sup> Regardless of whether the Chinese leadership was motivated primarily by considerations of domestic power or international status, China's official rhetoric and actions in the decades following its establishment provide ample evidence to support the view that its leaders had engaged in counter-stigmatisation by delegitimising the positions of the US and its allies.

As early as August 1949, even before any sanctions were imposed, Chairman Mao had begun to warn against the possibility of the US pursuing economic aggression to topple the newly established Chinese regime:

What matter if we have to face some difficulties? Let them blockade us! Let them blockade us for eight or ten years! By that time all of China's problems will have been solved [...] true, the few problems left to us, such as blockade, unemployment, famine, inflation and rising prices, are difficulties, but we have already begun to breathe more easily than in the past three years. We have come triumphantly through the ordeal of the last three years, why can't we overcome these few difficulties of today? Why can't we live without the United States?<sup>47</sup>

After sanctions were imposed, Mao and his associates began to include this form of aggression in a repeated litany of offences that undergirded an overarching governmental narrative intended to 'stir the hatred of the US imperialists among common Chinese' and to rally the populace for a potential confrontation with the US. Other grievances included the US's opposition to China over Korea, the presence of US military forces in the Taiwan Strait, the US's refusal to recognise the PRC, and the withholding

<sup>46</sup> Adler-Nissen 2014, pp. 143-176.

<sup>47</sup> Mao, 18 August 1949.

of the PRC's seat at the UN.<sup>48</sup> As the US tightened sanctions against China by imposing a comprehensive embargo, Mao and his associates escalated their anti-US rhetoric and emphasised China's 'resolve and confidence in resisting the international trade sanctions'.<sup>49</sup> In this context, the CPC leadership declared US sanctions against China to be 'illegal and morally wrong'.<sup>50</sup> This accusation, in particular, was associated with the freezing of China's assets by the US. Chinese leaders claimed that war had not been declared between the US and China and that therefore the US had breached international custom, as an adversary's 'bank assets [cannot] be frozen without declarations of war'.<sup>51</sup>

US and US-orchestrated sanctions against China remained in place even after the Korean War ended in July 1953. At this point, in addition to continuing their efforts to discredit US international policy—including its use of sanctions—by labelling it as imperialist and interventionist, the Chinese leadership began to expand its counter-stigmatisation strategy in a manner that was intended to increase China's own international status and to garner support from other nations.<sup>52</sup> China's leaders began to establish relationships with nations that they could portray as 'fellow sufferers' (such as the European colonies) as well as to articulate and promote an alternative set of principles to guide interstate relations. They focused their efforts in this regard on Asia and Africa, and they took every opportunity to establish shared identification with countries in these regions by suggesting that the Chinese, like 'all people of the East', had been 'bullied by Western imperialist powers'.<sup>53</sup> The CPC leaders and representatives insisted to these target audiences that as a result of its own experience, China was ideally positioned to understand and speak up for the developing world (i.e. 'us') against an 'imperialist West' (i.e. 'them').<sup>54</sup> As the historian Jian Chen notes:

[As early as November 1949, the Chinese leader] Liu Shaoqi contended that the victory of the Chinese revolution greatly enhanced the world

48 Chen 2001, pp. 88-89.

49 Chinese Trade Minister Ye Jizhuang quoted in Zhang 2001, pp. 94-96.

50 'Seven Counter-Measures against US Economic Sanctions Imposed on Our Country', Resolution, the CCP Central Commission on Finance and Economy, December 12, 1950, quoted in Zhang 2001, p. 84.

51 Ibid.

52 Historians have broadly agreed that changes to China's external policies during this period reflected Beijing's desire to expand the PRC's international space. See e.g. Zhang 2007, pp. 3-26; Niu 1999, pp. 39-41; Nakajima 2008, pp. 283-289; Zhang 2007, pp. 509-528.

53 'Minutes of Chairman Mao Tse-tung's First Meeting with Nehru', 19 October 1954.

54 The classic work on inter-group dynamics is by Tajfel 1981. See also Hogg 2006, pp. 120-121.

revolution by serving as a successful model for the national liberation movements in other colonial and semi-colonial countries [...] more than half of the world's population lived in the Asian-Oceanic region, and the Western powers had based the construction of their own 'civilisation' as well as their reactionary rules at home upon the exploitation of the peoples in the colonies and semi-colonies in the East and other parts of the world. Consequently, the realisation of national liberation of the colonies and semi-colonies would not only result in the collapse of the worldwide domination of Western imperialism but also lead to the emancipation of the peoples in Western powers themselves. Liu concluded that [the path of the Chinese revolution] was 'the path that we must follow, so that the colonies and semi-colonies will win liberation, and the labouring people in various imperialist countries will achieve emancipation'.<sup>55</sup>

On 31 December 1953, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai put forward for the first time what China began to proclaim as the guiding principles of interstate relations: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.<sup>56</sup> Zhou subsequently announced these principles—known as the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence'—to the international community during the Geneva Conference in 1954. For Beijing, the initiation of these guiding principles 'represented a series of new basic codes in conducting international affairs and politics, ones that were fundamentally different from the dominant codes and norms created by Western powers [and ones that] would further justify [the PRC's] claim to China's centrality in international relations'.<sup>57</sup> Zhou also visited India and Burma to assure these nations' leaders that China did not intend to 'export revolution' and that China believed that countries with different political systems could coexist peacefully. The Chinese political leaders reiterated these assurances during visits by the Indian and Burmese prime ministers to Beijing in October 1954.<sup>58</sup>

China also seized upon the Bandung Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in April 1955 as another opportunity to consolidate its efforts as well as to gain support from potentially sympathetic states. The event

55 Chen 2008, pp. 216-217.

56 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'China's Initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence'.

57 Chen 2008, p. 225.

58 Zhang 2007, pp. 519-521.

involved delegations from 29 Asian and African countries that, in the view of the CPC, were all former colonies that desired a different international order from the one that had been established by the US and its key allies.<sup>59</sup> The CPC leadership therefore felt that the Bandung Conference was an appropriate occasion for China to establish ‘a broad anti-Western-imperialist/colonialist “united front” among the “oppressed nations” in the non-Western world’.<sup>60</sup> In the run-up to and immediate aftermath of the event, the state-owned *People’s Daily* repeatedly depicted the US as an imperialist power (*mei diguo zhuyi*) that was out to sabotage the Bandung Conference. It also emphasised that China had the support of many countries—such as India, Indonesia, and Myanmar—in fighting the ‘imperialist forces’ and ensuring the successful conduct of the conference.<sup>61</sup> Zhou also took the opportunity of the conference to outline a Chinese vision that was structured around the Five Principles—one that would reject the use of sanctions against states that did not share similar political systems or ideologies—which China’s leaders sought to depict and promulgate as a clear alternative to the Western alliance system.<sup>62</sup> China’s audience at Bandung was a sympathetic one. As John Garver notes, China and India ‘favoured highlighting the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” as a normative basis for state-to-state relations, putatively in contradistinction to imperialist norms of aggression, bullying, warmongering, interference, and such’.<sup>63</sup> He also pointed out that Zhou’s speech at Bandung was ‘very well received by the audience [...] prolonged and warm applause followed Zhou’s speech, and many delegates later congratulated Zhou for an eloquent and reasonable presentation’.<sup>64</sup>

59 Ibid., p. 522; and Richardson 2010, p. 31.

60 Chen 2008, p. 239.

61 See e.g. ‘*sulian, aiji, libaneng dengguo baozhi he xultya yiyuan fabiao pinglun, zhongshi yafei huiyi de guoji yiyi* [USSR, Egypt, Lebanon and other countries’ newspapers and Syrian parliamentary members express their views concerning the international significance of the Asian-African conference], 17 April 1955; ‘*huanying yafei huiyi shengli zhaokai* [Welcoming the victorious opening of the Asian-African conference], 18 April 1955; ‘*geguo yulun huanying zhaokai yafei huiyi* [Various countries express their welcome on the conduct of the Asian-African conference], 20 April 1955; ‘*nuli zhengqu yafei huiyi de chengong* [Working towards the success of the Asian-African conference], 22 April 1955; ‘*wanlong huiyi shengli bimü* [The victorious closing of the Bandung conference], 26 April 1955; and Wu 1955.

62 See e.g. ‘*yazhou guojia huiyi; guanyu zhengzhi wenti de gexiang jueyi* [The conference of Asian countries; concerning various decisions on political issues], 12 April 1955; ‘*yafei huiyi shengli bimü; zhounelai zongli zai bimü huiyishang fayan* [The Asian-African conference concludes successfully; Premier Zhou Enlai speaks at the closing ceremony], 25 April 1955; and ‘*nuli zhengqu yafei huiyi de chengong* [Working towards the success of the Asian-African conference], 22 April 1955.

63 Garver 2016, p. 107.

64 Ibid.

As Jian Chen claims, the CPC leadership 'saw China's presence at the Geneva and Bandung Conferences as a valuable opportunity to boost the country's international prestige and reputation'.<sup>65</sup> Seizing this opportunity, China's leaders made a concerted effort to reach out to what they considered potentially like-minded states within Asia and Africa. They sought to gain support from these states by bringing them on board in the promotion of guiding principles for interstate relations calculated to appeal to nations whose colonial history made them wary of external intervention. Beijing's efforts were not in vain. Mineo Nakajima notes that 'China's prestige and influence [in the mid 1950s] rose steadily, and at one point Peking seemed to be emerging as the champion of the world's newly independent nations'.<sup>66</sup>

Beijing's diplomatic success notwithstanding, the historian Shu Guang Zhang argues that the Chinese leadership was ultimately unable to mitigate the political and economic impact of the US-led sanctions against China. These sanctions not only resulted in the breakdown of the Sino-Soviet alliance but also in part prompted the disastrous Great Leap Forward and the Anti-Rightist campaign in China.<sup>67</sup> Such an argument suggests the symbolic character of the international posturing in which the Chinese political elite engaged during the early years of the PRC, i.e. that it was part of an effort to counter the stigma of China being cast as a 'deviant state' in the international arena. This view, moreover, is supported by the fact that other similar efforts followed in subsequent years, in many cases also with greater investment in their symbolic value than in their material impact. For example, during a 1964 visit to Africa, Zhou announced China's 'Eight Principles of Foreign Aid' which distinguished Chinese aid policies from those of the West by stating explicitly that China would not attach any conditions to the dispensing of such largesse.<sup>68</sup>

This section has demonstrated that in the face of US-led sanctions against the newly established PRC during the Cold War, Chinese leaders adopted a counter-stigmatisation strategy by depicting the US and its allies as the 'transgressors' that had bullied and exploited countries in the developing world. They further sought—through their rhetoric and diplomatic efforts—to create new rules and a new world order that they claimed would be beneficial to other 'oppressed' non-Western nations. More importantly,

65 Chen 2008, p. 134.

66 Nakajima 2008, p. 261.

67 Zhang 2001, pp. 265-278.

68 For more details on the official guidelines of Chinese foreign aid, see White Paper issued by China's Information Office of the State Council, 'China's Foreign Aid', April 2011.



through these efforts, Chinese leaders sought to mitigate any losses to its international status and influence due to the stigma imposed by the US and its allies as a result of the sanctions.

#### 4.2.4 China's admission to the UN

In 1971, following more than two decades of lobbying, the PRC unseated the Republic of China (ROC) in the UN and replaced the ROC as a veto-wielding permanent member of the UNSC. Ostensibly, the admission of the PRC into the UN, particularly as a permanent member of the UNSC, accorded China 'the same authority and advantages of "great power exceptionalism" as the other permanent members'—a change that some scholars believe meaningfully reduced the incentives for China to pursue a revisionist agenda *vis-à-vis* the post-war liberal world order.<sup>69</sup> As G. John Ikenberry and other international relations scholars have argued, this order—as established after 1945 by the leading democratic states (i.e. the US and its key allies)—leveraged interlocking international institutions to 'mute the importance of power asymmetries within international relations'.<sup>70</sup> Ikenberry describes this international system as 'historically unique [...] more liberal than imperial—and so unusually accessible, legitimate, and durable'.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, these descriptors might not have represented key ideological or strategic values in the eyes of the Chinese political leadership. As Yong Deng explains, within the existing international system, 'the prototypical member of the established in-group is one that takes seriously the collective responsibility of maintaining the international order, practices liberal democracy, and embraces free-market principles'.<sup>72</sup> From this perspective, even if we grant that the acceptance of the PRC as a permanent member of the UNSC represented a sincere attempt by the US and other major European powers to embrace China as an equal power, China might not be perceived, either inside or outside of China, as having been fully accepted unless it conformed to the normative criteria of the 'established in-group'. In addition, given that these criteria align imperfectly at best with the normative values of the CPC leadership, such 'full acceptance' seems an unlikely and perhaps even a receding prospect.

The admission of the PRC to the UN indeed represents a prospective turning point in the course of sanctions behaviour towards China and

69 Ikenberry 2008, pp. 23-37. For similar views, see Lake 2014, pp. 61-82.

70 Ikenberry 2001, p. 6.

71 Ikenberry 2008. See also Ikenberry 2001; and Deudney and Ikenberry 1999, pp. 103-137.

72 Deng 2008, p. 26.

China's response. However, in tracing the roots and impact of this event, we should consider evidence regarding the intentions of the US and its allies in 'accepting' China as well as the perceptions of the Chinese political leadership regarding the nature and significance of this acceptance. We should also consider the impact of this event on the counter-stigmatisation strategy vis-à-vis US and US-led sanctions that China had adopted throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

#### 4.2.5 The road to China's UN admission

Immediately after the PRC's establishment on 1 October 1949, Zhou Enlai announced the Chinese leadership's intention to join the UN. He noted that the PRC's accession to the UN would be a 'badge of sovereignty [which would also] legitimise the government and its status as a great power'.<sup>73</sup> China's entry into the Korean War one year later, however, put Beijing's hopes for UN membership in limbo. Over the next two decades, the US lobbied its allies to vote against proposals seeking to admit the PRC into the UN. Among the reasons for its opposition was Beijing's (and Taipei's) insistence that the UN could not have 'two Chinas'. As the political scientist and former US official Lincoln Bloomfield proclaimed in 1966, 'since the heart of the American policy dilemma is to find a suitable formula for ensuring Taiwan's continued representation whatever befalls, [a] "two China" approach looks interesting or would if both Chinas had not violently opposed any scheme that undermined their respective claims to a monopoly on representation of "China"'.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the PRC's admission would necessitate the expulsion of the US-backed ROC, which the PRC claimed had 'unlawfully' occupied its UN seat.<sup>75</sup> In the mid to late 1960s, however, momentum built up for China's bid to join the UN. Joel Wuthnow suggests that one of the key factors in this regard was the process of 'decolonisation, particularly in Africa, [which had] led to a number of newly independent states [and changed] the composition of the UN such that, by 1965, about 76 per cent of its members hailed from the developing world, which tended to support China [entering] the UNGA'.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, in recognition of the PRC's growing international influence and status as a nuclear power, US's closest allies—notably the UK and France—began

73 Zhou Enlai quoted in Wuthnow 2013, p. 14. See also Liu 2014, pp. 26-27.

74 Bloomfield 1996, p. 659.

75 PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Struggle to Restore China's Lawful Seat in the United Nations'.

76 Wuthnow 2013, p. 14.

at this time to support China's bid for UN representation.<sup>77</sup> As Bloomfield notes, 'since France's decision in 1965 to recognise mainland China, the United States has been the only Great Power supporting Nationalist China'.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the US had found itself increasingly out of step with the mainstream of international opinion on PRC membership in the UN. In November 1970, US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger initiated two studies to review and reconsider US options in this regard: National Security Study Memoranda (NSSM) 106 and NSSM 107.<sup>79</sup> In NSSM 107, US officials opined that the PRC's entry into the UN would have an 'immediately unsettling effect' on the UNSC. The report reflected the US's longstanding strategy on the matter:

For many years we argued that Peking was not qualified for membership. The PRC's action in Korea and attacks on the UN gave point to our arguments. More recently we have placed our major emphasis on arguing against 'expulsion' of the ROC. We have based our (and the ROC's) case on political and membership grounds, and have intentionally elided the legal and representational issue (which government is the legal government and representative of China), since only the political argument was likely to persuade the Assembly to keep Peking out and Taiwan in.<sup>80</sup>

Over and above the US commitment to supporting the ROC, the prospect of the PRC becoming a permanent member of the UNSC appeared to be what worried US officials the most. This report corroborated with Bloomfield's warning that there was a need 'to keep Peking as long as possible from China's Security Council seat, even if seated in the Assembly',<sup>81</sup> given that there was a 'steady move back towards the use of the Security Council [...] [and the US cannot] say with any assurance that the India-Pakistan fighting would have been ended as it was in September 1965 or the Cyprus force extended for three months as it unanimously was in March 1966—or some future explosion quickly defused—with Peking in China's Council Seat'.<sup>82</sup> Recognising elements of China's 'counter-stigmatisation strategy', the authors of report NSSM 107 further warned that, as a UNSC member, the PRC 'would have a greater capacity for trouble-making than did the USSR'. This was because

77 Bloomfield 1996, p. 675. See also Sutter 2010, p. 60.

78 Bloomfield 1996, p. 654.

79 US National Security Council, NSSM 106 and NSSM 107.

80 US National Security Council, NSSM 107, pp. 12-13.

81 Bloomfield 1996, p. 670.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 662.

'as the self-appointed champion of the developing countries, Communist China would probably support or initiate efforts to bring before the Council complaints against colonialism and Western "imperialism"'.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, the report recognised increasing support among UN member states for the PRC's petition for admission. For this reason, the authors recommended that the US continue to support a dual representation proposal—i.e. a plan by which both China and Taiwan would be represented in the UN—to which the report explicitly acknowledged that neither Beijing nor Taiwan would agree.<sup>84</sup> The report proposed that the US attempt to perpetuate the decades-old stalemate while appearing to be eager, in principle, to see the PRC admitted to the UN. As an alternative strategy, the report suggested that the US could persist in its support for Taiwan (only), without attempting to dissuade others from advancing dual representation resolutions.<sup>85</sup>

In February 1971, a report prepared by an 'ad hoc working group' in response to NSSM 107 further warned that the US faced an 'immediate, major problem at the UN' in that the UNGA was likely to 'expel the Representatives of the ROC and seat the representatives of Communist China either [that] year or [the following year]'.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, about six weeks later, in a National Security Council meeting, US Vice President Spiro Agnew recommended that the US remain firm in its public support for Taiwan. The minutes of the meeting reveal that his recommendation was made with the awareness that the PRC's bid for UN representation would soon succeed:

I am not sure whether we should consider a defeat in the UN as something we should shy away from as a bad thing for the US now. I am not sure that a defeat at the UN is not in our interest. If we are defeated and Taiwan is replaced by Communist China, it does not affect our national security. Looking down the years with Peking—it will have a tall podium and espousing its interests which are not compatible with our views of the world. *If Peking gets in with our assistance or tacit consent, its statements later will have enhanced dignity before the world community [...]* I think that *if we stand with what we believe and take our lumps, that might preserve your options and the options of other Presidents better in the future.*<sup>87</sup> [emphasis added]

83 US National Security Council, NSSM 107, 24; and NSSM 107, Annex F, 1.

84 US National Security Council, NSSM 107, 30-38.

85 Ibid., Annex G, pp. 2-3.

86 US National Security Council, NSSM 107, p. 2.

87 Minutes of National Security Council Meeting (Part II), 25 March 1971.

Essentially, Agnew advised President Richard M. Nixon and the nation's top security officials that the US should continue to distance itself publicly from 'Communist China' and from the inclusion of China in the international community, even if doing so might compromise some of the US's immediate interests. This policy prevailed, and on 25 October 1971, the US delegation to the UN sponsored a draft resolution that would have declared the expulsion of the ROC an 'important question' requiring a two-thirds rather than a simple majority for approval by the UNGA. This resolution was rejected by a vote of 59 against, 55 for, and 15 abstentions. On the same day, the UNGA passed Resolution 2758 with 76 in favour, 35 opposed, and 17 abstentions.<sup>88</sup> In a defeat for the US and the US-backed ROC, Resolution 2758 recognised the PRC government as China's 'only legitimate representatives to the UN, and [expelled] forthwith the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek from the place which they unlawfully occupy at the UN and in all the organisations related to it'.<sup>89</sup>

In brief, far from willingly accepting the PRC into the UN, the US had 'staked its not inconsiderable prestige since 1950 [to keep] Red China out'.<sup>90</sup> The question, then, is as follows: Do Chinese leaders perceive China's UN admission to be a genuine attempt by the US and its allies to embrace the PRC as an equal partner in the international community?

#### 4.2.6 China's reaction to its UN admission

Shortly after Resolution 2758 was passed, the PRC leadership assembled and mobilised its first UN delegation, which was led by Vice Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua and with Huang Hua (previously China's ambassador to Canada) designated to represent the PRC at the UNSC.<sup>91</sup> Initially, China was careful not to be too aggressive in its UN participation or to antagonise the US directly. This strategy was elucidated by Zhou Enlai in 1971: '[China does] not have too much knowledge about the United Nations and [is] not too conversant with the situation which has arisen within the United Nations. [China] must not be indiscreet and haphazard'.<sup>92</sup> However, an undated document entitled 'Struggle to Restore China's Lawful Seat in the United Nations', published by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, offers a glimpse behind

88 Tanner 1971.

89 UN General Assembly 26<sup>th</sup> Session, Resolution 2758, 25 October 1971.

90 Bloomfield 1996, p. 655.

91 Wuthnow 2013, p. 15.

92 Zhou Enlai quoted in Choedon 1990, p. 17.

this reserved exterior of government-level sentiment in China regarding the nation's successful struggle for UN admission:

In July 1971, the US continued to attempt to block the settlement of China's representation in the UN. In addition to putting forward a resolution on the 'important question' with the Sato Eisaku government of Japan to the 26<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly, it cooked up a resolution on 'dual representation', namely, accepting the representative of the PRC in the UN but retaining the representation of 'the ROC' in it. In response to this open attempt to create 'two Chinas' in the UN by the United States, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a solemn statement on 29 August [1971]. It was pointed out in the statement that to restore the lawful rights of the PRC in the UN and expel the Chiang Kai-shek clique from the UN were two inseparable aspects of the same question and that China would never allow the creation of 'two Chinas' or 'one China, one Taiwan' in the UN. On 25 October [1971], the 26th UNGA rejected the 'important question' resolution with 59 votes against, 55 votes for and 15 abstentions. It proceeded to pass with an overwhelming majority of votes (76 votes for, 35 votes against and 17 abstentions) a resolution sponsored by Albania, Algeria and other 21 countries, which decided to restore all the lawful rights of the PRC in the UN and immediately expel the representatives of the Kuomintang clique from the UN and all its affiliated agencies. This is the famous UNGA Resolution No. 2758, which brought about a thorough and fair settlement of China's representation in the UN politically, legally and procedurally. *The restoration of China's lawful rights by the 26th UNGA represented a major victory won on this issue through protracted struggle by China and many justice-upholding third-world countries and other countries. It was a major breakthrough in China's diplomacy and marked the complete failure of the anti-China forces in their attempt to block the restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the UN.*<sup>93</sup> [emphasis added]

This account of the run-up to and significance of China's admission into the UN suggests neither the sentimental perception that admission represented a welcoming gesture on the part of the Western-oriented liberal world order nor an attendant belief that the US and its allies would willingly and genuinely accept China as an 'equal power' in the international community.

93 PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Struggle to Restore China's Lawful Seat in the United Nations'.

Rather, this document characterised admission into the UN as a definitive victory on the part of 'China and the Third World' against the US, Japan, and the ROC, supported by numerous smaller states. It also provides a glimpse into a leadership culture in which the idea of a struggle between opposing international camps persisted.

The momentous event of China's admission into the UN did not appear to have altered the Chinese leadership's perceptions towards the US and its allies to any meaningful extent. In the words of Mao Zedong, having been isolated by the West for more than two decades, China was finally 'carried into the UN by our brothers from Africa and other smaller countries' (*shi feizhou heiren xiongli he zhongxiaoguo jia yong jiaozhi ba women taijin lianheguo de*).<sup>94</sup> From this perspective, it is unlikely that Beijing would have abandoned its counter-stigmatisation strategy simply because it became a member of the UN and the UNSC in 1971.

#### 4.2.7 The lifting of Cold War sanctions and beginning of US-led sanctions after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident

Largely due to the Nixon's administration efforts to engage with China, US sanctions against China were gradually lifted in the decade following China's admission to the UN, and important foundations were laid on many fronts for the expansion of bilateral cooperation.<sup>95</sup> Kissinger and Nixon's visits to China in 1971 and 1972 paved the way for the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the US and China in 1979, which marked an important turning point in the bilateral relationship. As Evelyn Goh notes, US leaders recognised that Washington had to demonstrate to Beijing that they viewed China as an equal and 'legitimate great power'; and Washington 'expected Beijing to be willing to pay a price for this symbolic gain' by being more cooperative with the US on a broad range of issues.<sup>96</sup> Chinese leaders indeed reciprocated by toning down their counter-stigmatisation rhetoric during this period. Nevertheless, Beijing remained deeply suspicious of the US and its allies. By the early 1980s, Beijing became concerned about the increasing perception both within and outside of China that China was dependent on the US both economically and for offsetting the power of the Soviet Union.<sup>97</sup> This notwithstanding, as David Lampton points out,

94 Mao quoted in Luo 2015; and Liu 2011.

95 Meijer 2016, pp. 55-116.

96 Goh 2005, pp. 166-167.

97 Deng 2008, p. 5.

'President Richard Nixon and Chairman Mao Zedong, followed by President Jimmy Carter and Supreme Leader Deng Xiaoping, gradually constructed a grand bargain that helped stabilise Sino-American relations for nearly two decades (1972-1989).'<sup>98</sup> This improvement in US-China relations during this period is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that US exports of advanced technology to China increased from USD 630 million in 1982 to USD 1.7 billion in 1988.<sup>99</sup>

However, US-China relations were dealt a setback in 1989 following the crackdown by the People's Liberation Army on student demonstrations at Beijing's Tiananmen Square, which left hundreds dead and thousands arrested.<sup>100</sup> On the day following the Tiananmen Square Incident (henceforth Tiananmen), US President George H.W. Bush publicly expressed support for the demonstrators, hailing them as promoters of 'freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of association'.<sup>101</sup> In the same press conference, Bush reaffirmed his country's commitment to 'stand with those who seek greater freedom and democracy' throughout the world as well as to 'react to setbacks [to the process of democratisation] in a way which stimulates rather than stifles progress toward open and representative systems'.<sup>102</sup> Bush also announced that some forms of sanctions would once again be imposed against China, primarily to 'suspend certain things on the military side'.<sup>103</sup> Was the US once again trying to stigmatise China through the Tiananmen sanctions, and what were Beijing's responses to this fresh round of sanctions?

#### 4.2.8 The extent of post-Tiananmen sanctions, 1989-1993

As political repression in China escalated in the days and weeks following Tiananmen to include the leadership's endorsement of martial law, the mobilisation of troops, and the issuing of death sentences for demonstrators, Bush faced considerable pressure from members of Congress to adopt a much harsher public stance against the PRC.<sup>104</sup> Bush agreed to further

98 Lampton 2001, p. 2.

99 Meijer 2016, p. 84.

100 For details on events leading to the Tiananmen incident, see Harding 1992; Suettinger 2003; and Zhang, Nathan and Link 2002.

101 Transcript of George H.W. Bush news conference, 5 June 1989.

102 Ibid.

103 Transcript of George H.W. Bush news conference, 5 June 1989.

104 US Department of State, Briefing Memorandum for the Secretary, 'Meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Qian, November 30'.



tighten US sanctions against China. The US suspended all high-level visits to China; petitioned international financial institutions to suspend loans; and suspended or banned all arms sales, technology transfers, Overseas Private Investment Corporation assistance to US firms investing in China, and other trade development programme activities in China.<sup>105</sup> At the request of Congress, the Bush administration also lobbied US allies to impose collective sanctions on China, so as to 'demonstrate abhorrence of the repressive actions' of the Chinese authorities.<sup>106</sup> The European Community, along with the UK, France, Germany, and Japan, soon followed the US lead in introducing sanctions. The Asian Development Bank and the World Bank also agreed to suspend further lending to China.<sup>107</sup> Meanwhile, the US Congress passed with an overwhelming majority a comprehensive sanctions amendment by July 1989—which became attached to the US Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Federal Years 1990 and 1991 introduced in November 1989—that codified the US sanctions into law.<sup>108</sup> China suffered a significant decline in revenues from tourism, direct foreign investment, and foreign lending between 1989 and 1991 as a direct result of these sanctions.<sup>109</sup>

Nonetheless, President Bush appeared deeply reluctant to undertake drastic action against Beijing. At the risk of a rift with Congress—not to mention human rights advocates—Bush rejected proposals to recall the US ambassador to China and sought to minimise the impact of Tiananmen on US-China relations through a series of actions. Some of these efforts were summarised in a background brief that staff prepared for US Secretary of State James Baker in the run-up to his meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen in November 1990:

The President has taken steps to maintain the commercial relationship [between China and the US]. He renewed China's 'Most Favoured Nation (MFN)' status, despite strong Congressional opposition, and fought off Congressional attempts to overturn his decision. He kept US export financing programmes open in China and waived Congressional sanctions to permit Export-Import Bank lending to continue. He also waived Congressional sanctions to permit the licensing of the Asiasat satellite for launch by China.

105 Harding 1992, p. 226; and Suettinger 2003, p. 84.

106 See e.g. S. Res. 142, 'A Resolution Condemning the Brutal Use of Force by the Government of the PRC against Unarmed Chinese Students and Workers Demonstrating for Democracy, and for Other Purposes', 6 June 1989.

107 Harding 1990, p. 5.

108 Meijer 2016, p. 106.

109 Ibid.

US policies, with relatively few exceptions, continue to provide China with access to advanced technology. Support for World Bank lending has also continued to the maximum extent possible given legislative constraints and other important concerns, especially human rights.<sup>110</sup>

Thus, almost eighteen months after Tiananmen, the Bush administration was still eager to make the case to China that it was making proactive efforts to preserve the relationship between the two nations. And indeed, most of the sanctions were short-lived, with US allies (especially in Asia) showing little enthusiasm for sustaining them. For example, by November 1990, when the background brief quoted above was being prepared for Baker, Japan had announced the resumption of loan packages to China, prompting the US State Department to observe that 'the decision by the Japanese and the European Community to resume previously suspended activities [had] undoubtedly led the Chinese to believe that Western resolve on sanctions was failing and that the US was becoming increasingly isolated on China policy'.<sup>111</sup> Except for some forms of arms embargo, the US also gradually relaxed its sanctions in the next few years, with the vast majority being eliminated by 1993.

#### 4.2.9 China's response to the Tiananmen sanctions

In an undated report to Baker, the US Ambassador to Beijing summarised China's responses to the Tiananmen sanctions as follows: 'Virtually all direct comments on the US moves [were] limited to repeating the foreign ministry press spokesperson's statements [on] June 22 [1989] that China oppose[d] the US government's interference in China's internal affairs, and [would] not yield to outside pressures'.<sup>112</sup> Faced with both international condemnation and a volatile situation at home, there were indeed incentives for the CPC leadership to adopt a more muted response. Indeed, as a guideline for post-Tiananmen Chinese foreign policy, Deng quoted a pithy Chinese maxim: Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs cool-headedly; be good at maintaining a low profile; never claim leadership of the world; act but keep a low profile while biding our time (*leng jing guan cha, wen zhu*

<sup>110</sup> US Department of State, Briefing Memorandum for the Secretary, 'Meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Qian, November 30'.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Report by the US Ambassador to Beijing, 'Chinese Reaction to Latest US Moves: Muted, So Far'.

*zhen jiao, chen zhuo ying dui, tao guang yang hui, shan yu shou zhuo, jue bu dang tou*).<sup>113</sup>

Nevertheless, the Chinese leadership quickly engaged in counter-stigmatisation efforts. This can be glimpsed from the *People's Daily* reports of this period. Between July 1989 and the second half of 1990, *People's Daily* published many articles and commentaries expressing the Chinese people's 'extreme indignation' over the US attempt to cite the promotion of democracy, freedom and human rights (*dazhe minzhu, ziyou, renquan de qi hao*) as reasons to insult (*wumie*), attack (*gongji*), and ultimately overthrow the CPC government (*tufan zhongguo gongchandang de lingdao*).<sup>114</sup> These reports also underlined that although the PRC had been politically isolated and had had sanctions imposed on it from the moment it was established in 1949, such efforts by the US and its allies would only 'inspire the Chinese people' to work harder (*fafen*) and be more nationalistic (*jiqi zhongguo renmin de aiguo zhuyi jingshen*).<sup>115</sup>

Beyond the rhetoric of the *People's Daily*, the top Chinese leadership also appeared to be deeply unsettled by the international response to Tiananmen. As Yong Deng observes, 'the period of 1989-92 saw a besieged [CPC] leadership struggling to resist Western sanctions and thwart what it called the Western conspiracy of "peaceful evolution", [which it believed was] designed to overthrow the Chinese government'.<sup>116</sup> This casts doubt

113 English translation from Chen 2013, p. 175.

114 See e.g. '*jiu meiguo guohui tongguo zhicai zhongguo xiuzhengan; renda waishi weiyuanhui fabiao shengming; dui cubao ganshe woguo neizheng xingwei biaoshi jida fenkai* [Concerning the US Congress approving sanctions against China; China's Foreign Affairs Committee expresses extreme indignation against the gross intervention in China's internal affairs], 21 July 1989; '*jiu meiguo guohui tongguo zhicai zhongguo xiuzhengan; zhengxie waishi weiyuanhui fabiao shengming; dui zhezhong fanhua xingjing biaoshi jida fenkai* [Concerning the US Congress approving sanctions against China; CPC Central Committee's Foreign Affairs Committee expresses extreme indignation against anti-China actions], 23 July 1989; '*jiu meiguo guohui tongguo zhicai zhongguo de xiuzhengan; zhengxie waishi weiyuanhui yanzheng shengming; zhichu renhe zhicai zuzhi buliao zhongguo renmin shengli qianjin* [Concerning the US Congress approving sanctions against China; CPC Central Committee's Foreign Affairs Committee indicates that no sanctions would be able to stop the Chinese people from progressing victoriously], 23 November 1989; '*quanguo renda waiweihui zhaokai quanti huiyi; kangyi meiguo guohui cubao ganshe zhongguo neizheng; fengquan mei mouxie yiyuan cong kuangwang pianjian zhong jietuo chulai* [China's Foreign Affairs Committee calls for conference; opposes the US Congress's actions in intervening in China's internal affairs; advises US lawmakers to walk out of their arrogant biases], 4 February 1990; and Zhang and Sun 1990.

115 '*jiu meiguo guohui tongguo zhicai zhongguo de xiuzhengan; zhengxie waishi weiyuanhui yanzheng shengming; zhichu renhe zhicai zuzhi buliao zhongguo renmin shengli qianjin* [Concerning the US Congress approving sanctions against China; CPC Central Committee's Foreign Affairs Committee indicates that no sanctions would be able to stop the Chinese people from progressing victoriously], 23 November 1989.

116 Deng 2008, p. 41.

on any assumptions that the rapprochement with the US had left the CPC leadership any more convinced of Western acceptance of China as an equal partner in the international system and, accordingly, their willingness to discard their counter-stigmatisation strategy. Again, we can refer to the words spoken by Deng Xiaoping to the Japanese on 1 December 1989:

This turmoil has been a lesson to us. We are [now] more keenly aware that first priority should always be given to national sovereignty and security. Some Western countries, on the pretext that China has an *unsatisfactory human rights record and an irrational and illegitimate socialist system*, attempt to jeopardise our national sovereignty. Countries that play power politics are not qualified to talk about human rights. How many people's human rights have they violated throughout the world! Since the Opium War, when they began to invade China, how many Chinese people's human rights have they violated!<sup>117</sup> [emphasis added]

Here, against a background of significant improvements in China's bilateral relationships with the US and other European powers, and despite the efforts of President Bush and others to keep the response to Tiananmen to a minimum, Deng's comments reveal both frustration and indignation. In particular, he decries the interventionist policies and double standards practised by 'some Western countries'. Despite China's ostensible integration into the international system and nearly two decades of fairly steady progress in improving relations between China and the West, this closed-door discourse suggests that China's leaders saw the US and its allies as persisting in their attempts to stigmatise China as an 'irrational and illegitimate socialist system'.

Subsequently, in a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in July 1990, Deng reiterated China's view that Western countries had 'no right' to impose sanctions on China. He stated that 'experience [had proven] that China [had] the ability to withstand these sanction[s, and that] one special feature of China's development [was] that it [had] proceeded under international sanctions for most of the 40 years since the founding of the People's Republic. [Hence, if] there [was] nothing else [China was] good at, [it was] good at withstanding sanctions'.<sup>118</sup> Deng also took the opportunity to outline specific principles of China's foreign policy, which were as follows: China would not accept foreign interference designed to change China's

<sup>117</sup> Deng 1993, p. 348.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 359. The English translation is available at <http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/d1150.html>, accessed 18 October 2016.

social system; the 'key principle governing the new international order should be non-interference in other countries' internal affairs and social systems'; China—together with 'another fifth of the world's population' and 'developing countries of the Third World'—would not adopt America's capitalist system or allow it to interfere in their internal affairs; and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were the only acceptable 'norms for the new international political and economic order'.<sup>119</sup>

Notably, the third point specified here by Deng associates China with 'developing countries of the Third World', providing evidence that after the 1989 Tiananmen incident the Chinese political elite persisted in their strategy of counter-stigmatisation. Indeed, the Chinese leaders attempted to break out of diplomatic isolation following Tiananmen by proactively engaging other developing countries particularly in Asia, and their efforts met with a fair degree of success. As the November 1990 US State Department background brief acknowledges, China had 'passed through the one year anniversary of the turmoil of 1989 without violence; hosted the Asian Games without any embarrassing demonstrations or incidents; and burnished their credentials for participation in key global and regional issues by contributing to the handling of the Gulf crisis and Cambodia'.<sup>120</sup>

The sanctions imposed by the US against China following Tiananmen were much less significant in scope and duration than those imposed during the Cold War. Chinese leaders nevertheless viewed these sanctions as continued attempts by the US to stigmatise China and the Communist Party of China. The following section examines whether this dynamic of stigmatisation and counter-stigmatisation was sustained in the post-Tiananmen era—a period that witnessed increasing economic interdependence between China, the US, and other Western states.

#### 4.2.10 Post-Tiananmen debates, 1993 onwards

Despite the relatively short-lived sanctions imposed against China following Tiananmen, sustained debates within the US and Europe on whether they should continue to impose sanctions on China over its lack of progress on democracy and human rights also contributed to the top Chinese leadership's perception of continued Western attempts at stigmatisation. This was

119 Deng 1993, p. 359. The English translation is available at <http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/d1150.html>, accessed 18 October 2016.

120 US Department of State, Briefing Memorandum for the Secretary, 'Meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Qian, November 30'.

exacerbated by public remarks made by US politicians and officials against China. For example, in 1993, President Bill Clinton's National Security Adviser publicly labelled China as 'one of the "backlash states" in the company of Iran, Iraq, Burma, and North Korea'.<sup>121</sup> Speaking alongside Chinese President Jiang Zemin at a joint news conference, Clinton openly accused China of being 'on the wrong side of history' when it came to human rights.<sup>122</sup> Clinton further issued an executive order in 1993 linking the decision on whether to renew China's Most-Favored Nation (MFN) trading status with its human rights situation.<sup>123</sup> While Clinton subsequently decided against doing so, such debates within the US administration, particularly in the run-up to the creation of the new United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2005/2006, prompted China to accuse the US and other Western democracies of 'witch hunting' and of 'naming and shaming governments not to their liking' in the name of promoting human rights.<sup>124</sup> As Zheng Bijian, a top adviser to the Chinese leadership, wrote in 2005, the US had sought to draw lines between friends and enemies 'according to ideology and [a] social system based on the Cold War mentality, [...] values based on "the cultural superiority theory", [...] [and the] traditional notion that the rising power must challenge the existing hegemony'.<sup>125</sup>

China's relations with Europe were similarly damaged by the lingering effects of the Tiananmen sanctions. In October 2003, China and the European Union (EU) affirmed a commitment to build an 'All-Around Strategic Partnership', raising questions within Europe about whether it was still appropriate to retain the post-Tiananmen EU arms embargo against China, which put China in the company of 'rogue states' such as Sudan, Myanmar, and Zimbabwe.<sup>126</sup> The EU, at Beijing's request, promised to initiate discussions on lifting its arms embargo against China.<sup>127</sup> However, two rounds of efforts—in 2003 and 2010 respectively—fell through following significant opposition from some EU member states as well as relentless pressure from Washington. As Hugo Meijer observes, 'continued US pressures coupled with the changing diplomatic, strategic and economic calculus within the EU [...] marked the death knell of any prospects of lifting the EU

121 Quoted in Deng 2008, p. 32.

122 Bennet 1997.

123 Clinton, 'Executive Order 12850 – Conditions for Renewal of Most-Favored Nation Status for the People's Republic of China in 1994', 28 May 1993.

124 Deng 2008, p. 93.

125 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

126 *Ibid.*, p. 157.

127 Casarini 2012, pp. 63-80.

arms embargo against China'.<sup>128</sup> Speaking at a 2012 summit meeting with EU leaders, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao expressed 'deep regret' over the EU's failure to remove the arms embargo despite a decade of negotiations, which China had repeatedly described as a 'relic of the Cold War'.<sup>129</sup>

In 2010, the Norwegian Nobel Committee's decision to award the Nobel Peace Prize to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo, a key participant in the 1989 Tiananmen movement, ignited a furious response from Beijing. This was exacerbated by discussions within the US in 2014 (initiated by a bipartisan group of 13 House members) and 2016 (initiated by the Texas senator and then-Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz) on whether to rename the Chinese Embassy street in Washington after Liu, drawing remarks from the Chinese Foreign Ministry that such 'political farce' violated accepted norms of international relations and would result in severe consequences for the bilateral relationship.<sup>130</sup> These recurrent debates within the US and Europe have been perceived by the Chinese leadership as a sustained Western conspiracy to politicise Tiananmen and to undermine the political legitimacy of the CPC. As Jian Chen notes:

Since the Tiananmen bloodshed in 1989, the increasing criticism by other countries, especially those in the West, of Beijing's human rights abuses and hard-nosed policy towards Tibet and, more recently, Taiwan, have further offended Beijing's leaders. Beijing has persistently rebutted such criticism, claiming it to be a continuation of Western countries' interference with matters within the jurisdiction of Chinese sovereignty. In these ways, a 'Cold War' of another kind has continued between China and the West since the formal ending of the global Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s [...] China [today] is no longer a revolutionary country, but it is not a real 'insider' of the international community either.<sup>131</sup>

Taken as a whole, even as there is evidence that the US and its European allies have shifted their attitudes regarding China and, more specifically, sanctions

128 For more details on the EU's debate on whether to lift the arms embargo against China, see Meijer 2014, p. 48.

129 See e.g. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'Wen Jiabao: Arms Sales Embargo against China is a Legacy of the Cold War', 8 December 2004; and BBC, 'Chinese Premier Urges End to EU Arms Embargo', 20 September 2012.

130 See e.g. 'China Urges Veto over Naming US Plaza after Liu Xiaobo', *BBC News*, 17 February 2016; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on February 16, 2016'; and Ramzy 2016.

131 Chen 2001, p. 279.

against China, there is little doubt that the Chinese political leadership has up until the 2010s perceived continued Western stigmatisation against the ruling Chinese regime that has continued to threaten China's international status. As Aaron Friedberg observes, '[i]n recent years, official [CPC] ideology has become more explicitly anti-Western, attacking the liberal claim that there are universal values as an affront to China's unique civilisation and an attack on its distinctive institutions'.<sup>132</sup> In this context, Chinese leaders have continued to engage in a counter-stigmatisation strategy by seeking to delegitimise US and European sanctions while promoting an alternative set of principles to guide interstate relations.

#### 4.3 China's counter-stigmatisation: its sanctions frame at the UNSC, 1997-2016

The foregoing narrative suggests that despite changes to the international context between the Cold War period and the 2010s, the Chinese elite has consistently believed that the West engaged in sanctions to stigmatise China and the CPC and has responded through efforts at counter-stigmatisation. What, then, are the underlying principles of sanctions that China is in favour of and has put forward to other members of the international community? These principles—which originated from China's experience as a target of Western sanctions—can be distilled from speeches made by Chinese representatives at UNSC meetings. The UNSC is an important platform for states—especially the veto-wielding permanent members—to spread their ideas and garner support from other members of the international community on various issues. As Ian Hurd suggests, states' decisions on whether to support UN sanctions are complex, as they 'must consider a variety of costs and benefits, including foregone trade, reputation costs, the likelihood of success, and the value of the underlying principle the sanctions are intended to defend'.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, the records of UNSC meetings are the most systematic source of information publicly available, hence significantly reducing the possibility of selection bias.

Several caveats should be made here. First, the focus of this chapter is on distilling the various arguments that Chinese representatives have employed at the UNSC on sanctions-related resolutions, i.e. China's 'sanctions frame', with the aim of organising, entrenching, or problematising prevailing

<sup>132</sup> Friedberg 2018, p. 9.

<sup>133</sup> Hurd 2005, p. 499.



assumptions about when and how sanctions should be employed.<sup>134</sup> It will leave Chapters 5, 6, and 7 to examine whether China's stated standards of sanctions legitimacy is consistent with its behaviour, and therefore this chapter does not deal with China's actual voting behaviour with regard to these resolutions here. Second, it puts aside the question of whether China's claims were sincere and takes the approach of analysing these official remarks as speech acts, i.e. arguments used by various actors to convince or coerce each other and/or third-party states to support their positions and interests. Given that there is an abundance of data on public speeches and interactions, such an approach mitigates the methodological challenge that data on the intentions and decision-making processes of policymakers—especially in the case of China—is frequently inaccessible.

#### 4.3.1 Method of analysis

To identify the arguments that make up China's sanctions frame, I undertook a content analysis of every speech made by Chinese representatives at the UNSC that made reference to sanctions (either the use of sanctions in general or in relation to a specific sanctions regime) from 1997 to 2016 (i.e. the post-Deng Xiaoping decade). I constructed a codebook (reproduced in Appendix A) and worked with another coder throughout the entire coding process in order to enhance the reliability of the analysis.

First, we reviewed all the UNSC meeting records from 1997 to 2016 (4,402 records) and identified those in which the Chinese representative expressed China's views on a sanctions-related issue. There are 768 of these records, labelled as 'Subset A'. Second, we assigned each of the meeting records in Subset A to at least one (and sometimes several) sanctions category, for example, 'counter-terrorism' or 'promotion of good governance'.<sup>135</sup> The most important step in our coding process is the construction of a list of every distinct argument made by Chinese representatives concerning sanctions across this period. This list is then divided into pro- and anti-sanctions arguments. We grouped each of these arguments into five broader dimensions: (1) utility; (2) morality; (3) legitimacy; (4) group dynamics (e.g. having a region and/or regional organisation resolve its own problems); and (5)

<sup>134</sup> The act of framing is a process 'by which people develop a particular conceptualisation of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue'. Definition by Chong and Druckman 2007, p. 103.

<sup>135</sup> These sanctions categories are adopted from the study by the Targeted Sanctions Consortium. See 'Appendix I: List of Cases and Episodes', in Biersteker, Eckert, and Tourinho 2016, pp. 280-287.

others. Each speech in Subset A was coded as many times as necessary if it mentioned multiple arguments.<sup>136</sup>

We used a data analysis software, *NVivo*, throughout the coding process. We coded independently according to the procedures briefly described above and tested for reliability after each step. Agreement for steps 1 and 2 was always over 90 percent and at over 70 percent for step 3. The codebook, which comprises further details on the coding process, as well as sample extracts demonstrating the range of coding options, is included in Appendix A.

#### 4.3.2 China's stated standards of sanctions legitimacy at the UNSC, 1997-2016

Table 4.2 below summarises our findings. It comprises a list of sixteen different types of arguments used by Chinese representatives at the UNSC, clustered across the five different dimensions as indicated above. For example, we coded an argument as '100' as long as it made reference to the utility of sanctions employment (e.g. whether sanctions are effective in attaining policy objectives). The arguments were then further broken down into pro- and anti- arguments. Argument numbers 101 to 103, for example, comprise the different types of arguments that Chinese representatives have used in support of sanctions for utility reasons (e.g. 'sanctions have contributed to countering the threat'); and argument numbers 111 to 113 comprise arguments that have been used by Chinese representatives against the employment of sanctions, also for utility reasons (e.g. 'sanctions are counter-productive to objectives').<sup>137</sup>

The table below also reflects the number of times each argument was put forward by Chinese representatives to the UNSC from 1997 to 2016. These numbers are indicated in brackets beside the respective arguments. Such an approach allows us to get a sense of the most commonly employed arguments by Chinese representatives when discussing sanctions-related issues. While one could potentially quibble about the ways in which the arguments have been counted given the level of subjectivity involved in such a process, this should still not invalidate the main purpose of our coding project, which is to distil the distinct arguments that China has put forward at the UNSC on sanctions-related issues (i.e. China's sanctions frame). Sample abstracts of how we have coded the various arguments can be found at Appendix A.

<sup>136</sup> This is the same coding approach employed in Baumgartner, De Boef, and Boydston 2008, p. 107.

<sup>137</sup> This order of categorisation has similarly been adopted from Baumgartner, De Boef, and Boydston 2008, p. 107.

**Table 4.2 China's Arguments on Sanctions-Related Resolutions at the UNSC, 1997-2016**

<b>Pro-Sanctions Arguments</b>	<b>Anti-Sanctions Arguments</b>
<b>100. Utility (425)</b>	
101. Sanctions and efforts to implement them will contribute/have contributed to countering the threat or addressing the situation. (56)	111. Sanctions are counter-productive to policy objectives. (29)
102. Sanctions can be employed when they are proportionate to the situation, based on facts, and when other means have been exhausted. (123)	112. The UNSC should use other more effective tools (e.g. mediation and negotiation) if they are available rather than the frequent threat or use of sanctions. (58)
103. Sanctions can be used to serve the interests of the overall situation and must be effectively implemented when a consensus has been reached by the UNSC. (58)	113. Sanctions are not long-term solutions and must be constantly reviewed and updated/lifted as soon as there are changes to the situation. (101)
<b>200. Morality (100)</b>	
201. N.A.	211. Sanctions undermine the development of third world/developing countries. (12)
202. N.A.	212. Sanctions worsen humanitarian situations and affect innocent parties. (65)
203. N.A.	213. Sanctions and the threat of sanctions are frequently used wilfully by certain states and undermine the legitimate interests of target states. (23)
<b>300. Legitimacy (101)</b>	
301. The UNSC has the mandate to employ sanctions when necessary and after broad consultations. (18)	311. Individual countries use unilateral sanctions for their own interests and undermine the authority of the UNSC. (26)
302. N.A.	312. The UNSC cannot interfere in the internal affairs of other countries through the employment of sanctions or discuss issues that are unrelated to threats to international peace and security. (57)
<b>400. Group Dynamics (36)</b>	
401. Regional organisations have already expressed support for sanctions. / The international community needs to support the efforts of regional organisations. (12)	411. Regional organisations need to solve their own problems and are already engaging in constructive dialogue/actions. Sanctions interfere in these efforts. (24)
500. Others (15)	
501. China voted in favour of the resolution as its input has been sufficiently considered. (2)	511. China cannot agree with the resolution as the consultation process or resolution text did not sufficiently consider the input from all relevant parties. (13)
<b>Total no. of pro-sanction arguments: 269</b>	<b>Total no. of anti-sanction arguments: 408</b>

(Source: Compiled and calculated from UNSC Meeting Records, 1997-2016)

Table 4.2 reveals that while China more frequently employs anti-sanctions arguments than pro-sanctions ones, China is not entirely against the use of UN sanctions as a political tool. Indeed, Chinese representatives to the UNSC have explicitly acknowledged that 'sanctions are a mandatory tool bestowed by the Charter on the Council to fulfil its duty of maintaining international peace and security'.<sup>138</sup> Nonetheless, we can distil the conditions under which China thinks UN sanctions ought *not* be imposed. This can be grouped into three broad categories. First, codes 103, 301, and 311 indicate China's opposition to the use of sanctions without UN authorisation. Chinese representatives have repeatedly referred to unilateral sanctions by the US and its allies and further alleged that these sanctions worsened the situation and undermined the authority of the UNSC. According to many of these Chinese representatives, sanctions cannot be decided by a single country or a small group of countries. Responding to proposed sanctions against Ukraine, for example, the Chinese representative asserted that 'China [was] opposed, as always, to the Council's involvement in country-specific human rights issues and to the use of unilateral sanctions, or the threat of the use of sanctions freely in international relations'.<sup>139</sup> Speaking more broadly on the issue of UN sanctions, Chinese representative to the UN, Wang Yingfan, commented: 'Needless to say, sanctions against a sovereign State by any country unilaterally and in the absence of authorisation by the Security Council are far from appropriate'.<sup>140</sup>

Second, Chinese representatives have emphasised that the UNSC was only tasked to discuss issues relating to international peace and security. These issues do not include discussions on human rights and/or the promotion of democracy (or when the notions of 'Responsibility to Protect (R2P)' and 'good governance' are linked to issues of human rights and democracy promotion), which constitute interference in the internal affairs of other countries (see code 312). In China's view, the imposition of sanctions for such purposes is ultimately motivated by the desire of sender states to prompt a regime change in the target country. For example, summing up China's views on UNSC debates concerning imposing sanctions against countries with a 'bad human rights record', a Chinese representative said that 'the "human rights over sovereignty" theory serves to infringe upon the sovereignty of other States and to promote hegemonism under the pretext of human rights, [which] runs counter to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter,

<sup>138</sup> See e.g. UNSC, S/PV.4393.

<sup>139</sup> UNSC, S/PV.7576.

<sup>140</sup> UNSC, S/PV.4128.

[thus,] the international community should maintain vigilance against it'.<sup>141</sup> Referring to proposed UN sanctions against North Korea in 2015, another Chinese representative similarly made the following remarks: 'China is always opposed to the Security Council's intervention in issues that concern a country's human rights. The Security Council is not the place to address human rights issues. More importantly, human rights issues should not be politicised'.<sup>142</sup> China's strong objection to the discussion of such issues at the UNSC is likely prompted by its own experiences in the post-Tiananmen period. Such an approach is also in direct contradiction with that of the EU, for example, whose explicit sanctions objectives are to 'promote the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy: peace, democracy and the respect for the rule of law, human rights and international law'.<sup>143</sup>

Third, Chinese representatives to the UNSC have frequently argued that sanctions cannot be imposed based on the domestic laws of certain countries. For example, the Chinese representative to the UN, Wang Min, said the following during a UNSC meeting held in November 2014 to discuss the general theme of UN sanctions: 'Sanctions should not be a tool for one country to use in pursuit of power politics. The domestic law of one country should not become the basis for sanctions against other States. China is opposed to any practice of imposing sanctions on other countries on the basis of one's domestic law'.<sup>144</sup> This is in line with the findings from Code 311.

For China, therefore, UN sanctions can only be imposed when 'broad consultations and consensus' have been established in the international community (see Code 301). Codes 401 and 411 also indicate the importance that China accords to the positions of the various regional organisations on issues concerning their own regions. As a 'self-appointed champion of the developing world', moreover, China has consistently spoken out against proposals to impose sanctions when other developing countries are against it and has highlighted the negative impact of sanctions on developing countries. For example, China vetoed a UNSC draft resolution in November 2008 to impose sanctions on Zimbabwe. The Chinese representative cited the lack of support among African countries on such a resolution as a key reason for its veto: 'In talks at the recently held G8 summit in Hokkaido, Japan, several African leaders once again clearly stated their opposition to imposing sanctions against Zimbabwe at this stage. In recent days, during the Security

141 UNSC, S/PV.4011.

142 UNSC, S/PV.7575.

143 European Union External Action 2016.

144 UNSC, S/PV.7323.

Council's consultations on the situation in Zimbabwe, many countries, including China, repeatedly called upon the Council to respect the position of African countries on that issue [...] regrettably, the sincere appeals and reasonable proposals of those countries were not taken on board'.<sup>145</sup>

Codes 102 and 112 reveal China's preference for alternative means where possible, such as engaging in dialogue and negotiation. Chinese representatives have justified this general reluctance to employ sanctions by citing humanitarian reasons (see codes 211, 212, and 213).<sup>146</sup> They have also constantly reiterated that sanctions should only be imposed as a last resort to serve the purpose of political settlements and cannot be the end-goal.<sup>147</sup> Overall, while China recognises that there could be certain circumstances under which UN sanctions might be justified, it adopts a much more cautious public stance towards the employment of sanctions as a political tool, particularly when compared to the US and the EU, which tend to see UN sanctions regimes as a 'floor' from which unilateral and/or regional sanctions can be further imposed.<sup>148</sup>

Chinese representatives to the UNSC have also articulated the various conditions that should be met when UN sanctions are imposed. These conditions can be grouped into three main categories: (1) sanctions must be regularly assessed and—where appropriate—amended, suspended, and lifted as soon as possible (Code 113); (2) sanctions must be proportionate to specific situations (Code 102); and (3) monitoring mechanisms should be in place to enhance the efficiency of sanctions once imposed (Code 103).<sup>149</sup> China's stated standards of sanctions legitimacy, as described above, are summarised in Table 4.3.

In sum, the main themes of China's sanctions rhetoric are as follows: (1) sanctions cannot be used to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states, such as for reasons relating to democracy promotion and/or human rights; (2) sanctions can only be imposed when agreed upon in the UNSC (instead of unilaterally); and (3) sanctions authorised by the UNSC should act as a 'ceiling' instead of a 'floor' from which unilateral and/or regional sanctions can be further imposed. These standards of sanctions legitimacy, as distilled from the speeches of Chinese representatives at the UNSC from 1997 to 2016, are consistent with the overall themes of Beijing's rhetoric in

<sup>145</sup> UNSC, S/PV.5933.

<sup>146</sup> See e.g. UNSC, S/PV.3968 and S/PV.7323.

<sup>147</sup> UNSC, S/PV.7323.

<sup>148</sup> Charron and Portela 2016, pp. 117–118.

<sup>149</sup> See e.g. UNSC, S/PV.4394; S/PV.4713; S/PV.5474; S/PV.6347; and S/PV.7323.

**Table 4.3 China's Stated Standards of Sanctions Legitimacy at the UNSC**

Sanctions should not be imposed	Sanctions can be imposed
(1) Without the authorisation of the UNSC (i.e. sanctions cannot be decided by a single state or a small group of states).	(1) Following broad consultations and consensus among countries, especially neighbouring countries of the target state, leading to authorisation by the UNSC.
(2) On issues that do not relate to international peace and security, such as human rights-related reasons or the promotion of democracy.	(2) When other non-coercive means have been explored and exhausted, and as a means to an end, with the end being 'political settlements'.
(3) Based on the domestic laws of certain countries.	<p data-bbox="592 553 990 578"><b>Conditions for Sanctions Imposition</b></p> <p data-bbox="592 596 990 649">(1) Sanctions must be regularly reviewed and lifted as soon as possible.</p> <p data-bbox="592 677 990 730">(2) Sanctions must be tailored to specific situations.</p> <p data-bbox="592 758 990 844">(3) Monitoring mechanisms must be in place to enhance the efficiency of sanctions once agreed upon by the UNSC.</p>

response to US-led sanctions during the Cold War and Tiananmen. They reveal China's continued apprehension towards the use of sanctions as a political tool as well as the fundamental differences between China and the US/EU in their approaches towards sanctions imposition.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter advanced the argument that the PRC's experience as a sustained target of Western sanctions since its establishment in 1949 has resulted in the Chinese leadership's conviction that 'the West', led by the US, is determined to reduce China's international status by stigmatising the PRC as a 'destabilising other' whenever the opportunity arises. This also stems from a fear that the US aims to ultimately undermine the legitimacy of the Chinese government, notwithstanding China's growing influence in the international system, its increasing participation in almost all the major international institutions, as well as its expanding engagements with the US and its allies. In response, the Chinese political leadership has persistently engaged in a two-pronged counter-stigmatisation strategy, which seeks to: 1) delegitimise the approach towards sanctions adopted by the US and its allies by depicting it as imperialist

and interventionist, and 2) propose an alternative set of principles to guide inter-state relations. Taken together, this chapter has established that China meets the first condition for the international audience cost mechanism to work, i.e. it places significant value on international opinion. China is also particularly susceptible to this mechanism given its emphasis on gaining higher international status vis-à-vis the US and its allies.

The next few chapters will investigate the empirical evidence to determine whether China's sanctions rhetoric—as outlined in this chapter—has independent effects on the ways in which Chinese leaders employ multilateral and unilateral sanctions.

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## 5. China and United Nations Security Council Sanctions

### Abstract

Chapter 5 uses the dataset of sanctions-related resolutions tabled at the UNSC from 1971 to 2016 to present a correlation analysis that examines the extent to which expectations derived from the ‘rhetoric-based’ hypothesis align with China’s voting behaviour at the UNSC. Thereafter, it examines the backgrounds, debates, and outcomes concerning three case studies: UN sanctions against the DPRK (2006-2016); Syria (2011-2016); and Guinea-Bissau (2012). It examines whether the hypothesised constraining role of China’s sanctions rhetoric or one of the competing explanations best accounts for the outcomes in each case. It finds that China’s sanctions rhetoric had frequently prompted its decision-makers to act or vote in ways that were not the most favourable to China’s immediate political and economic interests.

**Keywords:** United Nations Security Council, sanctions, rhetoric, DPRK, Syria, Guinea-Bissau

Does China’s rhetorical strategy of counter-stigmatisation—i.e. putting forward arguments to challenge the US and its European allies’ approaches to the imposition of sanctions—influence its voting behaviour on sanctions-related resolutions tabled at the United Nations Security Council? Despite its professed ambivalence about the use of UN sanctions, China has rarely wielded its veto power at the UNSC to block sanctions resolutions. Instead, and paradoxically, China has often voted in favour of such resolutions. This chapter argues that China’s sanctions rhetoric has played an important constraining role in China’s voting behaviour. China has had to balance its material interests with the goal of sustaining the coherence of its counter-stigmatisation strategy. This was especially so when significant international attention was drawn to the issue in question—for example, through the

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rhetorical action of an external party—which increased the likelihood of China having to incur international audience costs (i.e. the penalty to credibility that states incur as a result of being perceived as acting at odds with their prior rhetorical commitments).<sup>1</sup>

This chapter unfolds in four sections. The first presents a correlation analysis of the dataset of sanctions-related resolutions tabled at the UNSC across a 45-year period from 1971 (i.e. the year of China's entry into the UN) to 2016, examining the extent to which China's voting behaviour is consistent with the expectations derived from the 'rhetoric-based' hypothesis discussed in Chapter 3. It then investigates three case studies in greater detail, namely, the UN sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) from 2006 to 2016; Syria from 2011 to 2016; and Guinea-Bissau in 2012. The three subsequent sections examine the backgrounds, debates, and outcomes concerning these respective cases, questioning whether the hypothesised constraining role of China's sanctions rhetoric or one of the competing explanations put forward in Chapter 2 best accounts for the outcome in each case.<sup>2</sup>

## 5.1 China and UNSC sanctions: correlation analysis and case study selection

Referencing the works of David Shambaugh and Andrew Small, Chinese analyst Michael Swaine notes in a 2010 article that 'many Western observers [have pointed] to Chinese assertiveness in several foreign policy areas, including [China's] persistent resistance to UNSC sanctions against Iran for its nuclear activities'.<sup>3</sup> A careful examination of the UNSC voting records, however, reveals a more complex picture of China's voting behaviour. For example, while China has indeed voiced objections to certain proposed sanctions against Iran, it supported UNSC sanctions against that country on at least five separate occasions between 2006 and 2010, all of which were targeted at Iran's nuclear activities.<sup>4</sup> Considering China's sanctions voting record more broadly, moreover, China supported 128 out of the 153 sanctions-related resolutions tabled at the UNSC between 1971 and 2016—a figure only slightly less than the number of affirmative votes concerning

1 See Chapter 3 for a more detailed elaboration on 'international audience costs'.

2 This combination of correlation analysis and focused comparison is adapted from Pape 1996, pp. 48–54.

3 Swaine 2010, p. 3.

4 See UNSC, S/RES/1696 (2006); S/RES/1737 (2006); S/RES/1747 (2007); S/RES/1803 (2008); S/RES/1929 (2010).

sanctions-related resolutions cast by the other UNSC permanent members (France: 136; the UK: 135; the US: 135; the USSR/Russia: 133).<sup>5</sup> Such a record is surprising given the Chinese leaders' longstanding distrust of sanctions.<sup>6</sup> What are the factors influencing China's voting decisions and behaviour?

### 5.1.1 Correlation analysis: methodology

In conducting a correlation analysis on a dataset of 153 sanctions-related resolutions tabled at the UNSC from 1971 to 2016, this section examines whether China's voting behaviour is in line with the expectations of a hypothesis based on material (i.e. political/economic) interest or one based on rhetoric. This analysis facilitated the selection of case studies and reduced the possibility of case selection bias. It also provided a preliminary sense of the potential predictive power of the 'rhetoric-based' hypothesis.<sup>7</sup>

First, I worked with two other coders to rank China's material interests—i.e. level of self-focused political, security, and/or economic concerns—with respect to the target and context of each sanctions debate. We assigned a code of '1' to each case in which China was deemed to have had minimal material interests in the target state at the time the relevant sanctions resolutions were being considered within the UNSC. The code '2' was assigned to cases in which China had discernible material interests, but losses in this regard could be expected to be only short-term and/or unlikely to pose a threat to China's security. We assigned the code '3' to cases in which China's significant interests in the target state were likely to be threatened by the proposed UN sanctions. In weighing China's economic interests for coding purposes, we considered not only bilateral trade volumes but also whether China's transactions with a given target state were of a particularly strategic nature (e.g. with respect to the import or export of natural resources such as oil and gas) as well as the difficulty that might be anticipated in replacing a given trade arrangement (i.e. whether China was likely to produce the goods domestically and/or be able to source them from other countries, as

5 During this same period, China either abstained or did not participate in 19 such votes and vetoed the remaining six (one resolution was adopted without a vote). The resolutions in question were targeted at 27 different state and non-state actors (the latter consisting of the Taliban, Al-Qaida, and ISIS/ISIL) and resulted in 24 different sanctions regimes being formally established by the UN. Those vetoed by China (alongside Russia) involved proposed sanctions against Burma/Myanmar (2007), Zimbabwe (2008), and Syria (2011–2016). Details of all 153 resolutions are included in Appendix B.

6 See Chapter 4 for details.

7 See e.g. Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2010, p. 10.

is likely to be the case for most food products). In addition, we gave extra weight to cases in which the target states constituted important territorial buffer zones for China—as with respect to the DPRK, for example. Finally, to mitigate the inevitable subjective element in the assignment of interest levels with respect to each sanctions target, we each worked independently, in parallel, to produce short write-ups regarding China's material interests in each potential sanctions regimes (see Appendix C). We then coded independently, based on all three write-ups, and finally tested for reliability by comparing our results. The agreement among the three coders was found to be above 80 percent.

In the next step, I coded for China's level of rhetorical commitment to the respective objectives that each of the proposed sanctions regimes was intended to fulfil. The categorised sanctions objectives that I used here were derived entirely from the Targeted Sanctions Consortium database. They are as follows: (1) counter-terrorism; (2) prohibition of armed conflict; (3) support for democracy and human rights; (4) non-proliferation; (5) judicial process; (6) good governance; and (7) Responsibility to Protect (R2P).<sup>8</sup> China has long opposed the imposition of UN sanctions for the purpose of *promoting human rights and/or democracy*. Sanctions debates with respect to these objectives were therefore coded as '1' (i.e. low level of likelihood that China would support such sanctions). Conversely, China has frequently expressed support for UN sanctions that fall unambiguously within the spectrum of promoting international peace and security, provided that such sanctions were not of a nature that Chinese policymakers would perceive as excessive intervention in the internal affairs of another state. This includes sanctions intended to achieve objectives in the areas of *non-proliferation* of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons; *counter-terrorism*; and the *prohibition of armed conflict*, all of which were assigned a code of '3'. Finally, China has habitually been reluctant to employ UN sanctions for the purpose of *promoting good governance; judicial process*; as well as *exercising the R2P*.<sup>9</sup> From China's perspective, such sanctions are less representative of open meddling in the ideological basis of sovereign systems than are those concerned with the interpretation of human rights/democracy. But they nevertheless constitute interference in internal affairs and hence must

8 See 'Appendix I: List of Cases and Episodes', in Biersteker, Eckert, and Tourinho 2016, pp. 280-287.

9 Interviews with Chinese analysts (personal interviews, Beijing, 24 to 28 April 2017). Interviews with European diplomats (personal interviews, Paris, 23 to 27 May 2016). Chinese analysts have claimed that the notion of 'Responsibility to Protect' is a 'slippery slope', as it remains unclear whose interests the international community was ultimately meant to protect.

be considered problematic for China to support in light of its traditional rhetorical position. Such sanctions cases were therefore assigned a code of '2'. Finally, I specify falsifiable predictions for both hypotheses in each case, and I compare them with the empirical outcome—namely, China's voting behaviour. For example, a material-based hypothesis predicts that China is likely to veto sanctions resolutions against countries in which it has extensive material interests (i.e. material interests coded as '3', such as the DPRK); whereas a rhetoric-based hypothesis predicts that China is likely to veto sanctions resolutions that are meant to promote democracy or human rights. For the sake of simplicity, I indicated 'abstain' in the more ambiguous cases, i.e. the cases coded as '2'.

As Robert Pape observes in his correlation analysis of the uses of coercive air campaigns, the process of operationalisation for the purpose of correlative tests necessitates 'a parsimonious version [of the theory] which includes only its main propositions'.<sup>10</sup> The primary objective of my correlation analysis is to provide a foundation for the case studies (e.g. assist in case selection). I will then test the various competing hypotheses by means of a fuller, contextual analysis of the individual cases.

### 5.1.2 Correlation analysis: the relevance of the rhetoric-based hypothesis

The parameters and findings of the correlation analysis are summarised in Table 5.1. The table also includes the assigned categories for 'Sanctions Objective' and the assigned codes for 'Material Interests' and 'Level of Rhetorical Commitment'. The order of presentation of the 153 instances in which sanctions resolutions were tabled within the UNSC follows chronology broadly across the identified period (1971-2016), with exceptions resulting from the fact that cases with the same target regime are either grouped together or—where the *objective* of the sanctions differed—placed adjacent to each other. This approach resulted in the sequence seen in the table and in the consolidation of the data into 34 cases. Two other cases indicated in the table below are irrelevant to the analysis and have been disregarded. The first is Iran because it pertained to the narrow issue of responding to the taking of US citizens as hostages at the US embassy in Tehran in 1980, on which there is no pre-existing record of Chinese rhetoric. The second is Al-Qaida/ISIL because China's political and economic interests vis-à-vis these non-state actors are very different from those of other states.

<sup>10</sup> Pape 1996, p. 50.

Table 5.1 Results of Correlation Analysis Regarding China's Interests, Rhetoric, and Sanctions Voting<sup>11</sup>

Regime(s) Targeted	Years in which Resolutions were Considered	Sanctions Objective (i.e. to promote/prevent)	Code for China's Material Interests	Prediction	Code for China's Level of Rhetorical Commitment	Prediction	Voting Outcome	Alignment with Hypotheses
Southern Rhodesia/ South Africa	1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1981, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988	Armed conflict	1	Affirm	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with both hypotheses.
<i>Iran (1)</i>	1980	N.A. (response to taking US citizens hostage)	1	Affirm	NA	NA	<i>Did not participate</i>	NA
Iran (2)	2006, 2007, 2008, 2010	Non-proliferation	3	Veto	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.
Iraq (1)	1990, 1991	Armed conflict	1	Affirm	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with both hypotheses.
Iraq (2)	2003, 2004	Non-proliferation	2	Abstain	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.

11. The UN Charter grants five countries—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—the status of 'permanent members' of the UN Security Council as well as a special 'right to veto'. Ten other countries are elected by the General Assembly as non-permanent members of the UNSC, and their terms last for two years. If any one of these five permanent members exercise their 'right to veto', the UNSC resolution is not approved. If a permanent member has reservations about a proposed resolution but does not wish to exercise its veto rights, it may choose to abstain. In such cases, the resolution can still be adopted if it obtains the required number of nine favourable votes. See UNSC, 'Voting System and Records'.

Regime(s) Targeted	Years in which Resolutions were Considered	Sanctions Objective (i.e. to promote/prevent)	Code for China's Material Interests	Prediction	Code for China's Level of Rhetorical Commitment	Prediction	Voting Outcome	Alignment with Hypotheses
Former Yugoslavia (includes Bosnia and Herzegovina)	1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1998	Armed conflict	1	Affirm	3	Affirm	Mixed (affirm; abstain)	Mixed.
Somalia	1992, 2002, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014	Armed conflict	2	Abstain	3	Affirm	Mixed (affirm; abstain)	Mixed.
Libya (1)	1992, 1993	Counter-terrorism	1	Affirm	3	Affirm	Abstain	Does not align with either hypothesis.
Libya (2)	2011	R2P	3	Veto	2	Abstain	Mixed (affirm; abstain)	Mixed.
Libya (3)	2011, 2013, 2014, 2015	Armed conflict	3	Veto	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.
Liberia (1)	1992, 2001, 2002, 2003	Armed conflict	2	Abstain	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.
Liberia (2)	2006, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016	Good governance	2	Abstain	2	Abstain	Affirm	Does not align with either hypothesis.
Haiti	1993, 1994	Democracy support	1	Affirm	1	Veto	Mixed (affirm; abstain)	Mixed.
Angola	1993, 1997, 1998, 1999	Armed conflict	2	Abstain	2	Abstain	Affirm	Does not align with either hypothesis.
Rwanda	1994, 1995	Armed conflict	1	Affirm	2	Abstain	Affirm	Does not align with either hypothesis.



Regime(s) Targeted	Years in which Resolutions were Considered	Sanctions Objective (i.e. to promote/ prevent)	Code for China's Material Interests	Prediction	Code for China's Level of Rhetorical Commitment	Prediction	Voting Outcome	Alignment with Hypotheses
Sudan (1)	1996	Counter-terrorism	1	Affirm	3	Affirm	Abstain	Does not align with either hypothesis.
Sudan (2)	2004, 2005, 2006, 2010, 2012	Armed conflict	3	Veto	3	Affirm	Abstain	Does not align with either hypothesis.
Sierra Leone (1)	1997	Democracy support	1	Affirm	1	Veto	Affirm	Aligns with material-based hypothesis.
Sierra Leone (2)	1998, 1999, 2002	Armed conflict	1	Affirm	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with both hypotheses.
Afghanistan (Taliban)	1999, 2000, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2015	Counter-terrorism	3	Veto	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.
Eritrea/ Ethiopia	2000, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013	Armed conflict	2	Abstain	3	Affirm	Mixed (affirm; abstain)	Mixed.
Al Qaida/ISIL	2002, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2015	Counter-terrorism	Non-state actor	Non-state actor	3	Affirm	Affirm	-
Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)	2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	Armed conflict	2	Abstain	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.
Cyprus	2004	Armed conflict	1	Affirm	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with both hypotheses.
Côte d'Ivoire (1)	2004, 2005, 2011	Armed conflict	1	Affirm	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with both hypotheses.

Regime(s) Targeted	Years in which Resolutions were Considered	Sanctions Objective (i.e. to promote/prevent)	Code for China's Material Interests	Prediction	Code for China's Level of Rhetorical Commitment	Prediction	Voting Outcome	Alignment with Hypotheses
Côte d'Ivoire (2)	2010	Democracy support	1	Affirm	1	Veto	Affirm	Aligns with material-based hypothesis.
Lebanon	2005, 2007	Judicial process	1	Affirm	2	Abstain	Mixed (affirm; abstain)	Mixed.
DPRK	2006, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016	Non-proliferation	3	Veto	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.
Burma/ Myanmar	2007	Human rights	3	Veto	1	Veto	Veto	Aligns with both hypotheses.
Zimbabwe	2008	Human rights	2	Abstain	1	Veto	Veto	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.
Syria (1)	2011	Human rights	2	Abstain	1	Veto	Veto	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.
Syria (2)	2012, 2016	Armed conflict	2	Abstain	3	Affirm	Mixed (abstain; veto)	Mixed.
South Sudan	2012, 2015	Armed conflict	3	Veto	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.
Guinea-Bissau	2012	Democracy support	1	Affirm	1	Veto	Affirm	Aligns with material-based hypothesis.
Yemen	2012, 2014, 2015, 2016	Armed conflict	2	Abstain	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with rhetoric-based hypothesis.
Central African Republic	2013, 2014	Armed conflict	1	Affirm	3	Affirm	Affirm	Aligns with both hypotheses.

The results of the correlation analysis are represented in the last column in Table 1: 'Alignment with Hypotheses'. Here, I identify whether China's voting in a given case aligns with the prediction based on the coded assessment of China's material interest in the targeted regime; with the prediction based on the level of China's rhetorical commitment for a particular objective-type; with both predictions; or with neither.

A tally of the findings shown in this column reveals that the rhetoric-based hypothesis predicted 18 of the total 34 consolidated cases. The material-based hypothesis, for its part, predicted 10 of the 34 cases. There were seven cases of overlap, i.e. cases in which voting can be said to be predicted by either hypothesis. Of the remaining 13 cases, seven yielded mixed results—i.e. China did not vote consistently on sanctions resolutions in these consolidated cases and therefore its voting behaviour could not be accounted for by the parsimonious version of either hypothesis—and six cases were not predicted by either hypothesis.

In short, the rhetoric-based hypothesis 'outperformed' its main rival (i.e. the material-based hypothesis) by successfully predicting eight more cases. In what follows, I identify three case studies so as to more fully assess the causal dynamics affecting China's voting behaviour on sanctions-related resolutions within the UNSC.

### 5.1.3 Selection of case studies

Warning against case selection bias, Alexander George and Andrew Bennett have observed that the 'most damaging consequences arise from selecting only cases whose independent *and* dependent variables vary as the favoured hypothesis suggests, ignoring cases that appear to contradict the theory and overgeneralising from these cases to wider populations'.<sup>12</sup> To provide a convincing basis for asserting a given hypothesis as the 'best fit' with the empirical record as a whole, one must also test the hypothesis against 'hard cases', i.e. those with respect to which the favoured (or examined) hypothesis might be considered least likely to fit.<sup>13</sup> To avoid shortcomings in this regard, I began my case study selection process by grouping the 34 consolidated cases (i.e. prospective case studies) into three categories according to their alignment with the parsimonious version of the rhetoric-based hypothesis: (1) hard or 'least-likely' cases: those in which the empirical outcome was found to align with the material interest-based hypothesis (see Table 5.2);

<sup>12</sup> George and Bennett 2005, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion on 'most-likely' and 'least-likely' cases, see Eckstein 1975, pp. 94-137.

(2) easy cases: those in which the outcome was found to align with the rhetoric-based hypothesis; and (3) mixed cases: those in which China’s voting behaviour could be explained by both hypotheses, appeared to be inconsistent within the same consolidated case, or could not be explained by either hypothesis. Table 5.2 shows the cases re-grouped according to this categorisation.

**Table 5.2 The 34 Consolidated Sanctions Resolution Cases Categorised According to Their Apparent Alignment with the Rhetoric-based Hypothesis**

Hard Cases	Easy Cases	Mixed Cases
Sierra Leone (1); Côte d’Ivoire (2); Guinea-Bissau	Iran (2); Iraq (2); Libya (3); Liberia (1); Afghanistan (Tali-ban); DRC; DPRK; Zimbabwe; Syria (1); South Sudan; Yemen.	Southern Rhodesia/South Africa; Iraq (1); Former Yugoslavia; Somalia; Libya (1); Libya (2); Liberia (2); Haiti; Angola; Rwanda; Sudan (1); Sudan (2); Sierra Leone (2); Eritrea/Ethiopia; Cyprus; Côte d’Ivoire (1); Lebanon; Burma/Myanmar; Syria (2); Yemen; Central African Republic.

To reduce the likelihood of selection bias, I selected one case from each of the categories represented in Table 5.2: the DPRK, Syria (2), and Guinea-Bissau. The DPRK is an ‘easy’ case for the rhetoric-based hypothesis, as China has repeatedly backed UN sanctions against the North Korean regime, despite its significant material interests in the DPRK. This case favours my rhetoric-based hypothesis from the outset. Of course, one could argue that in this specific case, China’s voting was merely a ‘façade’ and that Chinese leaders could easily have bypassed the DPRK sanctions regime if they had chosen to. However, China has repeatedly objected to sanctions against the DPRK before 2006, and it remains worthwhile to examine the factors that had prompted the change in China’s voting behaviour. Furthermore, the DPRK issue has been a major policy concern world-wide over the past decade, and an analysis of this case could also generate further relevant policy insight.

The second case study that I have selected is Syria (2). China is generally agreeable to the imposition of UN sanctions for the purpose of preventing armed conflict. An explanation is therefore required to account for why China cast abstention votes and vetoes concerning proposed UNSC resolutions that could have led to sanctions against the Syrian regime, despite its limited economic interests in Syria. Like the case of the DPRK, the Syrian

issue has also generated significant international attention following the war that began in 2011. Moreover, it is notable that China has cast its largest number of vetoes on the Syria case, making this an important case to consider in my examination of China's approach towards UNSC sanctions.

Finally, the 'hard' case for the set—that of Guinea-Bissau—is worth investigating in more detail in order to determine whether there are elements that would necessitate a revision of my hypothesis. Given that the sanctions objective in this case was to support democratic efforts in Guinea-Bissau—an objective that China has consistently opposed—China's affirmative vote in the UNSC is puzzling for a rhetoric-based hypothesis. From a methodological point of view, Guinea-Bissau is also a more appropriate case study as compared to Sierra Leone (1) and Côte d'Ivoire (2) (i.e. the other two 'hard cases'). This is because there are other sanctions-related resolutions concerning Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire that fall into the 'mixed cases' category, while those against Guinea-Bissau are exclusively 'hard'.

#### 5.1.4 China and sanctions: five competing hypotheses

Five hypotheses were introduced in Chapter 2 as competing prospective explanations of China's behaviour on sanctions-related resolutions within the UNSC. The first hypothesis (henceforth H<sub>1</sub>) suggests that during the period under consideration here, *China was not yet powerful enough to pose a direct challenge to US hegemony*. One can expect China's voting behaviour to be broadly aligned with the preferences of the US if it did not significantly compromise China's material interests.

The second hypothesis (H<sub>2</sub>) suggests that while China can be expected to react in accordance with systemic pressures and opportunities, it can sometimes be *constrained by the preferences and level of cooperation of its domestic actors*. Accordingly, China's voting behaviour within the UNSC would be influenced by considerations regarding whether the proposed UN sanctions would compromise the interests of some factions among its domestic actors. This constraint can be expected to feature especially prominently during periods when China's political leadership is weak or divided vis-à-vis other domestic players, e.g. more so during the Hu Jintao era (from 2002-2012) than under Xi Jinping.

The third hypothesis (H<sub>3</sub>) suggests that China's sanctions behaviour had been *constrained by its participation in international institutions*. In this context, China's voting behaviour would likely be aligned with the accepted principles of the UN and the UNSC and most likely also with the preferences and expectations of other UN member states.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) expects China to shy away from supporting UNSC sanctions as much as possible, especially when the proposed sanctions were targeted against states that share historical, political, and cultural affinities with China. This expectation rests on *China's longstanding aversion against the employment of sanctions* (and other coercive measures) as a political tool.

Finally, the proffered hypothesis (H5) suggests that China's voting behaviour had been *constrained by its rhetorical strategy of counter-stigmatisation* with respect to debates with the US and its allies on when sanctions can legitimately be employed. While China's initial reactions may be prompted by its material interests, its behaviour would change to more closely align with its earlier rhetorical commitments when one or more actors draw attention to China's contradictions.

The following section tests these hypotheses against the empirical record of China's behaviour with respect to proposed UN sanctions resolutions against the DPRK, Syria (2), and Guinea-Bissau. The focus is on factors that led to China's voting behaviour. Whether China subsequently complied with the sanctions is an important question that warrants a separate discussion. While the extent of China's intended compliance might indeed have influenced its voting considerations (i.e. China does not have to veto sanctions resolutions if it simply disregards them), an explanation is still required to account for the variance in China's sanctions voting within the UNSC.

The analysis for each case study unfolds in the following way: first, the contextual background is given; second, the first four competing hypotheses are examined to determine whether they satisfactorily explain China's voting behaviour; and third, the validity of the rhetoric-based hypothesis is assessed using the empirical evidence.

## 5.2 China and sanctions against the DPRK: from resistance to cooperation

### 5.2.1 Background of UNSC sanctions against the DPRK

The UNSC passed its first sanctions-related resolution (Resolution 1695) against the DPRK on 15 July 2006, after the DPRK launched seven ballistic missiles that landed in the Sea of Japan. This initial resolution was fairly muted and did not include mandatory sanctions. Instead, the resolution called on all UN Member States to 'exercise vigilance' and prevent the procurement from and export of 'missile or missile-related items, materials,

goods and technology' to the DPRK as well as to avoid transferring 'any financial resources in relation to the DPRK's missile or Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programme'.<sup>14</sup> On 14 October 2006, following the DPRK's conduct of its nuclear test, the UNSC unanimously passed Resolution 1718. This resolution, aimed at pressuring Pyongyang to terminate its nuclear tests and ballistic missile development, officially prohibited all UN member states from transferring arms and technology as well as luxury commodities to the DPRK. Cargo inspections were put in place, and asset freezes and travel bans were imposed on persons related to DPRK's nuclear weapons programme. In addition, a committee comprising all 15 members of the UNSC was established to administer these sanctions.<sup>15</sup>

From 2006 to 2016, the UNSC passed eight additional rounds of sanctions-related resolutions against the DPRK to condemn its repeated nuclear activities.<sup>16</sup> Notably, China backed Resolutions 2270 and 2321 (passed on 6 March and 30 November 2016 respectively), which comprised the toughest measures imposed on the North Korean regime in this period. Among other regulations, Resolution 2270 mandated the inspection of all cargo destined for or originating from the DPRK; prohibited Member States from registering their vessels in the DPRK; prohibited Pyongyang from 'supply[ing], sell[ing] or transfer[ring] coal, iron, iron ore, gold, titanium ore, vanadium ore, and rare earth materials'; prohibited the sale or supply of aviation fuel to the DPRK; and demanded the expulsion of Pyongyang's diplomats, government representatives, and any nationals 'acting in a governmental capacity who assisted in the evasion of sanctions or the violation of related resolutions'.<sup>17</sup> Resolution 2321 further strengthened these measures.<sup>18</sup>

In his study of China's behaviour at the UNSC, Joel Wuthnow claims that 'China's willingness to agree to these measures, in addition to other

14 UNSC Meetings Coverage and Press Release, 'Security Council Condemns Democratic People's Republic of Korea's Missile Launches, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1695 (2006)', 15 July 2006.

15 UNSC Meetings Coverage and Press Release, 'Security Council Condemns Nuclear Test by Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1718 (2006)', 14 October 2006.

16 See e.g. S/RES/1874 (2009); S/RES/2087 (2013); S/RES/2094 (2013); S/RES/2141 (2014); S/RES/2207 (2015); S/RES/2270 (2016); S/RES/2276 (2016); and S/RES/2321 (2016).

17 UNSC Meetings Coverage and Press Release, 'Security Council Imposes Fresh Sanctions on Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2270 (2016)', 2 March 2016.

18 UNSC Meetings Coverage and Press Release, 'Security Council Strengthens Sanctions on Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2321 (2016)', 30 November 2016.

decisions on North Korea, is surprising'.<sup>19</sup> In Wuthnow's view, Beijing ought to have been reluctant to be too tough on North Korea, given its concern that international pressure would reduce the chances for dialogue and trigger destabilising events such as regime collapse, a refugee influx into China (which shares a 1,300km-long border with the DPRK), and military conflict.<sup>20</sup> The following sections investigate possible factors that might account for China's cooperation on these sanctions-related resolutions against the DPRK.

### 5.2.2 Competing explanations concerning China's behaviour towards DPRK sanctions

According to H<sub>1</sub> (i.e. the hypothesis that China was not yet powerful enough), China's support for sanctions against the DPRK was likely a response to significant political and diplomatic pressure from Washington. Successive US administrations have placed significant emphasis on this issue. For example, the US had issued warnings that the military option was a possibility since 2003.<sup>21</sup> In April 2006, President George W. Bush also emphasised to the then-Chinese President Hu Jintao during Hu's maiden visit to the US that Washington considered the North Korean problem among its foreign policy priorities.<sup>22</sup> While the costs of going against the US on this issue might well have outweighed the benefits to be gained by China from shielding the DPRK from UN sanctions, it cannot account for China's record of deviating from the US in other cases that are important to Washington, e.g. Syria. Hence, US pressures alone cannot account for China's sanction preferences vis-à-vis the DPRK.

H<sub>2</sub> (i.e. the hypothesis that Chinese leaders were constrained by domestic actors) also fails to account for China's voting behaviour with regards to the DPRK issue. By 2006, when the UNSC first imposed sanctions on the DPRK, China had already begun to deepen its economic engagements with that country through various forms of trade and investment, particularly in China's Northeast region. North Korea was also a new market for Chinese state-owned and private enterprises. According to the Chinese General Administration of Custom, bilateral trade between China and North Korea was approximately USD 1.7 billion in 2006 and had reached USD 6.4 billion by

19 Wuthnow 2013, p. 62.

20 Ibid. See also Fu 2017, p. 10.

21 Fu 2017, p. 10.

22 Wuthnow 2013, p. 65.



2014.<sup>23</sup> Chinese officials and commercial actors—particularly in provinces with deepening economic engagement with North Korea such as Jilin, Liaoning, and Heilongjiang—were therefore unlikely to be supportive of any forms of UN sanctions that could have had an impact on their economic activities and interests. One might argue that China's domestic actors would have remained relatively indifferent to China's voting behaviour with respect to UN sanctions against the DPRK if the Chinese government turned a blind eye to their continued trading activities with the North Koreans. However, China has been increasingly complying with UN sanctions against the DPRK, including by imposing bans on all imports of iron ore, iron, lead, coal, seafood, and textiles from the DPRK since 2017. As a *Washington Post* report notes, 'pain and frustration [were] mounting' in Chinese cities such as Dandong, which trade extensively with the DPRK.<sup>24</sup> Analysts from China's Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences also admitted that 'sanctions [brought] huge loss[es] to Chinese traders [...] many companies doing border trade have gone bankrupt, and their owners run away, leaving people unemployed'.<sup>25</sup> H2 therefore does not offer a satisfactory explanation for China's support of UN sanctions against the DPRK.

An advocate for H3 (i.e. the hypothesis that *China was constrained by its participation in international institutions*) might claim that China has been socialised to the expectations of the UN/UNSC in its over three decades as a permanent member (1971–2016) and hence adopted a more cooperative approach to further the UNSC agenda. However, this institutionalist perspective fails to explain why China repeatedly attempted to block UN discussions of human rights issues in North Korea by forcing a procedural vote between 2014 and 2016.<sup>26</sup> In addition, such an explanation fails to adequately account for why China has wielded its veto on other occasions, such as in the cases of Burma/Myanmar (2007), Zimbabwe (2008), and Syria (2011 to 2016). We observe much more variation in China's behaviour than the 'socialisation' hypothesis would predict.

Finally, this ought to have been an 'easy' case for H4, i.e. the hypothesis that China has a longstanding aversion to the use of sanctions, particularly against countries that it shares historical or cultural affinities with. If China is indeed intrinsically against sanctions due to certain historically

23 Database from the Chinese General Administration of Custom.

24 Denyer 2017.

25 Ibid.

26 See e.g. 'UN Security Council Discusses North Korea Human Rights', *BBC News*, 22 December 2014; and Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2017'.

and culturally rooted ideas, we should expect China to wield its veto power to shield North Korea from UN sanctions. Yet China voted for sanctions against the DPRK. That it did so despite an alliance, cultural affinities, similar political ideologies, and a common cause during the Korean War poses a fundamental challenge to such a hypothesis.

The following section tests the rhetoric-based hypothesis (i.e. H<sub>5</sub>) against the empirical record of this DPRK case.

### 5.2.3 **Playing up China's non-proliferation commitments: the US as a rhetorical actor**

Rhetorical action, according to Frank Schimmelfennig, consists of 'the strategic use of arguments'.<sup>27</sup> A rhetorical actor chooses arguments not necessarily because he genuinely believes in them but because he perceives these arguments as being the most effective in persuading or pressuring one or more targets into acting in accordance with his preferences.<sup>28</sup> Schimmelfennig claims that in international politics, institutional sanctions and/or institutional decisions have limited effectiveness. By contrast, social mobilisation and social influence can prompt compliance under the right circumstances.<sup>29</sup> Schimmelfennig argues that shaming, or 'the public exposure of illegitimate goals and behaviours', is 'the most important mechanism of social influence' among members of an in-group.<sup>30</sup> He then proceeds to show how opponents of the Eastern enlargement of European organisations were entrapped into relenting after the Central and Eastern European governments based their claims for enlargement on 'the constitutive liberal values and norms of the community organisations to which the member states had subscribed' and shamed their opponents into honouring past commitments.<sup>31</sup>

The case study below on the North Korean sanctions helps modify Schimmelfennig's framework on two counts. First, it shows that the rhetorical actor and the target need not share a similar culture or values (at least not publicly) for rhetorical action to work. Rhetorical action can be effective as long as the target country values international opinion and the perception of its credibility and as long as the rhetorical actor is able to demonstrate that the target country is not living up to its earlier normative claims. Second, it

27 Schimmelfennig 2003, p. 199.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*, p. 213-225.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 218-219.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

demonstrates that flattery is as powerful a rhetorical tool as shaming. This is because the key objective of rhetorical action is not to publicly embarrass its target as such but to draw sufficient attention to the target's earlier commitments such that it feels compelled to align its behaviour accordingly to preserve its credibility. In this case, while China is not 'inside the actor's [i.e. the US] in-group or community',<sup>32</sup> the US ability to play up China's prior rhetorical commitments on non-proliferation was an important factor in prompting China to support, and eventually get enmeshed in, actions to restrain the nuclear activities of its longstanding ally.

Prior to 2006, China had used its influence to shield the DPRK from potential UN sanctions. This was despite repeated US calls for all countries to step up pressure against the DPRK after the DPRK expressed its intention to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and expel inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1993; launched a missile over the Sea of Japan in 1998; and openly admitted to having a secret nuclear weapons programme in 2002.<sup>33</sup> Responding to President Bush's requests for China to exercise its influence over the DPRK, the Chinese President Jiang Zemin said that China 'did not associate itself with North Korea's nuclear programme' and that the problem should be resolved bilaterally between the US and North Korea.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, during a visit by US Secretary of State Colin Powell to Beijing in February 2003, China politely rejected Washington's request for China to intervene in the North Korean issue and urged the US to negotiate bilaterally with Pyongyang in order to find a solution to the deepening crisis.<sup>35</sup> According to a former Chinese diplomat who had served in the DPRK, China firmly believed that only the US could provide the DPRK with the assurance required for the DPRK to give up its nuclear weapons (e.g. a peace treaty, normalisation of diplomatic relations, and integration into the world economy). China could not fulfil this role.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, there was a prevalent view within China during this period that the US was trying to implicate China in an issue that only Washington could resolve.

Powell's visit to China in 2003, however, proved to be a turning point. As the former Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, Fu Ying, has observed, 'the year 2003 was a watershed for China's role in helping address the Korean nuclear

32 Ibid, p. 218.

33 Wuthnow 2013, pp. 60-61; and Fu 2017, p. 7.

34 Jiang Zemin quoted in Glaser and Wang 2008, p. 167.

35 Park 2005, p. 84. See also Struck 2003.

36 Interview with former Chinese diplomat. Personal interview. Beijing, 27 April 2017.

issue [...] prior to then, the issue was addressed exclusively by the US and the DPRK through bilateral negotiations'.<sup>37</sup> In response to Beijing's repeated calls for Washington to persist in their attempts to resolve the issue with Pyongyang bilaterally, Powell engaged in rhetorical action by appealing publicly to China's earlier commitment to play a constructive role in global proliferation issues. China joined the NPT in 1992, signed the Protocol Additional to the IAEA Safeguards Agreement in December 1998, and by March 2002 'formally completed the domestic legal procedures necessary for the Additional Protocol to enter into force [...] [becoming] the first nuclear-weapon state where the Additional Protocol has taken effect'.<sup>38</sup> Chinese officials, diplomats, and analysts all admitted that China was very concerned about its international image particularly throughout the early to mid-2000s, and they frequently compared China to a 'growing teenager that required constant affirmation'.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, in the years preceding Powell's visit (from 1998 to 2001), the Chinese domestic media played up China's commitments to non-proliferation as important evidence of China's emergence as a 'responsible major power' in the world stage.<sup>40</sup> Aligning his rhetoric with such sentiments, Powell flattered China during a press conference in Beijing by publicly crediting China for its efforts in 'promulgat[ing] missile, chemical and biological, and munitions related export controls' since 2002. Powell also said that 'China's decision to adhere to international norms in this area fit with the historical and positive trend of China's acceptance of world standards'.<sup>41</sup> Urging China to play a much larger role in resolving the North Korean crisis, Powell reiterated Washington's opposition to bilateral talks with Pyongyang and expressed confidence that Chinese leaders were 'anxious to play as helpful a role as they can'.<sup>42</sup>

Beijing acceded to Washington's request shortly after Powell's visit. Less than one month later, Beijing dispatched then-Vice Premier Qian Qichen to Pyongyang to convince the North Korean regime to participate in multilateral talks. This visit paved the way for a trilateral meeting involving the DPRK, the US, and China, which was held in Beijing in April 2003, as well as for the eventual launch of the Six Party Talks (SPT), which also

37 Fu 2017, p. 2.

38 Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, 'Report of China on the Implementation of the NPT' (2005).

39 Interviews with Chinese officials, diplomats, and analysts. Personal interviews. Beijing, March 2016 and April 2017.

40 Johnston 2008, p. 148.

41 US Department of State archive, 'Press Conference by Secretary Colin L. Powell', 24 February 2003.

42 Ibid

included Japan, Russia, and South Korea, in August of the same year.<sup>43</sup> In the following month, Powell once again emphasised publicly that China and the US shared common interests in the non-proliferation arena and thanked China for ‘the leadership role that [China had] played trying to find a solution to [the North Korea] problem’.<sup>44</sup>

From 2003 to 2006, the US persisted in its attempts to flatter China into action. At a keynote address to the National Committee on US-China Relations in September 2005, US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick tapped into China’s discourse and called for China to fulfil its role as ‘responsible stakeholder’, particularly on the DPRK issue:

Responsible stakeholders go further: They recognise that the international system sustains their peaceful prosperity, so they work to sustain that system. In its foreign policy, China has many opportunities to be a responsible stakeholder. The most pressing opportunity is North Korea. Since hosting the SPT at their inception in 2003, China has played a constructive role. This week [the US and China] achieved a Joint Statement of Principles, with an agreement on the goal of ‘verifiable denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula in a peaceful manner’. But the hard work of implementation lies ahead, and China should share our interest in effective and comprehensive compliance.<sup>45</sup>

Two months later, Bush visited Beijing and echoed similar sentiments by thanking China publicly for sharing the same commitment as the US to global non-proliferation and the same belief that North Korea ‘must abandon [its] nuclear weapons programme[s]’ as well as for working with the US on the North Korea issue ‘as equal partners’.<sup>46</sup> This was despite Beijing’s unhappiness with the US for its imposition of financial sanctions against Pyongyang as the talks were proceeding, which Chinese officials felt had severely impaired the possibility of any progress.<sup>47</sup> However, by then, Beijing

43 Glaser and Wang 2008, pp. 169-170. For a detailed account of how the three-party talks evolved into six-party talks, see Fu 2017, pp. 9-16.

44 Glaser and Wang 2008, p. 170.

45 US Department of State archive, ‘Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?’, 21 September 2005.

46 US Department of State archive, ‘President’s Remarks to the Travel Pool in China’, 20 November 2005.

47 Interviews with Chinese officials and former diplomats. Personal interviews. Beijing, March 2016 and April 2017. A similar sentiment was expressed by former Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, Fu Ying. See Fu 2017, 13-14.

had found itself firmly enmeshed in the issue through its role as the Chair and host of the SPT. As Bonnie Glaser and Wang Liang point out, 'China realised that it had a major stake in the negotiations and worried that if the [SPT] failed, its international prestige could be tarnished'.<sup>48</sup>

The SPT began to fall apart by early 2006. As the US tightened financial sanctions against North Korea, the latter declared its intention to withdraw from the talks and further exacerbated tensions with its launch of seven ballistic missiles on 4 July 2006. China remained reluctant to undertake drastic action against Pyongyang, and the spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry merely urged 'all parties [to] remain calm and exercise restraint [...] instead of undertaking actions that could exacerbate tensions and complicate the situation'.<sup>49</sup> Beijing also reiterated its continued commitment to 'playing a constructive role' to help reduce tensions in the Korean Peninsula.<sup>50</sup> In parallel, the Chinese representative to the UN, Wang Guangya, warned that the imposition of UN sanctions in response to the DPRK's actions was a 'red line' that China would not cross.<sup>51</sup> Promising to find another way out, Beijing dispatched its Vice Foreign Minister, Wu Dawei, to Pyongyang in an attempt to strike a deal with the North Korean authorities to cease further missile tests. China had hoped that securing a compromise from North Korea would reduce the likelihood of significant UN intervention, either through the imposition of sanctions or the use of force. Wu, however, failed to reach any agreement with Pyongyang. As Wuthnow notes, this failed mission led the Japanese Ambassador to the UN, Kenzo Oshima, to comment that China 'seemed "desperate" and that the trip had been an "embarrassment"'.<sup>52</sup> China then found itself in an extremely difficult position. Notwithstanding its public commitment to 'do something' about the North Korean issue, the SPT had stalled and its delegation failed to obtain any compromises or assurances from Pyongyang.

To make matters worse, Pyongyang carried out a nuclear test three months later, on 9 October 2006, despite Beijing's efforts to dissuade the DPRK from doing so. Perceiving this action as a clear 'slap in the face' by Pyongyang, Beijing finally acceded—for the first time—to UN sanctions against North Korea, even as it proceeded to negotiate with the US and

48 Glaser and Wang 2008, p. 171.

49 'wajiaobu fayanren jiu chaoxian shise daodanshi fabiao tanhua [Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Comments on the North Korean Missile Test]', *Xinhua News*, 5 July 2006.

50 Ibid.

51 Wuthnow 2013, p. 64.

52 Wuthnow 2013, p. 64.

Japan to dilute the sanctions.<sup>53</sup> While Washington recognised that China might not adhere strictly to the sanctions resolutions, US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice praised China for its 'remarkable evolution' on this issue. Specifically, she noted that China was now at the centre of the issue and further stated that China was 'now committed to the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula' rather than insisting that Washington deal bilaterally with Pyongyang.<sup>54</sup>

Between 2003 to 2006, the US engaged successfully in a rhetorical strategy that combined elements of inducement through flattery and pressure through public reminders of China's non-proliferation commitments. The significant international attention that North Korea's nuclear activities had garnered then left China with little manoeuvring space, as China was not willing to be perceived by other members of the international community as going back on its non-proliferation commitments or as 'doing nothing' to restrain its erratic ally. Once China was pressured into chairing and hosting the SPT, it found itself having to move away from its original ambivalent position with respect to the North Korea issue and towards a much larger role; otherwise, it would risk compromising its credibility. And indeed, as a former Chinese diplomat lamented: 'We (i.e. China) are never in favour of sanctions against the DPRK, but once we had first agreed to the imposition of UN sanctions on the DPRK, there was no way out unless the DPRK halts its nuclear provocations'.<sup>55</sup>

By flattering China as a 'responsible stakeholder' or even a 'responsible major power' as well as by playing up Beijing's non-proliferation commitments, the US framed China's cooperation on the DPRK issue not as one in which Beijing would be giving in to Washington's demands but as a litmus test for members of the international community to determine whether China would indeed abide by its *own* commitments to promoting global norms such as non-proliferation. Notably, the Chinese elite appeared to have grown suspicious of the US discourse and strategy by 2009. For example, China's state-owned *Global Times* warned of 'superpower flattery', citing the director of the China Foreign Affairs University International Studies Department Zhang Lili—among other Chinese officials and experts—saying

53 Kan 2009, p. 32. During the author's interviews in Beijing from between 2015 to 2016, and again in April 2017, Chinese analysts and former officials also emphasised that North Korea's nuclear tests and refusal to proceed with the SPT despite China's persistent diplomatic efforts were 'an embarrassment for Beijing', leaving Beijing with almost no choice but to support UN sanctions against North Korea.

54 US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice quoted in Kan 2009, p. 32.

55 Interview with former Chinese diplomat. Personal interview. Beijing, 27 April 2017.

that Western countries flatter China because ‘they want China to help them solve their own problems’.<sup>56</sup> However, as a former Chinese diplomat who was involved in DPRK issues suggested, China’s hands had already been tied from the moment it agreed to hosting the SPT and supporting the initial UN sanctions resolution against the North Korean regime.<sup>57</sup>

Washington’s strategy of flattering China on the DPRK issue persisted until 2016. After reaching an agreement with China to pass harsh UN sanctions against the DPRK in March 2016, US Representative to the UN Samantha Power said the following: ‘In particular, the United States would like to recognise the leadership of China, which has worked closely with us in negotiating this extremely rigorous resolution’.<sup>58</sup> Washington recognised that the US would not be able to handle the DPRK issue on its own, for which reason it displayed a rare willingness to enhance Beijing’s stature by elevating it to an ‘equal partner’ on this issue. Washington also implicitly suggested that Beijing would have to assume responsibility if North Korea persisted in its ‘obsessive pursuit of weapons of mass destruction’.<sup>59</sup>

In contrast, the DPRK failed to publicly engage with and manipulate China’s earlier counter-stigmatisation rhetoric—as we will see in the case of Syria—to rhetorically coerce or induce China into taking its side. Instead, Pyongyang’s representatives simply went on the offensive by attacking the legitimacy of the UNSC. For example, North Korea’s representative to the UN angrily accused the UNSC of being ‘gangster-like’ and threatened ‘physical countermeasures’.<sup>60</sup> Because of this, supporting the DPRK could have undermined China’s own credibility at the UNSC—an unacceptable outcome for Beijing. Pyongyang’s repeated rebuffs of China’s diplomatic efforts, including its withdrawal from the SPT, also significantly frustrated Beijing, as such actions put China’s inability to restrain its longstanding ally on display to members of the international community.

At the same time, however, China has not relented in its opposition to any proposed UN action against North Korea over the regime’s human rights violations. From 2014 to 2016, China repeatedly forced procedural votes to block the UN from discussing the human rights situation in North Korea. Triggered by reports from the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the DPRK, these discussions routinely call for the UNSC

56 Kang 2009.

57 Interview with former Chinese diplomat. Personal interview. Beijing, 27 April 2017.

58 See speech by the US Representative to the UN, UNSC, S/PV.7638.

59 UNSC, S/PV.7638.

60 See speech by the DPRK Representative to the UN, UNSC, S/PV.5551.



to refer the situation in the country to the International Criminal Court and for targeted sanctions to be imposed against those who appear to be most responsible for 'crimes against humanity'.<sup>61</sup> China has vehemently expressed its opposition to such discussions, claiming that looking into a sovereign state's human rights record lies outside the UNSC's remit and that the Council should focus instead on denuclearising the Korean Peninsula. In December 2016, for example, China's representative to the UN, Liu Jieyi, said that the Council's discussion of the human rights situation in North Korea 'was contrary to the goal of stabilising the Peninsula', as the situation was 'complex, sensitive and dire'. He further suggested that such discussions at the UN could result in the escalation of tensions in the Korean Peninsula.<sup>62</sup> Chinese officials have also accused the US of 'linking the Korean nuclear issue with its disapproval of the North Korean regime', resulting in the conviction among North Korean leaders that the fundamental objective of the US was not denuclearisation but regime change.<sup>63</sup> Even as China agreed to the imposition of increasingly harsh UN sanctions against the DPRK for its nuclear activities, it has persisted in its efforts to put on record its continued opposition to human rights issues being used as a basis for the imposition of UN sanctions.

#### 5.2.4 Conclusion of the DPRK case

The ability of the US to direct international attention towards China's non-proliferation commitments through rhetorical action triggered the international audience cost mechanism. This, in turn, contributed to China drastically shifting its position on its involvement with respect to North Korea's nuclear activities. More specifically, China has since 2003 gradually abandoned its initial position that the North Korea issue was a matter to be resolved bilaterally between Washington and Pyongyang and has shifted instead to acting as a key player in leading UNSC discussions on the DPRK. China has also moved away from its earlier position that UN sanctions against the DPRK were a 'red line' that Beijing would not cross to one of working actively with the US on UNSC sanctions resolutions against North Korea.

61 See e.g. UN General Assembly, 'Situation on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea', A/70/362.

62 United Nations Meeting Coverages and Press Releases, 'Security Council Narrowly Adopts Procedural Vote to Authorize Discussion on Human Rights Situation in Democratic People's Republic of Korea'.

63 Fu 2017, p. 20.

Certainly, scholars such as Alastair I. Johnston have pointed out that China has since the 1980s exhibited greater willingness to take part in multilateral institutions and to abide by international treaties.<sup>64</sup> From this perspective, one could also argue that the NPT was not merely rhetoric but a binding international treaty. Nevertheless, even such treaties leave states with some manoeuvring space. As we see in this case, China had maintained that the DPRK issue should be resolved between Washington and Pyongyang up until 2003, even though it joined the NPT in 1992 and signed the Additional Protocol in 1998. While other factors might have mattered in influencing China's foreign policy behaviour, the timing indicates that Washington's rhetorical strategy played an important role in prompting China's shift in approach toward the DPRK.

It is certainly not the case that material considerations played no role in Beijing's calculations over cooperating with the US on the imposition of UN sanctions against the DPRK. Indeed, the US pressure on China to cooperate—or risk jeopardising US-China relations—could be considered an important material factor in accounting for China's voting behaviour. Beijing could also have been concerned about the prospect of US military action in North Korea or about North Korea's increasingly provocative nuclear activities destabilising the region and threatening China's own security should the situation in the Korean Peninsula deteriorate. Nonetheless, what this case study demonstrates is that US flattery and public appeal to China's non-proliferation commitments was an important trigger for China to launch the SPT and, more generally, to start becoming more actively involved in the North Korea issue after 2003. The exposure then made it much more challenging for China to subsequently adopt a non-cooperative and ambivalent stance.

## 5.3 China's rejection of proposed sanctions against Syria

### 5.3.1 Background of proposed UNSC sanctions against Syria

Inspired by the Arab Spring movements in Tunisia and Egypt in 2010, civilian protests in Syria against the ruling regime of President Bashar al-Assad began on 26 January 2011 and erupted less than two months later after fifteen children who had painted anti-government graffiti on a wall in

64 Johnston 2008.

Dar'a were detained and tortured by government authorities.<sup>65</sup> As protests rapidly escalated and spread across the country, the Syrian government responded with violence. On 22 April 2011, a large nationwide demonstration took place, and more than 100 people were killed by the Syrian army.<sup>66</sup> Briefing the UNSC a few days later, the UN Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, Lynn Pascoe, said that the Syrian army had 'started a major military operation against Dar'a and surrounding villages'. Pascoe further cited 'reliable sources [...] reporting the use of artillery fire against unarmed civilians, door-to-door arrest campaigns, the shooting of medical personnel who attempt to aid the wounded, raids against hospitals, clinics and mosques and the purposeful destruction of medical supplies and arrests of medical personnel'.<sup>67</sup> France, Germany, Portugal, and the UK subsequently sponsored a draft UNSC resolution, tabled on 4 October 2011, condemning Syria's 'grave and systematic human rights violations and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities'. This resolution was vetoed by China and Russia.<sup>68</sup>

This section focuses on the case of Syria (2), i.e. sanctions-related resolutions against Syria from between July 2012 to December 2016 with the objective of ending the armed conflict in the country.<sup>69</sup> Notably, these draft resolutions would not have imposed sanctions on the Syrian regime immediately but threatened sanctions in the event of non-compliance with the conditions of the UNSC resolutions. However, as a former Chinese Foreign Ministry official puts it, 'the risk that these proposed resolutions would pave the way to another resolution that would involve sanctions was enough for both [China] and Russia to veto them'.<sup>70</sup> In July 2012, as the UNSC was considering Resolution 6810 (which China vetoed alongside Russia), the International Committee of the Red Cross declared that a 'major civil war' was occurring in Syria. According to UN reports, more than 10,000 people (largely civilians) were killed between March 2011 and June 2012.<sup>71</sup>

65 Momani and Hakak 2016, pp. 896-897; and Zifcak 2012, p. 73.

66 Momani and Hakak 2016, pp. 896-897.

67 UNSC, S/PV.6524.

68 UNSC, 'France, Germany, Portugal and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: draft resolution', 4 October 2011.

69 Syria (1) includes two draft sanctions resolutions tabled against Syria in 2011 with the objectives of promoting human rights. See UNSC, S/PV.6524 and S/PV.6627. Syria (2) comprises three draft sanctions resolutions. See UNSC meeting records, S/PV. 6810; S/PV.7785; and S/PV.7825.

70 Interview with former Chinese Foreign Ministry official. Personal interview. Beijing, 23 June 2016.

71 UN News Centre, 'UN Suspends Monitoring Activities in Syria amid Escalating Violence'.

The Syrian crisis ‘took a further religious and sectarian turn’ in 2013, with conflict breaking out in northwestern Syria between Sunni rebels and Alawite groups backed by Hezbollah.<sup>72</sup> The Obama administration and then-British Prime Minister David Cameron contemplated a military response against the Syrian regime’s use of chemical weapons, but this proposal was met with a lukewarm response from the US Congress and the British Parliament. Instead, the US and Russia reached a compromise according to which the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons would oversee the dismantling of Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal. By the end of 2013, the Syrian crisis had reportedly ‘claimed an estimated 130,000 lives and created the largest displacement crisis in the world’.<sup>73</sup>

Since 2014, ISIS/ISIL’s invasion of Iraq and Syria, the US-led coalition mission against ISIS/ISIL, and the growing involvement of Iran and its allies in the region have further complicated the Syrian conflict. In October 2016, a draft resolution was tabled at the UNSC to ‘condemn the widespread violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law’ in Syria. The draft resolution also stated that the UNSC would be prepared to undertake ‘further measures under the Charter of the United Nations in the event of non-compliance [...] by any party to the Syrian domestic conflict’.<sup>74</sup> Two months later, Egypt, New Zealand, and Spain sponsored another draft resolution calling for a seven-day ceasefire in the city of Aleppo as well as for all states to ensure that ‘no funds, financial assets or economic resources are made available to ISIL, Al-Qaida, and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities’.<sup>75</sup> Both resolutions failed to be adopted by the UNSC. Russia vetoed both resolutions, while China abstained from the October 2016 resolution and vetoed the subsequent one.

Syria (2) represents a ‘mixed case’ for the rhetoric-based hypothesis. While China has routinely supported UN sanctions that are aimed at prohibiting armed conflict, historically, its largest number of vetoes have been cast in order to block UN actions (both sanctions and military intervention) against Syria. This voting outcome is also puzzling from the perspective of a material interest-based hypothesis. China’s interests in Syria, at least when compared to Russia’s, are modest at best. It does not share Russia’s political convictions on Syria, and while China was engaged in Syria’s oil exploration and development activities, many of such engagements had been thwarted

72 Momani and Hakak 2016, p. 900.

73 Ibid.

74 UNSC, S/2016/846.

75 UNSC, S/2016/1026.

by the ongoing violence in the country. Why, then, has China repeatedly vetoed proposed UNSC sanctions resolutions against Syria?

### 5.3.2 Competing explanations for China's behaviour towards sanctions against Syria

H<sub>1</sub> (i.e. the hypothesis that China was not yet powerful enough) fails to account for China's voting behaviour in the Syria case. UN sanctions against Syria would not have significantly compromised Chinese economic or political interests. China did not have any important infrastructure, such as military bases, in Syria, and had yet to invest heavily in the country. As a report from the China Institute of International Studies indicated, 'the China-Syria trade was worth only 2.48 billion US dollars (in 2010), accounting for only 0.08% of China's overall foreign trade [...] Chinese labour working and overseas Chinese living in Syria are very sparse and China's investments there are negligible'.<sup>76</sup> Conversely, Syria was of significant political interest to the US. The fall of the al-Assad regime would have been beneficial for Israel, a US ally, and would have reduced Iran's influence within the region.<sup>77</sup> The US and its European allies thus exerted significant political and diplomatic pressure on China and Russia to support draft sanctions resolutions against the al-Assad regime. While Russia's vetoes could have provided China with a political cover, China should still have been reluctant to explicitly and continuously act against the US's interests if H<sub>1</sub> was correct.

Admittedly, it is plausible that China's vetoes were meant to lend political support to Russia, which would otherwise have been isolated at the UNSC. However, China's voting record at the UNSC has not been consistently aligned with that of Russia's. One notable example was when China declined to join Russia in vetoing a draft UN resolution urging member states 'not to recognise the results of the referendum planned for March 16 in [Ukraine]'s autonomous Crimea region, or any alteration of its status', choosing instead to abstain.<sup>78</sup> The Russia factor was certainly important in Beijing's consideration on whether to support proposed UNSC sanctions against Syria. However, from the perspective of H<sub>1</sub>, this still does not fully explain why China was willing to expend significant political capital in repeatedly wielding its

<sup>76</sup> Qu 2012.

<sup>77</sup> Zifcak 2012, p. 91.

<sup>78</sup> UNSC Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 'Security Council Fails to Adopt Text Urging Member States Not to Recognize Planned 16 March Referendum in Ukraine's Crimea Region', 15 March 2014.

veto with respect to proposed sanctions against Syria, especially given its limited interests and the strong opposition from the US.

H2 (i.e. the hypothesis that Chinese leaders were constrained by domestic actors) similarly fails to account fully for China's voting behaviour. Indeed, Chinese companies had some stakes in Syria's oil fields and firms.<sup>79</sup> However, many Chinese analysts have pointed out that countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt were unhappy with China's vetoes with respect to the resolutions against Syria; and China's economic interests in Saudi Arabia, for example, were much more significant than those in Syria.<sup>80</sup> Proponents of H2 would also find it challenging to explain why Chinese domestic or commercial actors could constrain Beijing's voting behaviour in this case but not in the case of the DPRK, where China's economic interests were significant. Finally, as with the case of the DPRK, Beijing could have worked with the US to dilute the sanctions in order to protect its economic interests, or simply disregarded them, rather than repeatedly casting vetoes to block the resolutions.<sup>81</sup>

This case also poses a challenge to H3 (i.e. the hypothesis that *China was constrained by its participation in international institutions*). Such a hypothesis predicts that China would have supported these widely backed draft sanctions resolutions against Syria instead of casting repeated vetoes alongside Russia and thereby leaving the UNSC at an impasse. Various UN offices had been delivering devastating critiques of the actions adopted by the al-Assad regime since 2011 and had on multiple occasions urged the UNSC to take decisive action to mitigate the situation in Syria.<sup>82</sup> China's voting behaviour with respect to the Syrian crisis thus provides a stark demonstration of its willingness to leave the UNSC in deadlock when it suits its agenda, and hence reminds us that other factors may be driving China's decision-making processes at international institutions such as the UNSC.

It is possible that China's refusal to cooperate with the US and its allies on proposed sanctions resolutions against Syria is a result of China's strategic

79 For example, China's state-owned National Petroleum Corporation is engaged in Syria's oil exploration and development activities. Sinochem also holds a 50 percent stake in one of Syria's largest oil fields.

80 Interviews with Chinese analysts from the government-affiliated China Institute of International Studies and the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations. Personal interviews. Beijing, 24 to 28 April 2017.

81 Scholars debate on the extent to which China abides by UN sanctions against North Korea. For some examples, see Roy 2016, p. 185; and Reilly 2016, pp. 193-216.

82 See e.g. UN Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Human Rights Council on its Seventeenth Special Session', A/HRC/S-17/2, 23 August 2011; and UNSC, S/PV.6524. See also Zifcak 2012, pp. 59-93.

culture, which inherently favours other political solutions (e.g. dialogue and negotiations) over coercive measures like sanctions or military intervention (H4). In the absence of documents revealing the private considerations of Chinese decision-makers, it is difficult to establish whether China was opposed to the imposition of UN sanctions against Syria for such reasons. However, H4 proponents would have to account for why China—given its ‘aversion’ to sanctions—vetoed only six out of the 153 sanctions-related resolutions tabled within the UNSC between 1971 and 2016. One would also need to explain why China opposed coercive UN action (such as the threats of sanctions) against the al-Assad regime but extended its support to such measures in other cases, including sanctions targeted against China’s longstanding ally, North Korea.

The following sections show how the rhetoric employed by representatives from the US and other EU countries as well as by Syria influenced China’s voting behaviour with respect to the draft sanctions resolutions against Syria under consideration here.

### 5.3.3 Explaining China’s behaviour: discourse on human rights, intervention, and the Libya effect

During the briefing by UN Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe to the UNSC on 27 April 2011, China’s response was fairly muted. China neither aligned itself with the UK’s proposal for a ‘four-point’ plan, which proposed the imposition of targeted financial and travel sanctions against Syrian authorities, nor with Russia’s insistence that the situation developing in Syria ‘[did] not present a threat to international peace and security’.<sup>83</sup> Instead, the Chinese representative, Li Baodong, noted merely that China was ‘closely following the unfolding situation in Syria’ and expressed hope that ‘the various parties there will resolve their differences through political dialogue [and address the crisis before they] threaten peace and stability in other regions and have a significant negative impact on the recovery of the world economy’.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, unlike Russia, which made clear its opposition to any form of coercive UNSC action against Syria from the outset, China gave no indication that it would cast a series of vetoes to prevent the UNSC from imposing sanctions on the al-Assad regime.

On 4 October 2011, the first resolution for potential sanctions against Syria—drafted by France, Germany, Portugal, and the UK—was put to a

83 UNSC, S/PV.6524.

84 Ibid.

vote at the UNSC. Among other points, this draft resolution ‘condemn[ed] the continued grave and systematic human rights violations and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities’ and demanded that the Syrian regime ‘allow the full exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms by its entire population, including rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, release all political prisoners and detained peaceful demonstrators, and lift restrictions on all forms of media’.<sup>85</sup> China joined Russia in vetoing the resolution. Other BRICS members, namely Brazil, India, and South Africa, similarly expressed reservations regarding the draft resolution by casting abstention votes. France, one of the co-sponsors of the resolution, argued that the Syrian authorities had brought ‘extreme violence [...] against a population demanding to exercise their rights’ and that ‘the Security Council, which has the primary responsibility of maintaining peace and security’, had an important role to play.<sup>86</sup> Sponsors of this resolution further framed the vetoes by China and Russia as expressions of ‘disdain for the legitimate aspirations that have been so bravely expressed in Syria for the past five months [and as] a rejection of this tremendous movement for freedom and democracy that is the Arab Spring’.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the US representative stated that ‘today, the courageous people of Syria can now see clearly who on this Council supports their yearning for liberty and universal human rights, and who does not’.<sup>88</sup>

In the statements quoted above, the US and French representatives to the UNSC linked the promotion of freedom, democracy, and human rights explicitly to the Council’s responsibilities, suggesting that these issues concern the ‘maintain[ence] of [international] peace and security’.<sup>89</sup> As Ian Hurd notes, ‘language of threats to “international peace and security” is important in international law because it is the enabling phrase that the UN Charter uses to define the powers of the Security Council [and is] generally included in Security Council resolutions to justify coercive measures’.<sup>90</sup> China and Russia, which had together proposed another version of the resolution, insisted that they could not support sanctions or the threat thereof against Syria as a response to human rights violations in the country, as this was a domestic matter and therefore not part of the UNSC mandate. The Russian representative went further to suggest that the vetoes cast by

85 UNSC, S/2011/612.

86 See remarks by French representative, UNSC, S/PV.6627.

87 UNSC, S/PV.6627.

88 See remarks by US representative, UNSC, S/PV.6627.

89 See remarks by French representative, UNSC, S/PV.6627.

90 Hurd 2005, p. 514.



China and Russia were indeed, as the French representative had suggested, 'a veto on principle':

Of vital importance is the fact that at the heart of the Russian and Chinese [counter-]draft was the logic of respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria as well as the principle of non-intervention, including military, in its affairs; the principle of the unity of the Syrian people; refraining from confrontation; and inviting all to an even-handed and comprehensive dialogue aimed at achieving civil peace and national agreement by reforming the socio-economic and political life of the country.<sup>91</sup>

Seizing the opportunity represented by this interpretation, the Syrian representative to the UN sought to appeal to China and Russia by claiming that Syria was being targeted not because of 'any humanitarian reasons whatsoever' but because 'certain Western capitals' were against the idea of Syria taking an independent political position and, as a result, 'put pressure on the Syrian population and their livelihoods [in order to] push [the Syrian population] to replace its political regimes'. The Syrian representative further accused the US and its allies of violating 'a people's right to self-determination and to choose its political system without outside pressure'.<sup>92</sup> Unlike the DPRK representative in the earlier case who merely questioned the legitimacy of the UNSC and threatened counteraction, the Syrian representative here availed himself of China and Russia's rhetoric in an effort to generate support and undermine the legitimacy of Western demands for UN sanctions against Syria.

Strictly speaking, this draft resolution—which concerns the imposition of UN sanctions on the basis of promoting human rights—is not considered within the case of Syria (2). However, it is useful to discuss in this context because, as a former Chinese Foreign Ministry official puts it, 'UNSC discussions on this first resolution had set the tone to the entire Syrian issue'. From China's perspective, he explained, 'the hypocritical Western governments are not concerned because of humanitarian reasons but are simply citing human rights as an excuse to overthrow any regime that they do not like at will'. He emphatically emphasised that China 'simply could not allow that to happen, especially so shortly after Libya'.<sup>93</sup> Other prominent Chinese scholars

91 See remarks by Russia's representative, UNSC, S/PV.6627.

92 UNSC, S/PV.6627.

93 Interview with former Chinese Foreign Ministry official. Personal interview. Beijing, 24 April 2017.

and analysts have echoed similar sentiments. For example, one of China's most influential thinkers, Yan Xuetong, has argued that 'regardless of how China votes on Syria, the West will always see China as an undemocratic country with a poor human rights record'.<sup>94</sup> Other Chinese scholars have noted that China's earlier acquiescence to Western interference in Libya had 'raised speculation about whether China was abandoning its long held non-interference principle, tarnishing the very image that Beijing takes great pride in' and further resulting in Chinese domestic audiences accusing Beijing of 'compromising its principles'.<sup>95</sup> China, along with other BRICS members, was concerned that 'this draft resolution [was] part of a hidden [Western] agenda aimed at once again instituting regime change' (i.e. following Libya).<sup>96</sup> As the former Chinese Foreign Ministry official claims, 'China simply could not let a "second Libya" happen, which taken together (i.e. with Syria) would set a strong precedent for human rights matters to be used as a pretext for the UNSC's intervention in the sovereign rights of other countries'.<sup>97</sup>

Unlike the DPRK case, in which China and the US agreed on the importance of the principle of non-proliferation as well as on the legitimacy of the use of UN sanctions to fulfil such an objective, the Syrian crisis evolved into a debate among the great powers over whether the promotion of 'liberty and universal human rights' fell within the purview of the Council as well as whether the principle of non-intervention should be prioritised above all. Even though rhetoric of the draft resolutions against Syria had shifted from the objective of promoting human rights to that of prohibiting armed conflict by July 2012, the US and its European allies continued their rhetorical effort to legitimise the potential use of UN sanctions for the purposes of promoting liberty, equality, and democracy. For example, in the UNSC's deliberation of a proposed resolution against Syria in July 2012, the French representative said that 'the international community [should] respond to the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people to democracy, the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights [...] the third veto on Syria means that, for Russia and China, there will be no consequences for the Syrian regime's disregard of its commitments [...] history will prove them wrong; history will judge them'.<sup>98</sup>

94 Xuetong Yan quoted in Sun 2012.

95 Sun 2012; and Swaine 2012, pp. 1-18. This sentiment was also echoed by many other Chinese officials and analysts during the author's interviews in Beijing in June 2016 and April 2017.

96 UNSC, S/PV.6627.

97 Interview with former Chinese Foreign Ministry official. Personal interview. Beijing, 24 April 2017.

98 See remarks by representatives from the US, the UK, and France, UNSC, S/PV.6810.

Keen to justify its vetoes even as other BRICS members (except Russia) eventually relented and began voting in favour of draft resolutions against Syria by 2012, China activated its state-owned media, along with the input of highly influential Chinese scholars and analysts, to explain and justify its positions on this issue. For example, Qu Xing (President of the Chinese Foreign Ministry-affiliated think tank, China Institute of International Studies) emphasised in a widely circulated commentary in April 2012 that China 'would have no difficulty endorsing [...] any political arrangement supported by all sides in Syria' but that China could not support the draft UNSC resolutions against Syria. This was because it would be 'politically naïve' to expect al-Assad to resign, and the UNSC would be forced to negotiate whether to authorise the use of force against Syria, as it did against Libya.<sup>99</sup> Qu emphasised China's longstanding position of 'respecting the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity' of states, and he pointed out that, contrary to Western beliefs, China was of the view that the use of sanctions could not help to resolve the issues in Syria.<sup>100</sup> Similar official commentaries appeared in Chinese media outlets in the months that followed, emphasising the following themes: China's support for the efforts by the League of Arab States; China's principle of non-intervention; China's firm opposition to any efforts targeted at regime change; and China's preference for negotiations and political dialogue over sanctions or other coercive measures. Many of these articles also echoed the view that while 'there is perhaps no other value system which sounds more beautiful in the modern world than the West's, comprising democracy, liberty and humanitarianism [...] no other value system has resulted in so many international interventions which have caused so many problems [...] Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya are all examples of this'.<sup>101</sup>

China was careful to frame its vetoes not as obstructionist moves aimed at shielding the al-Assad regime but as ongoing efforts to prevent 'the West' from toppling political regimes in developing countries that were not to their liking. This is an example of China's counter-stigmatisation strategy in which it accused the US and its allies of 'hypocritical behaviour' and suggested that the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's actions in Libya, Afghanistan, and Iraq had caused more damage and innocent casualties than if they had stayed out of these conflicts. As the Chinese representative

99 Qu 2012.

100 Ibid.

101 Jin 2012.

to the UN suggested during a UNSC meeting: ‘Most important[ly], [whether the Security Council takes action against Syria] should depend upon whether it complies with the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States—which has a bearing upon the security and survival of developing countries, in particular small and medium-sized countries, as well as on world peace and stability’.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, in a July 2012 article, China’s state-owned *Global Times* accused ‘the US-led West’ of ‘loudly tout[ing] slogans of democracy and human rights [...] but the key target is still their geopolitical interests [in the Middle East]’.<sup>103</sup> The article went on to assert that while ‘the West’ was ‘trying to isolate China and Russia by insisting that the two [were] making the wrong choice’, China would hold on to its diplomatic principles by ‘prevent[ing] the West from overthrowing any regime at will’.<sup>104</sup>

To add legitimacy to its claims that China was not taking the al-Assad regime’s side and was casting its vetoes ‘as a matter of principle’, Chinese officials met with members of prominent Syrian opposition groups and issued official statements that called on both the Syrian government and the opposition to cease all violent acts.<sup>105</sup> In March 2016, China appointed a special envoy to more actively engage leaders from the al-Assad regime and opposition groups as well as to explain China’s position on the Syria crisis to other members of the international community.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, China continued to veto proposed UNSC sanctions-related resolutions against Syria. For example, two resolutions were considered by the UNSC in October and December 2016. China abstained on the former but again joined Russia in casting a veto on 5 December 2016, when the UNSC considered a ceasefire in Aleppo. In a rare move, the UK representative singled out China, claiming that China’s vote was ‘particularly surprising’ and that China had ‘chosen to veto not because of a lack of consultation, but because of their long-standing, misplaced faith in a despot who has killed nearly half a million of his own people, who has sanctioned the murder of civilians as they flee the bombed-out ruins of Aleppo—a despot who would rather reduce Syria to rubble than to negotiate an overdue peace’.<sup>107</sup> The Chinese representative retorted angrily, accusing the UK of ‘poisoning the atmosphere of the Security Council and abusing the solemn forum of

102 See remarks by China’s representative, UNSC, S/PV.6627.

103 ‘West Wrong on Chinese Public’s Syria View’, *Global Times*, 23 July 2012.

104 *Ibid.*

105 Sun 2012.

106 See e.g. ‘China Appoints First Special Envoy for Syria Crisis’, *Reuters*, 29 March 2016.

107 See remarks by the UK’s representative, UNSC, S/PV.7825.

the Council'. He further suggested that the US and its allies needed to take responsibility for the Syrian crisis:

How did the situation in Syria come about, and how did the problems that other countries in the Middle East are dealing with reach the point where they are today? Where did they begin, and why? What has been the role played by the various countries concerned? The historical record is very clear. Every member of the Council is very well aware of that. It cannot be changed by distorting the positions of some countries on the Council. I have already explained China's position and do not want to repeat myself.<sup>108</sup>

The repeated impasse at the UNSC with respect to the Syrian crisis had by this time evolved into full-blown finger-pointing by Council members for holding hostage the Council's mandate in fulfilling its responsibilities to 'international peace and security'.

#### 5.3.4 Conclusion of the Syrian case

Chinese scholars and analysts have pointed out that the Syria crisis 'presented a deep dilemma for China'.<sup>109</sup> On the one hand, China did not have extensive political or economic interests in Syria. Beijing is also generally reluctant to wield its veto power, which can leave the UNSC in deadlock. Beijing also struggled to portray itself as a 'responsible major power' that was neither adopting an obstructionist position on the Syria crisis nor taking sides with the al-Assad regime. Nonetheless, given that the Syria crisis had attracted significant international attention and that the issue could be seen as centring on whether the support for democracy and the promotion of human rights were legitimate reasons for the UNSC to intervene, China was left with little manoeuvring space. Beijing, moreover, was reluctant to be perceived as once again (i.e. in light of Libya in 2011) allowing the US and its allies to overthrow a regime—seemingly with UNSC consent—which could undermine China's longstanding rhetorical position of non-intervention.

As indicated, China's voting behaviour may have indeed been affected by its desire to extend support to Russia and/or to protect its longer-term interests in Syria (e.g. the potential acquisition of natural resources). However,

<sup>108</sup> See remarks by China's representative, UNSC, S/PV.7825.

<sup>109</sup> Interviews with Chinese scholars and analysts. Personal interviews. Beijing, 24 to 28 April 2017.

given the volatile situation during the period under consideration, China was unlikely to be able to invest heavily in Syria, and its economic interests in Syria were not significant enough to warrant potentially jeopardising its relations with the US or other states in the Middle East that are against the al-Assad regime, such as Saudi Arabia. In addition, China had previously demonstrated its willingness to act against Russia's interests, including refusing to align itself with Russia at the UNSC over the latter's annexation of Crimea.<sup>110</sup> In light of these considerations, it seems likely that China's desire to sustain the legitimacy of its rhetorical strategy of counter-stigmatisation played a crucial role in explaining China's voting behaviour on the crisis in Syria.

#### **5.4 China's support for sanctions against Guinea-Bissau: a failed test?**

In May 2012, China supported UNSC sanctions resolutions against Guinea-Bissau that, according to the categorisations of the Targeted Sanctions Consortium database, were proposed with the objective of promoting democracy in the country. In this instance, the rhetoric-based hypothesis appears to fail. It is therefore important to examine how this case differs from those of the DPRK and Syria as well as whether elements of the rhetoric-based hypothesis should be reconsidered in light of the evidence derived from it.

##### **5.4.1 Background of the Guinea-Bissau case**

On April 2012, the military in Guinea-Bissau abruptly halted an ongoing presidential election by arresting the front-runner, Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior. Leaders of the coup also detained the Interim President Raimundo Pereira as well as a number of senior government officials. They claimed that Carlos Gomes Júnior was conspiring with Angola to 'annihilate the armed forces of Guinea-Bissau' and that they were 'forced to act to defend themselves'.<sup>111</sup> Together with members of the various opposition parties, the military junta then proceeded to install a transitional government within

<sup>110</sup> UNSC, S/PV.7138. See also Sengupta 2014.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in report by European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies (Policy Department), 'Civil-Military Relations in Guinea-Bissau: An Unresolved Issue' (August 2012), p. 5.

a week of the coup d'état, which effectively removed Pereira and led to the dissolution of parliament.<sup>112</sup>

The UNSC reacted promptly. The first UNSC statement publicly denouncing the military coup was issued the very next day.<sup>113</sup> On 14 April 2012, the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, CPLP) held an emergency session in Lisbon and called for a UN-mandated interposition force for the 'defence of peace and security; the guarantee of constitutional order; the protection of institutions; the completion of the electoral process and the concretisation of the reform of the security sector'.<sup>114</sup> Two days later, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) dispatched a team to the country to negotiate with the military junta. On 17 April 2012, the African Union (AU) suspended Guinea-Bissau's membership. By the end of the month, ECOWAS announced targeted sanctions against Guinea-Bissau's military leaders.<sup>115</sup> The African Development Bank and the World Bank suspended development operations in Guinea-Bissau until constitutional order was restored.<sup>116</sup> Other organisations such as the European Union (EU), the Peacebuilding Fund, and the International Organization of la Francophonie also undertook various actions—such as the suspension of activities and further aid—to condemn the coup.

The UNSC issued statements threatening targeted sanctions against the leaders and supporters of the coup in the weeks that followed.<sup>117</sup> On 18 May 2012, following several rounds of discussions, the UNSC unanimously passed Resolution 2048, imposing targeted sanctions on five military leaders. The resolution 'demanded that the Military Command take immediate steps to restore and respect constitutional order, including a democratic electoral process, by ensuring that all soldiers return to the barracks, and that members of the Military Command relinquish their positions of authority'.<sup>118</sup> The UNSC also established a new sanctions monitoring regime and 'request[ed] the Secretary-General to be actively engaged in

112 Ibid. See also International Crisis Group, 'Beyond Turf Wars: Managing the Post-Coup Transition in Guinea-Bissau', 17 August 2012.

113 United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 'Security Council Press Statement on Guinea-Bissau', 13 April 2012.

114 Quoted in International Crisis Group, 'Beyond Turf Wars: Managing the Post-Coup Transition in Guinea-Bissau', 17 August 2012.

115 'ECOWAS Imposes Sanctions on Guinea-Bissau's Junta Leaders', *BBC*, 30 April 2012.

116 UNSC, S/2012/280.

117 UNSC, S/PRST/2012/15, 21 April 2012; and United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 'Security Council Press Statement on Guinea-Bissau', 8 May 2012.

118 UNSC, S/RES/2048 (2012). This resolution was sponsored by Portugal. See also UNSC, S/PV.6774.

coordinating international efforts to help restore constitutional order'.<sup>119</sup> Following negotiations between ECOWAS and the leaders of the coup, the military junta finally agreed to release the detainees and transfer power to a transitional civilian government on 23 May 2012.<sup>120</sup> Targeted sanctions against leaders of the military coup remained in place, and six other army officers were subsequently added to the sanctions list.<sup>121</sup>

At first glance, the rhetoric-based hypothesis fails to account for the empirical outcome of this case. China has consistently indicated its opposition to the imposition of UN sanctions aimed at promoting democracy. As we see in the Syria case, China has repeatedly emphasised that the UNSC's intervention in the political affairs of another state 'exceed[s] the mandate given by the Charter to the Council' and risks 'undermin[ing] the Council's authority and legality'.<sup>122</sup> Why did China not put forward similar arguments in the case of Guinea-Bissau as it did in the case of Syria but instead voted for the resolution to impose UNSC sanctions on the leaders of the military coup?

Compared to the DPRK and Syria case studies, scant attention has been paid to this case. This is likely because 'with a population of 1.6 million inhabitants living in only 36,000km<sup>2</sup>, Guinea-Bissau is one of the smallest and poorest countries in western Africa' and hence may not attract significant international attention.<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless, it remains important to examine the factors that prompted China's voting behaviour with respect to UNSC sanctions on Guinea-Bissau and to investigate whether one of the other competing explanations better account for the empirical evidence in this case.

#### 5.4.2 Competing explanations for China's behaviour towards sanctions against Guinea-Bissau

First, one could argue that given China's marginal material interest in Guinea-Bissau at that time, there was simply no reason for China to oppose

119 United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 'Security Council Imposes Travel Ban on Five Leaders of Coup in Guinea-Bissau, Demands Immediate Steps to Restore Constitutional Order', 18 May 2012,

120 European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies (Policy Department), 'Civil-Military Relations in Guinea-Bissau: An Unresolved Issue' (August 2012), p. 7.

121 Security Council Report, 'Guinea-Bissau Chronology of Events'.

122 See e.g. the Chinese representative Wang Guangya's comments at the UNSC on whether to place the issue of Myanmar/Burma on the UNSC agenda, UNSC, S/PV.5526.

123 European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies (Policy Department), 'Civil-Military Relations in Guinea-Bissau: An Unresolved Issue' (August 2012), p. 4.



the US and its allies by adopting a non-cooperative approach (H<sub>1</sub>). However, such an explanation seems partial at best. Compared to China, the US had even fewer political and economic interests in Guinea-Bissau. The US closed its embassy in the country in 1998, and while Guinea-Bissau was a growing export market for the US between 2009 to 2013, it only accounted for an extremely small percentage of total US exports to Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>124</sup> The US also appeared to have little interest in getting directly involved in the UNSC's deliberation on this case. US officials barely commented on the coup, and official responses were limited to some brief statements and reports by the US Department of State on the state of human rights in the country.<sup>125</sup> Accordingly, this issue was unlikely to affect US-China relations, especially if China had simply chosen to abstain from the vote. In addition, proponents of such a hypothesis would find it difficult to explain why China would want to avoid conflict with the US in this case but repeatedly go against the US in the Syria case discussed above.

H<sub>2</sub> would suggest that China's voting behaviour might have been constrained by the extent to which its domestic actors were willing to cooperate with the Chinese decision-makers. This is an unlikely explanation. In 2012, when the UNSC was considering sanctions on Guinea-Bissau, China's political and economic interests in the country were insignificant. China's main priority in Guinea-Bissau—and in many other small states in Central America and Africa—was to ensure that Guinea-Bissau would not succumb to Taiwan's 'chequebook diplomacy' and provide diplomatic recognition to Taiwan.<sup>126</sup> China's economic involvement in the country during that time therefore largely revolved around its *ajuda amigavel e gratuita* ('sincere and friendly help') assistance programme. More specifically, China offered financial assistance to Guinea-Bissau to support its construction of dams, infrastructure projects, and iconic buildings destroyed during its civil war as well as to establish hospitals and schools.<sup>127</sup> China also offered agricultural products and scholarships for students to pursue higher education in China. In return, Guinea-Bissau signed a deep-water fisheries agreement with China. China also considered conducting oil exploration activities in the country.<sup>128</sup> However, the oil exploration initiatives met with significant

124 US Department of Commerce, 'US-Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Investment: An Economic Report by the International Trade Administration', August 2014, p. 8.

125 See e.g. US Department of State, 'Guinea-Bissau 2012 Human Rights Report' (2012).

126 Guinea-Bissau switched diplomatic recognition to Taiwan in 1990 but restored full diplomatic relations with the PRC eight years later.

127 For details on China's activities in Guinea-Bissau, see Horta 2012.

128 Ibid.

opposition from environmentalists, and these arrangements remained at a preliminary stage when the sanctions were being considered. Given that hardly any substantive forms of trade or investments existed between the two countries, it is difficult to imagine that China's commercial or other domestic actors would play an active role in this case. In other words, the lack of China's economic interests—or any other activities—in Guinea-Bissau significantly reduced the likelihood of conflict between the goals of the state and its other domestic actors.

Third, proponents of rational or sociological institutionalism (H<sub>3</sub>) could argue that China's voting behaviour was influenced by its participation at the UNSC. China therefore voted in accordance with the collective preferences and expectations of UNSC member states. However, it is puzzling from such a perspective as to why China chose to cooperate in this case but wielded its veto power to block the UNSC from undertaking actions to intervene in other cases such as Zimbabwe, Burma/Myanmar, and Syria.

Finally, a strategic culture hypothesis (H<sub>4</sub>) fares badly in this case as it did in the case of the DPRK. If China, as a result of its strategic culture, is indeed against the employment of sanctions as a political tool, we should expect China to advocate for other forms of political solutions (e.g. diplomatic consultations or inducement) instead of casting an affirmative vote for proposed UNSC sanctions against Guinea-Bissau without any semblance of a protest.<sup>129</sup> This case therefore poses yet another challenge to such an explanation.

#### 5.4.3 Explaining China's voting behaviour towards Guinea-Bissau sanctions: the lack of a rhetorical actor

In the cases of the DPRK and Syria, there was at least one rhetorical actor to draw international attention to the difference between an offender's rhetoric and behaviour—i.e. the second scope condition of the rhetoric-based hypothesis—to trigger the international audience cost mechanism, which links China's rhetoric to its voting behaviour. On the DPRK issue, the ability of the US to draw international attention to China's prior non-proliferation commitments prompted China to adopt a much more cooperative approach. In the case of Syria, the rhetoric adopted by the key players (i.e. representatives of Syria and the other P<sub>5</sub> countries on the

129 The Chinese representative to the UNSC did not make any comments in the various UNSC meetings discussing sanctions against Guinea-Bissau. See UNSC, S/PV.6743; S/PV. 6754; S/PV.6755; S/PV. 6766; S/PV.6774; and S/PV.6818.

UNSC) portrayed the proposed sanctions as centring on issues relating to the support for democracy and human rights promotion, hence playing a significant role in shaping China's voting behaviour. The following section shows how the rhetoric-based hypothesis loses its explanatory power when no rhetorical actor is present to coerce (e.g. through shaming), induce (e.g. through flattery), or persuade China into aligning its behaviour with its prior rhetorical commitments.

China's first and only official response to this entire episode was a brief statement made by the spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry at a press conference on 18 April 2012, shortly after the coup occurred. Responding to media queries, the spokesperson said that China would firmly support the ECOWAS, CPLP, and other countries in that region in their efforts to mediate the crisis. When asked about whether China supported specific initiatives by the ECOWAS and the CPLP, including the deployment of peacekeeping forces to Guinea-Bissau, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson simply claimed that he was 'unfamiliar with the details'.<sup>130</sup> No further clarifications were provided by the Chinese Foreign Ministry or by China's representative to the UN, even during the various UNSC meetings discussing the situation in Guinea-Bissau. China's ambiguous and muted response to the events in Guinea-Bissau stands in striking contrast to its high-profile posture on and extensive involvement in the DPRK and Syria crises.

One could argue that China's low-profile posture on this issue is unsurprising, given that Guinea-Bissau likely occupies a low position on China's list of foreign policy priorities. However, a former senior Chinese diplomat previously based in several African countries explained that this case is a classic example of the dilemma that China frequently faces when it considers its approach towards the various crises in Africa:

China is generally against international sanctions on African countries, and strongly opposes the promotion of human rights and democracy being used as excuses to justify sanctions. However, China also believes that regional organisations should assume the key role in determining appropriate political solutions. The problem is that the AU is not very united. In addition, as it is heavily financed by the US and EU, it is not entirely independent. In order to ensure continued funding from these Western countries, the AU has to impose sanctions on its member states to

<sup>130</sup> PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, '2012 nian 4 yue 18 ri wajiaobu fayanren liuweimin juxing lixing jizhahui' (Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Regular Press Conference on April 18, 2012), 18 April 2012.

promote democracy, even if such sanctions are against their own interests, or when African countries themselves are aware that the sanctions would be ineffective. As a result, we (i.e. China) are frequently forced to choose between our longstanding principle to allow African countries to handle their own affairs, and our opposition to sanctions based on reasons of human rights and democracy.<sup>131</sup>

Other senior Chinese officials have made similar comments when asked about their views concerning UNSC sanctions on other African states. For example, in 2011, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi called on the US and its allies to lift sanctions that had been imposed on Zimbabwe for undermining democracy and rule of law, claiming that ‘all nations should respect each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity’. Yang further emphasised China’s longstanding position that ‘Africans have the right to choose their own way of development as they are the masters of the African continent [and] all others are just guests’.<sup>132</sup> From this perspective, Chinese decision-makers were caught in a conundrum. While they might have viewed the sanctions on Guinea-Bissau as a case of intervention in the internal affairs of another state, China also did not want to be perceived as going against the wishes of the AU and the CPLP. This was especially the case since representatives from other countries in the region were—in what the former senior Chinese diplomat claimed was ‘a rare show of unity’—calling on ‘the Security Council to do all that it can to support all of the measures that can be taken collectively to help the Republic of Guinea-Bissau to emerge from this crisis created by the military class’.<sup>133</sup>

The former diplomat further explained that it was ‘fairly easy for China to accede to this sanctions resolution’ because Guinea-Bissau was after all ‘not very important to China [...] and international attention on the issue was minimal’. Furthermore, the sanctions were not targeted at a ‘legitimate government’.<sup>134</sup> To offer a contrast, he cited the example of the Burundi crisis of 2015, claiming that Beijing was ‘very anxious’ when the AU threatened to deploy peacekeepers in Burundi over the objections of the Burundian government. As in the case of Guinea-Bissau, China was caught between wanting to respect the wishes of regional organisations and upholding its

131 Interview with former senior Chinese diplomat. Personal interview. Beijing, 26 April 2017.

132 Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi quoted in ‘China Urges West to Lift Sanctions against Zimbabwe’, *Global Times*, 12 February 2011.

133 Speech by the Angolan Minister for Foreign Affairs, UNSC, S/PV.6754.

134 Interview with former senior Chinese diplomat. Personal interview. Beijing, 26 April 2017.

longstanding principle of not intervening in the internal affairs of other states. Noting that the AU did not ultimately follow through with its threat, the former diplomat claimed that China would have been 'placed in a very difficult position' had the AU decided to do so, especially if the case had been brought to the UNSC for deliberation.<sup>135</sup>

In this regard, China's adoption of a low profile at the UNSC with respect to the crisis in Guinea-Bissau allowed it to avoid attracting attention to itself. Importantly, unlike in the cases of the DPRK and Syria, there was no rhetorical actor to either coerce or persuade China into changing its behaviour. In the UNSC meetings leading to the adoption of Resolution 2048, for example, there was unanimous support from the 15 UNSC member states to impose sanctions against the military leaders of the coup in Guinea-Bissau. The Foreign Ministers of Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Portugal as well as ECOWAS and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General shared similar positions at a high-profile UNSC meeting held on 19 April 2012.<sup>136</sup> They called for the international community to condemn the 12 April 2012 coup d'état 'with a unified voice', including undertaking concrete steps to 'affirm the democratic rule of law in Guinea-Bissau'.<sup>137</sup> While this unanimity could well be a result of negotiations and compromises between ECOWAS and the CPLP countries,<sup>138</sup> there was little interest among the extra-regional states—including the US and its key allies—to get directly involved. Therefore, unlike in the earlier cases in which either the US (in the case of the DPRK) or the target state (in the case of Syria) had drawn attention to China's prior rhetorical commitments, China faced little diplomatic pressure from other actors in this case. The international audience cost mechanism was therefore not triggered in this case.

From the perspective of counter-stigmatisation, China also had little incentive to adopt a non-cooperative approach with respect to sanctions on Guinea-Bissau. While the US and its key allies played active roles in pushing for the draft resolutions against the DPRK and Syria, for example, the sanctions resolution against Guinea-Bissau was championed by Portugal and supported by other key actors in the region. Like China, the US was also notably silent at the various UNSC meetings held to discuss the situation in Guinea-Bissau.<sup>139</sup> Instead, representatives from Guinea-Bissau, Angola,

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> UNSC, S/PV.6754.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Beyond Turf Wars: Managing the Post-Coup Transition in Guinea-Bissau', 17 August 2012, p. 14.

<sup>139</sup> See e.g. UNSC, S/PV.6754.

Portugal, and South Africa took the lead in the discussions and negotiations. Given that the target of China's counter-stigmatisation strategy is the US and its allies, there was little reason for China to proactively push for any position in this case. In fact, a veto or abstention vote from China would not only have had no effect on its counter-stigmatisation strategy but could even have risked alienating its supporters in the ECOWAS and the CPLP.

#### 5.4.4 Conclusion of the Guinea-Bissau case

China's decision to support UNSC sanctions against Guinea-Bissau, even though the sanctions were meant to facilitate the 'conclusion of the democratic electoral process in Guinea-Bissau', seemingly poses a challenge to the rhetoric-based hypothesis.<sup>140</sup> However, several lessons can be drawn from this case on the conditions necessary for China's sanctions rhetoric to have an actual effect on its behaviour. First, at least one party must trigger the international audience cost mechanism by engaging in rhetorical action to draw international attention to China's deviations. Unlike the strategic culture hypothesis, the rhetoric-based hypothesis does not assume that China has internalised its rhetorical commitments. In other words, China does not necessarily take elements of its rhetoric as a moral imperative that drives its behaviour. In this case, unanimity among regional players and within the UNSC, coupled with the relative lack of interest among other actors, resulted in the absence of a rhetorical actor to draw attention to contradictions between China's rhetoric and behaviour. China was therefore able to deviate from its sanctions rhetoric without having to suffer any damage to the legitimacy of its counter-stigmatisation strategy.

Second, the explanatory power of the rhetoric-based hypothesis could also be reduced when there are different elements in China's rhetoric that its decision-makers can potentially draw upon to justify their behaviour. While it is difficult to conclusively determine China's response if it had been called out on the contradictions between its sanctions rhetoric and voting behaviour, one might reasonably expect China to simply cite the unanimous position reached by the regional organisations as well as its longstanding position that the relevant regional organisations should determine their own political solutions to justify its affirmative vote. Chinese decision-makers might also have claimed that the sanctions were targeted at the leaders of the military coup, which they did not consider a 'legitimate government'. Taking these two factors into consideration, this case sheds some light on

140 UNSC, S/RES/2048 (2012), 18 May 2012.

why a parsimonious version of the rhetoric-based hypothesis—which does not take these two factors into account—could only account for slightly more than half of the cases under examination.

## 5.5 Conclusion

As summarised in Table 5.3, the five competing hypotheses demonstrated different levels of effectiveness in explaining each of the three cases discussed above. I coded 'high' for cases in which the empirical analysis found substantive evidence to support the hypothesis under examination; 'partial' for cases in which the hypothesis accounted partially for the empirical outcomes; and 'low' for cases in which the hypothesis could not account for China's voting behaviour. To avoid bias as much as possible, the 'principle of charity' was applied, i.e. I considered the competing hypothesis favourably (indicating as either 'high' or 'partial') so long as it offered *plausible* explanations to account for the empirical outcomes.

**Table 5.3 Comparison of Assessed Level of Effectiveness for Each Competing Hypothesis (H1-5)**

<b>Case Studies</b>	<b>H1: China was not yet powerful enough</b>	<b>H2: Constraints imposed by domestic actors</b>	<b>H3: Rational or sociological institutionalism</b>	<b>H4: Strategic culture</b>	<b>H5: China's sanctions rhetoric</b>
DPRK	Partial	Low	Partial	Low	High
Syria (2)	Low	Partial	Low	High	High
Guinea-Bissau	Partial	Low	Partial	Low	Low

In both my correlation and case study analyses, the rhetoric-based hypothesis fared better than the main competing hypotheses in accounting for China's voting behaviour with respect to UNSC sanctions resolutions. There is no doubt that material considerations could also have figured in China's decision-making. However, the objective here is to suggest that China's sanctions rhetoric is an important factor in influencing China's behaviour, particularly when international attention is drawn to the issue in question. This is because Chinese decision-makers are concerned that their credibility would be undermined should they be perceived as deviating consistently from their publicly stated commitments in this regard.

At the same time, China's material interests in many parts of the world are rapidly expanding. Increasingly, UN sanctions might undermine these interests. As earlier argued, China does not consider its sanctions rhetoric as a moral imperative, and one cannot take for granted that China will on its own accord act in accordance with its stated commitments. Therefore, the extent to which other members of the international community manipulate China's rhetorical strategy of counter-stigmatisation to their benefit is a significant factor in prompting China to align its behaviour with its rhetoric. As we saw in the case of Guinea-Bissau, the effect of China's sanctions rhetoric disappears altogether when there is minimal international attention on China's behaviour, i.e. when the international audience cost mechanism is not triggered.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn to examining the extent of China's own use of sanctions as well as whether China's sanctions rhetoric has had a similar constraining effect in this sphere as the one supported by the analysis presented above.

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## 6. China's Unilateral Sanctions: Eight Classic Cases Revisited

### Abstract

Drawing on secondary source material as well as interviews with government officials and commercial actors from 12 countries and 16 cities that were on the receiving end of purported Chinese sanctions, Chapter 6 establishes the nature, scope, and duration of unilateral economic sanctions employed by China between 2008 and 2018. It examines eight international disputes that have frequently been cited by scholars, policymakers, and journalists as examples of China's increasing use of unilateral sanctions: namely, alleged sanctions against France (2008); the US (2010); Japan (2010); Norway (2010); the Philippines (2012); Vietnam (2014); Taiwan (2016); and South Korea (2017). It shows that China's use of economic sanctions was far less widespread or far-reaching than commonly assumed by scholars and policymakers.

**Keywords:** Chinese unilateral sanctions, international disputes, classic cases

Given China's longstanding rhetorical opposition to the use of unilateral sanctions outside of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) framework, to what extent did China use its formidable economic power to exert political pressure on other states? This chapter re-examines the widespread perception among international relations scholars and policymakers that China has become more assertive after the 2008 global financial crisis, including in its use of non-UNSC-authorized unilateral economic sanctions.<sup>1</sup> A closer look at the empirical evidence suggests that this perception rests on a shaky foundation. Few studies have ever been conducted on China's employment

1 See e.g. Friedberg 2015, pp. 133-150; Yahuda 2013, pp. 446-459; Shambaugh 2010; and Friedberg 2018, pp. 7-40.



of unilateral sanctions; and those that have yielded either inconsistent or inconclusive results.<sup>2</sup>

So as to put this discussion on a stronger empirical footing, this chapter establishes the nature, scope, and duration of unilateral economic sanctions employed by China from between 2008 to March 2018. To do so, it examines eight international disputes that have frequently been cited by scholars, policymakers, and journalists as examples of China's increasing use of unilateral sanctions: alleged sanctions against France (2008), the US (2010), Japan (2010), Norway (2010), the Philippines (2012), Vietnam (2014), Taiwan (2016), and South Korea (2017). These cases occur over a ten-year period: from the 2008 financial crisis to the end of Chinese President Xi Jinping's first term in March 2018. This is admittedly not an exhaustive list. For example, China allegedly postponed talks for loans and development projects as well as imposed fees on commodity imports after Mongolia allowed a visit by the Dalai Lama in November 2016.<sup>3</sup> However, given the ambiguity of alleged Chinese unilateral sanctions—i.e. Chinese authorities deny that unilateral sanctions have been imposed, and as the subsequent chapters will show, even potential target states are frequently uncertain about the extent of such sanctions—it is difficult to clearly identify all the cases of Chinese sanctions. The eight selected cases nevertheless represent 'classic cases' in the sense that they are all high-profile incidents that have garnered significant international attention.<sup>4</sup> To reduce the likelihood of selection bias, the cases considered here involve a wide range of political disputes, including visits by the Dalai Lama, territorial issues (i.e. Taiwan and maritime disputes), issues concerning democracy and human rights, and the deployment of a US missile defence system on the Korean Peninsula.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. First, it reviews the background and extent of unilateral economic sanctions employed by China in each of these eight cases. Based on interviews with government officials on the receiving end of purported Chinese sanctions and research into the secondary source material, it demonstrates that while China frequently

2 Some existing works on this topic include Reilly 2012, pp. 121-133; Fuchs and Klann 2013, pp. 164-177; Poh 2017, pp. 143-165; Lai 2018, pp. 169-187; Blackwill and Harris 2016, pp. 93-151; and Li 2017.

3 See e.g. 'China Says Hopes Mongolia Learned Lesson after Dalai Lama Visit', *Reuters*, 24 January 2017.

4 This examination of 'classic cases' was inspired by Baldwin 1985, pp. 145-205; and Johnston's study of seven events in 2009/2010 to examine China's so-called 'new assertiveness' in Johnston 2013, pp. 7-48.

imposes diplomatic punishments (e.g. suspending official interactions) during these cases of political disputes, China's use of economic sanctions has been far less widespread or far-reaching than commonly assumed by scholars and policymakers. Building on this finding, this chapter then identifies patterns across the eight cases, which can provide a basis for an improved understanding of the factors that influence Chinese decision-makers' use of unilateral economic sanctions.

### 6.1 China's use (or non-use) of unilateral sanctions in the eight classic cases

In 2010, the Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman declared: 'The incident [of China cutting off rare earth supply to Japan] shows a Chinese government that is dangerously trigger-happy, willing to wage economic warfare on the slightest provocation'.<sup>5</sup> This chapter determines the extent to which such a characterisation of China's 'economic warfare' can be considered accurate. It examines eight cases of international tension involving China during the period from 2008 to March 2018: (1) the China-France dispute in December 2008 over French President Nicolas Sarkozy's meeting with the Dalai Lama; (2) the China-US dispute in January 2010 over arms sales to Taiwan; (3) the China-Japan dispute in September 2010 over a trawler collision in mutually claimed waters; (4) the China-Norway dispute in October 2010 over the Nobel Peace Prize award to Liu Xiaobo; (5) the China-Philippines dispute in April 2012 over the Scarborough Shoal; (6) the China-Vietnam dispute in May 2014 over an oil rig; (7) the China-Taiwan dispute in January 2016 over the then newly elected Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's refusal to explicitly endorse the '1992 Consensus'; and (8) the China-South Korea dispute in March 2017 over the deployment of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system.

The ensuing analysis suggests that China had employed unilateral economic sanctions on at least five occasions during this period, i.e. against Japan, Norway, the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea. However, it also demonstrates that China's use of sanctions during this period was significantly less widespread—both in terms of the number of cases and of the scope and duration of sanctions—than the popularity of the 'new assertiveness' argument would appear to suggest.

5 Krugman 2010.

### 6.1.1 China-France dispute over French President Nicolas Sarkozy's meeting with the Dalai Lama

On 6 December 2008, French President Nicolas Sarkozy met in Poland with the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, i.e. the current exiled spiritual leader of Tibet. In doing so, Sarkozy became the first European head of state who concurrently held the rotating post of president of the European Union (EU) to meet the Dalai Lama. China condemned the meeting and accused France of 'undermin[ing] China's core interest, gravely hurt[ing] the feelings of the Chinese people and sabotag[ing] the political basis of China-France and China-EU relations'.<sup>6</sup> Beijing declared that it would not participate in a EU-China summit that had been slated to take place in France only days later. China also allegedly removed scheduled stops in France from the upcoming travel agendas of two of its trade delegations.<sup>7</sup>

Based largely on these known actions and on an observable drop in trade in the following year, some scholars hold that China deliberately reduced trade with France and have further inferred that—along with other putatively related cases—there was a 'trade-deteriorating effect' vis-à-vis China for states that chose to meet with the Dalai Lama.<sup>8</sup> However, several French Foreign Ministry officials claimed that there was, at the time of the case under consideration, no correlation between the China-France economic relationship and disagreements at the political level. As one official puts it: 'The consequences to Sarkozy's meeting with the Dalai Lama were all political (i.e. suspension of political meetings), and neither market access nor investment projects were affected by the episode'.<sup>9</sup> On China's part, responding to questions on whether China intended to sanction France over this episode, the PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson Liu Jianchao merely expressed hope that France would 'take active steps to correct its mistake, and provide a conducive environment for the positive development of China-France relations'.<sup>10</sup>

Did Chinese sanctions against France actually take place? Were French officials simply downplaying the economic effects from the dispute, especially

6 China's deputy foreign minister He Yafei quoted in 'China Lodges Strong Protest to France over Dalai Lama Meeting', *China Daily*, 7 December 2008.

7 Fuchs and Klann 2013, pp. 166-167.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 164-177.

9 Interviews with officials from French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs. Personal interviews. 2 May 2016, Paris.

10 PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'wajiaobu jiu sakeqi jian dalai zhongguo shifou zhicai fafang dawen [PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs addresses questions on whether China would impose sanctions on France over Sarkozy's Meeting with the Dalai Lama]', 9 December 2008.

since there was an approximately 15% reduction in China's trade volume with France between 2008 and 2009?<sup>11</sup>

According to data from the European Commission Directorate-General for Trade, there was a similar decrease in China's overall trade volume with the EU across the same period (approximately 13%).<sup>12</sup> Table 6.1 further shows the trend of EU-China trade across a ten-year period from between 2007 to 2016.

**Table 6.1 Trend of EU-China Trade, 2007-2016**

Period	Imports			Exports			Balance Value (million EUR)	Total Trade Value (million EUR)
	Value (million EUR)	% Growth from previous year	% Extra-EU	Value (million EUR)	% Growth from previous year	% Extra-EU		
2007	233,863	19.4	16.1	71,823	12.8	5.8	-162,040	305,686
2008	249,102	6.5	15.7	78,301	9.0	6.0	-170,802	327,403
2009	215,274	-13.6	17.4	82,421	5.3	7.5	-132,853	297,695
2010	283,931	31.9	18.5	113,454	37.7	8.4	-170,477	397,385
2011	295,055	3.9	17.1	136,415	20.2	8.8	-158,641	431,470
2012	292,122	-1.0	16.2	144,227	5.7	8.6	-147,895	436,349
2013	280,151	-4.1	16.6	148,115	2.7	8.5	-132,036	428,266
2014	302,518	8.0	17.9	164,623	11.2	9.7	-137,895	467,141
2015	350,846	16.9	20.3	170,357	3.5	9.5	-180,489	521,203
2016	344,911	-1.7	20.1	169,686	-0.4	9.7	-175,225	514,597

*% Growth: relative variation between current and previous period*

*% Extra-EU: imports/exports as % of all EU partners i.e. excluding trade between EU Member States*

(Source: European Commission, Directorate General for Trade)

The overall trade volume between China and the EU was the lowest in 2009 across this ten-year period from 2007 to 2016. There is no publicly available evidence suggesting that China had sought to economically punish the EU as a whole for Sarkozy's actions. Rather than invoking the 'Dalai Lama effect', a more likely explanation is that most or all of the decline in trade resulted from the global financial crisis, the impact of which was felt most profoundly in late 2008 and 2009.

While China could indeed have punished France economically by depriving it of potential trade deals in the immediate aftermath of Sarkozy's

11 Figure cited in 'Chinese Premier Proposes to Advance Economic, Trade Links with France', *People's Daily Online*, 22 December 2009.

12 See European Commission, 'EU-China Trade in Facts and Figures', 20 July 2010.

meeting with the Dalai Lama, the evidence is insufficient to support the conclusion that China had employed any meaningful economic sanctions against France or the EU in this case when examined more critically and in context. In any case, even if China had indeed deprived France of potential trade deals in the immediate aftermath of the incident, such measures did not last for a very long time. China signed extensive trade deals with France less than a year later, which included ‘more than 40 contracts [...] covering various fields including automobiles, machinery, aviation, nuclear energy, transportation, electricity, telecommunications and service industries’.<sup>13</sup>

### 6.1.2 China-US dispute over arms sales to Taiwan

In 1979, in addition to officially establishing diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the US passed the Taiwan Relations Act, which established parameters for US relations with the island. Among other things, the Act provides the authority for US presidents to approve arms sales to Taiwan, as President Barack Obama did to the tune of USD 6.4 billion in January 2010. In this case, Beijing not only suspended all military-to-military contacts with the US but also threatened for the first time to impose sanctions on US companies that were involved in the offending sale<sup>14</sup>—a threat that was repeated several times subsequently, for example when Obama authorised further sales in December 2015 and when the Trump administration decided to offer a USD 2.2 billion arms sales package to Taiwan in July 2019.

As Alastair I. Johnston notes, Beijing had considered the possibility of sanctions during previous rounds of US arms sales to Taiwan (i.e. prior to January 2010), but the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Commerce had resisted such calls.<sup>15</sup> It is noteworthy that Chinese policymakers started to adopt the language of sanctions in 2010, and Chapter 7 will discuss how this case points to the limitations of my rhetoric-based hypothesis. Nonetheless, in this 2010 case, China did not appear to have followed up subsequently by undertaking any steps to

13 The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, ‘China Trade Delegation Signs Series of Deals with French Enterprises’, 28 November 2009.

14 Remarks by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, ‘2010 nian er yue er ri waijiaobu fayenren machaoxu juxing lixing jizhehui [Remarks by MFA spokesperson Ma Chaoxu at a regular press conference]’, 2 February 2010. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei also threatened US Ambassador Jon Huntsman that China would impose sanctions against US companies that engaged in arms sales to Taiwan. See Blackwill and Harris 2016, p. 96.

15 Johnston 2013, p. 16.

impose sanctions on US companies.<sup>16</sup> Aaron Friedberg also admits that ‘the follow-through and end results of this particular gambit [i.e. China’s threat to sanction US companies] were underwhelming: despite its public posturing, Beijing [did] not appear to have cancelled any contracts or ceased doing business with the major US aerospace firms involved in selling weapons to Taiwan’.<sup>17</sup> Scholars have further noted that ‘China’s unwillingness to react more vigorously to US arms sales has led to some frustrations among Chinese analysts and military officials’.<sup>18</sup> Despite calls by some Chinese military leaders to impose sanctions on US exports to China, ‘these voices were [also] ultimately overruled’ by Beijing.<sup>19</sup> And indeed, available data regarding the 2010 incident supports the view that neither trade nor China’s investment behaviour vis-à-vis the US was affected by this episode.<sup>20</sup>

### 6.1.3 China-Japan dispute over a trawler collision in mutually claimed waters

On 7 September 2010, a Chinese trawler collided with a Japanese Coast Guard vessel near the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Located in the East China Sea, the islands are claimed by both China and Japan. Japanese authorities arrested and detained the Chinese trawler captain, after which tensions between China and Japan escalated rapidly. China’s Premier, Wen Jiabao, declared on the sidelines of a UN general assembly meeting that China would take further action if the Japanese government did not release the captain.<sup>21</sup> Shortly thereafter, Chinese authorities arrested four Japanese citizens, allegedly because they were illegally videotaping military installations near the city of Shijiazhuang.<sup>22</sup> In September, the international press began to report that the rupture had affected trade between the two nations. In particular, a *New York Times* article stated that the Chinese government had ‘sharply rais[ed] the stakes [by blocking] exports to Japan of a crucial

16 Ibid.; and interview with Stephen Rademaker, former US Assistant Secretary of State. Personal interview. 13 April 2016, Washington, D.C.

17 Friedberg 2018, p. 28.

18 See e.g. Chen, Kastner, and Reed 2017, p. 233; and Garver 1977.

19 Chen, Kastner, and Reed 2017, p. 233

20 For data on the US-China trade relationship, see US Census Bureau, ‘Trade in Goods with China’; and Morrison 2011. There was similarly no evidence of Chinese sanctions against US companies involved in arms sales to Taiwan in 2015.

21 Branigan and McCurry 2010.

22 Johnson 2010.

category of minerals used in products like hybrid cars, wind turbines and guided missiles'.<sup>23</sup>

Officials from Japan's MFA confirmed that about two weeks after the incident, Japanese companies did indeed begin to encounter significant difficulties obtaining export licenses from China for rare earth minerals.<sup>24</sup> They claimed, however, that the situation lasted for less than ten days and that China resumed issuing such licenses to Japanese companies by the end of September 2010. They further pointed out that as Chinese officials had throughout that period denied issuing any instructions to restrict export licenses to Japan, they had no concrete evidence for the imposition of Chinese sanctions. Instead, the Japanese government had to conduct a series of its own surveys to determine the extent of Chinese sanctions. It found that by early October 2010, 40% of the potentially affected companies based in Tokyo and 80% of those based in China no longer faced problems procuring export licenses. As a result, the Japanese government announced during a press conference on October 12, 2010 that the rare earth situation with China had improved.<sup>25</sup>

Johnston, similarly, found little evidence to support the view that China had subjected Japan to an embargo of rare earth minerals. He observes that 'although October [2010] did see a decrease in many rare earth imports [from China], in 17% of the observations [i.e. analysed by commodity category and customs port] rare earth imports increased from September to October [and] in 41% of the observations rare earth imports grew in November over October'.<sup>26</sup> Despite the widespread perception that China banned rare earth exports to Japan following the collision, any actual interruption of trade in this category apparently lasted less than two weeks. There is no evidence of a negative impact in the months immediately following the dispute.

#### **6.1.4 China-Norway dispute over the Nobel Peace Prize award to Liu Xiaobo**

On 8 October 2010, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo. Beijing immediately claimed that the choice of recipient had 'desecrated the prize' and threatened that

23 Bradsher 2010; see also Tabuchi 2010.

24 Interviews with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan). Personal interviews, 29 July 2016, Tokyo.

25 Ibid.

26 Johnston 2013, p. 24.

the incident would severely affect China-Norway relations.<sup>27</sup> Despite the Norwegian government's assertion that it had no influence over the panel's decision, China soon suspended all bilateral political meetings with Norway, including those planned for the negotiation of a potential free trade agreement. The incident is blamed for prompting a six-year freeze in diplomatic relations between China and Norway, which only thawed following the official visit by Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg to China in April 2017.<sup>28</sup>

Academic articles and media commentaries discussing the impact of this incident on trade have focused on Chinese imports of Norwegian salmon, which was the most heavily impacted. A number of Norwegian officials confirmed that there was no official notice or written documentation from China suggesting that it would either boycott or make changes to inspections on (specifically) Norwegian salmon.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, according to Sigmund Bjorgo, director of the Norwegian Seafood Council in China and Hong Kong, Norway's share of the fresh salmon imports to China fell from around 95% before 2010 to around 1% by April 2015.<sup>30</sup> A study conducted by Norway-based analysts Xianwen Chen and Roberto Javier Garcier noted that the Beijing Capital Airport Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau had issued an order dated 8 December 2010 requiring stricter checks on Norwegian fresh aquaculture products. This was followed up by an order from the PRC Central Office of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine dated 28 January 2011 calling for more thorough inspections of salmon imports in general (i.e. not limited to Norwegian imports).<sup>31</sup> Bjorgo corroborated this account by further indicating that, although the January 2011 order stated that there would be stricter inspections on *all* imported salmon, there appeared to be much stricter inspections on Norwegian salmon.<sup>32</sup> The perception that Norwegian salmon was undergoing more time-consuming checks than salmon imported from other countries resulted in a 'self-regulating mechanism' whereby neither Norwegian exporters nor Chinese importers

27 'Awarding Liu Xiaobo Nobel Peace Prize May Harm China-Norway Relations, says FM Spokesman', *People's Daily Online*, 8 October 2010.

28 PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Xi Jinping Meets with Prime Minister Erna Solberg of Norway', 10 April 2017.

29 Interviews with officials from Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, Oslo. Personal interviews. 30 and 31 May 2016, Oslo.

30 Interview with Sigmund Bjorgo, Director of the Norwegian Seafood Council in China and Hong Kong. Phone interview, 7 December 2015.

31 Chen and Garcier 2016, p. 37.

32 *Ibid.*; and interview with Norwegian trade official. Personal interview. 31 May 2016, Oslo.



wanted to take the associated risk of exporting or importing salmon that could go bad due to lengthy inspections.<sup>33</sup> In any event, China introduced stricter import license quotas in 2013, and this made it even more challenging for Norway to get fresh salmon into the Chinese market.<sup>34</sup> This situation worsened in September 2014 and March 2015, when China announced that it would no longer import Norwegian salmon due to concerns that they contained infectious salmon anaemia, which could hurt China's aquaculture industry.<sup>35</sup>

There can be little doubt that China employed some form of economic retaliation by making it more difficult for Norway to export fresh salmon to China in the years following the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo. However, despite the significant impact on Norway's share of Chinese salmon imports, the overall effect of sanctions in this case was fairly limited. Other aspects of the economic relationship between China and Norway appear to have been unaffected by the dispute. Norwegian trade and foreign ministry officials noted that fresh salmon exports to China constituted only about five to ten percent of Norway's overall fish exports to that country and only about two percent of Norway's overall global salmon exports.<sup>36</sup> Norway's overall exports to China increased by approximately 20% from 2010 to 2011, despite a drop in Norwegian exports to Asia and despite the significant political fallout caused by the 2010 Nobel Prize incident.<sup>37</sup> A 2015 study by Norwegian researcher Bjørnar Sverdrup-Thygeson claimed that the overall volume of Norwegian imports from and exports to China had grown fairly steadily since 2010.<sup>38</sup> According to data from the Norwegian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, despite the drastic drop in fresh salmon exports, bilateral trade between Norway and Mainland China increased from NOK 60,847 million (approximately USD 7,729 million) in 2012 to NOK 87,825 million (approximately USD 11,156 million) in 2015.<sup>39</sup> China also overtook Denmark's position as the sixth largest recipient of Norwegian goods in 2015, marking an increase of 17.7% from 2014.<sup>40</sup> Marc Lanteigne, a senior analyst

33 Interview with Norwegian trade official. Personal interview. 31 May 2016, Oslo.

34 Ibid. A similar observation was pointed out in Chen and Garcier 2015, p. 11.

35 Chen and Garcier 2016, p. 47.

36 Interviews with officials from Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries. Personal interviews. 30 and 31 May 2016, Oslo. For data on Norwegian seafood exports to China, see also Sverdrup-Thygeson 2015, pp. 112-113.

37 Sverdrup-Thygeson 2015, p. 116.

38 Ibid., p. 109.

39 Norwegian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, 'Bilateral Trade with Mainland China'.

40 Statistics Norway, 15 January 2016.

at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, noted that bilateral trade between China and Norway hit record levels in 2015.<sup>41</sup> In the same year (i.e. 2015), China accepted Norway's application to be a founding member of its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

In addition, despite the initial concerns of Norwegian businesses, Norway's main export categories to China (i.e. machinery, transport equipment, and chemicals-related products) did not experience any repercussions.<sup>42</sup> Sverdrup-Thygeson further quoted Rolf Roverud, chief executive officer of Scana—one of the biggest Norwegian companies conducting businesses with China—as saying that they had 'never heard of the Nobel Peace Prize being mentioned as a relevant factor for [them] in China [...] [they] had expected problems with orders to shipyards, etc. as a result of sanctions, but [they] had not experienced this'.<sup>43</sup> In sum, even as Beijing imposed serious diplomatic sanctions against Norway that lasted for more than six years following the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo, China's economic retaliation remained relatively mild and limited in scope.

### 6.1.5 China-Philippines dispute over the Scarborough Shoal

On 8 April 2012, following the discovery of eight Chinese vessels at the Scarborough Shoal—a feature in the South China Sea that is claimed by China, Taiwan, and the Philippines—the Philippine Navy deployed its largest warship, the BRP Gregorio del Pilar, to the area. Two days later, the Philippine Navy boarded the Chinese vessels and found illegally collected corals and live sharks in one of them. The Philippine Navy proceeded to apprehend the Chinese fishermen and to begin taking possession of their vessels, only to be stopped by two Chinese maritime surveillance ships, the *Haijian 75* and *Haijian 84*, whose crew members informed the Philippine Navy sailors that they were in Chinese territorial waters and should leave immediately. The ensuing standoff—which by May 2012 involved as many as four Chinese surveillance ships and ten fishing boats confronting a Philippine Coast Guard ship and a vessel from the Philippine fisheries bureau—lasted until the evening of 15 June 2012. At that time, allegedly after US officials brokered a deal in meetings that involved then Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying, both parties withdrew their vessels, citing the threat of an impending

41 Marc Lanteigne quoted in Chan 2016.

42 Sverdrup-Thygeson 2015, pp. 109–110.

43 Rolf Roverud, quoted in Sverdrup-Thygeson 2015, pp. 110–111.

typhoon.<sup>44</sup> However, Chinese vessels returned to the Scarborough Shoal shortly thereafter and remained there until late in 2016.<sup>45</sup>

In May 2012, amid escalating tensions between China and the Philippines over the incident, international media outlets such as *The Financial Times* and *The Washington Post* reported the appearance of 'sudden Chinese restrictions on banana imports from the Philippines'.<sup>46</sup> Drawing on these reports, scholars also began to argue that Beijing had 'carefully calculated its sanctions to exert domestic political pressure on the Philippine government [in an attempt] to pressure Manila to resolve the maritime dispute quickly'.<sup>47</sup> Data provided by Philippine authorities, however, suggests that China's restrictions of banana imports from the Philippines began approximately one month *before* the Scarborough Shoal dispute and thus may not have been directly related to the dispute.<sup>48</sup> Specifically, the Bureau of Plant Industry in Manila was first notified by the Director General of China's General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine on 5 March 2012 that there were insects and mealybugs present in some of the bananas being exported to China.<sup>49</sup> Officials from China's General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine suspended the purchase of bananas from the export companies concerned and asked that the Bureau of Plant Industry strengthen the inspection of bananas and provide them with lists of banana export orchards and packing facilities in the Philippines. A series of meetings and written correspondence followed between the Bureau of Plant Industry, the banana stakeholders in the Philippines, and China's General Administration of Quality Supervision,

44 Interview with Jim Gomez, Chief Correspondent of the Associated Press in Manila. Personal interview. 20 January 2016, Manila.

45 Poh 2017, pp. 147-148. See also de Castro 2016, pp. 157-182; Perlez 2012; and Ratner 2013.

46 See e.g. Landingin 2012; and Higgins 2012.

47 Reilly 2012, pp. 129-130.

48 Bureau of Plant Industry, Philippine Department of Agriculture, 'Chronology of Events Regarding Banana and Pineapple Export to China', n.d., para 1; and Bureau of Plant Industry, Philippine Department of Agriculture, 'Report for DA Secretary Proceso J. Alcalá – Update on China Visit Re. Banana Issue' (May 2012), pp. 5-6. According to interviews conducted by the author with the Bureau of Plant Industry's National Plant Protection Organization of the Philippines, initial investigations revealed that the insect *Aspidiotus destructor Signoret* was found in the first batch of bananas detained and suspended by China. Interviews with representatives from the Plant Quarantine Office of the Bureau of Plant Industry at the Philippine Department of Agriculture. Personal interviews. 21 January 2016, Manila.

49 Interviews with representatives from the Plant Quarantine Office of the Bureau of Plant Industry at the Philippine Department of Agriculture. Personal interview. 21 January 2016, Manila.

Inspection and Quarantine. These communications continued throughout the Scarborough Shoal episode.<sup>50</sup>

While officials of the Bureau of Plant Industry and banana stakeholders in Mindanao—the second largest of the Philippine islands and the heartland of its banana industry—acknowledged that some Philippine companies faced significant difficulties in exporting bananas to China during the Scarborough Shoal incident, they also noted that there was no actual ban on Philippine bananas. Containers with bananas not infested with insects continued to pass through Chinese ports, even at the peak of bilateral tensions. Moreover, the volume of banana exports from Mindanao to China substantially exceeded 2011 levels in both 2012 and 2013 (see Table 6.2).<sup>51</sup> This fact alone should cast doubt on the widespread claim that China had imposed a ‘banana ban’ on the Philippines—severely threatening the livelihoods of the Philippine banana stakeholders—in an attempt to force Manila to resolve the Scarborough Shoal dispute in China’s favour.<sup>52</sup>

**Table 6.2 Mindanao’s Export of Banana-Related Products to China, 2011-2015**

Region	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015*
IX	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
X	5,966,005	6,089,410	3,937,241	5,507,670	8,474,880
XI	74,950,054	89,711,741	88,099,014	80,657,009	90,327,290
XII	N.A.	2,720,031	1,391,311	5,848,746	9,933,700
Caraga Region	N.A.	N.A.	47,172	N.A.	N.A.
Mindanao Total	80,916,059	98,521,182	93,474,738	92,013,425	108,735,870

*Note:* \*Data for 2015 does not include data for July, November, and December  
(Source: Philippine Statistics Authority)

Beyond banana exports from the Philippines to China, one could arguably point to lacklustre growth in Chinese loans and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) during this period as possible signs of China’s ‘unofficial sanctions’.

50 Poh 2017, p. 149; and interviews with representatives from the Plant Quarantine Office of the Bureau of Plant Industry at the Philippine Department of Agriculture. Personal interviews. 21 January 2016, Manila.

51 Interviews with representatives from the Plant Quarantine Office of the Bureau of Plant Industry at the Philippine Department of Agriculture; and with banana stakeholders in Mindanao. Personal interviews. 21 to 26 January 2016, Manila and Davao City. See also data in Table 1 from the Philippine Statistics Authority.

52 See e.g. Reilly 2012, pp. 129-130.

However, there are other factors to be considered beyond the South China Sea disputes. For example, the Philippine president at the time, Benigno Aquino III (who served from 2010 to 2016), had criticised the previous administration under Gloria Arroyo of rampant corruption, including during the signing of various infrastructural projects with China. Aquino therefore terminated several major infrastructural projects backed by Beijing, such as the USD 329.48 million National Broadband Network project and the North Luzon Railway System project.<sup>53</sup> Noting that the Aquino administration had also expelled Chinese workers from several ‘critical infrastructure’ projects, Jim Gomez, the Chief Correspondent of the Associated Press in Manila, noted that these episodes had caused China to lose confidence in the willingness of the various administrations to follow through with long-term projects, which gave Beijing pause for thought before committing to major investments with Manila.<sup>54</sup>

In brief, there is no direct evidence to support the claim that China employed economic sanctions against the Philippines in the aftermath of the Scarborough Shoal incident. One possible exception is in terms of tourism, where a significant decline of Mainland Chinese tourists to the Philippines could be observed (see Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3 Chinese Visitors to the Philippines, January-December 2012**

Month	Number of Chinese Visitors
January 2012	42,868
February 2012	26,289
March 2012	27,298
April 2012	26,807
May 2012	15,204
June 2012	12,283
July 2012	15,470
August 2012	13,660
September 2012	17,047
October 2012	18,888
November 2012	17,360
December 2012	17,709

(Source: Philippine Department of Tourism)

53 Liang 2018, p. 288. See also ‘Philippines’ Aquino Halts Foreign-Funded Infrastructure Projects’, *Associated Press*, 19 June 2011.

54 Interview with Jim Gomez, Chief Correspondent of the Associated Press in Manila. Personal interview. 20 January 2016, Manila.

As the Philippine scholar Aileen Baviera has pointed out, this decline in the number of tourists could be attributed to travel advisories issued by Chinese officials dissuading tourists (particularly tour groups) from visiting the Philippines following 'calls by Philippine nationalists to hold demonstrations against Chinese "bullying"'.<sup>55</sup> However, she noted that the 'de facto ban' on tour groups were quickly lifted after it became clear that no major anti-Chinese violence took place.<sup>56</sup> Such 'sanctions' targeted at the Philippine travel industry, if indeed in place, were therefore also very limited in scope. Notably, there was a 3.19% increase in the overall number of Mainland Chinese tourists to the Philippines in 2012 as compared to 2011.<sup>57</sup>

### 6.1.6 China-Vietnam dispute over an oil rig

On 2 May 2014, China's state-owned China National Offshore Oil Corporation placed an oil rig, *Haiyang Shiyou 981*, in waters near the disputed Paracel Islands. The location lay within Vietnam's exclusive economic zone. Tensions escalated rapidly. China and Vietnam dispatched surveillance and fishing vessels to the area and accused each other of hostile actions such as the firing of water cannons and the ramming of vessels. In the weeks that followed, violent protests took place in Vietnam, resulting in the deaths of more than 20 people and nearly 100 injured.<sup>58</sup> Fires were also set to industrial parks and factories owned by nationals from China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore. Faced with pressure from the respective governments, Vietnamese authorities quickly moved to end the protests. The standoff between Vietnamese and Chinese vessels, however, continued near the Paracel Islands for approximately two months. In July 2014, China removed the oil rig from the area, claiming that its drilling work had been completed a month ahead of schedule.<sup>59</sup>

Vietnamese officials noted that Hanoi had fully expected Chinese economic sanctions soon after the incident occurred given media reports on China's purported retaliation against the Philippines during the Scarborough

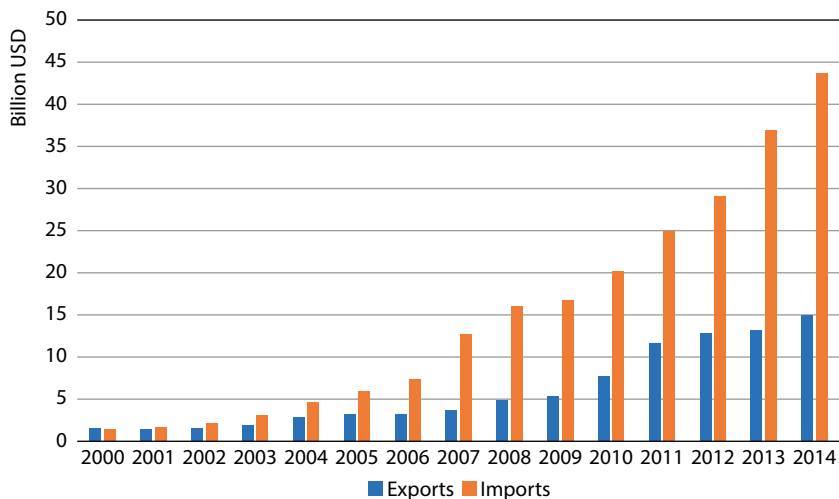
55 Baviera 2016, pp. 122-123.

56 Ibid.

57 See statistics from the Philippine Department of Tourism, 'Visitor Arrivals to the Philippines by Country of Residence'.

58 Hodal and Kaiman 2014.

59 Poh 2017, pp. 152-153. See also Hodal and Kaiman 2014; Mullen 2014; and Ruwitch and Lin 2014.

**Figure 6.1 Vietnam's Trade with China, 2000-2014**

(Source: World Integrated Trade Solution)

Shoal episode.<sup>60</sup> As a result, the Vietnamese government requested that its agencies and research institutions conduct an ‘urgent stock take’ to highlight specific areas of potential vulnerability that could be targeted by Chinese sanctions. Some of these reports and findings were even discussed in the National Assembly.<sup>61</sup> These officials noted, however, that China did not impose any form of economic retaliation against Vietnam throughout the incident.<sup>62</sup> Chinese officials also did not make any public or private threats to do so. Data from the World Integrated Trade Solution also reveals that the trade account between China and Vietnam continued to rise in 2014 (see Figure 6.1).

The only economic consequence for Vietnam appears to have been a decline in the number of Chinese tourists visiting Vietnam. For several months after the incident, China cancelled visits by Chinese tour groups and issued travel advisories warning its citizens against travelling to Vietnam.<sup>63</sup> But these actions could also be explained by legitimate concerns over safety

60 Interviews with Vietnam's Foreign Ministry staff and Tran Truong Thuy, Deputy Director of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam. Personal interviews. 5 January 2016, Hanoi.

61 Poh 2017, p. 153; and interviews with Vietnam's Foreign Ministry staff and Do Tien Sam, Editor in Chief and former Director of Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences. Personal interviews, 5 and 15 January 2016, Hanoi.

62 Interviews with Vietnamese officials. Personal interviews. 5 and 6 January 2016, Hanoi.

63 See e.g. Tsang and Agencies in Hanoi 2014.

as a result of anti-Chinese rioting rather than an attempt to 'punish' Vietnam economically. Once again, there is no direct evidence showing that China had imposed economic sanctions against Vietnam despite political tensions resulting from the oil rig incident.

### 6.1.7 China-Taiwan dispute over the newly elected Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's refusal to explicitly endorse the '1992 Consensus'

Taiwan's pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won the presidential and legislative elections in January 2016, replacing Ma Ying-jeou's Kuomintang (KMT) administration, which had held a more favourable position towards Beijing. The new DPP President Tsai Ing-wen's refusal to explicitly endorse the '1992 Consensus'—an understanding between Chinese and Taiwanese political representatives that there was only one China—prompted Beijing to suspend all forms of official communications with the Tsai administration.<sup>64</sup> In the months that followed, Beijing held military drills targeted at the 'Taiwan secessionist forces', and the spokesperson for China's Ministry of National Defense declared that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) would 'resolutely contain any action and attempt by the secessionists for Taiwan's independence'.<sup>65</sup> Given Beijing's resolve to exert pressure on the Tsai administration to adhere to the 'one China policy', to explicitly endorse the '1992 Consensus', and to prevent all forms of what it perceives as pro-independence activities, Beijing had significant political incentives to impose various coercive measures—including economic ones—on the Tsai government.

Data from Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs and interviews with Taiwanese officials and analysts reveal, however, that up until the end of Xi's first administration, there had been no direct correlation between the cross-strait political climate and economic interactions. There has been a steady increase in bilateral trade and economic exchanges between the PRC and Taiwan since 1992, even during periods of significant political tensions.

64 The '1992 Consensus' refers to an agreement reached between Mainland China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits and Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation for both sides to adhere to the one-China policy, although each party is allowed to interpret the meaning of 'one China' according to their own definition. See 'Full Text of Mainland's Taiwan Affairs Authorities Statement on Cross-Straits Relations', *Xinhua News*, 20 May 2016. Tsai Ing-wen said that she 'respected [the] fact' that Taiwan and Mainland China reached 'various joint acknowledgments and understandings in 1992' but stopped short of explicitly acknowledging the '1992 Consensus'.  
65 Mo 2016.



Trade volumes and other economic activity only dipped in 2009 and in 2015, likely as a result of the financial crises, especially since cross-strait political ties were positive during both of these periods under the relatively pro-PRC Ma Ying-jeou administration.<sup>66</sup> Since Tsai Ing-wen assumed the presidency in May 2016, Taiwan's trade with China (excluding Hong Kong) as a percentage of its overall foreign trade—far from being adversely affected—saw a slight increase from 22.7% in June 2016 to 23.2% in May 2017.<sup>67</sup> Representatives from the Taiwan Straits Exchange Foundation—a semi-official organisation established to handle all business matters with the PRC—also indicated that despite fears from Taiwanese businesses in China (*taishang*), there has not been any evidence of Chinese economic or trade retaliation.<sup>68</sup> In January 2018, a spokesperson for the PRC State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, Ma Xiaoguang, announced that trade between Taiwan and Mainland China had 'reached a record high of nearly USD 199.4 billion in 2017, up 11.3% from 2016'.<sup>69</sup>

There is little doubt, however, that the downturn in cross-strait political relations following the election of the Tsai administration had resulted in a significant reduction of Chinese tourists to Taiwan. More specifically, there was an 18% decrease in the number of Chinese tourists to Taiwan in 2016 compared to that of the previous year. Between January to April 2017, the number of Chinese tourists to Taiwan also dropped by approximately 50% compared to the same period in 2015. This could indeed be perceived as some form of Chinese sanctions against Taiwan. Taiwanese media outlets calculated that the sharp decline in the number of Chinese tourists visiting Taiwan between May 2016 and February 2017 resulted in a loss of approximately NT 55 billion dollars (USD 1.81 billion).<sup>70</sup>

According to officials from Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs, Beijing did not threaten or convey any policy changes concerning tourism and other

66 Interviews with officials from the Taiwan National Security Council and the Taiwan Ministry of Economic Affairs. Personal interviews. 26 and 30 June 2017, Taipei.

67 Interviews with and data provided by officials from the Bureau of Foreign Trade, Taiwan Ministry of Economic Affairs. Personal interviews. 30 June 2017, Taipei.

68 Interview with Luo Huai-jia, Deputy Secretary-General and Director of the Straits Exchange Foundation, Department of Economic Affairs. Personal interview. 30 June 2017, Taipei.

69 'Mainland Confident, Capable of Tackling Growing Risks over Cross-Strait Relations', *Xinhua News*, 17 January 2018.

70 See e.g. Shan, 'Chinese Tourism Losses Offset by Diversification', *Taipei Times*, 4 April 2017. These losses to Taiwan's travel industry were offset by an increase in international visitors due to Taiwan's relaxation of visa requirements. According to Taiwan's Tourism Bureau, the total number of international visitors to Taiwan (including those from Mainland China) reached a record high of 10.69 million in 2016, an increase of 2.4% as compared to 2015.

forms of economic interactions. Given that all forms of correspondence between China and Taiwan had ceased, there was also no discussion about these issues at the official levels.<sup>71</sup> The decline of Chinese tourists could be due to Chinese travel agencies suspending their promotions of group tours to Taiwan—likely at the direction of Chinese authorities—but it could just as well have been the result of widespread reporting in the Chinese media on safety issues following an incident in which a suicidal Taiwanese bus driver killed an entire Mainland Chinese tour group in July 2016.<sup>72</sup>

While political tensions between China and Taiwan might have resulted in a considerable decrease in the number of Chinese tourists, it remains notable that other areas of trade and investment were not affected by the political climate. Taiwanese officials and analysts revealed that following the cessation of political and official communications between Beijing and Taipei, Beijing had increased its efforts to induce Taiwanese businesses and youth to visit the Mainland by providing more grants for them to work and study in the PRC.<sup>73</sup> As Kwei-Bo Huang, a Taiwanese scholar who also served in the Ma Ying-jeou administration, suggests: ‘These people-to-people exchanges, along with [favourable] economic measures and programs, serve to reinforce the ties between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait and to diminish the confrontational nature of cross-strait relations’.<sup>74</sup> A spokesperson for the PRC State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, Ma Xiaoguang, also acknowledged that ‘the Chinese mainland [had in 2017] rolled out more

71 Interview with officials from the Taiwan Ministry of Economic Affairs. Personal interview. 30 June 2017, Taipei. Interview with Luo Huai-Jia, Deputy Secretary-General and Director of the Straits Exchange Foundation, Department of Economic Affairs. Personal interview. 30 June 2017, Taipei.

72 Interview with Luo Huai-Jia, Deputy Secretary-General and Director of the Straits Exchange Foundation, Department of Economic Affairs. Personal interview. 30 June 2017, Taipei. See also ‘24 Mainland Tourists Killed in Taiwan Coach Fire’, *Xinhua News*, 19 July 2016. It is notable that while the number of group tours from Mainland China to Taiwan decreased sharply, data from the Taiwan Ministry of Economic Affairs indicate that the number of private Chinese tourists to Taiwan (i.e. Mainland Chinese tourists visiting Taiwan without being part of a group tour) increased.

73 Interview with officials from the Taiwan National Security Council. Personal interview. 26 June 2017, Taipei. Interview with Kwei-Bo Huang, former Chairman of the Research and Planning Committee, Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and former Deputy Director of the Ma Ying-jeou and Wu Den-yih National Presidential Campaign Office’s Department of International Affairs. Personal interview. 27 June 2017, Taipei. Interview with Alvin Yao, Director of International Studies at the Prospect Foundation. Personal interview. 29 June 2017, Taipei. Interview with Lin Wen-cheng, President of the Foundation on Asia-Pacific Peace Studies. Personal interview. 3 July 2017, Taipei.

74 Huang 2017, p. 24.

than 20 policies to provide Taiwanese people who live, work or travel on the mainland with better services'.<sup>75</sup> In brief, despite the cessation of all political communications, China's use of sanctions against Taiwan over the Democratic Progressive Party's election victory was once again limited in scope (i.e. largely relating to controlling the number of Chinese tourists to Taiwan). In addition, Beijing appears to have preferred using softer approaches such as the facilitation of cross-strait exchanges for businesses and youth in pursuit of its ultimate goal of reunification.

### 6.1.8 China-South Korea dispute over the deployment of the US THAAD system

On 6 March 2017, the US began its deployment of THAAD—an anti-ballistic missile defence system—in South Korea, prompting vehement opposition and protests from Beijing. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that 'China [would] take necessary measures to safeguard its security interests, and the US and the ROK [would] have to bear all the resulting consequences'.<sup>76</sup> In an earlier statement, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi expressed China's displeasure by claiming that the coverage of THAAD, particularly the monitoring scope of its X-Band radar, went 'far beyond the defence need of the Korean Peninsula [as it] reach[ed] deep into the hinterland of Asia, which [would] not only directly damage China's strategic security interests, but also do harm to the security interests of other countries in [the Asia-Pacific] region'.<sup>77</sup> Wang further emphasised that China 'firmly oppose[d] any country [utilising] the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula to jeopardise China's legitimate rights and interests'.<sup>78</sup> Michael Swaine also explained that Beijing's strong opposition to the deployment of THAAD was due to the widespread belief in China that the system served the primary purpose of 'weaken[ing] China's strategic deterrent while contributing to a global anti-missile system threatening to both Beijing and Moscow'.<sup>79</sup>

Signs of Beijing's political and economic retaliation were almost immediately apparent after the first announcement in February 2016 that THAAD

75 'Mainland Confident, Capable of Tackling Growing Risks over Cross-Strait Relations', *Xinhua News*, 17 January 2018.

76 Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang quoted in 'China Voices Resolute Opposition to THAAD Deployment in ROK', *Xinhua News*, 27 February 2017.

77 PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Wang Yi Talks about US's Plan to Deploy THAAD Missile Defense System in ROK', 13 February 2016.

78 *Ibid.*

79 Swaine 2017, p. 8.

might be deployed in South Korea. Chinese authorities suspended several high-level political visits and dialogues and allegedly instructed Chinese travel agencies to significantly reduce the number of tour groups to South Korea.<sup>80</sup> According to statistics from the Korea Tourism Organization, there was an approximate 40% decrease of Chinese visitors to South Korea in 2017 as compared to 2016.<sup>81</sup> The South Korean National Assembly's Budget Office estimates that the decrease in China's tourists to the country led to losses of around USD 6.8 billion.<sup>82</sup> The Civil Aviation Administration of China also allegedly rejected requests by several South Korean airlines for an increase in the number of flights in January and February 2017, i.e. during the peak Chinese New Year period.<sup>83</sup>

Further allegations of Chinese sanctions emerged in March 2017 (i.e. around the actual deployment of THAAD to South Korea) after Chinese authorities closed 23 of South Korea's Lotte supermarket stores across China, citing safety and regulatory issues such as fire risks.<sup>84</sup> In August 2017, inspectors from the Beijing Development and Reform Commission confiscated 23 pump motors and four power transformers from two Lotte stores, claiming that the equipment failed to meet Beijing's power conservation standards.<sup>85</sup> These measures, as well as a series of protests by Chinese citizens against Lotte, took place in the months following Lotte's approval of a land swap deal with South Korea's defence ministry that allowed for THAAD to be deployed on the site.<sup>86</sup> By May 2018, 99 out of 112 Lotte stores based in China were shut down due to 'violations of fire safety regulations'.<sup>87</sup> By October 2018, Lotte Mart had withdrawn completely from the Chinese market. China also placed restrictions on South Korea's artists and entertainers, with booking agents and content distributors allegedly warned that failure to comply with the restrictions would result in fines or license cancellations.<sup>88</sup> While

80 Ibid., p. 2. Figures provided by the Federation of Korean Industries indicate that the number of Chinese tourists to South Korea fell from 15,984,000 in 2015 to 8,068,000 in 2016 and even further to 4,169,000 in 2017.

81 'Number of Foreign Tourists to Korea Dip 11% in March', *The Korea Herald*, 24 April 2017.

82 'Damage from China's Ban on South Korean Tours Estimated at 7.5 tln won', *Yonhap News Agency*, 3 December 2017.

83 Paradise 2019, p. 36.

84 Lee and Jourdan 2017.

85 Zhou 2017.

86 Li and Ge 2017.

87 Interview with Chun Sung Hwan, Director of the East Asia Economic Relations Division of the Republic of Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Phone interview. 30 May 2018; and 'China's Harsh Words Mask a Trade Boom with South Korea', *The Straits Times*, 30 September 2017.

88 Lim and Ferguson 2020.

Chinese authorities have not directly admitted to imposing any sanctions or restrictions on South Korea as a result of the dispute, China's state-owned *Xinhua News* claimed that 'a recent survey showed that more than four-fifths of Chinese people would support the ban on the appearance of South Korean entertainers in Chinese TV programmes if the government does so'.<sup>89</sup>

At the same time, however, trade and other investment projects between China and South Korea were largely unaffected by the political dispute over THAAD. When interviewed by Yonhap News Agency, South Korea's largest news agency, the President of the Korea Testing Laboratory noted that two potentially vulnerable areas—namely the manufacturing and technology sectors—were not affected by the political tensions that had rapidly escalated.<sup>90</sup> For example, exports of semiconductors and information technology products from South Korea to China saw a 75% and 34% year-on-year increase respectively.<sup>91</sup> South Korea's exports to China, which accounted for approximately 25% of the country's total foreign exports in 2016, also increased for five months consecutively from November 2016 to March 2017—the period in which political tensions between China and South Korea peaked—even as exports to the US and Europe declined during the same period.<sup>92</sup> According to another set of figures reported by the Korea International Trade Association, South Korea's exports to China increased by 12% in the January to August 2017 period from the previous year, amounting to USD 88.1 billion.<sup>93</sup> A senior official from South Korea's East Asia Economic Relations Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that bilateral trade between China and South Korea increased from USD 211 billion in 2016 to USD 240 billion in 2017.<sup>94</sup> Other Foreign Ministry officials and Seoul-based analysts also indicated that China's economic retaliation against South Korea over the THAAD episode has frequently been conflated by the media and other commentators with China's shifting economic policies, which started before the dispute. One example was China's suspension of subsidies for batteries from Korean car companies (e.g. Samsung). Since 2015 (i.e. before the THAAD episode), the

89 'Entertainment Shares in South Korea Fall on Worry About THAAD Deployment', *Xinhua News*, 4 August 2016.

90 Boram 2017.

91 Ibid.

92 Kim and Kim 2017.

93 'China's Harsh Words Mask a Trade Boom with South Korea', *The Straits Times*, 30 September 2017.

94 Interview with a senior official of the East Asia Economic Relations Division at the Republic of Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Phone interview. 30 May 2018.

Chinese government had begun to reduce subsidies for Korean batteries in order to promote its own domestically produced products.<sup>95</sup> In terms of motor vehicles, Korean automakers such as Hyundai and Kia had already been struggling prior to the THAAD dispute to compete with their Chinese rivals who were producing comparable vehicles at lower prices.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, the Chinese government has since 2015 (i.e. before the THAAD episode) been very keen to limit the popularity of K-pop and Korean soap opera so as to protect its own show industry.<sup>97</sup> As a prominent Korean analyst notes, 'the Chinese government would have been much more effective should they want to seriously impose sanctions against South Korea, especially since South Korea is an export-oriented economy, and China occupies about 25 percent of South Korea's trade'.<sup>98</sup> Another report indicates that 'China is South Korea's largest trading partner [...] and therefore essential to national GDP, 40 percent of which comes from exports; by contrast, South Korea was the source of just 10 percent of Chinese merchandise imports and did not feature among the mainland's top service suppliers'.<sup>99</sup> Table 6.4 below further illustrates South Korea's dependence on Chinese trade.

**Table 6.4 South Korea's Top Trading Partners, 2017**

Exports		Imports	
Merchandise	Services	Merchandise	Services
<i>China (24.8%)</i>	<i>China (21.8%)</i>	<i>China (20.5%)</i>	USA (25.3%)
USA (12%)	USA (14.9%)	EU (12%)	EU (18.9%)
EU (9.5%)	EU (12%)	Japan (11.5%)	<i>China (14.3%)</i>
Vietnam (8.3%)	Japan (8.5%)	USA (10.6%)	Japan (8.2%)
Hong Kong (6.8%)	Other (42.8%)	Saudi Arabia (4.1%)	Other (33.3%)

(Source: World Trade Organization)

Nonetheless, China's use of coercive economic measures against South Korea appears to be the most significant among all the eight cases under examination, particularly since it went beyond tourism to target selected South Korean businesses (e.g. Lotte), South Korea's entertainment industry,

95 Interviews with Republic of Korea Foreign Ministry officials and analysts. Personal interviews. 19 to 21 June 2018, Seoul.

96 Lim and Ferguson 2020.

97 Interview with Hankwon Kim, Head of the Korea National Diplomatic Academy Center for Chinese Studies. Personal interview. 18 June 2018, Seoul.

98 Ibid.

99 Lim and Ferguson 2020.

as well as specific food and cosmetic products that were required to undergo a much lengthier customs clearance process during the THAAD dispute. It hence fulfils the criteria of ‘moderate sanctions’ (i.e. economic retaliation that has a lasting impact on several aspects of the target country’s economy). A week after the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Beijing announced its desire to end the dispute with Seoul.<sup>100</sup> What may have led to Beijing’s shift of stance was the South Korean Foreign Minister’s statement that Seoul had ‘no intention of joining the US’s efforts to build a region-wide missile-defence system aimed at countering China’s expansion of its military capabilities’.<sup>101</sup> It is, however, at least equally plausible that Beijing could not afford to have appeared to be ‘soft’ on this matter any earlier, given the need to ensure domestic support and stability in the run-up to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. The concluding chapter will address the potential effects of nationalism on China’s sanctions behaviour. For now, it suffices to note that the scope of Chinese sanctions against South Korea, when taken as a whole, was fairly limited.

## 6.2 Evidence from the eight classic cases: summary and interpretation

The preceding analysis provides at best partial support for the argument that China used unilateral economic sanctions to pressure other states it had disputes with from 2008 until March 2018. In three of the eight classic cases, there was no evidence that any sanctions had been imposed at all. In the other five cases, the sanctions imposed could not be reasonably characterised as ‘high’ or impactful (see the ‘sanctions spectrum framework’ as presented in Chapter 2). As summarised in Table 6.5, four instances of ‘low’ and one instance of ‘moderate’ level sanctions were identified. The category designation of ‘high’ was used when the sanctions imposed had a lasting impact on the target country’s economy; ‘moderate’ was used when the sanctions imposed had a lasting impact on several aspects of the target country’s economy and/or some short-term impact on overall economic interactions; and ‘low’ was used when such measures had some short-term impact on a small and limited aspect of the target country’s economy but minimal to no impact on overall economic interactions. Table 6.5 also summarises briefly the nature of each case and the impact of actions taken by China, if any were in evidence.

<sup>100</sup> Choe 2017.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

**Table 6.5 Extent of Sanctions Imposed by China in the Eight Classic Cases, 2008-2018**

Case Study	Year	Types of Chinese Economic Sanctions Following Dispute	Level of Chinese Sanctions Imposed (N.A./Low/Moderate/High)
China-France over Dalai Lama meeting	2008	No direct evidence, although trade negotiations were suspended that could have led to more business opportunities.	N.A.
China-US over arms sales to Taiwan	2010	China threatened to impose sanctions on US companies involved in arms sales to Taiwan; no evidence of follow-up.	N.A.
China-Japan over trawler collision in disputed waters	2010	An approximate ten-day suspension in the issuing of rare earth export licenses to Japan. The decrease in rare earth imports across Japanese ports was, however, not uniform or lasting.	Low
China-Norway over Nobel Peace Prize Award to Liu Xiaobo	2010	Stricter inspections on, and limiting of licenses for, the import of Norwegian fresh salmon. Decrease of Norwegian fresh salmon imports into China was significant and lasted for more than six years. However, overall trade and investment patterns were unaffected.	Low
China-Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal	2012	Possible stricter inspections of Philippine bananas for a short period of time; some decline in the number of Chinese tourists to the Philippines. Overall volume of Philippine banana exports to China was, however, unaffected.	Low
China-Vietnam over oil rig	2014	No direct evidence; some decline in the number of Chinese tourists to Vietnam but this could also have been due to the violent riots.	N.A.
China-Taiwan over Tsai's refusal to explicitly endorse the '1992 Consensus'	2016	Significant decline in the number of Chinese tourists to Taiwan. Overall trade and investment patterns unaffected.	Low
China-South Korea over the deployment of THAAD	2017	Significant decline in the number of Chinese tourists to South Korea; tighter inspections of Lotte supermarkets in China, resulting in the eventual withdrawal of Lotte Mart from the Chinese market; some restrictions on the Korean entertainment industry. Overall trade and investment patterns unaffected.	Moderate



Two general observations regarding China's employment of unilateral economic sanctions can be drawn from these cases. First, with the exception of China's threats of sanctions against US companies involved in arms sales to Taiwan in January 2010 (and again in subsequent years), China made no known official threats or admissions of intended or actual sanctions in any of the cases examined. 'Chinese sanctions' in this period, therefore, were ambiguous and lacking in documentation. Second, China's unofficial sanctions were frequently targeted at very specific sectors (e.g. fresh salmon imports and tourism) and did not affect overall patterns of trade and investment between China and the target state. Moreover, even in these targeted sectors, China's use of sanctions was fairly limited in both scope and duration. It is indeed puzzling why Chinese decision-makers targeted these sectors when they did not follow through with 'actual' sanctions. Chapter 8 discusses some possible reasons.

To sum up, China's sanctions behaviour in these classic cases does not appear to have been aimed at imposing significant economic costs on the target states. 'Informal sanctions', when used by Chinese decision-makers, have also remained at the low to moderate end of the sanctions spectrum. They resemble that of signalling sanctions, i.e. primarily intended to send messages to targets (and other audiences) that there could be an economic cost if they undertook actions contrary to China's interests. Chinese decision-makers appear to be seeking to manipulate the ways in which both the target and third-party states perceive their capabilities and intentions, even though the limited measures undertaken by China may not prompt an immediate behavioural change.<sup>102</sup>

An important part of the puzzle remains to be addressed: *Why did China's decision-makers remain restrained and reluctant in their use of unilateral economic sanctions during this period?* Chinese decision-makers' consistent denials that they were employing any form of sanctions or economic retaliation in connection with all but one of the political disputes examined (i.e. US arms sales to Taiwan) is also puzzling. After all, one should expect sender states to make their message explicit in order to convince target audiences that there is a causal link between its behaviour (e.g. engaging in political disputes with the sender) and meaningful economic sanctions, even if the sanctions actually referenced at any given time are of limited impact. The ambiguity of Chinese sanctions, by contrast, dilutes any message that China had intended to send. Therefore, it is also worth investigating why

102 See Chapter 2 for more detailed explanations on the difference between the various types of sanctions. See also Chong and Poh 2020 on the effects of such sanctions on third-party states.

Chinese decision-makers shied away from making clear their intent. The next chapter tests the five competing hypotheses introduced earlier in this book against these eight cases to explain the factors that have influenced China's sanctions behaviour.

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## 7. Demystifying China's Sanctions Behaviour

### Abstract

Chapter 7 examines which of the five competing hypotheses as detailed in Chapters 2 and 3 best explains China's puzzling sanctions behaviour. It finds that China's longstanding rhetoric against the use of unilateral sanctions had resulted in China not being able to openly threaten or admit to the use of such economic tools in its pursuit of political goals. China's use of unilateral sanctions under the period of examination (if at all present) was therefore ambiguous and unofficial, targeted at narrowly specific sectors, and limited in scope. Furthermore, China found itself having to withdraw or further reduce the extent of sanctions when other parties used rhetorical action such as shaming or flattery to draw international attention to China's behaviour.

**Keywords:** Chinese unilateral sanctions, rhetoric, shaming, flattery

A closer look at the nature, scope, and duration of unilateral economic sanctions employed by Chinese decision-makers against France, the US, Japan, Norway, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, and South Korea (i.e. the eight 'classic cases') over political disputes that took place between 2008 and March 2018 reveals that although China employed diplomatic sanctions in these cases, its use of economic sanctions was limited.<sup>1</sup> Which hypothesis, as detailed in Chapters 2 and 3, best explains China's sanctions behaviour?

1 See Chapter 6.



## 7.1 China's unilateral sanctions behaviour: possible explanations

### 7.1.1 China was not yet powerful enough to employ unilateral sanctions effectively

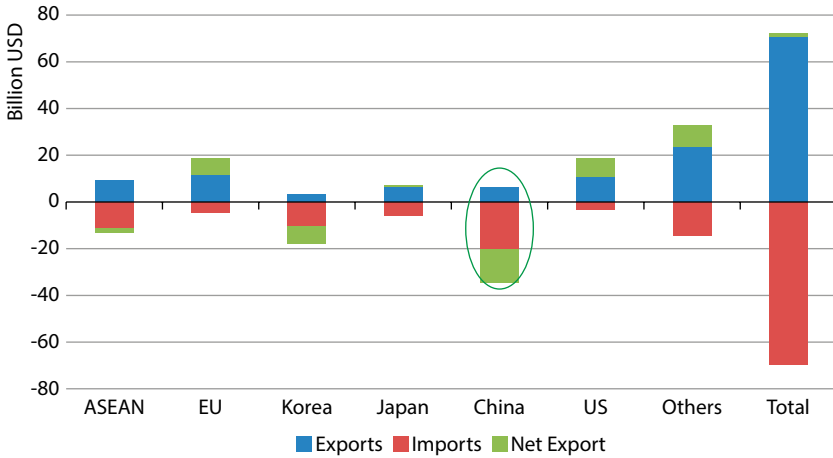
Based on insights from the realist research tradition, China's limited use of economic sanctions could be explained by the following: Even though China was developing rapidly during the period under examination, its economic capabilities were not sufficiently strong to employ unilateral sanctions effectively. Its economic interactions with other countries were also not sufficiently asymmetric such that China could hurt its target more than itself. One could also argue that the Chinese government places significant emphasis on continued economic growth to ensure internal balancing (i.e. increasing internal resources such as economic and military capabilities in order to deal with external threats)<sup>2</sup> as well as to sustain its legitimacy to rule. Therefore, it refrained from coercive economic and military measures such as the use of sanctions, which might have reduced its existing resources. However, China's use of sanctions as well as other coercive tools of foreign policy can be expected to increase as its capabilities continue to grow. China is also more likely to employ sanctions (or threaten to do so) against weaker states that are more heavily dependent on the Chinese economy than against stronger states.

Among the eight cases examined, China did not employ any sanctions in the disputes involving France, the US, and Vietnam, whereas it employed limited and targeted forms of sanctions against Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan and more sustained forms of targeted sanctions against Norway and South Korea. With the exception of the US, China has a larger economy than all of these countries. Vietnam is particularly vulnerable, given that the Vietnamese and Chinese economies are relatively complementary in the supply of consumption goods. Vietnamese firms import heavily from China because Chinese goods are relatively low in price and meet Vietnamese firms' requirements in terms of quality while permitting rapid capital circulation.<sup>3</sup> Figure 7.1 below summarises Vietnam's trade volume with its major partners in the first half of 2014, when the oil rig incident took place.

2 For more details on the differences between internal and external balancing, see Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 1990, pp. 5-56; and Elman 1996, pp. 7-53.

3 Data is drawn from Thanh 2014.

**Figure 7.1 Vietnam's Trade with China and its Other Major Partners, January – June 2014**



[Source: Vietnam Institute for Policy and Economic Research; General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2014)]

As Figure 7.1 makes clear, Vietnam had at the time of the incident a negative net export differential with China—the largest with any of its trading partners. Thus, it is puzzling that China would refrain from imposing any form of sanctions against Vietnam—a fact that surprised even policymakers in Hanoi. Among the cases considered here, the closest comparison to the Vietnam case may actually be that involving Japan. Granted, the two are very different. Japan is the world's third largest economy by nominal GDP, while Vietnam ranks 45<sup>th</sup>.<sup>4</sup> However, more relevant to the present analysis is the fact that Japan relied heavily on China for rare earth minerals, which could not be acquired or substituted at the same price from other suppliers. At the time of the China-Japan trawler incident, China accounted for 82% of Japan's rare earth imports, which also represented about 40% of China's rare earth exports worldwide.<sup>5</sup> This makes it clear that, a sustained rare earth embargo would have been harmful to both parties, but it would have affected the Japanese economy—particularly Japan's electronics and hybrid automotive vehicle industries—much more significantly. Thus, it is difficult to make a strong case that China lacked the economic clout to

4 The World Bank 2019.

5 Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (Japan), PowerPoint presentation 2011. See also Humphries 2013.

impose further economic pressure on Japan in the case in question, let alone on the smaller economies that account for almost all of the other cases considered. In addition, it also remains curious why China had only explicitly threatened sanctions against the US—the only country that has a larger economy than China.

Furthermore, it seems counterintuitive that China, which had by the 2010s clearly become a major economic power, would be restrained in its use of sanctions against economically vulnerable countries but be increasingly aggressive on the military and paramilitary fronts, such as it has been over maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas. As Alastair I. Johnston notes, since 2009 China has increased its military and paramilitary presence in the South China Sea, and ‘China’s diplomatic and military response to Japan’s 2012 purchase of some of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands from private owners [...] meet the criteria for a new assertiveness in its policy towards maritime disputes.’<sup>6</sup> Japan is a strong ally of the US, and it also possesses one of the strongest military forces in Asia. It would therefore be challenging to explain why China had adopted a more assertive diplomatic and security posture against a militarily powerful country such as Japan without at the same time contradicting the explanation regarding why China had refrained from employing sanctions against countries weaker in both economic and military terms, such as Vietnam.

### 7.1.2 The Chinese leadership was constrained by its domestic actors

Insights from the neoclassical realist research tradition suggest that even as states react to systemic pressures and opportunities, China’s ability to employ unilateral sanctions depends at least partly on its government’s ability to mobilise domestic actors, such as the relevant bureaucratic agencies, local officials, and commercial actors. Domestic pressure (or simply a reluctance to follow orders given by the central government) may prevent China’s leaders from imposing sanctions on states that it might have reason to target.

William Norris notes that Beijing has not been very effective in employing coercive economic measures to limit the scope of activity of Taiwanese businesses operating in China because local Chinese authorities in areas such as Xiamen and Fuzhou have strong incentives to help Taiwanese firms in order to enhance the economic performance of their own cities.<sup>7</sup> This is despite the fact that constraining Taiwan’s independence is a national

6 Johnston 2013, p. 9.

7 Norris 2016, p. 126.

strategic concern that ranks only second to regime survival.<sup>8</sup> Mingjiang Li similarly suggests that while border provinces are the ‘implementers of various policies and programmes’ agreed upon by the Chinese leaders and their foreign counterparts, ‘these provinces have their own local interests’ and could thus shape foreign policy outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

Without a doubt, China is not a unitary actor. Given China’s size, provincial governments and other domestic actors understandably play important roles in balancing national-level policies with narrower local interests. However, as Jae Ho Chung argues, ‘out of their perennial concern with effective local control, the leaders of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have been nearly obsessed with treating the whole of China as one “unified entity”’, and the central government in Beijing has in the post-Mao Zedong era ‘remain[ed] the “centre” of power and policymaking’.<sup>10</sup>

There could be cases in which local Chinese officials theoretically fail to cooperate in imposing sanctions against other states. However, the state’s direct ownership of much of China’s productive economic assets—e.g. in the form of state-owned enterprises (SOEs)—affords Beijing more control over domestic economic actors than is the case in many other countries. This includes countries that employ unilateral sanctions far more extensively than China, such as the US. Furthermore, as Lee Jones and Yizheng Zou suggest, even as China’s SOEs have increasing autonomy to ‘pursue profit-making activities’, the party-state ‘retains several authoritarian control mechanisms that leaders can potentially use’ when important interests are at stake.<sup>11</sup> This is especially the case since the Xi administration has strengthened the role of Party committees in China’s SOEs, claiming that ‘SOEs should become important forces to implement decisions of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee’.<sup>12</sup>

More specific to the case studies, one could take as an example China’s purported rare earths sanctions against Japan. The Chinese rare earth industry is heavily controlled by the government, which sets quotas for the amount of rare earth minerals that can be exported.<sup>13</sup> Between 2009 and 2010, the Chinese government was able to dictate a drastic reduction of overall rare earth exports from 50,000 to 30,000 metric tons without noticeable

8 Ibid., p. 111.

9 Li 2011, p. 5.

10 Chung 2016, pp. 8 and 145.

11 Lee and Zou 2017, pp. 746 and 755.

12 ‘Xi Stresses CPC Leadership of State-Owned Enterprises’, *Xinhua News*, 11 October 2016.

13 See Information Office of the State Council, People’s Republic of China 2010; and Tse 2011, pp. 5–6.

domestic opposition.<sup>14</sup> It is therefore unlikely that there would have been significant domestic pressure to constrain the Chinese government from banning rare earth exports to Japan for longer than ten days.

The case involving Vietnam also reinforces just how salient central state control is over key economic sectors. Local Chinese authorities in Yunnan and Guangxi had ample material incentives to ensure that political disputes did not damage economic ties with Vietnam. After all, a single port in Hekou county (Yunnan province) alone had a more than ten percent year-on-year increase of total imports and exports with Vietnam throughout the 2010s, and this volume reached USD 1.5 billion in 2016.<sup>15</sup> But it was central government directives, not local initiative, that had ensured such an outcome. Do Tien Sam, editor in chief and former director of the government-affiliated Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, revealed that local officials in China were given specific instructions from Beijing to ensure that economic interactions with Vietnam were not affected. As a result, Chinese local officials approached their Vietnamese counterparts to make special arrangements (e.g. extending customs working hours) so as to ensure that economic interactions continued even as bilateral tensions rose.<sup>16</sup> Even if provincial officials have some room to take initiatives that defend local interests (e.g. approaching their Vietnamese counterparts to ensure sustained trade), such measures could only be confidently undertaken under broad central direction.

In short, even though domestic actors may occasionally play a role in influencing foreign policy outcomes (as we see in the case of Vietnam), it is unlikely that they can thwart or even ignore Beijing if Chinese leaders are determined to employ sanctions against another state. This also looks like a tenuous argument given Chinese President Xi Jinping's continued consolidation of power. Since 2012, Xi's massive anti-corruption campaign has reinforced the centre's power and undermined the independence of local officials and other domestic actors across the country. China's *Xinhua News* reported that as of March 2018, more than 1.5 million officials had been punished and 'a total of 440 centrally administrated senior officials investigated'.<sup>17</sup> According to a report by *The Washington Post*: 'Since Xi started the push in 2012, authorities have investigated more than 2.7 million

14 World Trade Organization 2014, p. B-3.

15 'China's Hekou Port sees Booming Border Trade with Vietnam', *Xinhua News*, 13 April 2017.

16 Interview with Do Tien Sam, Editor in Chief and former Director of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences. Personal interview. 15 January 2016, Hanoi.

17 'Spotlight: China's Effective Campaign Sets Model for Global Anti-Corruption Cause', *Xinhua News*, 11 March 2018.

officials and punished more than 1.5 million people. They include seven national-level leaders and two dozen high-ranking generals. Prosecutors have tried about 58,000 officials and sentenced two to death'.<sup>18</sup> It would seem curious that a state able to directly attack such powerful local and sectional interests would be powerless to enforce compliance with its sanctions policy from these same interests.

### 7.1.3 China's participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO) shaped its sanctions behaviour

Based on the expectations of sociological and rational institutionalism, China's behaviour could be constrained by its participation in international institutions like the WTO. *Sociological* institutionalists would argue that, perhaps with the exception of some cases that directly threaten China's security interests (e.g. Taiwan), China would refrain from using sanctions because it has been socialised to honour its institutional commitments and obligations. This argument is, however, not supported by empirical evidence. Chapter 5 reviewed circumstances that demonstrate China's willingness to leave the United Nations Security Council at an impasse when doing so suits its agenda.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, China reacted strongly against the Philippines' effort to take China to international court over maritime disputes in the South China Sea. It has, moreover, objected vehemently to the decisions reached by the international arbitration panel based in The Hague, which ruled in favour of the Philippines against China. Therefore, while it is likely that China took its WTO obligations into consideration when deciding whether to impose sanctions against another member state, other factors need to be explored in order to account more broadly for China's sanctions behaviour.

*Rational* institutionalists, in contrast, would suggest that China cannot blatantly employ economic retaliation because doing so would violate its WTO commitments, thereby tarnishing its reputation and harming China's long-term interests.<sup>20</sup> According to the terms of Most Favored Nation (MFN) treatment afforded to fellow states within the WTO, for example, members cannot reduce benefits extended to one member (e.g. through the imposition of sanctions by restricting imports and/or exports) without similarly doing

18 Shih 2018.

19 See Chapter 5, especially the case study on UNSC sanctions against Syria, for more details.

20 See e.g. Simmons 1998, pp. 75-93; Downs and Jones 2002, pp. S95-S114; Guzman 2002, pp. 1923-1997; and Stein 2005, pp. 611-622.

so for all other members.<sup>21</sup> With some exceptions (e.g. the need to ‘prevent crucial shortages of essential goods’), member states also cannot limit exports to another member or restrict imports originating from another member.<sup>22</sup> In addition, while member states can impose regulatory requirements on imports, these regulations must also hold for domestic goods—that is, the requirements imposed must be non-discriminatory.<sup>23</sup> One could therefore argue that China could not employ sanctions to a significant extent, or admit to its use of sanctions, because it did not want to tarnish its reputation and hurt its long-term interests by openly flouting WTO regulations.

In the case involving Norway, for example, China would have violated its WTO obligations had it insisted on imposing restrictions only on imports of Norwegian salmon, as it did in the first order issued in December 2010, which it subsequently amended.<sup>24</sup> From this perspective, it is not surprising that China chose instead to cite as a reason for its eventual ban its concerns about viruses found in Norwegian fresh salmon that could cause infectious salmon anaemia. Chinese authorities also emphasised that such measures were in line with the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) and with established principles of the World Organization for Animal Health.<sup>25</sup> Thus, although the analysis presented in the preceding section showed that China did in fact impose sanctions in this case, its manner of doing so—and perhaps also the scope and duration of sanctions—was constrained by China’s WTO obligations.

Proponents of the institutionalism hypothesis, moreover, could point to China’s lifting of its decade-old rare earth minerals export quotas after an unsuccessful dispute with the US, the European Union (EU), and Japan in 2014 as another case in which China almost certainly altered its behaviour due to its participation in the WTO.<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, this constitutes an incomplete explanation. As Xianwen Chen and Roberto Javier Garcier argue, it would have been difficult for Norway to challenge China at the WTO because ‘China never notified the WTO Secretariat of the [enhanced inspection] measure, and physical evidence of discrimination is hard to obtain’.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the general exception clause

21 Howse and Genser 2008, p. 180.

22 Ibid.

23 Howse and Genser 2008, p.180.

24 See description of events in Chapter 6.

25 ‘China Imposes Partial Ban on Norwegian Salmon Imports due to Virus Worries’, *Xinhua News*, 20 March 2015.

26 World Trade Organization 2014, p. B-3.

27 Chen and Garcier 2016, p. 38.

in Article 20 of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) allows member states to impose restrictive measures as long as they fall into one of ten specified categories (e.g. necessary to protect public morals; necessary to protect human, animal, or plant life or health; etc.) and as long as they are not 'applied in a manner which would constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination between countries where the same conditions prevail'.<sup>28</sup> Like many aspects of international law, the provisions of Article 20 are somewhat vague and open to interpretation. Indeed, when debating whether the US could legally ban Internet gambling using the 'necessary to protect public morals' exception clause, a 2005 WTO panel noted that 'members should be given some scope to define and apply for themselves the concepts of "public morals" [...] in their respective territories, according to their own systems and scales of values'.<sup>29</sup> Such flexibility could allow China to use the various exception clauses to justify its restriction measures without having to suffer consequences to its reputation.

In fact, China took this approach in one of the cases considered above. In responding to US arms sales to Taiwan in 2010, China's state-owned media outlets openly explained—citing various experts—that China would not be in violation of WTO rules if it imposed sanctions against US firms. For example, a February 2010 article in China's state-owned *People's Daily* quoted Zhang Hanlin, director of the WTO Institute of the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, as stating that provisions of the relevant GATT articles allowed 'contracting parties [...] to apply trade controls they deem necessary for national security' and that China therefore had a right to penalise US companies that sold arms to Taiwan because they posed a threat to China's national security.<sup>30</sup> Mei Xinyu, a researcher with the PRC Ministry of Commerce Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, similarly said that 'no international organisation [was] allowed to deprive any country of the right to sanction companies that hurt that country's national security'.<sup>31</sup> Such an explanation therefore cannot adequately account for Chinese decision-makers' reluctance to use unilateral economic sanctions.

28 Cited in Howse and Genser 2008, pp. 182-183. See also World Trade Organization, 'WTO Rules and Environmental Policies', n.d.

29 World Trade Organization, 'United States – Gambling Appellate Body Report' cited in Howse and Genser 2008, pp. 184-185.

30 'Sanctions against U.S. Firms Selling Arms to Taiwan Not Violating WTO Rules: Chinese Experts', *People's Daily*, 6 February 2010.

31 'Sanctions against U.S. Firms Selling Arms to Taiwan Not Violating WTO Rules', *Xinhua News*, 5 February 2010.



#### 7.1.4 History and culture shaped China's sanctions behaviour, leading Chinese leaders to prefer inducement over coercion

There is as yet no general consensus among scholars as to what constitutes 'Chinese strategic culture'. Nevertheless, scholars espousing strategic culture theories essentially make one of two predictions regarding China's 'assertiveness' in the international arena. First, some scholars have argued that China maintains a notion of an ideal moral world order that considers cultural superiority as important as, if not more important than, military victories. Therefore, Chinese policymakers prefer the use of peaceful means such as economic inducements over coercive military or economic measures. China is thus not only unlikely to employ unilateral sanctions in connection with political disputes, it is also unlikely to employ coercive military tools.<sup>32</sup>

Other scholars, however, have argued that China has exhibited a 'hard realpolitik' or 'parabellum' strategic culture and that it will not shy away from the use of coercive tools to attain its foreign policy objectives.<sup>33</sup> However, whatever its merit in accounting for other aspects of Chinese foreign policy behaviour, this latter perspective is in the context of this study contradicted by the evidence of China's restraint in employing economic or trade sanctions between 2008 and March 2018 as well as by its reticence to openly declare its use of—or intention to use—such means. Thus, the focus here is on the validity of the first of the strategic culture assessments of China referenced above, which suggests that its current sanctions behaviour is shaped by a longstanding preference for inducements over coercion in its dealings with other countries.

In one of the earliest and most authoritative accounts of this notion of Chinese strategic culture, Tingyang Zhao argues that unlike the hegemonic imperialism of the US, China's view of diplomacy and world governance originates from the concept known as 'All-under-Heaven'—a 3,000 year-old traditional notion that emphasises reciprocity of the heart instead of the blatant pursuit of material interests. This perspective, Zhao claims, amounts to an injunction to 'let others reach their goals if you want to reach yours'.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the ancient Chinese empire pursued a 'voluntary tributary

32 See e.g. Zhao 2006, pp. 29-41; Kang 2010; Gills 1993, pp. 186-212; Zhang 2015; Qin 2012; and discussed in Zhang and Buzan 2012, pp. 3-36.

33 Johnston 1995. See also Johnston 1996, pp. 216-268. See Chapter 2 for a more detailed elaboration of these different theoretical perspectives.

34 Zhao 2006, pp. 35-36.

system'—one that is based on 'reciprocity [as] a true echo of the other's heart-felt respect than an economically equal exchange'.<sup>35</sup> Building on this theory of the so-called 'Chinese tributary system', David Kang argues that the East Asian 'tribute system', which existed from the founding of China's Ming dynasty in 1368 to the start of the Opium Wars in 1841, was based on 'a normative social order that contained credible commitments by China not to exploit secondary states that accepted its authority'.<sup>36</sup> This order was 'explicit and formally unequal but informally equal: secondary states did not believe nor did they call themselves equal to China, yet they had substantial latitude in their actual behaviour'.<sup>37</sup> While China demanded higher status, it did not employ coercive means against the weaker surrounding states in order to dictate their behaviour. One can extrapolate from these arguments made by Zhao and Kang that China refrained from employing sanctions—or threatening the use of sanctions—because the Chinese political elite has reached back to its historical past for guidance. It therefore favours inducement in order to build a 'new tributary system' rather than using coercive tools of foreign policy against its targets, as the latter would be against the principles of the Chinese political philosophy of 'turn[ing] the enemy into a friend'.<sup>38</sup>

A challenge to such an explanation, however, lies in its inability to account for China's assertive diplomatic rhetoric and military/paramilitary posturing during the period under examination. For if cultural factors had indeed constrained China's use of economic sanctions, why did these factors fail to constrain China's use of coercive means to change the status quo in the East and South China Seas? Furthermore, regardless of whether one adopts the first of the strategic culture assessments of China referenced above (i.e. Chinese policymakers prefer the use of peaceful means such as economic inducements over coercive military or economic measures) or the second (i.e. China has exhibited a 'hard realpolitik' or 'parabellum' strategic culture and cannot be expected to shy away from the use of coercive tools to attain its foreign policy objectives), we should expect to see alignment across China's use of foreign policy tools—namely, in the economic, political, and military spheres. This is because, from a strategic culture perspective, it is inconsistent to argue that China prefers the use of peaceful economic means but not political/military ones. If the Chinese

35 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

36 Kang 2010, p. 592.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Zhao, 'Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept "All-Under-Heaven" (Tian-xia)', p. 34.

leadership had indeed adopted such a cultural perspective, we should also expect China to adopt a harsher position in all its dealings with countries that it does not consider part of its tributary system—and conversely, we would expect it to refrain from using all forms of coercive pressure against states that it either considers part of or wants to co-opt into this system. It would be a dangerously subjective task to attempt to identify the states in today's world that the Chinese political elite would consider—or would desire to incorporate—as part of its 'new tributary system'. At any rate, such an analysis is unnecessary because, as the summary provided in Table 7.1 demonstrates, there is no consistent pattern across China's use of economic, political, and military tools in its dealings with given targets in the eight classic cases examined.

Chapter 6 clarified the category designations for 'level of economic pressure'. To recap, the category designation of 'high' is used when the sanctions imposed had a lasting impact on the target country's economy; 'moderate' when the sanctions imposed had a lasting impact on several aspects of the target country's economy and/or some short-term impact on overall economic interactions; and 'low' when such measures had some short-term impact on a small and limited aspect of the target country's economy but minimal to no impact on overall economic interactions. In Table 7.1, the category designation of 'high' is used for political pressure when specific actions were taken beyond diplomatic talk (e.g. demand for compensation or the expulsion of diplomats); 'moderate' when there was harsh diplomatic rhetoric and a suspension of political communications; and 'low' when there was harsh diplomatic rhetoric but official channels of communication remained open. As for military pressure, the category designation of 'high' refers to a situation where war (including small-scale war) was imminent; 'moderate' refers to a situation where military or paramilitary assets were deployed in response to the incident; and 'low' refers to a situation where indirect military or paramilitary actions were taken for signalling purposes (e.g. the conduct of military drills with the target being an explicit hypothetical opponent).

There is a subjective element to the coding for the levels of economic, political, and military pressure as claimed in the preceding chapter as well as in Table 7.1. Nonetheless, China's use/non-use and the assessed extent of foreign policy tools applied against given states in the context of prominent international disputes during the period under consideration varied considerably across the three categories represented in Table 7.1. Therefore, it appears unlikely that the empirical facts in the cases could be accounted for by any theory predicated on the target states' membership/

non-membership in a particular class, such as a new Chinese tributary system. Norway, for example, clearly does not belong to China's tributary system. However, notwithstanding the freeze in political relations with Norway that went on for more than six years after the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, it is significant in this context that China did not employ a high level of coercive measures (rather than a ban that was limited to fresh salmon imports) against this target. Conversely, should China indeed desire a new tributary system, the Chinese political elite would consider Taiwan to be part of this system, given its firm belief that Taiwan is an integral part of China. However, China employed more substantial forms of military/paramilitary pressure against Taiwan than it did against Norway. This calculus is, of course, unsurprising from a realist perspective, given that China has much larger interests in Taiwan than in Norway. Nonetheless, it demonstrates the challenge that proponents of a cultural-based hypothesis would face in explaining the overall pattern of China's foreign policy behaviour across the eight classic cases.

#### **7.1.5 China's sanctions rhetoric constrained its behaviour**

The rhetoric-based hypothesis states that China's use of sanctions had been constrained by its longstanding rhetorical opposition to the use of non-UNSC-authorized unilateral sanctions. This is because China has had to weigh the international audience costs that it would incur if it was perceived to be behaving in blatant contradiction with its rhetoric. Such a hypothesis predicts that while China might be tempted to employ sanctions against states that are weaker and economically dependent on China, its behaviour changes to align more closely with its anti-unilateral sanctions rhetoric when international attention is drawn to the issue due to the efforts of a rhetorical actor.

Chapter 6 analysed the events of and evidence regarding the eight cases and determined that China had employed some form of economic sanctions in the cases involving Japan, Norway, the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea. An explanation is needed for China's behaviour in these cases, since we would not expect China to employ sanctions at all should it indeed be constrained by its rhetorical opposition against the use of unilateral sanctions. The following section revisits these five cases and discusses the validity of the rhetoric-based hypothesis as an explanation for China's behaviour in each. It then discusses the limitations of this hypothesis as well as the challenges faced in the analysis of the three 'non-cases' of Chinese sanctions.

Table 7.1 Summary and Extent of Alignment across Categories of China's Use of Economic, Political, and Military Pressure in the Eight Classic Cases

Case	Level of Economic Pressure (see Table 6.5)	Types of Political and/or Military Pressure (the term 'military' here includes paramilitary pressure)	Level of Political and/or Military Pressure (the term 'military' here includes paramilitary pressure)	Extent of Alignment Across Categories
China-France over Dalai Lama meeting	N.A.	Political: Harsh diplomatic rhetoric; suspension of political meetings and talks. Military/Paramilitary: N.A.	Political: Moderate Military/Paramilitary: N.A.	Limited
China-US over arms sales to Taiwan	N.A.	Political: Harsh diplomatic rhetoric; suspension of military-to-military interactions. Military/Paramilitary: N.A.	Political: Moderate Military/Paramilitary: N.A.	Limited
China-Japan over trawler collision in disputed waters	Low	Political: Harsh diplomatic rhetoric; suspension of political meetings and talks; arrest of Japanese citizens on other offences; demand for compensation and apology. Military/Paramilitary: N.A.	Political: High	None
China-Norway over Nobel Peace Prize Award	Low	Political: Harsh diplomatic rhetoric; suspension of political meetings and talks. Military/Paramilitary: N.A.	Military/Paramilitary: N.A. Political: Moderate Military/Paramilitary: N.A.	None
China-Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal	Low	Political: Harsh diplomatic rhetoric; suspension of political meetings and talks; unilateral imposition of fishing ban in the area. Military/Paramilitary: More than a dozen Chinese vessels confronted a Philippine Coast Guard ship and vessel; water cannons were used; Chinese ships occupied the Scarborough Shoal and prevented Philippine fishermen from entering the area.	Political: High Military/Paramilitary: Moderate	None

Case	Level of Economic Pressure (see Table 6.5)	Types of Political and/or Military Pressure (the term 'military' here includes paramilitary pressure)	Level of Political and/or Military Pressure (the term 'military' here includes paramilitary pressure)	Extent of Alignment Across Categories
China-Vietnam over the oil rig	N.A.	Political: Harsh diplomatic rhetoric; suspension of political meetings and talks. Military/Paramilitary: Both China and Vietnam deployed numerous surveillance and fishing vessels to the area; ramming of vessels and firing of water cannons.	Political: Moderate Military/Paramilitary: Moderate	Limited
China-Taiwan over Tsai's refusal to explicitly endorse the '1992 Consensus'	Low	Political: Harsh diplomatic rhetoric; suspension of political and official communications. Military/Paramilitary: Some forms of military drills; Chinese aircraft carrier sails the Taiwan Strait.	Political: Moderate Military/Paramilitary: Low	Limited
China-South Korea over the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system	Moderate	Political: Harsh diplomatic rhetoric; suspension of political meetings and talks. Military/Paramilitary: N.A.	Political: Moderate Military/Paramilitary: N.A.	Limited

### *Japan*

Throughout the ten-day suspension of rare earth export licenses to Japanese companies following the trawler collision in September 2010, the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) as well as other Chinese officials in Beijing denied vehemently that any steps were being taken to restrict such licenses.<sup>39</sup> Officials from Japan's MFA noted that even they could not be sure whether China had intended to suspend rare earth export licenses, and all of the information available to them was based on the inquiries and surveys conducted by the Japanese government on the relevant Japanese companies.<sup>40</sup> On 23 September 2010—that is, about two days after Tokyo came to believe a 'silent' rare earth import ban had gone into effect—Akihiro Ohata, then Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, declared to the international media that China's trade ministry had instructed Chinese rare earth exporters to halt shipments to Japan, even as Beijing had told Tokyo that no embargo was in place.<sup>41</sup> Regardless of whether Ohata meant to publicly shame Beijing, this move drew further international attention to the issue and lent credibility to media reports that were already circulating that China was imposing sanctions on Japan amid escalating political tensions.

On the same day, a spokesman for China's Ministry of Commerce, Chen Rongkai, referred to a *New York Times* article citing Ohata's remarks and claimed that 'China has not issued any measures intended to restrict rare earth exports to Japan. There is no foundation for that [...] I don't know how the *New York Times* came up with this, but it's not true. There are no such measures.'<sup>42</sup> Two days later (on 25 September 2010), China's Ministry of Commerce once again publicly refuted Ohata's assertion, stating that 'China has not issued any measures intended to restrict rare earth exports to Japan; there is no foundation for that.'<sup>43</sup> Soon after, on 6 October 2010, in an address to European political and business leaders at the Sixth China-EU Business Summit in Brussels, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said that 'China's output of rare earth takes up a lion's share of the world's total, much bigger than its share in the world's total rare earth deposits'.<sup>44</sup> Citing sustainability

39 Interviews with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan). Personal interviews. 29 July 2016, Tokyo.

40 Ibid.

41 See e.g. Bradsher 2010; and Maeda and Mogi 2010.

42 'China Denies Banning Rare Earths Exports to Japan', *Reuters*, 23 September 2010.

43 Cited in King and Armstrong 2013.

44 See 'Premier Wen's Speech at Sixth China-EU Business Summit', *People's Daily Online*, 7 October 2010; and Su 2010.

rather than political considerations as the explanation for any perceived change in the flow of such resources, Wen emphasised that China had not imposed any ban on rare earth exports for political objectives and asserted that it would never use rare earth minerals as a bargaining chip.<sup>45</sup> By that time, surveys conducted by Tokyo had concluded that the majority of the relevant Japanese companies were no longer experiencing significant problems procuring export licenses. A month later, on 13 November 2010, Ohata met with the director of China's National Development and Reform Commission, Zhang Ping, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Japan. Zhang allegedly promised Ohata that he had instructed officials at the Chinese customs to further speed up inspections and that any remaining technical problems to the rare earth issue would be resolved shortly.<sup>46</sup> The volume of rare earth shipments to Japan further increased by December 2010.<sup>47</sup>

In sum, the evidence suggests that Chinese policymakers may have intended at first to impose some sort of punishment on Japan through the banning of rare earth exports, but they quickly withdrew as international attention on China's sanctions behaviour heightened as a result of Ohata's remarks and extensive reports from the international media.

### *Norway*

China's restrictions on imports of Norwegian fresh salmon arguably lasted longer (i.e. approximately eight years) than any of the Chinese sanctions identified in the cases examined here.<sup>48</sup> Throughout the entire period, Chinese officials denied that the restrictions on Norwegian fresh salmon were related to the political dispute and instead cited sanitary and phytosanitary reasons.<sup>49</sup> Unlike Japan, however, the Norwegian government did not contribute to the potential for the issue to escalate by drawing further international attention to the dispute (e.g. through 'shaming' China) or by raising the trade issue at the political level. Officials from the Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries indicated that it was a 'political decision' to not publicly discuss the unofficial salmon ban as well as to

45 Cited in King and Armstrong 2013.

46 Pu 2017, p. 106; and Smith 2015, p. 192.

47 This information was corroborated in the author's interviews with officials from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Personal interviews. 29 July 2016, Tokyo.

48 China lifted the restrictions in the second half of 2018, and China's imports of Norwegian salmon increased sharply in 2019. See Knowler 2020.

49 See e.g. 'China Imposes Partial Ban on Norwegian Salmon Imports Due to Virus Worries', *Xinhua News*, 20 March 2015.



refrain from raising an official dispute against China in the WTO.<sup>50</sup> The reason they indicated was that, despite the adverse impact on Norwegian fresh salmon exports—which constituted only a very small part of Norway's overall trade with China—trade relations between China and Norway were otherwise unaffected and overall exports from Norway to China remained healthy, with year-on-year increases. There was therefore a significant concern among Norwegian authorities that further politicisation of the salmon issue would serve only to exacerbate the deterioration in bilateral relations and negatively impact other areas of economic cooperation.<sup>51</sup> As a Norwegian Foreign Ministry official noted:

China is absolutely able to take economic costs if they want to make a political statement. The question is whether or when it will come down to that for Norway. We are certainly not there yet. We do not know which way it will go, [and] it remains a big question. But in terms of bilateral trade thus far, we do not really see an impact. The Norwegian enterprises in China also have not been challenged in any way. There is no point in unnecessarily escalating the issue—we want our enterprises to remain insulated from the fall-out.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, the Norwegian authorities chose not to step forward as rhetorical actors and trigger the international audience cost mechanism, which could have pressured China into changing its behaviour. Avowedly, this decision was based on the fact that China's limiting of sanctions to only fresh salmon prompted Norwegian officials to hope that the economic consequences of the political dispute could be contained. The fear of further coercive measures from China also prompted the Norwegian government to adopt a China-favourable position in certain other respects. For example, not only did it refrain from speaking out against the 'silent salmon ban', in May 2014 the Norwegian government for the first time refused to meet with the Dalai Lama.<sup>53</sup> According to Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg, this decision was rooted in Norway's desire to 'improve diplomatic relations and dialogue with China'.<sup>54</sup> Just as it refrained from publicly shaming China for practising

50 Interviews with officials from the Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries. Personal interviews. 31 May 2016, Oslo.

51 Interviews with Norwegian diplomats. Personal interviews. Beijing, 2 March 2016.

52 Interview with an official from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Phone interview. 29 December 2015.

53 See e.g. Gladstone 2014.

54 Ibid.

economic coercion in violation of its rhetorical stance against the practice, however, the Norwegian government also refrained from engaging in public flattery to draw further international attention to the conciliatory posture it adopted in refusing the 2014 Dalai Lama meeting, and it made no attempt to link its political compromises to the salmon ban. Beijing therefore did not reciprocate by lifting the restrictions on Norwegian salmon and instead maintained that the restrictions concerned seafood safety—an accusation that Norway has neither acknowledged nor openly disputed.

### *The Philippines*

The case of the Philippines provides an interesting point of comparison to that of Norway, as China similarly cited sanitary and phytosanitary reasons in connection with the restrictions that it temporarily imposed on Philippine banana imports.<sup>55</sup> As China's alleged banana ban began to draw attention in the international media, Philippine officials engaged in subtle flattering strategies by reminding their Chinese counterparts of the commitment of their respective presidents, Hu Jintao and Benigno Aquino, made during the latter's visit to China in 2011 to not allow the South China Sea issue to affect the bilateral economic relationship. The Philippine government even took China's side by openly challenging media accounts suggesting that China was imposing sanctions on Philippine bananas.<sup>56</sup> This was despite provocative statements against China emerging from President Aquino and other members of his government. Senior officials from the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs revealed that while they were privately convinced that China was 'making things difficult' for the Philippines because of the Scarborough Shoal incident, they were careful, both in their public statements and in their correspondence with the Chinese, to conform to the Chinese position that the banana issue was 'a technical and not political one'.<sup>57</sup> In addition to the foreign ministry, other parts of the Philippine government, such as the president's office and the agriculture department, also insisted that China's restrictions were of a technical nature.<sup>58</sup>

The strategy of Philippine bureaucrats in seeking to limit the extent of economic coercion from China by conforming to the latter's official

55 As indicated in Chapter 6, however, these restrictions were in place approximately one month before the Scarborough Shoal incident took place.

56 Interview with senior officials from the Philippine Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Personal interview. 29 January 2016, Manila. For relevant media reports, see e.g. Esplanada 2012.

57 Interview with senior officials from the Philippine Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Personal interview. 29 January 2016, Manila.

58 Baviera 2016, p. 122.

interpretation of its own action—i.e. treating the matter as a technical issue rather than potentially exacerbating the conflict by drawing attention to its political basis—shares similarities with that adopted by Norway in the matter regarding salmon exports. However, rather than simply adopting a low profile with respect to the issue, as the Norwegian government did, Philippine authorities took active steps—such as sending technical teams to China, presenting corrective measures to address their stated concerns, and putting in place new guidelines and measures to tighten fruit inspections within the Philippines—to demonstrate that they had met all of China's stated 'technical concerns'.<sup>59</sup> In this regard, the evidence suggests that rather than merely staving off further harm, Philippine authorities managed to reverse the damage already done. According to a report prepared for the Philippine Secretary of Agriculture, the Philippines sent a delegation to China to discuss China's concerns, and China's General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine agreed to 'continuously release the fruits on a daily basis as long as [no] insects [were found] in the fruits upon full inspection'.<sup>60</sup>

Admittedly, this case differs from the others in that Philippine bureaucrats did not engage in explicit rhetorical action of shaming or flattery to draw international attention to China's behaviour. Nevertheless, they achieved the same outcome of rhetorically entrapping Beijing by 'playing China's game'—that is, by agreeing publicly that the banana restrictions were due to sanitary and phytosanitary considerations and taking active steps to resolve the issue through technical means. In so doing, the Philippines managed to manoeuvre China into lifting the harmful restrictions, even as political tensions between China and the Philippines continued to heighten over the disputed islands in the South China Sea.<sup>61</sup>

### *Taiwan*

While Taiwan is a US ally, China perceives Taiwan as part of its territory and thus firmly considers Taiwan an 'in-group member'. This perspective was made evident when Chinese President Xi Jinping declared during his

59 Interview with officials from the Plant Quarantine Office of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Philippine Department of Agriculture. Personal interview. 21 January 2016, Manila. See also Bureau of Plant Industry, Philippine Department of Agriculture 2012.

60 Bureau of Plant Industry, Philippine Department of Agriculture 2012, p. 4.

61 Admittedly, a more far-reaching comparison of the extent and nature of the balance of interests and conflicts that characterise the relationship of each nation to China would be necessary before one could make credible claims regarding whether a similar strategy would have worked equally well for Norway in the case examined.

2015 meeting in Singapore with former Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou that '[China and Taiwan] are one family [...] we are brothers who are still connected by our flesh even if our bones are broken'.<sup>62</sup> The chairman of China's National Committee of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Yu Zhengsheng, also promised to 'befriend Taiwan compatriots [...] create favourable conditions to settle the Taiwan issue and realise the reunification of the motherland', including through 'enhanc[ing] political mutual trust and maintain[ing] favourable exchanges with the island'.<sup>63</sup> China's in-group members are more likely than out-group members to be successful in shaming strategies intended to prompt China to change its behaviour. Taiwan is a clear example.

Since the early 2000s, various Taiwanese administrations have attempted to shame China by openly pointing out that despite China's 'one-family' rhetoric, China was engaging in 'pressure tactics'—both military and economic—that could be considered unlikely to achieve any result other than driving Taiwan further away from China.<sup>64</sup> The cross-strait political situation further deteriorated following the election of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 2016. Nonetheless, China's Taiwan Affairs Office has continued to maintain that China and Taiwan are family (*liangan yijiaqin*) and that its position in this regard is that blood is thicker than water (*xueningyushui*).<sup>65</sup> Moreover, instead of threatening coercive economic measures to force the Tsai administration to endorse the '1992 Consensus', as one might expect given the political climate, Chinese authorities have declared their intention to increase their efforts and to adjust policies so as to facilitate more economic and personnel exchanges between China and Taiwan.<sup>66</sup> Although its actions have negatively impacted Taiwan's tourism industry, Beijing has chosen not to impose broader sanctions but to provide economic and social inducements to Taiwanese businessmen (*taishang*) and to Taiwanese youth by facilitating their investments and interactions with China, even as political communications have ceased. This is despite the fact that, as the Taiwanese scholar Kwei-Bo Huang notes, 'Taiwan has become much more dependent [economically] on mainland China than it had been in the past'.<sup>67</sup> Even as China's ability to impose sanctions on Taiwan has increased, China's anti-unilateral sanctions rhetoric, its public

62 Chinese President Xi Jinping cited in Phillips 2015.

63 'Mainland Committed to Peace, Stability Across Taiwan Strait', *Xinhua News*, 27 January 2015.

64 See e.g. Sutter 2010), pp. 223–224.

65 Spokesperson of the Taiwan Affairs Office of China's State Council quoted in Wang 2017.

66 *Ibid.*

67 Huang 2017, p. 34.

commitment to treating Taiwan as ‘family’ (so long as Taiwan does not declare independence), and Taiwan’s willingness to draw international attention to China’s ‘bullying’ had all constrained Beijing’s ability to engage in substantive efforts to influence Taiwan’s behaviour through economic coercion.

Some scholars have put forward a different argument, namely that China’s reluctance to employ a wide range of sanctions against Taiwan could be due to its desire to pursue reunification through economic integration.<sup>68</sup> However, this argument does not contradict the rhetoric-based hypothesis. As alluded to above, China’s open commitment to treating Taiwan as ‘one family’ has made economic inducement a much more feasible strategy than that of sanctions. The keener Beijing appears to be to induce (or to be perceived as inducing) Taiwan to unify with China, including through economic integration, the easier it would be for Taiwanese authorities to shame China into giving up any attempts to employ coercive economic measures against the island. This is, of course, unless Taiwan declares independence, which could pose an existential threat to the CPC, overriding potential concerns about international opinion and credibility.

### *South Korea*

Following the closure of 23 Lotte supermarket stores across China in March 2017, the South Korean trade minister, Joo Hyung-hwan, declared to parliament that South Korea had ‘notified the WTO that China may be in violation of some trade agreements’, officially drawing further attention to China’s use of coercive economic measures amid escalating political tensions over the US deployment of THAAD in South Korea.<sup>69</sup> Concerned about the potential repercussions of such an accusation, the Chinese foreign ministry promptly responded by insisting that China had not imposed any restrictions and supported ‘normal business and other exchanges between China and South Korea’ but also suggested that commercial success in China depended on ‘a corresponding basis in public opinion’.<sup>70</sup> For example, in an article written by an analyst from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, the author cited the increasing volume of bilateral trade between China and South Korea ‘despite the weak global economic recovery’ as well as the comments by a senior South Korean official allegedly echoing China’s claims that ‘there [was] no proof that China [was] taking “targeted policy

68 See e.g. Zhao 2005, pp. 224-238.

69 South Korea trade minister cited in Kim and Chung 2017.

70 Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson cited in Kim and Chung 2017.

measures” in response to THAAD’s deployment in the ROK.<sup>71</sup> As in the case of Japan, we see here efforts made by the Chinese authorities to mitigate the international audience costs incurred from the ‘silent’ economic retaliation measures that it had adopted against South Korea.

There can be little doubt that China’s tightened inspections of the Lotte supermarkets in China were linked to the THAAD issue. This case further reveals how the Chinese government is willing to cite the ‘sentiments of the domestic public affecting consumer sentiment’ in its employment of silent sanctions. The Chinese state-owned *Xinhua News*, for example, openly warned that ‘the Chinese people [would] not support a company complicit in damaging China’s interests’ should Lotte approve the land swap deal.<sup>72</sup> This notwithstanding, Beijing’s refusal to officially admit that it was imposing sanctions on South Korea, especially in WTO platforms such as during council meetings held by the Council for Trade in Services, did mitigate the extent of such measures.<sup>73</sup> For example, the head of Lotte Corporate Innovation Office, Hwang Kag-gyu, indicated that China’s claim that the Lotte closures were due to safety violations had offered Lotte the opportunity to ‘fix problems at the hypermarkets that were raised by Chinese regulators’ while still continuing their business investments in China.<sup>74</sup> This contrasts with outright sanctions linked to political disputes—a situation in which Lotte would likely have had to cease operations immediately. Certainly, limits to such mitigation measures remain, and the repeated regulatory challenges imposed by China—such as over fire safety, tax investigations, and delayed licensing approval—resulted in significant losses and ultimately the complete withdrawal of Lotte Mart from the Chinese market in October 2018.<sup>75</sup> However, other aspects of the China-South Korea economic relationship that were less susceptible to public opinion (as compared to that of tourism, entertainment, and shopping in Lotte) remained largely unaffected by the dispute.<sup>76</sup> In sum, even as China employed various forms of sanctions against South Korea as a result of the US THAAD deployment, its continued reluctance to admit to using sanctions—and the resultant lack of high-signature moves such as banning flights or putting in place laws or

71 See e.g. Xu 2017.

72 ‘Lotte Should Avoid Playing with Fire in Letting THAAD In’, *Xinhua News*, 19 February 2017.

73 ‘China Denies THAAD Retaliation against South Korea: WTO Report’, *The Straits Times*, 23 October 2017.

74 Head of Lotte Corporate Innovation Office, Hwang Kag-gyu, cited in ‘South Korea’s Lotte Group Says it Will Keep Doing Business in China Despite Diplomatic Row’, *Reuters*, 3 April 2017.

75 Lim and Ferguson 2020.

76 See Chapter 6 for details.

regulations to restrict commercial activity with South Korea—limited the extent of sanctions imposition.

### 7.1.6 Limitations of the rhetoric-based hypothesis

China's explicit threat to impose sanctions on US companies involved in the arms sales to Taiwan in January 2010 poses a challenge to the rhetoric-based hypothesis. This threat has been repeated several times since 2010, for example by the Chinese Foreign Ministry in December 2015 and July 2019, after respectively the Obama and Trump administrations authorised arms sales packages to Taiwan.<sup>77</sup> An explanation is required to account for why China had threatened sanctions against US companies if it truly desired to be perceived as abiding by its longstanding rhetorical opposition to the use of unilateral sanctions.

The preceding section suggests that China considers Taiwan an in-group member, and its rhetorical commitments to treat Taiwan as 'family' has prompted Beijing to refrain from employing a broad range of sanctions in persuading Taiwan to change its policies. China, however, perceives US policy towards Taiwan—especially its arms sales to the island—as a blatant interference in its domestic affairs and a hostile act against China that directly threatens its national and security interests. Following the announcement of the US arms sales to Taiwan in January 2010, for example, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson accused the US of retaining a 'Cold War mentality' and 'interfer[ing] in China's internal affairs'.<sup>78</sup> Referring specifically to the threat to impose sanctions on US companies participating in the arms sales, the spokesperson explained that this was because US companies had 'insisted on selling arms to Taiwan' despite China's strong opposition: 'The action has severely undermined the core interests of China and China-US relations [...] the responsibilities completely lie with the US side'.<sup>79</sup> China reacted especially strongly to the arms sales because it

77 See statements by the PRC MFA, '*waijiaobu fubuzhang heyafei jiu mei shou tai wuqi wenti xiang mei zhuhua dashi tichu yanzheng jiaoshe* [Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei Raises Solemn Representations to the U.S. Ambassador to China on the Issue of U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan]', 31 January 2010; '*zhongfang qianglie fandui meiguo xuanbu xiang taiwan chushou wuqi* [China Strongly Opposes the U.S. Announcement of Arms Sales to Taiwan]', 17 December 2015; and 'China Urges US to Withdraw Arms Sales to Taiwan', *Xinhua News*, 9 July 2019.

78 PRC MFA, 'Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Jiang Yu's Remarks on U.S. Raytheon Company's Arms Sales to Taiwan', 11 January 2010.

79 PRC MFA, 'Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu's Regular Press Conference on February 2, 2010', 5 February 2010.

perceived the US as persisting in its efforts to intervene in China's affairs. US authorities also did not make any attempt to trigger the international audience cost mechanism by highlighting—either through shaming or flattery—how China's move to sanction US companies was misaligned with Beijing's traditional rhetoric of not engaging in sanctions behaviour without the authorisation of the United Nations.

The importance of Taiwan to China could have prompted Beijing to deviate from its usual practice of not threatening or admitting to the use of unilateral sanctions over political disputes. More specifically, this case suggests that the proffered rhetoric-based hypothesis may not apply when Chinese leaders perceive the incentives of preventing an action (in this case, the US arms sales to Taiwan) as exceeding any potential international audience costs. Such examples could include issues of extremely high stakes that could threaten the CPC's political legitimacy, such as the need to win a war or retain sovereignty (e.g. in the case of Taiwan).

Nonetheless, Chinese officials and analysts had attempted to justify China's threat of sanctions by suggesting that the US arms sales to Taiwan directly threatened China's national security and that even the WTO allowed for such measures, as 'Article 21 of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [indicate that] contracting parties are free to apply trade controls they deem necessary for national security'.<sup>80</sup> From this perspective, Chinese elites had attempted to use the regulations of international organisations as a shield to justify its sanction threats, in turn reducing the international audience costs that it could incur in deviating from its usual rhetoric of being against unilateral sanctions.

The other two cases of France and Vietnam did pose some challenges for analysis, as it is difficult to determine the specific factor accounting for China's non-use of sanctions as compared to the other cases, in which China had attempted to use some form of sanctions but was subsequently constrained either because of international attention on the issue or the entrapment efforts of its target. Due to the opacity of China's decision-making processes, the conversations or records of meetings among the Chinese political elite are not accessible.

Nonetheless, there is some circumstantial evidence suggesting that China's reluctance to act against its rhetoric had prevented it from imposing sanctions on France and Vietnam altogether. For example, amidst reports by the French media of China 'for the first time explicitly threaten[ing] the

<sup>80</sup> 'Sanctions against U.S. Firms Selling Arms to Taiwan Not Violating WTO Rules', *Xinhua News*, 5 February 2010.



potential use of economic sanctions against France',<sup>81</sup> the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Liu Jianchao asserted that 'China [had] never done anything that [undermined] the interest of Europe'.<sup>82</sup> While urging 'Europe and France [to] respect China's major concern on issues involving China's sovereignty and territorial integrity', Liu also urged the domestic public to 'remain calm in viewing China-EU and China-France relations'.<sup>83</sup> From this perspective, far from 'explicitly threatening sanctions', the Chinese Foreign Ministry had tried to limit the impact of its fall-out with France. This is similar to the Chinese government's response to the domestic boycott against the French-owned supermarket chain Carrefour following protests in Paris that had led to a disruption of the Olympic torch relay in April 2008, just several months before the Dalai Lama episode. In this latter example, the Chinese government reminded its domestic audience that there were approximately 40,000 Chinese employees across China's 112 Carrefour stores who could be directly affected by the boycott.<sup>84</sup>

In the case of Vietnam, Chinese government-affiliated think tanks as well as the state-owned media also took pains to emphasise that China would not resort to unilateral sanctions. For example, an analyst from the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (a think tank affiliated with the PRC Ministry of State Security) said the following during a media interview in June 2014:

Vietnam has recently raised concerns that China would employ economic sanctions against Vietnam [as a result of the oil rig dispute]. Given China's longstanding foreign policy strategy, China would not adopt such an approach. Vietnam, however, has on its own initiative protested against Chinese goods and has also engaged in anti-Chinese riots. These actions [which are not Chinese sanctions] would have an adverse impact on the Vietnamese economy [*jinqi yuenan shenzhi tichu danxin zhongguo hui dui yuenan jinxing jingji zhicai de shuofa. xianran, cong zhongguo yiguan de waijiao zhengce laikan, zhongguo bukeneng caiqu zhezong zuofa. faner shi yuenan zisheng caiqu de yixie dizhi yu zhongguo jingji wanglai de jucuo yiji gezhong fanhua baoluan, jiang dao zhi yuenan jingji shoudao chongji*].<sup>85</sup>

81 Radio France Internationale quoted in Wang 2008.

82 PRC MFA, 'Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Jianchao's Regular Press Conference on December 2, 2008', 2 December 2008.

83 Ibid.

84 Jacobs 2008.

85 Translated by the author. Chen Qinghong quoted in Fu 2014.

As Vietnamese officials and analysts made known to their Chinese counterparts their concerns about potential Chinese sanctions, the Chinese political elite publicly denied the possibility of China resorting to sanctions.<sup>86</sup>

No direct evidence in these 'non-cases' can be produced to show that the desire to ensure the credibility of China's anti-sanctions rhetoric had stopped the Chinese government from imposing unilateral sanctions. However, it is worth noting that with the exception of China's response to the US arms sales to Taiwan, the Chinese government had vehemently denied introducing any measures to affect economic interactions as a result of political disputes. Furthermore, in the other five cases of limited Chinese sanctions, there is substantial evidence of China changing its behaviour to more closely align with its anti-sanction rhetoric either after international attention on these issues heightened (e.g. in the case of Japan) or because countries took steps to manoeuvre China into lifting the restrictions (e.g. in the case of the Philippines). Out of the eight cases examined in this chapter, economic relations between China and these countries were also largely unaffected during periods of political tensions, even in cases where the economic capabilities of these target countries were significantly weaker than that of China.

Overall, more direct evidence—such as policy memoranda or interviews where Chinese policymakers admit to or hint at having changed their behaviour due to the rhetorical action of other states—could indeed have been helpful to establish a stronger link between China's sanctions rhetoric and behaviour. However, this is unrealistic. Writing in 1984 about research concerning the Soviet Union's policy on the use of nuclear weapons, Jack Snyder notes the following:

Soviet statements about limited nuclear war cannot be taken at face value. The Soviets have a clear interest in feigning the belief that nuclear escalation is inevitable, since this would degrade the credibility of the U.S. threat to initiate the use of nuclear weapons in areas where the Soviets enjoy conventional superiority. Consequently, doctrinal pronouncements by themselves do not constitute satisfactory evidence of the Soviets' real views.<sup>87</sup>

In a similar vein, Chinese policymakers—who have thus far been unwilling to even admit to the use of unilateral sanctions—have a clear interest in

86 Interviews with Vietnamese officials and analysts. Personal interviews. 5 and 6 January 2016, Hanoi.

87 Snyder 1984/1985, pp. 95-96.

denying having reversed their policies in order to avoid incurring international audience costs for being called out on their inconsistencies. As Snyder goes on to suggest, since direct evidence is inconclusive, 'we should adopt a research strategy that makes the most systematic use of the best available information [and] that strategy should be to use the comparative case method as a way of drawing inferences largely from observable behaviour'.<sup>88</sup> Nina Tannenwald also suggests in her study of the non-use of nuclear weapons that 'the important point is that we have a reasonable expectation that the counterfactual (barking, using nuclear weapons) was likely to or could easily have happened but for the crucial factor or factors that we identify'.<sup>89</sup> This chapter, together with Chapter 6, showed that China could have employed unilateral sanctions much more extensively and effectively across a wide range of cases had it been more willing to admit to the use of unilateral sanctions. They have also demonstrated how China changed its behaviour when its target states focused international attention on the deviations between China's rhetoric and behaviour. The ruling out of the other possible explanations lends further credibility to the rhetoric-based hypothesis.

## 7.2 Lessons from the 'eight classic cases'

From the eight case studies examined in this and the preceding chapter, Chinese unilateral economic sanctions from between 2008 and March 2018 can be characterised as ambiguous and unofficial, targeted at narrowly specific sectors, and/or limited in scope. These sanctions have had some success in changing a target state's behaviour (e.g. Norway's refusal to meet with the Dalai Lama for the first time) as well as in sending signals to the target country and other audiences about the *potential and possibility* of China's sanctions (e.g. Vietnam's reactions to China imposing sanctions on the Philippines).<sup>90</sup> However, with the exception of China's response to the US arms sales to Taiwan, China's longstanding rhetoric against the use of unilateral sanctions had resulted in the Chinese political elite not being able to openly threaten or admit to the use of such economic tools in its pursuit of political goals. As a result, even when the Chinese government decided

88 Snyder 1984/1985, p. 99.

89 Tannenwald 2007, p. 30.

90 See Chong and Poh 2020 for further details on the impact of signalling sanctions on third-party states.

to impose sanctions, they had to rely on other reasons such as regulatory mechanisms or changing consumer sentiment to justify any restrictions they imposed on other countries. In cases where China employed limited forms of sanctions, it also found itself having to withdraw these sanctions at least partially when other parties used rhetorical action to draw international attention to China's deviant behaviour.

One could argue that talk, in this case, is irrelevant, since China was merely trying to justify actions that have been decided on the basis of other factors. It is China's actual sanctions behaviour that matters and not whether China admits to using sanctions. China could instil fear in its target audiences and manipulate the ways in which its potential adversaries consider the costs and benefits when adopting policies that could be perceived as antithetical to China's interests, even without admitting to the use of sanctions. However, the empirical evidence reveals that there is indeed a difference in outcome when the Chinese government refused to admit to using sanctions. In addition to leaving itself vulnerable to being rhetorically entrapped by its potential targets, Chinese decision-makers were also unable to pursue and sustain a broad range of sanctions without codifying such restrictions into law and without being perceived by the international audience as behaving in a manner that is in direct contradiction with China's sanctions rhetoric. Chinese decision-makers therefore either refrained from employing sanctions completely or kept their use of sanctions at the low end of the sanctions spectrum.<sup>91</sup>

This chapter does not argue that other factors such as China's material capabilities did not play a role in influencing China's sanctions behaviour. Chinese decision-makers were indeed tempted to employ various forms of economic sanctions when conditions were favourable to them. This trend is also likely to increase should China's economic capabilities continue to grow. However, what the evidence suggests is that the Chinese government would find it difficult to pursue a coherent and effective unilateral sanctions policy without making substantive adjustments to its sanctions rhetoric. Rhetoric can certainly shift over time. This notwithstanding, China's sanctions rhetoric is fundamentally linked to its efforts to counter-stigmatise the US and its allies.<sup>92</sup> In this regard, China's leaders would have to balance its desire to sustain a credible counter-stigmatisation strategy with its use of sanctions to pursue its more immediate policy goals.

91 See Chapter 2 for a more thorough description of the 'sanctions spectrum'.

92 See Chapter 4 for details.

Given the complexity of foreign policy decision-making, various more specific contextual or contingent factors could have also affected China's restraint in employing sanctions during the respective periods of political tension under examination here. For example, China could have been concerned about regional pushback against its maritime assertiveness in the South China Sea, and Chinese leaders were therefore reluctant to be similarly aggressive in its use of economic sanctions. As Frank Schimmelfennig points out: '[T]here is no end-point for increasing leverage in problem-driven research. There are always further alternative hypotheses, more cases, other kinds of observable implications, more data and other data sources'.<sup>93</sup> The objective here is to take into account the key competing theories in the existing international relations literature concerning Chinese foreign policy and to provide a testable and generalisable framework for China's sanctions behaviour. The testing and validity comparison of the five possible explanations have illustrated the superior explanatory power of the rhetoric-based hypothesis.

The following concluding chapter will provide a review of the main arguments put forward in this book and discuss the theoretical and policy implications.

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93 Schimmelfennig 2003, pp. 15-16.

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## 8. China's Sanctions Dilemma

### Abstract

Chapter 8 summarises the main findings of this book. Due to China's longstanding sanctions rhetoric, Chinese decision-makers had until the end of Xi Jinping's first term avoided making open use of unilateral sanctions during periods of political dispute. This was particularly the case when their target states used rhetorical action to draw international attention to China's attempted use of economic coercion. This chapter then reviews the theoretical and policy implications and discusses the future of China's sanctions rhetoric and behaviour. It also suggests areas for further study, in particular the balance between economic inducement and coercion in China's grand strategy as well as the links between economics and security.

**Keywords:** China, economic sanctions, economic inducement, rhetoric

There is a growing sense of anxiety around the world that China's leaders will become more able and more willing to employ economic sanctions as its economy strengthens. Many states are thus torn between greed and fear: they desire the economic benefits of engaging with China but are afraid that deepening engagement would give China additional leverage over them.

The empirical findings presented in this book confound the widespread assumption regarding growing Chinese assertiveness in its use of economic sanctions. It suggests instead that China's use of economic sanctions during the period under examination was limited, ad hoc, and targeted at narrowly specific sectors. Having found that potential explanations that are based on structural, domestic, and cultural factors could not provide a wholly satisfactory answer to China's ambiguous sanctions behaviour, this book put forward an original hypothesis: *It is China's longstanding sanctions rhetoric that has had the most influence on its sanctions behaviour.*

A theoretical framework was developed to explain why and how rhetoric could influence foreign policy behaviour—including sanctions. Drawing

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on the existing literature on audience costs and rhetorical entrapment, the framework introduced the ‘international audience cost’ mechanism which provides the link between rhetoric and (in this case) sanctions. Two conditions need to be in place for this mechanism to be triggered: the offending state whose behaviour has contradicted its rhetoric must be concerned about international opinion, and at least one rhetorical actor must be present to publicly point out the difference between the offender’s rhetoric and his behaviour. In addition, this mechanism is likely to work more effectively with status-conscious countries.

It would not be controversial to suggest that China is extremely concerned about status and international opinion. China’s experience of being a target of Western sanctions since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 had convinced Chinese leaders that ‘the West’, led by the US, was determined to reduce China’s international status by stigmatising China through various forms of economic punishment—the ultimate goal being to undermine the political legitimacy of the Chinese government. As a result, the Chinese political elite has since 1949 engaged in a rhetorical counter-stigmatisation strategy that has sought to delegitimise the sanctions strategy of the US and its allies by depicting them as imperialist and interventionist and to gradually redefine, in the understanding of the United Nations (UN) Member States, the notion of when and how sanctions could legitimately be employed. Given China’s desire to credibly pursue a counter-stigmatisation strategy and gain higher international status vis-à-vis the US and its allies, it fulfils the first condition that is necessary to trigger the ‘international audience cost’ mechanism. Whether China aligns its sanctions behaviour with its rhetoric is therefore dependent on the second condition, i.e. the presence of at least one rhetorical actor to draw international attention—through rhetorical tools such as shaming or flattery—to any contradictions between China’s rhetoric and its behaviour.

Examining China’s use and non-use of economic sanctions within and outside of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) framework, several findings emerge. At the UNSC, China has put forward the following sanctions rhetoric: sanctions cannot be used to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states, even for reasons relating to the promotion of democracy and/or human rights; sanctions can only be imposed when agreed upon in the UNSC; and sanctions authorised by the UNSC should function as a ‘ceiling’ instead of a ‘floor’ from which unilateral and/or regional sanctions can be further imposed. Simply put, Chinese leaders have claimed that the only ‘legitimate sanctions’ are those authorised by the UNSC to maintain international peace and security. All the sanctions employed by the US and its allies against China—which

were either unilateral or had not been endorsed by the UNSC—were therefore unacceptable and should be considered illegal. By looking at the cases of proposed UNSC sanctions resolutions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; 2006-2016), Syria (2011-2016), and Guinea-Bissau (2012), it becomes evident that China's sanctions rhetoric had frequently prompted its decision-makers to act or vote in ways that were not the most favourable to China's immediate political and economic interests. That said, Chinese decision-makers did not appear to consider their sanctions rhetoric as a moral imperative, given that they had voted for sanctions that supported their political and economic interests when international attention was scant (e.g. in the Guinea-Bissau case). Therefore, the extent to which China aligned its behaviour with its sanctions rhetoric was interpreted as highly dependent on the extent to which other actors (e.g. the decision-makers of other states) might be seeking to manipulate perceptions of China's rhetoric in a given case.

Turning to eight cases of unilateral Chinese sanctions allegedly imposed following bilateral political disputes—France (2008); US (2010); Japan (2010); Norway (2010); Philippines (2012); Vietnam (2014); Taiwan (2016), and South Korea (2017)—two major findings can be observed. First, throughout the period under examination, China's use of unilateral economic sanctions remained limited in scope and duration. Certain sectors, particularly tourism, appeared to be notably more susceptible than others to Chinese economic retaliation. However, the overall trajectories of trade and investment between China and its putative target states did not appear to have been affected meaningfully by the political disputes. Second, the economic sanctions employed by China in almost all cases—if any were employed at all—were informal and ad hoc. In other words, official statements or documentation from China typically cited factors such as safety (in the case of tourism), regulatory issues such as sanitary and phytosanitary standards, or changing consumer sentiment to account for any irregularities in their economic interactions. The 'sanctions' were also not so substantial or systematic as to render these claims implausible. In fact, it was often difficult or impossible for target countries to determine whether sanctions had indeed been imposed by China, which sectors the suspected sanctions would affect, and when or how these 'sanctions' could be lifted.

The case analyses collectively demonstrate the limitation that China's commitment to its longstanding sanctions rhetoric had imposed on its sanctions behaviour, at least up until March 2018. Up to and including the most recent case examined in this book (i.e. alleged sanctions against South Korea over the deployment of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system), Chinese decision-makers had continued to avoid making

open use of unilateral sanctions during periods of political dispute. This was particularly so when their target states used rhetorical action to draw international attention to China's attempted use of economic coercion. The interpretation that Chinese decision-makers were attempting to balance their pursuit of immediate political goals with their desire not to appear to be deviating blatantly from their traditional sanctions rhetoric fits well with what might otherwise seem an oddity in the analysed data: that in most of the cases examined, China displayed ambiguous, anomalous, and contradictory sanctions behaviour.

Before proceeding to examine the policy and theoretical implications, let us step back momentarily and consider why Chinese decision-makers bothered to employ informal and ad hoc unilateral sanctions in the first place—such as over tourism (in more than half of the cases examined) or over imports of fish and fruits (in the cases of Norway and the Philippines), given that this approach fell short of imposing sustained or significant economic costs on its targets. Without direct evidence of China's decision-making processes, it is difficult to answer this question with any certainty. However, a few reasonable conjectures can be posited. First, Chinese leaders might have been seeking to instil fear and to manipulate the cost-benefit calculus of these targets, with the hope of prompting anticipatory accommodation from its targets. For example, decision-makers in states with which China was on the verge of other potential political conflicts might pre-emptively and voluntarily refrain from adopting policies that could antagonise China or be antithetical to China's interests for fear that they would be next in line for punishment. This could either be because other states engaging in similar actions appeared to have been victims of Chinese sanctions (e.g. Vietnam's perception of Chinese sanctions against the Philippines) or because they suspected that some of their economic sectors had already been informally targeted by China (e.g. Norway's reluctance to risk further sanctions by confronting Beijing after facing difficulties in exporting fresh salmon to China).<sup>1</sup> Under such circumstances, China's potential targets might be prompted to align their behaviour with China's interests, even in the absence of actual sanctions. This would be an ideal scenario for Chinese decision-makers, as they could achieve favourable political outcomes without having to deviate from their sanctions rhetoric through the blatant use of unilateral sanctions.<sup>2</sup>

1 See Chapters 6 and 7 for details of the Vietnam, Philippines, and Norway case studies.

2 See Chong and Poh 2020 for details on what makes states susceptible to anticipatory accommodation.

Second, there appear to be increasing demands on the part of the Chinese domestic public—particularly on social media—for Chinese leaders to act much more aggressively against countries that they perceive as ‘hurting China’s interests’. In recent years, Chinese ‘netizens’ have been known to use social media platforms to call on their government to employ economic sanctions against countries such as Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam during periods of political dispute, such as when tensions in the East and South China Seas flared up.<sup>3</sup> In the following example from 2012, which was posted on an online news platform, a commentator argued that the Chinese government should ‘immediately employ economic sanctions against Japan, without delay; primarily because China’s use of economic sanctions is a “deadly” political tool that could reduce the arrogance of the Japanese (*zhongguo yingdang liji dui riben jinxing jingji zhicai, er bubi yanchi; shouyao de yuanyinshi, zhongguo shichu jingji zhicai zhege shashou jian, keyi bijiao youxiao di daji riben de xiaozhang qiyan*)’.<sup>4</sup> The opinion editorial further alleged that the majority of the Chinese domestic public would be ‘very disappointed’ (*feichang shiwang*) if Chinese authorities remained reluctant to impose sanctions against Japan, as ‘Japan and other countries would treat China as a joke’ (*rang riben he qita guojia kan women de xiaohua*).<sup>5</sup> The author concluded by claiming that sanctions against Japan would ‘inspire patriotic pride’ (*jifa zhongguo minzhong de aiguo qinghuai*) and ‘ensure sustained stability within Chinese society’ (*youliyu zhongguo shehui de changjiu zhian*).<sup>6</sup>

It would, of course, be difficult to ascertain the degree of accuracy in the claims of social media pundits to speak for ‘the majority of Chinese’. Moreover, there are precedents to suggest that the Chinese authorities are not above manipulating the appearance of public opinion—particularly in the form of nationalistic indignation—to suit their purposes. As James Reilly argues:

Chinese officials often encourage consumer boycotts—this occurred in 2005 against Japanese goods when Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in Japan (a Shinto shrine dedicated to fallen Japanese soldiers, including fourteen Class-A war criminals), and again in 2008 against Carrefour, the French-owned retail chain,

3 For more details, see e.g. Sun 2011.

4 Luo 2012.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.



following protests along the Olympic torch relay in Paris that criticised China's policies in Tibet and its human rights policies. Chinese leaders exploit public anger [over] such events in order to gain diplomatic leverage. Propaganda and selective media reports feed nationalist sentiment, which allows diplomats to claim that a certain action has hurt the feelings of the Chinese people and should be reversed.<sup>7</sup>

However, one also should not assume that the Chinese leaders are always in control of nationalistic sentiment. As Jessica Weiss notes, even if Chinese leaders can manipulate nationalistic indignation or keep nationalist protests under control if they desire to do so, there are 'domestic costs of defying popular sentiment'.<sup>8</sup> Increasing domestic demands on the Chinese government to adopt a more assertive stance against countries such as Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and South Korea could provide political incentives for Beijing to adopt certain low-cost measures (e.g. restricting the number of tourists by citing safety reasons) to appease its domestic public, even if Chinese decision-makers are reluctant to resort or admit to other forms of sanctions.

## 8.1 Policy and theoretical implications

The findings presented in this book have important policy implications for both China and its potential target states. First, China's use of informal and ad hoc sanctions, even when limited in scope, exerts signalling effects. Such effects can bring about short-term political benefits for China. For example, Chinese leaders may have an interest in signalling to their domestic public that they are 'doing something' to punish target states that may be perceived as acting against China's interests. Successful signalling in this regard can bolster the political legitimacy of China's leadership, especially when nationalistic sentiment is running high. With respect to international audiences, moreover, such signalling can have the effect of placing 'at the back of [targets state leaders'] minds [...] awareness of [the sender state's ability] to extend or withdraw economic cooperation' should its leaders decide to do so.<sup>9</sup> In the case of a powerful sender state such as China, one should not be surprised if weaker target states adopt anticipatory action,

7 Reilly 2012, p. 124.

8 Weiss 2014, p. 4.

9 Baldwin 1985, p. 100.

i.e. proactively and pre-emptively align their policy or behaviour with China's interests without waiting for China to impose more substantive economic punishment. This, in fact, was what appears to have happened in the 2010 Norway case. Norwegian officials were well aware that the economic relationship between China and Norway remained largely unaffected (with the exception of fresh salmon exports to China) despite heightened political tensions over the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo. However, confronted with the reasonable prospect of being further sanctioned by China, Norwegian leaders decided not to meet the Dalai Lama when he visited Norway to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his Nobel Peace Prize in May 2014.<sup>10</sup> Other countries, for fear of being next in line to be punished, appeared to have adopted similar approaches. David Cameron, for example, issued a 'blanket prohibition' forbidding his ministers from meeting with the Dalai Lama amid negotiations with the Chinese government over a euro bailout package in June 2012.<sup>11</sup>

The policy-benefit calculus that the paragraph above implicitly ascribes to China, however, is not one that can withstand frequent iteration. Chinese decision-makers cannot assume that they can employ informal and ad hoc sanctions at will and not eventually have target states begin to 'call their bluff'. As demonstrated, Chinese policymakers tended to back down when target states used rhetorical action to draw international attention to the inconsistency between China's rhetoric and behaviour.

Admittedly, Chinese leaders may have no problem with the apparent ambiguity in their sanctions behaviour. In fact, with the Chinese leaders' frequent denials that they are employing economic sanctions, it often seems as though their policy is to try to keep target states in the dark about their intentions.<sup>12</sup> As then Philippine President Benigno Aquino III expressed in 2014: 'At the end of the day, [our relationship with China] goes from hot to cold; sometimes they're very conciliatory, sometimes they make very provocative statements [...] we will confess we don't understand some of the messages sometimes. We are not sure.'<sup>13</sup> Given the power imbalance between China and many of its target states, such uncertainties alone could prompt countries to fall in line with China's preferences for fear of sanctions or other unwanted action. Moreover, even if such states occasionally do 'call China's

10 Interviews with officials from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Personal interviews. 30 May 2016, Oslo. See also Gladstone 2014.

11 Hope 2012.

12 Without direct access to Chinese policy papers, it is also unclear whether the Chinese government *perceives* its behaviour and actions as employing economic sanctions.

13 Gladstone 2014.

bluff', informal and ad hoc sanctions would have cost China very little, and its leaders can still consider other follow-up measures. Nevertheless, China's target states may gradually come to the realisation that China's use of economic sanctions tends to be more bark than bite. As we have seen in Chapter 7, political leaders that have had more interactions with China (e.g. Taiwan and Japan) already appear to be more well-versed in calling China's 'bluff' than states that are less familiar with China's foreign policy behaviour (e.g. Norway). As China's target states become more familiar with China's behaviour, they may become more sceptical of the potential damage and therefore less inclined to change their behaviour to suit Beijing's preferences.<sup>14</sup> This could be detrimental to Chinese leaders, as domestic audiences may perceive them as incompetent in managing international disputes.

Conversely, it is also not in China's interest for potential target states to become overly concerned about repeated instances of China's ambiguous sanctions behaviour as well as its growing influence and economic power. Such concerns could prompt states to reduce their reliance on the Chinese market, potentially jeopardising important Chinese economic initiatives such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In fact, there are already signs of this happening. For example, contrary to Vietnam's expectations, China did not impose economic sanctions against Vietnam in the aftermath of the 2014 oil rig incident. However, escalating political tensions and the fear of Chinese sanctions prompted Vietnam's decision-makers to seriously consider ways to diversify its market more rapidly.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, despite the knowledge that China's use of economic sanctions has thus far been limited, various administrations in Taiwan have identified reducing economic dependence on Mainland China as a key performance benchmark. The Tsai Ing-wen administration, for example, introduced the New Southbound Policy in an attempt to diversify its market by expanding Taiwan's trade with and investment in Southeast Asia.<sup>16</sup>

14 Chong and Poh 2020.

15 Interview with Ton Nu Thi Ninh, former Vice Chair of Vietnam's National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee and former Ambassador of Vietnam to the EU. Personal interview. 7 January 2016, Ho Chi Minh City.

16 Interview with Kwei-Bo Huang, former Chairman of the Research and Planning Committee, Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and former Deputy Director of the Ma Ying-jeou and Wu Den-yih National Presidential Campaign Office's Department of International Affairs. Personal interview. 27 June 2017, Taipei. See also ROC (Taiwan) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'New Southbound Policy: An Introduction', 1 March 2017.

Two additional insights can be drawn from the perspective of China's potential target states. First, the evidence of the cases examined in this study suggests that when states are tempted to undertake actions that could incur China's wrath, they should be aware that they can expect significant *diplomatic* sanctions from China (e.g. suspension of political interactions). This can lead to a temporary decline in further economic cooperation, for example due to the suspension of negotiations on free trade agreements. However, if China continues to conform to the same pattern of behaviour, significant economic sanctions in the form of restrictions to existing trade and investments are unlikely, particularly if China's potential target states successfully manipulate perceptions of China's rhetoric.

Second, the evidence suggests that even small states that are economically reliant on China are not passive actors and can play important roles in influencing China's sanctions behaviour. Decision-makers in smaller states—particularly those that are economically dependent on China—are understandably concerned about China's growing influence and about the potential impact of Chinese economic sanctions. They may therefore hesitate to undertake actions that could draw further attention to an existing dispute, potentially exacerbate tensions, and prompt further retaliatory action from China. Again, the Norway example—in which authorities in the target state were reluctant to openly confront China or draw international attention to China's six-year salmon ban—is a case in point. However, such behaviour not only increases the likelihood of further informal sanctions, it also leaves the target state with little alternative but to give in to China's demands. Instead, there are various rhetorical tools (ranging from shaming to flattery) that states can use to either coerce or induce China to change its behaviour in a more favourable direction. In doing so, target states' primary objective should be to draw international attention to the contradictions between China's rhetoric and behaviour, which will increase the pressure on China to back down on its use of such measures.

This book also contributes to existing scholarly efforts to examine the effects of rhetoric on foreign policy behaviour. First, it reiterates the point made by some scholars that talk is not always cheap in international politics.<sup>17</sup> Decision-makers do not necessarily impose domestic audience costs on themselves in order to send credible signals to external parties. However, any rhetorical commitments that they make—regardless of their motives—can limit their subsequent foreign policy choices. Political actors believe that it is costly to be perceived by international audiences as

17 See e.g. Schimmelfennig 2003; Krebs and Jackson 2007, pp. 35-66; and Krebs 2015.

blatantly acting in contradiction to their professed commitments. This, in turn, alters the cost-benefit calculus of decision-makers, prompting them to more closely align their actions with their words. In addition, regardless of whether reputation and prestige actually carry ‘strategic [or] intrinsic value’,<sup>18</sup> decision-makers can be prompted into aligning their behaviour with professed commitments so long as they *perceive* a real threat in incurring international audience costs (i.e. when they are being publicly called out for ‘bluffing’) that potentially reduces their international credibility or status.

The findings, moreover, show that rhetorical action and entrapment can work not only ‘inside the actor’s in-group or community’<sup>19</sup> but also with ‘out-group’ actors or even adversaries. In addition to shaming, which has been widely explored in the literature, this book preliminarily introduces the rhetorical tool of flattery. Flattery can be a useful tool because, in addition to drawing international attention to an opponent’s behaviour, it shines a favourable light on the target and thereby can generate good will between the target and the sender. Finally, by suggesting that status-conscious countries are likely to be more susceptible to the international audience cost mechanism, this book also helps to draw an explicit connection between the existing but distinct literatures on status and international audience costs.

With respect to the study of sanctions, this book seeks to go beyond a mere examination of the implementation and/or efficacy of sanctions and to further explore how sanctions are used as a policy tool in a non-Western context. On the first point, Chapter 2 noted that debates surrounding the use and efficacy of sanctions to change the behaviour of target states are central to the existing sanctions literature. However, it is at least as important to examine the non-material factors that can influence a state’s sanctions behaviour—i.e. factors prompting a state to choose to impose (or to refrain from imposing) sanctions beyond considerations of whether the sanctions would be effective in changing its target’s behaviour. In this regard, this book argues that China’s sanctions rhetoric had constrained its behaviour. While the extent of such an impact may well vary, the fact that rhetoric can have an impact on the sanctions behaviour of a state (or regional organisation) should not be unique to China. For example, the European Union (EU) has spelled out its commitment to ‘promot[ing] the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy: peace, democracy and the respect for the rule of law, human rights and international law’.<sup>20</sup> Would the EU then be obliged

18 Mercer 2017, p. 135. See also Mercer 1996.

19 Schimmelfennig 2003.

20 European Union External Action 2016.

to employ sanctions on a variety of issues concerning the promotion of democracy and human rights, even on occasions when it may not be in the EU's material interest to do so or when the EU recognises that the imposition of sanctions is unlikely to prompt a behavioural change from its target? Examining questions of this nature might offer fresh perspectives for how we understand and anticipate sanctions.

With respect to Western and non-Western contexts, some scholars seem to believe that the gap in this regard has narrowed sufficiently. For example, Andrea Charron and Clara Portela claim that while 'sanctions had [previously] been criticised by Third-World leaders as a tool to impose a Western agenda on them [...] the fact that some [of the] regional organisations now employing sanctions most frequently are located outside of the Western world is indicative of these measures' growing legitimacy and usefulness as foreign policy tools'.<sup>21</sup> By showing China's reluctance to embrace the use of sanctions as a foreign policy tool, this book casts doubt on such a characterisation. More specifically, as suggested in Chapter 5, although China is agreeable to the use of UN sanctions in support of certain objectives—such as counter-terrorism and non-proliferation—it has been increasingly vocal in its opposition to the use of sanctions for other purposes or for any purpose outside of the UNSC framework. Overall, in fact, China's sanctions approach cannot be considered to have moved closer to the norm within the 'Western world'. Furthermore, the attitudes and behaviour of many other states and regional organisations also do not point to an increasingly common understanding regarding the 'growing legitimacy and usefulness [of sanctions] as a foreign policy tool'.<sup>22</sup> For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been at least as adamant as China in its opposition to the use of sanctions as a tool of foreign policy, either against external parties or its own Member States.<sup>23</sup> Notably, after the Saffron Revolution that took place in Myanmar in 2007, ASEAN rejected significant Western pressure to impose sanctions against Myanmar.<sup>24</sup> China became an important ally on this issue in calling for the lifting of all international sanctions against the country.<sup>25</sup> It therefore remains

21 Charron and Portela 2016, p. 101.

22 Ibid.

23 Interview with Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Secretary-General of ASEAN from 2003-2007. Personal interview. 15 September 2016, Singapore. There is no record of ASEAN employing sanctions against another state thus far.

24 Interview with Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Secretary-General of ASEAN from 2003-2007. Personal interview. 15 September 2016, Singapore. Other sources include the Council of the European Union 2007 and the US Embassy in Lisbon 2007.

25 ASEAN Secretariat News 2012.

a useful endeavour to continuously explore non-Western approaches towards sanctions. As Ayse Zarakol notes: '[The] general theoretical indifference [on the part of many international relations scholars] to the non-West is backed up by the belief that if any of these states attain any agency, they will act just like their Western counterparts'.<sup>26</sup> Concurring with Zarakol about the pitfalls of such a belief, this book represents an initial attempt to understand how a model of 'sanctions with Chinese characteristics' could challenge our traditional understandings of sanctions as a foreign policy tool.

## 8.2 The future of China's sanctions rhetoric and behaviour

In the process of writing this book, I questioned the common trope in academic and media discourse that China has become increasingly assertive under President Xi Jinping—including in its use of economic sanctions—and painted a more complicated picture of a rapidly rising power that has had to balance its desire to abide by its longstanding rhetoric (in order to sustain credibility) and its desire to use economic sanctions to achieve short-term political gains. However, as China continues to grow in political and economic influence, its sanctions dilemma will also grow, and it remains to be seen how China's sanctions rhetoric and behaviour will evolve in the future. There is a distinct possibility that Chinese leaders will show fewer qualms about deviating from their traditional sanctions rhetoric and gradually shift China's sanctions rhetoric in the direction of endorsing the employment of unilateral sanctions outside of the UNSC framework. We are beginning to see signs of such a shift as Xi Jinping started his second term as president and further consolidated power with China's removal of a two-term limit on the presidency. For example, in March 2019, three months after the arrest of Huawei Technologies Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou in Vancouver, Canada, the Chinese customs allegedly cancelled a Canadian company's license to export canola to China, accusing Canada's canola seed shipments of containing 'harmful organisms'.<sup>27</sup>

China's sanctions rhetoric and behaviour will no doubt be shaped by a rapidly changing global order, a process accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic. This pandemic has the potential to affect power transitions, transform alliance structures, and fundamentally change approaches to globalisation and global governance. As tensions between the US and China

<sup>26</sup> Zarakol 2011, p. 241.

<sup>27</sup> Wong 2019.

escalated over who should be blamed for the global crisis, China moved rapidly on its international and domestic messaging as well as on its aggressive medical diplomacy, which included providing critical medical supplies such as masks and test kits to countries in need. Despite controversies about the quality of China's medical supplies, such efforts stood in stark contrast to the difficulties that the US and Europe faced in producing adequate numbers of test kits, medical equipment, and protective gear. After recovering from an initial fumble over its handling of the pandemic outbreak in Wuhan and scoring a relatively early victory over the coronavirus, Beijing sought to send a clear message that China was a responsible global power and was ready to play a key leadership role in responding to the crisis. China also demonstrated its desire to shape global public health rules, particularly as the Trump administration moved to terminate US ties with the World Health Organization (WHO) amidst the pandemic.<sup>28</sup>

In the meantime, however, Chinese officials and media sent conflicting messages amidst the global crisis. Following Australia's call for members of the WHO to support an independent review into how the coronavirus had emerged and spread worldwide, China suspended meat imports from several Australian abattoirs and slapped Australian barley producers with tariffs, allegedly in response to a longstanding anti-dumping investigation.<sup>29</sup> In a similar vein, following the Netherlands' decision to change the name of its de facto embassy in Taiwan from 'The Netherlands Trade and Investment Office' to the 'Netherlands Office Taipei', Chinese media outlets and social media platforms called for China to suspend medical supplies to the Netherlands, boycott Dutch goods, and cancel travel plans.<sup>30</sup> These threats point to the increasing willingness of Chinese officials and state-run media entities to make implicit and informal threats of economic sanctions and retaliation to suit China's purposes.

However, as per the other examples detailed in this book, China's threat and actual use of economic retaliation since the start of Xi Jinping's second term, including during the coronavirus pandemic, has remained half-hearted. For example, many other Australian meat processing facilities continue to export products to China. For reasons stated in this book, China's threats of sanctions are also unlikely to be formalised, leaving Chinese leaders with plausible deniability and are therefore most likely to be 'more bark than bite'.

28 Gramer, Lynch, and Detsch 2020.

29 Fernando 2020.

30 Everington 2020.



In the longer term, China is likely to gradually evolve its longstanding sanctions narrative, which will in turn alter its sanctions behaviour. As suggested in the earlier chapters, however, meaningful shifts in China's sanctions rhetoric are likely to lag behind the nation's rapidly increasing material capabilities and political interests. Among other factors, Chinese decision-makers do not appear to have much latitude in altering their sanctions rhetoric unless they are willing to emulate the manner in which the US and its allies have traditionally used economic sanctions as a tool of foreign policy. This seems unlikely in the near term—particularly within the duration of the Xi Jinping administration.<sup>31</sup> As Xi Jinping made clear during his marathon speech at the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in October 2017, his administration intends to build a foreign policy 'with Chinese characteristics', i.e. one that differs palpably from that of the US and major European powers.<sup>32</sup> From this perspective, it would be reasonable to expect China's sanctions behaviour in the near future to remain similar to what we have seen in the empirical case studies examined in this book—namely ambiguous, targeted at specific sectors, and limited in scope and duration.

### 8.3 Areas for further study

Finally, this book has introduced related areas that should be further explored. It would be worthwhile to examine more closely the non-material factors—including those beyond rhetoric, such as norms or culture—that can influence the ways in which states make decisions on whether to impose or participate in sanctions. The UN Security Council established its first sanctions regime in 1966, targeting the apartheid regime in Southern Rhodesia. It was not until the 1990s, however, that the use of UN sanctions as a political tool began to proliferate.<sup>33</sup> There has since been extensive debate among UN Member States over when and how sanctions should be used, how

31 It is unclear when the Xi Jinping administration will end, given that the CPC had in February 2018 abolished term limits on the Chinese presidency.

32 '*xijinpingshijiuda baogao quanwen (shilu)* [Full Text of Xi Jinping's 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report]', *Xinhua News*, 18 October 2017. See also the English translation, 'Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress', *Xinhua News*, 4 November 2017.

33 Only two UN sanctions regimes were established prior to the 1990s—Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. By contrast, 11 sanctions regimes were established in the 1990s alone. See Security Council Report 2013. For a complete record of UN sanctions regimes, see the consolidated list maintained by the UNSC.

legitimate sanctions are, and the appropriate scope for the employment of sanctions. The records of a UNSC meeting on November 25, 2014, in which the use of sanctions as a tool to maintain international peace and security was discussed, provide a preliminary sense of some of the differences among UN Member States on this issue.<sup>34</sup> This book has pointed to some of the disagreements among the five permanent members of the UNSC regarding the extent and frequency to which sanctions should be used. However, even starker differences in the approaches towards sanctions can be seen once one looks beyond the five permanent members of the UNSC to the rest of the international community. Such an observation has similarly been made by several sanctions scholars:

This debate [over when and how sanctions should be employed] reflects fundamentally differing views among Member States, particularly permanent members of the UN Security Council, about the Council's use and scope of sanctions which likely foreshadows challenges to reaching agreement on different conflict situations in the future. The expansion of institutional players, each with their distinctive policy tools and differing mandates, also complicates the international coherence of sanctions, and further undermines UN sanctions' effectiveness.<sup>35</sup>

Here, Thomas Biersteker, Marcos Tourinho, and Sue Eckert suggest that disagreements among UN Member States on when and how sanctions should be used have direct implications for the efficacy and implementation of UN sanctions. Serious efforts to investigate how and why different UN Member States and regional organisations approach sanctions are therefore not merely important from an academic perspective but could also contribute to these important and ongoing policy debates.

The relationship between sanctions and domestic factors should also be examined in closer detail. Nationalism and domestic sentiment could prompt Chinese decision-makers to employ limited forms of informal sanctions, even if doing so might not otherwise be their first choice. The literature on signalling sanctions contains debates on the extent to which decision-makers employ sanctions to appease their domestic population.<sup>36</sup> However, it remains unclear when and how domestic pressures could lead decision-makers to impose sanctions and whether the sanctions employed

34 UNSC, S/PV.7323.

35 Biersteker, Tourinho, and Eckert 2016, p. 272.

36 See e.g. Baldwin 1999/2000, p. 102; and Giumelli 2011.

under these conditions differ significantly from those that decision-makers employ in an attempt to directly influence their target's behaviour. One could also approach such a question from the perspective of target states. For example, how might domestic responses—including business lobbying—influence decision-makers' responses to sanctions? Scholars have long suggested that there is a 'rally-around-the-flag' effect to sanctions. Rather than turning against the government, the domestic population of target states might end up providing further support for its leaders.<sup>37</sup> What are the conditions necessary for the 'rally-around-the-flag' effect to take place, when and how can leaders of target states create such an effect, and how does this counterbalance the potential lobbying efforts by business elites who might be the most affected by sanctions? Answers to these questions will enrich the sanctions literature and lead to a better understanding of the impetus and consequences of sanctions impositions.

China's recent use of economic inducement through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) offers another promising line of inquiry. Economic inducement—i.e. promises of economic 'carrots' to be offered to another state in exchange for political compliance—is the other side of the sanctions coin. There are many existing studies on Chinese economic inducement, including its efforts to gain support in developing regions such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Chinese scholars have also used the term economic diplomacy (*jingji waijiao*) to describe the ways in which China can leverage its economic power in positive ways to further political objectives abroad.<sup>38</sup> These efforts notwithstanding, China's recent ambitious economic initiatives present new opportunities for more thorough research on the ways in which China uses economic inducement as a foreign policy tool as well as how and why China's use of such a tool has evolved. For example, one of China's most prominent diplomats, Wu Jianmin, characterised the BRI as 'the most significant and far-reaching initiative that China has ever put forward'.<sup>39</sup> The Chinese government has further declared that the BRI, which 'run[s] through the continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa, connecting the vibrant East Asia economic circle at one end and developed European economic circle at the other, and encompassing countries with huge potential for economic development' would offer enormous market potential and economic benefits for all countries involved.<sup>40</sup> In March 2018, the Chinese government

37 See e.g. Galtung 1967, pp. 378-416; Haas 1997, pp. 74-85; and Wood 2008, pp. 489-513.

38 See e.g. Yan 1987, pp. 54-58; Jiang 2000, pp. 51-56; and Sheng 2007, pp. 62-71.

39 Jianmin Wu quoted in Swaine 2015, p. 3.

40 PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce 2017.

announced it was establishing an international development cooperation agency directly under the PRC State Council to enhance 'the role of foreign aid as a key instrument of China's diplomacy as a major country'.<sup>41</sup> At a press conference following China's annual parliamentary meetings (i.e. *lianghui*) in May 2020, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasised China's continued commitment to the BRI despite the global pandemic and underlined that China will 'actively expand international cooperation on public health, and establish pandemic control mechanisms with more nations'. Wang Yi also declared China's desire to step up public health projects in belt and road countries in order to develop a 'healthy silk road'.<sup>42</sup> What has motivated China to introduce these initiatives? Is China seeking to use such positive tools of economic statecraft to create a new tributary system and in turn gain international status? How do these economic initiatives affect US-China relations as well as the pace of global and regional power transitions?

Shifting the focus to China's trading partners, it is notable that the potential for significant economic benefits to be derived from China's BRI had prompted 28 heads of states, 61 international organisations, as well as the heads of the UN, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to gather at the first major BRI summit held by China in May 2017.<sup>43</sup> This was followed by the attendance of 36 heads of states at the second BRI summit in April 2019.<sup>44</sup> Albert Hirschman famously argued that in an asymmetrical economic relationship, the more dependent state will find its political and domestic interests being reshaped over time and converging toward those of the less dependent state.<sup>45</sup> It would be worthwhile to put Hirschman's theory to the test by investigating the extent to which China's trading partners have changed their strategic calculations as a result of the perceived benefits of closer economic ties with China.

Having made the argument that Chinese decision-makers have been relatively restrained and reluctant in employing economic sanctions due to their longstanding sanctions rhetoric and that their overall sanctions approach is unlikely to change drastically in the near future, it would be all the more pertinent for analysts and policymakers to carefully consider the balance between economic inducement and coercion in China's grand strategy as well as the links between economics and security. Ultimately,

41 Reform plan quoted in Zhang 2018.

42 Ng 2020.

43 Mangin 2017.

44 'Second Belt and Road Forum Top-Level Attendees', *The Diplomat*, 27 April 2019.

45 Hirschman 1980, pp. 18, 28-29, 34, and 37.

despite slowing economic growth and increasing challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic, China's political and economic influence is unlikely to diminish in the near future. Its attitudes and approaches to the use of economic tools for political purposes—both sanctions and inducement—should therefore remain an important area for continued discussion.

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# Appendix A

## United Nations Security Council Meeting Records: Coverage of Speeches by Chinese Representatives, 1997-2016

### Introduction

This manual was designed to guide the collection and analysis of data concerning China's sanctions framing at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) from 1997 to 2016. It was discussed and shared between the author and another coder at the beginning of this data collection project. The *NVivo* data analysis software was employed by both coders throughout this project. This data collection project was conducted in three steps, and we tested for inter-coder agreement at the end of each step. The following sections provide details on the coding process.<sup>1</sup>

### Coding Instructions

#### *Step 1: Compiling and Labelling*

Out of all the UNSC meeting records from between 1997 to 2016 (4,402 records were compiled), we independently identified those in which at least one Chinese representative expressed China's views on a sanctions-related issue. We labelled this as 'Subset A', which comprises 768 records. Each of these meeting records in Subset A was then assigned a case identification number. This was labelled by the date of the draft sanction resolution, followed by the country code (as listed in the Correlates of War project) of the potential target (e.g. 31012012SYR). It was reflected as 'GEN' (i.e. 'general') in cases in which the issue of sanctions was discussed at the UNSC but was not directly linked to a specific episode or target country (e.g. 25112014GEN).

#### *Step 2: Identifying Sanctions Objectives*

Each meeting record in Subset A was then tagged to at least one of the six different categories of sanctions objectives: (1) prohibition of armed

<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 4, the methods employed in this coding process are heavily borrowed from those developed by Frank Baumgartner, Suzanna De Boef, and Amber Boydston in their study of how media framing of capital punishment has evolved over time. See Baumgartner, De Boef, and Boydston 2008, Appendix A.

conflict; (2) democracy support; (3) counter-terrorism; (4) promotion of good governance; (5) non-proliferation; and (6) population protection under Responsibility to Protect (R2P). These categories were adopted from the study conducted by the Targeted Sanctions Consortium (TSC), which tagged existing sanctions episodes from 1991 to 2014 to the various objectives.<sup>2</sup> We followed the TSC's categories where applicable and applied similar principles when coding for meeting records on sanctions-related resolutions that were not part of the TSC study (e.g. proposed sanctions that were either vetoed or not tabled, such as Syria and Myanmar). These sanctions objectives are not mutually exclusive. In other words, when multiple issues and objectives were involved, we tagged more than one category of sanctions objective to the meeting record.

### *Step 3: Distilling the Constituent Elements*

We constructed a list of every distinct argument made by the Chinese representatives concerning sanctions across this 20-year period and divided them into pro- and anti- arguments. This, in turn, reveals the constituent elements of China's sanctions frame. More specifically, we broke down the component parts of the speeches made by the Chinese representatives and grouped them into five broader dimensions: (1) utility; (2) morality; (3) legitimacy; (4) group dynamics; and (5) others. Each speech was coded for as many times as necessary. We then counted the frequency of each argument employed and indicated the numbers in brackets beside each argument. The coding requirements for this step are as follows:

Dimensions of Arguments (to be coded as many times as necessary)

(100) Utility Arguments: this refers to arguments relating to the efficacy of sanctions, e.g. whether they can be expected to achieve policy objectives.

(200) Morality: this refers to arguments invoking humanitarian reasons and/or other consequences on the target states as a result of the sanctions.

(300) Legitimacy: this refers to arguments relating to whether authority has been given for the parties involved to be discussing and/or imposing sanctions.

2 See 'Appendix I: List of Cases and Episodes', in Biersteker, Eckert, and Tourinho 2016, pp. 280-287.

(400) Group Dynamics: this refers to arguments relating to the level of support and concerns of regional groupings and/or the immediate region of the target country.

(500) Others: this refers to other types of arguments that are not included in the aforementioned categories.

Sample abstracts of the range of coding options are provided below:

Pro-Sanctions Arguments	Anti-Sanctions Arguments
100. Utility	
<p>101. Sanctions and efforts to implement them will contribute / have contributed to countering the threat or addressing the situation. (56)</p> <p><i>E.g. We were happy to learn that the international community has recently reached a higher degree of consensus and has adopted increasingly concerted measures with regard to sanctions against the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). These sanctions are yielding unprecedented results.<sup>3</sup></i></p> <p>102. Sanctions can be employed when they are proportionate to the situation, based on facts, and when other means have been exhausted. (123)</p> <p><i>E.g. Today, long after the Security Council resolutions were adopted, the fact that the situation remains unresolved is indeed a source of concern and a point worthy of our consideration. We believe that the most urgent task before us is to take concrete measures to effectively curb the illegal diamond trade and the illicit flows of and trafficking in arms so as to reduce the negative effect of these two phenomena on peace in Sierra Leone.<sup>5</sup></i></p>	<p>111. Sanctions are counter-productive to policy objectives. (29)</p> <p><i>E.g. The Chinese delegation is never in favour of imposing sanctions against any State indiscriminately; nor is it in favour of using sanctions as a threat. Experience shows that doing so can only run counter to our objectives. Nor will it contribute to a proper settlement of the problems [...] we believe that the current draft resolution is not conducive to the settlement of the problems concerned.<sup>4</sup></i></p> <p>112. The UNSC should use other more effective tools (e.g. mediation and negotiation) if they are available rather than the frequent threat or use of sanctions. (58)</p> <p><i>E.g. The Security Council should pay more attention to preventive diplomacy and use peaceful means such as mediation and good offices to defuse disputes and should avoid the frequent use of threat of sanctions and other measures of force.<sup>6</sup></i></p>

3 UNSC, S/PV.4090.

4 UNSC, S/PV.3826.

5 UNSC, S/PV.4262.

6 UNSC, S/PV.6870.

Pro-Sanctions Arguments	Anti-Sanctions Arguments
<p>103. Sanctions can be used to serve the interests of the overall situation and must be effectively implemented when a consensus has been reached by the UNSC. (58)</p> <p><i>E.g. China has always believed that all parties are duty-bound to implement the resolutions on sanctions against Iran resolutely, accurately, and comprehensively [...] we hope that, in accordance with its mandate and the principles of objectivity, fairness, and pragmatism on the basis of clear facts, concrete evidence, and extensive consultations, the Committee will continue to deal appropriately with cases of alleged sanctions non-compliance.<sup>7</sup></i></p>	<p>113. Sanctions are not long-term solutions and must be constantly reviewed and updated/lifted as soon as there are changes to the situation. (101)</p> <p><i>E.g. The sanctions set out in the relevant resolutions of the Security Council are not conducive to achieving the aforementioned objectives [of taking into account the bigger picture of peace and stability in the Horn of Africa]. China hopes that the Security Council will take the changes on the ground into account, continuously revisit the relevant content of its resolutions, and make timely adjustments.<sup>8</sup></i></p>
200. Morality	
<p>201. N.A.</p>	<p>211. Sanctions undermine the development of developing countries. (12)</p> <p><i>E.g. The sanctions against Libya have brought untold suffering to the Libyan people, especially to the women and children. They have undermined the development of Libya and have affected the economic development of third-world countries. We are gravely concerned about the adverse effects of the sanctions.<sup>9</sup></i></p>
<p>202. N.A.</p>	<p>212. Sanctions worsen humanitarian situations and affect innocent parties. (65)</p> <p><i>E.g. China has all along adopted a prudent attitude towards sanctions, as we believe that, rather than achieving the expected results, sanctions may often lead to further complication of a situation and affect the economic development and livelihoods of the people in the countries in question.<sup>10</sup></i></p>

7 UNSC, S/PV.7211.

8 UNSC, S/PV.7807.

9 UNSC, S/PV.3864.

10 UNSC, S/PV.6674.

Pro-Sanctions Arguments	Anti-Sanctions Arguments
<p>203. N.A.</p>	<p>213. Sanctions and the threat of sanctions are frequently used wilfully by certain states and undermine the legitimate interests of target states. (23)</p> <p><i>E.g. China does not agree that excessive pressure should be put on Iran or that new sanctions should be introduced. Some countries, which have imposed unilateral sanctions and wilfully expanded their scope, are undermining the legitimate interests and rights of other countries. China is opposed to such an approach.</i><sup>11</sup></p>
<p>300. Legitimacy</p>	
<p>301. The UNSC has the mandate to employ sanctions when necessary and after broad consultations. (18)</p> <p><i>E.g. The Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee is one of the main instruments at the disposal of the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, in the fight against terrorism [...] we hope that Member States will actively cooperate with the Committee in its activities in order to preserve the authority and effectiveness of the United Nations sanctions mechanism.</i><sup>12</sup></p>	<p>311. Individual countries use unilateral sanctions for their own interests and undermine the authority of the UNSC. (26)</p> <p><i>E.g. A small number of countries act at will according to their domestic laws and impose or threaten to impose unilateral sanctions against other States, which is not only in violation of the principle of sovereign equality among Member States but also undermines the authority of Council sanctions.</i><sup>13</sup></p>
<p>302. N.A.</p>	<p>312. The UNSC cannot interfere in the internal affairs of other countries through the employment of sanctions or discuss issues that are unrelated to threats to international peace and security. (57)</p> <p><i>E.g. China is always opposed to intervention by the Council on issues concerning the human rights situation in any country [...] the human rights situation in the DPRK does not constitute a threat to international peace and security. China is against allowing the Council to deliberate on the human rights situation in the DPRK.</i><sup>14</sup></p>

11 UNSC, S/PV.6930.  
 12 UNSC, S/PV.7071.  
 13 UNSC, S/PV.7323.  
 14 UNSC, S/PV.7575.

Pro-Sanctions Arguments	Anti-Sanctions Arguments
400. Group Dynamics	
<p>401. Regional organisations have already expressed support for sanctions / the international community needs to support the efforts of regional organisations. (12)</p> <p><i>E.g. We have taken note of the fact that many of the recommendations involve the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It may be said that without the true involvement and commitment of SADC, it will be impossible to implement many of the proposals, and sanctions against UNTIA could possibly remain hollow talk. We commend SADC countries for their determination and for their efforts to implement the sanctions against UNITA. At the same time, we are aware of the real difficulties SADC countries face, and we are therefore of the view that the international community should continue to provide SADC with necessary assistance concerning the sanctions against UNITA.<sup>1</sup></i></p>	<p>411. Regional organisations need to solve their own problems and are already engaging in constructive dialogue/actions. Sanctions interfere in these efforts. (24)</p> <p><i>E.g. In recent days, during the Security Council's consultations on the situation in Zimbabwe, many countries, including China, repeatedly called upon the Council to respect the position of African countries on that issue and to allow more time for the good offices and mediation efforts of the African Union and the Southern African Development Community. Regrettably, the sincere appeals and reasonable proposals of those countries were not taken on board. China deeply regrets that.<sup>2</sup></i></p>
500. Others	
<p>501. China voted in favour of the resolution, as its input has been sufficiently considered. (2)</p> <p><i>E.g. The Chinese delegation is in favour of adjustments to the Goods Review List and the relevant procedures with a view to improving the humanitarian situation in Iraq. In this spirit, we took part in the consultations on the draft resolution and proposed a number of amendments. We note that China's amendments have basically been reflected in the text. The text in general is quite balanced, and that is why China voted in favour of the draft resolution.<sup>3</sup></i></p>	<p>511. China cannot agree with the resolution, as the consultation process or resolution text did not sufficiently consider the input from all relevant parties. (13)</p> <p><i>E.g. The Chinese delegation took part in consultations on resolution 2220 (2015) in a positive and constructive spirit. During the consultations, some members, in particular the three African members, proposed some important, legitimate, and highly valid amendments. The consultations should have further heeded the views of all sides and sought to solve differences so as to reach a text that could enjoy the unanimous support of the whole Council. It is regrettable that the relevant amendments have not been fully reflected in the text. In the light of the situation, China abstained in the voting on resolution 2220 (2015).<sup>4</sup></i></p>
Total no. of pro-sanction arguments: 269	Total no. of anti-sanction arguments: 408

1 UNSC, S/PV.4129.

2 UNSC, S/PV.5933.

3 UNSC, S/PV.4683.

4 UNSC, S/PV.7447.

# Appendix B

## Complete List of Proposed United Nations Security Council Sanctions-Related Resolutions, 1971-2016

Nos.	Date	Res. No.	Sanctions Regime	Description	Sanctions Category	Voting Record
1.	30 December 1971	-	Southern Rhodesia	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France and US: abstain; UK: veto)
2.	29 September 1972	-	Southern Rhodesia	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France and US: abstain; UK: veto)
3.	22 May 1973	-	Southern Rhodesia	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France: abstain; UK and US: veto)
4.	6 June 1975	-	South Africa	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France, UK and US: veto)
5.	19 October 1976	-	South Africa	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France, UK and US: veto)
6.	31 October 1977	-	South Africa	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France, UK and US: veto)



Nos.	Date	Res. No.	Sanctions Regime	Description	Sanctions Category	Voting Record
7.	4 November 1977	418	South Africa	Apartheid; second usage of sanctions by the UNSC.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
8.	11-13 January 1980	-	Iran	Holding US nationalities as hostages.	-	China: Did not participate (France, UK, US: affirm; USSR: veto)
9.	30 April 1981	-	South Africa	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France, UK and US: veto)
10.	30 April 1981	-	South Africa	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France, UK and US: veto)
11.	30 April 1981	-	South Africa	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France, UK and US: veto)
12.	30 April 1981	-	South Africa	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France, UK and US: veto)
13.	31 August 1981	-	South Africa	Armed invasion of Angola; apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR and France: affirm; UK: abstain; US: veto)
14.	15 November 1985	-	South Africa	Apartheid; occupation of Namibia.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France: abstain; UK and US: veto)
15.	23 May 1986	-	South Africa	Apartheid.	Armed conflict.	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France: abstain; UK and US: veto)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
16.	18 June 1986	-	South Africa	Military occupation of parts of the territory of Angola; apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France: abstain; UK and US: veto)
17.	20 February 1987	-	South Africa	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France: abstain; UK and US: veto)
18.	9 April 1987	-	South Africa	Independence of Namibia.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France: abstain; UK and US: veto)
19.	8 March 1988	-	South Africa	Apartheid.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (USSR: affirm; France: abstain; UK and US: veto)
20.	6 August 1990	661	Iraq	Invasion of Kuwait; comprehensive sanctions.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from the P5)
21.	3 April 1991	687	Iraq	Nuclear proliferation; imposed arms embargo.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from the P5)
22.	25 September 1991	713	Former Yugoslavia	Conflict leading to the dissolution of Yugoslavia; arms import embargo on all parties.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
23.	23 January 1992	733	Somalia	Civil war; arms import embargo on all parties.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
24.	31 March 1992	748	Libya	Terrorist bombing of two commercial flights; aviation ban and arms import embargo against government forces, diplomatic sanctions.	Counter-terrorism	China: Abstain (Support from the other P5 countries)

Nos.	Date	Res. No.	Sanctions Regime	Description	Sanctions Category	Voting Record
25.	24 April 1992	751	Somalia	Civil war; arms import embargo on all parties.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
26.	30 May 1992	757	Former Yugoslavia	Involvement in the conflict in Bosnia; comprehensive sanctions.	Armed conflict	China: Abstain (Support from the other P5 countries)
27.	19 November 1992	788	Liberia	Civil war; arms import embargo on all parties.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
28.	17 April 1993	820	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Refusal to accept peace plans; first case of UNSC sanctions against a sub-state actor (Bosnian Serbs).	Armed conflict	China: Abstain (France, UK and US: affirm; Russia: abstain)
29.	16 June 1993	841	Haiti	Coup d'état (the Haitian army overthrew the democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide); petroleum import ban and arms import embargo on all parties; government asset freeze.	Democracy Support	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
30.	27 August 1993	861	Haiti	Suspension of sanctions.	Democracy Support	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
31.	13 October 1993	873	Haiti	Re-imposition of sanctions against Haiti; petroleum import ban and arms import embargo on all parties; government asset freeze, asset transfer.	Democracy Support	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
32.	15 September 1993	864	Angola	Refusal of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebel group to comply with peace agreement; arms import embargo and petroleum import ban against UNITA.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
33.	11 November 1993	883	Libya	Non-compliance by Libyan authorities; aviation ban and arms import embargo against government forces, diplomatic sanctions, asset freeze, oil services equipment ban.	Counter-terrorism	China: Abstain (Support from the other P5 countries)
34.	6 May 1994	917	Haiti	Non-compliance by military authorities; comprehensive sanctions.	Democracy Support	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
35.	17 May 1994	918	Rwanda	Large-scale violence; arms embargo imposed on all parties.	Armed conflict	Adopted without a vote
36.	31 July 1994	940	Haiti	Non-compliance; UNSC authorised the formation of a multinational force to be led by the US; comprehensive sanctions.	Democracy Support	China: Abstain (Support from the other P5 countries)
37.	2 December 1994	-	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Military activities by local Serbs and denial of humanitarian assistance to the Bihac region.	Armed conflict	China: Abstain (France, UK and US: affirm; Russia: veto)
38.	16 August 1995	1011	Rwanda	Suspension of arms embargo against Rwandan government; embargo on non-governmental entities remained.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

Nos.	Date	Res. No.	Sanctions Regime	Description	Sanctions Category	Voting Record
39.	7 September 1995	1013	N.A.	Establishment of Committee of Inquiry to investigate violations of arms embargo on Rwanda.	N.A.	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
40.	26 April 1996	1054	Sudan	Alleged involvement in an attempted assassination of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak; diplomatic sanctions.	Counter-terrorism	China: Abstain (France, UK and US: affirm; Russia: abstain)
41.	16 August 1996	1070	Sudan	Failure to comply with Organisation of African Unity (OAU) requests to extradite suspects; diplomatic sanctions and aviation ban.	Counter-terrorism	China: Abstain (France, UK and US: affirm; Russia: abstain)
42.	28 August 1997	1127	Angola	Imposition of sanctions against UNITA for its lack of compliance in implementing peace agreements.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
43.	8 October 1997	1132	Sierra Leone	Coup d'état; diplomatic sanctions, petroleum import ban and arms import embargo against all parties.	Democracy Support	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
44.	16 March 1998	1156	Sierra Leone	Return of democratically elected president; terminated petroleum sanctions; arms embargo against non-governmental entities remains in place.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
45.	31 March 1998	1160	Former Yugoslavia	Violence against peaceful demonstrators; arms import embargo on all parties.	Armed conflict	China: Abstain (Support from the other P5 countries)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
46.	12 June 1998	1173	Angola	UNITA's non-compliance; arms import embargo, petroleum import ban, aviation ban, diplomatic sanctions, asset freeze, diamond exports ban, mining services and equipment import ban, ground and waterborne transportation services and equipment import ban.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
47.	12 January 1999	1221	Angola	Downing of two commercial planes over UNITA-controlled territory in Angola.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
48.	15 October 1999	1267	Taliban	Terrorist acts; aviation ban and asset freeze.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
49.	22 October 1999	1270	Sierra Leone	UN Mission to assist in the implementation of the Lomé Peace Agreement; arms embargo and travel ban against non-governmental entities.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
50.	17 May 2000	1298	Eritrea/ Ethiopia	Interstate conflict; arms embargo imposed on governmental entities.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
51.	5 July 2000	1306	Sierra Leone	Illicit diamond trade fuelling conflict; travel ban and arms import embargo on non-governmental entities; diamond exports ban.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

Nos.	Date	Res. No.	Sanctions Regime	Description	Sanctions Category	Voting Record
52.	19 December 2000	1333	Taliban	Terrorism and non-compliance; aviation ban and asset freeze on government entities, arms import embargo, diplomatic sanctions and chemical acetic anhydride import ban.	Counter-terrorism	China: Abstain (Support from the other P5 countries)
53.	7 March 2001	1343	Liberia	Support for rebels in Sierra Leone in violation of UNSC demands; arms import embargo on all parties, diamond export ban, travel ban, diplomatic sanctions.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
54.	16 January 2002	1389	Sierra Leone	Travel ban and arms import embargo against non-governmental entities, diamond export ban (expired June 2003).	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
55.	16 January 2002	1390	Al Qaida/ Taliban	Terrorism; first sanctions resolution without a territorial connection—travel ban added and scope of asset freeze extended.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
56.	3 May 2002	1407	Somalia	Violation of arms embargo; arms import embargo on all parties.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
57.	6 May 2002	1408	Liberia	Arms import embargo on all parties, diamond export ban, travel ban, diplomatic sanctions.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
58.	20 December 2002	1452	Al Qaida/ Taliban	Terrorism; modified sanctions to take into account humanitarian needs.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
59.	6 May 2003	1478	Liberia	Extension of sanctions to include ban on timber exports.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
60.	22 May 2003	1483	Iraq	Lifting of trade sanctions against Iraq; arms embargo and targeted asset freeze were maintained.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from 14 states; Syria did not participate in the voting.)
61.	28 July 2003	1493	Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)	Arms import embargo on non-governmental entities.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
62.	24 November 2003	1518	Iraq	Establishment of committee for Iraq sanctions regime.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
63.	22 December 2003	1521	Liberia	Establishment of committee; additional ban on timber exports.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
64.	12 March 2004	1533	DRC	Illegal flow of weapons into the country; arms import embargo remains in place.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
65.	21 April 2004	-	Cyprus	Proposal for arms embargo and new security arrangements to prevent reunification of Greek and Turkish Cypriots.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (France, UK and US: affirm; Russia: veto)



<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
66.	8 June 2004	1546	Iraq	Formation of the Iraqi government; Iraqi cultural property trade or transfer ban and arms import embargo on non-governmental entities; asset freeze against former political regime.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
67.	30 July 2004	1556	Sudan	Humanitarian crisis and human rights abuses; arms import embargo on non-governmental entities.	Armed conflict	China: Abstain (Support from the other P5 countries)
68.	15 November 2004	1572	Côte d'Ivoire	Resumption of hostilities and violation of previous ceasefire agreement; arms import embargo on all parties, targeted travel ban and asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
69.	1 February 2005	1584	Côte d'Ivoire	Strengthening of arms embargo.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
70.	29 March 2005	1591	Sudan	Conflict in Darfur; arms import embargo on all parties, targeted travel ban and asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Abstain (France, UK and US: affirm; Russia: abstain)
71.	18 April 2005	1596	DRC	Arms import embargo against all parties, targeted travel ban and asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
72.	31 October 2005	1636	Lebanon	Assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri; targeted travel ban and asset freeze.	Judicial process	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
73.	15 December 2005	1643	Côte d'Ivoire	Continuing hostilities; addition of ban on diamond exports to existing sanctions.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
74.	21 December 2005	1649	DRC	Extension and expansion of sanctions against DRC.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
75.	25 April 2006	1672	Sudan	Darfur conflict; listing of four individuals to the existing sanctions regime.	Armed conflict	China: Abstain (France, UK and US: affirm; Russia: abstain)
76.	13 June 2006	1683	Liberia	Adjustment of arms embargo to allow weapons and ammunition to be used by security forces.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
77.	16 June 2006	1688	Liberia	Shift in sanctions objective to the promotion of good governance.	Good governance	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
78.	20 June 2006	1689	Liberia	Continuation of sanctions against import of diamonds, timber export ban lifted.	Good governance	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
79.	15 July 2006	1695	DPRK	Conduct of nuclear test; targeted arms embargo.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
80.	31 July 2006	1696	Iran	Uranium enrichment programme; sanctions threatened.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from the P5)
81.	31 July 2006	1698	DRC	Illegal arms trafficking; first resolution to mention children in designation criteria.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
82.	14 October 2006	1718	DPRK	Conduct of nuclear test; arms embargo, ban on imports and exports of proliferation-sensitive goods and technology, ban on luxury goods, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
83.	19 December 2006	1730	N.A.	Creation of focal point for delisting.	N.A.	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
84.	20 December 2006	1731	Liberia	Extension of sanctions regime.	Good governance	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
85.	22 December 2006	1735	Al Qaida/Taliban	Terrorism; targeted asset freeze, arms import embargo on non-governmental entities, travel ban.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
86.	23 December 2006	1737	Iran	Failure to terminate uranium enrichment programme; import and export bans on proliferation-sensitive goods and technology; targeted asset freeze.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
87.	12 January 2007	-	Myanmar	Human rights violations by Burmese authorities.	Human rights	China: Veto (France, UK and US: affirm; Russia: veto)
88.	24 March 2007	1747	Iran	Strengthening of sanctions regime against Iran with a general arms embargo and a ban on proliferation-related financial services.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
89.	30 May 2007	1757	Lebanon	Formation of an international tribunal to try suspects in the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister; sanctions regime remains in place.	Judicial process	China: Abstain (France, UK and US: affirm; Russia: abstain)
90.	10 August 2007	1771	DRC	Extension of sanctions regime: arms import embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
91.	3 March 2008	1803	Iran	Addition of travel ban to existing sanctions regime.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from the P5)
92.	31 March 2008	1807	DRC	Continuing illicit flow of weapons; first resolution to mention women in designation criteria.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
93.	30 June 2008	1822	Al Qaida/Taliban	Terrorism; targeted asset freeze, arms import embargo on non-governmental entities, travel ban.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
94.	11 July 2008	-	Zimbabwe	Human rights violations.	Human rights	China: Veto (France, UK and US: affirm; Russia: veto)
95.	20 November 2008	1844	Somalia/Eritrea	Continued hostilities and violation of arms embargo; arms import embargo, travel ban, asset freeze. Secondary sanctions on Eritrea with arms export embargo, travel ban, and targeted asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

Nos.	Date	Res. No.	Sanctions Regime	Description	Sanctions Category	Voting Record
96.	22 December 2008	1857	DRC	Continuing illicit flow of weapons; arms import embargo on non-governmental entities, travel ban, and targeted asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
97.	12 June 2009	1874	DPRK	Conduct of nuclear test; arms embargo against government forces, ban on imports and exports of proliferation-sensitive goods and technology, travel ban, bunkering ban.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
98.	17 December 2009	1903	Liberia	Renewal of targeted travel ban, adjustment of arms embargo to allow specific items for the Liberian government and UN peacekeeping forces.	Good governance	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
99.	17 December 2009	1904	Al Qaida/Taliban	Terrorism; creation of the Office of the Ombudsperson; targeted asset freeze, arms import embargo, diplomatic sanctions, travel ban.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
100.	23 December 2009	1907	Somalia/Eritrea	Eritrea's role in Somalia; refusal to withdraw troops following conflict with Djibouti; arms import embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze. Secondary sanctions on Eritrea; arms embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Abstain (Support from the other P5 countries)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
101.	28 May 2010	1925	DRC	Noted progress in DRC; arms import embargo on non-governmental entities, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
102.	9 June 2010	1929	Iran	Non-compliance with previous UNSC resolutions; ban on proliferation-sensitive goods and technology, targeted asset freeze, arms export embargo, travel ban, investment ban, targeted arms import embargo on government forces, bunkering ban.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from the P5)
103.	14 October 2010	1945	Sudan	Extension of sanctions; arms import embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Abstain (Support from the other P5 countries)
104.	17 December 2010	1961	Liberia	Renewal of arms embargo and sanctions against non-governmental entities, travel ban, and targeted asset freeze.	Good governance	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
105.	20 December 2010	1962	Côte d'Ivoire	Arms import embargo on all parties, travel ban, targeted asset freeze, diamond export ban.	Democracy Support	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
106.	26 February 2011	1970	Libya	Use of force against civilians; arms embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Responsibility to Protect (R2P)	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
107.	17 March 2011	1973	Libya	Use of force against civilians; UNSC authorisation of the use of force to protect civilians in Libya and strengthening of sanctions regime	R2P	China: Abstain (France, UK, and US: affirm; Russia: abstain)
108.	28 April 2011	1980	Côte d'Ivoire	Arms embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze, diamond export ban.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
109.	17 June 2011	1988	Taliban	Terrorism; establishment of a new sanctions regime on the Taliban separate from the Al Qaida regime; targeted asset freeze, arms import embargo on non-governmental entities, travel ban.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
110.	17 June 2011	1989	Al Qaida	Terrorism; strengthening of the authority of the Ombudsperson and creation of an Al Qaida sanctions regime separate from the Taliban regime.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
111.	29 July 2011	2002	Somalia/Eritrea	Obstruction of peace process; arms import embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze. Secondary sanctions on Eritrea.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
112.	16 September 2011	2009	Libya	Modification of sanctions regime on Libya regarding the arms embargo, asset freeze, and aviation restrictions.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
113.	4 October 2011	–	Syria	Human rights violations over demonstrations.	Human rights	China: Veto (France, UK, and US: affirm; Russia: veto)
114.	4 February 2012	–	Syria	Human rights violations.	Human rights	China: Veto (France, UK, and US: affirm; Russia: veto)
115.	17 February 2012	2035	Sudan	Arms import embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
116.	22 February 2012	2036	Somalia	Extension of sanctions against Somalia; imposition of ban on the export of charcoal from Somalia and the import of charcoal from Somalia	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
117.	2 May 2012	2046	Sudan and South Sudan	Cross-border violence; threats to impose sanctions in the absence of compliance.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
118.	18 May 2012	2048	Guinea-Bissau	Coup d'état; imposition of travel ban.	Democracy support	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
119.	12 June 2012	2051	Yemen	Threat of sanctions against groups undermining political transition in Yemen.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
120.	19 July 2012	–	Syria	Armed conflict and human rights abuses in Syria; compliance required or further (sanctions) measures could be imposed.	Armed conflict	China: Veto (France, UK, and US: affirm; Russia: veto)



Nos.	Date	Res. No.	Sanctions Regime	Description	Sanctions Category	Voting Record
121.	25 July 2012	2060	Somalia/Eritrea	Arms embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze, charcoal export ban. Secondary sanctions on Eritrea.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
122.	28 November 2012	2078	DRC	Non-compliance with previous UNSC resolutions; renewal of arms import embargo on non-governmental entities, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
123.	22 January 2013	2087	DPRK	Conduct of nuclear test; addition of individuals and entities to the list of targets in addition to the existing sanctions regime.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
124.	6 March 2013	2093	Somalia/Eritrea	Adjustment of arms embargo and lifting of purchase ban on light weapons.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
125.	7 March 2013	2094	DPRK	Strengthening of sanctions regime on DPRK; addition of financial sector restrictions to existing sanctions regime.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
126.	March 14, 2013	2095	Libya	Adjustment of arms embargo to boost the country's security and disarmament efforts.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
127.	24 July 2013	2111	Somalia/Eritrea	Reaffirmation of arms embargo on Somalia and Eritrea, adjustment of embargo to facilitate development of Somalia's security forces.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
128.	5 December 2013	2127	Central African Republic (CAR)	Civil war; arms import embargo on non-governmental entities; travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
129.	10 December 2013	2128	Liberia	Arms import embargo on non-governmental entities, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Good governance	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
130.	28 January 2014	2134	CAR	Expansion of sanctions imposed on individuals to include travel ban and asset freezes.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
131.	30 January 2014	2136	DRC	Continuing hostilities; renewal of sanctions.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
132.	26 February 2014	2140	Yemen	Groups undermining political transition in Yemen; targeted travel ban and asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
133.	5 March 2014	2141	DPRK	Extension of mandate of Panel of Experts on DPRK sanctions regime.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
134.	5 March 2014	2142	Somalia	Reaffirmation of arms embargo and sanctions regime but partial lifting of weapons ban on Somalia.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
135.	14 March 2014	2144	Libya	Reaffirmation of arms embargo and targeted asset freeze; extension of mandate of Panel of Experts.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
136.	19 March 2014	2146	Libya	Ban of illicit crude oil exports from Libya.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
137.	17 June 2014	2161	Al Qaida	Terrorism; reaffirmation of arms embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
138.	27 August 2014	2174	Libya	Violence against civilians and civilian institutions; reaffirmation of sanctions regime.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
139.	24 October 2014	2182	Somalia	Tightening of the implementation of charcoal ban, renewal of partial lifting of arms embargo.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Russia: abstain; affirmation from France, UK, and US)
140.	3 March 2015	2206	South Sudan	Threat of sanctions on those blocking peace in South Sudan; travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
141.	4 March 2015	2207	DPRK	Extend Panel of Experts mandate to monitor and strengthen effectiveness of DPRK sanctions.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
142.	27 March 2015	2213	Libya	Extension of measures to ban illicit crude oil exports from Libya; extension of mandate of the Panel of Experts.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
143.	14 April 2015	2216	Yemen	Imposition of sanctions on individuals undermining the stability of Yemen.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Russia: abstain; affirmation from France, UK, and US)

<b>Nos.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Res. No.</b>	<b>Sanctions Regime</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sanctions Category</b>	<b>Voting Record</b>
144.	2 September 2015	2237	Liberia	Renewal of arms embargo on non-state actors; termination of other sanctions.	Good governance	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
145.	17 December 2015	2253	ISIL/Al Qaida	Expansion and strengthening of Al Qaida sanctions framework to include a focus on the Islamic State; arms embargo, travel ban, targeted asset freeze.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
146.	21 December 2015	2255	Taliban	Reaffirmation of existing sanctions regime against the Taliban; arms embargo, travel ban, asset freeze.	Counter-terrorism	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
147.	24 February 2016	2266	Yemen	Extension of sanctions against destabilising actors in Yemen.	Armed conflict	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
148.	2 March 2016	2270	DPRK	Conduct of nuclear test; significantly tightened sanctions against the North Korean regime, including mandating the inspection of cargo transiting through UN member states' territory that is destined for or originating from DPRK.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
149.	24 March 2016	2276	DPRK	Extension of mandate of sanctions experts; reaffirmation of sanctions regime.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)

Nos.	Date	Res. No.	Sanctions Regime	Description	Sanctions Category	Voting Record
150.	25 May 2016	2288	Liberia	End of sanctions regime on Liberia, including the remaining arms measure, the mandate of the Panel of Experts, and the 1521 Sanctions Committee.	Good governance	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
151.	8 October 2016	–	Syria	Resolution calling for halt to Aleppo airstrikes; reaffirmation of sanctions against Al Qaida and ISIL affiliates in the draft resolution.	Armed conflict	China: Abstain (France, UK and USA: affirm; Russia: veto)
152.	30 November 2016	2321	DPRK	Conduct of nuclear test; strengthening of DPRK sanctions regime.	Non-proliferation	China: Affirm (Unanimous support from all 15 states)
153.	5 December 2016	–	Syria	Resolution calling for seven-day Aleppo truce vetoed; reaffirmation of sanctions against terrorist groups in the draft resolution.	Armed conflict	China: Veto (France, UK and USA: affirm; Russia: veto)

(Sources: *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations*; Appendix I: Official Document System of the UN; UN Bibliographic Information System; and Security Council Report, 'Special Research Report: UN Sanctions'.)

# Appendix C

## China's Material Interests with Targeted Sanctions Regimes

### 1. South Africa, 1970s and 1980s<sup>1</sup>

*Strategic.* China had minimal strategic interests in South Africa throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. South Africa had closer political ties with Taiwan, with which it established diplomatic relations in 1976. China's main objective in South Africa during that time was limited to gaining support from newly independent African states so as to expand its diplomatic influence in Africa vis-à-vis Taiwan.

*Economic.* As a result of South Africa's political ties with Taiwan as well as its apartheid regime, China's economic interests in South Africa during this period (i.e. 1971-1988) were very limited. South Africa's main trading partner was the UK, followed by the US. China had a minimal role.

*Rank.* 1

### 2. Iran (1), 1980 (N.A.) Iran (2), 2006-2012<sup>2</sup>

*Strategic.* Iran was (and remains) of strategic value to China. In the mid-to late 2000s, China began to see Iran as a potential partner to expand China's influence in the Middle East, particularly in the Persian Gulf. As a self-proclaimed 'leader of the developing world', China also wanted to be perceived as actively supporting a developing Iran.

*Economic.* Iran has large oil and gas reserves, which can help China meet its growing energy needs. China has significantly expanded its overseas energy and mining investments since the early 2000s and by 2009 had become Iran's top trading partner, with bilateral trade at approximately USD 30 billion. In the same year (i.e. 2009), China and Iran also undertook two major joint

<sup>1</sup> Mensah 2010, pp. 96-108; Farah 1974, p. 92; and Mlambo, Kushamba, and Simawu 2016, pp. 257-276.

<sup>2</sup> Swaine 2010, pp. 1-19; Harold and Nader 2012, pp. 1-23; and US Energy Information Administration 2015.

energy development projects worth more than USD 5.15 billion. By 2010, China depended on Iran for 11% of its oil imports. China's oil and gas ventures in the country were valued at USD 48 to 50 billion. In terms of arms sales, China was Iran's single largest foreign supplier of arms. It also helped develop Iran's indigenous defence sector, particularly missile design and technology.

*Rank [Iran (1)].* N.A.

*Rank [Iran (2)].* 3

### 3. **Iraq (1), 1990-1991** **Iraq (2), 2003-2004**<sup>3</sup>

*Strategic.* China had minimal strategic interests in Iraq in the early 1990s. By the early 2000s, China's main political objective was to expand its influence in the Middle East, including in Iraq.

*Economic.* China's economic interests in Iraq were primarily driven by its energy needs. Trade between China and Iraq was minimal between 1990 and 1991. China's trade with Iraq increased substantially by the late 1990s, including contracts that were established for Chinese companies to develop the oil fields in Iraq. However, China had to diversify its sources of oil supply during the Second Gulf War and limit the financial fallout of its energy investments in Iraq. Bilateral trade between China and Iraq also remained insignificant during this period, even though there was an increase from about USD 974.9 million in 2000 to about USD 17,567.5 million in 2012.

*Rank [Iraq (1)].* 1

*Rank [Iraq (2)].* 2

### 4. **Former Yugoslavia, 1990s (including Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1993-1994)**<sup>4</sup>

*Strategic.* While China shared some political and ideological affiliations with former Yugoslavia, especially in the 1970s, China's strategic interests

3 Harris 1991, p. 119; Huo 1992, pp. 263-276; and Yang 2013.

4 Johnson 1971, pp. 1-13; and speech by Chairman of Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) Forum, 14 May 2010.

in the former Yugoslavian countries were minimal following the collapse of the Soviet Union. By the 1990s, its main political objective with these states was to gain diplomatic influence vis-à-vis Taiwan.

*Economic.* China's economic interests in former Yugoslavia throughout the 1990s were minimal, owing largely to the protracted conflict in the region. For example, from between 1994 to 2010, Chinese investments in Bosnia and Herzegovina ranged from USD 1 to 2 million, a mere 0.04% of total foreign investments into the country.

*Rank. 1*

## 5. Somalia, 1992-2014<sup>5</sup>

*Strategic.* The strategic location of Somalia was (and remains) of significance to China. The Bab el-Mandeb, which connects the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, is a major oil transit chokepoint, and a significant portion of China's growing oil and gas imports passes through the Gulf of Aden. The volatility of Somalia could therefore pose a threat to China's energy security. For example, approximately 1,265 Chinese commercial vessels passed through the region from January to November 2008, where pirates attacked 20 percent and caught seven. China's involvement in stabilising Somalia also served its broader strategy of securing a Chinese foothold in the Horn of Africa.

*Economic.* Beginning in the 1990s and especially since the 2010s, China has had expanding interests in terms of trade and investment in the Horn of Africa. Since the mid-2010s, China has also sought to acquire direct access to Somalia's natural resources. In 2007, China's state-owned National Offshore Oil Corporation acquired a deal to drill for oil in Somalia's Puntland region. Bilateral trade also increased from USD 19.6 million in 2005 to 67.4 million in 2010. Trade flows, however, were largely one-sided, mainly comprising Chinese exports of construction materials and consumer goods to Somalia.

*Rank. 2*

5 Lanteigne 2013, pp. 289-312; Larik and Weiler 2011, pp. 86; and Jopson 2007.



**6. Libya (1), 1992-1993**  
**Libya (2), 2011**  
**Libya (3), 2011-2015<sup>6</sup>**

*Strategic.* China's strategic interests in Libya during the time periods under examination were fairly limited. However, following the 2011 Libyan crisis, Chinese government faced significant domestic pressure to evacuate more than 35,000 Chinese nationals in Libya who were involved in China's infrastructure and investment projects in the country.

*Economic.* China established an Economic Joint Committee with Libya in 1982, but its economic interests and involvement there in the early 1990s were limited. However, it began to invest more heavily in Libya in its attempt to explore new markets and tap into its extensive energy reserves in the late 1990s. China's investment projects, amounting to around USD 18 billion, focused on telecommunications, infrastructure, and railway construction. Chinese authorities reported losses of more than USD 600 million as a result of the conflict in Libya.

*Rank [Libya (1)].* 1

*Rank [Libya (2)].* 3

*Rank [Libya (3)].* 3

**7. Liberia (1), 1992-2003**  
**Liberia (2), 2006-2016<sup>7</sup>**

*Strategic.* China's strategic interests in Liberia during these periods were limited. However, Liberia twice broke off diplomatic relations with China in support of Taiwan. China therefore wanted to remain engaged in Liberia to safeguard its political influence. Since the mid-1990s, China has also consistently sent observers to perform peacekeeping operations in Liberia. China expanded its peacekeeping assistance to Liberia since 2003 (i.e. 600 engineers, medical personnel and transportation specialists), largely as a

6 Zerba 2014, pp. 1093-1112; Pham 2011; Sun 2014; Pollack 2014, pp. 298-304; and Wuthnow 2013, p. 27.

7 Chiung and Shih 2016, pp. 146-177; Roessler and Blair 2014; Shinn and Eisenman 2012, p. 317; Alessi and Xu 2015; and Hanauer and Morris 2014, pp. 44-116.

reward to Liberia for rescinding its recognition of Taiwan and as part of China's efforts to expand its diplomatic influence in Africa vis-à-vis the US.

*Economic.* China's economic interests in Liberia during these periods were primarily in mining and agriculture. From 2000 to 2003, China was the largest importer of Liberian hardwood timber. Trade between the two countries has grown continuously since the end of the Liberian civil war in 2003. In 2009, China-Union Investment Co. Ltd. won a USD 2.6 billion deal to renovate the Bong Mines, which was the largest investment in Liberia's history. In 2010, China signed six agreements in Liberia, reportedly amounting to almost USD 10 billion. Compared to other African nations, however, Liberia was not a major supplier of crude oil for China.

*Rank [Liberia (1)].* 2

*Rank [Liberia (2)].* 2

## 8. Haiti, 1993-1994<sup>8</sup>

*Strategic.* China had minimal strategic interests in Haiti during this period. China also did not have diplomatic relations with Haiti given the latter's political recognition of Taiwan. It only began to contribute peacekeepers to the UN mission in Haiti in 2004.

*Economic.* China had minimal economic interests in Haiti during this period. China opened a trade office in Haiti in 1997, but this was meant to cultivate informal political ties that could be leveraged in the event that Haiti ceased to recognise Taiwan.

*Rank.* 1

## 9. Angola, 1993-1999<sup>9</sup>

*Strategic.* Angola was of some strategic importance to China during this period. Beijing had supported Angola's liberation movements in the 1960s in the context of anticolonial and later Cold War politics. China's relations

8 Tubilewicz 2012, pp. 449-481; Campbell and Valette 2014; and Crossette 1996.

9 Corkin 2011, pp. 169-180; and Campos and Vines 2008.

with Angola in the 1990s persisted despite the civil war. This was also a result of China's intentions to amass diplomatic allies in Africa.

*Economic.* China's primary economic interests in Angola concerned oil. Angola's bilateral trade with China ranged from USD 150 million to 700 million throughout the 1990s. It became China's second largest trading partner in Africa (after South Africa) in the late 1990s. By the end of 2005, China's bilateral trade with Angola had increased to USD 6.9 billion. China has also engaged in defence cooperation and other forms of operations in Angola, primarily in the oil sectors.

*Rank.* 2

#### 10. Rwanda, 1994-1995<sup>10</sup>

*Strategic.* China had minimal strategic interests in Rwanda during this period. China was also not part of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) from 1993 to 1996 that was meant to help end the Rwandan civil war.

*Economic.* China's economic interests in Rwanda from 1994-1995 were minimal. Rwanda was depleted of human capital and bogged down in a civil war and genocide. Unlike other African states, it was also not resource-rich. China was, however, one of Rwanda's main suppliers of arms during the conflict through intermediaries in Africa. After the genocide, China provided financial assistance to the country in the form of infrastructure and development projects as well as scholarships for Rwandan students to study in China.

*Rank:* 1

#### 11. Sudan (1), 1996 Sudan (2), 2004-2012<sup>11</sup>

*Strategic.* While China did not have significant strategic interests in Sudan in the early to mid-1990s, Sudan became important to China in the early 2000s

10 Shinn and Eisenman 2012, pp. 145-378; Human Rights Watch 2016.

11 Shinn and Eisenman 2012, pp. 250-255; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) databases 2012.

given its rich resources, which could help meet China's increasing energy needs. Given Sudan's strategic location in the African region, it was also an important partner for China to build its diplomatic clout in Africa. In 2005, China played an important role in convincing Khartoum to accept an African Union-UN peacekeeping force, to which China also contributed personnel.

*Economic.* China has been involved in helping Sudan develop its oil sector since the mid-1990s. By 2005, more than 60 percent of Sudan's oil was being exported to China. This also constituted about five percent of China's oil imports. China's state-owned National Petroleum Company also became the biggest foreign player in the Sudanese oil industry and built two pipelines in Sudan in the late 1990s. In 2010, China imported USD 6.7 billion worth of products, mostly oil, from Sudan. Sudan had also become an attractive market for China's exports by the 2000s. In addition, Chinese companies have been heavily involved in several major infrastructure projects, notably the Merowe dam in North Sudan, which was completed in 2009.

*Rank [Sudan (1)]:* 1

*Rank [Sudan (2)]:* 3

**12. Sierra Leone (1), 1997**  
**Sierra Leone (2), 1998-2002<sup>12</sup>**

*Strategic.* China's strategic interests in Sierra Leone during both periods were minimal. As a UNSC permanent member, China supported various UN efforts to resolve Sierra Leone's civil war, such as arms embargoes and peacekeeping missions.

*Economic.* China has invested in the agriculture, healthcare, infrastructure, and education sectors in Sierra Leone since the 1970s. However, China's economic interests in Sierra Leone from between 1997 to 2002 were minimal. While a trade agreement was signed between the countries in 1989, China's involvement in Sierra Leone was limited during the latter's civil war from 1991 to 2002.

*Rank [Sierra Leone (1)]:* 1

*Rank [Sierra Leone (2)]:* 1

12 Shinn and Eisenman 2012, pp. 308-309; Datzberger 2013; and United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone 2005.

### 13. **Afghanistan (Taliban), 1999-2015**<sup>13</sup>

*Strategic.* Afghanistan was (and is) of significant strategic value for China, with security being the top concern. It was imperative for China to ensure that security and political dynamics in Afghanistan—arising from the Taliban, a host of other Islamist terrorist actors, and other international players—did not create instability in a region with two nuclear rivals (i.e. India and Pakistan). In addition, Afghanistan shares a 90km border with China, and active terrorist elements in China's restive Xinjiang region have also been receiving training in Afghanistan. Extremism and terrorism in Afghanistan can therefore threaten China's internal security.

*Economic.* China has provided extensive economic aid to Afghanistan. In 2014 alone, China provided USD 80 million worth of aid to the country. It further promised an additional USD 240 million in aid to Afghanistan over the next three years. China also had some economic interests in the country during this period, aimed primarily at Afghanistan's vast reserves of natural resources. In 2007, the Metallurgical Company of China won a USD 4.4 billion deal to develop the Aynak copper mine in Logar province. China has also invested in the Amu Darya oil fields in northern Afghanistan.

*Rank.* 3

### 14. **Eritrea, 2000-2013** **Ethiopia, 2000-2013**<sup>14</sup>

*Strategic.* China had (and still has) some interest in Eritrea because of its strategic location bordering Djibouti, Ethiopia, Sudan, and the Red Sea. Eritrea is also situated along the world's busiest shipping lanes.

Ethiopia was (and still is) important to China because the African Union's headquarters and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa are

<sup>13</sup> Zhao 2015; and Stanzel 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Eritrea formally became independent from Ethiopia in 1993. See Shinn and Eisenman 2012, pp. 269-278.

located there. China therefore views Ethiopia as an important regional hub. Ethiopia's strategic location (especially its control of Lake Tana, the Blue Nile's source), its significant population, and its economic centrality also made it a promising country for China to engage with.

*Economic.* China's economic engagement of Eritrea was at a nascent stage during this period and was focused on loans, grants, and infrastructure development. China had become Ethiopia's main trading partner by 2006. It also became involved in virtually every aspect of Ethiopia's economy, with investments in energy and road projects, railways, and telecommunications, although the value of China's investments lagged behind those of India, Saudi Arabia, and the US. In late 2010, Ethiopia was in eighth place among African countries with Chinese investments, way below South Africa, and represented only about 0.1 percent of China's total investments abroad.

*Rank.* 2

## 15. Al Qaida/ISIL, 2002-2015<sup>15</sup>

*Strategic.* Due to China's longstanding policy of non-interference, China has been very reluctant to get directly involved in counter-terrorism operations abroad. However, the activities of Al Qaida/ISIL could threaten China's national security, with Xinjiang being particularly vulnerable.

*Economic.* The activities of Al Qaida/ISIL could threaten China's economic interests in the Middle East, particularly in terms of China's continued access to energy resources. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Middle East is China's largest source of crude oil, and China expects to import more than 72 percent of its total oil from the Middle East by 2040. Chinese energy companies have significant investments in Iraq, which could be jeopardised by terrorist activities.

*Rank.* Not applicable as Al Qaida/ISIL are non-state actors.

<sup>15</sup> Chaziza 2016.

## 16. Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 2003-2014<sup>16</sup>

*Strategic.* The DRC was (and is) of some strategic importance to China. In addition to being a large country that China had built relations with as part of its strategy to expand its influence in Africa, China was interested in the DRC's enormous amount of untapped natural resources such as copper, cobalt, platinum, diamonds, gold, oil, and gas. Since 2003, China has also contributed more than 200 personnel annually to the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC.

*Economic.* China was (and is) interested in the DRC as a market for its manufactured goods and as a market for further infrastructure development. In 2010, DRC imports from China reached USD 2.5 billion and exports USD 521 million. Since the late 2000s, China also became a major investor in the DRC copper and cobalt sector. In 2008, Chinese companies entered into a massive USD 9 billion joint venture (Sicomines) to carry out infrastructure refurbishment and the extraction of copper and cobalt in the Congo. During this period, China was also importing timber from the country as well as investing in a major hydroelectric power station.

*Rank.* 2

## 17. Cyprus, 2004<sup>17</sup>

*Strategic.* Cyprus is situated in close proximity to the world's three great sea chokepoints of the Suez Canal, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Strait of Hormuz. It could therefore be an important strategic naval replenishment base for China, which could strengthen China's situational awareness and power projection in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. However, such considerations did not feature in China's considerations until the 2010s. In 2004, China's involvement in Cyprus was largely limited to its support of UNSC resolutions on peace negotiations and the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces.

*Economic.* China's economic interests in Cyprus in 2004 were minimal, with bilateral trade volume at about USD 290 million in 2005 (a 55% increase

<sup>16</sup> Kabemba 2016, pp. 73-87; and Shinn and Eisenman 2012, pp. 290-294.

<sup>17</sup> Lin 2016, pp. 63-78; PRC Embassy in Cyprus 2012; PRC MFA, 'Xi Jinping Meets with President of Cyprus', 15 October 2015.

from 2004). Since the early 2000s, China has been interested in potential investments in logistics infrastructure projects as well as in the gas fields in Cyprus.

*Rank.* 1

**18. Côte d'Ivoire (1), 2004-2011  
Côte d'Ivoire (2), 2010<sup>18</sup>**

*Strategic.* China did not have significant strategic interests in Côte d'Ivoire during these periods. Its involvement was primarily limited to contributing personnel to the UN peacekeeping efforts during the Ivorian civil wars.

*Economic.* China had limited economic interests in Côte d'Ivoire during these periods. China imported some raw materials and cocoa from the country, which amounted to approximately USD 111 million in 2010. China also helped to develop Côte d'Ivoire's state mining firm. Other economic projects were primarily limited to small-scale infrastructure development projects, such as the construction of hydroelectric dams and the laying of fibre optic cables.

*Rank [Côte d'Ivoire (1)].* 1

*Rank [Côte d'Ivoire (2)].* 1

**19. Lebanon, 2005-2007<sup>19</sup>**

*Strategic.* China had some interest in strengthening its relationship with Lebanon as part of its efforts to expand its influence in the Middle East. China deployed peacekeepers as part of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon during the Lebanon-Israel war and subsequently expanded its peacekeeping contingent to 1,000 engineering troops.

*Economic.* China had limited economic interests in Lebanon during this period. In 2004, bilateral trade between the two countries stood at around

18 Shinn and Eisenman 2012, pp. 317-319; and Coulibaly 2009.

19 Medeiros 2009, p. 163; Olimat 2014, p. 145; and Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Lebanon 2005.



USD 730 million. China's main imports from Lebanon were mainly precious metals, minerals, olive oil, wine, and vegetables. Its main exports to Lebanon were machinery, electronics, textiles, and plastic products.

*Rank. 1*

## 20. Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), 2006-2016<sup>20</sup>

*Strategic.* The DPRK was (and still is) of major strategic concern to China. It remains an important strategic buffer, as it shares a long border with China and (at least nominally) shares similar political and ideological affiliations. China has been the DPRK's largest trading partner and main source of critical supplies such as food, arms, and energy resources. Given its own security and economic interests, it was (and still is) imperative for China to prevent war from breaking out on the Korean Peninsula. During this period, Beijing wanted to ensure the political stability of the DPRK but also needed to take into account competing expectations and considerations in the UNSC as well as with respect to other international actors such as the US, South Korea, and Japan.

*Economic.* Compared to its strategic interests, China's economic interests in the DPRK during this period were largely limited to those in its north-eastern provinces bordering the DPRK. Bilateral trade between the two countries were dominated by frontier trade, and while China's state-led investment in the DPRK could easily be affected by sanctions, its small-scale trade could largely proceed. Local governments in these provinces, however, were expecting the central government to support their economic activities and cooperation with the DPRK. China-DPRK trade stood at USD 6.86 billion dollars by 2014. In 2015, the two countries jointly built infrastructure—comprising high-speed rail as well as bulk cargo and container shipping routes—in order to boost the DPRK's exports of coal to China. Economic exchanges with the DPRK during this period also made up about 40 percent of overall trade in China's Dandong city. From Beijing's perspective, such stable economic relations were important in helping to prevent regime collapse in the DPRK.

*Rank. 3*

20 Duchatel and Schell 2013, pp. 17-31; Wuthnow 2013, pp. 59-74; and Albert and Xu 2016. See also Chapter 5 for a closer examination of the case study on the DPRK.

## 21. Burma/Myanmar, 2007<sup>21</sup>

*Strategic.* Myanmar, which shares a land border with China, was (and still is) geographically strategic for Beijing. China can gain access to the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and Southeast Asia through Myanmar's ports and naval installations, which are crucial for China's power projection capabilities. These routes also offer China the possibility of eventually bypassing the Straits of Malacca for its shipments of oil and gas. In addition, Myanmar's location between China and its regional rival India meant that China has an interest in maintaining good relations with Myanmar vis-à-vis India.

*Economic.* China's economic relations with Myanmar during this period were part of its 'Go West' campaign, which started in 2000. Since the early 2000s, Myanmar has been an important energy transportation route for China as well as a source of hydropower and natural gas. By 2005, Myanmar was Yunnan's largest trading partner. From 2001 to 2007, China's exports to Myanmar more than tripled to USD 800.4 million, and its imports more than doubled to USD 231.6 million. In 2006, China signed an agreement with Myanmar on the construction of a gas pipeline from Myanmar's Rakhine state to China's Yunnan province. In the following year, China began to build a pipeline from Myanmar's Sittwe deep-water port to Yunnan, which would allow China to reduce its reliance on the Malacca Straits for its oil shipments.

*Rank.* 3

## 22. Zimbabwe, 2008<sup>22</sup>

*Strategic.* China's strategic interests in Zimbabwe during this period was limited to positioning itself for possible political change in Zimbabwe in order to be able to continue bilateral relations that favoured China's Africa strategy.

*Economic.* China had important economic interests in Zimbabwe during this period, primarily as a result of its demands for minerals and diamonds. Since the early 2000s, China has invested heavily in diamonds in Zimbabwe. In addition, many Chinese businesses started small-scale operations in Zimbabwe, including in the mining, retail, agriculture, telecommunications,

21 Sun 2012, pp. 51-77; Li 2010, pp. 113-133.

22 Shinn and Eisenman 2012, pp. 331-335; Alao 2014; and Zhang 2014.

medical, transportation, and power generation sectors. China imported an average of USD 149 million worth of goods from Zimbabwe between 2003 and 2009. Zimbabwe's imports from China also grew from USD 6 million in 2003 to USD 344 million in 2010.

*Rank.* 2

**23. Syria (1), 2011  
Syria (2), 2012-2016<sup>23</sup>**

*Strategic.* China had minimal strategic interests in Syria. It also did not share Russia's political convictions on Syria. The most significant threat for China was the links between Uyghur terrorist elements and Syria, although the risk remained larger in Afghanistan, which shares a border with Xinjiang. Unlike other major powers, China was also not involved militarily in Syria during these periods.

*Economic.* China had some economic interests in Syria during these periods. China was Syria's top trading partner in 2011. In the same year (i.e. 2011), Syria exported about USD 2.4 billion in goods to China, including electronic equipment and heavy machinery. China's state-owned National Petroleum Corporation was also engaged in Syria's oil exploration and development activities. The company, Sinochem, had also invested heavily in one of Syria's largest oil fields. Further engagements between China and Syria were, however, thwarted by ongoing violence in the country.

*Rank [Syria (1)].* 2

*Rank [Syria (2)].* 2

**24. South Sudan, 2012-2015<sup>24</sup>**

*Strategic.* China's strategic interests in South Sudan during this period were primarily energy-related. After South Sudan gained its independence in

23 Wuthnow 2012; and Clarke and Pantucci 2016. See also Chapter 5 for a closer examination of the case study on Syria.

24 Shinn and Eisenman 2012, pp. 255-256; International Crisis Group 2012; Lynch 2014; Large 2013; Duchatel, Gowan, and Rapnouil 2016.

2011, China had to ensure that its energy interests would be protected under the new South Sudan government, as 75% of Sudan's oil production was located in South Sudan. As Beijing had supported the northern government during the north-south civil war, China had to invest efforts in cultivating favourable diplomatic relations with South Sudan's political leadership and public. South Sudan is also strategically located within the African region.

*Economic.* South Sudan holds the third-largest oil reserves in sub-Saharan African. Therefore, China's economic interests in South Sudan were primarily oil-related. China was the biggest investor in South Sudan's oil industry during this period, amounting to billions of dollars. China's state-owned National Petroleum Corporation controlled a 40 percent stake in South Sudan's largest oil field. As part of China's search for emerging export markets, Chinese companies also invested in other sectors of South Sudan such as agriculture, financial services, infrastructure, and telecommunications. As of 2015, there were more than 150 Chinese enterprises in South Sudan, with investments amounting to more than USD 10 billion.

*Rank.* 3

## 25. **Guinea-Bissau, 2012**<sup>25</sup>

*Strategic.* China had minimal strategic interests in Guinea-Bissau. However, the country shocked Beijing when it switched diplomatic recognition to Taiwan in 1990, only restoring relations with the PRC in 1998. China's main political objective was therefore to remain engaged in the country to ensure that this did not occur again.

*Economic.* China did not have significant economic interests in Guinea-Bissau during this period. China's involvement was largely limited to development assistance in the form of funds for dam construction (amounting to about USD 60 million) and other infrastructure development projects. In 2006, China signed a deep-water fisheries agreement with Guinea-Bissau, which allowed Chinese fishing vessels to operate in Guinea-Bissau's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

*Rank.* 1

25 Horta 2012, pp. 32-39; and Horta 2007. See also Chapter 5 for a closer examination of the case study on Guinea-Bissau.

**26. Yemen, 2012-2016<sup>26</sup>**

*Strategic.* China had (and still has) some strategic interests in Yemen. The primary objective was to ensure that the crisis in Yemen would not threaten China's passage in the strategic Gulf of Aden or Bab el-Mandeb in the Red Sea, given that these routes are critical for the transport of China's energy resources. In addition, as a result of Islamist terrorists involved in the ongoing conflict, China also had to guard against a nexus developing between terrorist elements in Yemen and those in its own Xinjiang province.

*Economic.* China's economic interests in Yemen were limited during this period. It had about 14 enterprises and 450 personnel in Yemen, involved primarily in oil extraction, telecommunications, infrastructure development, and fishing. While China was not importing significant amounts of crude oil from Yemen in absolute terms, the total volume increased by 315 percent in the first two months of 2015 as compared to the same period in 2014.

*Rank.* 2

**27. Central African Republic (CAR), 2013-2014<sup>27</sup>**

*Strategic.* China's strategic interests in the CAR during this period were fairly limited, and its political objective was to safeguard its influence in the CAR vis-à-vis Taiwan.

*Economic.* China's economic interests in the CAR during this period were also limited. In 2010, CAR imported USD 26 million of goods from China and exported about USD 25 million. By 2015, China had become CAR's second largest export partner, accounting for 14.1% of the CAR's total exports. China also provided numerous aid projects for the CAR. Its largest aid project was the construction of a hydropower station (Zhejiang Electric Power Construction Co.), which began in 2011 and cost about USD 117 million.

*Rank.* 1

<sup>26</sup> Chaziza 2015; and Lee 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Shinn and Eisenman 2012, pp. 297-298; and CIA World Factbook 2017.

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