



Article

From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement

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Abstract

Since 2012, some scholars, both Chinese and foreign, have argued that China's assertive foreign policy is doomed to fail. Nevertheless, after examining China's foreign relations in the last two years, this paper finds that China has experienced improved relations rather than deteriorating ones. In comparison with the strategy of keeping a low profile (KLP), the strategy of striving for achievement (SFA) shows more efficiency in shaping a favorable environment for China's national rejuvenation. The author applies the theory of moral realism to explaining the role of the SFA strategy and argues that morality can increase both international political strength and the political legitimacy of a rising power. The key difference between the KLP and the SFA is that the former focuses on economic gains and the latter seeks to strengthen political support. That is the reason that the SFA values the role of morality and the KLP does not. Due to these different goals, the SFA strategy differs from the KLP strategy in aspects of tenets, general layouts, working approaches, and methods. So far, the SFA has achieved progress beyond people's expectation from Xi Jinping in 2012. Xi's strong leadership may become a new case suitable for illustrating the theory of moral realism.

The year of 2010 was a turning point for both China's international status and its relations with some countries related to East Asia. In 2010, China's GDP surpassed Japan's to rank only behind the United States. The year of 2010 also witnessed rising tensions between China and the United States, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam. These tensions intensified China's domestic debate over the necessity of

adhering to the *taoguangyanghui* (keeping a low profile, KLP hereafter) foreign policy strategy adopted by Deng Xiaoping during 1990–1991.¹ This debate has lasted for years before Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered a speech at the foreign affairs conference of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on October 24 2013.² In this speech, Xi formally presented the strategy of *fenfayouwei* (striving for achievement, SFA hereafter), signaling a transformation of China's foreign strategy from the KLP to the SFA. Since the media broadcasted Xi's speech, many scholars, both Chinese and foreign, have questioned whether the SFA strategy can create a better international environment for China than the KLP strategy. Based on the theory of moral realism, this article will discuss the role that the SFA strategy will play in shaping a favorable international environment for China's national rejuvenation.

Defenses for the KLP Strategy

The KLP strategy faced no challenges inside China in the 1990s. Internationally, the 'China threat' group tried to interpret the KLP as China hiding her true capabilities while biding her time for revenge. Chinese scholars did not question the efficacy of the KLP strategy until 2002 when some Chinese scholars argued that the KLP strategy was no longer suitable for China in the 21st century because Deng Xiaoping adopted it in response to the situation in the early 1990s.³ In the early 2000s, the main stream of Chinese scholars still defended the importance of the KLP strategy in Chinese foreign policy and the necessity of adhering to it.⁴ Critiques of the KLP

- 1 Dai Bingguo, 'Jianchi zou heping fanzhan daolu' ('Sincere in Purchasing Peaceful Development'), December 7, 2010, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2010/12-07/2704985.shtml>.
- 2 Qian Tong, 'Xi Jinping zai zhoubian waijiao gongzuo zuotanhui shang fabiao zhongyao jianghua' ('Xi Jinping Delivering an Important Speech at the Conference of Diplomatic Work Toward Surrounding Countries'), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), October 26, 2013, p. 1. During October 24–25, 2013, all members of the Standing Committee of the CCP attended a conference on diplomatic works. This conference was the highest level meeting on foreign policy decisions since the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949. Before 2006, the Chinese government only held diplomatic envoy conferences when the president or the premier delivers a speech on foreign policy to ambassadors and heads of institutions working on diplomacy. The 2006 foreign affairs conference was the first time local provincial governments' officials were present along with heads of government institutions.. Hu Jintao, then president, delivered a speech at the conference but other members of the Standing Committee of Politburo of the CCP did not attend the 2006 meeting.
- 3 Ye Zicheng, 'Guanyu taoguangyanghui he youshouzuowe – zaitan Zhongguo de daguo waijiao xintai' ('About Keeping a Low Profile and Making Achievement – More Discussion about China's Major Power Diplomacy'), *Taipingyang xuebao* (*Journal of the Pacific Ocean*), No. 1 (2002), pp. 62–66.
- 4 Qu Xing, 'Jianchi "taoguangyanghui, yousuozuowe" de waijiao zhanglue' ('Adhering to the Diplomatic Strategy of "Keeping a Low Profile and Making Achievement"'), *Zhongguo renmin daxue xuebao* (*The Journal of Renmin University*), No. 5 (2001), pp. 13–17.

strategy gained momentum after Sino-Japanese relations deteriorated because Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who came to power in 2002, paid annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine where 14 Japanese World War II war criminals were honored.⁵ Unexpectedly, despite increasing domestic critiques, the KLP strategy gained more support from foreigners, especially those who once attacked it as a Chinese conspiracy. However, for more than two decades, the KLP continues to be supported by the majority in China. Even after Xi formally transformed Chinese foreign policy strategy from the KLP to the SFA, there still exists strong domestic support for adhering to the KLP strategy.

Official Defense of the KLP Strategy

Many government officials continued to argue for keeping the KLP. Many Chinese veteran diplomats regard the KLP strategy as the foundation of China's foreign policy; and one of them even argued that the KLP strategy must be kept for at least a century, because China is still very weak and its rise is a long process.⁶

One most recent defense for the KLP strategy from high ranking officials was an article by the then State Councilor Dai Bingguo in 2010. His central defense was that China will not be able to retain a peaceful political environment for economic development if the CCP abandons the KLP strategy. In the article, he interpreted the KLP as 'being moderate and cautious, undertaking no leadership, raising no banner, searching for no expansion, not running after hegemony and being consistent with the idea of peaceful development'.⁷ These key points in this statement were originally brought up by Deng Xiaoping in 1990.⁸ The phrases 'undertaking no leadership' and 'raising no banner' suggest that China will not challenge American global leadership to avoid a zero sum game between China's national rejuvenation efforts and America's unchallenged global dominance since the end of the Cold War. This will help prevent the United States from focusing on containing the rise of China as

- 5 He Zongqiang, 'Wo wajiao xin zhexue: shijie tiaozheng youli Zhongguo taoguangyanghui ying jiangchi' ('Our New Diplomatic Philosophy: The World Adjustment Favorable to China We Should Adhere to Keeping a Low Profile'), *21 shiji huanqiu baodao* (Global Report in the 21st Century), January 2, 2003, <http://news.sohu.com/73/53/news205415373.shtml>; Xing Yue and Zhang Jibing, "'Taoguangyanghui" zhanlue zai sikao - jianlun ruhe shuli Zhongguo de guoji xingxiang' ('Rethinking the Strategy of "Keeping a Low Profile" - How to Establish a Good International Image for China'), *Guoji guancha* (International Observation), No. 6, (2006), pp. 13–19.
- 6 Wu Jingcai and Li Jing, 'Wu Jianmin shu Zhongguo wajiao 60 nian bianhua: taoguangyanghui renyao guan 100 nian' ('Wu Jianmin Describing China's Diplomacy of 60 Years: Keeping a Low Profile Should Be Guideline for 100 Years), June 1, 2009, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/news/2009/06-01/1713676.shtml>.
- 7 Dai Bingguo, 'Sincere in Purchasing Peaceful Development'.
- 8 Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping Volume III (1982-1992)* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1994), p. 350.

a global superpower. The phrases ‘searching for no expansion’ and ‘not running after hegemony’ indicate that other countries should not fear of the rapid growth of China’s power. The terms of ‘being moderate and cautious’ and ‘peaceful development’ were adopted by Hu Jintao’s administration. ‘B[b]eing moderate and cautious’ was purposely stated ahead of all other phrases for the sake of reducing the negative connotation of ‘keeping a low profile’.

These official defenses of the KLP strategy have been challenged by three facts. First, after the 2008 Olympic Games, China faced ever increasing pressure from the international society to take up more responsibility over security issues. Both developed and developing countries accused China of acting irresponsibly in its unwillingness to do so. They interpreted ‘undertaking no leadership’ as a rejection to participating in non-China centric international security issues and they regarded China’s insistence on identifying itself as a developing country as reluctance to providing economic aid to developing countries.

Second, in 2010, the Obama administration adopted a strategy to rebalance China in East Asia. Many believed that the KLP strategy has not prevented the United States from targeting China as a major strategic competitor. Third, maritime disputes with Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam reoccurred in 2009, further indicating that the KLP strategy could not even appease neighboring countries. These facts showed that the KLP strategy can no longer provide a favorable environment for China. In fact, the official interpretation of the KLP as ‘being moderate and cautious’ revealed the Chinese policy makers’ dilemma over the efficacy of the KLP and their reluctance to abandoning it.

Academic Defense

The KLP had strong support among Chinese scholars but now it faced challenges. As previously mentioned, in 2010, the United States adopted a rebalancing strategy to rein in the rise of China. In the same year, the Japanese government detained a Chinese fisherman near the Diaoyu Islands (a.k.a. the Senkaku Islands in Japanese) as a result of maritime territorial disputes with both countries claiming sovereignty over the area.

These two incidents intensified the debate over the necessity of adhering to the KLP strategy among Chinese scholars to such a degree that the *Global Times*, one of the most popular newspapers in China, held a public debate about the KLP strategy in late 2011.⁹ Despite growing tensions between China and the United States as well as Japan, many Chinese scholars continued to firmly stand by the official stance in defense of the KLP strategy. Qin Yaqing, a leading constructivist International Relations (IR) scholar in China and the Executive President of Chinese University of

9 ‘Zhuanjia jibian “taoguangyanghui”’: heping jueqi bu paichu wuli fanji qinfan’ (‘Experts Intensive Debate about “Keeping a Low Profile”: Peaceful Rise Does Not Exclude Military Counter-Aggression’), December 17, 2011, <http://china.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-12/2273974.html>.

Foreign Affairs, has been defending the necessity for the KLP strategy for years. His argument is typical of the constructivist theory emphasizing Chinese culture and characteristics rather than capability.¹⁰

In addition, leading scholars of international studies at Peking University, Fudan University, and Renmin University also defended the KLP strategy during 2011–2012. These three universities established the discipline of international politics in 1964 under the direction of the late Premier Zhou Enlai and were ranked by the Chinese Education Ministry as the top three educational institutions of international politics in 2012.¹¹ Wang Jisi, Dean of the School of International Politics at Peking University, argued that China must adhere to the KLP strategy because China's current political strength is a façade, while in reality China is still weak.¹² Shen Dingli, Executive Director of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University, argued that it is wrong to abandon the KLP strategy because China's rise is a long-time coming and the KLP is a long-term strategy.¹³ Jin Canrong, Associate Dean of the School of International Relations at Renmin University, argued that China should retain the KLP strategy because it will improve the external conditions and allow China to focus on its domestic problems.¹⁴

Although the above scholars may be affiliated with different schools of IR theories, they defend the KLP strategy with quite similar arguments, i.e. China is weaker than the United States and therefore China should avoid confrontation with the United States by continuing with the KLP strategy. One weakness of their defense is that the KLP strategy has served as a constant in China's foreign policy since 1990, but it cannot explain the dramatic ups-and-downs in Sino-American relations. The China–US relations experienced several crises after the Cold War, such as the Chinese cargo ship incident in 1993, bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia

- 10 Zhou Zhaojun, 'Zhuanfang Qin Yaqing: shiqida hou Zhongguo jiang gengzhongshi duobian wutai' ('Interview of Qin Yaqing: China's Diplomacy Concerns More about Multilateral Platform after the Seventeenth Party Congress'), October 12, 2007, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64093/64099/6369987.html>; Wang Zhao, 'Qiangying huoshi dui ziji zhuida de buli' ('Tough Policy May be Most Harmful to Ourselves'), January 1, 2013, <http://roll.sohu.com/20130101/n362170348.shtml>.
- 11 Academic Degree Center of Education Ministry of the PRC, 'Xueke pinggu gaoxiao paiming: 0203 Zhengzhixue (2012)' ('University Discipline Ranks: 0203 Political Science 2012'), January 29, 2013, <http://edu.sina.com.cn/kaoyan/2013-01-29/1112370365.shtml>.
- 12 Wang Jisi, 'Zhongguo de gouji dingwei wenti yu "taoguangyanghui, yousuozuowei" de zhanlue sixiang' ('The Issue of China's International Status and the "Keeping a Low Profile, Making Achievement" Strategy'), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (International Studies)*, No. 2 (2011), p. 4.
- 13 Shen Dingli, 'Full Text of a Speech at the Annual Conference of *The Global Time*', http://www.360doc.com/content/12/0114/11/3163972_179318980.shtml.
- 14 Jin Canrong, 'Chengshu de daguo shi lixingde – douzhi douyong bu douqi' ('A Mature Big Power is Rational – Competing Wisely and Bravely but not Angrily'), September 17, 2012, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2012/0917/c40531-19025384-1.html>.

in 1999, the clash of Chinese and American airplanes over the South China Sea in 2001 and the confrontation at the UN climate conference in Copenhagen in 2009. These events showed that the United States is not unwilling to adopt a confrontational policy against China even if China adheres to the KLP strategy. Obama's rebalancing strategy against China in 2010 is further proof.

International Support for the KLP

Since 2010, more and more foreign scholars, especially Americans, have come to fear that China might abandon the KLP strategy. Previously, many foreign scholars regarded the KLP as a Chinese conspiracy, especially in the 1990s when China's material capability was much weaker compared to the 2010s. After the unfriendly exchanges between the then Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and the then American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July 2010, foreign scholars started to accuse China of behaving assertively and suggested that China should not abandon the KLP strategy. Even John J. Mearsheimer, a leading scholar of offensive realism, suggested that China should adhere to the KLP strategy, 'Because your neighbors fear your rise, they challenge you. I would suggest Chinese leaders to be cautious and keep a low profile if I can give them any advice. Because you have time, be quiet'.¹⁵ Meanwhile, he also argued that China cannot have better relations with other countries as long as it gets stronger, no matter what it does.¹⁶

Mearsheimer's statement is representative of many foreign scholars' contradictory arguments. On the one hand, they accuse the KLP strategy as a conspiracy designed by the Chinese government to hide its capability. On the other hand, they blame China for replacing the KLP strategy with an assertive policy.¹⁷ In fact, most foreign strategic analysts would still consider the growth of Chinese power since the end of the Cold War as a threat regardless of whether China adhered to the KLP strategy or abandoned it. However, their argument cannot explain why China's relations with other nations were much better in the 2010s, even when China's foreign policy turned more assertive compared to the 1990s. Their arguments look even more insufficient in explaining the more current reality of 2013 when China consolidated relations with most of its neighbors except Japan and the Philippines. China adopted an unprecedented assertive policy against Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine which honors World War II criminals in December 2013. Chinese officials publicly stated that Abe has closed the door for dialogues, which signals that Chinese leaders will not meet with their Japanese

15 'Yan Xuetong, Mearsheimer: Zhongguo nengfou heping jueqi?' ('Yan Xuetong, Mearsheimer: Can China Rise Peacefully?'), November 11, 2013, http://www.21c.com.net/articles/qqsw/zlwj/article_2013110594793.html.

16 *Ibid.*

17 David Pelling, 'No One is Immune from Beijing's "Gravity Machine"', *Financial Times*, December 11, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/intl/comment/columnists/davidpelling>.

counterparts as long as Abe stays in power.¹⁸ Even though the Chinese assertive action intensified the diplomat dispute between China and Japan, one positive result is the increasing international criticisms on the Japanese government. Not only did Western media criticize Japan, but Japan's major ally, the US government, also ordered its Embassy in Tokyo to issue a formal statement expressing disappointment with the Japanese government.¹⁹ The explicit expression of disappointment over Abe's shrine visit by the American government is also unprecedented.

As is obvious, the KLP did not stop Abe from visiting the shrine, neither has it stopped America from criticizing Japan when China turns assertive towards Japan. The question is how can we explain all these inconsistencies and what theoretical lenses can help us better understand the influence of KLP strategy in the new era and its relationship to the SFA strategy in China's foreign policy.

Theoretical Framework

After Xi Jinping adjusted Chinese foreign policy from the KLP to the SFA, IR scholars worldwide made significantly divergent predictions about the consequence of this strategic adjustment. However, these predictions did not taking into sufficient consideration of the strategic environment for the emergence of the KLP and the SFA strategy respectively, nor their strategic impact on world politics. To answer the question of which strategy, the SFA or the KLP, can create a better environment for China's rise under bipolarization, we must first look at the impact of these two strategies. This article will address the impact of the SFA on China's relations with the United States, European powers, developing countries, and Japan via the theoretical framework of moral realism.

Moral Realism: A New Analytical Lens

The analysis in this article is based on three realist core assumptions: First, anarchy is the nature of the international system and security dilemmas are inevitable. Because states are very sensitive to their relative power gap with others, it is impossible for the second largest global power to hide its strength during the forming process of bipolarity. Second, foreign policy aims at achieving national interests and international power is an important part of the national interests of major powers. The priority of national interests is determined by a state's international status. For the second largest power to balance against the top power, it needs strategic allies more urgently than economic profits. Third, the competition for power is a

18 'FM: Abe Shut Door on Dialogue with China', January 7, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/video/2014-01/07/c_133024577.htm.

19 Takashi Oshima, 'U.S. Expresses Disappointment at Abe Visit to Yasukuni Shrine', *The Asahi Shimbun*, December 27, 2013, http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201312270048.

zero sum game and structural conflicts between the rising power and the existing power are inevitable. When the strategy of annexation is not available, the competition will turn to how to make more allies.

This article hypothesizes that the SFA strategy will serve China's goal of national rejuvenation better than the KLP by attracting more allies. The key necessary condition for a major power to rise up is to establish its international leadership based on solid strategic credibility. A rising power cannot build up its global strategic credibility without providing security protection and economic benefits to other nations, especially its neighbors. While the KLP focuses only on China's own economic development through economic cooperation, the SFA strategy aims at making more friends by letting others benefit from China's growth. Therefore, the SFA strategy can contribute to China's efforts of rejuvenation.

This article will analyze the differences between the KLP strategy and the SFA strategy before evaluating their impacts on Chinese foreign policy. It is difficult to pin point exactly when China shifted from the KLP to the SFA. Xi Jinping was elected as the General Secretary of the CCP in November 2012 but he has been involved in Chinese foreign policy decision making for quite long. He suggested that China needs to establish a new type of major power relations with the United States during his visit to the United States as Vice President in February 2012.²⁰ On July 7 that same year, he delivered his first public speech on China's security policy at the First World Peace Forum founded by Tsinghua University. In that speech, he pointed out: 'A country which pursues its own development, security and well-being must also let other countries pursue their development, security and well-being'.²¹ The ideas of a new type of major power relations and of *gongying* (win-win for all) became main components of Xi's SFA strategy.

After Xi assumed the position of the President of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in March 2013, there appeared three important documents illustrating the SFA strategy comprehensively in that year. These are Wang Yi's speech at the Second World Peace Forum in July, Yang Jiechi's article in *Qiushi* (Seeking Truth) in August and Xi's own speech on diplomacy toward surrounding countries in October. In the Chinese language, the phrase 'striving for achievement' in Xi's speech does not logically and linguistically associate with the phrase of 'keeping a low profile'. This article does not argue that this speech was the beginning of the transition of China's foreign policy from the KLP to the SFA, but rather it provided the necessary legitimization of the transition. To understand the meaning of the SFA strategy, one will have to analyze the three documents, namely Xi's speech, Yang's article, and Wang's statement.

20 Xi Jinping, 'Gongchuan ZhongMei hezuo huoban guanxi de meihao mingtian' ('Jointly Creating a Beautiful Future for China-US Cooperative Partnership') February 17, 2012, <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/17137277.html>.

21 Xi Jinping, 'Work Together to Maintain World Peace and Security', *Foreign Affairs Journal*, No. 5 (2013), p. 3.

In the following sections, I will first clarify the differences between the KLP and the SFA, and test my hypothesis with four cases, namely China's relations with the United States, major European powers, developing countries, and Japan, respectively during 2012–2013. Because Xi Jinping presented the idea of a new type of major power relations in February 2012, this article will use China's relationship with major powers during 2012–2013 to measure the impact of the SFA and use bilateral relations during 2000–2011 to measure the impact of the KLP. The case of China–US relations is used to test the efficiency of the KLP and the SFA in maintaining stability between a rising power and the existing power under structural conflicts. The case of China–European relations is designed for testing the role of the SFA in the consolidation of strategic cooperation between China and other major powers. The case of China–developing-country relations is used to test the SFA's effect on reducing relatively weaker states' fear of rising powers. The case of China–Japanese relations is designed to test whether there is a causal relation between the SFA and the deterioration of China–Japan relations.

The qualitative case studies will be followed by a quantitative analysis of China's relations with the United States, European powers, and Japan using the data of *Foreign Relations* collected and coded by the Institute of Modern International Relations at Tsinghua University. This available dataset makes it possible to combine qualitative and quantitative tests for this research. Unfortunately this dataset does not include data on Chinese relations with developing countries. Therefore, the case study of China's relations with developing countries will be qualitative only.

Strategic Credibility and International Morality

This article regards 'strategic credibility' as a key variable in shaping a better environment for China's national rejuvenation. In the past two decades, the KLP strategy had successfully created a favorable international environment for China's economic development, but not its rejuvenation. During 1992–2011, China's share of world trade increased from 0.02% to 10% but China's relations with the rest of world had seen no substantial improvement.²² The favorable environment for economic development did not bring China more friends or help China build a good global image. The public perception of the China threat persisted. Without a good national image founded on solid reputation, it is impossible for China to achieve the goal of national rejuvenation. Therefore, to achieve a favorable environment for China's national rejuvenation, it is key for the SFA to emphasize strategic credibility.

Strategic credibility is the lowest end of international morality. Xunzi said: 'Humane authority follows after establishing morality and hegemony follows after establishing credibility' (*yilierwang, xinlierba* in Chinese).²³ According to Xunzi,

22 <http://unctadstat.unctad.org>.

23 Sun Anbang and Ma Yinhua, *Xuzi* (Taiyuan: Shangxi guji chubanshe, 2003), p. 115.

strategic credibility is the lowest level of morality for an international leadership to be accepted by other states. Some scholars label me as a moral realist because of my argument that China cannot win the strategic competition for international leadership with the United States unless it adopts a humane authority strategy.²⁴ Many people assume that a realist theory should not be concerned about the role of morality in international politics. This might be true for structural realism and offensive realism. However, as a matter of fact, among the six principles of political realism suggested by Hans J. Morgenthau, the founding father of IR realism, two are about morality. He even has a chapter specialized on international morality in his most read book *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. In the book, Morgenthau reminds people that the international morality plays major roles in international politics but it may be wrongly used for bad purposes.²⁵ He also reminds readers that 'A discussion of international morality must guard against the two extremes of either overrating the influence of ethics upon international politics or underestimating it by denying that statesmen and diplomats are moved by anything but considerations of material power'.²⁶

When Mearsheimer argues that China will be more threatening to others when its foreign policy turns more concerned about morality, he implies that international morality has been what the United States claimed or what Morgenthau termed 'they pretend to observe' or 'declare they ought to observe'.²⁷ In this article, the term 'strategic credibility' or 'morality of human authority' refers to the moral rules actually observed by the international community rather than those used to cover up military aggression. Different from liberalism which exports the ideology of democracy and free trade with military might, moral realism follows the doctrine of 'no rejection to those who come to learn and never go out to lecture others' (*laierbujū, buwangjiaozhi* in Chinese).²⁸ One thing is true, imposing one's ideology or morality on others will inevitably lead to international conflicts, even military clashes. Nevertheless, civilization, not conflicts, will follow when morality is used for self-discipline. For moral realism, foreign policies featuring self-disciplined morality aim at obtaining more international support besides a moral image. Regarding the

24 Zhang Feng, 'Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2012), p. 96.

25 Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 7th edition. Revised by Kenneth W. Thompson and W. David Clinton (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), p. 12.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 240.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 240.

28 *Liji* said: '*Liwenquyuren, buwenquren. Liwenlaixue, buwenwangjiao*' ('Learning rites from others and not using rites to control others. Hearing about the rites and come to learn, not going to teach those who never heard of rites').

political moral principles that China proposed to the international community, Xi Jinping told Chinese officials: 'We should first practice those ideas ourselves'.²⁹

Although moral realism and classical realism agree that morality has an impact on the making of foreign policy, they are different in three aspects of morality. First classical realism views the function of international morality as being the protection of human life, while moral realism asserts that international morality also plays a role in the legitimization of policy and an increase of national power.³⁰ These two functions of international morality will be discussed in the following section. Secondly, classical realism argues that foreign policy consistent with international morality actually sacrifices national interests while moral realism contends that moral foreign policy is favorable to the strategic interest of a rising power.³¹ The top strategic interest of a rising power is to establish a new world order. It cannot achieve that goal if its foreign policy is fundamentally contrary to international morality. Thirdly, classical realism deems that nationalism is not humanitarian while moral realism argues that nationalist policy of a humane authority state (*wang*) can be humanitarian when its policy is guided by the concerns of global leadership (*you tianxia*).³² Humane authority is an ancient Chinese political concept about the highest form of world leadership based on both material strength and morality.³³ Moral realism modernizes the morality of humane authority with its principles of fairness, justice and civility.³⁴

Power and Strength

To understand the importance of morality in the SFA strategy, we have to distinguish between political power and material strength. In this article, 'power' is defined as one state's influence on the minds and actions of other states, which is similar to Morgenthau's definition.³⁵ 'Strength' is defined as elements of national capability. This definition is similar to 'elements of national power' in Morgenthau's book.³⁶ Linguistic-wise, 'power' has several meanings in English, including 'possession of control, authority, influence' and 'ability of act, physical might, mental or moral efficacy'.³⁷ Morgenthau confused his readers by using the word 'power' to express influence and capability interchangeably. In Chinese,

29 Qian, 'Xi Jinping Delivering an Important Speech at the Conference of Diplomatic Work Toward Surrounding Countries'.

30 Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, pp. 241–47.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 244.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 259.

33 Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 86–88.

34 Yan Xuetong, 'New Values for New International Norms', *China International Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2013), pp. 15–28.

35 Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, pp. 30 and 113.

36 *Ibid.*, Chapter 9, pp.122–62.

37 *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Massachusetts: G. & C Merriam Company, 1977), p. 902.

quanli (power) and *shili* (strength) are two separate words which basically cover the whole range of meanings of the concept of 'power' in English. As a result of the dominating influence of American IR studies, the confusion between power and strength could not be avoided.

To avoid the confusion between goals and tools in analyzing the KLP strategy and the SFA strategy, this article will regard 'power' as a foreign policy goal and 'strength' as tools used for increasing international influence. Among the elements of national strength, political leadership is the key factor. Ancient Chinese philosophers believed that political morality is very important for leadership capability. Xunzi argued that humane authority is the highest end of world leadership which is based on the strongest state's leader's morality.³⁸

International morality can legitimize a state's action thus increase a state's capability of international mobilization. Under the condition of equal strength, a moral state is able to make more friends and get more international support than a less moral state. In general, foreign policies aiming at making friends will dedicate more attention to morality than those targeting at economic interests. Therefore, the SFA strategy suggests 'a new concept of morality and interests' (*xinxing yili guan*) and 'a community of shared destinies' (*mingyun gongtongti*). These two concepts appeared first in Wang Yi's speech in June 2013. He said: 'China will vigorously uphold a new concept of morality and interests and establish a community of shared destinies with other developing countries'.³⁹ Since then, they have frequently appeared in official speeches and documents.

National Rejuvenation and Alliance

This article regards 'national rejuvenation' as the independent variable driving the SFA strategy. Xi Jinping defined national rejuvenation in the Chinese dream which became the top national goal.⁴⁰ The national rejuvenation as a phrase literally refers to resuming China's historical international status as the world's most advanced state during the period of Zhenguan Prosperity (627–649 AD) in early Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD). Today this phrase specifically refers to China's efforts to catch up with the United States in terms of comprehensive national power. When the Chinese government assigns national rejuvenation as the goal of the SFA strategy, the competition for international leadership between China and the United States will be inevitable. As the only superpower, the United States regarded its

38 Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought Modern Chinese Power*, pp. 86–88.

39 Wang Yi, 'Exploring the Path of Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics', *Foreign Affairs Journal*, No. 5 (2013), p. 19.

40 Kristie Lu Stout, 'Is Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" a Fantasy?', July 17, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/26/world/asia/chinese-dream-xi-jinping/index.html>.

global domination as the most important national interest served by its foreign policy. In his State of Union address of 2010, President Obama told the Congress that ‘I do not accept second place for the United States of America’.⁴¹ The structural conflict between China and the United States for the leading position will drive them to compete for more strategic alliances.

Alliance-making has been a traditional strategy of great powers to establish international leadership since ancient times. During the Spring and Autumn Period (722–481 BCE), Guanzi said, ‘A state will become a humane authority if it makes friends with most states and it can be a hegemon if it makes friends with half of states’ (*de tianxia zhi zhong zhe wang, de qi ban zhe ba* in Chinese).⁴² Both alliance making and annexation are strategies for great powers to compete for international domination in history. Nevertheless, the former became the only available strategy after the UN Charter illegalized annexation of other’s territory in 1945. The failure of Nazi Germany and the Japanese militarists in World War II also illustrated the ineffectiveness of annexation in the modern world. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union respectively established the NATO and the Warsaw Pact, two blocs of alliance countries. For maintaining its world domination, in 2010 the United States adopted a rebalance strategy, which sought to consolidate cooperation with traditional allies, to make non-NATO alliance with new friends and develop strategic cooperation with non-allies. As long as China regards national rejuvenation as its foreign policy goal, it has to abandon the non-alliance principle adopted in 1982.⁴³ The following section will discuss how the SFA strategy replaced the KLP’s goal of making money with making friends.

Differences between the SFA and the KLP

Most China watchers are familiar with the content of the KLP strategy, but few of them clearly understand the differences between the SFA and the KLP because the Chinese government did not provide any official clarification. To better compare the differences of these two strategies, we have to peruse the three documents by Xi Jinping, Yang Jiechi, and Wang Yi, respectively. Xi Jinping’s speech is very helpful for understanding the goals, tenets, general layouts, working approaches, and methods of the SFA strategy.

41 ‘Obama’s State of the Union Transcript 2010: Full Text’, January 27, 2010, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0110/32111_Page2.html.

42 Shen Guanzhi, *Guanzi yizhu (Translation and Notes of Guanzi)* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1998), p. 269.

43 Hu Yaobang, ‘Quanmian kaichuang shehuizhuyi xiandaihua jianshe de xin jumian’ (‘Starting a New Phase of Socialist Modernization Construction’), *Shier da yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian shang (Collections of Important Documents Since the 12th Party Congress)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1986), pp. 39–40.

Political Orientation versus Economic Orientation

The goal of the KLP strategy is maintaining peace in sounding areas for China's economic development. For instance, China gave first priority to preventing war on the Korean Peninsula rather than to denuclearizing the region. The goal of the SFA strategy also addresses the importance of regional peace and stability, but it also emphasizes that foreign policy should serve the need of national rejuvenation not just economic development. The concrete agenda of national rejuvenation is to establish a moderately prosperous society by the hundredth anniversary of the CCP in 2021, and a rich and strong socialist country by the hundredth anniversary of the PRC in 2049.⁴⁴ In his speech, Xi stressed that the strategic goal of China's diplomatic works regarding surrounding countries is to serve the implementation of national rejuvenation, to consolidate a friendly neighborhood, to protect national sovereignty, security and development, to improve political relations with surrounding countries, to strengthen economic interdependence, to deepen security cooperation, and to establish close cultural relations.⁴⁵ According to Xi, the goals of China's diplomatic works are mainly political, different from the economic goals of the KLP strategy. Even the target of strengthening economic interdependence is out of political concerns rather than economic interests. We can simplify the different goals of the KLP and SFA, respectively as making money and making friends.

The change in the goals of Chinese foreign policy from serving the need for economic development to national rejuvenation injected new initiatives into China's foreign policy. Under the KLP guideline, China passively adapted itself to changes in the international environment. The SFA strategy indicates that China will take initiatives to shape its external environment in a favorable direction. Xi asked Chinese officials to keep the big picture in mind in their work and he interpreted the big picture as 'to strive for a favorable external environment for national reform, development and stability, to protect national sovereignty, security and developing interests'.⁴⁶ It is obviously more difficult for China to shape a favorable international environment for national rejuvenation than to maintain a peaceful environment for economic construction. Compromise is an effective approach to avoid conflicts but it may not be a good method to obtain a favorable environment. For the sake of a favorable international environment for its national rejuvenation, China has to actively shape the external situation instead of adapting itself to the changes in external conditions. Xi encouraged Chinese officials 'to bravely undertake responsibility, to be creative and more initiative in achieving progress in diplomatic work toward surrounding countries'.⁴⁷

44 'Full Text of Hu Jintao's Report at 18th Party Congress', November 17, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/17/c_131981259_3.htm.

45 Qian, 'Xi Jinping Delivering an Important Speech at the Conference of Diplomatic Work toward Surrounding Countries'.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

Undertaking Responsibility versus Undertaking No Leadership

With different goals, the SFA and the KLP inevitably adopt different tenets. The tenets of SFA are mainly illustrated by the four Chinese characters of ‘*qin* (being close), *cheng* (credible), *hui* (benefiting) and *rong* (inclusive)’, while the tenets of KLP are to undertake no leadership, insist on non-alliance and give first priority to relations with the United States. In Xi’s speech, ‘being close, credible, benefiting and inclusive’ means that China should get closer to surrounding countries than before, build up strategic credibility among neighbors, provide them benefit from China’s economic growth, and develop regional cooperation with an open mind.⁴⁸ According to Yang Jiechi, President Xi emphasizes that China’s policy toward surrounding countries should politically insist on the principles of justice, fairness, and morality rather than economic interests.⁴⁹ This means that China’s policy toward surrounding states will be more concerned about strategic relations rather than economic cooperation.

‘Being closer’ to surrounding states does not only mean improving relations with neighbors but also implies that China will no longer take a neutral stance or side with the United States in conflicts between the United States and China’s neighbors. After the Cold War, China gave first priority to its relations with the United States, which was known as *zhongmei guanxi shi zhongzhongzhizhong* in Chinese. During 2010–2011, Chinese scholars debated whether Obama’s pivot/rebalancing strategy is a tactical policy for winning the presidential election or a strategic strategy for preventing China’s rise. That debate ended after Obama said in November 2012 that it was not a coincidence for him to arrange his first international trip to ASEAN countries immediately after winning the second term of Presidency.⁵⁰ Chinese policy makers realized that it is no longer possible to expect the United States to continue its strategic focus on the Middle East, and the efficacy of the KLP strategy was down to zero.

Since then, the phrase ‘*jiegouxing maodun*’ (structural contradiction) was widely used in describing the competition between China and the United States in official speeches. In his speech, Xi also said: ‘Surrounding area is strategically extremely important to our country in terms of geography, natural environment and mutual relations.’⁵¹ The word ‘extremely’ indicates that China will regard the surrounding area

48 *Ibid.*

49 Yang Jiechi, ‘Xin xingshi xia Zhongguo waijiao lilun he shijian chuangxin’ (‘China’s Creation of Diplomatic Theories and Practice in New Situation’), *Qiushi zazhi* (*Seeking Truth*), No. 16 (2013), p. 9.

50 Li Yuxin, ‘Obama xuanfengshi fangwen dongnanya baigong cheng Yazhou jiang cheng waijiao zhouxin’ (‘Obama’s Whirlwind Visit to South East Asia, The White House Said Asia Will Be Diplomatic Axils’), November 19, 2012, <http://www.chinanews.com/gj/2012/11-19/4338670.shtml>.

51 Qian, ‘Xi Jinping Delivering an Important Speech at the Conference of Diplomatic Work Toward Surrounding Countries’.

at least as important as the United States if not more important. This change was also seen from the level of conference at which he delivered this speech in October 2013. Those who attended this conference were all members of Standing Committee, all members of the Politburo in Beijing, all secretaries of the Secretariat of the Central Committee, State Councilors, members of Leading Group of Foreign Affairs, all provincial party secretaries and governors, ministers of party, central government, military and non-governmental institutions, heads of related financial institutions, and major state enterprises.⁵² This was the highest level conference on diplomatic work in China since the beginning of communist leadership in 1949.

'Credibility' is regarded as a key factor for a good leader, and strategic credibility is a precondition for becoming a humane authority or a hegemon in Chinese traditional political thoughts. The fact that Xi adopted credibility as one of the four foreign policy principles shows that China's foreign policy is transformed from weak-state diplomacy to strong-power diplomacy. After the Cold War, '*daguo waijiao*' (major country diplomacy) in Chinese official documents referred to China's policy toward those countries stronger than China, such as the United States, Russia, Japan, Germany, France, and the UK. The meaning of this phrase changed in Wang Yi's speech titled 'Exploring the Path of Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics' in June 2013. The term of 'major country' no longer refers to foreign powers but to China itself.⁵³ Besides the new meaning of 'major country policy', the principle of 'credibility' also implies that China will undertake more international responsibility on international issues, especially security ones. In contrast, the KLP strategy never touched on the concept of credibility because credibility means too much international responsibility and a leadership role. Credibility is opposite to the principle of undertaking no leadership.

The principle of 'benefiting' clearly refers to economic help to developing countries which leaves no room for misinterpretation. Xi said, 'Let surrounding countries benefit from our development' and 'provide more aid to developing countries within our capability'.⁵⁴ According to Yang Jiechi, Xi emphasizes that China should pay more attention to the economic interests of those countries that strongly support China rather than China's own economic interests.⁵⁵ This principle is very foreign to most of Chinese officials who grew up with the tenet of *zhifu guangrong* (being rich is glorious) and they do not yet understand why diplomacy should give first priority to morality rather than economic benefits which had been the priority of the KLP strategy for more than two decades.

The word 'inclusive' refers to the principle of openness. Xi explained that the Asia-Pacific is large enough for all states to develop in this region and China should

52 *Ibid.*

53 Wang, 'Exploring the Path of Major country Diplomacy', pp. 10–23.

54 Qian, 'Xi Jinping Delivering an Important Speech at the Conference of Diplomatic Work Toward Surrounding Countries'.

55 Yang, 'China's Creation of Diplomatic Theories and Practice in New Situation', p. 9.

actively push for regional cooperation with an open mind.⁵⁶ Both the SFA and the KLP encourage regional cooperation but there are two differences between them. First is that the former requires more initiative and is more active than the latter. In accordance with this principle, the Chinese government developed a general plan to establish three sub-regional economic communities. The three planned sub-regional economic communities are the silk economic belt in Central Asia, the economic corridor of China, India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar in South Asia, and the maritime silk route in South East Asia. Second, the regional cooperation of the KLP is exclusively economic but the SFA targets regional cooperation including political, security, cultural, and economic areas. It is the first time the Chinese government advocates establishing *mingyun gongtongti* (community of common destiny) with surrounding countries to deepen security cooperation. In his speech titled 'Establishing China-ASEAN Community of common destiny with Joint Hands', Xi Jinping illustrated the community of common destiny as consolidated political and strategic mutual trust, up-rated free trade zone, new concepts of comprehensive security, common security and cooperative security for regional peace and stability, extensive social and cultural exchange, and mutual respect of others' civilization.⁵⁷ It is obvious that community of common destiny differs from military alliance but it is unclear whether it is a closer or looser international body than alliance. Anyhow, community of common destiny includes military cooperation, which was avoided by the KLP strategy.

Political Morality versus Economic Profits

On the working approaches of the SFA strategy, Xi suggested 'to search for shared interests with surrounding countries, to uphold the new concept of morality and interests, to be of principle, to value friendship and to speak morality and justice'.⁵⁸ These working approaches differ significantly from those of KLP in many aspects.

First, the SFA strategy emphasizes strategic cooperation based on larger common interests while the KLP strategy based strategic cooperation on improving mutual trust. 'To search for shared interests' means China will be more practical and show greater initiative in developing strategic cooperation with neighbors under the conditions without mutual trust. In fact, states often use lack of mutual trust as an excuse to cover up the lack of sincerity for cooperation. This change is especially important in China's security cooperation with surrounding countries where the level of trust is low.

56 Qian, 'Xi Jinping Delivering an Important Speech at the Conference of Diplomatic Work Toward Surrounding Countries'.

57 Xi Jinping, 'Xieshou jianshe Zhonggou-Dongmeng mingyun gongtongti' ('Establishing China-ASEAN Community of Shared Destinies with Joint Hands'), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), November 4, 2013.

58 Qian, 'Xi Jinping Delivering an Important Speech at the Conference of Diplomatic Work Toward Surrounding Countries'.

Second, the 'new concept of morality and interests' is one of two new IR theories introduced by Xi's administration. It is as theoretically significant to the Chinese dream introduced by President Xi in his speech at the closing ceremony of 12th National Congress in March 2013.⁵⁹ The 'new concept of morality and interests' means that morality is superior to economic profits, while the KLP gives first priority to economic concerns.

Third, 'to be of principle, to value friendship and to speak morality and justice' means that China will make policy toward a given country according to the character of China's relations with that country. During the time of the KLP, many Chinese scholars argued that it is a Cold-war mentality in diplomacy to distinguish friends and enemies.⁶⁰ With the KLP guideline, China once tried to develop equal relations with every state without differentiating between friends and enemies. The SFA guideline will push China to categorize foreign relations into four types, strategic pillars like Russia and Pakistan, normal states like Germany and India, global competitor with only the United States, and hostile countries like Japan and the Philippines. The SFA strategy also tries to establish moral reputation and strategic credibility for China by letting neighbors benefit economically from China's growth. This approach differs from the KLP's principle of economically equal and mutual benefits.

Because the goal of the SFA strategy is to make more friends, possible allies, rather than making money, China's foreign policy will become politically oriented and be with principle. This change sets higher targets for China to achieve, therefore Xi, in his speech, asked government officials working on foreign affairs to devote more energy in their work and actively achieve better diplomatic result in surrounding countries.⁶¹ Some international political psychologists found that Xi's foreign policy is cooperative in nature but assertive in practice.⁶² This judgment is quite appropriate for the SFA strategy because this strategy has the characteristics of humane authority highly advocated by moral realism.⁶³ However, former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd found that the ideology of moral realism has razor-sharp nationalist contours.⁶⁴

59 'Xi Jinping zai quanguo renda bimuhui shang jianghua tan Zhongguo meng' ('Xi Jinping Talking About the Chinese Dream at the Closing Ceremony of the National Congress'), March 17, 2013, <http://bj.people.com.cn/n/2013/0317/c349760-18308059.html>.

60 Zhang Shengjun, 'Zhongguo waijiao buneng fangqi linghe siwei' ('Chinese Diplomacy Should Not Abandon Zero Sum Mentality'), November 28, 2013, http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_world/2013-11/4608457.html.

61 Qian, 'Xi Jinping Delivering an Important Speech at the Conference of Diplomatic Work Toward Surrounding Countries'.

62 He Kai and Feng Huiyun, 'Xi Jinping's Operational Code Beliefs and China's Foreign Policy', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2013), p. 211.

63 Yan Xuetong, *Lishi de guanxing: weilai shinian de Zhongguo yu shijie (Inertia of History: China and the World in the Next Ten Years)* (Beijing: Zhongxin chubanshe, 2013), pp. 180–215; Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought Modern Chinese Power*, pp. 99–106, 142–44, 216–21.

64 Endowment by Kevin Rudd to *Inertia of History*.

The Effects of the SFA Strategy

In addition to foreign criticisms on the new ‘assertiveness’ of Chinese foreign policy practices under Xi’s SFA strategy, many Chinese also question if the SFA strategy is harmful to China’s foreign relations. Some veteran diplomats openly criticized that the shift from the KLP to the SFA was shortsighted.⁶⁵ The year of 2012 was a transitional one therefore we did not see much impact of the SFA strategy. However, some major effects were seen in China’s diplomatic achievements in 2013. The year 2013 saw Chinese President Xi and Premier Li Keqiang visit countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, and Europe. The Chinese leaders met with more than 300 foreign politicians, and received more than 60 foreign heads of state or government in China. Meanwhile, China signed nearly 800 treaties or agreements on cooperation with other countries.⁶⁶ The following will be an evaluation of the impact of the SFA on Chinese foreign policy via an examination of the changes in China’s relations with major powers and surrounding countries from 2012 even though that year was a transitional period.

Stabilized China–US Relations

After Xi’s visit to the United States in February 2012, the Obama administration suspected that Xi’s idea of establishing a new type of major power relations was rhetorical for covering up a rather superficial bilateral friendship. Even after China reiterated this idea at the China–US Strategic and Economic Dialogue (SED) in May 2012, Washington still doubted Chinese sincerity. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton ordered American diplomats in Beijing to check out the contents of this idea proposed by China. Therefore, American diplomats had frequently questioned the substance of this concept on different occasions. The Obama administration did not realize that the concept of a new type of major power relationship does not entail close friendship, but healthy competition, or at least peaceful competition. The ‘New type’ refers to being different from the American–Soviet conflicts during the Cold War and the ‘major power relations’ mean those between rising powers and status quo powers. According to Yang Jiechi, the main goal of establishing a new type of major power relationship is to ‘explore new ways to manage the differences’ between China and the United States.⁶⁷

65 ‘Wu Jianmin cheng Zhongguo jianchi wajiao taoguang yanghui fandui xi ruoguo xintai’ (‘Wu Jianmin Arguing that China Adheres to Keeping a Low Profile Diplomacy and Opposing It Because of Weak Country Mentality’), January 2, 2014, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2014-01-02/052829139004.shtml?ADUIN=31995387>.

66 ‘Wang Yi zongjie jinnian Zhongguo wajiao chengguo zhanwang mingnian wajiao gongzuo’ (‘Wang Yi Summarizing China’s Diplomatic Achievements in This Year and Looking Ahead the Diplomatic Work of Next Year’), December 19, 2013, http://news.china.com.cn/2013-12/19/content_30937823.htm.

67 Yang, ‘China’s Creation of Diplomatic Theories and Practice in New Situation’, p. 9.

It was gradually recognized by Washington that Xi is sincere in his efforts to stabilize China's relations with the United States. During his informal meetings with Xi Jinping at a California estate in June 2013, President Obama agreed to establish a new type of strategic cooperation with China, although he was still reluctant to accept the phrase of 'a new type of major power relations'. One reason for Washington's doubt is that China did not clarify whether this concept applies to all major powers or to China-US relations only. Yang Jiechi tries to distinguish China's relations with the United States from other major powers in his article in August 2013. He said: 'Pushing for constructing a new model of major power relations between China and the United State and achieving healthy interactions and win-win cooperation with other major powers are important ideas of the Party's Central Committee led by Party Secretary Xi Jinping in operating major power relations.'⁶⁸ It is obvious that his statement of 'new type of major power relations' refers to China-US relations only.

In November 2013, this idea was first formally accepted by the Obama administration when Susan E. Rice, the National Security Advisor, delivered a speech on American policy toward Asia. She said: 'When it comes to China, we seek to operationalize a new model of major power relations. That means managing inevitable competition while forging deeper cooperation on issues where our interests converge in Asia and beyond.'⁶⁹

During November and December of 2013, two unexpected events tested this new type of major power relations between China and the United States. First, China-US political relations survived the test of China's declaration of an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea on November 23. Tokyo responded to China's declaration with an emotional policy, requiring China to rescind the decision and Japanese air companies not to report their flight plans to the Chinese government.⁷⁰ The Japanese government even suggested that American Vice President John Biden, who visited Japan in December of that year, issued a US-Japan joint statement to demand China to rescind the ADIZ. Biden turned down the Japanese proposal and described the US-Chinese relationship as being 'hugely consequential'. He also expressed the hope to use his connections with the Chinese leader to help defuse the crisis between China and Japan.⁷¹ The second event is about the US Naval guided missile cruiser Cowpens, which was involved in an incident with a

68 *Ibid.*

69 'American Future in Asia', Remarks as Prepared for Delivery By National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice at Georgetown University, Gaston Hall, Washington DC, November 20, 2013, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/21.

70 Mu Xuequan, 'China's Top Legislature Rejects Japanese Resolution on ADIZ', December 12, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-12/08/c_125823879.htm.

71 David Nakamura, 'Biden Opens Visit to China Aimed at Easing Tensions in Northeast Asia', *The Washington Post*, December 5, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/biden-opens-visit-to-china-aimed-at-easing-tensions-in-northeast-asia/2013/12/04/b9466ec2-5cbf-11e3-bc56-c6ca94801fac_story.html?wprss=rss_homepage.

Chinese military vessel in the South China Sea on December 6 2013. The Cowpens and the Chinese military vessel were less than 500 yards off from their bows. The Chinese vessel was from the group of Chinese Naval ships that included the aircraft carrier Liaoning.⁷² Beijing and Washington immediately communicated about this incident at the very top level and avoided cutting off military-to-military relations, which happened several times in similar situations in the past two decades. Additionally, in February 2014, President Obama met with the Dalai Lama in the White House’s Map Room, rather than the Oval Office, where he traditionally brings a visitor for a round of photographs.⁷³ China did not make any substantial retaliation on this event except rhetorical protections. This result indicated that both sides cautiously compete with each other strategically.

Besides the relatively peaceful outcome of the ADIZ issue and the level of danger involved with military ship collision, quantitative studies of China–US relationship by Tsinghua University also demonstrate improved stability of bilateral relations after China adopted the SFA strategy. The following graph shows that China–US relationship became less bumpy during 2012–2013 than during 2009–2011.

As seen from Figure 1, the differential in the amplitude of China–US relationship is 1.7 (between 0.4 and 2.1) during 2009–2011, and 1.3 (between 0.8 and 2.1) during 2010–2011 when China adhered to the KLP strategy, while the differential in the amplitude decreases to 0.7 (between 1.6 and 2.3) during 2012–2013 when China shifted to the SFA strategy. During the three periods, the standard deviations are 0.499, 0.471, and 0.227, respectively.⁷⁴ A larger standard deviation indicates less stability. An even more important sign is that China–US relations have been improved since August of 2012. These data may suggest that a new type of major power relationship has replaced the superficial friendship between China and the United States. The former relationship is more stable than the latter because these

72 Barbara Starr, ‘U.S., Chinese Warships Come Dangerously Close’, December 13, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/12/13/politics/us-china-confrontation>.

73 ‘Obama Meets Dalai Lama at White House, China Protests’, *New York Post*, February 22, 2014, <http://nypost.com/2014/02/22/obama-meets-dalai-lama-at-white-house-china-protests>.

74 Formula of Standard Deviation of China–US relationship $\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N (x_i - \mu)^2}$ where σ : standard deviation, N : number of values, x_i : individual values, μ : mean value

Data Sheet of Quantitative Measurement of China-U.S. Relationship

Year	Month											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
2009	1.1	1	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.8	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.6	1.7
2010	1.1	0.9	0.8	1	1.2	1.1	1	1	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.2
2011	2	2	2	2	2	2.1	2.1	2.1	1.8	1.8	1.9	1.9
2012	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7
2013	1.7	1.7	1.8	2	2	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.3

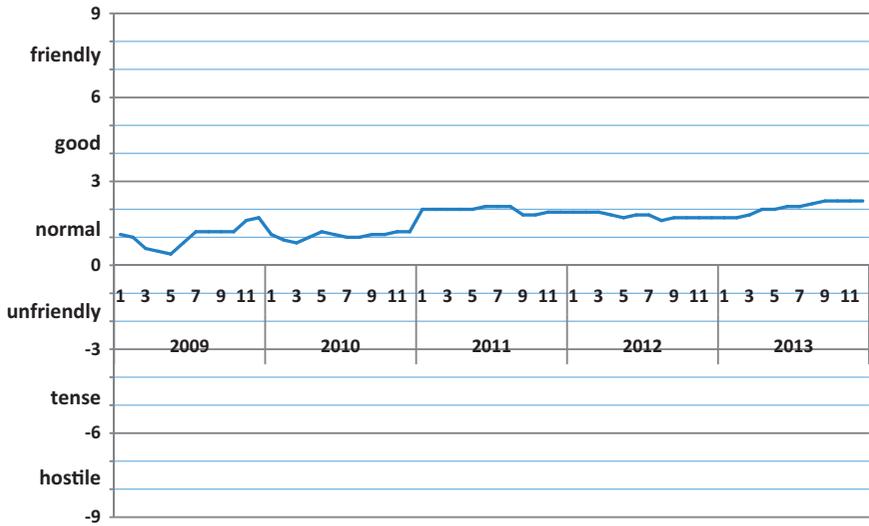


Fig. 1 Trend of China-US Relationship during 2009–2013.

Sources: The Institute of Modern International Relations, Tsinghua University, *China-U.S. Relations*, <http://www.imir.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/iisen/7523/index.html>.

two countries admitted that the core state of their relations is competition rather than cooperation. When one regards the other side as its competitor, their expectation for the other's favorable policy will not be high and their response to the other's unfriendly behaviors becomes less emotional.⁷⁵

Improved Relations with Major European Powers

After the SFA strategy, we have not only seen improved Chinese relations with the United States but also improved relations with European powers including Russia. Figure 2 shows this trend of improvement in 2013.

China-Russian relations have been much better than the China-US relations since the end of the Cold War, and it actually is the best among all of China's major power relations. Russia has been the only country with substantial military cooperation with China since the mid-1990s. Even though China-Russian relations are already at a high level, we see further consolidation of strategic cooperation with Russia after China moved from the KLP to the SFA. Figure 2 shows that China-Russian relations improved by 0.1 point in 2013.

Several events indicated the consolidation of their strategic cooperation during 2012–2013. China and Russia worked in tandem with an almost identical record of vetoes of Western resolutions such as the sanctions on Syria and Iran. They initiated

75 Yan Xuetong, 'The Instability of China-U.S. Relations', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2010), pp.280-285.

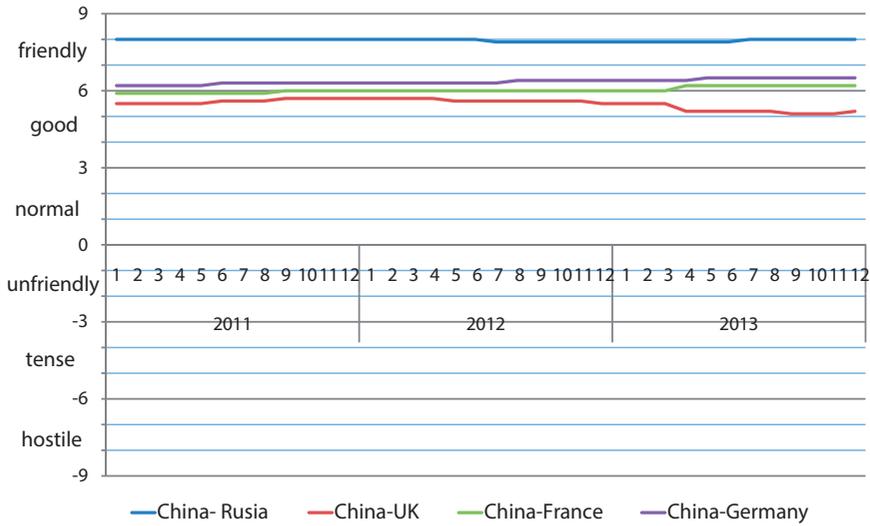


Fig. 2 Trend of China's Relationships with European Major Powers during 2011–2013.

Sources: The Institute of Modern International Relations, Tsinghua University, *China-Russia Relationship*, *China-Germany Relationship*, *China-France Relationship*, *China-U.K Relationship*, <http://www.imir.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/iisen/7523/index.html>.

a joint statement via the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to oppose military intervention by the Western powers in June 2012.⁷⁶ Soon after he was elected as the Chinese President in March 2013, Xi Jinping chose Moscow as the destination for his first foreign trip. During his visit to Russia, China and Russia issued a joint declaration, which stated to support each other's stance on territorial sovereignty.⁷⁷ This declaration indicated that China and Russia agreed to make joint efforts on territorial disputes with Japan. Although both China and Russia have had territorial disputes with Japan for years, they have never publically supported each other in this regard. In July 2013, they held a round of military drills including the biggest joint naval exercise China had ever participated in with another country.⁷⁸ Beijing regards the consolidation of its strategic cooperation with Moscow as the most important diplomatic achievement in 2013. At the end of that year, Wang Yi put the new improvement of China–Russia strategic cooperation on the top of all

76 'Shanghezuzhi shengming fandui junshi ganshe Xuliya' ('Shanghai Cooperation Organization Issuing an Statement Opposing Military Intervention into Syria'), June 8, 2012, <http://china.cankaoxiaoxi.com/2012/0608/46311.shtml>.

77 'Zhonghe liangguo yuanshou gongtong qianshu lianhe shengming' ('Chinese and Russian State Heads Signing an Joint Declaration'), March 3, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/2013-03/23/c_124494025.htm.

78 Simon Shuster, 'The World According to Putin', *Time*, September 16, 2013, pp. 22–23.

other diplomatic achievements in his annual report of China's diplomatic work.⁷⁹ When the Western leaders were absent from the Sochi Winter Olympics held in Russia in February 2014, Xi Jinping went to Russia in person to congratulate Vladimir Putin on this event. In response, Putin agreed to hold joint commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the victory of World War II by 2015, which showed Russian support in China's campaign to isolate Japan in East Asia.⁸⁰

China-German relations were also further consolidated after China adopted the SFA strategy. Germany has been China's largest economic partner within the EU for years and the bilateral trade reached \$161.13 billion in 2012, accounting for nearly one-third of China-EU trade.⁸¹ Chinese actual investment in Germany amounted to \$1.45 billion, an increase of 28.5% in 2012, even though the number of China's investment projects was in third place behind the United States and Switzerland.⁸² Despite this, China-German relations remain the best of China's relations with all Western major powers, and this relationship also improved during 2012-2013. Chancellor Angela Merkel visited China in August 2012 and Premier Li Keqiang visited Germany in May 2013. Merkel repeatedly stated that Germany attaches great importance to relations with China and hopes to work with China to maintain high-level exchanges, strengthen pragmatic cooperation and realize common development.⁸³

China-France relations also witnessed improvement in 2013, as shown in Figure 2. French President Francois Hollande visited China in April 2013. Hollande was the first head of state from a major Western power to visit Beijing after Xi Jinping took presidential office. He was accompanied by a high-ranking business delegation hoping to get a larger share of China's growing economy. During his visit, Airbus signed an order of 60 planes worth an estimated \$7.7 billion from Chinese airlines, French nuclear giant Areva and the Chinese National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC) talked about the construction of a nuclear waste treatment facility, and carmaker Renault looked into negotiations on a proposed factory in

79 'Wang Yi zhongjie jinnian Zhongguo waijiao chengguo zhanwang mingnian waijiao gongzuo' ('Wang Yi Summarizing China's Diplomatic Achievements in This Year and Looking Ahead the Diplomatic Work of Next Year'), December 19, 2013, http://news.china.com.cn/2013-12/19/content_30937823.htm.

80 'Meeting Putin, China's Xi Praises Sochi Games, Cooperation Between 2 Nations', February 7, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/02/07/meeting-putin-china-xi-praises-sochi-games-cooperation-between-2-nations>.

81 'Li's Visit to Elevate China's Ties with Germany, Europe', May 24, 2013, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013livisit/2013-05/24/content_16529145.htm.

82 'Li Keqiang's Visit to Germany for Managing, Focusing Economic and Trade Issues', May 25, 2013, <http://www.best-news.us/news-4540366-Li-Keqiang-39s-visit-to-Germany-for-managing-focusing-economic-and-trade-issues.html>.

83 *Ibid.*

Wuhan that would produce 150,000 vehicles per year.⁸⁴ Eight months later, French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault visited China in December to finalize those projects. During his visit, he oversaw a letter of intent signed by Areva and the CNNC for a joint venture to develop a zirconium facility; a contract in a consortium with Siemens to supply instrumentation and control systems for Fuqing Units 5 and 6; and a partnership agreement with China General Nuclear on renewable energy cooperation.⁸⁵ To mark 50 years of full diplomatic relations between Paris and Beijing, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius announced that travel permits for tourists from China will be processed within two days starting January 27 2014.⁸⁶

The improvement in China–UK relations is a typical case illustrating how the SFA strategy helps improve deteriorated relations with Western powers. Ignoring China’s warning, British Prime Minister David Cameron insisted on meeting with the Dalai Lama in London in May 2012. His decision resulted in losing all high-level meetings with Chinese counterparts for one and half years. After hard diplomatic works, he got an invitation from Beijing. During his visit to Beijing in December 2013, he said publicly that ‘the UK has voiced its respect for China’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, and the persistence of the one China principle, respecting China’s core interests and its major concerns’.⁸⁷ His statement was met with very positive responses from his Chinese counterpart, Premier Li Keqiang, who said that ‘The UK has voiced its respect for China’s territorial integrity and sovereignty’, and ‘China expresses its appreciation’.⁸⁸ The political improvement of bilateral relations resulted in substantial economic cooperation. For his trip to China, Cameron brought a big business delegation which was reported as ‘the largest British trade mission ever to go to China’ and he said to Li Keqiang that ‘the scale of the delegation mirrors the scale of the ambition that we have for the British-China partnership. We particularly want to explore all the opportunities of economic openness, openness of Britain to Chinese investment’.⁸⁹ He and Li Keqiang oversaw the signing of 10 agreements, including deals on space exploration, media exchanges and patent protection. Standing next to Cameron, Li Keqiang expressed that there had

84 Small Ball, ‘France Hopes Billion-Dollar China Airbus Deal Is First of Many’, April 26, 2013, <http://www.france24.com/en/20130425-china-france-airbus-francois-hollande-business-economy>.

85 ‘China and France Strengthen Nuclear Collaboration’, December 9, 2013, <http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/C-China-and-France-strengthen-nuclear-collaboration-0912137.html>.

86 Laura Zhou, ‘France to Fast-track Visa Approval for Tourists from China’, *South China Morning Post*, January 15, 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1405763/france-fast-track-visa-approval-tourists-china>.

87 ‘UK’s Cameron Emphasises Business in China Visit’, December 2, 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/uks-cameron-emphasises-business-china-visit-065906352.html>.

88 ‘British PM Emphasises Business in China Visit’, December 3, 2013, <http://au.news.yahoo.com/world/a/20118269/british-pm-emphasises-business-in-china-visit>.

89 ‘UK’s Cameron Emphasises Business in China Visit’.

been a 'breakthrough' agreement on high-speed rail development between the two countries as well as Chinese investment in civil nuclear power.⁹⁰

Improved Relations with Developing Countries

In 2013 China also improved its relations with developing countries. In March 2013, President Xi took a trip to Africa, visiting Tanzania, Congo, and South Africa, attending the BRICS summit, and meeting with national leaders from Egypt, Ethiopia, and the African Union.⁹¹ At the BRICS summit held in Durban, South Africa, Xi reached an agreement with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Sing, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, and South African President Jacob Zuma to set up a development bank for mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in the BRICS, as well as other developing countries. Meanwhile, they also agreed to explore the construction of a financial safety net through the creation of a Contingent Reserve Arrangement.⁹² At the first BRICS Leaders-Africa Dialogue Forum, Xi reaffirmed China's promise to give zero-tariff treatment to 97% of the tariff items of exports to China from the least developed nations having diplomatic ties with China.⁹³

During May 31–June 2, Xi Jinping made a journey to Latin America to visit Trinidad and Tobago where he held bilateral meetings with leaders from Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, the Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Surinam, and Jamaica before he visited Costa Rica and Mexico, respectively.⁹⁴ During September, he paid state visits to Central Asian nations such as Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, and attended the Group of 20 Summit in St. Petersburg in Russia, and the summit of the SCO in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.⁹⁵ In October, he paid state visits to two important Southeast Asian states, Indonesia and Malaysia while attending the 21st leaders' meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. Obama's cancellation of attending the APEC forum as a

90 'British PM Emphasises Business in China Visit'.

91 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Holds a Briefing for Foreign and Chinese Media on President Xi Jinping's State Visit to Russia, Tanzania, South Africa, the Republic of Congo and Attendance at the Fifth BRICS Leaders Meeting', March 21, 2013, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/dozys/xwlb/t1023948.shtml>.

92 'BRICS Summit Delivers Tangible Results', March 28, 2013, http://www.china.org.cn/world/2013-03/28/content_28381372.htm.

93 *Ibid.*

94 'Xi's Latin American Tour to Promote Cooperation', May 3, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-05/30/c_132417733.htm.

95 Mu Xuequan, 'Xi's Central Asia Trip Aimed at Common Development, All-win Cooperation', September 15, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-09/15/c_125389057.htm.

result of the US government temporary shutdown facilitated Xi's achievement at the APEC.⁹⁶ Xi's suggestion of establishing a 'community of common destiny' during his visit to Southeast Asia ensured that Indonesia and Malaysia would not side with the United States or the Philippines against China.

Primer Li Keqiang also visited several developing countries in 2013 and met with many leaders from developing countries. In May he visited India and Pakistan.⁹⁷ His visit to India strengthened mutual trust between China and India. Although the Indian media tried to fan the border disputes between the two countries, the Indian government adhered to improving political relations with China. In January 2014, India positively proposed a meeting between the Indian Director General of Military Operations and his Chinese counterpart to work out effective ways to avert or handle incursions across the Line of Actual Control.⁹⁸

In October, Li visited Brunei, Thailand, and Vietnam while attending the Eighth East Asian Summit in Brunei. He also attended the 23rd ASEAN Summit and addressed the plan to upgrade the China-ASEAN free trade with several proposals, including the establishment of an infrastructure investment bank between China and ASEAN to facilitate infrastructure construction connecting China and ASEAN.⁹⁹ His visit to Vietnam helped soften Vietnam's policy over the disputes in the South China Sea with China, and assured other ASEAN members to keep further distance from the Philippines' policy over the disputes. In November, he made his first visit to Romania and it was the first visit to Romania by a Chinese leader in almost two decades.¹⁰⁰ He attended the China-Central and Eastern Europe Economic and Trade Forum in Bucharest where he met leaders of 16 Central and Eastern European nations. After that meeting, he headed to Uzbekistan to attend the 12th Prime Ministers' meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states.¹⁰¹ Besides these two conferences, he also held bilateral meetings with almost every counterpart attending these forums.

96 Geoff Hiscock, 'Obama Withdrawal Puts China's Xi Jinping in APEC Box Seat', October 7, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/06/world/asia/apec-obama-xi-putin/index.html>.

97 Ananth Krishnan, 'China Announces Premier Li Keqiang's Visits to India, Pakistan', *The Hindu*, May 14, 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/china-announces-premier-li-keqiangs-visits-to-india-pakistan/article4713049.ece>.

98 'India Invites China for DGMO-level Talks', *Deccan Herald*, January 16, 2014, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/380384/india-invites-china-dgmo-level.html>.

99 Hou Qiang, 'News Analysis: Li's Visit to Further Strengthen Bilateral Ties between Hanoi and Beijing', October 18, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-10/18/c_132808810.htm.

100 Kit Gillet, 'China Cosying up to Eastern Europe', *Aljazeera*, November 26, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/11/china-cosying-up-eastern-europe-2013112513118391613.html>.

101 Zhu Ningzhu, 'Chinese Premier to Visit Romania, Uzbekistan', November 18, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-11/18/c_132897930.htm.

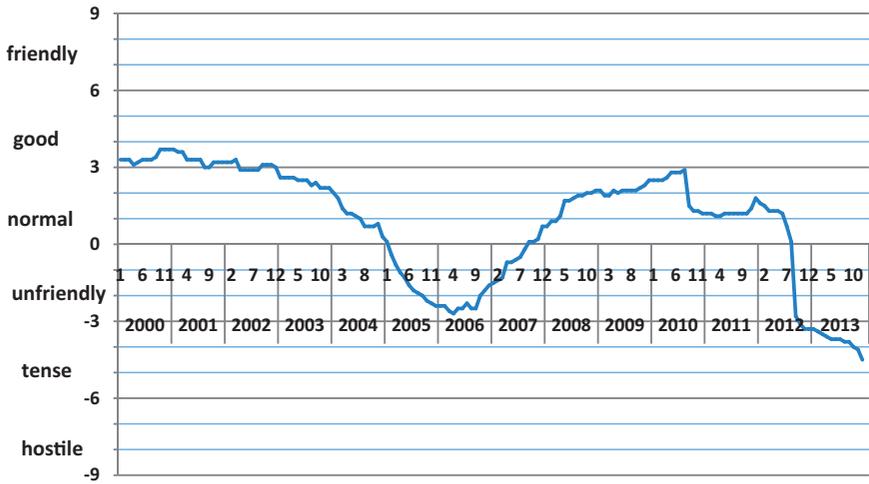


Fig. 3 The Trend of China–Japan Relationship during 2000–2013.

Sources: The Institute of Modern International Relations, Tsinghua University, *China–Japan Relations*, <http://www.imir.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/iisen/7523/index.html>.

Tensions with Japan

China–Japanese relations were an exception in China’s improving bilateral relations with major powers during 2012–2013. Some people regard this case as a disproof of the effects of the SFA strategy. However, the real situation is not that dire. After the Cold War, China–Japanese relations once deteriorated dramatically under Junichiro Koizumi because of his six visits to the Yasukuni Shrine.¹⁰² Another major downfall of China–Japanese relations was in September 2010 because the government of Naoto Kan purposely detained a Chinese trawler captain for 18 days due to a collision between a Japanese coast guard patrol ship and the Chinese trawler in waters off the Diaoyu Islands.¹⁰³ These two major deteriorations both took place when China adhered to the KLP strategy. China–Japanese relations would not have suffered those down-falls if the KLP strategy had been effective. Figure 3 shows the two major drops in China–Japanese relations.

The current confrontation between China and Japan was a direct result of the Yoshihiko Noda government’s nationalization of the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea in 2012.¹⁰⁴ Bilateral relations further deteriorated following

102 ‘Koizumi Visits Contested World War II Shrine’, August 15, 2006, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/14351560/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/t/koizumi-visits-contested-world-war-ii-shrine/#.UsIAb4GIWcE.

103 ‘Zhan Qixiong Back Home in Fujian, Ended Japanese Unlawful Detention’, September 25, 2010, <http://www.whatsonxiamen.com/news14781.html>.

104 Anh Huyen, ‘Japan’s Nationalization of Senkaku Islands Infuriates China’, September 11, 2012, <http://vovworld.vn/en-US/Current-Affairs/Japans-nationalization-of-Senkaku-Islands-infuriates-China/106516.vov>.

confrontation policies that both sides adopted over the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013 only made things worse.¹⁰⁵ Figure 3 shows that China–Japanese relationship under Abe fell down to even lower level than that during the rule of Koizumi's government. The two dramatic falls of China–Japanese relations after 2000 may be a result of structural conflicts between China and Japan, namely Japan cannot psychologically accept the fact that China is taking away its position as the second largest world economy. These two falls also imply that the current confrontation between China and Japan was not caused by China's SFA strategy.

Although China's SFA strategy could not soften Abe's confrontation against China, it has effects isolating Abe's government and consolidating relations with other countries. For instance, South Korea, Russia, and the United States all sided with China against Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine. South Korean President Park Geun-Hye has adopted the same policy as China to refuse any meeting with Abe since he assumed the presidency in February 2013.¹⁰⁶ Putin adopted a tough policy over the territory disputes with Japan. His Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that despite Putin's possible visit to Japan in 2014 there would be no swift solution to a territorial dispute that has prevented the signing of a formal peace treaty following the end of World War II.¹⁰⁷ Since 2012, the Obama administration has pressed Japan to return to the United States more than 300 kg of mostly weapon-grade plutonium that it exported to Japan for research purposes during the Cold War era.¹⁰⁸ Except for the Philippines, ASEAN states rejected Japan's suggestion to take a common stance against China's ADIZ at the Japan–AEAN special summit hosted by Japan in October 2013.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

This article tries to theoretically demonstrate why pursuing political leadership based on humane authority will benefit a rising power in establishing a favorable international environment. Both classical realism and moral realism emphasize the importance of international morality, but classical realism does not distinguish the

105 'China Says Abe not Welcome after War Shrine Visit', *The Washington Post*, December 30, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-says-abe-not-welcome-after-war-shrine-visit/2013/12/30/bc30314e-7133-11e3-bc6b-712d770c3715_story.html.

106 Julian Ryall, 'China, South Korea Reject Complaint from Japan over Statue of Assassin', *South China Morning Post*, January 27, 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1360486/china-south-korea-reject-complaint-japan-over-statue-assassin>.

107 Steve Gutterman, 'Russia's Putin Accepts Japan Invitation, Minister Says', January 21, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/21/us-russia-japan-idUSBREA0K0SF20140121>.

108 'US Presses Japan to Hand Back 300 kg of Plutonium', January 27, 2014, <http://www.vancouverdesi.com/news/us-presses-japan-to-hand-back-300-kg-of-plutonium/706755/>.

109 'Japan Unable to Get ASEAN Members on Same Page at Special Summit', *The Asahi Shimbun*, December 15, 2013, https://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201312150014.

different levels of international morality. By highlighting the correlations between different levels of international morality and different types of international leadership, arguments for moral realist theory presented in this article suggest that international credibility is not only a prerequisite for a rising power to establish a world leading power status, but also a necessary condition for a rising power to attract more allies than the existing hegemon.

Because of the anarchical nature of the international system, a rising power will inevitably challenge the existing hegemon and threaten its neighbors. The structural conflicts between the rising power and the status quo hegemon as well as other major powers will form a rise-dilemma for the rising power. The stronger the rising power grows, the heavier the system pressure imposes on it. Moral realism argues that the rising power will never have a favorable environment unless it can initiatively and morally shape the international environment. The rising power has to undertake the security responsibility for a better international environment, otherwise the rise-dilemma will automatically deteriorate its relations with other countries. The KLP strategy cannot work out a favorable environment for China's national rejuvenation because it avoids international security responsibility, which presents to other states an image of a selfish and threatening rising state. The political leadership of humane authority regards strategic credibility as the basis of international authority, thus, it deems strategic credibility as the most important national interest. The SFA strategy adopted by Xi Jinping aims at increasing China's strategic credibility, which includes providing security protection for neighbors. Moral realism regards security cooperation as the basis for reliable strategic relations between the rising power and other nations because only security cooperation can reduce neighbors' fear, increase small states' dependence and wining more strategic support.

According to moral realism, China made great diplomatic achievement with the SFA strategy in 2013 mainly because of the shift of its foreign policy from an economic orientation to a political orientation. Differing from the KLP with a core value of economic benefits, the SFA gives the priority to political dignity over economic interests. For the sake of dignity, the SFA sets up the task of making friends as the most important goal of Chinese foreign policy. When making friends replaced making money as the main goal of Chinese foreign policy, China's economic aids are designed for strategic relations rather than economic benefits, which naturally lead to improved relations with most countries in the world. For establishing a favorable environment for China's national rejuvenation, Xi Jinping assigned an ambitious target of establishing communities of shared destinies with surrounding countries. No matter whether the community of common destiny is a closer or looser body than alliance, it at least embraces military cooperation. To achieve the community of common destiny, China needs to strengthen strategic credibility therefore it must adopt a moral policy toward those countries that China wants to include in the community of common destiny. Before the common community of common destiny is established, the SFA strategy can at least assure that most countries choose a neutral stance between China and the United States.

According to moral realism, the SFA strategy stabilized China–US relations during 2012–2013 mainly because it transformed the bilateral relations from a superficial friendship to peaceful competition, namely to a new type of major power relations. While China adhered to the KLP strategy, neither China nor the United States admitted the structural conflict between them. Instead, both adopted a superficial-friendship policy toward each other. Superficial friendship is epitomized in character-strategy duality.¹¹⁰ As strategy it can temporarily reduce tensions between China and the United States, but it also boosted both sides' unreasonable expectations for the other side's favorable action. The high expectation will result in over-reaction to any of the other side's unfavorable actions. Therefore, China–US relations were very bumpy before China shifted to the SFA strategy. Opposite to the KLP, the SFA strategy is based on the assumption of the structural contradiction between a rising power and a status quo hegemon. In August 2011, Xi Jinping and Biden reached a common agreement that the two countries should have healthy competition.¹¹¹ After both sides agreed on the nature of their relations as competition, they reduced expectations for the other side's favorable actions and their relations became stabilized. This explanation can be supported by what Biden said during his visit to China in late 2013. 'The thing that has impressed me from the beginning — and I said this to the President [Xi Jinping] early on, and he's concluded as well — is that you are candid, you are constructive', Biden said. 'Developing this new relationship, both qualities are sorely needed. Candor generates trust, and trust is the basis on which real change, constructive change, is made.'¹¹²

During the forming process of bipolarity, it is impossible for a rising power to hide its capability. The KLP strategy cannot help reduce the international pressure on China to undertake more international responsibility, therefore, China was looked upon unfavorably and even immoral because the KLP strategy directed China to avoid international responsibility as much as possible. Taking a different approach, the SFA strategy encourages China to take up international responsibilities consistent with China's interests, capability, and its status as the second largest power in the world. This strategy helped China build an image of a moral and responsible power. China's image improved significantly in developing countries, mainly in Africa, in 2013.

The political values of the SFA strategy may be the most important factor contributing to the effectiveness of the strategy in shaping a favorable environment for China's national rejuvenation. The SFA strategy gave priority to morality over economic benefits and morality was crystalized as justice and fairness.¹¹³ These two

110 Yan Xuetong and Qi Haixia, 'Football Game Rather Than Boxing Match: China-U.S. Intensifying Rivalry Does not Amount to Cold War', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2012), pp. 109–13.

111 'Remarks by the Vice President at Sichuan University', August 21, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/21/remarks-vice-president-sichuan-university>.

112 David Nakamura, 'Biden Opens Visit to China Aimed at Easing Tensions in Northeast Asia'.

113 Yang, 'China's Creation of Diplomatic Theories and Practice in New Situation', p. 9.

political values are important components of the universal international morality and can be shared by many countries. Therefore, these two values will help China gain more international support. Unfortunately, the core value of the KLP was accumulation of wealth, which is regarded as selfish rather than a moral value in every civilization. That means the core value of the KLP undermines China's image in the world and is harmful to the implementation of national rejuvenation.

So far, many scholars, Chinese as well as foreign, believe that the SFA strategy is doomed to fail. Some have even compared the SFA strategy to the policy of Germany before World War I or that of Japan before World War II. This article does not argue that the strategy will inevitably succeed but only that it will do better than KLP in shaping an environment favorable to China's rise. The major risk of the SFA is not war with the United States, but rather military confrontation with some of its neighbors, especially Japan. As China grows increasingly stronger than its neighbors the SFA could be easily perceived as an aggressive strategy. Therefore, China needs to implement the SFA very delicately to avoid being regarded as an aggressive power and prevent international support for challengers.

Because China has only pursued the SFA strategy for a very short period, an assessment of its effects still needs to be tested by future events. However, the Chinese current collective leadership headed by Xi Jinping has been gaining a positive reputation both domestically and internationally since taking over the reins of China. The SFA strategy has so far led to more improved relations between China and other countries than to deteriorated ones. The proof of the pudding continues to be in the eating.