

Balance of influence: How China manages its relationship with developing countries

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Abstract

Unlike the realist prediction that a fast-rising state is likely to expand its power bases through harassment and exploitation of weaker states to satisfy its hunger for resources, China tries to keep a low profile and rhetorically stresses its peaceful rise and its role as a responsible power. Instead of using tangible threats, China is more inclined to exert influence by changing perceptions and then cultivating reciprocity. This paper provides a theory of the balance of influence (BOI), which argues that China seeks to balance against great powers' social influence in developing countries by creating desirable material benefits and psychological identification. In return, those countries would be more likely to satisfy and recognize China's needs. This argument is supported by reviewing China's foreign relationship with developing countries in Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, as well as the views toward China in those countries. Evidence indicates that China's social influence is relatively expanding. Not only do we see improvement in its global image but we also see favorable treatments toward China.

Keyword

China, developing countries, social influence, balance of influence, balance of power, guanxi

Introduction

For realists, a rapidly-rising country like China is prone to further expanding its power bases and causing trouble (Friedberg, 2005: 17-24). It possesses relatively superior and abundant power over weaker countries that can't help but expect unwanted harassment from China.¹ Rather than acting with aggression, however, China has tried to keep a low profile and rhetorically stresses its intention of rising peacefully and acting as a responsible power. Instead of reaching its goals by coercion, it more often than not resorts to strategies of courting and pleasing. In dealing with its core interest of national unification with Taiwan, Chinese diplomats always stress Beijing's goodwill of restraining from using the one-China policy to block Taiwan's participation in international non-governmental institutions. In return, they hope that the Taiwanese government can make further political concessions.² China is also well-known for its generous economic and financial assistance to developing countries, which some speculate is a strategy to garner sufficient oil imports. While it can simply exploit its neighbor for resources, China chooses to give and then seek cultivation later. In its engagement with poor countries, China treats their leaders with flattery and respect that is unseen from Western countries (Halper, 2010: 105). Instead of using tangible threats to secure interests, a rising China seems more willing to first influence others' behaviors by changing their perception of Beijing before expecting reciprocity. It seems more appropriate to interpret China's behavior as a softer means used to outperform the influence of other great powers.

In attempts to understand China's behaviors, it may be appropriate to approach it through the concept of *guanxi*. *Guanxi* is often used to characterize the Chinese way of managing personal relationships. It puts particular emphasis on the importance of social networks, which are made possible through a group of people connecting with each other through common traits or material incentives such as gifts (Gold et al., 2002: 5-8). If *guanxi* is established, favors asked are made legitimate and are granted. The concept of reciprocal obligation and indebtedness is what sustains the system of *guanxi*. Contemporary Chinese foreign policies put more emphasis on the management of *guanxi* rather than the manipulation of power. But how to systematically account for this feature and phenomenon remains a challenge. This paper seeks to address the concept of *guanxi* in Chinese foreign policy by borrowing from the theory of 'social influence,'³ which emphasizes the use of both material and psychological incentives to change the perception of weaker countries so to more easily garner reciprocal support or favors. In such way, China's rise is a balancing act between their and other great powers' social influence in weaker countries. I provide a theoretical framework of the balance of influence (BOI) to depict the strategies

Beijing uses toward weaker countries. Although at first glance, these countries are relatively weak in the material sense, they are in fact qualitatively stronger in their emerging voting shares in international affairs and their possession of natural resources. Therefore, to understand how a great power might approach them remains an important subject. Recognizing their surging position, other powers are following China's strategic model, as I will present with evidence later. In the next section, I critique the applicability of the balance of power (BOP) theory, the relational power approach, and existing BOI analyses in China's case. In section 3, I discuss the features, dimensions, and policy tools of BOI. In section 4, I empirically examine China's use of material and psychological balancing in developing countries in Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. Section 5 concludes the paper.

Literature review

Balance of power and Chinese foreign policy

The most widely-shared definition for 'power' in the field of political science might be the one defined by Robert Dahl (1957), which states that A caused B to do something that B otherwise would not have done. The definition implies that B is coerced by A to do something he dislikes. Without the power exerted on B by A, B would not have behaved as A expected. Therefore B's cooperation is motivated by his fear of the consequences of not cooperating rather than his free will. Dahl's definition also suggests a devastating nature of power. By introducing the coercive nature of power, realists have constructed the world of international affairs as a power-struggle game. Kenneth Waltz (1979) emphasizes the importance of the distribution of state power under anarchy, which dictates one's relative strength of power and its subsequent behavior. Because states cannot predict others' intentions, John Mearsheimer (2001) argues that the most rational way for states to guarantee survival is to obtain power to avoid being at the bottom of the power distribution. States therefore are incentivized to balance their power against other states through internal or external balancing; the former relates to the increase of military capability and the latter relies on forming alliances with other states. These actions are to ensure the absence of an undefeatable hegemonic power.

In adopting the power analysis, it is tempting to attribute the rise of China and its external involvement in overseas military missions and economic and financial affairs, as well as its attempt to improve its international reputation, to its intention to maximize power (Lai, 2009; Kaplan, 2010; Nabers, 2010; Lampton, 2008;

Mearsheimer, 2010; Schweller and Pu, 2011). However, this speculation is subject to at least four limitations.

Why does China cooperate? International cooperation resembles a non-cooperative game, which lacks binding contracts that sustain cooperation between individuals. In the game of the prisoners' dilemma, cooperation presents merely the second-best outcome (Axelrod and Keohane, 1985) as each state gives in to maximize its utility. It is thus puzzling to see China actively participating in international institutions (Iain Johnston, 2003; Economy and Oksenberg, 1999) and ardently building state-to-region international organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Forum of China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), as well as providing generous economic benefits through the institutions. Neo-institutionalists may argue that international institutions actually work effectively to solve problems of market failure, transaction costs, and information asymmetry that obstruct possibilities of cooperation (Keohane, 1984). However, it remains unclear why China isn't making relations with hard and binding institutions and is instead doing so with weak and soft institutions that have no teeth (Foot, 1998; Kuik, 2005). The reason may be that it is easier for China to exploit resources from weaker institutions, despite their meager constraints. However, even with these explanations, both approaches still do not fully explain China's behavior.

Decline of conflicts. If a power struggle truly exists, China should settle disputes with weaker neighbors with its superior forces. As China rises, we should expect more conflicts between China and its neighbors. However, according to Tønnesson (2009), East Asia has been very peaceful since 1979, with an average battle death below that of the world average. Before 1979, the average number of wars in East Asia was four per year, and the number went down to merely 0.5 from 1980 to 2005. When it involves its core interests, China is more rhetorically aggressive than behaviorally aggressive, as is seen in disputes regarding Senkaku Island and South China Sea. In the Sino-Central Asia case, it cost China large territorial concessions to secure cooperation from others (Fravel, 2005). Why China has become less war-prone externally remains a puzzle.

China's role in shaping norms. The answer to China's less war-prone behaviors may come from global norms that constrain the use of force. For realists, norms can be created and spread to service the interests of the powerful. Therefore, China's conformation to such a norm in the first place is puzzling, especially since it is growing stronger and is hungry for resources. This behavior contradicts the

power-maximization argument. For constructivist, global norms that advocate against the use of force emerged from social interactions between lawyers and governments who finally persuaded countries to refrain from military attacks (Finnemore, 2003). This minimally explains China's role, however, as it doesn't position it as a powerful world agent, whether it is in shaping norms or in its motivation for its actions. The puzzle is even more complicated when we see that Beijing is conforming to this norm even more so than Washington, the initiator of the norm (Foot and Walter, 2011: 31-78). China certainly has its own interpretation for many existing global norms. While the realist explanation is theoretically puzzling, the constructivist explanation is empirically vague and unclear about China's motivation. Thus, an alternative theoretical framework is required.

China's short-term behaviors. The last critique about the BOP is that it inadequately explains China's short-term behaviors. Empirical observations in both short and a long time spans may lead to different conclusions. If we observe the world history over the past two hundred years, the BOP explanation may fit better due to the wax and wane of major international wars. But this approach blinds us from considering the two attempts of globalization during the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the neo-liberal arguments were derived from contemporary empirical phenomena after the end of World War II (Keohane and Nye, 1977), Waltz's neo-realism tried to account for a longer period of history (Waltz, 1979). While the level of liberalization throughout history has fluctuated between stability and conflicts, the degree of liberalization in the contemporary world has moved up over the past several decades. Regardless of China's long-term perception and behaviors in a hundred years from now, one should seek to understand the driver for its short-term strategies of liberalization and compliance over the past decades. In the long-run, Beijing may suddenly become militarily aggressive due to potential exogenous shocks, but we also need an approach that is more suitable for understanding contemporary China.

Relational power and influence

Recognizing the limitations of power factors, scholars turned to the relational approach, which addresses the relational power connection between China and its counterparts. Although the possession of material resources remains a necessary condition for power, it needs to be considered along with its various dimensions (scope, domain, weight, costs, and means), which produce different levels of influence to different targets (Baldwin, 2013: 275-276). If a state's foreign policy

based on certain types of power corresponds to a target's interests, the relational power is stronger and more effective (Hagström, 2005). In order to analyze a state's power in this way, the relationship between actors should be defined. In adopting this approach, one inevitably looks at a static situation that involves multiple parties with fixed characteristics; thus, it is less ideal to capture the dynamic process of how one can increase or decrease its influence toward others. What happens if others' interests do not fit in with a state's policies? Does that reflect a state's weakness? Examination of Chinese foreign policies has shown that it has greatly and dynamically altered other states' perception of interests either by material or psychological means. Others' perception of interests have been shaped and changed by Beijing as it adopted flexible approaches to please others. A theory to explain the dynamic process is required.

One theory used to address this problem is the idea of balance of influence, which seeks to depict competition of influence among great powers. The aim is to change the relative relationship with weaker countries. John Ciorciari (2009) coined the term 'balance of great-power influence,' which identifies military, economic, institutional and ideational dimensions of influences that China seeks to expand above other great powers in the region. Aaron Friedberg (2011: 182-214) also introduces 'balance of influence' as a softer Sino-U.S. rivalry. Though innovative, they remain unclear about the sources, purposes, and strategies underlying the competition of influence, and fall short of a comprehensive analysis. In the next section, I address these problems by building up a theoretical framework of the BOI.

Balance of Influence

In this section I first discuss the nature of influence and argue that the concept of 'social influence' can remedy the flaws of BOP. Using this concept, I identify four dimensions of influences that are most important in China's diplomacy. This is followed by a discussion of how great powers balance each other's influence and how BOI can be applied.

What is influence?

Three kinds of influences are discussed here. At the two extremes are influencers that emphasize hard power and soft power, and in between is the social influence that uses both material and emotional ways to change others' behaviors.

Sphere of influence. The concept of influence is no stranger to international relations. Traditional studies have looked at the ‘sphere of influence’ controlled by great powers. Countries within the spatial area of the sphere of influence, mostly weaker countries, are influenced politically, economically, or culturally by the dominant country. The great game in Central Asia played by Russia and Britain, or bipolar blocs during the cold war era, was demonstrated when great powers exerted their influence to subordinated countries (Triska, 1986; Koslowski and Kratochwil, 1994). David Lake (2009: 54) developed a hierarchical theory to describe international relations, arguing that the increase of hierarchical system of security relationship can be manifested by the ‘sphere of influence in which a dominant state possesses the authority only to limit a subordinate’s cooperation with third parties... the subordinate... is prohibited from entering into alliances or other interactions with others.’ In this analysis, sources of influence possessed by major countries resemble the dimensions of power. Influences are made possible by material power. The party with more influence dictates how the subordinate should behave. Even though the subordinate can leave the hierarchical system, the costs would be too high. Such understanding of influence unavoidably concerns the distribution of coercive capability, which, as I argued above, has its limitations.

Soft power. Joseph Nye (2004) developed the concept of soft power in the field of international relations. He argues that soft power differs from ‘influence’ since influence sometimes has its hard dimensions. Soft power emphasizes the part of attraction that consists of three major dimensions: culture, political values, and foreign policies. The purpose of soft power is not to threaten or deter others but to change and shape their preferences. It uses co-optive, not coercive, ways to influence behaviors. Soft power makes others feel good about changing their behaviors on their own terms. In the spectrum of influence, the concept of sphere of influence and soft power stand at two extremes, as the former resorts to threats, leading to negative emotions, and the latter relies on attraction, leading to positive psychological perceptions. However, soft power is only one of the methods to understand the effect of great powers’ policies toward weaker countries – material interests cannot be forgotten. Although the Japanese culture is popular in Asia, especially among the Chinese community, it would be naïve to presume that Beijing would put aside the historical Sino-Japanese hostility and act in favor of Tokyo while dealing with their disputes (The Economist, 2012). Such assumptions do not fully capture the nature of conflict and competition behind China’s foreign policy.

Social influence. The concept of influence is discussed in the field of international relations, but it is also discussed among other disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, or mass communication. Each has their own methods in understanding influence. While they all agree that influence is closely related to the change of perception, they disagree on how others' attitudes can be changed. Herbert Kelman (1958) found that influence that brings about change and satisfaction is manifested in three different processes: compliance, identification, and internalization. Compliance occurs when the influenced expects to gain rewards. Identification occurs when the influenced seeks to maintain a satisfying relationship with others. Internalization occurs when the influenced accepts change because of a common value system. The possibility of influence here is made possible through social interactions between all parties where one's attitude and behaviors can be influenced and changed through those three processes. In the same vein, Robert Cialdini (2001) located six weapons of influences that can socially influence an individual's attitude and behaviors. They are reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity. Put simply, one's perception can be more easily influenced by a persuader who gives favors, asks for commitment, creates scenarios of similarity, possesses authority, is liked by others, and takes advantage of limited resources. Empirical studies of Chinese foreign policies by Alastair Iain Johnston (2008: 75-154) show that social influence theory can be applied to states' external behaviors. States respond not only to material but also social environments; thus, influence should be a function with both physical and psychological inducements. The former may include rewards or promises and the latter may involve identity formulation. Rather than by coercion, the influenced are willing to change their behaviors either with material benefits or recognition from the one exerting influence. The relevance of both material and psychological sources is how social influence distinguishes itself from the two extremes of the ideas of influence. Such interpretation is realistic because the games diplomats play in the global arena are all about influencing and changing perceptions by offering side payments or through building up networks and *guanxi*. States possessing both handsome resources and higher level of *guanxi* are more likely to influence their targets.

Four dimensions of influence

In the following discussion, I identified four major dimensions of social influence that matter in contemporary Chinese foreign policies.

Defending power. Defending power here refers to the military strength that a state possesses. The function of military force focused on in this paper differs from what the BOP emphasizes. Since the norm of Westphalian sovereignty has been ingrained and protected by international actors, international wars for acquiring large shares of territory are less common albeit there are still occasional skirmishes for several disputed islets. Nonetheless, police forces, more than military forces, engage in those skirmishes. Rather than enforcing territorial expansion or resource exploitation, contemporary military forces of great powers are used more often to defend regional or international interests in non-traditional security areas, such as transnational terrorism and maritime piracy. China, for example, has been expanding its limited power-projection capabilities in hopes of ‘defending regional interests ... to perform nontraditional missions, to conduct military diplomacy, to demonstrate international responsibility, and to increase China’s prestige’ (Glosny et al., 2010). The United States has helped Southeast Asian countries combat transnational terrorism. The revitalization of the Philippines-U.S. alliance can be attributed to the anti-terrorist coalition (Castro, 2003). Great powers that are willing to share their defense forces offer benefits to weaker countries. Receiving security rewards from great powers in dealing with domestic or transnational problems would satisfy the weaker countries and make them more comfortable in providing reciprocal favors. For example, weaker countries are more likely to provide opportunities for great powers to softly protect its security interests (Ciorciari, 2009: 165-167). In addition, great powers will be liked more if they shoulder the responsibility of managing public security issues. As a consequence, great powers that are willing to use their defense power to maintain regional security and stability will possess greater sources of influence.

Welfare creation. Creating welfare to others is the most direct way to give favors. The types of welfare include military, economic, financial, or social assistance. Military aid has been provided more often by great powers to engage in disaster relief in those hit by severe natural disasters. The act of transferring economic or financial resources from rich countries to poorer ones is considered a strategy to lure for compliance. Signing liberal economic agreements is also another way to aggregate welfare. Social assistance, such as humanitarian aid or fights against diseases, also constitutes an important aspect of assistance. Offering welfare is a powerful tool for the influencer because individuals tend to return favors. If the element of welfare consists of scarce resources, the degree of influence will be even more powerful because the sense of limitation would create higher sensitivity to needs. In addition,

weaker countries are more likely to positively perceive those who generously provide urgent assistance.

Transnational affinity. Transnational affinity refers to the degree of common ideas or values shared by two transnational societies. Cohesion becomes tighter with higher affinity among nations. Those who see themselves with common grounds can create a psychological affinity group and will more likely, and more easily, influence other group members. In social psychology, in-group favoritism demonstrates that a cohort of in-group members who share similar characteristic and features are more likely to give favors to each other (Tajfel, 1970). Deducing from this rationale, because democratic governments have more common features, an imagined in-group is more likely to occur among them. Not only are their attitudinal statuses more equally aligned, so are their ways of governance, which tend to differ from non-democracies; therefore their consistent mindset and expectations will likely encourage them to commit to each other. Along the same lines, countries sharing the Confucian culture are also more likely to identify, recognize, and understand each other. The similarity promotes reciprocal behaviors among members with similar cultural features. To attract weaker countries, great powers sometimes appeal to their similarities.

Development experience. A country's development experience constitutes a source of influence. Nye (2004: 11-15) mentions that a government's policies can be a source of power of attraction. A good policy can change other's preferences. This is manifested in the debate of superiority in the Washington and Beijing consensus. The prerequisite for this dimension is a distinct and successful development experience. Not only does it allow a successful great power to have enough resources to shoulder more international responsibility or offer abundant material assistance, it also builds up authoritative status. Such status can maximize a state's reputational effects, which can encourage and facilitate cooperation and establish trust (Iain Johnston, 2008: 83-84); therefore making it influence more likely to succeed. One of the keys for generating influence is to attain authority in the areas in which one seeks to exert influence. This is not necessary an economic development experience. It can also be political, social, cultural, or technological development. Once a state becomes a successful story or role model in an area of national development, others will be more likely to emulate and thus follow their instructions. Achieving successful developments could then lead to greater influence. Positive discussions in, or even adaptation of, the development model of Beijing consensus among many countries

illustrate such influence. In a nutshell, a successful case study creates authoritative status, which in turn generates influence.

The key for states to successfully influence through utilization of their defense power and creation of welfare is the willingness to engage in those affairs. Possessing resources is not enough to generate influence. States have to use those tools they have; otherwise, influence by reciprocity will not occur. On the other hand, the core to social affinity and a development experience is the collection or exportation of qualities that others find attractive. If a country is willing to transfer its resources to become more attractive to others, the consequent influence can be great.

Balance of Influence

The purpose of maintaining a balance of power is to avoid the presence of a single hegemony. States tend to check each other's power by means of internal or external balancing, as mentioned in the previous section. Similar to BOP, the purpose of balance of influence is to prevent an omni-influential state from rising. Unlike the rationale stating that maintaining BOP would increase the chances of external survival, keeping BOI will raise the probability of domestic political survival. As mentioned earlier, contemporary national governments worry less about how to survive in an anarchic world but more about how to prolong their ruling power through increasing material gains. This is especially true in a region where the ideas of democracy and capitalism are more widely shared. For a national political leader, the importance of how to prosper economically may exceed that of how to conquer or defeat others militarily. According to Gallup polls, the percentage of Americans who identify economic issues as the nation's most important problem has risen from 22% in 2001 to 53% in 2013, while only 4% considered national security as the most important problem. The percentage identifying economic issues reached its peak of 86% in 2009 (Gallup, 2013). In the World Value Survey of 2007, 45.3% of Chinese respondents considered 'a high level of economic growth' the issue their country should aim toward, while only 22.7% considered 'strong defense forces' to be the aim. When states foresee a small likelihood of military defeat, resorting to coercive power becomes a lower priority. China's non-interference doctrine in its foreign policy reassures its weaker counterparts and thus makes China's social influence even more acceptable and reliable. To the influenced, the change of preference due to the receipt of social influence becomes more likely with its aim to achieve outstanding development to prolong its political survival. Below I present two strategies for those who seek to generate influence.

Material balancing. In order to exert more influence on others or reduce the influence of competitors, a great power can resort to the transfer of resources or provide public goods, which could potentially change the perception and preference of the influenced. A great power that seeks relative increase of influence can shoulder more transnational responsibility than others in maintaining regional stability, such as by signing mutually beneficial agreements to improve others' welfare, pooling economic resources for humanitarian aid, or transferring technological skills to those seeking development. The key to note is that material balancing is generously giving tangible benefits with the hope of receiving reciprocity, cooperation, or conformity from the recipient later. As James Davis (2000) argues, the influence is stronger through promises and assurances when the influenced subject senses fear or insecurity. Therefore, by giving material interests to weaker countries that are insecure about their position, a great power could more easily bring influence. In social influence theory, those receiving favors are less inclined to say no to those giving favors. If both parties share more qualitative traits, the favor can constitute an even stronger influence. Dreher et al. (2013) mentioned that a group of 'new' donors is emerging and it consists of major emerging economies. New donors can understand better the problems and situation confronted by the recipients than Western donors; therefore, recipients are more willing to follow their instructions. Competition among Western and major developing countries in giving aid is undergoing. For great powers, donations are not simply altruistic behaviors but acts with purpose. In the international arena, generous material interests given is ultimately with the intention to influence recipients to act in favor of the donors (Woods, 2008).

Psychological balancing. In addition to influencing with material interests, creating psychological affinity can be a beneficial means to amass influence as well. Great powers can amass their influence by increasing social affinity and sharing or selling successful development experiences. They can also strengthen their material balancing strategies as aid recipients are more susceptible to new donors, as mentioned earlier. Social affinity can be created by means of exporting distinct cultures, presenting rhetorical discourse regarding similarity, or creating common traits. For example, China has increased its global influence in democratic countries by exporting the Confucius culture and historical legacies, emphasizing its capitalist market system, or simply becoming more democratic. Democratic countries seeking more influence on autocratic regimes can simply support the democratization of those regimes. In addition, a great power can also psychologically influence others by becoming a role model in certain areas and sell their expertise to other places. The influence is thus amassed through submission to its authoritative status and reputation.

One way for a great power to psychologically counterbalance others' influences is to successfully develop itself and then sell its authoritative experiences to other countries that are more easily affected by the great power's reputation.

China's growing social influence

In this section, I apply the BOI to China's material and psychological balancing strategies and their effects toward developing countries in Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Material balancing through defense diplomacy

With China's fast economic growth, it has been more willing to use material interests to increase its influence in the region. Recognizing the growing importance of the international image of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Beijing has conducted the so-called 'defense diplomacy' worldwide, especially in its neighboring areas. To protect maritime routes from piracy, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has begun to increase their presence in several important sea routes worldwide. After Hu Jintao coined the phrase 'Malacca Dilemma,' which concerns the disruption of waterway from both traditional and non-traditional threats, China has actively engaged in sending PLAN abroad (Lanteigne, 2008). In addition to the immediate waters, PLAN further conducted an anti-piracy mission to the Gulf of Aden in the end of 2008. Although China's gesture was seen as a means to secure waterway critical to the exchanges of commodities and energy (Chen, 2010), Beijing's continuous participation is welcomed by many, including the United States, its global competitor (Kaufman, 2009). Besides combating maritime piracy, PLAN also stretched its overseas engagement in Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief mission. In the state-sponsored People's Daily, Beijing claimed to have participated in overseas rescue operations in 16 natural calamities, including the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, Hurricane Katrina, and the Kashmir earthquake in 2005 (People's Daily, 2009). PLA had also provided disaster relief to the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. China sees such missions as an important part of its defense diplomacy. The aim of such behaviors is to build international goodwill and to shape an image of a non-threatening, responsible stakeholder (Chacho, 2009).

As a fast-rising country, China is rhetorically and behaviorally careful to present its overseas military action so not to touch a nerve. The People's Liberation Army (PLA), in addition to national security, has been adeptly utilized as a diplomatic tool

to expand its influence in other countries. So far, it still keeps a low profile and presents itself as a provider of international public goods. Such stance seems to be welcomed and further encouraged (Erickson and Strange, 2012). In the ongoing action plan between ASEAN countries and China (ASEAN, 2010), ASEAN countries stress their intentions to seek more Chinese participation in countering regional non-traditional security, including anti-piracy, even though some of them are in territorial disputes with China regarding South China Sea. The defense minister of the Australian government, an ally of Washington, officially appreciates China's global counter-piracy efforts (Smith, 2012). In another action plan under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC, 2009), African countries expressed welcome to China's involvement in anti-piracy missions that contribute to peace and security around the continent. Ian Storey (2012) argued that China's defense diplomacy of transferring military resources successfully stretches its influence to Southeast Asian countries and, in return, wins over their cooperation in many domestic and international affairs. For example, although Thailand is a key ally of Washington's in Asia, military relationships between Bangkok and Beijing has deepened with greater cooperation on non-traditional security fronts. In addition, China has offered more military resources to Thailand. Requested by Beijing to hold an amphibious landing exercise in 2009, Thailand in the end reluctantly agreed. The chief of Royal Thai Navy delicately expressed the change of Thailand's perception toward the Chinese military by saying that 'he hoped Washington would understand that Bangkok needs to have a drill with other friendly countries as well' (Bangkok Post, 2010). Changes are seen in Thailand's order of preference regarding foreign military relations.

Material balancing through welfare creation

China also adopts a material balancing strategy in transferring economic benefits to other countries. Sometimes the transfer is unrequited donation. In terms of bilateral or multilateral trade agreements, China has already signed 21 preferential trade agreements (PTAs), which ranks at the top in East Asia (UNESCAP, 2013). The ASEAN - China FTA (ACFTA) is one of them that helps clear the way for a deeper and more comprehensive regional trade agreement (RTA) in East Asia. In addition, the first round of China-Japan-Korea FTA (CJKFTA) negotiations ended in late March of 2013. Should it be signed in the near future, ACFTA and CJKFTA will constitute a strong RTA that benefits the region while excluding other Asian great powers like India, Russia, and the United States. Such mutual liberalization of the market will generate stronger interdependent relationships among the actors. China also seeks to establish tighter state-to-region relationships through international

institutions, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and FOCAC. Through these channels, China continues to offer economic aid without much political or policy conditionality attached. It also offers concessional deals in trade and loans to those countries (Lum et al., 2008; Saferworld, 2011). In the Central Asian case, China yielded large shares of territories that are factors of production; in return China secured their cooperation that directly and indirectly assisted the Communist regime to downplay its internal unrest (Fravel, 2005). Another facet of China's influence may come from its growing global purchasing power. In the late 1990s, China was an important buyer in the region; now China has become the single largest buyer in East Asia, as well as in the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, India, and Pakistan. Money from China would benefit their domestic economies (Chen, 2013).

Creating welfare for others can also be done through providing official development assistance (ODA) and building infrastructure. China's government transfer, which includes aid and disaster relief to other governments, increased from US\$300 million in 2010 to more than US\$4 billion in 2012.⁴ As the number of assistances increase, transnational differences can be eased with China's role in building higher regional connectivity (Singh, 2013). Beijing has acted more actively in ODA not only through unconditional financial transfers but also through providing favorable deals in building infrastructure; however, some argue that the amount of China's foreign aid far exceeds the former. In Southeast Asia, China's economic assistance to developing countries has challenged the principle of non-conditionality and non-interference among major Western donors and Japan. Around 60% of Africans consider non-interference as a positive policy (Sautman and Yan, 2009: 738). Although China is still a developing country with low income per capita nationwide, it has already become a significant international donor to developing countries. It is estimated that China's aid to Southeast Asia has increased from a total of US\$36 million in 2002 to US\$6,735 million in 2007 (Lum et al., 2009: 8). According to the World Bank, the infrastructure loans from the China Export Import Bank to sub-Saharan Africa reached around US\$12.5 billion by 2006 (Taylor, 2009: 22). China is especially keen to economically support authoritarian regimes whose oppressive ruling style has been criticized and punished by Western democratic regimes. China is also keen on providing incentives to those regimes so they would cut off relationships with Western countries and in turn embrace Beijing with reciprocal favors (Halper, 2010: 78-93). Evidence also shows that votes in human right issues in the General Assembly of the United Nations has significantly tilted in favor of China who opposes the UN's overseas intervention. In 1997, the United States secured 77% of high-voting coincidence on human rights votes in the General Assembly while China secured 41%. This started to change in the early 2000s. By

2007 China was able to garner 74% voting coincidence while the United States' percentage significantly dropped to 30%. The EU attributed this in part to China's separating the human right situation and their foreign aid (Gowan and Brantner, 2008). With laxer aiding conditions, China has signaled reluctance to use economic incentives to change the behaviors of recipients but has instead tried to cause impact through reciprocity.

Table 1. Perception of China as a good influence from people in Southeast Asia

Country	Favorable	Total	Percentage
Laos	777	957	81.2%
Malaysia	677	925	73.2%
Thailand	661	979	67.5%
Philippines	575	932	61.7%
Cambodia	595	971	61.3%
Indonesia	409	896	45.6%

Sources: AsiaBarometer 2007. Data are available upon request at: www.asiabarometer.org/en/data (accessed 25 February 2013).

According to the AsiaBarometer, a region-wide attitudinal survey, a majority of respondents in most Southeast Asian countries see China as a 'good' or 'rather good' influence on their countries (Table 1). While China is the primary supplier of ODA to Cambodia and Laos, the Philippines received the most loans and aid from China among other ASEAN countries (Lum et al., 2009). It should be no coincidence that people in these countries share a positive image toward China's influence. Such tighter donor-recipient relationship has played an important role in China's relationship with its neighbors. A commissioned global poll published by the BBC World Service in 2011 showed that China is seen as the most important economic partner for Asian countries. The average importance score is 7.18 for China while the United States only scored 6.90 and the EU scored 6.58.⁵ Survey also showed that most people in Asia see China's economic rise as something positive, where 63% of Indonesians and 61% of Filipinos gave China's rising economic influence a positive value. On a global average, 50% of people appreciated China's economic influence while 33% viewed it negatively (BBC, 2011). The survey of Africans' perception of China also demonstrated that China is a more favorable partner to the continent. Compared with Western countries, 71% of African respondents think that China's policies are at least the same or more beneficial to Africa; 68.4% think that Chinese are at least the same or more adapted to their local societies; 61.1% think China, as a rising power, potentially benefits Africa; and 21.4% think that China is practicing

neo-colonialism while 37.1% disagree. The survey initiator noted that positive responses to China may come from the fact that ‘China cheaply and efficiently builds much of Africa’s infrastructure’ (Sautman and Yan, 2009). China’s growing economic engagement has changed others’ perception of it in a positive way and it has on average been positively appreciated, even exceeding the international perception toward the United States. Beijing, as a consequence, can more easily exert its social influence in a world that welcomes the rise of China.

Psychological balancing through social affinity

Aside from transferring material resources to regional countries, China also seeks to change perceptions using psychological balancing strategies. One way to realize it is through creating social affinity that promotes commonalities or cultural export, which brings about partiality and greater understanding. China often appeals to its developing counterparts by positioning itself as a developing country, thus promoting south-south cooperation. China also resorts to common experiences of colonial rule to underscore the economic inequity situation. Scholars observe that in the mid-twentieth century, China resorted to common anticolonial experiences and the struggles against underdevelopment to form solidarity with third-world countries. It actively promoted the ‘spirit of Bandung,’ a legacy that’s still prevalent today and that further helps shore up China’s geo-economic interests in many developing countries (Mensah, 2010). More recently, during the first FOCAC ministerial conference in Beijing, the then Chinese president Jiang Zemin noted in his opening remark that ‘China is the largest developing country in the world and Africa is the continent with the largest number of developing countries’ (People's Daily, 2000). Jamie Monson (2008) observed that ‘Beijing often claimed to belong with Africa to the Third World, a category that was defined racially and historically ... the U.S. and Soviet Union were described as European and imperialist ... China also intentionally highlighted the difference between its own approach to foreign aid and that of other donors, in particular the U.S. and Soviet Union.’ In Central Asia, China has attempted to build the SCO as an authoritarian club capable of fending off democratic trends. They staunchly stand together against any anti-government movements after a series of color revolutions occurred in the early and mid-2000s (Ambrosio, 2008). Values featuring soft regionalism and decisions based on consensus are the ASEAN way of managing regional affairs. China, taking part in ASEAN framework, is thus seen a less-likely threat in the eyes of Southeast Asian countries (Acharya, 1997).

Another policy tool China puts emphasis on is cultural export, which is manifested in its vast establishment of the overseas Confucius Institute (CI).

According to China's official statistics, China opened 353 CIs and 473 Confucian classrooms in 104 countries from 2005 to 2011. Its official rationale of CI was to '[develop] Chinese language and culture teaching resources and [make Ministry of Education] services available worldwide' (Pan, 2013). The real purpose of CI in the eyes of some experts, however, deviates from that. Yang and Hsiao (2012) considered CI as 'an indispensable instrument for Beijing's careful promotion of soft power diplomacy.' In his testimony, Mosher (2012) sees CI as possessing a politicized mission for China's overseas propaganda, which raises a concern of a Chinese 'Trojan horse.' Paradise (2009) considered CI as a tool for Beijing to conduct 'impression management' and increase its worldwide attractiveness so to reassure others of China's peaceful development. From the perspective of Chinese officials, CI's mission is to create a popular brand name that will enjoy higher popularity, reputation, and more social influence (Starr, 2009). In addition to the general public, CI also offers courses to foreign diplomats. In Ethiopia, for example, the Addis Ababa Confucius Institute started language training programs for Ethiopian diplomats. Lam Gany Deng, one of the students, said '(CI) helps me a lot to understand China more and to further enhance relation with Chinese people ... it is a good opportunity to have way of Chinese communication and later I will know more about China' (Agency, 2010). The establishment of CI worldwide creates cultural affinity that intends to positively change foreigners' perception of China through teaching the Chinese language and culture and through building up more common traits worldwide. In doing so, China hopes to create an imaginary group of members who understand a common language and culture. Such group affiliation will, in turn, promote collective identity, deeper recognition and, by extension, mutual benefits.

Psychological balancing through model demonstration

Another psychological strategy China uses is increasing its authoritative status of a national development experience. China's astonishing economic rise has led to the acclamation of the so-called 'Beijing Consensus,' a concept that is still without an agreed-upon definition, specification, and focus (Ramo, 2004; Williamson, 2012), but is considered an effective alternative developmental strategy for countries that are incompatible or uncomfortable with the Washington consensus, which emphasizes deregulation in economic, financial, and industrial policies (Williamson, 2000). Unlike Washington consensus' more extreme market reform, the Beijing consensus has shown the possibility of incremental reform without the need of democratic reform. Such method sells especially well in many non-democratic developing countries where leaders loath to link economic growth to radical reform and the

democratic system. The official voice of the Communist Party, the *People's Daily* (2003), once commented that although China participates in many existing international institutions as a status-quo actor, its strategy is to seek recognition from international societies and then influence other countries. As China becomes more authoritative, countries with similar developmental histories can be ideationally influenced even if they were once adversaries. For example, Vietnam has closely followed the Chinese developing experiences and has generated outstanding economic growth. Hanoi also treats China's management of political and social issues as a desired model to learn from. Allegedly Vietnam's officials were learning Jiang Zemin's 'Three Represents' ideology (Cheow, 2004).

Joshua Kurlantzick (2013) reported that since the early 2000s, China has provided Southeast Asian officials training programs on its developmental model. He cited an Indonesian scholar Ignatius Wibowo's research that 'the attraction to the Chinese model is unconscious ... (Southeast Asian nations) have shifted their development strategy from one based on free markets and democracy to one based on semi-free markets and an illiberal political system ... the Beijing Consensus clearly has gained ground in Southeast Asia.' Laos also sent batches of officials to China to learn the Chinese development model, which received positive feedback from trainees (Southivongnorath, 2010). African people also see the Chinese model as an example to follow (Lu, 2012). This model sells not only because it empirically explains China's outstanding economic growth, but also China's emphasis on reconciling with local issues. Surveying the perception of China's developmental model, 74.2% of African people had a positive view on it. For most African people, China's developmental model is an ideal model to emulate (Sautman and Yan, 2009: 736). The former Director General of the World Trade Organization, Supachai Panitchpakdi, once commented that 'China's robust economic performance should be a source of inspiration for other developing countries' (Panitchpakdi, 2003). Evidence also indicates that 7 out of 10 Southeast Asian countries have followed the Beijing Consensus that features a semi-market economy with an illiberal polity. The trend relates to China's successful experience in surviving the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and China's successful economic story (Wibowo, 2009: 215-217).

Joshua Ramo (2004: 37) observed that 'China's emerging power is based on the example of their own model, the strength of their economic position, and their rigid defense of the Westphalian system of national sovereignty.' Developing countries such as Brazil or Mexico, seeking to embrace globalization while preserving their local culture, turn to China for its successful experience in achieving both. Beijing's ideas and policies have become more acceptable worldwide and have attracted more followers. A recent study found a correlation between a country's socio-economic

situation and its public's views toward China. The national image of China perceived by people in poor countries is better than those in rich countries. The investigators attribute this result to the fact that 'people in poor countries ... see economic progress as hugely important. They admire China's economic success' (Xie and Page, 2013: 867). Such unconscious psychological perception in recognition of China's authoritative expertise makes Beijing more influential. When China shares more common ground on national developmental policies with other countries, their thoughts and behaviors will become more mutually acceptable and compatible, and they will thus more likely act in tandem with each other. As such, Beijing's policies will secure more allies around the world. China's expertise in its unique economic model also makes it a trustworthy leader in the world. All these factors increase China's global influence worldwide.

Conclusion

This paper builds on a theoretical framework that seeks to understand the motivation behind China's foreign policies and its consequent behaviors toward weaker countries. The theory of BOP might seem to account better for China's relationship with other great powers and its long-term trends, but the theory presents some obstacles as we try to understand China's contemporary gesture toward the developing world. In addressing these obstacles, I provide a theory of BOI that offers alternative explanations for China's behaviors. With the unlikely chance of major international wars in the short-term, major powers rely less on coercive forces but more on softer and favorable incentives to change the behaviors of weaker countries, which elevate the status of influence in great powers around the world. To achieve this goal, powerful countries cultivate gains through either material balancing by providing beneficial material incentives or psychological balancing to converge common identities. The ultimate goal is to change the weaker countries' perceptions and priorities in a way favorable to the great power. One should note that this paper does not give any moral judgment to China's foreign policies. It simply presents the logic in its relationship management that emphasizes the expansion of social relationships. Whether the thoughts and motivations behind doors are benign or malign is beyond the scope of this paper. As Avery Goldstein (2003) indicated, a reassuring peaceful rise can be a precursor of the pursuit of an assertive hegemonic status.

Following the theory of BOI yields three implications. First, we have already seen several incidences of great powers competing for influence in developing countries; this trend will likely occur more saliently in the upcoming future.

Recognizing China's fast-growing economic influence in Africa, Japan has also pledged US\$32 billion to Africa in order to catch up with China. This shows a great power trying to balance another's influence through material incentives (Reynolds and Hirokawa, 2013). Since coercive forces are less desirable and has received wider rejections from China and its non-interference supporters around the world, the United States would be more reluctant to use its military forces to interfere with domestic issues in other countries. Instead, Washington might seek to expand its influence using economic incentives. In a recent political reform in Myanmar, for example, the United States has provided economic and financial assistance to facilitate the democratization process and, in turn, improve the bilateral relationship between Washington and Naypyidaw at the expense of its relationship with Beijing. Evidence shows that Myanmar has been strategically influenced by Washington's material interests in its road to democratic reform (Yang, 2013).

Second, China who claims to be rising peacefully will continue to pour out abundant economic resources. Psychological influences through channels such as the Confucian Institutes will be a major tool. Should China continue its economic growth, both of its soft weapons will be strong bases for China's regional and global influence in the immediate future. Third, competition for regional integration plans in East Asia will continue to be intensive since each great power is seeking to penetrate regional players through welfare creation. ACFTA, CJKFTA, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are seen as a manifestation of China's intention to exclude the United States from regional interests, while the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is considered Washington's strategy to deny Beijing. In such a scenario, Washington may return to Asia with a comprehensive plan that emphasizes economic, cultural, and diplomatic relationships instead of just military deployments (Ratner, 2013). Beijing will continue to contribute economic resources and actively sell its economic model to the region while shaming Western models that created a series of economic crises and domestic turmoil in countries such as Iraq. The region's future development might hinge on whose influence wins out in the end.

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¹ Weaker countries here refers to secondary powers or developing countries, excluding OECD members. I use them interchangeably to indicate countries that are physically weaker than great powers.

² The observation comes from author's own interviews with Chinese diplomats and scholars in several unofficial occasions.

³ The 'influence' discussed in this paper borrow the idea of 'social influence' by Herbert Kelman. Hereby both terms are used interchangeably in this paper.

⁴ The data comes from China's balance of payments statistics, which is maintained by the State Administration of Foreign Exchange of China, <http://www.safe.gov.cn/>.

⁵ The importance score scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is 'not important at all' and 10 is 'very important'.