

The Motives and Effects of China's "New Model of Major Country Relations" in China-U.S. Relations

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the motives behind China's proposal of the "New Model of Major Country Relations" to the U.S in June 2013 and its effect on China-U.S relations. The timing and the contents of the proposal shows that that China proposed this discourse to the U.S as a way of challenging conventional discourse in international relations regarding the possibility of a war between rising and established powers. By doing so, China was seeking to mitigate the heightening distrust that has been accumulating since 2009. China's proposal however, did not improve China-U.S relations as American suspicions and distrust only increased as China failed to meet the American expectations. This paper concludes that China and the U.S did not converge in terms of how they would interact with each other under this new model of relations because of different interpretations of the contents of the new model of major country relations.

Keywords: China-U.S Relations, Chinese Foreign Policy, New Model of Major Country Relations, Power Transition

1. Introduction

Much of the literature in today's international relations (hereafter IR) focuses on the broad trend of the rise of China and the relative decline of the U.S. At the heart of the debate surrounding the world's most "consequential" relationship in the world (Kerry 2014) is, what intentions does China as a rising global power harbor towards the established power – the U.S – and the rest of the world? In other words, in the terms used by power transition theorists, is China a revisionist or a status quo power?

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Many analysts and commentators have based their outlook on realist premises, warning against the possibility of a “Thucydides” type of trap in the bilateral relations which could lead to a “tragedy” between great powers, that is, a war between an established power (the U.S) and a rising, challenging power (China). (Mearsheimer 2006, 2010; Graham 2013) Such conceptions have arisen because of the underlying assumption that China has hidden intentions of usurping or challenging the U.S as a global hegemony as it rises. According to the power transition theory, the probability of war between great powers rises as the power parity between the established and rising power narrows, and the level of dissatisfaction of the challenging power rises. (Tammen et al. 2000) This pessimist view is supported by figures. The narrowing power parity between the two is most obvious in economic power as China has overtaken the U.S to become the world’s largest economy based on an analysis by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) based on purchasing power parity. (Duncan and Martosko 2014) In terms of economic growth rate, America’s growth rate of approximately 2.2 percentage in the recent pales in comparison with that of China which is 8.8 percentage from 2010 to 2013. (World Bank 2015a) In terms of military expenditure, the gap in their spending seems to be narrowing although China spends only about 2.0 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) because the same figure for the U.S. has been decreasing consistently from 4.7 percent in 2010 to 3.8 percent in 2013.

(World Bank 2015b) Traditional power transition theorists point out that a second criterion for China to overtake the U.S to become the dominant power would then be China’s political capacity, or the ability to govern while facing both internal and external pressures. (Tammen et al. 2000) With the advent of Xi Jinping as the new leader in 2013, his grip on power seems to be tighter and more consolidate. (Moore 2013; Economy 2014) Thus, we can see that the power transition theory’s argument about the imminent challenge by China against the U.S. hegemony is supported by both the numbers as well as observation of China’s external and internal power. At the same time, there are Others who give a more mixed prediction picture of China and the U.S. that China and the U.S will continue to compete and cooperating simultaneously with each other because of the breadth of their interdependence. due to their increased interdependence over a myriad of issues. (Shambaugh 2013; Brzenziski) This paper aims to contribute to this the scholarship on the China-U.S bilateral relations by studying China’s foreign policy discourse to see what China is thinking.

It analyzes Chinese foreign policy discourse on the “New Model of Major Country Relations” (hereafter NMMCR) which President Xi Jinping officially introduced to President Barack Obama during their Sunnylands summit in June 2013. While Western literature have focused more on the policy implications of NMMCR in China-U.S relations, (e.g., Denmark 2013, Lampton 2013) there has been little literature in questioning China’s intentions in proposing this new type of relations among major countries. This is surprising despite many questioning China’s intentions as a growing global power as well as the importance of analyzing foreign policy in a changing world and the constructivist views on foreign policy (Rosati, Hagan and Sampson III 1994; Kubalkova 2001). Chinese literature on NMMCR differ from the Western ones as they look at the origins and motives behind the policy. (Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences 2014; Han and Li 2015) This study extends on the Chinese literature by adding the American response to NMMCR and offers explanation on Chinese intentions based on the analysis of the timing of the proposal and wording of NMMCR.

While this paper does not argue that discourse alone matters a lot in reading the intentions and motives of a country, the manner in which China brought this policy to the surface over many years the past seven years since 2008 suggests the NMMCR is more than a discourse. This paper therefore analyzes not only the language or the selection of words in NMMCR to analyze Chinese intentions, but also China’s use of the NMMCR discourse from the post-structuralist approach which focuses on power struggles in discourses. Such moves suggest China’s attempt to maneuver itself in American-dominated discourse on IR, also illustrated through China’s call for “Chinese characteristics” of diplomacy and the debate on the need for a “China-zation” (中国化) of IR discourse.(central library book). While this is not to say that a country almost always adheres to its foreign policy, a country and its leaders may not always adhere to their foreign policy rhetorics, China’s introduction and proposal of NMMCR officially in 2013 it suggests there are motives for creating such discourse. Therefore, this paper questions why China decided to formally officially introduce NMMCR to the U.S in June 2013, and not earlier or later, and also why its foreign policy towards the U.S is labeled as “NMMCR.” borrowing the argument from power transition theory that a dissatisfied rising great power will challenge the dominant power. It also asks if the U.S has been receptive toward China’s proposal of a new model of relations by analyzing American official responses towards China’s proposal..

This paper, however, does not look at the military capability or the possibility of a physical war between the two powers. But instead, it looks at the war of "discourse" in IR as well as the Chinese action of introducing such discourse from early 2012. Borrowing the argument from power transition theory that a dissatisfied rising great power will challenge the dominant power in terms of challenging Western ideas especially in the discourse on international relations and great power relations, (Schweller and Pu 2011) this research argues that Chinese dissatisfaction with the discourse regarding its behavior in the American-dominated international system is shown through its "NMMCR" discourse in the recent years. This paper therefore argues that In other words, China introduced NMMCR as a formal foreign policy discourse in 2013 to challenge the hitherto U.S-led system and U.S hegemony in the IR discourse on China's rise. China seeks to be a major power that is different from the traditional major powers in IR discourse that use force against other major and dominant powers. Thus, this paper argues that China is a dissatisfied partner in the China-U.S relations in terms of how U.S discourse perceives and interprets China's act concludes that the NMMCR is inadequate in effectively maneuvering the current discourses on China-U.S relations (which are usually pessimistic) in the way China wants, not because of China's inadequate power and influence but because of an increase in American dissatisfaction with China and its NMMCR which resulted in a high level of distrust between the two.

This paper will therefore first explore the genealogy of this new foreign policy, and then attempt to reveal the reason why China introduced this formally proposed this policy to the U.S. in June 2013 by analyzing the China-U.S bilateral relations through their joint statements, speeches and other official releases especially during the annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue since 2009. The oft-used expressions and phrases in these documents would be taken to reflect the respective country's perception of the bilateral relations. The paper then discusses the influence the NMMCR had on China-U.S relations by looking at American response since mid-2013. Evaluates China's success in changing the discourse on China-U.S relations by looking at American response especially after China introduced the new foreign policy in 2013. The core question that has been bugging the U.S as well as its allies like Japan since the turn of the new century is whether China would rise peacefully and not be a threat. In fact, China's rise as a major power was undisputable in the U.S. even from early 1990s.

(Quoted in Tammen et al. 2000) The most sought-after theory in IR then of course is the power transition theory which predicts the probability of war between great powers depending on power parity between the established and rising power, and the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the challenging power. (Tammen et al. 2000) The narrowing power parity between the two is most obvious in economic power as China has overtaken the U.S to become the world's largest economy based on an analysis by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) based on purchasing power parity. (Duncan and Martosko 2014) In terms of economic growth rate, America's growth rate of approximately 2.2 percentage in the recent years in comparison with that of China which is 8.8 percentage from 2010 to 2013. (World Bank 2015a) Strong economic growth rate translating into economic power coupled with military power based on military spending, the gap in their spending seems to be narrowing although China spends only about 2.0 percentage of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) because the same figure for the U.S. has been decreasing consistently from 4.7 percentage in 2010 to 3.8 percentage in 2013. (World Bank 2015b) Traditional power transitionists point out that a second criterion for China to overtake the U.S to become the dominant power would then be China's political capacity, or the ability to govern withstanding both internal and external pressures.

(Tammen et al. 2000) With the advent of Xi Jinping as the new leader in 2013, his grip on power seems to be tighter and more consolidate. (Moore 2013; Economy 2014) Thus, empirical data and opinions point to a rising China that has reached the stage of challenging the U.S. power. As for literature on NMMCR, while American and in general the West have focused more on the policy implications of NMMCR in China-U.S relations, (e.g Denmark 2013, Lampton 2013) there has been little literature in questioning China's intentions in proposing this new type of relations among major countries. This is surprising despite many questioning China's intentions as a growing global power. Chinese literature on NMMCR differ from the Western ones as they look at the motives behind the policy. (Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences 2014; Han and Li 2015) This paper therefore expands on the Chinese literature and explores the U.S. response to NMMCR and extends on the Western literature by analyzing the NMMCR in the China-U.S. relations especially right after President Xi first officially proposed the NMMCR to President Obama in June 2013. In other words, in addition to a discussion on why China decided to make NMMCR its official policy discourse towards the U.S. in June 2013, this study also aims to update on the progress of NMMCR to see if it had affected the bilateral relations, and if so, how and why.

China is arguably dissatisfied with the U.S and the international system especially in terms of the discourse used to describe its rise and its external behavior. It views the current system as being uncondusive to behave as it wants because of the prevailing view that it is indeed a threat to the U.S-led system and that its motives as a great power is opaque. Thus, this paper argues that Chinese dissatisfaction of the discourse regarding its behavior in the American-dominated international system is shown through its introduction of the “NMMCR” in t

2. The “New Model of Major Country Relations”

The audience outside China seems to take China's foreign policy discourse lightly, as shown by the different variants of NMMCR in different media outlets. For example, although the Chinese foreign ministry officially translated its policy (xinxingdaguoguanxi 新型大国关系) into “new model of major country relations”, the media and the scholarship outside China used variants like “a new type of great power relationship,” “a new type of major-power relationship,” a “new model of great power relations” or a “new model” of major power relationships. (Perlez 2013; Lampton 2013; Hadly 2013; Asahi Shimbun 2014; Joongang Daily 2013) This paper, however, suggests that China's intentions as a rising global power can be better understood if its foreign policy discourse is scrutinized. That is, there are reasons why Chinese leaders chose certain words over others in their policy slogan, especially if it is directed against the world's incumbent super power and thus the wording in the slogan needs to be examined.

2.1 History of NMMCR

Because policy-making process in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is different from that in more democratic countries like the U.S., tracing the origin of the NMMCR is not easy. This difficulty is especially more so for foreign policies than economic ones, where final decisions are made by the top-tier officials in the government (Goldstein 2012) and at the same time there is a lack of independent think tanks in foreign policy issues that can influence the Chinese government and policies. (Glaser 2012) While avoiding the discussion on the foreign-policy making process in Chinese leadership, this research focuses on how the rhetoric on NMMCR is being used in Chinese diplomacy. This is because for one thing, tThe NMMCR in 2013 was not new in China's foreign policy.

Although the currently-used “new model of major country relations”(or NMMCR) is known to be first introduced by the current President Xi Jinping when he visited the U.S. as the then vice president of People’s Republic of China (China) in February 2012, the same Chinese expression (in Chinese)was also used by the Chinese government as early as in 2000 when it discussed China’s diplomacy for the new century. (Renmin 2000)In addition, consideration of the Russo-China bilateral relations is also necessary to better under the concept of NMMCR. (Mancinelli 2014)As for the use in China-U.S relations context, although scholars flirted with the NMMCR since as early as 2006 (Liu 2006), similar discourse started creeping entering into the official foreign policy discourse in 2008 when State Councilor Dai Bingguo used “new type of relations” to describe future China-U.S relations. (FMPRC 2008)

A similar phrase was used again in July 2009 by Dai during the Opening Session of the First Round of the China-U.S. Strategic and Economic Dialogues (S&ED). In this speech, Dai called for to describe the efforts needed by U.S. and China to build a “new type of relationship between two major countries” based on “mutual respect, harmonious coexistence and win-win cooperation”. (FMPRC 2009c) Therefore, since 2008, various expressions with similar connotation the same connotation of a new type of relationship between major countries have been used by Chinese officials in their foreign policy speeches and statements related to the involving U.S every year, implying China’s fledgling, yet consistent foreign policy discourse vis-à-vis the U.S. since 2008. the consistency in China’s foreign policy toward the U.S since 2008.Despite different variants of NMMCR since 2008, the concept of NMMCR began to be formally used by the Chinese government since Xi Jinping’s visit to the U.S. in February 2012. According to the speech made by Xi who was then the Vice President of China, China and the U.S. should put in joint efforts in four areas to make the cooperative partnership between the two into “a new type of relationship between major countries in the 21st century.”(FMPRC 2012a) This speech is important in the history of the NMMC Rrhetorics because first, it was introduced by Xi who was to be the next Chinese leader and thus his speech during this visit would serve as a precursor of future Chinese policy towards the U.S. when Xi becomes the president in 2013. Second, based on the official speeches posted on the website of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, there was a sudden rise in frequency of the NMMCR and its variants in the foreign policy speeches and statements made in 2012 and in 2013 as compared to the previous years.

As The finalized discourse in its current form (the NMMCR) the form of “a new model of major country relations” would be used by Xi when he proposed mentioned it to President Barack Obama during their bilateral meeting in Sunnylands, California in June 2013. (Xinhuanet 2013) Thus, the 2013 June meeting should be regarded as a watershed that marks the beginning of China’s foreign policy vis-à-vis the U.S. under the discourse of NMMCR.

2.2 Features of the “New Model of Major Country Relations”

The three key features of the NMMCR were laid out by proposed by Xi during the Sunny lands summit in June 2013 was without any significant contents, prompting scholars to call it a “slogan.” (Bush III 2013) but attention should be given to Attention should be given to Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s Yi’s speech at the Brookings Institution made three months after Xi first put forward the new model to the U.S. later because I It was through this speech that Wang elucidated the specific details of the NMMCR, which is defined as, number one, “no conflict or confrontation”; number two, “mutual respect” and number three, “win-win cooperation.” (FMPRC 2013c)

In the same speech, Wang further clarified the relationship among these three features and their respective roles, indicating implying China’s intentions as a “major country.” on par with the U.S. The first feature of no conflict or confrontation is the “prerequisite” for the new model of major country relations between China and the U.S. By this he meant that China would not resort to war so that the history of war between an incumbent power and rising power would not repeat. Avoiding war, according to him, would benefit both China and the U.S. because the nature of the international system is a globalized and an interconnected one in which all countries have “shared interests, “Giving support to liberal arguments that complex interdependence would prevent both powers from going to war with each other. (Find sources) Second, the principle of “mutual respect” would be the “basic principle” of the NMMCR. This feature is the a result of China and the U.S. being different in terms of political systems and cultures and yet as they both powers share share common interests, demanding both countries they are required to respect each other’s differences. Third, “win-win cooperation” between China and the U.S. is the “prescribed behavior” of both countries to realize the NMMCR.

The reason behind this is that bilateral cooperation between the two is inevitable in myriad areas such as cyber security, counter-terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, and in regional issues like Africa and Middle East. Minister Wang further clarified the NMMCR by using the metaphor of a building – mutual respect would be the “foundation of a building” upon which, if solid, would allow win-win cooperation. (FMPRC 2013a) Thus, by September 2013, the Chinese leadership seemed to have decided the contents of NMMCR, signaling their intentions to continue using this rhetoric in their public statements and speeches.

3. The Dynamics of China-US Bilateral Relations from 2009 to 2012

There is a need to overview the China-US relation since 2009 since this research suggests that the NMMCR rhetoric did not emerge abruptly. because the paper also argues that the NMMCR did not suddenly appear in 2012. It is a product of years of careful planning and strategic calculations on China's part as observed similar expressions of building a new type or model of relations with the U.S. were used in diplomatic speeches, statements, and remarks. The U.S. and the rest of the world, however seemed to have overlooked the message that China has been sending through its diplomacy rhetorics. that seem to have been overlooked by the U.S and the rest of the world.

The year 2009 was picked as the beginning of the analysis in this paper because the year 2009 marks the beginning of a new era of China-US relations after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008. The crisis not only took a toll on the US economy as its growth rate was negative in 2008 and 2009 and it has yet to recover to levels that of pre-2008 crisis, (World Bank 2015) but it also allowed “the rest” like China to rise relative to American global power. (Zakaria 2008) China emerged relatively stronger as it was relatively unscathed compared to the U.S and other developed economies, and the Asia-Pacific region became the new global economic powerhouse as Europe and Latin America were stricken by the GFC. Another possible reason why the year 2009 is significant is the election of Barack Obama as the U.S President in 2008 and a change in U.S leadership could have been perceived by China as an opportunity to further improve relations, as shown by Chinese eagerness for the Strategic Economic Dialogue, the predecessor to the Strategic & Economic Dialogue, to survive changing U.S administration in 2008. (Glaser 2008)

The period of 2009 through 2014 is short but nonetheless it reveals that China-U.S relations is an extremely dynamic one that is constantly in a flux because both powers are intertwined with each other in multitude issues and both take different stances in almost all issues. A survey of speeches, remarks and joint statements given by leaders and officials from both countries during their annual Strategic & Economic Dialogue (S & ED) since 2009 discloses the sticking points confronting the bilateral relations over the years. The S & ED materials were chosen as the key sources to analyze the state of bilateral relations as this mechanism was established in the year 2009 and being the most important bilateral mechanism between the China and the U.S today, it reveals best the interaction and dynamics between these two powers. This paper divides the period into four phases, with each phase being represented by a key phrase or discourse used frequently in speeches and remarks.

3.12009 – 2010: “A Positive, Cooperative and Comprehensive Relationship”

The impetus for China-U.S bilateral relations in 2009 was the GFC which necessitated both countries to coordinate and cooperate in economic and financial system rebuilding and recovery which was recognized by both countries. (FMPRC 2009b; State Department 2009d) Thus the 2009 S&ED prioritized issue-areas that were easier to agree upon such as economy, followed by climate change and clean energy. The importance of security issues such as North Korea's denuclearization and arms race issue dropped to the third place. (State Department 2009a; Clinton and Geithner 2009; State Department 2009c) The most oft-used phrase or expression to describe the bilateral relations in 2009 was a “positive, cooperative and comprehensive relationship,” which was also mentioned by State Councillor Dai Bingguo and President Barack Obama in during their speeches in July 2009. (State Department 2009b, White House 2009a; FMPRC 2009a; State Department 2009c) This broad discourse expression of “positive, cooperative and comprehensive relationship” suggests ambiguity on how to frame in framing the bilateral relations in 2009. The economic and financial issues were the priority and the first round of S&ED seemed to be more of an ad hoc crisis-management mechanism rather than a forward-looking meeting. representation of a trustful relationship. Two years after the crisis, the both countries still dwelled on the same “positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship.”

with China. (State Department 2010a; FMPRC 2010a) Coordination between the two for economic recovery became less salient and its importance dropped in the list from the US perspective because of security issues involving North Korea and the realization that there are differences in terms of property rights, Chinese domestic market, and financial sector. (State Department 2010b; State Department 2010c) China, however, dodged the security issue part and but reiterated the importance of economic recovery. It was also during the 2010 S&ED when State Councillor Dai Bingguo brought up the "NMMCR" discourse in his remarks about both countries having to overcome "suspicion, confrontation, and war". (State Department 2010d) In Therefore, in 2010 more differences than agreements started surfacing as China started deflecting suggestions' defending' itself in the face of American suspicions that that it is not a trustworthy power. in the American eyes..

3.2 2011: "Need for Mutual or Strategic Trust"

The S&ED in 2011 showed signs of growing conflict and growing distrust between the two countries, leading them to the establishment and addition of include a security dialogue and the Asia-Pacific Consultation to the S & ED mechanism for the first time. (State Department 2011c) This was because of the realization on both sides that misunderstanding, and misperception of the each other's intention and action could lead to serious consequences. In other words, b Both countries did not trust each other. The U.S seeking "candid and honest" talks and being explicit by admitting that there are "fears and misperceptions" in both countries reveals the accumulating distrust. (State Department 2011a) China, on the other hand, At the same time, China was harping on creating a new type of major country relations between the two. (State Department 2011 a)Hillary Clinton, the then-Secretary of State, in her speech called for avoidance of zero-sum game and to develop habits of cooperation between the two countries.(State Department 2011b)Dai Bingguo in his press conference also reciprocated the need to promote trust on both sides and was explicit that China would adhere to peaceful development and it has no intention of challenging the U.S. (FMPRC 2011a) The outcome of the year's S&ED was the addition of security dialogue and the Asia-Pacific Consultation to the existing bilateral mechanism.(State Department 2011c) The emerging discourse on distrust and zero-sum game in the S & ED dialogue in 2011 is not surprising when looking back at China's external policies in 2010.

Many scholars and analysts like Pei (2010), Shambaugh (2010) and Christensen (2011) highlight the year 2010 as the year when China was assertive in several aspects including its siding with North Korea following the sinking of Cheonan ship in March, its aggressiveness in diplomacy toward Japan following the fishing trawler collision in East China Sea, and China's unwillingness to cooperate in the Copenhagen Climate Change conference. (Cho 2013) China's behavior in 2010 bred suspicion in the U.S about China's intentions especially in security, and thus the S&ED in 2011 was held amid attempts to heighten trust between the two so as to avoid possible security dilemma which would further destabilize their bilateral relations and the East Asian region.

3.3 2012: To "Avoid Zero-Sum Game" and the Fate of Great Powers

The 2012 S&ED demonstrated determination on both sides to avoid the realist logic of "great power tragedy" in which a war breaks out as a rising power challenges an established power. In the opening remarks during the 2012 S&ED, the U.S was more forthcoming with their intention of avoiding a "zero-sum game" and unhealthy competition or conflict. (State Department 2012b) U.S also expressed its intention to change the repeating patterns of history between great powers by doing something "unprecedented" in history. (State Department 2012b; State Department 2012c) This was echoed by Dai Bingguo in his farewell remarks as he called for "new answers" to "old question" by avoiding the fate of great power politics in history. (FMPRC 2012a) Such iterations appear to be part of a trust-building effort on the part of the U.S. in order to reassure China of U.S. intention to "pivot" to Asia in late 2011 and the possibility of U.S containing China as Clinton preached on America's "Pacific Century" in October 2011. (Clinton 2011) while China similarly assuaged the U.S that China intended to avoid any conflict by pushing for the NMMCR based on mutual trust, respect and proactivity. (FMPRC 2012b; FMPRC 2012c; FMPRC 2012d) Repeated phrases of "unprecedented" history and the promotion of a new type of relationship between major countries by the U.S and China respectively point out to the anxiety on both sides to extinguish alleviate the growing flames of heightening distrust and misperception especially after U.S decided to "return" to Asia-Pacific region. China was defensive about its allegedly "aggressive" behavior in 2010 while the U.S was defensive about its policy toward Asia-Pacific region. In summary, the above analysis of the S & ED remarks and statements from 2009 to 2012 reveals the underlying but growing distrust between U.S and China which was initially veiled by the urgency created by of the global financial crisis of 2008.

But this distrust became increasingly obvious as economic and financial recovery took a back step in the dialogue over the years.

4. 2013-2014: NMMCR as China's Official Foreign Policy Discourse and the U.S Response

Distrust between China and the U.S was on the rise in 2013 when China officially proposed the NMMCR to the U.S in June. (White House 2013a; White House 2013b) The year 2013, however, is also significant for China-U.S relations because of the advent of a new administration under President Xi Jinping, and thus which implies that China's words and actions in 2013 were to be harbinger to China-U.S relations for at least another decade. the next five years. What should be scrutinized next in China's rhetoric of NMMC Rintroduced in 2013 and beyond is the consistency of the wording as well as the quotation marks used for NMMCR. In other words, why did China's decision-makers choose to formally officially introduce its foreign policy toward the U.S as the "New Model of Major Country Relations" NMMCR with quotation marks? A new administration under Xi Jinping does not suffice in explaining the formal introduction of NMMCR in 2013 because Hu Jintao, Xi's predecessor also touted on the same policy in 2012. This paper thus questions the motive and intention behind the NMMCR introduced in June 2013.

Since both China and the U.S agreed on the need to avoid the realist notion of potential war between a rising power and an established power in 2012, subsequent foreign policy discourse put forward by either country would be an anti-thesis of the ideas of neo-realist theory of IR and power transition theory. Put simply, China's NMMCR seems to confront the conventional IR discourse on power transition – that a war between an established power and a rising, dissatisfied power would occur– which appears frequently in many discussions surrounding the future China-U.S. relations. China's introduction of NMMCR in 2013 is an attempt to manipulate the current discourse in the academia and in general about China's intention to challenge the U.S as a rising power and its level of dissatisfaction. In other words, China's new foreign policy discourse reveals China's dissatisfaction with the discourse on China's "unpeaceful" rise.

4.1 Identifying the "New" in NMMCR

This paper argues that NMMCR is new in terms of its contents which are specified in T the three features of NMMCR elucidated by Foreign Minister Wang Yi in September 2013 may appear strange in the eyes of realist perception. First, the feature of "no confrontation" means that China would not go to war against the U.S. which is different from the prediction on great power conflict in the power transition theory. Second, the feature of "mutual respect" is another way of defying the hierarchical U.S.-led system in which U.S. as a global hegemony insists countries should follow values and systems promoted by the U.S. Third, the feature of "win-win" cooperation is also the opposite of realist assumption of zero-sum games in international politics. The NMMCR discourse is also new as it reveals China's desire to change the discourse about itself by selecting the word "country" over "power." Such deviation from the realist notion is not new for China as it will be briefly explained later how Chinese traditional values have been fused into China's foreign policy

Nevertheless, the introduction of NMMCR by China in June 2013 is not a radical change from the conventional neo-realist theory of power transition in IR as China's action of introducing this "new" idea is a way of challenging the U.S and the hitherto IR discourse that is dominated by American scholarship. The introduction and subsequent elucidation of the three features of NMMCR shows China's sincerity in promoting the discourse (and that it would not be one-time foreign policy rhetoric) and at the same time it also suggests China's dissatisfaction with the current discourse in IR and in the media about the alleged 'assertive' China's external behavior. Thus, an element of conflict between China and U.S still remains even if China pines for a "new" model of relationship with the U.S if the U.S – and the rest of the world – is not receptive toward this new idea and discourse. The discourse is part of China's attempt to project its image as a peaceful developing country. China's attempt to remove itself further away from realist discourses about great power politics is also apparent from the choice of the word "country" over "power" in NMMCR. Likewise, the word "major" instead of "great" was chosen as a way to project China's visions of a future international order as being one of multipolarity instead of bipolarity or unipolarity.

In a way, insistence of such words reflects a deviation from the frequent discourse on China as an ambitious global power which intends to challenge and usurp the status quo, possibly leading to a war with the U.S. The next question would then be, as already mentioned - why are quotation marks used with the NMMCR that was proposed in June 2013? Quotation marks are usually used for emphasis. Then why has the emphasis on the NMMCR begun in 2013 when principles of mutual respect, win-win cooperation, and non-confrontation have been reiterated by Chinese leaders for a long time in their foreign policy speeches and statements? The use of quotation marks for NMMCR since 2013 reflects two things. First, it shows China's intention to 'manipulate' introduce something new to the conventional theories of IR and conventional IR discourse on China. In a way this illustrates a 'Constructivist' approach to foreign policy-making since it shows Chinese attempts to change its identity through diplomacy rhetoric. Second, It also reflects a deviation or shift from China's hitherto passive foreign policy toward an active one foreign policy whereby China would no longer remain submissive to the status quo but instead it would initiate a new not only policies and institutions but also foreign policy discourse in IR. Such intention is heavily suggested in Foreign Minister Wang Yi's speech on China's plans to disseminate diplomacy with "Chinese characteristics." (FMPRC 2013b)

Thus, the NMMCR is not only specific to China's relations with the U.S but is also intended for its relationships with other major countries or blocs like the European Union (EU) and Russia. In other words, China is challenging the existing status quo in IR discourse or the Western-type of diplomacy by introducing the NMMCR as a 'Chinese style' of diplomacy and is intending to disseminate it to other countries as well. Hence, the word "model" is used instead of "type" in NMMCR, indicating that China has embarked on establishing its own style of diplomacy. Since 2014, China has also introduced its subsequent diplomacy based on a "new type of international relations" at several international platforms. (e.g, Xinhuanet 2015; ___)

4.2 Translating Words into Actions? Evaluation of NMMCR Based on American Response

While China's motives and intention behind the introduction of NMMCR in 2013 are crucial in understanding China's future path as it emerges as a major power, how the U.S has responded to China's suggestion is equally important when analyzing the NMMCR as it would show whether China has translated its NMMCR into action. the bilateral relations. Although the U.S initially appeared to be receptive toward China's suggestion for a new type of relationship between the two, there is growing distrust regarding China's sincerity in adhering to the features of NMMCR. This has been perpetuated by American dissatisfaction as a 'defender' of the existing system with Chinese attempts to change the IR discourse on their bilateral relations. Right after the bilateral meeting with President Xi Jinping on June 7, 2013, President Obama seemed to reciprocate Xi's "NMMCR" as he said that the "new model of relations" between the U.S and China can be advanced. (White House 2013b) However, the U.S. distrust would soon surface a month later when the Chinese media asked U.S officials what the U.S thinks of NMMCR. The U.S response was as follows:

"The only thing I'd like to say about that is, because I think it's important to ask the Chinese side what they – how they would define this expression, but I think that what's important here is that we use the S&ED – if we are going to establish a new type of relationship, what we would like to see is something more concrete in terms of cooperation. If they are going to talk – if the Chinese side is going to talk about moving away from old thinking in our relationship, then we ought to see more cooperation, and that's what we're hoping the S&ED will result in. And so that's what we've told our Chinese counterparts, especially on the strategic side, is that we already understand the Chinese side has an interest in realizing a new type of relationship. But the key for us is to find a way to do that and to build confidence between our two sides so we can actually achieve what we hope to." (State Department 2013d) [Italics added by author.] The response above clearly shows the lack of trust on the U.S side in whether China sincerely means meant it seeks sought cooperation with the U.S in terms of actions and not words. The U.S even explicitly expressed its disappointment with China and its NMMCR during the 2013 S&ED as shown by Deputy Secretary William Burns' response below.

“Of course, U.S.-China relations remain a work in progress. Our interests can differ, and so can our approaches. When we encounter differences or sensitive issues, we need to address them directly in consultation with one another. And that is why we were very disappointed with how the authorities in Beijing and Hong Kong handled the Snowden case, which undermined our effort to build the trust needed to manage difficult issues. Over the past two days, we made clear that China’s handling of this case was not consistent with the spirit of Sunny lands or with the type of relationship – the new model – that we both seek to build.” (State Department 2013e) [Italics added by author] While the first response showed that U.S. was initially hopeful about the 2013 S&ED since the dialogue was held a month after President Xi formally proposed the NMMCR to President Obama, the second response showed that U.S. initially accepted such proposal but was disappointed by China at the end of the 2013 S&ED. In turn, both responses reflect U.S.’s desire for frank and honest talks with China in sensitive issues like human rights rather than having talks under a broad slogan like the NMMCR. China, perhaps in attempts to deflect accusations about its failure to translate words into actions by cooperating with the U.S., made specific commitments in other less sensitive issue-areas like patent and food safety later that year. (White House 2013c)

The lack of distrust and confidence by the U.S. remained in 2014. During the Shangri La Dialogue in May 2014, U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel pinpointed at China for its unilateral actions like asserting territorial claims in South China Sea and declaration of declaring the Air Defense Identification Zone. (Defense Department 2014) During the conference, China at the conference made no reference to the NMMCR, but instead it struck back at both U.S. and Japan, accusing them of staging a direct provocation toward China. Lieutenant General Wang Guanzhong even added an impromptu speech accusing the Secretary Hagel’s speech of having “tastes of hegemony” and containing expressions of “coercion and intimidation” that could stir trouble in the region. (IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2014) The addition of security dialogue and Asia-Pacific Consultation into the S&ED as well as introducing military-to-military engagement and people-to-people exchange mechanisms between China and the U.S. are evidence of efforts by both sides to reduce distrust and misperception which could prevent security. In addition, Meanwhile, U.S. officials openly questioned China’s sincerity not only regarding NMMCR but China’s other foreign policies such as its periphery policy.

A U.S. senior official expressed skepticism toward China's sincerity to adhere to its words in his answer to a question on U.S. stance on territorial disputes in South China Sea. "China has stated repeatedly and at high levels its commitment to good relations with the countries on its periphery and its commitment to peaceful diplomatic means to address territorial issues. We want China to honor that and live up to its word." (State Department 2014a) [Italics added by the author.] Thus, in the early half of 2014, distrust escalated between the two and this was carried on to the S&ED in July. Secretary John Kerry echoed the skepticism toward China's sincerity in translating its words into action. "I heard many times President Xi Jinping just now talk about a great country relationship, a new model. I would say to you that a new model is not defined in words. It is defined in actions. The new model will be defined by the choices that we can make together. And that is why it is important for us to make the most of these next two days as we share the kind of inter-disciplinary experience that your delegation and our delegation have gained over the years." (State Department 2014b) [Italics added by author] This distrust and somewhat "cynicism" of the U.S. towards China's "NMMCR" has remained till the end of 2014. (Cheng and Xu 2014)

Therefore, in the first year of NMMCR and broadly, the official introduction of NMMCR as China's foreign policy vis-à-vis the U.S. did not have positive impacts on the bilateral relations as China's external behavior received bad marks was perceived negatively and did not match China's NMMCR. as China's actions did not reflect its words. The reason behind this is because of China's emphasis on the second feature of NMMCR which is "mutual respect" which Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his Brookings Institution speech referred to as the foundation of China-U.S. relations. This feature of mutual respect also encompasses the idea of equality between major and smaller countries, and also the idea of non-interference in domestic affairs. China's demand for and adherence to non-interference in its domestic affairs from by the U.S. was obvious when it refuted criticisms of its handling of the "Umbrella movement" in late 2014. It argued that by counter-arguing that America's "finger-pointing" at China is ironical considering America's own mishandling of the police officers' killings of two unarmed African Americans. (People's Daily 2014) More importantly, mutual respect clamored by China can only be fully understood by interpreting it in the context of China's "core interests," which are defined as, first, upholding China's basic systems and national security, secondly, protecting China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and thirdly, promoting economic and social sustained development.

(Xinhua net 2011) Moreover, Chinese leaders and officials have kept repeating that China remains committed to its core interests regardless of what happens. "Mutual respect" in general for China therefore means that other countries should respect China's core interests and in the China-U.S context, China is implying that the U.S. ought to not interfere in Chinese domestic affairs by criticizing Chinese actions. The U.S response in late 2013 and early 2014, however, interprets the NMMCR as indicating that China would 'change' its behavior in cooperation with the U.S. Thus, the U.S interpretation of China's NMMCR is more optimistic while China's intention with NMMCR rings a more solemn note. Hence, there is a gap in the perception by the U.S and China in terms of their expectations towards each other after China's announcement of NMMCR in June 2013. While the U.S appears to place the greatest weight of importance on "win-win cooperation," as shown by the quotes earlier which shows the U.S expectations for greater cooperative behavior, China seems to emphasize "mutual respect" the most as shown from Minister Wang Yi's speech on the need to accept China as a unique country as well as China's obsession and its adherence with to its "core interests." (FMPRC 2013)

Although China's insistence on safeguarding its "core interests" seems comprehensible from the rational and realist theories of IR, there are other possible explanations that are unaccounted for in traditional IR discourse. Conventional IR discourse, being heavily influenced by American scholarship, is unable to fully account for China's behavior. However, this problem can be relatively reduced if we take into account the influence of Chinese traditional values on China's foreign policy. The role of culture in China's foreign policy has become more salient recently as China constantly brings up the uniqueness of its culture in its diplomacy rhetoric to the extent of influencing its international relations. (Lynch 2013; Pethiyagoda 2014) China's insistence on protecting its core interests and the demand for mutual respect reflects China's interpretation of 'harmony.' For China, being in 'harmony' is as not being equivalent to 'uniformity,' and the and in the context of IR, it means that need for big big powers to should respect small countries.(Zhang 2013)is reflected in "mutual respect." In addition, China's idea of harmony does not imply an absence of conflict or clash. Instead, harmony in Chinese culture it underlines implies proper handling of conflicts and struggles which is different from Western understanding of 'harmony' as to mean 'peace' or an absence of conflict or dispute.. (Qin 2012; Zhang 2013)

Thus, based on these different interpretations and China's insistence on it being unique and different from Western civilization requires us to take into account China's culture and history as it influences Chinese perception that could be different from that of Western countries. Another implication of China's intransigence in wanting to be accepted as China it is and not what it ought to be brings us back to the argument of this paper – China's NMMCR is a form of challenging U.S. Western norms and ideas in IR discourse, but not in the same way as how realists perceive in traditional IR discourse. Put simply, the power struggle between China and the U.S. today does not involve physical clash but it is a war of ideas and discourse.

5. Conclusion: Spreading “Chinese Characteristics” to International Relations

Despite the failure of the NMMCR to improve China-U.S. relations since 2013, the NMMCR introduced in 2013 is worthy of attention in IR because it shows that China is attempting to influence the most consequential bilateral relationship in the world in the way it wants. China has constantly been pushing for the NMMCR since 2008 even though its bilateral relations with the U.S. face many hurdles especially in sensitive issues like human rights, cyber security, and maritime disputes in South China Sea. Moreover, the proposal of NMMCR and the failure to meet the American expectations of a more cooperative Chinese behavior seemed to have backfired since it only bred greater distrust. Nevertheless, China has moved onto further “proselytize” the conventional IR discourse and ideas by innovating diplomacy discourse in the form of “new type of international relations” in late 2014. (FMPRC 2014) This seems to be a continuation from the NMMCR, but which is to be applied to non-major countries. By expanding the application of the NMMCR to other major powers like Britain and Russia and by promoting new discourses on international relations, China seems to have embarked on a course of challenging conventional American-led IR discourses on great power relations and on China. Such moves can be understood from the Constructivist perception as China trying to gain control over its foreign policy. In addition, the contents of the NMMCR paint a more optimistic picture of China's rise. The recent fusion of Chinese culture and history into its official foreign policy discourse however, raises further questions regarding China's intentions because China seems to expect others to understand and accept Chinese culture as given.

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