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## Links

### China Threat

#### The illusion of the “china threat” is going to intensify unless concerned Countries such as the U.S. re-evaluate their discourse and thought processes

Chengxin Pan, PhD degree in Political Science and International Relations, 07-04-2012, http://www.fairobserver.com/article/three-way-illusions-south-china-sea-22

**In international relations, illusions are not merely harmless fantasies. When political actors act upon them as ‘truth’**, they are capable of constituting reality. **The current situation in** the South **China** Sea **has been shaped** in no small part **by** the aforementioned **illusions**. But the unfolding crisis is hardly in any country’s long-term interest, except for serving brief political or nationalist goals. **It is** therefore **time for all countries concerned to have a reality check and pull back from the brinks of these illusions.** **Otherwise,** it is not inconceivable that the **players in the region might continue to be bogged down in ever-spiralling disputes and competition that do not bode well for US-China relations or regional stability.**

#### The “china treat” is created by constructed discourse that attempts to increase U.S hege and otherizes China

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In the following sections, I want to question this "truth," and,¶ more generally, question the objective, self-evidentiary attitudes¶ that underpin it. In my view, the "China threat" literature is best¶ understood as a particular kind of discursive practice that¶ dichotomizes the West and China as self and other. In this sense,¶ the "truism" that China presents a growing threat is not so much an objective reflection of contemporary global reality, per se, as it is a discursive construction of otherness that acts to bolster the hegemonic leadership of the United States in the post-Cold War world. Therefore, to have a better understanding of how the discursive construction of China as a "threat" takes place, it is now necessary to turn attention to a particularly dominant way of U.S. self-imagination.

#### The “China threat” is not an external reality. U.S. self-knowledge explicitly creates the category of thought that makes China, because it doesn’t fit the universal, a threat.

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**The United States has** since **been construed as the manifestation of the law of nature**, with its ideas and institutions described¶ not as historically particular but as truly universal. For example, in¶ his second inaugural address in 1917, President Woodrow Wilson¶ declared that U.S. principles were "not the principles of a province¶ or of a single continent. We have known and boasted all along that¶ they were the principles of a liberated mankind. "^^ j ^ short, "The¶ US is Utopia achieved."^s It represents the "End of History."s\*¶ **What does this U.S. self-knowledge have to do with the way in which it comes to know others** in general **and China** in particular**?** To put it simply, **this self-knowledge is** always **a powerful analytical¶ framework within** **which other societies are to be known**. By envi-¶ sioning a linear process of historical development with itself at its¶ apex, the United States places other nations on a common evolu-¶ tionary slope and sees them as inevitably traveling toward the end¶ of history that is the United States. For example, as a vast, ancient¶ nation on the other side of the Pacific, China is frequently taken as¶ a mirror image of the U.S. self. As Michael Hunt points out,¶ we imagine ourselves locked in a special relationship with the¶ Chinese, whose apparent moderation and pragmatism mirror our¶ own most prized attributes and validate our own longings for a¶ world made over in our own image. If China with its old and rad-¶ ically different culture can be won, where can we not prevail?^^¶ Yet, in a world of diversity, contingency, and unpredictability,¶ which is irreducible to universal sameness or absolute certainty,¶ this kind of U.S. knowledge of others often proves frustratingly elu-¶ sive. **In this context, rather than questioning the validity of their own universalist assumptions, the people of the United States believe that those who are different should be held responsible for the lack of universal sameness.** Indeed, because "we" are universal**, those who refuse or** who **are unable to become like "us"** are no¶ longer just "others," but **are by definition the negation of universality, or the other**. In this way, the other is always built into this¶ universalized "American" self. Just as "Primitive . . . is a category,¶ not an object, of Western thought,"^^ so **the threat of the other is not** some kind of **"external reality"** discovered by U.S. strategic analysts**, but a** ready-made **category of thought within this particular way of U.S. self-imagination.**

#### We currently conceptualize China as being a solid hegemon who threatens American way of life, when in all reality it is a fluid country whose identity is constantly changing

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It may be the case that there is nothing inherently wrong with¶ perceiving others through one's own subjective lens. Yet, **what is¶ problematic with mainstream U.S. China watchers is that they¶ refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the inherent fluidity of¶ Chinese identity and subjectivity and try instead to fix its ambiguity¶ as absolute difference from "us," a kind of certainty that denotes¶ nothing but otherness and threats.** As a result, **it becomes difficult¶ to find a legitimate space for alternative ways of understanding an¶ inherently volatile, amorphous China^^ or to recognize that China's¶ future trajectory in global politics is contingent essentially on how¶ "we" in the United States and the West in general want to see it as¶ well as on how the Chinese choose to shape it.**^^ Indeed, discourses¶ of "us" and "them" are always closely linked to how "we" as "what¶ we are" deal with "them" as "what they are" in the practical realm.¶ This is exactly how the discursive strategy of perceiving China as a¶ threatening other should be understood, a point addressed in the¶ following section, which explores some of the practical dimension¶ of this discursive strategy in the containment perspectives and¶ hegemonic ambitions of U.S. foreign policy.

### U.S. Self-Identification

#### U.S. self-identification is what creates the “China Threat”

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**The (neo) realist emphasis on survival and security in inter-¶ national relations dovetails perfectly with the U.S. self-imagination,¶ because for the United States to define itself as the indispensable¶ nation in a world of anarchy is often to demand absolute security**. As¶ James Chace and Caleb Carr note, "for over two centuries the aspi-¶ ration toward an eventual condition of absolute security has been¶ viewed as central to an effective American foreign policy."50 And **this¶ self-identification in turn leads to the definition of** not only "tangi-¶ ble" foreign powers but **global contingency and uncertainty per se as¶ threats**. For example, former U.S. President George H. W. Bush¶ repeatedly said that "the enemy [of America] is unpredictability. The¶ enemy is instability. "5' Similarly, arguing for the continuation of U.S.¶ Cold War alliances, a high-ranking Pentagon official asked, "if we¶ pull out, who knows what nervousness will result? "^2¶ **Thus** understood, **by its very uncertain character, China would¶ now automatically constitute a threat to the United States**. For¶ example, Bernstein and Munro believe that "China's political¶ unpredictability, the always-present possibility that it will fall into a¶ state of domestic disunion and factional fighting," constitutes a¶ source of danger.s^ In like manner, Richard Betts and Thomas¶ Christensen write:¶ If the PLA [People's Liberation Army] remains second-rate,¶ should the world breathe a sigh of relief? Not entirely. . . . Draw-¶ ing China into the web of global interdependence may do more¶ to encourage peace than war, but it cannot guarantee that the pur-¶ suit of heartfelt political interests will be blocked by a fear of eco-¶ nomic consequences. . . . U.S. efforts to create a stable balance¶ across the Taiwan Strait might deter the use of force under cer-¶ tain circumstances, but certainly not all.54¶ The upshot, therefore, is that since China displays no absolute certainty for peace, it must be, by definition, an uncertainty, and¶ hence, a threat.

## Impacts

### Self-fulfilling Prophecy

#### Their representations China as a threat are a self-fulfilling prophecy

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More specifically, I want to argue that U.S. conceptions of China as a threatening other are always intrinsically linked to how U.S. policymakers/mainstream China specialists see themselves (as¶ representatives of the indispensable, security-conscious nation, for example). As such, they are not value-free, objective descriptions of an independent, preexisting Chinese reality out there, but are better understood as a kind of normative, meaning-giving practice¶ that often legitimates power politics in U.S.-China relations and¶ helps transform the "China threat" into social reality. In other¶ words, it is self-fulfilling in practice, and is always part of the "China¶ threat" problem it purports merely to describe. In doing so, I seek¶ to bring to the fore two interconnected themes of self/other con-¶ structions and of theory as practice inherent in the "China threat"¶ literature—themes that have been overridden and rendered largely¶ invisible by those common positivist assumptions.

#### In reality, there is no legitimate reason to justify the “China Threat.” The threat is created by perceptions and particular U.S self imaginations.

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At first glance, as the "China threat" literature has told us,¶ China seems to fall perfectly into the "threat" category, particularly¶ given its growing power. However, China's power as such does not¶ speak for itself in terms of an emerging threat. By any reasonable¶ measure, **China remains a largely poor country edged with only a¶ sliver of affluence along its coastal areas. Nor is China's sheer size¶ a self-evident confirmation of the "China threat" thesis, as other¶ countries like India, Brazil, and Australia are almost as big as¶ China**. Instead, **China as a "threat" has much to do with the particular mode of U.S. self-imagination**. As Steve Chan notes:¶ China is an object of attention not only because of its huge size,¶ ancient legacy, or current or projected relative national power.¶ . . . **The importance of China has to do with perceptions**, especially those regarding the potential that Beijing will become an¶ example, source, or model that contradicts Western liberalism as¶ the reigning paradigm**. In an era of supposed universalizing cosmopolitanism,** **China demonstrates the potency and persistence¶ of nationalism, and embodies an alternative to Western and especially U.S. conceptions of democracy and capitalism**. China is a¶ reminder that history is not close to an end. Certainly, I do not deny China's potential for strategic misbe-¶ havior in the global context, nor do I claim the "essential peace-¶ fulness" of Chinese culture." Having said that, my main point here¶ is that **there is no such thing as "Chinese reality" that can automatically speak for itself, for example, as a "threat."** Rather, **the¶ "China threat" is** essentially **a specifically social meaning given to¶ China by its U.S. observers, a meaning that cannot be discon-¶ nected from the dominant U.S. self-construction**. Thus, to fully¶ understand the U.S. "China threat" argument, it is essential to rec-¶ ognize its autobiographical nature.

## Answers

### AT: Predictions

#### Not all aspects of life, such as China’s global stance, have to be defined by opposition of the self. Difference that does not equate to threat can exist.

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Indeed, the construction of other is not only a product of U.S.¶ self-imagination, but often a necessary foil to it. For example, by¶ taking this representation of China as Chinese reality per¶ se, those scholars are able to assert their self-identity as "mature,"¶ "rational" realists capable of knowing the "hard facts" of inter-¶ national politics, in distinction from those "idealists" whose views¶ are said to be grounded more in "an article of faith" than in "his-¶ torical experience."41 On the other hand**, given that history is¶** apparently **not "progressively" linear, the invocation of a certain¶ other not only helps explain away such historical uncertainties or¶ "anomalies" and maintain the credibility of the allegedly universal¶ path trodden by the United States, but also serves to highlight U.S.¶ "indispensability."** As Samuel **Huntington puts it, "If being an¶ American means being committed to the principles of liberty,¶ democracy, individualism, and private property, and if there is no¶ evil empire out there threatening those principles, what indeed¶ does it mean to be an American, and what becomes of American¶ national interests?"^**2 In this way, it seems that **the constructions of¶ the particular U.S. self and its other are always intertwined and¶ mutually reinforcing.¶ Some** may **suggest** that there is nothing particularly wrong with¶ this since psychologists generally agree **that "individuals and¶ groups define their identity by differentiating themselves** from and¶ placing themselves in opposition to others."^3 This is perhaps true.¶ As the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure tells us, meaning itself¶ depends on difference and differentiation.'i'\* **Yet, to understand the¶ U.S. dichotomized constructions of self/other in this light is to¶ normalize them and render them unproblematic,** because it is also¶ apparent that **not all identity-defining practices necessarily per-¶ ceive others in terms of either universal sameness or absolute oth-¶ erness and that difference need not equate to threat.**

### AT: Realism

#### Realism link/answer to realism. NeoRealism uses the possible future military power of China to establish the threat instead of an objective account of Chinese reality.

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Having examined how the "China threat" literature is enabled by¶ and serves the purpose of a particular U.S. self-construction, I want¶ to turn now to the issue of how this **literature represents a discursive construction of other, instead of an "objective" account of Chinese reality.** This, I argue, has less to do with its portrayal of China¶ as a threat per se than with its essentialization and totalization of¶ China as an externally knowable object, independent of historically¶ contingent contexts or dynamic international interactions.¶ **In this sense, the discursive construction of China as a threat-¶ ening other cannot be detached from (neo)realism, a positivist.¶ ahistorical framework of analysis within which global life is reduced¶ to endless interstate rivalry for power and survival.** As many critical¶ IR scholars have noted, **(neo) realism is not a transcendent description of global reality but is predicated on the modernist Western¶ identity, which, in the quest for scientific certainty, has come to¶ define itself essentially as the sovereign territorial nation-state.** This¶ realist self-identity of Western states leads to the constitution of¶ anarchy as the sphere of insecurity, disorder, and war. In an anar-¶ chical system, as (neo) realists argue, "the gain of one side is often¶ considered to be the loss of the other,"''5 and "All other states are¶ potential threats."'•^ In order to survive in such a system, states¶ inevitably pursue power or capability. In doing so, these realist¶ claims represent what R. B. J. Walker calls "a specific historical articulation of relations of universality/particularity and self/Other**."^^¶ The (neo) realist paradigm has dominated the U.S. IR discipline in general and the U.S. China studies field in particular**. As¶ Kurt Campbell notes, after the end of the Cold War, a whole new¶ crop of China experts "are much more likely to have a background¶ in strategic studies or international relations than China itself. ""^^¶ As a result, for those experts to know China is nothing more or less¶ than to undertake a geopolitical analysis of it, often by asking only¶ a few questions such as how China will "behave" in a strategic sense¶ and how it may affect the regional or global balance of power, with¶ a particular emphasis on China's military power or capabilities. As¶ Thomas J. **Christensen notes**, "Although many have focused on¶ intentions as well as capabilities**, the most prevalent component of¶ the [China threat] debate is the assessment of China's overall¶ future military power compared with that of the United States and¶ other East Asian regional powers."''^ Consequently**, almost by¶ default, **China emerges as an absolute other and a threat thanks to¶ this (neo) realist prism.**