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**UNDERSTANDING CHINA'S RISE:  
STIGMA MANAGEMENT DURING XI JINPING YEARS (2012-2017)**

MA thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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# **UNDERSTANDING CHINA'S RISE: STIGMA MANAGEMENT DURING XI JINPING YEARS (2012-2017)**

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## **Abstract**

This MA thesis tackles two research questions. First, a theoretical one: How to understand the nature of China's rise? Through a theoretical discussion that engages major International Relations theories – neo-realism, Power Transition Theory, neo-liberalism, constructivism, and the English School – and the literature on status, status-seeking, stigma and stigma management, the thesis contends that in order to develop a satisfactory account on understanding China's rise, China needs to be looked through the stigma framework and it needs to be treated as a status-seeking stigmatized state. That is to say, that the specific historic context of how China became a part of the international society needs to be taken into account, because it has had a deep constitutive effects on the identity of China and consequently also its behaviour. It is the way that China manages its historic stigmatization that can reveal how the state perceives its current status and what is the nature of China's rise, i.e. what is the course that China is likely to take in the future.

Second, the thesis dealt with an empirical question: How has China managed its stigma in the Xi Jinping years (November 2012 - October 2017)? Post-structuralist discourse analysis was conducted on 30 official speeches by China's political elite. The empirical finding of the thesis was that out of four distinct stigma management strategies, three were present in the analysed time period. The mixed result is coherent with the theoretical background that China has an uneasy relationship with the existing normative order due to the specific historic context of the norms that constitute it. Through an interpretation of the empirical results, it became evident that currently the most dominant stigma management strategy is 'correction.' For the nature of China's rise this means that in the near future the state will continue to rise peacefully, although occasionally contradictory indications might occur.

**Key words:** China, China's rise, status, stigma, discourse analysis

# HIINA TÕUSU MÕISTMINE: STIGMAGA TOIMETULEK XI JINPINGI AASTATEL (2012-2017)

Mart Veliste

## Kokkuvõte

See Magistritöö tegeleb kahe uurimusküsimusega. Esiteks, teoreetilisega: Kuidas mõista Hiina tõusu loomust? Läbi teoreetilise arutelu, mis kaasab peamisi Rahvusvaheliste Suhete teooriad – neo-realism, *Power Transition Theory*, neo-liberalism, konstruktivism ja *English School* – ja kirjandust staatuse, staatuse-otsimise, stigma ja stigmaga toimetuleku teemadel, jõuab töö seisukohale, et Hiina tõusu loomuse rahuldavaks seletamiseks on vaja Hiinat vaadata läbi stigma raamistiku ning Hiinat tuleb kohelda kui staatust-otsivat stigmatiseeritud riiki. Teisisõnu, tuleb arvesse võtta konkreetset ajaloolist konteksti, kuidas Hiina sai osaks rahvusvahelisest ühiskonnast, sest sellel on olnud sügav mõju Hiina identiteedile ja järelkult ka käitumisele. Viis kuidas Hiina tuleb toime oma stigmaga aitab paljastada, kuidas riik näeb oma praegust staatust ja milline on Hiina tõusu loomus ehk millise kursi võtab Hiina tulevikus.

Teiseks tegeles töö empiirilise küsimusega: Kuidas on Hiina oma stigmaga toime tulnud Xi Jinpingi aastatel (November 2012 – Oktoober 2017). Viidi läbi poststrukturealistlik diskursuse analüüs Hiina poliitilise eliidi 30nel kõnel. Empiirilise tulemusena selgus, et neljast erinevast stigmaga toimetuleku strateegiast esinesid analüüsitud ajaperioodil kolm. See segane tulem on kooskõlas teoreetilise taustaga, mis kirjeldab Hiina keerukat suhet eksisteeriva normatiivse korraga tulenevalt spetsiifilisest ajaloolisest kontekstist, mis on selle korra loonud. Läbi empiiriliste tulemuste tõlgendamise sai selgeks, et hetkel on kõige domineerivam stigmaga toimetuleku strateegia on 'parandamine'. Hiina tõusu loomuse seisukohalt tähendab see, et lähitulevikus jätkab Hiina rahulikult tõusmist, kuigi aeg-ajalt võib esineda vastakaid ilminguid.

**Märksõnad:** Hiina, Hiina tõus, staatus, stigma, diskursuseanalüüs

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AIIB – Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BRICS – an association of five economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

CPC – Communist Party of China

GD – General Debate (of the United Nations)

IR – International Relations (academic field)

NDB – New Development Bank

OBOR – One Belt, One Road

PRC – Peoples' Republic of China

PTT – Power Transition Theory

U.S. – United States

UN – United Nations

WTO – World Trade Organization

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## Introduction

The rise and development of China<sup>1</sup> has been a subject of increasing debate in both political circles and academia for the past three decades. China has come a long way from its Mao-era isolation and destructive campaign politics. China's reform and opening-up policies initiated by Deng Xiaoping have made the country the second largest economy in the world. It is also the largest exporter and single biggest holder of foreign currency reserves. As Jonathan Kirshner (2010: 31) posits: "China has become both a pillar and an engine of global economic growth." Indeed, an International Monetary Fund study has concluded that "a 1 percentage point change in China's growth sustained over five years is associated with a 0.4 percentage point change in growth in the rest of the world (Arora and Vamvakidis 2010: 13)." Economic growth has also carried over to the military sector. China currently has the second largest<sup>2</sup> military expenditure in the world and notably acquired its first aircraft carrier in 2012 and opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017. Not to mention that Beijing holds one of the permanent seats at the United Nations (UN). Before this background, it is fair to say that China has become a major player in contemporary international affairs. As China is becoming more important in world politics it is increasingly important to understand the nature of China's rise.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to generate new understanding to the nature of China's rise by emphasizing China's stigmatized identity and researching its stigma management strategies. Consequently, my thesis is built around two research questions:

1. How to understand the nature of China's rise?
2. How has China managed its stigma in the Xi Jinping years (November 2012 - October 2017)?

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<sup>1</sup> Here and throughout the text, by China, I mean the People's Republic of China. This is a simplification for the benefit of the text's flow.

<sup>2</sup> Although one should keep in mind that the US still spends more on the military than the next 8 countries (China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, U.K., India, France, Japan, and Germany) combined. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2016) "the US military spending in 2016 was \$611 billion—nearly 3 times as much as China's military spending, which was the second highest in 2016 at \$215 billion."



With 'China's rise' I refer to China's growing importance on the international stage both in economic, military and political terms. By the 'nature of China's rise' I mean the future course that China is likely to take. In other words, the goal of the thesis is to understand where China is headed, given that its capabilities have grown and that it has become a powerful actor.

The first, primary research question, is in its essence theoretical. My aim is to open up the discussion on the nature of China's rise. I present how major International Relations (IR) theories have so far discussed the nature of China's rise (Chapter 1). I argue that all of them generate a limited interpretation to understanding China's rise. First, they do this by placing too much explanatory power on structures, either material (neo-realism, Power Transition Theory, neo-liberalism) or ideational (constructivism, the English School), which means they end up treating states as if they act alike, i.e. as 'like units.' Second, the theories have overlooked the history behind the formation of the international system/society and how specific states became a part of this system/structure. Treating states as 'like units' is problematic because they discuss the nature of China's rise as if it was a state like any other. It does not mean that I claim China to be a unique case. Rather, the argument is that the theories have a generally limited understanding of states who were not part of the Westphalian European core and became members of the international system/society later.

These so-called 'late comers' include states who were in the periphery and margins of the system/society that started to expand from the European core and a such were often colonized or semi-colonized between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. The specific history matters because it has had a deep impact on the identities on the 'late comers' and consequently it influences their behaviour. The fact that non-Western states entered the international society later means that they have a different relationship to this society/structure which they have become socialized into. Because of the specific history, the 'late comers' will always have an ambivalent or erratic relationship towards the international society - sometimes cooperative but other times conflictual. Furthermore, a state's rise will also be computed differently by the rising state by constantly reflecting on the history of their relationship with the structure inside which they are 'rising'. I thereby follow-up on Ayşe Zarakol (2011) who has argued that it is

only by applying the frame of stigmatization that the behaviour of certain states can be fully understood.

I will argue that China is one of such states that can only be fully understood through the stigma lens. China had been the ‘core’ of a distinct international relations system for nearly two thousand years before it came into a traumatic contact with the West that shattered its earlier self-perceptions (Suzuki 2009, Zhang, X 2010). Ever since the First Opium war (1839-1842), China has had to modernize and redefine itself in a system of not its own making, only to yet again find itself falling short of the required standards. Although China has made major advancements in the past decades, the legacy of the disastrous contact with the West and subsequently having to deal with Western hegemony while establishing itself as a nation state at the same time, has created a sustained preoccupation with international status for China.

Therefore, in order to fully assess the nature of China’s rise, there is a need to emphasize how China became a part of this international society/system and how this specific history has important manifestations today. Consequently, as an answer to the primary question, I propose that to understand the nature of China’s rise the lens of stigma should be applied and China should be treated as a status-seeking stigmatized state. In other words, it is important to understand how stigma shapes and conditions the nature of China’s rise. I develop this argument based on the literature on status, status-seeking, stigma, and stigma management (Zarakol 2010, 2011, 2014, Ward 2013, Adler-Nissen 2014, Larson et. al 2014). Applying the ‘stigma’ lens helps to account for the traits of China’s international conduct which are marked by different, at times seemingly contradictory tendencies, driven by power aspirations in one, reaffirming its commitment to established principles in another. I argue that carrying a stigma generates a certain kind of pressure for status-seeking. Based on Zarakol (2011), I will argue that states have four distinct options to ‘manage’ their stigmas. The type of stigma management a state uses will influence the nature of China’s rise. This leads me to my secondary (empirical) research question.

Empirically, this thesis aims to find out how China is managing its stigma in the Xi Jinping years (November 2012 - October 2017). This is relevant because the way the stigma is managed has consequences for political decisions as shown in Zarakol’s (2011)

analysis of Japan, Russia, and Turkey. That is to say, the way China's rise will play out, depends on China's stigma management. To answer the empirical research question, i.e. to show how China manages its stigma and how this reflects in China's identity, I conduct a post-structuralist discourse analysis on China's official discourse, i.e. 30 speeches given by the political elite of China between November 2012 and October 2017. As identities are discursive the existence of stigma can be best understood through discourse. By conducting the empirical analysis, the thesis provides an answer to the secondary research question and gives a better understanding of the nature of China's rise.

Therefore, with this thesis, I contend to bring new insight to the nature of China's rise by applying a theoretical framework that has been neglected so far. In this way, my contribution to the IR literature on China rise (see Chapter 1) is to bring together 'stigma' and China. Despite the existence of vast scholarly work on China's rise, to my knowledge, no one has applied the concept of 'stigma' to analyse the case – this adds academic relevance to the thesis and gives it an exploratory nature. I apply the analytical lens of 'stigma' on China and, by doing so, highlight facets overlooked by other perspectives about the nature of China's continuous rise.

Like any study, this thesis comes with its limitations. Although I move away from structural explanations and emphasise the importance of the history of how certain states became a member of the international system/society and the role that states themselves play, I will not be 'unpacking' the state, so to speak. That is, I will not be looking at internal debates<sup>3</sup> or bureaucratic struggles that are shaping China's rise. Although such an analysis would definitely bring valuable insights, I lack the access to such discussions and struggles taking place inside the authoritarian regime. Instead, I work with the outcomes of these debates and struggles, i.e. the views presented to the public through official statements by President Xi Jinping, Premier of the State Council Li Keqiang and Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

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<sup>3</sup> Although not analysed through the stigma framework, some authors have already incorporated analysis of Chinese academic debates to their work. An especially good overview of internal academic debates in China comes from David Shambaugh's book *China Goes Global* and the chapter on *China's Global Identities* (2013: 11-36). See also Breslin (2013), Suzuki (2014), Qi (2015), Irvine (2017).

Secondly, this is a qualitative single case study. Albeit comparisons to other status-seeking stigmatized states, or to the discourses of United States (U.S.) and Japan, or between different periods of China's history could all generate valuable input, I have limited myself to an in-depth study of China in the past five years. Before drawing comparisons, a single case basis discussion is needed because China has not been approached through the stigma framework before. Therefore, this limitation follows the aims of the empirical part, namely to illustrate the applicability of the stigma perspective, i.e. that China can be understood as a stigmatized state and that different stigma management strategies can be discerned. More ambitious aims such as investigating change, or conditions for change in China's stigma management, are left for others.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. In Chapter 1, I first give a short background of the general discussions around China's rise. I then go into the major IR theories and how they have made sense of China's rise and the expectations they put forward on the basis of their core assumptions. I also highlight their shortcomings from treating all states as 'like units' and overlooking the history of how certain stigmatized outsiders, including China, have become a part of the international system/structure. In Chapter 2, I introduce an alternative approach to assessing the nature of China's rise. I build the theoretical foundations of this thesis based on the literature on status, status-seeking, stigma, and stigma management. I argue that it is significant to understand and assess the status-seeking nature of certain stigmatized states. In Chapter 3, I make the argument that China is a status-seeking stigmatized state. In Chapter 4, I introduce my methodology and explain the analytical decisions around discourse analysis and text selection. In Chapter 5, I apply the stigma framework on China and present the empirical findings of the conducted discourse analysis.

## 1. Theoretical discussion surrounding a rising China

China's rapid development has generated both awe and worry. So far the state has officially followed the principle of 'peaceful rise'.<sup>4</sup> The concept's origins can be traced back to the initiation of the reform and opening period by Deng Xiaoping.<sup>5</sup> Under Hu Jintao, 'peaceful rise' was introduced into China's official foreign policy, although the terminology was later changed to 'peaceful development' in 2004.<sup>6</sup> In its essence, 'peaceful rise' is about development strategies.<sup>7</sup> However, from the get go, the aim of 'peaceful rise' has also been to assure the rest of the world that despite the growth of China's economic and other capabilities, the state intends to behave in a peaceful manner (Goldstein 2005). For example, the concept's architect Zheng Bijian (2005) has argued that China's path to great power will be different from other rising states as it will not seek hegemony or dominance and it will instead strive for peace and cooperation. In other words, Zheng wanted to counter the dominant fear that rising powers are destabilizing forces to international order.

Nevertheless, the growth of China's capabilities have raised concerns internationally.<sup>8</sup> The worry over China's rise encompasses a multitude of issues, covering both economic and military aspects, i.e. what does China intend to do with its increasing wealth and

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<sup>4</sup> The concept first appeared in late 2002 and its creation has been attributed to Zheng Bijian, an ex-government official, adviser to the top elite in the CPC, and influential political theorist at the time.

<sup>5</sup> It is therefore not surprising that a lion's share of works on Chinese foreign policy repeat Deng's oft-cited quote from early 1990s: "observe developments soberly, maintain our position, meet challenges calmly, hide our capacities and bide our time, remain free of ambition, never claim leadership" (Foot 2006: 84).

<sup>6</sup> For a full account how and why this change took place, see Glaser and Medeiros (2007). Despite the name change the content and purposes of the concept remained the same.

<sup>7</sup> In 2005, Zheng Bijian (2005: 24) wrote that the goal of 'peaceful rise' will be achieved once China has "shaken off underdevelopment and will be on a par with the middle rung of advanced nations. For this reason, Avery Goldstein (2005) has called 'peaceful rise' "explicitly a strategy for a period of transition, designed for the decades it will take China to rise." Indeed, most of the 'peaceful rise' concept focuses on the need for a peaceful external environment so that China over the next half a century could solve its development issues - the so-called multiplication and division problems. "Since China has 1.3 billion people, any difficulty in economic and social development, however small, will become a large-scale problem if it is multiplied by 1.3 billion. Similarly, despite China's impressive accumulation of financial and material resources, when divided by 1.3 billion people, it is quite low." (Glaser and Medeiros 2007: 298)."

<sup>8</sup> The 'China threat' narratives can actually be traced back to the early 1990s, specifically in the context of Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Tour" which re-launched market reforms and pushed 'China collapse' theories of 1989-1991 to the background (Deng 2008: 104).

military strength, regional and global implications, i.e how does China's rise affect regional stability and global US uni-polarity, and ideological issues such as the challenge the authoritarian-Marxist ideology, that has been behind the 'successful' growth, poses to the liberal-democratic-capitalist values of the West. The U.S. Under Secretary of State Robert Zoellick (2005) once aptly called this a 'cauldron of anxiety.' He noted that "many countries hope China will pursue a 'Peaceful Rise', but none will bet their future on it" (Zoellick 2005).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in recent years, a new belief has emerged that China's foreign policy has taken an assertive turn. For example, the year 2008, in the light of the Beijing Olympic Games and the global economic crisis, has been identified as "the high point of patriotic hubris" in China (Hughes 2011: 602). There are fears that this increasingly patriotic mass might pressure Beijing to take a harder stance on international issues even if it is not aligned with the general policy goals of the party. Additionally, Xi Jinping's major initiative, the One Belt, One Road (OBOR)<sup>10</sup>, has been perceived as "a geopolitical pivot which seeks to realize Mackinder's vision of a Eurasian heartland unopposed" (Burrows and Manning 2015). Yet, there are also those who find the assertive nature of China's rise to be overemphasized (Johnston 2013, Jerden 2014, Suzuki 2014, MacDonald 2015)<sup>11</sup> or do not see the rise of China as such problematic (Kang 2007, Fravel 2010, Qin 2010)<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> An example of a such sceptical stance reads as follows: "China may genuinely believe its rise will be peaceful, but once it has gained enough resources, it is likely to want more and be willing to concede less and hence put up with less of the *status quo*." (Legro 2007: 519) A similar sentiment has been expressed by Haukkala and Jakobson (2009: 63) regarding China's energy security: "No one knows how China will behave in the long term if its overseas investments to secure natural resources are genuinely threatened. Or, worse yet, if it concludes that by abiding by the present international norms it can no longer secure the energy and raw materials that are imperative for economic development."

<sup>10</sup> A series of large scale infrastructure projects aimed at connecting the markets of Europe, Central-Asia and China as the ancient silk road once did. Also known as the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road or as the Belt and Road Initiative.

<sup>11</sup> Johnston (2013: 9) points out that China's foreign policy has always been persistently assertive on sovereignty and territory issues, i.e. there has not been a significant turn for a more assertive foreign policy in the past years. Similarly, MacDonald (2015) emphasises the problematic timelines of the assertive China narrative that overestimate and dramatize changes in Chinese foreign policy. In his paper, Jerden (2014: 87) concludes that "'China's new assertiveness' existed only as a social fact within the bounds of the intersubjective knowledge of a particular discourse, and not as an objectively true phenomenon external to this discourse." Suzuki (2014) has looked at China's academic debates and identified the existence of an 'Occidentalism' strand of thinking that constructs idealised Western great powers as the only legitimate form of great power identity to be emulated, which suggests that the possibility of a Chinese challenge to the moral fabric of the international order has been overemphasized.

<sup>12</sup> Kang (2007) has argued that China's rise will not be problematic as the history of East Asian international relations has had little signs of power balancing and that nearby states are much more likely

Finally, there authors who can be placed somewhere in-between the peaceful-assertive spectrum (Foot 2006, Zhang J. 2015).<sup>13</sup>

The plethora of interpretations on China's rise illustrates the wide interest in the subject and how conflicting the predictions are. In the following sub-chapters I will discuss in greater detail how major IR schools - neo-realism, Power Transition Theory (PTT), neo-liberalism, constructivism and the English School - have assessed the nature of China's rise. I will argue that all these approaches are limited in generating a satisfactory account of the nature of China's rise. First, they fail to do so because they are all overly structural and consequently treat states as 'like units', i.e. as units that act alike notwithstanding their internal attributes. This means that they overlook how agency matters. Secondly, they take a limited view on history. They do not pay sufficient attention to the constitution of these agents into international system/society, and how the history of the way in which they were brought into international system/society shapes their identities and their actions.

### **1.1. China's rise and International Relations theories**

There is a vast amount of scholarly work trying to analytically assess China's rise. Different schools of thought in International Relations (IR) have interpreted the potential consequences of China's rise for regional and world politics, stability of international society, US-China relations, and China's foreign policy. A variety of explanatory variables have been evoked - economic interdependence, international institutions, democratization, international anarchy, identities, ideologies, strategic cultures, and norms - to predict the consequences of China's rise.

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to accommodate China's rise. Qin (2010) develops his argument on Chinese worldview and philosophical tradition, i.e. the Chinese way of thinking, to make the case for a peaceful rise. According to him the Chinese leadership understands that the 'general tendency' of the modern world is overwhelmingly dominated by peace, cooperation, and development (Qin 2010: 149). Fravel (2010) has weighed the benefits and cost of China's territorial expansion and concludes that as the benefits are limited the likelihood of expansion is low, given that China acts 'rationally.'

<sup>13</sup> Rosemary Foot (2006) has described Beijing's foreign policy strategy as containing elements of both accommodation and 'hedging' with the current US-dominated global order. Jian Zhang (2015) claims that since Xi Jinping took the helm of the state, China has been advocating 'peaceful rise 2.0' which in his view features a more purposeful pursuit of China's national interests and maintaining a peaceful external environment conducive to China's rise. In his view, peaceful development is still the aim, but compared to previous periods, the development comes with its conditions, is premised on reciprocity and determination to forcefully protect China's national interests if need be.

The purpose of this section is to give an overview how major IR theories - neo-realism, PTT, neo-liberalism, the English School, and constructivism - have been used to assess the nature of China's rise. All these theories have brought valuable insights to the IR discipline in their own time and place. However, I argue that the explanatory power of those major approaches falls short for understanding the nature of China's rise. My purpose here is not to go into detailed discussions of all the theories, but rather to introduce their core assumptions briefly to illustrate the background against which my stigma-centric approach stands.

While neo-realism, PTT, and neo-liberalism interpret China's future action based on its growing material power or institutional constraints on that power, they neglect ideational factors by treating them as secondary to material factors. Sequentially, constructivism and the English School take these ideational factors into view in the form of international society and socialization into this society, but they fail to adequately account for the nature of China's rise because they also do not put enough emphasis on how China joined this society from an inferior position and how China has been stigmatized by the society. Therefore, the purpose of the following review is to highlight how, despite of their differences, these mainstream approaches still struggle with providing a full account on the nature of China's rise. On the backdrop that none of these material and ideational theories are fully satisfying, I will argue that there is a place for the stigma theory which takes into account the stigmatized identity of the agent and the historical experience that has constituted it.

I begin this discussion by introducing the interpretations of China's rise based on the materialist neo-realist, PTT, and neo-liberal approaches.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.1.1 Neo-Realism

There are two famous approaches within the neo-realist school, the so-called 'defensive realism' developed by Kenneth Waltz (1979) and 'offensive realism' prominently represented by John Mearsheimer (2001). Both put the structure of international anarchy at the centre of IR theory. It is the anarchical international system that makes all states

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<sup>14</sup> I focus on the neo-variants as they represent the current mainstream discussions. I omit classical realism and liberalism from the discussion because they are used less frequently in current IR debates in general and regarding discussions on China's rise.



behave in a similar manner, i.e. anarchy constitutes states as 'like units'. It is a 'self-help' system of relative gains - one state's increased power comes at the expense of others. Power is held to be the ultimate source of security in this anarchic world. According to 'defensive realism' the most important task for a state is to secure its survival in the anarchical system, whereas 'offensive realism' takes it further by arguing that the aim is to seek regional hegemony as only then the state would be truly secure. Realists see states as 'black boxes', that is, "their identities and interests are treated as fixed and trans-historical" (Chou and Poole 2015: 53).

For Realists the single most important feature of China is its rising power (Friedberg 2005: 17). Robert Gilpin (cited in Kirshner 2010: 58) has described the ambitions of a rising state as follows: "as the power of a state increases, it seeks to extend its political influence." The prospects for China's rise is that China too will seek to increase its influence. 'Offensive realism' postulates that the world is condemned to perpetual great-power competition and that rising powers will almost always seek regional hegemony by aggressively challenging the dominant power (Mearsheimer 2001). Mearsheimer (2001: 401-402) claims that China cannot rise peacefully and as its capabilities increase, China will become an aggressive state determined to achieve regional hegemony. In Waltz' systemic theory it is the change in distribution of power between units that can change the international structure as a whole by triggering re-balancing. Therefore, a Waltzian theorist might infer that China's rise fundamentally changes the structure of the system. With regard to the nature of China's rise, whether defensive or offensive in fashion, neo-realists predict that as China's economic and military power rise, the *status quo* will eventually be challenged by China's assertiveness.

#### 1.1.2. Power Transition Theory

Power Transition Theory focuses on historic and current rising powers and whether and how they endanger the *status quo*. The crux of the matter according to Friedberg (2011: 18) is that:

"Established powers tend to regard themselves as the defenders of an international order that they helped to create and from which they continue to benefit; rising powers feel constrained, even cheated, by the status quo and struggle against it to take what they think is rightfully theirs."

PTT is built up on two important notions, ‘parity’ and ‘satisfaction.’ PTT scholars claim that once parity, the relatively equal distribution of power between the current superpower and its contender, is reached, a major war is more likely to occur. The second and equally important notion for PTT theories is ‘satisfaction’. It is the degree of satisfaction of the rising power regarding the *status quo* that determines the likelihood of war once parity is reached (Lim 2014: 281). In other words, parity leads to conflict only if the rising state is unsatisfied with the current world order. The key strategy for the dominant power to keep its leading position is to spread satisfaction as broadly as possible, especially among great powers (Tammen 2008: 320).

PTT, as a theory developed to assess rising powers, is particularly interested in the nature of China’s rise. Already during the Cold War, A. F. K. Organski<sup>15</sup> made an unconventional prediction that China and India will be future great powers - “the question is not whether China will become the most powerful nation on earth, but rather how long it will take her to achieve this status” (Organski 1958, cited in Tammen 2008: 314-315). As China is ever closer to achieving this goal, it is not surprising that the theory has inspired many researchers. The current superpower, the U.S., and the rising power, China, are today more than ever closer to parity. For example, the 2008 financial crisis has been pointed out as a key moment where the U.S was among the worst affected countries while the challenger was relatively less affected (Öskan 2010: 139-142).<sup>16</sup> As the two states are becoming closer to parity, satisfaction becomes important for scholars working in the PTT framework. It has been noted that U.S. support of China’s bid for WTO membership is as textbook case where the dominant power was interested in spreading satisfaction (Tammen 2008: 321). In his analysis of China’s satisfaction, based on traditional PTT satisfaction indicators, Lim (2014: 296) concludes that China is “strongly dissatisfied with the existing regional [East Asia] *status quo*.” According to Lim (2014), extraordinary growth of Chinese military expenditures and the main orientation of Chinese military modernization efforts, the

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<sup>15</sup> The PTT was developed by A. F. K. Organski in the fifties as a direct contrast to the balance of power logic upheld by realists. According to Balance of Power Theory, peace is most likely when there is a balance of power between states or coalitions in the world (Tammen 2008: 316). That is, power differentials make conflict more likely. Organski turned this upside-down, claiming that conflict is most likely in situations where power is reaching parity.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Öskan (2010: 132) refers to IMF according to which in 2009 the U.S. economy contracted 2,4% and Euro area 4,1% whereas at the same time China grew 8.7%.

consolidation of the ‘China model’, i.e. the dis-similarities between institutions of the dominant state and contender, and China’s behaviour towards the rules of regional institutions such as ASEAN, all suggest a dissatisfied China. Therefore, with regard to China’s rise, PTT theorist point out that China and the U.S. are getting ever closer to parity and there is an ever increasing risk for a great power war or at least there is a need for the U.S. to keep China ‘satisfied’.

### 1.1.3. Neo-Liberalism

Similarly to their realist counterparts, neo-liberals treat states as ‘like units’ acting in an anarchical system. The difference is that neo-liberals see a way out of the anarchical power struggle through institutions and economic interdependence. Therefore, the neo-liberal side has looked at the effects of intentional institutions and economic interdependence to argue for a less dramatic change in global politics in the wake of China’s rise. The logic follows that institutions help improve communication and reduce uncertainty between states and therefore mitigate the effects of an anarchical system (Keohane 1989). Liberal institutionalist G. John Ikenberry (2008a; 2008b) has stressed that the current international order enjoys a never-before seen degree of integration and institutionalization that has made the system more stable against rising states. He argues that “the more institutionalized and encompassing the existing order is, the more difficult it is for a newly rising state to overturn it – and the more likely it will pursue an accommodative strategy (Ikenberry 2008a: 92).” In his view the present day global hierarchy differs from previous global hierarchies as it is harder to overturn and easier to join. As Ikenberry (2008a: 91) argues:

“The United States – more so than any previous hegemonic states – has created an international order that tends to reproduce itself. It is an open and expansive order built around institutions that bind its members together and which mitigates security competition and rivalry within it.”

Liberals point out that China has sought membership in the WTO and nuclear non-proliferation regime and has begun to play a more active and prominent role in the United Nations (Friedberg 2005: 14). Alistair Johnston (2008, cited in Breslin 2010: 55) has shown how participation in the global disarmament regime has resulted in changes not just to Chinese discourse and action, but also to Chinese bureaucratic structures to make them ‘fit’ with the existing global institutions. Furthermore, Ikenberry opposes

PTT theorist that tend to take a narrow view when they compare China and the U.S. According to him (Ikenberry 2008b: 24): “China does not just face the United States; it faces a Western-centered system that is open, integrated, and rule-based, with wide and deep political foundations.”

Economic interdependence theory on the other hand postulates that greater volume of trade and investment between countries creates strong incentives for preserving peace as the costs of war would be too great. Deudney and Ikenberry (2009: 90) argue that autocratic capitalist states, that are often considered as threats to the liberal world order, are fundamentally interested in maintaining ‘an open, rule-based economic system’ as they are dependant on the foreign trade and investments it provides. According to liberal thinkers, China’s current economic interests are congruent with the current global economic system - a system where China has thrived and will continue to thrive (Ikenberry 2008b: 32). Therefore, regarding China’s rise, neo-liberal theorists emphasize the effects of interdependence and institutions on rational cost-benefit calculations and infer that it is too difficult and costly for China to challenge the U.S.-led system. That is to say that China’s rise will continue to be peaceful and the state will remain a *staus quo* power.

#### 1.1.4. Problems with the materialist approaches

It has become evident that the aforementioned materialists theories come to contradicting conclusions on what to expect from China in the future, i.e. what will be the nature of China’s rise. Legro (2017: 521) has explained the puzzle very well:

“In sum, both power and economic interdependence may push strategy in particular directions but such moves have also been reversed even when power and interdependence conditions remain fairly constant. Similarly, some times states may stick to their plans even as conditions of power and interdependence alter significantly.”

Furthermore, not only are the predictions contradictory, but the approaches also struggle with assessing China’s current behaviour. Neo-realism fails to explain why China has not actively challenged the U.S. Instead, China has grown through opening its markets to the rest of the world and the state has actively joined international institutions. That is to say, China has decided to accept U.S. global leadership and has supported the institutions founded by it. Regionally, PTT struggles to explain why conflict did not

erupt between Japan and China when the latter's capabilities overtook the former (Qin and Wei 2008: 118). Neo-liberals are also faced with a puzzling picture. Whereas some aspects of China's rise correspond to the institutionalist expectations, others do not. China seemingly upholds the institutions of the international system while it is only to an extent constrained by them, e.g. rejecting the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea arbitration tribunal ruling on the South China Sea<sup>17</sup>. In this case, China seems to prioritize 'might over right' by constructing military outposts on artificial islands in the contested sea. And while supportive of the existing institutions, recently China has been actively establishing new seemingly parallel international institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Silk Road Fund, and the New Development Bank (NDB)<sup>18</sup>.

In other words, there is a need to look for explanations elsewhere. While neo-realism, PTT, and neo-liberalism explain specific facets of China's rise, they do not capture the whole picture, which is not only conflict or cooperation, but often both can be present simultaneously. The theories are too rigid to assess why sometimes a state can challenge the international order by asserting its place in power politics and at other times supporting the very same order and seeking to enhance status within the existing system. A common aspect of the materialist approaches is that they neglect the role of ideational power in favour of material capabilities. They assess the nature of China's rise based on its increased and increasing capabilities and by doing so they paint China's rise with a broad brush by drawing expectations from a full-scale assertion and power politics or from a full-scale constraint by institutions. Therefore, the focus on material power paints a too simplistic picture of ensuing dynamics. Ideational factors need to be taken into account to understand the contradictory behaviour. The materialist assumptions have been avoided by constructivists and the English School which I introduce in the next sub-chapter.

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<sup>17</sup> The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea arbitration tribunal ruled in favour of the Philippines and concluded that China does not have historical rights over most of the sea (Perlez 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Also known as the "BRICS" bank. The bank's headquarters is in Shanghai. BRICS is the acronym for an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

#### 1.1.5. Ideational approaches - constructivism and the English School

Both constructivists and the English School have contributed to IR with their emphasis on the normative and societal dimension of international relations. Constructivists argue that ideational factors play a crucial part in shaping international political behaviour, and that “agent’s interests are derived from identity-construction, which is constituted in the course of social interaction” (Suzuki 2009: 5). The identities and interests of states are discursively structured by intersubjective rules, norms and institutions (Reus-Smit 2002: 488). On that account, the key structure of the international system from a constructivist perspective is inter-subjective, rather than material (Wendt 1994: 385). Ideas underpin and give meaning and purpose to the development and employment of power itself, i.e. the ideational structure gives meaning to the structure of capabilities (Qin and Wei 2008: 121). Shared ideas, beliefs, perceptions and values give the world structure that exerts a powerful influence on social and political action (Adler Nissen 2014: 149, Chou and Poole 2015: 55). According to Wendt (1994) historically contingent interactions at the systemic level change state identities and interests.

The principal concept of the English School is ‘international society.’ ‘International society’ has been conceptualized as a social order or a social arena that is built on shared constitutive norms and practices such as sovereignty, international law, diplomacy, territoriality, the equality of peoples - they are essentially “the deep rules of the game” (Suzuki 2009, Buzan 2010). There is a functionally driven logic that interaction between states would always generate norms that shape those interactions (Buzan 1993).<sup>19</sup> In other words, English School scholars point out that states, as members of a society of states, always follow some norms, rules and procedures in their interactions. These norms and rules become important in structuring state identity and conduct (Reus-Smit 2002: 490). Shared norms and practices, the so-called ‘primary institutions’, constitute ‘international society’ and define what behaviour of its members is and is not legitimate and appropriate (Buzan 2010: 6, Qin 2010: 130). According to

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<sup>19</sup> Even under anarchy, pressures of life would eventually develop at least a few basic elements of International Society (Buzan 1993: 342-343). Instead of escaping anarchy through formal (secondary) institutions like neo-liberal institutionalists do, the English School mitigates anarchy through ‘primary institutions’ which can be understood as shared norms and practices.

Buzan (1993: 349), “the bottom line of international society is the mutual recognition by nearly all states of each other as legally equal sovereign entities.”<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, the two approaches share an interest in norms, shared values and social order. There is affinity between the English School and work of constructivists like Alexander Wendt as they both “assume the centrality of states, and both interrogate the meaning of international system/society according to the intersubjective practices through which it is constituted” (Tim Dunne, cited in Reus-Smit 2002: 489). Compared to their materialist counterparts, scholars working in the English School tradition do not see anarchy, as a competitive and lawless ‘self-help’ realm, to fit the reality of international politics (Suzuki 2011: 4). The same is true for constructivists. Wendt (1992) has famously argued that ‘self-help’ in realism is just one form of an inter-subjective ‘structure of identity and interest’ and in fact “anarchy is what states make of it.” Wendt saw that under anarchy there can be either a competitive, individualistic or cooperative system, i.e. different modes of interaction can shape different kinds of anarchic culture. On that account, both approaches give space for variable forms of life under anarchy (Reus-Smit 2002: 489).

Constructivism and the English School also converge on the dynamic of socialization. States, embedded in an international social structure, inevitably undergo a process of socialization. Following the logic of appropriateness, they accept these provided values, norms and roles (Qin and Wei 2008: 122). In other words, it is presumed that actors internalize norms and standards of behaviour in social structures (Zürn and Checkel 2005: 1045). Furthermore, according to prominent constructivist scholar Martha Finnemore (1996, cited in Qin and Wei 2008: 122) “the international system provides and teaches norms not only to regulate the behaviour of the agent, but also to shape its identity and body.” “Constructivist models of norm-diffusion implicitly assume the pre-existence of a rather thick international ‘society’ that has already constituted the principal actors in rather homologous, mutually intelligible, and ‘modern’ ways” (Zarankol 2014: 312). In other words, states are socialized both in their identities and behaviour to act as ‘like units’ within the social order.

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<sup>20</sup> This has conventionally been taken to mean that ‘international society’ is a society which aims for the tolerance and coexistence of its members (Suzuki 2009: 1).

Constructivists and English School scholars are not worried about the rise of China in itself, but about the political nature of China's rise. A state's rise is considered peaceful by the English School if it does not disturb the order and accepts the 'primary institutions' of international society (Qin 2010: 130). According to Xiaoming Zhang (2011: 782), who has conducted a thorough analysis on how the English School has approached China through-out history and regarding its current rise, no English School scholar has clearly depicted rising China as a challenger to the global order dominated by the US in the post-Cold War era, but they are concerned about potential effects of China's rise. He also points out that there is not a unified understanding of the consequences of China's rise within the English School and that their interpretations depend whether they are solidarists, pluralists or solidarist-pluralists when it comes to norms such as human rights and humanitarian intervention (Zhang X. 2011: 778-780). In other words, the assessment depends on which institutions are considered as 'primary.' For example, Barry Buzan (2010: 18) considers China to be a 'reformist revisionist' state who accepts some of the primary institutions of international society but resists, and wants to reform, others. He concludes that China's peaceful rise over the next three decades will not be easy because it must accept international society's changed and changing primary international institutions, in particular those of democracy, human rights, and environmental friendliness (Buzan 2010).<sup>21</sup> Yongjin Zhang (2001: 63) agrees by stating that "As the world seems to be moving beyond Westphalia, China stands as a staunch defender of the Westphalian order."

Therefore, from an English School point of view, the nature of China's rise depends first on the nature of international society, i.e. which norms does it in-compass, and second, whether China successfully socializes into those norms. Similarly, from a constructivist view point it depends how China's identity has been socialized into the society. In other words, they are concerned about the possible challenges a rising China poses towards the values, norms and institutions of the Western-dominated international society.

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<sup>21</sup> Qin (2010: 130, 142) explains that according to Buzan's interpretation it seems that it is easier for China to accept behaviour-oriented institutions such as sovereignty and diplomacy, but harder to accept value-oriented institutions such as human rights and democracy which China's identity precludes.



## **1.2. Concluding the discussion - problem with structure and socialization**

Although both constructivists and the English School have brought important insights to IR by incorporating ideational factors, they still share a flaw with the materialist theories. All five theories discussed are overly structural, i.e. structural pressures constitute states into behaving as 'like units'. Therefore, they do not give enough agency to individual states or pay attention to unit-level specifics. In the words of Ayşe Zarakol (2011: 22) they " [...] mistakenly impute equal manoeuvring room to all actors in the international system." For neo-realism, PTT, and neo-liberalism, world politics are structured through a materialist power-oriented international system. It is the anarchical system that makes states act in the same manner. On the other hand, constructivism and the English School emphasize ideational structures at the systemic level - for constructivists, it is 'cultures of anarchy', for the English School it is the 'international society.' But they too end up treating states as 'like units' in the intersubjective society where each state has equal weight. It is considered that as soon as the state is a member of international society, as a result of socialization, it becomes a state like any other and is an equal provider of the structure. This understanding of socialization is problematic.

In the words of Zarakol (2010: 4): "Anything resembling an intersubjective normative consensus in international relations often originates in the West." Both the English School and Wendt-ian constructivists treat the historical process of the formation of international system/society as a one way finite street. International society, according to the main narrative of Bull and Watson (1984), originated in Europe, first as Christendom, then as an European international society, and finally expanded to become a global if not universal international society. The argument, ergo, goes that colonized and semi-colonized states accepted the Western norms as they were defeated and could not compete with the military, economical and cultural superiority of the West. Socialization is therefore viewed as rational response by states to systemic constraints or material incentives (Zarakol 2011: 31). It is consequently presumed that it was natural for them to socialize. Therefore, while constructivists and English School scholars emphasize the importance of identities and norms, they overlook the stratifying power and historic origins of these norms and the fact that there is social stratification

within the international system (Zarakol 2011: 14-15). Because of the specific history and power behind norms, states cannot be treated just as 'like units.' That is to say, that the origins of the norms play an important role in the identities of 'late comers' even if they have socialized into those norms.

Moreover, after becoming members of this international society where sovereignty is the defining norm, it is taken that the states accept the new normative reality fully. However, as Shogo Suzuki has shown in his book *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society*, the ways states reacted to and internalized these norms were varied. Zarakol (2014: 311) has highlighted a similar point:

“Contrary to what is often assumed, norm-internalisation does not always lead to compliance. Normative judgements may be simultaneously internalised and outwardly rejected. Non-compliance is at times a result of hyper-awareness of the particular origin of norms, rather than an unwillingness of the would-be-recipients to do 'good' deeds, or their inability to understand what is 'good'.”

In other words, states act differently when faced with normative pressures. Even when the norms are internalized, there is always a tension because of the awareness of their particular origins. The English School, especially, has been criticized for being overly Eurocentric and downplaying almost all agency on the receiving end of states that came into contact with a new West-centric international system (Suzuki 2009, Zarakol 2011, Zhang X. 2011).<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, like materialist theories, the English School and constructivism expect states to behave in the similar ways after socialization - to act as 'like units'. But they miss that there are crucial differences among states, even at the systemic level, in the way how they have been constituted into international society and how this shapes their consequent way of acting. The fact that non-Western states entered the international society later means that they have a different relationship to this society/structure which they have become socialized into. That is to say that they react differently to structural

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<sup>22</sup> Suzuki (2011: 15) has criticized: “English School accounts of non-European polities' socialization into European International Society are overly structuralist and do not provide us a full understanding of how non-European polities attempted to insert themselves into their new international environment.” According to Zhang Xiaoming (2011) English School scholars have “interpreted China's relations with and its status in the Western-dominated international society, in a selective and ethnocentric way.”

pressures than Western states would. For the West, there is greater overlap between the norms governing international society and domestic society (Zarakol 2010: 4). Whereas 'late comers' interpret these norms and the systemic pressures through their foreign origin. As Zarakol (2014: 328) has aptly stated: "Some may adopt norms just because they are Western and others reject them for just that reason." Because of the specific history, the 'late comers' will always have an ambivalent or erratic relationship towards the international society - sometimes cooperative but other times conflictual. Realizing that history matters places China in a more accurate context around which to assess the nature of its rise. Furthermore, even the rise itself will be computed differently by constantly reflecting the history of their relationship with the structure inside which they are 'rising'.

On this backdrop, I argue that there is a place for stigma theory which takes into account the identity of the agent and the historical experience that has constituted it. In order to get a better understanding of 'late comers', a picture from within is needed. Therefore, to answer the primary research question "How to understand the nature of China's rise?", I propose that the lens of stigma should be applied. In Chapter 2, I develop a status and stigma based approach that pays attention to ontological pressures of status-seeking, how the international society came about, how this specific history has influenced and influences the behaviour of certain actors and how socialization is not automatic, but rather states have ways to 'manage their stigma.'

## **2. Theoretical framework: status-seeking and stigma management**

As the previous sections illustrate, there is a cacophony of theoretical voices dealing with the expectations of the nature of China's rise. Yet, we have not come much closer to unpacking the puzzle. Yongjin Zhang (2013: 1412) has written:

“China's political change, economic transformation and strategic policies since 1990 seem to have defied most anticipations, projections and predictions by economists, political scientists and international relations specialists, whether from the political right or the political left, be they realist, liberal or constructivist.”

In other words, there is a need for an alternative approach for understanding the nature of China's rise and, consequently, to answer the primary research question of this thesis. In this chapter I pick up an alternative theoretical avenue to assess the nature of China's rise., i.e. the future course that the state is likely to take.

I take China's rise as a starting point, i.e. China's rise gives academic relevance for analysing the case, but I do not intend to infer its future action based on its material rise as such. This is where I differ from neo-realist, PTT, and neo-liberal approaches. I agree with them that China's rise has been significant. I am working with the same background information and context that China has become and is becoming more important in global politics and therefore it is especially important to understand what China intends to do with its increased power. However, I look for understanding not from the rise itself, but from China's state identity that is intertwined with issues of status and stigma. Rather than focusing on material factors and formulating causal expectations on this basis, I suggest focusing on ideational factors to interpret the course that China is likely to take.

However, differently from constructivist and English School perspectives, I do not over-emphasise the structural effects. Instead, I go for a modified account of these ideational approaches and take China's specific historic experience, i.e. its unit-level specifics, into account. Theoretically, this means opening up the socialization narrative/theory. I develop my approach on the literature of status-seeking and stigma management (Zarakol 2010, 2011, 2014; Ward 2013, Larson et. al 2014, Adler-Nissen 2014). Like constructivists and the English School, this approach emphasises the ideational factors in world politics. However, it also gives more agency to China. That

is, socialization is not a linear one way process but that states have a choice on how to interact vis-a-vis the dominant norms of the system. In other words, states have options on how to 'manage their stigma.' Therefore, I claim that the nature of China's rise does not depend only on the prevailing normative structure of the international society, but also on the actor, and how the actor fits into this structure. The theoretical framework developed in this chapter will be analytically applied to China in Chapter 5, where I seek to answer the secondary research question.

I will start by introducing the the concept of status, a more familiar concept in mainstream IR literature, with a special focus on status-seeking. As will become evident, status-seeking is important in the context of stigma management, which I will turn to in later sub-chapters. For now, it is sufficient to say that stigma management is a particular form of status-seeking in the case of states that encountered the West-centric world as 'late comers'.

## **2.1. Status**

The International Relations literature on status has its roots in psychology, sociology and behavioural economics. Status has been understood as a pervasive and irreducible feature of social life that is endogenous to society and functions as second-nature in human relations (Pouliot 2014). The premise is that people have an inherent tendency to compare themselves to others. For example, research in economics has shown that people would prefer to have less absolute gains, if their relative gains compared to their neighbours are higher than have higher wealth that is equal to their neighbours (Freedman 2016: 801). Vincent Pouliot (2014: 197) explains:

“People seek status because they were born into a state of profound sociality, surrounded by other people at every minute of their life, constituted and reconstituted through continuous social interaction, always standing in relation to others.”

Status has been defined as “a phenomenon of stratification derived from the subjective evaluations and judgements that individuals make of one another in terms of the commonly recognized values of their society” (Scott 1996, cited in Freedman 2015: 800).

However, status is not just about comparisons. More precisely, it involves a set of commonly shared comparative evaluations which form a hierarchy. Status demands more than two actors, and therefore differs from the concept of reputation (Renshon 2016: 522). Most simply put, status is standing or rank in a hierarchy along some dimensions of comparison. This hierarchical nature makes status inherently positional, 'a positional good' (Larson and Shevchenko 2010: 69), that is to say, one actor moving up in the hierarchy requires some other actor's downgrading. Furthermore, status can be seen as intrinsically valued social good or as one that can grant benefits, i.e. it is instrumental (Renshon 2016: 521). In sociology, status implies social recognition that leads to privileged treatment that may or may not lead to material gains (Deng 2008: 1). To conclude, status as a rank in a hierarchy is a positional instrumental good that is formed through subjective, yet commonly shared, comparative evaluations.

Because many identity markers for individuals are related to social groupings, e.g. class, ethnicity, nationality or race, the self-evaluative comparisons also take place on the group level. According to Pouliot (2014: 196) "social identity theory presumes a human need for self-esteem and positive identification, which creates in-group versus out-group tensions." Therefore, status has also found its place in IR. International relations as the relationships between different states, which are composed of people, are also inherently social. It has been argued that states are also such groupings which inherently require comparisons with others (Larson et. al 2014, Larson and Shevchenko 2014).

Wendt (2004: 291) has argued that states can be considered as real actors (or persons, the term he prefers) to the extent that they are considered as purposive actors that have collective/corporate intentions. The members of society or the state operate as a single cognitive system (Wendt 2004: 304). That is to say that states as such possess certain cognitive attributes that can be attributed to the collective, not specific individuals. According to Ringmar 1996 (cited in Wendt 2004: 313): "States are constituted by narratives of 'We' as opposed to 'Them', which define individuals as members of collective identities that are not reducible to individuals." Along the same lines, Zarakol (2011: 100) has conceived the consciousness of states through their constituting narratives which allow for states to 'feel' "various human emotions associated with the act of recognition, such as humiliation and loss of self-esteem." Therefore, status

literature treats states as agents having identities and interests. In this thesis I will do the same.<sup>23</sup>

## 2.2. Status in International Relations

Status in IR has been based on similar conceptual grounds as in other social sciences. For example, in his paper on Japanese revisionism in the 1930s, Ward (2013: 613) gives the following definition: “status refers to the position within a publicly acknowledged or collectively understood social hierarchy that an actor occupies.” In *Status in World Politics*, a collection of articles on status, the editors (Larson et. al 2014: 13) provide a conglomerate definition of status as “a collective, subjective and relative social relationship involving hierarchy and deference.” Status has been an insightful concept for IR because it broadens the understanding of state behaviour regarding cooperation and conflict.

First, similarly to constructivists and the English School, status literature emphasizes the social context of the international system. States are seen to be acting in a social order where their standing depends on a socially constructed ranking system. Most importantly, power, as the key variable for realists and PTT theorists, is not the only important characteristic for determining a state’s position. Although some attributes that serve as the basis for status are measurable, others are less so. States can be ranked according to other valued attributes, such as wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, socio-political organization and diplomatic clout (Larson et. al 2014: 7). But even this list is not comprehensive. As Ward (2013: 613) notes: “While actors may rank high or low along relatively objective dimensions, such as height or weight, social status refers to a position within hierarchical orders that are intersubjective and contingent upon the recognition of relevant others.” Larson et. al (2014: 9) have aptly paraphrased Wendt by saying that “status is what states make of

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<sup>23</sup> I am aware of that this move has also been objected. According to Wendt (2004: 315): “Philosophically, the physicalist ontology of modern science assumes that reality is made of purely physical stuff, and since states are not physical systems it seems to follow that, of course, they are not real.” However, as Zarakol (2011: 100) has pointed out, “any IR theory that treats states as unitary actors inevitably requires heuristic leaps.” Indeed, most mainstream IR literature conceives states as unitary actors.

it.”<sup>24</sup> For example, Suzuki (2008) describes China and Japan as states which despite meeting many of the criteria associated with great powers are nonetheless insecure in their status. He asks a question that is difficult to answer in materialist frameworks: “Why China, which in many ways is already a great power, should be so concerned with ‘great power recognition’ or feel the need to project this particular image” (Suzuki 2008: 46)? The main take away here is that mere economic or military strength is not always enough for high status since status is dependent on inter-subjectively constructed meanings within the society of states. Therefore, while China’s rise has changed the global balance of capabilities, i.e. the ‘objective’ dimension for ranking has changed, it nonetheless lacks status vis-a-vis the West.

Suzuki’s question leads us to the second aspect that makes status a valuable concept. As status literature treats the international realm as a social realm it also offers a non-materialist interpretation for state behaviour - states act in certain ways because they want to obtain status. This is often called ‘status-seeking behaviour’. As status includes non-objective dimensions this behaviour is characterized by the attempt to change perceptions. As Larson et. al (2014: 11) put it: “Because status is subjective, status-seeking behaviour seeks to influence other’s perceptions of a state’s relative standing by acquiring status symbols.” Therefore status-seeking behaviour differs from actions aimed at increasing raw material power and instead focuses on influencing perceptions through rhetoric, diplomatic activity, acquiring of status symbols, and seeking membership in international institutions. Examples of status-seeking behaviour in international relations include space programs, acquisition of high-technology weapons, major diplomatic initiatives, promotion of a state’s soft power or culture, and efforts to surpass others’ economic growth rates (Larson et. al 2014: 12).

The question still unanswered is why would a state care about status in the first place, i.e. what makes states seek status? Even more so, what makes it so relevant that it can at times be a foreign policy goal in itself? For example, Yong Deng has described Chinese sensitivity to status as if it was the country’s overriding foreign policy objective (2008: 8). As will be explained in the next section, there are two reasons for this, an instrumental and ontological one. The problem, however, is that both can lead to

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<sup>24</sup> Vincent Pouliot (2014: 192) has also pointed out that “the very nature of status markers as well as the legitimate ways to pursue them, are eminently contested.”



conflict. Therefore, by applying the framework of status-seeking a more multifaceted picture emerges which other IR approaches cannot account for with regard the nature of China's rise. If a state is pursuing status it does not take the form of full-scale power maximization, i.e. rational behaviour geared towards security (neo-realism and PTT) and it does not lead to full-scale support of all institutions (against institutionalism) and finally, neither does it lead to acting like any state, as if as if all states rank equally, sit equally comfortably, in the normative structure of international society (constructivism and the English School).

### 2.2.1. Status-seeking as a behavioural aim in itself

Firstly, as was mentioned earlier, status can be instrumental. 'Having' status can grant benefits. According to Renshon (2016: 515): "states seek status commensurate with their abilities because it is a valuable resource for coordinating expectations of dominance and deference in strategic interactions." For instrumental reasons, membership in international institutions is especially important in the modern international system (Larson et al. 2014: 22-23). Because some international institutions make political decisions with systemic effects, membership in them is greatly desired (Suzuki 2008: 49). In order to take part in the process of governing international society the UN Security Council seats are especially sought after. This is why states like Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan have argued for reform in the distribution of permanent seats in of the United Nations Security Council. At the same time, smaller states spend a lot of time, energy and resources to win election to one of the non-permanent seats (Larson and Shevchenko 2010: 70). These examples illustrate that a greater status can bring instrumental benefits to a state.

Second, and more profound reason why states seek status is connected to recognition of one's identity.<sup>25</sup> The status insecurity of Japan and China pointed out by Suzuki comes

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<sup>25</sup> Opinions on who can grant this recognition are varied and conflictual in IR status-literature. Renshon (2016) and Larson et. al (2014) argue that status is more effectively gained from high status actors, i.e. other great powers, while Hurrell (2016) also deems necessary the recognition from smaller and weaker states. Alternatively, according to Flikke (2016) status can be enhanced and recognized through a bilateral relationship. He has described the relationship between China and Russia as 'mutually status-granting.' Finally, Freedman (2016) argues that outside recognition, in any scope, might not be enough at all if the signal of recognition does not match the relevant status markers on the receiving end (Freedman 2016). According to Freedman, comparisons to past-selves can be just as important for status as comparisons

from the lack of or the perceived lack of recognition from others. The desire of recognition is a desire to be a subject of a certain kind, hence, it is central to a sense of *self* (Ringman 2002: 119). This is deeply related to a state's ontological security, i.e. feeling secure in one's identity. Ontological security can be understood as the need of consistent *self* through time and space and the desire to have that sense of *self* recognized and affirmed by others (Zarakol 2010: 3; Innes and Steele 2014: 15). Maintaining this ontological security requires preserving continuity in relationships to the world (Zarakol 2011: 149). Put differently, it motivates actors to hang onto existing self-conceptions because this helps stabilize their social relationships (Wendt 1994: 388). Status recognition is especially important for great powers and states seeking to become great powers. To become a 'legitimate great power', as Suzuki (2008) calls them, a state needs to be accepted as a system-upholding player. Legitimate great powers support the *status quo* by carrying the collective responsibility of upholding the moral fabric and core norms of international society while enjoying institutional privileges and mutual recognition as equals (Suzuki 2008: 47, 50). Therefore, some states seek status because it is deeply connected to their identity.

The dynamics driving status-seeking present a more complex picture of conflict and cooperation than neo-realism, PTT, and neo-liberalism do. Both the instrumental and ontological reason for status-seeking can lead to conflict. States that consider themselves or are considered by others inferior might try to catch up. This can be done peacefully, as Japan did after 1868, or violently, as Japan did after 1931 (Ringmar 2002: 116). The instrumental logic posits that as status is an inherently scarce resource (Larson et. al 2014: 24) states can decide to use force to obtain it. According to Jonathan Renshon (2016: 526):

“Because states can expect to profit from a higher status and because status is positional and thus other states can be expected to be reluctant to cede status voluntarily, violence may be one way of achieving higher status.”<sup>26</sup>

But conflicts can also occur due to the subjective nature of status and its recognition issues. Ward talks about 'status inconsistencies' and 'status immobilities' as a potential

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between states. In the case of stigma theory, which will be introduced soon, the so-called 'audience of normals' or 'core' of international society is considered most relevant.

<sup>26</sup> In his article Renshon (2016) demonstrates that status deficits are significantly associated with an increased probability of war and militarized interstate dispute initiation.

sources of conflict. A ‘status inconsistency’ is “a situation in which an individual, group, or state is not recognized by other actors as having achieved the level of status that the individual, group, or state believes it deserves or to which it aspires (Ward 2013: 613-614).” According to him, the most dangerous situation arises when ‘status immobility’ is perceived by the status-seeking state.<sup>27</sup> ‘Status immobility’ is a belief that the status attribution system, i.e the status markers and the recognition of other states, is stacked against them and that successful status competition is impossible (Ward 2013: 615). Following a similar logic, Renshon argues that states deprived of the status they believe to be deserving may turn to conflict because conflicts can be status enhancing. Renshon states (2016: 526):

“Because militarized conflicts are public, dramatic, and salient, they are chances for the international community to simultaneously calibrate judgements concerning how much international standing a given state possesses.”

In other words, if the status-seeking state perceives that it cannot gain more status in the existing inter-subjective system and/or it is not given the respect it deserves, the state can challenge the system through aggression in the hopes of reshaping the status attribution within it. Therefore, the occurrence of conflict can depend upon whether the status aspirations are respected by others. Ultimately, whether sought for instrumental or ontological reasons, status offers an additional account, besides the nature of power distribution (neo-realism and PTT) and economic interdependence (neo-liberalism), for understanding conflict and cooperation between states.

Regarding China, the instrumental reasons for status-seeking do not explain much. China as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the second largest economy already enjoys these benefits. It is hard to see why China would be ‘upset’ about its current status from the instrumental perspective. However, the ontological route offers much more intriguing avenues to explore. As I will elaborate in the next sub-chapter, stigma is a relevant concept to be included to the status-seeking literature because it broadens the understanding of ontological status-seeking further. Including stigma is especially relevant for understanding just how important status is for some countries identities and how and why status-seeking comes about for these states.

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<sup>27</sup> Regarding status inconsistency, Mattern and Zarakol (2016: 639) have argued that “those with superior material positions tend to become socially competitive when those with inferior material positions have a higher status rank.”

### 2.2.2 Moving forward - from status to stigma

As stated, status is a positional instrumental good that is formed through subjective comparative evaluations. Status is also related to the understanding of *self* and a state's ontological security. Because having status can generate benefits in the international system, states often seek higher status. This causes two sorts of tensions. The first stems from its instrumental value - as with any scarce resource, struggle over it can lead to conflict. The second tension comes from the way status is formed, or how it comes to be, in the first place. Because status is inter-subjective and in order to "have" status, one needs to be recognized as "having" it, conflicts can occur when one's perceptions of its status are at a mismatch with the status-recognition that other actors give.

Having established the importance of status in international relations and the concept's analytical value in understanding actions of states, I will take it even further by introducing the concept of 'stigma' developed by Ayşe Zarakol (2011). I argue that the stigma theory is a more nuanced way of looking at status and status-seeking. Before going into the details of stigma theory, it is important to point out how it improves the conceptualization of status. It does this on two accounts.

First, stigma theory puts a strong emphasis on the fact that the present dynamics of the international system continue to be underwritten by the status hierarchies of the past (Zarakol 2011: 17). It is important to realize that the current status hierarchy has gotten its ramifications from the Western world. Therefore, states are not just seeking status within an inter-subjective social hierarchy, but the present hierarchy is flop-sided towards the West. Stigma theory emphasises the Western origins of the current system and as such deals theoretically with a more fixed or harder to overturn status hierarchy. Despite the fact that principles of legitimacy that define international society have historically changed, which implies that the current principles of legitimacy can at one point be debated between great powers as well (Zhang Y. 2015), we are at the moment still stuck in a very West-centric system. Status can appear immutable or 'sticky', that is to say that an individual or state sometimes manages to maintain their status even after the behaviour and attributes that caused it have vanished. "Once a state obtains a certain status along with the accompanying privileges, it retains a presumptive right to that status which can outlast the initial conditions that gave rise to it" (Larson et al. 2014).

Freedman (2015: 804) has noted that “the history of the international system has been defined by states who have been able to maintain their prestige and status long after losing their material pre-eminence.<sup>28</sup>” This reflects the highly problematic relationship of the stigmatized vis-à-vis the existing West-centric order. Whereas constructivism and the English School presume that states would always seek status within the existing society as socialized entities, stigma theory offers four different strategies how states can seek status, i.e. ‘manage their stigma’, amongst which is an option to reject the entire status hierarchy.

Secondly, as already implied by the first, stigma theory brings in history. This historical context becomes especially relevant for understanding just how important status is for some countries identities and how and why status-seeking comes about for these states. For these states, the desire for more status stems from prior stigmatization. This, I will argue, is also the case for China. In order to understand the nature of China’s rise emphasis needs to be placed on its historic stigma. But it is not only the stigma that matters, but also how it is ‘managed.’ It is the way China manages its historic stigmatization that can reveal how the state perceives its current status and what is the nature of China’s rise, i.e. what is the course that China is likely to take in the future. For this reason, as already mentioned, the secondary research question of this thesis is: How has China managed its stigma in the Xi Jinping years (November 2012 - October 2017)?

Therefore, with the rest of this thesis, I will be going into a sub-category of status-seeking - stigma management. It is a more specific status seeking that applies for certain stigmatized states. I will now turn to introduce stigma and stigma theory.

### **2.3. Stigma**

The concept of ‘stigma’ originates from 1960s sociology and the writings of Erving Goffman. Stigma is about lacking attributes that are perceived necessary to be considered normal. It is connected to the feelings of inferiority, shame, and frustration. The best example is the attribute of blindness:

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<sup>28</sup> Here the status literature interestingly coincides with Ikenberry’s neo-liberal argument presented earlier that the current global hierarchy is harder to overturn than previous ones.

“[...] a blind person who has spent a lifetime developing skills to function as well as a ‘normal’ person, [will] only find time and time again that people cannot but see him as a blind person, that whatever he does, he cannot shed the label of blindness as the primary marker of his identity (Zarakol 2011: 3).”

However, there is no inherent value in the ability of sight in a social sense. Blindness and other attributes are given their social relevance through comparisons to normative expectations. That is, blindness is not the cause of the stigma, it is the expectations of the society that define how such an attribute will be received (Zarakol 2011: 65). Similar attribute dependant perceptions can be identified in state relations.

‘Stigma’ has been introduced to the field of International Relations through the works of Ayşe Zarakol (2010, 2011, 2014) and Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2014). In world politics, stigmas are linked with norms and rules of the international society. Stigmatization is different from the IR concept of ‘othering’ in the sense that with the former also separation, loss of status and discrimination occur (Adler-Nissen 2014: 146). “States that fall short of the normative ideals of international society at any given time can be stigmatized, in other words, tainted and discounted” (Zarakol 2011: 63). A fundamental idea in stigma theory is that international society is inherently stratified. The current world order with its specific norms originates largely from the West. That is to say, the norms have historic roots in the European culture space and in the formation of a system based on nation states – the system that is commonly referred to as the Westphalian system. However, most political entities and peoples who today enjoy independent statehood were not part of the Westphalian core and have become a part of it as ‘late comers’. Most of those states have historically encountered the West through an uneasy relationship of being considered and feeling inferior. As Zarakol (2011: 4) writes:

“Not being of the ‘West’, being behind the ‘West’, not being ‘modern’ enough, not being developed or industrialized or secular or civilized or Christian or democratic enough – these are examples of designations (and, later, self-evaluations) that have essentially functioned as stigmas for states.”

A crucial thing to note here is that stigmatization is not only something connected to history and the colonial period. Zarakol’s main argument is that even today this historic and systemically induced stigmatization circumscribes the behaviour of non-Western states. This is due to the impact it had on the formation of the nations’ identities and the hierarchic nature of the international system. Modern international society was built on a dynamic of stigmatisation where many “joined at a disadvantage, and the various

pathologies of stigmatisation have been incorporated into modern national narratives and state identities” (Zarakol 2014: 312-313). According to Hedley Bull (cited in Suzuki 2011: 181) continuous Western domination of international society has meant that non-European peoples have been compelled to use European concepts of self-determination and sovereign integrity in order to overthrow Western colonial dominance and safeguard their independence. Furthermore, European states have been successful in insinuating their idea of civilization into the Charter of the United Nations. In the words of Keene (2013: 952):

“Within the United Nations system, they [Europeans] had already substantially won the battle to shape what was regarded as ‘normal’, and for that they can thank the considerable power — military, civilian and normative — that their 19th-century ancestors had already invested in the struggle.”

Instead of the effects of anarchy, proposed by the realist school, and ways how those effects are mitigated by confidence building institutions or interconnected markets, as discussed by the liberal school, it is actually the role of hierarchies that matters in world politics. Zarakol, together with Janice Mattern (2016), has elsewhere tackled the fundamental neo-realist dichotomy between domestic and international politics - the understanding that domestic politics take place in a realm of hierarchy, whereas international politics between sovereign states occur in anarchy, a world without a governor. Mattern and Zarakol (2016) point out that there exists hierarchy within anarchy - international law, international institutions and the informal authority of the hegemon function as the ‘governors’ in the international realm. Furthermore, they argue that hierarchies have always been in world politics, even before nation states came to the fore, and that the current hierarchy has its specific historic context. Therefore, states have not carried an equal weight in the formation of this intersubjective international system/society as constructivists and the English School posit.

Therefore, realizing the hierarchic nature of the world, the way normality has been established and how states had to accept it, leads to a different understanding of a state’s rise in the system/society than other theories account for. Zarakol argues that stigmatized states become extra-sensitive to concerns about status, and shape their foreign policy accordingly. Therefore, stigma theory puts the rising states identity and the way it perceives the existing system to the fore instead of plain power dynamics. States are not just ‘like units’ who secure their survival with power. Therefore, it is only

by applying the frame of stigmatization that the behaviour of certain states can be fully understood (Zarakol 2011: 241).

To sum up, stigma in the international relations context is the feeling of accepted inferiority by countries that encountered the West in a matter that shattered their earlier perceptions and made them follow the example of modernisation. But the specific history and origins of these norms that the 'late comers' have socialized into have not been forgotten, they constantly generate uneasy identity issues precisely because of their Western origin. Consequently, historic stigmas constitute the need for certain states to constantly seek status. This means that in order to fully understand the characteristics of China's rise, there is a need to understand how it too was stigmatized and how it shapes the nature of its rise.

#### 2.3.1 Stigma theory - a deeper understanding of the relevance of status

Now that I have given an overview of stigma, it is again beneficial to reflect on the dynamics between 'stigma' and 'status'. The concepts are closely related. Being stigmatized means that one is considered somehow inferior. Carrying a stigma implies that one's place in society, i.e. status, is somehow lower. Without the stigma, a blemish on one's identity, the status would be higher.

Stigma theory and status literature come together most on the matter of status seeking in relation to the need for recognition and ontological security. Whereas status literature offers both instrumental and ontological explanations for the need of status, the stigma theory does not approach status from an instrumental angle. In other words, the potential benefits of a higher status are not the driving force of status-seeking in the stigma framework. Instead, stigma theory shows how the need for status is deeply embedded in the identities of the 'late comers' that have encountered the international system/structure from an inferior position. Therefore, compared to the conceptual and theoretical aspects of status outlined earlier, stigma theory puts emphasis on the stigmatization process itself and on history. It is not just that the state is ranked lower, but it is ranked lower according to a set of alien values that have a specific geographical and historical context in Western imperialism.



Although stigma management and status seeking have been analytically used in similar ways<sup>29</sup>, they are not one and the same. For example, a state could seek higher status without being stigmatized beforehand. Consider for example Finland as a hypothetical case of a status-seeking state. Finland might want more international respect and have a greater say in things, but it does not need to carry a historic stigma for these aspirations. The aspirations could have instrumental roots. Perhaps Finland just wants to rise in rank above the other Nordic countries and to be considered, or even recognized, as the leading force of the region. Stigma management as a form of status-seeking is only relevant for states that initially remained in the periphery of the international system/society and encountered the West-centric system as ‘late-comers’.

Furthermore, while both literatures put emphasis on hierarchies, they do this in different ways. Status, by definition, is a rank in a hierarchy. It is seen that states compete in a social-world to obtain a higher rank in a hierarchy that is characterized by intersubjectively agreed parameters. For stigma theory, it is the historic origins and specific legacy of this hierarchical structure that pushes states to seek status and consequently affects state behaviour. Moreover, whereas status-seeking takes place inside one status hierarchy, stigma theory proposes that states can also break away from the hierarchy. There is more than one way to obtain status which depends on how stigma is ‘managed.’ This leads me to a vital argument of the stigma theory developed by Zarakol. That is, a stigmatized state has a set of choices to approach its stigma, in other words, choices of how to seek status.

The following chapter is especially important for the analytical aims of this thesis as in the empirical section I will be unpacking how China ‘manages’ its stigma in order to produce understanding to the nature of China’s rise.

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<sup>29</sup> For example, Larson and Shevchenko (2015) have turned to social identity theory to map strategies that a group can pursue when their identity is no longer favourable, i.e. how states can improve their status. They call them ‘social mobility’, ‘social competition’, and ‘social creativity’. Although they are somewhat similar to Zarakol’s strategies for stigma management, their content is different and dilutes the picture from the essence of stigma theory.

### 2.3.2. Options for stigma management

By giving a voice to the stigmatized, Zarakol attempts to contest mainstream IR literature and its Eurocentric nature<sup>30</sup>. Stigma theory helps to reveal ‘the face of the socializee’ (Epstein 2012), so to speak. Therefore, by using the stigma framework, agency is given to states that have encountered the West-centric system from an inferior position. According to Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2014: 144):

“[...] states that are unable or unwilling to conform to ‘normal’ standards are not merely objects of (failed) socialization. Rather they are active agents, able to cope strategically with the shame they are subjected to and, in some cases, may even challenge a dominant moral discourse by wearing their stigma as a badge of honor.”

Stigma, as an historic blemish on a state’s identity is hard to change, but the state will always have a way to deal with it. As mentioned earlier, socialization is not a finite one way process. How a state manages its stigmatization is related to the way it approaches existing norms and the hierarchical nature of international society. Thereafter, there is more than one option to manage a stigma in order to seek status.

Zarakol identifies two broad ‘stigma-management strategies’<sup>31</sup> that each have two sub-categories, whereas constructivism and the English school only saw one option in socialization. According to stigma theory, states can either ‘attempt normalcy’ or to ‘embrace the stigma’. As Zarakol (2011: 107) states, a state can either:

“Embrace the international normative order and deal with the problem of stigma by casting it as an endogenous problem, or reject the international normative order and deal with the problem of stigma as an exogeneous challenge.”

There are two ways to ‘attempt normalcy’, i.e. accept the norms imposed. Zarakol calls these ‘correction’ and ‘passing’. ‘Correction’ is about accepting the normative order and fixing one’s discrediting characteristics. It is about seeking recognition from ‘normals’.

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<sup>30</sup> According to her (Zarakol 2011: 6): “The lack of attention given to the particular cultural and historic origins of the modern international system may just be the most glaring oversight in mainstream IR .”

<sup>31</sup> Lacking a better phrase for it, I borrow the term “stigma-management strategy” from Adler-Nissen (2014). It is necessary to point out here that I mostly develop this section on Zarakol’s theorizing. Adler-Nissen has taken the concept further from a historic ‘West-and the Rest’ dichotomy and sees stigmatization happening continuously in international relations and even among Western states. For her, it is more about shaming and labelling. For example, in her article she presents the case of how there was an attempt to stigmatize Austria in 2000 by its EU partners and the US. However, I find that by making the concept broader it also becomes fussier and overlapping with other IR terminology. Therefore, I have decided to rely on a more concise, albeit narrower, approach to stigmatization. I will, however, refer to Adler-Nissen where appropriate.

Therefore, 'correction' is in line with the mainstream English School understanding of socialization. 'Correction' is most common in the case of defeated states that emulate the norms of the victor. Although Zarakol does not provide an example herself, post-World War II Germany is probably the best example of a corrective strategy. However, according to Goffman (1963, cited in Zarakol 2014: 317) even in cases where such correction has occurred "what often results is not the acquisition of fully normal status, but a transformation of self from someone with a particular blemish into someone with a record of having corrected a particular blemish." This again shows how rigid the existing normative hierarchy is and why an uneasy relationship remains between norms with Western-origin and the 'late comers' trying to act by them.

A narrower option of accepting the normative order is 'passing', which relies on presenting the discrediting attributes as aberrations of previous regimes. 'Passing' is usually accomplished by "sweeping under the rug certain historical periods of dissimilarity with the core and constructing a national identity that is centered on a period of common lineage." Zarakol discusses how many East European states have cast aside everything from their Soviet era history and formed their independent identities as inherently linked with Europe. For example, in Estonia, Samuel Huntington's book on clash of civilizations became a centre piece in this line of identity construction (see Kuus 2007). However, the applicability of the 'passing' strategy is limited. According to Zarakol (2011: 97): "[...] it is not really an option for countries that cannot mount a plausible claim to a common heritage with the core."

There are also two ways a state can be more reluctant towards the imposed norms and to 'embrace the stigma'. The first sub-strategy can be marked as 'blessing in disguise', which means that the stigma background is considered valuable (Zarakol 2011: 98). The stigmatized state has accepted the imposed norms, but also values its previous 'backward' background as it can be used for political gains. According to Zarakol, the best examples of 'blessing in disguise' are modern Japan and Turkey<sup>32</sup> that for the past decades have tried to act as bridges between the Western and Eastern identity spaces. Both states have constructed their identity in the way that they are the most developed, i.e. 'normal', in their regions while at the same time their developmental background

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<sup>32</sup> It can be debated if this is still the case today.

allows them to act as a leading examples to other states that are in the process of 'becoming normal'. For example, Japan upholds both the dominant norms of the international society and its Asian identity. Japan takes best of both worlds, so to speak, and tries to act as a leading example to other states in the region. In other words, Japan constructs itself as the most 'normal' state in its region.

The most rejective strategy, 'break with reality', or 'counter-stigmatization' in Adler-Nissen's terminology, is a case where the state accepts difference, while at the same time turning it into a virtue and separate source of pride (Adler-Nissen 2014: 153-154). With this strategy a state "claims to reject the dominant norms of the international system and substitute their own version of "reality"" (Zarakol 2011: 98). In the case of 'breaking with reality', the state would seek recognition from and identify with other stigmatized groups and not care about the perceptions of the 'normals'. Andrew Hurrell (2006) has similarly argued that states can improve their social status by articulating alternative sets of values which other states can rally round, thus creating an anti-hegemonic coalition in which to claim leadership status. The Soviet Union, modern Iran and, until recently, Cuba are examples of 'break with reality' strategy.

Stigma management, then, is about how the state seeks to obtain status. The main takeaway here is that stigmatized states have a set of options how to react to the imposed stigma (see Appendix 1). First, it can 'correct' itself and follow the criteria demanded by the normals. Second, it can try to 'pass' as a normal by constructing a historical connection with the core. Third, it can use its past-inferiority as a 'blessing in disguise' to present itself as the leader within a group of states that have been even more stigmatized. Fourth, it can ignore the dominant status-granting hierarchy and seek respect and recognition elsewhere by 'breaking with reality'. Realizing the existence of these four strategies expands thinking about socialization and status-seeking.

Regarding the nature of China's rise, the question becomes which stigma management strategy is being currently adopted. Depending on the strategy used, the nature of China's rise will take a different form, i.e. China will be encountering the existing international society in a different manner. By identifying the stigma management strategy, new insight is created into understanding the nature of China's rise. This is the goal of the empirical section presented in Chapter 5.

## **2.4. Conclusion of the theoretical discussion**

With this theoretical discussion I have done the following. First, I introduced the major IR theories - neo-realism, PTT, neo-liberalism, constructivism and the English School - and presented their basic conceptualizations of international relations and how scholars working in these schools of thoughts have assessed the nature of China's rise. Although they all have brought valuable insight to IR in general and to explaining/understanding China, they have their shortcomings. They have all been overly structural, treating states as 'like units' and taking a narrow perspective on the relevance of the specific history behind the formation of the international system/society. To fill the gap, I incorporated literature on status, status-seeking, stigma and stigma management. By bringing these strands together I elaborated on how to understand status-seeking behaviour. I argued that stigma management is a specific form of status-seeking that applies to states that encountered the West-centric international system/society as 'late comers.' Furthermore, based on Zarakol, I argued that states have different ways to 'manage their stigma' which broadens the view from a simple 'socialization' perspective to a set of choices a state can make. Realizing the existence of these four stigma management strategies opens a new inroad into thinking about socialization and status-seeking.

A theoretical limitation to keep in mind is that the concepts of status and stigma, that this thesis has been built up on, originate from psychology. However, it is possible that the psychological roots themselves are themselves overly West-centric. That the way the concepts of status and stigma have been understood are also located in a specific geographical-cultural context. It has been pointed out that questions of human psychology have overwhelmingly been answered through analysing the behaviour of samples drawn entirely from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic societies (Henrich et. al 2010). Indeed, Qin Yaqing (2010) has claimed that China's peaceful rise has been, and is possible, due to the Chinese way of thinking. He argues that Western philosophy since the Enlightenment has been embedded with conflictual dialectics where "A and non-A can never be mutually inclusive", whereas the Chinese thinking is based on complementary dialectics where "A is in the process of becoming non-A" (Qin 2010: 139). Essentially it means that this is a completely different way of making sense of the world. If that is the case, then it is possible that I too have been

overly West-centric. However, at this time, there is no way to overcome this limitation. The discussion whether understandings of psychology are equally applicable throughout the globe needs to be explored elsewhere, most likely through inter-cultural dialogue within Psychology as an academic field and not necessarily in IR, although the latter should always be conscious of its geographical-cultural origins.<sup>33</sup>

The primary research question presented in the beginning of the thesis read as follows: “How to understand the nature of China’s rise?” So far, with the theoretical discussion, I have proposed that the lens of stigma needs to be applied on China. Having presented what status, status-seeking, stigmatization, stigma and stigma management stand for, I will with the rest of this thesis show how they matter in the case of China and for the nature of its rise. In Chapter 3, based on secondary literature, I am putting forward the argument, and answer for my primary research question, that China is best understood as a stigmatized state. Firstly, the chapter gives a brief account about the history behind China’s encounter with the West-centric international system/society to illustrate that the dynamics behind the process were similar to the three cases used by Zarakol on which she developed the stigma theory. Secondly, I will emphasize how this history of stigmatization has had deep effects on China’s modern identity. Having presented the background and illustrated the need to look at China’s identity more precisely, I will analyse the workings of stigma and stigma management strategies in contemporary China. Chapter 4, therefore, introduces post-structuralist discourse analysis as my methodology and Chapter 5 presents the analysis to answer the secondary research question: How has China managed its stigma in the Xi Jinping years (November 2012 - October 2017)?

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<sup>33</sup> For an exploration of Chinese-specific psychology, see Michael Harris Bond’s (2010) book *The Oxford handbook of Chinese psychology*.

### 3. China - a status-seeking stigmatized state

In this chapter I engage further with my primary (theoretical) research question, namely “How to understand the nature of China’s rise?” In the previous theoretical discussion I argued that the nature of China’s rise needs to be assessed by applying the lens of stigma. I will therefore elaborate on the argument by directly adding China to this discussion. The conclusion is that in order to fully understand the nature of China’s rise, it needs to be treated as a status-seeking stigmatized state.

I take an interpretive ‘understanding’ approach which instead of ‘explaining’, i.e. focusing on causal relationships, seeks to understand international relations from within. In their seminal work, Martin Hollis and Steve Smith (1991: 205) described understanding as follows: “understanding requires reconstructing the rules on the one hand and seeking the actor's intentions, legitimating reasons, and underlying motives on the other.” They add, “To understand is to reproduce the order in the minds of actors [..., which needs to be] traced by identifying the rules which guide their thoughts and actions (Hollis and Smith 1991: 87).” Therefore, in order to understand China and the nature of its rise, I look into the formation of its stigmatized identity that shapes its intentions. I operate on the state level and do not seek a system level explanation for China’s potential actions. While stigmatization is structurally induced, it plays out in the identity of the actor. That is to say, in order to see stigma at work, I need to look at how the actor is rationalizing outside pressures.

In order to apply the stigma theory to China, I need to make my argument that China is a ‘stigmatized’ state. In her book *“After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West”*, Zarakol focuses on the status aspiring behaviour of Turkey, Japan, and Russia which in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century went through analogous processes of stigmatisation.<sup>34</sup> According to Zarakol (2011: 4): “Before incorporation into the Westphalian system these states had their own normative standards by which they defined themselves as

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<sup>34</sup> Zarakol does not discuss China in her book. She only refers to it in a single footnote, claiming that “Aspects of my argument apply to states such as Iran, India, China, and Thailand as well, but what distinguishes Turkey, Japan, and Russia is the relative autonomy they were able to retain vis-à-vis Europe” (Zarakol 2011: 8). Therefore she omits China purposefully. However, I do not agree with her reasoning. I think China had just as much autonomy (recall Suzuki 2009) to deal with the socializing pressures of the West. As I argue in the main-body of this chapter, the way China’s contact with the West played out and the way it still matters today, is very similar in the case of China.

"normal" and others as different, abnormal, or inferior." Therefore, in the next two sub-chapters, I shall argue that China is similar 'late comer' to Japan, Russia, and Turkey, that has gone through an analogous historic encounter with the West and is similarly still seeking status in the current international system/society. First, I will explain the history behind China's encounter with the West-centric international society and draw parallels to the cases on which Zarakol has based her theory. Secondly, I elaborate how this traumatic history and modern day stigmatization still impacts China.

### **3.1. China - a 'late comer' to international society**

While status is important for all international players, it is especially relevant for China precisely because it has been stigmatized. China today finds itself in an international society whose characteristics have been sculpted in the West, i.e. in the cradle of today's international society. These norms are not inherently valuable, but have a very specific historic context (Epstein 2012). Just as the cases analysed by Zarakol - Japan, Turkey, and Russia - China too encountered the West in a humiliating manner in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup> Before the disastrous contact with Western states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, China was at the centre of a completely different international relations system.<sup>36</sup> As Yongjin Zhang (2001: 44) puts it, "until the second half of the nineteenth century, Chinese international relations were subject to their own distinctive rules, norms, discourses and institutions." In that system, China was itself the core that could define 'normality'. Especially traumatic for China's was its defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894 – 1895) which "put an end to China's last remaining tributary relations with Korea, signalling the final collapse of the East Asian international order (Suzuki 2011: 10)." In other words, the entire Chinese world-view of foreign relations came crumbling down.

What is important to note here, is that the encounter with the West did not only manifest as a military defeat, but also ideational, one affecting ontological security. In the words

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<sup>35</sup> China was humiliated in the First Opium war (1839 – 1842), Second Opium War (1856-1860), Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), by the suppression of the Boxer rebellion in 1900 by a unified army of eight foreign nations, by Japanese aggression on Chinese soil since 1931, and through all the so-called unequal treaties that were imposed on China after each defeat.

<sup>36</sup> For a better understanding of the characteristics of the East Asian or sino-centric system, see Kang (2007) and Suzuki (2011).



of Zarakol (2011: 105): “The transition from being a threat to being a loser, by definition, impinges on the desire to have a stable social identity in the system. For the first time, China confronted a civilization with universalistic pretensions of its own (Wang 2012: 67). Reflecting back on the initial definition of status, this means that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the previous hierarchical social relationship collapsed and China had to start earning respect and seeking recognition in a new, alien, structure. As a consequence of the defeat, China lost its previous identity and has been trying to redefine itself both during the Republican and Communist era, i.e. it has constantly felt ontologically insecure. I will elaborate on this in the next sub-chapter.

Furthermore, China was not incorporated to the modern world on its own terms, or on negotiated terms, but on the terms of the West. The material and ontological defeat eventually led China to follow the example of the West in modernization. But just like Turkey, Japan and Russia, China too was late to the modernisation and had to make great efforts to catch up. Zarakol (2011: 211) has identified that in all three cases of her research, modernisation was sought through very radical social and economic reconfigurations, which she calls ‘shock mobilisation programs’. I would argue that most of the campaign politics of Mao Zedong, that relied on masses and will-power, are exactly this type of mobilisation programs. For example, The Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) in its essence was a radical attempt to modernize and catch up with the West. There are additional similarities between Turkey, Japan, Russia, and China, such as claiming to have ‘unique characteristics’ or ‘unique solutions’ (Zarakol 2011: 208-209) and going through processes of “civilizing peoples across their territories” (Zarakol 2011: 212). But the key point here, however, is that all four countries “undertook the project of reconstructing themselves as a ‘modern’ states in the same period that they were coming to terms with the ‘rise of the West’” (Zarakol 2011: 30, see also Zarakol 2010). China had to essentially re-invent itself from a civilization into a nation state (see Zhao 2004: 16-19).<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, China is not just a state that seeks to be recognized according to the new systems' rules. China seeks to be recognized as a great power, i.e. to possess something

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<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, according to Zarakol (2014: 325): “Making a case against European hegemony in the nineteenth century (whether militarily, legally, or culturally) required first ‘manufacturing’ a ‘national’ culture worthy of its territorial sovereignty.”

similar to its former glory. According to Zarakol (2011: 104): “Those who have had power in the past are more likely to resent the loss of it.” Just as Turkey, Russia, and Japan, China lives in the shadow of a greater past. China, considering itself as the centre of the world, survived the ancient and classical periods and flourished through most of the modern world history. It had been an empire for over two thousand years<sup>38</sup> before it started to crumble under the challenges of Western imperial demands and superior technology. Having established the historic similarities between the cases, there remains to be made an argument for the relevance of stigmatization in contemporary China.

### **3.2. Contemporary China and stigmatization**

As discussed in Chapter 2, an important aspect of historic stigmas is that they affect states even long after the stigmatizing event occurred. Although China has made major advancements in the past decades, the legacy of the disastrous contact with the West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and subsequently having to deal with Western hegemony while establishing itself as a nation state at the same time, has created a sustained preoccupation with international status for China. For this reason, Yong Deng (2008: 8) has called China “the most status-conscious country in the world.” Nowadays, the ‘century of humiliation’ (1839-1949) is a central part of the victimage narrative in Chinese identity.<sup>39</sup> One of the main slogans of Chinese nationalism is “never forget national humiliation” (Wang 2012). Status-seeking in Chinese foreign policy has been described as an ‘overriding policy objective’ or ‘consistent objective’ (Deng 2008: 8; Larson and Shevchenko 2010: 66). Therefore, the feeling of past inferiority is a visible driving force for today’s politics.

This explains why China has been keen on large status laden projects, i.e. status markers, such as the Beijing Olympics, the Shanghai Expo, construction of fashionable skyscrapers and aircraft carriers, joining international institutions, and even launching

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<sup>38</sup> It must be noted here that the “two thousand years” was not a continuously peaceful period. Dynasties rose and fell and there were longer periods of turmoil where power and territory was divided by warring factions. Nevertheless, in China’s historical narrative the continuity of Chinese culture through-out the millennia is emphasized. The defeat to the West was of a different kind because they were not interested in emulating the culture of the Chinese. Until then, “the strong ability to culturally integrate outsiders was indeed a chosen glory of the Chinese people (Wang 2012: 67).”

<sup>39</sup> The narrating of a trauma is a practice of identity (Innes & Steele 2014: 22).

the OBOR initiative. The successful firing of a Chinese anti-satellite missile on an old satellite in 2007 could similarly be seen as an act that sought to change perceptions.<sup>40</sup> All of these examples are costly signals of great power status that demand enormous capabilities and resources that most countries do not possess (Pu and Randall 2014: 143-145). However, despite sending these status-signals, becoming a 'legitimate great power' has been a challenge for China as it has often been perceived by the Western-democratic core as threatening.

Ever since the First Opium war, China has tried to find its suitable place in an alien world order; often finding itself falling short of the required standards. While China has been occupied with modernization and nation-building, i.e. 'correcting' itself to fit the society, the normative demands of the 'core' have continued to change. In the words of Xiaoming Zhang (2010: 237): "[...] 'the standard of civilization', as one form or another, has always been there, although its meaning has been in the process of change or evolution." In the contemporary world, normative standards such as international law, human rights, and democracy are used by an 'audience of normals' to stigmatize those who do not follow the norms fully (Adler-Nissen 2014, see also Suzuki 2014). China, that today is no longer a 'backward' empire, but a modern industrialized nation state, still faces stigmatization by the West. According to Yongjin Zhang (2015: 322): "China seeks social recognition in a world not of its own making and in which it carries a social stigma as a perceived threat to the liberal global order." He expands:

"China carries the social stigma of being a threat to the liberal global order dominated by the United States or as a norm violator in international society, from non-proliferation to climate change and to human rights." (Zhang Y. 2015: 315)

Other scholars have agreed. According to Suzuki (2008: 51):

"Beijing's human rights abuses within its own borders, its military build-up, and its reluctance to enforce democratic governance on behalf of international society makes China appear to be harbouring revisionist intentions."

At the same time, in Beijing's view, it is the U.S. that is dangerous, crusading, hegemonic, unilateralist, and dismissive of international law that will not rest until it imposes its views and its way of life on the entire planet (Foot 2006: 92; Friedberg 2011:

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<sup>40</sup> According to Goldstein (2005): "The successful 2007 firing of a Chinese anti-satellite missile on an old satellite caused serious concern in the West as it had not been previously evident that China possessed such a capability let alone the determination to conduct such a risky but highly visible test."

22).<sup>41</sup> China is in an unfavoured position here. As the U.S. wields more power and legitimacy, it enjoys greater credibility than China in mutual imputation of negative images (Deng 2008: 103). Indeed, the group that is well established in positions of power is the one that can effectively stigmatize another (Zarakol 2011: 82). Therefore, despite its rise, China still struggles to be regarded to qualify for full membership in the international system/society because the normative goalposts have moved and ‘compliance’ has been difficult.

In this chapter I have made the case that China has been historically stigmatized, just like Turkey, Japan, and Russia, and this has created similar tensions within China’s identity. I also showed how stigma plays a prominent role in China’s nationalist narratives, in foreign policy development and imitating large status-laden projects. Therefore, I have answered my primary research question of “How to understand the nature of China’s rise?” I claim that in order to fully and in a satisfactory manner understand the nature of China’s rise, i.e. the course China will likely take in the future, the framework of stigma theory needs to be applied. Moreover, China needs to be treated as a status-seeking stigmatized state, that from the get-go of encountering the West-centring international society has had an uneasy relationship with the normative demands of this society and that the relationship is still problematic due to the change in the norms that are imposed by the ‘core’ or ‘audience of normals’ of international society. Treating China as a stigmatized status-seeking state helps to account for behaviour that sometimes comes off as contradictory or erratic.

I will now use this theoretical knowledge to empirically analyse China’s stigma management and to answer my secondary (empirical) research question: How has China managed its stigma in the Xi Jinping years (November 2012 - October 2017)? The following chapter will introduce the post-structuralist discourse analysis methodology used to analyse China’s stigma-management.

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<sup>41</sup> According to Foot (2006: 81), in Beijing the “US decision to embark on establishing missile defence systems as well as assuming leadership of the war in Kosovo was seen as evidence of a grand strategy of world domination.”

#### **4. Methodology – discourse analysis**

This is a single case study of the People's Republic of China as a stigmatized state. A single case study is chosen because the purpose of this thesis has precisely been to generate insight into the nature of China's rise and to answer the secondary research question: How has China managed its stigma in the Xi Jinping years?

As I have established earlier, stigma is a blemish on one's identity, a feeling of inferiority that usually comes from lacking some qualities of 'normals.' I follow David Kang's (2007: 20) understanding of identity:

“an identity is how a nation defines itself in the world, what it thinks is an appropriate role and actions for itself and others, and is a relatively stable understanding and expectation about self and others that is socially constructed.”

Identities are constructed through difference (Aydın-Düzgit 2013: 525). To know what a state is, there needs to be an understanding of what it is not. The existence of a stigmatized identity becomes most clearly evident in discourse. This is because identities are discursive. According to Lene Hansen (2006: 15):

“The productive nature of language implies that policy discourse is seen as relying upon particular constructions of problems and subjectivities, but that it is also through discourse that these problems and subjectivities are constructed in the first place.”

Only through language constructions 'things', including states, are given meaning and endowed with particular identities (Hansen 2006: 16). Language is important as it is the central feature of human sociality and international relations themselves are a “social” endeavour (Sayin and Ates 2012: 17). Therefore, the way one state conceives itself compared to others is articulated through language. It is the political discourse produced by those who must deal with their stigmatization and inferiority in which stigma reflects and through identity, informs action. Therefore, I will conduct my research by applying discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is understood as the close study of language and language use as evidence of aspects of society and social life (Taylor 2013: 4). Therefore my main focus will be identifying used language constructions, i.e. why have things been described in this way and not any other way? According to Hansen (2006: 41-45) identity constructions involve spatial, temporal and ethical dimensions. According to Hansen

(2006: 43): “temporal themes such as development, transformation, continuity, change, repetition, or stasis are crucial for understanding and analysing the construction of identity within foreign policy discourse.” It is insightful to pay attention to the way China is presented along these dimensions. Temporal themes that indicate a change or stasis are especially relevant regarding status and China’s rise. Paying attention to temporal themes will help to reveal if China’s rise is seen as possible inside the existing global order or is there a perception of status immobility, which implies dissatisfaction and ‘breaking with reality.’

As discussed in the theory section, a state can manage its stigma in roughly four ways: ‘correction’, ‘passing’, ‘blessing in disguise’, and ‘break with reality.’ These strategies manifest in different articulations of the *self* and the international system/society. A ‘correction strategy’ would involve discursive representations that emulate values, identities, ideologies of the ‘normals’ and indications of support for the institutions of international society, i.e. upholding the current ‘universal’ values and norms. Statements about the need of adjustment or self-discipline to meet the standards are also representative of a ‘correction strategy.’ A ‘passing strategy’ would become evident through constructions of common lineage with the core. For example, during Estonia’s European Union (EU) accession process, president Lennart Meri linked the EU and Estonia’s potential place in it with the experience of the medieval Hanseatic League.<sup>42</sup> Meri stated: “Everything new is well forgotten old. [...] I would like to say that we in Europe have an experience of a previous European Union” (Kuus 2007: 53). A ‘blessing in disguise’ strategy would imply an identity construction where a balance is struck between the stigmatized background/history and how it benefits China today. A ‘break with reality’ strategy would manifest in statements that emphasize pride in deviance, in creations of a separate system of honour, but also *Othering* of the U.S and Chinese values juxtaposed negatively against Western values.

Therefore, it matters what and how is presented in Chinese discourse because it reveals facets about China’s identity and its status-seeking and stigma management aspects. By analysing China’s discourse I will be able to answer my empirical research question,

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<sup>42</sup> The Hanseatic League was a network of trading cities led by Lübeck and other northern German towns and centered on the Baltic Sea. From the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, four towns of current day Estonia were also a part of this league.

“How has China managed its stigma in the Xi Jinping years (November 2012 - October 2017)?” and consequently bring new insight to the nature of China’s rise.

#### **4.1. Structure of the analysis**

I have structured my discourse analysis project by following an arranging-structure developed by Lene Hansen (2006). She sets up a discourse analysis research project through four choices or dimensions. It is a decision of [1] which type of discourse will the focus be on, i.e. which intertextual model is of importance, [2] how many ‘selves’ will be studied, [3] in which temporal frame will the analysis take place, and [4] which event(s) are important for the study (Hansen 2006: 66-73). My research is devised as follows:

Firstly, the focus is on official discourse of the Chinese state and the Communist Party. I am looking what and how is being discussed in official speeches about China’s position in the current world order. I am structuring this analysis through the four stigma management strategies to see how China’s stigmatized identity is represented and articulated. In other words, how does China relate to the existing normative framework and can signs of certain stigma management strategies be detected. Secondly, this is a single ‘self’ study – the case of China.<sup>43</sup> Thirdly, I have limited my study to the Xi Jinping years - from November 2012, when he assumed office as General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), until October 2017, when he was re-elected for another term. This narrow focus helps to identify the most current situation and to conduct an in-depth analysis. In these five years, president Xi has successfully consolidated his power in Beijing as shown by the fact that ‘Xi Jinping’s Thought’<sup>44</sup> was added to the party’s constitution and he was re-elected as the party chairman for a second term at the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017.

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<sup>43</sup> Although identities are always relational and looking at the discourse of, say, U.S. or Japan could have additional merits, I limit my self to China to go in-depth with the case on which the stigma lens, to my knowledge, has not been applied to. This limitation has also been made due to size constraints.

<sup>44</sup> First presented as “Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” within the larger report that Xi Jinping gave at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (Xi 2017b).

There is also a belief that Xi is a leader of a different character than his predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin.<sup>45</sup>

The final dimension that Hansen recommends considering is whether there are key events around which to structure the analysis. The selection of these moments should be “analytically driven by changes in important political structures or institutions (Hansen 2006: 70).” Xi’s era has definitely seen new political developments such as setting up an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea, launching of the OBOR initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Silk Road Fund, and the New Development Bank (NDB). However, it is difficult to pinpoint and assess the weight of these and other events as structural changes that would require structuring the analysis specifically around them. Rather, it makes more sense to consider them as a continuous development or as a single event of Xi taking office in 2012, i.e. identifying the change in China’s leadership as an important change in China’s political structure.

Furthermore, treating it as one event is more in line with the aim of this thesis and most adequate for observing stigma and stigma management. Structuring analysis around events is purposeful if the aim is to compare discourses around the events, but this is not in line with my aim. The objective of the thesis is to analyse stigma and its management to understand the nature of China’s rise. Therefore, empirically, my aim is to identify the current stigma. Stigma, as an attribute of one’s identity, does not simply change overnight. It remains relatively stable across events. Therefore, treating Xi Jinping’s years as one event, is in line with the goals of this thesis and will help to identify stigma management strategies. Therefore, I do not frame my analysis further around particular events but take the Xi Jinping years as a singular event to analyse the current stigma management.

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<sup>45</sup> Maria Repnikova (2016) has pointed out that the fatherly image of ‘Xi Dada/Uncle Xi’, portrayed in domestic media, is a new image not present with Hu and Jiang. Since October 2016, Xi has also been referred to as the ‘core leader’ of the Communist Party. This title has been given earlier to Mao, Deng, and Jiang, whereas Hu was never referred to as the ‘core’ (Buckley 2016). Another novel aspect about Xi compared to his predecessors is that he now also holds the title ‘Commander-in-chief of Joint battle command of People’s Liberation Army’, a new institutional position set up in April 2016 (Panda 2016). The traditional main roles that China’s leaders typically hold are the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, President of the People’s Republic of China, and Chairman of the Central Military Commission.



To conclude, I conduct a post-structuralist discourse analysis on China, as a single *self*, by limiting it to official discourse, the Xi Jinping years (November 2012 - October 2017) and without a special focus on any event, but rather treat the period as a continuous representation of China's identity construction under the new leadership. I will now turn to explain my text selection.

#### **4.2. Text selection**

I once again turn to Hansen and her guidance in choosing which texts to analyse. Besides the obvious that the texts should be from the period under analysis, Hansen points out the importance of analysing key texts that are “frequently quoted and function as nodes within the intertextual web of debate (Hansen 2006: 74).” Furthermore, Hansen sets up three criteria for choosing contemporary texts for analysis, they need to: [1] have clear articulation of identities and policies, [2] be widely read and attended to, [3] have formal authority to define a political position (Hansen 2006: 76). These are the guiding principles of developing this research.

For my analysis, I have chosen 30 speeches (see Appendix 2) between November 2012 - October 2017 that meet Hansen's criteria. They all offer insights to the politics and identity of China as they deal precisely with international politics and focus on foreign policy. They are uttered by the highest political elite in China, by President Xi Jinping, Premier of the State Council Li Keqiang and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, i.e they have authoritative value. Major speeches given at high-profile meetings, which have gained wide attention both domestically and internationally, are included. Among others, the speeches given at UN General Debates (GD), at the 2016 Hangzhou G20 summit and at the 2017 World Economic Forum are analysed. Whereas most speeches analysed were given at international summits, I included two speeches that were primarily aimed at domestic audiences, to my analysis. These were Xi's first press-meeting after being elected as the new chairman at the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress and Xi Jinping's report at 19<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress. These can be considered as key speeches because both were and have been widely read and discussed globally.

An important source for my analysis has been the collection of Xi Jinping's speeches from the book “*The Governance of China*,” which includes speeches between

November 2012 and June 2014.<sup>46</sup> As a compilation of the CPC Chairman vision, it is a valuable source on the guiding-principles and perceptions of China's elite. It is an authoritative source because it is representative of what Beijing wants to portray. Although, some of the speeches in the book are presented partially or through 'main points', it is still a relevant source, because the choice of emphasizing those parts has been intentional. Omissions and highlights are in themselves discursive strategies. Therefore, I claim that all the analysed speeches are relevant because of the messages and self images they communicate and portray. These speeches are a window to China's identity and stigma management, i.e. they provide insight into the nature of China's rise.

It needs to be emphasized that all the texts analysed were in English, as I do not have enough proficiency in Mandarin. Although this means that I need to be careful with the scope of my conclusions<sup>47</sup>, researching the English language sphere does have its own benefits. These speeches have been aimed at international audiences as they have been given at international summits and high-level political occasions. Therefore, they have been written and translated for international audiences - institutions, foreign governments and English speaking public. Therefore, language is not an obstacle to the research at hand. It is a matter of approach. One could analyse how the texts are presented to the public and used internally, but that analysis would be heavily linked to the domestic sphere. The approach used in this thesis, however, is interested in the constructions taking place in the international sphere as identities are constructed in relation to others. However this restriction should be kept in mind throughout assessing this research as the extent of conclusions and interpretations apply foremost to the English language sphere. I will now turn to present my analysis and the main findings in Chapter 5.

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<sup>46</sup> I focused my attention on speeches that had international politics as their focus, therefore analysing all the speeches under the chapters: *Peaceful Development; New Model of Major-country Relations; Neighborhood Diplomacy; Cooperation with Developing Countries; Multilateral Relations*.

<sup>47</sup> Therefore I do not know if there are differences in the texts which are presented to the English speaking (foreign) and Chinese speaking (domestic) public. It is also possible that the years 2012-2017 have seen 'key' speeches that have not been translated to English speaking audiences.

## **5. Analysis – China’s stigma-management in the Xi Jinping era**

I begin my analysis with a general discussion on how China is presented in the speeches and then move on to discuss the presence of the concrete stigma management strategies. Although they are inherently connected, some aspects of China’s identity construction could apply to more than one strategy. Furthermore, the first part of this analysis reflects back to the secondary literature on China, whereas the second is a more straight forward application of stigma theory. The analysis around specific strategies is directly connected to my secondary research question, “How has China managed its stigma in the Xi Jinping years? Identifying the most prominent strategy is important for assessing the nature of China’s rise. On the basis of the following analysis I will be presenting an interpretation of these findings in Chapter 5.6.

### **5.1. Representations of China’s identity**

#### 5.1.1. China - a peacefully developing country

It is fitting to return to where the thesis began - the notion of peaceful rise/development. References to peaceful development are still omnipresent in the official rhetoric. Peaceful development is presented as “Party’s strategic choice” (Xi 2013o) and “natural choice of the Chinese people” (Xi 2013a), a “conclusion drawn from an objective assessment of China’s history, present and future” (Xi 2014c), “rooted in the rich heritage of Chinese civilization (2014c) and “what the fine traditional Chinese culture calls for” (Xi 2013a). The last two examples are particularly interesting because a cultural link has been attached to the concept. Peaceful development is cast as historically contiguous and is therefore a specific form of identity building that constructs China as a peaceful entity throughout time. At the latest UN GD Foreign Minister Wang Yi (2017) explained further: “Aggression is never in the genes of the Chinese and acts of colonialism or plundering others are nowhere to be found in China’s track record.” The link made with genes, a biological aspect of the human body, is striking. It is as if the Chinese people are incapable of aggressiveness. Such a strong emphasis on the peaceful nature of China and the Chinese, functions as an identity opposite to the experienced aggressiveness of Japan and Western states.

China's political elite has also engaged directly with the fears surrounding China's rise. In one of the study sessions of the Political Bureau of the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee, after taking the helm of the state, Xi (2013a) proposed:

“We should let the world learn more about China's strategy of pursuing peaceful development and let the international community view China's development for what it is and treat it accordingly.”

This implies that the international community has so far misunderstood China's intentions. In another speech, Xi ridicules the threat narrative: “They [some people] even portray China as being the terrifying Mephisto<sup>48</sup> who will someday suck the soul of the world” (Xi 2014c). In order to convince otherwise, most analysed speeches either put a lot of emphasis on China's commitment to a peaceful rise or to emphasize how China's development is beneficial for all, ergo, there is no need for other states to worry about China's growing capabilities. The two mostly go hand in hand.

Examples of the former read as follows: “China is firmly committed to the path of peaceful development” (Xi 2014e) and “[...] we have made a solemn pledge to the whole world that we will never seek hegemony or commit any act of expansion” (Xi 2013a). Just as Zheng Bijian initially did, the nature of China's rise has been juxtaposed to previous rising powers. According to the president: “China does not subscribe to the outdated logic that a country will invariably seek hegemony when it grows strong” (Xi 2014c; 2016) and “No matter what stage of development it reaches, China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion” (Xi 2017b). These statements are coupled with history: “China was long one of the most powerful countries in the world. Yet it never engaged in colonialism or aggression” (Xi 2014c). These statements relate back to representations of the Chinese as inherently peaceful. Besides the link to peacefulness made through Chinese culture and genes, China is also represented as “a staunch force for upholding world peace” (Xi 2013a; 2014e), “a force for peace” (Wang 2017) and “an anchor of world peace” (Wang 2017).

Regarding the latter, how China's development benefits all, Xi (2013b) once argued: “By growing stronger through development, China will bring more opportunities, rather than threats, to the rest of the world.” Elsewhere, China's development is communicated

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<sup>48</sup> A demon in German literary tradition. As the speech was given at the Körber Foundation in Germany, this symbol was used to resonate with the local audiences.

as as “an opportunity for the world” (Xi 2013a; 2013h; 2017) or that it brings “opportunities to business communities in other countries” (Xi 2017) and produces “positive spill-over effects for the world economy” (Xi 2013i). Most commonly however, it is articulated that China needs peace and development such as much as the world needs China to develop peacefully. For example Xi (2013b) has stated: “China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world [... and] the rest of the rest of the world also need[s] China to seek prosperity and stability.” Finally, it should be noted that, sovereignty and ‘core interests’, have been placed above peaceful development. An oft use phrase reads as follows: “No country should expect China to swallow any bitter fruit that undermines its sovereignty, security, or development interests. (Xi 2013a; 2014c). Accordingly, through the analysis, it became evident that China still feels the need to constantly emphasize its benign intentions and nature.

#### 5.1.2. China - a developing country

Although the previous section dealt with the construction of peaceful development, it is insightful to separately discuss how China’s development stage has been presented. China’s development in the past decades is at times brought as an example of a great achievements by the state or party. In his address to the CPC at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Xi (2017b) claimed that “[...] the party [has propelled] China into a leading position in terms of economic and technological strength, defense capabilities, and composite national strength.” These achievements have been especially emphasized at the UN General Debates. At the 72<sup>nd</sup> GD, Wang Yi (2017) stated: “Sustained development of a country with over 1.3 billion people is an enormous contribution to world peace.” Similarly, President Xi likes to emphasize that “China has lifted over 700 million people out of poverty” (Xi 2016, Xi 2017), which has then drastically benefited the entire world. Another example reads: “It only took China, a country over 1.3 billion people, a few decades to travel a journey that took developed countries several centuries to cover. (Xi 2013c). All of these statements indicate, on the one hand, that China has been successful in managing large scale challenges. The last example even presents China as more successful in development than developed, ergo mostly Western, countries. On the other hand, these achievements are framed as China’s contribution to the world as a whole.

Nonetheless, it is at the same time emphasized that China is still a developing country. For example, Xi (2014c) has stated: “We are keenly aware that China will remain the worlds largest developing country for a long time and that to improve the life for its 1.3 billion people calls for strenuous efforts.” Elsewhere, phrases such as “China remains a developing country”, “living standards are not yet high”, “much awaits to be done in modernization” and “China remains a populous country with a weak economic foundation and uneven development” are indicators of this (Xi 2013c; 2013h; 2017, Li 2016). Therefore, China has been represented both as a strong state that has gone through remarkable development and as a developing state facing many challenges.

These opposite representations are interesting. When China’s still developing nature is emphasized, it is as if China is re-affirming its inferior status. China can only be considered a ‘developing country’ if there are ‘developed countries’ as *Others* to compare with. Referring back to the stigma theory developed by Zarakol, ‘not-developed enough’ is a designation similar to stigmatizing labels such as ‘not-modern’ or ‘not-industrialized’ used by colonial Western states towards outsiders. The fact that China evaluates itself to be a developing country, shows that China has internalized the notion of development as valuable. On the other hand, when China emphasizes the developmental achievements of the past decades, it acts as a source of pride - a positive attribute of the state’s identity. These two opposites can also function differently instrumentally. Emphasizing the need for further development can rally the Chinese people to work harder, whereas emphasizing the success behind the party can boost nationalism and national morale. There is also a third instrumental option, that I will elaborate on in the discussion of ‘blessing in disguise’ stigma management strategy.

#### 5.1.3. China - in need of “national renewal” in light of ‘century of humiliation’

Xi Jinping’s first speech after being elected as the new General Secretary at the 18th Party Congress was clearly and unsurprisingly aimed at the domestic audience. All the presented difficulties and challenges for the party and state were domestic in their nature, e.g. “corruption” and “being divorced from the people (Xi 2012).” However, even in the short press conference, Xi managed to make noteworthy references to the ‘century of humiliation’. He described the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century as times where “our nation (...) survival hung in the balance” and made a distinction between “poor and

backward Old China” and “increasingly prosperous and powerful New China” that is opening “a completely new horizon for the great renewal of the Chinese nation (Xi 2012).” Elsewhere, references to the humiliating past have involved phrases such as “Chinese people have suffered so much in modern times” (Xi 2013a), “agonizing suffering” (Xi 2013a), “ordeal too bitter to recall” (Xi 2014c), “century of untold suffering” (Xi 2013b), “times of fierce struggle (Xi 2017b) and “darkness of domestic turmoil and foreign aggression” (Xi 2017b). Whereas the references are usually vague in language, Japan’s militarism was emphasized in one of the analysed speeches as having caused 35 million Chinese casualties (Xi 2014c). These examples illustrate that the century of humiliation is still a relevant identity construction in the Xi era and is in-line with what the secondary sources described. Furthermore, it is evident that the historic experience has made China acutely conscious about its sovereignty. Perhaps the strongest statements comes from Xi Jinping’s (2017b) latest address:

“We stand firm in safeguarding China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and will never allow the historical tragedy of national division to repeat itself. We will never allow anyone, any organization, or any political party, at any time or in any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China!”

The most interesting aspect is that in a speech that spans over 60 pages, this was the only sentence that was emphasized with an exclamation mark. As already mentioned, statements on peaceful rise are at times also coupled with phrases that show China’s will to defend its sovereignty and security.

In other words, the historic stigma is still very much there in China’s identity. Even more so, it is the foundation for current identity building. Without constructing the past as highly problematic, Beijing could not promise the ‘great rejuvenation’ of the Chinese nation. The question is, then, how will this rejuvenation be achieved, i.e. in line with the aims of this thesis, what is the nature of China’s rise? This will be unravelled in the following sub-chapters where China’s identity construction is analysed through the lens of stigma management strategies. I will first go through the strategies of ‘passing’ and ‘blessing in disguise’ and then turn to ‘correction’ and ‘break with reality’ options. I have chosen to structure it in this order because the first two are conceptually more limited cases and, as I will explain, they are also less visible identity constructions in the case of China. It is also more efficient to discuss the latter two strategies consecutively, because theoretically they function as opposites and the discussion around them

presents a somewhat puzzling picture - both strategies are present and it comes down to what are considered as the 'primary institutions' of the current international society.

## **5.2. Stigma management strategy - Passing**

Zarakol (2014: 97) described 'passing' as "sweeping under the rug certain historical periods of dissimilarity with the core and constructing a national identity that is centered on a period of common lineage." 'Passing' as a strategy is not present in China. This is not surprising, as it is hard to imagine a substantive positive historical connection or cultural similarity with the Western core on which this identity construction could be built on. The closest identity construction in this manner comes from Xi's first public speech at the U.S. in 2015. Xi made several historical references, going back 230 years to U.S. merchant ship 'Empress of China' and finishing with joint efforts in the Second World War where the two nations fought "shoulder to shoulder" (Xi 2015a). This is definitely a positive articulation that overlooks the fact that the U.S. was one of the imposers of 'unequal treaties' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that the U.S. supported the Kuomintang in the Chinese Civil War (1946-1950) and that the two states were sworn enemies during the Cold War until relations started to warm up in 1971.

However, it feels like a stretch to call this a passing strategy in Zarakol's sense. Rather it is a common diplomatic practice in state to state relations to bring such positive examples in order to build further cooperation. Indeed, Xi Jinping has made similar remarks when addressing Kazakhstan, Russian, Arab, Latin-American and ASEAN audiences (Xi 2013a; 2013b; 2013e; 2013k; 2014f). Furthermore, historical connections or cultural similarity with the core were not emphasized in other analysed speeches. Two years earlier, during his first visit to the U.S., Xi (2013f) only emphasized the cooperation that had taken place "over the past more than 40 years" which had "laid a solid foundation for [...] cooperation." Even moreover, Xi has even emphasized the distinctiveness between Europe, also part of the 'normative core', and China - "China represents in an important way Eastern civilization, while Europe is the birthplace of Western civilization" (Xi 2014d).

Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that although China is not constructing historical unity with the Western core, it does this regionally. China often uses the history of



trading along the ancient silk road to build a common and positive past with other nations. For example, at the China-Arab summit, Xi (2014f) placed the ancient silk road in the frame of “history of exchanges and mutual learning between civilizations.” At Nazarbayev University, where Xi first uttered the OBOR initiative, Xi (2013f) said the following: “Throughout the millennia, the peoples of various countries along the ancient Silk Road have written a chapter of friendship that has been passed on to this very day.” He later termed it as the “spirit of the Silk Road” (Xi 2013k; 2014f). In his speech at a Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting, Xi (2013k) even used the phrase “duty bound” to describe how the member and observer states had to “carry forward” the ‘Silk Road spirit.’ Although, this dilutes the conceptualization of passing vis-a-vis the ‘normals’ or the ‘core’, it is nonetheless a specific identity construction that seeks to overcome some of the difficult aspects of history in order to promote the OBOR initiative. To conclude, ‘passing’ is not present in China’s identity construction, but a similar logic can be observed in the case of establishing a common positive past with states that are situated around the OBOR trade routes.

### **5.3. Stigma management strategy - Blessing in disguise**

‘Blessing in disguise’ identity construction occurs when the stigmatized state has accepted the imposed norms but also values its previous ‘backward’ background because it can be used for political gains. Zarakol described this strategy for states that attempt to bridge the East and the West, i.e. the historic core of the international society and the states that were initially in the geographical periphery. In the case of China, the ‘blessing in disguise’ identity construction can be seen if we broaden the definition of the strategy slightly from the East-West to a developed-developing dichotomy. As discussed earlier, China still sees itself very much as a developing country. By emphasizing its developing nature, China has occasionally been discursively presented as a state that will always be committed to other developing countries, as the voice of the developing countries or as the most important developing country. For example, at the 70th GD, Xi Jinping (2015b) stated:

“China will continue to stand together with other developing countries. We firmly support greater representation and say of developing countries, especially African

countries, in the international governance system. China's vote in the United Nations will always belong to the developing countries.”

As another example, Xi (2015a) has expressed: “A great number of countries, especially developing countries, want to see a more just and equitable international system, but it doesn't mean they want to unravel the entire system or start all over again.<sup>49</sup>” Here China presents itself as the voice of other developing countries, i.e. China ‘knows’ what developing states want. On the flip-side, China also uses the success of its development as an example for other developing states. At the 2017 World Economic Forum, president Xi (2017) sought to convince the audience of the benefits of the global market and joining the WTO by using a vivid metaphor: “We have had our fair share of choking in the water and encountered whirlpools and choppy waves, but we have learned how to swim in this process. It has proved to be a right strategic choice.” Said differently, the message here is that other developing states should follow China’s lead in opening up to the international markets. Finally, although China is a developing country it is also a powerful country, a permanent member of the Security Council even, that can pull its weight in the UN system for the benefit of other developing countries. Therefore, China ‘understands’ the struggles of developing states and can also stand up for their rights due to its power. To conclude, the ‘blessing in disguise’ strategy is present in China’s identity, where it accepts its developing character but also benefits from it in relations with other developing countries.

However, there is one more thing to note about how China has engaged with other developing countries that reflects back to the status literature. China has engaged with these states through the respect or recognition they have given China. That is, in a few of the analysed speeches, China directly refers to events that were described in the status literature as status laden projects. In the speech given in Tanzania, Xi (2013c) made the statement:

“When the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay came to Dar es Salaam, the Tanzanian people welcomed the Olympic flame with song and dance, as if celebrating their own festival. This jubilant occasion is etched in the memory of Chinese People.”

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<sup>49</sup> It must be noted that both of these statements also directly refer to the ‘international system’ and its ‘reform/unravelling’, these notions will be dealt with in the ‘correction’ and ‘break from reality’ sub-categories. In the present section I limit my focus to the discussion around articulations that are relevant to the ‘blessing in disguise’ strategy.

This statement once again illustrates how important the 2008 Olympic games were for China. The fact that the torch relay was met with protests<sup>50</sup> in San Francisco and Paris over China's human rights record and Tibetan independence comes as a stark contrast to the celebratory picture painted by Xi in the case of Tanzania. Another similar statement was made at the China-Arab States Cooperation forum, where Xi (2014f) said: "Nor will we forget the votes cast over 40 years ago by 13 Arab states, together with our African friends, for the PRC to regain its UN seat." Membership in the UN Security Council, as discussed before, is also highly sought after and functions as a status marker. Accordingly, both cases are examples where China is voicing gratitude towards other developing states for granting respect towards China. As an extension, it could mean the non-Western countries are seen as more satisfying status-granters than the Western 'core'.

#### **5.4. Stigma management strategy - Correction**

The 'correction' strategy implies that a state is seeking to be a member of the club of 'normals' and for that reason it emulates the existing norms. Regarding China, there are definitely signs that China sees itself as a part of the normative core and is a responsible upholder of the existing norms. All five speeches given at the General Debate of United Nations General Assembly during Xi's period have been supportive of the United Nations framework and its success in upholding world peace. At the 70th UN GD President Xi (2015b) stated that "peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom are common values of all mankind and the lofty goals of the United Nations." Both Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Premier of the State Council Li Keqiang have referred to the UN as "the core" of the international system. Wang (2013) stated that "China will firmly promote reform of the global governance system with the United Nations at its core." Three years later, Li (2016) claimed that the prevailing peace of the last 70 years is a testimony "to the effectiveness of the existing international system with the UN at its core and of the norms of international relations established on the basis of the UN Charter." He further demanded that "this international system and these norms governing international relations must be upheld resolutely (Li 2016)."

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<sup>50</sup> For details, see Gordon et. al (2008); Walter and Batty (2008).

Discursively, this is as strong as a statement can get regarding the acceptance of the existing UN-based normative order. President Xi has also made similar remarks in his speeches (2013g, 2015a, 2016). For example, at the fifth BRICS summit, Xi (2013d) encouraged: “We should continue to step up coordination and cooperation under the frameworks of the United Nations, the G20 and international economic and financial institutions to uphold our common interests.” This is noteworthy, because China here encourages a club of rising states, i.e. a potentially disruptive force for the international system/society, to adhere to the existing institutional frameworks.

Furthermore, although China supports the UN system, occasionally statements are made that call for reform of the existing institutions. At the latest UN GD, Foreign Minister Wang (2017) declared that: “the UN needs to constantly improve its institutions and mechanisms to better reflect the interests of the majority of countries and the evolving international landscape.” A year earlier, Li (2016) spoke of “steady reform and improvement of global governance mechanisms.” At the 69th GD Wang (2014) argued: “Given their familiarity with local developments, we should leverage the strengths of regional organizations and countries and support them in addressing regional issues in ways suited to their region.” This reference to regional organizations and countries was not this explicitly present in the other analysed speeches and is likely related to the launching of China’s regional initiatives and institutions around the same time (OBOR, AIIB, NDB).

China is mostly concerned with the existing financial institutions. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Xi repeatedly referred to the current global economic governance system as “inadequate” (Xi 2017). Elsewhere, he has stated that “we must improve global economic governance” (Xi 2013h; 2013i). But despite these statements, it is noteworthy that according to the official discourse the new institutions are not meant as challenges to the existing institutions and system, but rather to support the existing order. For example, at the G20 speech in Hangzhou, Xi (2016) explained: “The new mechanisms and initiatives launched by China are not intended to reinvent the wheels [...] they aim to complement and improve the current international mechanisms.” While proposing to establish the AIIB, Xi (2013n) noted that the bank would “work together with the existing multilateral development banks in and outside

the region.” Therefore, China is advocating for reform of large global institutions but does not intend to set up a separate international society.

Therefore, the ‘correction’ strategy is present in China’s approach towards the existing order. The UN is seen as the ‘core’ of the current normative order and it is important for China that these norms are upheld. Although China supports reforming the existing UN framework and is establishing new institutions, both are communicated as supportive of the current normative framework. That is to say that reform is supported within the boundaries of the existing system.

### **5.5. Stigma management strategy - Break with reality**

The ‘break with reality’ strategy would imply that the dominant norms of the international system are rejected and substituted with an alternative interpretation of one’s normality or an alternative ‘reality.’ As already mentioned in the previous section, China upholds the UN system. However, the picture gets more complicated when specific norms are included to the discussion. This relates back to the debate within the English School on which norms constitute the ‘primary institutions’ in the contemporary world, i.e. it is a question of which norms are considered as dominant and which norms need to be followed to be considered ‘normal’.

The traditional ‘primary institution’ of the international society has been sovereignty. If this limited view is taken, then, China is not abandoning or denying the dominant norms of the international society as sovereignty is also a key principle for China. Consequently, in the limited sense, China is not ‘breaking from reality.’ At the UN GD, Wang (2014) demanded that “the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity must be upheld.” It was shortly followed by “[different countries] right to independently choose their social systems and development paths must be safeguarded” (Wang 2014), a statement that president Xi has nearly identically uttered elsewhere (Xi 2013h; 2015). In his first visit to Africa as the president of China, Xi (2013c) also emphasized this stance:

“China upholds justice and opposes the practice of the big bullying the small, the strong lording over the weak, and the rich oppressing the poor, just as it opposes interference in other’s internal affairs. [...] China will continue to firmly support Africa in its endeavour to independently resolve African issues.”

However, by strongly upholding sovereignty, China denies humanitarian intervention, that has also been proposed as a ‘primary institution’ by some English School scholars (recall Zhang, Y. 2001, Buzan 2010). In a discussion with Ban Ki-moon, Xi (2013g) argued that “exerting pressure won’t work” and that “external military intervention will make things worse.” Although never directly mentioned, these statements can be read as directly aimed at the West and the U.S. in particular, as they have interfered in the affairs of other countries for humanitarian causes. This reflects back to what I discussed in Chapter 3, that is, in the eyes of China, it is the U.S. that seeks to assert its hegemony in the world by sometimes even going outside of the UN framework.

Furthermore, human rights, which have also been discussed as a ‘principle institution’, does not appear once in the analysed speeches. Another such norm, democratic governance, has a more complicated picture. The word ‘democracy’ was present, but not in the context that Western states use it. In his 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress address, Xi (2017b) uses phrases such as “peoples democratic dictatorship”, “intraparty democracy” and “socialist consultative democracy”, but these all carry a different meaning in the context of how the party-state works. More prominently, however, democracy is used as a concept belonging to international relations. The “democratic principle for handling international affairs” (Xi 2013b) stands for the “equality of all countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor.” (Xi 2017b) In the Chinese view, democracy between states, is what safeguards equality and sovereignty. For example, Wang (2017) has demanded: “The UN should promote such spirit of democracy and make sure all countries enjoy equal rights and opportunities and follow the same rules in international affairs.”

Therefore, the question remains where to draw the line between upholding the UN system and ignoring some other norms. Making a claim that China is today managing its stigma through a ‘break with reality’ strategy, depends upon which norms are considered central to it.

#### 5.5.1 ‘New type of international relations’

‘Xi Jinping Thought’, now part of the CPC constitution, posits that “[...]diplomacy with Chinese characteristics aims to foster a new type of international relations and build a community with a shared future for mankind” (Xi 2017b). In the same speech Xi later

explains that the new form of international relations involves “mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation” (Xi 2017b) and features “cooperation and mutual benefit” (Xi 2013b). Although not always explicitly presented under the label ‘new type of international relations’, a majority of speeches analysed provide a certain vision of international relations, that have “a fair and pragmatic attitude” (2014a), “a coordinated and balanced approach” (2014a), “sound interactions and mutually beneficial progress” (2013a) and include “equality-based dialogue and friendly consultations” (2014a), “mutual learning” (2014b), “mutual understanding” (2014c), “mutual respect” (2013c), “mutually beneficial development” (2013c) and are “truly just and equitable, and thus provide institutional safeguards for world peace and stability” (Xi 2013b). All of these can be taken as a part of what Xi Jinping calls the ‘new type of international relations’ and as a direct extension, how China perceives the international order. Although, these notions all sound positive, the problematic aspect is that they are presented as novel. That is to say, that the current situation of international relations could be interpreted as uncoordinated, unbalanced, unfair, unfriendly, unequal and so forth. Xi himself has also referred to the alternative or existing order as one that has “Cold War mentality” (2013b, 2013m), “zero-sum thinking” (Xi 2014e) or even as an “arena where gladiators fight each other” (Xi 2013d)."

This vision of international relations is often articulated through, what I would call, a ‘civilizational discourse.’ China is often referred to as a civilization, instead of state/nation, and international relations are at times described as relations between civilizations. For example, in the Party address, Xi (2017b) states: “We should respect the diversity of civilizations. In handling relations among civilizations, let us replace estrangement with exchange, clashes with mutual learning, and superiority with coexistence.” Elsewhere, phrases such as “conduct exchanges among different civilizations in an amicable and open minded manner” (2014a), “no single civilization can be judged superior to another (2014b) and “copying other civilizations blindly or mechanically is like cutting one’s toes to fit one’s shoes - impossible and highly detrimental” (2014b). Therefore, what China proposes is “harmony without uniformity” (Xi 2014d; 2014b; 2014c).

On the one hand, these discursive representations are strongly ‘rejective’ in nature, as they propose something ‘new’ and ‘better’ instead of the existing normative order. The

new type of relations are also placed on a different unit level - instead of nation states, it is the civilizations that matter as primary actors. Furthermore, as discussed, the concept of a sovereign nation state is in its origins a Western norm, a fundamental aspect of the Westphalian order. When China encountered the West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it had to re-invent itself from a civilization to a nation-state. Now it seems as if China wants to go back to the civilizational level, a level which would grant more diversity. On the other hand, it is hard to label the discourse surrounding 'new type of international relations' under 'breaking with reality' because China is not advocating this new system for some stigmatized group. Rather it is cast as an alternative for the whole world. Therefore, it is as if China is not trying to re-define its own normality or reality, but rather China actually tries to re-define what is meant by normality in the first place. Consequently, it might be, following Yongjin Zhang (2015), that China is trying to debate the current principles of legitimacy. As a caveat, it must be noted that China is not rising in vacuum and its actions will ultimately also depend on what the other states like the U.S, Japan, and Russia are doing.<sup>51</sup>

## **5.6. Findings - China's stigma management and the nature of its rise**

The aim of this thesis has been to generate understanding into the nature of China's rise and to interpret which course will China be most likely taking as it continues to rise. After identifying stigma, as an important analytical framework for assessing the nature of China's rise in the theoretical discussion of this paper, this chapter turned to applying the stigma lens to create an empirical snapshot of China's current stigma management. I sought to answer my secondary research question, "How has China managed its stigma in the Xi Jinping years (November 2012 - October 2017)?", through conducting a post-structuralist discourse analysis. That is, I analysed China through the stigma framework and sought to identify which stigma management strategy has been most prominent in this time period.

I started my empirical analysis by looking at how China sees and presents itself. Firstly, the empirical analysis revealed that 'peaceful development' is still a prevalent identity

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<sup>51</sup> It has been pointed out by Björn Jerden (2014: 51) that: "The belief in a new Chinese assertiveness might lead other actors to harden their China policies, which in turn could produce an assertive response from Beijing, regardless of whether a policy change existed in the first place."



construction for China. It has even been represented as inherent to the Chinese civilization or as something that is present in the Chinese ‘genes.’ This discursive construct implies that the Chinese are not capable of aggressiveness, unlike the Western states and Japan that have engaged in colonialism. China is still acutely aware that the rise of its capabilities are seen as threatening. Sometimes the ‘China threat’ notions are dealt with head-on, by emphasising the need to communicate China’s intentions better, other times the notion is treated as ridiculous. Most commonly, however, China is constructed as central to world peace and its development is cast as a provider of opportunities for the whole world.

Secondly, the analysis revealed that, China has been constructed both as a strong state that has gone through remarkable development and as a developing state facing further challenges. This contradiction is interesting, because the opposites can manifest in different ways, either invoking pride or demanding more effort. When China’s still-developing nature is emphasized, it is as if China is re-affirming its inferior status, whereas emphasizing the success behind development constructs a proud identity. Finally, it became evident, that China still carries the stigma of being humiliated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Reference to the ‘century of humiliation’ are still used and Xi Jinping’s narrative of ‘national renewal’ has been cast as a direct opposite to it. This is a temporal identity construction where the past is cast as awful, but the future will be great.

The second part of the empirical analysis engaged head on with the secondary research question to find out which stigma management strategy has been most prominent during the first five years of the Xi Jinping period. Firstly, I identified that ‘passing’ is not present in the speeches. Unsurprisingly, China is not actively constructing an identity that is historically linked to the Western core. However, it does occur in the case of building a positive background on which to promote the OBOR initiative. Secondly, ‘blessing in disguise’ strategy was observed in China’s identity when the state positions itself as an exemplary developing country, i.e. as a leading example among the stigmatized developing states. Therefore, China does at times accept the normative order and its inferiority in it for the purpose of gaining benefits as the ‘leading’ developing country.

Regarding ‘correction’ and ‘break with reality’ the findings are more complicated. On the one hand, China fits the ‘correction’ strategy because China upholds the UN structure, encourages others to do the same and is a firm supporter of sovereignty. Although China voices the need for reform in the dominant global institutions, it is done within the boundaries of the existing order. Perhaps most striking is the fact that China encouraged other BRICS members, i.e. ‘rising’ states that could unravel the existing order, to support the current system. On the other hand, there are aspects that ascribe to the ‘break with reality’ strategy. China denies humanitarian intervention, does not emphasize human rights and talks about democracy as a norm to be upheld in international relations, rather than the domestic sphere. Therefore, making a claim that China is today managing its stigma through a ‘break with reality’ strategy, depends upon which norms are considered central to the normative order.

Therefore, three stigma management strategies were identified simultaneously. This mixed picture corresponds with the stigma theory. Because of the specific history the ‘late comers’ will always have an ambivalent or erratic relationship towards the international society - sometimes cooperative, but other times conflictual. The tensions between and inside the stigma management strategies will occasionally manifest in deterrent political actions. However, based on the empirical analysis, my interpretation is that the dominant strategy during Xi Jinping first five years has been ‘correction.’ China still adheres to the institutions and norms with Western, i.e. foreign origin. This means that China has accepted the designations of its historically lesser status and has sought to emulate the values of the ‘core’, with the aim to raise in status within the existing system. Although there are discursive representations of a ‘new type of international relations’ and emphasis is put on the level of civilizations, these are not (yet) rejective of the normative standards, but rather reforming in nature. China does not want to break away from the core, but to become a relevant player of the core. While working on that goal, China seeks to promote a modified view of international relations, the so-called ‘new type of international relations.’ In my interpretation, China, foremost, sees itself as a part of a UN based system where states adhere to sovereignty. Once that system is in place and upheld, more cooperative relations can be developed on the basis of respecting each other’s civilizational distinctiveness.

If China currently adheres to the ‘correction’ strategy then for the nature of China’s rise it means that China will remain a *status quo* state and will not be undermining the order. That is to say, that China’s rise will continue to be peaceful. I would still expect the tensions between the stigma management strategies to occasionally manifest in deterrent and contradictory political action, but I would be surprised if China in the near future would engage in an all out assertive behaviour. After so much emphasis on peaceful development, the need for a stable environment for this development, and juxtaposing the essence of Chinese civilization and people against aggressive Western powers, there would have to be a strong rupture that would make it worthwhile for China to re-define itself and seek status through conflict.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to provide new understanding to the nature of China's rise, i.e. the future course China is likely to take, by applying the theoretical framework of stigma and stigma management developed by Zarakol and Adler-Nissen. To my knowledge this has been the first time that the framework of stigma has been applied to China. This means the study provides an original perspective on understanding the nature of China's rise.

With this thesis, I sought to answer two research questions. The primary question was: "How to understand the nature of China's rise?" I engaged in a theoretical discussion with major IR theories - neo-realism, Power Transition Theory, neo-liberalism, constructivism and the English School. I argued that all of them are limited in their assessments of the nature of China's rise. This comes from their overly structural nature that treat states as 'like units' that will behave in a similar manner. By doing so, the theories have overlooked the history behind the formulation of the system/society and how China has become a part of the existing system/society. As a result, they fail to see the deep tensions within China's identity towards the West-centric international order. To fill the gap, I incorporated literature on status, status-seeking, stigma and stigma management. I argued that the nature of China's rise can only be satisfactorily understood if its stigma identity and how it constitutes its specific status-seeking behaviour, is taken into account. I argued that carrying a stigma generates a certain kind of pressure for status-seeking, that will account for occasionally contradictory and seemingly erratic behaviour. Therefore, by applying the framework of status-seeking a more multifaceted picture emerged which other IR approaches cannot account for with regard to the nature of China's rise.

By bringing together status and stigma literature, it became evident that stigma management strategies are a more multifaceted approach to conceptualizing status-seeking. It is a specific form of status-seeking that applies to states that were not a part of the Western core and had to join the international system/society as 'late comers.' Compared to main-stream status literature, stigma theory is novel in seeing a theoretical possibility for a state to exit the status hierarchy. Whereas constructivists and

the English School see socialization as a finite systemic process, the literature on stigma presents that states actually have four distinct options for managing their stigma. Furthermore, the way a state will behave, or how it will 'rise' in an international system/society, will depend on the stigma management strategy. On this background, I sought to answer my secondary research question: "How has China managed its stigma in the Xi Jinping years (November 2012 - October 2017)?"

In the empirical section, I conducted a post-structuralist discourse analysis on 30 speeches given by China's political elite between November 2012 and October 2017. As the chosen texts were all in English, my conclusions are foremost limited to this language space and outward identity projection only. My empirical finding was that three types of stigma management strategies were simultaneously present in China's discourse - 'blessing in disguise', 'correction', and 'break with reality.' This mixed picture corresponds with the stigma theory. Because of the specific history the 'late comers' will always have an ambivalent or erratic relationship towards the international society - sometimes cooperative, but other times conflictual. Based on the empirical analysis, my interpretation is that the dominant strategy during Xi Jinping first five years has been 'correction.' China does not want to break away from the core, but to become a relevant player of the core. In my interpretation, China, foremost, sees itself as a part of a UN based system where states adhere to sovereignty. If 'correction' strategy is prevalent, I means that China will most likely continue rise peacefully in the near future. However, there will occasionally be contradictory indications of policy coming from the tensions within China's stigmatized identity.

Like any study, this thesis also comes with limitations. I have here only focused on establishing the groundwork and providing first empirical insights into China's stigma management. More is to be done in developing stigma and stigma management strategies as theoretical frameworks and analysing China's through them. Follow-up studies should expand the empirical side by broadening the time frame under analysis or including other discourses. Extending the period under analysis would allow to observe continuity or change in China's stigma management strategies over the past decades. Identifying changes could help for accounting different phases in China's rise and would contribute to theory building, as it would allow to look into why stigma management strategies change. Alternatively, the empirical side could include other

discourses such as academic debates or public discourse involving media and popular culture, which are under heavy state control in China. It has been discussed that the recent Chinese action movie “Wolf Warrior 2” is a representation of a Chinese identity that is no longer stuck in the humiliation narrative trope. According to Evan Osnos (2018) ““Wolf Warrior II” captures a new, muscular iteration of China’s self-narrative, much as Rambo’s heroics expressed the swagger of the Reagan era.”

To see if the narrative has indeed changed, one needs to continuously keep an eye on China’s discourse and politics by interpreting it through the lens of stigma, and then, perhaps, conduct another such research project in five years time when the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC has convened.

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## Appendix 1 - Stigma management strategies

Stigma management strategies				
Aim	Attempt normalcy		Embrace stigma	
goal	embrace the established order		remain an outsider	
problem identification	endogenous problem		exogeneous problem	
Strategy	"Correction"	"Passing"	"Break with reality"	"Blessing in disguise"
Characteristics	accepting the normative order	"sweeping under the rug certain historical periods of dissimilarity with the core and constructing a national identity that is centred on a period of common lineage"	rejecting dominant norms	claim to benefit from a stigma background
	fixing discrediting characteristics		alternative interpretation of one's normality	act as a bridge between the East and the West
Examples	post-WWII Germany	East Europe after USSR collapse	Soviet Union, present day-Iran	present-day Japan

The table is based on: Zarakol, Ayşe (2011). *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 96-98

## Appendix 2 - Analysed speeches

	Speech	Speaker	Time	Location
1	Address to the media at the 18th National Congress of PRC	Xi Jinping	15. Nov 2012	19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China
2	"Strengthen the Foundation for Pursuing Peaceful Development"	Xi Jinping	28. Jan 2013	3rd group study session of the Political Bureau of the 18th CPC Central Committee
3	"Follow the Trend of the Times and Promote Global Peace and Development"	Xi Jinping	23. Mar 2013	Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Russia
4	"Be Trustworthy Friends and Sincere Partners Forever"	Xi Jinping	25. Mar 2013	Julius Nyerere International Convention Center, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
5	"Work Hand in Hand for Common Development"	Xi Jinping	27. Mar 2013	Fifth BRICS Leaders Meeting, Durban, South Africa
6	"Forge a Stronger Partnership Between China and Latin America and the Caribbean"	Xi Jinping	5. Jun 2013	Senate of Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico
7	"Build a New Model of Major-country Relationship Between China and the United States"	Xi Jinping	7. Jun 2013	Meeting the press with president Obama, Sunnylands, California, U.S.
8	"Work together for Mutually Beneficial Cooperation"	Xi Jinping	19. Jun 2013 & 19. May 2014	Talks with Ban Ki-moon, United Nations
9	"A better future for Asia and the World"	Xi Jinping	7. Apr 2013	Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2013, China
10	"Jointly Maintain and Develop an Open World Economy"	Xi Jinping	5. Sep 2013	G20 Summit, St. Petersburg, Russia
11	"Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt"	Xi Jinping	7. Set 2013	Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan
12	"Carry Forward the 'Shanghai Spirit' and Promote Common Development"	Xi Jinping	13. Sep 2013	13th meeting of the Council of Heads of Member States of SCO, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
13	"China at a New Starting Point"	Wang Yi	27. Sep 2013	General Debate of the 68th session of the UN General Assembly
14	"Work Together to Build a 21st-century Maritime Silk Road"	Xi Jinping	3. Oct 2013	People's Representative Council of Indonesia
15	"Work Together for a Better Asia Pacific"	Xi Jinping	7. Oct 2013	APEC CEO Summit, Bali, Indonesia
16	"Diplomacy with Neighboring Countries Characterized by Sincerity, Reciprocity and Inclusiveness"	Xi Jinping	24. Oct 2013	Seminar on the work of neighborhood policy, Beijing, China
17	"Follow a Sensible, Coordinated and Balanced Approach to Nuclear Security"	Xi Jinping	24. Mar 2014	Nuclear Security Summit in the Hague
18	"Exchanges and Mutual Learning Make Civilizations Richer and More Colorful"	Xi Jinping	27. Mar 2014	UNESCO Headquarters
19	"China's Commitment to Peaceful Development"	Xi Jinping	28. Mar 2014	Körber Foundation, Germany
20	"Build a Bridge of Friendship and Cooperation Across the Eurasian Continent"	Xi Jinping	1. Apr 2014	College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium
21	"New Approach for Asian Security Cooperation"	Xi Jinping	21. May 2014	4th Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
22	"Promote the Silk Road Spirit, Strengthen China-Arab Cooperation"	Xi Jinping	5. Jun 2014	6th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum
23	"Jointly Pursue Peace and Development and Uphold Rule of Law and Justice"	Wang Yi	27. Sep 2014	General Debate of the 69th session of the UN General Assembly
24	Xi's speech on China-US ties	Xi Jinping	22. Sep 2015	Seattle, U.S.
25	"Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind"	Xi Jinping	28. Sep 2015	General Debate of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly
26	"A New Starting Point for China's Development A New Blueprint for Global Growth"	Xi Jinping	3. Sep 2016	G20 Summit in Hangzhou, China
27	"Work for a World of Peace, Stability and Sustainable Development"	Li Keqiang	21. Sep 2016	General Debate of the 71st session of the UN General Assembly
28	"Jointly Shoulder Responsibility of Our Times, Promote Global Growth"	Xi Jinping	17. Jan 2017	World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland
29	"Toward Peace and Development for All"	Wang Yi	21. Sep 2017	General Debate of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly
30	"Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era"	Xi Jinping	18. Oct 2017	19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China

\* these speeches were presented as 'partial' in *The Governance of China*

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