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**POWER, PERCEPTION AND POLICYMAKING:  
THE FOREIGN POLICIES OF THE US AND THE EU TOWARDS  
CHINA**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Politics**

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## **ABSTRACT**

China's rise has put it on a trajectory to overtake the international system's dominant powers – the United States of America (US) and the European Union (EU) – at some point this century. Some observers conclude that the historical pattern of such transitions catalysing great power conflict is likely to continue with China's ascendancy. Power-transition theory (PTT) anticipates that the established powers will strive to maintain the status quo by extending their relative power advantage over the rising challenger and curtailing its power where possible. Yet the actual responses of the US and the EU have not conformed to these expectations; instead, they have both largely welcomed China's rise and sought to integrate it into the international system. We can see that policymakers continually express interpretations of China's rise which we would not expect to find if the logic of PTT prevailed. This raises a question: *How have different interpretations of the 'rise of China' influenced the foreign policies of the US and the EU towards China?*

I argue that varied perceptions of the implications of China's rise have shaped policy preferences in ways that are inconsistent with concerns over the threat of an impending power-transition. Policy discourse at key junctures in bilateral relations revealed that 'China's rise' is actually a contested notion and that the different interpretations in play at that point in time affect the policymaking process in ways that cannot be accounted for from state-centric perspectives. While China's growing power and relations with these actors have been widely studied, little attention is paid to how competing interpretations of China's rise impact upon policymakers' preferences and the eventual responses. Despite the growing prevalence of threat rhetoric (at least in the US), China's rise is often conceptualised by key policymakers as presenting considerable economic and political opportunities. In the EU, perceptions of economic and political opportunities have not been challenged by threat interpretations and thus its overall approach has been informed by the former with little substantive debate amongst key actors.

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name Scott Brown \_\_\_\_\_

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AEI	American Enterprise Institute
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASAT	Anti-Satellite
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ASL	Anti-Secession Law
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Corporation
CRS	Congressional Research Service
DoD	Department of Defense
DoS	Department of State
EFP	European Foreign Policy
EP	European Parliament
EPC	European Political Cooperation
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
ESS	European Security Strategy
EU	European Union
EU3	France, Germany and the United Kingdom
EUFP	European Union Foreign Policy
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
GAERC	General Affairs and External Relations Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
GWoT	Global War on Terror
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	International Relations
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MES	Market Economy Status
MFN	Most Favored Nation

MP(s)	Member(s) of Parliament
NCR	Neoclassical Realism
NME	Non-Market Economy
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
NTR	Normal Trade Relations
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PNTR	Permanent Normal Trade Relations
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRC	People's Republic of China
PTT	Power-transition theory
Rep.	Representative
SCIO	State Council Information Office
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCHR	United Nations Commission on Human Rights
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US(A)	United States (of America)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USTR	US Trade Representative
WTO	World Trade Organisation

## INTRODUCTION

### ***1. Focus of the Project and Research Question***

On September 27<sup>th</sup> 2008 – days after my PhD studies began – *taikonauts* completed China’s first spacewalk, only the third nation to accomplish this feat behind the United States of America and the Soviet Union/Russia. A few months prior, the world’s attention focussed on Beijing as it hosted the Olympic Games; up until then, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) generally sought to avoid close scrutiny of life inside the country. The spectacle of the opening ceremony and China’s dominance of the medal table seemed emblematic of its new-found confidence on the international stage. On the eve of the 59<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC, Premier Wen Jiabao praised the contribution of these achievements towards “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (cited by Xinhua, 2008).

The rise of China is frequently posited as one of the most important international developments since the end of the Cold War; the speed with which it has risen has prompted predictions that it will become the predominant power sometime this century. This has implications for the standing of the system’s current great powers – how they react will be crucial for the future of international relations. Great power behaviour is one of the main points of inquiry within International Relations (IR) scholarship; seeking to understand the factors which drive behaviour and especially the tendency for interstate conflict. It is within such contexts that observers have attempted to analyse what to expect from China, not only as a great power but also from the process of its ascendancy and how this affects others.

Attempts to understand great power behaviour are reflected in the interest in and debate over the impact of China’s capabilities and intentions on the international system. China’s rise is now an inescapable issue for policymakers, regardless of whether they regard it as hostile or benign. Attempting to understand how other international actors have responded – and should do in the future – has taken up much scholarly attention. Mainstream International Relations (IR) theories and the associated literature offer different perspectives on the principal motives driving state behaviour and responses. The genesis of these different perspectives is rooted in the development of IR theories following World War II when scholars focussed predominantly on the causes of war. No single understanding of global affairs emerged; instead, a plethora of

theories blossomed from scholarly attempts to understand the world. The two leading camps – realism and liberalism – have been pitted against each other, shaping the development of IR as a discipline (Smith, S. 2007: 4).

Realism is the school of thought that arguably came to dominate the post-war academic landscape, advanced as an explanation politics driven by power unfolded in an anarchical system. Structural/neo-realism is widely considered to be the dominant theory of IR and has retained great influence since its articulation in Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979). The issues of China's rise are clearly connected to a number of neorealism's core assumptions: states as the primary global actors; a condition of international anarchy entailing security threats; states differentiated on the basis of their relative power capabilities; and states paying close attention to the balance of power. Yet the neorealist preoccupation with state *survival* is arguably less relevant: for all the concerns regarding China's rise, there is scant evidence that any other major polity considers its very survival to be under threat. Furthermore, there is no definitive form of the theory: variations within the neorealist camp – e.g. between Waltz's (1979) defensive realism and Mearsheimer's (2001a) offensive realism – create the possibility of different explanations of outcomes depending on the strand utilised.

Neoliberalism accepts the concept of international anarchy (Keohane, 1982: 332) although there is disagreement with neorealism regarding the limitations imposed by it (Baldwin, 1993: 5). Neoliberalism emphasises the potential for cooperation (often via the mediating influence of institutions) as a means for actors making absolute gains (Baldwin, 1993: 5). The option to use force is likely to be constrained by conditions of interdependence (Keohane and Nye, 2001: 23) generating an incentive for cooperative engagement. Constructivist approaches to understanding international affairs have proliferated in the post-Cold War era, yet despite the prevalence of certain works – such as Alexander Wendt's (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics* – again there is no single definitive constructivist theory. The diversity of theoretical approaches can be illuminating, but also makes it difficult to identify where to start in terms of testing the utility of particular ones in relation to developments in the international arena. In addition, proponents of these approaches have generally favoured abstraction – that is, developing the capacity to refer to the international system as a whole, rather than discrete events within it. While such comprehensive approaches may be useful for claims to relevance and simplification of a vast, complex array of international relations, they

necessitate further theoretical development if one wants to move from a level of abstraction to a specific issue or development.

Thus in effect, the plurality of IR theoretical disciplines provides numerous perspectives from which China's rise could be examined. However, this thesis focuses on one: power-transition theory (PTT). Whilst a wide range of theoretical frameworks could be adapted to examine how established powers respond to China's rise, they are not specifically designed to do so and thus proponents could contest the application of the theory to particular developments, situations or relationships<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, PTT is designed to examine precisely the development unfolding since the end of the Cold War: a rising power gaining in economic, political and military power in a way that could potentially alter the status quo arrangements of the international order as upheld by the established powers. Power-transition theory arguably emerged out of what Brian Schmidt (2002: 8) called the "elusive but persistent goal of mainstream IR in the United States to achieve the status of a 'true' science".

China's emergence (or more accurately, re-emergence) as a great power arguably represents a continuation of the historical pattern of greats powers rising and falling, as extensively researched by Paul Kennedy (1988) among others. Over the past half century, research has led to the development of power-transition theory (PTT) which posits that established powers will attempt to maintain their position for as long as possible by adapting their behaviour and offsetting gains made by the rising power. Transitions have often resulted in conflict – a trend which some observers argue is set to continue. PTT is the theory which we would expect to provide the clearest insights into how the established powers respond to the rise of a potential challenger. Rather than assess which IR theory is 'best' at explaining these responses, this thesis concentrates on PTT because it is the one that should have the most purchase in relation to these issues. Moreover, as is demonstrated in the following chapter, there is evidence to suggest that the ideas of PTT have influenced how some commentators understand China's rise to a degree that is not true of other theories. For instance, Waltz's (1979) defensive realism suggests that a bipolar system is inherently more stable than a unipolar system; such logic has not been invoked to argue for the positive implications of China's rise. At the same time, Keohane and Nye's (2001) arguments on complex interdependence should decrease

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, see the debate between Colin Elman (1996a; 1996b) and Kenneth Waltz (1996) over the applicability of neorealism to the examination of foreign policy.

concerns over conflict; while many have acknowledged the economic opportunity presented by China's rise, there are persistent concerns that it may use hard power to get what it wants at some point in the future.

PTT has clear expectations for how established powers are expected to respond to the rise of a potential challenger (China) because it threatens the status quo arrangements which the dominant power (here, the US) and its allies (which includes the EU) wish to preserve. When the challenger is rising rapidly, this creates uncertainty about the future and consequently generates instability amongst the powers. Authoritarian states such as China are presumed by PTT to be inherently dissatisfied with a status quo in which democratic states dominate and thus automatically will challenge this when they get the chance. These factors, in combination, increase the risk of conflict between the challenger and the established powers. As a result, the rapid rise of an authoritarian state poses an existential threat to the system which the dominant powers benefit from and uphold.

Some of the academic literature and political commentary would suggest that these ideas have infiltrated policy discourse over China's rise. Debates amongst policymakers, political commentators and analysts have generated opposing sets of ideas about China's rise as either a 'threat' or an 'opportunity'. The 'threat' characterisation has given substance to the idea of an impending power-transition between China and the US. Invoking the logic and language of PTT, many commentators are drawn to the conclusion that China's rise brings about the possibility – for some, the inevitability – of conflict. Under PTT logic, it appears that policymakers will progressively perceive China's rise in terms of a 'threat', with alternative perspectives diminishing in salience as the external environment becomes increasingly incongruous with such conceptualisations.

By focussing on interactions between rising and established powers, PTT *should* be capable of providing insights into how the US has reacted to the rise of China, a potential challenger to its dominant status. There has indeed been a general drift towards threat rhetoric based on PTT logic within the US; despite its significant power advantage, some US policymakers have expressed concern that the gap is closing, which will allow China to act upon hostile intentions. However, the US has largely adhered to an approach of engagement with China, which is difficult to reconcile with PTT. By logical extension, other powers which derive

benefits from the status quo ('satisfied' powers within PTT lexicon) such as the EU – arguably one of the US' closest partners – should also be concerned by such developments. Yet the existing literature and empirical record would initially seem to suggest policy discourse within the EU does not seem to reflect these concerns and its behaviour has differed in discernible ways from the US. This leaves open a question regarding how US and EU responses to key events in their relations with China match up with expectations that can be derived from PTT.

Looking at how policymakers have debated responses to China's rise, it becomes clear that how they actually perceive their external environment is not consistent with what we would expect if PTT were correct. This leads to the central question driving the research: *how have different interpretations of the 'rise of China' influenced the foreign policies of the US and the EU towards China?* I intend to investigate the extent to which actors' perceptions of their external environment and understand the implications of this drives their preferences for action, and assess whether this presents a more compelling account of foreign policy behaviour than accounts which privilege international-level factors and material capabilities. PTT appears to implicitly assume that perceptions are 'fixed' as states are the primary actors, with policymakers responding objectively to the changing international system. Considering how the US and the EU have responded to key events within their respective relationships with China will allow me to examine the discourse around these and subsequently determine what the arguments revealed about policymakers' interpretations of China's rise. This facilitates the analysis of the importance of perceptions in the determination of specific policies and US and EU responses to the rise of China more broadly.

The advantage of the approach I develop here is that its applicability is not restricted to one polity; by using it to explain responses to discrete events and general trends across a period of twenty years for two very different international powers, I demonstrate the analytical model's versatility as a tool for understanding the development of foreign policy. Beyond the project's analytically innovative features, the empirical focus should also be of interest to those examining US- and EU-China relations and scholars of IR/Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) more broadly. Most in-depth analyses of and explanations for foreign policy behaviour tend to focus on a single set of bilateral relations. Examining two sets of bilateral relations has given this project a broader empirical scope without sacrificing analytical purchase; the utility of the model is demonstrated by its explanatory capacity in each instance. Secondly, while

perceptions have been explored elsewhere in FPA literature, there is a lack of such studies in US- and EU-China relations; this thesis fills that gap.

## ***2. Case Selection and Timeframe of Analysis***

China, as the object of study, has become a more significant international force over the past three decades; its rise in the international arena has been catalysed by substantial economic growth since opening its markets at the end of the 1970s (Yee and Storey, 2004: 2). Since the late 1980s China's leaders have been converting this economic power into military power. The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s left China as one of the few potential great powers in the system. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a member of the nuclear club, and with an economy ranked fourth by GDP in 2007 (World Bank, 2008), China is already a significant player in the international arena and its centrality to the future of global affairs is set to increase. World Bank President Robert Zoellick has aired the concept of the US and China comprising a 'G2' (China Daily, 2009a) at the core of world politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Through increasing economic, military and political power, China is changing the landscape of international relations. It fits the criteria for a potential challenger under the logic of power-transition theory: a large nation undergoing rapid economic development and working its way up the international rankings. The speed at which this is occurring creates uncertainties about how the Chinese government will behave – both abroad and at home – because of its authoritarian regime type. The latter also feeds into concerns that China is dissatisfied with the Western-led international system and will seek to exert its newfound power to change the rules of the game in its own favour. China is arguably the first real (if not only) potential challenger to American dominance in the post-Cold War era. This uncertainty over when China will 'arrive' as a superpower and what it will want fosters debate and disagreement among outside observers.

The United States has been indisputably the predominant power in the international arena throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; in 2005, it accounted for forty-eight percent of world military expenditure (Stålenheim et al, 2006: 301). The US also remains the world's leading economy, and is a member of both the UNSC and the nuclear club. It was

also a key architect of the post-World War Two international system, contributing to the establishment of its key institutions and instilling its values in international law and norms. In this light, the US fits with the dominant, status quo power of PTT and as the classic ‘state’ actor in wider IR theory and FPA. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has been the sole superpower of the system but China’s rise has put it on a trajectory to emerge as another superpower. The relationship between the two has grown considerably, both economically and politically with extensive high-level contacts between the two sides.

The US has extensive security interests in East Asia through its close ties with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan; maintaining its forward presence is tied into its consideration of itself as the key guarantor of regional stability. Both are also significant trading partners for the other in terms of cheap imports for the US and a key market for exports for China. In 2008, they were each other’s respective second-largest trading partner (Morrison, 2009a: 1; Morrison, 2009b: 9). The sheer size of the US’ political, economic and military power means it has a significant interest in any developments in the international arena; China’s rise is arguably one of the most significant developments since the end of the Cold War. Its status as the world’s predominant power makes it an ideal actor to include in a study of how perceptions of this rise of China influence behaviour on the international level.

The second polity subjected to analysis, the EU, is a major economic force in the world and its Member States retain significant military capabilities whilst two of the members – France and the United Kingdom (UK) – are also nuclear powers and sit with the US and China on the UNSC. The initial stages of European integration were facilitated by the US’ security guarantee and the EU has continued to derive benefits from the status quo and can be considered as a major contributor to the maintenance of this system. There are intense debates over the EU’s status as an international actor, with many rejecting the concept altogether and arguing that focus should remain on the states as has been the tradition in mainstream IR thinking. For instance, Robert Kagan (2004) argued that the EU is not an international security player and therefore its involvement in such matters is expected to be minimal at best. Yet it has increasingly been treated as one, not only by academics but by other international actors – including China and also the US.

While mainstream IR theories have been relatively slow to embrace this idea, some scholars have applied realist theories to the EU's international behaviour (Hyde-Price, 2006, 2008; Zimmermann, 2007). Other EU scholars, particularly those advocating the 'normative power Europe' framework (Manners, 2002) – which is arguably now the dominant approach in the literature – treat the EU as an international presence while explicitly rejecting the notion that the EU should attempt to develop state-like qualities. PTT has rarely been utilised in relation to the EU with the exception of Kugler et al's (2004) analysis of the Iraq war via PTT, wherein the EU was treated as a unitary actor. Yet EU specialists have not incorporated the theory into their work, perhaps because 'China threat' rhetoric is less prominent in European policy discourse.

I align with arguments that the EU is an international actor with discernible foreign policies that are distinct from the aggregate policies of its Member States. I do this because there has been a concerted effort to deal with China at the EU-level, rather than just Member States seeking to forge their own policies. What we see is that there are not just statements of EU *policies* but also clear examples of EU *actions* towards China, thus it is more than a rhetorical 'front'. It is not treated as analogous to a state, but rather as a distinctive, multifaceted actor (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006). Accordingly, in relation to all three principal actors, I use the term 'polity' throughout the thesis. Treating the EU as an international actor in its own right entails that it has a distinctive foreign policy separate from that of its Member States – as Larsen (2009: 544) argued, "EU foreign policy and member state foreign policy both belong to European foreign policy governance, but can be separated analytically". The case of the EU demonstrates the need for using analytical approaches which transcend traditionally state-centric approaches to both IR theory and FPA. The Member States remain important in the analysis, but rather than focussing on their behaviour independent of the EU, I look to their foreign policies as indicators of their preferences for the EU-level policy response. The Member States are the key actors within the EU's primary foreign policymaking subsystem – the Council. A comprehensive analysis of all Member States is beyond the scope of this research, therefore I focus on two Member States in particular – France and the UK. This allows me to explore the relationship between Member States' preferences and their interpretations of China's rise in detail.

As mentioned above, both France and the UK are significant players in world affairs as military powers and members of the UNSC and retain activist foreign policies. They constitute two-thirds of the so-called ‘EU3’ at the core of EU politics, and therefore their preferences on and input to the development EU foreign policy are crucial. Germany completes the EU3, but I have chosen to concentrate on France and the UK for a number of reasons. These two have differing visions for the EU as a global power, particularly in terms of its security/military role (Gordon, 1997/98: 89) whereas Germany tends to align with France on this matter. All three have extensive bilateral relations with China, but varied approaches. Fox and Godement (2009) identify France and Germany’s stance towards China as relatively similar, while the UK stands apart. France has been a more proactive player in China policy, with Germany often following its lead. Consequently, France and the UK offer a more interesting avenue of research for this project.

In the US and the EU, we have two very different international actors facing China’s rise. They are two actors with varied forms of international presence and different levels and types of international importance. These factors are not only significant because they are at the core of many studies of great power relations, but have often been central to the explanations of behaviour. The US is the world’s sole superpower and the classic ‘state’ actor; the EU is arguably an economic superpower but in some senses it is still ‘finding its feet’ with respect to political presence. The US has more extensive interests and responsibilities in East Asia. The US defines its interests globally and although the EU supports the status quo arrangements of the international order, the scope of its interests is not comparable. The EU is often conceptualised as fundamentally different to the US in terms of its approach to international relations – exemplified by the concepts of civilian power (Duchêne, 1972) and normative power (Manners, 2002) – which would suggest that its reaction to China’s rise would be distinctive from that of the US. In light of these differences not only between the nature of their international presence but varied levels of importance to and responsibility in the international arena, we might expect the US and the EU to respond very differently to the rise of China.

Although adding a layer of complexity to the analysis, it is hoped that the comparison of their responses to China’s rise will bolster the arguments by demonstrating the importance of interpretations of the external environment in the formulation of policies. To advance these

arguments, I devote Chapter Five to the study of the transatlantic debate over the EU's proposal to lift its arms embargo which revealed that their respective discourses contained different sets of interpretations of China's rise. This is particularly interesting to examine as it is surprising just how vociferous the US' reaction to the proposal was given the similarities in their overall responses to China's rise up until that point. Explaining this and the divergence between their stances on the issue – despite both polities imposing similar policies at the same time and in reaction to the same event – is an important step in my attempt to explain the importance of perceptions to the generation of foreign policies. Examining the factors which contributed to this provides a significant opportunity to test the thesis' analytical approach.

The timeframe of analysis runs from January 1989 until January 2009. Before the end of the Cold War the main focus of American and European concern was primarily the Soviet Union. After 1989, China became more prominent as an international actor given that the international system changed from one of bipolarity to unipolarity and a few 'potential' powers. The US was then free to concentrate on other international issues – including other prospective rivals. China was exceptionally militarily weak until the end of the Cold War but for the past two decades has focussed on upgrading its military powers, made possible by its rapid economic expansion over the same time period. The end of the Cold War also presented the opportunity for the EU to pursue a distinctive international role, which led to attempts to construct a more coherent external policy including the institutionalisation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

This period is also significant for the rate of China's rise and numerous events in its relationships with the two established powers. The timeframe is sufficient in scope to identify some general trends in the foreign policies of these actors, allowing for comparison between the general drift in their policy discourse and the responses to particular events. Many – but not all – of these events have received scholarly attention already but questions remain over how they have impacted the evolving interpretations of and responses to China's rise. The timeframe also allows for changes of key actors within the decision-making process, enabling consideration of whether particular interpretations are resilient over time or whether the changing identity of decision-makers simply determines foreign policy behaviour. The timeframe also opens up the opportunity for conducting interviews with policymakers involved at the time; events further in the past would likely have negated this. The 2009 cut-

off point avoids bringing in another US administration and considering changes to the EU's foreign policymaking processes brought in by the Lisbon Treaty.

In the chapters examining the US and EU responses to China's rise, I employ six case studies of events within the relationship that represent instances which catalysed discourse on the appropriate policy response and in some cases initiated heated debates between policymakers. These events make it possible to examine how key policymakers perceived China at the time through the content of the preferences they expressed in relation to how to respond. This is important because simply analysing foreign policy documents and statements represents a single view carefully shaped by the government of the day; there are limited clues as to what led to those positions being adopted. However, looking at the debates and arguments over policy responses to developments in relations with China allow us to identify the range of preferences and the arguments that are used to substantiate these. The cases selected are all important points in the development of US- and EU-China relations in different ways. Through this approach, my research engages in comparison between two polities, as well as a longitudinal study of the evolution of US and EU responses. This allows me to consider the research question in a number of different settings, allowing for comparison between the findings and thereby assessing whether the arguments developed hold up when comparing the development of policies of the two polities.

The logic behind each case selected is elaborated at the start of the relevant sections in Chapters Three and Four; however, it is worth giving an overview of the reasoning here. The selection of the incidences was based on examining the literature to determine which episodes in relations with China's rise had received the greatest attention. In both sets of literature on the US and the EU, the Tiananmen crackdown and China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) were the two incidences which have been common in almost all major studies because they have been taken to represent, respectively, a major setback and a major step forward in both sets of relations. The Taiwan Strait crisis has been seen as something of a watershed in US-China relations as it was the closest the two sides came to armed conflict in the time period studied, yet it is conspicuous by its absence in EU-China studies despite the EU's interests in regional stability. These three cases, in addition to the arms embargo debate in Chapter Five, establish the basis for making comparisons between the US and the EU's responses in the Conclusion. To develop the analysis of the US' policies, I also look at the

Clinton administration's policy of connecting China's trade status to its human rights record and subsequent reversal, because at first glance it indicates a reversal of a 'tougher' approach to China. The 2001 spy-plane collision and the response to China's anti-satellite (ASAT) test both provided instances where tensions in the military domain could easily have escalated, yet this does not appear to have been the case. As well as receiving considerable attention as isolated events from academics, each case has been integrated into studies of the overall relationship.

In the EU's case, I look at the common policy on tabling resolutions on China within the UN Commission on Human Rights which, like the US dropping linkage between trade and human rights, indicates that the EU's position on the importance of admonishing China's human rights situation had changed. The formation of the EU-China strategic partnership suggests a significant advance in the relationship and the potential for closer cooperation, thus is worth studying, especially as it contextualises subsequent developments. On the other side, the refusal to grant Market Economy Status goes against the grain in terms of increasingly cooperative relations and subverts the notion of the EU's approach to China as unconditional engagement. As I highlight in Chapter One, there are few systematic studies of EU-China relations which integrate studies of such events; however, each of these has been widely discussed in isolation within the academic literature, particularly the strategic partnership. I illustrate that there is scope for analysing more extensively what their significance is to the development of the EU's response to the rise of China over the twenty year period.

In a broad sense, the transatlantic arms embargo debate is interesting because it appeared to provide further evidence of the strategic rift in the transatlantic relationship, mostly notably revealed by the divisions over the Iraq war in 2003. The underlying concern for some policymakers and observers was that the US and the EU now effectively saw the world quite differently, rather than isolated disagreements over particular policies or events. I dedicate an entire chapter to the study of the debate because it presents the clearest opportunity to explore how the differing interpretations China's rise have influenced a particular policy which was imposed by both the US and the EU at the same time for the same reason. Moreover, we can use it to help understand the substantive similarities and differences between interpretations of China salient within the US and the EU at the time and why these came to be. These opportunities are not present in the other cases examined in Chapters Three and Four, as the

embargo case was a unique example of the same ‘starting point’ for the two sides only to develop in different paths over fifteen years. Importantly, the analyses in Chapters Three and Four help to contextualise the arguments developed in relation to this case, thus their inclusion is necessary as much of the explanation of the arms embargo debate rests on a deeper understanding of the evolution of US and EU responses to China’s rise up until that point.

### ***3. Analytical Approach, Methodology and Sources***

#### *The Analytical Framework*

Up until now, I have only provided brief insights into the analytical approach and how it facilitates the development of my arguments. As stipulated in the research question, I am interested in developing an account of how the responses of the established powers to the rise of China have been influenced by differing interpretations of this phenomenon. I do this by engaging in a study of how China’s rise has been interpreted by policymakers in both the US and the EU and the subsequent impact upon their policy preferences. The approach developed draws on both FPA and EFP in order to understand the relationship between policymakers’ perceptions and the international level behaviour of the polities they serve (I will return to set out my project’s relationship to FPA/EFP literature in Chapter One). This is applied to the examination of a series of events that represented significant junctures in the US- and EU-China relationships in Chapters Three and Four.

Robert Jervis’ (1976: 14-5) work on the importance of perceptions in foreign policy stipulated that differences in policymakers’ preferences can be traced back to their perceptions of their external environment. As a state-centric approach, PTT cannot account for factors at the decision-making level. Neoclassical realists have attempted to bridge the gap, but concentrate only on perceptions of threat (Schweller, 2006: 38) and assume that there is an objective reality which can be perceived correctly or incorrectly by policymakers. I leave aside questions of whether actors can accurately perceive reality objectively because I am only interested in how the perceptions they have created influence their preferences – hence I do not engage with the notion of ‘misperceptions’. I use ‘perception(s)’ and ‘interpretation(s)’ interchangeably to denote the same phenomena and convey that there are discrepancies between how actors perceive the external world; this point might get lost if only using

‘perception(s)’. I favour these terms over ‘images’ because, as Larsen (1997: 3) noted, these “are often seen in the literature to be of a general character coming close to belief systems, perceptions are often understood as perceptions of something, in other words, as more concrete”. In this sense, images can be impressionistic whereas perceptions have a specific ‘ground’ – a characteristic or trait of another entity/actor.

I establish policymakers’ perceptions of China by looking at the arguments presented over the course of the decision-making period of the case under examination. Policymakers do not simply state their preferences, but attempt to justify them in an attempt to persuade others. To do so, they make claims about both the significance of China’s rise and the implications of the current situation being dealt with, which reveal their perceptions. To uncover these perceptions, I rely on various sources, particularly media reports, congressional/parliamentary proceedings and reports, interviews and primary data collected by others and published in the academic literature. By looking at policy discourse before, during and in some cases after the decision-making in response to a specific case, I am able to ascertain the perceptions influencing the process, rather than post-hoc justifications of preferences.

It is impossible to discount the possibility that policymakers were concealing their true motives, but given the commonalities in arguments over time – in some cases, from the same people – it is reasonable to make the assumption that these were sincere expressions of preferences in order to ‘win’ the debate and have policies consistent with their views implemented. There is a degree of resilience to perceptions even as China grew in power; this can be attributed to the tendency for people to assimilate information to their pre-existing views (Jervis, 1976: 143). Since policymakers’ pre-existing interpretations of an external actor shape how they view new developments, this produces a tendency whereby new information is interpreted so as to fit with these (Jervis, 1976: 153). As Yaacov Vertzberger (1990: 343) explained, “currently held perceptions serve as important actual and interpretative inputs in the formation of present and future perceptions”. This is precisely why we do not see perceptions of China changing in line with its shifting material power.

I utilise an open-ended, holistic approach to examining the development of policy by drawing on numerous sources to create an account of the sequence of events in the policy-making process. This allows me to gain insights into the discussions (discourse) which unfolded

during the decision-making process in each of the cases examined in later chapters. Consequently, I am able to pinpoint not only actors' preferences for how to respond in each instance, but also their interpretations of China's rise as they attempt to justify their preferences and persuade other actors. Additionally, we can see the trajectory of the salient interpretations of China's rise over a twenty year time period, illustrating how perceptions – and subsequently responses – have evolved as China grows more powerful. In the decision-making process, actors engage in debates, advancing their preferences which are predicated on their perceptions of China's rise as a phenomenon on the international stage and understanding of its implications. The premise of this approach is that differing interpretations of China's rise produce varied preferences for how to respond through policy. Debates amongst policy actors are not just about how to respond in that specific instance; they are also part of a wider contestation of what 'China's rise' means and the ensuing implications.

However, not all actors have the same opportunity to translate their preferences into policy. Thus while there may be debates within the wider policy community over the appropriate response, at the actual point of decision-making, only certain actors will determine what is done. For both the US and the EU, this is not always the same group of actors, depending on the nature of the event they are facing. Drawing on the work of EFP scholars (White, 2001; Stumbaum, 2009), I define foreign policies as the product of foreign policy subsystems rather than of the state/polity as a whole. Subsystems are particular institutional arrangements within which certain agencies and actors assume responsibility for decision-making. In later chapters I specify the characteristics of the US and EU's subsystems, but for the purposes here it is enough to say that different subsystem arrangements have implications for who is able to (attempt to) translate their preferences into policies. The historical record enables identification of which subsystem was in play by the issue-area said to be relevant to the case by the main actors.

Within democratic polities such as the US and EU, the number of policy elites able to voice their preferences on policy during the normal day-to-day business of government is almost impossible to track. There is no way to possibly consider the extent to which the perceptions of every actor who engaged in the policy discourse had any impact. Thus, for the purposes of this research, there needs to be a way of moving beyond the cacophony of competing voices in the policy community at large and consider which perceptions mattered most when it actually

came to determining the response to be adopted. Examining decisions through foreign policy subsystems focuses the attention on the actors who were involved with the process of taking those decisions. The differing subsystem arrangements in the US and EU can facilitate or constrain the ability of particular actors to translate their preferences into policies. Approaching the analysis of decision-making via subsystems is advantageous as it overcomes the conceptual barrier that the US and EU's policymaking processes are simply too different to enable comparison; we can look across the different subsystems to understand how policymakers' preferences were translated into policies.

These ideational and institutional components of foreign policymaking inform the empirical research in the thesis; the actual analytical framework is operationalized through a two-step process of addressing the following questions in relation to each case studied:

- How did the differing interpretations of the rise of China inform policymakers' preferences in relation to the issue(s) at hand?
- Which actors were involved in decision-making and to what extent were their preferences mediated by the subsystem through which policy was developed?

While there is a range of scholarship examining the influence of various cognitive factors on decision-making (Hudson, 2007: 22-27, 30-33), I focus on ideational factors which are expressed through policy discourse, rather than trying to 'get inside the head' of individual policymakers. While such analyses have significant merit, given that in both the US and EU there are large numbers of actors with a role to play in foreign policymaking going down this path would necessitate collection of quantities of empirical evidence well beyond the scope of this project. I contend that it is also unnecessary within the objectives of this thesis; the interpretations of China's rise expressed in policy discourse are sufficient grounding for my arguments. I use this approach to examine why decision-makers do not react to changes at the international level in accordance with PTT's expectations.

By applying this model to the various case studies in the US and EU's bilateral relations with China it is possible to establish whether the varied interpretations of China's rise influenced policymakers' preferences in a particular direction and any subsequent impact on the policy responses chosen. PTT anticipates a clear relationship between changing external factors and

the foreign policy behaviour of the established powers but struggles to account for deviations from these because it ignores the fact that how policymakers interpret these external factors and then frame the development in policy discourse influences the policies adopted. My approach may have greater scope to account for the impact of external factors on foreign policy behaviour via the decision-making process and, consequently, why power-transition frames have not dominated the policymaking agenda.

### *Methodology and Sources*

My open-ended approach to policy analysis is suitable for considering how ideational factors influence the decision-making process. As mentioned above, I employ this technique to determine how perceptions of China's rise have influenced the responses of the US and the EU. The aim is to uncover how specific events were debated in policy discourse and assess the content of the interpretations conveyed through actors' arguments. As I am dealing with intangible ideational factors, I determined that checking that the inferences made were consistent with evidence from multiple sources would contribute to a more robust analysis. This necessitated triangulation via multiple sources in order to ensure the analysis' validity and reliability. Triangulation in qualitative research is "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell and Miller, cited in Golafshani, 2003: 604).

The first step was to build a comprehensive picture of the events studied as far as possible using the available public records, academic literature, third-party reports and media sources. This uncovered significant amounts of useful evidence yet as far as my research was concerned it remained incomplete, thereby necessitating further research. Textual analysis of key policy documents was utilised to reveal insights into how China's rise was interpreted at the time of their publication. However, official documentation that recorded decision-making processes and debates pertaining to the relevant events were frequently found to be inaccessible to the public. Numerous freedom of information requests were lodged with the relevant authorities to gain access to these. However, these were often rejected for a variety of reasons; commonly, 'national security' concerns were cited. I was able to conduct archival research at the British Library, National Archives (London), European Commission Library (Brussels), National Security Archive, Library of Congress (Washington, DC) and the George

HW Bush Presidential Library (College Station, Texas) to access some documents not otherwise available.

Extensive semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions – a style suited to interviewing elites (Leech, 2002: 665) – were conducted to collect primary data. The interviewees included policy elites (officials and elected representatives), think tank researchers, analysts, observers and commentators in London, Paris, Brussels and Washington, DC between 2010 and 2011<sup>2</sup>. Varying levels of identification were offered to interviewees and references to interviews throughout the thesis reflect this. The objective was to gain detailed insights into how events and China’s rise in general were perceived by policymakers and build a picture of the decision-making process in (some of) the cases studied in Chapters Three through Five. These interviews unearthed useful evidence which I have incorporated into my analysis; some insights are novel and therefore help to fill empirical gaps in the literature. Cross-referencing between the accounts of various interviewees also serves to increase reliability in the findings and ameliorating (to some extent) problems associated with the accuracy of historical accounts presented by individuals.

One issue here was that I did not manage to interview as many current and former policy officials as I would have liked. In particular, those who were still in office at the time were unable or unwilling to talk to me about issues which were or even still are sensitive in the context of relations with China. Some interviewees preferred to remain completely off the record, providing me with information on the guarantee that I would not use it in my thesis. Former officials who had moved on were often difficult to track down. This was especially the case in the EU. In the UK, my access to current policy officials was restricted by the institutions themselves, granting me limited access to an individual who was designated as ‘representing’ the official view. Overall, I conducted around fifty interviews for the research. Aside from ‘off the record’ interviews, some simply did not provide much in the way of new information. Nevertheless, I believe that the interviews I have cited are of high quality and drawing on other sources – in particular committee hearings and media reports – has provided a wealth of supporting evidence throughout the thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> Ethics approval for the fieldwork was granted by the (then) Faculty Ethics Committee in March 2010.

#### ***4. Main Findings and Contribution***

The central finding is that the notion of ‘China’s rise’ has been interpreted in various ways by different actors over time; the lack of a single, objective meaning has led to contestations between preferences for how to respond to this shift in the international arena. This has been not been explored in the literature to date, with little critical reflection on the concept and its impact on policy preferences. The problem is, many policymakers and academics have been preoccupied with questioning whether China is rising or not, without considering what the notion of ‘China’s rise’ is taken to signify. These differing interpretations shape policymakers’ preferences for how to respond to China’s emergence.

I argue that there are considerable variations in how policymakers have interpreted the significance of China’s rise, yet there has been little real discussion of what the term ‘China’s rise’ actually means within policy communities. Instead, the focus appears to be on disagreements between the implications of this, resulting in contestation between divergent preferences for how to respond. The evidence suggests that ‘China’s rise’ takes on different meanings for different actors at different points in time. For the most part, the US and EU’s responses to the rise of China have not been predicated on perceptions of an impending threat to their position in the status quo. Even looking at perceptions of China in the context of specific dimensions of international relations – military, economic and normative – there is little evidence that ‘threat’ conceptualisations were the dominant view amongst policymakers. Instead, the economic and political opportunities presented by China’s rise have persisted and contributed to the development of the overarching strategies of engagement for both the US and the EU. The commonality between their responses is interesting given that both are very different international actors: the US is the classical model of the superpower state, whereas the EU is generally considered to have a unique presence based on its civilian/normative values. Thus, it might be expected that they would pursue different paths in dealing with China. In the existing literature on US and EU responses to China’s rise, there is still work to be done in terms of developing explanations of their behaviour over time.

Further, although China’s power grew considerably over the timeframe of analysis, this has not elicited the sort of responses from the established powers we would expect to see if they operated under the logic of PTT. As very different international actors with different

policymaking structures (subsystems) we might expect to see very different reactions to China's rise from the US and EU – but this has not transpired. We also see that their respective policy discourses over China's rise have varied considerably, with different perceptions evinced by policymakers. Ultimately, the broad similarities between their strategies were down to interpretations of China's rise as presenting economic and political opportunities prevailing within both the US and EU. Crucially, these were frequently held by the key policymakers within the main subsystems, therefore policies often reflected preferences predicated on these interpretations. This tendency has translated into the maintenance of strategies of engagement in response to China's rise.

Labelling China's rise as either a 'threat' or 'opportunity' obscures the fact that interpretations are multifaceted. In the thesis, I identify six overarching interpretations pertaining to different aspects of China's rise which I outline in detail in Chapter Two. These aspects are the military, economic, normative and political dimensions of the relationships with China. These are then presented in pairs: first, China as either a military threat or not (non-threat). This has related to the threat presented to its neighbours, the US within the regional context but also potentially – in the extreme arguments – globally. Second, China as an economic threat or an opportunity, in terms of whether its economic power will hurt the established powers, or benefit them through increased trade and raising China's stake in the current international economic system and its various institutions.

Third, China as a normative threat versus a political opportunity are paired as there has been no discussion of China as presenting a 'normative opportunity'. Those attempting to counter perceptions of the Chinese regime as a threat to the norms and values of the international system tend to concentrate on political opportunities of drawing China into the established system, increasing its stake in the maintenance of the status quo and playing a more significant role internationally, commensurate with its growing size. In some respects, the threat interpretations are concerned with an 'active' China, whereas the opportunity interpretations convey a sense of passivity, wherein it is not so much China's direct behaviour that generates these, but rather they are a by-product of its rise. The former also spark a greater urgency about the immediate implications, as the threats were often seen as real in the present, rather than simply relating to what China might become.

The analysis in Chapter Two lays an important foundation for subsequent understanding of the policy responses examined in the later empirical chapters as the interpretations outlined are reflected in the discourse of the US and the EU to varying degrees with changing salience over time. These underpinned the preferences of policymakers and contextualised the policy debates over specific events; in other words, the cases were not treated as isolated incidents by policymakers but a part of the broader relationship, thus the implications they drew from their interpretations of China's rise shaped how they sought to react in these instances. Even so, there was little real explicit debate over what 'China's rise' signified amongst policymakers in either polity, despite the apparent gaps between interpretations. Due to the lack of explicit recognition of this, the groundwork in Chapter Two provides a way of identifying these gaps and the implications they had for the development of policies towards China. There was little disagreement in terms of the fundamental objective – ensuring China's peaceful emergence – but actors often had different preferences for how best to achieve this. While all of the threat perspectives became more prominent in the US, only the normative and economic threat perspectives gained much traction in the EU and even then these were rare. In both polities, the political and economic opportunity interpretations appeared to grow as China did with the implication that they continued to dominate even as discourse – at least in the US – became more heated.

The analysis shows that understanding the nature of preferences alone is not enough, but there needs to be some consideration of who gets to translate their preferences into policies and how they go about doing so. In other words, although the discourse over China's rise is ongoing throughout the American and European policy communities and a variety of actors can participate in debates over the appropriate responses to specific developments, the final decisions are taken by select actors. These could be identified by looking at the foreign policy subsystem responsible for the formulation of responses on the relevant issue-area. Nevertheless, these actors cannot 'shut out' the preferences of others entirely and compromise between competing sets of preferences can and does occur. Therefore we need to look at the discourse taking place to understand why key actors do not always simply translate their preferences into policies.

The research has significant implications for understanding US- and EU-China relations. In both cases, I assert that there is not a single, overarching 'China policy', but rather multiple

policies which are underpinned by a general commitment to engaging with China, assisting its development as an international actor as opposed to attempting to contain its rise. Even as China's power increased rapidly and debates intensified over the implications of its ascent to great power status with more references to its rise presenting a threat – particularly in the military and economic dimensions – the US' policies have largely adhered to the engagement strategy. The growing threat perceptions have been overshadowed by the dominance of perceptions amongst key policymakers of China's rise as presenting economic and political opportunities. As a result of the presence of sharply contrasting interpretations of China's rise, policies were vigorously contested with substantial debates emerging at many key junctures in the relationship. There was a particularly evident schism between the administration and Congress, where perceptions of China as an emerging threat held greatest sway. Congress was not always involved in policy formulation but some of its members used their public platform to keep their views alive within policy discourse.

In the EU's case, I demonstrate that it has foreign policies towards China which are distinct from the aggregate of Member States' policies but, as noted, no single, definitive policy. The concept of engagement has been embraced more wholeheartedly than in the US, with little in the way of substantive debates over the implications of China's rise or even over significant junctures in the relationship. This has meant that the policies have not been produced through a substantive public debate over the appropriate response to China's rise. The most notable feature in the EU's consideration of China's rise is the degree of convergence around interpretations of significant economic and political opportunities for the EU. By 2003 this had developed to the stage where the concept of China as a strategic partner emerged within EU policy discourse and effectively became an interpretation of China in its own right. Differences in actors' preferences were produced largely by disagreements over whether the economic or political dimensions of the relationship should be prioritised. The only true dissent came from the European Parliament, but it had no decision-making responsibility in the relevant subsystems, therefore could only affect discourse at the margins, with virtually no impact on the preferences of the other actors.

The transatlantic debate over the EU's proposal to lift its arms embargo against China (imposed in response to the Tiananmen crackdown of June 1989) was the first time that the implications of China's rise really became subject to scrutiny in the context of the EU-US

relationship. Examining this case in depth demonstrates the importance of interpretations of China's rise for the development of specific policies. The debate evinced that although both the US and the EU were committed to engaging China as it emerged, the implications of this process – as they saw it – differed considerably. Whilst in the EU the dominance of economic and political opportunity interpretations led the embargo to be regarded as outdated and harmful to progress in the relationship, on the US side it was considered to be more necessary than ever.

This was due to the increasing salience of perceptions of China as a potential military threat therefore preventing its acquisition of high-end technology which could advance its military capabilities significantly was considered a priority. Although interpretations of China as an economic and political opportunity had until then prevailed in the US' policy discourse, there was no 'opportunity' from the US in this case – only possible losses if the EU transferred technology to China which would increase its military threat potential. There were clear political and economic opportunities for the EU, but in the US there was no scope for actors who generally subscribed to such interpretations to frame the move in such terms. The original reason behind imposition – China's human rights record – was not central to either side's preferences. For each side, the underpinning logic of their embargoes had shifted due to evolving interpretations of China's rise. Although both had acted upon interpretations of this as an economic and political opportunity, in the US the growing presence of military threat perceptions had produced a continuous contestation between rival perspectives; there were no possible gains from the EU lifting its embargo thus proponents of threat perspectives of China's rise were able to dominate the US' discourse on the issue. The shifting logic underpinning their respective embargoes meant that they were essentially talking past each other: the preferences of the other side were not fully understood as they were incongruous with their own interpretations of China's rise.

Demonstrating the contested nature of 'China's rise' within the US and the EU and the subsequent impact on the evolution of their policies constitutes a direct challenge to mainstream IR theories – particularly PTT – which presuppose that material factors and the structure of the international system determine behaviour. The 'big changes' to the balance of power and the international order – with which mainstream IR is preoccupied – are grounded in the interactions of policymakers and the decisions that they make on the basis of their own

pre-existing ideas and preferences. The US and EU's responses to the rise of China have not been predetermined by material interests or the desire to preserve their relative positions as PTT would expect. The examination of the intersection between material and ideational factors within the decision-making environment makes a contribution to FPA's task of reconnecting IR to its ground of human beings (Hudson, 2005: 2).

The thesis presents new empirical material on US- and EU-China relations and examines a number of events in their relationships from a new perspective. Particularly on the arms embargo case study, my analysis concentrates on the transatlantic debate which I contend is where the 'real' debate took place; internal EU deliberations largely focussed on questions of timing. The importance of the arms embargo debate as a window into broader interpretations of China's rise – particularly in the US – has been overlooked in the existing literature. Finally, the analytical model itself is an innovative contribution: analysis of variations within and between the US and EU's responses to the rise of China demonstrates its utility in generating robust explanations for foreign policy behaviour. Although the project did not start out to be a work of 'comparative foreign policy', the model enables cross-polity analysis of foreign policymaking. The model may be of use to Foreign Policy Analysts working with single or multiple case studies and should appeal to either 'classic' FPA or EFP scholars.

### ***5. Structure of the Thesis***

The next chapter reviews the relevant literature, starting with an overview of PTT before concentrating on existing accounts of US and EU relationships with China and their responses to its rise. In addition, I consider the small bodies of literature which look at the arms embargo debate in varying degrees of depth and also the US-EU-China relationship. The intention is to further expand on the importance of the questions raised in the thesis and highlight the potential for this research to contribute to the debates within the literature. Chapter Two outlines the six main interpretations of China's rise which were present in the US and EU over the timeframe. These require elaboration due to the tendency for others to categorise China's rise in terms of an either/or threat-opportunity dichotomy, which overlooks important variations between different types of threats and opportunities. Drawing on evidence from the policy discourse and also the measures which their proponents use to substantiate their arguments – such as China's military budget, economic growth and trade flows – the chapter

establishes the differences across the different interpretations and relates them to the more general concept of China's rise outwith the context of particular decision-making instances.

I then move on to the main empirical analyses of the foreign policy behaviour of the two established powers. Looking first at the US in Chapter Three, I analyse the six cases in bilateral relations; through my analytical framework I develop an understanding of how evolving interpretations of China's rise impacted upon US policies in response to these. Throughout, I contemplate the expectations in each case from the power-transition perspective and reflect on what value my approach has compared to this theoretical approach. This process is then repeated for the EU in Chapter Four. Having then dealt with the US and EU separately, Chapter Five turns to examine the evolution of their respective arms embargo policies towards China and the transatlantic debate sparked by the EU's proposal to lift its embargo in detail in order to demonstrate what comparative insights the analytical approach can deliver. The final chapter summarises the findings of the thesis and discusses their implications for the study of responses to China's rise and also wider IR debates and the advancement of FPA and EFP. It also reflects on opportunities for future research based on questions thrown up over the course of the research.

## **CHAPTER ONE | HANDLING CHINA'S RISE: EXPLANATIONS OF FOREIGN POLICY IN THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE**

### ***1.1 Introduction***

China's rise is a hot topic, regularly referred to as the most significant change to the international system since the end of the Cold War. It is now commonly accepted that China is rising – although ‘how fast’ is debated extensively – and that this will have significant implications for the future of international relations. Whatever course it takes, China will be an important player in the world for the foreseeable future. Its political, strategic and economic relationships with the US and the EU have received considerable scholarly attention (more so the US). However, what is meant by ‘China’s rise’ means different things to different people; there are numerous interpretations of the implications of China’s rise within these two polities, which have had a significant impact upon the policy discourse around this development and subsequently the preferences of policymakers.

Some parts of the literature reflect these debates – between scholars writing that China’s rise poses a challenge to the established powers and those who see it as more likely to integrate with the established international system. Others argue that it is too early to say for sure how China will emerge and subsequently suggest erring on the side of caution. Scholars do not appear particularly eager to subscribe to threat perspectives (although there are prominent exceptions) yet there is generally little critical reflection on how these debates are contributing to policymaking at key junctures in the relationships between the established and rising powers. In short, the importance of how different interpretations of China’s rise are shaping the responses of the US and the EU has not been explored within the majority of studies.

The first section develops an overview of the power-transition theory (PTT) literature, elucidating its precepts and implications for relations between established and rising powers. PTT has had a significant influence over some studies of China’s rise, specifically on US-China relations where its logic and language are frequently invoked, even though the theory itself is rarely employed in these analyses. The ‘received wisdom’ of PTT is now of more significance than its theoretical models developed during the Cold War, precisely because of its impact on the thinking of some scholars and observers. From there, I then look at the

literature on US-China and EU-China relations in sections 1.3 and 1.4 respectively. I find that contributions to the literature on China's rise and its relations with the US and EU, while valuable, have missed opportunities to explore the impact of interpretations on policy. The US-China section also examines studies which have employed or critiqued PTT to assess US-China relations (to date, PTT has not been applied to EU-China relations).

My review of the arms embargo debate literature reveals that the dominance of Euro-centric analyses has obscured the importance of the transatlantic debate. This section then considers the limited number of studies of US-EU-China relations, suggesting that this reflects a tendency to prioritise bilateral relationships in International Relations (IR) scholarship. The penultimate section covers the literature that informs my analysis and arguments and that I build upon. Specifically, I review the IR, Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and European Foreign Policy (EFP) literature and studies which inform this analysis and those which have examined the importance of perceptions and interpretations in foreign policymaking. I conclude that the explanations for the behaviour of the US and the EU towards China rarely share much common ground in terms of their analytical focus. My arguments bridge the gap to some extent by presenting an account of behaviour which focuses on the interaction between international developments and actors' subjective interpretations of their external world which shape the development of foreign policies.

## ***1.2 Power-Transition Theory***

I argue much of the 'threat' rhetoric surrounding China's rise employs language and logic that is derived from PTT. By introducing PTT's precepts here, I provide a basis for substantiating the links between it and the various 'threat' perspectives. Although Tammen et al (2000: 6) attempted to disaggregate PTT from realism (preferring the label of 'rationalism') the theory clearly has its roots in this school of thought. PTT rests on analysis of international relations at the structural level in which states are the primary actors, differentiated by their relative power capacities. PTT shares with offensive realism (Mearsheimer, 2001a) and hegemonic stability theory (Keohane, 1980; Gilpin, 1981) the view that a preponderance, rather than equilibrium, of power maintains peace in the international system (Tammen, 2008: 317).

Deeply concerned by the upheavals of the two World Wars and post-WWII uncertainty, AFK Organski (1958) developed PTT to “provide a framework that... affords a better basis for the prediction of future events than does the theory of the balance of power” (Organski, 1958: 300). Decades before China’s rise, Organski (1958: 307, 310) recognised that it would become a major world power, linking its regime type to the potential for a clash with the dominant power. Organski (1958: 321) observed that China (along with Russia) was “still far behind the Western nations in power, although one might not think so if he took the newspaper reports and speeches of Western military and civilian leaders at face value”. This point relates directly to my claims – more than fifty years later – regarding interpretations of China’s threat. Discrepant interpretations were recognised by the founder of PTT but treated as an anecdotal curiosity rather than important in their own right.

Organski’s (1958: 322-3) argument which formed the core of PTT was that

challenges by newcomers result in war... the major wars of recent history have all... [involved] the biggest power in the world and its allies against a challenger (or group of challengers) who had recently risen in power thanks to industrialization. One could almost say that the rise of such a challenger guarantees a major war.

Wars result when the rising power is dissatisfied with the status quo order; satisfied powers are not confrontational (Organski, 1958: 330-2)<sup>1</sup>. Thus whether Western policymakers take China to be a satisfied or dissatisfied rising power will shape their attitudes towards it – as is shown subsequently, there is still much debate on this point. Organski and Jacek Kugler (1980) further developed the theory<sup>2</sup> and through statistical analyses found that half of all historical transitions were followed by conflict. The authors intended to incorporate analysis of “the culture of elites, their belief systems, their skill in negotiation, their ability to decipher signals from other leaders, as well as in the constraints and opportunities imposed on and

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<sup>1</sup> This explained why the transition between the UK and the US did not result in conflict. The latter did not actively pursue world leadership and its internal developments benefitted the UK economically (Organski, 1958: 323). The US did not seek to challenge the extant order: “far from destroying the Anglo-French international order” the US gave it “a new lease on life by continuing to defend it after England and France alone no longer possessed the power to do so” (Organski, 1958: 324).

<sup>2</sup> DiCicco and Levy (1999: 681) consider Organski (1958) and Organski and Kugler (1980) to constitute the foundations of the PTT research programme.

provided for all elites by the institutions in which they must operate” (Organski and Kugler, 1980: 14). In reality, they continued to prioritise “a particular shift in capabilities, the surpassing of the most powerful nation by another” (Morrow, 1996: 327).

Adjusting earlier arguments, Organski and Kugler (1980: 28) postulated that conflicts would not always be initiated by the rising power in an attempt to accelerate the transition process, but could be “a desperate attempt on the part of the still-dominant nation to intercept the challenger’s progress”. Yet the transition is inevitable even if the process takes decades, “punctuated by a number of armed conflicts” (Organski and Kugler, 1980: 28). The authors aimed to “establish a single, reliable measurement” of the distribution of power as separate indicators were inherently weakened by “impressionistic estimates” which often proved “fanciful” (Organski and Kugler, 1980: 33). They opted for Gross National Product (GNP); recognising that this was an imprecise measure, they incorporated flexibility by declaring “equality” to be achieved when the rising power reached eighty percent of the established power’s GNP (Organski and Kugler, 1980: 49).

For the present purpose it is unnecessary to cover the various strands of PTT; however, to understand its implications for debates on China’s rise it is expedient to draw attention to its core assumptions, outlined by DiCicco and Levy (1999: 684). First, states are the primary international actors and their leaders “are rational” in their choices. The international system is hierarchical – not anarchical – under a dominant power, in which change is dependent on states’ internal economic growth. PTT scholars take economic power as prior to military advances (Schweller, 1999: 2) since measurements of military components “fail to capture the dynamics of power change” (Tammen et al, 2000: 16). That is not to say that military power is unimportant under PTT, as interstate war is impossible without it. However, it has not been incorporated into theoretical modelling by PTT scholars.

Lemke and Werner (1996: 240) diverged with the exclusion of military power, arguing that spending patterns are a crucial variable for measuring power *and* assessing intentions, as a rapid increase “indicates that the challenger is committed to changing the... status quo”. Such logic is frequently invoked by those who see China’s rise as a military threat to the US. Kim (1992: 157) observed a fast-rising power can produce a situation in which both the rising and dominant powers are “caught unprepared” for the impending transition, increasing the

propensity for conflict. The speed of China's rise has indeed formed a core aspect of threat interpretations. Morrow (1996) indirectly established that PTT is also applicable to EU-China relations. Morrow (1996: 313) posited that the "logic of overtaking" meant that PTT applied not only to the relationship between the dominant power and the rising challenger, but any case where one state's "capabilities are growing relative to the other's" – that is, PTT also holds when the rising challenger passes others 'on the way' to the top.

A single measure of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the status quo remains elusive in PTT scholarship (DiCicco and Levy, 1999: 690) which clouds certainty in judgements over likely future behaviour. In China's case this is amplified by the tendency for threat proponents to link its revisionist intentions to its regime type and rapid development of military capabilities. Power-transition theorists have argued that democratic states tend to support the status quo (Lemke and Reed, 1996) because it promotes their interests and values. As a non-democratic state, the concern is that China seeks to change the system to safeguard its interests and values. Additionally, timing issues continue to complicate PTT with disagreement over whether wars will occur prior to, at the point of, or following the transition (DiCicco and Levy, 1999: 694). Yet the extent of (dis)satisfaction and its focus – whether it is far-reaching or only in relation to specific issues – are potentially important factors still underspecified in the PTT literature.

Morrow (1996: 329) noted that PTT scholarship had not explained why the dominant power does not defeat smaller powers before they cross the line from potential to actual challenger, which is arguably relevant in relation to the US' response to China's rise. The supposition that the dominant power will not initiate conflict as it is satisfied with the status quo is problematic precisely because the emergence of a potential challenger "constitutes a potential threat to the status quo" (DiCicco and Levy, 1999: 695). Thus an early war would be a prudent move to maintain the status quo. Tammen et al (2000: 27) contended that

initiating conflict is counterproductive since the dominant power... having set the international rules and norms... cannot disrupt them by its own actions without serious loss of support... by preserving the status quo, the dominant nation seeks to attract as many satisfied countries as possible to secure its preponderance.

Since the rising challenger will eventually overtake the dominant power and change the rules anyway, it is not clear why the latter allows this to transpire. It also fails to account for the tendency of great powers to bend the rules of the game in their own interest while expecting others to abide by them. For example, the US waged war on Iraq in 2003 even though – as prominent PTT scholars have noted – Iraq could not meet the criteria of a global challenger (Kugler et al, 2004: 169). If the hope is simply that the rising power will eventually become satisfied, this would constitute non-rational ‘wishful thinking’ on the part of the dominant power, violating a core tenet of PTT. I contend that PTT’s theoretical parameters are too restrictive to properly encapsulate why the predominant power does not crush its potential rival(s). More convincing explanations are found through examination of how interpretations of the rising power influence the responses developed at the policymaking level.

PTT does not predict that all transitions necessarily entail war (Kim and Morrow, 1992: 896). The problem has been, as Lemke and Kugler (1996: 20) pointed out, that “some scholars have... treated power transitions as necessary and sufficient conditions” for war. However, application of the theory’s precepts to the case of China’s rise from the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards does not give much hope that its overtaking of the US will be peaceful. Organski and Kugler (1980: 226) set out a pessimistic view of the future, predicting that at some unspecified point China’s economic development would lead it to “overtake the Soviet Union and then, decades later the United States. The period after each passage will create the conditions for nuclear wars to occur”. A significant limitation of PTT’s statistical models is that they must be applied retrospectively. Although scholars have indulged in predictive modelling, the range of variables held constant removes the politics from the future of international relations.

Drawing together these various facets of PTT, it is possible to identify core expectations for great power behaviour:

1. The dominant power and its allies are satisfied with the status quo and seek to preserve it.
2. To qualify as a ‘potential challenger’, an actor’s power must be on a trajectory for parity with the dominant power.
3. Fast-rising powers are more likely to cause instability.
4. Transitions involving dissatisfied rising powers are likely to result in conflict.

5. The dominant power and its allies will seek to preserve the status quo order, through encouraging integration or confrontation.
6. The rising challenger will eventually be successful, even if the transition takes time.

Although PTT scholars see two options for the dominant power(s) – engagement with a view to integration, or confrontation – they effectively treat these as binary and thus have difficulty explaining more complex behaviour which does not neatly conform to either. PTT cannot specify when one will be chosen over the other and anticipates a linear pattern of behaviour: as the challenger's power increases, the behaviour of the established power is likely to become increasingly confrontational if the prospects for integration diminish (unless the rising power is clearly becoming satisfied – for which there is no definitive test). Behaviour which oscillates between these two paths is also difficult to explain from a PTT perspective. The assumptions of states as coherent actors operating in environments of complete information struggle with uncertainty over levels of (dis)satisfaction and future intentions. I argue that PTT routinely overlooks the unique characteristics of the relevant relationships, the decision-making processes within polities and the specific climate of international relations at a given point in time.

PTT scholars have failed to recognise their own impact on how actors interpret the rise of new powers. Thanks to their scholarly efforts, the consequences of power-transitions are well known and frequently referenced by some analysts and policymakers – even if understanding of PTT's theoretical precepts and methodologies remains limited. This has led to the 'lessons' of PTT infiltrating some areas of policy discourse. PTT effectively assumes a single understanding of international relations between the rising and established powers, thus there is only one interpretation of the situation possible. We could thus expect that policymakers, armed with this knowledge, would favour confronting the rising challenger as soon as possible as allowing a challenger to approach parity will spell the end of the dominant power's reign. I aim to draw these assumptions into the light and challenge them, highlighting the problems with PTT's influence over conceptualisations of China's rise. Tackling PTT in this thesis is important because it should be applicable to these relationships, yet it constantly falls short of encapsulating their reality while still shaping the way that some think about them.

### **1.3 US-China Relations**

Despite their apparent potential, few scholars have harnessed FPA approaches to examine the importance of perceptions in US-China relations. I draw on insights from cognitive FPA without ‘getting inside the mind’ of the individual decision-maker. Goldstein (1997/98: 38) analysed interpretations of China’s arrival, interrogating whether these matched up to ‘reality’, finding that its rising power was actually quite modest and projections for “great gains in the foreseeable future” were exaggerated. Goldstein (1997/98) concentrated on perceived versus actual power, rather than broader interpretations of China’s rise in relation to different issue areas. Broomfield (2003) concentrated on threat perceptions, dividing them into three categories – ideological, economic and strategic – which is replicated here, although I utilise different labels and examine non-threat/opportunity interpretations which are only hinted at by Broomfield (2003), who implies that the ‘China threat theory’ is largely based on misperceptions.

Herbert Yee (2005: 112) contended that “perceptions of a China threat are often affected by domestic political factors”. Yee (2005) explicitly addressed the debates between factions within the US policy community. However, this was somewhat generalised, concentrating mainly on outlining the content of the China threat thesis in US policy in broad brushstrokes. Although Yee (2005: 117-124) acknowledged debate between proponents of containment versus engagement, there was little systematic research into how these impacted the development of policy or consideration of the evolution of these perspectives in response to China’s rise – although the relatively limited analytical scope is perhaps explained by the fact that this was a chapter in an edited volume. Yee (2005) appeared optimistic that mutual perceptions could be improved, paving the way a more stable relationship. Zhao Quangsheng (2007) argued that there was an emergent perception of “one up, one down” in relation to China overtaking a declining US, mostly based on expectations of future trends from current change in relative power. However, these scholars have not engaged in systematic analysis of perceptions within an FPA framework, thus there is scope for building on their accounts.

As Scott (2008) observed, studies of US responses to China’s rise are often more interested in speculating about the future rather than explaining recent history. Rich, descriptive works from Robert Suettinger (2003) and Nancy Tucker (2001) provide excellent insight into what

was going on ‘behind the scenes’, but do not engage in analyses of the factors critical to the development of policy towards China. Other studies in the decision-making FPA tradition have examined in close detail the processes in the formulation of policies, but these rarely engage with broader theoretical discussions, leaving a gap between IR and FPA scholarship. Since the mid-1990s academics were asking whether China should be contained or engaged (Shambaugh, 1996) and debates over China’s rise proliferated in the late-1990s following the Taiwan Strait crisis (Cooper, J., 1997; Dreyer, 2000). Some have suggested that China’s threat in this regard was not particularly high (O’Hanlon, 2000; Ross, 2002), or in fact presents opportunities for cooperation on global issues (Medeiros and Fravel, 2003).

Within the diverse range of literature which analyses US-China relations, there have been numerous studies rooted in decision-making FPA, which is essentially the dominant approach (compared to cognitive or societal approaches) in US academia. Tan Qingshan (1992) drew on the decision-making models proposed in *Essence of Decision* (Allison, 1971). Tan’s approach is not formally adopted here, but the examination of the executive-legislative subsystem’s dynamics was influenced by the ‘interbranch’ model in his text. Others have sought to include decision-making approaches in wider analyses. Rosemary Foot (1995) critiqued realist explanations of the relationship, arguing that a variety of other factors within the wider contextual structure of both international and domestic arenas influenced the relationship. Both of these studies focussed on a time period prior to the post-Cold War era; much has changed in the relationship that is worth further exploration. Robert Ross’ (1998) edited volume examined domestic-level variables, although the findings were not reconciled in a final analysis. However, the individual contributions reflected the growing interest in such factors in the context of US-China relations.

Myers et al (2001) investigated domestic political factors (executive/legislative influence, NGOs and interest groups), the Taiwan issue and external actors such as the EU, Asia-Pacific nations and China itself but omitted reconciliation of these factors. In another decision-making FPA study, Jean Garrison (2005) identified the recurring patterns in US-China relations, finding that in the post-Cold War era the policy objectives of the three Presidents have been broadly similar and had to deal with domestic opposition. I concur with Garrison’s (2005) conclusions on the constraining influence of Congressional politics and the continuity in preferences across multiple administrations; however our analytical foci differ as Garrison did

not interrogate broader questions of great power behaviour, instead concentrated on institutional processes in policymaking. Of the few studies that attempt to link specific events together and generate more nuanced explanations, David Lampton's (2001) *Same Bed, Different Dreams* is a key contribution. Looking at the international, national and individual levels, Lampton (2001:314, 355) found that the complexity of the relationship is such that there is little scope for one or a small number of individuals to determine its development. While our approaches differ, Lampton's (2001) work provided a platform to build upon by linking different levels and looking at the dynamics of decision-making.

Some scholars have continued to push mainstream IR perspectives as the best lenses with which to view the relationship. Russell Ong (2012) produced a structural realist account of China-US strategic competition, asserting that Chinese policymakers favoured the creation of a multipolar world rather than replacing US unipolarity with its own. Ong (2012) did not envisage an immediate challenge to the US on the basis that China's central objective of continued economic growth requires international stability which necessitated a degree of strategic cooperation with the US. Despite treating China as a dissatisfied power, Ong (2012) disagreed with PTT theorists on likely behaviour because it was not so dissatisfied as to seek an immediate revision to the international's systems structures and rules. Yet Ong (2012: 13, 144) implicitly agreed with PTT when arguing that the US' concern will be to maintain its hegemonic position and avoid China gaining parity in the military, political or economic realms. Although Ong (2012) touched upon the prevalence of differing interpretations of China's rise in the US, his structural perspective led him to discount their impact on policy development and conclude that both sides were largely motivated by balance of power logic.

PTT-specialists Tammen et al (2000: 33, 153) claimed China has “surfaced as the new threat to US dominance of world affairs” and must be watched at both regional and global levels. It is interesting that they expected “some US opinion leaders... to fall back on familiar Cold War rhetoric and policies such as containment” (Tammen et al, 2000: 164) which will increase China's revisionist tendencies, yet failed to recognise that such rhetoric is often informed by PTT itself. The “anti-Chinese forces” in the US, they claim, will make it difficult for the US to manage China's emergence as a satisfied, status quo power (Tammen et al, 2000: 174). The implicit assumption running through their work is that China will emerge as a dissatisfied power without proactive US influence to shape its preferences.

Rapkin and Thompson (2003) suggested that it is still too early to judge China's level of dissatisfaction but acknowledged the growing salience of the China threat narrative within the US. On military capabilities they argued that *qualitative* differences matter, a first for PTT scholarship (to my knowledge). They considered the dominant power's perception of (dis)satisfaction levels, but not of relative power which have fuelled China threat perspectives. They concluded that the power-transition is still inevitable, concurring with Tamm et al (2000) that the US should encourage China's development as a satisfied power. Eric Weede (2003) argued that PTT was ambivalent as to China's level of dissatisfaction but advocated integrationist strategies to avoid conflict. Tamm and Kugler (2006: 35) warned that the war on terror jeopardised the US' continued predominance as it diverted resources which would be better directed at future challengers. China's military development did not constitute an arms buildup (Tamm and Kugler, 2006: 48), although this ignores concern within sections of the US policy community. While acknowledging evidence of China's satisfaction with the international order, they argued that US policies should be directed at encouraging China's development as a satisfied power (Tamm and Kugler, 2006: 52).

Other analyses applying PTT have arrived at contrasting conclusions. For Schweller (1999: 26-7), China's growing power was alarming precisely because "both history and scholarship show that countries undergoing economic transitions tend to pursue assertive and expansionist foreign policies". Combining this factor with the government's attempt to remain in power and the inability to predict future intentions, Schweller (1999: 27) concluded that engagement will be difficult, reducing the prospect of integrating China into the established order. David Lai (2011: 2) claimed that the US and China were "willing to blaze a new path out of this deadly contest" and would break with history. While Lai acknowledged rival interpretations of China's rise, he did not link them to recent behaviour but instead pointed the paths they *might* take the US down. Lai (2011: 202) saw Taiwan as the most likely cause of conflict but argued that the two sides recognised that they are in a power-transition, reducing the possibility of such outcomes. Such an argument does not take seriously the possibility that dissatisfaction with the status quo might lead China to challenge the US, as PTT expects.

Zhu Zhinrun (2006: 2, 4) explored whether a US-China power transition would lead to a major war via "an agent-structure model that... emphasises the role of decision-making and

diplomacy in the study of power transition”. Although critiquing traditional PTT models, Zhu (2006) essentially worked within PTT logic to establish ways to *avoid* its expectations, rather than critique their limitations. His central hypothesis is that “if the government, the public and top leaders in both the dominant power and the challenging power have positive evaluations of the bilateral relationship in a friendly international system, power transition will end in peace” (Zhu, Z., 2006: 23). While the centralisation of “positive evaluations” has strong parallels with the focus of this thesis, my approach differs in that I am looking to explain recent behaviour, rather than what will happen in the future. Zhu’s (2006, Ch. 5) examination of US-China relations between 1990 and 2005 was generalised and, while acknowledging different interpretations, used these to project into the future rather than consider the impact on relations to date. I agree with Zhu’s general ideas about how best to understand international relations, but reject PTT as an appropriate starting point and seek to explain rather than predict.

Robert Ross and Zhu Feng’s (2008: 293) edited volume *China’s Ascent* attempted to “wed [PTT] with the policy problems of peaceful management of the rise of China” by examining a range of domestic and international factors which would impact China’s rise. Ross and Zhu (2008: 314) concluded that war between the US and China is avoidable due to a range of variables not employed by core PTT scholarship, yet still considered it an appropriate starting place for examining US-China relations. Robert Art’s (2008: 289) chapter concluded that “great power status does not doom a state to be aggressively expansionist and warlike”, instead the choices of Chinese elites will shape its behaviour. On the US’ side, Art (2008) recommended a policy of accommodation where not contrary to national interests; however he was more prescriptive than analytical of US behaviour up until now.

Steve Chan (2008: 121) examined PTT on its own terms and found no evidence that China was approaching the US in terms of power. As such, Chan was critical of applications of PTT to US-China relations on empirical grounds but contended that PTT as a theory of international relations should be revised rather than rejected. This included the hypothesis that it would be a “nervous declining power” rather than rising power that initiates conflict (Chan, 2008: 122). He also warned that “mistaken beliefs about the other can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies” and cautioned against popularising some interpretations of reality whilst dismissing others (Chan, 2008: 123). However, Chan (2008) did not take seriously the impact

of power-transition perspectives in US foreign policymaking, sticking mostly to state- and structural-level analyses.

Evelyn Goh (2009: 80) argued that PTT's utility in the study of US-China relations was limited as it could not help "identify which power is likely to start a war, or when". Goh's analysis ruled out a direct confrontation as a plausible scenario on the basis of the considerable power gap between the two sides and the fact that China was effectively a status quo power. Yet she highlighted that asymmetric warfare would obviate the need for power parity between the two sides, an argument I pick up on later in the thesis. Goh's (2009: 82-3) rejection of PTT is largely structural, essentially leaving open the possibility that its concepts might become relevant in the future. Zhao Quansheng (2005) argued that US policy has been directed at integrating China with the established order, consistent with what he claims are PTT expectations as sides work to avoid the conflict which, as he acknowledged, others have anticipated. I agree with Zhao's summary of US policy but not his take on PTT expectations which are puzzling as he does not explain why other power-transition theorists do not arrive at such conclusions. I argue that Zhao has focussed on the policy recommendations of PTT scholars and retroactively applied these to US behaviour. This is problematic as PTT scholars would argue that to ignore their theory's expectations would guarantee their realisation.

Chin and Thakur (2010: 120) put forward a more nuanced form of a power-transition which did not necessarily entail conflict by criticising the oversimplification of depicting China as choosing two paths at a crossroads; they envisaged an alternative route where China will continue to internalise "select global practices and norms, alongside registering its desire and right to be at the table for rewriting some others". They explicitly claimed that China's ascendancy as a significant political opportunity for the West – especially the US – as reforms to the global system and its institutions require Chinese cooperation (Chin and Thakur, 2010: 134). However, they noted that US rhetoric emphasises "burden-sharing" but avoids acknowledging the need for "power-sharing", which will be a vital part of discussions if the US wants to prevent a return to balance of power politics (Chin and Thakur, 2010: 134-5).

We can also see PTT logic in the work of other theorists. As a prominent example, John Mearsheimer's (2001a, 2001b) offensive (neo)realism drew similar conclusions regarding the implications of the likely behaviour of the status quo and rising powers; China's emergence as

a regional hegemon would lead the US to contain it. Mearsheimer (2010: 381-382) has asserted that China's rise is unlikely to be peaceful as a dissatisfied, revisionist power and will prompt the US to behave more aggressively, contributing to a "gathering storm". Zhao and Liu (2007: 601) have demonstrated the limitations of offensive realism in relation to China's rise, and suggested that power-transition perspectives require greater consideration. Chan (2008: 129) also pointed out that if all states are expansionist when the opportunity arises, "a status quo power is an oxymoron". Nevertheless, the similarities in predictions about the potential for conflict are important, especially given Mearsheimer's prominence in the field.

Others have argued that China's relative rise is not as pronounced as some analyses suggest, but do not break free from the analytical constraints of PTT – and broader mainstream IR – perspectives. These often concentrate on questions over the extent of China's rise, with less interest in its perceived significance, contending that it does not yet challenge the US' influence either regionally (Economy, 2005; Sutter, 2007) or globally (Smith, MA., 2012). Elizabeth Economy (2005: 425) argued that China could not displace the US even at the regional-level, although the latter could not "remain complacent about the status quo" because of China's increased regional activism. Avery Goldstein (2005: 212-3) argued that historical analogies of other rising powers are weak, with 'status quo' or 'revisionist' labels oversimplifying reality.

Moreover, China's foreign policy behaviour is more consistent with that of a status quo power, as integration with the current system is crucial to its continued economic development. Goldstein (2005: 213) noted that uncertainties for the future remain, with no guarantee as to whether its behaviour amounts to "an unhappy accommodation to reality that will be forsaken if a more prosperous and powerful China has the chance to choose more freely". Ikenberry (2008) argued that China was more likely to join, than attempt to overturn, the established system. Foot and Walter (2010) asserted that China has grown more accepting of global norms and international order, indicating a lack of revisionist tendencies. Etzioni (2011: 657) argued that the US "can safely continue to seek to turn China into a partner before concluding that a course of confrontation is unavoidable", but saw US behaviour as evidence of containment strategy despite 'partnership' rhetoric.

It is evident that there is still lively debate amongst scholars as to what drives the US' policies, with a variety of perspectives adopted to look at decision-making processes and the trends in the relationship. My contribution is to move the debate forward by offering a new perspective. Those that examine the US' response to the rise of China often pay more attention to what might happen in the future. Although the various critiques of PTT's applicability to US-China relations are valuable contributions, they could also consider the fact that PTT's logic has infiltrated policy discourse. By highlighting the problems associated with PTT's influence, I present a critical reflection on how US-China relations are considered within the existing literature and offer an alternative perspective which I claim has greater analytical grasp on the driving factors on the US' side.

#### ***1.4 EU-China Relations***

EU-China relations have received comparatively less scholarly attention than US-China relations. This can be at least partially attributed to the EU's still-developing international presence, as well as the relatively recent development of its political relations with the (re)emergent China. Some might contend that there are fewer potential 'flashpoints' in the relationship, which makes it less interesting for IR scholars. Kay Möller (2007: 181) suggested that "perhaps because of the implicit demotion of their own continent, most European scholars hesitated... to embrace wholeheartedly the notion [of China's rise]" unlike their US counterparts. However a wealth of new literature advancing a range of approaches has appeared in recent years. Considerations of a 'China threat' are exceptionally rare within EU-centric scholarship, which is telling as it essentially reflects the discourse on China's rise within the wider European policy community. In turn, this then mirrors the distinct policy discourses on China on the two sides of the Atlantic.

Studies of the importance of perceptions in EU-China relations are scarce; through historical analysis Rupert Hodder (1999) argued that Europeans largely accepted China's self-image and consequently the engagement policies largely deferred to this. Kay Möller (2002) presented a general overview of EU-China diplomatic relations and 'mutual strategic perceptions' although did not consider their impact on policy preferences. Gill and Wacker's (2005) edited collection of short papers identified diverging perceptions between the US and EU on China's rise and considered the arms embargo; however, there was no systematic analysis drawing

together the various contributions within. These contributions were not structured around FPA/EFP approaches, but rather more general studies of developments, thus provide useful information but leave room for further analytical development.

There are few contributions on European perspectives of a ‘China threat’. Joachim Glaubitz (2004: 118) stated that “it goes without saying that in a strict military sense, Europe does not perceive a direct threat from China”. Glaubitz (2004) claimed that European governments were concerned about the potential for China to emerge as a hegemonic power in East Asia, although provided no supporting evidence. For Glaubitz (2004) the greatest source of concern in the EU is in the political dimension, particularly in relation to human rights issues but notably absent from his chapter was any consideration of an economic threat. In the same volume, Brian Hook (2004: 145-7) found that British ‘China threat’ perspectives were, up until 1997, confined to future treatment of Hong Kong. Emergent concerns thereafter were related to human rights and commercial concerns, but these were limited and not associated with China’s rise as a threat to the current international order. Jean-Pierre Cabestan (2011: 87) claimed that “the political elite, the think tanks, the media and the public opinion are all more critical of China since this country’s authoritarian rise has become more obvious and dramatic”. Yet he conceded that these concerns were not focussed on China’s rise *per se*, but rather its authoritarian government (Cabestan, 2011: 89).

The reality is that most scholarship on EU-China relations focusses on the EU-level policy to encapsulate the state of play in the development of broad relations, thus there is a wide consensus on the existence of EU foreign policies towards China. More often than not, there are nods to the continued importance of Member States, but space limitations and/or a pre-determined scope curtail substantive analysis of their input. Over the past decade or so, scholars have increasingly adopted the EFP approach of treating the EU as an international actor (Griese, 2006; Callahan, 2007; Glen and Murgo, 2007; Geeraerts, 2011) and this has been particularly prevalent in studies of the strategic partnership (Casarini, 2006; Scott, D., 2007; Smith, MH and Xie, 2010). The ‘Normative power Europe’ concept has been utilised by some scholars, even if they are somewhat critical of the effectiveness of the policies developed (Mattlin, 2012). Yet few of these approaches incorporate extensive decision-making analysis and consequently do not engage with questions regarding the importance of perceptions at this level. Cognitive FPA approaches have so far been essentially non-existent in the EU-China

literature, although the normative/civilian/ethical power Europe models have some parallels with societal FPA approaches.

The increasing importance of the EU as an international actor has had an unintended side-effect: Member State relations with China now receive less attention, with the notable exceptions of British (de Burgh, 2005; Eisel, 2007; Brown, K, 2011), French (Wellons, 1994, Wong 2006) and German relations with China (Möller, 1996, 1998) or combinations thereof (Weske, 2007), though these analyses inevitably reference the EU context. Yet the lack of extensive studies is somewhat surprising given the close political relationship between France and China (Wong, 2006: 59), and the tendency for the UK to prioritise “its bilateral relationship with China over European channels” (Fox and Godement, 2009: 25). This trend simply reflects the growing importance of the EU as a vehicle for Member States’ preferences towards China.

Although the output of EU think-tanks is taken up in the next chapter, there is one standout contribution which deserves consideration here in part because it forms an important part of my analysis. This is John Fox and François Godement’s (2009) *A Power Audit of EU-China Relations*, from the European Council on Foreign Relations. This is uniquely interesting due to its categorisation of Member States’ China policies. Their central thesis was that the creation of an EU policy towards China has been complicated by the diverging approaches of the EU Member States in response to China’s rise. Consequently, they categorise the Member States into four groups based on their attitude: Assertive Industrialists, Ideological Free-Traders, Accommodating Mercantilists and European Followers (Fox and Godement, 2009: 4-7). The groups are of uneven sizes, differing influence within Europe and fluid rather than fixed. Fox and Godement’s (2009) categories essentially pinpoint the differentiations between Member States in terms of the interpretations of China’s rise which define their preferences for EU-level policies, which make them useful in the context of my analysis.

William Callahan’s (2007) examination of EU-China relations employed an analytical focus which shares similarities with that adopted here. His close reading of both EU and China policy documents led to an argument that the political narrative on the relationship was confined to “a specific narrow range of topics” (Callahan, 2007: 781). These are also, according to Callahan (2007: 790) aspirational in content rather than reflecting the current

state of relationships. Although Callahan incorporated consideration of the output of European think tanks, he did not relate his findings to the wider policy discourse on China in the EU and concentrated heavily on anti-American sentiments in the EU from 2003 onwards. This removes his analysis from the context of the EU's discourse on China's rise which I argue has been shaped by consistently positive interpretations over the timeframe of analysis. Roland Vogt (2009a: 62) briefly discussed "competing narratives" of China's rise within the literature through a simple threat/opportunity dichotomy, rather than examining the presence of these views in policy discourse. These approaches are influenced by discourse-based FPA frameworks, but have not reconciled this with decision-making analysis, missing out on the intersection between the two. Thus, there is room for further study here.

Recent contributions have provided expert analyses of a breadth of issues in the EU-China relationship, particularly David Kerr and Liu Fei's (2007) *The International Politics of EU China Relations* and David Shambaugh et al's (2008) *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, Policies and Prospects*, both of which concluded by looking to the future direction of the bilateral relationships. Edited volumes from Ludlow (2007), Gaens et al (2009), Vogt (2009b) and Men and Balducci (2010) take different perspectives on the development of the strategic partnership and looked to future prospects in light of recent issues and events. There was little consideration of how the preference for a strategic partnership emerged in the first place. Given that these volumes all ponder future relations, there is a parallel with some of the US scholars identified above; although on the European side there is less concern about China's potential to disrupt the current international order. These volumes add to collective knowledge, but leave open the door for further development of FPA/EFP approaches to the study the EU's response to China's rise.

Van der Putten and Chu's (2011a) *China, Europe and International Security* volume brought together European and Chinese scholars to understand the bilateral security relationship and its impact on global security. Ultimately, from the various analyses the editors concluded that while there were greater prospects for cooperation than conflict, the relationship had no "significant effect on international security" yet (van der Putten and Chu, 2011b: 198-200). The consensus appeared to be that the EU's response to China's rise was not driven by security concerns, but the book's scope prevented the authors uncovering what the driving factors actually were. These works examined policy development and provide interesting

insights, but opted not to apply analytical frameworks to explore further the factors driving policy. Due to scope limitations, such volumes tend to steer clear of decision-making processes in any great detail, thus how policy discourse and specific preferences have developed are in turn not featured in their analyses.

Others tend to focus on the historical development of EU-China relations, alongside the continued popularity of economic issues, particularly since this is one of the main areas for cooperation and conflict (see for instance, Heron, 2007; Leal-Arcas, 2009; Kong, 2012). For the most part, these forgo explicit analytical frameworks designed to illuminate factors that shape the EU's foreign policies. Santos Neves and Bridges (2000a) brought together a number of scholars to consider relations with China and the two Special Administrative Regions from both Member State and EU-level perspectives. The conclusion drawn was that policies were primarily driven by economic interests, although the political dimension was particularly important for the likes of the UK (with its connection to Hong Kong) and was generally becoming more salient at the EU level (Santos Neves and Bridges, 2000b). A special edition of *The China Quarterly* in 2002 endeavoured to assess the development of the relationship since 1978, covering a broad range of issues amongst which economic relations (Algieri, 2002) and human rights (Baker, 2002) stood out as the most important. Kay Möller (2002) scrutinised diplomatic relations and mutual strategic perceptions although took a different approach to the one presented here, leaving aside analysis of the factors which shaped these perceptions and their impact on policy preferences. In short, the contributions offer explanations of what happened, although leave open the opportunity for more research into the 'why' behind these outcomes.

The 2008 special issue of *The Current Politics and Economics of Asia* on EU-China relations provided yet more perspectives on recent developments. For example, Nicola Casarini (2008) surveyed the growing importance of EU-China relations for the region, while Benjamin Zyla (2008) examined the EU's engagement of China since the end of the Cold War and Reuben Wong (2008) offered analysis of the development of common economic, diplomatic and human rights policies towards China. Across these two collections, lively and interesting debates on the state of relations were presented, though there was little consideration of the underlying factors which contributed to the way in which the EU has responded to China's rise. The factors they identified as influential – economic interests, competition between

Member States, etc. – were not reconciled through a clear analytical framework. Again, there is space to build upon the existing literature here.

May-Britt Stumbaum (2009) sought to address the deficiencies in other contributions by employing an EFP framework based on the assumption of rational actors seeking to maximise their preferences through particular structural constraints and institutional frameworks. Thus, the “outcome depends on the preferences of the actors and the institutions involved” (Stumbaum, 2009: 18). Stumbaum (2009: 216-7) found that business interests had the greatest impact on the Council’s decision-making process, followed by external actors whilst the national parliaments, media and public had much less impact. Nicola Casarini (2009) provided a more detailed analysis of the economic, technological and political dimensions of the evolving relationship. This represented another step forward in analytical approaches, with the argument that the relationship’s development has comprised “material (realist), idealist (liberal), and ideational (constructivist) elements” (Casarini, 2009: 8) consistent with what we see in most sets of bilateral relations in the international arena. Casarini’s (2009: 9) key insight was that the EU’s foreign policies under the rubric of ‘engagement’ are aimed at ensuring that “Beijing’s expectations concerning its economic development would be as positive as possible and the costs involved in engaging in an aggressive foreign policy prohibitively high”.

However, I am less convinced that soft-balancing against the US was as prominent a factor in the development of the relationship as Casarini (2009: 192) suggested. Although perhaps a factor for some Member States in the logic of a strategic partnership at the time, I will argue in later chapters that the EU’s policy discourse on China has often developed absent of explicit consideration of the US, as highlighted by the arms embargo case. Casarini (2009: 18) explicitly excluded examination of “differences among various European actors” which, I think, is why we arrive at different conclusions on the motivations behind certain policies. The evolution of the EU-China relationship as a form of soft-balancing against the US has been explicitly addressed and rejected in the literature by Terry Narramore (2008) who discounted the idea of an emergent EU-China ‘axis’ on the basis of both sides largely accepting US preponderance.

The range of analyses of EU responses to China’s rise is limited, in stark contrast to the US literature. This arguably reflects the fact that the issue is not as openly debated within the EU

and the general lack of divergent interpretations which stoke the arguments propounded by American policymakers and scholars. Jonathan Holslag (2006: 578) contended that the EU's policies were driven by a desire to "mould China to its own perceived model", but that this project had largely been "a failure". However, Holslag's (2006) aim was to examine the impact of policies, not the underlying motivations. Generally, analyses tend to be introspective, examining the limitations of the EU's ability to engage with China, as highlighted by the likes of Glen and Murgo (2007) who argued that the EU's approach has been guided by economic considerations. There is substantive work on the strategic partnership (e.g. Smith, MH and Xie, 2010), but most analytical contributions tend to be interested in the degree to whether this is truly strategic, rather than the larger issues of what it says about the EU's response to the rise of China.

Consideration of EU-China relations from mainstream IR theories remains limited; in terms of PTT-perspectives, I can only find one contribution which takes the EU seriously. The aversion to applying mainstream IR theories appears to stem from a view that these are fundamentally unsuitable to the case of the EU; since it is not a state, it is problematic to conceptualise within these state-centric frameworks. Yet it is not impossible: Hubert Zimmerman's (2007; 2008) analyses of the EU's negotiations on China's accession to the WTO and the Doha Round apply realist concepts. However, Zimmerman's work offers relatively restricted views of the EU's external relations and gives only superficial insights into the decision-making process, which is arguably one reason why realism has been avoided by other scholars of EU-China relations who tend to engage more with FPA/EFP. Elsewhere, realism has been applied to the EU's international presence more broadly; Barry Posen's (2006) structural realist account of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and Adrian Hyde-Price's (2006; 2008) realist critiques of the 'ethical power Europe' and 'normative power Europe' concepts are prominent, but rare, examples.

The starting assumption amongst realist scholars that states are the predominant actors in international relations and that without statehood the EU cannot have 'real' foreign policies limits its utility for those of us who contend otherwise. Others, such as Karen Smith (2005), are dissatisfied with the debates over what the EU 'is' and have argued that we should pay more attention to what it does in international relations. For Smith (2005: 81), the EU, as with other international actors, is situated "somewhere along a spectrum between two ideal-types of

civilian and military power". There are many contributions to the literature which take seriously the idea of the EU as a unitary actor: Andrew Moravcsik (2009) labelled it a (quiet) superpower with both hard and soft capabilities. Others continue to dispute such characterisations, arguing that the EU should not be considered as such so long as Member States retain sovereignty over foreign and security policies (Foot, 2010: 212-3). However, as I show below, there are PTT scholars who now take the EU seriously as an actor in its own right. Here, I take the EU to be a unitary actor, subscribing to Bretherton and Vogler's (2006: 22) description of it as a "multifaceted actor", as definitions based around types of 'power' are too restrictive. In this view, the Member States are effectively key 'policymakers' even though simultaneously retaining their own independent capacity for action on the global level.

There has been a virtual absence of attempts to apply a PTT framework to EU-China relations. The one exception is Yeşilada et al's (2006) consideration of potential implications of future EU enlargement and its impact on global power transitions; yet their analysis was preoccupied with the future rather than recent history. It would appear that power-transition theorists previously took a dim view of the EU's impact on the international arena, with Organski and Tammen (1996: 341) stating that security questions were "beyond [Europeans'] abilities for the time being". However, PTT's scope was broadened in the 1990s to look beyond the dominant power and its closest competitor to include the power relations between other actors in the system (DiCicco and Levy, 1999: 691). PTT analyses have prioritised states as the key actors, but even this has been relaxed. Kugler et al's (2004: 169) analysis of the impact of the war on Iraq for the international system treated the EU as a unitary actor, in line with "increasingly common practice... [a] united EU is accepted as one of the near absolutes today in world politics". Thus whatever original theoretical barriers in PTT might have prevented consideration of EU-China relations have already been removed by the theory's proponents.

The literature on EU-China relations which advances arguments on the basis of rigorous analytical frameworks is still in development, with recent contributions – namely Stumbaum (2009) and Casarini (2009) – pointing the way ahead. FPA and EFP approaches, while increasing in number, seem to still be outweighed by more general overviews of the state of relations. Even the various, ever-popular models of the EU as an international actor have very rarely made their way into examinations of specific cases and virtually not at all in longitudinal studies. Within EFP, it is possible to conceptualise the EU as an international

actor more readily than classic FPA and yet studies adopting the former remain scarce. As Möller (2007: 181) commented, “explicit attempts to organize research in a theoretical framework remain the exception”; I intend this thesis to be one of the pieces of research going against the trend. By drawing on elements of Stumbaum and Casarini’s work, I contribute to efforts to present systematic analyses. It is possible that the continued uncertainty over what type of international actor the EU is will remain a key obstacle to the development of robust frameworks, but that is not to say that without resolution of this question we cannot move forward.

### ***1.5 The Arms Embargo Debate and US-EU-China Relations***

#### *The Arms Embargo Debate*

The arms embargo debate has been referenced in most work on EU-China and EU-US literature from 2005 onwards. There have been a number of prescriptive arguments which encourage greater transatlantic dialogue on East Asia and for Europe to take a more proactive role in the region (e.g. van der Putten, 2009). In the academic literature on EU-China relations, there are often passing references to the debate with simplified evaluations of the outcome – the EU dropped the idea when the US objected. As I contend in Chapter Five, this position obscures the fact that US opposition was set out in 2004 and yet the EU almost arrived at consensus in 2005 even as US rhetoric intensified. Neither does it account for why the US and the EU ended up so far apart in terms of their preferences on a policy which they imposed at the same time for the same reasons. There are in fact only a few studies which have examined the arms embargo debate closely. For the most part, these are Euro-centric and tend to treat the US as an external actor impacting on the EU’s decision-making process, rather than concentrating on the transatlantic debate itself.

Stumbaum’s (2009) case study of the arms embargo issue in her analysis of EU decision-making towards China examined a wide range of government and societal actors, finding that external actors – namely the US and China – had a significant impact on the EU’s paralysis on the issue, with both attempting to pull the EU in different directions. Stumbaum (2009: 199-200) argued that business interests were important in influencing the UK’s position; the European Parliament had only “symbolic influence” overall, while the media and public

opinion had virtually no impact. What Stumbaum did not investigate was how the policy discourse over China's rise created a permissive environment for the EU to consider lifting the embargo in the first place. The focus on the EU's internal decision-making also draws attention away from the transatlantic debate to some extent. Stumbaum did not link the EU's consideration of the arms embargo into its wider response to China's rise – this is to be expected given the main aims of Stumbaum's project, but leaves room for further research.

Nicola Casarini (2007) argued that the arms embargo's relevance went beyond the EU-China relationship as it took on a transatlantic dimension and emerged as an issue relevant to the whole of East Asia. Although acknowledging that the EU and US have different views of China, Casarini generally concentrated on the strategic/security side rather than broader aspects of the respective relationships. Although the US' opposition is considered, this was mostly attributed to regional security issues rather than considering how this related to the wider context of the US' response to China's rise. Casarini's (2009) assessment essentially refined the arguments from his article, and while set up to examine the perspectives of the various sides in the debate was primarily Euro-centric and, in keeping with the theme of his book, focussed on the technical provisions which regulated EU arms sales to China. The analysis of the US' position was relatively brief and, as with Stumbaum (2009), concentrated on the arguments put forward in opposition to the EU for the most part. For Casarini, the arguments boil down to regional security interests whereas I argue that the arms embargo case provides a window into the wider interpretations of China's rise than has been realised in the literature.

Elsewhere, the arms embargo case has been employed to provide insights into a variety of issues in EU foreign policy (EUFP) and relations with the wider world, highlighting that the issue is crucial not just in the context of EU-China or even EU-US-China relations, but relates to wider concepts of the EU's identity, values and role in the world. Some have focussed on how the arms embargo issue presented (and continues to present) problems for the development of the EU as a security/strategic actor (Kreutz, 2004) or its strategic partnership with China (Men, 2007). Umbach (2004: 50) suggested that the EU needed to "establish clear rules and criteria for all future sales of military equipment and... the transfer of dual-use technologies" as well as a transatlantic strategy for dealing with "new and global security challenges", preferably via dialogue mechanisms. Kayte Rath (2006) considered the impact of

the issue on the concept of the UK government's ethical foreign policy. Pascal Vennesson (2007) argued that the proposal was intended to send a positive signal to China, but the symbolic significance for the US varied and raised concerns, although did not link their significance to the wider divergences in interpretations of China's rise. Mykal (2009) suggested that unlike the US and Japan attempting to uphold unilateral world order, the EU's proposal was part of a strategy to balance against this and develop a multilateral world order.

Little academic analysis of the US' role in the debate has been conducted to date, which I contend is a significant oversight given that the major debate was not within the EU but across the Atlantic. Some American scholars such as David Shambaugh (2005a) and Bates Gill (2010) have produced work which reveals more about the American perspective than their European counterparts, but do not go as far as to explain what caused divergence in policy preferences in the first instance, or why the US' initial efforts to influence the EU's preferences were unsuccessful. Another feature of their work is that there seems to be an implicit acceptance that the US was 'in the right'. Indeed, in one discussion paper Shambaugh (2005a) explicitly argued for the US' position. What I hope to present in this research is a more detached analysis of both sides. For a paper on US-China strategic considerations and the role of European soft power, Sebastian Bersick (2006) conducted interviews with some US policy officials in 2005 in which the issue came up, but there is not much detail on the motivational factors, just restatements of the US' position.

I contend that a systematic analysis of US preferences and how these were shaped by interpretations of China's rise is necessary to produce a better understanding of what the arms embargo debate tells us about the US reaction to China's rise. For instance, in an examination of Western policies on China's human rights record, Randall Peerenboom (2005: 158) argued that the US' response to the EU's proposal was part of a wider containment strategy and that human rights was used as an "excuse" by some to justify the continuation of arms embargoes. Guo Xiaobin (2007: 191) depicted President Bush as "resigned" to the EU's decision and it was Congress that was opposed. Ross et al (2010c: 288) concluded that "US security interests in East Asia required the European states to change their China policies" but did not explain why there was a transatlantic debate lasting over a year. In stark contrast to Mykal's (2009) 'balancing' claim (above), Zhu Feng (2008: 43) attributed EU "reluctance" to lift the arms embargo as evidence of bandwagoning with US hegemony and pressure from the latter

resulting in accommodation of its interests. This account completely disregarded the actual dynamics of the transatlantic debate in 2004-5. It is illogical in this specific case that the EU was simultaneously balancing against and bandwagoning with US hegemony<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the various perspectives employed in the literature, there is a notable pattern that they have discussed the origins of the embargo policies with reference to the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989 and then taken 2003/4 as their starting point for the analysis of the debate itself. The arms embargo case offers a significant opportunity to understand the substantive similarities and differences between interpretations of China salient within the US and the EU and why these came to be. By exploring how the different domestic political discourses over China's rise shaped preferences on the embargoes, I am able to make a contribution to the literature by exploring the case in a new light. The other main contribution is a more systematic exploration of the US' preferences and input to the debate than has previously been advanced.

### *US-EU-China Relations*

There are few studies of US-EU-China or even of US- and EU-China relations, which is perhaps surprising, since it has “emerged as one of the most important strategic trilateral relationships in the world” in the early twenty-first century (Gill, 2010: 259). The lack of such studies is arguably responsible for limitations in accounts of the arms embargo debate. Ross et al's (2010a) edited volume presented wide-ranging analyses of important issues and dynamics within the relationships. The starting position was that the three powers were all interested in “preserving aspects of the contemporary international order” but observed that there was “simultaneously lack of consensus” on certain components of this (Ross et al, 2010b: 1). Within this volume, Foot (2010) argued that the US and EU differ in their approaches to China because they are unequal powers with different attitudes towards international relations. I contend that this is not the full story as it does not account for how behaviour has been shaped by the debates (or lack thereof) within the policymaking processes, thus does not encapsulate shifts in the individual behaviours of the two powers.

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<sup>3</sup> In this sense, I am referring specifically to what the EU's consideration of lifting the arms embargo entails, while acknowledging that in the broader context of EU-US relations, simultaneous balancing/bandwagoning is indeed possible. An interesting analysis of the EU's management of US power by Michael H Smith (2005: 131) evinces a number of “co-existing tendencies”, including positive reactions to US demands (reflex) whilst opposing other demands/actions and distancing the EU from certain policies (resistance).

Foot (2010: 212) also claimed that the US and EU hold “differing conceptions of world order”, which might cause problems for categorising both as status-quo oriented. Wong (2009) also indicated that the EU and China were both challengers to the US which was preoccupied with maintaining its position. Yet Foot (2010: 221) acknowledged that both want to see China integrate with the established order; what becomes clear is that it is not so much that they disagree on the international order itself, but how to behave within it. As the editors noted in their final analysis, the EU seeks to “work within the current international order to establish multilateral mechanisms that can enhance cooperation and integration” (Ross et al, 2010c: 283). Their assessment did not cast China as a dissatisfied, revisionist power in the sense that its preference is for multipolarity over unipolarity but “no longer rejects the international order” (Ross et al, 2010c: 282, 286). The book argued that all three powers will be central to the future of international order, but since it was not the intention to systematically compare the evolution of US- and EU-China relations, it leaves a gap in our knowledge over how the established powers have responded to China’s rise.

David Shambaugh’s (2002) short paper on US and EU approaches to China largely concentrated on identifying points of divergence and convergence in policies and objectives, finding more of the latter. Shambaugh (2002: 1) stated that some of the differences were “simply reflective of the history, geography, and strategic context that shape the respective approaches and policies”. I do not disagree, but would add that how these play out in policy discourse is the missing aspect of Shambaugh’s (2002) summary. Following a conference on US and EU approaches to China, Shambaugh and Wacker (2008) produced an edited volume of the various contributions to consider how the two sides can advance common agendas. While the various chapters presented considerable insights into specific issues, there was no overarching theoretical framework thus no clear picture emerged as to the factors which contributed to the US and EU responses to the rise of China. Some of the authors touched upon the importance of policy discourse within the US and the EU, but this was not rigorously scrutinised. A chapter by Wong (2009) gave a general overview of European and American perspectives on China, but presented the analysis as though there was just one view in each polity, based on consideration of their self-images.

Contributions to this subfield of the literature have often appeared in journal articles, although none have yet addressed the questions this research asks. Bruce Weinrod (2006: 17) acknowledged “a variety of historical, cultural, geopolitical and economic reasons” shaped approaches to China but concentrated on security issues, attributing behaviour to differing levels of regional security involvement and concluded with a set of policy recommendations. The article (by necessity) skimmed over many important developments and provided no clear answer as to why the divergence between the US and the EU on security issues in relation to China had gone unnoticed (examined in Chapter Five). Griffin and Pantucci (2007) focussed on the transatlantic tensions in the wake of the arms embargo debate but did not analyse their origins in depth, instead concentrated on ways to ameliorate them. Elsewhere, they tend to pop up as single chapters within edited volumes (e.g. Chu and Chen, 2011), precluding systematic analyses of the driving forces behind their policies. Although I do not analyse a ‘triadic’ relationship between these actors or provide a comprehensive account of the differing relationships, my approach does provide insights into why patterns of behaviour in their respective foreign policies have varied with greater clarity than elsewhere in the literature.

There is substantive scope for this thesis to make a contribution to this area of study by presenting a systematic analysis of how interpretations of China’s rise within the US and EU have evolved and how this impacts upon policy discourse and the preferences which policymakers advance in the decision-making process. The arms embargo case is the perfect test for this approach, given that both the US and EU initially imposed similar policies at the same time for the same reason, but their positions diverged over time. Although many have looked at US- and EU-China relations separately, so far there has been little research into their responses to China’s rise in a single project via FPA or EFP. Further, existing studies have not featured substantive analysis of perceptions/interpretations, despite the disparities evident through everyday discourse. My arguments open up a new front in the study of these relations as well as the arms embargo case by utilising an innovative framework which tackles issues previously not addressed in the literature.

### ***1.6 Perceptions and Policymaking***

As I established in the Introduction, I investigate the responses of the established powers to China’s rise by engaging in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). Christopher Hill (2003: xix)

described the FPA project as “an attempt... to draw out deeper meanings than appear on the surface, and to understand action in terms of the way actors constantly redefine themselves through interaction with others”. FPA is a common approach in studies of US- and EU-China relations (e.g. Garrisson, 2005 and Stumbaum, 2009 above). I contribute to this body of research, but rather than focus on one set of bilateral relations, I consider both. My approach has been influenced by Valerie Hudson’s (2005: 2) assertion that “human decision makers acting singly and in groups are the ground of all that happens in international relations” and that FPA has the capacity to reconnect IR with this ground. I also identify FPA’s stated need for actor-centricity; that is, the assumption that policymakers cannot be treated as “interchangeable generic rational utility maximizers... equivalent to the states that they [serve]” (Hudson, 2007: 6). The tendency to rely on structural, state-centric models – such as PTT – for answers has allowed the logic of these to pervade how we think about and discuss such issues, producing deficient explanations.

The core assertion of FPA is that examining foreign policy at the decision-making level is vital to generating explanations of behaviour at the international level. This analysis attempts to move beyond the restrictions of concentrating on the reactive element of foreign policy in order to look at how policy is influenced by factors endogenous to the decision-making process at specific instances but also across a longer period of time. To develop my approach, I draw on the strengths of various strands of FPA scholarship, incorporating elements of ‘classic’ decision-making analysis and European Foreign Policy (EFP) which developed distinct analytical approaches and tools to gain better understanding of the EU’s unique characteristics.

This thesis concentrates on how the competing interpretations of China’s rise held by policymakers shape the preferences which determine policy responses. The contribution which bears greatest relation to this research is David Shambaugh’s (2005b) article which addressed the concept of the ‘strategic triangle’ of US-EU-China relations – as noted above, one of the few studies in this area. Shambaugh (2005b: 8) argued that the arms embargo debate had revealed the “significantly different prisms through which Europe and the United States view China’s rise” and addressed how these had strained relations within the ‘triangle’. However, the analysis of these ‘prisms’ was brief – due to the publication format – and presented them as though there are single perspectives for each of the US and the EU, rather than considering

competing interpretations within these polities. I go further in terms of the depth of understanding by examining competing perspectives within the two polities to understand how the discursive elements shape the decision-making process. Nevertheless, Shambaugh's article highlighted the utility of understanding how different interpretations of China's rise led to divergent policy preferences between the two sides. Given the insights from this relatively brief article, it is somewhat surprising that no-one, including Shambaugh himself, has applied a similar approach in a larger research project.

A key text which informed the analysis was Jean Garrison's (2005) *Making China Policy: From Nixon to GW Bush*, which was included in the summary of US-China relations literature above and represents a 'classic' FPA approach. Garrison's (2005) analysis attempted a comprehensive analysis of issues and events over the time period, while here only certain events are selected. Although as stated above, I do not contradict Garrison's findings, the differences lie in our analytical approaches and what we are trying to explain. I concentrate on understanding how competing interpretations of China's rise influenced policy responses, whereas Garrison (2005) concentrated on building an explanation of the constraints on actors produced by the decision-making processes. Nevertheless, I consider my analysis to reinforce some of Garrison's (2005) arguments but also expand upon them to examine broader questions about the response of the established power to the rise of a potential challenger.

On the EU side, Stumbaum (2009, mentioned above) studied decision-making in the EU's policies towards China, including the arms embargo. Stumbaum focussed on determining what led to decisions and 'non-decisions' in policymaking, but does not engage with wider questions about how the EU is responding to the rise of China in the international arena. Stumbaum (2009) followed Brian White's (2001) model of tracing the development of EU foreign policies through distinct foreign policy subsystems, thus revealing their utility as a guide to understanding whose preferences mattered in particular cases. This reinforces the applicability of this approach for examining EU foreign policymaking towards China; I also go on to analyse US foreign policy via its subsystems. I also differ from Stumbaum by developing my analysis around policy discourse over China's rise amongst key policymakers rather than a wider range of actors within the EU. This narrower focus permits closer analysis of the evolution of policies within the key policymaking settings.

The tradition of examining perceptions and interpretations is well established in the IR and FPA literature. Robert Jervis' (1976) seminal *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics* essentially laid the groundwork for this area of research. Jervis' (1976: 14-5) central argument was that the differences in policy preferences can be traced to the differences in perceptions of 'reality' held by decision-makers; an argument which is echoed within this research although I do not attempt to determine what constitutes the 'true reality' of China's rise. The assumption here is that how the external environment is perceived is always subjective and dependent on the individual actor; for as Jervis notes, "normal human behaviour often does not fit even a loose definition of reality" (Jervis, 1976: 24). Even realists such as Stephen Walt (1987) and Randall Schweller (2006) have acknowledged the importance of perceptions in their work, although they continue to prioritise power-based explanations of international relations. Herrmann (1986: 843) defined perceptions as interpretations of external reality which guide the thoughts and actions of individuals within foreign policymaking structures; following this, I use the terms 'perception' and 'interpretation' interchangeably as they are generally taken in FPA to be equivalent: Voss and Dorsey (1993: 8) argued that "perception and interpretation are interwoven processes".

Perceptions have often been considered within cognitive FPA approaches, where individual policymakers' views of the world are taken to be of crucial importance to explaining decisions. This has been particularly prominent within the development of political psychology FPA (e.g., Herrmann, 1986, 1988a, 1988b; Hermann and Hermann, 1989; Vertzberger, 1990; Voss and Dorsey, 1993) and continues in more recent work (Castano et al, 2003; Duelfer and Dyson, 2011). This approach incorporates insights from the field of psychology and looks not only at individual decision-makers but also at group decision-making dynamics (Hudson, 2007: 22-3). Besides cognitive FPA models, others have attempted to incorporate perceptions into approaches which could enable explanation of foreign policy behaviour across different states, such as Walter Carlsnaes' (1987) model. Elsewhere, studies of how decision-makers respond to 'threats' in the international arena have commonly focussed on the importance of perceptions (Meyer and Miskimmon, 2009: 625). Works which incorporate perceptions into more general assessments of relations between international actors (e.g. Fernández Sola and Smith, MH, 2009) have also appeared, moving towards reconciliation between FPA and mainstream IR approaches. However, as noted above, there is a gap in the literature on both US- and EU-China relations to be filled by

developing an in-depth analysis of the competing interpretations of China's rise and how these have shaped responses.

Moving beyond state-centric analyses of foreign policymaking, I examine how policymakers' preferences are shaped by the various interpretations of China's rise salient within discourse during each case. Not all policymakers are involved in every instance of decision-making, thus I examine the process within policy subsystems to concentrate on those actors whose preferences mattered. Subsystems are "made up of those institutions and actors that are directly involved in the policymaking process in a specialized policy area" (Jenkins-Smith et al, 1991: 852). Hence, subsystems are effectively 'shortcuts' to identifying the relevant processes and actors, meaning that we can identify whose preferences mattered most. The subsystem concept emerged in US public policy scholarship (Jenkins-Smith et al, 1991; Baumgartner and Jones, 1991). However, this has not translated into foreign policy studies, arguably because classic FPA – developed in and for the US – is still widely considered as applicable. I would not disagree that it is applicable to the US, but it is not for the EU. To generate explanations which are comparable across the two, we need a single approach.

EFP is drawn into the analysis here, as scholars working in this field (e.g. White, 2001; Stumbaum, 2009) have utilised the concept of policy subsystems while treating the EU as an international actor in its own right, although the idea has been under-utilised in the literature to date. This emerged as a consequence of dissatisfaction with 'traditional' FPA approaches which, despite their agent-centric analyses, were tied to the concept of foreign policy as the product of the state (see White, 2001: 32). Subsystems have been incorporated into studies of EFP; the existence of an EUFP is commonly accepted to be beyond doubt, but since the EU itself is not a state, a new set of analytical tools are required if understandings are to be generated. As Carlsnaes (2006: 546) noted, "to the extent that the nature of the EU remains conceptually contested, the nature of its foreign policy system – however conceived – will also remain an issue of conceptual contention".

I identify with White (2001) and Stumbaum's (2009) treatment of foreign policies as the product of specific subsystems rather than of the state/polity as a whole. The use of subsystems in the study of EUFP has been relatively rare, considering the potential analytical leverage. To my knowledge, only Stumbaum (2009) has employed them to study EU-China

relations, thus my research provides further support for the utility of subsystems and goes a step further by demonstrating that they can be employed in significantly different polities – the US as the archetypal state actor and the EU as a unique entity. Perceptions/interpretations have been examined in certain parts of the literature, yet commonly without a supporting analytical framework. By drawing on the various strands of FPA and EFP literature – particularly those which incorporate perceptions in the analysis – I offer an explanation of responses to China's rise which have generally been. Following Hudson's (2005) lead, the intention is to reconnect IR to its ground – human policymakers.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

The outline of PTT sets the stage for understanding how it has informed perceptions of China's rise. Although threat interpretations have increased in salience – mostly in the US – there is little evidence to suggest that such logic shapes actual *policies*. PTT creates a framework through which China's rise can – and, according to its proponents, should – be interpreted, as well as expectations for how the dominant powers will respond. The implications of China's rise are contested within the literature, much as they are within policy discourse. The US-China literature has predominantly focussed on the strategic competition between the two whilst PTT has been employed directly by some, although making little headway in terms of developing persuasive explanations for behaviour. No study tackling PTT examined how factors at the decision-making level affected behaviour. My approach draws on decision-making FPA scholarship and the literature on perceptions of China while retaining a focus on the relationship at the international level. Thus, I combine the strengths and insights from different branches of existing work to move the analysis of US-China relations forward, facilitating a contribution to ongoing debates over the importance of perceptions in foreign policy, both at the decision-making and international levels.

The economic relationship and, more recently, the nascent strategic partnership dominate the EU-China literature, with few scholars utilising EFP/FPA approaches to explore the impact of perceptions on the response to China's rise. Accounts of relations are largely based around conceptualisations of power, but there is still no consensus on how China's rise should be analysed or the factors driving the EU's response. Further, there is a lack of reflection on how interpretations of China have contributed to policy debates and subsequently shaped

preferences at key junctures in the relationship. I demonstrate the utility of my analytical approach for the explanation of EU-China relations and address these gaps, presenting a new, systematic account for what has driven the EU's decision-making. I side with the EFP approach of treating the EU as an international actor in its own right, adding to analyses of EU foreign policymaking in the context of its relationship with China.

I engage the ongoing debate over the arms embargo case by shifting perspective from what has come before. The Euro-centric focus of the existing literature leaves room for gaining further insight into what the debate tells us about the divergence in American and European interpretations of China's rise. In Chapter Five, I argue that it is necessary to link in the developments of the interpretations of China's rise within both the US and EU in the intervening fourteen years to fully understand why their preferences diverged and why the debate lasted well over a year. The US-EU-China literature is still thin on the ground, with only small steps towards analytical frameworks suitable for assessing the development of relations within a single project.

## CHAPTER TWO | INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ‘RISE’ OF CHINA

### ***2.1 Introduction***

This chapter queries which interpretations of China’s rise featured in the policy discourse of the US and the EU from 1989 to 2009. What ‘China’s rise’ signifies varies amongst policymakers and shifts over time, in policy discourse it has become a contested notion with significant impact on the evolution of the US and EU’s responses. The review of the perceptions literature in the previous chapter illustrated that although their importance has been acknowledged, their potential analytical leverage has not been fully recognised in studies of responses to China’s rise. Generalised ‘threat’ versus ‘non-threat’ characterisations are oversimplified as they do not specify what aspects of China’s rise are threatening (or not).

Through examination of patterns within the discourses in both the US and EU, I isolate six overarching interpretations relating to specific areas of China’s rise and its impact. Perceptions of China in military (threat versus non-threat), economic (threat versus opportunity), normative (threat) and political (opportunity) terms have attracted the most attention in the policy discourse and academic literature, warranting consideration here. These are analytically useful as they contextualise the arguments within the discourse around key junctures in the US- and EU-China relationships and indicate which factors shaped decision-makers’ preferences. Incorporating evidence from the debates in the policy community, I show that there are real differences of opinion over China’s rise, influencing the responses of the two established powers since the end of the Cold War. These insights ‘ready the ground’ for the analysis in the subsequent empirical chapters by unpacking the qualities of the different interpretations of China that are identified in the analysis of US and EU policy discourse.

The argument that there are various interpretations of the data relating to China’s rise poses a problem for a key power-transition theory (PTT) assumption that policymakers operate in environments of complete information and can be expected to act on the basis of a clear, single understanding of the external situation. I argue that attempting to establish an ‘objective’ view of the ‘reality’ of China’s rise is redundant as it is clear that policymakers react to how they perceive their external environment. Perceptions are the basis of their interaction with the external environment and their actions in response change that

environment. As such, I do not use the term ‘misperception’, as the perception is correct to those who hold it. PTT has scope for exploring differences at the decision-making level. Policymakers utilise evidence in different ways to support their arguments and/or discredit rival interpretations. The salience of particular interpretations within discourse varies over time. Threat perspectives have been virtually absent from EU discourse, thus the reader will note that certain sections are predominantly US-centric. There are some nuances within the interpretation categories: for instance, although actors in both the US and EU promulgate views of China as a political opportunity, these interpretations are not identical. This necessitates discussion of the major discrepancies. Although I expand upon this in later chapters, it is worth pointing out that interpretations are not necessarily mutually exclusive: for instance, China might be seen as an economic opportunity but also a military threat. When it comes to the analysis of how they shaped preferences we need to identify which were dominant at that time to understand their impact upon the response.

The following sections take each interpretation and outline its main precepts, bringing in data from a variety of sources<sup>1</sup> to illustrate how these interpretations are justified by their proponents. Policymakers and commentators often utilise information selectively and concentrate on different measures to suit their purposes. The analysis draws in indicators of military and economic power, China’s human rights record and considers certain facets of its foreign policy behaviour. Sections 2.2 to 2.4 examine the ‘threat’ perspectives, divided into military, economic and normative categories. Sections 2.5 through 2.7 examine military ‘non-threat’, economic and political opportunity categories. The final section provides a summary of the chapter’s main findings. We can see that the logic of PTT has influenced the reasoning behind American threat perspectives, particularly in relation to military issues. This tendency has been overlooked by much of the literature examining responses to China’s rise. This has not occurred in the EU; its policymaking community not invoked power-transition concepts, tempering the interpretations of China’s rise.

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<sup>1</sup> See methodology note in Appendix.

## **2.2 Military Threat**

Interpretations of China as a military threat commonly evince power-transition logic. This can be at either the regional or global level; more commonly, the immediate concern relates to the former, yet there are those who suggest that China's trajectory will make it a global military threat and on the fringes there appear to be a few who believe it already is. Linkages are made between the two within the discourse; those who perceive China as a growing threat in the East Asia region have inferred that it intends to (and will) pose a challenge in the wider international system. However, some contend that the threat will probably remain confined to the East Asian region, signalling varied interpretations of the significance of China's military rise. These 'levels' signify differences in the extent of concern harboured by actors, as although the source of the threat is the same – China's expanding military capabilities – the implications inferred from this development will differ. There is also a difference between immediate and future threat perceptions: some are more concerned with what China's power means at present, versus those who are concerned about what it will do when it becomes even more powerful. The latter view has still often created preferences for acting in the present to prevent China from achieving its threat potential.

Connections are often made between China's possible future intentions and military spending patterns and the acquisition of certain capabilities. William Cohen (2007: 683) argued that China was destined to behave as other emerging powers had in the past; specifically, China will "resume its place as East Asia's hegemonic power and extend its influence wherever it can in the rest of the world". Hard power alone is insufficient to confer 'great power' status (Kim, 1998: 6) but some assume that China is boosting its military capability so that it may emerge as a great power regionally, and eventually globally, that would be capable of confronting the US. In this sense, China's rise is understood as inherently threatening. Further, aspects of China's foreign policy have led some to conclude it holds revisionist, if not outright hostile, intentions prompting arguments that China must be contained and that the US needs to maintain its military advantage.

Studies of China's rise proliferated in the early 1990s, prompting debates between whether it was likely to increase tensions or even conflict (Roy, 1996). Concerns were compounded by the strategic dynamics of East Asia which Aaron Friedberg (1993/94) described as "ripe for

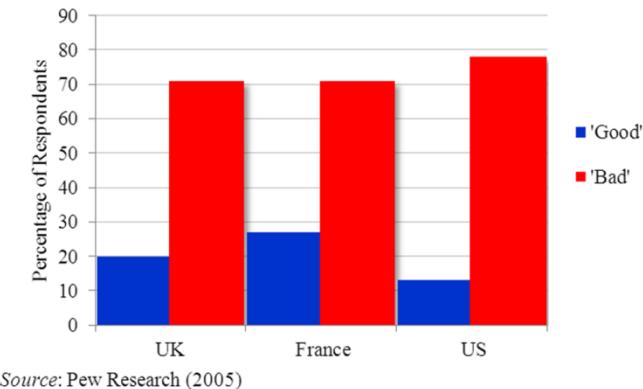
rivalry". China's post-Cold War foreign policy towards other Asian states has to some extent been guided by a desire to prevent the formation of an alliance which may threaten its interests (Breslin, 2009: 819). The US' regional presence and links with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan has fostered wariness amongst Chinese policymakers, who at times view the US as attempting to contain China's rise (Yong, 2001: 353). This has perpetuated something of a vicious circle, whereby concerns about US regional presence are voiced some sections of China's policy community; this then reinforces interpretations amongst some in the US that China ultimately seeks regional – and possibly global – hegemony. China's policies and actions toward Taiwan have done nothing to dispel 'China threat' interpretations, which the regime has consistently attempted to counter since the mid-1990s (Yong, 2006: 186). Such perspectives are damaging to China's attempts to gain acceptance in the international arena, yet the domestic importance of Taiwan has resulted in China reiterating its resolve to use force if necessary to prevent Taiwan declaring independence (Goldstein, 2007: 671).

PTT logic has shaped interpretations of China's rise held by policymakers, academics, analysts, and the media. The range of materials on China's rise is effectively immeasurable in terms of quantity; however a comprehensive study as well as being impractical is unnecessary. It is enough to show that there are prominent accounts which have evinced interpretations of China as a military threat. This encapsulates the concept of China as a military threat, but is more precise as it conceptualises the level at which China constitutes a threat. Public opinion data shows that concerns over China's rise as a military power are not just confined to the US. The Pew Research Global Attitudes Project<sup>2</sup> revealed that on the possibility of China becoming more militarily powerful than the US, most respondents thought this would be a negative development (Figure 2.1). In the case of the European countries, this is intriguing as military threat interpretations have not gained traction within EU-level policy discourse.

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<sup>2</sup> Publicly available data on questions relating to opinions on China is only available from 2005 onwards. Further, there were no EU-wide figures, thus I concentrate on British and French attitudes.

**Figure 2.1 - Views on China Becoming as Militarily Powerful as the US, 2005**



The policy discourse in the US is littered with examples of interpretations of China posing a military threat, based on the expectation that its rise will bring it into direct confrontation with the dominant power. Since the mid-1990s, media and public commentators have propagated such threat perspectives; Charles Krauthammer's essay 'Why We Must Contain China' in *Time* magazine is a case in point and was widely referenced in China debates thereafter. Krauthammer's (1995) arguments of a growing China threat invoked power-transition logic, claiming it was "an old-style dictatorship, not on a messianic mission, just out for power", comparing it to "late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, a country growing too big and too strong for the continent it finds itself on". Pointing to the lessons of history of rising powers ending in world wars, Krauthammer (1995) warned that "we cannot let that happen with the emerging giant of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" and argued for containment strategy.

This article was followed by books which expounded threat perspectives by utilising power-transition concepts. Gary Schmitt (2009: ix) of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) noted that "history suggests rapidly rising powers often bring uncertainty, instability and competition with them as they begin to assert themselves on the international scene", which has underpinned the concerns over China's rise. Bernstein and Munro's (1997: 24-6) *The Coming Conflict with China* flagged China's expanding military capabilities as indicative of aggressive intentions both regionally and globally. They argued that American policy, previously mixed and ambiguous, should be oriented to contain China's rise (Bernstein and Munro, 1997: 31). Edward Timperlake and William Triplett (1998: 1) accused the Clinton administration of turning "a deliberate blind eye to... threats to our national security" to gain campaign contributions from China. In their follow-up work, *Red Dragon Rising: Communist China's*

*Military Threat to America*, they critiqued the administration's policies and warned that the "democratic countries are about to be unpleasantly surprised by the emergence of a hostile, expansionist, nondemocratic superpower armed with the most modern weapons... and it will be our fault" (Timperlake and Triplett, 1999: 12).

*Washington Times* writer Bill Gertz's (2002:2) book *The China Threat* described a new Cold War waged by China and insisted that the US needed to "maintain and build up its military power" to counter the ever-increasing threat, pointing to the success of such a strategy in the case of the USSR. Gertz (2002: 199) claimed that China sought to undermine the US "around the world", establish itself as the "dominant international political and military power"; this threat was so serious that it risked the US' "very national existence". Peter Navarro (2008: xv) contended that China's "extremely rapid and often chaotic industrialization" placed it "on a collision course with the rest of the world". Navarro (2008) argued that the US must confront China's attempt to challenge the status quo and gain world dominance. China's hostile intentions, Navarro (2008: 149-50) claimed, were evident from its massive military-build up. Navarro and Autry (2011: 1) claimed 'death by China' was a "very real risk... as the world's most populous nation and soon-to-be largest economy is rapidly turning into the planet's most efficient assassin". Their arguments covered imports of unsafe toys to developing capabilities to "drop virtually untrackable nuclear bombs from space" (Navarro and Autry, 2011: 1, 6). The authors associated China's development of a blue-water navy with hostile intentions (Navarro and Autry, 2011: 111-2) and repeatedly warned that China's rise comes at the expense of the US and more needed to be done to counter the growing threat.

Constantine Menges (2005: xvi) of the Hudson Institute claimed that "[a]n increasingly assertive and wealthy Communist regime in China intends to dominate the nine-tenths of Asia Beijing has historically claimed as its sphere of influence, then use that as a springboard to global dominance". Menges (2005: xxi) cautioned that "[h]istory suggests that a nuclear-armed Communist regime in China is likely to be more aggressive and assertive as its armed might grows to match its ever increasing economic strength". Menges (2005: 472-3) was optimistic that the US could remain preponderant through stringent restrictions on the volume of Chinese imports, the development of a missile defence system and financial assistance for pro-democracy groups. Harsh Pant (2011:2) asserted that China has engaged in expansionist behaviour and harboured revisionist intentions. Pant (2011: 2-3) claimed that "all great powers

seek hegemony and China is no different”, and since US policymakers remain committed to retaining primacy “will do their best to prevent the emergence of China as a great power”.

Under PTT, the expansion of the rising power’s military is considered indicative of preparing for the (effectively inevitable) conflict with the status quo power (Lemke and Werner, 1996). Accounts emphasising China’s threat potential often focussed on spending trends, acquisition of power-projection capabilities, and China’s lack of transparency over what it has, how much it spending, and why it is doing so. At the publication of the DoD’s 2005 China military power report, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld asked “since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: Why this growing investment? Why these continuing large and expanding arms purchases? Why these continuing robust deployments?” (cited by Gertz, 2005a). Rumsfeld’s questions reflect concerns that China’s military buildup is designed to allow it to confront the US. Representative Randy Forbes<sup>3</sup> (2008) has argued that cases of Chinese espionage would not only allow China to “be an equal” to the US, “but also to possess a dangerous set of tools that – given the right circumstances – pose a significant threat”. Forbes cited budget increases, cyber warfare and blue-water navy as reasons for reassessments of policy.

Capabilities and spending are two crucial components for determining the relative power distribution. While expenditure is a measure of input, its trends can signify shifts in priorities and capabilities (Sköns and Stålenheim 2008: 242). Military expenditure can “reveal much about a country’s strategic intentions and future military plans”, thus serving “as a gauge of a nation’s defence commitment and resolve, or its potential to threaten others” (Bitzinger, 2003: 164). Despite China’s relatively low starting-point, spending has been a key area of concern due to the pattern of double-digit increases year-on-year. It is widely accepted that China consistently publishes figures which fall well short of the true total which creates concern on the basis that a benign power would have no need for secrecy – thereby fuelling ‘uncertainty of intentions’. China’s official figures routinely omit “defence investment, weapon and equipment production or funds for weapons purchased abroad” (Stålenheim et al, 2006: 310-311) which leaves open the possibility of considerable variations in estimates.

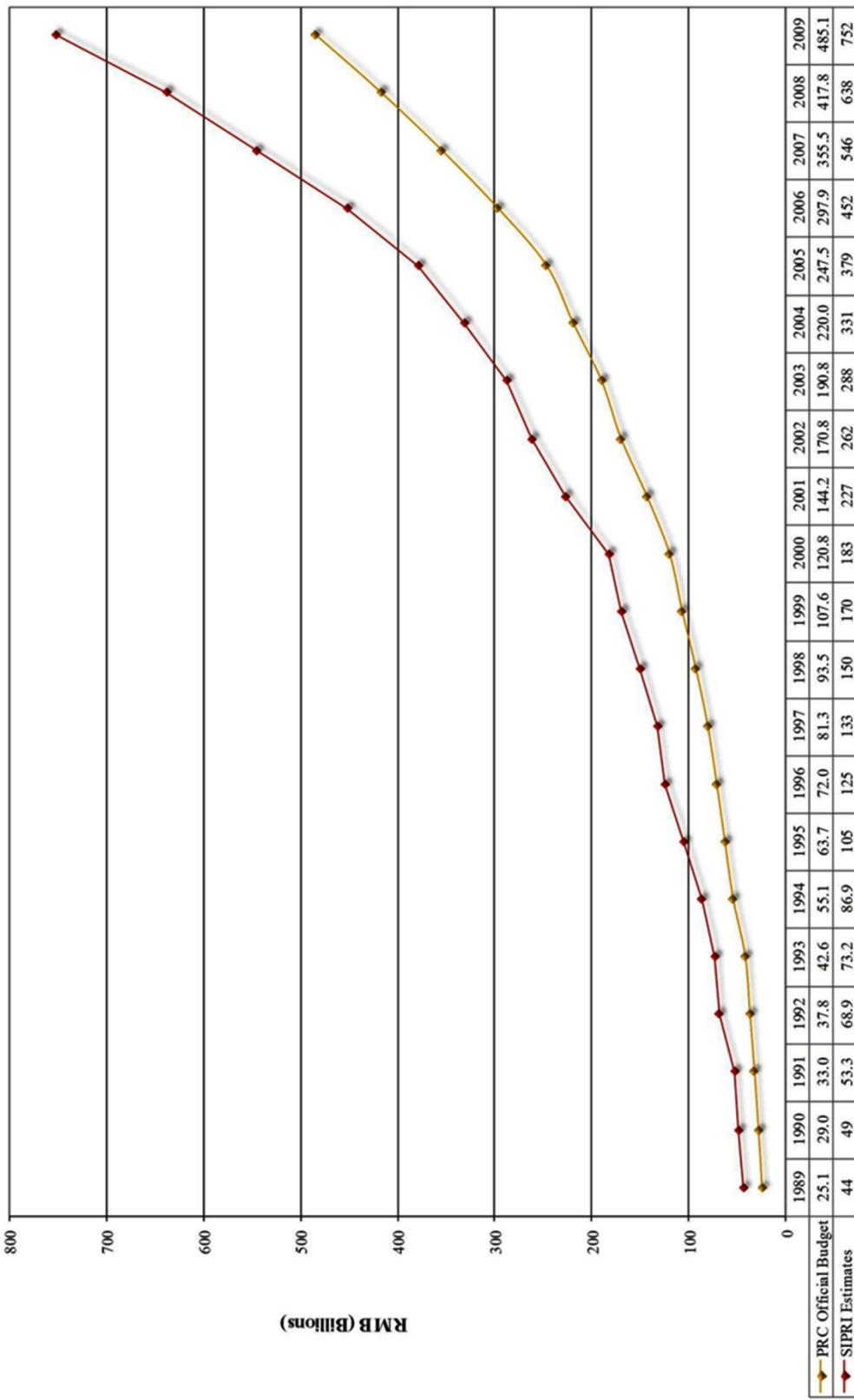
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<sup>3</sup> R-VA.

Figure 2.2 compares China's official budget releases with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) estimates, and Figure 2.3 is taken from the US Department of Defense's (2009) China military power report. These reveal significant discrepancies between China's declared spending and third-party estimates. Thus the rapid increases in spending and the high-end estimates have contributed to a growing concern that China presents a military threat to the US. For instance, following China's 2007 military budget announcement and in light of its anti-satellite missile test in January that year, Tkacik (2007a) claimed that its intention was "to challenge the US as a military superpower" and questioned the purpose behind "assembling a military machine worthy of a superpower other than to have the strength to challenge the United States' strategic position in Asia".

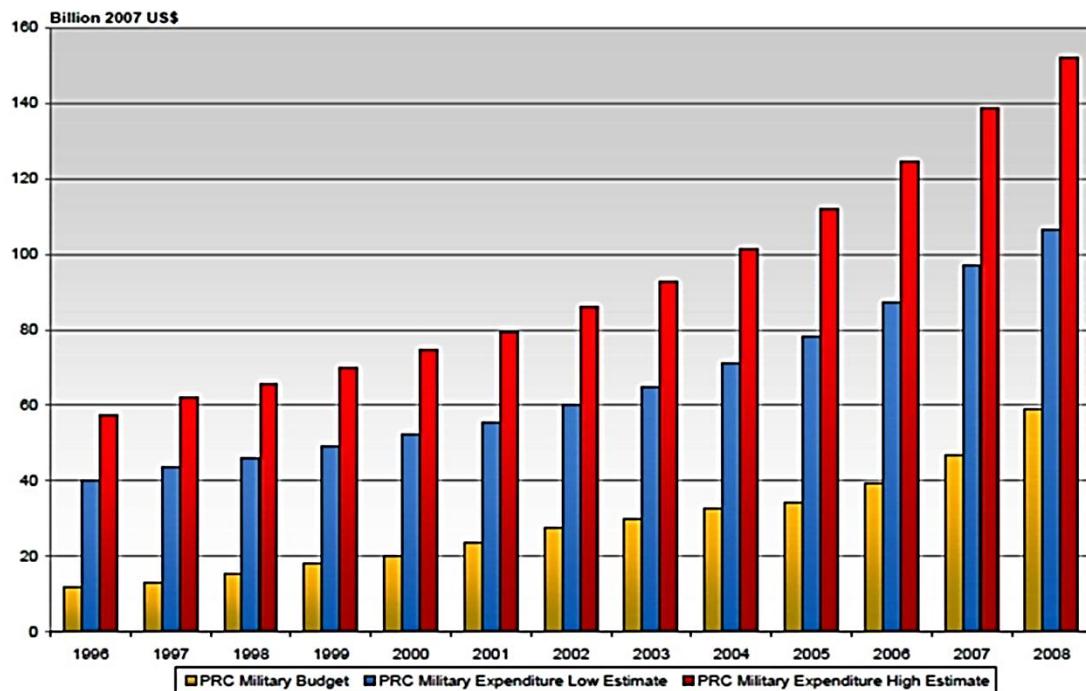
In relation to capabilities, US commentators emphasise China's capabilities – current and in development – with a predisposition to interpret this as directed at them. The US' 2009 report drew attention to the modernisation of nuclear strike capabilities with the introduction of mobile land-based intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles capable of reaching the US (DoD, 2009: vii). The report also noted China's increasing focus on developing "electronic warfare, computer network operations, and kinetic strikes [that] disrupt battlefield network information systems" to "support... warfighting and power projection capabilities" (DoD, 2009: 14). While the US' strategic forces vastly outnumber China's, the shift since 2000 from a vulnerable strategic force to a "more survivable and flexible strategic nuclear force" has produced a "credible sea-based deterrent" and enhances China's capacity to inflict "significant damage" on the US (DoD, 2009: vii).

**Figure 2.2 - PRC Defence Expenditure (RMB Billions, current prices); 1989-2009**



Sources: SIPRI (2010); SCIO (2009); China Daily (2009b)

**Figure 2.3 - US Estimates of China's Military Expenditure, 1996-2008**



Source: Department of Defense (2009)

Even if China is not nearing parity with the US, certain developments flagged by threat-perspective proponents clearly indicate that there is substantive concern about China's capabilities and what these mean for its future intentions. Richard Fisher of the International Assessment and Strategy Center stated that the "post-Cold War peace is over... we are now in an arms race with a new superpower whose goal is contain and overtake" the US (cited by Gertz, 2005b). China's ability to implement asymmetrical warfare tactics was highlighted in January 2007 with its launch of an anti-satellite missile (ASAT)<sup>4</sup>. China's development of such capabilities and tactics fuelled questions over its intentions in the US, as it is the only realistic target of these developments.

Prospects for a Chinese blue-water navy are also highlighted, as this would allow the PLA Navy (PLAN) to operate well beyond China's shores, creating the potential for offensive operations. PLA and PLAN doctrines have been constructed around hypothetical conflict with the US, with emphasis on asymmetric tactics that would be necessary to offset technological

<sup>4</sup> The US' response is examined in Chapter Three.

superiority (Goldstein and Murray, 2004: 187-188). This in itself has been sufficient to fuel threat-perspectives within the US. Although the PLAN lacks an aircraft carrier – generally considered a mainstay of power projection (You and You, 1991: 145) – China’s military and political leaders have held extensive discussions over the need for such a capability, fuelling much speculation among observers (Storey and You, 2004: 125-126). China had already purchased one ship which could be refurbished (DoD, 2009: 40)<sup>5</sup> and several out-of-commission carriers to be examined by naval engineers to develop understanding of their construction, possibly to facilitate production of its own ‘blueprint’ (Storey and You, 2004: 128). Acquisition of – even plans to acquire – such capabilities raised concerns amongst some in the US, since an aircraft carrier is arguably surplus to defensive requirements or the protection of shipping lanes (Goldstein, 2007: 652).

US analyses of China’s military clearly indicate persistent concern that China is developing capabilities specifically designed to enable it to fight the US, fuelling the ‘threat’ narrative. I could find no evidence of military threat perspectives in the work of major think tanks or European-based analysts that suggest China’s rise should be interpreted in such a way. Even some European books with seemingly provocative titles – e.g. James Kynge’s (2006) *When China Shakes the World* – contain little evidence of threat interpretations. To the extent that China’s regional or global military threats ever come up in media reports in the UK or France<sup>6</sup> the general pattern was for discussion of threats perceived by the US (and occasionally other Asian states such as Japan), rather than indicating that there was a threat perception within the EU. As with the US, the discourse within the decision-making environment in the EU is effectively a microcosm of the wider public policy discourse.

Considerable interest in China’s military expansion has emerged in policy discourse, depicting spending patterns and capability procurement as inherently directed at the US and its interests in the region and globally. Moreover, these interpretations commonly articulate such developments in terms of power-transition logic, whereby the purpose behind the development is to challenge the US’ dominance regionally and ultimately globally. Combined with pessimistic interpretations over China’s intentions (although some claim ‘uncertainty’ or

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<sup>5</sup> In 2011 – two years after the timeframe of analysis’ cut-off date – China did indeed initiate tests with this ship. It will take some time (measured in years) before the PLAN is able to fully integrate this with its existing forces.

<sup>6</sup> The two Member States whose media reports I use throughout the thesis.

‘realistic’), the evidence can be harnessed to support such arguments. As subsequent chapters show, this interpretation is a perennial feature of US policy discourse, perpetuated by a vocal minority of actors. This has also overlapped into the interpretations of China in other dimensions and to some extent is treated as overriding other issues because of the negative implications anticipated. That is, economic and political opportunities drop out for proponents of the military threat perspective because of the danger posed to the US’ security. In the EU, I find no evidence that military threat interpretations have entered the discourse, much less shaped policy. As such, when security-related issues have emerged, the salience of these opportunity interpretations has prevailed unchallenged.

### ***2.3 Military Non-Threat***

Despite the seeming prominence of threat interpretations of China’s rise, there are interpretations of its rise that China’s rise does not inherently pose a military threat. This pertains not only to the immediate scenario, but some claim that it will remain so in the future. On relevant issues, this is the dominant interpretation within the EU. Arguments have been advanced that China is more likely to favour stability in the regional and international systems precisely because its main objectives are delivering economic prosperity and maintain the government’s position in power – which are widely understood stood to be in interconnected: one requires the other. Thus China will continue to support the status quo arrangements to continue along its developmental path. This interpretive framework dismisses concerns over China’s military build-up by highlighting the relative power advantage the US continues to enjoy. Trends in military spending do not cause alarm as they are seen as a by-product of a rapidly expanding economy and a natural pattern of behaviour for a rising power.

Proponents of non-threat interpretations – particularly academics – claim that fears of power-transitions are misplaced due to a failure to appreciate the current international context. Rosecrance (2006: 35) argued that international conditions in the post-Cold War world did not look like those of 1914; consequently China would not “disrupt essential economic arrangements” central to its development. Zhu Feng (2008: 53) saw the unipolar configuration as a systemic constraint which limited opportunities to challenge the US. Combined with China’s domestic political and economic change, hard-balancing behaviour would be unlikely to arise. Babones (2011: 88) concluded that China’s rise does not threaten US hegemony or

the current international order due to extensive domestic challenges, cautioning against “hype and panic” and urging recognition of China as a “large but ordinary country”.

Avery Goldstein’s (1997/8: 73) examination of the gap between US interpretations and the reality of China’s military power chastised alarmist accounts, warning that these had the potential to create “a self-fulfilling prophecy of rivalry”. Goldstein (2005) rejected comparisons between China and Nazi Germany, arguing that fears of an impending power-transition were misplaced. Acknowledging that the ideas of PTT had infiltrated that US policy debates Goldstein (2007: 640-1) compared PTT with institutionalist theories to consider China’s likely behaviour as it continued to rise, finding that overall there was mixed evidence as to whether either of these had predictive utility. Fravel (2010) pointed out that PTT missed the fact that the purported benefits of aggressive behaviour – specifically territorial expansion in Asia – may be outweighed by costs. Fravel (2010) argued that China’s rise was more likely to be peaceful and would not pose a regional military threat.

Non-threat perspectives assume that China’s rise will lead it to integrate with – rather than attempt to overturn – the established system, (Ikenberry, 2008), leading its proponents to argue that engagement is the appropriate response. Due to its rapidity, China’s rise may cause instability irrespective of intentions, thus Rex Li (1999) contended that the best way to ensure stability was for other powers to encourage its integration with the international community. Some power-transition theorists (e.g. Tammen et al, 2000) have argued that engagement is necessary so as to avoid their theory’s expectations, but there is evidence from the discourse to suggest that there is a sincere normative value attached to this approach to international relations, especially from EU policymakers. In an interview in 2005, EU High Representative Javier Solana argued “throughout history, new arrivals or new competitors have often been regarded as threats, but the reality is that a stronger and more confident China is good for the world” (cited by Xinhua, 2005a). For Solana, engagement was justified as “our goals [are] converging ever more closely, it makes sense to work together ever more closely” (cited by Xinhua, 2005a).

There are few – if any – US policymakers willing to declare that China will indefinitely remain unthreatening. However, there is support for arguments that the level of threat has been exaggerated. Analysts frequently point to the substantial relative power gap between the US

and China when it comes to military capabilities and readiness (Bajoria, 2009) and/or argue that there is a shared interest between the two for regional and global stability which reduces the prospects for confrontation (Shambaugh, 2008; Cossa, 2009). There have been conscious efforts to disregard inferences that China's military expansion equates to hostile intentions. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell contended in 2005 that "threat comes from the capability to execute... [military] plans and the intention to do so... my analysis in the last four years is that China has no such intention. China wishes to live in peace with its neighbors and the US" (cited by Xinhua, 2005b).

Richard Bush of the Brookings Institution observed that "there's no question that China is building up its capabilities, but China has displayed no intentions of using those capabilities" against the US (cited by Pan, 2006a). The Cato Institute's Ted Carpenter contended that there was a lack of "definite evidence that their military ambitions go substantively beyond Taiwan" (cited by Pan, 2006a). Despite the DoD's reports often being seized upon by threat proponents to support their claims, others have noted that the assessments also highlight China's weaknesses and some positive steps, such as participation in joint exercises with the US and contributions to international peacekeeping missions (Pincus, 2008). Ivan Eland (2003: 12) of the Cato Institute suggested that the US "should accept that [China], like other great powers, will want more influence over its region. If kept within bounds, that increased sphere of influence should not threaten vital US interests".

In the EU, military non-threat interpretations of China are effectively undisputed. The EU is not directly involved in East Asia's regional security and is not a global security actor – although the powerful Member States arguably could fulfil such roles. Examining European rhetoric suggests that the non-threat interpretation is not just a consequence of the absence of power: there is a genuine interpretation of China's rise as a positive development. Some have argued that China's rise will enhance the prospects for greater multilateral coordination and cooperation on the world stage by the system's great powers. For Charles Grant (2008), the EU's role in the promotion of multilateralism is crucial because it is the only "big power" which can be relied upon to do so. The notion of closer EU-China relations was a particularly attractive notion around 2003 when EU Member States such as France and Germany openly questioned US unilateralism. In turn, the non-threat interpretation has been reinforced by China's stance that it regards the EU as a possible pole in a multipolar world order to mitigate

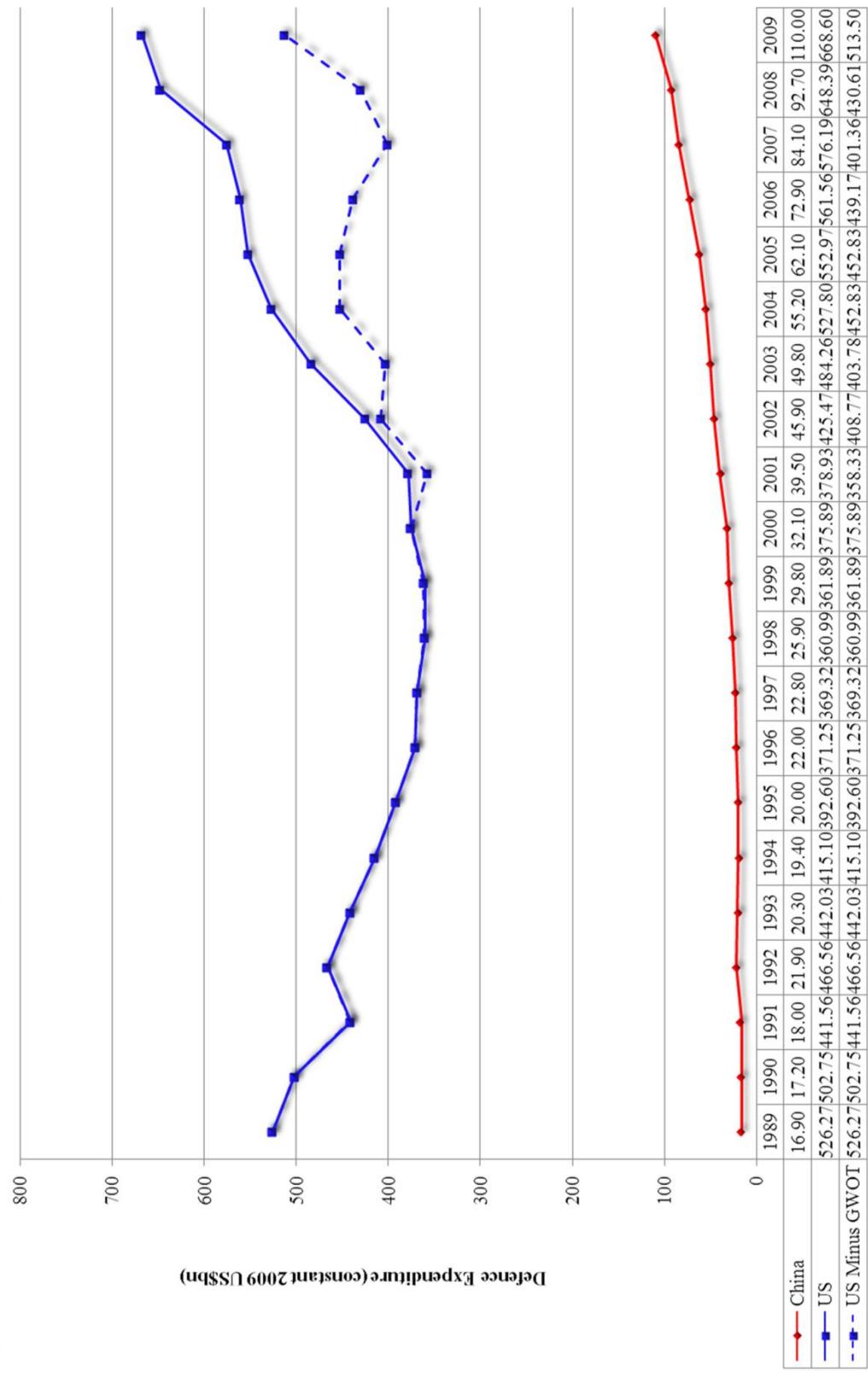
the presently unbalanced unipolar configuration (Holstag, 2011: 295). The UN also features in China's vision of a 'democratised' international order which protects the interests of a number of states rather than just the dominant power (Foot, 2006: 91).

Whereas threat proponents focus on China's military expansion in absolute terms, data on relative trends highlights the US' continued predominance. Figure 2.4 illustrates trends in China's military expenditure compared to the US<sup>7</sup>. Since expenditure is a measure of input rather than capability, that China has increased its spending faster than the US does not immediately signal a shift in relative power. The US had been spending more on a vastly qualitatively superior force for decades; thus even though China has modestly reduced the spending disparity the US' dominance in spending allows it to increase the gap in capabilities even if at a reduced rate. The EU's combined defence expenditure dwarfs that of China, yet these resources are being committed independently by Member States and thus compatibility/interoperability remains low. Figure 2.5 shows that France and the UK – the EU's two leading military powers – have already been surpassed by China in spending terms. Yet there has been no emergent threat discourse around China's military expansion within the EU. As resources have not been diverted to the establishment of an EU-level military, it is clear that the Member States do not consider China's rise to constitute a threat to their security or international status.

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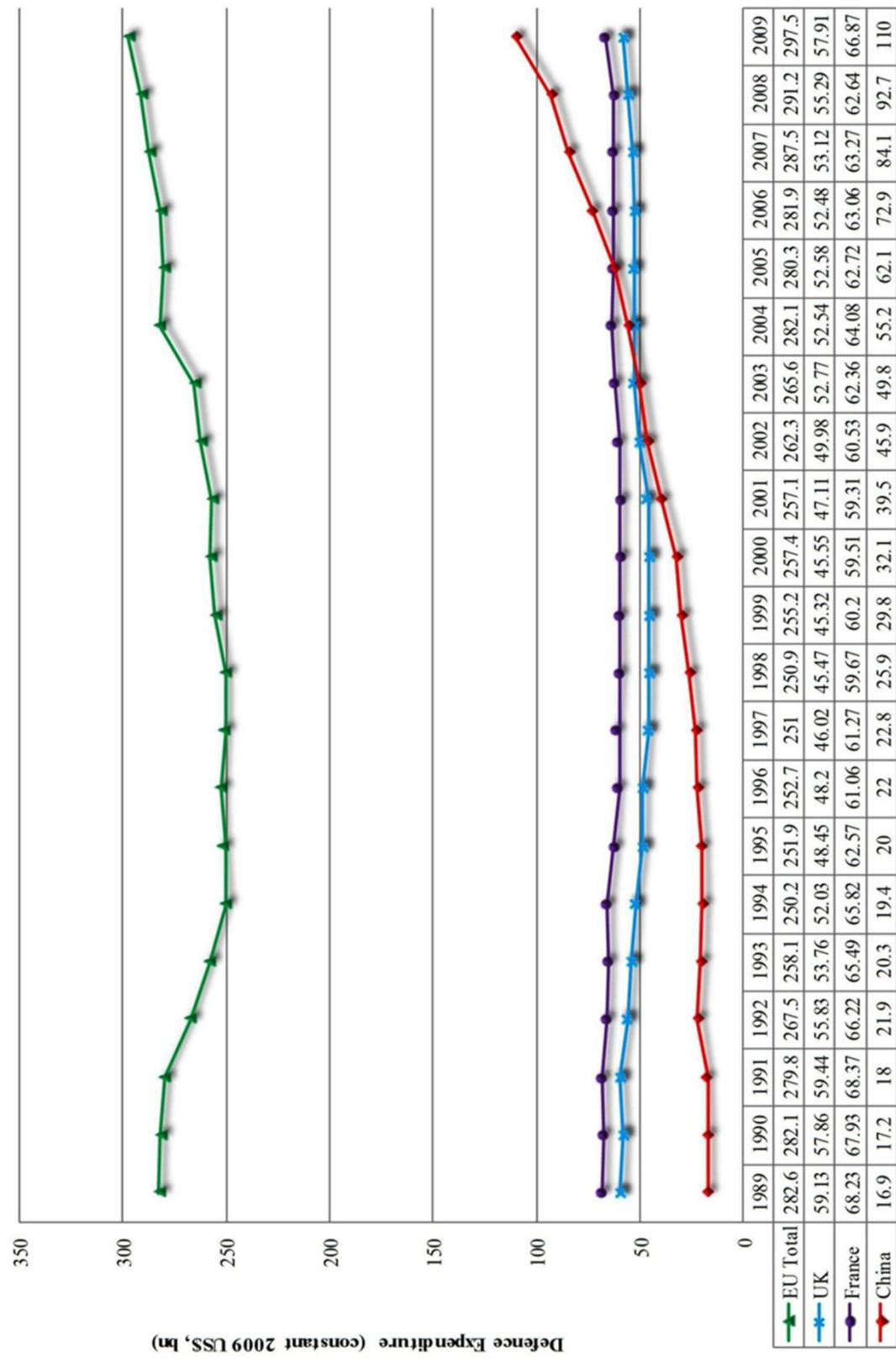
<sup>7</sup> US defence spending post-2001 increased substantially to fund operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since SIPRI examines all defence expenditure, the exclusion of spending on 'global war in terror' (GWT) operations was necessary because resources committed to these cannot be used elsewhere. By subtracting budgetary allocations for the GWT (based on SIPRI reporting), the remaining total could be described as the 'normal' defence budget. This suggests that the relative spending gap has closed to some degree but the US continues to spend significantly more.

**Figure 2.4 - PRC and US Defence Expenditure (Constant 2009 US\$b); 1989-2009**



Source: SIPRI (2010)

Figure 2.5 - PRC and EU Defence Expenditure (Constant 2009 US\$b); 1989-2009



Source: SIPRI (2010)

Goldstein (2006: 135) argued that the primary short-term objective for military modernisation and planning is preventing Taiwanese independence through force (if necessary) and combatting US military support. Following the 2006 DoD report on China's military power Kurt Campbell, a former State Department official, argued that China was "primarily interested in increasing conventional options in regional contingencies and vis-a-vis Taiwan" rather than threatening the US (cited by Tyson, 2006). Analyses of China's capabilities continue to emphasise technological and training weaknesses (Goldstein and Murray, 2004: 195). Even with substantial modernisation of its air-force, Lewis and Xue (2006: 241) stated that capabilities fall considerably short of matching its main potential adversaries. China has long depended on Russia as its main source for military technology imports (Weitz, 2006). Since Russian technology lags far behind that of the West, the extent of modernisation China has achieved remains limited and illustrates weaknesses in China's defence industries (Lampton, 2008: 6).

US analyses often focus on what Avery Goldstein (1997/98: 44) termed "pockets of excellence" whereby the PLA has successfully modernised a narrow range of capabilities whilst comprehensive modernisation of its forces remains a long way off. Observers may be prone to overestimating China's threat potential by concentrating on specific capabilities. One interviewee commented that China's investment in capabilities like aircraft carriers would divert resources from asymmetric capabilities which could pose a threat to the US, without ever being able to challenge its qualitative supremacy<sup>8</sup>. Another factor is that China's priorities closer to home, notably regional territorial disputes with other powers in the South and East China Seas and the need to defend national interests within its Economic Exclusion Zone may be the main catalysts for military expansion. Holmes and Yoshihara (2008: 367) argued China's naval expansion is likely to be oriented towards the Indian Ocean's sea lines of communication which are vital for access to energy supplies. From this perspective, China's growing power reflects a desire to protect its interests rather than aggressive intentions.

The Chinese leadership has repeatedly stressed the benign nature of their policies, as evinced by the 2003 document 'China's Independent Foreign Policy of Peace' which insisted that issues should be resolved peacefully and that China did not seek to interfere with other

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Bonnie Glaser, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, 08/03/11.

countries and was “opposed to hegemonism” (MoFA, 2003a). Although military threat proponents dismiss these efforts as rhetoric, there is some evidence that others take China seriously. Kenneth Lieberthal commented that “the presumption is that if [China] take[s] on America frontally [they] aren't going to grow wealthy and strong because there's such a chasm in terms of capacity, economic and military” (cited by Economist, 2004). According to David Denoon<sup>9</sup>, China has moved away from “the very aggressive and violent [regional] policy of the 1970s and 1980s, where it was quite willing to use force, to a much more diplomatic route in the 1990s” (cited by Pan, 2006b).

China’s actions and regional policies have often been used to suggest it favours stability over confrontation and does not seek to present a threat. Wang Fei-Ling (2005) argued that China is risk-averse and favours the status quo precisely because it is focussed on (in order of importance) political preservation, economic prosperity and the pursuit of prestige. China has attempted to play a constructive role on the North Korean nuclear issue: in response to developments in 2003 it “stepped into the fray, suspending crucial oil shipments to North Korea, sending high-level envoys to Pyongyang, and shifting troops around the Sino-Korean border” (Medeiros and Fravel, 2003: 22). As China’s future development is reliant on continued regional stability (Goldstein, 2006: 136), it seeks to avoid a regional arms race, US intervention in the Korean peninsula, or even simply greater defence cooperation with states which perceive North Korea as a threat (Moore, 2008: 14). While China reprimands North Korea, it has remained its main source of aid and trade; although a nuclear armed North Korea is potentially destabilising for the region, the regime’s collapse would equally present another set of problems (Moore, 2008: 2-3).

Another goal has been the protection of territorial integrity through continual emphasis on the importance of state sovereignty, especially in relation to Taiwan. At the same time, China has attempted to emphasise its desire for peaceful cooperation with the US (Levine, 1998: 99; Wang, J. 2005: 39) and engaging in bilateral dialogue mechanisms to promote cooperation (Economy and Segal, 2009: 15). China has increased its regional activism, aiming to reassure others that it has become or is at least moving towards becoming a “good neighbour, a constructive partner, a careful listener, and a nonthreatening regional power” (Shambaugh,

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<sup>9</sup> Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Professor of Asian Politics and Economics at New York University.

2004/5: 64). Its regional diplomatic efforts have included settling border disagreements with Russia and Vietnam, providing assistance during the Asian financial crisis and actively pursuing a Free Trade Agreement with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Garrison, 2005: 26). Hempson-Jones (2005: 718) identified China's embrace of regional dialogue as evidence of a trend towards more cooperative foreign policies.

Chinese policymakers have sought to address threat interpretations head-on, with the hope of preventing policy changes (particularly in the US) that would have potentially negative implications (Callahan, 2005). Since the late 1990s, the Chinese leadership had stressed that China was a “responsible power” (Richardson, 2011: 288) however ‘peaceful rise’ was intended as an extension and clarification. Premier Wen Jiabao first articulated this concept in December 2003<sup>10</sup>, claiming that unlike the rise of the European and American powers, China’s rise would be peaceful, using “scientific and technological progress to solve the problems of resources and the environment” (cited by Callahan, 2005). This concept has been argued for and supported by the findings in Chinese scholarship (Zheng, B., 2005; Choo, 2009) and linked to China’s aspirations for the construction of a harmonious world (Liu, J., 2009) in which it would not seek hegemony (Zheng, S., 2006: 172). De Castro (2007: 131) argued that the concept contains acceptance of US hegemony as its power is so ingrained in the international system.

Although considerable attention in policy discourse is given to perceived threats stemming from China’s rise, there is also a strong dissenting view which sees China’s rise as relatively benign, either because the power gap remains too large or because its leaders are not thought to harbour hostile intentions toward the established powers or the international system they maintain. Under such views, engagement and cooperation are seen as not only feasible but positive. These perspectives have been effectively unchallenged within the EU’s policy discourse, whereas in the US there is considerable debate between the rival interpretations of the threat (or lack thereof) posed by China. The persistence of this perception has strengthened the political and economic opportunity perceptions, as arguably an overriding threat of an actual or potential military threat would curtail their influence on policy responses.

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<sup>10</sup> This was later rebranded to ‘peaceful development’, but substantively little changed (Bergsten et al, 2008: 49).

## **2.4 Economic Threat**

Economic power is often linked into assessments of a growing military threat due to its centrality to the expansion and maintenance of hard capabilities, as emphasised by PTT scholars who treat it as the main component of national power (Levy, 2008: 18). Neorealists such as Mearsheimer (2001a: 61) and Walt (1987: 22-23) also argue that economic power is a necessary precursor to expanding military power. However, economic power in its own right can present a threat: it creates the potential to wield economic and political power in the international arena, effectively buying influence. The ‘soft’ component of economic power will challenge the economic and political dominance of the established powers. There are also more nuanced facets of economic power: a substantive trade surplus, ownership of foreign governments’ debt and manipulation of its own currency are issues which are often presented as evidence of a Chinese economic threat. Cheap Chinese labour and a weak currency present a challenge to Western domestic manufacturing industries, reducing the capacity of the established powers to maintain their own standing in the international order.

Evidence for the economic threat perspective is plentiful. American journalist Ted Fishman (2006) reasoned that China’s economic rise will be at the expense of the established powers through its manufacturing strength and weak intellectual-property regime. Fishman (2006: 287-288) expressed concern that the development of an EU-China political axis could be detrimental to the US’ international standing. Fishman conceded that China’s “military and geopolitical ambitions” are beyond the scope of his work but, tellingly, drew on Mearsheimer’s (2001a) assertions that China’s rise will lead to a contest for supremacy<sup>11</sup>; with no reference to alternative perspectives, it becomes clear that Fishman’s concerns over China’s economic rise are rooted in assumptions that it will allow it to dominate the world. Accepting that conflict is not inevitable, Fishman (2006: 293) argued that China will eventually be able to prevent the rest of the world from forcing it to play by the system’s established rules due to its economic power.

Peter Brookes (2005) of the Heritage Foundation told the House of Representative’s Committee on International Relations that “China is using its burgeoning economic power to

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter One.

gain political and economic influence internationally, at America's expense wherever possible, in an effort to succeed the US as the world's most powerful nation". Such concerns were evident in the US' domestic debate over the possibility of the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) bidding for US firm Unocal in 2005<sup>12</sup>, with clear threat interpretations of China's economic development surfacing. It was reported that policymakers in "Congress and the Pentagon think it may hasten an inevitable clash between the US and China for economic and political leadership in the world" (Ip and King, 2005). Members of Congress railed against the bid on the basis that it was effectively violating the rules of "fair trade" on the basis that CNOOC received considerable governmental subsidies (White, 2005). Tkacik (2005) called on the US to wake up to the "threat [posed] to American national security". Allowing the sale to go ahead would give the "unintended message to Southeast Asia... that America is on the wane", with a resultant loss of political influence (Tkacik, 2005). This has been linked by the Chairman of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission to China's mercantilist policy of "lock[ing] up attractive energy supplies wherever it can" (D'Amato, 2005: 6); at some point in the future as resources dwindle, this will be to the US' detriment and Chin's gain.

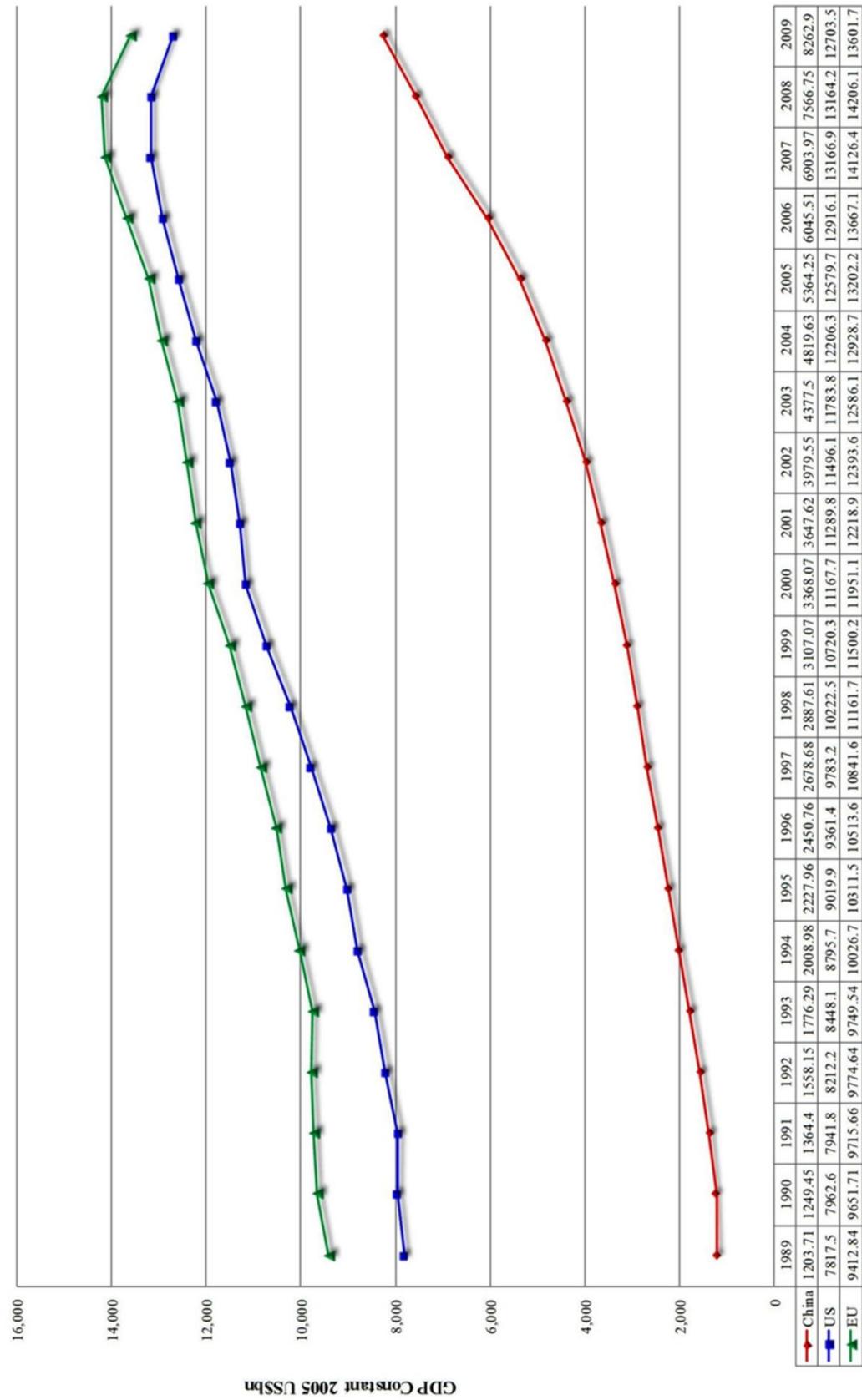
The notion of a 'Beijing Consensus' conveys threat interpretations of China's rise. This posits that China's economic growth facilitates a challenge to the liberal international order, blurring the lines somewhat between the economic and normative threat categories. The basic idea is that while China presents its approach as "progressive engagement" with the current system, it is simultaneously "the protagonist in a clash of values, governance and two versions of modernity in the twenty-first century" (Halper, 2010: 2). The ability of "non-Western market converts... which have learned to extract the best from both market capitalism and one-party government" shatters "the illusion that capitalism begets democracy" (Halper, 2010: 2). This leads to negative interpretations because its combination of economic prosperity with authoritarian rule is putatively attractive to some developing countries; adherence to such a model holds the potential to undermine Western influence globally and challenge the status quo.

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<sup>12</sup> The bid was eventually withdrawn by CNOOC following Congressional opposition.

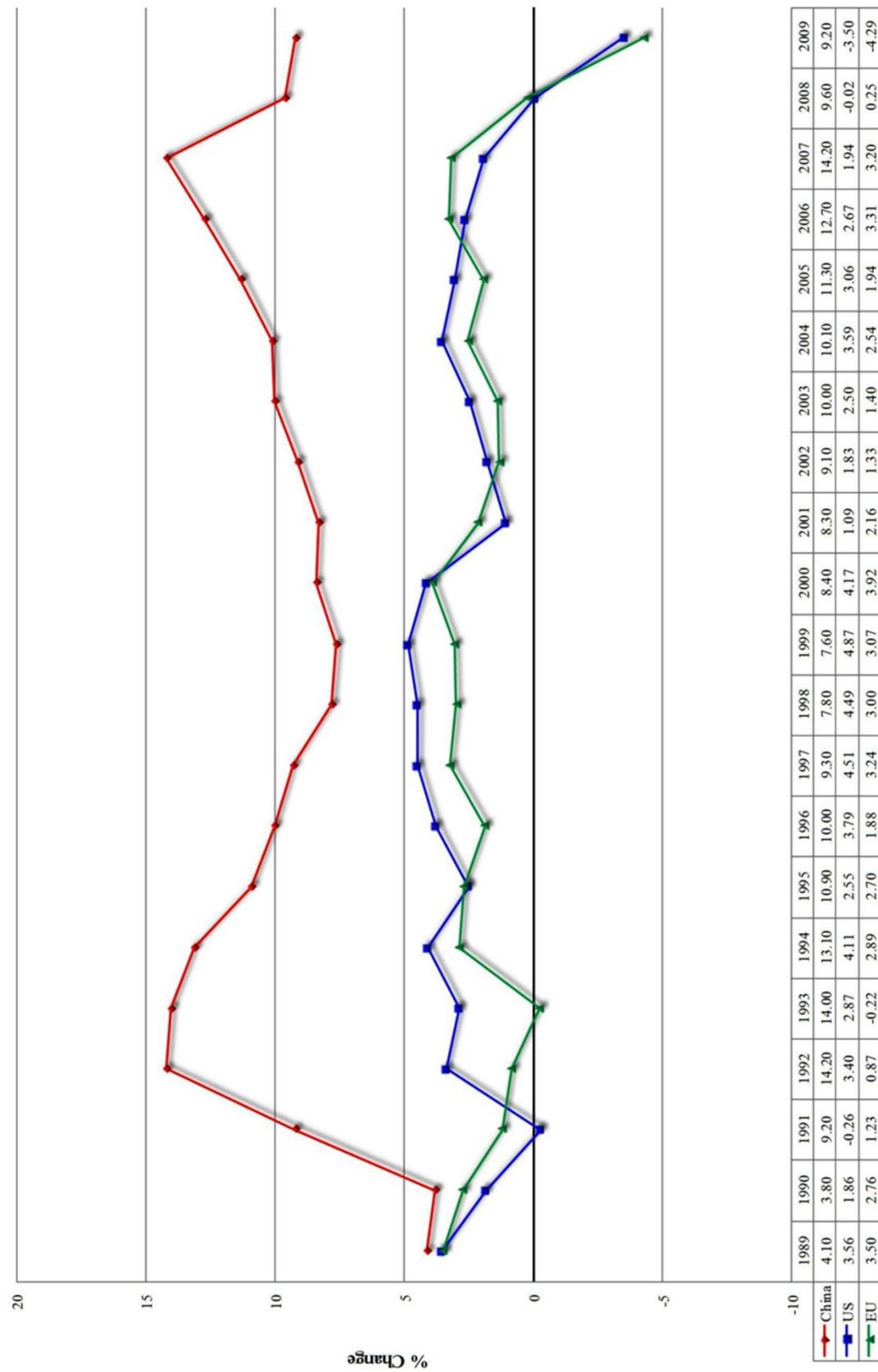
Gross domestic product (GDP) is commonly adopted as the main indicator of national economic power (Chan, S. 2008: 13). Figure 2.6 displays the GDPs of the three polities in purchasing-power parity (PPP) terms and Figure 2.7 represents the annual growth rates. The data illustrates that China has been able to close the gap in overall GDP terms and that its growth rates have remained consistently high over the timeframe. The rapidity of economic growth is concerning under PTT-logic precisely because it leads to a situation in which neither the established nor rising power are ‘prepared’ for the impending transition, thus increasing the prospects for instability and conflict. It is clear that this has been taken up in the US policy community whereby China is seen as a growing economic threat. This is exacerbated as it is not only rapid growth that has unsettled some observers, but also China’s resilience during periods such as the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 (Shirk, 2008: 20) and slowing expansion in more advanced economies circa 2000-2001. Consistently high growth rates have transformed China’s economy and other global economic players increasingly take China’s economic weight seriously and pay close attention to its expanding clout.

**Figure 2.6 - GDP of the PRC, US and EU in PPP terms (Constant 2005 US\$b); 1989-2009**



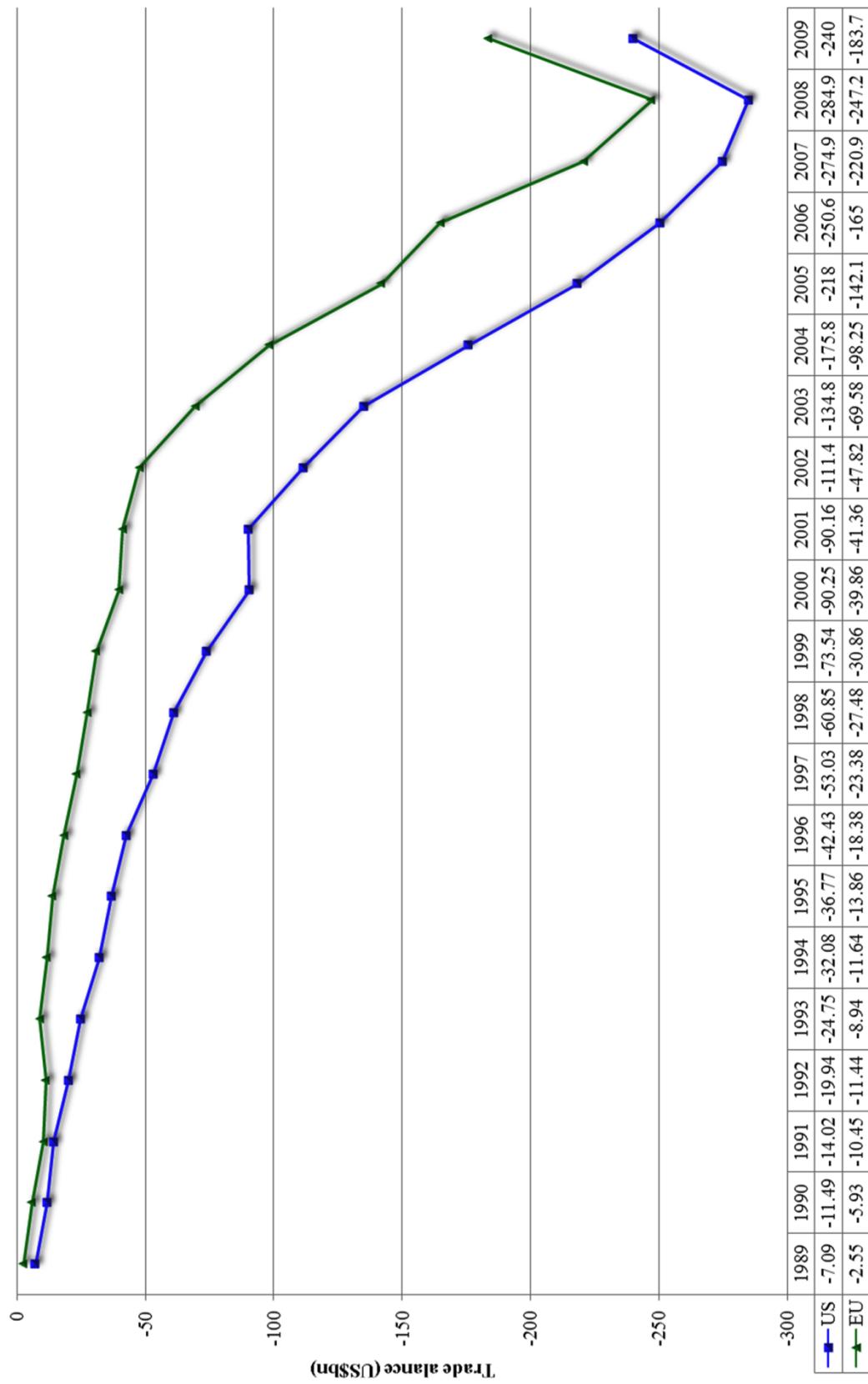
Source: World Bank (2012)

**Figure 2.7 - GDP Growth for the PRC, US and EU (% Change); 1989-2009**



Source: World Bank (2012)

**Figure 2.8 - US and EU Trade Balances with the PRC (US\$bn); 1989-2009**



Source: IMF (2012)

China as an ‘economic threat’ perspectives have been substantiated and reinforced by estimates of its future standing. A widely cited paper from Goldman-Sachs identified China as one of the four main large developing economies which – if high growth rates persist – will become some of the largest economies in the world (Wilson and Purushothaman, 2003: 3). The report’s significance lay in its projections for China’s growth which were laid out in such clear terms that it would be difficult for the international community to dismiss the apparent inevitability of its ascendancy as a key economic player in the near future. Specifically, it was anticipated that China would become the world’s second largest economy by 2016<sup>13</sup> and overtake the US by 2041. More recent estimates from the IMF suggest that China could become the world’s largest economy (in PPP terms) by 2017 (The Economist, 2012). Such changes have been interpreted by some as zero-sum and as a result fuelled threat perspectives.

Proponents of the economic threat perspective also concentrate on China’s unfair trade practices, which they see as a challenge to the rules of the international economic institutions created and maintained by the West. Despite acceding to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, China’s willingness to comply with its rules has persistently been an issue for both the US and the EU. Glaubitz (2004: 127) noted “cautious optimism” that WTO accession was evidence of China’s integration with the current international order. The explicit argument made by many Western proponents of China’s accession (as we will see in Chapters Three and Four) was that it constituted a further step in integrating China with the established system, encouraging it to play by the rules and increasing prospects for domestic economic and political reform. Continued intransigence on China’s part has created a belief amongst proponents of threat-perspectives that their arguments were vindicated; China will use the WTO to its own advantage without abiding by the rules. To them, the West undermined its own interests by helping China further enhance its economic strength, challenge the established rules and remain authoritarian while deriving the benefits of membership.

Economic threat perspectives are often predicated on the established powers shifting from small trade surpluses in the 1980s to large and expanding trade deficits, creating concerns over job losses to and growing dependence on China. One commentator referred to the trade deficit as “an unacceptable transfer of wealth from America to China” (Hawkins, 2005). The pattern

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<sup>13</sup> Although outside the timeframe of analysis for this project it is worth adding that China’s became the second largest economy happened in late 2010 (BBC News, 2011), ahead of estimates.

has been the same for both the US and the EU, although the latter's has remained somewhat smaller than the former's (Figure 2.8, above). The speed of China's economic transformation compounds the worries over the size of the deficit: for instance, China was the US' second largest trading partner by 2008 (largest source of imports, third largest export market) whereas thirty years before it was outside the top thirty (Morrison, 2009: 1) The West is typically dependent on cheap Chinese imports of consumer products such as computers, apparel, and audio and visual equipment, which can pose a threat to domestic manufacturing industries. Robert Scott (2007) of the Economic Policy Institute argued that the growing trade deficit with China had cost the US over two million jobs between 1997 and 2006. The concern expressed by some commentators (e.g. Gaffney, 2005; Hawkins, 2005) is that since China seeks to become the predominant world economic power, trade deficits and increased Western dependency give China significant economic (and potentially political) leverage.

China is a major global economic player with the ability to "affect world currency values and related trade flows" (Sutter, 2003/4: 79). This has increased its global influence, which is seen to have a negative impact on the influence of the Western powers, in keeping with the 'Beijing Consensus' outlined above. China's increasing economic influence in Africa has, more recently, posed certain challenges to the established actors. Liu Lirong (2011: 7) noted that since 2007 the EU has sought to engage with China in dialogue as its "policy choices [toward African nations] affect the interests of the EU with regard to energy and natural resources, external trade, as well as the dissemination of its norms and values".

Of the threat interpretations of China's rise, it is the economic one which is most evident within EU discourse. However, the perceived threat is in relation to disruption for domestic economic interests rather than fears that China will displace the EU as an economic power in the international order. Specifically, Member States such as France, Italy, Spain and Greece are concerned about harm to their manufacturing sectors (Fox and Godement, 2009: 26). These states tend to adopt protectionist trade preferences, but avoid critiquing China on political issues to avoid retaliation – thus have been labelled as "Accommodating Mercantilists" (Fox and Godement: 2009: 26). Eastern European States hold similar fears "since they compete directly with many new Chinese manpower industries", although this is somewhat offset by prospects of foreign direct investment (FDI) from China (Godement, 2008: 67). Overall, however, the economic threat perspective in the EU has not been as

pronounced in the US in the sense that EU policymakers do not express concerns that China is seeking to displace the EU in the international economic order.

The threat perspective of China's economic rise is partly rooted in the link between growing wealth and military power, but there are distinct arguments that the former is intrinsically problematic in a zero-sum situation where China's economic prosperity comes at the expense of the West. Thus, like the military threat perception, the economic threat can relate to the immediate and/or future context. The speed of China's rise, the closing gap in GDP figures, and increasing trade deficits have fostered interpretations of a threat to the international standing of the established powers. Increasing economic might enhances China's political influence and this has been interpreted by some as inherently detrimental to Western powers' political influence. Linkages with other threat interpretations – military and normative – reveal that China's economic power underwrites its ability to pose threats in these dimensions.

### ***2.5 Economic Opportunity***

Rejecting zero-sum conceptualisations of China's expanding economic power, other actors have interpreted China's rise as presenting an opportunity. Even in the CNOOC/Unocal case (above), threat perspectives were not unchallenged. Sebastian Mallaby (2005) argued that "it's hard to paint a plausible scenario in which Chinese control of Unocal would hurt us – despite loud exclamations to the contrary from Congress. For one thing, Unocal's oil output accounts for a tiny fraction of US consumption". To illustrate why China does not present a threat, proponents of this view highlight increased interdependence between China and the established powers and the necessity of stability in the international economic system which has been central to China's growth over the past few decades. China's economy is heavily dependent on exports to the West. Some actors have argued that China is simply a non-threat in the economic realm, but others have made substantive arguments that China's economic development presents a significant and positive opportunity from the position that their own economies will stand to gain, but also that China will increasingly participate in – and maintain – the established international economic institutions and their rules. Thus, this tends to be a forward-looking perspective, although some concentrate on the current benefits.

China's potential as an economic opportunity gained prominence in the early 1990s (Cable and Ferdinand, 1994). Positive assessments were based not just on expectations of China's market potential, but also its behaviour: Acharya (1999: 7) and Clegg (2009: 59) have argued that China's resilience in – and response to – the Asian financial crisis of 1997 demonstrated its development as a responsible power, dampening threat perceptions of its rise amongst its neighbours. Studies of China's role and prospects for continued economic development (Bergsten et al, 2006; Wang, L., 2012) tend to distance themselves from threat perspectives, signalling (implicitly or explicitly) that China will not seek to overturn the system it has come to rely on due to ever-growing interdependence with those very international structures. This is supported by arguments that while China's importance on the world stage is increasing, its economic power is not as great as suggested by others who focus primarily on the power of the state with insufficient regard to the global political-economic context (Breslin, 2005: 753).

Analysts such as Alvin Rabushka (2007) of the Hoover Institution have highlighted the current opportunities, noting that China's interdependent economic relationships have generated shared interests in "global economic and political stability", creating an "enormous opportunity" for cooperation. Daniel Ikenson (2006) of the Cato Institute argued that "China's economic success is something to celebrate and embrace, not to fear and oppose. It is a testament to the potential of engagement and globalization, and an indictment of isolationism". In the US, low-cost Chinese imports have helped restrain inflation and interest rates, increased consumers' purchasing power and boosted demand for other products (Elwell, et al, 2006: 1). This has helped production to shift into areas where it has a comparative advantage (Elwell, et al, 2006: 1) as well as spurred faster economic growth and job creation (Bergsten et al, 2006: 10). China is not only dependent on Western markets for exports, but also dependent on imports from other Asian nations, thus is part of the global-supply chain, rather than being able to sustain its economic growth independently. Andreas Freytag (2008) argued that such "processing trade" has grown in importance for China's exports. To that end, it has been argued that China depends on the continuity of and stability in this system and is more likely to work with than against other powers (Johnston, 2005: 32).

Actors within the EU have been key proponents of the economic opportunity interpretation of China's rise. Although following the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989 interpretations of China as a human rights violator were salient within the EU, this was quickly superseded by

interpretations of China as an economic opportunity. With most of the economic sanctions imposed in the wake of Tiananmen lifted relatively quickly, bilateral relations continued along a path of mutual cooperation with no further ‘upsets’ in economic relations in the early 1990s (Ash, 2008: 191). Economic ties dominated the relationship as China’s market presented a significant opportunity for goods and services from the EU (Reuter, 2007: 173). The formal establishment in 1995 of the human rights dialogue and the EU’s first Communication paper marked the increasingly political nature of the relationship, yet the economic dimension served as the platform upon which these developments were possible.

Godement (2008: 67) noted that in Scandinavian countries and the UK, increasing Chinese imports are “not seen as a threat, but more often as an opportunity for consumers to avail themselves of lower prices”. These “Ideological Free-Traders” (Fox and Godement, 2009: 6) advocate free trade with China but simultaneously apply pressure on political issues. For Germany, the largest “Assertive Industrialist”, China is a significant market for its industrial exports such as machine tools and equipment – a dependency which “tends to insulate Germany from long-term political reprisals” for its criticisms of China on economic and political matters (Fox and Godement, 2009: 24). Even though “Accommodating Mercantilists” view China’s economic rise as threatening in some respects, they still prioritise good economic relations as rival interpretations have pushed the opportunity narrative. European actors link China’s economic development to its role as a great power; President of the European Central Bank, Jean-Claude Trichet (2007), argued that

there is no doubt that the global economy has benefited enormously from the emergence of China and that this new giant has brought new opportunities as well as challenges to Europe. In order for both China and the world economy to continue to reap these benefits, it is essential that China increasingly assumes the global responsibilities that inevitably accompany its growing economic clout.

The purported negative implications of trade deficits with China are contested under this interpretation, because the raw data masks the benefits to Western economies. Daniel Griswold (2006: 9) of the Cato Institute noted that most of the US’ imports from China are “consumer goods that improve the lives of millions of Americans every day at home and in the office”. As Hughes (2005: 94) pointed out, “almost 60 percent of Chinese exports to the

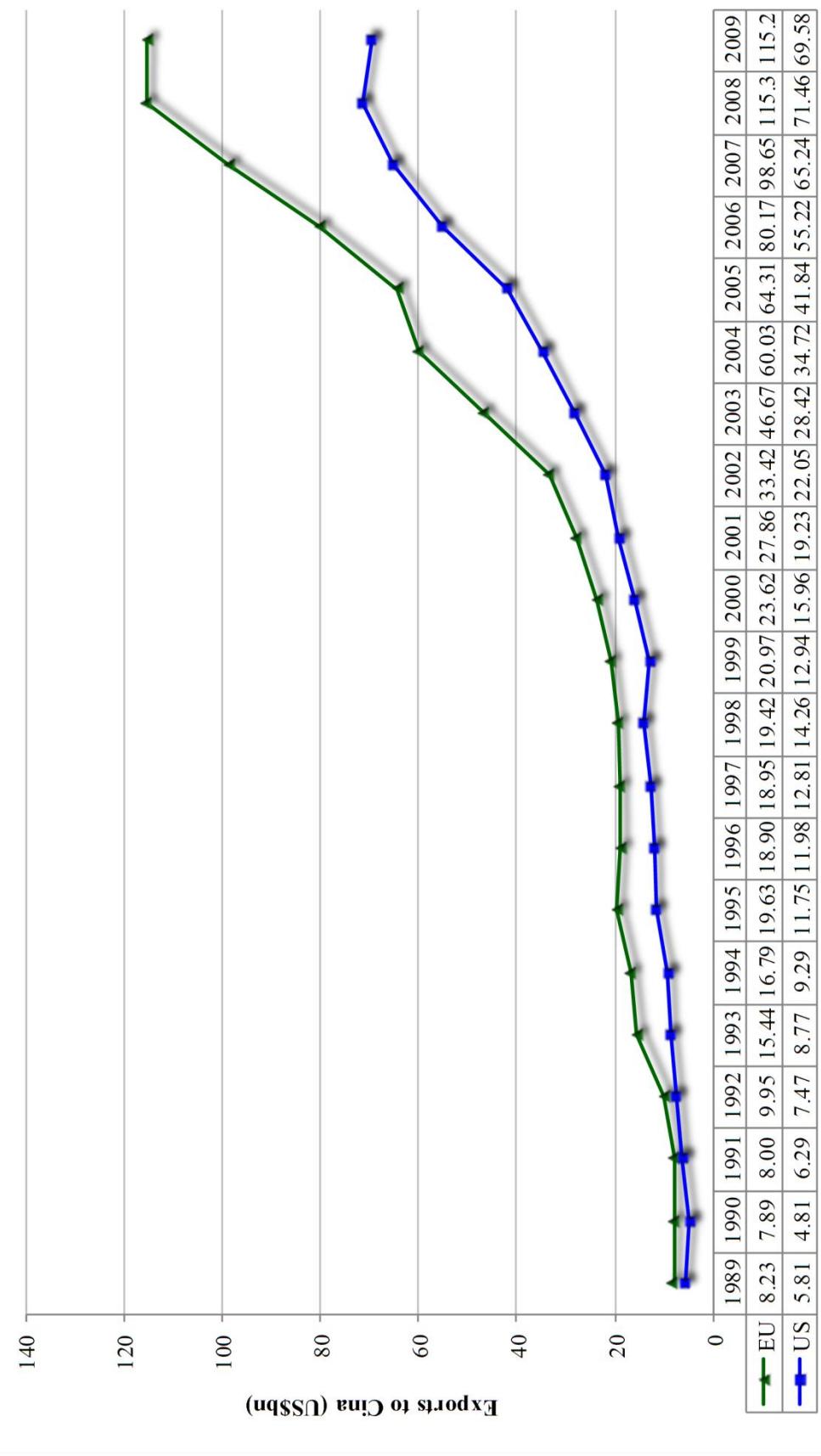
United States are produced by firms owned by foreign companies, many of them American". Nicholas Lardy (2007) argued that while there were challenges associated with China's growing economic power, the opportunities presented outweighed these, as he illustrated with a specific example:

China is the world's largest importer of semiconductors and microprocessors—of the total global semiconductor output in 2005, about 60 percent were sold to China. Most of these go into cell phones, DVD players, laptops, etc. These products are then shipped back to Europe and the US.

The data in Figure 2.9 reveals that China has become an increasingly important destination for American and European exports, especially from 2000 onwards. This would seemingly support the opportunity interpretation of China's rise and puts the trade deficit data (Figure 2.8, above) into perspective; it is not a one-directional shift of increasing imports from China, but also exports to China. As noted above, China became the US' third most important export market; for the EU, it was the fourth most important by 2008 (Gambini, 2009: 3).

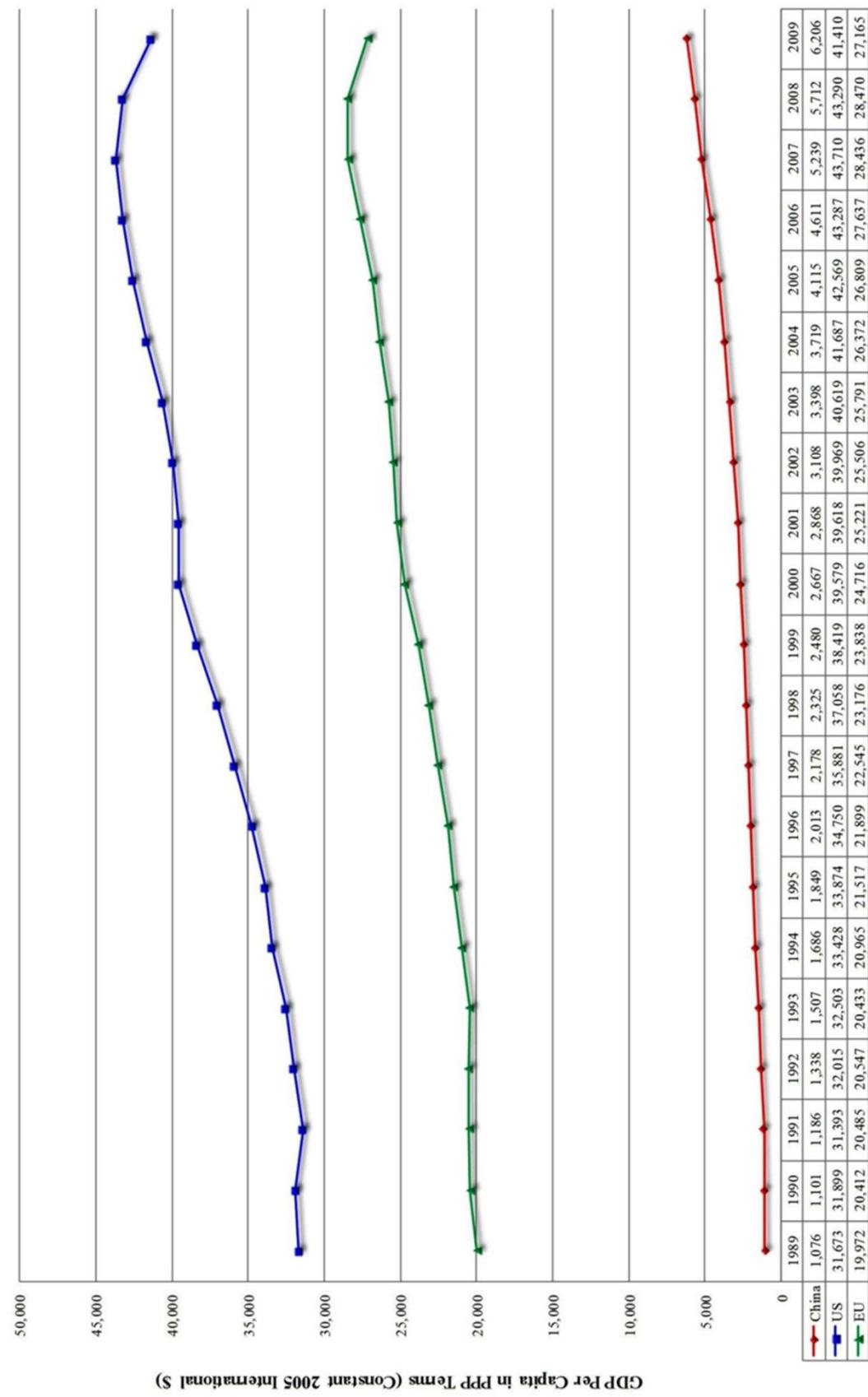
China's leadership regards economic development to be locked in a symbiotic relationship with political stability and their continued rule, which has shaped its foreign economic policies (Miller, 2010: 97). For instance, its "non-ideological attitude" to the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council was argued by Harris (2008: 138-139) as critical for acceptance to its successor – the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) – and facilitated its ability to cooperate with the neighbouring advanced economies. Economic development has also perpetuated a conceptual shift of interests as associated with those of developing nations to the great powers, promoting bilateral relations with the latter to the key focus of policy (Medeiros and Fravel, 2003: 32). Hempson-Jones (2005: 704) argued that shifts towards cooperation in China's foreign policy were most pronounced in economic issues – highlighted by its "sovereignty-bending admission" to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which went beyond self-interest. WTO membership and participation in some G8 meetings have encouraged China to "expand its definition of the national economic interest beyond the very short term" (Leonard, 2006). While participation in such institutions is undoubtedly necessary for China's continued economic growth, proponents of the economic opportunity perspective also see its willingness to do so as evidence of its development as a responsible international player.

**Figure 2.9 - US and EU Exports to the PRC (US\$bn); 1989-2009**



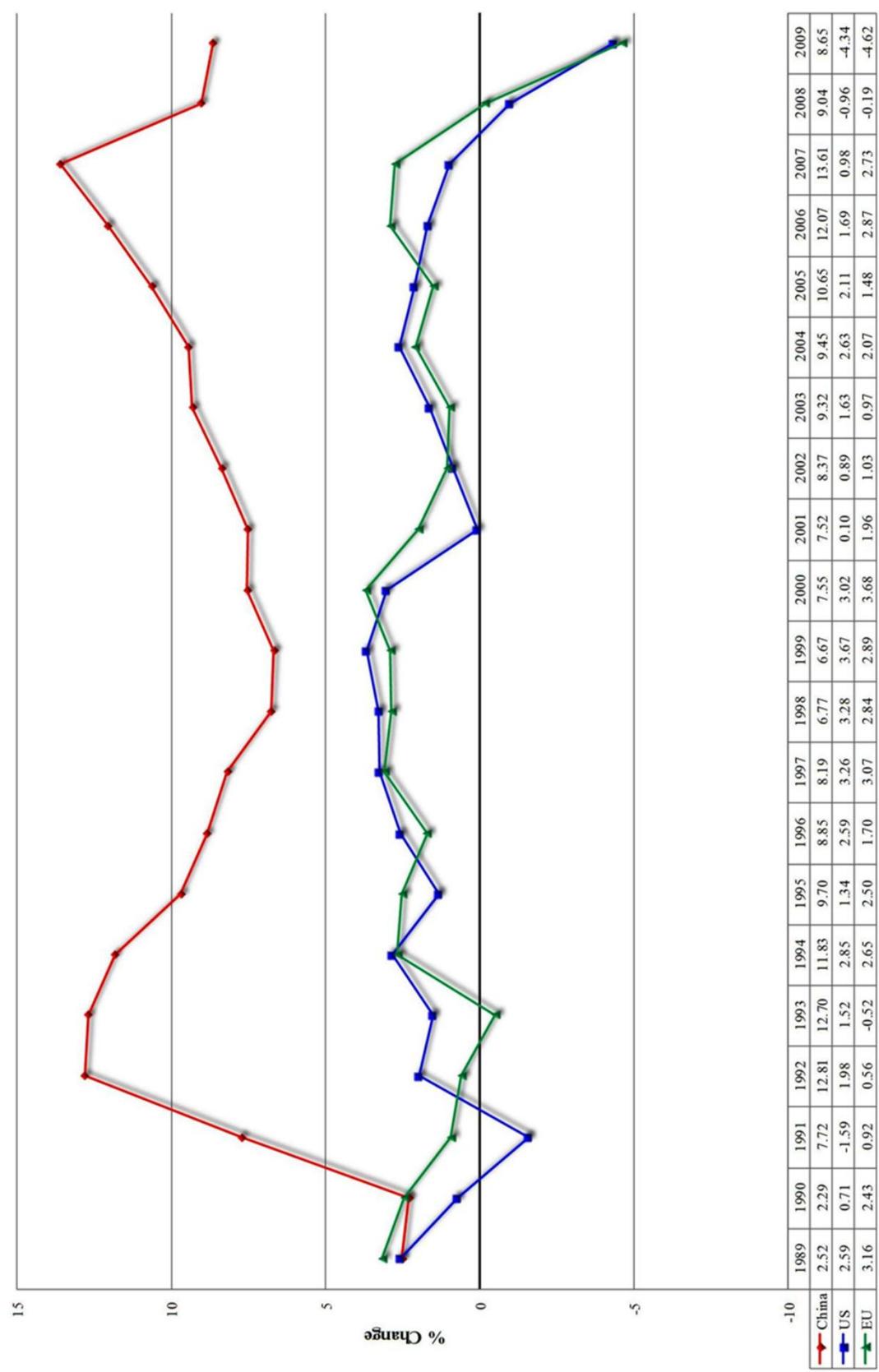
Source: IMF (2012)

**Figure 2.10 - GDP Per Capita in PPP Terms of the PRC, US and EU (Constant 2005 International \$); 1989-2009**



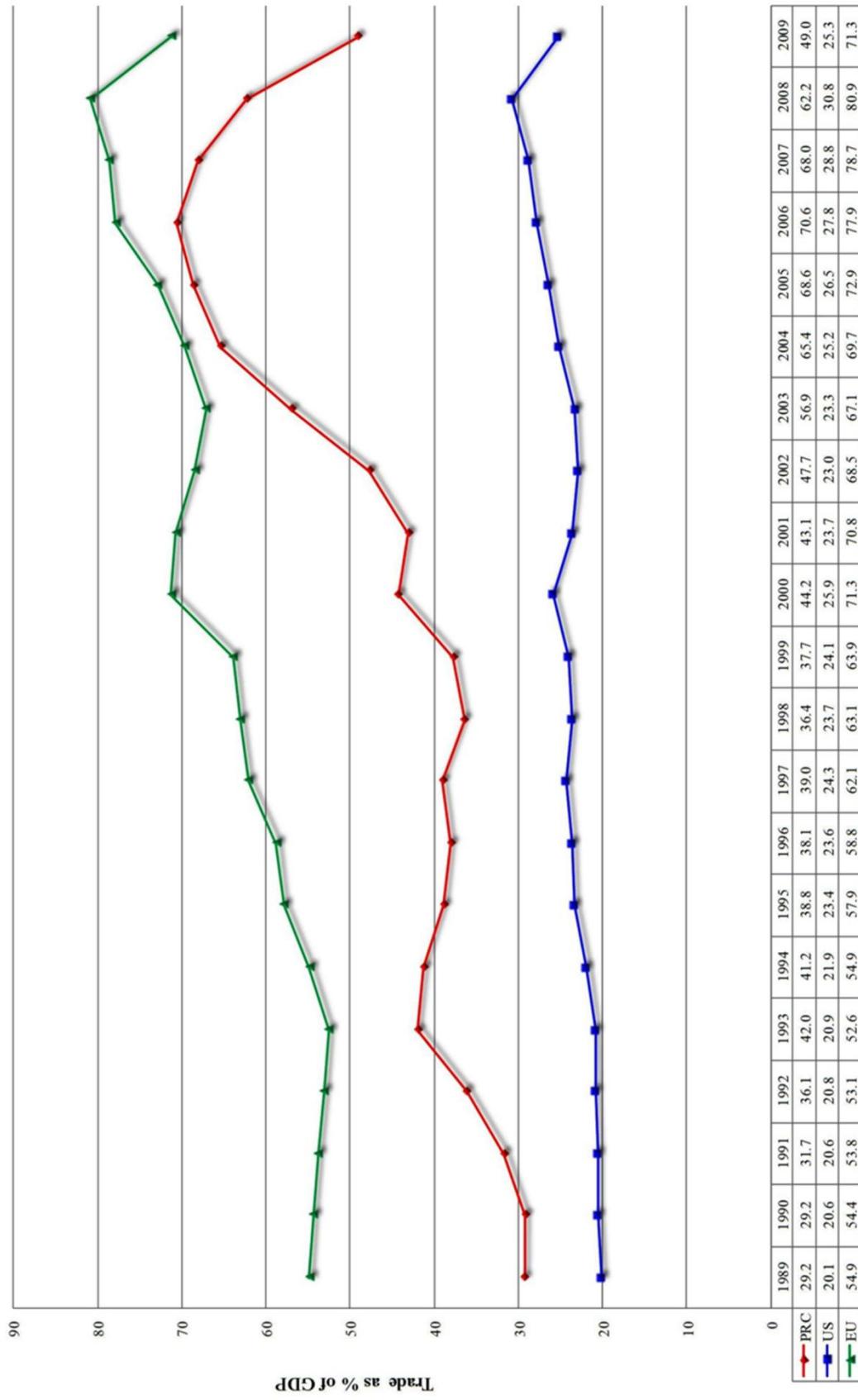
Source: World Bank (2012)

**Figure 2.11 - GDP per Capita Growth for the PRC, US and EU (% Change); 1989-2009**



Source: World Bank (2012)

**Figure 2.12 - Trade as a Percentage of GDP for the PRC, US and EU; 1989-2009**



Source: World Bank (2012)

Embedded within opportunity perspectives is the rejection of the threat interpretation, primarily on the basis that China is not powerful enough to seriously challenge the West. While data related to overall GDP (Figure 2.6 above) paint a picture of national economic strength, China remains relatively poor in GDP per capita terms (Figure 2.10) – a measure of the population’s productive capacity frequently used by power-transition theorists (Levy, 2008: 13). Figure 2.11 shows that annual growth in GDP per capita closely follows the pattern observed for overall GDP growth (Figure 2.7 above) and is expanding faster than the US or the EU – which is to be expected given China’s weaker starting point. Yet the vast majority of those that promote threat interpretations of China’s economic rise frequently focus on *national* and not *per capita* measures of GDP. When this is taken into consideration, there is greater scope for arguing that China is less likely to harbour revisionist intentions because it is dependent on stability in the current system to deliver economic prosperity for its population.

Trade levels as a percentage of GDP can be utilised as an indicator of the extent to which a country is integrated into the global economy (Kim, 2006: 285). Figure 2.12 shows that China has become progressively integrated over time – hence its economic growth is increasingly fuelled by international trade. China falls between the EU<sup>14</sup> and the US in terms of dependence on trade but witnessed the greatest degree of change over the timeframe. This was facilitated through exports of cheap manufactured goods to the West (Lardy, 2002: 6) resulting in China being dubbed by some as the “workshop of the world” (Martin and Manole, 2004: 1). Production of these goods is dependent on imports of materials and intermediary goods from other countries, positioning it as a link between Asian economies and industrialised markets (Story, 2005: 104) and fostering interdependence with the global supply chain. Again, this contributes to interpretations of China as an economic opportunity rather than threat as China needs not only stability in the international economic order, but also political stability in East Asia if it is to continue pursuing domestic economic development.

The economic opportunity interpretation has become so prevalent in both American and European policy discourse that some commentators have lamented the apparent displacement of human rights concerns (more on this in the next section). This interpretation entails China’s

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<sup>14</sup> As a caveat, the EU’s figures would appear to include intra-EU trade, which then inflates the figures if we wanted to look simply at trade to the rest of the world. However, from the World Bank’s (2012) database, it is impossible to disaggregate these figures, therefore I decided to use what was available rather than exclude the EU from this altogether.

growth is positive not only for bilateral trade relations, but for the global system more generally as China is expected to continue on its integrative path. Under this logic, there are fewer concerns that China's economic prosperity is allowing it to expand its military power – mostly because it is assumed that China will not seek to destabilise the region through aggressive behaviour as this would disrupt its economic development. However, as we will see in subsequent chapters, although there is a tendency for those who view China as primarily an economic opportunity to also consider it unlikely to be a threat in the military dimensions, some actors do not rule the latter out entirely. Nevertheless, the importance of this perception is clear, as it remains salient even under discussion of non-economic issues in the bilateral relationships, although more so in the case of EU discourse than in the US.

## ***2.6 Normative Threat***

Power-transition accounts presuppose that in a hierarchical order dominated by a democratic power other rising democracies are likely to be satisfied with the system that benefits them. Non-democracies, however, cannot be guaranteed to be satisfied; precisely because the dominant power imposes its values on the international order, these powers are more likely to be dissatisfied and seek to revise the rules of the game. Immediately, we can see that the rise of authoritarian China should pose problems for the US and EU. China may pose a threat to the norms and rules of the established order, even if it does not engage in direct military confrontation. Yet, despite the importance of regime type in this sense, PTT actually has little to say about normative issues – such as human/democratic rights – as they are not relevant to power calculations. However, it is clear that many actors do pay attention to these aspects of China's international behaviour and invoke power-transition logic to contend that it harbours revisionist intentions towards the status quo.

Robert Sutter (2003/4: 75-6) noted that the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989 had a significant impact on some US actors' perceptions of China as "economically alluring and reforming" with that of "an oppressive Communist dictatorship". For Keidel (2007) "value differences between China and the US and its allies underpin concerns that China's military and other foreign policy intentions will eventually lead it to harm US interests". Edward Friedman (2011: 20) argued that China's character was essentially that of a revisionist power, for three central reasons: its apparent belief that the current international order is "immoral"; that China

is a better centre for “a moral world order”; and its behaviour which allegedly show it to be “already acting on the basis of the first and second points, lending credence thereby to power transition theory”. One statement from an unnamed ‘senior defense official’ cited by Gertz (2005b) invoked historical analogies in outlining the threat:

We may be seeing in China the *first true fascist society* on the model of Nazi Germany, where you have this incredible resource base in a commercial economy with strong nationalism, which the military was able to reach into and ramp up incredible production [emphasis added].

This is the only example I could find of any official/observer referring to China as a fascist state. Evidently, it is not commonplace in policy discourse but the fact that Gertz – a key proponent of threat interpretations – included it in his article hints at the concern over the Chinese system.

Commentators such as Timperlake and Triplett (1998), Gertz (2002) and Menges (2005) worked normative issues into their arguments regarding China’s military threat. For Gertz (2002: 2), China’s quest to supplant US power was motivated by its communist nature, ruling out peaceful coexistence. Menges (2005: 8-9) identified China’s “drive toward domination” to be partly driven by “Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought” in conjunction with the view “that domination is the ultimate guarantee of security for the... regime”. Thus China’s threat is a combination of expanding hard power and (inferred) intentions based on support for an oppositional ideological and normative structure. This has also been reflected in Congressional discourse, where critics frequently utilised the prefix ‘communist’ when discussing China. As Chapter Three demonstrates, this was evident at the time of the US’ deliberations over a bilateral trade deal between 1999 and 2000. Notably, policymakers did not use it in relation to China’s economic system; rather, to distinguish China as authoritarian, as a human rights violator and also as a growing threat to the region and the US’ national security. This arguably invokes Cold War-era narratives of the communist threat which were used to distinguish the identity of the US from that of its perceived enemies (Campbell, 1998: 169).

Yee and Storey (2004: 2) pointed out that threat interpretations of China’s rise frequently link hegemonic aspirations to its “authoritarian socialist political system” in addition to its “rapid

economic growth and historical role as a great power". During the Cold War, Soviet Communism was the "chief threat to freedom" which the US saw itself as having "an incontestable obligation to combat" (Hunt, 2009: 153). Undoubtedly, the Cold War hangover of innate distrust of communist regimes is evident in the threat rhetoric propounded in the US; one interviewee stated that this was embedded in the American mentality with regard to China and other communist regimes<sup>15</sup>. Newspaper columnists and some members of Congress consistently refer to "Communist China" to underscore their point about the challenge posed (examples are explored in Chapter Three). While China undoubtedly remains authoritarian, its commitment to communist ideals is rhetorical at best; this has hardly passed American policymakers by and they appear to use the 'communist' prefix to denote authoritarian.

John Tkacik (2006) of the Heritage Foundation argued in a report that China's political regime contributed to the threat posed: while acknowledging that "by itself, the rise of a new power in Asia need not be alarming". Tkacik (2006: 1) saw reason to be concerned in the emergence of "a new superpower that works against the interests of freedom, free trade, and global stability". Tkacik (2006: 2) identified China's goal as not just balancing US power, but to "reclaim [its] ancient place as the preeminent power in Asia, replacing the [US]". In an editorial piece, Tkacik (2007b) warned that the US may not be able to promote democracy beyond its own shores because "we face a Chinese Superpower intent on legitimizing illiberal forces lurking in the shadows of Asia's fragile new democracies". While the authors of the AEI's 2009 report *An American Strategy for Asia* acknowledged that what sort of power China would become was still unclear, they still expressed a belief that "an authoritarian China's efforts to restore what its leaders see as their country's "rightful place" at the apex of an Asian and possibly a global hierarchy could undermine the critical US objective of preserving an Asia prosperous, peaceful, and free" (Blumenthal and Friedberg, 2009: 7).

Hans Maull (1997) argued that China was not satisfied with the status quo for a variety of "historical and socio-psychological" factors related to the 'century of humiliation' inflicted by Western powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, thus its growing power would be directed towards these powers and the system they have constructed. Callahan (2008: 759) observed that "an idealized version of China's imperial past is now inspiring Chinese scholars' and

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Congressman Eni Faleomavaega (D-American Samoa), former Chair of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Washington DC, 14/07/10.

policymakers' plans for China's... and the world's future". Callahan (2008: 758-60) argued that this trend revealed that China might seek to establish a new hegemony in the event of surpassing the US as the dominant power, rather than a post-hegemonic arrangement. In a policy paper for the Centre for European Reform, François Heisbourg (2001: 6) cautioned that "Europeans are well advised not to underestimate the legacy of the 'unequal treaties; which the forces of European imperialism inflicted on China", indicating that nationalist sentiments may influence China's foreign policies.

Whilst policy may no longer contain ideological dimensions or features of "hostile, militant, xenophobic, anti-Western or isolationist nationalism" (Chen, Z. 2005: 52), the perceived need to regain China's "rightful place" in Asia (Roy, 1998: 1) and regain great power status in the international arena (Breslin, 2010: 52) arguably conveys a desire to change the status quo. Lampton (2001: 251) referred to China's "victim complex" which created a "sense of entitlement". This has contributed to the characterisation of China in some sections of Western discourse as dissatisfied with the current international order. Indeed, now that China's foreign policy objectives do not centre on the export of revolution, the main basis for threat interpretations has been the influence of nationalism on policy direction. Such concerns persist in the face of Chinese protestations to the contrary. The American Enterprise Institute's Gary Schmitt (2006) tackled China's self-proclaimed 'peaceful rise' in a Weekly Standard article, alluding to parallels between its stance on Taiwan and rising Nazi Germany's claims over Alsace and Sudetenland. Schmitt (2006) argued that China's authoritarian system inevitably fuelled distrust; by contrast, India's rising power did not cause concern.

Nationalism in Chinese foreign policy has also garnered much attention from academics (Whiting, 1995; Friedman, 1997; Callahan, 2004; Carlson, 2009). Some Western analysts have viewed this as a negative factor, anticipating that China will exert its influence abroad to satisfy nationalist sentiments at home. Peter Gries (2001: 26) cautions that the Chinese have not forgotten about the 'Century of Humiliation' at the hands of the West; Chinese responses – both from the government and public – to the bombing of its Belgrade embassy conveyed anger at the continued hostility towards China. As such, China's historical treatment at the hands of Western powers is often taken by Western observers to be important to contemporary understandings of China's national identity (Yuan, 2008: 213). Atanassova-Cornelis (2012) noted that America is the predominant 'significant other' in the construction of Chinese

nationalism and often in a negative light, which is picked up on by some US observers. Carlson (2009: 31) found that opposition to US hegemony is a core feature in Chinese nationalism but simultaneously critiqued other scholars' oversimplified views of it.

China's human rights record is of great concern for the US and the EU, as well Western non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch as part of the wider policy community. Table 2.1 presents a summary of the annual human rights reports from these four actors<sup>16</sup>. While noting some improvements over time, the reports have consistently asserted that these are incremental, only partially implemented or ignored in practice; thus overall improvement has been minimal. The expansion of human rights violations into new areas of life – such as the internet and increasing repression in Tibet and Xinjiang – contributed to assessments of China's human rights record worsening in some areas. These critiques of China are used by some commentators to underpin normative threat interpretations both in terms of its domestic situation but also in the international arena, especially in the US Congress and the European Parliament. There, policymakers often make linkages between China's human rights record and its regime type, arguing that as a consequence China's rise inherently challenges the values system of the Western powers. For certain EU Member States – such as the Scandinavian countries and the UK – their "benign vision of China's economic rise" is balanced by their critical views on China's human rights situation Godement (2008: 67).

Beyond China's own poor human rights record, Sceats and Breslin's (2012: 1) report for Chatham House observed increasing international anxiety over the implications of China's rise for the international human rights system, due to its regular opposition to "interference on human rights grounds in its internal affairs and those of other states". They contended that other international actors assume that China's ascendancy as a global power is "threatening to this part of the international system" (Sceats and Breslin, 2012: 1). The authors cite concerns that the international human rights system "will be corroded in the long run if other developing states choose to follow China's path" even if China does not actively promote its own norms abroad (Sceats and Breslin, 2012: 41). China also undermines "Western sanctions

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<sup>16</sup> See methodology note in Appendix.

and arms-control measures” against other human rights violators (Sceats and Breslin, 2013: 43).

These normative threat interpretations recur frequently in political discourse, particularly in conjunction with the military threat interpretation or as a counterargument against the economic and political opportunity perspectives. Normative issues and controversies could be used by the established powers – who view themselves as upholders of the rules of the current system – to delegitimise China in the international arena to maintain their overall political dominance over the revisionist power. Beyond a merely instrumental value, however, it is clear that there are significant sections of the policy community that view China’s authoritarian government and explicit opposition to some international norms as a cause for concern. It appears that as China grows in power, this perception has diminished somewhat, or at least has become less prominent in policy discourse – as we shall see in later chapters.

**Table 2.1 - Summaries of Human Rights Reports; 1989-2009**

Amnesty International	Human Rights Watch <sup>1</sup>	US Department of State	European Union
1989 [Dominated by events of June] Estimated at least one thousand people killed, thousands injured & thousands more detained; Extensive evidence of HR violations in Tibet; Religious freedom severely curtailed; Extensive & arbitrary use of the death penalty	[Dominated by events of June] Intensified and institutionalized repression of the democracy movement; thousands detained; tightened restrictions on religious and ethnic groups; martial law lifted in 1990, but substance of ML remained; announced release of political prisoners, but no independent verification	[Dominated by events of June] HR climate 'deteriorated dramatically'; Country-wide crackdown on participants, supporters and sympathisers of protests; Extrajudicial and political killings, arbitrary detention, torture, denial of due process all major concerns; Fundamental freedoms heavily restricted	N/A - first human rights report published by the EU in 1999
1994 Persecution & detention of political dissidents; members of religious & ethnic groups; Repression of people perceived as threatening the established political order intensified; Introduction of further repressive legislation; Continued increasing use of death penalty & executions; Some political dissidents released		Peaceful critics arrested, detained and tortured; Release of dissidents timed to manipulate world opinion regarding Olympics bid; Continued violation of freedom of expression; Crackdown on pro-democracy movements; New State Security Law deleterious for journalists; Religious, ethnic and regional groups repressed	Continued widespread HR abuses; Restriction of fundamental freedoms; Reduction in no. of political detainees, but thousands remain; Ethnic minorities in Tibet and elsewhere continued to be abused and repressed; Some progress such as prisoner releases & freedom of movement for govt critics and reaffirmed adherence to Universal Declaration of Human Rights
1999 Most serious crackdown on peaceful dissent for a decade; Thousands arbitrarily detained for exercising rights to fundamental freedoms (expression, assembly, etc.); Crackdown on HR activists; Arbitrary & extensive use of the death penalty; Continued repression of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet regions		Some encouraging developments, but HR practices still cause for concern; Greater scope for debate over reform, dissidents released & signing of major international HR treaty; but continued controls on expression, association & assembly; religious, ethnic & regional groups continue to be repressed (Tibet & Xinjiang)	Some improvement re: legal system & social and economic rights; Areas of concern: freedom of opinion, expression & assembly, extensive use of the press; Censorship of the internet; Fewer death penalty, arbitrary detention & political prisoners released early than in previous years; Continued repression in Tibet & other regions; Some small steps against members of the China Democratic Party & Falun Gong; HR situation in Tibet & Xinjiang as "alarming" towards legal reform

Table 2.1 (Cont.)

<b>2004</b> Progress towards reform in some areas (via legislation), but no significant impact on serious and widespread HR violations; Continued use of death penalty; Crackdown on Uighur community justified under 'war on terrorism'; Freedom of expression & religion severely restricted; forcible return of North Korean refugees despite international obligations	Some progress in strengthening legal system, more media freedom & taking account of public opinion; Constitutional amendment to protect HR, but overall remains a highly repressive state; Continued corruption, censorship, curtailment of religious freedoms; Repression of ethnic and regional groups (Tibet & Xinjiang); HR record in Tibet remained poor; Fundamental freedoms restricted	HR record remained poor; Repression perceived as threatening to government authority/national stability; Constitution amended to mention HR for first time; Extensive use of death penalty & extra-judicial killings; International war on terror used as pretext for crackdown in Xinjiang; HR record in Tibet remained poor; Fundamental freedoms restricted	Mixed progress on social-economic development, rule of law & constitutional amendment mentioning HR; Serious concerns remain: fundamental freedoms, continued use of the death penalty & torture, ethnic minority rights in Tibet & Xinjiang; Need to protect HR when countering terrorism
<b>2009</b> Tightened restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly & association; Pervasive internet & media controls remained; Severe & systematic campaign against the Falun Gong continued; HR defenders persecuted; extensive use of the death penalty; Crackdown on religious & ethnic groups also continued	Restrictions put in place for Olympics continued; freedom of expression association & religion limited; Extensive govt censorship of the internet; Slow progress on legal reform; First gay pride festival in Shanghai in June; High presence of troops in Tibet following 2008 riots; July violence in Xinjiang met with govt crackdown	HR record remained poor & worsened in some areas; Cultural & religious repression of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang; Detention & harassment of HR activists increased; Continued control of fundamental freedoms; April: govt unveiled National Human Rights Action Plan, but not implemented; HR record in Tibet remained poor	Notes continued "serious concerns" about HR in China; Alludes to continued use of torture; Notes progress on economic rights of citizens & reform of criminal justice system; Limited progress on rule of law, freedom of expression, association & religion or belief, ethnic minority rights & use of the death penalty

<sup>1</sup> 1989 report focussed solely on US policy towards China in response to Tiananmen, thus 1990 report used

Sources: Amnesty International (1990, 1995; 2000a; 2005; 2010); Human Rights Watch (1990, 1994; 1999; 2005; 2010); Department of State (1990, 1995; 2000; 2005; 2010); Council of the European Union (2000; 2005); EUEAS (2010)

## **2.7 Political Opportunity**

There is no evidence within the discourse of ‘normative opportunity’ interpretations of China’s rise – that China is becoming more democratic or fully acceptant of the established international norms. That said, it is not espousing opposition to democracy and has not ruled it out for its own future; instead its leaders contend it will develop along its own path (Legro, 2007: 518). While there was optimism in both America and Europe in the early 1990s that engagement could eventually lead to political reform, no timeframe could be specified. Yet some actors view China as more than a ‘non-threat’ to the status quo system; they see opportunities for integration into the international system and hence, as a political opportunity. Rather than focussing on specific issue-areas, these take a more comprehensive view of China’s rise. Some commentators see China as a potentially responsible player which could help to maintain the Western-constructed international system; China’s active support would renew the system’s legitimacy. Seema Desai (2006: 2) argued that international economic institutions are widely understood to be “in need of reformation and repair” and for a new or reworked system to have credibility, China would need to have input into the process.

China assuming the role of a responsible power is also seen as vital to dealing with a range of global issues. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick (2005) argued that “it is time to take our policy beyond opening doors to China’s membership into the international system: We need to urge China to become a *responsible stakeholder* in that system” [original emphasis]. Elaborating this concept, Zoellick (2005) explained that responsible stakeholders “recognize that the international system sustains their peaceful prosperity, so they work to sustain that system”. In 2007, US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson (2007) asserted that the “the economic and geopolitical landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be greatly influenced by the way in which the United States and China work together”. Paulson (2007) pointed to the US-China Strategic Economic Dialogue<sup>17</sup> established in 2006 as a mechanism which had allowed to two sides to begin writing “the next chapter of our strategic economic relationship”.

The successes of the engagement approach lead to a self-reinforcing interpretation of China as a political opportunity. The Independent Task Force (2007: 7) – composed of former

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<sup>17</sup> In 2009, the Obama administration changed this to the ‘Strategic and Economic Dialogue’ – denoting the wider agenda of the dialogue from that point onwards.

policymakers, academics and commentators – established by the Council of Foreign Relations asserted that “growing adherence to international rules, institutions, and norms – particularly in the areas of trade and security – marks China’s global integration”. The report also acknowledged that China was increasingly assertive as its power grew, recommending that US policymakers “should not be satisfied with the state of US-China relations or indifferent to the economic, security, and political challenges presented by China as an emerging great power” (Independent Task Force, 2007: 7-8). The core recommendation was that “integration of China into the global community represents the best strategy to encourage China to act in ways consistent with US interests and international norms” (2007: 74).

Glaser (2006) highlighted that the promotion of bilateral cooperation and China’s more active role in the international system has been a common theme in US foreign policy: the Clinton administration’s aim of building a “constructive strategic partnership” was continued by the Bush administration’s advocacy of the “responsible stakeholder” role for China. Although the term ‘political opportunity’ is not used explicitly in the articulation of these concepts, this label encapsulates the ideas conveyed. For instance, during a visit by President Hu Jintao to the US, President GW Bush (2006) stated that:

The [US] welcomes the emergence of a China that is peaceful and prosperous and that supports international institutions. As stakeholders in the international system, our two nations share many strategic interests. President Hu and I will discuss how to advance those interests and how China and the United States can cooperate responsibly with other nations to address common challenges.

Glaser (2006) cautioned that there are limitations to how extensive the relationship can be, as for the US, “in the absence of a greater convergence of values and agreement on the normative underpinnings of the international system, a comprehensive strategic security partnership with China is neither feasible nor desirable”. Nevertheless, a key theme in US foreign policy discourse has been to emphasise the prospects for cooperation in the international arena across a range of issues given common interests between the two.

Within EU policy discourse, the political opportunity interpretation emerged in the mid- to late-1990s; although arguably still subservient to the perceptions of economic opportunities,

the two are complementary and facilitated the emergence of the ‘strategic partnership’ concept in 2003. Hackenesch and Jin (2009) provide an apt summary of the core of this interpretation: “the EU needs China not only with regard to economic and security interests, but also in order to promote and implement its conceptions of international relations”. Grant and Barsych (2008: 9) suggested that the EU can harness the strategic partnership to “integrate China more fully into multilateral global governance”. As Chapter Four reveals, for some actors there was also a view that China presented an opportunity as a potential ‘pole’ in a multipolar, multilateral order (Grant and Barsych, 2008: 5). The political opportunity interpretation has gained prominence in part because military threat perceptions have not manifested within policy circles; thus there are fewer obstacles in the relationship to good political relations. In the EU, there is not the same hesitancy on the concept of a ‘strategic partnership’ as there is in the US; although it is commonly argued that the relationship is not currently strategic, it is nevertheless the clear aspiration for many within the EU.

For the most part, discussions of the EU-China partnership have concentrated on its limited nature as truly ‘strategic’; yet there are few dissenting voices that disagree with the aspiration of a more strategic relationship – indeed, many of the critiques offer up recommendations for how to attain this (e.g. Casarini, 2006; Grant and Barsych, 2008; Hackenesch and Jin, 2009; Geeraerts, 2011). Though critical of the EU’s unconditional engagement approach to China, Fox and Godement (2009: 52, 65) see potential for a more effective relationship based on a strategy of reciprocal engagement which will require European policymakers to “persuade China that listening to the EU on major strategic issues pays, while ignoring it carries a cost”. Ultimately, their analysis and recommendations suggest that a stronger EU-China relationship is in the interests not only of these two parties, but the world.

The other political opportunity is that China can offer the EU recognition as an important international actor. The EU is still developing its own international presence, and such recognition from other important international players is a facet of its developing foreign policy. The US, by contrast, has no such concerns. The high-level contacts between the two sides – especially the annual EU-China summits – serve as manifestations of the importance accorded by each side to the relationship. Thus the opportunities for the EU are not just about the international system, but about its own international presence. A report by Lerais et al

(2006: 139) for the European Commission’s Bureau of European Policy Advisers<sup>18</sup> contended that “the EU should assist China in overcoming the challenges of transition and reform... to anchor China firmly in the international system and continue to engage in an ongoing dialogue of where the system should be heading and defend views that we hold dear”. This logic is frequently employed in arguments that the EU has an opportunity to play a constructive role by shaping China’s development on the international stage (see Barsych et al, 2005: pp51-2).

China’s foreign policy behaviour and attitude towards the international system have been crucial to the development of political opportunity interpretations. As Sutter (2003/4: 87) noted, “in sharp contrast to Mao’s messianic vision and provocative behavior, Chinese reformer Deng Xiaoping and succeeding leaders have been prepared more to deal with the world as it is”. Rather than attempting to rail against the established system by exporting communist revolution (Broomfield, 2003: 284) or promoting “alternative ideological/economic/political/social models for others to emulate” (Shambaugh, 2008: 303), China’s policy objectives have been relatively restrained and pragmatic. Charles Grant (2008) argued that the trend in China’s foreign policies suggested it was on track to emerge as a “responsible stakeholder” as envisaged by Zoellick. That China stresses its peaceful rise and participates in bi- and multilateral dialogue – including with the US and the EU – has apparently served to reinforce these perceptions. Proponents of political opportunity perspectives argue its foreign policy has remained relatively consistent over time, with the primary objective of furthering national interests without upsetting the status quo.

Following the Tiananmen crackdown, China’s policies did not evince anti-Western or anti-American sentiments despite the intense reaction to what the Chinese leadership ostensibly regarded as an internal affair (Kim, 1998: 21). Instead, China accepted that closer relations with the West were inevitable given the collapse of communist regimes elsewhere (Segal, 1991: 162). The end of the bipolar system meant that China’s international relations were no longer defined by the overarching US-Soviet relationship and the waning of the Cold War’s ideological schism had also presented an opportunity to develop a non-ideological international identity, a task it approached via adopting policies of engagement and cooperation with the rest of the world (Yahuda, 2008: 26). This was evinced through acts such

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<sup>18</sup> It is necessary to note here that the report explicitly states that the views expressed within are those of its authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commission (Lerais et al, 2006: ii).

as signing of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1991, the normalisation of relations with a number of neighbouring states and participation in ASEAN summits (Clegg, 2009: 55).

Breslin (2010) argued that China will increasingly push to change the rules and norms of the international order but in ways that would not cause instability or instigate global crises precisely because such outcomes would endanger economic growth and domestic political stability. In this sense, China is largely supportive of the status quo, and any revisionist intentions are moderate and unlikely to provoke conflict. A report from the Center for American Progress claimed that “Beijing is deeply engaged in international institutions and initiatives. The Chinese show up, they are serious, and they often contribute to policy discussions in a constructive manner” (Hachigian et al, 2009: 2).

Despite its authoritarian character, Mark Leonard (2006) observed that China “is surprisingly susceptible to outside pressure on foreign policy”. Thus at least in this dimension, there are prospects for China internalising international norms and playing by the rules. The ‘China threat’ interpretation, to the extent it has manifested in the foreign policies of others (or to the extent China thinks it has) has meant that the “fear of foreign attribution of a threat reputation has shaped... foreign orientations” such as seeking accession to the WTO (Yong, 2006: 201). The ‘threat’ label may erode the status of China as a legitimate international actor (Yong, 2006: 204) which has been a mainstay of its post-Cold War foreign policy goals. China has consistently downplayed accusations that its ‘rise’ poses a ‘threat’ to the established powers or system. Evidently, some Western policymakers and observers take this seriously.

Sceats and Breslin’s (2012: 47) report was not entirely pessimistic, noting China’s behaviour within the UN Security Council was “more nuanced and flexible than is often assumed”. However their main examples were more recent, such as its constructive role in Sudan’s acceptance of a UN-African Union peacekeeping mission in 2007. Hempson-Jones (2005: 704) argued that China’s “attitude toward UN peacekeeping missions in Cambodia, Somalia, and East Timor” revealed a “more pragmatic stance that sanctions a certain level of interference into other states’ affairs”. Ratification of some international human rights treaties and participation in the Human Rights Council “demonstrate[d] that [China] wishes to be perceived as accepting the legitimacy of the international human rights system and, broadly, the norms on which it is based” (Sceats and Breslin, 2012: 55).

While China's behaviour remains mixed, there is scope for those who interpret China's rise as a political opportunity to argue that this will continue to evolve and that the established powers can play a positive influence on its direction. Indeed, Sceats and Breslin (2012: 55-6) postulated that:

if its leadership is able to steer it through its many domestic challenges, it is conceivable that China will begin to adopt a less defensive attitude towards human rights both at home and abroad and that new possibilities will open up for joint working with Western states on international human rights issues.

Albeit with a cautionary note that it was too early to conclude that China's behaviour had changed and that the international human rights system remains "a peripheral concern" for the leadership (Sceats and Breslin, 2012: 56).

Above, I noted the tendency for normative threat proponents to define China as 'communist' in order to support their argument regarding the challenge its rise poses. This terminology has not been utilised in the arguments who interpret China as a political opportunity. Indeed, arguments that China presents a political opportunity implicitly play down the concept of China as a normative threat. Additionally, proponents of this perspective disagree – explicitly or implicitly – that the historical patterns of power-transitions are bound to be repeated as China becomes more powerful in the international arena. Instead, due to China's substantial interest in global stability and provided that the established powers continue with strategies of engagement and facilitate an increased role for China in the international system, its rise will support, rather than challenge, the status quo. As a result of the persistence of military non-threat and economic opportunities, this interpretation has been able to gain traction in both the US and the EU. However, it would appear in the US that when threat perceptions in those other two dimensions gain salience, the political opportunity interpretation becomes less prominent in policy discourse. In the EU however, the political opportunity perceptions are reinforced by the inception and perpetuation of the notion of China as a strategic partner. As I argue in later chapters 'strategic partner' has in some ways become an interpretation itself.

## ***2.8 Conclusion***

The six interpretations outlined above are to be found in the policy discourse over China's rise in the two polities examined, where they are utilised in justification of preferences advanced by the relevant policymakers. The analysis here shows that the extent of China's rise – let alone the implications for other actors – is contested in policy discourse. This is important in the context of how their responses to this have evolved. In short, exploring the content of each interpretation here sets the scene for considering how these differing interpretations influence the decision-making process in the following chapters. Each of the threat interpretations – military, economic and normative – contained elements of power-transition logic, whereas the non-threat/opportunity interpretations tend to deny the expectations generated by the former. The economic threat interpretation is crucial as it underwrites the military and normative threats perceived by observers. These observations provide linkages between the theoretical framing of the thesis developed in the previous two chapters and the empirical analysis of policy formulation in the cases examined subsequently.

This chapter indicated that the distinctions between interpretations made in the empirical analysis are grounded in the wider discourse over China's rise. However, the necessary breadth of the analysis here reduced the possibility of closely examining the evolution of these interpretations over time. This is remedied in the following chapters, where we see that the economic and political opportunity perceptions have grown over time, although in the US there appears to be a drift towards greater perceptions of China as a military threat, and not just prospectively, but immediately. Distinguishing between these various interpretations provides greater insight into specifics of policy discourse than standard threat/opportunity binary models. Combinations of these interpretations are possible: China could be viewed as an economic opportunity but a normative threat, for instance. These typologies will be used to define the interpretations which were salient at the time of policymaking in response to the events which are examined across the subsequent three chapters.

## **CHAPTER THREE | DEBATING THE RISE OF CHINA IN US FOREIGN POLICY**

### ***3.1 Introduction***

China presents one of the greatest challenges for the US in the post-Cold War era. Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State and National Security Adviser, observed that

[s]ignificant groups in both countries claim that a contest for supremacy between China and the United States is inevitable and perhaps already under way... even though China's absolute military capacities are not formally equal to those of the United States, Beijing possesses the ability to pose unacceptable risks in a conflict with Washington and is developing increasingly sophisticated means to negate traditional US advantages (Kissinger, 2012: 44-5).

As the predominant global and regional power, the US has extensive interests which China's rise will directly and/or indirectly impact. Addressing whether China was a dissatisfied power, Kissinger (2012: 52) noted that since “[t]he current world order was largely built without Chinese participation... [it] sometimes feels less bound than others by its rules”. Even if China's rise is benign, it will fundamentally alter the global balance of power presently stacked in the US' favour. China's closed, authoritarian regime adds another layer of complexity as it makes reading intentions difficult and stokes distrust among some observers. Some conclude that China's objective is to correct the power imbalance in East Asia created by the US' presence. China occupies much of the US' attention in the international sphere and security issues are increasingly prominent in the domestic consideration of China policy. It is commonly asserted that this relationship will define the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Kissinger references a view held by some within the US that China's rise signals an impending power-transition. This is rooted in power-transition theory (PTT) which creates particular expectations for the interaction between China as a rising power and the US, the dominant power. As China's material power increases, the US' foreign policies should reflect greater concern that China has revisionist, hostile intentions and seeks to attain the predominant position in the international system. Due to these factors, the US should be an easy case for PTT to explain. By definition, under interpretations of an impending power-

transition, China's rise is inherently against the US and will likely result in conflict. The general drift in US foreign policy would perhaps suggest that arguments based on power-transition interpretations have indeed gained traction. Yet bringing China into the world has been the goal of US policy from President Nixon onwards<sup>1</sup>, pursuing policies of engagement even when debates over the implications of China's rise have intensified.

This is puzzling, given China's growing power and the apparent increasing salience of characterisations of its rise as an impending power-transition. *How can we explain the continued pattern of engagement which characterises US foreign policy decision-making toward China?* By addressing this question, the chapter adds to the main objectives of the thesis: developing explanations for how China's rise is being interpreted by the established powers' policymakers and how this impacts upon policy debates and formulation. The findings feed into the examination of the transatlantic arms embargo debate (Chapter Five) and the consideration of the differences between the US and EU in their responses to China's rise (Chapter Six). Rather than a single interpretation coming to dominate the discourse, there has been a persistent divergence in the conclusions drawn by various groups of policymakers and analysts regarding the implications for US interests and the international system broadly.

The six interpretations identified in Chapter Two are evident in the US' policy discourse to varying degrees during the specific periods analysed, generating distinct preferences which policymakers attempted to translate into policy. At times, these interpretations and their implications for the US were explicitly stated; in other instances they were inferred from the justification of the preference advanced in the decision-making process. These events provide an opportunity to examine how these debates developed along with the changing reality of bilateral relations and, consequently, how the rival explanations influenced the creation of policy responses. The events selected are interesting not just because they represent a significant development in the relationship but also because they subsequently became part of the wider on-going debates on China's rise, therefore their importance extends beyond the immediate impact in a specific timeframe.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Banning Garrett, Asia Program Director, Atlantic Council, Washington DC, 09/03/11.

The analysis also demonstrates that policymaking is not simply a contest between rival interpretations but is also constrained by the particular policymaking structures through which responses are developed. Utilising foreign policy subsystems, it is possible to determine the actors involved in the creation of policy on specific issue-areas related to an event which provides insights as to why some interpretations appear to be more ‘influential’ in shaping policies despite the increasing visibility of rival interpretations within policy discourse. Proponents of the latter are not generally in policymaking positions where they are able to translate their preferences into policy while ignoring others. In some instances, compromises between preferences are necessitated by the ability of one set of actors to block another.

The second section defines the US’ foreign policy subsystems before we move to examine the decision-making processes in six cases to determine how different interpretations of China’s rise influenced the outcome (section three). The fourth section reflects on the key findings of the empirical analysis and further develops the explanation for the pattern of engagement in the US’ China policies. The final section relates the analysis to the main questions driving the research. Over the timeframe of analysis, China’s rise has been a strongly contested notion and the resultant debates within the US’ policymaking structures have had an impact upon the preferences and decisions of policymakers. The most important finding is that despite China’s growing power and vocal sections of the US policy community interpreting this as a growing threat, interpretations which characterise China as a potentially responsible player and downplay threat concerns have not only persisted but also been key to the determination of the US’ responses and policies at key points in the relationship.

### ***3.2 US Foreign Policy Subsystems***

The US’ policy subsystems are arranged around the executive and legislative branches of government. The executive subsystem is the primary venue for foreign policymaking across all issue areas. The Constitution grants the President the greatest prerogative over foreign policy (Powell, 1999: 259) and in practice has remained dominant (Peterson, 1994: 217). All decisions are taken in the name of the President, thus they assume ultimate responsibility for the actions of the various executive agencies (Tan, 1992: 19). Delegation of policy formulation increases the scope for policymakers to advance their own preferences, but require Presidential approval. However, the President’s personal level of involvement in

policy formulation, the agencies/actors they prefer to delegate responsibilities to, and the political acumen of these actors will vary over time and across administrations. For instance, Ross (2001) and Tucker (2001) paint very different pictures of the George HW Bush and Clinton administrations: the former was heavily involved in foreign policymaking and had a keen interest in relations with China. Clinton's personal interest in foreign policy generally and China specifically was considerably lower, initially leaving executive agencies to compete with each other for influence.

Under the Constitution, Congress has authority for trade policy although has the power to delegate to the presidency, a mechanism which was used extensively in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and resulted in growing presidential power on specific decisions (O'Halloran, 1994: 6-7). There is no area of policy under consideration where Congress enjoys exclusive prerogative, as it relies only passing legislation which requires Presidential approval unless there is a two-thirds majority in both Houses to override a Presidential veto. Even then, the President continues to influence policy through control of the bureaucratic agencies responsible for implementation and also through the use of Executive Orders, national security directives, proclamations or executive agreements (Canes-Wrone et al, 2008: 4). Consequently, Peterson (1994: 217) deigned Congress a "secondary political player" in foreign policy. Congress pays intermittent attention to foreign policy issues – let alone China – and does not act as a unified body, therefore its ability to influence the decisions varied considerably depending on the case and the level of interest generated.

Congress' main powers in the executive-legislative subsystem relate to foreign economic policy – alongside the constitutional requirement for the Senate to ratify treaties with third countries. Congress has some shared powers over foreign policy under the Constitution, and often has the impetus to challenge presidential policy under pressure from the public (Myers and Shambaugh, 2001: 3-4). Congress' major sources of power over military/security policy are the 'power of the purse' and the War Powers Act, which are effectively utilised in response to the President's actions. The President also enjoys informational advantages, particularly in terms of diplomatic information and state secrets (Powell, 1999: 561). In most cases, because the President enjoys a first-mover advantage (Canes-Wrone et al, 2008: 6), they are often able to act unilaterally and put Congress in a position where they are only reacting to

presidential decisions rather than directly formulating policy. Nevertheless, Congress is arguably the key venue for debate, giving policymakers a platform to voice their views.

### **3.3 US Responses to Key Events in the Bilateral Relationship**

Before turning to examine specific cases, the way in which the US' stated policies towards China have evolved since the end of the Cold War provides a useful starting point for understanding how interpretations of China's rise have evolved over time. While the US does not produce public documents on China policy, the *National Security Strategy (NSS)*<sup>2</sup> documents highlight the state of relations and US objectives. Table 3.1 gives an overview of key quotes from these, providing insights into trends of the salient interpretations. The most important trend across the documents was the consistent emphasis on engagement against the background of China's increasing power. The justifications for this approach evinced interpretations of China's rise as a positive development which created opportunities for the US and the international system more widely. Frequent references were made to the US welcoming China's emergence as a peaceful actor and contributor to the global system.

Although China's expanding power received increasing attention this was paired with consistent emphasis on the determination to engage China to ensure its emergence as a responsible, peaceful power. The GHW Bush and Clinton administration documents articulated interpretations of China's rise as more of an economic and political opportunity than any form of threat. The GW Bush administration's documents are more ambiguous; subtle warnings regarding the 'path' China's leaders intend to follow indicate that military threat interpretations in play but also reiterated that the US welcomed China's peaceful emergence. Overall, the stated approaches are generally consistent with behaviour adopted – as I demonstrate below – rather than simply constituting empty rhetoric. While China often complains about a containment strategy, this is not part of the US' stated intentions<sup>3</sup> nor is it

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<sup>2</sup> The NSS documents are produced by the executive branch. This is worth mentioning because there are often clear gaps between the interpretations of China's rise in the administration and Congress (as well as between factions in Congress). No equivalent documents are produced by Congress or in collaboration between the two branches. Such documents would largely replicate the position of the NSS, otherwise this would potentially create two separate visions of foreign policy. There is no truly single 'China policy', but policymakers attempt to construct an outwardly coherent position to signal intentions to third parties.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Banning Garrett, Washington DC, 09/03/11.

reflected in its behaviour. The statements cited in Table 3.1 are, as the analysis below shows, insights into the perceptions which dominated the US' discourse on China policy.

To investigate how differing interpretations of China's rise have influenced the preferences of US policymakers, this section examines six instances of decision-making. These cases have been examined extensively in the literature, but rarely in terms of what they tell us about the evolution of perceptions of China in the US. By examining a set of incidences which are not just about China's military power, we are able to see how the different dimensions of China's rise contribute to a policy discourse in which competing perceptions vary in salience over time. In debates over how to respond to developments in the relationship, policymakers advance their preferences which are predicated on their interpretations of China's rise. Thus the policy debates are more than just reactions to events at a specific point in time, but also represent a wider contestation of the implications of China's rise for the US. By understanding foreign policy decisions as the product of distinct policy subsystems, it is shown that these can facilitate or constrain the ability of particular actors to translate their preferences into policies.

In effect, although debates over events often revealed diverging interpretations of China's rise, I find that characterisations of China's rise as a threat are rarely propagated by key decision-makers within the administration. Consequently, the preferences of key policymakers were not guided by the logic of power-transitions, but instead interpretations of China's rise as presenting opportunities (economic and political) and potentially contributing to regional and global stability have dominated. These interpretations are, however, conditioned to some extent by a remaining uncertainty as to where exactly China will end up, which has often manifested a preference for 'managing' the relationship in a way that is conducive to overall stability in the bilateral relationship itself and the East Asian region at large.

**Table 3.1 - Key Quotations from the US' National Security Strategy Documents**

NSS	Quotations
1990	“The phenomenal growth in East Asia will likely continue, and by early in the next century the combined [economic] output of Japan, the Republic of Korea, China and Taiwan may exceed our own” [p6]
1991	“China is coming to view its neighbors in a new light, and is gradually adjusting to a changing perception of the Soviet threat” [p9]
1995	“China maintains a repressive regime even as that country assumes a more important economic and political role in global affairs” [p1]
1998	“A stable, open prosperous [China] that assumes its responsibilities for building a more peaceful world is clearly and profoundly in our interests” [p43]; “The two summits [1997 & 1998] were important milestones toward building a constructive... strategic partnership” [p43]
1990	“The relationship between [the US] and China,... has also contributed crucially to regional stability and the global balance of power” [p12]
1991	“China, like the Soviet Union, poses a complex challenge as it proceeds inexorably toward major systemic change... Consultations and contact with China will be central features of our policy, lest we intensify the isolation that shields repression. Change is inevitable in China, and our links with China must endure” [p9]
1995	“We are developing a broader engagement with... China that will encompass both our economic and strategic interests... We will also facilitate China's entry into international trade organizations” [p29]
1998	“Our relationship with China will in large measure help to determine whether the 21st century is one of security, peace, and prosperity for the American people. Our success in working with China as a partner in building a stable international order depends on establishing a productive relationship” [p43]
1990	In response to Tiananmen “we have sought to avoid a total cutoff of China's ties to the outside world. Those ties not only have strategic importance, but globally and regionally, they are crucial to China's prospects for regaining the path of economic reform and political liberalization” [p12]
1991	“One of our goals is to foster an environment in which Taiwan and the People's Republic of China can pursue a constructive and peaceful interchange across the Taiwan Strait” [p9]
1995	“We are strongly promoting China's participation in regional security mechanisms to reassure its neighbors and assuage its own security concerns. We have also broadened our bilateral security dialogue” [p29]
1998	“Seeking to isolate China is clearly unworkable. Even our friends and allies... would not support us; we would succeed only in isolating ourselves... More importantly, choosing isolation over engagement would not make the world safer” [p43]

**Table 3.1 (cont.)**

NSS	Quotations
<b>2002</b>	<p>The US “relationship with China is an important part of our strategy to promote a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region. We welcome the emergence of a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China. The democratic development of China is crucial to that future” [p27]</p> <p>“In pursuing advanced military capabilities that can threaten its neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region, China is following an outdated path that, in the end, will hamper its own pursuit of national greatness” [p27]</p>
<b>2006</b>	<p>“As China becomes a global player, it must act as a responsible stakeholder that fulfils its obligations and works with [the US] and others to advance the international system that has enabled its success” [p41]</p> <p>The US “will welcome the emergence of a China that is peaceful and prosperous and that cooperates with us to address common challenges and mutual interests... [which] can guide our cooperation on issues such as terrorism, proliferation and energy security” [p41]</p> <p>The US “seeks a constructive relationship with a changing China. We already cooperate well where our interests overlap, including the current war on terrorism and in promoting stability on the Korean peninsula” [p27]</p>

Sources: White House (1990; 1991; 1995; 1998; 2002; 2006)

By tackling the cases chronologically, their influence on the evolution of the debates over China's rise can be analysed. These cases are important not just because they represent significant junctures in the relationship but because they were marked by debates over specific policies and debates between rival interpretations of implications of China's rise. The preferences which are successful in the policymaking process are predicated on particular interpretations of China's rise, but are not necessarily the whole story. Therefore as well as establishing what interpretations were present at any given time, it is necessary to be able to identify whether subsystem arrangements contributed to the success of one over its rivals. The point is to show that not only is China's rise a contested concept in US policy discourse, but also that there is a pattern in terms of which actors subscribe to particular interpretations and are in a position to act upon these. For each case, two central questions are used to structure the analysis. These are:

- How did the differing interpretations of the rise of China inform policymakers' preferences in relation to the issue(s) at hand?
- Which actors were involved in decision-making and to what extent were their preferences mediated by the subsystem through which policy was developed?

The first aims to establish the developments in the discourse over China's rise and how the contestation between different interpretations conditions the political environment in which responses are formulated. The second question leads to an explanation of why certain actors were able to translate their preferences into policy at the expense of others and the way in which, at times, rival interpretations are effectively 'shut out' of the policymaking process. This approach facilitates an appreciation of the context of the debates over China's rise and in turn why particular decisions were arrived at by those responsible for policy determination.

### *Tiananmen Crackdown*

The spring of 1989 witnessed mass protests – made up primarily of students – in Beijing, catalysed by the death of party dissenter Hu Yaobang and fuelled by the widening gap between the rich and the poor and high inflation (Dreyer, 2000: 617; Mason and Clements, 2002: 164). After the failure of negotiations in the June, the government mobilised the army to

suppress the protesters with the death of hundreds as a result. This brought China into sharp focus in the US, undoubtedly contributing to conceptualisations of China's rise as a potential threat – normative, but also militarily – and still casts a shadow over relations. As a result, Congress' interest in the country increased dramatically which, as the analysis demonstrates below, has had a substantial impact on the China policies of the three administrations studied. Some concluded that China's use of violence against its own citizens implies that it would not hesitate to do the same in the international arena. The first debates over the implications of China's rise developed in the aftermath of the event. As such, Tiananmen is an ideal starting point for the analysis.

Key power-transition theorists Tammen et al (2000: 117) gave no real account of the US' response, simply stating that "sanctions in the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre had little effect on events in China, as other satisfied nations demurred. From a Power Transition perspective, the effectiveness of trade sanctions is very limited". Although arguably too early for power-transition interpretations of China's rise to have taken root, Tiananmen arguably provided the first evidence of China as dissatisfied with international human rights norms and values and willing to use force to achieve political objectives. In this case, PTT's expectation would be for the US to reinforce the system's rules to guard against China's potential challenge and punish this transgression. Tammen et al (2000) were incorrect to say that other satisfied powers balked from taking action – the EU and Japan amongst others imposed their own sanctions. More importantly, they failed to consider the significance of Tiananmen for US perceptions of China as it has become part of the policy discourse and invoked in arguments that China's rise presents both a normative – and potentially military – threat.

The schism between the administration – particularly President Bush – and Congress over the appropriate course of action was driven by differing interpretations of the event itself and, more widely, the importance of the US-China relationship. Both branches of government were clearly appalled and dismayed by the events; however Bush strove to maintain bilateral relations and pursue policies aimed at promoting China's economic development and political reform, showing no signs of contemplating isolating China from the international community. The majority of Congress had a different perception of the importance of China and the appropriate response. The immediate reaction was shaped by the President in the executive

subsystem, but Congress' power over economic policy meant that it was partly forged within the executive-legislative subsystem.

Given that human rights were taken to be universal values, the immediate objective for both the administration and Congress was an end to the repression. Under presidential prerogative, sanctions were imposed across the political, military and economic dimensions including the cancellation of high-level meetings, cooperative projects and the cessation of arms sales. Beyond this, both branches sought to obtain better human rights protection in China but diverged in their preferences for how to achieve this. The administration evidently favoured engagement whereas Congress pushed for responses which would effectively have ostracised China. Human rights issues and concerns over Chinese citizens' future immediately became more prominent expressions of a normative threat in discourse, particularly within Congress.

In Bush's (1989a) first press conference, he "deplore[d] the decision to use force" and could not "ignore the consequences for our relationship with China". However, he also expressed a preference for continued engagement:

This is not the time for an emotional response, but for a reasoned, careful action that takes into account both our long-term interests and recognition of a complex internal situation in China... It would be a tragedy for all if China were to pull back to its pre-1972 era of isolation and repression... I would argue with those who want to do something more flamboyant because... this relationship is vital to the [US] (Bush, 1989a)

Throughout, Bush reiterated his desire to preserve the relationship as far as possible while condemning the violence. Days later, Bush (1989b), responding to criticism of his approach, argued that it was "in the interest of the [US] to have good relations" with China as it became a more important international actor. The underlying logic was that the best hope for reform was to encourage China's engagement with the world rather than attempting isolation and allowing hardliners to suppress the population further. This suggested an interpretation not of a normative threat, but a political opportunity for the US to shape China's development in a positive manner. As such, China's re-emergence on the international scene itself was still considered a welcome prospect by Bush, despite its behaviour in this instance.

In contrast, responses from Congress rarely cited the importance of the relationship, prioritising the promotion of democracy/human rights. While the President's actions received support from many (see statements in Congressional Record, 1989: H2315-8 & S6129-30), others felt that it had not gone far enough. Nancy Pelosi<sup>4</sup> called for a “full-scale economic embargo” (Congressional Record, 1989: H2319); recalling the US’ ambassador to send a signal to the Chinese government was also a popular preference. One letter to Bush from Members requested tabling a resolution at the UN Security Council condemning China’s actions for “reasons of regional stability and peace” (Ritter, 1989: 1). This indicates a perception of China as a regional military threat based on its behaviour. Congress supported Bush’s initial response, but many felt that it did not go far enough and preferences for more extensive sanctions emerged in the debates. Congressional Democrats personalised the issue by attempting to argue that Bush was ‘close’ to China<sup>5</sup>. The upswing in Congressional activism was remarkable; Tiananmen made China a more prominent foreign policy issue and fostered strong views amongst legislators. This subsequently complicated policymaking for the administration, particularly on issues such as China’s Most Favoured Nation renewal (Tucker, 2001: 450), as rival interpretations in the debates curtailed Bush’s ability to act upon his preferences into policies on issues where Congress had some say.

The language employed by Congresspersons was notably more forceful than the President’s, with regular references to the “butchers of Beijing” (e.g. Congressional Record, 1989: H2502) and persistent emphasis on the brutality of the suppression of democratic aspirations. Although the administration repeatedly condemned the use of force, its language was more tempered as Bush saw this as vital to avoid isolating the Chinese leadership and preserving the relationship. Bush’s preference was based on his clear interpretation of China as an increasingly important player with which the US had to engage to shape its rise; Tiananmen did not alter this and Bush strove to ensure it did not derail his policies. Bush had a deep interest in China prior to assuming the Presidency, having served as Chief of the US Liaison Office. Daniel Reuther<sup>6</sup> commented that Bush’s personal experience was advantageous as “he understood how important the whole issue [Tiananmen] was and secondly how crucial it was

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<sup>4</sup> D-CA.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with former senior US administration official, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>6</sup> Reuther served in America’s China Embassy, 1987-1989.

to maintain contact with the Chinese so that we didn't lose contact with the reformers" (cited by Tucker, 2001: 446).

Despite critical interpretations of China in Congress and the media, Bush continued with policies consistent with his own interpretation. His decision to dispatch diplomatic missions to China in July and December 1989<sup>7</sup> to salvage relations demonstrates the importance he accorded the maintenance of the engagement policy. Secretary of State James Baker explained that the President did not want to "compound [the Tiananmen] tragedy by seeking to isolate China from the international community" (cited by Ignatius et al, 1989). Although couched in diplomatic language, Scowcroft's description of the US as "friends" of China and the purpose of the visit as "to resume our important dialogue on international questions of vital interest to both our nations... [and] to reduce the negative influence of irritants in the [bilateral] relationship" (cited by Erlanger, 1989) provided insights into the administration's interpretation: China was an emerging power with which the US needed to engage to encourage along a path of reform. When the visits became public knowledge, the administration was heavily criticised by members of Congress for undermining the response to Tiananmen (Sullivan, 1992: 11), fostering an image in Congress and the media<sup>8</sup> of "Bush [as] 'soft' on China" (Tucker, 2001: 438). The contrast between the administration and Congress' preferences reveal a substantial division between their views on the importance of US-China relations and broader interpretations of China's rise.

Bush saw the trips as a responsible step in foreign policy and "the prudent exercise of presidential prerogative" (Lampton, 2001: 25); evidently less concerned about the potential risks domestically than he was about losing the gains in US-China relations of recent years<sup>9</sup>. Even in the immediate aftermath, diplomatic ties were maintained and officials supported the continuation of a working-level relationship. Bush vetoed Congress' legislative attempt to extend Chinese students' visas<sup>10</sup>, on the grounds that this would restrict his ability to be flexible in foreign policy matters and would likely alienate China's leadership further (Skidmore and Gates, 1997). Yet Bush subsequently enacted its provisions, directing the

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<sup>7</sup> National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger.

<sup>8</sup> See op-eds from McGrory (1989), Hoagland (1989) and Lord (1989, former ambassador to China).

<sup>9</sup> Interview with former senior US administration official, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>10</sup> H.R.2712 – The Emergency Chinese Immigration Relief Act and S.1370 - Emergency Chinese Immigration Relief Act of 1989.

Attorney General to allow PRC nationals to remain in the country (Thornburgh, 1990: 1-3). As a result of Congress' attempts to determine policy through the executive-legislative subsystem, the President was effectively forced to partially accommodate these preferences to curtail criticism. Another complicating factor for Bush was that Chinese officials often consider bills to represent the government position, but do not always take note of which ones actually pass<sup>11</sup>. The concern was that Congress would undermine the administration's message, thus limiting domestic criticism was crucial for securing Bush's main preferences.

The divergence between Bush's perception of the crackdown and the dominant view in Congress was not over Tiananmen in isolation, but was driven by their broader interpretations of the importance of China to the US and the international system. This forced the President to play a balancing act between maintaining bilateral relations and preventing domestic political fallout. There were also some divergences in preferences within the executive branch; James Baker and some other key players were initially eager to meet the political needs of the moment to show that the US was appalled at what had happened<sup>12</sup>. These were largely contained to the inter-agency process, with the general thrust being in the same direction, but there was a gap between the administration as a whole and the President who did not want to respond as strongly, due to progress in US-China relations<sup>13</sup>. The President had the ultimate prerogative to act upon his own preferences, and this was what he did.

Bush's activism and determination to control the policy response demonstrates the President's pivotal role in both the executive and executive-legislative subsystems. This enabled Bush to directly pursue policy preferences based on his own interpretation of the events in the context of the developing relationship and with sufficient support from his own party in Congress block other actors from translating their preferences into policy. A less engaged President may have interpreted the implications of the events differently and developed alternative preferences or allowed a wider range of actors – such as Congress – to implement their preferences. Bush's strong belief in his interpretation of the importance of China and ability to determine policy were central factors shaping the US' response.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Wayne Morrison, Specialist in Asian Trade and Finance, Congressional Research Service, Washington DC, 09/07/10 [NB: personal views, not representative of CRS].

<sup>12</sup> Interview with former senior US administration official, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with former senior US administration official, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

The massacre was argued by the Chinese leadership to be a domestic affair, and not the concern of outside actors. While it did not pose a direct threat to the US security, both the events and the PRC's continued belligerence in the face of condemnation clearly created concern that China was a threat to its own people; conceivably, this could have fostered interpretations of an emerging revisionist power which sought to change the system's rules. Accusations of weakness due to Bush's engagement policies evinced concerns about China's future behaviour, not just in terms of the treatment of its own citizens but also towards other international actors. This was evinced in Ritter's (1989) aforementioned letter:

when the leaders of a nation do not respect the human rights of their people during times of international peace, these leaders are much more likely to provoke war in periods of international tension – irrationally exploiting and expending their citizens.

Thus the concept of China as a threat beyond its own borders actually emerged in the aftermath of Tiananmen; although not widely propagated the seeds were planted in the minds of some policymakers. It is evident however that an alternative interpretation persisted in the administration, producing a more moderate response than would have been the case under an interpretation of China as an emerging revisionist power.

From a power-transition perspective, it might be argued that such an interpretation was actually present, characterising the response as an opportunistic attempt to curtail China's development through the imposition of economic sanctions and the arms embargo; yet key PTT proponents have argued that such sanctions are ineffective. Such an argument is incongruous with the evidence presented relating to interpretations of the events and China more broadly. Moreover, while the US sought to reassert the universality of human rights norms, it did not seek to 'punish' China particularly forcefully. Explaining the development of the response required examination of how preferences of key policymakers were shaped by their interpretations not just of the event, but of China's importance and status as an emerging international player. The most significant outcome of the debate was the generation of differing interpretations of China's character and the status of the bilateral relationship; the divergence between these have widened as China's power has grown, leading to splits in assessments of the implications of China's rise.

### *MFN Linkage/Delinkage*

After Tiananmen, China's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status became subject to annual contention, as Congress sought to exercise influence over some area of policy as punishment for human rights violations (Tucker, 2001: 450). Congressional critics argued that Bush was wrong to continue conferring the status upon a country which had so blatantly violated human rights, whilst Bush and his administration argued that MFN was not an appropriate instrument for attempting to influence China's internal policies and behaviour. Power-transition perspectives would likely posit that China's continued violation of human rights constitutes revisionist intentions towards international norms. Continued benefits from trade with the US would strengthen China, enhancing its ability to ignore human rights issues. The Clinton administration's initial policy change was based on a concern that China posed a threat to its own citizens and for violation of international norms. However, it is evident that the administration's interpretation of the importance of China as a political and economic opportunity changed within a year. The justification of 'delinkage' and Congressional reactions to this move indicate a divergence in interpretations. Although there was some support from Congress for delinkage, this was drowned out by its opponents.

Rhetoric in the presidential campaign demonstrated the incongruity between Clinton's interpretations of China and those of the outgoing administration, paving the way for policy change following inauguration. However, to explain why the policy of linking China's MFN status to improvements in China's human rights record was dropped within a year – despite minimal discernible progress – it is necessary to understand how the administration's interpretations of the implications of China's rise evolved. As noted above, Tammen et al (2000: 117) asserted that from a PTT perspective, economic sanctions are of limited use. Yet PTT would nevertheless expect the dominant power to avoid policies which were actively beneficial to the rising power. Its proponents would regard the linkage policy inconsequential at worst, but the subsequent reversal as detrimental to US interests since China had not shown any move towards a 'satisfied' disposition. The initial change, 'MFN linkage', was indicative of a general willingness to accommodate Congressional preferences, ostensibly to enable Clinton to pursue goals in other policy domains. The shift in the administration's preferences

was prompted by developing perceptions of China amongst key players; the dominant interpretation which emerged was consistent with that of the previous administration.

Winston Lord (cited by Tucker, 2001: 455) noted that “Clinton saw that Bush was vulnerable on [China], and it might play well before the American people” but at the same time “didn’t want to swing all the way over to isolation and containment. He genuinely was concerned about... human rights”. In this sense, Clinton’s initial preferences were not founded on a strong perception of China as a normative threat, but were tactical in the context of the election. Clinton’s criticisms of Bush effectively determined that he would have to take a different approach in office. The overriding concern was that policy was acceptable to Congress to avoid squandering political capital necessary for the domestic agenda (Lampton, 2001: 34). However, as with GW Bush and the EP-3 incident (below), the interpretations of China conveyed through campaign rhetoric eventually gave way to alternatives which saw China as an increasingly important international actor with which the US needed to engage.

The threat of revoking MFN represented a more coercive approach in China policy. This was consistent with Clinton’s heavy criticism of Bush’s policies, arguing that previous MFN battles between the administration and Congress had “divided our foreign policy and weakened our approach over China” (Clinton, 1993a: 981). At this time, the Taiwan lobby in Congress – then particularly strong – were opposed to MFN renewal. Congress had used the issue as a ‘valve’ to vent frustration over China’s human rights, the situation in Tibet and the status of Taiwan<sup>14</sup> but placing these issues on the agenda also revealed interpretations of China as a human rights violator and a growing threat to international norms. Playing on Cold War-era conceptualisations of ‘other’, Jesse Helms<sup>15</sup> (amongst others) constructed an adversarial image of China by repeatedly employing the prefix “communist” (see Congressional Record, 1993: S6336). This language, as noted in Chapter Two, has parallels to Cold War narratives of the communist threat, adding to the interpretation of China as a normative threat.

In the case of delinkage, both the shifting preferences among key policymakers in the administration and the changing level of the President’s direct involvement in policymaking

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<sup>14</sup>Interview with Bonnie Glaser, Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, 08/03/11.

<sup>15</sup>R-NC.

were important factors. Formulating policies had previously been left to various administration officials while Clinton focussed on domestic politics; the absence of a well-defined China strategy and a multitude of actors with divergent preferences attempting to influence policy allowed for the changes to take place relatively easily once interpretations of China shifted. Although Clinton held prerogative over key issue-areas, he did not remain engaged with this issue after linkage, instead delegating responsibility to other administration officials. Clinton only became involved when there was a shift in other policymakers' interpretations which prompted a debate within the administration as the deadline for a decision drew near.

The linkage policy was enacted through an Executive Order<sup>16</sup> in May 1993, making MFN renewal subject to improvements in human rights. The Executive Order also required China to adhere to commitments under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and the Missile Technology Control Regime. Although conditionality was not attached to these criteria, their inclusion arguably indicates wider concern about China's behaviour internationally as well as at home in terms of violating the norms embedded within these treaties as well as the concern that it might actively arm other states which were of concern to the US. In Clinton's (1993b) letter to Congressional leaders justifying linkage and the decision to renew for that year, the language suggested that China was had made minor improvements on human rights but still had some way to go. Clinton avoided extensive criticism of China, instead noting positive steps and highlighting areas of potential progress. Similarly, Clinton's (1993a) statement on linkage stressed China's importance, rather than defining it is a broader threat to US interests or security.

Some Congressional Democrats advanced preferences for immediate revocation of MFN but lacked sufficient support or power to translate these into policy (Dittmer, 2001: 437). Edward Markey<sup>17</sup> stated that a "straight, unconditional denial of MFN... is the only response" to China's record on human rights and weapons proliferation (cited by McGrory, 1993). Senator DeConcini<sup>18</sup> criticised China's human rights record and also argued for revoking MFN on the basis of its military build-up which would potentially destabilise the region (Congressional

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<sup>16</sup>Executive Order 12850 of May 28th, 1993.

<sup>17</sup>D-MA.

<sup>18</sup>D-AZ.

Record, 1993: S6855). Gerald Solomon<sup>19</sup> argued that MFN extension was unwarranted given China's lack of progress on human rights issues (Greenhouse, 1993). However, despite the linkage policy receiving majority support, there was no clear Congressional stance. For instance, Bob Dole<sup>20</sup> criticised the conditionality policy on the basis of potential economic damage to the US and the need for good relationships with China which was "going to be a huge force in Asia" (Congressional Record, 1993: S6813).

The administration's failure to specify what would actually constitute sufficient progress to satisfy the conditions imposed was problematic as it contributed to a lack of consensus between administration policymakers on the policy's efficacy: "[i]n the absence of decision by the President, each bureaucracy... [gave] amorphous presidential views the content they [preferred]" (Lampton, 1994: 621) to support their own position. One policy official was quoted as observing that "virtually everyone in the Cabinet and subcabinet has an opinion" (cited by Williams and Devroy, 1994). There were also growing divisions within Congress over linkage, with Clinton meeting Congressional leaders on both sides of the debate to consider options (Devroy, 1994). House Speaker Thomas Foley<sup>21</sup> argued that linkage was "not the most effective way to advance human rights... it's very public and challenging and confrontational" (cited by WSJ, 1994).

The lack of consensus within the administration prompted Clinton to assume a proactive role. Growing recognition of China's increasing power meant that its cooperation on issues such as North Korea's nuclear programme would be vital (Lampton, 1994: 599), a factor given little consideration previously. An interviewee who was part of the decision-making process noted that Clinton's intervention was decisive, as his consideration of the evidence changed his preferences<sup>22</sup>. In discussions with administration officials, Clinton's most pointed argument was that sanctions and embargoes against Cuba over fifty years had not resulted in democracy, concluding that there was little chance to bring about change in China through the linkage policy<sup>23</sup>. This shift in policy preferences was facilitated by the broader reinterpretation of China as an important global actor with which the US needed to engage, based on perceptions

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<sup>19</sup>R-NY.

<sup>20</sup>R-KS.

<sup>21</sup>D-WA.

<sup>22</sup>Interview with former high-level US policy official, Washington DC, 07/07/10.

<sup>23</sup>Interview with former high-level US policy official, Washington DC, 07/07/10.

of potential political and economic opportunities. Others in the administration shared this preference, such as the National Economic Council, as well as Congresspersons whose constituencies depended on trade with China (Lampton, 1994: 605-6); these actors' preferences were based on their perception of significant economic opportunities from improved bilateral relations and no conditionality for MFN.

Clinton (1994: 1166) announced in May that progress had been unsatisfactory due to continuing human rights violations; instead of revoking MFN it was renewed, with the linkage between its future status and human rights improvements ended. Clinton (1994: 1170) stated during a press conference that the decision "is not about forgetting about human rights. This is about which is the better way to pursue the human rights agenda". Clinton (1994: 1166-7) argued that China was an important nation and that the decision would help China to become a more responsible player domestically and internationally. Articulating a preference for a policy of broad engagement (Clinton, 1994: 1168), the language revealed an interpretation of China's rise presenting economic and political opportunities. Further evincing this reinterpretation of China's growing importance as a political opportunity, Clinton (1994: 1170) declared that he was "offering to build the basis of a long-term, strategic relationship" with China.

Members of both parties in Congress argued that the US was turning its back on human rights in China, restating the normative threat presented. Attempts were made to revoke MFN outright<sup>24</sup> and Pelosi introduced a bill<sup>25</sup> for reinstating conditionality, although these did not pass (Li and Drury, 2004: 289). While there were strong advocates of continued linkage, others were less interested but went along with it for political reasons<sup>26</sup>. This suggests that the majority were not strongly committed to the preferences manifest in the legislation; as such, despite the rhetoric there was no definitive interpretation of China as a normative or economic threat driving their behaviour. Congress had scope to alter such policies within the executive-legislative subsystem if there was sufficient support to first pass the legislation then overturn a presidential veto if required.

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<sup>24</sup>H.J. Res. 372 and H.J. Res. 373 (1994).

<sup>25</sup>H.R. 4590 (1994).

<sup>26</sup>Interview with former high-level US policy official, Washington DC, 07/07/10.

Policymakers' views of the international context and their interpretations of China's behaviour influenced their preferences on this issue (Lampton, 1994: 598). Clinton's 'hands-off' approach to policy afforded the State Department and the National Security Council (NSC) considerable influence over policymaking, privileging their interpretations (Lampton, 1994: 598-9). Jean Garrison (2007: 116-7) described Clinton's decentralised advisory system as effectively allowing others to run China policy. This led to divisions within the cabinet, producing three distinct preferences. Some argued that human rights should be the touchstone of relations, whilst others argued that the linkage policy was ineffective and likely to be counterproductive. The final view – belonging to the business community and their supporters in the administration – contended that linkage was disadvantaging US exports due to China's retaliatory imposition of tariffs<sup>27</sup>. These divergent preferences emerged from various interpretations not only of China's domestic and international behaviour, but also its importance to the US. The on-going competition between these sets of preferences eventually forced Clinton to take a decision.

Changing preferences in the administration were linked to an evolving interpretation of China; initially, this was relatively simplistic: China was a human rights violator (normative threat) which needed to be coerced into changing its behaviour. Arguments presented by key policymakers in the run-up to delinkage indicate that interpretations of China as both a political and economic opportunity had (re)emerged. Discussions within the administration and justifications for delinkage forwarded by Clinton were not just about human rights or trade relations; they were about how the US should respond to China's emergence as a more powerful international player. Initially, the President and Congress were in harmony with respect to their policy preferences and interpretations of China. Over time, more administration actors concluded that sacrificing the broader relationship on the basis of human rights concerns was irrational. This position was rejected by many in Congress, who continued to prioritise human rights issues<sup>28</sup>. That the Chinese government did not simply accede to US demands forced the Clinton administration to reevaluate its position not because it was powerless, but rather because their calculus of the relationship's importance had changed.

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with former high-level US policy official, Washington DC, 07/07/10.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with former high-level US policy official, Washington DC, 07/07/10.

The linkage policy was essentially a delayed reaction to Tiananmen; Clinton's interpretation of China as a normative threat prompted him to utilise policymaking powers to effect a policy change advocated by Congress since 1989. This is consistent with PTT expectations, except it cannot explain timing of such behaviour when variations in individual policymakers' positions should not matter. While the ascendancy of Clinton to the White House explains the shift in policy, the subsequent reversal requires understanding why the preferences of administration actors changed. Arguments advanced in the spring of 1994 reveal a shift in interpretations of China as an economic and political opportunity as it continued to rise, altering the parameters of the policy discourse. China's rise was seen as too important by administration officials to be subject to such sanctions. PTT does not allow for this, as the importance of China's rise is fundamentally rooted in the challenge to the US it presents. The impact of the administration's reconsideration of its approach to relations with China was evident in later policy documentation – specifically the 1995 NSS which set out an engagement strategy (White House, 1995). The reaction of some in Congress to delinkage and continued attempts to revoke MFN indicate that their interpretations of China as a normative threat were unchanged.

### *Taiwan Strait Crisis*

This significant test of Sino-American relations in 1995 and 1996 was catalysed by the US granting Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui a visa following Congressional intervention after the application had initially been rejected (Dreyer, 2000: 619). During his visit, Lee referenced "the Republic of China on Taiwan" in a speech which was considered provocative towards China (Lord, cited in Tucker, 2001: 481). In response, China recalled its US ambassador, delayed its agreement to the nomination of James Sasser as the new US ambassador and cancelled numerous bilateral meetings (Kissinger, 2011: 473). The following month, China launched missiles into the Taiwan Strait in an apparent attempt to intimidate Taiwan's leadership (Cooper, 1997: 200). The tests were followed by larger training exercises in August and November. China's aggressive actions intensified in early 1996 in the build-up to the first democratic Taiwanese presidential election; influencing the outcome of this was China's primary objective. The crisis is a crucial case because the US response – the dispatch of two aircraft carrier groups to the region – can be construed as the closest the two sides came to conflict over the timeframe of analysis. Yet following the peaceful resolution of the crisis, the

administration continued with its policies of engagement and downplayed threat perspectives which had gained salience in Congress.

This crisis was arguably the first real demonstration of China's increasing military strength and potential willingness to employ it for political ends. Tammen et al (2000: 37) noted that the Taiwan issue has "significance well beyond its geographical context" because China is a potential challenger. The US "cannot afford to allow the China-Taiwan dispute to polarize US-Chinese relations or poison the relationship to the extent that China becomes an aggressive, dissatisfied power". The crisis presented a challenge to the US' defensive commitments to Taiwan and its wider regional commitments. In this context, those interpreting China's rise as part of an impending power-transition would see China's behaviour as indicative of increasingly hostile intentions and confidence in its abilities as it rises. One possible interpretation of the 1995/96 crisis was that of China challenging the status quo of cross-Strait relations, which it had accepted since 1949 under the "cover" of the 'one-China' principle (Ross, 2002: 54). PTT would expect a strong reaction to this growing military threat, to ensure that the US' regional dominance remained unchallenged. Unchecked aggression on China's part would only invite more in the future.

Threat interpretations were prevalent in some commentary: the *New York Times* labelled China as "bellicose and uncompromising towards its adversaries" (Tyler, 1995a). Former China ambassador, James Lilley, claimed "they are beginning to take us on in international waters, and that is pretty dangerous" (cited by Tyler, 1996). Charles Krauthammer (1996) accused the administration of "craven diplomacy" and ending with a warning that if "you wait for war, you invite war", heavily implying a growing regional military threat. Yet the administration did not conceptualise the event as a direct threat either to Taiwan or US interests. Nevertheless, China's behaviour was widely regarded as irresponsible as it risked an accident or miscalculation which might inadvertently instigate conflict. The absence of a strong threat interpretation contributed to a restrained response consistent with established policy. The executive branch's control of military/security policies excluded preferences generated by rival interpretations – from the decision-making process.

The eventual dispatch of two aircraft-carrier groups to the region was the chosen response not because policymakers anticipated an impending conflict over Taiwan, but rather because it

signalled continued commitment to its security alliances and broader regional stability. That the US did not attempt to contain China's growing military capabilities – either during the crisis or in the following years – contravenes expectations under a power-transition interpretation of China as a rising challenger. Yet the concept of engagement with China was subsequently reinforced, not diminished. This in itself is interesting because the evidence suggests that the crisis did not dramatically shift the dominant interpretation of China's rise towards a growing regional military threat, despite the fact that it has been described as a “turning point” (Lampton, 2001: 46) and supposedly “brought the biggest change in American goals and means since 1972” (Nathan, 2000: 95).

While the response marked a departure from normal interactions with China in the region up until that point<sup>29</sup>, the decision to dispatch aircraft-carriers with the implicit threat of force did not result from a significant shift in interpretations of China's rising military power. The potential use of force was established under the existing policy framework of the Taiwan Relations Act which committed the US “to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system” of Taiwan (US Congress, 1979: §2.2.6). Administration actors did not conclude that the crisis required such action, as a result of the prominence of interpretations of China's rise which prioritised regional stability, i.e. China was considered a military non-threat at least in terms of its intentions. This facilitated strong preferences amongst key administration players for avoiding confrontation.

The language used in the 1995 NSS indicated that China as a potential regional military threat was one possible interpretation of its rise (White House, 1995: 29); however, the language in the document around the aims of the US' engagement with China and the positive aspects of its increased economic and political power indicated that the threat interpretation was not dominant. The extent to which China's rise was considered as potentially threatening was restricted to its impact upon US regional interests. The NSS was published in February that year so provides insights into the administration's interpretation of China's rise heading into the crisis. Thus, actors within the administration were arguably predisposed to interpret the

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with John Park, Senior Research Associate, US Institute for Peace, Washington DC, 09/07/10.

crisis within this framework; as the analysis below demonstrates, this was not sufficiently disruptive to force a reconsideration of their ideas about China.

At the time, Congressional support for Taiwan was high with generally negative attitudes toward China and lingering resentment over the MFN/human rights linkage issue. However, Congressional input in shaping the response was limited by three factors. First, military/security issues fall under the control of the executive subsystem. Second, Congress had less information on the crisis, with only select members serving on intelligence and armed service committees briefed<sup>30</sup>. Finally, Congressional actors refrained from voicing their preferences too much since their demands for Lee to be granted a visa was a contributing factor to the onset of the crisis<sup>31</sup>. So while pro-Taiwan forces favoured a stronger response on the basis that China represented a threat (see below), they were unable to influence policy.

Administration responses to China's missile tests were initially restrained, noting that the actions were not conducive to regional stability but not going as far as condemning them (Suettinger, 2003: 226). However, defence officials on a China delegation in November appeared to interpret these as threatening. One official was stated that "China is brushing off military plans and operational contingencies that they haven't thought about since the 1950's. This is an issue we are very concerned about" (cited by Tyler, 1995b). Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Joseph Nye warned against the use of force, but also noted that policies of engagement through military contacts would continue (Tyler, 1995b). Thus although there appears to have been a growing interpretation of a regional military threat, the broader policy of engagement to influence China's rise had not been altered as the dominant military non-threat and political opportunity interpretations still outweighed it.

The given justification of the dispatch of the ACGs to the region did not define China either as a revisionist power or an immediate threat; a State Department press briefing in March 1996 noted that they served as "a signal meant to convey the strong interests that we have in a peaceful outcome" in the situation (cited by Ross, 2002: 56). This is not to suggest that commitments to Taiwan were not real or that it would not intervene in a conflict, but rather that such an eventuality was not likely. Administration officials concluded that the prospects

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, former US policy official, Washington DC, 28/06/10.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, Washington DC, 28/06/10.

of China attacking US forces in the region were considerably smaller than the potential of an attack on Taiwan (Ross, 2002: 80). Additionally, there was a concern in the administration that Taiwan's response to China's actions might result in an accident, creating an escalating situation which would potentially involve the US<sup>32</sup>. Consequently the administration's understanding of the crisis' precarious nature was more complex than simply China threatening Taiwan.

The administration's response indicated that threat interpretations were not particularly influential; had this been the case, we would expect stronger criticism and a more forceful reaction. China became increasingly aggressive in early 1996 in the run-up to the Taiwanese election, conducting numerous missile tests and exercises in the waters around the island (Chen, 1996: 1055). From then NSC Director of Asian Affairs Robert Suettinger's (2003: 253-6) account, the NSC and Departments of Defense and State<sup>33</sup> shared responsibility for shaping the response. Secretary of Defense William Perry was not usually 'hot-headed' on China but considered this situation to be very serious<sup>34</sup>, commanding significant attention within the administration. The consensus was that the US had to take steps to prevent rash action but avoid destabilising the situation (Suettinger, 2003: 255). The group's interpretation was clearly that China did not present a direct threat to regional security at that time.

Preferences for engagement and non-confrontation remained stable; it was an important distinction that China was displaying force but not actually threatening or using force at that time<sup>35</sup>. This view was consistent across the administration: Perry's statements indicated that the situation was not interpreted as imminent danger to Taiwan (Ross, 2002: 80). Had threat interpretations prevailed, there would have been a greater propensity to conceptualise the display of force as a precursor to its use. However, documentary evidence indicates that the exercises were seen as primarily an attempt to influence Taiwan's first democratic presidential election (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1996: 1). That is not to say that China's actions were acceptable simply because they were not a direct threat to Taiwan's security; rather the

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<sup>32</sup>Interview with Richard Bush, Washington DC, 09/03/11.

<sup>33</sup>The actors involved were Suettinger, Perry, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff John Shalikashvili, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake and his deputy, Sandy Berger. Clinton had little involvement with policy formulation, as the group presented their options to "the president... [who then] concurred with the decision" (Suettinger, 2003: 255).

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, Washington, DC, 28/06/10.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Richard Bush, Washington DC, 09/03/11.

response was mediated by this interpretation of China's motivations. The actions of both sides have been described as "shadowboxing" (Blechman and Wittes, 1999: 24), however power-transition interpretations would still advocate a response to China's hostile intentions, irrespective of the actual limitations of its capabilities.

Congressional responses illustrate a mixture of interpretations of the events and by association China's rise. Republicans in particular took a hard stance; Rep. Solomon referred to China as a nuclear armed giant growing "more adversarial by the day" (Congressional Record, 1996: E482). Senator Frank Murkowski<sup>36</sup> wanted the "Senate to... go on record deplored the military threat" of China, although continued that he did not see an attack on Taiwan as imminent (Congressional Record, 1996: S2623). Dissenting views were also expressed: Dianne Feinstein<sup>37</sup> effectively attributed blame to Taiwan for provocative actions (Congressional Record, 1996: S2628). The House resolution on the crisis<sup>38</sup> implied that China's behaviour was a threat to regionally stability, with a clear preference that US "military forces should defend Taiwan in the event of invasion, missile attack, or blockade" (US Congress, 1996). Further references were made to China's attempts to "intimidate the [US] with veiled threats to launch a nuclear attack against the [US mainland] should the [US] assist Taiwan in defending itself from attack" (US Congress, 1996). It appeared that such a remark had been privately made by a Chinese official to a US official<sup>39</sup> but the administration did not take this as indicative of China's actual intentions. The preamble was amended by the Senate, removing the commitment to actively defending Taiwan and references to the nuclear threat which suggested that the prevailing interpretation of China as a military threat was relatively more moderate in the upper chamber.

Despite China's actions and the massing of military capabilities directly across the Strait, US-China relations did not deteriorate in the crisis' aftermath. Instead, officials continued to advance preferences for policies of engagement as the best way to deal with China<sup>40</sup>. Some have suggested that the crisis resulted in considerable change in policy (Dickson, 2002) but the evidence suggests continuity in interpretations of China's rise amongst administration

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<sup>36</sup>R-AK.

<sup>37</sup>D-CA.

<sup>38</sup>H.Con.Res.148.

<sup>39</sup>Interview with Robert Sutter, Washington, DC, 28/06/10.

<sup>40</sup>Interview with Richard Bush, Washington DC, 09/03/11.

policymakers. Revisions to the US-Japan Defense Guidelines which came after the crisis were rooted in concerns over North Korea<sup>41</sup> – even though references to cross-strait stability were made – rather than a direct response to this crisis. Continued preferences for engagement can be attributed to the absence of interpretations of China’s rise as inherently threatening; this limited the impact of the crisis on policy in ways that we – or rather, power-transition theorists – would otherwise anticipate. In Congress, the crisis does appear to have reinforced interpretations of China’s rise as a threat, based on calls for an end to strategic ambiguity and greater arms sales to Taiwan (O’Hanlon, 2000: 52).

The response was predicated on a perception of China engaging in irresponsible behaviour, with a limited goal of influencing Taiwan’s election rather than challenging the status quo and threatening conflict. Crucially, PTT does not allow for such nuances: behaviour is taken on face value at the international level. Two broader concerns also contributed to the response: the need to reassure regional partners that it was still committed to regional stability and specific security commitments<sup>42</sup>; and also the “domestic front in Congress” (Lord, cited by Tucker, 2001: 486) – a lack of response would perhaps have emboldened China and led to stronger Congressional criticism of the administration. Taiwan’s immediate security was not considered to be directly at stake (Ross, 2000: 108), thus sending the aircraft-carriers *into* the Strait was deemed unnecessary. The administration’s preference for engagement was predicated on calculations that the balance of power was not directly at stake. That the crisis did not escalate further and US-China relations were able to effectively return to normal thereafter reinforced the administration’s interpretation that China was not guaranteed to emerge as a threat. The extent to which China was viewed as presenting a threat was confined to regional security, but based more on its capabilities rather than its intentions.

#### *WTO Accession & PNTR*

WTO entry has been suggested to denote a change in China’s international behaviour from an ideological basis to the recognition of international rules and norms (Chan, G. 2004: 48; Clegg, 2009: 128). WTO accession would allow it to sustain rapid economic growth (Adhikari and Yang, 2002: 1-2), offer protection from discrimination through the rule-based trading

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Banning Garrett, Washington DC, 09/03/11.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Richard Bush, Washington DC, 09/03/11.

system (Ikenberry, 2008: 107) and grant recognition as a member of the “club of rule-abiding countries” (Shirk, 2008: 132). Gerald Chan (2004: 68) argued that it may be “the most significant peaceful change in the global political economy in the post-Cold War world”. WTO accession would also give China greater say in the making of international rules, which would increase its power. Between 1999 and 2001 debates became more intense over China as an emerging power and the implications for the US. These were exacerbated by a number of events: the Cox Report on Chinese espionage; the Chinese reaction to the US’ accidental bombing of the China’s Belgrade Embassy; and the tenth anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown. Relations were also affected by Taiwan’s President Lee’s apparent rejection of the ‘one China, two systems’ model, increasing cross-strait tensions in the summer of 1999 (Suettinger, 2003: 380-5). Each of these was linked into the larger debate over China’s accession to the WTO and granting Permanent Normal Trade Relations<sup>43</sup> (PNTR) status. The debate itself had greater importance for US-China relations than has generally been recognised in the literature. Despite the aforementioned events and vocal opposition to China’s WTO membership from some legislators, the administration played a leading role in integrating China into the international economic system<sup>44</sup>.

Tammen et al (2000) variously indicated that China was, around that time, a dissatisfied power and its growing economic strength would present a challenge to the US. PTT anticipates the US should maintain its relative advantage by doing nothing that will accelerate the already-rapid rise of a potential challenger. Especially against the background of deteriorating relations and a sense of a growing military threat, PTT would expect that the US would not pursue policies which would allow China to expand its economic power as it would in turn be used to bolster its military power further. Throughout the WTO/PNTR debates, those who argued that China was a growing threat – whether economically, normatively or militarily – were the most vocal opponents of further integration. Those who argued that China’s rise was an economic and/or political opportunity were the main proponents of assisting China’s WTO entry. The wider context of relations around that time (Cox Report, Belgrade Embassy) further problematizes US behaviour for PTT.

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<sup>43</sup> The term ‘Normal Trade Relations’ replaced ‘Most Favoured Nation’.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with former high-level US policy official, Washington DC, 07/07/10.

Divergence between Congressional and administration preferences was a significant obstacle as the former could veto a proposed deal. Clinton saw China's WTO accession as part of his legacy (Bhala, 2000: 1511) which reinforced his desire to secure a deal. This alone cannot explain the administration's perseverance in the face of substantive opposition; an important factor was the persistence of Clinton's interpretations of China's rise having potentially positive implications in both the economic and political dimensions, as developed during the MFN delinkage process. The debates illustrated the contestation between different interpretations of China's rise and their impact on policymaking. Despite China threat proponents – predominantly in the House – seeking to block WTO accession/PNTR, they were defeated by policymakers whose preferences were based on interpretations of China as an opportunity and an emerging great power with which cooperation was necessary.

The administration argued that China's membership would be mutually beneficial for respective national interests, bilateral relations and the global system (Lampton, 2001: 177). Amongst administration players, it was thought that China would become a more responsible stakeholder<sup>45</sup> and adopt the WTO's norms in its own interests, thus there was a “get them into the tent” attitude<sup>46</sup>. This line of argument reflects the interpretation of China's rise as presenting both political and economic opportunities. By contrast, sections of Congress argued that Chinese WTO membership could undermine economic interests or its continued human rights violations should preclude admission<sup>47</sup>; views consistent with the economic and normative threat interpretations of China's rise. Some supported WTO membership but opposed PNTR on the grounds that some form of leverage should be retained.

Congressional opponents to the deal would reference China's military threat to support their position<sup>48</sup>, warning that the trade deficit funded PLA modernisation, demonstrating overlap between the economic and military threat interpretations. Congressman Rohrabacher<sup>49</sup> argued that US military power was “in decline”, while China was “building a massively repressive military regime that threatens the United States” (Congressional Record, 1999: H326). Rohrabacher went on to allege that China harboured revisionist intentions, citing similarities

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Wayne Morrison, Washington DC, 09/07/10.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with former US policy official, Washington DC, 08/03/11.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with former high-level US policy official, Washington DC, 07/07/10; interview with Congressional aide, Washington DC, 28/06/10.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, Washington DC, 28/06/10.

<sup>49</sup> R-CA.

to Nazi Germany (Congressional Record, 1999: H329-30) and asserting that the US should “defang this emerging dragon before it is ready to strike” (Congressional Record, 1999: H331). Discussing the revelations of the Cox Report<sup>50</sup>, Rohrabacher described China as “a regime that hates everything America stands for and is determined to dominate the 21<sup>st</sup> Century... [and] is militaristic and expansionist” (Congressional Record, 1999: H1062). Rohrabacher went further than almost any other threat proponent, but nevertheless these concerns were reflected to varying degrees by others.

Evidently, the trade debates were not taking place in isolation but in the midst of debates over China’s growing military and normative threats, and what this meant for the US. Congressman Burton<sup>51</sup> claimed that the “the Chinese Communist government is advancing their nuclear technology... if they are not on a par with us yet, they are getting very, very close; and we are going to be in jeopardy if we ever have a conflict” (Congressional Record, 1999: H2909). These debates and obvious bipartisan concern over the developments in 1999 contributed to a wider consideration of China’s rise than simply a cost/benefit analysis of its WTO membership. This was not a partisan issue, as opponents and supporters hailed from both parties, divided by their interpretations of the implications of China’s rise in terms of economics, politics and security.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (1999) invoked power-transition logic in the *Wall Street Journal*, contending that “Beijing’s paramount goal is to displace US influence in the Asia-Pacific region”. Helms (1999) called for a tougher stance on China as engagement policy – now being conducted from a position of weakness – had failed. John Hayworth<sup>52</sup> argued that the Cox Report necessitated reconsideration of China’s WTO accession, recalling a Chinese official’s observation that America cared more about Los Angeles than about Taiwan in relation to its defence commitments. Hayworth appeared to treat these comments as indicative of hostile intentions and China’s rise as inherently threatening

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<sup>50</sup> The report’s most significant claim was that that China had “stolen design information on the... most advanced thermonuclear weapons” (Select Committee, 1999: ii). Allegations emerged that the administration had intelligence of espionage but failed to respond, compromising national security (Suettinger, 2003: 361). One interviewee (Michael Swaine, Senior Associate at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, 15/07/10) noted that while the report influenced the beliefs of some, many others in the policy community did not give it much credence. Suettinger (2003: 379) was even more direct: “as analysis, the Cox report was dreadful”. Regardless, its mere existence was damaging and exacerbated executive-legislative divisions over China policy.

<sup>51</sup> R-IN.

<sup>52</sup> R-AZ.

(Congressional Record, 1999: H1065) despite administration officials concluding that it was “empty bluster... or a calculated bluff” (Suettinger: 2003: 248) rather than a direct threat.

While representing extreme positions rather than the ‘mainstream’, these examples indicate the range of views and arguably contributed to the delay of the deal. The tenth anniversary of Tiananmen was also used as a reminder of the Chinese government’s authoritarian character. Tom Lantos<sup>53</sup> likened Tiananmen to the Chinese reaction to the Belgrade Embassy bombing<sup>54</sup>, arguing that the government had not changed in a decade (Congressional Record, 1999: H3530). Although Congressional critics were not united on the kind of threat China posed, a clear preference emerged from their disparate interpretations: to deny a deal on WTO accession and later PNTR. This was diametrically opposed to administration preferences and threatened to derail the process. Yet after the summer, the administration pressed ahead with the negotiations for the deal. Following extensive negotiations led by US Trade Representative (USTR) Charlene Barshefsky in Beijing that November, the deal was secured. Clinton addressed the logic of the deal in the context of China’s rise:

it is in the strategic interest of the United States. One of the great questions of the next several decades... is whether China and the [US] will have a constructive relationship or be at odds. I believe that just as we work together in the United Nations, even though we sometimes disagree, we will work together in the WTO  
(cited by NYT, 1999).

The reaction in Congress was predictably mixed. One prominent WTO accession supporter – House Rules Committee Chairman David Dreier<sup>55</sup> – argued that China’s integration with the rules-based system would “go a long way toward improving stability in the [Asia Pacific] region” (cited by Davis and Taylor, 1999). Others, such as Rohrabacker, Helms and Ernest Hollings<sup>56</sup> remained opposed, with the former claiming that the deal amounted to “putting our stamp of approval on having a gangster regime coming into yet another international body” with the possible consequence that “the organization itself will be corrupted by having the

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<sup>53</sup>D-CA.

<sup>54</sup>American explanations that this was a tragic error and subsequent apologies offered were rejected by China, where the incident was seen as “the latest of a long series of Western aggressions” (Gries, 2001: 33).

<sup>55</sup>R-CA.

<sup>56</sup>D-SC.

world's worst human rights violator in its midst" (cited by Stevenson, 1999), once more invoking normative threat interpretations of China's rise.

Although the deal was secured, PNTR status still had to be conferred: although a negative vote from Congress would not impede WTO accession, it would prevent US companies benefitting from China's commitments (Lardy, 2000: 6). Clinton argued in his 2000 State of the Union address that despite some uncertainty over China's trajectory, it was by no means pre-determined or beyond influence. Calling for Congress to grant PNTR, Clinton stated that China's integration with the international system would benefit US interests and "advance the cause of peace in Asia and promote the cause of change in China" (Congressional Record, 2000: H33). Explaining his preference for dealing with China's rise, Clinton stated: "No, we do not know where it is going. All we can do is decide what we are going to do. But when all is said and done, we need to know we did everything we possibly could to maximize the chance that China will choose the right future" (Congressional Record, 2000: H33).

In order to block PNTR, the loose coalition between conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats of the MFN debates re-emerged (Sutter, 2001: 90). Congressman Barr<sup>57</sup> claimed that it was an "undisputable fact that Communist China is a real and growing threat" (Congressional Record, 2000: H120). Another worried about "trading with a country that holds Americans hostage every day by maintaining nuclear weapons targeted" at the US (Congressional Record, 2000: H2349). These arguments explicitly invoked both normative and military threat interpretations of China's rise. The economic threat perspective was also salient, as some were concerned about exacerbating the trade deficit (Faux, 2000: 2). Congressman Traficant<sup>58</sup> claimed that the deficit was financing "an army that someday may come after us" (Congressional Record, 2000: H578). Human rights and labour forces generally wanted to retain some kind of 'check' over China<sup>59</sup> through annual renewal of NTR. Granting PNTR was argued to signal that the US "condones [China's] inexcusable religious persecutions and human rights abuses" (Congressional Record, 2000: H2349).

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<sup>57</sup> R-GA.

<sup>58</sup> D-OH.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with former US policy official, Washington DC, 08/03/11.

PNTR supporters concentrated on economic opportunities; Congressman Knollenberg wanted Congress to “avoid the temptation to give in to the protectionist forces” (Congressional Record, 2000: H2254). These views were often derided as economically opportunistic and inattentive (or outright unsympathetic) to human rights; Congressman Brown<sup>60</sup> claimed that the US would be “accepting the outrageous treatment of laborers in China” (Congressional Record, 2000: H3410). These critiques pointed to questions of legitimacy, attributing PNTR approval as signalling that China’s authoritarian regime was acceptable. This was then linked to the military and normative threats presented by China’s rise; Dan Burton claimed that the trade deficit was

more money with which to buy rope to hang us with... They are building the largest army in the world... We are going to pay for it, and all the while our defenses are being lowered and lowered... They are an enemy of the free world... [and] a threat to the entire world (Congressional Record, 2000: H3685).

Positions on PNTR were not simply divided along lines of interpreting China’s rise as a military or normative threat or not; some generally disposed to this view voted in favour of PNTR on the basis of economic benefits (for instance, see Kyl’s<sup>61</sup> remarks, Congressional Record, 2000: S10129). Neither was it divided along partisan lines, as many Republicans in the House supported PNTR; it was some Democrats the administration needed to persuade. The vote eventually passed in the House in May 2000 – following this intensive administration activism<sup>62</sup> – and then comfortably in the Senate that September (Suettinger, 2003: 397). This was important since had the result been close, PNTR status would likely be revisited by opponents with potentially negative implications for relations<sup>63</sup>. The underlying interpretations of China for many legislators had not changed; one interviewee noted that there were still elements within Congress at the time of the interview that wanted PNTR revoked<sup>64</sup>.

The policymaking process carried over from the final days of Clinton’s administration into the new GW Bush administration. During the campaign, Bush strongly criticised Clinton’s

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<sup>60</sup> D-OH.

<sup>61</sup> R-AZ.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with former high-level US policy official, Washington DC, 07/07/10.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with former high-level US policy official, Washington DC, 07/07/10.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Wayne Morrison, Washington DC, 09/07/10.

policies and identified China as a strategic competitor. While evincing a strong interpretation of China as a potential military threat, Bush nevertheless made clear he supported WTO membership and PNTR (Scobell, 2002: 359) on the basis of his perception of significant economic opportunities from China's rise and integration with the international economic system. Bush also had to contend with Congressional attempts to revoke PNTR and reinstate annual renewal, which resulted in the President utilising a waiver to renew NTR (Jones, 2002: 7-8). The continuity between the two administrations' preferences was facilitated by similar beliefs relating to the US' ability to shape China's rise despite disagreement on its character.

PTT is essentially at a loss when it comes to explaining this case, as the US' behaviour goes against its assumption that the dominant power will seek to maintain its relative advantage. Appreciating the contribution of rival interpretations of China's rise to vociferous policy debates is vital to understand the development of policy on WTO membership. However, the evidence does not indicate that interpretations of China as an economic and political opportunity won over previous critics; rather, these interpretations prevailed because they were held by key players in the administration and a sufficient majority of Congress. Those who interpreted China as an economic/normative/military threat invoked power-transition logic, marking a new stage in the debate over China's rise where such a threat was given explicit consideration. The appearance of such arguments also indicated the presence of wider military threat interpretations within the policymaking community, whereas previously it had largely been considered threatening in the regional context. Thus the nature of the China threat was shifting in discourse to some extent. China's normative threat was the most frequently cited but not a smokescreen for a containment strategy; rather it was based on a genuine belief of the universal nature of human rights and the moral obligation of the US to promote them.

### *EP-3 Incident*

In April 2001, the collision between a US EP-3E surveillance ('spy') plane and a Chinese F-8 fighter jet resulted in the death of the Chinese pilot and the US crew making an unauthorised emergency landing and subsequently being held on Hainan Island. China argued that this was detrimental to national security interests given that the collision took place over its Exclusive Economic Zone (Slingerland et al, 2007: 53). Both sides blamed each other for the incident (Donnelly, 2004: 28-9); President Jiang Zemin and Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan's call for

an apology initially went unanswered (Gries, 2006: 327). China held firm – despite US insistence that fault lay with the Chinese pilot – arguing that the US harboured hostile intentions. Its policymakers also viewed America as unconcerned by the death of the pilot, leading to demands for the US to show “respect” (Yee, 2004: 66). China’s intransigence and accusations of US hostility initially appeared to reinforce the new Bush administration’s view of China as a strategic competitor. As argued above, 1999-2001 was a critical period for the debates over China’s rise in the US and this incident could conceivably have contributed to the deterioration of bilateral relations. Instead, after eleven days, an apology letter was finally issued, although avoided making a direct apology (Zhang, H. 2001: 385).

China’s response to the collision should have reinforced military and normative threat interpretations: its apparent belligerence and growing assertiveness, as well as violation of diplomatic norms, suggest an emerging challenger with revisionist intention. The incident was the first real foreign policy test for Bush – intuitively, China’s behaviour should have reinforced his perception of China as a competitor as it demonstrated willingness to stand up to the US, symbolically challenging its dominant position in the region. PTT says little about isolated diplomatic incidents, but it would expect the dominant power to assert its authority and the rules of the international diplomatic system. However, this was not the case; the outcome actually suggests that threat interpretations were side-lined in the determination of policy despite a rhetorical shift in the early days of the GW Bush administration.

The outcome – the temperance of rhetoric and maintenance of amicable relations (Dickson, 2002: 651) – was influenced by Bush’s decision to delegate responsibility to policymakers in his administration, consistent with his hands-off approach to foreign policy matters at this time. However, these policymakers’ interpretations of China’s rise were moderate relative to Bush’s, and their understanding of the event was more nuanced. A significant concern for administration hawks and some in Congress was that China was not willing to play by the rules of the game, often linked to other examples of its alleged belligerent behaviour. For the most part, the administration did not engage with this debate, although some statements after the resolution indicated continued misgivings about US-China relations. Bush’s immediate response was consistent with his interpretation of China as a challenger, yet this changed relatively quickly once Rice and Powell assumed responsibility for policy formulation. While

the incident did reinforce interpretations of a rivalry for some<sup>65</sup>, the administration re-established ‘engagement’ as the basis of relations thereafter, predicated on political opportunity and military non-threat interpretations.

During the 2000 election campaign, Bush promised a more ‘realist’ foreign policy which would be oriented towards defending national interests including the construction of theatre missile defence in East Asia (Gries, 2005: 402). References to China as a ‘strategic competitor’ evinced an interpretation of China’s rise markedly different to that of his predecessor and closer to the military threat perspective. Presidential candidates are able to make such statements without bearing responsibility for policy; what they say and do cannot make a difference and, importantly, their interpretations are not conditioned by the responsibility of managing relations. Presidents regularly criticise their predecessor’s policies, but once in office recognise that there are certain interests at play, and go with the “current”<sup>66</sup>. Rhetoric is constrained due to communication to multiple audiences, domestically and abroad<sup>67</sup>.

At the time, there was also a notable shift in how the administration viewed the relationship more broadly, recognising China’s increasing importance internationally and that an adversarial relationship was not in the US’ – or the world’s – interests. For the duration of the negotiations the administration cut off contact between officials and their Chinese counterparts with the exception of those involved in discussions<sup>68</sup>. The logic behind this – and the lead role assumed by Powell and Rice – was that it was a diplomatic issue which required extensive discussions between the two sides. The Department of Defense was not publicly involved since, as a Pentagon spokesperson noted, “there is a diplomatic solution to this incident and not a military one” (cited by Sanger, 2001a).

The State Department – with White House support – was responsible for formulating the response. Thus there was little scope for cross-departmental debate and largely kept policy hawks – particularly those in the Department of Defense such as Rumsfeld – out of the

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Daniel Blumenthal, former senior director for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia in the Secretary of Defense’s Office of International Security Affairs, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Wayne Morrison, Washington DC, 09/07/10.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Daniel Blumenthal, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, Washington DC, 28/06/10.

process. The range of perceptions of the situation articulated by key policymakers was relatively narrow given the lack of contrasting interpretations of China's rise among them. Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice (the key actors) successfully convinced the President that the initial policy line would have negative implications for bilateral relations. This prompted a shift to a more pragmatic view of the situation (Garrison, 2005: 170-2). Although there was some debate over the implications of the event and what it meant within the context of China's continued rise, statements from the administration thereafter indicated that threat interpretations had been diminished – not reinforced – by the experience.

Bush's (2001a) immediate response was to declare China's behaviour as "inconsistent with standard diplomatic practice, and with the expressed desire of both our countries for better relations", demanding the immediate release of the crew<sup>69</sup>. Bush (2001b) cautioned that the "accident has the potential of undermining our hopes for a fruitful and productive relationship" with China, but emphasised that he wanted to "keep this accident from becoming an international incident". Once Rice consulted with other officials and experts, it was revealed that the Chinese had complained about that flight for months and was an accident waiting to happen. This shaped Rice's own view of the event and interpretation of China's behaviour. In turn, Rice's briefings to the President influenced Bush's interpretations of the situation<sup>70</sup>. Other policymakers often considered 'hawks' also recognised need for a pragmatic response; a member of Vice President Cheney's staff had indicated that Cheney wanted "rational management of the relationship" to avert a crisis and resolve the situation<sup>71</sup>. Consequently, the advocated approach of the key players had sufficient support to avoid protracted debates within the administration.

A diplomatic resolution was still relatively slow which allowed for some debate to play out within the US policy community. China's main demand – an apology – was initially unacceptable to the US, although they eventually issued in a letter (Avruch and Zheng, 2005: 344-5) which was worded in such a way that allowed Powell to contend afterwards that they had not directly apologised (Yee, 2004: 80). This was important as the administration

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Chris Nelson, Senior Vice President Samuels International Associates and Editor of the Nelson Report, Washington DC, 07/03/11.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Chris Nelson, Washington DC, 07/03/11.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Chris Nelson, Washington DC, 07/03/11.

attempted to avoid appearing weak or as though they had bowed to China's wishes, ostensibly because Congress had called for a tougher response. Although Congress had limited scope to influence the response, some aired their preferences in response to the administration's decisions and the justifications of the response. Thus, rival interpretations of China's character and the implications of its rise persisted in policy discourse.

Discussions of China's rise were often framed in relation to whether it was a strategic partner or competitor. Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Shelby<sup>72</sup> argued that China's behaviour demonstrated that it was "not our strategic partner, and never was" (cited by Mufson and Pan, 2001). John McCain clearly linked the event to a growing regional military threat when he stated that he "would be more inclined to make sure that Taiwan has the ability to defend itself given this intransigence" (cited by Mitchell, 2001). Rohrabacher went further, claiming that it "opens the door for... providing weapons to countries like the Philippines who may also be threatened by Communist China" (cited by Mitchell, 2001). This response is unsurprising from China threat proponents such as Rohrbacher, but the event's magnitude is reflected in the apparent impact on those previously less hostile, such as Senator Joseph Biden who cautioned against a "meltdown" in relations but acknowledged that although he had "not been very supportive of upping the ante on Taiwan", that view "could be overwhelmed by events" (cited by Mitchell, 2001).

While some within the administration still held concerns about China as a "partly-emerging competitor" and saw the relationship as a rivalry – consistent with the military threat interpretation – the antagonistic rhetoric was largely dropped and military contacts were resumed (Dumbaugh, 2002: 16). Following the release of the crew, Bush (2001c) stated that both sides "must make a determined choice to have a productive relationship that will contribute to a more secure, more prosperous and more peaceful world". The administration's approach was shaped by interpretations of China as an increasingly important power with which the US had to cooperate, reflecting the political opportunity interpretation embraced by the Clinton administration. There was an emergent understanding amongst administration policymakers that while China posed challenges, amicable relations were of greater strategic and political importance. As such, the dominant perception of China in the administration was

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<sup>72</sup> R-AL.

arguably that of both a competitor and partner of the US<sup>73</sup>, rather than a simple either-or distinction. The response to the incident defied expectations in light of the administration's previous rhetoric which would have suggested a more confrontational response.

The persistence of varied interpretations within the administration helps explain the general drift towards a general hedging strategy and occasional references in policy statements to the potential military threat presented by China. Bush appeared to evince a threat interpretation when he declared later that month that the US would do "whatever it took" to defend Taiwan (cited by King, 2001). This represented a stronger policy commitment than made by previous presidents<sup>74</sup> and a break from the concept of strategic ambiguity. The State Department immediately insisted that policy had not changed. Bush also confirmed that policy had not changed, but the earlier statement had already created confusion (King, 2001). However, subsequent actions and statements appeared to reaffirm the more moderate position that had emerged during the EP-3 incident; the administration's enthusiastic support for renewing NTR was – according to one official – due to the "need to counter some of the impressions of the past few months" (cited by Sanger, 2001b).

This 'damage-limitation' led by the State Department further highlights the central role of key policymakers in shaping China policy. If the President's interpretation of a military threat had been clear-cut, it is likely that the State Department would have been overridden on this issue. The general tone of statements and the resumption of high-level contacts indicated that policy was driven by preferences for closer relations with the rising power. The administration's policies following the event were also evidently influenced by the recognition of China's potential influence on the issue of North Korea's nuclear programme<sup>75</sup>, which was seen as more of a threat. In this sense, China's rise was perceived as conducive to US interests and regional stability, rather than as detrimental and destabilising. Such a perception is consistent with both the political opportunity and military non-threat interpretations.

Early rhetoric seemed to indicate that interpretations of China's rise as a military threat would form the basis of policy and this incident could easily have accelerated this shift. Indeed, this

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with Daniel Blumenthal, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Dean Cheng, Heritage Foundation Research Fellow, Washington DC, 25/06/10.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, Washington, DC, 28/06/10; Interview with Daniel Blumenthal, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

would have been consistent with PTT's expectations. In reality, the response was dominated by an interpretation of China as an increasingly important international actor with which the US needed good relations. Threat interpretations, while expressed by some over the course of incident, did not underpin the preferences of the small number of administration officials involved in policy formulation. Rice and Powell's perceptions of the event and China's rise produced a clear preference for engagement which was successful due to the President's relative detachment from foreign policymaking early in his administration. The strength of Bush's commitment to the interpretation of China's rise initially espoused was evidently limited, allowing alternative interpretations to guide policy.

Interpretations of China as a political opportunity and the general engagement strategy were reinforced after the terrorist attacks in September 2001. The post-9/11 period witnessed an increasing frequency of high-level contacts and bilateral exchanges (Shambaugh, 2002: 245). Randy Schriver stated that Bush's views of China did not change much over the administration's duration, but rather references to a strategic partnership were predicated on the necessity of cooperation, or at least to marginalise Chinese opposition to US action<sup>76</sup>. In this sense, engagement policies were reinforced by a broader interpretation of China's importance to the international system rather than of China's character directly. The prevalence of China threat interpretations in administration rhetoric was diminished post-9/11, with focus of exogenous threats shifting to that of international terrorism.

#### *Anti-Satellite Test*

China conducted a successful anti-satellite (ASAT) ballistic missile test against its own satellite in January 2007. This was criticised internationally for the creation of debris in low-orbit due to potentially negative implications for other satellites, the International Space Station and future space missions (Johnson-Freese, 2007: 20). It has been suggested that the missile launch was an attempt by China to signal its capabilities and to project its power around the world (Economist, 2008: 23-24). The exercise demonstrated China's ability to disrupt the US' satellite network thereby offsetting its advantages in military and nuclear capabilities (Tellis, 2007: 42). This development was directly relevant to assessments of

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Randy Schriver, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Arlington, VA, 07/07/10.

China's military capabilities. Despite the US retaining qualitative superiority, capabilities employed in asymmetric strategies can offset this advantage by rendering much of the US' sophisticated technology redundant in a crisis situation – such as over Taiwan.

Contrary to PTT's emphasis on the need for the rising power to obtain near-parity with the dominant power, these advances increased the threat potential without closing the relative gap in overall power. There was a parallel concern over China's failure to communicate in advance its intention to conduct the test, its subsequent silence followed by initial denial once the story broke internationally (Tellis, 2007: 42). The lack of transparency relating to its activities should have provided ammunition to proponents of threat perspectives; yet the US' response was arguably relatively muted, with little discernible increase in perceptions of China as a military threat amongst key administration policymakers. Of all the developments examined, this incident should have provoked a greater shift towards threat interpretations of China's rise as it presented the clearest indication of the potential challenge to the status quo.

Military build-up has become more prominent in PTT scholarship since Lemke and Werner (1996), but more importantly has become an integral part of arguments which postulate that China's rise signals an impending power-transition. Indeed, the ASAT capability became an important reference point for those arguing that China's rise presented a military threat. Although the administration repudiated China for violating international norms of conduct in outer space, the response did not overtly treat China as a military threat even though it presents what should be an easy case for PTT. The demonstration of capabilities which could severely hurt the US in conflict should prompt a strong response. Discussion of 'hedging' emerged as a result of the increased attention to China's military developments over the Bush administration. With the apparent proliferation of military threat interpretations, the demonstration of a sophisticated asymmetrical capability may have provided a catalyst for a significant downturn in relations. However, the administration's policy preferences were driven by the continued prevalence of perceptions of China's importance to regional and global security questions and as a growing power which the US needed to integrate into the international system.

The executive subsystem was the venue for the formulation of the response, given that the incident was a military/security issue. The State Department (Barnes, 2007) and NSC rather

than the DoD were central to policymaking (Milowicki and Johnson-Freese, 2008: 5); at that time, the State Department and NSC were populated with policymakers who were keen to minimise disruption to the wider relationship, based on their interpretations of political opportunities presented by China's rise. Their views of the event were thus conditioned by the wider context of the importance of China's rise. Bush's involvement was minimal, although he consented to the formulated response. Although policymakers considered ASAT capabilities to be directed at the US<sup>77</sup>, they did not see it as an urgent threat to national security. Instead, after initial repudiation, other issues resumed prominence in the bilateral agenda. This was illustrated by Cheney (2007) questioning China's commitment to its stated policy of a "peaceful rise" in light of the ASAT test and military build-up more widely, but at the same time praising China's contributions to the Six-Party Talks on North Korea, emphasising the need for continued cooperation.

The DoD's (2006: 29) *Quadrennial Defense Review* reported that "of the major and emerging powers, China has the greatest potential to compete militarily...and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional US military advantages". The 2006 NSS had stipulated that the US sought to engage China but would also "hedge" against the possibility that its rise did not result in the "right strategic choices for its people" (White House, 2006: 42). Although both reports had explicitly reaffirmed the objective of encouraging China's growth as a responsible player, the ASAT test demonstrated that China had substantial disruptive capabilities, which could easily have diminished the belief that promoting its emergence as a 'responsible player' was realistic. Evidently, there was genuine concern over the military implications and China's possible intentions<sup>78</sup> and confusion over who had initiated the launch, raising questions over whether the PLA had acted independently<sup>79</sup>. China's initial silence following the test served to exacerbate worries over both capabilities and intentions. The lack of transparency added to the uncertainty over China's rise, yet the prevailing interpretations in the administration were largely unchanged.

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Daniel Blumenthal, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, Washington, DC, 28/06/10; interview with Michael Swaine, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Daniel Blumenthal, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

Until this point, the US had not faced a potential opponent in space, as the Cold War had ended before the contributions of space capabilities to warfare were understood<sup>80</sup>. This development represented unchartered waters, presenting an opportunity for interpretations of China as a threat – either to regional and global security or as a potential challenger and revisionist power more broadly – to gain greater traction in policy discourse. China’s ASAT capabilities undoubtedly added a new dimension to the debate over its rise but military threat interpretations, although promoted by some, did not produce a shift in the preferences of the key decision-makers in relation to the fundamental approach to China’s rise. Had such interpretations prevailed a more confrontational response would have been forthcoming based on the expressed preferences of those who saw the event itself as indicative of the broader threat presented by China’s rise.

As the US had carried out such tests previously and since the move did not violate any international treaties<sup>81</sup>, criticism focussed primarily on the creation of debris and China’s apparent unwillingness to conform to international norms of behaviour, particularly the non-weaponisation of space. These factors led the administration to emphasise China’s irresponsible behaviour, arguing for greater communication, transparency and adherence to international standards of behaviour on China’s part. However, policymakers frequently reiterated preferences for continued engagement and the repudiation of China’s behaviour was relatively short-lived. This suggests that the event had not fundamentally altered interpretations of China’s rise. In contrast, Congressional actors continued to cite the test as evidence of China’s growing military power and hostile intentions towards the US (see for instance, Stearns<sup>82</sup> warnings over Chinese cyber-attacks, *Congressional Record*, 2007: H10323).

The test could have been interpreted as part of China’s efforts to push the US out of the Asia-Pacific region, as anticipated by John Mearsheimer (2006: 162), providing evidence of (at a minimum) an impending regional power-transition. If Zhang Baohui (2011) is correct to hypothesise that the US-China space relationship is the quintessential embodiment of the security dilemma, it is surprising that there was not a stronger response or deterioration in

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Dean Cheng, Washington DC, 25/06/10.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Michael Swaine, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>82</sup> R-FL.

military and even political relations. This indicates that the threat of an impending power-transition was not the dominant concern within the US policy community; rather the administration's focus was on small powers with disruptive capabilities and (perceived) hostile intentions. At least on this specific issue, China was apparently identified as a status quo power – hence on the same ‘side’ as the US – while it was North Korea that harboured revisionist intentions, despite its status as a small power lacking the potential to disrupt regional or global hierarchies.

The incident did, however, influence the views of the military<sup>83</sup> in a negative direction. One DoD official claimed that the test “showed they are not following us [militarily] but trying to leap ahead” (cited by Gertz, 2007). One former administration official noted that the strike was considered as an impressive technological feat for China<sup>84</sup>. A number of policymakers saw the test as indicative of a growing military threat and consequently intensified their arguments over China<sup>85</sup>, although they were not in positions to directly translate their preferences into policy. Concerns over the ASAT test echoed many of those raised in the 2004-5 debate over the EU’s China arms embargo<sup>86</sup>, since space technology is dependent on dual-use technologies – those with both civilian and military applications (Hagt, 2007: 3).

Although the response was determined by actors within the executive subsystem, Congressional actors vocalised concerns and attempted to initiate policy change through the executive-legislative subsystem. Senator Kyl advocated funding to improve space defence capabilities and hearings to determine whether China’s capabilities were derived from US technology, “shared or stolen” (Milowicki and Johnson-Freese, 2008: 12). However, there was no clear consensus in Congress, as the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Joseph Biden warned against fostering an arms race (Butler, 2007). With no definitive position emerging, Congress’ ability to influence the deliberations in the administration was limited.

Preferences for continued military-to-military exchanges were part of the administration’s desire to continue engaging China; there was also the advantage that these exchanges provided an opportunity to put across America’s concerns. Commander of the US Pacific Command,

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with China analyst, Arlington, VA, 02/07/10.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Michael Swaine, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Randy Schriver, Arlington, VA, 07/07/10.

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter Five.

Admiral Keating, personally delivered a message to the PLA that the ASAT test was inconsistent with China's proclaimed peaceful rise but also reiterated the principles of the US' engagement policy, declaring an interest in more "extensive and sophisticated" bilateral military exchanges and exercises (Yardley, 2007). These exchanges facilitate dialogue in an attempt to influence China's future behaviour through positive inducements. Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas Christensen (2007) conveyed the administration's views on China's rise to a Congressional committee:

Rather than trying to contain China, we are trying to help shape its choices as it rises in influence so that China plays a responsible and stabilizing role in the international system. Despite some areas of real friction, US-China relations are far from a zero-sum game, and if we manage the relationship well on both sides of the Pacific, we should be able to keep it that way.

Administration officials frequently pointed to China's positive steps on the North Korean issue as evidence that it was stepping up its efforts to be a partner of the US<sup>87</sup>, evincing continued prevalence of the political opportunity interpretation of its rise. The envoy handling the North Korean nuclear issue, Christopher Hill, stated that the Six-Party Talks would not be disrupted by the ASAT test as they were "on a different track" (cited by Lanfranco, 2007). In this context, the logic behind administration preferences for a relatively restrained response to the ASAT test becomes evident. These preferences were translated into policy as a result of the administration's prerogative of controlling the diplomatic relationship. Despite the intensification of debates over China's rise, which had been less prominent on the foreign policy agenda since 9/11, an engagement strategy based on interpretations of China's presenting both a political and economic opportunity has continued to underpin US policies.

Writing in the *Washington Post*, Elizabeth Economy (2007) of the Council on Foreign Relations argued that debates over the specifics of the ASAT launch risked "obscuring [its] real message... rhetoric notwithstanding, China's rise will be as disruptive and difficult as that of any other global power". Economy (2007) claimed that "China, with its rapidly growing economy and large population, already exerts an unsettling and often negative impact on the

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Randy Schriver, Arlington, VA, 07/07/10.

world". While not claiming that China was overtaking the US, Economy (2007) implied that it may happen in the future, especially by reference to the need for continued US global leadership to uphold the current system. As noted in Chapter Two, Tkacik (2007a) argued that between China's increasing military budgets, development of threatening capabilities and the ASAT test, there was a clear "intent to challenge the US as a military superpower". Tkacik, like other threat proponents, assumes that the US' own power is regarded as benign; a premise which Jervis (1976: 62-4) warned can lead to a spiral of insecurity.

Such commentaries were frequent in the media and their arguments were repeated by some in Congress, bringing China's rise back to the top end of the foreign policy agenda which had largely been dominated by the global war on terror. However, the test did not just fuel the debate over China's rise; there was also considerable discussion over the US' role in the lack of an international agreement that would prevent a space-based arms race with some observers viewing the test as an attempt to prompt the Bush administration to rethink its position on such a treaty (Holmes, 2007). There was also a view that the test revealed the vulnerabilities of the US' system and that this was a problem the US should address, rather than looking at an international agreement or blaming China.

The ASAT test had no discernible negative impact on the prevailing interpretations of China's rise amongst key administration officials, outwith the DoD. By extension, there was little change in policies that signalled the deterioration of the relationship. Administration policymakers' preferences for engagement appeared to be intensified rather than diminished despite the salience of military threat interpretations in the revived debate over China's rise. This contravenes PTT expectations of the dominant power seeking to curtail the expanding power of the rising challenger. While acknowledging the challenges posed by its behaviour, administration officials continued to advance preferences based on interpretations of China as an increasingly important international actor and contributor to regional/global security. The implications of the test were secondary to other issues: North Korea, overall regional stability and continued engagement with China (despite the oft-cited hedging strategy). In on-going debates over China's rise, the administration continued to reference the hedging element of its strategy, but placed emphasis on engagement. Thomas Christensen's (2008) statement to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission concluded that

it is possible that in spite of the benefits that have accrued to China in the current US-led international system, China will at some point in the future attempt to use its growing military power and political and economic influence to undermine this system and be able to inflict severe damage to US interests. We must prepare for this contingency without allowing that preparation to become the core of our China strategy. Rather, we need to recognize that it is in the US national interest to support the rise of a China that is prosperous and at peace with itself and the world.

### ***3.4 Interpretations of China's Rise and Decision-Making in the US' Foreign Policies***

The US' response to China's rise has been strongly conditioned by the rival interpretations held by policymakers and the debates which arise between these. These shape policymakers' preferences for particular courses of action, often with considerable gaps between these competing sets of preferences; the Tiananmen, MFN and WTO/PNTR cases illustrated this clearly in terms of divisions between the executive and legislative branches. One interviewee commented that such divergent views exist simply because the US has never dealt with a country like China before<sup>88</sup>. Although Congress was never fully united, there was a consistent trend of vocal elements expressing preferences which indicated the various threat interpretations of China's rise, often framed in power-transition terms. Decisions made in the executive-legislative subsystem were marked by intense competition for influence amongst preferences derived from the rival interpretations. The consequence of these varied interpretations and institutional constraints on policymakers acting upon their preferences has been that US policies are not 'objective' responses to the changing reality of China's power.

Although concerns of an impending power-transition were evinced through the various threat interpretations of China's rise, these views were only embraced by a minority of policymakers. Further, the key policymakers within the executive branch did not appear to hold these. Nevertheless, these ideas recurred in the discourse around these key events, with proponents of such views often pointing to the historical record of previous transitions to substantiate their claims. Despite China's growing power, these views did not come to

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with Dean Cheng, Washington DC, 25/06/10.

dominate policy discourse; as Kissinger (2012: 46) noted, although “the rise of powers historically often led to conflict with established countries... conditions have changed”. One interviewee commented that many policymakers understand that “China is not the Soviet Union, which posed clear, unambiguous threats”<sup>89</sup>. Arguably, it is consistently recognised by the majority of policymakers that a policy of engagement is the “only course” of action since treating China like an enemy would bring about that very result<sup>90</sup>. Yet this has not precluded sharp debates over the implications of China’s rise.

These debates in the early 1990s were generally dominated by economics and human rights, although we saw occasional references to a potential military threat at the regional level (and even beyond) despite China’s then relative weakness. After the delinkage of MFN from China’s human rights record, Congress did not attempt to push on human rights issues so vigorously<sup>91</sup> although concerns were frequently invoked in discussion of other issue-areas. From the mid-1990s the military and security dimension became an increasingly important part of the debate. As I argued earlier, 1999-2001 witnessed extensive debates over the implications of China’s rise before being supplanted by the war on terror in the minds of US policymakers. The response to the EU’s proposal to lift its China arms embargo – the missing piece of the puzzle in this chapter – and the ASAT test refocused attention on China and revealed continued uncertainty within the US as to where China was headed. Despite this, the US saw an ongoing need for cooperation and remained committed to policies of engagement.

The US’ policies did not reflect increasing concern over an impending power-transition, but rather demonstrated a largely constant approach of engagement with an objective of influencing China’s rise in ways conducive to US interests, regional and global stability and mutual prosperity. Perceptions of threat within the administration and some members of Congress were focussed on China’s threat to regional security interests, but these concerns were sometimes extrapolated and used to bolster the interpretations rooted in power-transition logic by some policymakers. Although there was a general drift in foreign policy towards hedging under GW Bush, dominant interpretations of China’s rise posited that its emergence presented political and economic opportunities as it could rise peacefully through integration

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Michael Swaine, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Michael Swaine, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Richard Bush, Washington DC, 09/03/11.

with the established international system, which seemed to be underway. The US – guided by the administration – has attempted to pursue a “pragmatic” relationship with China, which has prevented strong action being taken<sup>92</sup>. This continuity is often overlooked in analyses of the relationship due to high-profile events being examined in isolation, over-emphasis on the extent of policy change and the framing of the relationship as an impending power-transition.

The durability of the non-threat/opportunity interpretations of China’s rise which generated preferences for engagement helps explain why the responses observed were not consistent with what would be expected if policymakers were guided primarily by interpretations based on power-transition logic. Across the various cases, some members of the policymaking community advanced preferences for alternative responses but were largely unsuccessful in getting their way. The persistence of these competing interpretations in itself is an interesting phenomenon given that the general drift of foreign policy and apparent proliferation of the various threat interpretations would increase the latter’s scope for greater impact on decision-making. Yet what we see is in each case, the response established was not only based on preferences derived from interpretations of China’s rise as a potentially positive development, but came through a domestic debate in which threat interpretations were presented by some and rejected by the administration. Focussing on policy responses alone without considering the wider context of policy discourse would miss out on these dynamics.

Even though the executive branch has greater overall prerogative in foreign policy, it was not always the case that the preferences advanced by its key players were implemented directly; due to some responses being formulated in the executive-legislative subsystem compromises had to be made when a gap between interpretations transpired – as demonstrated by some of the policy initiatives implemented by Bush in the wake of Tiananmen. As noted above, Congress pays attention to China-related issues intermittently, very rarely acting as a unified body, thus its influence on decisions varied depending on the case, the level of interest in the latter and the internal contest between different interpretations. The divisions within Congress in the WTO/PNTR case highlighted that despite vociferous opposition from some legislators, there was also support for the administration’s position which ultimately allowed the President to enact his preferences.

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, Washington DC, 28/06/10.

Congress represents a diverse range of interests which helps explain the array of interpretations of China's rise. Representatives from states with very little trade interaction with China are less likely to interpret it as an opportunity. Others have substantial trade relations and even send their own trade delegations to China<sup>93</sup>. As such, foreign policies can have an impact on electoral fortunes for members of Congress who, consequently, "may find it politically costly to yield to the president's foreign policy concerns" (Milner and Tingley, 2011: 38). Congress also picks and chooses which issues it deals with whereas the administration is continuously responsible for the formulation and execution of policy<sup>94</sup>. Consequently, the starting points for administration and Congressional actors for interpreting China's rise are substantially different. Congress often exhibits a wider range of perceptions in comparison to the administration<sup>95</sup>. Legislators in Congress are generalist – foreign policy is a very small part of what most members deal with – thus there is a tendency for more simplified views of China<sup>96</sup> which has led to the development of preferences often at odds with those of the administration.

As we saw, the right- and left-wings have a tendency to unite against the centre (as in the MFN and WTO/PNTR cases); disagreements are often within parties rather than between them<sup>97</sup>. The implication is that left/right ideological divisions are of little help in anticipating preferences for China policy. The same can also be said for the administration, in that despite their campaign rhetoric of both Clinton (Democrat) and GW Bush (Republican), they found themselves in the situation where their initial interpretation of China and the importance of the bilateral relationship had shifted. Although the GW Bush administration took a more sceptical view, both Presidents pursued policies of engagement and formulated responses to events in the bilateral relationship on the basis of interpretations of China's rise as an opportunity in terms creating economic benefits and also as a partner for cooperation on other key issues. This was facilitated by limited perceptions of China presenting a military threat regionally or globally. Ultimately, their approaches were not much different from that of GHW Bush.

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with John Park, Washington DC, 09/07/10.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Richard Bush Washington DC, 09/03/11.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Richard Bush, Washington DC, 09/03/11.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with China analyst, Alexandria VA, 02/07/10; interview with Policy Analyst, Washington DC, 13/07/10.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Richard Bush, Washington DC, 09/03/11.

Members of Congress' arguments often raised concerns from other issue-areas in the justification of their preferences in particular cases. This was especially evident on trade relations, where interpretations of China as a normative threat due to continued human rights violations (MFN case) and as a growing military threat due to its expanding power (WTO/PNTR case) were bound up in the policy discourse, gaining almost as much prominence as perceptions of China's rise as an economic threat. The administration arguably did the same in some cases, although going the opposite way; its justification of more moderate responses to particular incidents – such as the Taiwan Strait crisis and EP-3 incident – saw arguments which placed each event in the wider context of bilateral relations. These arguments invoked concepts consistent with interpretations of China's rise as a political and economic opportunity in the sense that it potentially had positive implications for US interests – namely stability in the East-Asian region. Again, the low salience of military threat interpretations was instrumental in allowing these interpretations to hold sway.

The dominant interpretation within the administration across the timeframe of analysis was that of China as a rising power which presented political and economic opportunities, thus necessitating engagement. This created the need for the administration to manage the relationship at the domestic as well as the international level<sup>98</sup>. In the latter, the executive's prerogative generally enables it to secure particular goals and interests with the intent of shaping China's rise. In the former, the administration exercises considerable effort negotiating its position with Congress and discouraging it from taking legislative action that could be interpreted by China as a change of policy. This is necessitated by the variety of interpretations of China which are readily apparent within Congress. On any issue, the White House has to consider how a piece of legislation, resolution or speech will affect its ability to manage US-China relations<sup>99</sup>.

The administration must also regulate the extent to which its different agencies can voice their preferences to prevent sending mixed messages, thus rival interpretations within the administration can sometimes be suppressed. For example, DoD policymakers tend to take a harder line in their views of particular developments, but as one interviewee pointed out their

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with Chris Nelson, Washington DC, 07/03/11.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Chris Nelson, Washington DC, 07/03/11.

remit is to consider the worst case scenario<sup>100</sup> thus are primed to interpret China's growing power as a potential threat to US interests and security. While the President can control for this, the same is not possible – or indeed desirable in American political culture – in the case of Congress. The management of the China relationship is not as simple as saying something has to be done; policymakers have to ask what can be done and what tools are available to do something<sup>101</sup>. The cases demonstrated a tendency for moderate approaches with a strong preference for favouring the status quo and stability in relations, based on interpretations of China's rise as not inherently presenting a threat to the US' interests or position in the international arena. Thus, policies anticipated under PTT-based threat interpretations of China's rise did not materialise. The divergence between interpretations also contributed to disagreement over what constituted 'national interests' in most of the cases. Generally, it is the President's prerogative to define the 'national interest' but their arguments were not always accepted.

### ***3.5 Conclusion***

This chapter demonstrated that the contestation between rival interpretations of China's rise have shaped the development of the US' foreign policies in response to the shifting situation in the international arena. In doing so, it revealed the limitations of insights to be gained from considering the relationship from a PTT perspective, since its expectations failed to match up to the reality of how the US responded even as China grew stronger. The US does not have a coherent, singular policy towards China but multiple policies which can change independently of each other depending on which interpretations prevail in the policy debates. Over the cases examined, there was a clear pattern that perceptions of China's rise as an economic and political opportunity were consistently influential amongst key policymakers; the extent of China's military threat was more hotly contested, although for the most part, it appeared that policy decisions were predicated on the perception that China favoured stability both regionally and globally, rather than challenging the US and the established system.

Although there was a trend toward the proliferation of interpretations of China's rise as a military threat, these were not the basis of preferences advanced by key policymakers within

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with China analyst, Alexandria VA, 02/07/10.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with former US policy official, Washington DC, 08/03/11.

the administration who had the greatest degree of responsibility over policy. These prevailed precisely because they were dominant amongst key administration policymakers, who had significant influence in both the executive and executive-legislative subsystems. For PTT, the trends in the US' responses are problematic since it should have been an easy case. Policymakers' interpretations consistently focussed on economic and political opportunities and the potential for China to emerge as a responsible player which contributed to the maintenance of the current international system. However, the realities of policymaking did not allow administration policymakers to always get their way, opening up scope for competition between divergent sets of preferences.

The US' executive subsystem is dominant in foreign policymaking and although debates in the wider policy community can be influential, interpretations and preferences of administration actors – particularly the President – were often crucial. However not all actors were equally involved in different cases as the nature of the event would privilege certain actors; for instance, the Department of Defense had limited input on policy in the EP-3 incident because it was considered by top officials to require a diplomatic, not military, response. This case also highlighted the President's capacity to directly engage in policymaking or delegate responsibility, with implications for how important their own interpretations were. Usually when they did not have strong preferences they delegated responsibility – as Clinton did with the conditional MFN policy between 1993 and 1994. The response to Tiananmen demonstrated the impact of a highly-involved President with a well-developed interpretation of China; by contrast, the response to the EP-3 incident contravened the precepts of Bush's putative China threat perceptions precisely because he did not dominate the process.

It is well established that the President is the primary foreign policymaker; this research concurs with the caveat that we must understand how the President's preferences are conditioned by policy discourse. Overall, the importance of the contested nature of China's rise within US policymaking illustrates the weaknesses of purely institutional analyses. Limitations of theoretical perspectives which deal with international-level factors are even more obvious as they cannot account for either the institutional or ideational factors which influenced responses, overlooking how international-level factors are interpreted and processed by policymakers and the constraints imposed by the decision-making setting. The processes of response-formulation are not identical, even within the same subsystem.

Competition between different sets of preferences – and by extension interpretations of China’s rise – within subsystems creates impediments to their translation into policy.

## CHAPTER FOUR | DEBATING THE RISE OF CHINA IN EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY

### ***4.1 Introduction***

As with the US, China's rise has been widely recognised by academics and policymakers alike to pose a number of challenges and opportunities for the EU. Its rapid development not only creates new issues in the bilateral relationship or changes the nature of existing ones, but also creates challenges and opportunities for the EU's still-developing foreign policy project itself. At a basic level the EU has long benefitted from – and helped shape – the current international order which China's rise may challenge. The political project of European integration was – at least initially – possible in part thanks to support from the US as its security guarantor. The transatlantic alliance is central to the current international order and thus the EU would be expected to be resistant to challenges to this system. The literature on the EU's international relations has shied away from engaging with power-transition theory (PTT) and, in reverse, proponents of the latter appear largely uninterested with the EU. Yet in the context of its relationship with a rising China, there is no inherent reason as to why power-transition interpretations would not emerge amongst policymakers.

The problem is that PTT is indeterminate with respect to how the EU will behave in response to China's rise. Although, as I noted in Chapter One, Kugler et al (2004) treated the EU as a unitary actor from a PTT-perspective, they did not expound their reasoning for doing so. PTT is state-centric and does not inherently expect non-state entities such as the EU should behave like states. The point is that, contrary to Kugler et al's (2004) assumption, it would be equally plausible to argue that since the EU is not a unitary state actor then PTT is an inappropriate analytical lens. This presents two possibilities: either the EU is a power in the system and will behave in accordance with PTT precepts as China rises, or it is not equivalent to a state actor and therefore will ignore the impact of China's rise on the status quo order. In other words, perceptions of China's rise as part of a power-transition do not produce a specific set of preferences as we would expect in the case of the US. This elasticity provides scope for accounting for any outcome but comes at a cost as it is essentially unable to explain the specific development of EU-China relations along one path versus another. Since I am treating

the EU as a unitary actor, it is useful to consider the value of PTT's expectations in parallel to my analysis.

Looking at the trends in the EU's foreign policies towards China, it is clear that a confrontational approach has not been adopted. Some have described the approach as largely an unconditional form of engagement (Fox and Godement, 2009), however I suggest that in some instances this is an oversimplification and that despite persistent differences between Member States, there is an EU foreign policy towards China. The EU has not acted on the basis of military or normative threat interpretations or, for the most part, an economic threat. Consequently, there is no evidence to suggest that the EU regards the rise of China as an impending power-transition which threatens to destabilise the current international order. Instead, the EU has actively sought to engage with China to integrate it with the established system. While PTT might allow for this insofar as it reduces revisionist tendencies, the EU has actively promoted the concept of China as a responsible player in a multilateral world order and latterly, a strategic partner. Both of these concepts are rooted firmly in a perception of China's rise as presenting political and economic opportunities. Yet the EU has not completely ignored the challenges that are presented by China's rise.

As such, the EU's response to the rise of China does not conform to either of the two extremes mentioned above, though power-transition perspectives cannot tell us where it falls between these. This chapter establishes why the EU has not acted consistently with expectations of a status quo power in response to the development of China on the international scene. Through analysis of how China's rise has been interpreted and debated within the EU, this chapter contributes to the thesis' main objectives, namely, developing explanations for how China's rise has been interpreted by the established powers' policymakers and how these interpretations impact upon policy debates and formulation. The findings feed into the examination of the transatlantic arms embargo debate (Chapter Five) and the consideration of the differences between the EU and the US in their responses to China's rise since the end of the Cold War (Chapter Six).

I contend that within the EU, a limited range of interpretations of China's rise has emerged and the differences between these are relatively narrow. To the extent that threat perceptions have surfaced, these tend to be in relation to the economic and normative dimensions and are

held by a very small number of actors who are peripheral to the policymaking processes. The consequence of this lack of divergent interpretations of China's rise has been that there have been no significant debates over its implications within the EU. The clear preference at the conceptual level of the relationship has been for an engagement strategy, and differences thereafter tend to be between different preferences for how best to conduct this engagement. Interpretations of China's rise as a threat rooted in concerns of an impending power-transition are essentially non-existent in policy discourse. The development of foreign policies has not been constrained by protracted debates over the implications of China's rise which has allowed for the policies of engagement to persist with little deviation over time.

To demonstrate this, the chapter proceeds as follows. Section two outlines the EU's foreign policy subsystems, paving the way for section three in which I examine the decision-making processes in six cases, focussing on how the dominant interpretations of China's rise influenced the responses adopted. The selected events are interesting in their own right as significant developments in the bilateral relationship but are also part of the wider struggle in the EU to determine its own international presence and how it should approach relations with other significant actors. Some of the events fed into the wider discourse over China's rise and thus had a more extensive impact than their immediate consequences in the relationship; however the nature of this impact was qualitatively different than in the US. From there, in section three I assess the implications for the development of the EU's policy responses to the rise of China, reflecting on the key findings of the empirical analysis and further developing the explanation for the persistent pattern of engagement in the EU's China policies.

#### ***4.2 EU Foreign Policy Subsystems***

While the US is the model state actor with significant military power with considerable foreign policy power vested in the head of state, the EU's international presence stands in contrast to this. Its policymaking structures do not conform to the standard 'state' model; it lacks combined military power and does not have a single individual with substantive authority over foreign policies. In the Introduction and Chapter One I expounded the reasoning behind treating the EU as a unitary actor within this project. Within this context, the EU has identifiable foreign policies distinct from the policies of its Member States – as is widely accepted within the literature – produced through unique subsystems. In order to identify

perspectives on China's rise, I rely on the positions expressed in EU-level policy debates by the relevant actors – the Member States, the Commission and the European Parliament – as indicative of their perspectives on China's rise. Here, I treat individual Member States' policies as revealing their preferences for EU-level policies as it is reasonable to assume that they hold consistent preferences for policies constructed at the national and intergovernmental levels. In other words, the EU's foreign policies towards China are the output of the intergovernmental and supranational subsystems.

As there is no EU 'government' continuously responsible for the formulation of policies, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of how the policymaking process operates. I draw on EFP scholarship to define the EU's foreign policy subsystems. White's (2001: 40-1) initial contribution was to disaggregate types of European Foreign policy, whereas Stumbaum (2009: 48-9) concentrated on the decision-making structures of the intergovernmental, supranational and national subsystems. Here, the national foreign policy subsystem – that is, the independent policies of Member States – is left aside because it does not constitute EU-level foreign policy. Concentrating on the intergovernmental and supranational subsystems, I am then able to examine the EU's collective response to the rise of China.

The intergovernmental subsystem is comprised of the Member States coordinating external action through the European Council and the various incarnations of the Council of Ministers (the Council). This is the primary venue for EU foreign policymaking in the majority of policy areas, with the exception of foreign economic policy. Within the intergovernmental subsystem, representatives act on behalf of Member States as the key policymakers. For brevity, I will simply refer to 'Member States' when discussing the intergovernmental system. In foreign policy, decisions are taken by unanimity which should imply equal weighting. In practice, the larger Member States carry more influence, particularly France, Germany and the UK; commonly labelled as the 'EU3' to denote their centrality to the determination of EU policies. One interviewee explained their importance in terms of their capacity to formulate and follow through on policy<sup>1</sup>. Without their consent and participation, little can be achieved with EU-level policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with French foreign policy official, Paris, 21/05/10.

The supranational subsystem comprises the European Commission as the primary actor, although the Council exerts influence by setting the policy agenda to which the Commission adheres. Nevertheless, the Commission enjoys substantial power over implementation of policies and effectively has developed an independent set of preferences in relation to China. The Commission, as the executive arm of the EU, has multiple internal agencies which do not need to be detailed here but are drawn into the analysis where necessary. Stumbaum (2009) identified the European Parliament and European Court of Justice as part of the supranational subsystem. However, the latter is excluded on the grounds that in the cases examined it did not contribute in any meaningful way, thus had no relevance to the analysis. The European Parliament is retained in the analysis as it was a key contributor to policy discourse on the rise of China, even though it had no ability to actually formulate policies independently or to block the preferences of other actors despite passing resolutions which outline the majority preference in an attempt to influence the decisions of the Council and Commission. The European Parliament ends up being a forum for the expression of varied interpretations of China's rise, but its members are not active policymakers.

#### ***4.3 EU Responses to Key Events in the Bilateral Relationship***

In contrast to the US, the EU has specific policy documents on China – the ‘Communication’ papers – that illustrate the evolution of interpretations of China’s rise. The Communications were drafted by the Commission in close coordination with the Member States and then approved by the Council. This process has been important, as there have not been significant debates over the process, at least in the public domain. These documents have readily been accepted by Member States as the basis for EU policies towards China. Unfortunately – from the perspective of this analysis, at least – the EU did not produce specific policy papers on China prior to 1995<sup>2</sup>. Table 4.1 draws on key passages in the five Communications published since then<sup>3</sup> to highlight how China’s rise was contextualised within these.

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the 1985 Trade and Cooperation Agreement which formed the basis of EU-China relations. Given that this predates the timeframe under examination, it is not included in the analysis.

<sup>3</sup> The 2006 Communication paper is the most recent in the series; the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement – under negotiation since 2007 – was expected to produce a new document which would take the place of the Communications. At the time of finalising this chapter (April 2013), the PCA was still under negotiation.

The obvious trend observable across the various documents was that interpretations of China as an economic and political opportunity were consistently dominant, alongside the introduction of the term ‘strategic partner’ from 2003 onwards. Constructive engagement – a term borrowed from America’s China policy (Shambaugh, 1996: 1) – was repeatedly advanced as the best way to respond to China’s rise. The 2006 Communication was the alone in addressing China’s expanding military power, noting that the lack of transparency had caused some concern. Nevertheless, the overall interpretation of China’s rise in the document did not vary from previous documents. The approach advanced across the Communications has been reflected in the EU’s behaviour towards China, as the cases below demonstrate.

This section examines the EU’s responses to six major events in its relationship with China since 1989. This provides an opportunity to study the circular process by which interpretations of China’s rise have influenced the preferences of EU policymakers and, in turn, how these developments themselves shape interpretations. In contrast to the US cases, not all of these have featured prominently in the literature – despite their significance in the context of the EU’s response to China’s rise, the Taiwan Strait crisis and the human rights resolutions at the UN Commission on Human Rights have received virtually no attention. Even those which have been considered – particularly the strategic partnership – have not been utilised to explore the evolution of perceptions of China. Moving beyond the preoccupation with EU-China economic relations, we can analyse how perceptions related to different issue-areas contributed to the evolution of perceptions of China’s rise and, in turn, the evolution of policy discourse at the EU-level.

To reiterate the point made in Chapter Three, the responses to these events are treated as more than an isolated reaction at the time in which they unfolded, but also provide insights into the broader consideration of the implications of China’s rise for the EU. What we see is that the formulation of responses evinced occasional diverging preferences, but the various actors involved held remarkably convergent interpretations of the implications of China’s rise. There were slight deviations depending on what aspects of the relationship certain actors prioritised, but there was little evidence of depictions of China’s rise constituting a threat to EU interests, and no references to power-transition concepts. Overwhelmingly, policymakers focussed on the growing economic and political opportunities, including the putative strategic partnership.

Policymakers rarely questioned whether China might follow another path – or at least, such concerns were not expressed in public discourse or through policy documentation.

The impact of the events on the evolution of the EU's interpretations of and policy discourse on China's rise is traced chronologically. The cases are intriguing because despite representing significant junctures in the EU-China relationship, only one – the UNCHR resolutions – resulted in anything like a 'debate' within the EU between competing preferences. This was a consequence of the significant degree of convergence between actors' perceptions of China's rise; while there was not complete consensus around one single interpretation the distance between them was generally quite narrow, standing in stark contrast to what we saw in Chapter Three. That different preferences emerged within the scope of two essentially overlapping and complementary interpretations – China's rise as an economic and political opportunity – requires further investigation and highlights the complexity of EU foreign policymaking towards China. To understand this latter point fully, it is necessary to question why certain actors held greater sway over decisions than others. For each case, two central questions inform the analysis. These are:

- How did the differing interpretations of the rise of China inform policymakers' preferences in relation to the issue(s) at hand?
- Which actors were involved in decision-making and to what extent were their preferences mediated by the subsystem through which policy was developed?

**Table 4.1 - Key Quotations from the EU's Communication Documents**

Com	Quotations
1995	<p>“China is increasingly strong in both the military-political and the economic spheres... [and] is becoming part of the world security and economic system at a time of greater economic interdependence” [p3]</p>
1998	<p>“China’s emergence as an increasingly confident world power is of immense historic significance, both to Europe and to the international community as a whole. China has become a major partner in a world increasingly bound together by the forces of globalisation” [p5]</p>
2001	<p>“The rise of China represents enormous opportunities and challenges to the international system. The question is how China can share in the responsibilities and opportunities suited to its rapidly increasing power” [p3]</p>

**Table 4.1 (cont.)**

Com	Quotations
<b>2003</b>	<p>“China has entered a new and challenging phase in its social and economic reform process. It has also become increasingly involved in world affairs, especially in multilateral fora, and is rapidly emerging as a major player in the world economy thanks to its dynamic growth and accession to the WTO” [p3]</p> <p>“Europe thus has a major political and economic stake in supporting China’s successful transition to a stable, prosperous and open country that fully embraces democracy, free market principles and the rule of law. The EU has much to offer here, stemming in part from its own experience in integrating accession countries from East and Central Europe” [p3]</p>
<b>2006</b>	<p>“The EU’s fundamental approach to China must remain one of engagement and partnership... [which] should meet both sides’ interests and the EU and China need to work together as they assume more active and responsible international roles, supporting and contributing to a strong and effective multilateral system” [p1]</p> <p>“China has traditionally described its foreign policy as one of strict non-interference, but as it takes on a more active and assertive international role, this becomes increasingly untenable. The Chinese government is beginning to recognise this, and the international responsibilities commensurate to its economic importance and role as a permanent member of the [UNSC] as illustrated by its increasingly active diplomatic commitments” [p3]</p> <p>“Chinese foreign policy has become progressively more proactive and constructive, with China increasingly engaged on both global issues and in regional dialogue, as in the case of the Korean Peninsula. In this context, China has expressed clear interest in strengthened political ties with the EU” [p8]</p> <p>“There is increasing concern caused by the opacity of China’s defence expenditure. As expenditure continues to increase, China needs to be convinced of the importance of improving transparency. At the same time, the EU should improve its analytical capacity on China’s military development” [p11];</p> <p>“China is one the EU’s most important partners. China’s re-emergence is a welcome phenomenon” [p12]</p>

Sources: Commission (1995; 1998; 2001; 2003; 2006)

The first establishes developments in discourse relating to China and how the interpretations of its rise have shaped the political environment in which responses to these events were formulated. The second question sets up an examination of why particular actors were successful in translating their preferences into policy ahead of others and considers the relationship between the intergovernmental and supranational subsystems given that the Council and Commission were both involved in the development of policy responses in some cases. Through this two-stage analysis, the intention is to uncover the context of interpretations of China's rise at specific points in time and how these influenced preferences and subsequently why particular decisions were arrived when there was, at times, disagreement between actors' preferences. In some cases, actors outwith the key subsystems held discrepant interpretations and made these known within the policy discourse but were unable to translate these into policies. In this sense, these actors – particularly Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) – were not key decision-makers but part of the discourse taking place. Bringing them into the analysis highlights the divergence between interpretations within the EU even when within the relevant subsystems there was a tendency towards homogeneity, precluding substantive debate over implications of China's rise between the key actors.

### *Tiananmen Crackdown*

The Tiananmen crackdown occurred “at a time when [bilateral] cooperation... was being strengthened”, resulting in a “sudden deterioration in the political climate” (Commission, 1990: 348) and brought human rights issues onto the EU’s agenda for China. Although criticism of China’s human rights record has faded as attention turned to economic opportunities and the potential for a stronger political relationship, Tiananmen nevertheless had a lasting impact on some perceptions of China’s rise, as demonstrated in various cases below and in the arms embargo debate (Chapter Five). The EU Member States immediately issued individual repudiations followed by various collective responses, finalised at the Madrid Summit. At this stage, China’s development had not reached a point at which we would expect economic or military threats to have emerged in discourse; however, a normative threat interpretation was evident in some quarters, as China appeared dissatisfied with international human rights norms and values and willing to use force for political ends. The violation and eventual cancellation of certain sanctions a relatively short space of time

later demonstrates that Tiananmen had not fundamentally altered the interpretation of China as an economic opportunity at that time.

Since PTT is indeterminate in relation to how the EU will respond to China's rise, it struggles to anticipate which response will be adopted: the two extremes would be a harsh response to the normative challenge (when the EU is taken as a unitary actor) versus a very limited response. The EU's actual behaviour was more nuanced: a range of sanctions were adopted following strong repudiation of China's actions but subsequently dropped the majority of them relatively quickly. I argue that understanding how Tiananmen impacted upon perceptions of China and policymakers' preferences offers a clearer explanation of this outcome. At this stage, the EU's external relations were conducted through European Political Cooperation (EPC), an intergovernmental policymaking process which represented a distinctive foreign policy subsystem in its own right by the 1980s. To respond to the Tiananmen crackdown via the intergovernmental subsystem, agreement had to be achieved between the (then) twelve Member States on the substance of the message and actions. The contents of their individual responses to the events are treated as indicators of their preferences for the EU-level response.

Although the policy decisions taken by the EU through EPC were not binding, the commitment to undertake an EU-level response is indicative of the growing sense that this form of cooperation was "an important addition to, but not a replacement for, national foreign policy competence" based on "a balance of nationally defined interests" (Allen, 1996: 290). The decision to have an EU response to Tiananmen reveals that the Member States' interpretations of the events and of China's character at that time were largely congruent, despite slight differences evident prior to the joint statement. Their actions in the following months and years however, illustrated that policies would be subject to competition between rival preferences for which aspects of the relationship to prioritise.

The UK was worried by possible implications for Hong Kong, particularly in relation to human rights protection following retrocession scheduled for 1997 (Baker, 2002: 48). On June 5<sup>th</sup>, Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe stated that no sanctions were under consideration at that point, leading backbench MPs to criticise the government's lacklustre response (Independent, 1989). Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher took a harder stance the following day, expressing "utter revulsion and outrage" at the killings (Hansard, 1989: Vol.154 Col.14). One former

policy official noted that Thatcher was concerned about the Communists in China (with an emphasis on their ideology, indicating a normative threat) and as such the potential implications for Hong Kong in addition to the reaction of the British media and public shaped her response to the killings<sup>4</sup>. Thatcher also initially invoked concerns of a military threat when she claimed that “[the crackdown] shows that Communism stands ready to impose its will by force on innocent people and we must take that into account in our views on defence” (Hansard, 1989: Vol.154 Col.14).

Calls for complete cessation of all exports were rejected by Howe who identified with GHW Bush’s response, arguing that “it is important to maintain diplomatic, commercial and other human contacts... in order to try and retain the opportunity for recreating [China’s] previous open disposition” (Hansard, 1989: Vol.154 Col.33). While repudiating China’s behaviour, the government maintained a policy of engagement in the hope of exerting influence, not least because the arrangements of Hong Kong’s handover still had to be finalised – government officials were concerned that China could not be trusted to adhere to the existing agreement. Ahead of the group of seven leading economies (G7) meeting in July, it was reported that the UK would press for no further sanctions to avoid isolating China (McEwen and Pomery, 1989). Prominent politicians including Labour leader Neil Kinnock and Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown called for stronger diplomatic responses and the imposition of economic sanctions (Hansard, 1989: Vol.154 Col.14; Lynch, 1989). Thatcher and Howe defended their position, countering that the best approach for ensuring Hong Kong citizens’ freedom post-retrocession was engaging China to encourage better behaviour and adoption of international rules and norms, rather than risk isolation which would turn the country inwards.

France immediately froze official relations with China and was a key player in the push for a common European response (Stephens, 1989). President Mitterrand declared that “a regime that is reduced to firing on its youth to survive, when the youth it has educated rises up in the name of freedom, has no future” (cited by CWS, 1989); which in Bullock’s (1992: 619) assessment constituted the harshest response of all Western leaders. Tiananmen stirred up “collective memories of the French revolutionary past and the student demonstrations in 1968” (Stumbaum, 2009: 86); indeed, 1989 marked the bicentenary of the French revolution. The

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with former British policy official, London, 07/05/10.

strength of the French reaction was evident when the government insisted on the addition of the arms embargo to the list of sanctions (Wong, 2006: 82). The debate in the *Sénat* on June 5<sup>th</sup> heard references to the need for support of protesters against “Communist totalitarianism” (JORF, 1989: 1086). However, there was little criticism of the government’s immediate response, unlike in the UK. The government’s early response seemed to suggest a significant shift in how its policymakers interpreted China’s character.

While the EU’s response was determined within the intergovernmental subsystem, actors within the supranational subsystem also voiced their reactions despite limited ability to determine policy; these were largely consistent with Member States’ perceptions. The Commission deplored the “brutal repression of the people” and warned that “cooperation between China and the Community can only suffer as a result and would risk being permanently affected if the policy of the Chinese government were to start on a course which would put at risk the policy of openness and reform” (Commission, 1989). The Commission took what limited action it could by cancelling meetings between China’s Minister of Foreign Economic and Trade Relations Zheng Tuobin and Commission President Jacques Delors (Agence Europe, 05/06/1989). The European Parliament (1989) passed a resolution<sup>5</sup> which condemned the “brutal liquidation” of protestors and called for the Council to “consider severe restrictions... especially in the areas of aid, trade and investment” if repression continued.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, an initial, albeit brief, EU response “strongly condemn[ed] the violent repression” and warned that “continuing repressive actions, in violation of universally recognised human rights principles, will greatly prejudice China’s international standing” (cited by Agence Europe, 08/06/1989). This was followed by an agreement at the Luxembourg Council meeting to attempt to coordinate national-level responses where possible and although not imposing joint sanctions at that point, warned that normal relations could not continue (Agence Europe, 12/06/1989). The language employed characterised the events as incompatible with Western conceptualisations of human rights and China itself as a human rights violator, behaving inconsistently with European expectations. However, there was no indication of an emerging interpretation of China harbouring revisionist intentions towards established international norms.

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<sup>5</sup> This came in the September, as the previous session had ended prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> of June.

The Conclusions from the Madrid European Council (26-27<sup>th</sup> of June) condemned the “brutal repression” and called on China to “put an end to the repressive actions against those who legitimately claim their democratic rights” (European Council, 1989). Respect for human rights and democratic aspirations “is an essential element for the pursuit of the policy of reforms and openness that has been supported by the European Community and its Member States” (European Council, 1989). The declaration went on to list the measures adopted, including engaging China on human rights issues in the “appropriate international forums”, suspending military cooperation and the imposition of an arms embargo, suspension of “bilateral ministerial and high-level contacts” and reducing other forms of cooperation (European Council, 1989). The declaration itself did not convey any particular characterisation of China beyond that of a human rights violator.

The Declaration was non-binding, leaving considerable scope for deviation from the declared policies at each Member State’s discretion. While the objective of obtaining more robust human rights protection was maintained within EU policies thereafter, the repudiation of China’s behaviour was relatively short-lived ostensibly as certain Member States did not consider this approach conducive to positive change. Yet it is significant that the Member States agreed on a joint position given that the political dimension of external relations was not particularly well-developed at that time and relations with China were dominated by trade. The other interesting aspect was that many of the EU’s sanctions were brought to an end relatively quickly (with the exception of the arms embargo). One factor which apparently contributed to this was that for some, particularly France, once the initial furore had died down, perceptions of China as an economic opportunity returned to the forefront of policy considerations. Consequently, the strength of the economic opportunity interpretation was demonstrated when France – followed by others – opted to break ranks over the sanctions, rendering them unsustainable.

The UK’s primary incentive for normalising relations was the ongoing negotiations over the Hong Kong handover, with the Joint Liaison Group resuming meetings in September (Mauthner, 1989). France’s overt concern for further human rights abuses was apparently short-lived, as it breached some sanctions within six months of their imposition and sought to re-establish ties (Wellons, 1994: 342). However, France continued to push the issue of human

rights in dealings with China, as it was one of the few countries which placed conditionality on the resumption of high-level bilateral contacts; Prime Minister Dumas asked Beijing in April 1991 to accept a human rights delegation as part of the renormalisation of relations (Cabestan, 2011: 197). Yet France breaching the sanctions was effectively the catalyst for the EU eventually lifting most of them; the common position lasted only approximately ten months (Wellons, 1994: 342). There was consensus that the sanctions were of limited use in effecting behavioural change and that progress would only be made through engagement (Wellons, 1994: 343). By October 1990 the Member States had collectively agreed to “progressively normalize” relations (Commission, 1991: 295), in part influenced by economic considerations (Algieri, 2002: 76).

However, as of 1990 the EU collectively pursued a resolution on China at the UN Commission on Human Rights and successfully maintained this common approach until 1997 (more on this below). China was clearly perceived as a human rights violator in the immediate aftermath of Tiananmen, however the normative threat interpretation of China was offset by the continued salience of the economic opportunity view of its rises and clearly shaped policymakers preferences as the initial shock of Tiananmen wore off. Thus power-transition perspectives cannot account for the nuances of the EU’s response: an initial hard-line stance which soon softened and was eventually replaced by economic and political engagement. The evidence suggests that the imposition of economic sanctions and the arms embargo were not an opportunistic attempt to curtail China’s development, but rather rooted in understandings of the ‘appropriate’ response required. Explaining the development of the response required examination of how preferences of policymakers (particularly the Member States) were shaped by perceptions of the event and also, more widely, of China’s importance as an emerging international economic player.

### *Taiwan Strait Crisis*

The EU’s engagement with the Taiwan Strait crisis was minimal despite some Member States’ regional security interests which could have prompted more extensive involvement. In the EU-China relations literature the crisis has generally been overlooked, presumably because the EU was not an active player. Yet it is precisely because the EU did not respond to the crisis and how relations developed after this that makes it so interesting in relation to the EU’s evolving

interpretations of China's rise and overall character: China's behaviour had barely any impact on EU policy players' perceptions. Those focussing on relative military power might explain the EU's non-involvement as simply consequential of its lack of power, but thereby overlook the specific context of EU and bilateral Member State relationships with China and the dominant interpretations of the latter therein.

Power-transition perspectives of this event would conceptualise China's behaviour as indicative of a growing military threat, which should concern the EU (from the perspective that it is a unitary actor) as it has repeatedly asserted that the Taiwan issue must be resolved peacefully. But the indeterminacy problem for PTT again presents alternatives for the EU: its response could take the form of military integration to allow it to take on greater responsibilities in East Asian security. Alternatively, the EU could simply ignore the crisis. That the former did not occur suggests that power-transition logic was not at the core of European perceptions of the crisis. If the EU did nothing, power-transition proponents could explain this by citing two grounds: first, the EU lacked power-projection capabilities and a regional presence in East Asia that would have enabled it to play a more active role. Second, as a result of the EU's non-involvement in regional security, China's actions did not contravene EU interests. Under a PTT-based perspective in which the EU does not respond to the rise of China, the problem of attempting to understand the EU's reaction falls away. However, the EU's response did not match either of these scenarios; understanding the genesis of the actual response requires consideration of the broader interpretations of China's rise at that time. The response was conditioned by interpretations of China's rise as presenting political and economic opportunities. However, that the crisis did not result in reconsideration of these interpretations requires explanation.

Although the EU's regional security interests were marginal (in comparison to the US), they were nevertheless real. The EU has continually reiterated commitment to regional stability – because of the impact instability would have on its economic performance – and promoting China's peaceful emergence. Additionally, the EU has participated in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF) since its inception in 1994, created to facilitate "constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern; and to make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region" (ARF, 2011). The EU sought to

expand its engagement strategy through agreeing in 1994 to launch the Asia-Europe Meeting which would increase its political visibility in the region. This gave the EU some stake in regional stability, which the crisis threatened to upset.

Due to their continued governance of Hong Kong and Macau, the UK and Portugal bore the greatest stake in regional security at the time. Accordingly, we might expect they would push for a strong EU response, or failing that, pursue strong independent responses. The UK's main priority was Hong Kong's impending retrocession in 1997 – although an issue from which the EU was detached<sup>6</sup>. At the height of the crisis, HK Governor Chris Patten voiced concern that China would “tear out the roots of democracy” (cited by Walker and Reguly, 1996). Michael Yahuda (1993: 246) observed that “the British military and political presence... small as it may seem, contributes to Britain being recognized as a factor in the Asia-Pacific region”. However, Hook (2004: 147) stated that “there was little the UK could do on its own” and its only realistic option would have “involved a joint response with EU partners alongside the US and Japan”. However, policymakers conveyed no preference for such a course of action.

France exported various military items to Taiwan between 1990 and 1994, driving a wedge between it and China. From China's perspective, these sales of predominantly advanced weapons technology were highly controversial (Shambaugh, 1996: 20) as they constituted interference in domestic affairs. However, France's actions were not based on preferences for arming Taiwan against China or influencing the regional balance of power; rather, the sales should be seen in the context of purely economic calculations. Taiwan was a willing customer for advanced technologies and French defence companies needed new markets as Western demand dropped following the end of the Cold War. The new government under Prime Minister Édouard Balladur ended these sales in 1994, followed by Foreign Minister Alain Juppé's attempts to repair Franco-China relations (Shambaugh, 1996: 20). The election of President Jacques Chirac in 1995 ushered in an era of greatly improved bilateral relations.

In the initial stages of the crisis (summer and autumn of 1995) the EU was essentially silent. The EU was still cosponsoring resolutions on China's human rights record at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (see below) but beyond this, there were few points of

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Leon Brittan, former External Relations and Trade Commissioner of the EU, London, 05/05/10.

tension in the relationship. In July, the EU's China ambassador, Endymion Wilkinson, had confirmed that the upcoming Communication paper conveyed a preference “to play a more active role in bringing China into the mainstream of world economic and political life” (cited by Walker, 1995) which indicated perceptions of the EU as an economic and political opportunity. In early 1996, the EU continued to pursue policies of engagement with no evidence of emergent threat perceptions, even as tensions in the Taiwan Strait continued. UK Foreign Minister Malcolm Rifkind visited China in January, commenting that “when you are dealing with a country of 1.2 [billion] you don't need me to tell you the potential purchasing power of this nation” (cited by Higgins, 1996). One of the clearest indicators of the lack of military threat interpretations amongst EU players was the revelation that a Spanish shipyard was exploring the possibility of building China’s first aircraft carrier. This would mark the “first time any country has built an aircraft carrier for a foreign navy” (White, 1996) and, moreover, significantly bolster China’s blue-water capabilities<sup>7</sup>. In the end the deal did not progress; yet its timing and even very consideration suggest that not only was China seen as predominantly an economic opportunity, but that some considered it a non-threat in the military dimension.

As China’s military exercises intensified the Council Presidency (1996) declared on March 8<sup>th</sup> that the EU “deeply regrets” China’s missile tests, warning that the planned exercises “could lead to further tension in the region and increase the possibility of any miscalculation eventually leading to confrontation”. The EU called on China “to refrain from activities which could have negative effects on the security of the entire region and urges an early resumption of the cross-strait talks” (Council Presidency, 1996). This was the single collective EU response; despite the intensification of China’s exercises to coincide with Taiwan’s election later in the month, no further reaction was presented. While the response conveyed a clear preference for a peaceful resolution – consistent with established policies – there was evidently no willingness within the EU to become involved. On the same day as the EU’s response, a Foreign Office spokesman outlined the UK’s position, remarkably similar to that of the US administration:

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, possessing an aircraft carrier and being able to deploy it effectively are not the same thing.

We are concerned the missile firings were so close to Taiwan and we believe this will further heighten tensions in the region. We don't believe there is an imminent threat to Taiwan but... there is a real possibility of miscalculation, leading to confrontation (cited by Poole, 1996).

The Commission attempted to play down the significance of the crisis while maintaining engagement with China (Möller, 2007: 180). Then External Relations Commissioner, Leon Brittan, recalled that “we weren’t going to interfere in [the crisis], obviously we hoped it wouldn’t escalate too much but it was something that we kept well out of... I wouldn’t want to say the EU absolved itself of [responsibility], but it did not consider that it could be useful to intervene”<sup>8</sup>. Taiwan has not been generally perceived by policymakers as an important issue in EU-China relations, resulting in – with the exception of the European Parliament – support for China’s position (Mattlin, 2009: 108-9) or, at a minimum, an aversion to rocking the boat. Gerald Segal (1996), British scholar and political commentator argued that “to hold China to its fragile pledges about personal freedoms for the people of Hong Kong” then the UK “must help the Americans convey the same tough message: that China cannot do whatever it wants just because it claims sovereignty over other people”. This was not the perspective taken by the UK; Malcolm Rifkind noted that although the crisis had caused some concern over Hong Kong’s security within the policy community, views of China as a threat remained low<sup>9</sup>.

Soon after the Taiwanese election and the cessation of military exercises, France hosted a visit from Premier Li Peng; Chirac reportedly wanted better diplomatic relations as well as trade deals (Webster, 1996). It was reported that in private unnamed French officials had said that “the stand-off between America and China... could work in their favour” in terms of developing closer political and economic ties with China (Sage, 1996). The French government’s positive disposition towards China did not enjoy complete domestic support, with over two hundred French deputies using the visit as an opportunity to call on China to pull out of Tibet (Webster, 1996). Opposition MPs claimed that Chirac was overlooking human rights issues and several thousand Parisians protested Li’s visit (Dejevsky, 1996). Chirac’s overtures towards China set the standard for the remainder of his presidency, as we

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Leon Brittan, London, 05/05/10.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Malcolm Rifkind, former British Foreign Secretary, London, 17/06/10.

see in the following case of the UNCHR resolutions and, in the transatlantic arms embargo debate (Chapter Five).

Members of the European Parliament had a strong interest Taiwan-related issues and reacted forcefully to the crisis (Möller, 2002: 27), at least rhetorically. The Parliament passed two resolutions which evinced strong interpretations of China as a threat to Taiwan's security and also its nascent democratic system. The first established a clear preference for a strong EU-coordinated response, calling for

the Council to exercise its influence... to prevent such acts of aggression against Taiwan and to persuade them to refrain from all intimidation aimed at interfering with the elections... requests the Council to obtain such an assurance from the [Chinese] government (European Parliament, 1996a).

The Parliament sits outwith the intergovernmental subsystem, thus although it made its preferences known in policy discourse, the resolution had no discernible impact on the position of the Council. The second resolution, passed as China's military exercises intensified, urged "China to stop all preparations for any military action directed against Taiwan... to renounce the use of force as a means of settling disputes... refrain from further provocative actions... [and] expresses its support for the people of Taiwan" (European Parliament, 1996b). Möller (2002: 27n) observed that the language of this resolution was in contrast to the Council's statement on the crisis, which appeared to adopt a more diplomatic tone, ostensibly to avoid provoking a negative reaction from China. Here we see the military threat interpretation of China's rise gaining traction in the Parliament, but limited capacity to translate preferences into policy.

If the EU's interpretations of China's rise were predicated on power-transition logic – under the assumption that it is a unitary actor – we would expect to see a stronger response in this crisis given the regional interests of some Member States. However, the actual response of condemning China's behaviour was conditioned by a strong preference to avoid provoking a reaction which would aggravate the situation or lead to a negative turn in EU-China relations. In short, the EU did not ignore the crisis but did not involve itself directly. Looking solely at Member States' interests – the UK's responsibility for Hong Kong and France's apparently

close relationship with Taiwan (at least for part of the early 1990s) – fails to explain the response adopted. Perceptions of the crisis itself have to be placed in the wider context of the EU’s interpretation of China’s rise as presenting economic and political opportunities; against this background, good bilateral relations were as much an end in themselves as means to other objectives. Which interpretations particular actors prioritised varied, but the consequence was a strong preference for non-involvement. Only the EP, which had minimal impact on policy, expressed views which conveyed perceptions of China’s rise as a military threat.

### *Human Rights Resolutions at the UNCHR*

Following the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the EU collectively tabled annual resolutions on China’s human rights record at the UN Commission on Human Rights<sup>10</sup> (UNCHR). This is the main intergovernmental forum through which members of the UN (at least theoretically) hold each other to account for human rights behaviour in accordance with the UN Declaration on Human Rights. The EU was a key player in the process of drafting and tabling the resolutions against China, thus arguably presenting evidence for the conceptualisation of China as a normative threat through its continual violation of human rights. While the resolutions never passed, their significance lay in signalling that the EU viewed China as a human rights violator. Normative threat interpretations were salient within policy discourse in the early 1990s; however, China’s rising power prompted a shift whereby perceptions of political and economic opportunities came to dominate, resulting in diminished preferences for confrontational stances on normative issues amongst the Member States. Further, the EU’s internal debates on the resolutions became preoccupied with presenting a united front, rather than critical reflection on the implications of China’s rise and the continued problems with its human rights situation. Member States coordinated their policies within the intergovernmental subsystem, at Council meetings ahead of the annual UNCHR sessions. The Member State which held the rotating Presidency tabled the resolution to be cosponsored. The Commission and EP could not directly influence policy although MEPs often vocally supported continued joint resolutions. The increasing salience of the economic and political opportunities presented by China’s rise allowed the EU-level preference to change relatively easily with minimal internal debate.

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<sup>10</sup> Superseded by the UN Human Rights Council as of 2006.

PTT says little about normative issues beyond their utility as indicators of (dis)satisfaction with the status quo. Since PTT can accommodate – but not specify – any EU response, tabling resolutions could be explained as the EU as a unitary actor enforcing the set of rules and norms supported by the dominant powers. Equally, a break in policy would matter little since it has no impact on the material basis of China’s rise. However, as we saw in Chapter One, power-transition theorists have also argued that the established powers should attempt to integrate the rising power into the established system to diminish revisionist intentions. In this light, we would expect to find evidence that policymakers realised that treating China as ‘outside’ of the accepted responsible actors would be counterproductive; to prevent a power-transition China would need to be treated as an equal. While the evidence shows a clear preference for integrating China into the international arena throughout the 1990s (and beyond), the policy discourse did not reflect power-transition logic. Rather, the EU’s motivation was based on perceptions of China as an economic and political opportunity and consideration of its own positive influence on China’s re-emergence. The alternative PTT perspective is that the EU is not a unitary international actor and thus is not expected to conform to patterns of behaviour expected under conditions of an impending power-transition. However, this understanding effectively precludes the possibility of PTT explaining developments in which the EU acts in a unitary fashion at all.

The 1995 Communication located a “commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms” at the “heart of EU policy” (Commission, 1995: 6)<sup>11</sup>. It also foreshadowed the end of the joint resolutions, warning that “relying solely on frequent and strident declarations will dilute the message or lead to knee-jerk reactions from the Chinese government” (Commission, 1995: 6). Still, the document stressed the importance of “the involvement of the international community” in the UNCHR, noting that the 1995 vote on a resolution suggested the approach was “bearing fruit” (Commission, 1995: 7). The 1998 Communication made no reference to the end of cosponsored resolutions, instead emphasising the positives of engagement through bilateral human rights dialogue (Commission, 1998: 6). Its resumption (after cancellation in 1996) demonstrated China’s “new-found willingness to engage in a serious and results-oriented dialogue” (Commission, 1998: 9). The document concluded that China’s “growing

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<sup>11</sup> There is no documentation which contextualises the policy at the UNCHR prior to this date.

strength has been matched... by a growing sense of responsibility" and that its "increasing assertiveness on the world stage... deserves a positive response" (Commission, 1998: 25). The language throughout identified China as an increasingly important international actor; against this background, the end to cosponsored resolutions was considered appropriate.

Until 1994, China used a non-action motion<sup>12</sup> to circumvent votes on resolutions – the one vote took place in 1995 but did not pass (Whitaker, 1995). That same year, the EU and China agreed to establish a bilateral human rights dialogue and in 1996 the EU's (final) joint resolution was once again defeated. Following this, the rhetoric on engagement over confrontation emerged, particular from France. French diplomats told the *Financial Times* that although the outcome of dialogue remained uncertain, it was nevertheless advantageous to have a joint position (Buchan, 1996). The UK and Nordic states had backed stronger condemnation but eventually came round to supporting dialogue; one French official stated that "at least we are now all walking the same tightrope in dealing with Beijing" (cited by Buchan, 1996). In 1997, a number of Member States broke ranks. France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Greece opted not to co-sponsor the resolution. A French Foreign ministry spokesman accepted that "the rule of law is far from being established in China" but stressed that "a choice must be made between a confrontation that is cut off from reality and a constructive dialogue" (cited by Mirsky, 1997). China's threats over trade relations, according to some commentators, influenced President Chirac's preferences given his impending visit to China during which he would secure contracts for Airbus (Barber, L. 1997). The line on human rights subsequently taken by senior French diplomats in Paris and Brussels was that "private persuasion should take place over public posturing" (cited by Palmer, 1997a).

This shift in preferences led to strong criticism from the Netherlands and Denmark – both Ideological Free-Traders willing to challenge China on sensitive political issues – who strongly backed the resolution. One diplomat told *Agence Europe* (04/04/1997) that Dutch Council President Hans van Mierlo regarded the inability to agree on a resolution as "a serious setback for the Union's foreign policy prospects" and threatened "the essence of the EU's human rights policy". The main Council debate was not explicitly over the opportunities of China's rise versus its continued human rights problems, but focussed inward on the EU's

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<sup>12</sup> "a procedural device designed to avoid a vote on a resolution and to cut short any debate on an embarrassing issue" (Buhrer, 2003: 11).

inability to develop a common position. The Commission weighed in on the issue: President Jacques Santer's spokesperson stated that policy was "in complete disarray" and the Commission viewed the decision of some not to back the resolution "with very great concern" (cited by Palmer, 1997a). These views were repeated parallel to the UNCHR meeting: External Relations Commissioner Leon Brittan lamented that "the lack of consensus... [is] a weakness... Some Member States... could have been able to rally to the broad consensus of other Member States" (cited by Agence Europe, 16/04/1997) – an apparent reference to France and Germany. Notably, Commission officials refrained from commenting on China's human rights directly and spoke only to Member States' preferences, reflecting its limited capacity to shape policy.

The UK supported the Netherlands' resolution rather than assume the lead due to concerns over Chinese threats of retaliation, and with the impending handover of Hong Kong in July wanted to maintain stable relations (Capella, 1997). Ahead of the UNCHR meeting, Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind stated that "it is important that international attention is focussed on the need for improvement in China's human rights situation" (cited by Binyon et al, 1997). A majority of Member States supported the resolution, yet French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette argued that "China has to be treated differently than other less important states" (cited by Palmer, 1997b). For France and the others who abstained, China was not just another country culpable of human rights violations but an increasingly important political and economic player. At any rate, the outcome was another blocked resolution.

Chirac's visit to China the following month was condemned by MEPs, accusing him of putting economic gains ahead of principles and citing a lack of respect for the EP's resolution condemning China's human rights record (Agence Europe, 20/05/1997). Yet Chirac was not only interested in economic gains, but sought to establish a comprehensive bilateral partnership. During the visit the two sides signed a statement pledging to "engage in reinforced co-operation, to foster the march toward multipolarity" and to "oppose any attempt at domination in world affairs" (cited by Walker, 1997). These points were clearly aimed at the US – consistent with Chirac's well-documented anti-American sentiments (see Meunier, 2007). Chirac's interpretation of China's political opportunity focussed on its potential as a 'pole' in a multipolar system; rather than being concerned about the rising power, Chirac seemed to actively welcome a change to the status quo. Under Chirac, France was an

Accommodating Mercantilist which interpreted China's rise as an economic opportunity; thus the government's preference on the resolutions was consistent with expectations that it would not push China on sensitive issues, instead prioritising good political relations<sup>13</sup>.

The EU and China agreed to resume the human rights dialogue in September 1997, with the EU emphasising that it wanted to conduct this in a "constructive spirit" (*Agence Europe*, 20/09/1997). At the start of 1998 the UK held the rotating presidency and pushed for a common line. Robin Cook argued ahead of his January China visit that it would be "very valuable to have a common position" on human rights (cited by Buchan and Kynge, 1998). Cook did not explicate a preference on the resolution, instead concentrating on the need for a united front. *Agence Europe* (22/01/98) reported that the UK had actually joined the resolution's opponents – on this basis, it can be inferred that Cook wanted a common position of silence. France's European Affairs Minister, Pierre Moscovici, articulated a preference for dialogue over resolutions that would make the EU appear "both aggressive and ineffective" (cited by *Agence Europe*, 28/01/1998).

The February General Affairs Council (1998) concluded that "in view of the first encouraging results of the... human rights dialogue... neither the Presidency nor Member States should table or co-sponsor a draft Resolution". At the launch of the new Communication, Leon Brittan stated that "the EU needs to do more to recognize China as a global power" and on human rights concluded that "the question is simple – whether to discuss the issues which are of concern to the EU or whether to take actions which register criticism and even condemnation to the point where dialogue is no longer possible" (cited by *Agence Europe*, 04/02/1998). Here we see interpretations of China's rise as changing the nature of bilateral relations filtering into discourse over how to respond to its human rights situation. Consequently, the collective decision was taken to not co-sponsor a resolution (Baker, 2002: 56). One Beijing-based European diplomat attributed this to the "realisation that our policy of confronting China on human rights was not necessarily the most effective method... dialogue may actually achieve more meaningful progress" (cited by Harding and Kynge, 1998).

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that although Chirac came to power in May 1995, France supported the 1996 resolution. There is a lack of evidence from the public record and my interviews (I was unable to interview officials who were around at that time) to explain why this was the case. The most likely factors were a) widespread support amongst other Member States in 1996 and b) the preference shift representing another step in Chirac's efforts to boost political relations with China in 1997.

Cook continued to argue that a common position was the more important aspect and the outcome in 1997 did not “do a service to human rights by showing an EU which was deeply divided” (cited by *The Independent*, 1998). Prime Minister Tony Blair sought closer relations with Europe than his predecessor and decided not to back a joint resolution; despite Cook’s declarations of an ‘ethical foreign policy’ upon taking office. This move was criticised by Rifkind and others in the opposition who claimed there was no evidence to justify the policy change<sup>14</sup>. Blair further distanced himself from the previous government during a visit to China in April for the inaugural EU-China Summit, when he claimed that he was “in no doubt that he was in the company of a fellow moderniser” with Premier Zhu Rongji (cited by Binyon, 1998). Here, Blair’s emphasis on the similarities between himself and the Chinese leader was consistent with the broader context of the EU’s engagement policies and set the tone for summit which the EU had pushed for to further advance bilateral political relations.

In subsequent years, human rights issues became less visible on the EU-China agenda; bilateral dialogue effectively provided China with a means to avoid further resolutions (Baker, 2002: 57). However, the EU continued to oppose China’s use of the non-action motion procedure to avoid a vote and indicated that it would vote in favour of any resolution successfully tabled. This suggests a tension between concerns for human rights and the increasing preference for good political (and also economic) relations with China. In early 1999, there was extensive Parliamentary debate over the issue, with substantial criticism of the failure to back resolutions and a call for the reversion to the previous strategy (Agence Europe, 29/01/1999). In March, the General Affairs Council (1999) confirmed that there would be no joint EU resolution; no joint resolution has been tabled since.

While there is no evidence that Member States held wildly different views of China’s human rights situation, it is apparent that the issue lost ground to interpretations of China as a growing political and economic opportunity. This case witnessed genuine debate over policy direction, yet not one between rival interpretations of China but rather competing preferences for how the EU should behave. This resulted from the convergence of Member States’ perceptions of the opportunities presented by China’s rise. The stated objectives of the

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Malcolm Rifkind, London, 17/06/10.

different parties were the same, but were separated by their considerations of the appropriate policy direction. To the extent that China was discussed, the discourse did not reflect power-transition logic. Rather, China as a normative threat was played off against China as an economic/political opportunity, too big and important simply to be rebuked. Within the intergovernmental subsystem, the preferences of the larger states dominated; without France's backing from 1997 onwards, a joint resolution became impossible. The UK's subsequent alignment with France meant alternative interpretations held by other, smaller Member States had less scope to influence policy; these shifts cannot be accounted for by PTT-perspectives whether we treat the EU as a unitary actor or not.

### *WTO Accession*

The EU played an important role in China's WTO accession as its own growing importance allowed it to act as a "counterweight to US negotiating influence" and "easing political tensions" of the accession process (Eglin, 1997: 493-4). That there was no extensive debate over China's rise contributed to the EU's strong support for accession, as the perceived political and economic opportunities for the EU were translated into policies. The EU continually put the goal of integrating China into the global economy front and centre in its foreign economic policies with clear objectives of opening China's market and enforcing institutional rules. Trade Commissioner Leon Brittan stated in October 1997 that EU support was not unconditional (Agence Europe, 15/10/1997), but required economic rather than political concessions. Contrary to Zimmermann's (2007) examination of the EU's motivations detached from the wider story of the response to China's rise, I argue that the convergence of interpretations of China's rise as an economic and political power created consensus around supporting accession.

PTT could be used to suggest that either the EU will be unaffected by China's rise since it is not an international actor – thus WTO accession is inconsequential – or that as a unitary actor it will respond as other established powers would, in which case the issue does matter. However, what PTT anticipates here is ambiguous, creating two contrasting approaches to China's WTO membership from a European perspective. Tammen et al (2000) argued that the established powers should encourage the rising power's integration with the international system to increase its stake in the established order and attenuate revisionist intentions. Yet as

I argued earlier, their recommendations are designed to avoid the expected outcomes that are generated by applying PTT to China's rise; the evidence does not suggest that EU support for accession was based on such reasoning. The alternative is that WTO membership should be opposed as it would increase China's economic power, hastening its rise and the power-transition with the EU. However, such interpretations were not salient within the EU policymaking community. The EU's support for China's accession was driven by interpretations of significant economic and political opportunities; the various threat perceptions did not come into play.

Here, policymaking involved negotiations carried out through the supranational subsystem and ratification within the intergovernmental subsystem. This was important since, as Zimmermann (2004: 77) pointed out, there is an "absence of easy institutional entry points for interests which disagree with the strategy set by the member states and the Commission". However, this case was interesting precisely because of what was missing from the EU's internal policymaking environment: any level of dissent from the agreed policy between Member States, or the Member States and the Commission, and the virtual lack of discussion of human rights issues despite the so-called democratic clause (see below). Leon Brittan recalled that in his negotiating role he had to "carry along the Member States" to maintain a united position, as "what the EU can do when it is united and agreed is infinitely more than what any individual member state – even the largest and most powerful – can achieve"<sup>15</sup>.

Policy rhetoric – especially from Commission negotiators – conveyed a perception of this stage of China's rise as a political opportunity: it would benefit from exposure to the system's rules and norms, contributing to domestic political and economic reform and enable it to play an international role commensurate with its size. In short, economic engagement would contribute to "peace, security and prosperity" (Leal-Arcas, 2009: 22). However, human rights issues rarely featured in the discussion, which might have been expected given that the EU had, since 1995, a "so-called democratic clause which ha[d] to be included in international trade agreements", the purpose of which is to promote democratic principles through its trade policies (Zimmermann, 2008: 258-9). With no positive developments in China's human rights record, the simple answer might be that economic opportunity interpretations of China's rise

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Leon Brittan, London, 05/05/10.

overrode this normative policy component. However, the Member States and Commission shared a “strong ideological commitment... to a policy of multilateral engagement” which was seen as the most effective way of improving human rights (Zimmermann, 2004: 74).

The end of the UNCHR resolutions could be construed as paving the way for pursuing closer economic relations without strong focus on human rights. The EP did not host vociferous debates on China’s membership and the human rights issue; resolutions were passed calling for the Council and Commission to push for human rights improvements before accession, but these had little demonstrable impact on the approach to negotiations. Overall, there was little evidence of threat interpretations along military or economic dimensions or that it would seek to change the rules of the system in its favour. The EU’s working premise was articulated by Pierre Moscovici<sup>16</sup> (2000) in response to a question for the Council in the EP:

the process leading to China’s admission... is not the appropriate forum for tackling issues relating to human rights... [An] increase in trade transactions would support [EU] efforts with a view to guaranteeing respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, values which form the very foundation of Europe.

This reflects the popular view amongst Western policymakers that trade liberalisation would (eventually) entail political liberalisation, although proponents of the ‘Beijing Consensus’ have subsequently argued that China has taken what it wants from the international capitalist system while resisting the expected political reforms.

The Parliament’s opinion on the agreement was sought, but had no impact on the Council’s acceptance of the eventual deal with minimal debate (Zimmermann, 2004: 76). The EP critiqued the lack of human rights consideration and some MEPs also called for mandatory Parliamentary assent (e.g., Clegg, 2000) although apparently there were several (unnamed) Member States unwilling to agree to this (Cabeza, 2000). The Commission’s responsibility for trade policy through the supranational subsystem enables it to pursue policy objectives without being bound by the EP (Elgin, 1997: 497). Within the Commission, the key official responsible for dealing with China’s accession was the Trade Commissioner – initially Leon

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<sup>16</sup> Minister for European Affairs, France.

Brittan and then Pascal Lamy after September 1999 – who enjoyed consistent backing from the Council. Although Member States had varied economic interests, the consensus around the economic opportunity presented by China’s rise coupled with the Commission’s lead negotiating role contributed to a united stance. Brittan commented that

China’s growing economic and political self-confidence is an overwhelmingly positive development. It should serve as an incentive for the EU to engage the country more fully, not as a threat from which to retreat. I believe Europe has everything to gain and nothing to fear from a strong, open and prosperous China (Europa Press Release, 1998a).

Brittan later linked engagement to the growing importance of both China and the EU globally, considering them “united by the fact that the world depends heavily on both of us, in a time of global economic uncertainty, for economic leadership and security” (Europa Press Release, 1998b). Bilateral negotiations were disrupted in the wake of the bombing of China’s Belgrade Embassy by NATO<sup>17</sup> in the spring of 1999 and did not resume until October (de Jonquieres, 1999). The Chinese reaction to the bombing was mostly directed toward the US, but not exclusively as the UK embassy was targeted by protesters (Economist, 1999)<sup>18</sup>. Brittan argued that since the EU separated politics from the accession process China should do the same as “important commercial issues should not be determined emotionally” (cited by Abrahams, 1999), although to no avail. Yet there was no discernible concern amongst EU policymakers that China’s reaction was indicative of hostile attitudes towards the West.

By January 2000 the EU was under pressure as US-China negotiations had already concluded (Algieri, 2002: 75). The main stumbling point appeared to be whether China would be willing to make the required concessions and then the Commission’s attempts to determine whether proposals were acceptable. Consequently, the delays in the conclusion of the EU-China deal were due to technical rather than political factors. There was no opposition to China’s accession to the WTO between or within Member States (Zimmermann, 2004: 81). The UK’s support for accession was consistent with its Ideological Free-Trader status but the lack of

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<sup>17</sup> Ten EU states participated in Operation Allied Force under NATO, including France and the UK.

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, when British newspaper, *The Observer*, reported in October 1999 that the bombing had been deliberate (a charge strongly denied by NATO) (Sweeney, 1999) this did not derail EU-China negotiations.

human rights concerns was not. Malcolm Rifkind noted that the preceding Conservative government sought “to support China wherever its emergence as a global economic power could be directed in a responsible way... the more that China would become involved in global organisations like the WTO, the more its transformation into a global superpower will be a responsible transition”<sup>19</sup>.

During the negotiations, there was some marginal criticism of the UK government’s focus on economic opportunities over human rights. The House of Commons’ foreign affairs committee argued that it would be “utterly unacceptable if there were to be... a trade-off between improved economic and commercial relations and a less forceful approach to human rights” (SCFA, 2000). However, the Committee did not challenge the government’s policy stance, recognising that China was a “significant market”. In response, Robin Cook disagreed

that there is a trade-off between the pursuit of our commercial interests and a forceful approach to human rights... the integration of China into the world community in general, including China’s accession to the [WTO], is the most powerful external factor likely to strengthen the rule of law and lead to an improvement in the human rights situation (SSFCA, 2001: 3).

France strongly favoured reaching a deal as soon as possible, since its trade relationship had previously been highly politicised by issues such as arms sales to Taiwan (Taube, 2002: 86). Chirac had consistently pushed for closer relations between Europe and Asia generally and aimed to increase France’s exports to the region<sup>20</sup>. Chirac’s enthusiasm for China’s WTO membership was evident when he stated in 2000 that a final deal on accession was imminent within a matter of days and that technical matters were minor (Calle, 2000a), which was inaccurate; a senior EU diplomat stated that Chirac was “out of step” with the Commission (cited by Irish Times, 2000). One journalist wondered whether Chirac’s statement, rather than being naïve, was designed to appease the Chinese as his upcoming visit would be “difficult” due to the sale of a satellite to Taiwan (Calle, 2000b). Analysis of the French press during the negotiations suggests that there was no strong opposition to the government’s preferences

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Malcolm Rifkind, former British Foreign Secretary, London, 17/06/10.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with François Godement, Head of China Programme and Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, Paris, 20/05/10.

based on rival interpretations of China. Chirac was thus able to pursue his preferences – which were consistent with the Accommodating Mercantilist characteristics – unencumbered.

Economic self-interest on the part of the EU was a significant factor, but does not fully account for the preferences of the Member States and Commission. Economic opportunity was just one component of the EU's motivations – the perception of China's rise as a political opportunity reinforced the commitment to the engagement strategy, with the objective of promoting China's emergence as an international player with a stake in the established order. Zimmermann (2004: 74) argued that it was “striking how much the member countries and the Commission pushed industry” by leading trade delegations and promoting the concept of China as an economic opportunity, effectively shaping “the agenda for Europe's China policy”. Following the agreement, Pascal Lamy told participants of the EU-China Business Dialogue he was “convinced that the geopolitical shifts in the century ahead will see China playing an increasingly pivotal global role... [thus] it is worth investing heavily in building a good relationship” (Europa Press Release, 2000). The European Parliament (2000) had not given up on the human rights argument, passing a resolution which called for accession to be linked to improvements to the human rights situation “in accordance with international standards”; however no such conditionality was implemented.

As well as the aversion to tying human rights issues into negotiations, there was no real debate within the EU over potential negative implications of China's increasing economic power. From a PTT perspective in which the EU is considered a unitary actor, we would have expected such perceptions to emerge. Policymakers recognised that the EU had already benefitted – and would continue to do so – from the opening up of China's market<sup>21</sup>. The EU's preferences on WTO accession were derived from a set of largely convergent interpretations of China's rise as an economic and political opportunity, reinforcing the need for an engagement strategy to ensure China would fulfil its potential and play by established international economic rules, integrating further with the system. Policy discourse did not evince interpretations of China presenting an economic threat predicated on power-transition logic. Military threat perceptions were completely absent, and normative concerns restricted to the EP which unsuccessfully attempted to direct the EU's policy discourse. While differing

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 01/06/10.

economic interests are central to Fox and Godement's (2009) Member State categorisations, on the WTO question these were less pronounced, allowing for a common position to emerge based on an overriding interpretation of China as a significant economic opportunity.

### *The EU-China Strategic Partnership*

China had not documented its EU policy until 2003 when it began to pursue a strategic partnership – although this was initiated by the EU. China's policy paper called for closer relations between the two sides but did not make explicit reference to a strategic partnership (MoFA, 2003b). Still, this was seen as significant by European policymakers given that it was the first such policy paper China had ever produced for a third party. The launch of the partnership in itself constituted an 'event', but its true significance lay in the development of bilateral relations thereafter, particularly when considering of the Market Economy Status case and the EU's consideration of lifting its arms embargo. Undoubtedly, the perceived importance of the strategic partnership was greater on the part of the EU than for China, as the former expected this to facilitate greater discussion of key issues, while the latter anticipated it would result in *less* discussion (Mattlin, 2009: 104), shielding the PRC leadership from pressure on sensitive topics.

The *European Security Strategy* identified China as one of the global powers with which the EU should pursue strategic relations in light of the "increasing degree of interdependence and the necessity of cooperation in strategic international affairs" (Men, 2008: 3). Since the launch of the 'strategic partnership' it has become a central theme in European policy discourse. Most of the related literature is preoccupied with assessing whether the relationship is to be considered 'strategic' or not (e.g. Berkofsky, 2006; Hol slag, 2011) – one interviewee referred to a "whole theology around degrees of strategic partnership with China"<sup>22</sup>. Interviewees consistently reflected that there was no consensus on strategic priorities or how to actually go about making the relationship more strategic. I am more concerned with how the 'strategic partnership' concept came about and has subsequently shaped interpretations of, and debates over, China's rise within the EU. I argue that 'strategic partner' effectively has become a manifestation of the political opportunity interpretation in its own right.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with former UK policy official, London, 28/04/11.

If starting from the PTT assumption that the EU, as a non-state entity, is unconcerned by rising powers the strategic partnership presents a problem. Under this logic, the EU is insignificant internationally and China's rise has little impact – thus the formation of a strategic partnership would not be anticipated. In the alternative PTT perspective where the EU as a unitary actor is expected to behave as a status quo power, preferences for integrating the rising power into the current international system can be accommodated when they are driven by a desire to assuage revisionist intentions. However, European rhetoric on the partnership does not suggest that this was the motivation. If anything, the EU should have been working to reinforce its strategic partnership with the US to protect its position in the international order. The evidence does not indicate that power-transition logic was at play, but simultaneously does not suggest a purely accommodationist approach. Instead, an interpretation of China's rise as presenting a political opportunity is evident through the policy narrative. In some ways, the strategic partnership itself is more than just a descriptor; it has become an interpretation of China's rise in its own right. This is not necessarily all-pervasive; various actors have put different weight on the concept over time but nevertheless it became the dominant way to reference what China represented to the EU.

The strategic partnership has not been codified in a single document, thus just what exactly it entails remains unclear; this provided the EU flexibility to characterise new dialogue and cooperative efforts as evidence of the growing strategic partnership, giving substance to its stated objectives of helping China emerge as a responsible actor. According to the 2003 Communication, the EU sees the partnership as a vehicle for encouraging China to integrate with the established international system, particularly in multilateral settings (Commission, 2003: 5-8). The EU identified with "China's concerns for a more balanced international order" (Commission, 2003: 23) which could be read as critical of the unipolar arrangement. The 2006 Communication reaffirmed commitment to the strategic partnership, with greater need for cooperation on the basis of their increasingly "active and responsible international roles" (Commission, 2006: 2). As noted in Table 4.1, one of the most significant statements was that "China's re-emergence is a welcome phenomenon" (Commission, 2006: 12). Interestingly,

although the *ESS* (European Council, 2008) set out the need for strategic partnerships the review of its implementation (European Council, 2008) barely made any reference to them<sup>23</sup>.

The strategic partnership required backing from the European Council and General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC), hence the initial policymaking process was located within the intergovernmental subsystem. No arguments that China was a strategic competitor rather than partner emerged from (or within) Member States. Although some already had strategic partnerships with China (France and the UK), these were notional rather than actual. One former UK policy official commented that “there was a lingering suspicion in the UK about the [EU’s] strategic relationships” on the basis that they might imply “some kind of military relationship”<sup>24</sup>, yet this did not create a preference against an EU-China strategic partnership. What is interesting about the Member States’ positions is that the prospects were not particularly favourable just a few months previous. Divisions over the Iraq war had raised questions over the viability of a common foreign policy (Lee, 2005: 165); some commentators saw the *ESS* and the strategic partnership concept as propagating a multipolar world which Chirac promoted but the UK opposed; a difference which would be difficult to overcome (Hughes, 2003). Others have questioned the commitment to the strategic partnership, claiming that although the EU pushes to enhancing the relationship, there has at times been “a sense that individual member states do not really mean it” (*The Guardian*, 2005). Yet this has not prevented the ‘strategic partner’ interpretation dominating and reshaping policy discourse since its emergence.

The Commission was also a key proponent in making the case for, and shaping, the strategic partnership through its responsibility for drafting the Communications as well as its role in trade policy, routinely referred to as the core of the strategic partnership. Key Commission officials actively pushed the concept in public discourse; Commission President Romano Prodi identified in April 2004 “a comprehensive, robust and enduring relationship” as “one of the EU’s top foreign policy priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (Europa Press Release, 2004: 6). Since 2007, the negotiations of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement – widely expected by European policymakers to deepen the strategic component of the relationship – have been

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<sup>23</sup> The first extensive review of the state of the strategic partnership came in December 2010 (see Ashton, 2010); due to the cut-off date for the timeframe of analysis, this review is not considered here.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with former UK policy official, London, 28/04/11.

led by the Commission indicating the relevance of both the intergovernmental and supranational subsystems here. The convergence between the Member States' and Commission's interpretations of China's rise presenting economic and political opportunities combined with a distinct lack of rival views precluded substantive debate on the issue.

The rhetoric at the launch of the partnership was illustrative of these positive interpretations. The General Affairs Council's (2003: 6) October conclusions stated that both sides had an interest in cooperation "in light of their prominent international role and their increasing political and economic weight". The conclusions drew on China's cooperation in the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue – although the EU itself was not a participant – to argue that the role assumed by China "illustrates how its perception of the world is changing as it gets further integrated into the global community" (General Affairs Council, 2003: 7). This view of China's rising power and behaviour on the international scene was used to justify deepened bilateral relations in the document, which reiterated the positive contribution the EU could play through its strategy of engagement. Ahead of the sixth EU-China summit, Commission President Prodi commented that "as the EU enlarges and China continues to emerge on the world stage, our bilateral and international agenda is more challenging than ever" but was optimistic that the meeting was "a major opportunity to move forwards together" (cited by Europa Press Release, 2003a: 1).

The initial momentum behind forging the partnership was relatively short-lived (Taneja, 2010: 372). The failure of the EU to lift its arms embargo as well as non-movement on the Market Economy Status issue (see below) contributed to this cooling off. China's request for an end to the arms embargo arguably served as a 'litmus test' for the strategic partnership, especially the extent to which the EU was able to develop a foreign policy independent of US influence. Despite the disappointment for China, this apparently had little negative impact on the EU's interpretation of China as a strategic partner. In testimony to the House of Lords' European Union Committee, Charles Grant argued precisely the opposite: following the arms embargo debate, "more European governments started to understand that China was not just a market, it was also a strategic actor, a rising power and that they needed to consider those factors as well as the economic side of their links" (cited by EUC, 2009).

This was manifest in subsequent rhetoric and behaviour; from mid-2005 and into 2006, the EU continued to emphasise the importance of advancing the partnership. In July 2005, Commission President Barroso stated that the EU's challenge was to

understand China's dramatic re-emergence, to learn to work better with this tremendous country and seize the opportunities provided by its unprecedented growth. It is in China's and Europe's interest to build a partnership strong enough to deal with the global challenges we face (Europa Press Release, 2005b: 2).

Barroso's argument appeared to be that there were more commonalities than differences between the EU and China, tying the economic opportunity interpretation to the 'strategic partner' interpretation. In a speech commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of bilateral relations, External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner argued that as "global players", the EU and China had "a responsibility to work together to address the most important challenges facing our world today" (cited by Europa Press Release, 2005c: 2).

To update the basis of their relationship, the EU and China have been negotiating on a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) since 2007. Due to continued problems with defining what objectives and interests constitute the 'comprehensive strategic partnership' this has not yet been finalised. The EU sought to move the relationship to a level where it would not be "so easily soured" by trade disputes (Hall, 2005). In 2008, Commissioner Mandelson argued for more high-level dialogue to enhance "engagement with China that focuses on our joint strategic interests and deepens the trust required to raise and resolve trade differences constructively and quickly" (cited by Europa Press Release, 2008). Here, the emphasis is placed on the convergence of interests which positions China not just as an economic opportunity, but also an important political partner. An EU official told the *Financial Times* that the EU recognised the need to deal "at the highest political level, with the active participation of senior commissioners" as a "true reflection of China's importance in the world and... for Europe" (cited by Barber, T. 2008).

The resilience of the concept of China as a strategic partner has been remarkable, even with significant obstacles such as MES, the arms embargo, various other trade disputes and occasional political disagreements such as China's cancellation of the 2008 joint summit. In

many ways, the EU's rhetoric on the strategic partnership has intensified; statements from high-level policymakers frequently accorded the EU and China significant global importance and emphasised the positive aspects of China's rise. Ahead of the November 2007 summit, Commission President Barroso stated that “*as the two main global actors*, we not only have bilateral interests... but also shared responsibilities to meet global challenges such as climate change, a dynamic and far-reaching multilateral trade system and development cooperation” (cited by Europa Press Release, 2007 [emphasis added]).

While the strategic partnership has not developed as far as the EU would have liked, this has not resulted from internal debates between rival interpretations of China's rise. Whitman (2010: 29) noted that policies are hampered by “a lack of Member State consensus over the nature and scope of co-operation; a disconnect between Member State bilateral relations and EU bilateralism; and weak EU diplomacy in the face of [a] powerful [state] espousing a fundamentally different world-view”. Yet while these issues stand in the way, one interviewee pointed out that “most EU countries have similar positions, their interests coincide” in relation to the “broad picture”<sup>25</sup>, which provides the basis for a more strategic approach to relations. Therefore the lack of progress is due to the complexities of the intergovernmental policymaking process and the tendency for Member States to focus on short-term, “small issues where they may have different interests”<sup>26</sup>.

Although the concept of the strategic partnership received much criticism from the academic community for its lack of definition and questionable results, there was little in the way of real debate at the EU-level prior to its formation. In part this was down to the general optimism about the current state and future direction of relations at the time. However since its inception, the Commission and Member States have not queried the appropriateness of the designation of China as a ‘strategic partner’ but rather taken this as the starting point for considering relations. Even within the European Parliament – which, as noted in other cases examined, has tended to take a more critical view of EU-China relations – has accepted this characterisation of the relationship. I found just one instance where an MEP called the strategic partnership into question due to concern over China's treatment of Tibetans, asking the Commission whether the partnership should be frozen in response (Borghezio, 2008). The

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with European policy official, Brussels, 28/05/10.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with European policy official, Brussels, 28/05/10.

reply from Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner (2008) addressed the Tibetan issue but did not engage the strategic partnership question, seemingly too far removed from mainstream discourse to warrant attention.

The development of a strategic partnership contravenes PTT-based expectations from both possible conceptualisations of the EU's status as an international actor. Further, the EU's policy discourse reveals that since its launch, it has become the reference point for framing issues and developments within the relationship. The convergence of key actors' perceptions has meant that rival interpretations of China as an economic, military or normative threat predicated on power-transition logic have not surfaced, allowing the 'strategic partner' concept to attract considerable support with no critical reflection. As we will see in the following chapter, the 'strategic partner' interpretation of China was a key factor which facilitated preferences for lifting the arms embargo to gain traction. While others question whether the relationship is truly strategic, they have overlooked the fact that the very emergence of the concept has had an impact on the way that EU policymakers understand the implications of China's rise and how they seek to act in response to this development.

### *Market Economy Status*

China's Market Economy Status (MES) was tied into its WTO accession agreement with the EU. China accepted to be treated as a non-market economy (NME) until 2016 unless it could prove that it was a market economy (Kastner, 2009: 7). Without MES, the EU can use trade defence instruments against 'dumping' of products, in other words selling them below production costs. For China, withholding MES is discriminatory treatment which leaves it vulnerable to protectionist measures (Green, 2004: 1). Since June 2003, China has proactively sought early MES recognition from WTO members as a "matter of national pride" which would represent a "stamp of national approval" (Green, 2004: 2). As such, while the NME versus MES designation might appear rather technical and far removed from the 'big picture' of China's rise, it actually carries considerable political importance for China. It is no coincidence that MES was requested in the same year that China published its EU policy paper, agreed to the strategic partnership and requested the lifting of the arms embargo. This arguably indicates that the Chinese leadership attributed political value to gaining MES, given that it would not result in significant economic benefits; rather, by refusing MES approval, the

EU was seen to be treating China not as an equal. The case appears then to be something of an anomaly for the EU's relationship with China, as it could be construed as a deviation from its strategy of engagement – indeed, undermining the concept of ‘unconditional engagement’ as touted by some (e.g. Fox and Godement, 2009).

Here, decision-making falls into the supranational subsystem as the Commission’s responsibility for external trade policies allows it to define MES criteria and analyse progress. If China fails to meet the criteria, then MES cannot be granted easily<sup>27</sup> even if some Member States supported conferral. Member States’ preferences are nevertheless important as the Council decides the overall policy objectives (Woolcock, 2010: 387-8). Informally, the Commission needs the backing of a number of the Member States – pressure from powerful states could override the Commission’s preferences. Unanimous backing is unnecessary – as we will see below – so long as at least a plurality of powerful Member States shares the Commission’s preferences. The case reveals interpretations of China’s rise as presenting an economic threat amongst some Member States; albeit relatively restrained and narrowly defined. Policy debates were fairly minimal since the Commission’s leading role on this policy meant that disagreements between Member States were not played out in the public arena. Economic threat perceptions were also aired by some MEPs but with negligible impact. Instead, the MES issue has been caught up in wider debates on moving the relationship forward; in some ways, it is an extension of the strategic partnership case.

PTT perspectives have little to say about MES, since it is a small component of the overall relationship. From the perspective of the EU as a unitary actor which responds as a status quo power, the manifestation of economic threat interpretations could be taken as evidence of power-transition logic. Yet is difficult to make this argument persuasively, as the wider context of policy discourse paints a different picture; even if we look at the economic dimension, MES applies to only a small portion of bilateral trade<sup>28</sup> and beyond this, the economic opportunity perception dominated. The case may alternatively be construed as indicative of China’s unwillingness to play by the established rules of the system by requesting MES early without meeting the required criteria and reneging on previous agreements. Yet the EU has constantly reiterated that MES will be granted once these criteria

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 01/06/10.

<sup>28</sup> About half a percentage point of EU-bound exports (Rémond, 2007: 348).

are met, holding it out as a ‘carrot’ to encourage economic reforms and further integration with the international system. Simultaneously, the EU has continued to emphasise the opportunities presented by growing bilateral trade relations rather than resorting to rhetoric of a growing economic or normative threat. Understanding this case in the context of the wider relationship illustrates the complexities of attempts to develop a strategic partnership with China whilst pursuing policies of engagement designed to shape its behaviour.

The Commission maintained a clear preference throughout, although this was challenged by some who wanted to strengthen EU-China political relations and by academics who consider the criteria “vague and arbitrary” (Messerlin and Sally, 2007). Others argued that the Commission’s position was questionable given Russia (a non-WTO member) was granted MES in 2002 for political reasons. China also pointed to others including Singapore, Australia and New Zealand which had conferred MES (Rémond, 2007: 348, 351) to challenge the validity of the Commission’s assessment. European policymakers were evidently aware of the political sensitivity of MES for China: trade officials told the *Financial Times* that China was motivated by a desire to eliminate its “pariah status” which stemmed from Tiananmen and that the “stamp of respectability matter[ed] enormously” (cited in Buck and Dempsey, 2004). Another report cited EU officials claiming Chinese policymakers believed that MES recognition would put them on “equal footing” with the western powers (Buck and Dickie, 2004), at least in terms of its status as an economic power. Yet this did not prompt a shift in policy preferences despite the wider context of the nascent strategic relationship; thus the impact of the political opportunity interpretation was constrained by other factors.

Early signs painted a promising picture for China: in October 2003 Chirac indicated that he wanted the EU to confer MES and lift the arms embargo (Barsykh et al, 2005: 14). Reference to these two issues at the same time appeared to present the decision as primarily political, at odds with the Commission’s stance. Yet Trade Commissioner Lamy also signalled the growing closeness of the two sides, describing the relationship as a “honeymoon”, although did caution that MES was still being studied (cited by Agence Europe, 17/03/2004). He followed this up with talk of the “growing maturity and strength of the EU-China trade relationship” (cited by Dombey, 2004) which seemed to indicate a good environment for MES to be granted. Generally, rhetoric on bilateral relations from late 2003 into mid 2004 was overwhelmingly positive, evincing perceptions of China as a ‘strategic partner’ as well as

presenting economic and political opportunities. The Commission's June 2004 decision to withhold MES (Agence Europe, 29/06/2004) contravened this trend. Recognition of China as a 'transition economy' was taken as an intermediate step to acknowledge progress towards market reform, although the designation did not "carry much weight" (Filippini, 2009: 238).

As an 'Accommodating Mercantilist', France supported withholding MES despite enthusiasm for extensive engagement on other issues, as shown in the UNCHR, WTO and arms embargo cases (Chapter Five). However, temporary 'deviations' in French preferences reveal that perceptions of China's rise as a political and/or economic opportunity have at times overridden the default position of opposition. Both Chirac and his successor Nicolas Sarkozy expressed preferences for conferring MES at times when they were attempting to enhance political relations. Chirac's overtures in late 2003 suggested that, much like the finalisation of WTO accession and the lifting of the arms embargo, he aimed to create a favourable impression of France (and himself), disregarding other EU actors' preferences. Chirac reverted to opposition as a consequence of the downturn in EU-China relations sparked by the indecision over the arms embargo, turning his attention to defending French economic interests. While Sarkozy took France's China policy in a new direction and was more critical on political issues (Fox and Godement, 2009: 27), his perception of significant economic opportunities through prospective aerospace and civilian nuclear power contracts led him to declare (temporarily) support for granting MES in November 2007 (Nougarède, 2007).

The UK supported MES as it sought to reduce obstacles for Chinese imports to Europe, consistent with the traits of 'Ideological Free-Traders'. Without significant domestic manufacturing interests no perception of China's economic rise as threatening had emerged within the UK, thus its arguments were predicated on the economic opportunity interpretation. Additionally, the political opportunity interpretation came into play as the UK argued that the EU should recognise China as an important international player. The UK pushed this approach in 2005 under its Council Presidency, with Minister of State for Trade Ian Pearson arguing that Russia had already been awarded MES, thus "we think the rise of China should be similarly recognised" (cited by Lau and Minder, 2005) with no reference to the requirement of meeting the technical criteria. However, European officials argued around this time that aside from the technical criteria, the political climate was not conducive to an agreement on MES either (Hall, 2005), with the non-lifting of the embargo souring relations.

Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson rebuffed these calls to grant MES “for the sake of strengthening [EU-China political] relations” (cited by Beattie, 2005). However, in a speech in Beijing, Mandelson stated that “attitudes in Europe … will be influenced by a broader perception of how China is developing, in its political, social and economic behaviour, both at home and abroad” (Europa Press Release, 2005a: 6). This signalled that MES might be decided politically if China conformed to the expected standards of an important player on the international scene. Under WTO rules, MES will automatically be conferred in 2016; EU policymakers have realised that the window of time for utilising MES as leverage on political or economic issues is closing<sup>29</sup>. However, the contestation between the economic/political opportunity and economic threat perceptions of China’s rise constituted a significant barrier to the creation of alternative policy options. The EU has attempted to avoid charges of protectionism by awarding MES to individual Chinese companies (Taneja, 2010: 383) but refusal of individual applications have still been met with the same blanket response from China that these decisions are unacceptable (Minder, 2006)<sup>30</sup>, perpetuating political tensions.

The European Parliament could not directly influence policy, but debates between conflicting perceptions of China’s economic rise have often taken place. However, no definitive stance on MES one way or the other has emerged within the EP, precluding any attempts to influence wider EU discourse on the matter. The Committee on International Trade’s report on prospects for bilateral trade relations (Lucas, 2005) identified threats from China’s trade practices to the EU’s manufacturing industries but also emphasised the opportunities to be gained from the overall relationship. A debate on trade relations in July 2007 revealed the salience of both economic threat and opportunity perceptions amongst MEPs, and some contended that it was simultaneously both; a point which Mandelson – partaking in the debate – agreed with (European Parliament, 2007). MEPs readily expressed concerns over China’s economic threat, but beneath the surface rhetoric these were actually confined to specific areas of the trade relationship with particular emphasis on unfair practices. These concerns were not extrapolated to develop arguments that China was aiming to displace the EU as an international power or revise international trade rules.

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 01/06/10.

<sup>30</sup> It is worth pointing out that since the WTO Anti-Dumping Agreement makes no reference to the concept of non-market economies there is no basis to challenge the EU’s policy through WTO dispute settlement procedures (Detlof and Fridh, 2006: 10, 29).

It is interesting that MES had not been granted by the end of the timeframe of analysis<sup>31</sup> as this indicates that not all of the EU's foreign policies towards China can be characterised as part of unconditional engagement even though Fox and Godement (2009: 11) asserted that it was in the trade relationship where the "failure" of this approach was most obvious. Green (2004: 1) predicted that the EU would grant MES before the US<sup>32</sup>, thereby creating "transatlantic tensions on how to deal with China", yet this did not transpire. Political conditionality might advance other normative goals, however my arguments are not prescriptive; as the EU has imposed economic conditions for MES and stuck to them., this case is a prime example of 'conditional engagement' which has not derailed relations or resulted in detrimental consequences for the EU. This fits with the broader discussion taking place in the EU since 2003 – rather than debates between heavily contrasting interpretations of China's rise, more consideration was given to how the EU could improve bilateral relations.

Broader interpretations of China as an economic opportunity were constrained by the technical criteria which safeguarded the Commission's preference, but also by some Member States' protectionist reflexes – despite the Commission insisting otherwise (Europa Press Release, 2006). Although refusal might be construed as deviation from the engagement strategy, it is clear from the context of policy discourse expressed in key documents (see Table 4.1) and surrounding the establishment of the strategic partnership – that engagement was very much still the *modus operandi*. Interpretations of China's rise influenced by power-transition logic did not materialise within policy debates. Looking beyond whether policy changed or not, it is clear that the EU struggled with questions of how best to use available policy instruments to secure its broad objectives. Refusal to grant MES is a double-edged sword for aspirations for a more strategic approach: on one side, it protects the Member States' economic interests but simultaneously undermines the development of bilateral relations.

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<sup>31</sup> Correct at the time of finalising this chapter (April 2013).

<sup>32</sup> The US has not granted MES and this has been far less of a salient issue in US-China relations than EU-China relations.

#### ***4.4 Interpretations of China's Rise and Decision-Making in the EU's Foreign Policies***

The preceding analysis shows that the EU's foreign policies toward China have been shaped in a political environment in which the non-threat/opportunity perceptions of China's rise across the various issue-areas have consistently prevailed. Although at different times we saw the economic and normative threat interpretations surface within policy discourse, they were generally expressed by a minority of actors; as such, convergence rather than divergence in interpretations of China's rise was a persistent theme within the EU. To the extent that there were deviations, these tended to be minor and confined to the context of particular issue-areas or even specific policies. In all, it is clear that the majority of the EU's most important actors have perceived China's rise as a positive development which presents more opportunities than it does problems<sup>33</sup>.

As a result, there has been no real substantive debate between rival interpretations taking place; thus the development of the bilateral relationship has not been subjected to intense consideration within the EU. As one interviewee pointed out, with the exception of trade, the EU has not thoroughly debated its collective policy towards China; rather "there is a Commission policy which is endorsed and modified by the collective decision within the European Council which then becomes EU policy"<sup>34</sup>. Although this is arguably an oversimplification by overlooking the fact that the Commission policy is developed with Member State preferences in mind, the lack of intense debate over China policy has been possible because there are no strongly conflicting interpretations amongst actors; we would expect divergent preferences to force greater debate during the policymaking process.

What emerges from the above analysis is that even with the lack of real debate there are clear interpretations of China which dominate policy discourse. These have evolved over time, but rather than shifting towards views of China as a threat as its power grows, what we see are increasingly expansive views of the opportunities China presents: initially, the dominant interpretation was that of an economic opportunity which was, as a result of Tiananmen, conditioned by a parallel perception of China as a human rights violator, in other words a

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with French foreign policy official, Paris, 21/05/10.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Thomas Klau, Head of the European Council on Foreign Relations' Paris Office, Paris, 20/05/10.

potential normative threat. As China became more powerful, the former took precedence over the latter and developed into an interpretation of China as a political opportunity as well as economic; as a powerful international actor, China could make a positive contribution to the international system – with help from the EU.

The political opportunity interpretation posited that China's emergence on the international scene was a positive development as it could potentially become a 'responsible' international player. This gave way to consideration of a strategic partnership from 2003 onwards, which then itself became the core of the EU's interpretation of China, even though the ability to act upon this has not always matched expectations created by policymakers. One interpretation did not replace the other, rather the others still existed in parallel and thus we see multiple but overlapping interpretations in the EU, leading to divergences of preferences between the actors. Although we see differing preferences between the Member States from time to time – as well as the Commission having a clear set of preferences of its own – the 'gap' between these preferences was not particularly large in terms of their broad objectives. This has left the door open for the pursuit of a strategy of engagement without substantive reflection from the main policy players. The European Parliament was arguably the only source of distinct interpretations of the rise of China; its effective exclusion from the EU's foreign policy subsystems meant that its ability to shape policies in response to the rise of China was essentially non-existent. Nevertheless, it contributed to the policy discourse, even if it was not directly engaged by the Council or Commission.

Moreover, the analysis showed that the power-transition logic was absent from the interpretations of China's rise within the EU's policy discourse. Despite China's growing power, the prospect of such a situation had not been entertained seriously – or at least publicly – by the EU's policymaking community. This defies the expectation that as the rising state becomes more powerful, perceptions of an impending power-transition will emerge. This was aptly summarised by one interviewee who noted that the EU cannot afford to miss the train by failing to engage with China, given its increasing significance to the world<sup>35</sup>. Even policymakers from Member States which still see themselves as important international actors in their own right – namely France and the UK – have not embraced perceptions of China's

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with former EU policy official, Paris, 21/05/10.

rise as posing a military threat. To some extent, the lack of a true EU military/security presence in the world may have contributed to this; however the economic and political dimensions are also important aspects of the power-transition concept and even when economic and normative threat perceptions surfaced, these were not predicated on such concerns. One interviewee revealed that there were elements within national institutions that were concerned about China's military expansion and the lack of transparency, but noted that this had not become part of public debates at the national level, much less the EU level<sup>36</sup>. The engagement strategy towards China has not been subject to challenge from dissenting voices; this has been part of the criticism from the academic community, particularly Fox and Godement (2009) that the EU's engagement approach has effectively been unconditional.

The problem with PTT in the case of the EU, as noted throughout the chapter, is its indeterminacy depending on how the EU is conceptualised as an international actor (or not). PTT can be manipulated in such a way to explain extremes of possible responses: a full-tilt reaction in which the EU responds to China's rise as a state would – or attempting to become more state-like by integrating further – to preserve its place in the international order or at the other extreme, effectively do nothing. But it is inherently limited as it cannot explain why the EU pursues one path over the other or when its policies might begin to change. My approach of examining how interpretations of China's rise informed policymakers preferences is able to explain the evolution of the EU's foreign policy behaviour in each of the cases by placing the decisions taken in the broader context of how China was understood by policymakers at that given time and, in turn, how these events shaped policymakers' interpretations. Despite the differences between the Member States in terms of their own power standings, economic interests and willingness to challenge China on political/normative issues, they have produced largely convergent interpretations of China's rise over the timeframe of analysis.

The EU's foreign policy subsystem arrangements constrained how actors' preferences were translated into policies towards China. The intergovernmental subsystem has been largely dominated by the most powerful states as the convergence of their preferences a necessary condition of producing acceptable policies. The Tiananmen case exemplified a case where the Member States acted constructively to produce a policy, however maintaining unity thereafter

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10.

proved challenging. In the early 1990s, the intergovernmental process worked well for producing UNCHR resolutions on China but this quickly fell apart when the preferences of some Member States shifted as their perceptions of China's rise became fixated on the economic opportunities presented. Within the supranational subsystem, the Commission's most significant contributions to the EU's relations with China have been made through its responsibility for trade policy, enabling it to translate its preferences into policy. These preferences were based on largely constant interpretations of China as both an economic and political opportunity. The MES case presented something of a deviation here as arguably China was treated more as an economic threat, although Commission policymakers continually argued that the decision had to be based on technical criteria which were removed from considerations of China as either a threat or opportunity.

When divergent preferences over certain policies emerged – such as the UK pushing for MES being awarded – the subsystems acted as barriers to policy change. Policy development through the intergovernmental subsystem formally required unanimity between all the Members, although when the most powerful Member States were in agreement, change was more likely. Policy coordination had always been complex even before enlargement to twenty-seven, meaning that it tends to be at the lowest denominator<sup>37</sup> although in broad terms their interests are largely similar<sup>38</sup>. Consequently, the convergence between interpretations of China's rise has been a crucial condition for the development of policies over time – without this, it is reasonable to assume that the lowest common denominator would not have moved beyond economic interests.

As one interviewee put it, the rationale is that if the EU is to have influence in the world it needs to integrate in foreign policy and that this project is “precisely to face up to new emerging powers” such as China<sup>39</sup>. Therefore examining institutional dynamics and policy responses alone would only provide part of the picture; the context of policy discourse and how individual actors arrive at particular preferences is key to understanding the evolution of the EU's policies towards China over the timeframe of analysis. That the EU's interpretations of China's rise have consistently focussed on the opportunities presented is noteworthy against

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with EU-China specialist, London, 18/04/11.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with former EU policy official, Paris, 21/05/10.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 28/05/10.

the background of China's increasing power, the increasing complexity of bilateral relations and, within this, issues which have the potential to cause friction. Interpretations of China's rise presenting a threat along the economic and normative dimensions do exist within the EU policy community, but they are not widely supported and have had little impact on policy discourse or the EU's actual policies towards China.

These interpretations are not static; what we see is that they broaden to encompass a wider range of issue-areas as China's power expands. There was continual emphasis of China's rise as a positive development based on the opportunities presented; this view has evolved from defining 'opportunity' on the basis of economic partnership to incorporate the political relationship, which developed into an interpretation of China as a 'strategic partner'. The EU's policymaking is at times frustrated by the complexity of its foreign policy subsystem arrangements. Had EU actors held widely divergent interpretations of China, then it is plausible that in combination with the subsystem structures this would have precluded the emergence of any EU China policies beyond, perhaps, trade. Examining both the policymaking processes and how salient interpretations contextualised decision-making at specific periods of time provided considerable understanding into the factors behind the EU's largely welcoming response to China's rise.

#### ***4.5 Conclusion***

The analysis here demonstrates that the development of the EU's foreign policies in response to the shifting situation in the international arena has been shaped by the largely convergent interpretations of China's rise. These persisted over the various cases related to multiple dimensions of the relationship – that is, there was a high degree of consistency in interpretations across different issue-areas. Consequently, in policy discourse challenges to the prevailing views were rare. The cases analysed and the overall evolution of EU-China relations highlighted that, as is commonly asserted in the literature, there is no single 'China policy' but rather an overall approach which can be defined as 'engagement' which gives rise to multiple policies which can change independently of each other. Because there was only a narrow range of interpretations of China at play within the EU, the preferences which emerged across various issue-areas were often complementary rather than conflicting. This resulted in

consistency in the EU's policies in that they almost invariably adhered to the principle of engagement, based on a belief that the EU can play a positive role in China's emergence.

Over the time period, normative threat perceptions gave way to interpretations of China's rise as presenting considerable economic and political opportunities. Through the cases examined, we saw an increasing depth of conviction in these perceptions, particularly with the emergence of the strategic partner concept which effectively became the dominant lens through which the relationship was viewed. Tiananmen cast a shadow over European perceptions but clearly not to the same extent as in the US. While the episode continued to serve as a reference point for more critical Member States and MEPs in discussions over subsequent events, there were no sustained interpretations of China as an emerging normative or military threat. This allowed for closer economic relations, which in turn fostered perceptions of a significant political opportunity, culminating in the establishment of the strategic partnership. These interpretations have persistently influenced the preferences of key policymakers, with little explicit debate over whether China intended to challenge the EU's position in the international order or change the international system's rules and norms in its own favour. Taken as a unitary international actor, the EU's responses were inconsistent with PTT's expectations for how established powers react to the rise of a potential challenger.

Understanding actors' preferences and policymaking mechanisms is important because the ability to translate preferences into policies is substantially different from a normal 'state' configuration, particularly when Member States (increasing in number over the twenty year period examined) all technically have equal weighting as Council decisions required unanimity. As different actors push more on certain issues than others and the EU3 – France, Germany and the UK – have the greatest informal power, the decision-making process in each case was not identical. These factors lie beyond the analytical grasp of PTT perspectives, highlighting the latter's limited utility for explaining the EU response to China's rise. The EU committed itself to engagement as its main actors had the same objective – encouraging China's development as a responsible international player (and later a strategic partner) that would integrate with and contribute to the existing international order. In this context, how actors prioritised economic and political opportunities relative to each other was a key factor. Exploring international-level factors cannot explain policy development alone.

## CHAPTER FIVE | THE TRANSATLANTIC ARMS EMBARGO DEBATE: DIVERGING INTERPRETATIONS OF THE RISE OF CHINA

### 5.1 Introduction

In the Chapters Three and Four, we found that the concept of ‘China’s rise’ takes on different meanings for different actors, with implications for policymaking. In the US, the presence of rival interpretations led to vociferous debates, yet threat perceptions only had a limited impact on policy. For the EU, the degree of convergence around economic and political opportunity interpretations meant that there was little true debate over the implications of China’s rise, resulting in an uncontested strategy of engagement across all policy areas. In this chapter, I go a step further and contend that understanding how China’s rise has been interpreted and debated also enables us to explain variations *between* US and EU foreign policies. To do so, I focus on the transatlantic debate on the EU’s proposal to scrap its China arms embargo. Although the US and EU imposed similar policies at the same time, for the same reason and with the same objective, ultimately they ended up diverging on their preferences for the future direction of their respective policies. Given that both are confronted with a rising China which continues to violate human rights it is initially unclear why this divergence occurred.

From power-transition theory’s (PTT) perspective, the arms embargo case should be relatively clear cut. However, as I elaborate in the next section, there are significant problems with the insights that it might provide. If we start with the assumption that the EU is a unitary international actor, PTT still overlooks the variations within and between the established powers, on the assumption that status quo powers will respond in a similar fashion to rising challengers. However, if the EU is not to be considered as such, then the indeterminacy problem creeps back in, as there is no clear guide for how it will behave. The issue of the EU’s embargo is, as one interviewee noted, “not so much an EU-China problem as it an EU-US-China problem”<sup>1</sup>, making it an ideal window into the way different understandings of China’s rise have shaped their respective reactions to China’s rise. A more satisfactory explanation is forthcoming through an examination of how differing interpretations of China’s rise allowed policymakers’ preferences with respect to the embargoes to evolve in different directions.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with EU-China analyst, Brussels, 26/04/11.

The case demonstrates a clear instance where the two sides had similar policies predicated on the response to the same event and justified on the same grounds, yet ended up in significantly different positions on the issue fourteen years later. The transatlantic debate reveals distance between the two established powers' responses to the rise of China which cannot be explained by international-level factors alone. While the importance of factors such as regional security presence (or the lack thereof) cannot be dismissed, they do not fully account for the evolution in policy preferences, the EU Member States' positions on the arms embargo and, moreover, why the debate played out as it did. In the next section, in addition to setting out PTT-based expectations, I set the stage for my analysis by briefly identifying the relevant subsystems. I then turn to develop my argument, by first recounting the origins and substance of the embargoes, referring back to the context of US-China and EU-China relations in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown and then consider the development of the policies from until 2003. This is followed by close examination of the transatlantic debate to determine the impact of the divergent interpretations of China's rise the considerations of the arms embargo issue within the EU and the US and the content of the transatlantic debate itself.

The final section summarises the main findings and reiterates the argument, which is that the divergence between the US and the EU which opened up between 1989 and 2003 resulted from the different experiences of interpreting and debating the rise of China. Although both sides have largely adhered to strategies of engagement, in the US debates frequently arise from widely discrepant interpretations of China's rise whereas this has not been the case in the EU. This created different contexts in which the status of the arms embargoes, once placed on the agenda, was reconsidered by policymakers. This was not a salient issue on the agenda of either side prior to 2003, thus the divergence of preferences went unnoticed. When it arrived at the forefront of policy considerations, the actors within the US' executive-legislative subsystem collectively interpreted this in the context of China as an emerging military threat, producing a clear common preference for the embargo to remain. While for the most part, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, the political/economic opportunity interpretations have dominated in the US, in this specific case there was no 'opportunity' for the US – only negative outcomes. For the EU, perceptions of economic and political opportunities of China's rise fostered momentum behind the proposal, despite the reservations of some.

## **5.2 PTT Expectations and Subsystems**

The embargoes were initially imposed because the Western powers found it morally unjustifiable to sell weapons to a repressive regime. As China became more powerful but made little headway in improving its human rights situation, the embargo remained a useful tool both symbolically to remind China that it failed to live up to international expectations regarding conduct in domestic affairs and also prevented China from closing the relative power gap with the established powers – at least, quicker than it otherwise would. However, as we have seen, power-transition theorists are sceptical of the effectiveness of sanctions due to their limited impact on the changing power dynamics. The embargo has no impact upon China’s economic expansion, which is fundamental to PTT conceptualisations of threat. At the same time, maintaining the arms embargo would be no bad thing if a power-transition was anticipated<sup>2</sup>. It undoubtedly impacts China’s military expansion by denying it the most advanced systems, but threat proponents can point to data (see Chapter Two) which indicates that China’s military power has grown rapidly even with Western arms embargoes in place

Since PTT is indeterminate as to how the EU will respond to the rise of China, the preference for lifting the arms embargo can be accommodated from the perspective that it is not a global actor and thus unconcerned by the changes in the international order. However, if we treat the EU as a unitary international actor which does pay attention to such changes – as some PTT scholars have done – then the move to lift the arms embargo is more difficult to explain. Further, from either perspective, the differences between Member States’ preferences and the sudden end to the momentum to lift in 2005 are problematic; PTT could only explain homogeneity in Member States’ preferences and behaviour towards China. Its state-centric basis precludes analysis of differing perceptions of China present within the decision-making

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<sup>2</sup> As an aside, key PTT scholars Tammen et al (2000) have proposed that the US should allow technology transfers to China. Although they did not explicitly discuss the arms embargo, the following passage seems to suggest that the ban on high-end dual-use technology will prove counterproductive: “policies that affect technical transfers involve risk. Outcomes are preconditioned by geostrategic conditions, but final decisions are made by decision makers who evaluate the future of economic dynamics and changes in the status quo. If a risk is to be taken, we believe it should be taken in favour of creating stability. Confronting China... is unlikely to produce a stable international system. Co-opting these nations may produce a lasting peace. Since the [US] and China will approach parity in the future, a policy that builds trust in the status quo is the best bet to achieve peace” (Tammen et al, 2000: 121). This view arguably fails to recognise just how much of an issue this would be for US policymakers. However, Tammen et al’s (2000) policy proposals were designed to prevent the power-transition which PTT predicts; it does not suggest that such a course of action is actually likely.

process. It is also worth pointing out that power-transition perspectives concentrate on relationships between two actors (the status quo and revisionist powers) which makes them unsuitable for exploring trilateral relations – the dynamics of which, as I will argue, were fundamentally important in this case.

Before commencing our analysis it is necessary to identify which US and EU foreign policy subsystems were in play as, following on from the previous chapters, this is an effective route to locating whose preferences mattered most in the decision-making process. Although the US was not considering changes to its own embargo, I am interested the development of the response to the EU's proposal which emerged through its foreign policy subsystems. The President's predominance in foreign policy naturally meant that the government's stance was determined through the executive subsystem. However, Congress expressed strong views on this issue and attempted to pressure the administration to respond more forcefully and also attempted to pass legislation intended to influence the EU's decision. Thus, the US' response to this event was a product of the executive-legislative subsystem. The EU's consideration of lifting its arms embargo created a rare instance of convergence in preferences between executive and legislative actors, albeit not in relation to the US' own policies towards China.

The EU's arms embargo was initiated by the European Council and although there was no legal commitment, it was to be lifted through unanimous consent within the Council. Therefore the intergovernmental subsystem was the key venue, with Member States the key decision-makers at all stages<sup>3</sup>. However, the Commission and Parliament had a role to play in the deliberations to varying degrees; the Commission largely sought to stay out of the debate but its principal foreign policy players spoke out on occasion, and were generally disposed to support lifting the embargo<sup>4</sup>. The Parliament, clearly the strongest opponent of lifting – even compared to some of the more reluctant Member States – attempted to shape the Council's consideration of the embargo through frequent and vocal criticism based primarily on human rights concerns. Although policy change would take place through the intergovernmental subsystem and thus Member States' preferences mattered most, an examination of the EU's internal discourse needs to account for the input from actors within the supranational

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with former EU policy official, Paris, 21/05/10.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 28/05/10.

subsystem given their efforts to influence the discussion taking place to a greater extent than in any of the other cases studied.

### ***5.3 The Origins, Substance and Development of the Embargoes, 1989-2003***

Establishing the origins and substance of the arms embargoes imposed on China and tracing their development from the Tiananmen crackdown up until the end of 2003 establishes the context of the transatlantic debate. Most of the literature examining the arms embargo issue pays lip service to its origins and then jumps to late-2003/early 2004, overlooking how American and European interpretations of China's rise had diverged in the intervening period. As is demonstrated below, their respective experiences of interpreting and responding to China's rise were central to the development and eventual outcome of the transatlantic debate. Here, I draw on the findings of Chapters Three and Four to establish how their preferences on the arms embargo issue fit into the wider setting of their response to China's rise. I contend that the evolution of interpretations of China's rise in the US (subject to constant debate between rival views, with a prominent 'threat' narrative emerging but largely not guiding policy) compared with the EU (virtually no debate or salient threat perspectives) was fundamental to the shift in preferences.

#### *The EU's China Arms Embargo*

The EU announced the imposition of its arms embargo at the Madrid European Council in late June (see Chapter Four's *Tiananmen Crackdown* section for details). Reportedly, France insisted on the adoption of the arms embargo as part of the sanctions package (Wong, 2006: 82), predicated on a perception of China posing a continued threat to its own citizens. The arms embargo was established in the Council Declaration which outlined an agreement to the "interruption by the Member States... of military cooperation and *an embargo on trade in arms with China*" (European Council, 1989 [emphasis added]). The statement did not define what arms or related materials were subject to the embargo, or mechanisms for enforcement. As the embargo was a "very limited and abstract proposition"<sup>5</sup>, implementation was the

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10.

responsibility of Member State governments leaving leeway for how this was translated into national policies<sup>6</sup>.

That the EU's embargo was not reinforced as a Common Position following the inception of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is significant because it would have in effect shifted the embargo from a political to a legal commitment and reduced the scope for selective readings by Member States (Kreutz, 2004: 46). Following its imposition, the Member States did not immediately clarify their respective understandings of the arms embargo (at least, not publicly). As a political declaration there was no particular requirement for clarification and most Member States had pre-existing national arms export controls in place. The implication is that there was no codified EU-level embargo, but rather a new political declaration against arms sales to China. However, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has identified some Member States' definitions of the embargo, providing insights into whether threat perceptions underpinned the continued necessity of the embargoes.

In April 1997, France's Defence Minister Charles Millon stated that "there is no question of going back on the decision about the arms trade" with China (cited in SIPRI, 2004a), although did not elaborate why this was the case. When Millon raised the prospects of greater cooperation with China, he noted that this would be "conducted within the framework of our European and international commitments" (cited in SIPRI, 2004b), implicitly including the arms embargo. The language employed was vague with little explanation of precisely how the embargo was interpreted, although SIPRI concluded that this is the closest to a definition as France has provided<sup>7</sup>. The UK's definition was expounded by Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Alastair Goodlad in response to a Parliamentary question in 1995 (SIPRI, 2004c). Goodlad emphasised that weapons which could be used for "internal repression" were prohibited and that applications for other transfers were considered on a case-by-case basis (Hansard, 1995: Vol.256 Col.842-3). The list of prohibited items did not include dual-use technologies: those with potential civilian or military application which facilitate the development of high technological warfare capabilities. There was no concern – at least at that time – about the potential implications for China's military strength, suggesting an absence of perceptions of a (potential) military threat.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with former UK policy official, London, 28/04/11.

<sup>7</sup> I found no other definition during the course of my research.

Although Member States would be reluctant to go against the political commitment of the embargo (Archick et al, 2005: 5), it was not impossible for them to do so depending on national export controls. Despite the embargo, SIPRI identified continued arms transfers from the EU (see Table 5.1)<sup>8</sup>. There is then a differentiation between the embargo as an actual barrier to arms transfers and its status as a commitment to EU norms and as a ‘message’ to China on human rights. These transfers occurred in spite of commitments to other export control regimes, such as the 1996 Wassenaar Arrangement<sup>9</sup> which applied to conventional weapons and sensitive dual-use technologies. While this was not targeted at any particular state, it should have served as another constraint on exports to China (Grimmett, 2006: 4). From the interviews conducted in London, Paris and Brussels, there was overwhelming agreement that the embargo’s significance lay in its status as a symbolic reminder to China of Tiananmen’s legacy. However, even this was evidently waning among some Member States prior to the initiation of the embargo’s review.

In the 1990s there was evidence of shifting positions on the embargo. Despite Millon’s statement (above), French policymakers indicated in 1997 that progress in human rights may allow for the embargo to go and allow consideration of exporting dual-use technologies (Godement and Serra, 2000: 17). However, the evidence does not suggest that the French government considered the original reasons for the embargo to have been eradicated. Within a year of its election, the Labour government in the UK reportedly circulated an internal paper which considered the possibility of removing the arms embargo (Stumbaum, 2009: 171)<sup>10</sup>. Around this time, both the UK and France were attempting to forge closer political relations with China, as we saw in relation to the UNCHR case in Chapter Four. While there were no national or EU level debates on the embargo’s status during this period, there were indications of shifting preferences well before China called for an end to the embargo in 2003, suggesting that the desire to lift the embargo was not purely driven by the latter.

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<sup>8</sup> The SIPRI database indicates that only four Member States exported arms to China over the timeframe of analysis – France, Germany, Italy and the UK.

<sup>9</sup> The Wassenaar Arrangement – which the EU Member States and US are party to – the successor to the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM) (Grimmett, 2006: 1).

<sup>10</sup> As far as it is possible to determine, no researcher has yet accessed this document, nor is there much evidence to suggest what the conclusions were. However, its existence is still significant. The paper’s subject was raised in interviews with British policy officials; however none could recall (or would admit to) any details of it, and suggested if such a paper had been written it would have been seen only by those most closely involved in the government’s decision-making. A Freedom of Information request relating to this document in 2010 was denied.

**Table 5.1—European Arms Exports to China, 1989-2008 (US\$M, 1990 constant prices)**

Year	France to China	France to World	France % to China	UK to China	UK % to World	EU to China	EU to World	EU % to China	
1989	80	2,199	3.64	10	3552	0.28	111	7439	1.49
1990	59	1,714	3.44	0	1891	0	76	5606	1.36
1991	68	1,066	6.38	0	1526	0	85	5443	1.56
1992	57	1,089	5.23	0	1217	0	69	3977	1.73
1993	55	829	6.63	0	1465	0	67	4209	1.59
1994	120	800	15	0	1485	0	136	5241	2.59
1995	137	980	13.98	0	1451	0	149	4204	3.54
1996	155	1,926	8.05	0	1642	0	173	5867	2.95
1997	101	3,093	3.27	10	2408	0.42	119	6905	1.72
1998	97	3,250	2.98	20	1413	1.42	132	6917	1.91
1999	128	1,845	6.94	50	1391	3.58	198	5613	3.53
2000	123	1,107	11.11	60	1648	3.64	198	4569	4.33
2001	139	1,444	9.63	60	1401	4.28	213	4009	5.31
2002	151	1,472	10.26	40	1119	3.57	203	3997	5.08
2003	143	1,444	9.9	40	768	5.21	197	4326	4.55
2004	167	2,282	7.32	80	1337	5.98	274	5022	5.46
2005	164	1,807	9.08	40	1042	3.84	223	5772	3.86
2006	148	1,717	8.62	40	853	4.69	202	5711	3.54
2007	137	2,400	5.79	50	1008	4.96	195	733	2.66
2008	178	2,048	8.69	50	998	5.01	234	5835	4.01

Source: SIPRI (2012)

In the period between the embargo's imposition and the move to lift it, the EU's interpretations of China had evolved, with the 'human rights violator' perspective giving way relatively quickly to that of an economic opportunity. This in turn expanded to see China as a political opportunity in terms of contributing to a multilateral world order and upholding the international system, rather than seeing China as wanting to alter the rules of the game in its favour. Both France and the UK had started referring to China as a "strategic partner" in the context of their own bilateral relations by the late 1990s and this perspective was gaining traction at the EU-level, as articulated in the *European Security Strategy* (European Council, 2003). The embargo stood as an obstacle to fostering closer relations through the new strategic partnership (Stumbaum, 2009: 171), a view which has persisted even after the 2004-5 debate<sup>11</sup>. Its removal would symbolise that the EU wanted to deal "with China fairly and properly as a full scale, comprehensive strategic partner which is a fellow member of the UN"<sup>12</sup>. Lifting would also indicate an independent European foreign policy – that is, not informed by US preferences (Casarini, 2007: 385).

China's 2003 EU policy paper explicitly called for the embargo's revocation "at an early date so as to remove barriers to greater bilateral cooperation on defence industry and technologies" (MoFA, 2003b). Subsequently, China ramped up its diplomatic campaign on the issue beginning with the October 2003 EU-China summit<sup>13</sup> (Kreutz, 2004: 49). The issue was symbolically important to China's leadership<sup>14</sup>, serving as something of a test for the strategic partnership. Thus, the promise of an even closer relationship was attractive to the EU within the context of the well-established political/economic opportunity interpretations of China's rise and particularly in relation to the emergent interpretation of China as a strategic partner. It also allowed China to set the terms of the relationship's agenda by concentrating on the arms embargo rather than on the broader issue of human rights<sup>15</sup>. The embargo's end would be the

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<sup>11</sup> In interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 04/06/10, this was mentioned, noting that this logic still held.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with former UK policy official, London, 28/04/11.

<sup>13</sup> The joint statement (Europa Press Release, 2003b) did not actually mention the issue, but Kreutz (2004: 49) cited officials acknowledging that the issue was discussed.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with EU-China analyst, Brussels, 26/04/11; interview with Stanley Crossick, Senior Fellow at Brussels Institute of Contemporary China Studies, Brussels, 01/06/10.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with EU-China specialist, London, 18/04/11.

price the EU had to pay for increased cooperation from the Chinese, irrespective of human rights concerns – to the extent that they still featured on policymakers' lists of priorities.

### *The US' China Arms Embargo*

The US' embargo is a much more straightforward story. The cessation of arms sale was part of the package of sanctions which the GHW Bush administration imposed after Tiananmen. Bush's embargo was later reinforced by law<sup>16</sup> (Archick et al, 2005: 4), which declared that it should be continually made clear to the PRC leadership that “resumption of normal diplomatic and military relations... will depend on the halting of executions of pro-democracy supporters, releasing those imprisoned for political beliefs, and increasing respect for human rights” (HoR, 1989). The legislation's most specific reference to arms transfers placed the export of dual-use technologies under strict controls. The Act noted that Congress

exempts from the suspension on the issuance of munitions export licenses any systems and components designed specifically for civil products and controlled as defense articles only for purposes of export to a controlled country, unless the President determines that the recipient of such items is the Chinese military or security forces (HoR, 1989).

The legislative basis of the embargo also included a provision or the President to issue a waiver allowing for certain transfers (Stumbaum, 2009: 173-4). Table 5.2 illustrates that the US has been more consistent in adhering to its embargo than the EU, although some arms-related transfers have occurred. The most significant use of the waiver prerogative occurred in 1992 when Bush took the decision to finalise four previously suspended Foreign Military Sales with China which dated from the mid-1980s<sup>17</sup>, which were possible because they coincided with a relatively tranquil period in cross-Strait relations<sup>18</sup>. The interesting feature of this waiver was not the transfer itself *per se*, but rather how it was justified by Department of State spokesperson Richard Boucher (1992); initially, he declared that there would be no more arms sales agreements with China following the closing out of these programmes. Yet a later

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<sup>16</sup> Section 902 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1990-1991.

<sup>17</sup> Since they were already paid for prior to their suspension in June 1989, they do not show up as exports in Table 5.2.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, former Congressional Research Service specialist, Washington DC, 29/06/10.

segment of the statement seemed to suggest that the administration's position in relation to the efficacy of sanctions in the military sphere may have been changing:

We have made our point. We now believe that continuing to hold aging items after a 3 [and a] 1/2-year suspension hinders rather than helps US efforts to promote cooperative PRC behaviour in a range of areas (Boucher, 1992).

However, the timing of the statement – late December 1992 – was less than a month before Clinton took office. The change of key administration policymakers effectively ‘reset’ the government’s preferences to strong – albeit implicit – support of the arms embargo, given the strongly critical line Clinton’s campaign had taken on China (see Chapter Three) which evinced perceptions of China as a normative threat. The arms embargo is not definitive in that what is considered to constitute national security is subjective dependent on the situation and the individual who holds decision-making power. Although this seems to contradict the US’ position on the embargo’s importance, of more significance are the technologies that have been transferred and those that are not; the US has been primarily concerned about transfers of high-end dual-use technologies which are liable to have military end-users. The US has consistently refused to export such technologies under the conditions of the legislation imposing the ban.

Beyond the reference to the arms embargo in 1992, it has not been an issue on the US’ China policy agenda. Clinton appeared ready to shift the direction of overall policy – as signalled by MFN linkage – yet as we saw in Chapter Three, this did not transpire. While there were instances of increased tension between the US and China – particularly the Taiwan Strait crisis – and different interpretations of China’s rise emerging within policy debates, the US has continually opted for policies of engagement at key instances. Although there has been a consistent narrative from some parts of the policymaking community that China’s rise poses a military threat, more moderate voices seem to accept that uncertainty remains. Despite growing perceptions of China as a potential political opportunity, the persistence of threat perspectives precluded any shift in preferences away from maintaining the embargo; if anything, the Taiwan Strait crisis and Cox Report would have reinforced commitment to the policy for many, although it did not feature in the discourse around these developments.

**Table 5.2 - Arms Exports of USA, 1989-2008 (US\$m, 1990 constant prices)**

Year	US to China	US to World	% to China
1989	0	11,313	0
1990	0	10,664	0
1991	0	12,667	0
1992	0	14,170	0
1993	<0.5	14,144	<0.01
1994	14	11,694	0.12
1995	2	11,190	0.02
1996	2	11,031	0.02
1997	0	14,529	0
1998	0	15,788	0
1999	0	11,443	0
2000	0	7,665	0
2001	0	5,902	0
2002	0	5,107	0
2003	0	5,627	0
2004	0	6,828	0
2005	0	6,696	0
2006	0	7,404	0
2007	0	7,919	0
2008	0	6,463	0

Source: SIPRI (2013)

#### ***5.4 The Diverging Interpretations of the Rise of China in the Arms Embargo Debate***

The transatlantic debate over the EU's embargo illustrated a clear gap between the US and EU in terms of their approaches to relations with China. Initially, this seems puzzling precisely because both had started off at the same point on this policy. The debate threatened to become a major schism in the transatlantic alliance which was already fragile in the wake of divisions over the Iraq war. Further, the debate dragged out for over a year, during which the two sides appeared to talk past each other when trying to communicate the logic behind their preferences. Throughout, the US and EU argued over the particular implications of lifting: whether this would lead to EU arms exports to China or not, and whether this was sending the 'right' or 'wrong' message regarding human rights. Behind the arguments in the public discourse was a contestation between different interpretations of the implications of China's rise. In this section, I argue that explaining the genesis of the EU's consideration of lifting, the

nature of the US' objections and the substance of the transatlantic debate requires consideration of the evolution of their interpretations of China's rise. Specifically, the transatlantic debate was strongly shaped by the differing experiences of the US and EU in terms of their internal debates – or lack thereof in the case of the EU – between rival interpretations of China's rise and its implications not only for their own polities, but the international system more broadly.

To do this, I look at both the US and EU together as the interactions between policymakers are what produced the substance of policy discourse that is subjected to analysis. Although the transatlantic debate did not kick off properly until 2004, to capture what catalysed the EU's proposal to lift I take late 2003 as the starting point for the analysis. Close examination of the development of preferences on both sides of the Atlantic – and responses to the other side's arguments – reveals different interpretations of the implications of China's rise. Here, I concentrate on the period up until the end of the substantive debate, but in the next chapter I consider how the embargo's post-debate status figured in the context of US-EU-China relations. I also present a detailed overview of the debate, as other accounts – such as in Stumbaum (2009) and Casarini (2009) – are somewhat incomplete, particularly in terms of the US' input. Consequently, there are missing details in the existing literature which are important to how the debate played out and revealed the importance of interpretations of China's rise.

As contended in Chapter Four, within the EU there have not been substantive debates between differing interpretations of the implications of China's rise. Evidence from the public discourse revealed that the reason behind this was not lack of political space to do so but rather because the actors with greatest responsibility for determining the EU's foreign policies – the Member States – have held relatively similar interpretations. This was underpinned by a strong interpretation of China as an economic opportunity that has expanded to conceptualise China's rise as a political opportunity in the sense that it could play an increasingly active, positive role in the international arena. This then developed into a view of China as a strategic partner at a time when the establishment of a strategic identity was on the EU agenda. This context was crucial for the consideration of lifting the arms embargo and strongly informed the arguments put forward by proponents of lifting. However, interpretations of the US as the EU's primary strategic partner were also influential, particularly in 2005 when the political

environment became less conducive to lifting. The debate did not just play out in the context of how the EU interpreted China's rise, but also its perspective on relations with the US.

The main consequence was that the EU's internal embargo debate was more of a deliberation than any true contestation of rival preferences for keeping the embargo indefinitely versus lifting (whether as a short- or medium-term objective). To that end, the internal discussions in 2004 and early 2005 were over the timing of the lifting and the improvements that the EU should look for in return, rather than substantive debates over whether it should actually be lifted or not. Dissenting voices were to be heard in the EP, but due to the decision being a purely intergovernmental one – deliberated at the level of the Council of the EU and European Council – the Member States opted not to engage with these rival perspectives in any meaningful sense. Lip-service was often paid by vague promises to take on board the EP's concerns, yet there was no discernible impact on the EU's stance or the deliberations over the embargo. This allowed the momentum towards lifting to develop relatively quickly.

That is not to say however that there was unanimity from day one; indeed, certain Member States were opposed due to continued concerns over human rights, the need for a Code of Conduct on arms exports, and the appropriateness of sending a 'positive' signal to China at that time. However, internal disagreements did not prevent the EU moving from a proposal to review the embargo to a commitment to lift it in the space of a year. Indeed, right up until the day China adopted the ASL in 2005, it looked likely that consensus would be reached. Despite divergent preferences on particular issues, the underlying interpretations of China's rise – as an economic, political opportunity and putative strategic partner – facilitated a political environment in which lifting was not only a real possibility, but almost a reality. The lack of formal conditionality – which received considerable criticism – was due to difficulties in getting the Member States to agree to the criteria<sup>19</sup>; yet the commitment to the general principle of lifting allowed the EU to proceed without a final agreement on conditions. For François Godement, this was an example of unconditional engagement, although not a "pure case" due to a degree of "bluff": some Member States wanted to agree with everyone by not going against either China or the US<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 01/06/10.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10.

Interviews with former US officials confirmed that for the Bush administration, security concerns took greater priority than human rights in the US-China relationship in the period of the transatlantic debate<sup>21</sup>. That is, it was the military threat perspective which took precedence over any view of China as a normative threat. Interviewees were keen to point out that this did not mean that human rights concerns were not of importance to the administration, but rather that the concerns were multi-faceted with some of greater significance than others. This indicated that the logic underpinning the embargo had shifted for policymakers: no longer was the embargo there to prevent China purchasing weapons with which it could harm its own citizens or as a symbol reminding the PRC that they were expected to respect human rights; it was now largely about US national and regional security interests. Because the US had never internally debated the status of its own embargo, there was no explicit acknowledgement that the embargo's purpose had changed for the US.

The focus on human rights was, however, strong in Congress. A number of those who led Congress' response to the Tiananmen crackdown were still in office in 2004/5 and evidently their interpretations of China had not changed significantly. For instance, Nancy Pelosi<sup>22</sup>, Joe Biden<sup>23</sup> and Richard Lugar<sup>24</sup> along with some of their colleagues wrote on several occasions to GHW Bush in 1989 to express their dismay over China's actions and to urge the President to take a firmer stance against China<sup>25</sup>. During the 2004/5 transatlantic debate, these same individuals frequently criticised the EU for neglecting the human rights situation in China. In particular, the comments of Lugar and Biden in the Senate Foreign Relation Committee's (2005) hearing on 'the lifting of the EU Arms Embargo on China' were focussed primarily on human rights issues. These revealed interpretations of China as a normative threat which resembled those in the European Parliament: a brutal authoritarian regime with little respect for human rights. In Congress, these interpretations were manifest from 1989 onwards and remained largely unchanged – and arguably reinforced – due to China's intransigence in relation to improving human rights conditions.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Dennis Wilder, Washington DC, 15/07/10; interview with Randy Schriver, Arlington VA, 07/07/10.

<sup>22</sup> D-CA.

<sup>23</sup> D-DE.

<sup>24</sup> R-IN.

<sup>25</sup> See discussion of Congress' reaction to Tiananmen in Chapter Three.

There was little shared ground in terms of the EU and US' positions on the issues, precluding the development of shared understanding precisely because their interpretations of China's rise and its implications not only for themselves but the international system were considerably different. Even where there was consensus between some actors in the US and EU (specifically, the Parliament) that the embargo should remain their respective preferences were predicated on differing interpretations. Nevertheless, this allowed the US to attempt to build support for its preferences within the EU even if they had different reasons for promoting the embargo's retention. The divergence in their interpretations was further compounded by the fact that the two sides had never had substantive dialogue on East Asian security<sup>26</sup> which would have provided a forum through which concerns could be raised and differences identified. Following the transatlantic debate, the two sides agreed to establish an East Asian Strategic Dialogue, although only a few of these meetings ever took place.

While the underlying logic of the embargo had changed for the US in such a way that it became more necessary, a similar process had not occurred in the EU. Instead, the embargo was only predicated on the original reasons for its imposition: censure of the Chinese government's actions in June 1989. What had changed was the cost of maintaining the embargo relative to the benefits accrued: the main cost was that it presented – or at least, China claimed that this was the case – an obstacle to better political and economic relations; the possible benefits were minimal, as it had not resulted in significant improvements in the area of China's human rights<sup>27</sup> and, although not a major concern for the EU, had not prevented China's military from developing. Thus the embargo's effectiveness could easily be called into question from the EU's perspective, especially in terms of its utility in relation to human rights<sup>28</sup> which was the original reason for imposition.

Chapters Three and Four demonstrated that despite the persistence of overarching strategies of engagement from the US and EU in their relations with China, these were in many ways qualitatively different and conditioned by their respective domestic political discourses over China's rise, which was far more contested in the US. Specifically, although the US had pursued engagement, beneath the surface there was considerable tension between competing

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with French policy official, Paris, 18/05/10.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 01/06/10.

perspectives on the implications of China's rise. Following the EP-3 incident, the Bush administration's foreign policy had not been directly determined by interpretations of China as a potential military threat. However, they still existed and the arms embargo presented an opportunity for them not only to resurface, but dominate policy discourse for a period. As one EU official recognised in March 2004, "the United States does not want to contribute to the militarization of a country they perceive as a potential strategic adversary, while the Europeans are in a partnership approach, in particular business"<sup>29</sup> (cited by Zecchini, 2004).

In this case, I deviate slightly from the approach in the rest of the thesis as the US' policy responses were not directed at China, but rather the EU. Nevertheless, the intention of the US was to influence the policies of a third party towards China on the basis of preferences shaped by the salient interpretations of China's rise within its policymaking community at that time. The transatlantic debate's significance lies in the revelation that a wider range of policymakers acted on the basis of threat interpretations than had been the case in the events examined in Chapter Three. However, the analysis here shows that the US was not motivated by perceptions of an impending power-transition; rather, the threat interpretations were complex, involving a range of factors connected to the US' regional security interests.

The EU's actions, rather than any specific behaviour of China, had been the concern for the US and led to the threat interpretations of China's rise gaining greater salience as policymakers pondered the potential implications of the removal of the arms embargo. An opinion piece appearing in the *Washington Post* by former US official Daniel Blumenthal and Thomas Donnelly (2005) of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission<sup>30</sup> indicated that the EU had

inadvertently kick-started the debate in Washington about China's intentions. The truth is that beneath the rosy rhetoric there remains a great deal of tension... [a]lready, talk of a 'China threat' is re-emerging in the corridors of Congress, the Pentagon and inside the Bush administration.

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<sup>29</sup> Original: "Les Etats-Unis ne veulent pas contribuer à la militarisation d'un pays qu'ils perçoivent comme un adversaire stratégique potentiel, alors que les Européens sont dans une logique de partenariat, en particulier commercial".

<sup>30</sup> At that point, both were also resident fellows at the AEI.

This had evidently not been the intent of European policymakers; having failed to consult with the US over the move they had not considered the potential ramifications<sup>31</sup>. European interviewees indicated that even if this had taken place, the US' response – especially from Congress – would most probably have been the same<sup>32</sup>. My findings concur with this: the reaction was primed by their perceptions of China as a growing military threat; it was not simply in response to not being consulted on the issue. Another interviewee suggested that the debate wasn't about arms exports to China, but that some in the US wanted to prevent a “normal relationship” between the EU and China<sup>33</sup>. Given Chirac's disagreements with the US in 2003 and perception that it had been ‘weakened’, it is unlikely that he would have wanted to engage with the US at an early stage. However, it is surprising that other Member States – particularly the UK – did not attempt to push for greater transatlantic dialogue before supporting the initiative. The rhetoric from the EU as US objections intensified appeared to suggest that policymakers largely expected that the US would simply have to live with the EU's decision.

### *Proposal to Lift*

In late 2003, the emergent perception of China as a strategic partner – and China's apparent reciprocal recognition of the EU as such – created a permissive environment in which the move to lift the embargo could receive real consideration. Although China's pressure mattered, the positive political environment was essential for the proposal to gain traction. There was no simultaneous attempt to pressure the US on its embargo, as their bilateral relationship was not in a condition where it could realistically be considered. The proposal was advanced by France and Germany<sup>34</sup> at the December 2003 European Council meeting where it was agreed that the foreign ministers in the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) should review the embargo over the coming months (European Council, 2003: 19). The decision to review required unanimous agreement; even Member States which tended to be more politically critical of China gave their backing. UK Foreign Secretary Jack

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with US policy analyst, Washington DC, 13/07/10.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 01/06/10; interview with Stanley Crossick, Brussels, 01/06/10.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 03/06/10.

<sup>34</sup> Austria, Italy, Spain and Greece also supported ending the embargo (Agence Europe, 27/01/2004); with Finland and the Netherlands joining this group later (Casarini, 2009: 124).

Straw later revealed that he had supported the proposal “because, on the face of it, [the embargo] had run its course” (cited by SCID, 2005).

The available evidence suggests that Member States’ positions were predicated on two distinct avenues of thought regarding the priorities in the bilateral relationship. The gap between their interpretations of China was relatively narrow and this was reflected in preferences on the issue. Yet while there was general consensus that China’s rise presented political and economic opportunities, the embargo’s origins – the Tiananmen crackdown – did bring about renewed attention to the specific human rights violations of 1989 and the contemporary human rights situation in China. The linkage between the two in discourse indicated perceptions of China as still possibly a normative threat. However, the consensus appeared to be that despite significant continued problems, China had made enough progress to render the original reasons for the embargo invalid<sup>35</sup>. Human rights concerns were further offset by appeals to China’s growing political importance as a strategic partner: it was inconsistent to have such a relationship and yet maintain the arms embargo. Zimbabwe and Burma were used as common reference points to underline the fact that China was ‘different’ in a positive sense.

Those who strongly supported lifting the ban appeared to be driven by primarily by interpretations of China as a political/economic opportunity and as a strategic partner, at the expense of other issues in the bilateral relationship (human rights) and, to some extent, the EU’s relationship with the US which was already strained given the fallout over the Iraq war in 2003. Notably, the main proponents behind the proposal fell under the Accommodating Mercantilist group (Fox and Godement, 2009); France and Germany, as two-thirds of the EU3, were the drivers behind the embargo being placed on the EU’s agenda. Other early supporters such as Spain and Italy were also assigned to this group; since these Member States are less willing to push China on political issues in order to develop their political and economic relations, their support is to be expected. Member States termed as European Followers such as Luxembourg and Austria tend to go along with the consensus, and thus did not strongly object. Those Member States which acceded to the EU during the debate generally fell within these two groups but had indicated that they were willing to go along with the consensus of the other fifteen.

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with French foreign policy official, Paris, 21/05/10.

Chirac – who wanted an announcement prior to President Hu Jintao’s January visit to France – raised the issue himself after failing to convince Commission President Romano Prodi to bring it up (Patten, 2005: 281); although Prodi had declined, the Commission did not attempt to prevent France and other Member States from pursuing their preferences (nor could it). France’s move was foreshadowed by Defence Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie’s proposal to soften the embargo to facilitate sharing “sensitive military technology” with China (Evans-Pritchard, 2003). On this basis, France appears – at least partly – influenced by a perception of China as an economic opportunity for its defence industry. This was consistent with France’s – and particularly Chirac’s – general pattern of engagement with China: as an Accommodating Mercantilist, France avoids challenging China on sensitive political topics such as human rights issues and operating on the premise that close political relations would produce economic benefits.

One interviewee suggested that it might be possible to put a ‘question mark’ as to whether Chirac and Schroder really wanted to lift the embargo or whether they were paying lip-service to Chinese authorities<sup>36</sup>. Although it is beyond the scope of this research to prove/disprove this, the proposal soon gathered momentum either way. French, and specifically Chirac’s, interpretations of China as a significant economic and political opportunity were decisive factors in shaping the preference to act; Chirac’s assessment of the contemporary international political environment played a part in the timing. Another interviewee indicated that in late 2003, Chirac perceived the US as a “weakened” international actor as a consequence of the disputes surrounding the invasion of Iraq<sup>37</sup>. Consequently, Chirac concluded that discussing lifting the arms embargo as a stepping-stone to stronger EU-China relations (spearheaded by France) was feasible. Chirac made early promises to China that the embargo would be removed quickly and raised expectations<sup>38</sup>; along with Schroder, he believed they could win over the Council and push lifting through<sup>39</sup>, underestimating the complexity of reaching the required consensus<sup>40</sup>. Chirac appeared to overestimate his political influence within the EU<sup>41</sup> and failed to anticipate the reticence of others to agree to a quick policy change. Chirac’s view

<sup>36</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 01/06/10.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 01/06/10.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 28/05/10; interview with Stanley Crossick, Brussels, 01/06/10.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 01/06/10; interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with French foreign policy official, 21/05/10.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 28/05/10; interview with Stanley Crossick, Brussels, 01/06/10.

of the US also led him to underestimate its resolve and willingness to challenge the EU on this particular issue.

What is perhaps most surprising is that the Ideological Free-Traders including the UK, Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark were not fully against. This group has generally been more willing to confront China on sensitive political issues, particularly human rights. Yet on the embargo although they were reticent to support lifting without positive steps from China on human rights issues, none fully opposed the lifting in principle. These states followed the second avenue of thought which focussed on the continued human rights violations within China (Glen and Murgo, 2007: 338), thus indicating slightly different interpretations of China compared to those strongly supporting. However, their interpretations of China were not defined along human rights issues completely; all of these Member States also viewed China as an economic opportunity as well and, to varying degrees, as a political opportunity. For instance, the UK was argued to have initially favoured lifting the ban on the grounds that it stood to lose out in other areas of trade with China if it took an adversarial stance on the issue (Stumbaum, 2009: 172).

Following the December summit, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi – then Council President – justified the proposal on the grounds of “the will, apparently sincere of the new Chinese political class to make progress on economic issues and political rights” (cited by Agence Europe, 13/12/2003). This conformed to the prevailing interpretations of China as an economic and political opportunity while downplaying the normative threat upon which the embargo was originally predicated. Throughout the 2004-5 debate, a constant refrain was that maintaining the embargo was inconsistent with the changing reality of China’s rise. In light of the contemporary setting of the relationship, the embargo was the only remaining obstacle to closer relations: maintaining an arms ban on a strategic partner does not represent a great deal of trust. The designation of China as a strategic partner allowed proponents of lifting to characterise China as part of an ‘in’ group versus other human rights violators such as Zimbabwe and Burma<sup>42</sup> as an ‘out’ group. This component of the argument appeared to be influential on the preferences of those initially reluctant to support the proposal, particularly for those who were not likely to be looking for economic opportunities from China. Part of the

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<sup>42</sup> These countries were often used as a point of reference in EU rhetoric on the arms embargo.

motivation behind these preferences was the desire for recognition from China of the EU as a strategic partner, especially since China had included its desire to see the embargo lifted in its EU policy paper.

Despite lacking formal power, the European Parliament was active in its opposition to lifting (Stumbaum, 2009: 167). The EP clearly had little power to influence the intergovernmental policymaking process, but consistently made its preferences known and called on the Council throughout 2004-5 to act in accordance with these. Arguments were made by MEPs that the Parliament's views should be taken into account since it was the only democratically-elected EU institution (for instance, McKenna in EP, 2004a); it was best placed to protect the human/democratic rights of the Chinese people and speak on behalf of the EU population. The EP immediately debated the initial proposal and adopted a resolution (EP, 2003a) which received overwhelming support – 373 in favour to 32 against with 29 abstentions (Kreutz, 2004: 50) – revealing a dominant preference among the MEPs that the embargo should stay.

The debate preceding the vote revealed that this preference was informed by interpretations of China as a human rights violator and as a growing threat to Taiwan (EP, 2003b) – in other words, both a normative and military threat. The views expressed were, in some ways, consistent with those of the US Congress: references to China as a “Communist dictatorship” – and even one to “Red China” – were used by those arguing that the proposal was untenable (EP, 2003b), terms absent from the rhetoric in the intergovernmental subsystem. However, the resolution did also seem to leave open the possibility that the EP’s position could change in the future by calling on the Council and Commission to “use the issue of the embargo as a unique opportunity to engender real progress in key areas of human rights” (EP, 2003a: 3). Given that the embargo had little impact in the first fourteen years of its existence, the message appeared to be that the EU could consider lifting as part of a political bargain to ensure compliance with international human rights norms. Yet as the debate intensified – and took on a transatlantic dimension – the EP’s opposition deepened.

Following the January 2004 GAERC meeting, it was reported that all Member States except France were in agreement to maintain the embargo at that point (Evans-Pritchard and Broughton, 2004). The Council acknowledged that it would consider the issue again in the near future (GAERC, 2004a: 8) indicating opposition not to the principle but rather the timing,

a position confirmed by German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Smith, C. 2004). Following this meeting, the issue became more prominent in the China policy discourse due to individual Member States, particularly France, ensuring that it remained on the agenda. During Hu Jintao's state visit to France, Chirac (2004) stated that the arms embargo "no longer makes any sense today. It's obviously not likely to change the strategic balance of power. It will be lifted, I hope, in the coming months. I repeat: France is very much in favour of this".

Chirac's statement indicated not only his preference but also his belief that the conditions under which the embargo was imposed had changed. France's political system affords the president considerable autonomy in foreign policymaking (Risse-Kappen, 1991: 487), but Chirac was also strongly supported by Defence Minister Alliot-Marie. Internally, the defence ministry was not united on the issue<sup>43</sup>, but the President's prerogative effectively meant that divergent preferences at lower levels of government were inconsequential. The national governments of France and Germany saw improvements in China's human rights record and, while accepting that they were still not excellent, had improved enough to render ostracising China along with the likes of Burma<sup>44</sup> and Zimbabwe inappropriate due to its increasing international importance (Cabestan, 2007: 138; Feng 2007: 275). This fits with the growing interpretation of China as a 'strategic partner' for the EU, contributing to an environment in which the removal of the arms embargo could be considered. Although initially backing the review, the UK backed off in early 2004, only to shift stance a few months later (see below). Sweden and Denmark also had reservations, but notably no delegation had expressed clear opposition to the review procedure (Agence Europe, 27/01/2004). If Member States' governments perceived China as a potential normative or military threat, opposition to the review process (frequently expressed in the EP) would have been expected to surface in the intergovernmental decision-making process.

As argued in Chapter Four, threat interpretations of China's rise are virtually non-existent within the EU; thus a general sense emerged through the policy discourse early on that an end to the embargo was inevitable. In February 2004, CFSP High Representative Javier Solana stated "I don't think lifting arms embargo is a big problem" (cited by People's Daily, 2004).

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 04/06/10.

Although Solana did not outline a timeframe the impression conveyed was that a decision would be reached soon, just as Chirac had suggested. At this early stage, it would appear that Chirac and Solana were either ignoring the US' initial response (see below) to the proposal or underestimating the conviction behind it. One interviewee commented that at the very outset, French and German officials had been uncertain over how much US opposition they would face and hoped they could “get away with [lifting] without too much protest from Washington”<sup>45</sup>.

### *The Beginnings of the Transatlantic Debate*

It was around this time that the US started to express its opposition to the EU's proposal. For the US, the EU's proposal was untenable from the outset. At the time, the government was undoubtedly preoccupied with the global war on terror and its military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq<sup>46</sup>. As such, relations with China were not a particularly high priority at that point. The rival interpretations of China's rise (see Chapter Three) were still very much active, but at that point in the time not aired as frequently as they previously had been. However, when the EU's arms embargo review came up, the military threat interpretation was the most widely invoked amongst policymakers from both the administration and Congress. From the US' perspective, the move would mostly likely have negative implications for its interests; at best, these may be limited but there were certainly no positive aspects to the EU's deliberation over the embargo. To some extent, that the US responded harshly to the proposal and stressed the potential problems of allowing China access to high-end military technology reflected the logic of power-transition perspectives. However, looking more closely at the arguments and the reasons behind these, we can see that the threat interpretation was more nuanced than this.

The US considered the retention of the EU's embargo as crucial for broader regional stability. Interestingly, this concern was not a significant part of the US' public rhetoric in the debate; for obvious diplomatic reasons, US policymakers do not ‘yell’ about the situation they have been attempting to manage in East Asia<sup>47</sup>. Thus the arguments of some EU policymakers

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Thomas Klau, Paris, 20/05/10.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with US policy analyst, Washington DC, 13/07/10.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Dennis Wilder, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

indicated that this concern had evidently not been communicated clearly in the years leading up to the outbreak of the debate. Although US actors may have pressed the point in private, EU officials – including some who were closely involved in discussing this issue with the US – to identify this apparently failed to recognise this issue as one of the US’ major anxieties. What US officials failed to appreciate in return was that with little stake in regional stability, European interpretations of the implications of China’s rise had developed in a different way to their own, resulting in a significant gap opening up by 2003. This apparently led to communication problems during the debate, as the arguments being put forward by each side were effectively at odds with the respective prevailing interpretations of China’s rise, thus the claims did not impact the preferences of the others.

Linked into concerns over China’s military expansion and regional stability was the matter of US credibility, in terms of commitments to regional allies<sup>48</sup>. The US has an enduring image of itself as an Asian Pacific country responsible for continuing to support security and stability in the region<sup>49</sup>. The US was already concerned in 2003 with the levels of tensions on the Korean peninsula<sup>50</sup>, thus the sensitivity of potentially negative developments – such as the EU removing its embargo – was high. Such concerns were evidently not shared by the EU; at least as far as US policymakers could see: the EU’s claims that lifting the arms embargo would not increase the quantity or quality of weapons technology available to China from the European arms industry was regarded as insufficient or even baseless by US officials<sup>51</sup>. The US’ regional presence and self-identification as a critical player in ensuring regional stability and protector of allies has been an important point of interaction between it and China. The context of the EU-China relationship is much different, with no such role for the EU, nor its Member States in any real capacity. Following the Hong Kong handover in 1997, the US considered the UK to have dropped its security interest in the region – along with it went the wider European understanding of the geopolitical situation<sup>52</sup>, even though both France and the UK have held security dialogues with China since (Casarini, 2009: 124).

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Randy Schriver, Arlington VA, 07/07/10; interview with Daniel Blumenthal, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with US policy aide, Washington DC, 06/07/10.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with John Park, Senior Research Associate at the United States Institute of Peace, Washington DC, 09/07/10.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Daniel Blumenthal, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Dennis Wilder, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

The main implication for the US was the potential negative impact on its security concerns<sup>53</sup>. With no arms embargo in place, the EU may end up providing the Chinese with technologies that could, hypothetically, be used against US soldiers in some future conflict in the Taiwan Strait<sup>54</sup>. There was also a concern that allowing China access to technologies that would expedite force modernisation could potentially lead to a destabilising arms race in the region involving the likes of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, which would change the security environment in which the US operated. One interviewee in the US indicated that it did not seem possible that this was what the EU actually wanted, thus the view in the US policymaking community was that the EU simply had not considered the security implications<sup>55</sup>. The conclusion was that the EU should not lift the embargo if it was committed to the concept of allegiance with the US. Even despite disagreements over issues such as the Iraq war, US policymakers expected that on the issue of China, European views would be close to their own.

One other factor in relation to arms industries was the threat to the US' arms/defence industry as the dominant force in the global industry (Wacker, 2005: 31). This was not explicated by US policymakers – for fear of undermining their other arguments – but was picked up on in some analyses of the debate (see Wacker, 2005) and suggests perceptions of a potential economic as well as military threat. Cooperation between European and Chinese firms may lead to innovation in technological developments and competitive pricing, whilst the size of the European arms industry might grow, decreasing the relative advantage of the US' industry. The US also imports certain technologies from the EU, and would be unlikely to want competition from China potentially seeking similar systems. It is not particularly surprising that US policymakers did not forward such arguments as they would not only have had little impact, but would have potentially undermined the main arguments the US was making to the EU about why the embargo needed to be maintained.

The *Washington Post* cited European diplomats reporting that the administration had “quietly lodged a series of formal protests” at both the EU and national levels (Pan, 2004). Due to the embargo review being placed on the agenda with virtually no internal consultation, there had

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with John Park, Washington DC, 09/07/10.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, Washington DC, 29/06/10.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with former senior US administration official, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

been no official contact with the US. Some administration actors were aware that the issue was being considered at some level within the French and German governments<sup>56</sup> with “rumours” circulating in early 2003 but the information took time to filter through the bureaucratic organisations which delayed the explication of the administration’s position<sup>57</sup>. The lack of an intense response from the US from the very outset was not indicative of a relaxed attitude on the matter. The US communicated concerns that it would send the wrong signal to China when it still violated human rights and, additionally, technology transfer could threaten US security (Pan, 2004). State Department spokesman Richard Boucher<sup>58</sup> told the press that the administration believed “that the US and European prohibitions on arms sales are complementary, were imposed for the same reasons, specifically serious human rights abuses, and that those reasons remain valid today” (cited by Pan, 2004).

In March, Secretary of State Colin Powell met with the European Ministerial Troika, stating afterwards that he had “voiced… concerns at a European lifting of the weapons embargo” and, repeating Boucher almost word for word, argued that the US and EU “imposed bans for the same reasons, in particular the serious violations of human rights … we [the US] believe that those arguments remain valid today” (cited by Agence Europe, 03/03/2004). Despite direct communication between high-level officials, the EU was not deterred although did attempt to allay US misgivings by qualifying its arguments. Solana told the press in mid-March that he hoped settling the issue would lead to improved relations with China but added that the EU did not want to “contribute to increasing arms in the region” (cited by Agence Europe, 18/03/2004). The EU’s position was that this was a political gesture rather an economic decision in order to open up new markets, consistent with the purported strategic partnership between the two sides. This reflected a perception of China as a political opportunity and also confirmed that the EU did not see its rise as a military threat.

The Bush administration remained unconvinced and stepped up its diplomatic campaign through “making representations in European capitals and in Brussels” on the issue (State Department official cited by Spiegel, 2004). Although no agreement had been reached in the GAERC and European Council meetings of February and March, the issue was being pushed

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Dennis Wilder, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Randy Schriver, Arlington, VA, 07/07/10.

<sup>58</sup> As an aside, it was Boucher who had stated on behalf of the GHW Bush administration in 1992 that the US’ point had been made (see above) and was now delivering the opposite message under GW Bush’s presidency.

by those Member States who wanted a decision sooner rather than later. As one French official put it, “the question is not that of the embargo, but of the consistency of the whole of our relationship with China”<sup>59</sup> (cited by Zecchini, 2004). On the US side, a State Department official commented that “to the extent that we’ve told them [the EU] that this is a bad idea and they’re still considering it, that’s a concern to us” (cited by Spiegel, 2004). At this point, while both sides appeared to recognise that their preferences in relation to the embargo were premised on differing interpretations of the implications of China’s rise, the extent of the gap between these was not fully appreciated. The EU evidently did not anticipate that the US’ reaction would intensify over time while the US administration had apparently expected that the EU would drop the issue relatively quickly.

In the US, the administration initially took the lead on outlining the response. There was no policy change considered in relation to its own embargo, but the argument presented indicated that the logic which underpinned that policy had itself changed. Congress also actively voiced its opposition to the proposal and although did not push for policy changes towards China, did consider a new policy on defence-related technology cooperation/exchange with the EU (Agence Europe, 16/07/2005), although ultimately this did not materialise. However, that it almost transpired is indicative of how seriously the perception of China as a potential threat was taken. Although the US pushing for the EU to maintain policy continuity as an indirect response to China’s growing power, thus we can still talk meaningfully about a US-response which was determined through both the executive and executive-legislative subsystems. The convergence of preferences within the executive-legislative subsystem (a rarity, as Chapter Three demonstrated) meant that the US was able to convey a consistent message to the EU and exploit divisions between the Council and the EP as well as between Member States once it became apparent in March 2005 that some were having second thoughts.

The EU’s decision-making process contributed to the protracted nature of the transatlantic debate. Consensus between all Member States was required to lift the embargo and the difficulty of getting to this point prevented a quick decision. Although the European Parliament emerged as the strongest opponent of the move, its exclusion from the policymaking process meant that, at best, MEPs could attempt to informally influence the

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<sup>59</sup> Original: “la question n'est pas celle de l'embargo, mais d'une mise en cohérence de l'ensemble de notre relation avec la Chine”.

Council's position by contributing to the wider discourse on the issue. The Commission's position was generally taken to be supportive of lifting due to the political and economic opportunities presented by China; it is possible that had the Commission sided with the EP then there would have been greater contestation between actors with differing preferences. Within the intergovernmental subsystem, not all Member States carried equal influence; the preferences of the EU3 were crucial and the Member States which acceded in 2004 signalled that they would follow the consensus of the 'older' Member States.

### *The EU Pushes On*

In April, the GAERC (2004b: 10) decided that the Committee of Permanent Representations (Coreper) and the Political and Security Committee (PSC) should "take the discussion forward". Although the issue did not feature in the conclusions of the May meeting (GAERC, 2004c), this was followed by a significant development: the UK came out in support of the proposal to lift (Webster et al, 2004), as had Finland and the Netherlands. Sweden and Denmark's positions were more complex as their governments did not wish to break EU consensus but faced opposition from their own Parliaments (Casarini, 2006: 31). In 2005, Jack Straw indicated that he had consistently supported lifting from December 2003 onwards, asserting that he had "long understood China's argument" that to "lump them in with... Burma and Zimbabwe is not appropriate" (cited by SCID, 2005). Blair was more reticent in part because of the US' opposition but by the end of May sought to forge consensus on lifting within the EU. However, an actual decision was delayed, as a European diplomat explained "the political readiness to make the gesture... has to be ripe and it is clearly not that moment now" (cited by Castle, 2004).

US opposition further intensified in June, with Powell warning that the embargo's end could result in EU Member States being barred from access to US military technology (Webster et al, 2004). This would be detrimental for the Member States – particularly the UK which was highly dependent on access to and cooperation with the US' defence industry. Yet this did not affect the momentum of the drive towards lifting within the EU nor shift the UK's position, although the latter argued that no decision should precede the US presidential election due to the issue's sensitivity (Webster et al, 2004). Given the UK's political closeness to the US it might have been expected that this increasing pressure would have altered its preferences.

That same month the UK participated in its first joint naval exercise with China, which a British Commander described as “a symbol of our political ties” (cited by August, 2004). While the exercise and embargo are separate issues, the timing of both arguably projected an image of the UK as increasingly politically close to China as well as the other EU Member States.

The interpretation of China as a military threat was non-existent for the UK despite the US’ now-explicit message that they were concerned by China’s military development; to some extent, this challenges conventional wisdom that British foreign policy preferences tend to reflect those of the US (particularly during the Blair and Bush years). At least in relation to China, the UK’s interpretation was sufficiently independent to allow it to follow the European current. Although New Labour had resumed technology transfers to China as of 1997, this had not translated into automatic support for ending the embargo (Brown, 2011: 37). One reason suggested by both François Godement<sup>60</sup> and Rath (2006: 51) for Blair’s pursuit of lifting was that the idea of being on the “losing side” of the EU3 in the relations with China would be damaging not just for economic interests, but also for the UK’s ambition to be an important actor in Europe and a strategic partner of China.

Consensus was proving difficult to forge by August, again with the UK playing the awkward partner. While a government official stated that Blair would “probably” still vote for lifting the embargo, they also acknowledged that he was having second thoughts (cited by MacAskill and Watts, 2004). Aides had also indicated to the press that Blair argued that he had been rushed into support for lifting and had not realised what was at stake (Fenby, 2004), prompting a reassessment of the government’s preferences. However, rather than being predicated on shifting interpretations of China, it appeared to be the case that Blair’s deliberations were informed by his interpretations of the relative importance of relations with the US, the EU and China. Despite Blair’s hesitancy, the UK did not change stance and continued to work towards lifting with other Member States. The US’ position remained the same but was less vocal in the late summer as the EU was working quietly but also partly due to its own efforts to reach an agreement with China on transfer of nuclear-related technology for civilian use, which

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10.

officials admitted might send the wrong message to the EU about the embargo (cited by Hutzler, 2004).

In October the EU attempted to accelerate the decision-making process. Chirac promised that France “shall try to obtain the swiftest possible lifting... of this embargo, which is of another time, and no longer corresponds to today's realities” (cited by The Economist, 2010). Ahead of a visit to China, Chirac acknowledged to Chinese journalists that “our American friends have strong reservations” but reaffirmed commitment to press ahead (cited by Dombey, 2004a). State Department official Gregory Such stated that the presidential election would have no bearing on the US' preference, but added that he was “not pessimistic about the reaction we are going to get from EU governments on this” (cited by Dombey, 2004a). These statements reflected the continued failings of both sides to appreciate the gap between their respective positions. Upon arrival in China, Chirac described its economic rise as “an opportunity for our growth and our jobs” which France must take (cited by Arnold and Kynge, 2004); this argument evinced the principal interpretation of China’s rise which underpinned his preference for lifting the embargo.

That month, The Netherlands’ Foreign Minister, Bernard Bot asserted that the EU could soon “indicate a positive orientation towards lifting” (cited by Browne, 2004a). A French diplomat opined that the “understanding about the need to lift the embargo has increased” (cited by Browne, 2004a). The UK also appeared to be back on board with the general EU consensus by this point, with Straw confirming that the UK was “not in any sense against the lifting of the embargo, but it has got to be done in a proper and sensible way... as agreed by the whole of the EU” (cited by Dombey, 2004b). François Heisbourg (2004), director of the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique<sup>61</sup>, argued that the “absurdity” of the China arms embargo was underlined in mid-October by the removal of an analogous policy on Libya<sup>62</sup>. With Member States converging around a consensus to lift, the EP attempted to intervene on the issue again. A Parliamentary discussion was less of a debate and more a reaffirmation that the majority of MEPs saw the proposal as sending the wrong message to China so long as it continued to violate basic human rights (EP, 2004b).

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<sup>61</sup> Paris-based think-tank.

<sup>62</sup> Heisbourg (2004) was critical of the EU’s lack of strategic thinking, but also of the US for failing to demonstrate to the EU “what it has to gain from maintaining the embargo, rather than playing its current punitive game”.

The Parliament sought not only to maintain the embargo, but also reinforce it through strengthening the Code of Conduct on arms exports (Agence Europe, 19/10/2004). This led to the adoption of Raül Romeva i Rueda's<sup>63</sup> report which sought to make the Code legally binding as a precondition to lifting alongside definitive progress on human rights, notably through ratification of the International Covenant Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (Agence Europe, 19/11/2004). Ultimately, without a formal foreign policymaking role, the EP could not push the EU to take a decision on the Code of Conduct<sup>64</sup> or establish formal preconditions for lifting. Since the embargo policy fell within the remit of the intergovernmental subsystem, the preferences of the EP were excluded from the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the US engaged the EP's committee on foreign affairs in attempt to influence the EU's position (Agence Europe, 05/04/2005).

In November, External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten (2004: 2) addressed the EP on the issue, stating that although the nature of CFSP meant that the Commission was not directly involved there was an embedded interest in the development of the debate due to the likely implications for the wider EU-China relationship. Patten examined both sides of the argument, and although he did not explicitly come down on one side of the argument, his choice of language seemed to indicate a preference for lifting if China could demonstrate improvements in its human rights situation. After outlining continued problems – particularly on civil and political rights – Patten (2004: 2) noted that

[w]ithout making any direct link, we have... consistently told China at the highest level that lifting of the embargo would be greatly assisted if they could take concrete steps in the field of human rights; steps that could convince European public opinion of the appropriateness of such action.

In the run up to the December EU-China summit, China's intensified lobbying efforts were acknowledged by Patten (EP, 2004b). The US warned that the issue was “very close to the bone” for the administration and that it was “not at all in the EU’s interest to lift the arms

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<sup>63</sup> Spain, Greens-European Free Alliance.

<sup>64</sup> In the event, the Code of Conduct did not become binding until December 2008 as Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP (GAERC, 2008).

embargo” (cited by Browne, 2004b). However, there was now substantial momentum behind lifting in the intergovernmental subsystem, with Italy declaring support (AFP, 2004). Bernard Bot on behalf of the Dutch Council Presidency stated that the embargo would not be lifted prior the summit, but the EU would send a “positive signal” on the issue (cited by Agence Europe, 23/11/2004). The summit’s joint communique recognised the “rapidly maturing comprehensive strategic partnership” and the EU reaffirmed “its political will to continue to work towards lifting” (Council, 2004: 2, 9). The perception of China as a strategic partner was pervasive in the rhetoric, which informed preferences to lift with no conditional linkages on human rights established (Agence Europe, 19/12/2004). This paved the way for the European Council (2004: 19) to invite “the next Presidency to finalise the well-advanced work in order to allow for a decision” on lifting, although reiterated that this should not lead to increase – either qualitatively or quantitatively – arms exports. The establishment of a putative deadline (end of June 2005) highlighted the deepening convergence between Member States’ preferences.

### *The Debate Heats Up*

If it was possible to argue that the US had been restrained in its opposition to the proposal up until this point – which I contend it is not, in light of the evidence outlined above conveying the US’ preference – then the December 2004 declaration was a catalyst for stronger efforts to pressurise the EU. US officials warned of a “very powerful reaction” in the event of lifting (cited by Spiegel, 2004). In late December, an anonymous Pentagon source announced that if the embargo was lifted, a possible retaliatory measure from the US would be to deprive EU countries of military technology (Agence Europe, 29/12/2004). The rhetoric became more heated and evinced strong perceptions of China’s military rise as not only potentially destabilising in East Asia, but also a broader military threat. By contrast MEPs continued to object on human rights grounds (see Agence Europe, 22/12/2004), conveying interpretations of China as a continued normative threat. Moreover, the predominant view in the intergovernmental subsystem was that of China as a strategic partner, with little attention given to possible military threats. The divergent interpretations of China’s rise had now led to a sharp divide between the US and the EU and threatened to create a transatlantic schism.

A pressing issue for the US was that China would be able to increase its imports of dual-use technologies (those which have potentially civilian and/or military applications), facilitating the development of high-end weapons systems and furthering China's military modernisation programme. The Department of Defense was already worried about China's increasing military expenditure<sup>65</sup>, which fed into concerns about the potential implications of lifting the embargo. One former UK policy official noted that US officials saw lifting as analogous to a European 'blessing' on China's military modernisation efforts<sup>66</sup>. Additionally, the EU's arms industry is highly interdependent with that of the US with significant levels of cooperation and sharing of technologies between the two sides. This meant that an end to the EU's embargo would potentially result in China acquiring advanced American technology via the EU (Wacker, 2005: 31), which would again severely affect the US' relative capabilities superiority over China<sup>67</sup>. David Shambaugh (2005a: 27) noted that most observers agreed that China's domestic military-industrial complex lags behind that of advanced countries (such as EU Member States) by some ten to twenty years.

Beyond the issue of China's acquisition of sensitive weapons technologies, there was another important concern harboured by the administration. Wilder stated that there was a symbolic component related to the future of Taiwan. The administration was concerned by the possibility of the EU ending its embargo would signal that it was not worried about China's behaviour towards Taiwan; that is, confirm that it did not see China as a potential military threat. Although at the time of its imposition, the embargo was not related to China's policy towards Taiwan; by 2004 the worry within the administration was that with no EU arms embargo, the US would be the only state left to have such an embargo against China<sup>68</sup>. This would then allow the PRC to complain that the US was the only actor that held concerns regarding Taiwan, and that no others in the international arena were committed like the US; this would potentially result in China attempting to pressure the US to drop its protective stance towards the island<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 03/06/10.

<sup>66</sup> Interview former UK policy official, London, 28/04/11.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Dennis Wilder, Washington DC, 15/07/10; interview with US policy analyst, Washington DC, 13/07/10.

<sup>68</sup> Australia had lifted its embargo in the 1990s and Canada had never imposed one.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Dennis Wilder, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

Compounding this factor, as the administration saw it, was the behaviour and rhetoric of Taiwan's president, Chen Shui-bian. The US believed at that time that he would likely push for an independent Taiwan. Any unilateral declaration of independence could provoke conflict with China, which the US was adamant it wanted to avoid. Even without action, stronger rhetoric from Chen would irk the PRC. When the US initially engaged the EU on the embargo, it became apparent to US officials that EU policymakers did not view the fragility of the status quo across the Strait as they did, and were unaware of the potential implications: the administration feared that Chen would become more belligerent if China was able to persuade the EU to lift<sup>70</sup>. Wilder's comments regarding the likely behaviour of Chen indicated how important the political situation in Taiwan – and particularly the views of its leader – mattered to the US' preferences in relation to the embargo. It was not just interpretations of China as a military threat at play here (although they mattered considerably), but the wider context of how other regional actors would react. The administration worried that Taiwan's –particularly Chen's response –could worsen cross-Strait relations, directly undermining the US' main objective of maintaining stability.

The issues of Taiwan's security and regional stability tended to be concerns of the US (Archick et al, 2005: 31) rather than the EU Member States. This was perhaps predictable because the EU had no comparable regional role; however US critics were apparently surprised that their European allies would fail to recognise the problems lifting the embargo would cause in this dimension. Additionally, US critics often argued that China may yet use European weapons technologies to further oppress its own citizens but with virtually no impact on EU preferences; these arguments were made in 2004 and yet the EU pressed ahead into 2005 with its intention to lift the embargo, arguing that it would not result in a flood of European arms to China. For the US, the Taiwan Strait crisis in the mid-1990s had arguably reinforced the necessity of the embargo by demonstrating how China was increasing its ability to project its power across the Strait: the EU's non-involvement in that episode meant that the same conclusions were not drawn. The passage of the Anti-Secession Law (see below) was a tipping point, because its language was directly relevant to the concerns that the US was trying to communicate to the EU. In Congress, the Cox Report in 1999 had cemented interpretations of China's rise as inherently militarily threatening to the US.

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Dennis Wilder, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

Despite the US' explicit opposition to the proposal, the EU stuck to its plan; even after talks with US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice in January, Javier Solana said that he expected the US to "be able to live with" the EU's decision (cited by Fidler et al, 2005). The main argument used in defence was that the US fundamentally misunderstood the implications of embargo's removal. On the basis of the European Council's December Conclusions, the EU's line was that it would not increase China's military capability as the US feared. Solana argued that lifting was "more a political decision than a military one... it simply involves putting a stop to a political decision made at a specific time in the history of China, rather than a modification of military relations" (cited by Archick et al, 2005: 19).

There appeared to be a belief within the EU that the US' objections were in relation to the technicalities of arms control; policymakers failed to recognise that the US' interpretations of China's rise were significantly different to their own. Jack Straw argued that while the move would undoubtedly create tensions, "the challenge in terms of foreign policy is not to eliminate differences... but to manage [them]" (cited by Blitz and Dombey, 2005). A senior US official rejected the idea that the US had misunderstood the implications of lifting, warning that "a failure to understand the significance of this issue is going to result in major problems for transatlantic arms procurement" (cited by Dombey and Fidler, 2005). These statements from Straw not only highlighted the UK's continued support to lift at that point, but arguably also that the failure to recognise that the divergence in interpretations on the two sides of the Atlantic effectively made such management impossible.

In an interview with European media in February 2005, Condoleezza Rice (2005b) argued that the two sides did not fundamentally disagree about China:

We have the same concerns about how to deal with the prospect of a China that is economically rising very quickly, and of course... the political power... [and] the regional power that goes with that. I think we both agree that we want to help to integrate China into the international community so that it's a positive force, not a negative force in international politics.

For diplomatic reasons, Rice may have attempted to downplay the gap. Although both the US and EU have consistently identified the objectives of integrating China into the international community as a positive force, their positions on the embargo revealed that their interpretations of the implications of China's rise had diverged substantially. Both sides still wanted China to integrate into the international community and play a constructive role, but the EU was more optimistic about the inevitability of this outcome than the US. Within the US, frequent debates between rival interpretations of China's rise had kept threat perspectives near the surface of policy discourse; the EU lacked such stark divisions, with disagreements largely over whether to conceptualise China as more of a political than economic opportunity. Further, the question was not only about China, but about the appropriateness of this particular policy. Thus when the EU raised the prospect of removing its embargo, the threat perspectives were able to dominate the US' policy discourse: for US policymakers, there were no benefits and evidently no political space for a reconsideration of the US' own arms embargo against China to emerge. Due to the persistent lack of clarity of China's intentions in East Asia, there has been no desire in the US for exporting any military hardware due to the common interpretation amongst policymakers that China's military development indicates hostile intentions<sup>71</sup>.

The EU's apparent inability – or unwillingness – to factor in the US' concerns and preferences led to increased US activism, particularly from Congress which had until that point left the majority of the work to the administration. The House of Representatives passed a resolution which reaffirmed the US' own arms embargo and condemned the EU proposal. The language employed was direct: the House “deplore[d]... the European Council’s decision to finalize work toward lifting its arms embargo on China, actions that place European security policy in direct conflict with United States security interests” on the basis that China’s military build-up “and the strategic doctrines and policies that underpin such a buildup remain shrouded in secrecy and imply challenges for strategic deterrence between the United States and China” (HoR, 2005). Receiving 411-3 support, this had only a symbolic impact that did not compel the administration to act. With the passage of a similar resolution in the Senate the following

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with US policy aide, Washington DC, 06/07/10.

month<sup>72</sup>, the message clearly revealed strong interpretations of China as a growing military threat.

In February, Condoleezza Rice held talks with high-level officials, including Council President Asselborn, High Representative Solana and External Relations Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner. At this point, Rice (2005a) stated that those she had discussed the issue with had “tried to take account of our concerns” and reported that the US was “being listened to”. Nevertheless, she still pressed that the US had “to worry about the military balance in that region and... [the impact of] technology transfers” as well harbouring concerns about human rights, referring back to Tiananmen (Rice, 2005a). It appears, however, that Rice was too generous in her assessment of the extent to which the EU was taking on board US concerns, as the EU continued ahead with its approach to the lifting effectively unaltered thereafter. Shortly after Rice’s visit, a senior US official stated that “Europeans don’t feel [China’s threat to occupy Taiwan] is their problem... they need to understand just how much the Americans feel it is theirs” (cited by Allen-Mills, 2005). Again, perceptions of China as a regional – and also a broader military – threat, were clearly coming through from the US, but were not salient in the EU.

European arguments that increased arms exports were not a motivating factor were undermined that same month when French Defence Minister Alliot-Marie stated that maintaining the embargo would lead China to develop its indigenous defence industry rapidly, thus lifting “could be a better protection for us than maintaining it” (cited by Spiegel and Thornhill, 2005). This added to US concerns that the EU’s arguments were nothing more than a fig leaf and provided more ammunition to those arguing against lifting. Importantly, Alliot-Marie’s claim overlooked the fact that China’s indigenous defence industry was, around that time, regarded as somewhere between ten and twenty years behind the West (Shambaugh, 2005a: 5). Therefore weapons and high-technology transfers would potentially negate the barriers to rapid military development faced by a relatively less-developed arms industry dependent on outdated Russian exports. Consequently, for those US policymakers who already perceived China’s growing military power as indicative of hostile intentions, the EU was effectively seeking to facilitate China’s ability to act upon these. This ran contrary not

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<sup>72</sup> S.Res.91: ‘A Resolution urging the European Union to maintain its arms export embargo on the People's Republic of China’ (Senate, 2005), introduced by Gordon Smith (R-OR).

only to US security interests, but also to the EU's stated interests in regional and global stability.

In terms of the economic opportunities bound up with the embargo, Member States had frequently stated that profiting from arms sales was not their intention – although the French Defence Minister's comments on the embargo's end potentially preventing China's domestic arms production from expanding undermined this argument to some extent. Nevertheless, some Member States who made this point also called for a reinforced Code of Conduct (such as the UK), in an effort to add credibility to their stance. However, there was also the incentive of increased trade with China in non-arms trade which would be potentially lucrative, as Chinese policymakers were keen to stress (Agence Europe, 28/04/2005); thus the economic factor was not restricted to the one dimension of the trade relationship. China's rise as an economic opportunity had long been the prevailing interpretation within the EU, therefore its centrality to policy preferences in this case is consistent with the overarching approach to the relationship. Member States generally made few references to human rights conditions in China, implications for regional stability or cross-Straits relations, at least in the early stages of the debate, which tended to be the concerns influencing some Member States to favour a longer timeframe for lifting.

Throughout February, there was a marked intensification of the transatlantic debate, fuelled by what officials on both sides identified as a “deep philosophical divide” (Bumiller, 2005). The aforementioned Blumenthal and Donnelly (2005) article referred to the EU's proposal as a “threat” which would constitute “a genuinely hostile act” against the US. Although this was their personal view, the article conveyed the policymaking community's consensus: the EU was actively working against US interests given that China was, self-evidently as far as Americans were concerned, a potential rival (if not outright threat, although for some it clearly was) to its interests in the region. Henry Hyde (2005) opined in the *Wall Street Journal* that lifting would strike a blow to China's pro-democracy movement, invoking normative threat perceptions alongside the broader security concerns.

A meeting between President Chirac and Bush further underscored the persistent divergence in preferences and the disconnect between their views on China more broadly. Chirac stated that the EU intended to lift “the last obstacles to its relations with this great power of the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century”, reaffirming that China was the EU’s “strategic partner” (cited by Rennie, 2005a). However, Chirac qualified this by stating that it should be done so under conditions that the EU and US “define together” (cited by Bumiller, 2005). Bush reiterated the “deep concern in [the US] that the transfer of weapons would be a transfer of technology to China, which would change the balance of relations between China and Taiwan” (cited by Rennie, 2005a), again evincing regional military threat perceptions underpinning the US’ preference.

During his Brussels visit, Bush addressed the issue of strengthened EU Code of Conduct on arms exports, stating that the EU needed to give Congress assurances and guarantees which would “allow it to stand down from its position” (cited by Agence Europe, 24/02/2005). The emphasis on Congress was due to its ability to legislate sanctions on the EU, and also arguably suggested that only Congress was the ‘problem’ in the US. This appeared to be taken up by the EU, as an official commented to the press that “there is no way that we will ever satisfy... Congress” (cited by Castle, 2005). A spokeswoman for Solana also stated that the real battle was with Congress as “the [Bush] administration knows that they cannot stop it” (cited by Cooper and Champion, 2005). The prospect of a battle with Congress however, evidently did not deter the EU especially as officials seemingly interpreted the administration’s position that the lifting was inevitable. A US official later sought to dispel such a notion: “I should not leave you in any way with the impression that we [in the administration] have changed our view. We have merely heard out the Europeans” (cited by Bullimer, 2005).

### *The Anti-Secession Law and the EU’s Change of Heart*

The adoption of the Anti-Secession Law (ASL) by China on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March had a significant impact on the course of the EU’s consideration of the embargo and the transatlantic debate. One EU official referred to it as “an unfortunate coincidence”<sup>73</sup>. The law – which affirmed that “[t]he state shall never allow the “Taiwan independence” secessionist forces to make Taiwan secede from China under any name or by any means” (China Daily, 2005) – was interpreted by some policymakers in the US and EU as evidence of China’s hostile intentions towards Taiwan, stoking regional military threat perceptions. These were predicated on the specific assertion that the PRC would “employ non-peaceful means and other necessary

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with EU policy official, 28/05/10.

measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity" (China Daily, 2005). The law emphasised that peaceful means must be exhausted or independence declared by secessionist forces before such recourse; language which Austin (2005: 16) noted had previously never been officially adopted in respect to Taiwan. However the mere inclusion of the force provision served to reinforce the arguments made by those in the US who already perceived China's rise as a growing threat.

The ASL effectively ended the chances of a final decision to lift by June 2005 as intended. The EU had dispatched a delegation to Washington headed by Annalisa Giannella in a bid to persuade the US to drop its opposition, but their arrival coincided with the ASL's adoption. The delegation found itself on the defensive in what became an embarrassing situation for the EU<sup>74</sup>. Consequently, according to one EU official familiar with the delegation's work, their arguments were not taken into account by US policymakers for whom the issue – as actors in the EU saw it – became intensely emotional<sup>75</sup>. British officials in Washington stated that they were not just caught off-guard by the strength of the US' reaction, but also by China's decision to pass the ASL (Jaffe and Champion, 2005). This reflects something of an anomaly in the EU's decision-making process as the ASL had been in the pipeline for some time but the EU had, apparently, not considered its implications for lifting. At this point, European proponents of lifting effectively gave up as there was a realisation that US political pressure was now too great<sup>76</sup>.

The passage of the ASL combined with the US' continued pressure altered the political environment in a way that made lifting extremely unpalatable. Rather than the US dictating the EU's policy, European actors recognised that they risked damaging EU-US relations if they continued to pursue lifting. Giving Beijing the answer it wanted would be untenable, yet proponents did not want to damage relations with China by taking it off the table altogether. Solana's spokeswoman asserted that the EU's position had not changed, but they were now "in a more complex environment" which made "the initial timeline a little more complicated" (cited by Watts and Watt, 2005) – perhaps something of an understatement. Thereafter the EU continued to talk about the embargo as though it was still under real consideration. This led to

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 28/05/10.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 04/06/10.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 04/06/10.

the presentation of the “non-decision” (Stumbaum 2009: 199); the EU would continue to work towards lifting the embargo at some unspecified time in the future.

France’s position was not influenced by the ASL<sup>77</sup>; Chirac was adamant that there was no reason to think there had been a change in the EU’s plans (Dombey and Minder, 2005), apparently due to his underestimation of the impact of this legislation<sup>78</sup>. The strength of his perception of China as a political opportunity/strategic partner was unaffected by this new development. The reality was that the UK, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Luxembourg (then Council President) and the Scandinavian countries were now having second thoughts (Watson et al, 2005). Belgium and Italy also changed position on an early end to the embargo (Dinmore and Harding, 2005); although it is worth pointing out here that the opposition was to lifting by June 2005 rather than the principle of the December 2004 Conclusion to move towards lifting (Agence Europe, 19/04/2005) – Member States’ preferences had undergone an adjustment rather than complete revision. As was evident from the EU’s continued attempts to push ahead with the strategic partnership over the remainder of the timeframe of analysis, the arms embargo debate had not led to a fundamental shift in the EU’s interpretations of China as a rising power; the strategic partner and economic opportunity perspectives still prevailed.

For the UK, China’s adoption of the ASL appeared to impact the government’s preferences in relation to the embargo based on the potentially negative implications that continued support would have, particularly for transatlantic relations. Blair already faced difficulties managing relations with the US on one side and France and Germany on the other<sup>79</sup> which were then exacerbated by the embargo debate, particularly after ASL came into force. When the UK assumed the Council Presidency in July, Blair did not want responsibility for lifting nor, in the political climate at that moment, back an end to the embargo in June as the Council was still committed to (Rath, 2006: 51). Thus, we saw a shift in the UK’s preferences from support in principle to seeking to delay the lift in a relatively short space of time. Without the UK’s support, an agreement through the intergovernmental process was off the table in the immediate future.

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with French policy official, Paris, 21/05/10.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 28/05/10.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 01/06/10.

The ASL provided the US with a platform for being more direct in its arguments against the embargo. Rice, contrary to her previously rather diplomatic stance, warned that the EU “should do nothing to contribute to a circumstance in which Chinese military modernisation draws on [EU] technology. It is [the US], not Europe, that has defended the Pacific” (cited by Watts and Watt, 2005), Senator Lugar<sup>80</sup>, chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, noted that while he had been reassured by Straw’s promise that the reinforced Code of Conduct would prevent technology transfers, cautioned that if this was not the case “then there could be some unfortunate and dramatic consequences” (cited by Alden and Sevastopulo, 2005), referring to possible sanctions on US-to-EU technology transfers. When Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick met with Ferrero-Waldner, he repeated the warning of negative implications for future transatlantic defence-related cooperation, adding that the US did not want to expand problems further into non-arms commercial relations (Agence Europe, 05/04/2005).

In the following months, the EU maintained that it was working towards lifting, although qualified this by calling for progress from China on human rights. For instance, External Relations Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner indicated that China would need to ratify the ICCPR and release the Tiananmen Square political prisoners (AFP, 2005a). Of the Member States, only France maintained strong public support for immediate removal predicated on the perception of China as a strategic partner. Talking to the press, an aide to the defence minister declared that

the embargo is politically counter-productive, unnecessary and does not concern itself with American interests. If we want to make China an important partner, we must show them that we do not rate it at the same level as Zimbabwe (cited by Denuit and Lasserre, 2005)<sup>81</sup>.

Prime Minister Raffarin reaffirmed the commitment to lift, describing the embargo as “anachronistic, unjustly discriminatory and in complete contradiction with the current state of

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<sup>80</sup> R-IN.

<sup>81</sup> Original: “cet embargo est politiquement contre-productif, inutile et il ne concerne pas ce qui intéresse les Américains. Si on veut faire de la Chine un partenaire important, il faut lui montrer qu'on ne la met pas au même rang que le Zimbabwe”.

the Euro-China strategic partnership”<sup>82</sup> (cited by AFP, 2005b). In mid-April, the Member States decided at an informal meeting to delay a final decision, with German Foreign Minister Fischer admitting “there was no consensus” (cited by Rennie, 2005b). Interestingly, France was so intent on lifting the embargo that, according to Foreign Minister Michel Barnier, it was willing to accept a legally-binding Code of Conduct which it had previously opposed (Dombey, 2005)<sup>83</sup>. However, although the EU committed itself to renewing the Code of Conduct, the opportunity to lift the embargo by June had effectively evaporated.

However, that some EU officials continued to indicate publicly that a decision could still be reached led to the US Congress drafting a law that would sanction the EU in the event of the embargo’s end. The aim, according to Agence Europe (01/07/2005), was to dissuade rather than punish European arms sales and promote transatlantic coordination of their arms sales and policies. This legislation – the East Asia Security Act – ultimately failed 215-203 as it required two-thirds support. There was reportedly a last-minute change in preferences of around one hundred legislators due to intense lobbying from the US Chamber of Commerce, the aerospace and electronics industries (Agence Europe, 16/07/2005) due to the potential negative impact on their commercial interests. The change in preferences was predicated on US economic interests rather than a softening of Congress’ position on the EU’s plans to lift its arms embargo, which remained the official policy. The ASL had reinforced perceptions of China as a threat, not lessened them. By the time of the vote, it was apparent an immediate end to the embargo was unlikely, thus there was less at stake with the outcome of the bill.

Indeed, Congressional activism on the embargo had eased upon the UK’s assumption of the rotating Council Presidency in July 2005, as it was largely accepted in both the EU and US that there would be no move to lift during the following six months. In September, Solana repeated the EU’s pledge to lift on political rather than military grounds (Agence Europe, 07/09/2005) but he had little ability to influence Blair who was now firmly against lifting in the immediate future. When President Hu Jintao visited the UK in November, it was reported that he wanted to persuade Blair to revive the process, but an FCO official gave the non-committal response that the UK was working with the other Member States towards the

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<sup>82</sup> Original: “anachronique, injustement discriminatoire et en complète contradiction avec l'état actuel du partenariat stratégique euro-chinois” .

<sup>83</sup> Also confirmed in interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10.

eventual lifting (Doyle and Russell, 2005). In this context, there was no need for continued transatlantic debate over the arms embargo as the momentum towards lifting within the EU had dissipated even before the UK took over the Presidency, at which point the EU reverted to a non-committal position on the embargo with no set deadline.

Although the substantive transatlantic debate effectively ended following the passage of the ASL, it cannot be inferred from the EU's response that Member States' interpretations of China were fundamentally altered. While there was some increased concern about China's intentions, these were short-lived. The interpretations which had led to the move to lift in the first place proved resilient, with continued invocation of the concept of China as a strategic partner in the policy discourse. This explains why even after the very public argument with the US on the issue, the EU has persistently maintained that it is working towards lifting the embargo. The main change was a revaluation of the preference to lift the embargo by June; the main impact of the ASL's passage was that Member States recognised that continued attempts to lift at that time would be futile and possibly jeopardise the EU's relationship with the US<sup>84</sup>. Although Congress' attempt to legislate for reciprocal action ultimately failed, the mere attempt to do so had an impact<sup>85</sup>. Before the vote had even taken place in the House of Representatives, there was acceptance amongst European policymakers that the attempt to lift the embargo was dead in the water<sup>86</sup>. Another compounding factor was the rejection of the EU's Constitutional Treaty referendum in late May 2005 by the French public. Following this, French officials accepted that they had lost the ability to influence EU policy at that time as they were in "defensive mode"<sup>87</sup>.

The UK's reluctance to support continued attempts to lift the embargo was not simply deference to the US position, which had been explicated in early 2004, prior to the UK adopting a much more favourable stance towards lifting. The US made it clear to the UK that it wanted it to oppose the move, which initially the UK refused to do (Agence Europe 21/01/2005). Kayte Rath (2006: 54) argues that the UK had resisted US pressure and attempted to act as a bridge between the US and the EU until the passage of the ASL, which made this untenable and offered a way out for the UK, as a "convenient ladder... to climb

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 03/06/10.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with EU policy official, Brussels, 28/05/10.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10; interview with Stanley Crossick, Brussels, 01/06/10.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10.

down”<sup>88</sup>. The ASL did not fundamentally alter the UK’s interpretation of China but rather the government’s assessment of the contemporary political environment; this goes some way to explaining why the UK government only sought to delay the lifting rather than reverse the Council’s commitment to lifting entirely.

The other side of this would be that such a move would drive a wedge between the UK and the other two main Member States – France and Germany – at a time when sensitivities over the Iraq war remained. Although the UK’s position on the embargo was initially one where it supported the principle but was more restrained than others, its move in 2004 to fully support lifting indicated that its interpretation of China was closer to that of France and Germany than it was the US. Despite apparent concern that trade and political relations with China may suffer it did not push for the embargo’s end along with the prospect of losing influence in the EU by being on the ‘wrong side’ of this issue<sup>89</sup>, had the UK government interpreted China’s rise as threatening then it would be unlikely that support for the embargo’s end could be considered. If we consider a hypothetical situation in which the UK was opposed to the proposal when it emerged on the EU’s agenda, it is reasonable to suggest that it would have fallen at the first hurdle.

### ***5.5 Conclusion***

The transatlantic debate over the arms embargo resulted from the differing interpretations of China’s rise within the US and EU’s respective policy communities. As the debate unfolded over 2004-05, it was apparent that it was not being contested on the grounds of its original imposition, but rather perceptions of China’s rise more broadly were entangled with the embargo policy; in the US, the prominence of military threat perspectives in policy discourse had contributed to a shift in the underlying logic of the arms embargo – security issues superseded human rights concerns. These concerns have less to do with China being able to suppress its own citizens and more to do with its increasing ability to close the relative military gap with the US and potentially threaten regional security in East Asia. Although the US’ policies had up until then largely been dominated by perceptions of China’s rise as an economic and political opportunity, the issue at hand could not be conceptualised within these

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with former UK policy official, London, 28/04/11.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with François Godement, Paris, 20/05/10.

interpretations. That is, for the US there was no ‘opportunity’ presented by the EU’s proposal to lift its arms embargo, only losses. Essentially for the first time in the post-Cold War period, the policy discourse did not feature a debate between differing perspectives as policymakers were effectively united in their perceptions of the implications of the EU’s proposal. PTT struggles to account for the evolution of the US’ preferences on the arms embargoes against the wider context of the US’ interpretations of and responses to China’s rise up to that point.

On the EU’s side, interpretations of China as a normative threat which had informed preferences for the embargo had given way to perceptions of China as an economic and political opportunity and latterly a strategic partner. Taking the EU as a unitary actor, PTT cannot account for the evolution of the EU’s preferences; however my approach of examining perceptions provides a nuanced account. Combined with the lack of military threat interpretations in European policy discourse, this created a permissive environment for the consideration of lifting the embargo. As the two sides attempted to persuade the other to accept their position, these differences produced a discourse in which they were unable to reach a common ground. In the end, a combination of political factors effectively ended the debate, but the divergent interpretations of the implications of China’s rise persisted. Accordingly, neither side was able to persuade the other as dominant interpretations of China’s rise in their respective policy communities were unaffected by the debate. Both sides effectively ended up talking past each other; while the outcome might have been to the US’ liking at that point, it had not been able to convince the EU to drop the idea of lifting the embargo altogether.

## CHAPTER SIX | CONCLUSIONS

### ***6.1 Introduction***

Through this summary of my findings, I reiterate the central arguments and discuss their significance in terms of the questions posed at the outset. Most importantly, I posit that interpretations of ‘China’s rise’ vary between actors and over time, shaping policymakers’ preferences and how they debate potential responses. Within the US, there has been greater contrast between interpretations, resulting in persistent debates over how to respond. In the EU, considerable convergence between interpretations has effectively precluded contestation between rival preferences over the substance of policies towards the rising power. These different experiences of debating and responding to the rise of China were most clearly demonstrated in the transatlantic dispute over the EU’s proposal to lift its China arms embargo, where the US strongly opposed the move; even though both sides imposed similar policies at the same time in response to the Tiananmen crackdown, their preferences drifted apart due to the differing patterns of interpreting and responding to China’s rise since 1989.

I also consider what implications my findings have for the academic literature. Returning to the various subfields reviewed in Chapter One, I reflect on how my thesis challenges and adds to each, setting out ideas for possible directions for future research. I have discovered that my arguments speak to wider theoretical debates in International Relations (IR) scholarship, thus I briefly consider how my thesis adds to these. This gives me an opportunity to explore where my contributions fit in the existing literature but also outline points of departure from the work of others. Overall, I believe that the thesis’ focus has enabled me to contribute to the literature in several dimensions, furthering the ideas of numerous scholars by drawing them into one original piece of research. I close the chapter with some final thoughts on the research and the new questions which have been opened up during the research and writing process.

The main contributions of this thesis are threefold. First, it provides a novel and useful explanation for why the US and EU have responded to China’s rise by looking at how policymakers have interpreted this phenomenon and understood its implications. Second, the systematic study of US- and EU-China relations fills gaps within the existing literature and also adds to the small amount of literature which examines US-EU-China relations within a

single research framework. Third, the thesis provides a more comprehensive account of the transatlantic arms embargo debate, particularly in terms of original empirical material, redressing the dominance of euro-centric accounts. In addition to these central facets, there are a number of other, though smaller, contributions of the thesis, which I outline below.

## **6.2 Main Findings**

I started by observing that it is now commonly accepted that China is rising, a change which has already had – and will continue to have – significant implications for the future of the international system. How the main (status quo) powers of the system respond to this will be a crucial factor in global affairs over the coming decades and beyond. The puzzling part is that despite concerns frequently expressed by some observers that China's rise will be disruptive and potentially dangerous, the actual behaviour of two of the main powers – the US and the EU – have not treated it as such. Instead, both have embraced the concept of engagement, committing to bring China into the international system rather than blocking its development. The central question which drove my research is simple: *how have different interpretations of the 'rise of China' influenced the foreign policies of the US and the EU towards China?*

At the outset, I made the case for analysing the utility of power-transition theory (PTT) in relation to understanding how the US and the EU had responded to China's rise. While other theoretical perspectives have gained more prominence in the field of IR, I highlighted that the generality of many of these dominant perspectives meant that they lacked the capacity to develop very specific expectations for how the established powers should respond. Thus employing any of these perspectives would leave too much room for variance in behaviour. PTT on the other hand, has a clear prescriptive element and thus should be a useful lens to employ. Reflecting on the empirical evidence reinforces this justification on two fronts: first, the evidence indicates that China is indeed rising relative to the established powers thus PTT should be relevant, especially given the added uncertainty created by the rapidity of China's rise and the development of military capabilities which pose problems without attaining parity. Second, there was evidence that PTT's logic had entered policy discourse: some policymakers and commentators were well aware of the historical cases of conflict during transitions and based their assessments of China's rise on these.

On the other hand, there was no evidence that policymakers saw China's growing power as conducive to a more stable international arena through creating bipolarity – which is the logic of Waltz's (1979) defensive realism. Crucially for the arguments presented here, PTT logic however was not all-pervasive in policy discourse; nevertheless, there was sufficient evidence to support looking closely at its analytical purchase on the cases at hand. Theories which select the state as the unit of analysis – such as neorealism, neoliberalism of Wendt's (1999) constructivist account – would be severely limited in their capacity to account for the divergences between actors' preferences within decision-making processes. Although PTT is similarly constrained, its clear expectations for behaviour in a shifting power dynamic meant that when examining each case it was straightforward to deductively establish what actors' preferences should have been, whereas alternative theories would have necessitated a greater degree of ambiguity.

PTT claims that status quo powers will respond to the rise of a potential challenger: they will seek to prevent a power-transition where possible by curtailing the rising power's emergence. PTT's main contribution to received wisdom has been that such transitions throughout history have been violent. 'Threat' is rooted in material power but also the rising power's dissatisfaction with existing international arrangements; in a system led by democratic powers, an authoritarian power is considered inherently dissatisfied. This logic has translated into the 'China threat' rhetoric – predominantly in the US. Due to its very nature as a rising authoritarian power, China is expected to seek to overturn the Western-led international system, imposing new rules and norms consistent with its own values and interests. This has led scholars to devote considerable energy to determining the extent to which China is rising, whether it is 'satisfied' or not and the implications for the established powers. I have contended that this is actually less important than understanding how policymakers in the US and the EU perceive the international environment as this has a direct impact upon policy development. That is not to say that this work is not relevant, as it can play a part in the debates over the nature of the changing international landscape and try to inform interpretations. In reality, variations between interpretations as opposed to precise calculations of shifts in the relative distribution of power need to be our starting point to understand why the US and EU have responded to China's rise as they have.

The main argument is that the US and EU's responses to China's rise are shaped by actors' perceptions of this (i.e. what is happening) and, subsequently, their inferred implications. Policymakers' preferences are not predetermined by the polity they act on behalf of or by the power dynamics relative to third parties. 'China's rise' is a contested notion, taking on different meanings for different actors which results in a shifting discourse, with interpretations rising and falling in prominence over time. Even so, in Chapters Three and Four I identified the recurrence of the economic and political opportunity interpretations amongst key actors in both the US and EU, facilitating the maintenance of overarching engagement strategies. Further, these interpretations cannot simply be forced into a 'threat versus opportunity' dichotomy, as it depends on the issue-area in question. It is perfectly feasible for China to be seen as, for instance, a threat to economic interests but not to regional security. These nuances are important as they give rise to variations between preferences.

Additionally, the process of translating preferences into policies was an important step in determining why particular interpretations appear to have greater impact than others. While the policy community is continuously engaged in policy discourse, certain actors have greater 'success' in acting upon their preferences. Discourse still matters because it serves as the venue where the varying interpretations of China's rise are contested when responses to developments in the relationship are considered. I utilised foreign policy subsystems to explain this; rather than treating foreign policies as the product of the state/polity, the particular institutional arrangements of specific subsystems allowed us to identify which actors had responsibility for formulating policy responses. In both the US and EU (both representative democracies), this is always a subsection of the policy community; all can participate in the wider debate, but not all are involved in policymaking. This made it feasible to trace decisions back to specific actors' preferences and, from their arguments, determine how they interpreted China's rise.

On the basis of the empirical analysis throughout, I argue that the six interpretations of 'China's rise' (identified in Chapter Two) are validated as useful ways of disaggregating the main ways in which the concept has been articulated. These were developed through an iterative process of examining the evidence and drawing on some ideas explored by other academics – although to my knowledge no-one has delineated such a set of contrasting interpretations of China's rise. These interpretations are deliberately wide-ranging because

they are not constant over time, thus a degree of flexibility facilitated identification of recurring patterns without getting tangled in aspects unique to specific situations. For instance, the perceived extent of the political opportunity China's rise presents shifted dramatically between the early and late 1990s. These six interpretations provide a better foothold for examining how China's rise is perceived beyond the generic 'threat versus opportunity' dichotomy.

My analysis rested upon a two-step analytical approach which firstly questioned how interpretations of China's rise informed policymakers' preferences and secondly identified how preferences were mediated by the subsystem through which the response was developed. The findings enable me to argue that examining the interaction between debates over specific events and the wider discourse on China's rise provides significant insights into why particular decisions were taken. The within-case comparisons – that is, the examination of the events in the US and EU's respective relations with China – revealed how the differing contexts of interpreting China's rise and formulating policies in response. From these analyses, the reasons behind the similarities in their approaches – pursuing engagement – had emerged from different political contexts in each polity.

For the US, the events examined themselves became reference points in the continued debate over China's rise and despite the peaks and troughs in the relationship divergent interpretations have persisted and shaped actors' preferences. Tiananmen clearly cast a lasting shadow over the relationship, with threat-perception proponents continually referencing the episode to bolster their arguments. The Taiwan Strait crisis was similarly used as an example of China's hostile intentions. The period of 1999-2001 saw the most intense debates between competing interpretations. Ultimately, perceptions of China as an economic and political opportunity prevailed within the administration despite strong expression of economic and military threat perceptions by some in Congress. It seemed that the new Bush administration's perceptions were going to take policy in a different direction; however the EP-3 incident caused policymakers to reconsider the importance of the relationship both politically but also in relation to regional stability. Thereafter, despite the gravitation towards threat discourse, the political/economic opportunity perceptions have largely continued to underpin policy choices. Consequently, the US' policies have not followed PTT-based expectations.

My research builds on Garrison's (2005) work by employing decision-making analysis and incorporating consideration of the importance of interpretations of China's rise within US foreign policymaking. It differs through tackling broader questions about US-China relations and by employing subsystems, which is novel for the literature. The thesis moves beyond largely descriptive approaches to US-China relations and accounts of decision-making processes which do not relate their findings to wider debates about US behaviour towards China or more general IR discussions. This is important because it offers insights into larger questions regarding the factors which shape the US' response to China's rise. Other studies which divided interpretations into either 'threat' or 'opportunity' have overlooked important nuances, neglecting the evolution of notions of 'China's rise' and consequently how debates based on differing perceptions influence preferences. The application of PTT – explicitly and implicitly – to US-China relations was found wanting precisely because it cannot capture these dynamics.

Various authors have touched on the importance of perceptions and interpretations, but without developing categories for these on the basis of empirical research. More work could be done to develop these further and examine their utility in US-China relations since 2009 under the Obama administration. The evidence in Chapter Three indicated that perceptions endured over time, but whether this remains the case post-2009 requires consideration. If they do not, this thesis' assertions will require reconsideration. It will be interesting to see whether the general drift towards threat rhetoric has continued. Particularly after the 2008 financial crash which weakened Western economies while China continued to grow, research into perceptions of China would be enlightening. Tied into this is the importance of views on China's rise in the context of the US' so-called 'Asia pivot' and the push for a Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement.

I have attempted to steer clear of making predictions about the future and concentrate on recent relations. Nevertheless, without claiming any predictive capacity, it is not unreasonable to suggest that having a good understanding of prevailing interpretations at specific points in time helps identify the origins of particular preferences. As events unfold in the relationship, we should look to how China's continuing rise has been portrayed in recent discourse; this can point to the range of possible responses and identify whose perceptions matter most, although it will not determine the precise decision that will be taken. In general, understanding how the

notion of China's rise is interpreted and the ensuing debates has been shown here to be a useful mode of analysis when it comes to exploring why the US' policies continue to prioritise engagement even when China is becoming more powerful and threat rhetoric more prevalent within discourse.

The tendency for convergence between the EU's main actors' interpretations precluded substantive discussion of the significance of China's rise, limiting debates around specific events. Although Tiananmen has had a lasting impact this has not been to the same extent as in the US, in part due to the lack of threat perceptions in other issue-areas meaning there are fewer instances to refer back to the event. The EU's policies on human rights resolutions and China's WTO accession illustrate the dominance of perceptions of economic and political opportunities, with differences between Member States' preferences usually determined by which of these they prioritised. Across most of the cases, interpretations of the events themselves were strongly shaped by perceptions of China's rise as a positive development. Market Economy Status proved an exception, although this was influenced by Member States' competing economic interests and the Commission's technical criteria. The central argument is reaffirmed by these observations as the convergence around the opportunity/non-threat interpretations can help explain why the EU has not responded to China's rise as though it were concerned about an impending power-transition even though the former is acting as a unitary international actor. In the absence of substantive policy debates, the EU's foreign policies developed unconstrained by interpretations of China's rise as a threat. Accordingly, the 'China's rise' discourse did not develop along the same path as that of the US, facilitating the pursuit of alternative policy responses.

EU-China relations are still understudied: considerable attention has been devoted to single issues or what the EU's objectives should be, but there have been few attempts to link together various events to analyse trends in policies. In a number of cases, I have added new empirical evidence; the EU's limited response to the Taiwan Strait crisis has barely been mentioned let alone explained in the literature despite occurring in the mid-1990s. In this sense, I hope to have added to cumulative knowledge on the relationship as well as offered insights to how the EU's primary actors have perceived China's rise and acted on their understandings of the associated implications. The linkage to IR debates on how established powers respond to the rise of a potential challenger is also novel as scholars have predominantly focussed on the

actualities of the relationship. Since there are few studies on EU-China relations overall (in comparison to US-China), it is to be expected that there has been even less work on perceptions in this field. In part, the scope of existing scholarship might be explained by the general convergence of Member States' interpretations of China's rise which at first glance might suggest a lack of obvious puzzles. This convergence cannot be assumed *a priori*, and is an important factor in explaining the development of EU policies. PTT has not been used in the literature, which is in itself unsurprising as there is little evidence of its logic within EU discourse over China's rise. Rather than assuming it cannot provide insights, it deserves consideration as the EU is an established power. My evidence confirms that its explanatory capacity is indeed limited.

My analysis provides support for studying EU foreign policymaking via subsystems. Building on Stumbaum's (2009) analysis, I go further by looking at a wider range of cases over a longer timeframe and interrogating what the evidence tells us about how the EU has responded to China's rise and why. Fox and Godement (2009) did not identify their Member State categories as descriptors of prevailing interpretations, but this is essentially what they boil down to. My empirical evidence shows that these categories are analytically useful, although to remain current will periodically need to be refined. Future research will also need to incorporate changes to the EU's foreign policy subsystems brought about by the Lisbon Treaty. The EU's subsystems and actors are in a state of flux due to continued integration and enlargement, thus understanding foreign policy behaviour is a dynamic area of research. The implications of the 2008 financial crisis on European interpretations of China's rise (if any) would be a prime example of where my approach could be applied in future research.

Looking at the US and EU together allows for reflection on the similarities and differences between their experiences of responding to China's rise. The US consistently pursued engagement even as China's power increased rapidly and debates intensified over the implications of its ascent to great power status. From a power-transition perspective, this is puzzling as we would expect the US to see China's rise as inherently threatening to its own position and the status quo arrangements of the international system. Under this logic, the US should prioritise maintaining its predominance in the system and preventing China from accumulating the necessary power to challenge it at both the regional and global levels. Yet

the patterns in the US' behaviour and, moreover, the preeminent interpretations of China's rise, did not match up to these expectations.

For the EU, its relationship with China is arguably less important than its relations with the US and Russia. To some extent, China is a 'choice' for the EU, giving it more latitude in its approach to the relationship. This presented an interesting opportunity to look at how two very different international actors have conducted their distinctive relationships with the same rising power. The EU also advocated a strategy of engagement but unlike the US this was less qualified, with little substantive debate over the implications of China's rise. PTT could be utilised to explain a situation where the EU as a unitary international actor responds to China as a potential challenger but also the alternative scenario where it ignores shifts in the international order because it is not a state. While this flexibility may initially appear advantageous, it is problematic from a PTT-perspective; we do not know when to expect one outcome over the other. Only through analysis of internal factors can we determine why the EU chooses one path over the other; systemic pressures alone do not account for the development of the EU as an international actor as it is the product of agreements between the Member States. Even when treating the EU as a unitary international actor, in all the cases analysed it was evident that PTT's expectations were out of step with the reality of its developing foreign policies towards China.

EU foreign policy is predominantly determined through the intergovernmental subsystem. Yet this is evidently far less hierarchical than the US' subsystem arrangements, with Member States formally enjoying an equal voice – although in reality the influence of the EU3 has often created a *de facto* hierarchy even if they need to persuade other Member States to agree to their preferences. This was often possible because of a dearth of strongly contrasting interpretations of China. Utilising the four categories of Member States' approaches towards China devised by Fox and Godement (2009) helped simplify the array of preferences present. The supranational subsystem is notionally easier to comprehend as the Commission is the key player, although Member State preferences shaped the working policy agenda. Perceptions of China's rise which challenged Member States' prevailing views were mainly contained with the European Parliament which could do little beyond contribute to the discourse since it is excluded from both the intergovernmental and supranational subsystems.

It is worth considering the few cases which were examined in both the US and EU chapters in terms of how they help us understand the differences between their responses to the rise of China. Table 6.1 provides a brief summary of the responses to these. Looking back over the responses of the two polities, we can see that their respective responses highlight the importance of looking at broader perceptions of China's rise. In response to the Tiananmen crackdown, the US' response was very much shaped by a play-off between the President's interpretation of China as an economic and political opportunity versus Congress' perceptions of a normative and potential military threat. The EU had no such contestation, with Member States united in their perceptions at that time. However, after the initial furore had died down, perceptions of economic opportunities resurfaced and displaced normative threat perceptions which had emerged. In response to the Taiwan Strait crisis, the US' response was conditioned by the prevalence of perceptions within the administration that China did not present a military threat to Taiwan or the US. Although the US wanted to protect its regional status and interests, the response was far more tempered given that the crisis could be taken as evidence of the rising challenger flexing its muscles and 'testing' the dominant power.

By contrast, there was not only a complete lack of military threat perceptions in the EU but also strong economic – and growing political – opportunity perceptions. This was despite two Member States retaining regional interests at that time. Their recent policy discourses had evolved differently, with the US' debates over China's MFN status, shaping the context in which the wider debates over China's rise took place. In relation to WTO accession, both pursued engagement policies based on strong perceptions of economic opportunities first and foremost, but also political opportunities. This demonstrated the centrality of the opportunity interpretations in both polities around this time. However, their domestic policymaking contexts were very different: in the US, there was a vociferous debate due to the prevalence of threat perceptions in Congress – not just economic, but military and normative too. In the EU, these were all effectively absent, to the extent that the supposed democratic clause of the EU's trade negotiations dropped out without any controversy. These cases illustrate that there were different perceptions of China's rise present in the US and the EU at the same time – as PTT assumes a single understanding of international relations, it cannot account for these differences despite the evident implications for the behaviour of these two polities.

**Table 6.1 – Comparison of US and EU Responses to the Same Key Events**

Event	US	EU
Tiananmen Crackdown	Imposition of economic, political and military cooperation sanctions. Vicious response from Congress focusing on threat presented to China's citizens. Administration sought to preserve political relations as far as possible.	Imposition of economic, political and military cooperation sanctions. Responses from key Member States, France and UK, demonstrated normative threat perceptions. However, many of the economic sanctions were lifted relatively quickly.
Taiwan Strait Crisis	Warned China of dangers of provocative behaviour and dispatched two aircraft carrier groups to reinforce commitment to regional stability and right of Taiwan to hold democratic elections – latter was seen as main target of China's aggression.	Opted for policy of non-intervention in the issue despite the regional interests of UK and Portugal. Released statements condemning China's behaviour, but fairly restrained. Commission attempted to downplay significance of event to maintain good political relations.
WTO Accession	Despite negative developments in the wider context of the relationship – the publication of the Cox Report and the bombing of China's Belgrade embassy – the administration pushed through its preference to admit China to the WTO and award it PNTR status.	Despite variations between Member States' economic interests in relation to China, there was clear consistent support from the EU for China acceding to the WTO. The so-called democratic clause that was supposed to underpin the EU's trade agreements with third countries did not feature in policy discourse.

This argument also applies to the arms embargo debate, which revealed a sharp division between the responses of the US and EU to China's rise. The dispute was fuelled by differing perceptions of China's rise which influenced assessments of what was at stake with the EU's proposal to lift. Although their respective embargoes differed in substance (the EU's was not binding but rather a vague political commitment), the original motivations behind them were the same. The case revealed that their stances had diverged over time creating a situation in which there was a shift in preferences not only within the two polities but also between them, presenting a unique opportunity to examine how interpretations mattered in the evolution of preferences on the same policy. When the debate emerged, it was clear that the embargo's status related to military, economic and normative issues thus it could provide insights into broader understandings of the implications of China's rise. In the US, the EU's proposal was considered wrongheaded and detrimental to its interests. Whereas economic/political opportunity interpretations previously prevailed in the US, in this case there was no potential opportunity thus the discourse was dominated by those who held threat perceptions.

It became clear over the course of the debate that the US and EU's strategies of engagement derived from different understandings of the implications of China's rise. EU policymakers saw the embargo as not only as unnecessary but actively detrimental to bilateral relations. In the US, it became more necessary as time passed due to uncertainties over the intentions behind China's developing military capacity. China's human rights record seemed relatively inconsequential to either side – its importance in the primary interpretations of China's rise had ostensibly decreased. Instead, the perceived economic and political opportunities strongly shaped European policymakers' preferences. In the US, the increasing prevalence of perceptions of China as a potential threat both in East Asia and more widely on the global stage hardened preferences for preventing arms and technological transfers. The shifting logic underpinning the arms embargoes led to a situation where both sides were effectively talking past each other in the sense that neither fully appreciated the content of the interpretations behind the other's preferences.

From the US' side, there was no evidence that any actors saw the EU's proposal as acceptable. Although perceptions of China's rise as an economic and political opportunity had not diminished, the idea of the EU ending its embargo could not be reconciled with these

perspectives, thus no counterargument emerged in the discourse for allowing the EU to pursue lifting. That is not to definitively rule out the possibility that some individual actors took such a view; however if there were any, they did not express this at that the time and were not amongst the key decision-makers, at least as far as is discernible from publicly available sources and my interviews (future research once documents become available will provide answers here). The implication was that the administration was able to advance its position with domestic backing and while the prospect of the embargo gained momentum in the EU, the introduction of the Anti-Secession Law (ASL) evidently led to a reassessment of the appropriateness of such a move in the altered political environment, based on shifted perceptions of China's behaviour. However, it was evident that the dominant interpretations of its rise were unaffected. Indeed, the EU is still committed to lifting the embargo, and twice the issue has resurfaced (more on this below). Prior to the adoption of the ASL, only MEPs had strongly argued within the EU for retaining the embargo, predominantly based on interpretations of China as a normative threat.

That the distance between American and European preferences – and more broadly, their interpretations of China's rise – was apparently not recognised until the EU undertook its review of the embargo is interesting because it illustrates that these two strategic partners had not engaged in sustained dialogue on China despite its growing importance. The lack of communication on the embargo prior to the announcement was problematic for the US as it removed the opportunity to convey its security interests clearly<sup>1</sup>. While in the GHW Bush administration there had been regular contact with European states to emphasise the continued need for the ban on arms sales, this had ceased well before 2003<sup>2</sup>. The public side of US-China relations constantly emphasised the positive aspects<sup>3</sup> which created a situation where the EU was either not factoring in the concerns of the US or was simply not aware of them in the first place<sup>4</sup>. Again, PTT's single understanding of international relations fails to satisfactorily explain how the two sides ended up in such different positions on this issue. The aspects of China's rise which were most salient in their interpretations of that time differed considerably, leading to incongruous preferences on the status of the EU's embargo.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Randy Schriver, Arlington VA, 07/07/10.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with former senior US administration official, Washington DC, 15/07/10.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Robert Sutter, Washington DC, 29/06/10.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Randy Schriver, Arlington VA, 07/07/10; interview with Dennis Wilder, Washington DC, 15/07/10; interview with Daniel Blumenthal, Washington DC, 15/07/10; interview with Robert Sutter, Washington DC, 29/06/10.

US policymakers had not recognised that American and European interpretations of the global security environment – forged during the Cold War – were diverging<sup>5</sup>. There was a general sense that had the US maintained better communication on security issues or had the chance to voice its opinion prior to the announcement then the debate may not have emerged. This would possibly have been preferable for both sides as its public nature undermined the strength of the US-EU relationship. However, I would argue that the proposal would still have been pushed onto the agenda by Chirac given the strength of his perceptions of China as an economic and political opportunity; these perceptions were pervasive in the EU, although Chirac was arguably their strongest proponent. This highlights the impact of evolving interpretations upon bilateral relations not only between the established powers and the rising power, but also between the former. PTT assumes satisfied powers are on the same page, thus fails to consider the possibility of such divergences which can be detrimental for their relationship. While exploring this issue was beyond the scope of my research, it deserves further contemplation from academics on policymakers as the transatlantic relationship can clearly be affected when discrepant perceptions of China (and other changes in the international system) arise.

Although the outcome was what the US wanted (the embargo remained), the issue has not disappeared. China still raises the issue in the bilateral summits, where the EU reaffirms that it is still working towards lifting, gently reminding China that it would like to see some improvements in its human rights situation – although formal conditionality has never been proposed. In early 2010, the Spanish Council Presidency suggested that the embargo issue may be revisited, only to have Catherine Ashton sweep the issue back under the carpet<sup>6</sup>. In late 2010 and early 2011, there were reports that the High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton, France and Spain had engaged in discussions to look again at lifting (Korski, 2011) although once word of this was out, the plan was quickly dropped.

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with US-China analyst, Alexandria VA, 02/07/10.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Spanish policy official, Brussels, 31/05/10.

Around this time, Ashton was spearheading an assessment of the state of the EU's strategic partnerships. A leaked internal document<sup>7</sup> described the embargo as a "major impediment for developing stronger EU-China cooperation on foreign policy and security matters" (Ashton, 2010: 4). If there was hope that the Obama administration would not object as the Bush administration had, I would suggest that – on the basis of my research – the US' preferences have not shifted even with a binding EU Code of Conduct for exports now in place. The optimism amongst some in Europe suggests that even after the 2004/5 debate, there is still a gap between interpretations of China's rise which precludes fully appreciating how important an issue this is in the US. Any future moves on the embargo's status would require extensive transatlantic dialogue if the EU wants to avoid a downturn in relations with the US. The pattern of the issue periodically resurfacing on the agenda will not do US-EU-China relations any favours.

### ***6.3 Implications for the Literature***

In this section, I will outline the contributions to the literature of these findings. The findings are not definitive but provide satisfactory answers to the research question and raise more questions which could form the basis of an interesting future research programme. Beyond the specific points mentioned below, I am confident that my empirical material adds to our collective knowledge on US- and EU-China relations, especially on the arms embargo case because of the previous focus on the EU side, with less said about the US. In addition, I address how the thesis speaks to some of the wider issues in IR scholarship.

#### *Arms Embargo Debate Literature*

The arms embargo is often treated as a self-contained episode, with limited analysis of how the evolving interpretations of China's rise contributed to the divergence of US and EU preferences. I believe I have shown that the differing positions from which the two viewed China's rise contributed to the emergence of the debate. The thesis also fills a gap in the literature through analysis of the US side; Casarini (2009) and Stumbaum (2009) both

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<sup>7</sup> This is now widely available online – see bibliographic entry. I submitted an 'access to EU documents' request to the EEAS in 2013 in the hope of verifying the authenticity and accuracy of the leaked document, but was given only a heavily redacted copy with key information missing.

considered its input but treated it as an external actor impinging on the EU's decision-making process, rather than examining what it said about US-China relations in its own right. The US-China literature has overlooked how the debate serves as a window into the evolving perceptions of China's rise. The US interviews add new empirical material and move the discussion beyond the prevailing euro-centric focus.

Many volumes on EU-China relations mention the debate in passing but tend to oversimplify it by asserting that the EU dropped the issue when the US objected. I argue that we should seek to avoid oversimplifications as to avoid future problems in US-EU-China relations we need to be able to understand the factors which made the debate so complex. We have already seen signs in 2010 and 2011 that the issue is never far from consideration in the EU. Despite arguments that this issue is solely between the EU and China, if policymakers want this issue resolved the reality is that the US will always have a view and should be consulted by Europeans to avoid damaging the transatlantic relationship. Research into the evolution of the policies from 2005 to 2011 could provide further insights into change and continuity in interpretations of China's rise. If and when the embargo is lifted there will be an opportunity to reassess each point from imposition to lifting, examining the evolution of European and American preferences in parallel with their evolving interpretations of China's rise.

#### *PTT and Wider IR Literature*

Although I have been mostly interested in how PTT's ideas have pervaded 'China threat' rhetoric, my findings have some implications for PTT scholarship. The thesis challenges PTT assertions over how established powers respond to the rise of a potential challenger. The main tenet of this is that my findings suggest that material power alone does not determine behaviour in the international arena. While it can tell us something about the hierarchical structure of the system we still need to know how actors perceive this and what implications they infer. Although power-transition theorists still debate how to measure levels of (dis)satisfaction with the status quo, they take it for granted that established powers will perceive these accurately. The debates over whether China is status quo or revisionist and the likely implications suggest otherwise.

PTT's main legacy has been the assertion that power-transitions are violent. Although its empirical analysis is grounded in complex models, this has been extricated from scholarship and embedded in collective knowledge. The logic and language of PTT has worked its way into discourse over China's rise. This is arguably a natural consequence of research on such a highly important subject, but there needs to be more critical reflection on PTT as its theoretical precepts have not kept pace with the changing reality of international relations. Such reflection is imperative as there is a possibility that PTT's central expectation could lead to self-fulfilling prophecies: if actors see both a transition and conflict as inevitable then China's rise is inherently a threat and ensuing attempts to head-off a transition would bring about the very result they feared by transforming China into a hostile power.

PTT's proponents have acknowledged that decision-making processes need to be taken into account but have not followed through with this. PTT posits a single state-centric understanding of international relations without considering how variations in interpretations impact decision-making at the domestic level. PTT is a specific manifestation of realism, even though proponents of PTT have attempted to distance it from this school of thought. As I argued in Chapter One, offensive realism and hegemonic stability theory share many of the expectations of PTT. In this sense my findings also speak to realism more broadly which is important as this is arguably still the dominant perspective in IR, with neorealist theories focussing on how the structure of the system determines behaviour.

My findings show that rather than a single, objective perspective of the structure this is actually what is contested when policymakers debate China's rise and its implications. Differing interpretations can increase or decrease in salience over time, with rival perspectives catalysing competition amongst policymakers for influence over decisions. The realist assumption that actors perceive their external environment objectively overlooks the considerable degree of subjectivity in perceptions which directly influences behaviour at the international level. The findings suggest that material power is not what has driven responses to China's rise, directly challenging core PTT and neorealist assumptions. Instead, we need to take into account a wider range of factors – my thesis indicates that interpretations of the rising power and the inferred implications are key to understanding US and EU responses.

Some mainstream IR theorists have attempted to link perceptions into their studies. Taking Walt's (1987) refinement of neorealism, perceptions of threat inform the idea of a "balance of threat" rather than "balance of power". However, Walt (1987) continues to presuppose that policymakers act on the basis of a common national interest, which I have argued is problematic. This latter point is also taken up by other FPA scholars, who have critiqued assumptions of national interest. Thus although Walt takes some steps away from traditional realist perspectives, there are still limitations in his approach to understanding behaviour at the international level through domestic level factors. Further, Walt (1987) only appears interested in perceptions of threat – perhaps because of his realist pedigree – without giving due consideration to perceptions of opportunity and the mediating effect these can have on threat perceptions prevalent within the policymaking community.

#### *FPA/EFP Literature*

The analytical framework proved useful for not only independent analyses of the US and EU but also comparative analysis which has generally been absent from the literature. Tacit acceptance that the US and EU are too 'different' has seemingly put others off undertaking comparative FPA. I contend that this is not the case and that cross-polity analyses are both possible and illuminating. In line with much of the EFP literature, I treat the EU as a unitary international actor in its own right. This entails a rejection of the assumption inherent to mainstream FPA that foreign policies are the output of *states*. Decision-making FPA scholarship was spearheaded by US scholars and thus the traditional state model has predominated. Instead, I adhere to the concept of policies as the product of foreign policy subsystems, which has been utilised in some EFP works in order to move away from state-centric FPA.

Due to the project's scope, I have treated perceptions as 'given' rather than attempt to assess their genesis, but further research into perception formation could help advance my findings. For instance, political psychology approaches to FPA could provide a more comprehensive account of the origin and impact of perceptions. Explaining why actors within the same polity can develop contrasting perceptions would provide new insights not only to China's rise. This could be a three-stage analysis, adding to the analytical model used here to understand where the perceptions which influenced policy came from. Analyses at this level would be complex,

necessitating a more selective focus on a smaller number of events. Extensive interviews with the involved policymakers and access to minutes of key meetings in the process at multiple levels of government would be essential. As I discovered, current officials are often unable to talk on sensitive issues or were not present for events being researched and former officials can be hard to track down. Access to relevant documents is heavily restricted for decades, making it difficult to get a full picture of what was going on and to triangulate between various sources.

Although mainstream rationalist FPA studies often follow Allison (1971) by concentrating on competing bureaucratic interests, the evidence presented here suggests that within agencies there is scope for disagreement identifiable through policy discourse. Allison's work is based on state structures that are less readily adaptable to the EU. Rationalist FPA is restrictive as it overlooks the importance of discourse and ideational debates between actors. These can often reveal that even when actors want the same outcome – such as China's peaceful emergence – they can have contrasting or even incompatible ideas of how to achieve this. While I have not adhered to a constructivist mode of FPA – such as that advanced by Jutta Weldes (1999) which focus on self-perceptions of identity as the driving factor behind actors' behaviour – I do incorporate constructivism by focussing on the subjectivity of perceptions and the importance of discourse as part of the process, rather than distinct from it.

Weldes' (1999) model would allow future research to examine the origins and development of perceptions – both of the self and other – and their implications for policy formation. For example, in the arms embargo debate US policymakers had argued that the EU did not have to maintain stability in East Asia thus did not understand the necessity of its embargo. Since the US is there by choice, its regional security role is a component of its self-perceived identity; this is missing from the EU's identity, creating an opportunity to explore differing identities and how they influence the way in which actors perceive the world. I am more sceptical of constructivist claims regarding *state* identities, as we would expect all actors to then follow the same behaviour – this has not been the case in many of the events examined. In the EU, I touched upon what was happening within Member States but did not explore national-level discourse extensively. Henrik Larsen's (1997) study of French and British discourse on Europe could serve as a model for this purpose, potentially adding to our understanding of perceptions on preference formation.

FPA scholars have looked to neoclassical realism (NCR) as an intersection between FPA and IR theory due to its ontological position that “understanding the links between power and policy requires close examination of the contexts within which foreign policies are formulated and implemented” (Rose, 1998: 147) with behaviour as the product of “systemic pressures... filtered through intervening domestic variables” (Schweller, 2006: 6). I have not linked my approach to NCR because of differences in basic assumptions about the nature of international relations and different research objectives. At its core, NCR assumes that material power and systemic pressures which can be understood objectively drive international relations. Domestic-level factors are treated as obstacles to states behaving in accordance with standard realist expectations. Rathbun (2008:297) asserted that a “necessary component of [NCR]... is to demonstrate that when domestic politics and ideas *interfere* substantially in foreign policy decision making, *the system punishes states*” [emphasis added]. I argue that there is no definitive ‘national interest’ as actors’ perceptions of the international system vary, shaping their understanding of the implications of changes within it. Domestic politics and ideas are not interference with decision-making; the latter cannot be disentangled from the former.

Although not part of the original research question, the thesis also has implications for EFP scholarship. Primarily, it reinforces the claims that the EU can be treated as a unitary actor as it provides an analytical framework which accounts for the development of the EU’s foreign policies towards China. Secondly, it also supports the EFP approach of moving beyond state-centric analyses in the study of foreign policymaking, which provided considerable analytical leverage here and allowed for comparison between the EU and the US, which has not been given extensive consideration elsewhere in the literature. Treating the EU as an international actor with distinct foreign policy subsystems turned out to be an effective approach for understanding the development of the EU’s China policies. As such, this supports the school of thought that the EU should be treated as an international actor beyond the aggregation of Member States’ behaviour. The findings, however, raise questions for Normative Power Europe – arguably the dominant approach in EFP – as it suggests that the EU’s policies were rarely based on normative considerations such as human rights and the promotion of democracy. Indeed, the evidence suggests that China’s rise has rarely been interpreted through a normative lens – instead, political and economic concerns take precedence. Consequently, NPE’s applicability to EU-China relations is called into question by my findings.

Criticisms of the EU as a ‘strategic actor’ – relevant in the context of EU-China relations – are predicated on the fact that it is not a state (Biava et al, 2011: 1233). The problem is that these criticisms compare the EU to an idealised strategic state actor with clearly defined strategic objectives towards which all policymakers are working. However, my analysis revealed divisions in the US between the administration and Congress (as well as within these branches) which would fall short of such criteria; yet it would be difficult to argue that the US is not a strategic international actor just because it does not have a comprehensive China strategy. EU scholars should perhaps re-examine their criteria of a strategic actor. I have made steps in this direction in a spin-off from this thesis (Brown, S. 2012), arguing that consideration of the EU as a strategic actor could be reoriented to examine subsystems rather than expecting it to conform to this ideal type.

Finally, my approach contributes to wider debates about international relations and foreign policymaking beyond the relationships examined. A key point that emerges is that there are no objective assessments of ‘threat’ based on national interests. In the US debates over China’s potential threat illustrated significant discrepancies between perceptions. Across the various cases, there was no ‘clear and present’ threat perception, thus with speculative assessments there was significant scope for disagreement between actors. This relates back to the point made in the previous section regarding realist assumptions of objective perceptions of international relations based on clearly defined interests. Policy debates between perceptions of threat versus opportunity and what to do about it are relevant in all power relationships, thus the approach and arguments generate insights for the field of IR more broadly.

#### **6.4 Final Comments**

To close, I would like to reflect on the central value of this project. Returning once more to the original question – *how have different interpretations of the ‘rise of China’ influenced the foreign policies of the US and the EU towards China?* – I think that the thesis has contributed to the debates over these relations between great powers by departing from prevailing approaches. The proposed answer, in concise form, is that the very concept of ‘China’s rise’ has different meanings to different actors, and this has influenced their preferences for what to do about this change in the international order. This has been overlooked in the debates up

until now, but its significance extends beyond academic curiosity. The analysis presented suggests that it actually has had an impact on how the US and EU have – so far – responded to the (re)emergence of China as a significant player in the international arena. I hope that I have been able to add a new perspective on the driving factors behind these increasingly-important relationships and made a contribution to the ongoing debates within the literature over how best to understand them.

## **APPENDIX | METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES**

### *Military Power*

The primary source for military budgets was the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) online database. Other sources were used throughout where conducive to create a comprehensive analysis of relative military power. Finally, since the US' Department of Defense has been producing reports on China's military power since 2002 these were used to examine whether the US' estimates are in line with independent analyses, as significantly different figures may influence how policymakers view China's power.

One potential limitation of 'external' sources is that of accuracy. Even for states which divulge data freely, complete accuracy cannot be guaranteed and indeed some figures within reports are estimates or approximate numbers. SIPRI Yearbooks report that reliability of their data is limited as it does not encapsulate actual expenditure, only reported expenditure or their own estimates. Additionally, comparisons between states are limited by the varying coverage of country reports and the method of currency conversion (Stålenheim et al, 2009: 214). However, within the context of this research exact data is not a necessity: PTT focuses on variation in relative power over time, thus trends in capability build-up and force orientation are of greater significance than precise measurements. Additionally, what policymakers in the US and EU *think* China has or is developing is more important so long as the data is accepted as credible.

One method sometimes adopted for the analysis of military expenditure is to apply purchasing power parity (PPP) calculations. However, this was rejected for this chapter for several reasons. Bitzinger (2003: 171) cautions that such estimates are not entirely useful as calculating PPP for military purposes is essentially guesswork and fails encapsulate variations in quality and the level of sophisticated technology available (generally quite low for China). Crane et al (2005: 16) argue that since military equipment is not included in calculations of PPP – and is generally priced at world market values –these figures should be utilised carefully. SIPRI evaluations of military expenditure also note similar problems with PPP, adding that there is no "ideal method for comparison of military expenditure" (Stålenheim et al, 2008: 179). SIPRI's calculations of military expenditure use Market Exchange Rates as

opposed to PPP due to the associated problems and uncertainties with the latter (Sköns and Stålenheim 2008: 247). Finally, when actually applied to the data in Figure 2.4, China's military expenditure had essentially caught up with the US (once GWOT appropriations were subtracted). These figures exceeded other estimates substantially – including those from the US and SIPRI (Figures 2.3 and 2.4 respectively) – thus the utility of applying PPP is limited if other analyses do not use it.

### *Human Rights Reports*

The analysis drew on the reports of two prominent international non-governmental organisations directly involved in research into and protection of human rights: Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Analysis of both groups' country profiles on China in their annual reports facilitated triangulation between the data presented in their respective assessments. As with other independent sources examined previously, no measures will be completely accurate but the importance of these reports is that they are produced by influential groups and contribute to how policymakers view the issues. Following the approach of previous sections, the analysis rested on 'snapshots' from the reports at five year intervals, as the analysis is interested in broad trends rather than year-on-year variations. Additionally, the analysis draws on human rights reports produced by the US and EU to assess whether these actors view the human rights situation in China in a similar light as these influential NGOs. Comparison across the four series of documents also facilitated verification of the arguments put across by the various reports and consolidating information about particular issues.

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