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Lucas Deane Myers

Macalester College, lucasdeanemyers@gmail.com

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The Sino-American War of Words: Soft Power as Coercion

Lucas Deane Myers

Advisors: Professor David Blaney

Professor Andrew Latham

Political Science Department

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Abstract: Soft power is typically understood to involve attraction, or the influence an actor gains through the positive image of its institutions, ideals, and culture. However, this conception underplays the coercive side of soft power. Attractiveness is not a pre-existing, unchanging condition but a socially constructed reality that allows the attractive actor to exercise discursive power over other actors. Soft power conflicts appear, therefore, as a “war of words.” In such wars of words, participants utilize coercive soft power, or representational force, to reify a narrative and self-identity into social reality while simultaneously detracting from the opponent’s. Utilizing discourse analysis, I then apply my model to the US-China relationship from 2009-2016 to show (1) that the two actors waged a war of words through their respective public discourses and (2) that representational force should be recognized as an important feature of soft power.

Introduction

In Joseph Nye's well-known conception, political actors utilize soft power 'attraction' to further their interests without needing to resort to other, more coercive forms of power. The actors with the greatest soft power assets are those whose ideals, institutions, and governmental systems are the most 'attractive' to others. Western democratic countries such as the United States of America are typically considered to wield the most effective soft power. Authoritarian states, such as China are likewise understood to lack soft power due to their unattractive institutions. But, given the socially constructed nature of a relative concept like "attractiveness," the questions arises: how are ideas rendered attractive? Answering these questions sheds light on the coercive side of soft power and its usage in a form of interstate competition that I term the "war of words."

In this paper, I build on the work of scholars such as Janice Bially Mattern and Joanna Szostek to argue that International Relations (IR) has neglected the coerciveness of soft power by assuming the universal and unchanging attractiveness of Western ideas and institutions. With a new understanding of soft power as containing attractive and coercive aspects, I construct a theoretical framework that envisions how this coercive side of soft power functions as a weapon in a 'war of words' where actors attempt to make themselves 'attractive' while simultaneously rendering the opposing actor 'unattractive.' According to my "war of words" model, actors competing over the attractiveness of ideas may weaponize coercive soft power, known as "representational force,"¹ to render the opponent's self-identity and narrative "unattractive" while defending or augmenting their own, a process that unfolds over time in a flow of progressing responses. Finally, I apply my model to an analysis of US-China representational

¹ A term I borrow from Mattern that describes the coercive, or detractive, side of soft power.

force in the period 2009 to 2016. We learn from this case study that the US and China waged a war of words against each other in an attempt to reify their chosen narrative, a situation that shows how actors weaponize their coercive soft power in a bilateral relationship.

Section I: Soft Power and Coercion

Joseph Nye altered IR's understanding of power with his development of the concept of attractive "soft power." Through soft power an actor exerts 'attraction' or influence. As Nye defines it, soft power "is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced."² In contrast to hard power, soft power constitutes the immaterial aspects by which a political actor encourages other actors to act in accordance with its wishes. Nye depicts the United States and other Western powers as wielding the strongest "soft power" by virtue of their superior ideas and institutions. This depiction of soft power underplays the coercive aspects of the phenomenon, however. "Attractiveness" must always have 'unattractiveness' as its counter. Constructivist scholar Janice Bially Mattern argues that Nye focuses too much attention on the naturalness of attraction and thereby ignores soft power's coercive aspect.³ Nye assumes Western attraction is pre-existing and attractive to all cultures with Western-style democratic norms exerting the most attraction throughout history, a situation he considers will continue into the future. When we do

² Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004): ix.

³ Janice Bially Mattern, "Why 'Soft Power' Isn't So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics," *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2005): 583-612.

not presume pre-existing universal attraction and allow for the social construction of ideas, a coercive element becomes apparent.

As Mattern explains, “representational force,” or coercive soft power, is a means by which states attempt to secure its self-identity and deconstruct another’s social reality:

Actors often have incentives, which are rooted in the ontological (in)security of their sociolinguistically-constructed subjectivity, to fix the terms of the ‘reality’ in question in a manner that is congenial to the perpetuation of their Self – regardless of others’ views of the ‘evidence’. Thus, rather than trying to persuade one another of the ‘true’ meaning of ‘reality’ they fight over it (verbally) among themselves. They sociolinguistically construct ‘reality’ not through evidence-based argument but through representational force.⁴

Through the use of “representational force,” an actor’s discourse “threatens the target with unthinkable harm to their constructed reality unless it submits...The unthinkable harm threatened, however, is not physical, for that would imply physical force rather than representational force. Instead the harm promised is to the victim’s own ontological security.”⁵

With representational force, a political actor coerces another into agreeing with its worldview and accepting its ideas as truth. Such a phenomenon is particularly present between actors that lack a shared cultural worldview.⁶ Soft power is thus not only attractive but also coercive.

Attractiveness is not effective without the relative unattractiveness of the other, a social reality only achievable through a type of competition known as the war of words where actors attempt to coerce each other into sharing the same world view by detracting from the opponent’s social reality.

⁴ Ibid, 583.

⁵ Ibid, 586.

⁶ Ibid, 601. The US-China case study is a particularly rich example of coercive soft power. The two nations inhabit radically different worlds predicated on their own histories and hegemonic ideologies, and which arguments, ideologies, or identities make sense to the Chinese government do not necessarily hold water in America. Due to the dependence of their identities on differing ideas of what ideas exert attraction, the two sides will attempt to persuade the other of their own ideas of what is attractive and what is repulsive. This rethinking of soft power opens up the possibility of utilizing representational force in a ‘war of words,’ a concept other authors explore but do not create a theoretical framework to guide analysis.

Only a few scholars have drawn on Mattern to examine verbal fighting. Most IR scholars continue to view soft power through the lens of attraction, not coercion. The literature on East Asian IR, for instance, has historically been hamstrung by its focus on attraction to the neglect of coercion. Works focusing on competition over attraction but not coercion abound.⁷ In his study of the Korean peninsula, Watson argues that “soft power is attractive power” and therefore leaves little room for the possibility of coercive soft power.⁸ Similarly, exploration of China’s soft power in Korea similarly focuses solely on attraction.⁹ Hongying Wang and Yeh-Chung Lu present Chinese and Taiwanese soft power as attraction for both domestic and international audiences.¹⁰ Similarly Zhang Weihong argues that China recognizes the importance of soft power as attraction and aims to develop more.¹¹ Wang Yiwei in his “Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power” comes closer to examining the *strategic* implications of soft power when he highlights the recent Chinese efforts to coordinate a “peaceful rise” by downplaying the ‘China threat’ narrative in the public sphere. Wang’s analysis hints at an effort to combat foreign portrayals of China, but does not fully explore the logic of coercion as a competition or war of words.¹² Schweller and Pu likewise grant agency to the Chinese government’s efforts at “delegitimation” of the American international system but maintain that such efforts rely upon

⁷ Heng Yee Kuang, “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the softest of them all? Evaluating Japanese and Chinese strategies in the ‘soft’ power competition era,” *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 10 (2010): 275-304; Geun Lee, “The Clash of Soft Powers Between China and Japan: Synergy and Dilemmas at the Six-Party Talks,” *Asian Perspective* 34, no. 2 (2010): 113-139; Amit Kumar Gupta, “Soft Power of the United States, China, and India: A Comparative Analysis,” *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 26, no. 1 (June-December 2013): 37-57.

⁸ Iain Watson, “South Korea’s State-led Soft Power Strategies: Limits on Inter-Korean Relations,” *Asian Journal of Political Science* 20, no. 3 (2012): 304-325, 309.

⁹ Jung-Nam Lee, “The Rise of China and Soft Power: China’s Soft Power Influence in Korea,” *Chinese University Press* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 127-154.

¹⁰ Hongying Wang and Yeh-Chung Lu, “The Conception of Soft Power and its Policy Implications: a comparative study of China and Taiwan,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 17, no. 56 (August 2008): 425-447.

¹¹ Zhang Weihong, “China’s cultural future: from soft power to comprehensive national power,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 16, no. 4 (November 2010): 383-402.

¹² Wang Yiwei, “Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (March 2008): 257-273.

attractiveness.¹³ In a similar vein, Martin A. Smith presents Chinese soft power as offering an alternative to Western attractiveness.¹⁴ Another scholar, Sheng Ding, argues that Chinese cultural power could serve to promote Chinese policy and institutions abroad, even hinting that coercive aspects of cultural power are important, but neglects to fully articulate what that sort of aggressive soft power entails when taken in the context of a bilateral relationship.¹⁵ In an analysis of Chinese soft power, Hayden recognizes Chinese efforts to increase their soft power through public diplomacy that emphasizes the attractiveness of Chinese culture.¹⁶ Almost without exception, the scholarship on soft power in East Asia hinges on attraction.

Outside of studies of East Asia, a few scholars approach the concept of representational force. Kose et al. argue that soft power's effectiveness in the Middle East varies depending on the perspective of local identities and thereby hints at a need to convince the other of one's narrative truth.¹⁷ Wastnidge depicts Iranian efforts to utilize public diplomacy and cultural attraction as a means of waging "soft war," thereby coming close to equating soft power with representational force. Although connecting Mattern's representational force to his analysis of Iran by noting that "Iranian political actors have arguably conceived of soft power in much the same way as they do hard power," Wastnidge fails to develop this into a theory of a coercive soft power 'war of words' because he argues that the Islamic Republic aims to counter Western

¹³ Randall L. Schweller and Pu Xiaoyu, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline," *International Security* 36, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 41-72, 57.

¹⁴ Martin A. Smith, *Power in the Changing Global Order* (Malden: Polity Press, 2012), 163. Smith also misunderstands soft power by arguing it that "either exists or it does not" and therefore commits the same logical error that Nye does by ignoring social construction.

¹⁵ Sheng Ding, *The Dragon's Hidden Wings: How China's Rises with its Soft Power* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008).

¹⁶ Craig Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts* (New York: Lexington Books, 2012).

¹⁷ Talha Kose, Mesut Ozcan and Ekrem Karakoc, "A Comparative Analysis of Soft Power in the MENA Region: The Impact of Ethnic, Sectarian, and Religious Identity on Soft Power in Iraq and Egypt," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 0 (2016): 1-20.

claims of cultural superiority through attraction; coercion is not viewed as a necessary element.¹⁸ Kiseleva makes a similar claim in regards to Russia. She argues that Russia's elite aims to "employ soft power in the West in a way that would facilitate understanding and a sense of affinity between the two sides."¹⁹ Kiseleva discusses Russian policy discourse as a tool for countering Western attraction. Russia ultimately rejects the hegemonic Western understanding circulated via US soft power by arguing for its own culturally-grounded self-identity in its soft power practices. Kiseleva, like Wastnidge, argues that authoritarian states recognize their deficiencies in institutional attraction (democracy, rule of law, etc.) and instead must rely upon cultural attraction. Yet, both authors stop short of developing a theoretical framework to identify and analyze a soft power war and therefore continue to argue that Western attraction is universal and unchanging. Relative soft power is only understood in the context of increasing one's own attractiveness and never in the sense of decreasing another's.

Joanna Szostek alone explores "detraction" as key to soft power in the context of an "information war."²⁰ She highlights the lack of analysis of the "detractive" use of soft power in the international relations literature and moves to provide an example of detractive soft power. Examining the 2010 Belorussian 'information war' with Russia, Szostek argues that detractive soft power constitutes a sort of modernized propaganda war. Borrowing from Miskimmon et al.,²¹ Szostek labels detractive soft power as a type of strategic narrative in which states attempt to control their own citizens' perceptions of the other and then project a negative narrative onto

¹⁸ Edward Wastnidge, "The Modalities of Iranian Soft Power: From Cultural Diplomacy to Soft Power," *Politics* 35, no. 3-4 (November 2015): 364-277.

¹⁹ Yulia Kiseleva, "Russia's Soft Power Discourse: Identity, Status and the Attraction of Power," *Politics* 35, no. 3-4 (2015): 316-329.

²⁰ Joanna Szostek, "The Power of Detraction: Belarusian Reporting of Russian Social Problems During 'Information War,'" *The Journal of Social Policy Studies* 14, no. 1 (2016): 99-112.

²¹ Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

opponents as a sort of verbal attack. She highlights the 2010 information war between Belarus and Russia as an example of how a state actor utilizes soft power to construct a strategic narrative that serves its goals. However, by only engaging with one actor's strategic narrative (Belarus), Szostek does not construct a theoretical framework for the "reception and response" aspect of a soft power conflict, a phenomenon that Szostek argues necessitates further study.²² Therefore, I construct a framework for analyzing a bilateral "war of words" that will help shed light on the unfolding of a war of words between two actors that respond to each other's narratives in a reactive manner. In addition, the US-China case study provides another example of detractive soft power in action between a non-Western authoritarian state and a Western democracy.

Despite the growing interest in soft power, few scholars recognizes its coercive character or, if they do so, neglect to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing and identifying a 'war of words.' Correcting this oversight, I build on Mattern's conception of representational force and Szostek's exploration of Belarus-Russian information war to formulate an organized theory of a coercive soft power "war of words" that I then apply to the US-China relationship from 2009 to 2016. The war of words theory aims to provide a framework to describe the policy actions of two actors who, in response to each other's moves, utilize representational force to reify their preferred narratives into social reality and achieve relative attraction.

Section II: A Theoretical Framework for the War of Words

²² Szostek, "The Power of Detraction," 110.

Representational force is the foundation of the war of words. In Mattern's account, representational force involves the use of coercive, or detractive, soft power to defend the self-identity, attack the other's, and garner outside sympathy and support. Due to the constructed nature of social reality, self-identities can be deconstructed through a rendering of the self-identity and its ideas as falsehoods or of less ethical value. Undermining another actor's attraction and reifying one's own strategic narrative argument as attractive requires a deconstruction of the other's social reality by publicly attempting "to bully the audience into agreement with his interpretation."²³ Because perceived legitimacy and correctness are necessary for a state's argument to be effective, representational force can be utilized to delegitimize or humiliate the other actor in front of its audience and thereby force it to accept one's counter-narrative.²⁴ In direct attacks on an opponent's self-identity, one actor gives the other a "non-choice" that implies the destruction of the other's self-identity or some other serious diminishment should it fail to comply.²⁵ Representational force is therefore used to weaken another actor's narrative in order to coerce the opposing actor, or the audience, into following the attacker's preferred narrative. A successful soft power war of words would mean that the audience, and perhaps the opposing actor, come to accept one's argument and thereby accede to one's demands. When this phenomenon occurs within the context of international relationships, one begins to see a war of words take place where actors counter each other's narratives and engage in verbal fighting.

Recognizing the possibilities of coercive soft power in a bilateral relationship, I build on the existing scholarship to develop a theory describing such a war of words between political

²³ Mattern, "Soft Power isn't so Soft," 602.

²⁴ Ibid, 586.

²⁵ Ibid, 602.

actors that unfolds over time. To develop my theory, I outline how representational force is organized into strategic narratives, targets audiences, has at least three identifiable narrative tactics (offense, defense and riposte), and exists within the space of discourse. Representational force, or weaponized soft power, when utilized by two or more actors struggling over social reality, resembles a war with moves and countermoves unfolding over time with the aim of achieving victory for one's preferred narrative. The attractive side of soft power therefore constitutes the denouement period after a war of words ends: once one actor's narrative defeats the opponent's the winning narrative becomes the commonality or norm that then exerts attraction.

In my conception, the primary weapon of in a representational force war of words is the strategic narrative, the means by which an actor organizes its preferred vision of social reality and persuades others of its truth.²⁶ Strategic narratives can be seen "as compelling storylines which could explain events convincingly and from which inferences could be drawn."²⁷ Thus, strategic narratives are the organized stories that actors tell to try and convince other political actors that their interpretation of the world is correct. Miskimmon et al. argue that strategic narratives reify into social reality and thus affect how actors view and act in the international order.²⁸ The war of words is of vast importance to political actors; social reality and norms matter for state behavior. It is much easier to act when one's policies are in line with hegemonic norms. The reification of a strategic narrative's ideas and content as attractive in social reality can only happen through a representational force war of words. In my theory, I adopt the concept of a strategic narrative and

²⁶ Miskimmon, et al. *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*, 2.

²⁷ Lawrence Freedman, "The possibilities and limits of strategic narratives," in *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion, and War: Winning domestic support for the Afghan War*, ed. Beatrice De Graaf, George Dimitru, and Jens Ringsmoose, 17-36. (New York, Routledge, 2015), 19.

²⁸ Miskimmon et al., *Strategic Narratives*, 67.

use it to describe the package of ideas, views, norms, and self-identities to be reified as attractive or, in the case of one's opponent, unattractive. Like Szostek, I argue that strategic narratives are key to detractive soft power but differ in that I employ the concept of the strategic narrative as a subset of a comprehensive war of words theory that encompasses other important considerations such as responsive deployment tactics and audience.

As a *social* construction, a war of words requires an audience. As Epstein argues, states “talk” and thus articulate themselves to others in the words they speak: “States, like individuals, position themselves in relation to other states by adopting certain discourses and not others.”²⁹ Audience is key to understanding representational force and the war of words. Soft power only exists in relation to other actors and representational force thereby requires other participants’ attentions to be captured. Whether the participants in a war of words speak to each other, the globe, a regional community of leaders, or a specific population, representational force functions in relatively the same manner. The content and emphasis of a strategic narrative, differs depending on audience.³⁰ Although discovery of the intended audience is reliant primarily on contextual inferences, it remains a vital consideration when discussing representational force.³¹ In terms of tactics and delivery, once a government decides upon a strategic narrative tailored to an audience it must be delivered in an effective manner.

²⁹ Charlotte Epstein, “Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics,” *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 2 (2010): 327-350, 341.

³⁰ I aim to construct a general theory of soft power war. The specific content of a narrative or method of deployment differ between varying contexts. What one actor would argue towards an authoritarian state differs significantly from a narrative directed at a non-state actor. Likewise, ideas change over time: one could potentially examine soft power in other eras.

³¹ China for example typically translates its words into English in a presumable attempt to reach a global audience. Given that all of Xi's public speeches are hosted on the Foreign Ministry website, Xi's publications, and other Chinese language media, a domestic Chinese audience exists as well. America's audience can be read in a similar manner. In many cases, Obama speaks directly to a foreign audience, such as during his visit to Australia and Japan. In others he addresses the ‘Pacific’ community. A domestic American audience exists for the Obama administration as well. In any case, representational force aims to alter social reality in the minds of the audience and the opposing actor; without a listener there is no war.

Effective deployment of representational force in a war of words requires responding to the other actor's words. Thus, there are several tactics that are available to an actor and its strategic narratives during the war of words: offense, defense, and riposte. One can view these moves as akin to the tactics of a military in a hard power war. By defining these tactics, I aim to provide a framework to categorize an actor's response during a particular moment in the war of words. The first type, offense, constitutes an aggressive attack on the opponent's self-identity or existing narrative with one's preferred narrative. An offensive move typically presents a new argument or renews an old one but does not reuse the opponent's. Beyond simple criticism, inclusion and exclusion from larger group identities arises often in offensive moves: if one actor can successfully create the feeling of isolation (or actual international isolation) in the opponent the coercive act is that much more effective. As Sarah Ellen Graham argues in a study on the emotions generated by public diplomacy, the feeling of closeness is vital to self-identity: "The integrity of an ingroup as a collective actor is sustained through shared emotional climates and the positive feeling of belonging. It follows that outgroups are also apprehended and evaluated in less positive emotional terms, by virtue of their very status as outgroups."³² Due to the importance of community, redefining a group's boundaries can also serve as an effective coercive tactic: isolate the opposing actor's self-identity by placing it in the out-group and the actor begins to feel the pressure.

In response to an offensive, an actor has two options, a defensive response and a riposte response. A defensive response often includes retrenching one's own arguments and denying criticism. By defending, an actor holds firm and refuses to accept the opponent's criticisms and attacks. A riposte is more complex and involves an attempt to deflect criticism onto the attacker,

³² Sarah Ellen Graham, "Emotion and Public Diplomacy: Dispositions in International Communications, Dialogue, and Persuasion," *International Studies Review* 16 (2014): 522-539, 535.

another party, or through a manipulation of the attacker's narrative for one's own use. One can think of a riposte as first acknowledging the opponent's move by accepting the beneficial aspects of it, rejecting the harmful parts of the narrative, and finally attempting to incorporate the beneficial parts into one's own narrative. Thus, a riposte is a useful means of turning an opponent's criticism on its head and reutilizing aspects of the narrative to suit one's own needs. Offense, defense, and riposte are three forms that a strategic narrative may take when it is applied through representational force.

Given that representational force is delivered with words, I rely upon Lene Hansen's discourse analysis methodology to examine how actors' deliver, argue for, and formulate strategic narratives to wield representational force in a war of words scenario.³³ It is beyond the scope of my study to examine whether representational force is effective, I aim only to provide evidence for its use in in a detractive war of words. Hansen and her method of discourse analysis allows the researcher to organize a study around a core set of decisions. First, the researcher must decide the number of selves to be researched. Due to the oftentimes conflictual US-China relationship and the vast cultural divide between the two actors, I compare the United States government under President Barack Obama with the Chinese government during the tenure of President Xi Jinping, a period in which a war of words appears most evident.³⁴ Second, the researcher must decide on which intertextual models, or the breadth and types of texts identified,

³³ Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 23.

³⁴ Examining just one self-identity would limit the usefulness of my study and limit the application of my findings as it would bias my results towards one actor, not to mention an inability to compare the two. Although all states are complex communities consisting of many actors, organizations, and individuals with many different shifting identities and interests. The self-identity that I am interested in is the hegemonic public identity of the state for that is the identity that dominates the policy discourse and in turn limits the range of policies the leaders may adopt. The government's public identity is the identity that the population views, is influenced by, and interacts with. Therefore, this identity is what informs the limits of policymaking due to the need for legitimacy. In line with Hansen's argument for the importance of a stable governmental identity in policymaking, should the government act out of concert with the public's perception of its normal behavior, then the government's policies are more liable to receive public dissension.

to use as sources. I chose texts from policy discourse as issued by the governments themselves: speeches, proclamations, and policy statements.³⁵ Third, the researcher must delineate the temporal perspective, which in my case is 2009 to 2016. Given that the Sino-American relationship has long experienced tension, my focus on 2009 to 2016 stems from that period being bookended by radical shifts in policy on both ends. The election of President Obama and his brief engagement of China serves as a useful starting point while President Trump's radical policy departures mark a major shift and a logical endpoint.³⁶ Finally, the researcher must choose the number of events examined which, in my case, is solely the US-China relationship from 2009 to 2016. No other possible wars of words will be examined in my study. Drawing upon Lene Hansen's model for discourse analysis and identity exploration, I analyze the official policy discourse of both the People's Republic of China and the United States of America from 2009 to 2016 in order to identify their use of representational force in the context of a war of words to demonstrate the coercive possibilities of soft power and its use in international competition.

The next two sections discuss how the US and China fought a war of words from 2009 to 2016. Instead of utilizing material hard power or economic sanctions, both of which carry a high cost, the US and China utilized representational force to render the opposing self-identity unattractive while defending their own, a textbook example of a war of words.

³⁵ Representational force is a governmental policy and, as such, non-dominant and non-governmental voices are not included because the war of words that I am analyzing is waged between the two governments, not their private citizenry or non-governmental actors. With that in mind, I focus on government-issued sources and ignore those of scholars or other public figures. Although some scholars and individuals influence the government, the views of those directly engaged in policymaking are the focus of my analysis, not the discourse as a whole. In the case of China, the authoritarian nature of the regime aids in the dissemination of its narrative. Even in the contemporary American media environment where partisan and oppositional voices reach wide audiences, the production of foreign policy narratives is still largely in the hands of the executive branch, as discussed in Tim Groeling and Matthew A. Baum. "The longest war story: Elite rhetoric, news coverage, and the war in Afghanistan," in *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion, and War: Winning domestic support for the Afghan War*, ed. Beatrice De Graaf, George Dimitru, and Jens Ringsmoose, 318-347 (New York: Routledge, 2015), 321.

³⁶ I do not mean to argue that the US and China have not fought other wars of words in previous time periods or that the election of President Trump marks the end of one. I simply desire to demarcate logical starting and end points for my analysis.

Section III: The American Pivot to Representational Force

In an increasingly strident manner over the course of his tenure, Obama's administration utilized representational force to detract from the Chinese government's self-identity. Presented as outside the international community, a violator of international law, a threat to its neighbors' self-determination, and a dangerous oppressor of its own people, China and its social reality were increasingly assailed by the American policy discourse. The Obama administration constructed an imagined coalition of American allies all concerned with Chinese power and growth that included Japan, Australia, Indonesia, India, the Philippines and other supporters of the current neoliberal global system. Portrayed as denying the global community's wishes, China appears as a member of a rogue out-group. In addition, China's ruling party was depicted as illegitimate. Targeting the CCP in its most sensitive area, its popular support, the Obama administration painted China as rejecting its people's innate democratic desires.

When first in office, Barack Obama's policies emphasized the economy but a change in foreign policy was seen as imperative given the harsh global and domestic reaction the Bush-era unilateralism received.³⁷ Hoping to capitalize on the improvement of the Sino-American bilateral relationship since 9/11, Obama reached out to the Chinese for rapprochement. In February of 2009, Secretary of State Clinton addressed the Asia Society in New York with words of encouragement, weaving a narrative of peaceful change.³⁸ Whereas once "Asia was frozen in a

³⁷ This trend is visible in Obama's 2009 address to Congress, most notably a desire for international multilateralism and an economic focus. Barack Obama, "Remarks of President Barack Obama—Address to Joint Session of Congress," Speech, Washington, D.C., Office of the Press Secretary (February 24, 2009) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-address-joint-session-congress>.

³⁸ Hillary Clinton, "Remarks at the Asia Society." Speech, New York, (February 13, 2009) <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2009a/02/117333.htm>

cold war, wracked by poverty, and seemingly destined for desolation” it was now a “contributor to global culture, a global economic power, and a region of vital importance to the United States.”³⁹ As a dominant theme throughout her speech, Clinton took care to directly address China and reassure it of America’s benign intentions. Instead of war, there would be peace: “Now, some believe that China on the rise is, by definition, an adversary. To the contrary, we believe that the United States and China can benefit from and contribute to each other’s successes.”⁴⁰ In a speech that November in Tokyo, Obama said a “zero-sum game” is not necessary and that the US is prepared to “welcome China’s effort to play a greater role on the world stage—a role in which their growing economy is joined by growing responsibility.”⁴¹ In 2009, America consistently presented China as a potential partner to its in-group that, despite differences, had a “right to choose their own path, and all countries should respect each other’s choice of a development model.”⁴² This opening narrative relied on attraction, avoiding representational force and detraction of China’s self-identity. That strategy, however, shifted towards representational force after the engagement strategy failed.

Spurred in large part by the breakdown of cooperation in the diplomatic realm, the administration’s discursive output began firmly portraying the Chinese as aberrant. As Christensen writes, the change in rhetoric matches a change on the ground with the failure of America’s initial policies, though “not necessarily the Obama team’s fault, however, because Chinese actions bear much of the blame.”⁴³ Chinese provocations in the South China Seas,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama at Suntory Hall,” Speech, Tokyo, Japan, Office of the Press Secretary (November 14, 2009) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-suntory-hall>

⁴² “U.S.-China Joint Statement,” Office of the Press Secretary, White House, (November 17, 2009) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-china-joint-statement>

⁴³ Thomas J. Christensen, “Obama and Asia: Confronting the China Challenge,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (2015): 28-36, 28.

reluctance to cooperate on Obama's climate change proposals, and outreach to North Korea in 2009 convinced the Obama administration that a more aggressive use of soft power became necessary to accomplish his policy goals. Christensen argues that Chinese insecurity at home and its confidence in its new power in the global realm prompted China to adopt more aggressive actions abroad.⁴⁴ With the two sides unwilling to compromise on policy, the Americans launched a representational force offensive in 2010 aimed at weakening Chinese legitimacy abroad and domestically. The war of words had begun.

Obama's State of the Union address of 2010 marks a clear change from the previous year's policies by emphasizing a renewed American competitiveness.⁴⁵ The 'pivot to Asia' strategic narrative aimed to detract from China and weaken its influence. Two key documents best represent America's 'pivot' narrative: Obama's speech to Australia's Parliament and Hillary Clinton's opinion piece in *Foreign Policy*. In these documents, America presents itself to the global community as its leader while China is labeled as behind the tide of history and its 'peaceful rise' as anything but peaceful. The implications were clear. To fit into America's world, China must adopt human rights-based values and listen to the people's demands for democracy. Should they not then they will not prosper and develop and certainly not fit into the American-led order. Through such language, American representational force aimed to weaken the Chinese self-identity and coerce it into accepting American policies in the region.

In line with America's goals, we see two key audiences for the American representational force efforts: the CCP and the East Asian international community. By detracting from the CCP

⁴⁴ Thomas J. Christensen, "The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing's Abrasive Diplomacy" *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (March/April 2011): 54-77, 59.

⁴⁵ Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address," Speech, Washington, DC, Office of the Press Secretary (January 27, 2010) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-state-union-address>. President Obama presents the US as the deserving leader of the global world order.

and the Chinese government, the US weakened the Chinese self-identity and denied Chinese claims to legitimacy, thereby making them more pliable to cooperation. As demonstrated by the firm emphasis on America's allies for much of the US pivot, Obama's administration also likely aimed to shore up the US image as a reliable partner and firm defender of the international system against threats from states like China. Whether the US intended for its message to reach a domestic Chinese audience is difficult to ascertain due to issues of access and translation within China. With that in mind, the main thrust of the American pivot appears aimed at the Chinese government and America's allies.

In Secretary Clinton's article, "America's Pacific Century," one witnesses the firm construction of America's identity as a "Pacific nation," a key claim that set up America's verbal offensive.⁴⁶ Clinton presented America as indispensable to the people of Asia: "Just as Asia is critical to America's future, an engaged America is vital to Asia's future. The region is eager for our leadership and our business," an implication that shushes China's claim to leadership.⁴⁷ Like Clinton's article, Obama's speech to the Australian parliament argues that America is a Pacific nation.⁴⁸ This move cemented the idea of America as leading the Pacific in-group. Obama depicted his new policy as reflecting a "fundamental truth:" "The United States has been, and always will be, a Pacific nation...[:] generations of Americans have served here, and died here—so democracies could take root; so economic miracles could lift hundreds of millions to prosperity. Americans have bled with you for this progress, and we will not allow it—we will

⁴⁶ Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century: The Future of Geopolitics Will Be Decided in Asia, Not In Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States Should Be Right at the Center of the Action." *Foreign Policy*, no. 189 (November 2011): 56-63, 57-58.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 58.

⁴⁸ Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament." Speech. Canberra, Australia. Office of the Press Secretary (November 17, 2011) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>

never allow it to be reversed.⁴⁹ The shared history of the region binds it to America, a shared history that is highlighted by blood sacrifice. America is thus depicted as responsible for any “Asian miracle” that has taken place since the end of World War II. If history is the requirement for Pacificness, then the US presents itself as having paid a hefty and worthy price for inclusion. From a representational force standpoint, depicting the US as the leader lends more legitimacy to American detraction of China.

Its position as the leading Pacific nation defined, the US verbal offensive moved against the CCP’s self-identity. It began by portraying Chinese success as the product of *America’s* system: “Like so many other countries before it, China has prospered as part of the open and rules-based system that the United States helped to build and works to sustain.”⁵⁰ Although portrayed as an “emerging partner,” America implied that China needs to join the US and its in-group because China benefited from the American system and thus owes a debt to the current order. In its construction of China, American representational force aimed to convince the global audience, and perhaps China’s domestic population, that China is the lesser power, the less advanced, and ultimately the wayward nation in need of “stewardship.”

In an additional chastisement, America promptly outlined the dangers of China’s rise: its military buildup, its failure to reform into a fully democratic nation, and its human rights record. Clinton’s article hit those ideas home by claiming that China is the aggressor in the Pacific and that its military buildup is the threatening one. Continuing to paint America as the parent and China as the petulant child, Clinton urged China to “overcome its reluctance” and to begin a dialogue to end the Chinese transgressions in “sensitive issues like maritime security and

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” 59.

cybersecurity.”⁵¹ In a final blow, the US construction isolated China: “The United States and the international community have watched China’s efforts to modernize and expand its military, and we have sought clarity as to its intentions.”⁵² The article painted China as operating outside of international norms, an area that America stands up for: “When we see reports of public-interest lawyers, writers, artists, and others who are detained or disappeared, the United States speaks up, both publicly and privately, with our concerns about human rights.”⁵³ It was China that is in the wrong. The American conception of what constitutes human rights is claimed as the correct one and, subsequently, Clinton argued China needs to change to fit into the global system America leads. In typical representational force fashion, the implicit outcome of a failure to conform is presented as dangerous to the Chinese self-identity: “Without [reforms], China is placing unnecessary limitations on its own development.”⁵⁴ The danger to the success of China’s development constitutes the key threat in American representational force: the CCP is depicted as heading towards failure and therefore should conform to American policy.

Obama’s speech in Australia developed the administration’s chief criticism of China during the verbal offensive. Obama directly addressed what he argued are the reasons for China’s waywardness: its form of government and its view of human rights. In line with Clinton’s arguments that a peaceful and cooperative relationship are possible, Obama highlighted the possibilities of a positive relationship whilst frankly outlining sources of disagreement: “The universal human rights of the Chinese people.”⁵⁵ As he highlighted in a later section, America presents its values as universal:

⁵¹ Ibid, 60.

⁵² Ibid, 59.

⁵³ Ibid, 60.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 60.

⁵⁵ Obama, “Remarks to the Australian Parliament.”

These are not American rights, or Australian rights, or Western rights. These are human rights. They stir in every soul, as we've seen in the democracies that have succeeded here in Asia. Other models have been tried and they have failed -- fascism and communism, rule by one man and rule by committee. And they failed for the same simple reason: They ignore the ultimate source of power and legitimacy -- the will of the people.⁵⁶

The American narrative proclaimed China is increasingly out of touch with the reality of human governance. As the “pivot” gained ground, America increasingly portrayed itself as the defender of global norms and Western values with China’s government of “communism and committees” ignoring the “will of the people.”⁵⁷ This portrayal delegitimized the CCP domestically and abroad in order to coerce them into the American system, an offensive likely aimed at the CCP itself and the Asian international community.

Despite targeting the same audiences for the majority of the war of words, the Obama administration’s representational force ramped up further in 2014 as a response to a renewed Chinese defensive effort, the details of which I explore in the next section. Expanding beyond human rights, Obama’s speech at the US Military Academy broadened his assault with the argument that China is out of touch with international norms and laws: “In the Asia Pacific, we’re supporting Southeast Asian nations as they negotiate a code of conduct with China on maritime disputes in the South China Sea. And we’re working to resolve these disputes through international law.”⁵⁸ By framing the problem as one of international law versus China, Obama

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ For more examples of a demarcation of in-group and out-group with an exclusion of China and its threat to said group, see Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan at Hiroshima Peace Memorial,” Speech, Hiroshima, Japan. Office of the Press Secretary (May 27, 2016) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/27/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan-hiroshima-peace>; Barack Obama, “President Obama: The TPP would let America, not China, lead the way on global trade,” *The Washington Post* (May 2, 2016) https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-obama-the-tpp-would-let-america-not-china-lead-the-way-on-global-trade/2016/05/02/680540e4-0fd0-11e6-93ae-50921721165d_story.html?utm_term=.a88c42132dbf; Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the United Nations General Assembly,” Speech, New York, New York, Office of the Press Secretary (September 28, 2015) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/28/remarks-president-obama-united-nations-general-assembly>

⁵⁸ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony,” Speech, West Point, New York, Office of the Press Secretary (May 28, 2014) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony>

singles out the Chinese as rogue, a position no country wishes to be in.

Building on the notion that China is out of touch with reality, America's representational force worked to build a feeling of isolation in China. In order to weaken the CCP's self-identity, American detraction weakened the legitimacy of the Communist government through explicit constructions of in-group and rogue out-group. In several joint statements issued in conjunction with American allies, the US presented China as outside its family of nations. The US-India Joint Strategic Vision argued that India is now a responsible power concerned with security "in the South China Sea" and one that will "call on all parties to avoid the threat or use of force and pursue resolution of territorial and maritime disputes through all peaceful means," a direct shot at China.⁵⁹ In a joint speech with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, Obama claimed Japan "will take on greater roles and responsibilities in the Asia Pacific and around the world." Following this construction, Obama once more painted China as increasingly out of line: "I want to reiterate that our treaty commitment to Japan's security is absolute... We share a concern about China's land reclamation and construction activities in the South China Sea, and the United States and Japan are united in our commitment to freedom of navigation, respect for international law, and the peaceful resolution of disputes without coercion."⁶⁰ The in-group of nations, consisting of virtually every Pacific power but China, is emphasized as in accord with America's thinking on international order and is further reinforced through a construction of a shared history centering on the Second World War.⁶¹ The Sino-US alliance against Japan went unmentioned.

⁵⁹ "U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region." Office of the Press Secretary (January 25, 2015) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-strategic-vision-asia-pacific-and-indian-ocean-region>

⁶⁰ Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan in Joint Press Conference," Speech, Washington, D.C., Office of the Press Secretary (April 28, 2015) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/28/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan-joint-press-confere>

⁶¹ Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to Filipino and U.S. Armed Forces at Fort Bonifacio," Speech, Manila, Philippines, Office of the Press Secretary (April 28, 2014) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/28/remarks-president-obama-filipino-and-us-armed-forces-fort-bonifacio>.

The onus of change in this narrative falls upon the CCP and not the US. In order to maintain its legitimacy as a “responsible actor” and an in-group country, China has to become an in-group nation: “[America] does not benefit from a relationship with China or any other country in which we put our values and our ideals aside.”⁶² The Chinese must enter the in-group as others have:

There are times where when we speak out on these issues we are told that democracy is just a Western value. I fundamentally disagree with that. Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, they have built thriving democracies. Filipinos showed us the strength of People Power. Indonesians just voted in a historic election. I just came from Burma; this is a place that for 40 years was under the grip of a military junta, one of the most closed and oppressive nations on Earth. And there, I was inspired by citizens and civil society and parliamentarians who are now working to sustain a transition to a democratic future.⁶³

The inclusion of Taiwan was a particularly harsh blow to the Chinese self-identity. The American narrative implicitly argues that, if Taiwan can do democracy, then China can as well. By including many countries once seen as dictatorships similar to China, Obama emphasized that China remains obstinately backward. Surely a stronger attack on the CCP’s self-identity would be difficult to articulate.⁶⁴

The climax of this offensive strategic narrative hit China’s core identity with Obama’s criticism of China’s developing status. China’s narrative emphasizes its developing status and Obama, in his joint statement with President Xi Jinping in 2015, refutes China’s defense of its inward focus: “We can’t treat China as if it’s still a very poor, developing country, as it might have been 50 years ago. It is now a powerhouse. And that means it’s got responsibilities and expectations in terms of helping to uphold international rules that might not have existed

⁶² Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama at the University of Queensland,” Speech, Brisbane, Australia, Office of the Press Secretary (November 15, 2014) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/15/remarks-president-obama-university-queensland>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ The issue with American representational force when it assaults a Chinese domestic audience, however, is its use of English. Whereas the Chinese are careful to provide their own translations through their official news media outlets, the Americans do not translate their narrative into Chinese for a domestic Chinese audience.

before.”⁶⁵ Obama claimed that China should behave like the in-group and accept the responsibilities associated with membership. Along with refutation of China’s role, the US belittled Chinese leadership: “When it comes to every important international issue, people of the world do not look to Beijing or Moscow to lead—they call us.”⁶⁶ To compound this argument, Obama highlighted the weaknesses of Chinese power in comparison to the United States: “In today’s world, we’re threatened less by evil empires and more by failing states...Economic headwinds are blowing in from a Chinese economy that is in significant transition.”⁶⁷ By hitting Chinese economics, Obama directly undermines the chief source of Communist Party legitimacy, its perceived economic strength.⁶⁸ With his previous assaults on Chinese governmental stability, Obama challenged China by criticizing their development and claim to economic leadership.

Most interestingly, *Atlantic Monthly*’s interview with President Obama displays a cognizance on the part of the American government as to its coercive use of soft power.⁶⁹ The fullest articulation of his representation of China is best summarized by his statements in that interview:

I do believe that the relationship between the US and China is going to be the most critical...if we get that right and China continues on a peaceful rise, then we have a partner that is growing in capability and sharing with us the burdens and responsibilities of maintaining an international order. If China fails; if it is not able to maintain a trajectory that satisfies its population and has to resort to nationalism as an organizing

⁶⁵ Obama qtd. Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People’s Republic of China in Joint Press Conference,” Speech, Washington D.C., Office of the Press Secretary (September 25, 2015) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/25/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-joint>

⁶⁶ Barack Obama, “Remarks of President Barack Obama—State of the Union Address As Delivered,” Speech, Washington, D.C, Office of the Press Secretary (January 13, 2016) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/01/12/remarks-president-barack-obama-%E2%80%93-prepared-delivery-state-union-address>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Economic growth has been presented as the chief source of CCP stability in Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004).

⁶⁹ As already mentioned in the literature review, IR scholarship discusses the acknowledgement of soft power’s importance by state actors such as China. This interview however, provides evidence that America’s strategic narrative aimed to coerce China into accepting US interests.

principle; if it feels so overwhelmed that it never takes on the responsibilities of a country its size in maintaining the international order; if it views the world only in terms of regional spheres of influence—then not only do we see the potential for conflict with China, but we will find ourselves having more difficulty dealing with these other challenges that are going to come.⁷⁰

As this interview shows, Obama openly viewed his words and policies as having an effect on Chinese willingness to accept the primacy of American interests and current international system.

As articulated in the above analysis, the Obama administration's representational force can be divided into two strategic narrative offenses. First, "the pivot to Asia" constructed America as the leader of the Pacific nations and argued that democracy and the current international order are responsible for the economic prosperity of the region. China was portrayed as a threat to the American-led international system and a fundamental challenge to the idea of western liberalism that must be converted into believer. The final offensive came after vigorous Chinese efforts to assert America's lack of Pacificness, success, and leadership. Obama's 2014-16 rhetoric responded to China by delegitimizing the CCP on both the domestic and international levels in order to rhetorically coerce them into cooperating with the Obama administration's policies. Constructed as an out-group nation, a threat to the international system, and oppressive of its own people, China's government's self-identity was attacked and undermined by US representational force. In terms of success, however, American representational force was relatively unsophisticated and perhaps ineffective in comparison to the complex Chinese response under President Xi Jinping.

Section IV: The Nuance and Complexity of China's Representational Force Strategy

⁷⁰ Barack Obama qtd. Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine." *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 2016) <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>

As the historical hegemon of Asia, Chinese thought on international relations aims to carve its own path as a nation separate from Western ideologies and pathways of development.⁷¹ During the Maoist Era, Chinese strategy adopted realpolitik as best exemplified by the restraint Mao displayed when challenged by the vastly superior United States.⁷² Xi Jinping's depiction of the Chinese self-identity maintains those basic foundations of Chinese foreign policy with a more aggressive tilt. Chinese representational force reflected that aggression and constituted an opening defensive move followed by a concerted riposte and a culminating counter-attack to the US pivot.

Like the American strategy China's took several years to escalate. Chinese representational force only developed beyond defense into riposte and offense in 2012 with President Xi Jinping's rise to power. In 2009 when Obama's tenure as the American president began, President Hu Jintao governed China. Noted for his relatively inward and technocratic leadership, President Hu primarily focused on domestic prosperity and economic growth.⁷³ Hu Jintao's government recognized the importance of soft power but mainly focused on developing the cultural attraction aspect of it.⁷⁴ Aiming to equalize the balance of power with the US, China worked to lessen America's perceived predominance of power.⁷⁵ Under Hu, the Chinese therefore attempted to increase their attractive soft power without detracting from the US.

⁷¹ Nele Noesselt, "Mapping the world from a Chinese perspective? The debate on constructing an IR theory with Chinese characteristics," in *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations* ed. Yongjin Zhang and Teng-chi Chang, 98-112 (New York: Routledge, 2016), 109.

⁷² Alastair Iain Johnston, "Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China," in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein, 216-268 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 258.

⁷³ Kerry Brown, "Hu Jintao's Legacy," *Foreign Policy* (November 8, 2012) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/11/08/hu-jintaos-legacy/>

⁷⁴ Zhang, "China's cultural future: from soft power to comprehensive national power," 383-402.

⁷⁵ Zhang Baohui, "Chinese Foreign Policy in Transition: Trends and Implications," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 39, no. 2 (2010): 39-68, 44.

Compared to President Xi Jinping's representational force, Hu Jintao's rhetoric did not constitute a strong exertion of coercive representational force and therefore did not display the competitive attempt at detraction one would see in a war of words.

As president, Xi Jinping wields a level of personal power unseen since the days of Mao Zedong. In terms of rhetoric, "Xi and his conservative colleagues are turning more and more to nationalism.... 'Xi Jinping has raised the Chinese Dream slogan and bolstered China's position on the world stage.'"⁷⁶ Before the current administration, the Communist Party utilized collective leadership to avoid the excesses of the Maoist era.⁷⁷ But, as Alice Miller argues Xi is now presented as a major reformer who wields a greater share of institutional power than Hu.⁷⁸ In line with his growth in power, Xi enacted a more nationalistic Chinese foreign policy, especially in the South China Seas.⁷⁹ With this change, a concerted Chinese coercive representational force began to emerge in 2012.

With the US moving first, the newly appointed President Xi responded quickly with a defensive move. In many ways, Xi Jinping's response is far more complex than America's: China's narrative sows doubt about the American role in the system without explicitly mentioning the US and thereby feeling the full force of American soft power.⁸⁰ Chinese discursive acts construct China as a benevolent power improving the livelihoods of its own people and furthering developing-nations' concerns. In a riposte to US claims that the current

⁷⁶ Willy Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping: Renaissance, Reform, or Retrogression* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 35.

⁷⁷ Hu Angang, *China's Collective Leadership System* (Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, 2013)

⁷⁸ Alice Miller. "How Strong is Xi Jinping," *China Leadership Monitor*, 2014.
<http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm43am.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Robert D. Blackwell and Kurt M. Campbell, "Xi Jinping on the Global Stage," *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council Special Report No. 74 (February 2016) <http://www.cfr.org/china/xi-jinping-global-stage/p37569>

⁸⁰ American soft power's predominance leads me to suggest that a direct criticism of the US is only available to certain nations in certain contexts, such as Iran or North Korea. For China to call out America would only lend support to the American narrative that China is a rogue state.

world system is responsible for global security, China then portrays the current system as vital to stability and peaceful development of all nations but manipulates the American narrative by rejecting America's claim to leadership.⁸¹

As the war of words continued, China redrew global community boundaries into developed and developing groups while depicting itself as a developing nation that rejects foreign interference in its own and others' affairs. Xi highlights a shared history as the key marker of positive relations with other nations and a commitment to sovereignty as vital. Furthermore, the importance of win-win partnerships and appeals to mutual respect and cooperation, points to a Chinese effort to redefine themselves as a vital member of the global community. By fighting the American construction of China as a devalued out-group member, China's riposte aimed to reconstruct the global community to include themselves not as an aspiring hegemon but as an equal and important member. Primarily shoring up its own self-identity against American discursive constructions, President Xi's narrative appeared defensive at first but gradually morphed into a riposte that reframed the American narrative's support of the current system as correct but needing a new, development-focused leader, a strategy that culminated in an offensive against America's international role during 2015.

Xi's opening defensive move finds its initial and most succinct expression in his first speech as the leader of China following the conclusion of the 18th Party Congress.⁸² As the opening remarks to his entire tenure, President Xi outlined his construction of China and his preferred understanding of the world situation. His constructions are defensive against American

⁸¹ Thus, the Chinese representational force strategy can be understood to encompass all three archetypal responses available to an actor. Defense->Riposte->Offense.

⁸² Xi Jinping, "Xi Jinping's speech at the unveiling of the new Chinese leadership," Speech, Beijing, China, *South China Morning Post* (November 15, 2012) <http://www.scmp.com/news/18th-party-congress/article/1083153/transcript-xi-jinpings-speech-unveiling-new-chinese>

representational force and shore up the Communist government's sense of self-identity, chiefly through remarks on the endurance of the Chinese people, the intimate ties between Party and population, and China's long history. In the context of the Sino-American war of words, Xi's move raised a metaphorical shield to defend the Communist Party's self-identity and reassure its people.

In the speech, Xi quickly references a shared anti-colonial struggle to build a connection between China's people and its ruling "patriots:" "In modern times, China endured untold hardships and sufferings, and its very survival hung in the balance. Countless Chinese patriots rose up one after another and fought for the renewal of the Chinese nation, but all ended in failure."⁸³ The connection of the eventual triumph of the Chinese people to the Party is asserted strongly and claimed as vital to the prosperity and economic success of modern China. Xi presents the ruling leadership as responsible for the victories of China over its tumultuous past: "Since its founding, the Communist Party of China has made great sacrifices and forged ahead against all odds. It has rallied and led the Chinese people in transforming the poor and backward old China into an increasingly prosperous and powerful new China, thus opening a completely new horizon for the great renewal of the Chinese nation."⁸⁴

Once Xi established the importance of the Party to China, he moved to assert the importance of China to the world, perhaps as a response to American attempts to undermine China by associating it with out-group nations. Directly referencing the "family of nations," Xi's speech highlights his planned efforts to further the "great renewal of the Chinese nation, make the Chinese nation stand rock-firm in the family of nations, and make even greater contribution

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

to mankind.”⁸⁵ The implications behind the choice of “family of nations” and “great renewal” supports an interpretation that China intended to defend its position against aggressive American representational force. Not a member of the out-group, China instead is a vital member of the international community with a global role. The narrative of the ‘great renewal’ appears to justify China’s important role in the global family that, despite limitations during the period of foreign domination, is now legitimately restored. As a final conclusion to his defense, Xi motions for the world and China to deepen their ties: “Just as China needs to learn more about the world, so does the world need to learn more about China. I hope that you will continue your efforts to deepen mutual understanding between China and the world.”⁸⁶ The message of Xi’s speech is clear: China has returned to once again to take a leading place in the family of nations.

Though an opening salvo asserting the Chinese self-identity as a vital and respectful member of the international family of nations, this speech lacks any overt references to the US, yet its direct response to American criticisms appears to be a concerted effort to counter Obama’s construction of China as an out-group country. Thus, I qualify Xi’s opening salvo as defensive in nature. Given the preponderance of American soft power, perhaps the Chinese government did not feel a strategy aimed at deconstructing the American self-identity was a feasible goal until later. In terms of audience, given that his speech primarily discusses the domestic situation, Xi aimed to convince the Chinese people of the CCP’s importance to them to counter American detraction. Instead of undermining the American self-identity, Xi moved to defend China’s with a concerted defensive representational force strategy aimed at answering and defeating the Obama administration’s constructions.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

In a defense that transformed into a riposte more directed towards an international audience, President Xi in two 2013 speeches countered the hegemonic American narratives on the supposed lack of Chinese participation in world affairs as a responsible stakeholder and that nations on China's periphery are American allies by nature. Xi addressed the Asian business community at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference and the APEC CEO Summit, two gatherings of important movers and shakers in the Asia-Pacific. What makes this narrative a riposte is its manipulation of American tropes through its description of the global system as a positive force. This riposte is most clear when examining the Chinese additions to the claim that the global system is benevolent. Three themes dominate the narrative: China's identity as a developing nation, its role as a global stakeholder, and a provider of Asian prosperity and security. By arguing for these three "truths," China intends to manipulate the American narrative by agreeing that the international system is positive but arguing that America's claims about the groups within the global community and the role of China within those groups are false. China's corrections aim to rhetorically reorient the hegemonic understanding of community membership, leadership, and the role of development in the international system.

President Xi wove a narrative of Asian development and growth in his opening remarks. Starting with a brief acknowledgement of Asian successes, Xi placed China firmly in the community of the developing nations of Asia and urged the participants to join Chinese efforts to pursue regional prosperity. In fact the title of the forum is most telling: "Asia Seeking Development for All: Restructuring, Responsibility and Cooperation."⁸⁷ In regards to

⁸⁷ Xi Jinping, "Remarks at opening plenary of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2013," Speech, Hainan Province, China, *Xinhua*. (April 10, 2013) http://www.china.org.cn/business/Boao_Forum_2013/2013-04/10/content_28501562.htm

development, Xi seemingly met US criticisms of Chinese governmental and economic systems by implying that China could serve as a new model for growth and prosperity in Asia:

Mankind has only one earth, and it is home to all countries. Common development, which is the very foundation of sustainable development, serves the long-term and fundamental interests of all the people in the world. As members of the same global village, we should foster a sense of community of common destiny, follow the trend of the times, keep to the right direction, stick together in time of difficulty and ensure that development in Asia and the rest of the world reaches new highs.⁸⁸

Xi disputes the American separation of democratic, international law-abiding in-group nations from deviant out-group and replaces it with something new. Speaking as a developing nation, China insisted that prosperity and growth remain vital to the global community. Xi implicitly targeted US claims of dominance by criticizing its neoliberal development model.

In his mind, the Western preference for democracy before development is no longer realistic and perhaps even detrimental. Xi made the claim that, although many nations found success with old models of liberal governance and economics, the developing nations should recognize that the global system has changed, a trope that permeates his speech:

Nothing in the world remains constant, and as a Chinese saying goes, a wise man changes as time and event change. We should abandon the outdated mindset, break away from the old confines that fetter development and unleash all the potential for development... We should steadily advance the reform of the international economic and financial systems, improve global governance mechanisms and provide support to sound and stable global economic growth. Asia, with its long-standing capacity for adjusting to change, should ride on the waves of the times and make changes in Asia and global development [that] reinforce and benefit each other.⁸⁹

By indicating that China and the other Asian nations should lead the way towards adopting a new system for development, Xi can only have meant one thing: steer a new path for the developing nations away from the old Western (American)-old ways. This riposte narrative implied that the

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Western Consensus does not adequately meet the needs of developing nations and thus should be subtly altered.

China's 'Asianess' was most heavily pressed in Xi's APEC CEO Summit speech that firmly tied China to Asia and the Pacific. Addressing the region's business community, President Xi presented China as a good partner and friendly neighbor with which the developing countries of the region should unite: "China hopes to join hands and be in one mind with Asia-Pacific partners to jointly build a better Asia-Pacific that will guide the world and benefit all parties and the offspring."⁹⁰ As a community, the Asian nations need to stay together and move as one. In his most stark terms yet on this theme, Xi argued that "China cannot develop without the Asia-Pacific and the Asia-Pacific cannot develop without China."⁹¹ Given his emphasis on the developing nature of Asia, there is little doubt that America and Japan do not fit into Xi's construction of the Asia-Pacific region. The demarcation of developed and developing grows ever sharper throughout the narrative.

Beyond Asia and, as a rebuttal to American characterizations of China as ignorant of its important role in global stability, Xi identified China as "an important member" of the Asian global "family." Xi attempted to manipulate America's strategic narrative by echoing its call for the continuance of existing institutions but with new developing (i.e. Chinese) leadership. To establish China's presence and acceptance of the system, Xi described how "China cannot develop itself in isolation from the rest of Asia and the world."⁹² Not selfish, as in Obama's characterization, China is presented as a cooperative stakeholder and friendly neighbor:

⁹⁰ Xi Jinping, "Having Full Confidence in China's Economic Development Prospects to Build a Better Asia-Pacific That Will Guide the World and Benefit All Parties and Offspring," Speech, Bali, Indonesia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (October 9, 2013)
http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfwynmlxycx21apec_665682/t1087044.shtm

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Xi, "Remarks at opening plenary of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2013."

Promoting good neighborliness is a time-honored tradition of China. To enhance peaceful development and win-win cooperation in Asia and the world is a race that has one starting point after another and knows no finishing line. We in China are ready to join hands with friends from across the world in a concerted effort to create a bright future for both Asia and the world and bring benefit to the Asian people and the people around the world.⁹³

By the end of 2013, China is fully constructed as a developing nation and an important leader of that group, especially in Asia, and the family of nations at large. In opposition to American claims, China argued that it embraces global challenges and improves the livelihoods of all peoples everywhere as a responsible great power. China does not ignore the needs of the world, nor is it an aberrant member of an illegitimate out-group. More sharply, it rejects the Western in-group and non-Western out-group categories associated with the passing global order as “outdated” and replaces them with a wider group of developing countries and, more specifically, the Asia-Pacific. The US, although seldom explicitly present in these speeches, nevertheless is notable by its absence. By issuing an effective riposte, China presented itself as a primary sponsor of the global order and offers up new developing and Asian communities. With its identity as an Asian state firmly inscribed, Chinese rhetoric in this period asserted a theme omnipresent in Chinese foreign policy discourse: the importance of its sovereignty and its great renewal.

Returning to a global focus, Xi’s 2014-15 rhetoric shifted the focus of Chinese representational force from riposting the American into launching its own offensive. In a flurry of public appearances in 2015, Xi most clearly articulated his views on the US-China relationship. The US-China joint statement, along with his speech to the UN and to the National Committee on US-China Relations, built a narrative aimed at the global community through a call for a new model altogether. In his own words, the “new model” involves a China that is

⁹³ Ibid.

“firmly committed to the path of peaceful development.”⁹⁴ The Chinese will not attempt to upend the global system nor attempt to gain regional hegemony. Instead, the Chinese intend to uphold the current system as a leader. At the UN, Xi urged all countries to “renew our commitment to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, build a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation, and create a community of shared future for mankind.”⁹⁵ In a counter to Obama’s presentation of China as outside or opposed to the current international order, Xi heralded the great strides that the United Nations and its institutions have made. In fact, President Xi highlighted Chinese participation as one of the builders of said system:

China is the current international system’s builder, contributor, and developer, and participant, and also beneficiary. We are willing to work with all other countries to firmly defend the fruits of victory of the Second World War, and the existing international system...and at the same time, promote them to developing a more just and equitable direction.⁹⁶

These norms, however, are presented differently than how the United States normally argues.

One can contrast the Chinese focus on sovereignty in the UN to the American focus on a liberal world order of democracies. Although subtle, the difference lies with the universality of norms: America promises to extend its normative understanding to the domestic scene of foreign countries while China promises to defend the right of governmental self-determination in the international order.

⁹⁴ Xi Jinping qtd. Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People’s Republic of China in Joint Press Conference,” Speech, Washington D.C., Office of the Press Secretary. (September 25, 2015) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/25/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-joint>

⁹⁵ Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind,” Speech, New York, New York, Gadebate.un.org (September 28, 2015) https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/70/70_ZH_en.pdf

⁹⁶ Xi Jinping qtd. Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People’s Republic of China in Joint Press Conference.”

Sovereignty is the key element of these norms: “The principle of sovereign equality underpins the UN Charter...The principle of sovereignty not only means that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries are inviolable and their internal affairs are not subjected to interference. It also means that all countries’ right to independently choose social systems and development paths should be upheld.”⁹⁷ In essence, China rejected the US notion that Western human rights should spread across the globe to all countries and puts forth the thesis that each nation should decide for itself which path to take. American claims of universal values and the aberrant state of Chinese governance are firmly rejected. In this way, Xi portrayed America as an overly interventionist and domineering norm violator and then places them outside the family of self-determining nations. Thus, riposte becomes offense.

One of the principal tropes that Xi’s riposte relies upon is that the claim of membership in the international community hinges on a shared history. America talks about World War II as ushering in a new world. China, in a similar manner, constantly referred to its role in the war as the primary credential for its authorship of the current system. In the UN speech, Xi highlights the “World Anti-Fascist War.”⁹⁸ The laurels of victory, however, lie with the Chinese who fighting “as the main theater in the East, China made a national sacrifice of over 35 million casualties in the fight against the majority troops of Japanese militarism.”⁹⁹ American participation in the war and its help to the Communist forces after the Yan’an mission¹⁰⁰ is

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind.”

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ For an in-depth exploration of an overlooked but vital aspect of CCP-American cooperation, see Richard Bernstein, *China 1945: Mao’s Revolution and America’s Fateful Choice* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014) In his excellent exploration of the strategic choice the US faced in WWII between the Kuomintang and the nascent Chinese Communists, Bernstein rehashes the argument that the US could have avoided the early Cold War competition with the People’s Republic if it had more fully thrown its weight behind Mao but firmly rejects that line of thinking by exploring the underlying Chinese desires to avoid American post-war dominance.

ignored beyond a cursory nod in Xi's speech to the National Committee on U.S. China Relations: "China and the United States, as allies in World War II, fought shoulder-to-shoulder to defend world peace and justice."¹⁰¹ While acknowledging the American alliance, Xi moved to ensure China is remembered as the key participant in the conflict. Chinese representational force thus intends to weaken America's claim to primary leadership of the post-war world order.

At the National Committee speech, President Xi emphasized the anniversary of the end of World War II as a reminder of the necessity to oppose hegemony: "China's defense policy is defensive in nature and its military strategy features active defense. Let me reiterate here that no matter how developed it could become, China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion."¹⁰² Thus, Xi moves to fight against US claims that China aims to expand or threaten the rule of law in the Pacific region. In these speeches, Xi parried the main American criticisms of China on cyber warfare, military buildup, and rule of law. In regards to cyber security, an area Obama often emphasized as a threat, Xi claimed that China and the US must "both" improve, thus reframing the conflict as equally American in origin as it is Chinese.¹⁰³ Then, Xi refuted American claims of Chinese cyber violations by claiming that "China is a staunch defender of cybersecurity. It is also a victim of hacking."¹⁰⁴ Through equal victimhood, President Xi denied US claims and subtly casts doubts upon America's construction of itself. When it comes to military buildup, Xi emphasizes that "peaceful development is the right path"¹⁰⁵ and that "[both the US and China] have truly affirmed the new progress made in the confidence-building

¹⁰¹ Xi Jinping, "Remarks at the National Committee Dinner," Speech, Seattle, Washington, *Xinhua* (September 24, 2015) http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/24/c_134653326.htm

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Xi Jinping qtd. Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People's Republic of China in Joint Press Conference."

¹⁰⁴ Xi Jinping, "Remarks at the National Committee Dinner." Speech. Seattle, Washington. *Xinhua*. September 24, 2015.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

mechanisms between the two militaries.”¹⁰⁶ The implication being that Chinese military moves are not cause for worry. By tying the US into the conversation on responsible military cooperation, the Chinese put equal onus on the Americans to maintain a peaceful relationship, a rhetorical tactic I interpret as offensive.

Ultimately, the thrust of Chinese self-identity and other constructions in the three speeches relies primarily upon a rejection of the Thucydides Trap. Although US policymakers do not mention the Realist construction by name, Xi Jinping at the National Committee on U.S. China Relations, directly addresses the fears of the necessity of a Sino-American war:¹⁰⁷ “There is no such thing as the so-called Thucydides trap in the world. But should major countries time and again make the mistakes of strategic miscalculation, they might create such traps for themselves,” a clear warning for the US.¹⁰⁸ Given his presence at an American organization, Xi’s audience is clearly American. Chinese representational force at that juncture appeared offensive and intended to force the onus of threat to peace onto the Americans.

Despite his claims of Chinese involvement and support of the current system, President Xi aimed to temper expectations in an expertly crafted strategy to deny US attempts at forging an in-group and out-group dichotomy. Instead, Xi proposed a different framework in which China is the largest developing nation. In his speech to the UN, Xi most clearly outlined his thinking on China’s place in the world:

China was the first country to put its signature on the UN Charter. We will continue to uphold the international order and system underpinned by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. China will continue to stand together with other developing countries.

¹⁰⁶ Xi Jinping qtd. Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People’s Republic of China in Joint Press Conference.”

¹⁰⁷ The two English translations of this speech, one from the an official mouthpiece of the CCP, *Xinhua*, and the other from the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations are virtually the same apart from the omission of the Thucydides Trap mention in the latter. I rely upon the *Xinhua* translation because it represents the official Chinese English presentation, the version that the Chinese would likely aim towards the English speaking American audience.

¹⁰⁸ Xi Jinping, “Remarks at the National Committee Dinner.”

We firmly support greater representation and say of developing countries, especially African countries, in the international governance system. China's vote in the United Nations will always belong to the developing countries.¹⁰⁹

Just like the US, China is a founding member of the current system and believes that system is the key for modern success but, perhaps most importantly, is still a developing nation. As evidenced by his references in previous speeches to the failures of the old economic consensus, Xi sought to place China at the head of the developing nations.

Chinese representational force under Xi Jinping began as a move that started defensively by parrying American discourse but then grew into a riposte aimed at appropriating the US narrative for itself and finally ending with a condemnation of America as a violator of norms and a threat to the global order that China helped build. As a complex set of moves, China's representational force appears sophisticated and subtle; it refrained from mentioning the US unless necessary and is more fully aware of its audience.¹¹⁰ Whether the Chinese strategy is successful is up for debate. Overly aggressive rhetorical attacks can seem heavy-handed and propagandistic. By nuancing one's representational force an actor can better tailor their narrative to its desired audiences. Perhaps an authoritarian state like China and its firm control over the media is naturally more capable of controlling a strategic narrative and thus representational force. Additionally, Chinese leaders are acutely aware of their soft power deficiencies and have acted accordingly to craft a strategy aimed at improving their capabilities.¹¹¹ The United States and its norms, perhaps due to their hegemonic position, are more difficult to adapt to changing

¹⁰⁹ Xi Jinping, "Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind."

¹¹⁰ The fact that China provides its own English translations indicates that China's intended audience is the international community. The US does not provide Chinese translations of its speeches and thus does not seem to target the domestic Chinese community in a precise manner.

¹¹¹ Stig Stenslie, and Chen Gang, "Xi Jinping's Grand Strategy: From Vision to Implementation," in *China in the Era of Xi Jinping*, edited by Robert S Ross and Jo Inge Bekkevold, 117-136 (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 127.

times. Everyone knows and anticipates the American narrative before it is even issued, thus giving oppositional narratives a greater range of variability and maneuver.

Section V: The War of Words' Window into Discursive Hegemony and the US-China

Relationship

An analysis of American and Chinese public diplomacy shows that the two countries used representational force to wage a war of words. This case confirms Mattern's claim that soft power is more than simply attraction, as well as Szostek's initial exploration of its use as state policy. Soft power attraction always involves representational force that can be utilized by an actor as a belligerent policy aimed at preserving one's own self-identity and its attraction while also detracting from the other's. If successful, this forces an opposing actor to alter its behavior and perhaps gather sympathy and support from the audience. Despite identifying a war of words as crucial, my contribution beyond Szostek, Mattern, and others is to analyze the composition and response chain within a representational force conflict and thereby construct a theoretical framework that describes and organizes this war of words.

On the conceptual level representational force can be viewed as the utilization of the coercive or detractive aspect of soft power. The war of words theory formulates a framework for identifying how representational force is used in an international relationship where multiple actors respond to each other's narratives in an evolving manner. Given the centrality of identity and its well proven effects on behavior in international relations, an attempt by a foreign or opposing actor to weaken your own position necessitates a response. Whether the attacked actor defends, ripostes, or launches a separate offensive, the two parties engage in a war of words

fought with soft power. The presence of a coincident hard power war is a different issue altogether but the basic structure of the war of words should remain the same in such a case.

In relation to the US-China relationship, my findings illuminate an important area of competition in the contemporary era. From 2009 to 2016, the US and China fought a war of words with representational force. When the Obama administration's initial outreach to the People's Republic was rebuffed, the Americans launched a systematic assault on the Chinese self-identity to match their material "pivot to Asia." Drawing lines around the in-group of American allied Western-style democracies and out-group rogue nations, Obama's rhetoric worked to isolate the Chinese self-identity in the hopes of forcing it to feel alone and pitted against the tide of history. As part of the verbal assault, the United States also worked to divide the CCP government from the Chinese people by claiming that the Chinese Communists were unwilling and unable to adequately provide for the population, continue development, and institute necessary Western human rights reforms. As the Chinese government underwent a power transfer from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping, the Obama administration continued its offensive through 2016, gradually ramping up the rhetoric to portray the Chinese as dangerous rejecters of the international system, a system the Americans argued is vital to Chinese success. The CCP is thus portrayed as ungrateful and its behavior as self-defeating.

President Xi Jinping, recognizing the American verbal offensive, immediately began working to defend the CCP's self-identity. His first move constituted defense. Denying the existence of a divide between Western-style countries and rogue states, Xi drew different lines predicated on the divide between developing and developed countries in a riposte response. Xi argued that the Western model was outdated and that the developing states should move to shape their own political and economic systems by standing together against hegemony and

colonialism. Subtly and deftly asserting Chinese leadership of the developing cohort, the CCP moved to downplay the need for American leadership. In a culminating offensive move, Xi portrayed Chinese policies as in line with the United Nation's charter and its articles enshrining sovereignty and the right for every country to self-determine its own development path, a narrative that asserted Chinese righteousness at the expense of the US. Utilizing a complex representational force strategy containing all three types of strategic narrative, Xi Jinping worked to insert his own truth into the minds of both a domestic and international audience.

Who won is difficult to say and beyond the scope of my project. Public opinion and material actions such as alliance building, military mobilization, or hastened negotiation could all serve as indicators of victory or defeat. I merely seek to illuminate and organize a previously neglected type of competition that adds important nuance and depth to our understanding of the role of soft power in international relations. I also attempt to shed light on an area in which the US and China are already competing for global leadership. Furthermore, and perhaps more worryingly, the implications of this soft power war open up opportunities for non-hegemonic ideas like illiberalism and other anti-democratic ideologies to increase their influence globally. Careful study of how representational force was central to the hegemonic universalism of Western ideas during the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as more complex case studies in which multilateral wars of words are examined, might be helpful for understanding the possibility of new global ideologies becoming hegemonic. A more concrete method of understanding victory and defeat also remains an important gap in my theory. Furthermore, a study of domestic wars of words would help shed light on oppositional narratives and the construction of hegemony within political communities. Through this new understanding of coercive soft power as a weapon in a war of words, IR scholars can begin to better understand how soft power functions during a

competition over attractiveness and, ultimately, how modern mass media increasingly becomes a weapon for powerful actors within political communities to achieve their goals.

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