Theodor Tudoroiu

China's Two Identities

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Chapter 1
Introduction

In November 2017, the newly appointed Chinese ambassador in Stockholm, Gui Congyou, gave an interview to the Swedish public radio. A key issue he mentioned was the situation of Gui Minhai, a Chinese-born Swedish national. This second Gui was a publisher and writer highly critical of China's leaders. His unfriendly activities had consequences: he was kidnapped by Beijing's agents in Thailand, jailed in China, and forced to confess his 'crimes.' Predictably, this led to outrage among the Swedish public and media. The hostile attitude upset China's ambassador. In the interview, he undiplomatically warned the Swedes that they were playing a dangerous game: 'We treat our friends with fine wine, but we have shotguns for our enemies.' Some opposition MPs called for him to be declared persona non grata, but the Ambassador knew there was no reason to panic. In two years, he would be summoned to Sweden's foreign ministry more than 40 times with no effect. The reason was obvious. In a newspaper interview, the Chinese diplomat bluntly stated that Sweden was 'not important enough to threaten.' In December 2017, he explicitly warned that Beijing might restrict trade if tensions escalate. Sweden exported to China goods and services worth US $7 billion. In neighboring Norway, Beijing's sanctions had hurt trade for half a decade after Chinese activist Liu Xiaobo received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010. A survey showed that 70 percent of the Swedes had an unfavorable opinion of China; but their government did not dare to take any action against the Chinese 'wolf warrior' (*The Economist*, February 20, 2020; *South China Morning Post*, January 21, 2020). As shown in more detail in Subchapter 3.3, Gui Congyou was hardly the only 'aggrieved and abrasive' Chinese diplomat (Manuel 2020: 24) used by the leadership in Beijing to intimidate foreign journalists, politicians, and governments. It is true that, especially after November 2022, a 'tactical adjustment' (Yang 2023) seems to have curbed this undiplomatic style of diplomacy. Unfortunately, other brutal features of China's foreign policy are hardly disappearing. Threats and provocative military actions against Taiwan are launched every week. Beijing is in the process of taking over 80 to 90 percent of the South China Sea while bullying neighboring states. In the East China Sea, the main target is represented by the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.

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At times, however, Chinese officials have even claimed Japan's Ryukyu Islands (Schreer 2019: 503). At the border with India, Beijing has periodically triggered clashes by occupying disputed areas. The last face-off, in 2020, resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers, including a senior army officer (Withnall 2020). From 1990 to 2008 alone, China had no less than 23 territorial disputes with neighboring states (Shlapentokh 2020: 12). Under President Xi, the trend was reinforced. Furthermore, Beijing makes efforts to seriously increase its military and especially naval capabilities. From 2014 to 2018, China built warships with a larger total tonnage than the navies of France, Germany, or India. During the last 15 years, it launched 12 nuclear submarines (*The Economist*, March 16, 2023). Beijing has 'amass[ed] more ships (though not more tonnage) than America's navy' and is 'becoming a more adventurous naval power' (*The Economist*, December 9, 2021). At the same time, many infrastructure projects constructed by China in the Belt and Road Initiative partner states are dual-use, *i.e.* can be employed for both civilian and military purposes. In particular, the 'String of Pearls' strategy–which relies on a massive network of new or upgraded dual-use ports–is intended to turn China into the dominant naval power in the Indian Ocean. In addition to the military base established in 2017 in Djibouti, Beijing is constructing a naval base in Cambodia's Ream and negotiates similar projects located in Mozambique's Beira and Katembe. Works started at the Khalifa port in the United Arab Emirates were suspended only due to American pressure, which also made the government of Equatorial Guinea withdraw its approval for a similar project (see Subchapter 3.4). In the Pacific, China concluded a secret security agreement with the Solomon Islands in March 2022 that, initially, seems to have included the establishment of a naval base. A similar project may exist for Vanuatu. Equally important, in May 2022, Beijing proposed to its partners in the Pacific Islands a secretive China-Pacific Islands Countries Common Development Vision that 'aimed to create a bloc of "China-Pacific Island" countries' (O'Brien 2022) with an explicit security component (see Subchapters 6.2 and 6.3). This mirrored, on a regional scale, President Xi's launching of the wider Global Security Initiative in April 2022, which represents a 'push for a China-centered security community and new Chinese pressure on BRI partners to join China's militarising struggle against US "hegemonism"' (Arase 2022; see Chap. 7). Overall, this flood of Chinese diplomatic and military actions and policies is difficult to ignore. It depicts the Middle Kingdom as an assertive and aggressive great power that makes considerable efforts to increase its military capabilities and ability to project hard power regionally and globally.

Still, a fundamentally different Chinese foreign policy line exists that is genuinely peaceful and cooperative. It explicitly relies on the famous Five Principles, which made such a positive impression worldwide that the 1955 Bandung Conference incorporated them, in a modified form, among the ten principles of the non-aligned movement (Panda 2014). This foreign policy promotes the equally famous win–win cooperation that has been received with enthusiasm by the leaders of almost all states in the Global South. The Belt and Road Initiative, launched by President Xi less than one year after he acceded to power, has offered to the developing world huge Chinese loan-financed and built infrastructure projects that have been hailed as a generous,

disinterested alternative to those proposed by the Bretton Woods institutions and Western donors (see Subchapters 5.2 and 5.3). At closer scrutiny, the disinterest may be questioned; but the benevolence is genuine as it stems from China's *guanxi* (relationality), a Confucian 'tradition of nuanced balancing of relationships within the family, society, the state, and the international community' (Kavalski 2017: 151). Under its influence, relations tend to become ends instead of means at the domestic, as well as international, levels (Kavalski 2018: 91, 95). Relationality stimulates Chinese actors to 'prioritize sociality, personalization, and reciprocity' (Kavalski 2017: 155) in international affairs. The most important consequence is the development of a model of normative power centered on dialogue: China 'understand[s] that a position of leadership cannot be inflicted upon others (by force or through domination), but needs to be earned (in the process of interaction)' (Kavalski 2014: 313). This is well illustrated by the 'harmonious respect for the other' (Kavalski 2018: 94) that constitutes 'a cardinal virtue' of China's interactions with the outer world. The resulting Chinese foreign policy line abhors the use of hard power. It relies on projections of normative power that are based on practices of interaction and the logic of relationships. In line with the working of *guanxi*, the leadership in Beijing optimizes relationships instead of transactions. It rejects the reliance on the preponderance of power to maximize benefits; instead, it concentrates on stabilizing beneficial relations. Accommodating the partner's perceived needs is preferred to bargaining. Instead of being defined in terms of rights and obligations, China's norms emerge and develop as behavioral standards; its partners spontaneously accept them in the process of interaction (Womack 2008: 20–21; Kavalski 2014: 313–314; see Subchapter 2.3). In practical terms, this translates into a cooperative type of foreign policy that relies on the Chinese socialization of the Global South political elites. In addition to persuasion, a critical role is played by the use as material incentives of the BRI infrastructure projects, which increase the political legitimacy of and electoral support for targeted elites.

In analytical terms, the obvious problem is the stark contrast between the often brutal hard power actions depicted in the first paragraph and the cooperation-based normative power actorness presented in the second paragraph of this Introduction. Three main views exist that rely, respectively, on (1) the idea that China's hard power-based international behavior is limited to issues closely related to its domestic affairs; (2) the importance of historical factors, which are mainly related to the 'century of humiliation;' and (3) the aggressive attitude of the United States, which compels Beijing to respond using instruments of the same nature. In turn, these views have made certain scholars believe that Chinese foreign policy is simply based on ad hoc adjustments related to a pragmatic practice of realpolitik, which explains its incoherence (Hyer 2015; Danner 2018: 6). Another group believes that China does have a grand strategy, but a contradictory one (Buzan 2014; Roy 2014) as its rather Liberal nature is accompanied by a number of Realist aspects related to the aforementioned three views. However, all these approaches have flaws–which I discuss in the introduction to Chap. 3–that prevent them from providing a comprehensive response to the contradiction signaled at the beginning of this paragraph.

This book proposes an understanding of China's bifurcated foreign policy based on the existence of two different Chinese identities. Constructivists associate the concept of identity with a set of features 'that we now embrace as given.' They critically include 'the fact that identities are multiple' (Goff and Dunn 2004: 4). Indeed, 'we all have many, many identities, and this is no less true of states' (Wendt 1999/2003: 230). Often, these identities 'are not only complex, but contradictory' (Goff and Dunn 2004: 7). Alexander Wendt discussed them as scripts or schemas about what states are and what they should do in a certain context. They are activated selectively based on specific situations (Wendt 1999/2003: 230). In the case of China, I associate its first identity with that of a 19th-century-style territorial empire, which I define as a state that controls, formally or informally, the effective political sovereignty of other political societies. Despite its multiethnic, multinational, and multicultural nature and the existence of multilevel, often overlapping jurisdictions, this is a modern state representing a concentration of sovereignty and territoriality. It relies on land as the most important factor of production and power and, accordingly, it tries to size foreign territory. This key foreign policy objective, as well as the perception of numerous factors as threats to national security, leads to aggressive international behavior that results in the frequent use of hard power. China's second identity is that of a 21st-century-style postmodern global power, which I define as a great power that relies on capital, labor, and knowledge as opposed to land. Accordingly, instead of territorial expansion, it struggles for a greater market share in the world economy. By outsourcing its production of goods, it has become a 'head' nation that highly benefits from the new international division of labor. These market-related priorities and the preferences of its extroverted society have led to a diminished interest in the use of hard power. Instead, the international actorness of a postmodern global power relies mainly on structural power whose four dimensions–security, production, finance, and knowledge–are much more effective in achieving its interests, which are often global in scale. These two identities are activated selectively based on specific situations (Wendt 1999/2003: 230). The fact that the same Chinese state and government threaten to use brutal force when dealing with Taiwan and employ a friendly discourse, accompanied by foreign aid 'gifts,' when interacting with African or Caribbean BRI partners is not an exercise in realpolitik. It is due to the existence of two coherent foreign policy patterns that are the result of China's dual identity.

I have already developed this idea in my previous work and especially in a recent book on the geopolitics of the Belt and Road Initiative (Tudoroiu 2024). However, the identity dimension was treated there rather superficially as the focus was on other aspects of China's global actorness. Accordingly, I felt that, given the complexity and importance of this dimension, a separate study was needed in order to provide a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of the emergence, development, features, and impact of the two Chinese identities, which have played a key role in China's rise and significantly influence its present interactions with the rest of the world. This is the reason that made me write the present book.

An obvious question related to China's two identities concerns their unusual coexistence. The territorial empire one was inherited from the Maoist era when it represented a fundamental feature of the Chinese polity. The postmodern global power

identity emerged and developed as a consequence of Deng Xiaoping's reforms. To relegitimize the rule of the Communist Party, an economically-extroverted developmental path was chosen that involved the joining of the multilateral institutions of the American-led international order. Within these institutions, China's technocrats, high officials, and political elites were socialized, which ultimately resulted in a new identity of the Chinese state-society complex that should have replaced the old one. This did not happen due to regime continuity. The Communist Party felt threatened by the same democracy-related domestic and external forces and processes as in the past. This compelled it to preserve the repressive and defensive instruments of the Maoist territorial empire, which prevented the disappearance of the associated identity. Instead of replacing it, the new one simply added a new layer.

Socialization in the norms of multilateral institutions, however, only led to a half-developed postmodern global power identity. China became the prosperous workshop of the Western-centered globalization 'from above' but remained a subordinated 'body' nation with little say in the decision-making processes of the US-led international order. Reciprocal socialization efforts intended to change this order from within in ways favorable to Chinese interests–the aforementioned 'peaceful rise'–brought only limited results. Consequently, President Xi decided to take advantage of the cognitive shift triggered by the 2007–2008 global financial crisis among the political elites in Beijing: the United States in particular and the West in general were irremediably declining and China was called to save the world by establishing its benevolent hegemony. After he acceded to power in late 2012, Xi Jinping launched the ambitious construction of a new, Chinese-led international order, which is conceived as a 'thick' order associated with two Chinese-centered globalizations 'from above' and 'from below.' This vast enterprise relies on the postmodern global power identity as it makes use of relationality-based projections of normative power. Using the infrastructure projects of the Belt and Road Initiative, China socializes the political elites in power in the partner states. By accepting the Chinese norms, these elites change their beliefs, align their states' policies with Beijing's local, regional, and global interests, and join the Chinese-led international order. It is this process that brought the Chinese postmodern global power identity to maturity. Today, China is a 'head' nation in control of its international order supported by massive 'from above' and 'from below' globalizing flows of people, goods, and ideas.

Importantly, there is no contradiction between the two Chinese identities. On the contrary, they form a virtuous circle characterized by a specific division of labor. The cooperative postmodern global power identity is closely associated with the construction of the new international order. The territorial empire one is related to the subordinated but important role of protecting the Chinese territory, 'sea lifelines,' and international order. As shown by the Solomon Islands case study in Chap. 6, the normative power projections of the postmodern global power open BRI partner states to the territorial empire. Once solidly installed, the latter is able to use hard power to defend the former's presence and interests. For the time being, there is little need for such defense, which explains why the postmodern global power identity is much more visible in China's international actorness. However, the balance between the two identities might change in the not-so-remote future. It is important to mention the

serious challenge represented by the coherent and well-organized counteroffensive of the United States and its allies, which perceive China as a counterhegemonic challenger. The ensuing increased importance of the Chinese territorial empire identity will certainly exacerbate Sino-American tensions, which may lead to a new cold war.

All these elements are analyzed in the next chapters, which are organized as follows. Chap. 2 sets up the book's theoretical apparatus. It starts by discussing the concept of identity, as well as its understanding and use by thin cognitivist Constructivists, while insisting on the multiplicity of each actor's identities. The process of international socialization is then analyzed based on Jeffrey Checkel's views of Type I and II socialization. International socialization is seen as an exercise of power but also as producing power. The chapter proceeds by defining normative power and discussing its key features. Because China's specific type of normative power is based on relationality, this concept is analyzed in a separate section. The concept of empire is then discussed as relying on one state's formal or informal control of other political societies. The final subchapter brings together theoretical elements proposed by Richard Rosecrance in his analysis of the virtual state, Susan Strange in her study of structural power, and Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal in their discussion of the postmodern state. They are used to define and analyze the aforementioned concepts of the 19th-century-style territorial empire and the 21st-century-style postmodern global power. Finally, the chapter shows that these concepts allow for the comprehensive understanding of the corresponding dimensions of China's global actorness.

Chapter 3 provides an in-depth analysis of the 19th-century-type territorial empire identity that present China inherited from the Maoist period. Due to regime continuity, Deng's reforms did not put an end to China's perceived vulnerability to external threats. Events ranging from the fall of communism in Eastern Europe to the American intervention in Iraq convinced the leadership in Beijing of the need to preserve and strengthen China's military instruments, which could be done only through the maintenance of the territorial empire. To avoid a Sino-American clash in the Pacific, President Xi's construction of a new, Chinese-led international order took the form of a projection of normative power targeting the Global South. But the US 'pivot to Asia' convinced him of the critical importance of the protective role played by the hard power-based territorial empire, whose expansion and actorness he intensified. Its concentration of sovereignty and territoriality is well illustrated by the over-securitization process associated with President Xi's concept of comprehensive national security and China's involvement in various territorial disputes. Subchapter 3.4 concludes the chapter by scrutinizing the geostrategic dimension of the confrontation between China the territorial empire and the increasingly coherent and effective 'networked security architecture' created by the US Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Chapter 4 analyzes China's socialization in multilateral institutions that resulted in the emergence and development of its 21st-century-style postmodern global power identity. To ensure the success of economic reforms, the post-1979 leadership in Beijing embraced multilateralism and international institutions. Details are provided of China's participation in the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the

World Trade Organization, the international environmental regime, the UN Conference on Disarmament, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and the international human rights regime. A common pattern of socialization is identified based on micro-processes of role playing/mimicking and social influence involving Chinese experts, high-ranking officials, and the political elite. However, this only led to Checkel's first, less advanced type of socialization. Not all the norms of multilateral institutions were adopted and a reciprocal socialization phase typically followed the apprenticeship one. This is a Chinese effort to change the norms of multilateral institutions in ways beneficial to Beijing's interests. This process often brought significant results but was unable to take China beyond the situation of a 'body' nation caught in a center-periphery economic relationship and subordinated to Western-controlled socializers. Before President Xi launched the construction of a new international order, China's 21st-century-style postmodern global power identity was only half-developed.

Chapter 5 analyzes the consolidation of this identity associated with the construction of a new, Chinese-led international order. The latter relies on a set of Chinese multilateral institutions that prominently include the Belt and Road Initiative. The process of Chinese socialization it enacts is examined in detail in a separate subchapter, which points to the creation of an international center-periphery structure based on patron-client relationships. The same Initiative has been instrumental in the development of the Chinese-centered globalizations 'from above' and 'from below.' The former upgraded China the postmodern global power to a 'head' nation in control of new transnational economic flows and institutional mechanisms of global governance. The 'from below' globalization led to the 'transnationalisation of the Chinese nation-state' based on the use of a deterritorial Chinese identity. Both reinforce Beijing's international order as a thick order that relies on massive and diverse globalizing flows of goods and people. As a result, China's 21st-century-style postmodern global power identity has finally reached maturity. At present, this identity plays an important role in shaping world politics. In the future, however, challenges that notably include the American counteroffensive might significantly alter both its features and international impact.

Chapter 6 uses the Chinese presence in the Solomon Islands to study the interplay of China's two identities. The Belt and Road Initiative was used by China the postmodern global power to socialize the Pacific Islands political elites in power. Less predictably, the riots that periodically target the increasingly large Chinese diaspora were instrumentalized to justify the regional involvement of China the territorial empire. By 2022, the secretive China-Pacific Islands Countries Common Development Vision 'aimed to create a bloc of China-Pacific Island countries' that would challenge America's 'island chains' strategy. The case of the Solomon Islands shows how successive anti-Chinese riots had very limited consequences in 2006 but were used as a reason to shift diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 2019 and were instrumentalized to conclude a secret bilateral security agreement in 2022 that brought China the territorial empire deep into the Pacific. This is illustrative of the virtuous circle formed by China's two identities. The postmodern global power identity serves to bring in the territorial empire, which will eventually protect it militarily.

For the time being, however, we are witnessing only the first stage of this process where the postmodern global power remains China's most important identity.

Chapter 7 presents the book's findings and conclusions. It first shows how, due to regime continuity, the 21st-century-style postmodern global power identity had to develop as a new identity layer instead of simply replacing the 19th-century-type territorial empire identity. It then briefly examines the drive to maturity of the former identity as a result of the construction of a new, Chinese-led international order and the two associated Chinese-centered globalizations. The two Chinese identities form a virtuous circle, but its continued existence is threatened by a growth crisis triggered by two factors: the absence of security-related norms in the normative core of the postmodern global power identity, which prevents the Chinese socialized political elites in partner states from willingly accepting the arrival of the territorial empire; and the coherent and well-organized counteroffensive of the United States and its allies. The leadership in Beijing responded by launching the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative, whose specific roles are analyzed.[1] The last part of the chapter discusses the influence of Beijing's old and new Initiatives on the future evolution and interplay of the two Chinese identities, as well as these identities' impact on China, its international order, and the international system.

I have chosen to use a case study centered on the Solomon Islands in particular and the Pacific Islands in general because, in this region, the actual impact of China's two identities on its foreign policy is most visible. Recent developments reveal key aspects of the interplay of these identities that significantly contribute to the construction of a new, Chinese-led international order. The case study presented in Chap. 6 (1) provides a typical example of less developed Global South states in need of infrastructure, which made them a natural target of the Belt and Road Initiative; (2) using its infrastructure projects, China has succeeded in socializing their political elites in power. The Solomons are highly representative for the ensuing alignment of policies with Beijing's multifaceted interests and joining of the Chinese-led international order; (3) the socialization process was enhanced by Beijing's instrumentalization of the Chinese diaspora, which is kept under the influence of the 'overseas Chinese state' through the successful promotion of a 'de-territorialised ideology of nationalism' (Duara 2003: 14). Chinese associations and individuals successfully lobbied the elites in power for political purposes and contributed to the Chinese socialization of their members; (4) Chinese activities have had detrimental consequences for various socio-economic groups in the Pacific Islands, which led to the emergence of the typical elites-society gap; (5) Beijing's efforts to change its negative image took the form of Chinese 'state-sponsored information manipulation' (Allsop 2023), which included the involvement of China–Pacific friendship associations that are coordinated from Beijing as part of China's united front work; (6) the failure of this strategy is illustrated by the riots that periodically target the Chinese entrepreneurial

[1] The Global Artificial Intelligence Governance Initiative pertains to the same category. However, it is not scrutinized in this book because its creation was announced after the completion of the manuscript.

migrants in the Pacific. At the same time, the evolution of China's responses to these riots shows the fundamental upgrading of Beijing's regional strategy. The passive behavior of the 2000s was replaced, in the early 2020s, with the use of the Solomon Islands riots as a pretext for the conclusion of a security agreement that brought China the territorial empire into a region whose security used to be controlled by the United States and its allies; (7) this is part of a wider strategy. Since 2018, China the territorial empire has targeted the region in an effort to challenge America's 'island chains' strategy and 'break through the network of US military bases and security alliances that it sees as restricting its operating space' (*Economist Intelligence Unit*, July 8, 2022: 34). The secretly negotiated 2022 China-Solomon Islands security agreement allows for the deployment of Chinese military and paramilitary forces to restore 'social order,' as well as Chinese ship visits, logistical replenishment, and stopovers. Initially, the establishment of a Chinese military base was also envisaged; (8) this success was followed by the even more ambitious promotion of the secretive China-Pacific Islands Countries Common Development Vision. Through this multilateral agreement, China 'aimed to create a bloc of China-Pacific Island countries' (O'Brien 2022) with an explicit security component; (9) in response, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand launched a complex counteroffensive that marks the expansion of Washington's regional approach beyond the traditional focus on diplomacy and security. The new Western emphasis on infrastructure offers the Pacific Islands elites an alternative to the BRI, which seriously endangers their Chinese socialization; (10) on the Chinese side, the case of the Solomons and, more generally, the Pacific Islands illuminates the mutually reinforcing strategies followed by China the territorial empire, which needs 'partners' for security purposes, and China the postmodern global power, which can turn target states into such partners through the socialization of their political elites. If and when China the territorial empire is solidly installed in the Pacific, it will be its turn to protect militarily the interests of China the postmodern global power, thus completing the virtuous circle formed by the two Chinese identities. The fact that all these elements are present and can easily be studied in the Solomon/Pacific Islands provides a solid justification for the use of this region as a case study.

From a methodological point of view, this book relies on a large volume of secondary sources. Many of the issues analyzed in the following pages–and especially China's relationship with the current international order and the Belt and Road Initiative–have been the object of numberless books, peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, reports, newspaper articles, and Internet texts. In addition to the quality of the sources I employed, I gave priority to the most recent ones, as this is a rapidly evolving field. In terms of text organization, each chapter starts with a very detailed extended abstract. Readers who find it too long can easily skip it; the actual beginning of the chapter can easily be identified. My experience, however, shows that such abstracts represent a useful instrument for people not interested in the details of a specific chapter but willing to get an accurate image of its content. They may also help readers who are looking for parts dealing with a certain subject. The extended abstracts do not contain references even in the case of citations. The latter are always repeated in the body of the chapter where they are fully referenced.

Finally, I would like to mention a comment on a paper based on this book's content that I presented at last summer's APSA conference in Los Angeles. A scholar claimed that, while my argument on the existence and features of China's two identities is solid, the topic itself is not relevant because it has no practical consequences. While I am certainly subjective, I believe that–perhaps unfortunately–the interplay of these identities is highly relevant. As shown in the book's concluding chapter, the (im)balance between China's postmodern global power and territorial empire identities is likely to have major geopolitical consequences, which may include a cold war. That, I am afraid, is not an abstract detail from Academia's ivory tower.

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Chapter 2
A Constructivist Theoretical Framework

This chapter sets up the book's theoretical apparatus. Subchapter 2.1 introduces the concept of identity, which is necessarily central to the analysis of China's two identities. It discusses the understanding and use of this concept by thin cognitivist Constructivists while insisting on the multiplicity of each actor's identities. It also shows that this book's reliance on Wendt's views on identity cannot be questioned using the typical strong cognitivist criticism of essentialization. Mainly due to processes of international socialization, the identities of actors analyzed in the following chapters are in constant evolution; this prevents them from being taken as existing prior to action. Subchapter 2.2 discusses the Constructivist understanding of international socialization. The analysis of this form of complex learning is based on Jeffrey Checkel's views of Type I and II socialization. International socialization is seen as an exercise of power but also as producing power, which is both relational and structural. After presenting its features and the issue of reciprocal socialization, the subchapter scrutinizes the associated processes of strategic calculation, cognitive role playing, and normative suasion, as well as the micro-processes of social influence, role playing/mimicking, and persuasion that China has experienced as a socializee and used as a socializer. Subchapter 2.3 starts by defining normative power and discussing its key features. The present rise of a number of normative powers is then examined based on their distinct patterns of international interactions. Importantly, normative power entails power relations: it is through a projection of normative power that China the postmodern global power is constructing a new international order. Its specific type of normative power is based on relationality. Accordingly, a separate section analyzes this concept, which is based on the idea that the finality of social actions is represented by the formation of social ties, not the satisfaction of utilities. In Western social sciences, relationality led to the development of a central divide between relationalism and substantialism in the late 1990s. In particular, the field of International Relations experienced a fully-fledged relational turn, which influenced scholars working on Chinese IR in both the West and China. For its part,

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the Chinese relationality (*guanxi*) stems from a Confucian-inspired intellectual tradition and represents a dominant feature of the entire society. In foreign policy, it led to the development of a model of normative power centered on dialogue and based on the logic of relationships. Its forms of manifestation include China's 'harmonious respect for the other' and the ensuing 'intense and skillful diplomacy of respect.' The subchapter discusses two relationality-based Chinese theoretical approaches proposed by Qin Yaqing and Zhao Tingyang. It also analyzes the relationality's vulnerability to exploitation: the practice of 'indebtedness engineering' is at the origin of the much-criticized Chinese 'debt-trap diplomacy' exemplified by China's taking over of the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka. Subchapter 2.4 analyzes the concept of empire. Its status became peripheral due to decolonization but, after the mid-1980s, it returned as 'a self-referential concept' at the heart of International Relations studies of hierarchy. This was due to the rise of globalization, whose features often overlap with those of empires. However, this scholarly revival came at a price: the literature often fails to distinguish empire from hegemony. The subchapter analyzes two of the most influential approaches that avoid this intellectual trap. That proposed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri perceives empire as governmentality and understands it as the new form taken by sovereignty: a capitalist international order that is deterritorialized and non-state centered. This obviously prevents it from being employed in the study of a specific imperial power. Therefore, this book is based on the rival approach developed by Michael Doyle. It views empire as something different from the types of power characteristic of both domestic and international politics as it relies on one state's formal or informal control of other political societies. The subchapter proceeds by presenting the features of empires and the conditions leading to their creation. All these elements provide the theoretical basis for the understanding of the imperial dimension of China the territorial empire. Its territorial dimension is analyzed in Subchapter 2.5, which also defines the concepts of 19th-century-style territorial empire and 21st-century-style postmodern global power. This is done using, first, Richard Rosecrance's analysis of the transition from pre-industrial territorial states, which relied on land as the most important factor in both production and power, to the trading state during the 1970s and 1980s, and the virtual state—whose economy is reliant on mobile factors of production—in the late 20th century. Second, the contribution of Susan Strange is scrutinized that, in addition to the transformation of the state, analyzed the new forces and structures responsible for new types of international interactions under globalization. In particular, structural power—which relies on security, production, finance, and knowledge—became much more relevant than relational power. Third, the concept of postmodern state introduced by Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal is analyzed, which led to the 'litening' of great powers unwilling to use hard power anymore. The subchapter further develops this idea by emphasizing the postmodern global powers' shift from hard/relational to structural power. It then proposes definitions and discusses the features of the concepts of 19th-century-style territorial empire and 21st-century-style postmodern global power. Finally, it shows that these concepts allow for the comprehensive understanding of the corresponding dimensions of China's global actorness.

2.1 Identity

2.1.1 The Unit of Analysis

Dual identity is a rather unfamiliar concept that cannot be analyzed without an in-depth discussion of the various—and, often, contradictory—meanings ascribed to 'identity' in International Relations (IR). Such a discussion, however, has a prerequisite. IR and, more generally, social sciences scholars have analyzed the identity of actors ranging from individuals and social groups to states and international organizations (the example of the European Union immediately comes to mind). It is important to identify, from the very beginning, this book's unit of analysis as it significantly influences the treatment of the concept under scrutiny. Of course, beyond its perception as territorial empire or postmodern global power, China is a state. So are its partners and rivals. Yet, their numerous and diversified interactions hardly follow the pattern of the Realist billiard ball model. As shown in Chap. 5, Beijing's main geopolitical instrument in the Global South is the Chinese socialization of the political elites in power (Tudoroiu 2021). Unsocialized socio-economic groups in the BRI partner states that are detrimentally affected by the socio-economic consequences of China's economic activities represent, on the contrary, vocal adversaries of the Chinese presence. At times, anti-Chinese policies are adopted in response to their pressure. For their part, the millions of entrepreneurial migrants that have left China may take decisions individually, but the Chinese-centered globalization 'from below' they enact is used by the leadership in Beijing as a foreign policy instrument (Tudoroiu 2022). This is to say that various social groups and individuals need to be taken into consideration when analyzing China's international relations and identity, which prevents the use of the state as an appropriate unit of analysis. Instead, this book follows Alexander Wendt's focus on the state-society complex. It was Robert Cox who introduced this term as part of his neo-Gramscian analysis of the interpenetration of the concepts of state and civil society. Under globalization, the border between their respective domains has become vague and imprecise (Cox 1981/1986: 205). In fact, Cox's post-positivist Neo-Marxist research agenda intended to reject the ontology of Neorealism and its ahistorical determinism by showing that social forces, not states, are the main actors of international politics. He understood both states and world orders as the product of social forces and processes responsible for the genesis of various configurations of state-society complexes (*Ibid.*; Overbeek 2004: 127). This is why a plurality of forms of state exists, which is in perpetual change and has nothing in common with Waltz's 'reif[ication of] a world system' (Sinclair 2016: 511). Accordingly, the concept of state-society complex emerged as a versatile unit of analysis (Tudoroiu and Ramlogan 2019: 158). It was adopted by theoretical approaches that include a critical perspective on global governance and global civil society (Massicotte 1999: 139–140), the study of the present military transformation in the organization for and conduct of war (Latham and Sethi 2012: 175), the 'transnational historical materialism' of the International Political Economy 'Amsterdam Project' (Van Apeldoorn 2004: 142; Fichtner 2016: 6), and

the 'second wave' Weberian historical sociology approach, whose 'thick' conception of the state-society complex is based on the idea that domestic and international structures 'are co-constituted and are fundamentally embedded within a series of social relationships' (Hobson 2002a: 21; Hobson 2002b: 66, 75; Bhambra 2010: 132). Within IR Constructivism, Alexander Wendt argued that 'not only is the state constituted by its relationship to society, but so is society constituted by the state' (Wendt 1999/2003: 210). He employed the term 'state' only to refer to the Weberian organizational actor representing an organization that claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence and has sovereignty. When referring to all the essential properties of the state—that also include an institutional-legal order, a society, and territory—to study its international actorness, he systematically used the concept of state-society complex (*Ibid*., 202). Similarly, this book is based on the idea that the international interactions of both state and society are relevant and need to be taken into consideration, which is done by choosing the state-society complex as the unit of analysis. Therefore, this is a study of the dual identity of the Chinese state-society complex. It emphasizes the fact that the emergence and development of the 'two Chinas' are mainly due to international processes where both states and various parts of their societies play an important role.

2.1.2 The Emergence of the Identity Perspective

Identity is often depicted as 'an inescapable dimension of being:' without it, 'no body could be' (Campbell 1992/1998: 9; Berenskoetter 2010: 1). Richard Lebow presented the concept of identity as 'the secular descendant of the soul, and coined for much the same reasons: to provide unity and consistency to people' (Lebow 2016a: 182). It helps to 'define/clarify one's position in a certain situation or relationship;' it makes 'the unfamiliar familiar' (Berenskoetter 2010: 9; Hopf 2002: 6). Political leaders use identity as a 'frame of reference (…) [to] initiate, maintain, and structure their relationships with other states" (Cronin 1999:18). Empirically, it is easy to note that different identities are associated with different foreign policy patterns. This is very visible, for example, when a territorial empire such as the Soviet Union is compared to a postmodern great power such as 'Global Britain.' The origins of identity as a concept have been traced back to early modern Europe (Lebow 2016b; Vucetic 2017/2020) but it was only in the 1950s that Erik Erikson imported it into the field of psychology. During the 1960s, this concept migrated to other social sciences such as sociology and anthropology. In the realm of International Relations, elements of identity were analyzed by scholars such as Karl Deutsch, Kenneth Boulding, Kal Holsti, and Robert Jervis; but they paid little attention to identity as a concept. A major change took place only at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. On the one hand, IR Postmodernism emerged, which made use of identity in its radical challenging of pre-existing positivist theoretical approaches. On the other hand, the end of the Cold War led to the reshaping of structures of governance, nationalism, ethnic conflicts, the creation of many new states in the former

communist bloc, the accelerated process of European integration, and aggressive globalization. In different ways, all these processes had an important identity dimension that became the focus of numerous IR scholars (Berenskoetter 2010: 1–3). In their book about 'The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory,' Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil presented this development as a return to an older use of identity associated with classical IR theories (Lapid and Kratochwil 1996; Stark Urrestarazu 2015: 127). Yet, this idea was rejected by other authors as none of the older theoretical approaches showed 'substantial engagement with the concept itself.' Such an engagement was exclusively associated with the rise of post-positivism, which brought 'a "discovery" rather than a "return"' of the concept of identity (Berenskoetter 2010: 2–3; Stark Urrestarazu 2015: 127). This major shift is illustrated by the massive increases in the number of International Relations articles related to identity that took place around 1993 and 1995, respectively (Stark Urrestarazu 2015: 129). A large number of scholars analyzed different aspects of this concept (Williams 1998; Zehfuss 2001; Wæver 2002; Kowert 2010; Berenskoetter 2010; Epstein 2011; Lebow 2016b; Vucetic 2017/2020). As a result, identity has become 'central to research agendas that seek to move beyond rationalist and materialist assumptions of state action' (Bucher and Jasper 2016: 392). In particular, identity is 'as central to the constructivist paradigm as power is to realism and wealth to liberalism' (Lebow 2016a: 1).

Unlike positivist scholars who believe that identities of international actors 'are given prior to and independent of interaction,' all Post-Positivists argue that identities are permanently changing on the basis of international interaction (Bucher and Jasper 2016: 394). This common position, however, does not prevent the extreme diversity of concerned theoretical approaches. In showing how identities and relations structure each other, Alexander Wendt chose systemic-level theorizing (Wendt 1999/2003). At the other extreme, William Bloom—in a book appropriately titled 'Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations'—relied on the concept of 'national identity' to present the state as an entity made up of individuals; it is because the 'mass national public' identifies with the state that the political leadership can represent the latter (Bloom 1990). Other scholars have proposed various mixes of these approaches to deconstruct the positivist understanding of the Westphalian sovereign state defined as a fixed entity characterized by a bounded territorial space. Instead, 'they pointed to its multifaceted and contingent nature, product of a history of shifting collective identities and social conventions' (Berenskoetter 2010: 3). In this heterogeneous theoretical context, identity as a concept has been approached in two ways. On the one hand, there is an effort to focus on the common elements of various theories in order to reach a relatively neutral understanding. On the other hand, many scholars have questioned the possibility of such neutrality because various treatments of identity are embedded in mutually incompatible theoretical and normative positions: identity is—and has to be acknowledged as—'an essentially contested concept' (*Ibid*., 2). This made Patrick Thaddeus Jackson argue that 'there is thus a good deal of confusion among scholars working on identity,' which further increases the lack of consensus on this concept (Jackson 2004: 169). All post-positivist approaches perceive identity as socially constructed, but an important point of disagreement is

the extent of this construction (*Ibid.*). For example, in Foreign Policy Analysis, the 'conventional constructivists' have studied in what way the identities of states inform foreign policy processes and how the formation of these identities is shaped by international structures. For their part, the more radical 'critical constructivists' chose to scrutinize the co-constitution of foreign policy practices and political subjectivities through the use of the concept of identification (Vucetic 2017/2020). This is illustrative of the differences between two very different groups of students of identity in International Relations: the weak cognitivist Constructivists and the strong cognitivist Post-Structuralists/Postmodernists. A third group has to be added that anchors its research of identity in social psychology and/or psychoanalysis (Stark Urrestarazu 2015: 132). In turn, the Constructivists are divided into two categories that conceptualize identity differently. One focuses on the importance of norms in shaping identities, which 'develop through contestation and alternation, and dissociation or adherence to prevailing norms' (Bucher and Jasper 2016: 394). Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink even defined a norm as 'a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity' (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 891). The other category focuses on the 'formative role of others for identity formation processes' (Bucher and Jasper 2016: 394). In Chap. 4, I show how the identity of China the postmodern global power was, in part, forged through the partial acceptance of the norms diffused by the multilateral institutions of the American-led international order. In Chap. 5, I discuss China's diffusion of its own norms through the Belt and Road Initiative, which aimed at changing the identity of partner states in the Global South. Still, my analysis is not exclusively associated with the norm-based approach. I study the acceptance and rejection of—and/or the effort to change—relevant norms as the result of socialization processes where the 'formative role of others' plays a decisive role. Accordingly, the analysis proposed in this book is situated at the border of the two aforementioned categories. Returning to the more general treatment of identity by Constructivists, its 'uneasy amalgam of constructivist language and essentialist argumentation' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 6; Bucher and Jasper 2016: 394) has constantly been criticized by more radical post-positivist scholars. As shown in more detail later in this chapter, Wendt was one of the main targets of such attacks due to his self-avowed preference for 'a weak or essentialist social constructionism' that accepts the existence of a relatively stable state identity (Wendt 1994: 385; Stark Urrestarazu 2015: 132).

Essentialization is firmly rejected by the group of strong cognitivist scholars inspired by post-structuralism and critical discourse analysis. The group, which prominently includes IR Postmodernists, stresses the 'constructed and contested nature of cultural meaning and social phenomena' (Stark Urrestarazu 2015: 132). Its understanding of the concept of identity is based on the existence of self/other, inside/outside, and domestic/foreign boundaries and the constitutive practice of 'othering.' Fundamentally, identity is defined by difference. Moreover, this concept is understood—in stark contrast with Wendt's view—'performatively, that is, as an ongoing, always incomplete series of effects of a process of reiteration' (Bucher and Jasper 2016: 395; Laffey 2000: 431). To Postmodernists, there is no place for 'relatively stable' state identities. Fully structured subjects cannot exist. It is precisely the

'incompleteness of structural identity' that 'constitutes the subject as the locus of a decision about how to establish itself as a concrete subjectivity with a fully achieved identity' (Torfing 1999: 149; Bucher and Jasper 2016: 395).

The final group of students of identity is inspired by social psychology and/or psychoanalysis. In the first case, the starting point is represented by the social identity theory or the social categorization theory. Both lead to an understanding of identity as the result of constant interaction and comparison with others. Associated 'emotion-laden situational social similarities and differences' lead to multiple in-group/out-group categorizations. In addition to individual identities, collective ones can emerge through 'depersonalization:' a shift in the level of identification allows for the 'self' and 'others' to be understood as group identities. Such approaches have been used to analyze various collective identities at the international level; examples prominently include the European Union. Freudian 'identification theory' provides the basis for psychoanalysis-inspired approaches to identity. It argues that individuals' perception of an 'endangered *Eros*' leads to their need for survival and identity preservation. Scholars such as aforementioned William Bloom adapted this view to the realm of International Relations by identifying the '"psychobiological imperative" of individuals and groups to act jointly in an identity-enhancing (or identity-preserving) manner' due to the fact that identity is related to self-esteem and humiliation. A 'national identity dynamic' develops that is the main reason for collective action and, often, aggressive foreign policy (Stark Urrestarazu 2015: 133–133; Bloom 1990: 50). As repeatedly mentioned, this book adopts Wendt's Constructivist approach, which provides an appropriate theoretical framework for the understanding of the socializations processes analyzed in Chaps. 4 and 5. Before discussing Wendt's views on identity, however, some important issues related to this concept need to be scrutinized.

The first of them concerns the relationship between identity and interests. In large measure, the centrality of identity within the theoretical apparatus of this book is due to the fact that, to Constructivists, identity is the basis of interests. 'An actor cannot know what it wants unless it knows what it is' (Wendt 1999/2003: 231); 'identities both generate and shape interests' (Jepperson et al. 1996: 60). As interests are mirrored by foreign policy discourse and actions, the explicative power of an identity perspective is superior to that of a utilitarian one because it can also justify actors' 'irrational' behavior, which is not related to the maximization of utility (Berenskoetter 2010: 4). Another relationship that has often been analyzed is that between identity and culture. Identity is 'constructed through ideas, norms, values, symbols, discourses, and practices, often subsumed under the label "culture"' (*Ibid*., 5). Such cultural parameters are associated with meaning structures, which provide frames that serve as orientation devices for individuals and collective actors. Through them—i.e. through 'culture'—identities are created and maintained. Yet, this is not a one-way relationship. From a Constructivist perspective, culture, identities, and interests are mutually constituted. They nevertheless remain independent concepts. Importantly, identity is less vague than 'culture' (*Ibid*., 5, 9), which may explain its more frequent use in Constructivist analyses. This is also an important reason for keeping 'culture' outside this book's theoretical apparatus.

As shown in previous paragraphs, the post-structuralist understanding of the concept of identity is based on the existence of self/other boundaries and the constitutive practice of 'othering.' For their part, scholars inspired by social psychology believe that 'a sense of Self is socially constructed with or against certain "Others"' (*Ibid*., 5, 9). Finally, as explained below, Constructivists also acknowledge the importance of the self/other opposition. This definition of identity by difference has led to two understandings of identity, which have diverging behavioral implications. On the one hand, scholars who focus on the social identity theory or the contribution of 'othering' to the construction of identity argue that identities generate a conflictual attitude toward out-groups. The process of in-group identity creation leads to the identification of the group's members with a high-valued in-group, which in turn makes them acquire self-esteem. This, however, results in the devaluation of out-groups visible in phenomena such as ethnocentrism and discrimination. The respective stereotyping of self and other in positive and negative terms, therefore, leads to conflict, which is independent of material interest. A different view focuses on the cooperative effects of identity. Instead of pointing to the rejection of out-groups, some of the scholars inspired by social identity theory have emphasized the empathy and altruism that members of a group develop toward each other due to higher levels of in-group identification. For their part, role identity theory Constructivists have pointed to the fact that social roles taken by actors 'entail behavior that is considered normatively appropriate or even deeply habitual (and thus unconsciously enacted).' While conflictual behavior might also ensue, this approach has mainly been used to explore the effect of norms that prevent realpolitik-inspired behavior (Johnston 2008: 74–75). In addition to the identity/alterity opposition or, as some authors see it, nexus (Guillaume 2011: 24), the internal and external dimensions of identity have also been studied. In various branches of the social sciences, the former concerns the individual and personal level while the latter is related to the collective and social one. In social psychology, for example, this leads to 'the interplay between personal and social identity.' In International Relations, this '"internal/external" interface can be easily translated into the familiar relationship between the "domestic" and the "international"' (Berenskoetter 2010: 9). Both dimensions are relevant to the identity of a state-society complex.

2.1.3 Defining Identity

The emergence of Constructivism 'rescued the exploration of identity from the postmodernists' (Checkel 1998: 325; McCourt 2022: 11). This book relies on the definition of identity provided by Alexander Wendt, which is compatible with the views of many weak cognitivist scholars: identity refers to 'relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self' (Wendt 1992: 397). It represents 'a property of international actors that generates motivational and behavioral dispositions' (Wendt 1999/2003: 224; see Flockhart 2006: 94–97). The 'self' indicates that this understanding of identity 'is at base a subjective or unit-level.' Yet, it also depends