When the idea of a G2 was first floated in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008–2009, it was met with considerable suspicion—and occasionally outright opposition—in China. In essence, there was a feeling that China was being expected to do things on a global scale that a country of its level of development had neither the ability nor the responsibility to undertake. It was being ‘flattered’ into prematurely taking on the provision of global public goods by being treated as a near-competitor by the United States. In response, sceptical Chinese analysts and officials argued that even though China had (at the time) the world’s second largest economy, ‘large’ was not the same thing as ‘rich’ (let alone powerful). In per capita terms China was still a relatively poor country, with around 150 million people living in poverty, and thus should be expected to behave on the global scene accordingly as a developing and/or emerging power.¹ This reticence was compounded by a suspicion that countries in the West were in some way trying to put the blame for the financial crisis on global imbalances (and thus on countries like China) rather than undertaking painful structural financial reform themselves.² Why should China have to take on increased burdens in solving global problems that were not of its making, instead of focusing its (more limited than appeared at first sight) resources on dealing with its own domestic development challenges?³

Moreover, the idea of forming a special alliance with the pre-existing superpower sat uneasily with Chinese analyses of (and hopes for) the changing nature of the global order. A combination of the decline in US power, the rise (though not to be exaggerated) of new powers and the spread of a type of globalization that undermined the authority of states to control economic activity meant that the world was entering a new era.⁴ As the then Premier Wen Jiabao put it in rejecting the G2 concept:

⁴ For a representative example see Cui Liru, ‘Quanquihua shidai yu duojihua shijie’ [The globalization era and the multipolar world], Xiandai guoji guanxi [Contemporary international relations], 30th anniversary commemorative issue, 2010, pp. 1–5.
Some say that world affairs will be managed solely by China and the United States. I think that view is baseless and wrong ... It is impossible for a couple of countries or a group of big powers to resolve all global issues. Multipolarization and multilateralism represent the larger trend and the will of people.5

Scroll forward three years and a very different understanding of China’s global power status (and relationship with the United States) was evident when Xi Jinping proposed to establish a ‘new type of Great Power relations’ (xinxing daguo guanxi) between the two countries during his trip to Washington in 2012. Xi Jinping subsequently repeated the concept during high-level meetings between US and Chinese figures. For example, during his meeting with Thomas Donilon, National Security Advisor to the US President, Xi said that:

Both sides should, from the fundamental interest of the people of the two countries and of the world, join the efforts to build up China–U.S. cooperative partnership, trying to find a completely new way for the new type of great power relations, which would be unprecedented in history and open up the future.6

This new relationship was partly intended to provide a basis for solving bilateral problems between China and the United States—but from a more symmetrical position than before. To be sure, in the majority of Chinese eyes the United States remains the predominant global power, and will continue to do so for some time to come. But this is now a relationship between two Great Powers rather than between one Great Power and one developing economy. It was also partly a signal of an acceptance that China has a special role and duty as a Great Power to work with the United States and other Great Powers to solve global problems. Here it is perhaps worth noting that Xi’s Washington visit took place prior to the 2012 G8 meeting—a meeting which was hosted by the United States, and to which China was not invited.7 So perhaps the timing of Xi’s overture to President Obama had something to do with reminding Washington of the new realities of global power configurations and the utility (or lack of it) of trying to solve global problems without China’s active participation.

Another point that was not so apparent in 2012, but has become clear as more time has passed, is that under Xi Jinping, China has abandoned its strategy of ‘keeping a low profile’ and is instead proactively striving to establish ‘a favorable international environment for China’s national rejuvenation’.8 This shift is based in part on a reassessment of what is often referred to in China as its comprehensive national strength relative to the strength of others, and the increasingly widespread belief

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5 ‘Chinese premier rejects allegation of China, U.S. monopolizing world affairs in future’, Xinhua News, 21 May 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/21/content_11409799.htm. (Unless otherwise stated at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 2 May 2016.)
7 Non-members of the G8 are normally invited to the summit to discuss issues in which they have interests at stake, but in 2012 no additional country representatives were invited at all.
in China that while the country cannot challenge the United States as the world’s predominant power just yet (and indeed will not be able to do so for some time to come), it has already attained ‘Great Power’ status, and now has a period of strategic opportunity in which to exercise this power to serve Chinese interests. Initially, this ‘strategic opportunity’ period was typically described as the first decade of the twenty-first century. We are now past the middle of the second decade, and some argue that the moment of opportunity is still there, but that China must act quickly as the United States is trying to create a new Washington-based global governance structure antithetical to Chinese interests—for example, through the creation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.\(^9\) And while China is only one of a number of rising powers that are increasingly prepared to challenge the legitimacy of the existing global order, its increasingly dominant position puts it at least first among equals, and for at least some in China, makes it already the global No. 2.

While the idea of China as a Great Power is widely accepted within the country itself, once you dig a little and try to discover what being a Great Power actually means (or, to put it another way, what you need to be defined as a Great Power), then broad consensus is replaced by ambiguity and uncertainty. And it is exactly this lack of clarity that is the focus of this article.\(^10\) By analysing 141 Chinese-language articles, we open up domestic ‘insider’ debates—over the nature of China’s international identity, the nature of Chinese power and the nature of the global order—to a wider non-Chinese-speaking community. As noted above, while some Chinese scholars consider China to have already achieved the status of the world’s ‘No. 2’ or even a superpower, the mainstream discourse views China as both a Great Power and a rising power at the same time. And it is this double identity (or perhaps identity confusion) that makes it hard to pin down what exactly is at the heart of a Great Power relationship (be it a new one or not). As the boundary between Great Power and non-Great Power is unclear, this conceptual vagueness has made China’s strategic intentions more difficult to predict.

There is also some disagreement over whether only the United States qualifies as a Great Power with which China needs to establish a new type of relationship, or whether this status applies to other countries as well (and if so, which ones). But the dissent on this point is limited: the vast majority of Chinese scholars build their analysis solely around Sino-US relations. Accordingly, we suggest that the mainstream discourse of this concept is moving towards what we might call a ‘G2 with Chinese characteristics’. This is a G2 relationship defined by and for China/Chinese interests on Chinese terms, rather than one established by outsiders primarily to serve the interests of others. In this respect, China can be seen as increasingly playing the role of a norm contestor and perhaps even a norm shaper, rather than just a norm taker.

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\(^10\) We do not explore here the origin and evolution of the concept of a new type of Great Power relations. This was the focus of a separate study: see Jinghan Zeng, ‘Constructing a new type of Great Power relations: the state of debate in China [1998–2014]’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 18: 2, May 2016, 422–42.
Contextualizing the study: methods, theories and concepts

This article forms part of a broader study that has its roots in trying to understand how China’s changing global role is understood within the country itself, and how these debates translate into calls for a change in Chinese policy positions. It is important to say at the outset that this is a diverse debate with numerous different voices and opinions. Of course the nature of Chinese politics places certain constraints on what can be discussed; it is not easy, for example, to find calls for Taiwanese independence. But as long as China’s core interests are respected,¹¹ there is considerable room for a spread of different views to be articulated about what China’s place in the world is today, what it could or should be in the future, and the best way of achieving broad agreement on the need for further national rejuvenation.

There are some broad areas of consensus that provide a background context to the specific debate around China’s Great Power status and the new type of Great Power relations.¹² The first is the belief that there really has been a significant shift in the distribution of power in the global order (particularly after the global financial crisis), and that China has been one of the major beneficiaries of this power shift. Importantly, this does not mean that China is on the verge of replacing the United States as the world’s dominant power any time soon; any changes China wants to push for will have to take place from within the existing structure of US predominance, which places considerable constraints on what China can achieve and how it can operate. A second emerging consensus is that China (or, perhaps more correctly, China’s leadership) was not prepared for this rapid rise and relative change in power capabilities and is now struggling to learn how best to evaluate, exercise and use its newly found power in ways that lead to real influence and change. As the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Fu Ying put it, China ‘needs time’ to ‘grow into the role as a world citizen’.¹³

The third broad consensus is built around a recognition that the current international order has served China rather well since the end of the Cold War, providing an international environment that has facilitated China’s growth and re-emergence as a global power. To be sure, there are concerns about the distribution of power in the current institutions of global governance and some of the norms that underpin them. These are related to the belief that China’s voice is not given as much weight as it should be in global politics, and a general if diffuse feeling that China is not accorded enough respect by other international actors. What this means is that China is pushing a reform agenda rather than seeking to replace the current global order with a new Sinocentric order; and that it is seeking to achieve this reform in ways that do not fracture the existing system and in the process harm China’s own interests. For many Chinese analysts, this

¹² The following four paragraphs are informed by discussions with Jia Qingguo, Ren Xiao and Zhao Minghao in November 2015; we are grateful for their agreement to include this material here.
already complicated endeavour will be made more difficult by a perceived US turn away from multilateralism to the formation of new rules of economic governance exercised through putative new institutions such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership that would once more place China as an outsider.

While China may have what Vice-Premier Wang Yang calls neither ‘the ability nor the intent to challenge the United States’ and overthrow the existing global order, the fourth consensus is that there is now a greater appetite in China both to assert Chinese interests and objectives, and to take action to redress perceived inequities and governance gaps by increasing China’s ‘institutional voice’ (zhiduxing huayuquan). This has in part taken the form of providing new sorts of governance through, for example, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the BRICS New Development Bank. While it is too soon to know exactly how the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ and ‘Twenty-first-century Maritime Silk Road’ initiatives will develop, they are widely seen by the Chinese as manifestations of a new proactive China seeking to establish itself as a major global actor.

This proactivity is also seen in the establishment of a wide range of different types of relationships with other states, depending on the partners’ levels of development and/or alignment with China on major policy issue areas. The aim is to establish a network of global hub-and-spoke partnerships with China at the centre. For example, one hub-and-spoke relationship links China with other rising powers that have a shared dissatisfaction with the pace and scope of reform of global governance institutions. Another separate relationship links China through a more paternalistic development partnership with African states, as epitomized by the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation. And in China’s own neighbourhood, it has built another separate partnership built on shared trade and financial futures with south-east Asian states (and ASEAN as an organization), and another set of relationships with neighbours to the north and north-west through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The same proactive approach also entails building different sorts of relationships with (other) Great Powers—and this, of course, is where the new type of Great Power relations comes back to the centre of attention.

Methods

In order to study the Chinese discourse of a new type of Great Power relations, we used the term ‘new type of Great Power relations’ (xinxing daguo guanxi or xinxing de daguo guanxi) to search Chinese academic articles from China’s largest journal database, China National Knowledge Infrastructure. This helped us to identify 141 articles with the term in the title. We then developed a code manual in order to undertake content analyses of these articles. We divided our data analysis into two terms, focusing respectively on ‘new type of relations’ and on ‘Great Power’. This


15 For details on the evolution of the concept of institutional voice, see the discussion on ‘expanding China’s role in global governance’ on the China Policy website, 19 Nov. 2015, http://us2.campaign-archive2.com/?u=3fd756a9690135f7bec6d127&t=822399aaaa&e=ae4f6660cf1.
article will focus on the ‘Great Power’ dimension, building on a previous article that considered the ‘new type of relations’. In order to validate and contextualize our findings, we conducted two sets of interviews with representative academics in Beijing in April and June 2015, making final adjustments after further discussions with Chinese academics at the Beijing Forum in November 2015. All our data, including the coding manual, codebook, online appendix and other replication materials, are available online from our research page.

This methodological approach allows us to cover a wide range of material, in contrast to studies that choose instead to focus on the arguments of a small selected number of key participants in the debate. Its main advantage over this more selective method is to provide a comprehensive overview of the breadth of the debate in general and to take the temperature of the national debate as a whole, including the voices of those not often heard in analyses of Chinese debates. What it does not allow for very easily is identification of which voices are more authoritative and influential—both in the debate itself and in translating the academic debates into actual policy. In terms of the quantitative analysis in the article, this approach is fairly ‘democratic’ as it treats all publications equally irrespective of the weight and importance of either the journal or the author. To adjust for this, our analysis is supported by examples of representative positions and understandings, which draw wherever possible from those writings identified as the most significant by colleagues in China.

Theoretical context

China’s call for a new type of Great Power relations has an important theoretical context—or, more correctly, two theoretical contexts. The first is ours as observers and analysts of Chinese debates and of shifting Chinese policy. The second is the theoretical context of the debates within China itself. It is important in an article like this to point out that the two are not the same. For example, many analysts have argued that realism remains the dominant theoretical approach used in Chinese International Relations academia. But to identify an overall tendency towards realism is not to assert that those analysts are themselves all starting from the same realist position; indeed, as they are trying to identify different domestic discourses, it is more likely that they start from alternative competing positions. In our case, as we are interested in the way in which different identities coexist, how those different identities emerge, evolve and change, and how they influence the policy arena, it goes without saying that we do not think that national interests are systemically or otherwise simply ‘given’. While this specific study concerns itself only with the manifestation of identity politics in the specific form of Great Power relations, it is built on a wider interest in how these identities are

16 Zeng, ‘Constructing a new type of Great Power relations’.
17 See https://sites.google.com/site/zengjinghan/data.
18 Qi Hao, ‘China debates the new type of Great Power relations’, Chinese Journal of International Politics 8: 4, 2015, pp. 349–70. Qi Hao’s article also provides an interesting counterpart to this one by focusing on the ways in which a new relationship might be realized and the challenges and obstacles that lie in the way.
formed in the first place. Moreover, we argue that many of the core terms that are associated with international politics and Great Power relations lack intersubjective meaning—including the term ‘Great Power’ itself. We thus need to parse what these terms mean to different people in different settings to ensure that we do not simply impose our meaning and understanding on what others are saying. We are not suggesting that the way in which academics and policy analysts debate key concepts is the only determinant of Chinese foreign policy—far from it. But we do suggest that these debates shed some light on how China might act in the future.

Although this is primarily a study of academic discourses, there is a close connection between academic research and policy analysis in China, and these debates have important policy implications. The policy community is well represented in our selection of articles, of which 24.1 per cent were written by scholars at Chinese state-affiliated think-tanks and 4 per cent by senior officials. This latter group includes a number of high-profile officials including Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Cui Tiankai, the Chinese Ambassador to the United States; Yu Hongjun, Vice-Minister of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); He Yafei, deputy director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (and former vice-minister of foreign affairs); and Ma Zhengang, a former Chinese Ambassador to the UK. Moreover, making policy suggestions is a key objective of Chinese academic writings on politics—perhaps even the principal purpose. It is not uncommon for China’s leaders to introduce new policy initiatives (or concepts) in a top-down manner before the concepts on which they are based have been fully fleshed out or understood. Once the initiative has been announced, scholarly debate (note here the blurred line between academic and policy-based research) gradually and incrementally fills the concept with substance and meaning. The need for such grounding and explanation is sometimes made more urgent by outsiders’ attempts to impose their (rather than Chinese) meanings on the concept, as they try to interpret Chinese objectives and intentions in ways that serve others’ interests, rather than China’s. Thus, in order to let China become a system shaper it is important for Chinese thinkers to develop the country’s discursive power and ability to define and operationalize core concepts in order to lay a foundation for articulating its interests and objectives to others.

This brings us to the theoretical context of the studies within China. There remains a degree of suspicion in China that some in the West set out to deliberately misinterpret Chinese intentions. Others argue that even in the absence of such deliberate intent, such a misrepresentation can still emerge through the use of theories and historical precedents that are simply not appropriate for studying China’s rise today. Western theories are just that—western; they are built on the study of western (mostly European) experiences in a very different historical epoch. For those who hold this view, chief among these misguided theoretical starting-points are ‘power transition’ understandings built on neo-realist assumptions. Here there is a particular focus on the work of John Mearsheimer, who argues that history has shown us that a rising power and an existing hegemon are
unlikely to come to peaceful accommodation, and applies this analysis to US–China security competition in East Asia, suggesting that there exists here a great potential for war.\textsuperscript{19} While this might sound like a wholly academic endeavour, Chinese leaders have noted the pessimistic prediction of this theory, and called for a Chinese response. In the words of Xi Jinping, ‘we all need to work together to avoid the so-called Thucydides trap—destructive tensions between an emerging power and established powers’.\textsuperscript{20} The initiative to promote the idea of a new type of Great Power relations is part of the solution to avoiding this ‘Thucydides trap’. As the rest of this article will make clear, while China has not yet explicitly elaborated what the new type of Great Power relations is, it has been very clear about what it is not: it is not the old type of Great Power relations as envisaged by power transition theory, which involves power struggles, conflict and a zero-sum game.

While the motivation for this Chinese-coined concept might be to disprove power transition theory, we suggest that its implications do not necessarily lead to the optimistic and peaceful future that its originators seem to envisage. As we elaborate below, this concept is underpinned by a shifting Chinese identity—an identity that considers China as deserving of a greater voice and greater respect in global politics. It reflects China’s rising expectations not just of its own role in the world, but also of how others should respond to and treat China as a Great Power. The extent to which others—especially, of course, the United States—will accept this position and the Chinese version of the ‘G2’ remains open for debate. Simply stating that things will be different does not necessarily mean that they will be. The key is how others respond, and how they change their positions (and identities) as China changes its own.

\textit{The strategic importance of defining ‘Great Power’}

Given that relations with other Great Powers are often described as ‘the core’ of Chinese diplomacy,\textsuperscript{21} understanding the concept of a ‘Great Power’ is the key to deconstructing the real meaning of the ‘new type of Great Power relations’. Of course, the concept of Great Powers is not a new one: it has a long academic tradition reaching back to the early nineteenth century and analyses of the changing balance of power in Europe. These historical precedents, and the idea that European experiences are the ‘cradle’ of the study of Great Powers, are reflected in the Chinese literature—but only in a limited fashion. The focus here is typically on the Napoleonic wars as an example of what can happen when a dissatisfied rising Great Power confronts the established status quo. However, it is notable


\textsuperscript{21} Zhao Kejing and Yin Xiting, ‘Meiguozhanlv tiaozheng yu zhongmeixinxing daguoguanshi’ [American strategic adjustment and a new type of Sino-US Great Power relations], \textit{Gongzhi guanshi xueyuan xuebao} [Journal of University of International Relations], no. 6, 2012, p. 81.
that only five of the articles considered these European precedents, and only four
discuss more recent non-Chinese theoretical debates by addressing the work of
Kenneth Waltz.

So while it may well be the case that current Chinese thinking is informed by
previous historical experiences and theories, it generally does not specifically
engage with them in the literature, which instead tends to focus on the specifics of
China’s current circumstances. The primary context here is the attempt to estab-
lish a discourse that is accepted and shared outside China. The promotion of the
idea of China as a ‘Great Power’, as predominantly used by Chinese scholars,
implies that Beijing expects the world—and the world is sometimes just a short-
hand reference to the United States—to recognize China’s status as a Great Power
and treat it as such. For Shi Yinhong, if this were to come about, it would establish
a ‘strategic space’ where China could pursue its interests and objectives in a way
that is not possible for ‘normal’ (non-Great Power) states. But this desire to be
seen as a Great Power is somewhat tempered by a desire not to be expected to take
on the burdens associated with global predominance and/or leadership. Hence the
need for balance in the understanding of China’s new global status—as great, but
still developing and rising.

There is also a domestic context. This Chinese discourse about Great Power
status is strongly related to the (changing) nature of one-party rule. Over the
past three decades, the CCP has been promoting itself as the only vehicle that
can deliver China’s national rejuvenation as one part of its strategy to maintain
regime legitimacy. In this discourse, it is only under CCP leadership that China
has gradually won back the Great Power status that it enjoyed before a hostile and
rapacious West (combined with corrupt and ineffective pre-CCP leaders) took the
country into a ‘century of humiliation’. The brilliant leadership of the party, so
the argument goes, has won hard-fought gains, and only the party can maintain
China’s new found Great Power status in the face of still hostile western forces.

But once more we see the need to balance, and the need to temper some of the
expectations of what China as a Great Power can and/or should do. The promo-
tion of the CCP as a means of attaining national(ist) ends has helped the party win
popular support in the short term. The danger is that the popular acceptance of
China as a Great Power (or world power No. 2) might generate high, unrealistic
and/or expensive expectations of what China could and should be doing in inter-
national affairs. If Chinese diplomacy fails to meet rising expectations, then the
leadership and the regime might appear to be ineffective. Thus, Chinese interna-
tional identity needs to find a balance between promoting the idea of China as a
Great Power on the one hand, and realistic power capabilities and global leadership
commitments (international diplomatic reality) on the other hand. Once more, we
see an incentive to moderate the ‘Great Power’ discourse by combining it with
‘rising power’ capabilities and expectations.

22 Shi Yinhong, ‘Goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de hongguan de sikao’ [Macro thinking on establishing a new
type of Great Power relations], Qianxian [Front], no. 7, 2014, pp. 47–9.
23 Jinghan Zeng, The Chinese Communist Party’s capacity to rule: ideology, legitimacy and party cohesion (London:
The identity of China in world politics

If China needs to establish a new type of Great Power relations, then it stands to reason that it must already be a Great Power. But while the idea that China is a Great Power might be taken as given, what this actually means remains contested and debated. Some argue that ‘Great Power’ status is simply a matter of strength, which can be measured by such factors as population size, range of territory, economic scale, technological potential and military power. Others argue that it should be decided not by those factors but rather on a less easily quantifiable capacity to make and implement international rules, or to exercise global political and economic influence more broadly. However, the dominant position is not to define the term at all, with very few articles actually providing a clear definition. When it comes to considering China as a Great Power, this lack of definition is not so important (as long as everybody accepts that it is a Great Power). But it is important when we switch the focus to identifying other (potential) Great Powers with which China is to have relationships. For example, according to Pan Wei, a prominent pro-left scholar, a Great Power is a country with ‘exceptional strength’. This immediately raises the question: which countries could be considered to have ‘exceptional strength’? As we will discuss later, this remains somewhat open to debate.

The academic discourse about a new type of Great Power relations includes other identities of China in addition to that of ‘Great Power’. Figure 1 shows the frequency of different conceptions of China’s international identity in the debate. The second most frequently mentioned identity is ‘rising power’ (jueqiguo) and/or ‘emerging power’ (xinxing daguo). Fully 87 per cent of articles consider China to be a rising power. This is quite understandable given that the concept is primarily proposed to manage the potential conflict with the existing hegemonic power: China might be a Great Power, but is not a peer competitor of the United States, which will remain the world’s predominant power for some time to come. The global responsibilities that fall on China and the United States respectively should reflect this asymmetry in Great Power status. Furthermore, this identity of China as a rising power can itself be subdivided, into China as a ‘unique’ rising power and as a ‘normal’ rising power. The former suggests that China is the rising contemporary Great Power (or clearly the most important one); the latter suggests that China is one of a group of emerging powers as manifest, for example, in the BRICS. As we shall explain in more detail below, this distinction has important consequences for thinking about how China should act, and with what partners, to achieve its aims.

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24 Niu Haibin and Song Qing, “‘Goujian xinxing daguo guanxi’ xuesu yantaohui zongshu” [Conference review of ‘establishing a new type of Great Power relations’], Guoji zhanwang [International review], no. 4, 2013, pp. 134–8; Zheng Xuefei, “Xinxing daguo guanxi goujian yu guoji zhixu zhuandaoxing” yantaohui zongshu’ [Conference review of ‘establishing a new type of Great Power relations and transition in the international order’], Xiandai guoji guanxi [Contemporary international relations], no. 11, 2013, pp. 61–2.
25 Zheng, “Xinxing daguo guanxi goujian yu guoji zhixu zhuandaoxing” yantaohui zongshu’.
26 Zhao Gancheng, ‘Zhongyin guanxi: xinxing daguo guanxi de qianzhi yu yansheng’ [China and India: a corollary to new Great Power relations], Nanya yanjiu [South Asia studies], no. 2, 2014, p. 32.
27 Pan Wei, ‘Zhéngzài jueqi de “xinxing daguo guanxi”’ [The on-going rise of a new type of Great Power relations], Xuesu qianyan [Frontiers], no. 6, 2013, p. 28.
One article in our sample critically evaluates China’s position as an ‘emerging
power’. It argues that, from the perspective of history, the United States is still a
‘young emerging power’ and far from senescence. China, on the other hand, is more
like a ‘traditional power’ than an ‘emerging power’, because it has just been gradu-
ally reverting to its rightful historical position as a Great Power.28 This discourse
goes back to the Chinese narrative of history according to which China had always
been a leading power before the humiliations of the nineteenth century, and is
now merely reassuming its (rightful) place in the global order. From this point of
view, the revival of China is a much more appropriate image than the rise of China.

‘World power’ (shijie daguo) is the third most frequently mentioned identity
(11.34 per cent). To many Chinese scholars, China has always been a world
power—a key actor in world affairs. However, some also argue that the goal of
China’s rise is to become a world power, suggesting that it is not one yet.29 This
ambiguity may arise from the fact that the concept of world power is not actually
defined in any of the writings, and means different things to different people.

China as No. 2 (lao er) is the fourth most frequently mentioned identity (9.21
per cent).30 In Chinese academic discourse, it is widely argued that China is the

28 Xu Jian, ‘Goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de lishi tiaojian yu zhuyao wenti’ [Historical conditions
and major problems in establishing a new type of Sino-US Great Power relations], Guoji wenti yanjiu
[International studies], no. 2, 2013, p. 19.
29 Yang Yongfeng, ‘Daxiyang xianzhang zaixian yingmei lunzhan—pingshu lishi dui zhongmei goujian xinxing
daguo guanxi de qishi’ [Reflections on a dispute between Great Britain and the US in the Atlantic Char-
ter: enlightenment on building the new Sino-US relationship in the Asia–Pacific region], Taipingyang xuebao
[Pacific journal], no. 6, 2014, p. 69.
30 It is noteworthy that in this debate Chinese scholars use the term lao er rather than shijie di er (the second
most powerful). Lao er literally means the second child in the family, but the translation as No. 2 seems more
appropriate in this context.
second most powerful country in the world, and the concept of a new type of Great Power relationship is introduced to manage the potential conflicts between No. 1 (the United States) and No. 2 (China). In this discourse, China is considered as No. 2 in terms not only of economic size but also of ‘comprehensive national strength’. This identity overlaps partially with that of ‘rising power’, in that China could be both No. 2 and a rising power; however, it also explicitly suggests that China is a ‘unique’ rising power rather than a ‘normal’ rising power within the BRICS group.

The most controversial identity is perhaps that of China as ‘superpower’. In the Chinese literature, the term ‘superpower’ is usually applied only to the United States and the former Soviet Union before its dissolution. In the debate on a new type of Great Power relations, a few writers (1.42 per cent) consider China to be a superpower.31 For example, Jia Qingguo, the dean of the School of International Studies at Beijing University, argues that:

China is a normal Great Power as well as a superpower … it has the interests of a normal power and those of a superpower. As these two identities and interests are often contradictory or conflicting, it has been increasingly difficult for China to identify its interests and maintain the stability and continuity of its foreign policy.32

The view of China as a superpower is undoubtedly a minority position, the dominant view being that only the United States can be viewed as a contemporary superpower.

It is notable that these identities are somewhat vaguely defined in most of the Chinese academic discourse. China as No. 2 and as superpower are perhaps the least vague. Even so, Chinese scholars often add adjectives (e.g. developing) before key terms to qualify them—for example, describing one country or another as a developing Great Power or a developing world power. Sometimes, those adjectives will change the meaning of the term. For example, Zhao Gancheng considers India ‘a developing Great Power and emerging power’ but not a real ‘Great Power’.33 Yu Lei and Shamsul Khan consider China an ‘emerging superpower’ but not yet a real ‘superpower’.34 Those adjectives make the use of those identities more complex and vague.

This vagueness and the diverse understanding of the various power identities have also led to disagreement over which countries are Great Powers, as we will discuss below. Here, the key point is that, with some exceptions, and in different ways, the identification of China as a Great Power is modified, qualified and

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32 Jia Qingguo, ‘Bingchi “zhizheng zhaoxi” jingshen: jiji goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi’ [Upholding the “seize the day” spirit: actively constructing a new type of Sino-US Great Power relations], Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu [Study of international politics], no. 1, 2014, pp. 10–19.
33 Zhao, ‘Zhongyin guanxi: xinxing daguo guanxi de qianzhi yu yansheng’.
perhaps moderated by insisting that China is still on an upward trajectory—and by implication, not yet at the point where it should be expected to take on all the obligations and responsibilities of a fully fledged global superpower.

**Great Powers as seen from China**

Great Powers in Chinese discourse traditionally meant two types of states: superpowers and historically major countries such as Germany and the UK. More recently, a third category has been added with the rise of emerging powers. So, from this increasingly broad set of countries, which now qualify as contemporary Great Powers in China’s ‘new type of Great Power relations’ framework? Figure 2 shows the frequency with which various countries are referred to as Great Powers in the Chinese literature. Those most frequently mentioned as Great Powers are the United States (93.6 per cent), Russia (15.6 per cent), India (10.6 per cent) and Japan (9.2 per cent).

**Figure 2:** Frequency with which countries are referred to as Great Powers in the Chinese academic discourse about a new type of Great Power relations (1998–2014)

![Figure 2: Frequency with which countries are referred to as Great Powers in the Chinese academic discourse about a new type of Great Power relations (1998–2014)](image)

35 Zhao Bole, ‘Zhongyin guanxi—xinxing de daguo guanxi’ [Sino-India relations: a new type of Great Power relations], *Dangdai yatai* [Contemporary Asia–Pacific studies], no. 8, 2005, pp. 31–6. Sometimes Russia is included as the heir of the Soviet Union, but it is also considered as an emerging power.
A G2 with Chinese characteristics?

At the risk of oversimplification, we can identify two broad strands of argument here.\(^36\) The first, more dominant strand is where the only relationship that is specifically referred to in discussions of Great Power relations is the one between China and the United States (72.3 per cent of articles). In this strand, it is widely believed that China entered a new historical epoch at some point during the global financial crisis. From the end of the Cold War, the Sino-US relationship was characterized as one between the unipolar superpower (the United States) and a normal power (China). Now China has risen out of the ranks of other normal powers (such as Japan and Russia) in the previous multipower international system,\(^37\) taking a special role of No. 2 in the world.\(^38\) Some even argue that the United States should accept China as a Great Power of equal status.\(^39\) But whether China is conceived of as No. 2 or joint No. 1, the underlying message is the same: the new type of Great Power relationship refers only to China’s relations with the United States,\(^40\) and cannot be extended to its relations with other major countries.\(^41\)

This strand of thinking results in a conception of China’s place in the global order that has much in common with the previous G2 idea. And indeed some writers argue explicitly that the new type of Great Power relations is a modification of the G2 concept.\(^42\) However, crucially, it is a modification on China’s terms, taking China’s world-view and interests into account rather than just accepting the American G2 concept built on the American world-view and American interests. If it implies a G2, it is a ‘sinicized G2’.

There are differences of opinion over how best to build this new type of Sino-US relationship. For some, the key is to establish the vision first, and then gradually fill it with substance.\(^43\) Others argue that given the lack of strategic mutual trust and the structural contradictions between the two, the establishment of this relation-

\(^{36}\) This is not to say that there are only two views. Indeed, there is great diversity and variation in the Chinese academic discourse. We use this simplified division merely to introduce our findings. Moreover, there is some overlap between the two, as we will explain below.

\(^{37}\) Yuan Peng, ‘Guanyu goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de zhanlve sikao’ [Strategic thoughts on establishing a new type of Sino-US Great Power relations], *Xinli dai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary international relations], no. 5, 2012, p. 6.

\(^{38}\) e.g. Yang Luhui, ‘Zhongguo jueqi beijing xia de zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi’ [A new type of major power relationship between China and the US in the context of China’s rise: from the perspective of the supply of international security public goods], *Shandong daxue xuebao* [Journal of Shandong University], no. 6, 2013, p. 4; Dong Chunling, ‘Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi: xin zai hechu?’ [A new type of Sino-US Great Power relationship: what is new?], *Shijie zishi* [World affairs], no. 8, 2013, pp. 52–3; Yuan, ‘Guanyu goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de zhanlve sikao’, p. 6.


\(^{40}\) Wang Jisi and Wu Shengqi, ‘Zhongmei dui xinxing daguo guanxi de renzhi chayi ji zhongguo duimei zhengce’ [Cognitive differences between the US and China and China’s American policy], *Dangdai shijie* [Contemporary world], no. 10, 2014, pp. 2–7.


\(^{42}\) Zhang Jian, ‘Shilun zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de goujian’ [Discussing the establishment of a new type of Sino-US Great Power relationship], *Guoji guanxi yanjiu* [International relations studies], no. 3, 2013, pp. 62–71.
A G2 with Chinese characteristics?

ship needs to begin by managing the actual interaction between the US and China and then to proceed by gradually forming an effective management mechanism. Wang Jisi and Wu Shengqi argue that these two different approaches are reflected in the two different strategies deployed respectively by the two countries: China emphasizes the principles of the concept, while the United States insists on the primacy of its functioning, that is, how to use it to solve specific problems.44

It is also argued that the United States should adapt to the rise of China, facing the reality that the United States and China stand side by side as two world Great Powers in the Asia–Pacific region.45 Some also argue that China is a world Great Power rather than the so-called ‘East Asia Great Power’ of American discourse, and thus that Sino-US relations should not be limited to the Asia–Pacific region.46 Su Changhe argues that China’s peaceful rise has proved the American alliance system obsolete, and thus that ‘it is time for the US to change itself and adapt to the world’.47 However, there is also a recognition that China needs to change too, and that the establishment of a new type of Great Power relations requires a process of ‘re-normalization’, in the course of which China should avoid being overconfident and impatient, and the United States should not be too anxious or overly sensitive when facing its declining power and influence.48

Great Powers beyond the United States

By contrast, the second strand of writing and thinking, while acknowledging the significance of Sino-US relations, focuses on a broader range of countries and of relationships with other Great Powers.49 This partly embodies a recognition that the world is too complex and diverse to be ruled by just two countries, and that Sino-US cooperation alone is not sufficient to ‘achieve world peace, stability, and prosperity’.50 It is also argued that the rise of China is not an isolated but a group phenomenon, and that it is only one of a number of rising powers challenging US supremacy.51 From this perspective, the term Great Power incorporates substantial diversity,52 and, just as there is more to the world than the United States alone,

44 Wang and Wu, ‘Zhongmei dui xinxing daguo guanxi de renzhai chayi ji zhongguo dui mei zhengce’ [Cognitive differences between the US and China and China’s American policy].
45 Xiao An, ‘Shiguan zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi qianjing de liuge jiaodianxing wenti’ [Six focal issues for prospects of a new type of Sino-US Great Power relationship], Shijie zhishi [World affairs], no. 12, 2013, p. 27.
46 Niu and Song, ‘“Goujian xinxing daguo guanxi” xueshu yantaohui zongshu’, p. 177.
47 Su Changhe, ‘Gongshengxing guoji tixi de keneng—zai yi ge duoji shijie zhong ruhe goujian xinxing daguo guanxi’ [The possibility of a Gongsheng international system: how to build a new type of relationship between large countries in a multipolar world], Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi [World economics and politics], no. 9, 2013, p. 18.
48 Li Yonghui, ‘“Zai zhengchanghua”: zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi jianshezhong de guanli wenti’ [‘Re-normalization’: the management problems of establishing a new type of Sino-US Great Power relations], Xuedai guoji guanxi [Contemporary international relations], no. 4, 2013, pp. 15–17.
49 Zhao Xiaochun, ‘Weilai zhongmei guanxi he guoji zhidu de kenengxing miaohui—goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de sanye zhongguo sidu de liujing’ [On the possibilities of future Sino-US relations and international order: three important theoretical problems in building a new Great Power relationship], Xueshu qianyan [Frontiers], no. 6, 2013, pp. 6–13.
50 Zhao, ‘Weilai zhongmei guanxi he guoji zhidu de kenengxing miaohui’, pp. 11–12.
51 Dong Chunling, ‘Lengzhan fanzi yu zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de douju’ [Reflections on the Cold War and the construction of a new type of Sino-US Great Power relations], Shijie zhishi [World affairs], 6, 2014, p. 34.
52 Chou Huafei and Zhang Bangdi, ‘Quanli zhuanbian he zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi goujian’ [The building of a new type of Sino-US Great Power relationship at a time of transition in international power], Tongji
so it is important to build new types of relationships with a range of other Great Powers as well. 53

Within this broad strand of writing there remains considerable disagreement over the definition of Great Power. We roughly divide the articles in this strand into three groups, although we recognize some overlap between the views of the first and second groups. 54 Those in the first group tend to focus on the United States and traditional major countries, including Russia (15.6 per cent), Japan (9.2 per cent), Canada, Germany, the UK, France and the EU more broadly. 55

The second group focuses on the US and emerging powers—especially the BRICS—with Russia and India the most frequently identified rising Great Powers (Russia is considered variously as a rising power and a traditional ‘risen’ one). For these authors, the rise of China is not an isolated case, but is representative of a broader shift in the global balance of power towards emerging powers. 56 The Sino-US relationship is thus best seen as just one example of how to establish a working relationship between a rising and an existing power, rather than one that can dominate the international order on its own. 57 For example, Zhang Xiaoming argues that the primary content of the new type of Great Power relations is a relationship between non-western and western Great Powers. 58 Thus support for a new type of Great Power relations emanates not only from the strategic requirements of China, but from all emerging powers. China is a representative of the emerging powers and an important participant in the BRICS grouping; however, it is not their ‘leader’. 59 It has been suggested (in interviews conducted by the authors in Beijing) that expanding the number of challenger rising powers is a useful strategic tool, as it might turn some of the attention that is typically focused on China towards other powers as well.

The third group extends the definition of Great Powers to cover a wider range of developing countries. For example, Pan Wei takes the view that the new type of Great Power relations includes China’s relations with a number of developing countries including Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and the Philippines. 60 However, as is clear from figure 2, this is very much a minority view in the literature.

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53 Zhao, ‘Weilai zhongmei guanxi he guoji zhixu de kenengxing miaohui’, p. 12.
54 Some focus on both traditional major countries and emerging powers. For example, Li Zhifei distinguishes three levels in the new type of Great Power relations: Sino-US relations; Sino-Russian and Sino-EU relations; and China’s relations with developing powers. See Li Zhifei, ‘Fei chuantong anquan zhili yu xinxing daguo guanxi’ [Non-traditional security governance and the construction of new relations between the Great Powers], Jiaoxue yu yanjiu [Teaching and research], no. 6, 2014, pp. 62–8.
56 Zhang and Jing, ‘Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi’, p. 25.
57 Zhang and Jing, ‘Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi’, p. 25.
60 Pan, ‘Zhengzai jueqi de xinxing daguo guanxi’, p. 28.
Debating world order: a bipolar versus a multipolar world

Table 1 briefly summarizes the differences between the two main strands in the Chinese discourse on a new type of Great Power relations. Over a third (39.71 per cent) of the articles analysed explicitly argue that we are in, or moving towards, a multipolar world. However, this new world order might take considerable time to emerge, and there is a strong school of thought that suggests the current system, with one single superpower and a multiplicity of other powers, is not going to change in the next five to ten years; some suggest that, in the short run at least, it might even be strengthened. Some argue that the world might become an unbalanced multipolar structure in which American power will sit at the top level, with other countries occupying positions of polar power but at lower levels. Within this fragmented system, China is likely to be closer to the first level than any other country.

Table 1: A brief summary of the differences between the two main strands in the Chinese discourse on a new type of Great Power relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>Non-G2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Powers</td>
<td>US and China</td>
<td>US, China, traditional western powers, emerging power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conception of global order</td>
<td>Potentially bipolar world/ shared governance or co-governance with US</td>
<td>Multipolar world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of the rise of China</td>
<td>The rise of China is a unique phenomenon</td>
<td>The rise of emerging powers including China is a group phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In relation to other countries</td>
<td>More focus on traditional major countries such as Japan, Germany and Russia and China’s coming to the fore among these countries</td>
<td>More focus on emerging developing countries (e.g. BRICS) and China as one of those emerging powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American hegemony</td>
<td>Challenged by one single rising power, i.e. China</td>
<td>Challenged by a group of emerging powers including China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance model</td>
<td>The US and China can co-govern the world</td>
<td>The world cannot be well governed by only two countries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

61 Tang Jing, ‘Hou weiji shidai de shijie xinxing daguo guanxi ji zhongguo waijiao yingdui zhanlve’ [A new type of Great Power relations in the post-crisis era and Chinese foreign diplomatic strategy], Renzi sheke [Human resources and social science], no. 3, 2014, p. 309.
63 Xu, ‘Goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de lishi tiaojian yu zhuyao wenti’, p. 18.
Using a Pearson’s chi-squared test, we find that articles that refer only to the Sino-US relationship are less likely to mention a multipolar world than those in the second strand of thinking. But here the water gets rather muddied and it is not easy to identify clear schools of thought. This seems to be in part at least because there is confusion over the nature of bipolarity, and its relationship with a G2-type understanding of the future world. There are some very loud proponents of bipolarity. For example, Wu Xinbo argues that the new type of relationship is a ‘new type of bi-polar relationship’ which provides a foundation for ‘the US and China to co-govern the world’. He acknowledges, though, that this might not be a very palatable idea for much of the rest of the world, and suggests that the two powers first work together to co-govern regional affairs, and then gradually move to the global level.

On reflection, however, the system that he is describing does not sound like bipolarity as it is normally understood: that is, a system in which two competing power centres oppose each other and attract allies and partners into competing camps or blocs. It sounds, rather, like a system where, whether they like it or not, China and the United States have some sort of special responsibility to try to provide global public goods and global governance, owing to their individual and collective power status. For example, Yuan Peng argues that the United States, as the most developed country and the representative of western developed countries, and China, as the largest developing country and the representative of emerging powers, can work together to represent ‘the demand of the overwhelming majority and reshape the international order’. Jiang Lingfei argues that when facing the challenge of global governance, the United States and China as two world powers have an unshirkable leadership responsibility. Similarly, Da Wei argues that ‘as the two most important power centers in the world, China and the US could together become the defender, reformer, and builder of the international system.’ This might be a system in which two powers share global predominance and have the most important bilateral relationship in the world, which plays a key role in deciding the future of the international system. But this is not the same thing as bipolarity. Indeed, in some respects, the emphasis on cooperation and shared leadership is the antithesis of bipolarity.

Finally, there is a group of scholars who do not see this movement towards shared leadership as either possible or desirable, let alone both. For example, Yu Hongjun argues that the United States and China simply ‘do not seek global

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64 Pearson chi-squared test: $X^2(1, N = 141) = 13.391, p = .000.$
69 Da Wei, ‘Goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi de lujing xuanze’ [Approaches to building a new type of Great Power relationship between China and the United States], Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi [World economics and politics], no. 7, 2013, p. 71.
co-governance’ and ‘bipolarity’, and that to interpret the new type of relationship as a revised G2 is simply ‘ignorant’.71 For Zhang Zhengwen, the only way that China and the United States could assume this position of shared leadership is for China as No. 2 to fall under some form of leadership from America as No. 1 and thereby become a willing agent of US strategic intentions. Quite simply, ‘this is impossible for China to accept’.72

A new type of Great Power relations with Russia, India, Japan and the EU

The strong focus on the United States leaves little room for other countries in this Chinese-coined concept. Nonetheless, there is some discussion of relations with the EU, Russia, Japan and India. As figure 2 shows, 15.6 per cent of articles refer to Russia as a Great Power that is second only to the United States among the world’s other Great Powers (China excepted—that is, Russia sits in third place behind the US and China). The Sino-Russian relationship is perhaps the second most important among the new type of Great Power relations and the longest in duration to date. As we have shown elsewhere, Chinese writers have been referring to the search for a new type of Great Power relationship with Russia since the 1990s.73 Indeed, it was in relation to Russia that the term was first used—though its current iteration seems to have been developed independently rather than explicitly and deliberately building on this earlier articulation.

Many consider the way in which China and Russia have built a new relationship, despite the previous intense hostility between the two states and the persistence of a number of points of disagreement, as a ‘model’ for how to build a new type of Great Power relationship with other states.74 However, once again we find no common position; there are also pessimistic views on Sino-Russian relations. Some argue that the importance of Sino-Russian relations is overstated. Sino-Russian relations are not sustainable because the current close ties are a necessary consequence of American pressure.75 Thus, China should ‘properly and rationally’ assess Sino-Russian relations and not have excessively ‘high expectations’.76 As one article explains, ‘although the strategic mutual trust between China and Russia has reached a quite high level, we still belong to two “families”. In many areas, we

71 Yu Hongjun, ‘Zhongmei goujian xinxing daguo guanxi de yiyi yu qianjing’ [Implications and prospects of building a new type of Great Power relationship between China and the United States], Guoji wenti yanjiu [International studies], no. 5, 2013, p. 7; Chen Zhimin, ‘Xinxing daguo guanxi de xingtai fenxi’ [Morphological analysis of a new type of Great Power relations], Guoji guancha [International review], no. 5, 2013, p. 18.
73 Zeng, ‘Constructing a new type of Great Power relations’.
74 Niu Jusheng and Du Gang, ‘Hezuo gongying de xinxing daguo guanxi qianzhan’ [Preview of cooperation and a win–win new type of Great Power relations], Weishi [Truths and facts], no. 12, 2013, pp. 91–3.
75 Zheng, “Xinxing daguo guanxi goujian yu guoji zhixu zhuanshang yangtaohui zongshu”.
76 Wang Sheng and Luo Xiao, ‘Goujian zhong e xinxing daguo guanxi de jichu yu lujing’ [A foundation and path for building a new type of Sino-Russian Great Power relations], Xianshi guoji guanxi [Contemporary International Relations], no. 7, p. 49.
have very different or even confrontational interests.'77 If one of the reasons for the development of mutual trust is the existence of shared mutual distrust of the United States, this makes Sino-Russian relations largely a secondary consequence of the primary Sino-US relationship. For example, Chen Jian notes that ‘in the context of the US returning to Asia, some argue that China should abandon the non-alignment policy and form an alliance with Russia against the US’.78 Thus, if China reassesses its relationship with the US, it might then avoid the strategic tendency towards ‘alliance with Russia against the US’.79

After Russia, India is the third most frequently mentioned Great Power in the debate (10.64 per cent of articles), with three articles specifically focusing on building Sino-Indian Great Power relations. The earliest academic discussion on a new type of Great Power relations between China and India dates from 2005. Here it is argued that Sino-US relations are a typical example of China’s relations with a developed Great Power, and Sino-Indian relations are a typical example of China’s relations with developing Great Powers.80 Some argue that although China does not consider India a Great Power, it could apply the principles of a new type of Great Power relations in its relationship with India.81

Of all the potential new relationships, the most controversial is with Japan, which is referred to as a Great Power in 9.22 per cent of articles (making it the fourth most frequently mentioned Great Power). Given the at times rather heated tone of discussion about Japan in parts of the Chinese media and among some online communities, it is notable that there are a number of rather positive analyses. Many argue that China should use its new mentality to deal with Japan in order to secure its own peaceful rise. Here, China could learn from the United States, which made decisions based on strategic interests instead of historical conflict when developing its relationship with Japan after the Second World War.82 But of course, this is not the only view. Some argue that it is too early to talk about a new type of Great Power relationship between China and Japan, because the relationship has not yet even reached the level of normality.83 Some doubt whether Japan deserves to be called a Great Power, arguing that the Abe administration lacks the sense of responsibility and justice that a Great Power should have.84 Indeed, during the authors’ interviews in Beijing, some scholars explicitly told us that Japan does not fit into this concept at all, no matter how loosely it is defined.85

78 Chen Jian, ‘Shilun xinxing daguo guanxi’ [Discussing a new type of Great Power relations], Guoji wenti yanjiu [International studies], 2012, p. 16.
79 Li Yongcheng, ‘“Xinxing daguo guanxi de goujian: lilun, shijian he wenti yantaohui” zongshu’ [Conference review: ‘the building of a new type of Great Power relations: theory, practice and problems’], Waijiao pinglun [Diplomatic review], no. 1, 2013, p. 155.
80 Li, ‘Fei chuantong anquan zhili yu xinxing daguo guanxi goujian’ [Non-traditional security governance and the construction of new relations between the Great Powers], p. 65.
81 Zhao, ‘Zhongyin guanxi: xinxing daguo guanxi de qianzhi yu yansheng’.
82 Liu Jingqian and Shu Biquan, ‘“Guoji guanxi yanjiu” fakanshi ji goujian xinxing daguo guanxi yantaohui zongshu’ [First issue ceremony of ‘International Relations studies’ and conference review on establishing a new type of Great Power relations], Guoji guanxi yanjiu [International Relations studies], no. 3, 2013, p. 153.
85 Authors’ interviews conducted in Beijing, June 2015.
The last notable Great Power is the EU, referred to by 8.51 per cent of articles as a Great Power. A new type of Great Power relationship between China and the EU would undoubtedly be a special case. It is argued that the EU as a supranational entity is a Great Power even though it does not speak with a single voice. Thus, China should develop not only a relationship with the EU but also relationships with its constituent member states. The debate also refers to certain specific European countries, including France, the UK and Germany, as Great Powers. However, although one article specifically focuses on Sino-French relations, Germany and the UK are only briefly mentioned as Great Powers in broader studies of groups of Great Powers. The Chinese Ambassador to the UK, Liu Xiaoming, has argued that the new type of Great Power relations should be applied to the UK–China relationship, but in this he seems to have found few supporters, at least in Chinese academia.

Conclusions

For understandable reasons, the outside world has tended to concentrate on what the rise of China means for the international order. But in doing so it often—not always—ignores the internal dimension of this change: how this rise is changing Chinese views of the nature of the rise itself, of China’s new global status and power, and of the character of the global order. These internal discourses and debates, we argue, will play an important role in shaping what key Chinese actors think that they can achieve on the global stage, and how they can go about doing it.

When examining the concept of a new type of Great Power relations, we find that this Chinese-coined concept indicates a fundamental shift of China’s evaluation of the power status of itself and others. Within China, there is a range of understandings of the country’s identity, including rising power, world power, No. 2 power and superpower. Nevertheless, we argue that there is a clear and broad consensus that China really is a Great Power. However, we also suggest that while there is an increasing confidence in asserting China’s global status (in ways that were not evident before the global financial crisis), it is less clear how understandings of ‘power’ link with understandings of global leadership and the provision of global public goods. While there does seem to be an acceptance that China’s power status gives it some obligation (that does not accrue to other ‘normal’ states) to do things on the global scale, in this respect its Great Power status is qualified by the widespread insistence that it is still an emerging and not yet a fully risen power. In general, it seems that the crucial point of China’s being acknowledged as a Great Power—perhaps in a G2 with Chinese characteristics—is to enable it to do things that are good for China. This may have consequences that are good for others too, but China’s primary responsibility is still to itself.

In general (again), there is an acceptance that the United States is going to remain the world’s most important power for some time to come. And while building new relations with other countries remains important, it is the relationship with the United States that is key for China as it attempts to find its new place in the global order (and thus, in consequence, for the global order itself). Changing the world as No. 1 is a hard enough task. Changing the world as No. 2—particularly when the No. 1 doesn’t seem very keen to ease your path to further global power—is even harder. Hence the perceived need both to build alliances with sets of countries to balance the power of the No. 1, and to try to persuade it to accept your legitimate interests and goals as a responsible global Great Power.

Collectively, the Chinese literature suggests something of a hierarchy in the types of relationships that China is building (or attempting to build) with others, and how far this new relationship building has progressed. The most successful and developed new relationship is with Russia. Relations with India and other emerging powers are proceeding well and moving in the right direction. Relations with Europe are also developing, and occupy an important role in terms of establishing a differentiated strategy for dealing with western powers (rather than perceiving and treating the West as a single whole). And although some people suggest that the relationship with the United States has already shifted to a new model, most suggest that it is very much a work in progress—and is the key for creating a new strategic space for China to operate in.88 Or, as more elegantly put by Yang Jiemin: ‘The model of the new type of Great Power relations is Sino-Russia relations, its emphasis is Sino-US relations, its growing point is Sino-BRICS relations, its focal point is Sino-Europe relations, and its difficulty is Sino-Japan relations.’89

While we reassert the importance of studying domestic debates in China as a means of trying to understand how China might behave as a Great Power in the future, we finish by pointing to two reasons why studying these discourses on their own is not enough. The first is that the world is not just of China’s own making—and neither is China’s place within it. For Chinese-generated conceptions of world order and Great Power relations to translate into real power politics in the ways envisaged by Chinese thinkers, others will have to be persuaded to accept and buy into them. This might prove to be a rather difficult task. The second is that it is important for these debates to remain connected to reality. By this we mean that what is said and argued within China about its nature as a Great Power will be viewed by others alongside the track record of how key Chinese actors utilize Chinese power in international politics. In particular, the way this power is articulated in the country’s regional relations might make the already difficult task of persuading others to accept Chinese views of China as a Great Power even more problematic.

88 Ren Xiao, ‘Suzao xinxing daguo guanxi’ [To establish a new type of Great Power relations], Guoji shiye [Theoretical horizon], no. 12, 2013, p. 62.