

# The Identity Factor in Chinese Relations with Europe

## China and the Barbarian Civilization

**Bjørnar Sverdrup-Thygeson**

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## Chapter 9

### Identity Matters

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## 9 Identity Matters

### Summarizing the China-Europe Identity Nexus

From a long-standing identity as the apex of civilization, atop one of history's most enduring suzerain systems, imperial China encountered the modern state system through a dramatic collapse. Barbarian European powers not only defeated the imperial forces in battle, but also upended the millennia-old Chinese distinction of barbarian and civilized, enforcing Europe as the new steward of the standards of civilization. The case of Russia has been used as an example of the identity-driven difficulties former centres of suzerain systems face to find an ontologically secure place, commensurate with their self-image, in modern international society.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese entry into this society was, compared to Russia, even more traumatic, and the trauma is very much kept alive today.<sup>2</sup> As such, China should be expected to be a prime example of a state whose identity perceptions matter for its foreign policies – in particular with regards to Europe. Concluding the investigation of the dual research puzzle of how Europe matters for Chinese identity, and how identity matters for China's policies towards Europe, this book argues that over the last decades key political events in the China-Europe relationship are indeed difficult to fully account for without bringing Chinese identity issues into the equation. The research underpinning this conclusion has ascertained how Europe played a role in Chinese ontological security crises since the fall of Qing dynasty. European barbarians not only defeated China militarily – as barbarians have done at multiple points in history – but also imposed a different cosmology of civilization, where China was considered the barbarian. Furthermore, investigating contemporary political crises in China-Europe relations, the resulting analysis supports the proposition that identity issues were prevalent drivers in these key political and diplomatic cases. Ontological security seeking constituted an important consideration as Beijing formulated and implemented its policies towards Europe in this period.

Different foundational narratives constituting the ontological security of the Chinese polity, gave rise to specific discourses of Europe, and these discourses then constituted a particular political space for the Chinese actions in their relationship with Europe. Through tracing these changing Chinese

discourses, and Europe's role in these, it has become clear the extent to which the variations in these discourses shaped the political incentives for China's Europe policies in distinctly different ways over the last century. In other words, the issue of identity turned out to be a substantial one in the China-Europe relationship, and Beijing was proved ready to undertake actions to preserve their ontological security, which goes beyond what would be expected if employing only economic or rational-political logic to the analysis of Chinese Europe policies. As Kerry Brown has summarized the relations between China and the EU; "in a strange way, each has a moral and cultural vision of itself that jars with how it views the other partner; this vision in fact creates problems with how the two engage and interact. Until these issues of internal self-identity are dealt with, external relations are unlikely to get any easier."<sup>3</sup> As this book has detailed over the preceding chapters, these identity issues hampering the Europe-China relationship are deeply rooted in a century-long history of Chinese identity crises, in which Europe has played a central part. In sum, analyses of China-Europe relations have been suffering from the predicament that has been outlined by Wang Zheng and Callahan, amongst others, namely being too singularly focused on a narrow subset of factors, in particular on the economic dimension.<sup>4</sup> The divergences in rather symbolic issues of political values that are important for both parties' identities have been proven to shape the dynamics of the China-Europe relationship. As such, to discount identity issues from an analysis of China's foreign policies towards Europe entails overlooking one of the most salient variables of the relationship.

This book has explored the China-Europe identity nexus on two analytical levels, through the historical and the contemporary section, respectively. The former section has undertaken a historical reading of the Chinese concepts of Europe, and how it has related to Chinese ontological security seeking as political entrepreneurs sought to re-establish foundational narratives for the various iterations of a new Chinese polity after the fall of the Qing dynasty. The analysis identified the intimate connection between the various political projects of China in the late-Qing, the post-Imperial, and the post-War eras, and how the image of Europe was co-constituted with the construction of novel national narratives. In mapping these representations, a number of foundational narratives has been identified. These have structured the role of Europe in the Chinese discourse, and as such Europe's relevance to the Chinese political projects of ontological security seeking in the modern era. These foundational narratives changed profoundly over a, historically speaking, relatively short time period, as China went through a century of both great political upheaval and ideological dynamism. Through the analysis of political and ideological textual monuments from these key political periods, several ideational developments of broader relevance stand out. As the historical background has demonstrated, the Chinese idea of Europe was at the outset a distant one, reflecting the relative isolation of these two civilizational centres throughout most of history. During the colonial era the European

powers, formerly considered barbarians, were able to force a complete reversal of the traditional Chinese distinction between the civilized Self and the barbarian Other. This dealt a body blow to the ontological security of the traditional Chinese world order, and the Chinese polity itself.

The role of the Chinese idea of Europe in these fundamental political and ideological upheavals was analysed first through the case of the Self-Strengthening Movement of the late Qing dynasty. This movement essentially sought to readjust from traditional Sinocentrism, establishing ontological security through implementing European technologies, but insisting on Chinese political and moral superiority. This was famously summarized as the principle of *ti/yong*: taking the Chinese culture as the essence, whilst utilizing European technology for Chinese ends. As the contradictions inherent to this distinction between the socio-economic basis of an industrial society and the technology resulting from it became ever harder to transverse, a more radical reform movement sought to instead implement also socio-economic and political reforms, based on European ideals. Thus, in the second case, the years giving birth to the early Republican era, a new distinct narrative sought dominance. This built from a novel basis of how human societies, China included, all are evolving based on the same universal laws. This foundational narrative sought rather to establish a Chinese polity whose ontological security was based on emulating not only the technology but also the political and philosophical structures of Europe, and seeking confirmation for this new identity now also outside the borders of the Chinese polity itself. This entailed a wholesale reformulation of the ontological essence of a Chinese polity, decentering it from that of a singular universal empire and seat of civilization, to that of being only one nation-state amongst many, seeking approval as an equal member of the European-defined family of nations proclaiming to uphold these new standards of civilization. Overall, this period demonstrated how Chinese ontological security seeking, and the resultant political processes, was intimately entwined with the Chinese narratives of Europe.

This Republican foundational narrative then gave way to yet another renegotiation of the ontological basis for the Chinese polity, as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power after the Second World War. The global political and ideological landscape of the Cold War meant that the former colonial powers of Western Europe played a substantially smaller role in constituting this new Chinese foundational narrative. However, the related narratives of Europe saw distinct and important changes throughout this period. This is demonstrated through the analysis of two key historical periods; the first case being that of the early days of the CCP's New China, as the communist party-state was built and articulated with Mao at the helm; the second case covered the time of Deng Xiaoping's reforms, which saw a substantial adjustment of the ontological basis of the CCP's Chinese polity. In the early era of the CCP's New China, the main change was how the predominant discourse of Europe was changed from a colonial Other of the

imperialist world, to being in the ‘second world,’ a battlefield in the midst of an ideological struggle, in which China solidarized with sections of the continent. Thus it was less of an Other than was the United States. This narrative prepared the ground for an early change in the Chinese strategy towards Europe, and made it a less contentious place to learn from in the years before the Chinese opening towards the United States progressed further. During Deng Xiaoping’s years of reform, Europe was regarded as less ideologically relevant, reflecting the ideological changes in China towards pragmatism. However, the idea of Europe as partly separated from the United States opened a discursive space for clear support for the European integration project, as part of a strategy to achieve a more multipolar world order.

Regarding modern-day Chinese Europe policies, the contemporary section argues that the post-1989 Chinese narrative of China and the West as ‘equal but separate civilizations,’ opened a space for a particular identity dynamic to play out in the relationship between these two actors. Europe’s role as an ideological subject position for China to define itself against increased its relevance. The post-1989 foundational narrative formed the basis for a second layer of Chinese main discourses of Europe, through which the Chinese framed their relationship. Key amongst them were the discourses about being co-rising power poles, representing distinct political models, but of equal value. Arguably, these discourses opened a policy space where a number of issues became particularly important political drivers in terms of securing recognition of the ontological status of the Chinese identity. These included seeking recognition for a regime of different, non-liberal, political values, and for territorial sovereignty, and seeking Europe’s cooperation as common partners in global multipolarization. The case of the diplomatic processes surrounding the proposed lifting of the EU’s arms embargo in the early 2000s, confirmed how identity questions were a considerable issue shaping the crisis that demarcated a ‘tipping point’ in China-EU relations, which led to a stop in the discussions of a Brussels-Beijing axis in international politics. As the chapter’s analysis demonstrated, for Beijing the issue causing a diplomatic crisis was not so much about being denied access to European arms. Rather this was about being denied ‘face,’ as the EU in effect refused to give China a symbolic status upgrade.

Identity-driven policies in contemporary China-Europe relations were investigated further, through yet another key conflictual inflexion point in the relationship; the breakdown in relations happening in the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics, as the 2008 EU-China summit for the first time got cancelled by the Chinese. This was due to a number of diplomatic rows, in particularly the French and German political leaders’ decisions to meet with the Dalai Lama. The analysis found the foundational Chinese narrative to be unaltered, but traced notable changes in the derived main discourses of Europe, mainly that the discourse of the EU as China’s co-rising power pole weakened as Chinese official discourses increasingly emphasized the success of China’s own economic model after the global financial crisis. The main discourse on

being granted equal but distinct status stayed permanent, and if anything reflected a more aggressive twist, related to a more assertive range of foreign policy repercussions. Thus, although economic concerns formed a notable backdrop to this nadir in China-Europe relations, one of the main points of discontent was in the realm of ontological security discrepancies between the two parties. As the Chinese sense of self grew more assertive, they increasingly sought recognition for their foundational narrative as a great power founded on differing values, and thus more openly challenged the universalism-based ontological security of the European powers France and Germany. From the Chinese side, the solution to the crises was for the Europeans to recognize the principle of *ti/yong* civilizational diversity. As demonstrated, this form of identity recognition was indeed how the impasse was resolved, as Germany and France both officially communicated recognition, even though diplomatically strong-armed to do so, of the CCP's foundational narrative. In effect this was not just any diplomatic spat, but a fundamental disagreement that although bereft of much practical political or economic importance, went to the heart of the ontological narratives of each of these two polities.

This key tension did not subside even as the overall China-Europe relationship was normalized. The rise of Xi Jinping as the most dominant Chinese leader since Deng, dovetailed with an increasingly assertive set of main discourses on Europe, which fed into a set of policy directions that drove the diplomatic crises in China-United Kingdom and China-Norway relations in the years 2010–2016. The Chinese foundational narrative with regards to Europe showed through this period a subtle shift towards emphasizing China as a civilization not only separate, but successfully so. Concurrently, the Chinese main discourses relating to Europe developed further along a trajectory where a successful Chinese model of development was increasingly contrasted to that of the West, and where a revived version of the Chinese past civilizational centrality increasingly was placed as an idealized future of the CCP's national narrative. The derived policy directions thus entailed an increasing readiness by the Chinese government to spend political and economic capital in pursuit of European states' acquiescence. Hence the solution was again closely related to what is described as an ontological security-seeking measure, essentially pushing for the European countries' recognition of Chinese status, and confirming the Chinese narrative as separate, successful, and worthy of great power respect. The analysis concluded through the lens of the foundational narrative of China with regards to Europe, that the high-profile and eye-catching number of foreign policy initiatives and new discursive actions from Xi Jinping rather reflects an intensification of already extant discourses, rather than a radical break. As such the chapter also contributes to a broader debate in the literature,<sup>5</sup> over the extent to which Xi Jinping's foreign policies is based on radically different conceptions over China's place in the international society than those of his immediate predecessor. The much advertised 'new assertiveness' under the leadership of Xi Jinping, is a reality, but is far more representative of continuities in the Chinese foreign

policy discourses than what is often recognized. The discourses of the Hu Jintao era already contained similar linkages between the Chinese Self and the European Other. Xi Jinping's rhetoric is thus substantially different as a matter of degree, rather than a matter of kind. The foundational narrative of the 'Chinese Characteristics' in opposition to the idea of universal values, is thus likely to continue to create tensions in the Chinese relationship with Europe, and even more to the extent that the spread of Chinese economic and political interests entails it may confront European interests along an increasing number of sectors, and a wider range of geographical locations.<sup>6</sup> In conclusion, the Chinese discourses of Europe, based on a foundational narrative reflecting cultural and political dilemmas with deep roots in Chinese historical experience with Europe's barbarian civilization, was a constituent part in shaping current Chinese conceptions of their political goals.

### **Contributions and Implications**

Going forward into a more conflictual relationship between China and Western nations, it is notable how the continued accumulation of power by Xi Jinping has gone hand in hand with an increasingly assertive development of the Chinese discourses of its place in the world. Xi Jinping has very actively continued the ideological confluence of Marxism and traditional Chinese culture, blending also the CCP's old nemeses Confucius and Sun Yat-sen together into a form of national-communist civilizational syncretization. The irony of this is palpable for a movement that decades ago was busy denouncing Confucius and demolishing his shrines. One important adjustment of this narrative, the roots of which have been identified and analysed in the previous chapters, is the increasingly active position on promoting the Chinese civilizational vision abroad, including the recent Global Civilizational Initiative,<sup>7</sup> and at times going so far as to emphasizing the superiority of the Chinese political system compared to the West.<sup>8</sup> Thus, we may see a further change in the foundational narrative from identifying China as being a separate civilization seeking equality and redress, to a civilization not only separate from Europe, but successfully so.<sup>9</sup> Recent research has already demonstrated how Chinese newspapers' view of Brexit was one of contrasting Europe as a troubled Other to the Chinese self.<sup>10</sup> A continued change in the Chinese foundational narrative from being unique and equal, to unique and superior, would define Xi Jinping amongst the most important political entrepreneurs of modern China, and likely herald an even more assertive Chinese set of international policies.

These early shifts in the foundational narrative have been preceded by changes in the main discourses on Europe, as China has increasingly expanded its demands to being respected as a great power with a successfully distinct political system, and the power to realign the international system to its advantage in a 'period of historical opportunity.'<sup>11</sup> Such a move was evident in the shift to a more assertive policing of Chinese status and face,

through the period that saw a substantial change to an aggressive diplomatic posture known as ‘Wolf Warrior diplomacy,’ after Xi cemented his power at the 2017 Party Congress.<sup>12</sup> China’s mounting economic and political troubles following the COVID-19 epidemic drove a dialling down of this strident diplomacy,<sup>13</sup> and instead instigating a diplomatic charm offensive towards key European partners.<sup>14</sup> However, when faced with a challenge to its identity narrative through the opening of a Taiwanese Representative Office in Lithuania in 2021, Beijing hit back through an unprecedentedly strong battery of diplomatic and economic measures. This included, for the first time, secondary sanctions attempting to block imports to China of a range of goods from other EU countries containing Lithuanian parts.<sup>15</sup> In the face of continued Lithuanian protests, bolstered politically by support from the United States and the EU, Beijing had to scale back these measures, but bilateral trade between the countries continues to feel the consequences.<sup>16</sup> This illustrates that in such cases of perceived transgression against the Chinese identity narrative, even in a more challenging international environment for China, Beijing is now willing to apply harsher and more comprehensive measures than before in order to police the Chinese foundational narrative in Europe.

Great power competition between China and the United States has, in particular since the Trump administration, hardened to a level where there is a live debate on whether it deserves the term “new Cold War.”<sup>17</sup> This political *zeitenwende* has also made itself felt on the European continent. European public opinion towards China has grown considerably more negative since the COVID epidemic, and European policies towards Beijing have also taken a far more assertive turn, in particular on the EU-level.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, as China is facing an increasingly difficult relationship with the United States, it has actively sought to court European capitals.<sup>19</sup> These efforts at weakening a transatlantic alignment on China through diplomatic efforts painting Europe as a separate power pole in a pivot position between Beijing and Washington, is likely to increase as United States-China ties grow more conflicted. As detailed throughout this book, this recent development is nevertheless a policy that has deep roots in Chinese relations with Europe. This further increases the relevance of deep knowledge of the China-Europe dyad. Deng proclaimed about the United States-Soviet rivalry, that “if the two Superpowers want hegemony they first have to control Europe.”<sup>20</sup> This reflects how the Chinese narrative of Europe went through an important shift in the years after the Second World War, in particular through Mao’s Three Worlds theory,<sup>21</sup> where a narrative split opened between ‘The West’ as a threatening and radically different Other, whilst Europe, on the other hand, can be a partner in the process of helping China establish their status internationally through acting as a potential counterbalance rather than a constituent part of US hegemony. A balancing pole in a China-Europe-United States triangle.<sup>22</sup> Ironically, over the later years the increasingly impactful attempts at forging the EU into a stronger and more cohesive foreign policy actor, a goal long encouraged by Beijing, has dovetailed with the negative policy shift towards

China in European countries.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, that these old narrative structures are still underpinning Chinese policies and strategic thought towards Europe in a radically different international political environment were latest demonstrated in Xi Jinping's 2024 official visit to France, Serbia, and Hungary – where he underlined repeatedly the importance of Europe undertaking 'independent' foreign policy choices.<sup>24</sup> As a superpower competition between China and the United States escalates, challenging the European geopolitical position,<sup>25</sup> this half-century-old Chinese foreign endeavour is not likely to disappear. As such, the case for further expanding the literature on Europe-China relations, and in particular EU-China relations should not need too much explication. In a world that has rapidly moved past the post-Cold War unipolar moment, the tendency of the international relations literature to gravitate around a body of hub-and-spokes style works focusing on US interaction with other foreign actors, should be further supplemented by literature focusing on bilateral relations between the other poles in the international system. This book's comprehensive take on modern-day China-Europe relations, with a wide-ranging historical background of China-Europe relations, also aims to be a platform for potential future research on this relationship.

Regarding the theoretical ambitions motivating this study, the primary goal was addressing the fact that the growing field of ontological security studies has only rarely been applied to Chinese cases. The argument was that this approach could contribute saliently to analyses of China's politics of identity. By providing a clear analytical framework able to integrate investigations of current-day political relevance with analysis of the narrative-driven dynamics of identity-construction, the ontological security approach demonstrated its salience. Moreover, the theoretical framework proved itself particularly suited for the Chinese case, given how the framework consciously avoids the reification of the nation-state. The Chinese historical experience entails that identity analysis of China should avoid the more teleologically nation-state-based approaches often prevalent in other theoretical frameworks, based even more predominantly on the European experiences. As we have seen, China's history of having a millennia-old cosmology and related political structure suddenly and fundamentally challenged, resulted in attempts at reconstituting the ontological basis of the polity through a number of widely varying ideologies, political organization models, and the related foundational narratives: from denial to Europeanizing republicanism and from constitutional monarchy to very different varieties of communism.

A second theoretical motivation was the argument that in the same way as the ontological security approach can contribute to the analysis of China, so can the Chinese case contribute to the literature on identity in international relations generally, and ontological security theory specifically. Given the novelty of these theoretical contributions, I will detail them briefly below, whilst also indicating some implications for these concepts in terms of further research. This book's undertaking of a broad study of China, from the mid-19th century till today, has contributed to widening the conceptual universe

of ontological security studies though the inclusion of a case both temporally, geographically, and culturally dissimilar from the main body of works. In the process, this research has proved a salient arena for further exploring two extant but undercovered concepts in ontological security theory, as well as applying three Chinese-derived expansions of the conceptual framework. With regards to what the case of China has been able to contribute with in terms of conceptual exploration, the two distinct avenues explored were those of the role of ontological security seeking and narrative entrepreneurs and, secondly, the role of the past and mnemonic structures in identity narratives. As such, this investigation concludes that the use of the concept of ontological security seeking is a particularly important prism for investigating the underexplored issue of states seeking to fundamentally change their regularized relationships with other actors, and adapt the foundational narratives of the polity in order to achieve legitimacy. Not the least this includes the role of narrative entrepreneurs as political actors negotiating new foundational narrative frameworks for a polity. Secondly, this book also contributes to the growing literature on how identity processes play out through different modalities in polities that entered modernity through externally imposed social processes. Such historical backgrounds reverberate through the institutionalized memories of a society, as it provides a particular background for the temporally based narratives seeking to draw a coherently emplotted arc from this past to the future. The analysis of the historical and contemporary texts demonstrates how China shares the traits of other non-Western empire with memories of colonial trauma, by being more concerned with their identity narratives being intersubjectively acknowledged by foreign actors, and more conscious about their status recognition, a dynamic that arguably has proved integral to Chinese Europe policies over the last decades.

Furthermore, three Chinese-derived concepts have contributed saliently to the ontological security framework throughout this investigation of Chinese identity dynamics, concepts that arguably are of relevance also to other polities in the region, as well as globally. Overall, these conceptual additions to ontological security theory underpin this book's argument for a circumscribed de-universalization of ontological security theory. Ontological security is a concept that when defined at the higher level of generality, is a universal drive for polities to seek stable self-identities. The modalities through which this process is sought achieved, differ to an extent that the Western-centric development of the theory so far has insufficiently reflected. These conceptual developments thus contribute to a better understanding of the specificities of the role of Chinese ontological security seeking in the country's foreign policies in general. Hence, they also contribute to our understanding of these processes for other rising powers of the global South, at a moment when understanding these actors' motivations on the international arena is becoming ever more important. Of these three conceptual developments, the first is to recognize more explicitly the importance of external status recognition and the dynamics of face. Relating to Buzan's call to better include face as a concept into international relations

theories,<sup>26</sup> this book suggests that within the ontological security framework it is salient to recognize it as a particular mode of external recognition seeking. There are two distinct features of Chinese foreign policy for which the utilization of face as an analytical concept is particularly salient. As the empirical sections has demonstrated, these are firstly, the dominant presence of apology diplomacy as an onus of Chinese foreign relations, and secondly, the role of ritualized recognition. This also relates further to the second conceptual development, namely the role of *guanxi*, or the extent to which the analysis has traced a pronounced Chinese focus on ontological security through particularist bilateral role relations rather than universal rules. This operationalization reflects the aforementioned definition of face as the reciprocated recognition of relational hierarchy, as observed at key points in contemporary Europe-China relations. Thus, this book argues for the operationalization of the difference between polities whose ontological security is founded with a more pronounced focus on seeking recognition from others based on a universalist view of the polity's fundamental values versus a polity that seeks ontological status recognition based on parochial, bilateral, relationality. In such a model, modern China is defined as the latter type.

The third conceptual expansion concerns the extent to which materiality informs the ontological security status by engaging with the concept of material success, and political and economic functionality as one possible mode of ontological security seeking. This dynamic is intimately related to the Chinese conceptualization of *ti/yong* as conceptual framework to address the inherent tensions of externally driven modernity as it relates to the traditional cosmology of non-Western actors in the international system. This concept should thus be relevant not only for China, but for a wider range of emerging powers in the international system. Furthermore, the broader Chinese relevance of the old *ti/yong* dilemma is striking, as the Chinese leadership argues in favour of separate civilizational rights whilst seeking to straddle the homogeneous drive of modern economic and technological modes of organization. As Neumann has summarized the dilemma in his treatise on Russia:

Russian thinking about the country's place in the world starts from a contradiction. On the one hand, given its self-perception as great, Russia should do its own thing. On the other hand, given that the states system is a self-help system where units have to relate to the most effective models available for how to organise or suffer the consequences, backward Russia has to own up to cutting-edge models – European or otherwise – or suffer marginalisation.<sup>27</sup>

A similar dilemma was at the core of the Chinese ontological security crisis of the late Qing dynasty. However, the *ti/yong* discourse has played the role of serving as a solution to this seemingly intractable dilemma, by constructing a discourse that opens for copying a number of more efficient technologies, whilst sheltering this process from more general identity issues, thus making

the process more politically viable. This ties into the tacit social compact of the current political regime, whose domestic legitimacy has been founded precisely on its abilities to deliver rapid economic gains to the populace. Of course, if the CCP manages to achieve lasting material success based on a competing political paradigm to that of the West, such a validation of the *tū yōng* principle that has for a long time been a key fault line in the Chinese foundational narratives, would have deep repercussions also globally.<sup>28</sup> The late Qing dynasty was unsuccessful in their attempts at utilizing Western technology without also importing the social models these sprang from. So far, no one has managed to successfully do this over time – but achieving this seems to be an overarching goal of Xi’s political and economic efforts at creating, for the first time, a stable and economically dynamic, autocratic great power.

Drawing upon these conceptualizations, and the role they have been demonstrated to play in China-Europe relations, there are certain implications of wider relevance for the further study of Chinese foreign policy that will be briefly sketched out. With reference to the ongoing discourse about whether the currently intensifying Sino-United States competition equals a new Cold War, it is important to note the stark contrast of China’s current relational, particularist vision as compared to the Soviet Communist universalist proselytizing. China is hardly any revolutionary of universalist ideological zeal.<sup>29</sup> However, given the rules-based foundation of the established world order, such a differing approach is no less of a fundamental challenge. This predisposition is at the core of the concerns raised in Western capitals about the growing role of China in international politics. “Westerners preferred to mediate international relationships through a ‘de-personalized, formal, rationalized caucus of international law’ (...) [China] seems to want ‘special civilizational rights’, either in the absence of an agreed rewrite of the rules or as a way of challenging them.”<sup>30</sup> The degree to which China in the future chooses to define its identity in particularistic and civilizational terms, is thus one of the main avenues through which Chinese ontological security seeking will shape the future of the international order.

As a final remark, this book contends that current megatrends of global convergence are likely to increase the salience of the ontological security approach.<sup>31</sup> In the age of globalization and migrations flows, exploring the political dynamics of mass identity formation is ever more important.<sup>32</sup> The theoretical vantage point of ontological security is a particularly good lens through which to analyse the deep-rooted issues of identity and insecurity that is based on the foundations of identity politics; namely who are ‘we’ and who are the ‘other’? Importantly, populism and identity grievances are not exclusive to the Western world, although the majority of the ink spilt is on this.<sup>33</sup> This myopia is both academically and politically unsustainable, and will be increasingly so. As globalization and the spread of industrialization makes the world’s economic and political power centres increasingly ‘non-Western,’ it is all the more reason to analyse how these effects play out in the rising power centres of the world.<sup>34</sup> The identities of the world’s rising

powers are being reshaped at the same moment as these new powers are reshaping global politics. As such, even more scholarly attention should be allotted to understanding this interlinked dynamic, by a deeper exploration of the identity issues driving these rising non-Western powers' foreign policies. Through analysing the role of ontological security in China's policies towards Europe, this book offers one such contribution to the literature.

## Notes

- 1 [Neumann 2011](#), 484.
- 2 [Wang 2012](#); [Callahan 2004](#); [Hagström 2021](#).
- 3 [Brown 2017](#), 148–49.
- 4 [Wang 2012](#), 11.
- 5 [Jerdén 2014](#); [Doshi 2019](#); [Friedberg 2014](#).
- 6 See, for example, discussions in [Carrozza 2018](#).
- 7 [FMPRC 2023](#).
- 8 [Xi 2022](#); [Economy 2022](#), 7–8.
- 9 [Zeng 2017](#).
- 10 [Yang 2023](#).
- 11 [Doshi 2021](#), 262.
- 12 [Sullivan and Wang 2023](#); [Martin 2021](#).
- 13 [Ruwitch 2023](#).
- 14 [Barkin 2023](#).
- 15 [Euronews 2021](#); [Reynolds and Goodman 2023](#).
- 16 [Bohman 2021](#); [Janelūnas and Boruta 2022](#).
- 17 [Christensen 2021](#); [McFaul 2020](#).
- 18 [Silver, Devlin, and Huang 2020](#); [Von der Leyen 2023](#).
- 19 [Kine and Lau 2023](#); [Zhao 2024](#); [Foy et al. 2023](#).
- 20 [Deng 1975](#).
- 21 [Yee 1983](#); [Kim 1989](#); [Chen 2017](#); [Mao 2003](#).
- 22 [Hu 2016a](#), 505; [Hu 2016b](#), 472; [Casarini 2022](#).
- 23 [EEAS 2023](#); [Rieker and Giske 2023](#).
- 24 [Xi 2024b](#); [Xi 2024a](#); [Rachman 2024](#).
- 25 [Tunsjø and Dong 2020](#).
- 26 [Buzan 2018](#).
- 27 [Neumann 2016](#), 6.
- 28 On this note, a particularly interesting debate revolves around the overlap of two of the current age's most important megatrends, namely the rise of China, and the advent of Big Data-driven AI capabilities, and how these two may combine to create a new form of 'Digital Leninism.' See, for example, [Browne 2017](#); [Wright 2018](#); [Lee 2018](#); [Millward 2018](#).
- 29 [Mitter 2022](#).
- 30 [Coker 2019](#), 181.
- 31 For a brief overview of globalization's challenges for extant political structures; see, for example, [Giddens 1991](#); [Barber 2010](#); [Kinnvall and Jönsson 2002](#); [Calhoun 2007](#); [Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen 2018](#).
- 32 [Giddens 1991](#); [Kinnvall 2004](#); [Barber 2010](#); [Kinnvall and Jönsson 2002](#); [Calhoun 2007](#).
- 33 [Müller 2014](#); [Applebaum 2016](#); [Müller 2016](#); [Krastev 2007](#); [Judis 2016](#); [Wiarda 2013](#).
- 34 [Zakaria 2016](#); [Müller 2016](#); [Judis 2016](#).

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