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Xiaoyu Pu. *Rebranding China: Contested Status Signaling in the Changing Global Order.*

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Editor: Diane Labrosse | Commissioning Editor and Chair: Steve Chan, University of Colorado, Boulder

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INTRODUCTION BY STEVE CHAN, UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, BOULDER

The participants in this roundtable had planned to discuss Xiaoyu Pu's *Rebranding China* at the 2020 meeting of the International Studies Association in Honolulu, Hawaii. COVID-19, however, intervened to cause the cancellation of the conference. We are grateful that we still have this opportunity to have an online conversation on Pu's book in the form of this H-Diplo/ISSF roundtable.

This book discusses how Beijing has tried to frame and communicate its international position to both its domestic and foreign audiences. This effort requires careful coordination in order to manage the different and even dissonant images that Beijing wishes to convey to different people. It tries to establish its nationalist credentials for domestic legitimacy without unsettling and even alarming foreigners. It also wants to demonstrate that it deserves international recognition of its rising status, while at the same time claiming that it remains a developing country that identifies itself with the global south. Pu presents us with a nuanced picture about Beijing's attempts to propagate and reconcile its multifaceted images to different audiences.

The following reviews are written by colleagues with deep knowledge about China; all have lived, studied, and/or done research there. Yong Deng is to my knowledge the first scholar to have written on China's pursuit of international status.¹ In the interest of advancing further research on this topic, he asks how the multiple signals being sent by Beijing to disparate audiences 'add up' to form a total composite image of China and how effective Beijing's mass communications have been. Scott Kastner and other reviewers raise the same question about the need for further research to determine the extent to which Beijing has been successful in promoting its desired images at home and abroad. Moreover, he suggests that we should broaden our research to include comparative studies of other rising countries such as Brazil and India, and to examine more closely the tradeoffs entailed in sending mixed and even contradictory signals to different audiences. Echoing Kastner but offering a somewhat different concern, Gregory Moore asks whether the pursuit of status is a universal tendency for all states and, if so, whether it is to the same extent. He asks whether this pursuit may be especially germane for a traditionally hierarchical society and a culture with strong status consciousness (like China), and whether this research focus on status may be less relevant to other countries without such social or cultural legacies (like the U.S., with its egalitarian ethos). Thus, he calls for a deeper understanding of a country's heritage and careful consideration of the extent to which an emphasis on status pursuits is universally applicable or salient.

While also acknowledging Pu's contributions to the existing literature on signaling, Brandon Yoder raises several important questions. What is exactly 'status signaling' and what distinguishes it from other kinds of signaling? How can one discern a sender's motivations from its ostensible signals? Furthermore, what makes a signal credible to its intended audience? Ketian Zhang concurs with Pu about the duality and tension in China's signaling behavior. She points out, however, that such duality and tension may not just be intended to serve Beijing's instrumental purposes. Rather, they can also reflect genuine cognitive dissonance and the pertinent officials' difficulties in reaching an agreement about what it means to be a powerful or high-status country. Indeed, there is the further possibility that the multiple and sometimes competing signals being emitted from Beijing can simply indicate bureaucratic politics, with different government agencies and political factions sending their own respective preferred messages. Finally, Zhang asks how the public image that a country seeks to project may shift over time given its changing power relations with others. The reviews are followed by Xiaoyu Pu's response. He offers further clarifications on the idea of status pursuit, the coherence and evolution of China's identities, and directions for future research.

In my own view, Pu makes important contributions to several research topics that engage international relations scholars. What follows is my attempt to situate this book in the broader context of international relations theorizing, specifically with

¹ Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

respect to three strands of recent scholarship relating to states' quest for status, identity politics in their relations, and their legitimization rhetoric.

First and most obviously, *Rebranding China* speaks to a recently burgeoning literature on states' pursuit of international status,² calling attention especially to how this pursuit on the part of rising states may produce conflict with the established ones who may be concerned about preserving their own existing positions and forestalling any decline in their international prestige or standing. We have learned from this recent scholarship that states' quest for a higher status sometimes offers a more persuasive account of their conduct than their pursuit of power. Indeed, in some cases their quest for status—such as Czarist Russia's claim to represent its co-religionists in the Holy Land leading up to the Crimean War and Wilhelmine Germany's efforts to build a *Hochseeflotte* (high sea fleet) before World War I—was undertaken without regard to its negative effects on their material power or security position and even seemingly in ways that undermined their power and security.³ Arguably, the denial by the Western established great powers of equal status to interwar Japan on perceived racial grounds was also a factor contributing to the chain of events that eventually led to the Pearl Harbor attack.⁴

This more recent scholarship on the quest of states for status recognition of course follows a long tradition of scholars seeking to understand interstate conflict as a result of a state's frustration due to its sense of relative deprivation,⁵ whereby it feels that it has suffered a status deficit due to other states' failure or refusal to fully recognize its status according to its self-perceived accomplishments.⁶ *Rebranding China* returns us to this important research agenda that has somehow been neglected until recently. As suggested by the relevant literature, states do not always fight to gain more power or security. They can also contest and compete for more intangible and more elusive objectives such as prestige, glory, and a higher standing or rank in the international status hierarchy. Richard Ned Lebow argues that these motivations have been far more common as a source of historical conflicts among great powers than their security concerns.⁷ There has of course been much discussion about China's recent rapid gains in relative power and how such a development may augur a transitional war or present a "Thucydides's trap" in its relations with the United States.⁸ Pu's book serves an important corrective to this

² Deng, *China's Struggle for Status*; Deborah W. Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 34:4 (2010): 63-95 and *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019); Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Jonathan Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," *International Organization* 70:3 (2016): 513-550 and *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); and Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³ Michelle Murray, "Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition before First World War," *Security Studies* 19:4 (2010): 656-688; and William C. Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics* 61:1 (2009): 28-57.

⁴ Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*.

⁵ Ted R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

⁶ For examples of this earlier research on status inconsistency or status discrepancy as a cause of interstate conflict, see Maurice A. East, "Status Discrepancy and Violence in the International System," in James N. Rosenau, Vincent Davis, and Maurice A. East, eds., *The Analysis of International Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 299-319; Charles S. Gochman, "Status, Capabilities, and Major Power Conflict," in J. David Singer, ed., *The Correlates of War II: Testing Some Realpolitik Models* (New York: Free Press, 1980), 83-123; Manus I. Midlarsky, *On War: International Violence in the International System* (New York: Free Press, 1975); James L. Ray, "Status Inconsistency and War Involvement among European States, 1816-1970," *Peace Science Society Papers* 23 (1974): 69-80; Thomas J. Volgy and Stacey Mayhall, "Status Inconsistency and International War: Exploring the Effects of Systemic Change," *International Studies Quarterly* 39:1 (1995): 67-84; and Michael D. Wallace, *War and Rank among States* (Lexington: Heath, 1973).

⁷ R. Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motivations for War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 18.

⁸ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: Norton, 2011); A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Ronald L. Tammen, Jacek Kugler,

prevailing tendency to focus *only* on power shifts among states without regard to China's self-professed identity or motivation. Given China's obviously important role in this discourse, this book also offers a much-needed analysis of Beijing's quest for international recognition by someone who is actually an expert on China. It is one of the first such studies to follow the pioneering work of Yong Deng;⁹ most international relations scholars writing on topics such as power transition theory and international status competition are generalists who do not command any deep knowledge about China whereas most China specialists are not well acquainted with international relations theories. As my references to the relevant literature thus far make abundantly clear, the dominant narrative has been decidedly one-sided in that it tends to present only a Western or U.S. centric perspective on power transition and states' quest for recognition.

As mentioned, states can feel aggrieved because of their perception of being denied the status they think they deserve, producing a strong sense of relative deprivation that can incline them to initiate conflict to rectify this situation. Sometimes a state can commit the mistake of 'overreaching,' as in the case of Czarist Russia leading up to the Crimean War, whereby its leaders sought a higher status that turned out to be unwarranted in terms of its actual capabilities. Pu's book suggests that Chinese leaders may be aware of the danger of this tendency to overreach, and that they have sometimes deliberately emphasized China's weaknesses and avoided taking a leadership role. One is reminded of Deng Xiaoping's admonition to his colleagues and successors that China should bide its time and hide its brilliance, emphasizing economic development as its top priority. In other words, an aversion to assuming a high profile in international relations and deliberately avoiding status displays can sometimes coexist with Beijing's demand for international recognition and its conspicuous attempts to show off. The former tendency to 'lie low' can reflect Beijing's efforts to stay out of Washington's "strategic headlights."¹⁰

This behavior can also be caused by Beijing's attempt to shirk burden-sharing in the provision of international public goods, causing some to detect a "Kindleberger trap."¹¹ Charles Kindleberger was of course well-known for his theory of hegemonic stability,¹² claiming that a dominant hegemon is necessary to support and sustain world order and prosperity. Parenthetically, lest one finds it odd that a country like China can sometimes understate or underplay its status, it may be recalled that the U.S. pursued aggressive foreign expansion only considerably after it had acquired the material wherewithal to do so. This agenda was delayed by the weak institutional capacity of its executive branch.¹³ Even long after it had attained the undisputed position as the world's most powerful country, Washington did not behave like a 'responsible stakeholder' in today's jargon, such as when it refused to join the League of Nations and when it undertook beggar-thy-neighbor protectionist policies as evidenced by the 1930 Smoot-Hawley legislation that deepened and widened the Great Depression. Thus, as Pu reminds us, it is important not to "essentialize" China (107), treating its conduct and policy as if they are unique or exceptional.

Douglas Lemke, Allan Stam III, Mark Abdollahian, Carole Alsharabati, Brian Efird, and A. F. K. Organski, *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House, 2000).

⁹ Deng, *China's Struggle for Status*.

¹⁰ Jonathan D. Pollack, "The Transformation of the Asian Security Order: Assessing China's Impact," in David Shambaugh (ed.) *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 329-346.

¹¹ Joseph Nye, "The Kindleberger Trap," Project Syndicate. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/trump-china-kindleberger-trap-by-joseph-s-nye-2017-01?barrier=accesspaylog>.

¹² Charles P. Kindleberger, *World in Depression: 1929-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

¹³ Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

Rebranding China makes a second contribution to the international relations literature by illuminating the important question of how China sees itself. Much of the prevailing U.S. discourse on China's rise has reflected a binary mentality to either contain or engage it.¹⁴ The 'engagers' are forthright in acknowledging that their objective is to integrate China into a world order dominated by the U.S., and to convert it into a 'responsible stakeholder' in accordance with the rules set by Washington. "Responsibility" in this light is treated as the same thing as "supporting and enforcing US interests."¹⁵ The problem with this approach is of course that it insists on China making all the necessary adjustments, and it overlooks or dismisses China's own sense of its identity and its own understanding of its role in international relations. Yet, "to satisfy its recognition demands, the established powers must engage the rising power *on its own terms* and not structure its interactions with the goal of identity change [by the rising power]."¹⁶

I take China's official representation of itself to both its foreign and domestic audiences to be more than just spin, propaganda, or 'cheap talk.' As Stacie Goddard states succinctly, "talk matters."¹⁷ This talk shows how a country sees itself, and how it would like others to see it. Beijing wants to project a dual image as a member and representative of the developing world as well as a consequential major power whose views and interests need to be given due regard in international affairs (especially in matters pertaining to its home region). There is nothing unique or special about multiple portraits or identities being projected by a country. Japan, for example, has presented itself as both an Asian country and a member of the select club of Western developed democracies. The U.S. has likewise seen itself and wants others to perceive it as an indispensable global hegemon and as a guardian of the interests of countries located in the Western Hemisphere and more broadly, democracies around the globe. Staking out such a 'straddling,' 'bridging,' or 'intermediary' position in international and/or regional relations of course has a strategic purpose behind it and will naturally also have strategic consequences in how other countries manage their relations with the country in question. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's Prussia, for example, posed itself both as a leading voice of nationalism representing German-speaking states as well as a conservative force defending the legitimate monarchical order. This strategic position enabled it to achieve its rapid ascent without arousing other countries' suspicions and hence causing them to join a countervailing coalition to contain and confront a rising revisionist power.¹⁸

Construction of identity and, even more importantly, propagation and legitimation of this identity are a critical factor in shaping whether a power transition will end peacefully or violently. Even though Britain and the U.S. fought in 1812, they managed to eventually become close allies after the U.S. as a rising power unseated Britain as the ruling hegemon first in the Western Hemisphere and then in the entire world.¹⁹ Mutual perception by the elites and subsequently by the mass publics

¹⁴ Obviously, this is a generalization but one that captures the two prevalent orientations of policy suggestions advanced by most American writers on China's rise. For helpful collections of essays on this subject, one somewhat dated and one more recent, see Robert S. Ross and Feng Zhu, eds., *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), and Huiyun Feng and Kai He, eds., *China's Challenges and International Order Transition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

¹⁵ Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 216.

¹⁶ Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 206. Italics in the original.

¹⁷ Stacie E. Goddard, *When Right Makes Might: Rising Powers and World Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 198.

¹⁸ Goddard, *When Right Makes Might*. See also Stacie E. Goddard, "Embedded Revisionism: Networks, Institutions, and Challenges to World Order," *International Organization* 72:4 (2018): 763-797.

¹⁹ Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Charles Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010);

of these countries that they shared the same heritage as members of the Anglo-Saxon family eased the tensions of the power transition, culminating in the special relationship that enabled London to win two world wars and that has persisted to this day. As a contrasting example, although many Americans (including President Woodrow Wilson) had once thought of imperial Germany as a paragon of constitutional state, rule of law, and bureaucratic efficiency, their perceptions increasingly turned negative and shifted to ‘othering’ ‘the Teutons’ as World War I approached.²⁰ Identity politics—the construction and conveyance of meaning by differentiating ‘them’ from ‘us’—very much lies at the heart of international conflict and cooperation.²¹ We are seeing increasing rhetoric in both China and the U.S. pointing to this ‘us versus them’ differentiation voiced by their respective elite and public.

The role played by identity politics was at least part of the story explaining Japan’s feeling of being denied its rightful place among the great powers due to racial discrimination, culminating in its decision to start the Pacific War in 1941. The West had refused to agree to the principle of racial equality demanded by Japan at the Versailles peace conference concluding World War I, and in subsequent years the U.S. had passed laws that restricted Asian (including Japanese) immigrants and outlawed their right to own land. Racial identity also helps to explain other more recent phenomena such as why there is not a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in Asia.²² One can, moreover, wonder whether ‘civilizational’ considerations²³ rather than the West’s insistence on democracy or human rights are the real reason behind excluding Russia and China from the existing club of established powers, and Turkey’s inability to gain admission to the European Union.

Naturally, self-identification can also be important because our image of ourselves determines how we act—or not act (such as when we are self-restrained from acting in a way that is contrary to our values). Indeed, this self-image even provides the basis for our perceptions of others, shaping our attributions of others’ characters and motivations. American journalist and political scientist Harold Isaacs has been quoted saying that “by examining the images we hold, say, of the Chinese and Indians, we can learn a great deal about Chinese and Indians, *but mostly we learn about ourselves...*”²⁴

A third area of contribution made by *Rebranding China* pertains to Beijing’s legitimization strategies. How does Beijing try to portray its recent rise, and how does it convey its future intentions? Legitimation strategies matter most in the context of rapid power shifts among the leading states, that is, during times of power transition that are fraught with uncertainties about the intentions of both rising and ruling states. The word ‘strategies’ naturally suggests that what Beijing has to say reflects purposeful design and deliberate choice. Purposiveness and deliberation are necessary because Chinese leaders are

and Stephen R. Rock, *Why Peace Breaks Out: Great Power Rapprochement in Historical Perspective* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) and *Appeasement in International Politics* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000).

²⁰ Ido Oren, *Our Enemies and US: America’s Rivalries and the Making of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²¹ David L. Rousseau, *Identifying Threats and Threatening Identities: The Social Construction of Realism and Liberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

²² Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism,” *International Organization* 56:3 (2002): 575-607.

²³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

²⁴ Quoted in Chengxin Pan, *Knowledge, Desire and Power in Global Politics: Western Representations of China’s Rise* (Cheltenham, UK: Elger), 43. Italics in original.

speaking simultaneously to multiple audiences, domestic and foreign.²⁵ They are engaged in conveying information and giving meaning (explaining and justifying) to their actions to diverse and even opposed audiences. For example, they need to communicate their commitment to the peace and stability of international relations as well as their dedication to the cause of justice and equality. Therefore, they need to show that they stand ready, able, and willing to contribute to public goods while at the same time not overlooking the need to redress the persistent problems of poverty and injustice that especially afflict developing countries. They need to signal their willingness to cooperate and even accommodate other great powers like the U.S. without, however, alienating nationalists at home. Similarly, they need to communicate their aspiration to redress past grievances and restore China's position as a great power without alarming the established powers that China has a revisionist agenda to challenge the existing international order.

Goddard suggests that a state's ability to speak with multivocality is important, defining multivocality to mean the ability to speak authoritatively and authentically to multiple audiences concurrently.²⁶ So far, Beijing seems to have successfully navigated this demanding task by simultaneously presenting itself as a rising power that will play "by the rules," and yet one which is dedicated to promoting fair changes to the existing rules in order to redress current and past injustices or unfairness (such as in its demand to reform the voting quotas of the International Monetary Fund, and its insistence on protecting the sovereignty rights of weaker countries subject to Western interference).

Chinese leaders appear to have adroitly positioned their country *both* as a major power to be reckoned with (and hence a member of the 'establishment' even though they have thus far declined to join the select G8 club) and at the same time, a powerful advocate for the less powerful. They have thus sought to place China in the role of an important broker or intermediary. They have been assisted in this endeavor by their evident social capital; China, like the rest of the developing world, has clearly suffered at the hands of Western imperialism and can thus speak from its own experience in sympathy with other victims of this foreign predation. China has obviously gained much of the material wherewithal to influence regional and even global affairs, and the so-called Beijing model of economic development has established its credential in the wake of China's rapid growth. Chinese leaders have also framed China's rise as a national mission to restore their country's past standing to their domestic audience while at the same time reassuring their foreign audience that this rise will be peaceful.

A rising power's ability to blend effectively resonant messages for multiple audiences is one of the factors affecting whether its rise will encounter accommodation or resistance from the established powers.²⁷ The key is *not* to have to choose privileging either a domestic or a foreign audience but to communicate persuasively to both. Naturally, we will need more systematic research to determine the extent to which China's public rhetoric has resonated with the elites and publics of other countries, for example, by studying cross-national surveys of popular opinion, or even its own people, including compatriots living in Hong Kong and Taiwan. *Rebranding China* has launched us on this research path by reminding us that official rhetoric is not just empty or cheap talk,²⁸ and that it should instead be taken seriously in order to discern how a country sees itself, seeks to communicate its intentions, and tries to legitimate its accomplishments and aspirations to both its own citizens and the outside world.

²⁵ Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42:3 (1988): 427-460.

²⁶ Goddard, *When Right Makes Might*.

²⁷ Goddard, *When Right Makes Might*.

²⁸ On costly signals, see James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49:3 (1995): 379-414, and "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41:1 (1997): 68-90.

Participants:

Xiaoyu Pu is an associate professor of political science at the University of Nevada, Reno. He is a Public Intellectuals Program fellow with the National Committee on United States - China Relations and a non-resident senior fellow with the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, D.C. Pu is the author of *Rebranding China: Contested Status Signaling in the Changing Global Order* (Stanford University Press, 2019). His research has appeared in *International Security*, *International Affairs*, *The China Quarterly* and *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*. He is an editor of *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*.

Steve Chan is College Professor of Distinction at the University of Colorado, Boulder. His most recent book is *Thucydides's Trap? Historical Interpretation, Logic of Inquiry, and the Future of Sino-American Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

Yong Deng is a professor of Political Science at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland. His publications include *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Scott Kastner is a professor in the Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is author of *Political Conflict and Economic Interdependence across the Taiwan Strait and Beyond* (Stanford University Press, 2009) and *China's Strategic Multilateralism: Investing in Global Governance* (Cambridge University Press, 2019; with Margaret M. Pearson and Chad Rector).

Gregory J. Moore is Head of the School of International Studies at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China, and a fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. He is author of *Niebuhr International Relations: The Ethics of Foreign Policymaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Starting in the fall of 2020 he will be Professor of Politics and Global Studies at Colorado Christian University in the U.S.

Brandon K. Yoder is a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in the School of Politics and International Relations at Australian National University, and a non-resident Research Fellow in the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore. His research centers on international relations theory and the politics of China and East Asia, and employs a combination of formal models, historical case studies and laboratory experiments. He is the editor of a special issue of *International Politics* titled "International Relations Theory and China-Russia Relations after the Cold War" (Forthcoming, 2020). His work has also appeared in the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Political Science Quarterly*, the *Chinese Journal of International Politics* and *International Interactions*, among other outlets.

Ketian Zhang is an assistant professor of international security in the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. Ketian researches rising powers, coercion, economic statecraft, and maritime disputes, with a regional focus on China and East Asia.

REVIEW BY YONG DENG, U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY

With *Rebranding China*, Xiaoyu Pu delivers on what he promises, offering a theoretical framework on China's status signaling and an updated account of Chinese foreign policy since the 2008 global financial crisis. Here I will highlight the book's contributions to the study of Chinese foreign policy and raise three issues concerning the net effect of mixed signals, the absence of a dominant identity, and the limits to status signaling.

The study posits a China with conflicted identities rising precariously in the world. The international relations literature commonly differentiates status into either a club good or a positional good, both of which are likely zero sum and inherently competitive.¹ Studies based on the social identity theory, however, see status as both a positional and a club good. They argue that aspiring great powers define status and devise status management strategy in terms of their relations with the dominant group of established powers.² Differing from the literature, Pu's study suggests that China has a "repositioning problem", which requires status signaling to project "the kind of standing [it] wants to have in international society" (9, 10). But with an unsettled identity, China wants to present multiple images to the world. It thus invariably sends mixed signals, and hence the struggle for rebranding.

The status literature in international relations, while differing on the definition on status, agrees that the state always values higher, not lesser status. But Pu perceptively argues that China sometimes prefers lower status for pragmatic considerations. Even after becoming the world's second largest economy, China insists it is still a 'developing country' in order to identify itself with the global south, to eschew international responsibilities, and to underscore its power gap with the United States. When China pursues higher status through conspicuous giving, such as contributing to regional financial stability during the East Asian financial crisis or offering the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it acted as if it were a responsible power rather than a revisionist threat. By focusing on the agency of the rising power, Pu's study rejects the ineluctable logic of a violent power transition in the great-power politics of the twenty-first century.

With a conflicted identity, China must calibrate its image-building to cater to the preferences of different audiences. Thus, Pu sees China's status signaling as a multi-level game. Particularly innovative is the incorporation of the domestic-international 'two-level game' into his analytical framework. The imperative need of the ruling Chinese Communist party to secure domestic legitimacy means that China must create an image of a strong nation on the cusp of great rejuvenation. At the international level, however, the Chinese government must adjust its messages for differing audiences in the neighboring region, the global south, and the advanced West.

The book fills important gaps in international relations theorizing on status and in the empirical study of Chinese foreign policy. It also provokes questions that call for further inquiry. Three questions stand out. First, if China must send multiple signals to disparate audiences at home and abroad, how do the signals affect each other? Second and relatedly, how are we to determine the weight of each signal absent a dominant identity? Third, if "status largely depends on recognition from others" [and] "is an attribute that is primarily located in other people's minds" (18), then, what are the limitations to China's image-projection?

China's mixed signals, which are aimed at different audiences, must have an impact on its total image. In strategic bargaining, a state that is concerned about a general reputation of resolve must consider what Thomas Schelling calls "the interdependence of commitments." Explaining U.S. deterrence strategy in Europe during the Cold War, Schelling writes,

¹ T.V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

² Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Deborah W. Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

“the main reason why we are committed in many of these places is that our threats are interdependent.” Credibility there and then will affect credibility here and now.³ In the same vein, the status signals cannot be compartmentalized in terms of their audience effect; they too are interdependent. As Pu notes, the emphasis of the China Dream on domestic legitimacy undercuts the reassurance message China seeks to send abroad. Likewise, Beijing’s “developing country” identity may contradict its yearning for global leadership (45, 50, 98).

But China’s messaging contradictions beg the question of what total image, if any, Beijing wants to cultivate and how it tries to resolve the tensions in its mixed signals to project that image. This seems to be a central question because it goes to the heart of the efficacy of China’s rebranding. Does contradictory messaging mean the futility of China’s rebranding? If not, is it by design or by necessity? One wonders if the dissonant signaling would stall China’s rise to great-power status. Clearly Beijing does not assign equal weight to the many images. And the relative importance of the target audience may change too. For example, the global south has gained importance thanks to the BRI. Delving into the interplay of the multiple images would help scholars to discern and account for change in China’s foreign policy.

Interdependence of signals is directly related to the second question of whether contemporary China has a dominant identity. If status matters, as Jonathan Renshon argues,⁴ only in terms of the state’s particular reference group which he calls status community, then identifying China’s status community or priority audience would help sort out the hierarchy of identities. According to Jeffrey Legro, a country’s orthodox worldview, i.e., the dominant idea, sets its foreign policy choice. Post-Mao China’s foreign policy reflected the paramount reformist leader Deng Xiaoping’s worldview that China must and can achieve national success by integrating into the world order.⁵ Like many scholars, Pu notes the assertive turn in Chinese foreign policy under President Xi Jinping after 2012-3. This would suggest a shift in China’s dominant idea towards some proactive revisionism. Yet, China’s status signaling, according to Pu, shows an even more conflicted identity, with greater emphasis on its weakness under President Xi. This is both counterintuitive and puzzling, especially considering China’s major power diplomacy under Xi that many consider to be well coordinated and ambitious.

Finally, as Pu argues, much like reputation, one’s status depends on the belief and judgement of others, namely, the target audience. International politics may figuratively be a theater, but it is not so in the literal sense. It is ultimately a competitive world where the states are hypersensitive to power and threats from across their national borders. With the current breakdown of the liberal world order and return of great-power competition, international anarchy has become more salient, imposing limitations on China’s strategic spinning.⁶ China’s growing power and pursuit of ‘core interests’ will severely limit how others respond to Beijing’s status messaging, making its reassurances resonate less with the target audiences abroad. For example, the South China Sea disputes have persistently belied its reassurance message in Southeast Asia and in the West.

As Pu writes, as China has become the No. 2 power in the world, “managing tensions with number-one power is an increasingly urgent matter for China” (39). The reigning power would be threatened not just by its closest competitor, but also a major country seeking to lead a rival coalition of nations against the international status quo. Maoist China’s identity as the leader of the downtrodden Afro-Asian nations in a world revolution generated heightened fear in the United States,

³ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 55.

⁴ Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁵ Jeffrey W. Legro, “What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power?” *Perspectives on Politics* 5:3 (September 2007): 515-534.

⁶ Ionut Popescu, “American Grand Strategy and the Rise of Offensive Realism,” *Political Science Quarterly* 134:3 (Winter 2018-2019): 375-404; John J. Mearsheimer, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order,” *International Security* 43:4 (Spring 2019): 7-50.

provoking decades of cold war between the two countries.⁷ As the next power reaches close parity with the hegemonic power, it singularly threatens the latter's "preponderance of material resources" and authority to "establish and enforce the basic rules and rights" in the international system.⁸ Thus, as China becomes the most formidable challenger to the United States, it faces diminishing space for strategic spinning. Take, for example, the 'developing country' status. The Trump administration has tried to strip China of its developing country status in the World Trade Organization, and the Office of U.S. Trade Representative has recently done so unilaterally. President Trump even declared at the 2020 Davos World Economic Forum, "As far as I'm concerned, we're a developing nation, too."⁹ His appropriation of the developing country status to neutralize one of China's key identity claims foreshadows the acute status dilemma that lies ahead in the Sino-U.S. relations.

Pu's timely book provides a much-needed new perspective on China's rise, reminding us of the inadvisability of seeing China as a unitary state actor with a fixed strategic plan to take over the world. *Rebranding China* both advances and shows the fruitfulness of the line of inquiry on China and status. It will inspire further studies that contribute to the promising research program on status in international relations.

⁷ Gregg A. Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry during the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University Of North Carolina Press, 2017).

⁸ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the world Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 32; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 30.

⁹ Remarks by President Trump in Press Conference, Davos, Switzerland, January 22, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-conference-davos-switzerland/>.

REVIEW BY SCOTT L. KASTNER, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK

It has become commonplace to assume that a rising China seeks greater status in the international system, and often Chinese government behavior and rhetoric is consistent with such an expectation. Chinese President Xi Jinping, for instance, often portrays China as a great power whose growing prosperity is brightening growth prospects across the world. As he put it in a well-known 2017 speech at Davos: “China’s outstanding development achievements and the vastly improved living standards of the Chinese people are a blessing to both China and the world.”¹ China’s status-seeking behavior also appears to have been on display during the current coronavirus crisis, as the People’s Republic of China (PRC) sends medical equipment abroad (including to developed countries such as the U.S.) while hailing the PRC government’s successes in slowing the spread of the disease within China.

Nevertheless, as Xiaoyu Pu observes, China’s status seeking behavior is far from uniform. Indeed, at times, China signals lower status: Chinese leaders, for instance, often portray China as the world’s largest developing country despite its economic achievements, noting that hundreds of millions of Chinese still live in poverty. Pu’s new book seeks to make sense of these seemingly contradictory signals. To do so, he draws from literatures on status signaling in sociology, psychology, international relations, and even the hard sciences, and leverages a diverse set of case studies ranging from China’s pursuit of aircraft carriers, to its institution building initiatives in Asia, to its behavior during the 2008 global financial crisis.

I view Pu’s book as making several important contributions to the growing literature on China’s rise. First, unlike previous work that has tended to portray China as a country seeking great power status,² Pu’s theoretical framework explores China’s seemingly contradictory status signals. For example, Pu argues that rising powers like China (which typically face a range of internal pressures) focus first and foremost on domestic audiences when signaling status, and they are most likely to signal higher status when domestic legitimacy is threatened. The pursuit of an aircraft carrier program, and the lavish 2015 Victory Day military parade, help to illustrate this logic; Pu suggests that both can be thought of as “weapons of mass consumption” (53), aiming in part to increase the Chinese Communist Party’s prestige at home. On the other hand, China has been most likely to signal a lower status when seeking to reassure other countries of its intentions, when seeking to shirk on international commitments, and when trying to demonstrate solidarity with other developing countries.

Second, Pu’s book offers a comprehensive overview of some of China’s different identities and the diverse set of audiences that Chinese leaders target in their status signaling. As Pu observes, there is no single, fixed Chinese identity. Rather, “China is a conflicted state with a political discourse grounded in several competing ideologies and narratives” (37). In his research, Pu identifies several narratives as most important in this regard, including China as a socialist state, China as a developing country, China as an emerging great power, China as an established great power, China as a quasi-superpower, and China as historically the predominant power in the region. And Chinese leaders signal status to a range of different targets, including domestic audiences, countries in East Asia, countries in the global South, and countries in the West.

A third key contribution centers on the dilemmas that Chinese leaders face in trying to signal different type of status to different audiences. One obvious problem here is that signals intended for one audience can be observed by others; thus, for instance, efforts to signal great power status via weapons of mass consumption to a domestic audience have the potential to undercut reassurance signals that are sent to other international audiences. Indeed, as Pu observes, they can intensify

¹ “Full Text of Xi Jinping Keynote at the World Economic Forum,” *CGTV*, 17 January 2017: <https://america.cgtn.com/2017/01/17/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum>

² Examples include Yong Deng, *China’s Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Yong Deng and Fei-ling Wang, eds., *In the Eyes of the Dragon: China Views the World* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); and Richard K. Betts and Thomas J. Christensen, “China: Getting the Questions Right,” *The National Interest* 62 (Winter 2000/2001): 17-29.

security dilemmas in the region (or “status dilemmas,” 64), perhaps increasing the likelihood of costly arms races that will leave all countries worse off. These types of dilemmas are likely to intensify as Chinese power continues to grow.

Future research should build on Pu’s study in several ways. First, as Pu himself suggests, future studies should explore how other rising states—such as India or Brazil—signal status in the current international order. To what extent does their status signaling behavior mirror that of China? Second, future research should seek to build on Pu’s argument to develop more concrete theorizing concerning some of the tradeoffs that status signaling can generate. For instance, if efforts to signal a certain status risk undercutting other goals, under what conditions do status concerns win the day in China’s signaling behavior? Similarly, what can leaders do to minimize some of the contradictions that arise from signaling to multiple audiences? Finally, future work should do more to assess, systematically, whether China’s status signaling is actually succeeding. Do efforts to spin China as a developing country successfully alter views of China in target audiences? Do we have data to assess whether the aircraft carrier program actually increases Chinese Communist Party legitimacy in China?

In sum, Xiaoyu Pu has written an important and timely book, one that offers a fresh perspective on Chinese foreign policy. It makes a number of important contributions and should help to inspire future research on status signaling in China and elsewhere.

REVIEW BY GREGORY J. MOORE, UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM NINGBO, CHINA

Xiaoyu Pu has given us an excellent analysis of China's contemporary foreign policy behavior, an important contribution to our understandings thereof. He has also advanced the IR (international relations) literature on the role of status, status signaling, and the general importance of ideational (non-material) drivers of foreign policy. As a theorist of IR and a long-time student of Chinese foreign policy, I think his book will be important in both theory-building and foreign policy analysis.

I will start by summarizing some of what I think are Pu's important findings. Noting that "the struggle for status or standing has been a major source of international wars," and that "the logic of positionality" is "largely ignored in IR" (5), he sets out to "provide a theoretically informed analysis of China's global repositioning in the twenty-first century" (9). He achieves this indeed. His term "rebranding" is a "metaphor for China's diplomatic repositioning" (6). He finds that China has presented two faces to the world in its foreign policy, which he describes as analogous to the red mask (reassuring, mild) and the white mask (aggressive, fearsome) from historical Chinese drama. Focusing on the most recent two decades, he notes that from 1997 to 2007 Chinese foreign policy portrayed the reassuring façade to its neighbors and the world, in line with former Chinese supreme leader Deng Xiaoping's *taoguang yanghui* ("avoiding the spotlight, nurturing obscurity" or "biding our time"), and this foreign policy was very successful (in his view and in my own). From 2008-2018, and up to the present, I would argue, Chinese policymakers have however pursued a more robust foreign policy, one which some have called "striving for achievement" (or *fengfa youwei*, or *yousuo zuowei*).¹ Pu argues (rightly in my estimation) that this change was marked by the 2008 global financial crisis, when China began to feel more confident about the advantages of its financial system and industrial policy while the West struggled in both areas. During these two time periods, both the red mask and the white mask were worn/brandished, so to speak, in some cases China's policy being meant to reassure good intentions, provide public goods, and keep a low and non-threatening profile, while other times the regime sought to demonstrate firm and resolute positions with no compromise, staking its claims to territories in the South China Sea, the Himalayas (against India, for example) or elsewhere in a way that appears quite aggressive. His way of understanding these two different faces comes through his presentation of status signaling. In other words, sometimes China wants to be seen as a developing country, a benign and unambitious force whose people are just trying to make their way in the international commons, whereas other times the regime wishes to position itself as a great power or even a hegemonic power (though it disavows the label) that should not be trifled with. All of this is to say, sometimes China signals a low status, and sometimes a high status.

Pu makes good sense of this duality by pointing to different policy goals at different times and places, with the overarching explanatory variable being domestic politics. In Pu's words, the Chinese government's "most important [political] rationale is strengthening the legitimacy of the CCP [Chinese Communist Party]" (37). I couldn't agree more. When it is in the leadership's interest to portray China as benign, it signals low status and shows the red (benign) mask. When it seeks to be seen as a great power, it signals a high status and shows the white (aggressive) mask.

Another important contribution here is Pu's breakdown of conspicuous consumption and highly expensive projects like manned space flight and the acquisition of aircraft carriers, of which China now has two and is building a third. He notes, "the primary goal of this type of conspicuous consumption is to satisfy one's ideational needs" (54). This is a crucial observation and from a theoretical standpoint it underlines the importance of ideational variables and how they co-constitute and are co-constituted by material variables (such as aircraft carriers). In other words, if one wants higher status, just as is the case with individuals, sometimes states turn to conspicuous consumption like aircraft carriers, getting nuclear weapons, manned space flight, etc., so as to join/accede to an elite club that only a few can afford.

Our Realist friends might tell us that all states seek maximum power, and thereby maximum status, but that is not what Pu finds. He finds that China often does seek low status when it is in its interest. He finds three explanations for low status

¹ See Yan Xuetong, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7:2 (2014): 153-184.

seeking behavior (90-2). First is reassurance. When a power like China is rising, it may signal low status so as not to provoke the reigning great power in the system, in this case, the United States. Second is shirking. China has been focused on building its economy (and its military, remembering the mantra *fuguo qiangbing* or “rich country, strong army,” an old Chinese slogan/goal which predates the CCP),² and has not wanted to be distracted by contributing much to the global commons, to public goods, up until very recently with its Belt and Road Initiative, its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, etc. Third is solidarity with other developing countries so as to have their support in the United Nations Security Council, at the World Trade Organization or in other global fora, another reason to claim developing country status, disavowing G7 membership, etc. Pu concludes that China’s low status seeking behavior is primarily driven by utilitarian considerations. Again, I find this analysis persuasive.

There is one area where I might offer a gentle and respectful critique, however. I will start with a statement Pu makes about the U.S., which will help me segue into a discussion about the role of culture or difference and generalizability. Pu says, “status competition between China and the United States is inevitable” (3). Yet that assumes the U.S. cares as much about status as China does. I don’t think it does. In fact, I don’t believe the U.S. sees an authoritarian one-party state like China as a threat to its status today, nor do I think American foreign policy is highly motivated by status (if it were, I would expect many changes in U.S. foreign policy in recent years, for U.S. status has declined remarkably in the last three years or so). The U.S. cares about its interests, and cares about having the power to accomplish them, but I don’t think American foreign policymakers think much about U.S. status, certainly not the way policymakers in Beijing do.³ Perhaps it is the case that the U.S. takes status for granted, having been the strongest power in the system for decades, and so policymakers in Washington don’t spend a lot of time thinking about it. That is possible, but more likely in my opinion is something else: the importance of status differs substantially in different cultures.

The one thing I find lacking in this study is a deeper treatment of the role of culture and its impact on status seeking. Certainly, Pu addresses culture, primarily on pages 6, 8 (FN 62), 18 and 106-7. China has a culture (6) that is based on hierarchies. Confucian societies are organized hierarchically, thus status, which is tied to but more fluid than hierarchy, is of vital importance in such a society. Because of this, status is an indispensable part of any discussion about the rise of China, both in terms of what status is ascribed to China by other powers and in how China sees its own status. The importance of status here is a culture-driven attribute and anyone trying to understand China’s foreign policy must factor it in. Studies like Qin Yaqing’s have broken new ground with respect to culture’s role in Chinese foreign policymaking,⁴ though Pu rightly notes (107) that there have been two errors that have plagued the literature on China’s rise: ignoring the role of Chinese cultural and historical differences (as in Realism, wherein China will be expansionist because ‘the strong do what they can...’); and essentializing China’s cultural differences (as in some Chinese government narratives that China will rise peacefully because China is different than other powers). Pu is careful to avoid these two extremes and indeed the status signaling approach does provide a middle ground in this respect, neither ignoring nor essentializing culture. On the other hand, in his wise attempt to avoid essentializing culture, in my opinion Pu has erred a bit too much on the side of ignoring

² See Orville Schell and John Delury, *Wealth and Power: China’s Long March to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 2013).

³ Along these lines, another observation. Pu says the U.S. “prioritizes military power as the essential source of status” (55), but I am not sure that is true (nor does he provide evidence or links to studies that substantiate that claim). Americans are indeed impressed by military power, but whatever international status they enjoy comes as much from their movies or iPhones or music or software hegemony or sports infrastructure or economic and technological innovations as from their military prowess.

⁴ See Qin Yaqing, *Relational Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Though some might argue that perhaps Qin goes too close to essentializing culture here.

culture, or at least not sufficiently discussing culture, or linking it to the literature on culture and China studies in particular.⁵ His study would have benefitted had he done so, in my opinion.

This leads to questions about generalizability. Pu states that he believes his approach “could be universally applied” (114, FN 62), but while I believe it is applicable beyond China, I am less sure it is universally so. It seems that this analysis would be important in studies of countries like China, Russia, Japan or Korea, where similar social and cultural dynamics are at work as it regards the importance of status, ranking, and social hierarchies. This approach may be less useful in cases such as the United States, however, where people tend to dislike hierarchy and spend less time thinking about status. How would one explain the status-diminishing policies of a president like Donald Trump, who in three years has done more to diminish U.S. status than anyone could have imagined? After all, this decline in U.S. status has occurred even though both the U.S. economy and U.S. military spending/capabilities have grown significantly under Trump (until the coronavirus emerged, at any rate). I would argue that building the domestic economy and appealing to his conservative base with conservative Supreme Court appointments and anti-immigration policies (for example) are more important to Trump than any status benefits he might derive from the international community. International status for the U.S. is not high on his list of priorities (though I am sure status matters a lot to him personally as it regards his own standing in the U.S. media, U.S. polls, and rankings of wealthiest Americans, etc.).

Having said all of this, I agree with the general thrust of Pu’s study and as a constructivist welcome this sort of approach with open arms. I think the book will be cited widely. In the end, however, I do draw darker conclusions about the rise of China and the potential for war between China and the U.S. than Pu does. Near the end of the book he says, “...the nuclear age has made power transition by means of a deliberate hegemonic war unthinkable” (102) and argues that “...concern over a new Chinese hegemony might be overblown” because China’s comprehensive national power is not yet that impressive (100). I can’t say I agree with him in either case. Nor can I believe statements such as General Chen Bingde’s: “The world has no need to worry, let alone fear, China’s growth. China never intends to challenge the United States” (93). Cultural and social norms in China tell me that having the status of being number one will be vitally important to the CCP (Chinese Communist Party). Moreover, Pu rightly links China’s status-seeking to the legitimacy and in/security of the CCP, making status potentially an existential issue for the Party as it formulates China’s foreign policy. If all of this is right, the implications are important to students of IR and policymakers in Washington, especially if Chinese leaders overestimate the U.S. decline, which I believe they’ve been doing since 2008, and overestimate their own power and status, which I believe they’ve also been doing since 2008. For in this case the stage may be set for a conflict the likes of which we have not seen in 75 years. If I am right, it would not disprove the general correctness of the analysis in this book, for status and domestic politics are key drivers of Chinese foreign policy, and paying attention to the status signaling emanating from Beijing in coming years should be a vital part of the work of anyone trying to understand Chinese foreign policy.

⁵ See Qin (2018); Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs* (1996); Gregory J. Moore, “‘In Your Face’ - Domestic Politics, Nationalism and ‘Face’ in the Sino-Japanese Islands Dispute,” *Asian Perspective* 38:2 (April-June, 2014): 219-240; Yosef Lapid, *The Return of Culture in International Relations Theory* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995); Christian Reus-Smit, *On Cultural Diversity: International Theory in a World of Difference* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); etc.

Over the past 25 years, mountains of scholarship and policy analysis have been produced attempting to discern the likely intentions of a rising China. Yet little consensus has been reached, with experts falling all over the spectrum in their assessments of China's goals and whether they are compatible with those of the United States and its allies.¹ As has been pointed out elsewhere, this incoherence is quite puzzling given all the attention paid to China's foreign policies and their implications for China's likely intentions.² Indeed, China's foreign policy behavior seems to present something of a Rorschach test: it is possible to see virtually any set of motives behind it, even for observers with advanced methodological training and deep empirical knowledge.

Xiaoyu Pu's *Rebranding China* offers an original and compelling explanation for the extraordinary difficulty scholars and policymakers have had in attempting to infer China's intentions: China is sending wholly contradictory signals, intended for different audiences and reflecting different aspects of China's national identity. Specifically, Pu argues that China is motivated by conflicting status concerns. On the one hand, China, like any state, desires greater status in the international community. This would afford the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government greater privilege in international fora, greater respect and deference from other states for its national interests, and, most importantly, greater legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese public for continued single-party autocratic rule. But at the same time, China has a strong countervailing incentive to tap the brakes on its rising international status, downplaying its power and influence, emphasizing its weaknesses, and minimizing the extent of its ambitions. This is part of a longstanding reassurance strategy targeting both powerful countries like the U.S., in order to avoid a "status dilemma" that could trigger international balancing or containment in response to China's rise, as well as smaller regional neighbors and developing countries that China hopes to draw into its orbit and away from any potential anti-China coalition.

Rebranding China makes a substantial contribution to both the literature on China's rise and the burgeoning literature on the role of status in international politics.³ Its question is important, topical, and puzzling: why does China send seemingly contradictory signals about its capabilities and intentions? Pu offers a novel and deductively coherent theoretical argument to explain this puzzle: states are responsive to multiple audiences, and so have incentives to signal different images in different contexts. I agree with the author that this is an important advance in the literature on status, insofar as it explains why a state would alternatively seek both higher status and lower status. This contrasts with the general assumption in the literature that actors always seek higher status and differ only in the means and degree of success with which they pursue it.

Furthermore, the book is empirically rich and attempts to engage seriously with alternative materialist hypotheses. It is wary of the common shortcoming in the literature on status of implicitly privileging status motivations over other observationally equivalent explanations for state behavior. Drawing on primary sources in both Chinese and English, Pu seeks to establish that China's status motivations are not only supported by circumstantial evidence, but also by statements of Chinese policymakers which confirm that status considerations played at least some role in their decision calculus.

¹ "Are U.S. and Chinese National Interests Incompatible?," *Foreign Affairs* (14 August 14 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ask-the-experts/2018-08-14/are-us-and-chinese-national-interests-incompatible>.

² Harry Harding, "Has US China Policy Failed?" *Washington Quarterly* 38:3 (2015): 95-122; Brandon K. Yoder, "How Credible are China's Foreign Policy Signals? IR Theory and the Debate about China's Intentions," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, forthcoming.

³ For another theoretically-informed recent work that analyzes Chinese foreign policy through the lens of status, see Deborah Welch Larson, "An Equal Partnership of Unequals: China's and Russia's New Status Relationship," *International Politics* (21 August 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-019-00177-9>.

Along with its many strengths, the book of course raises several questions, which I will lump into three baskets. First, what is actually being signaled in ‘status signaling,’ the book’s core concept? Is it status or something else? Second, what is China’s motivation for sending these signals? How do we weight status motivations against alternative ones, and how do we tell the difference between them? And third, what makes these signals credible? Why should China’s various audiences believe them?

On the first question, it is important to note – as Pu does very clearly – that status is not what is actually being signaled when states engage in status signaling. Indeed, it cannot be: status is defined as “collective beliefs about a given state’s ranking on [socially] valued attributes” (17), and a state’s status “depends on the intersubjective recognition of others” (21). Clearly, a state cannot signal to others what *their* beliefs about it are. Rather, as Pu explains, the state sending status signals adopts behavior that reveals private information about itself to others in order to “maintain or change [others’] status beliefs about themselves in the international hierarchy” (21).

If states cannot signal their own status, then what *do* they signal when they seek to attain higher status? On this point, *Rebranding China* is less clear. It actually appears that a signal of nearly any attribute can be a status signal, as long as that attribute is seen as desirable by the receiver(s) and therefore has the potential to increase the sender’s status in the receivers’ eyes. This raises the question of what distinguishes status signals from other kinds of signals that are prevalent in the IR literature. Pu explicitly claims that status signaling *is* distinct, and “offers a new type of signaling model” that diverges from signals of “resolve, capability and benign intentions” (10). Yet the only grounds for this claim is that status signals pertain to long-term attributes while the others “attend to short-term events,” which is obviously untrue in the cases of long-term reputation building or reassurance in the context of a decades-long power shift such as China’s.

In fact, it appears that the only thing that distinguishes status signals from others is the motivation behind them. Status signaling actually refers to status *seeking* through a signaling process, in which the sender credibly reveals socially desirable attributes such as wealth, power, or benign motives. In principle, this would be a very useful distinction. The empirical task in testing the book’s hypotheses would then be to identify signals that are intended by the sender to increase its social standing in the international community for its own sake, independent of other instrumental purposes, such as economic or security ends.

Problematically, however, Pu obscures this distinction as well, defining status signaling so broadly that it subsumes instrumental motivations. As he puts it, “status signaling can have instrumental or [intrinsic] objectives...states with an instrumental objective signal their status to get valuable resources such as power or material rewards” (25). This engenders concerns about the falsifiability of the argument. If signals that are meant to achieve material ends also can be interpreted as status signals, then it would appear that *any* signal is a status signal. This would deprive the concept of its analytical utility and make hypotheses regarding when and how status signals are sent impossible to test.

This point is made clear by many (though certainly not all) of the examples of status signals that are marshaled in the book. The acquisition of weapons systems that “satisfy instrumental needs for physical security” are deemed status signals (26), as is China’s unveiling of such weapons in a “message [that] was clearly aimed at the United States: military intervention in the Western Pacific would come at great cost” (63). This looks identical to garden variety deterrence. Indeed, even hegemonic war – existential, system wide conflict that often eliminates a subset of the combatants – is repeatedly characterized as a means by which states signal their preferred status, and is even analogized at one point to a symbolic crown ceremony that establishes the legitimacy of a new ruler (25).

The all-encompassing definition of status signaling makes it difficult to find a viable alternative hypothesis against which to test Pu’s argument. One possible “status-free” account of the contradictory Chinese signaling patterns described in the book might look like this: First, China had strong security incentives early in its rise to maintain cooperation, in order to avoid a balancing response while highly vulnerable, but as it has gained power it has become less vulnerable to containment and

more capable of altering the status quo immediately in accordance with its preferences.⁴ Thus, China has shifted over time from a strategy of “keeping a low profile” toward one of “striving for achievement” on certain core issues, most notably its sovereignty claims over Taiwan and the South China Sea.⁵ However, it simultaneously reassures other countries about its benign intentions on other issues pertaining to broader aspects of the international order, in order to elicit cooperation and avoid balancing from small and large states alike.⁶ China also benefits from increased influence in international institutions, but at the same time prefers to avoid bearing the burden for providing international public goods.⁷ As such, it uses its substantial aggregate national capabilities to initiate new institutions and gain leverage in existing ones, but also claims (accurately) that its level of development is far lower than that of Western countries, making it less capable of being a ‘responsible stakeholder.’

Note that status motivations are completely absent from this narrative. China reassures other states for security reasons, in order to avoid balancing, and for economic reasons, in order to sustain cooperation. It signals high aggregate capabilities to gain the material benefits of dictating the terms of international cooperation, and low development to avoid the material costs of supplying public goods. And it signals high resolve to satisfy its material interests on territorial issues.

These material/instrumental hypotheses should be placed in stark juxtaposition to the status-based argument advanced in *Rebranding China*, so that the two can be evaluated against each other. But instead they are often presented as *part* of Pu’s argument, folded into the expansive definition of status signaling that conflates material and non-material motivations.⁸ The empirical chapters then include non-status signals alongside status signals as support for the book’s argument. For example, in accounting for why China provided regional public goods during the 1998 Asian financial crisis, Pu argues that China was pursuing a reassurance strategy that was designed to convince its neighbors of its benign intentions and their shared interests. This was for economic and security purposes: “The consensus among Chinese leaders in the late 1990s was that China should create favorable international conditions for continuing China’s economic growth while reducing the risk that other countries would see a rising China as a threat” (72). Moreover, characterizing such “efforts to project an image of benign leadership” (77) as status signals is distinctly at odds with Pu’s earlier claim that the “purpose of [status signaling] is not to signal a benign intention, nor does it signal resolve in crisis bargaining” (21). The same holds for China’s deterrent threats and coercive actions on its maritime periphery (80-82), and its efforts to reassure the United States of its limited capabilities and ambitions in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis (Chapter 6).

The good news is that these falsifiability concerns are ‘non-fatal,’ and come with a relatively easy fix. With a narrower definition of status signaling, it is quite possible to test Pu’s compelling theoretical framework against alternative materialist theories. Indeed, Pu is able to do so convincingly in arguing that China’s naval modernization and military displays are

⁴ This is a common finding of the realist and rationalist literature on power shifts. See Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁵ On the issue-specific nature of China’s signals in the South China Sea, see Alastair Iain Johnston, “How New and Assertive is China’s New Assertiveness?” *International Security* 37:4 (2013): 7-48.

⁶ For a version of this argument from a realist perspective, see Nicholas Khoo and Michael L.R. Smith, “China Engages Asia? Caveat Lector,” *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 196-211.

⁷ For instrumentalist accounts of this behavior, see G. John Ikenberry and Darren J. Lim, “China’s Emerging Institutional Statecraft,” Brookings, Project on International Order and Strategy (2017); Daniel W. Drezner, “Perception, Misperception, and Sensitivity,” in Robert Ross and Øystein Tunsjø, eds., *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017): 69-99.

⁸ This is done explicitly in the proposition on page 32, which contains the main set of hypotheses that are examined in the empirical chapters.

examples of conspicuous consumption motivated by status (56-64). Here, Pu carefully delineates status motivations from material motivations for weapons acquisition, and adroitly argues that the military systems China is acquiring (e.g., aircraft carriers) are suboptimal for meeting its security needs. Yet they are highly valuable as symbols of China's arrival as a great power and peer of the United States, as well as its expanding global reach. Most importantly, Pu draws on primary sources to show that status was a central consideration in the calculations of Chinese policymakers for acquiring and displaying these new military technologies. This is an exemplary empirical evaluation of a status-based hypothesis.

My final question concerns the credibility of China's status signals. Pu's clever theoretical move of introducing multiple audiences to explain the incoherence of China's signaling patterns is something of a double-edged sword. As Pu notes, "China is sending signals about its image to different audiences. The challenge for China is that all audiences are receiving all China's signals" (50). But if this is true, and the signals intended for different audiences contradict each other, then why should either audience believe the signals China intends for it? More concretely, if the CCP government attempts to reassure the United States of its benign intentions while also signaling expansive revisionist aims to its domestic audience to foment nationalism, why would the United States believe China's reassurances? Why would one or both receivers not dismiss the signals it receives as likely misrepresentation, and not update its beliefs in response?

The author clearly sees this question as one that falls outside of the scope of *Rebranding China*, which makes no attempt to evaluate changes in the beliefs of China's receivers. But the answer is nevertheless pertinent to the logic of the argument that is presented. Pu claims to employ a rationalist framework in which China is responding to countervailing incentives to send different signals to different audiences. But if those signals do not prompt the receivers to change their beliefs, then China's incentives to send them would fall away. Why go to the trouble of sending costly signals to reassure the United States, if the U.S. will simply see the contradictory messages to China's domestic audience and ignore those reassurances? Why maintain the veneer of being a weak developing state in an effort to shirk responsibilities if doing so does not make other countries any more credulous that China is incapable of providing international public goods? Indeed, leaders in the United States and other countries certainly do not currently appear to be persuaded by China's proclamations of benign intentions and limited capabilities. The credibility of China's signals is therefore at the heart of Pu's argument about China's incentives to send them, and it is a ripe area for further theoretical development.

Again, these criticisms in no way diminish the contributions of the book described above. *Rebranding China* significantly advances both our understanding of the motivations behind China's puzzling contemporary foreign policy patterns, as well as our theoretical understanding of the role of status in IR more broadly. It is essential reading for scholars of either topic.

Xiaoyu Pu's *Rebranding China* discusses the series of contradictory signals that China has sent to the world regarding its status. Pu observes that "on the one hand, China continues to struggle for more recognition as a rising great power; on the other hand, China emphasizes its developing country status, sometimes complaining about other nations' over-recognition of its rise in the international system" (2). In other words, China sometimes emphasizes its international status but, at other times, downplays its status. Going against the conventional wisdom that rising powers will always want higher international status, Pu demonstrates the duality and contradiction of China's status signaling. He argues that China tends to use "low-status signals for instrumental purposes, and its high-status signals are often for symbolic purposes as well as domestic mobilization" (11).

Rebranding China is an important academic contribution because it adds to both the theoretical literature on status and signaling as well as the empirical literature on China's foreign policy behavior. What is especially commendable about the book is that Pu fuses the often-arbitrary divide between status and signaling and emphasizes the instrumentality of China's status signaling. As someone who researches signaling and Chinese foreign policy, my review focuses on Pu's contribution to the signaling literature and empirical studies on rising powers such as China.

Pu makes a significant contribution to the signaling literature, which sometimes focuses exclusively on particular kinds of signals, including costly signals such as audience costs.¹ States, however, can be sending mixed signals to multiple targets. As David Baldwin noted in 1985 on states' use of economic sanctions, sanctions serve as signals to multiple audiences, such as the sanctioning state's domestic audience, the state's allies, the target state, as well as the sanctioning state's adversaries.² In a similar vein, *Rebranding China* demonstrates that China balances between domestic and several international audiences when sending signals, including Western countries, China's neighbors, and the global South. Pu's research, therefore, adds to the burgeoning literature that examines how rising powers balance among different audiences.³

In addition to targeting multiple audiences, China also sends various, sometimes conflicting signals. As Pu notes, China seeks to project the image of "a strong great power" while simultaneously seeming to be uncomfortable with its "sudden high profile in global affairs" (35). *Rebranding China* uncovers the subtlety and tension in China's image projection. That is, China is aware that it is caught in the middle of the spiral and deterrence model. It needs to both demonstrate resolve (a strong image) while downplaying the assertiveness of its behavior (a benign and unassuming image). The "good cop, bad cop" analogy, used by Chinese major general Luo Yuan, is an excellent illustration of the tension in China's signaling (36). Pu's research cuts against two extreme arguments that China is either exclusively aggressive or benign. It shows the duality and tension in China's overall grand strategy and foreign policy behavior.⁴ The book indicates that there are much greater nuances to Chinese foreign policy than policy hawks and doves in Washington would expect.

¹ See, for example, James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audience and the Escalation of International Disputes," *The American Political Science Review* 88: 3 (September 1994): 577-592; Todd S. Sechser, "Reputations and Signaling in Coercive Bargaining," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62:2 (February 2018).

² David Allen Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

³ See, for example, Stacie E. Goddard, *When Right Makes Might: Rising Powers and World Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

⁴ Similarly, see Ketian Zhang, "Cautious Bully: Reputation, Resolve, and Beijing's Use of Coercion in the South China Sea," *International Security* 44:1 (Summer 2019): 117-159.

Regarding methods, sources, and empirics, Pu's *Rebranding China* is rigorously written with ample primary Chinese language sources, including official government documents and interviews with officials and foreign policy analysts. What is particularly impressive about Pu's research is the breadth of topics covered in the book, which range from China's military modernization to foreign economic policies. The extensive empirical examples used in *Rebranding China* give it greater internal generalizability.

There are several aspects of the book that prompt some interesting questions, which could be worth future research. First, I completely agree that the signals China sends are mixed. China signals its status as a strong military power while emphasizing its developing world status. This, however, might not necessarily be purely instrumental, but rather reflects the difficulty in defining and conceptualizing power. For example, China has the second largest GDP in the world, but if we calculate power on the basis of GDP per capita, then China falls behind. China's nuclear weapons and delivery systems might be state of the art, but its navy still has a long way to go before even catching up with China's neighbors such as Japan. It might be precisely this reason that China's aircraft carriers currently seem more of a signaling device for its domestic audience as opposed to serving military functions. After all, the Chinese navy faces logistical issues for long-distance power projection. Aircraft carriers, in particular, require an extensive logistics, support network, and well-trained pilots. In the same vein, China's 5G development is advanced but it lags in other technological sectors.

As Michael Beckley argues, if one takes a net balance approach to power, calculating input and output as well as human capital, education, and other factors, U.S. hegemony will endure.⁵ North Korea and Pakistan are also examples of states that have nuclear weapons while being economically backward. As such, there might be an objective basis for why China has multiple images. This is not to say that China's signals are not intentional. Rather, calculating power, and by extension, status, is in and of itself complicated. It is, therefore, difficult to define exactly which signals are high status and low status.

Relatedly, one wonders how conflictual are China's signals? If one agrees with Thomas Schelling, in order for a coercive strategy to be successful, it has to be coupled with reassurance that the coercer is not doing more once the target complies.⁶ Michael Glosny, for example, argues that China has been engaging in reassurance as a critical component of its grand strategy.⁷ In this sense, Pu's work speaks to the broader literature that focuses on states' use of a "carrots and sticks" strategy, or the "wedge strategy," including the Bismarckian Germany.⁸ *Rebranding China* also begs the interesting question of to what extent the audience—domestic and international—perceives China's signals in the way China intended?

Finally, Pu's fascinating book leaves us with more puzzles for future research. What will China's patterns of status signaling be if and when China becomes more powerful in the future? What will China's signaling preferences be in the future trajectory? Do rising powers, historical and contemporary, behave similarly in status signaling? *Rebranding China* bridges the literature on status and signaling while providing much-needed insight into Chinese foreign policy decision-making. It is a must-read that will generate even more exciting work in studies of rising power behavior.

⁵ Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

⁶ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

⁷ Michael A. Glosny, "The Grand Strategies of Rising Powers: Reassurance, Coercion, and Balancing Responses" (Ph.D. dissertation: MIT, 2012).

⁸ Timothy W. Crawford, "Preventing Enemy Coalitions: How Wedge Strategies Shape Power Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Spring 2011): 155-189.

Many commentators and strategists worry that the competition between China and the United States will lead to rising tensions and conflicts. A popular narrative assumes that both countries want to be the world's No. 1 power. Michael Pillsbury asserts that China has a "secret strategy" to replace the U.S. as the leading global power.⁶¹ Graham Allison argues that the conflict between China and the U.S. is driven by "the Thucydides Trap," a deadly pattern of structural stress that results when a rising power challenges an established power.⁶² In my book *Rebranding China*, I counter this popular view with an alternative perspective. Offering a theoretically informed analysis of China's global repositioning, I argue that China's rise is both real and limited. Facing multiple audiences, China sends seemingly contradictory signals about its status and role. China sometimes struggles for more recognition as a great power and at other times worries about the over-recognition of its rising status. The rise of China poses complicated challenges to the international community.

I am grateful to Steve Chan for introducing this roundtable discussion of my book. I also thank the five highly qualified scholars, Yong Deng, Scott Kastner, Gregory Moore, Brandon Yoder, and Ketian Zhang, for their thoughtful review. The reviewers identify and recognize the key contributions of this book. First, while most exiting studies assume that rising powers always want to have a higher status, my book demonstrates that it is not always the case. Rising powers must deal with multiple trade-offs and dilemmas while projecting their images on the world stage. Second, while most studies on status in international relations largely ignore domestic politics, I put domestic politics front and center and incorporate the perspective of two-level games in the analysis of status in world politics. Third, inspired by inter-disciplinary ideas from psychology, sociology, and behavioral economics, I introduce the idea of status signaling which enriches international relations theory-building in multiple aspects. Finally, analyzing China's foreign policy in the twenty-first century, my book provides an original explanation for China's seemingly contradictory signals.

While recognizing the strengths and contributions of the book, the reviewers ask insightful and stimulating questions on status signaling as well as China's foreign policy. I divide these questions roughly into four groups: one on the conceptualization and implications of status signaling; two that are related to Chinese foreign policy; and a final one on the future direction of research.

Status Signaling: Conceptualization and Implications

Several reviewers raise questions related to the conceptualization and implications of status signaling. Yoder argues that my broad definition of status signaling "conflates material and non-material motivations." He urges me to clarify the concept of status signaling. What is being signaled? How do we distinguish status motivations from other motivations? Moore asks whether status signaling can be applied to analyze the United States. Kastner suggests that it will be fruitful to examine status signaling of other emerging powers such as India and Brazil.

I would take this opportunity to clarify my conceptualization of status signaling and its implications. First, status signaling in international relations is "the mechanism of information transmission that aims to change or maintain a status belief among relevant political actors" (19). In other words, a state uses "a subset of signals to convey the information that [it] is asserting a particular standing in international society" (19). The key difference between status signaling and other kinds of signaling is the motivation behind signaling—whether status is a primary motivation to send the observed signals. In

⁶¹ Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2015).

⁶² Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

international relations, status pertains to “collective beliefs about a given state’s ranking on valued attributes.”⁶³ As status is social and relational. What kind of information can be constituted as a status signal can vary, depending largely on the particular social and cultural context. For instance, information about a country’s wealth and capabilities sometimes constitutes a status signal. In this sense, status signaling can overlap with other signaling processes. However, most existing studies of signaling focus on a state’s resolve or capabilities in short-term bargaining situations. In contrast, status signaling is typically related to the long-term standing and position that a country might want to have in international society.

Second, people sometimes strive for status as an end itself. In these situations, status motivation is the opposite of instrumental and material calculations. However, status could be both an end itself and a means to achieve other instrumental goals. A narrower definition of status signaling, proposed by Yoder in his review, would focus purely on psychological and symbolic motivation. Such a narrower definition of status signaling cannot capture and describe the actual and complex role status plays in social life and international politics. A broader conceptualization of status signaling goes beyond the dichotomy between symbolic motivation and instrumental calculation. In *Rebranding China*, I have provided many examples in which status motivation overlaps and intermingles with instrumental and material calculations. For instance, a young lawyer’s luxury car serves both symbolic and instrumental purposes, and so does a rising power’s aircraft carrier (17; 55-61). In these cases, status motivation is a complementary rather than a competing alternative to instrumental calculation.

Third, Yoder suggests that a signaling model based on security motivation might provide a “status-free” account of China’s foreign policy conduct. Of course, any good theoretical model can explain some aspects of international politics. I would not be surprised if a rationalist model or a defensive realist framework can explain some aspects of Chinese foreign policy.⁶⁴ But I argue that status signaling can still provide a complementary and even more complete account of China’s foreign policy behavior in some contexts. For instance, China’s response during the Asian financial crisis was driven by both instrumental calculations and status signaling calculations (78-80). For some military programs such as China’s anti-ship ballistic missiles, security-seeking might provide sufficient explanation. However, for other weapons programs such as aircraft carriers, status signaling explanation might be more complete and more appropriate. In *Rebranding China*, I do differentiate among China’s types of weapons, writing that “China’s development of anti-ship ballistic missiles might relate more to the perceived geopolitical threat since the late 1990s than to China’s desire to achieve great power status” (53).

Finally, regarding the external validity of status signaling, Moore suggests that my framework can mostly be applied in some East Asian countries as hierarchical norms dominate these societies. He doubts if status signaling could be applied to U.S. foreign policy. Elsewhere, I have used the concept of status signaling to analyze India’s foreign policy.⁶⁵ While acknowledging that cultural difference might shape specific manifestation of status signaling in different societies, I emphasize that there is no essential difference regarding motivations and patterns of status signaling across different societies (107). The struggle for status is driven by the fundamental human psychological need for self-esteem. The theoretical

⁶³ Deborah Larson, T.V. Paul, and William Wohlforth, “Status and World Order,” in Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7.

⁶⁴ For excellent explanations of Chinese foreign policy based on a defensive realist framework or rationalist framework, see: Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China’s Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Brandon Yoder, “Uncertainty, shifting power and credible signals in US-China relations: Why the ‘Thucydides Trap’ is Real, but Limited,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24:1 (2019): 87-104.

⁶⁵ Xiaoyu Pu, “Ambivalent Accommodation: Status Signalling of a Rising India and China’s Response,” *International Affairs* 93:1 (2017): 147-163.

inspirations of status signaling come from social science studies of both Western and Asian societies.⁶⁶ Regarding status motivation and the U.S., status has been an important driving factor in Washington's foreign policy throughout contemporary era.⁶⁷ While President Donald Trump might have damaged some aspects of U.S. international status (especially soft power), status consideration has still driven some aspects of U.S. foreign policy even in the Trump era.⁶⁸

Is China's Dominant Identity Shifting in the Xi Jinping Era?

In recent years, President Xi Jinping has dramatically changed China's domestic politics and foreign policy. Are some of my arguments still valid in the new era? Deng raises some insightful questions: while China might have multiple identities, is there a dominant identity that is more important than others? Assuming that China has a dominant identity, is the dominant identity shifting from the opening and reform era to a new era? Zhang asks a related question: how might China's status signaling evolve if China becomes even more powerful in the future?

While acknowledging there are many changes in the Xi Jinping era, I argue that there is still much continuity in China's foreign policy. First, I am not sure if China really has a dominant identity even in the Xi era. While China has pursued a more active and assertive foreign policy, it has not yet abandoned its multiple identities, including its self-identity as the largest developing country. In his report to the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping described China as a "great power" many times. But he also stated that "China's international status as the world's largest developing country has not changed."⁶⁹ Some analysts might suggest that Xi's report clearly demonstrates China's grand strategy and global ambition⁷⁰ I have a different interpretation. Setting China's national rejuvenation as a long-term goal, Xi surely wants to consolidate China's great power status. However, international status is a social and relational term. While the 19th Party Congress in 2017 clearly defined China's social and economic goals, it was vague on China's international strategy. China's struggle with status duality, as both a rising great power and a large developing country, remains unchanged.

How would China rethink its developing country status as its economic and social development enters a new stage? If China continues to grow in the future, I estimate that the behavioral pattern of Chinese foreign policy will increasingly resemble that of a typical great power. However, China will not abandon its developing country status anytime soon. China's three rational calculations remain unchanged: to reassure the established powers, to avoid taking unwanted responsibilities, and to strengthen political solidarity with other developing countries. Admittedly U.S. resentment against China is increasingly driven by China's continuing emphasis on its status as a developing country. The Trump administration complains that many large emerging economies such as China have been taking unfair advantage of this

⁶⁶ For instance, Robert H. Frank, *Choosing the Right Pond: Human Behavior and the Quest for Status* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Young Jee Han, Joseph C. Nunes, and Xavier Drèze, "Signaling Status with Luxury Goods: The Role of Brand Prominence," *Journal of Marketing* 74:4 (2010): 15-30.

⁶⁷ Tudor Onea, *US Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: Restraint versus Assertiveness from George HW Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013).

⁶⁸ John Glaser, "Status, Prestige, Activism and the Illusion of American Decline," *The Washington Quarterly* 41:1 (2018): 173-197; Reinhard Wolf, "Donald Trump's Status-driven Foreign Policy," *Survival* 59:5 (2017): 99-116.

⁶⁹ Xinhua, "Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress," http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm.

⁷⁰ Daniel Tobin, "How Xi Jinping's 'New Era' Should Have Ended U.S. Debate on Beijing's Ambitions," CSIS Report, 8 May 2020: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-xi-jinpings-new-era-should-have-ended-us-debate-beijings-ambitions>

status under the World Trade Organization's rules.⁷¹ It will be interesting to see if resentment against China's claim as a developing country will lead to any new thinking of China's international status in Beijing.

Second, while China appears to have become more assertive internationally, China's domestic and foreign policies are still driven by a deep sense of insecurity. In other words, China's domestic politics and its foreign policy might be driven by an unusual combination of hubris and paranoia. Both ambitious and insecure, China's leadership has different incentives to emphasize different Chinese identities to various audiences. However, it is difficult for China's leaders to send signals exclusively to a targeted audience. As the Chinese Communist Party continues to demonstrate China's international status to help secure its domestic legitimacy, they will continue facing complicated pressures from multiple audiences.

Is China a Coherent or an Incoherent Actor?

My overall argument suggests that China is sending contradictory signals about its preferred status on the global stage, sometimes highlighting its rising power status and at other times emphasizing its developing country status. In some places, however, I also suggest that the duality of China's image projection seems to indicate some rational and instrumental calculation: China wants to have great power privileges, but China also wants to avoid taking unwanted responsibilities whenever possible. In regional diplomacy in Asia, China wants to send a reassuring message while maintaining its coercive face. As Zhang points out, "how conflictual China's signals are?" This probably raises an even larger question: is China a coherent or incoherent actor while sending various status signals?

I do not have a definite answer at this time. My observation is that China has a mixed record. In some sense, China seems to behave like a coherent actor with a rational strategy when sending status signals. This rational strategy is reflected in different dimensions. At the national level, there seems to be a minimum consensus regarding China's multiple identities. China's behaviors also reflect some rational calculation and cost-benefit analysis. Still, there are also reasons to believe that China's grand strategy contains some incoherent aspects. Within China, there are still ideological incoherence, ambiguity, and domestic contestation regarding China's role and status on the world stage. China's different signals are sometimes contradictory. Different domestic interest groups and factions might prioritize different dimensions of China's status signals.

Future Directions: How Multiple Audiences Respond to China?

According to Deng, China's status signaling has important limitations, and the U.S. and other countries do not necessarily accept China's status spinning. Kastner raises the question whether China's status signaling is effective or not. Yoder questions the credibility of China's signals. All these comments highlight an important limitation of my book: focusing on China's status signaling, it does not address the question about how various audiences react to China's signaling.

I excluded the empirical story of how multiple audiences respond to China largely due to logistic reason. While signaling and perception are theoretically two sides of the same coin, it is empirically too difficult to examine both processes in the same project.⁷² However, I acknowledge that how various audiences respond to China could become an important and

⁷¹ Jeff Mason and David Lawder, "Trump Targets China in Call for WTO to Reform 'Developing' Country Status." *Reuters*, 26 July 2019: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-wto/trump-targets-china-in-call-for-wto-to-reform-developing-country-status-idUSKCN1UL2G6>

⁷² According to Robert Jervis, his first book *The Logic of Images in International Relations* is theoretically linked to another book, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. After all, the sending and receiving of messages and images are two sides of the same coin. However, it was too difficult for him to examine these two processes in the same project. See, Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), preface, xii-xiii.

entirely new project. How do we explain the obvious limitations of China's status signaling? It is possible to posit some preliminary answers.

First, China's image problem is partially driven by China's contradictory signals. As Deng insightfully points out, the effects of signaling can be interdependent. Also, as Kastner suggests, some status signaling goals might undercut other goals. Second, China's censorship and outdated propaganda system might further exacerbate China's image problem. To boost domestic legitimacy, China's propaganda machines have often highlighted and even exaggerated China's achievements in economic growth and technological innovation. Recent Sino-American tensions have prompted some Chinese elites to rethink "Chinese triumphalism."⁷³ Furthermore, the dichotomy between internal propaganda and external propaganda is outdated in the globalized era. While the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda might primarily serve domestic mobilization, foreign audiences might also receive this information, often generating an international backlash against China.

Finally, hegemonic orders depend on not only material power, but also on a legitimating ideology. In terms of ideology, most great powers in the current international system support liberal democratic ideals. Due to its ideational limitations, China is unlikely to become a new hegemonic power in the foreseeable future.⁷⁴ China's authoritarian system makes it more difficult to sell its image to many international audiences. According to the Chinese strategic thinker Yan Xuetong, a leading power must promote a moral foreign policy that is attractive to other countries. This requires consistency between a leading power's domestic ideology and the political values it pursues abroad. "Unfortunately, the present Chinese government is conflicted in this regard, and thus the Chinese leadership of the next generation bears moral realist expectations."⁷⁵

Once again, I would like to thank all five reviewers for engaging my book in such a careful manner. I am particularly honored that such stellar scholars view my book in a positive light, and I am also grateful for their insightful and intelligent critiques. I have learned much from these reviewers. Regarding how status matters in international relations and how China's foreign policy evolves, many questions remain to be explored in the future.

⁷³ Xiaoyu Pu and Chengli Wang, "Rethinking China's Rise: Chinese Scholars Debate Strategic Overstretch," *International Affairs* 94:5 (2018): 1019-1035.

⁷⁴ Bentley B. Allan, Srdjan Vucetic, and Ted Hopf, "The Distribution of Identity and the Future of International Order: China's Hegemonic Prospects," *International Organization* 72:4 (2018): 839-869.

⁷⁵ Xuetong Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 53.