
Xi Jinping's Operational Code Beliefs and China's Foreign Policy

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What will China's foreign policy be under Xi Jinping, the new Chinese leader in Beijing? Will Xi follow Hu Jintao—his predecessor—or change the course of China's foreign policy orientation in the next decade? Engaging in the current debates over rising China's foreign policy and its implications for regional security, we suggest 'bringing the leaders back in' for a study of China's foreign policy under Xi. We apply operational code analysis, a political psychology approach, to examine the differences and similarities of Xi and Hu's belief systems. We suggest that Xi shares Hu's philosophical and instrumental beliefs, which implies more continuities than changes in China's foreign policy under Xi. In addition, Hu and Xi share similar cooperative worldviews, but the latter's strategy tends to be more assertive. This suggests that although Xi is a status quo leader, optimistic about the existing international system, he may adopt an assertive foreign policy to achieve his strategic goals if external pressure grows too great. Other states, especially the United States, need to review and revise their foreign policy on China should they have adopted, or intend to adopt, a containment policy towards the PRC, because although a rising China may not be a threat, an angry China indeed will be.

Xi Jinping became the new General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the 18th CCP Congress of November 2012. International Relations (IR) scholars and policy analysts are now intrigued by the

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question: will Xi change China's foreign policy orientation?¹ Given China's 'assertive turn' of diplomacy since 2009, a more concrete question is that of whether or not Xi will maintain this assertive orientation or steer China's foreign policy in a more cooperative direction.² This question is important for two reasons. Practically speaking, Xi's succession of power signifies a new generation of leadership in China. Barring the occurrence of a critical event, Xi will be in power for the next 10 years. Given China's continuous ascent on the world stage, the period will both define China's future and be critical to regional security and world peace. In other words, in the next decade Xi will determine China's future and also shape world politics. Theoretically speaking, China's foreign policy under Xi will settle the long-standing debate among IR scholars on China's rise and its implications for world politics. If Xi's foreign policy continues along the assertive path, the pessimistic school of thought on China's rise, mostly realism, will win out. If Xi's foreign policy takes a more cooperative direction, optimistic scholars, mainly liberals, may have more to say. If Xi's foreign policy direction is uncertain, the indeterminate school of China's rise, such as constructivism, may be proven right.³

Through a political psychology approach—operational code analysis—this article engages in the theoretical debate on China's rise and goes some way towards predicting China's foreign policy under Xi during the next 10 years. We suggest that leaders' beliefs act as a transmission belt between individual leaders and the external environment. Through examining Xi's operational code beliefs, we argue that Xi's belief system is similar to that of Hu Jintao, his predecessor in the CCP. This suggests that Xi's foreign policy orientation will not depart too far from Hu's, and that scholars' worries about dramatic changes in China's foreign policy under Xi are unwarranted. A more nuanced analysis shows that Xi's main philosophical belief, which reveals his worldview on the nature of the political universe, is as optimistic and cooperative as Hu's; however, Xi's main instrumental belief, i.e. his strategic approach to achieving goals, implies a more assertive direction than that of Hu. This difference signifies that China's foreign

¹ For examples of discussions on China's foreign policy under Xi, see M. Taylor Fravel, 'Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping', *The Diplomat*, November 23, 2012; Robert Keatley, 'Foreign Policy Priorities for Xi Jinping', *The National Interest*, December 20, 2012; Kenneth Lieberthal, 'Xi Jinping's Challenge', *Foreign Policy*, November 27, 2012.

² For an excellent review of perceptions of China's assertiveness, see Michael Swaine, 'Perceptions of an Assertive China', *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 32 (2010) <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor>; Michael Swaine, 'China's Assertive Behaviour-Part One: "Core Interests"', *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 34 (2011); Michael Swaine and M. Taylor Fravel, 'China's Assertive Behaviour-Part Two: The Maritime Periphery', *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 35 (2011).

³ For an excellent review of optimistic versus pessimistic views on China's rise, see Aaron Friedberg, 'The Future of US-China Relations', *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2005), pp. 7-45.

policy under Xi in the next decade may display the two distinct features of being cooperative in nature and assertive in practice.

This article is in four sections. First, we briefly review the three schools of thought in the study of the foreign policy of a rising China. They are: realist-revisionist; liberal-status quo; and constructivist-uncertain. We suggest that 'bringing leaders back in', i.e. a psychological approach, complements the theoretical deficiencies of the existing debate over China's foreign policy orientation. Secondly, we introduce operational code analysis and suggest a new typology in the study of China's foreign policy. Rather than simply categorizing a rising China into a revisionist versus status quo power, we suggest that the dynamics of Chinese leaders' philosophical and instrumental beliefs offer a more nuanced indication of Chinese foreign policy orientations. In other words, we need not only to examine what kind of leader Xi is, but also to gauge what kind of foreign policy he will adopt for China. Based on leaders' philosophical and instrumental belief systems in operational code analysis, we construct a new typology of state leadership: assertive-revisionist; assertive-status quo; moderate-revisionist; and moderate-status quo, in efforts to shed light on China's foreign policy under Xi.

In the third section, we apply operational code analysis to compare and contrast the philosophical and instrumental beliefs of Xi and Hu based on their public statements and speeches, respectively, from 2007 to 2012 and from 2002 to 2012. We also examine the changes in Hu's belief system during his tenure from 2002 to 2012. In conclusion, we discuss the implications of our findings for regional security and China's future. We suggest that although Xi is a status quo leader who is optimistic about the existing international system, his foreign policy may imbue a more assertive strategy with respect to achieving goals, especially before consolidating his power and in the face of severe external pressure.

Three Schools of Thought on a Rising China's Foreign Policy

Scholars and pundits have heatedly debated China's rise and its foreign policy orientation since the 1990s. There are three major schools of thought: realist-revisionist; liberal-status quo; and constructivist-uncertain. Most realists are pessimistic about China's rise with regards to regional security since they suggest a revisionist direction of foreign policy for a rising China. Liberals, in contrast, optimistically argue that China will not upset the existing international system because a status quo-oriented foreign policy best fits China's interests. The uncertain constructivist school focuses on the role of ideas and norms in shaping China's foreign policy, and suggests that China's future is still unwritten. Although all three schools of thought raise

valid arguments, they suffer from a conflation of the nature and behaviour of states and an absence of attention to leaders' different beliefs.

Realism: China Is Doomed to be a Revisionist Power

To a certain extent, different stripes of realism share a common argument with respect to the threat or potential threat of a rising China to the international system, although they disagree on how to deal with it. For example, John Mearsheimer's offensive realism suggests that as a rising power, China's policy behaviour will be no different from that of the United States in the 19th century, i.e. pursuing regional hegemony in its own hemisphere.⁴ This means that China will adopt a Chinese version of the 'Monroe Doctrine' to chase the United States, the existing hegemon, out of the Asia Pacific, just as the United States did the European powers in the 19th century. Therefore, the United States, the current regional hegemon, will do anything to constrain, contain, and slow down China's rise.⁵ The 'gathering storm' will hence loom large in the Asia Pacific as a consequence of China's rise.⁶ Mearsheimer's argument is shared by power-transition theorists, who suggest that a rising power is more likely to be a revisionist power within the international system, challenging the hegemon and disturbing the existing international order.⁷

Although defensive realists believe that states within the international system pursue security rather than power, they are nevertheless worried about China's rise, the decline of the United States, and the transformation of the international system.⁸ As Christopher Layne points out, the emerging

⁴ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

⁵ For similar containment arguments, see Denny Roy, 'Hegemon on the Horizon? China's Threat to East Asian Security', *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1994), pp. 149–68; and Gerald Segal, 'East Asia and the "Constraint" of China', *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1996), pp. 107–35.

⁶ John Mearsheimer, 'The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (2010), pp. 381–96.

⁷ For a general power transition argument, see A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1958); A. F. K. Organski and Jack Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980); Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For applications of power transition theory to China's rise, see Douglas Lemke and Ronald Tammen, 'Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China', *International Interactions*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2003), pp. 269–71; and Ronald Tammen and Jack Kugler, 'Power Transition and China-US Conflicts', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 1, No.1 (2006), pp. 31–55; and Jack Levy, 'Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China', in Robert Ross and Zhu Feng, eds., *China's Ascent* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 11–33. For criticisms on applying power transition theory to China's rise, see Steve Chan, *China, the US., and the Power-Transition Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁸ For defensive realism, see Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); Jeffrey Taliaferro, 'Security Seeking under Anarchy', *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2000), pp. 128–61. Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to US Primacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005); C. L. Glaser, 'Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help', *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (1994/1995), pp. 50–90.

multipolarity since the Cold War is inevitable, and China's rise is doomed to be a nightmare amid the US's unipolar illusion.⁹ Differing from offensive realists and power transition scholars, defensive realists suggest an offshore balancing strategy for the United States.¹⁰ It means that the United States should gradually withdraw its security commitments and avoid a direct power competition with China in the Asia Pacific, and instead encourage other Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and India, to balance the rising threat from China.

In a word, most realists label China a revisionist state as its military and economic capabilities within the international system continue to grow. China's 'assertive diplomacy' since 2009, such as the uncooperative attitude displayed at the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, the refusal to punish North Korea's provocations, as well as the recent diplomatic stand-offs with Japan and the Philippines over territorial disputes, has further endorsed the realist stand on China's foreign policy. The US 'pivot towards Asia' since 2011 is, moreover, perceived (by China) as US efforts to balance against China's rise, just as certain realists have predicted.¹¹

Liberalism: China Wants the Status Quo

Most liberals have an optimistic view of China's rise, although they cite different reasons. Some suggest that economic interdependence can alleviate the intensity of strategic competition between the United States and China.¹² Others argue that the liberal international order set by the United States after World War II benefited China's economic development, and will also curb China's revisionist ambitions.¹³

Liberals suggest that China should remain a good citizen or a status quo state in the existing international order led by the United States, featuring multilateral institutional settings in the financial and security realms since

⁹ Christopher Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise', *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1993), pp. 5–51; Christopher Layne, 'House of Cards: American Strategy toward China', *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1997), pp. 77–95; and Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Christopher Layne, 'Offshore Balancing Revisited', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2002), pp. 233–48; and Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power*.

¹¹ John Mearsheimer, 'The Gathering Storm'. For US Pivot towards Asia, see Hillary Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy*, November, 2011; Kenneth Lieberthal, 'The American Pivot to Asia', *Foreign Policy*, December 2011; Robert Dreyfuss, 'Fool's Errand: America's Pivot to Asia', *The Diplomat*, December 5, 2012.

¹² For some liberal discussions, see James L. Richardson, 'Asia-Pacific: The Case for Geopolitical Optimism', *National Interest*, No. 38 (1994/95), pp. 28–39; Ralph A. Cossa and Jane Khanna, 'East Asia: Economic Interdependence and Regional Security', *International Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (1997), pp. 219–34; David Shambaugh, 'China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order', *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2004), pp. 64–99.

¹³ See G. John Ikenberry, 'The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (2008), pp. 23–35.

World War II, because the stakes are too high for China to challenge the system. Unlike realists, liberals believe that the United States can still play a leadership role in the Western order even after it loses hegemon status in the future multipolar world.¹⁴ In other words, multilateral economic and security institutions embedded in the Western order may not be able to stop China's rise, but will constrain its behaviour. Therefore, most liberals advocate an engagement policy towards China wherein China will be further integrated, enmeshed, and entangled in international rules and institutions.¹⁵

China's 'charm offensive' in the 1990s and 'peaceful rise' pledge in the early 2000s seem to support the 'status quo' foreign policy suggested by liberals.¹⁶ After all, China did in 2001 strengthen its economic ties with the United States and join the World Trade Organization.¹⁷ China moreover eased regional suspicions about its economic and military ascent through proactive participation in regional multilateral institutions and strengthened confidence-building measures.¹⁸ However, as mentioned above, the turn China has taken since 2009 to a more assertive diplomacy has cast deep-seated doubts on liberal optimism about China's rise. The question that remains is whether or not liberals are totally wrong. In other words, has China really decided to give up all the benefits stemming from economic interdependence and the existing international order?

Constructivism: China's Uncertain Future

Constructivists emphasize the role of norms, culture, and ideas in state behaviour.¹⁹ They normally have an uncertain view on China's rise as well as on its foreign policy orientation. For example, Jeffery Legro raises the critical question of 'what China will want' after the rise of its military and

¹⁴ G. John Ikenberry, 'Liberalism and Empire: Logics of Order in the American Unipolar Age', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2004), pp. 609–30; G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ For an engagement argument, see Elizabeth Economy, 'Don't Break the Engagement', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (2004), pp. 96–109; for a critical evaluation, see Paul A. Papayoanou and Scott L. Kastner, 'Sleeping with the (Potential) Enemy: Assessing the US Policy of Engagement with China', *Security Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1–2 (1999), pp. 157–187.

¹⁶ See Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Zheng Bijian, 'China's "Peaceful Rise" to Great-Power Status', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 5 (2005), pp. 18–24.

¹⁷ See Robert D. Hormats, Elizabeth Economy and Kevin Nealer, eds., *Beginning the Journey: China, the United States, and the WTO* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2001).

¹⁸ Marc Lanteigne, *China and International Institutions: Alternate Paths to Global Power* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Kai He, *Institutional Balancing in the Asia Pacific: Economic Interdependence and China's Rise* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁹ For a general social constructivism theory, see Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

economic power in the international system.²⁰ According to Legro, the question is unsettled because Chinese political leaders are experiencing a clash of ideas and intentions with regards to China's future role in the international system. Therefore, what the rise of China brings to the world will depend on which strategic ideas and intentions win out. Other powers, especially the United States, according to Legro, should keep their 'ideational engagement' with China without directly intervening in China's internal affairs. Reformist elites can then promote the Soviet type of 'new thinking' in China while maintaining China's integration with the world.

In a similar vein, Alastair Iain Johnston suggests that Chinese foreign policy elites have been socialized by cooperative security norms and rules through their participation since the Cold War in multilateral institutions.²¹ This socialization effect, in turn, has enabled Chinese foreign policy elites to educate their leaders in what China should do in the international system, and contributed to the cooperative direction of China's foreign policy since the Cold War. Similar to Legro, Johnston's policy suggestion is to further engage China through multilateral institutions. Chinese leaders and policy elites will thus continue to be socialized by the cooperative norms of security and foreign policy decision-making.

Like liberals, constructivists also face difficulties when accounting for China's 'assertive turn' of foreign policy since 2009. One possible explanation may be the contingent nature of ideas and intentions as well as the non-linear socialization process. In other words, Legro might suggest that the turn to a more assertive diplomacy reflects a temporary triumph of China's conservative elites over its reformists, while Johnston might argue that the socialization process of cooperative security norms is obstructed by other norms, such as nationalism or *realpolitik*.

Too Simple, Too Arbitrary

Although all three schools of thought contain elements of truth, they suffer from two problems: a conflation of the nature and behaviour of states, and an absence of attention to leaders' different beliefs.

First, scholars conflate the nature of states with the behaviour of states. Most realists adopt a 'billiard ball' view of states, wherein they all share the same nature under anarchy—that of either seeking security or pursuing power, the only difference being their differing extents of power.²² In addition, most realists rely solely on state behaviour as an indicator for assessing

²⁰ Jeffrey Legro, 'What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power', *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2007), pp. 515–34.

²¹ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions 1980–2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

²² For classic realist works, see Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948); Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

the nature of that state. Therefore, according to realism, China will not be satisfied with the current international order led by the United States and become a revisionist state as it becomes bigger and stronger. However, this may not necessarily be the case, since state behaviours may or may not reflect the nature of states. Offensive realists, such as John Mearsheimer, argue that even though all states are status quo in nature, they have to behave offensively, like revisionists, in the anarchic system in their quest for security.²³ In contrast, classical realists such as Hans Morgenthau argue that all states have a 'limitless lust for power', but their behaviours are sometimes constrained by the balance of power and diplomacy among states.²⁴ In the middle of these two extremes, Thomas Christensen and Jack Snyder acknowledge certain aggressive behaviours by status quo states, such as the 'chain gangs' during World War I, and Randall Schweller argues that some 'jackal' (revisionist) states may bandwagon—and thus constrain their greedy nature—for profits.²⁵

Therefore, a status quo power may behave aggressively if the state's leaders believe that external pressure is imperative. By the same token, a revisionist state can conceal its ambitions and behave like a status quo power if state leaders believe that it is not a good time to challenge the existing order. It is true that China has displayed an assertive turn in its diplomacy since 2009. However, the unanswered question remains that of whether or not China has indeed become a revisionist state, or if this assertive behaviour is only that of a status quo power under specific conditions.

It is important to answer the above two questions prudently and carefully. If the answer to the first scenario is yes, as most realists believe, then a balancing or even a containment policy is a good policy choice for other states to deal with a rising China. If the second scenario turns out to be true, i.e. China's assertive behaviour does not signify a revisionist nature, then balancing and containment policies will exacerbate the security dilemma between China and the outside world. In other words, a status quo China may be forced to behave aggressively if it faces too much pressure from the international system.

It is still debatable how best to assess the nature of states. Although Schweller wisely points out that there are different types of states in the system, such as revisionist versus status quo, he fails to specify criteria through which to assess the nature of states.²⁶ Constructivists are right to

²³ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

²⁴ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*.

²⁵ Thomas Christensen and Jack Snyder, 'Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity', *International Organization*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1990), pp. 137–68; Randall Schweller, 'Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In', *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1994), pp. 72–107.

²⁶ Randall Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

suggest that leaders and ideas indeed matter in shaping and constituting state nature and behaviour. However, most constructivists treat norms and ideas as exogenous in nature, in that states' leaders either take initiatives to localize global norms or become a target for socialization by external norms.²⁷ The purely ideational and exogenous treatment of ideas and norms raises the question of where they originate and where the interaction between leaders' beliefs and the external environment takes place.

There is, moreover, insufficient attention to the role of leaders' beliefs in shaping state behaviour as well as to the different dimensions of leaders' belief systems. Both realism and liberalism assume that all leaders are alike, and are rational in making decisions. Therefore, whether or not leaders have different beliefs does not matter in international politics. Although constructivists emphasize the role of leaders, they normally oversimplify leaders' belief systems to that of a one-dimensional receiver of external influences. However, as John Duffield suggests, there are five dimensions of leaders' belief systems: worldview; interests and preferences; causal beliefs; normative beliefs of right/wrong; and identities, loyalties, and emotional attachments. All play an integrated role in shaping leaders' policy choices.²⁸ When applying this multidimensional view of leaders' beliefs to the case of China's foreign policy, it is crucial to unpack Xi's belief system if we intend to understand and predict what China will do in the future.

Operational Code Beliefs and Four Types of Leadership

In this research, we suggest 'bringing leaders back in' and emphasize the role of leaders' belief systems in connecting leaders' policy decisions with the external material and ideational worlds. Our general argument is that leaders' belief systems are key to understanding both the nature and the policy of states in the international system. On the one hand, a leader's belief system reflects what kind of leader he or she is, and relates directly to what type of state the country will be within the international system. If a state leader harbours revisionist ambitions and perceives the nature of the political universe as conflictual, this state is likely sooner or later to become a revisionist power within the system. If a state leader has a limited security-oriented goal and holds a cooperative worldview, the state is more likely to be a status quo power within the system. Leaders' beliefs moreover dictate the policy behaviours of states, as the different policy choices of states are

²⁷ For an example of the localization of norms, see Amitav Acharya, 'How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism', *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (2004), pp. 239–75.

²⁸ John Duffield, *World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions, and German Security Policy after Unification* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 24–5.

the means whereby leaders achieve their strategic goals within the international system.

To capture the multidimensionality of leaders' belief systems, we introduce the operational code construct and highlight the two fundamental types of leaders' beliefs to assess the nature and the behaviour of states. Operational code analysis is a psychological approach to leadership studies that has recently developed as a neobehavioral approach to foreign policy analysis. It suggests that the study of foreign policy decision-making should focus on connecting two worlds—the external world of events and the internal world of beliefs—by using the leader's operational code or belief system. Further, it highlights two types of beliefs: philosophical beliefs 'about the nature of the political universe' that represent the external world of events, and instrumental beliefs for 'making decisions about the exercise of power versus other actions in the political universe', which prescribe possible strategies, tactics, and moves.²⁹

Based on Nathan Leites' prototypical studies of the Bolshevik operational code of the 1950s, Alexander George formalized the methodology of operational code analysis by suggesting 10 questions as a tool for gauging and analysing any individual's philosophical and instrumental belief system.³⁰ The questions are as follows:

Philosophical Beliefs

- P-1 What is the 'essential' nature of political life? Is the political universe essentially one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one's political opponents?
- P-2 What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one's fundamental values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic, or must one be pessimistic on this score; and in what respects the one and/or the other?
- P-3 Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?
- P-4 How much 'control' or 'mastery' can one have over historical development? What is one's role in 'moving' and 'shaping' history in the desired direction?

²⁹ Stephen Walker, 'Foreign Policy Analysis and Behavioral International Relations', in Stephen Walker, Akan Malici, and Mark Schafer, eds., *Rethinking Foreign Policy Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p.6.

³⁰ N. C. Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1951); Alexander George, 'The "Operational Code": A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-making', *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 13, No. 2 (1969):190–222. For an excellent example of operational code analysis applications in foreign policy analysis, see Mark Schafer and Stephen Walker, eds., *Beliefs and Leadership in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

P-5 What is the role of 'chance' in human affairs and in historical development?

Instrumental Beliefs

I-1 What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?

I-2 How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?

I-3 How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled and accepted?

I-4 What is the best 'timing' of action to advance one's interests?

I-5 What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one's interests?

Ole Holsti further constructed six types of operational codes for leaders.³¹ Stephen Walker later revised Holsti's typology into four types of belief systems with three key beliefs: (P-1) nature of the political universe; (I-1) strategic approach to goals; and (P-4) ability to control historical development.³²

In this article we highlight two 'key' operational code beliefs, the P-1 belief (nature of the political universe) and the I-1 belief (strategic approach to goals), as an analytical tool to assess the nature and the policy behaviour of a state.³³ Since the P-1 belief reflects a leader's general worldview, it can be used to gauge what kind of a leader he or she is or what kind of a state the country will be. If a leader's worldview is conflictual in nature, it suggests that the state is more likely to be a revisionist power in the system if opportunities arise. If a leader's worldview is cooperative in orientation, the state is more likely to be a status quo power if no dramatic pressure occurs.³⁴

³¹ Ole R. Holsti, 'The "Operational Code" as an Approach to the Analysis of Belief Systems', Final report to the National Science Foundation Grant SOC75-15368 (1977).

³² Stephen Walker, 'The Interface between Beliefs and Behaviour: Henry Kissinger's Operational Code and the Vietnam War', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1977), pp. 129–68; Stephen Walker, 'The Motivational Foundations of Political Belief Systems: A Re-analysis of the Operational Code', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1983), pp. 179–202.

³³ It should be noted that the P-1 and I-1 beliefs are conceptualized as the 'key beliefs' by Stephen Walker and Mark Schafer. This means that other beliefs within each category should flow from and be theoretically and empirically linked with these two key beliefs according to theories of cognitive consistency. See Mark Schafer and Stephen Walker, 'Operational Code analysis at A Distance: The Verbs in Context System of Content Analysis', in Mark Schafer and Stephen Walker, eds., *Beliefs and Leadership in World Politics: Methods and Applications of Operational Code Analysis* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), p. 33.

³⁴ Here, we mainly refer to great powers in world politics when we discuss 'revisionist versus status quo'. As one of the reviewers points out, small powers may not be qualified as a 'revisionist' in the international system.

The I-1 belief indicates how leaders achieve their strategic goals, i.e. what kind of policy they are likely to choose. Similarly, we categorize two types of behaviour: assertive and moderate policies. If the I-1 belief shows an assertive direction, it suggests that the leader is more likely to use an assertive approach to achieving goals. If the I-1 belief reflects a moderate orientation, it means that the leader is more likely to use a cooperative approach to fulfilling goals.

Through incorporating the two key operational code beliefs, we can construct a 2×2 typology shown in Figure 1, which can identify four types of leadership or states in the international system: assertive-revisionist; assertive-status quo; moderate-revisionist; and moderate-status quo.³⁵

Based on this new typology, we can revise our original question about Xi's ascent to the new leadership and the implications for China's foreign policy orientation. Neither realists nor liberals may even consider Xi's influence on foreign policy, because the structural imperatives (either the distribution of power of realism or economic interdependence and entangled institutions of liberalism) have determined a path for China's new leadership in the next 10 years. Constructivists may say 'it depends', since they have to wait and see how different policy elites fight to exercise their different ideas and strategic intentions.

As suggested, all these existing approaches miss an important factor—Xi's belief system—in shaping the direction of China's foreign policy. We argue that through unpacking Xi's belief system, especially the P-1 and I-1 operational code beliefs, we can empirically assess what kind of leader Xi is, what kind of state he will lead (revisionist versus status quo), and what kind of policy he will adopt (assertive versus moderate) in the next 10 years.

Traditionally, operational code analysis relies on qualitative methods, i.e. the interpretation of interviews and analyses of written texts, to assess leaders' beliefs. Since the 1970s, scholars have gradually developed the Verbs in Context System (VICS) and Profiler Plus—computer-based content

³⁵ Our typology is different from Ole Holsti's six types of operational codes (A, B, C, D, E, F) and Stephen Walker's revised Holsti operational code typology which used three key beliefs (P-1, I-1, and P-4) to locate a leader within quadrants of the revised Holsti typology. Here, we focus on leaders' beliefs in Self (I-1) and Other (P-1) without considering their ability to control historical development (P-4). To a certain extent, we simplify Holsti and Walker's typologies without considering leaders' ability to exercise power since we focus on the nature of the leadership and behaviour, not on how and whether they can achieve their goals. For Holsti and Walker's typologies, see Ole R. Holsti, 'The "Operational Code" as an Approach to the Analysis of Belief Systems' and Stephen Walker, 'The Motivational Foundations of Political Belief Systems: A Re-analysis of the Operational Code', and Stephen Walker, 'The Evolution of Operational Code Analysis', *Political Psychology* Vol. 11, No. 2 (1990): 403–18.

P-1 Belief (Nature of the Political Universe)

	-1 (conflict)	0	(cooperation) +1
-1 (conflict)	1 Assertive-revisionist	2 Assertive-status quo	
0	3 Moderate-revisionist	4 Moderate-status quo	
+1 (cooperation)			

I-1 Belief (Strategy)

Fig. 1 A Typology of Leadership/State Based on the Two Key Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs.

analysis programs—for scientifically ‘retrieving and analysing a leader’s operational code beliefs’.³⁶ VICS is a computer software program used for content analysis based on verbs in a leader’s speeches. The verbs are coded, using a dictionary, to construct indices of a leader’s view of the political universe and strategy preferences according to George’s 10 questions about philosophical and instrumental beliefs. Many scholars have applied operational code analysis and the VICS indices to analyse foreign policy decision-making by examining decision-makers’ belief systems.³⁷

As mentioned earlier, we focus on the two ‘master’ or key operational code beliefs of Xi—the P-1 belief and the I-1 belief. In the VICS indices, the

³⁶ Stephen Walker, Mark Shafer, and Michael Young, ‘Profiling the Operational Codes of Political Leaders’, in Jerald M. Post ed., *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders: With Profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 215–6.

³⁷ For an example, see Stephen Walker, Mark Schafer, and Michael Young, ‘Systematic Procedures for Operational Code Analysis: Measuring and Modeling Jimmy Carter’s Operational Code’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (1998), pp. 175–89. Huiyun Feng, ‘The Operational Code of Mao Zedong: Defensive or Offensive Realist?’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2005), pp. 637–62; Akan Malici and Johanna Malici, ‘The Operational Codes of Fidel Castro and Kim Il Sung: The Last Cold Warriors?’, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2005), pp. 387–412; Greg Marfleet, ‘The Operational Code of John F. Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis: A Comparison of Public and Private Rhetoric’, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (2000), pp. 545–58; Mark Schafer and Stephen Walker, ‘Democratic Leaders and the Democratic Peace: The Operational Codes of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (2006), pp. 561–83.

P-1 belief is coded continuously from cooperation (+1.0) to conflict (-1.0); the I-1 belief is also measured continuously from cooperation (+1.0) to conflict (-1.0). Integrating the VICS indices with our leadership typology, we can locate Xi in a specific cell of the typology and examine both the nature of the state/leadership and the behavioural patterns of China's foreign policy. For example, if the operational code analysis shows a leader's P-1 belief value as -.50 and I-1 belief value as +.50, he will be located in cell 3 of Figure 1, which indicates that he or she is a revisionist leader, although the foreign policy will be moderate in direction.

It is worth noting that another key belief in operational code analysis is the P-4 belief, indicating whether a leader believes that he or she has a strong sense of control over historical development. This belief is coded continuously from weak (.00) to strong (+1.0) in the VICS indices. The P-4 belief is also useful in revealing a leader's ability, and even his personality, when exercising power.³⁸ Leaders who have a strong belief in historical control, that is, a high P-4 value, are likely to be decisive, strong decision-makers, i.e. more inclined to practise their beliefs. In contrast, a low P-4 value leader is likely to be a weak, indecisive person, easily influenced and less likely or capable of operationalizing or practising beliefs. The P-4 belief is not included in the leadership typology with P-1 and I-1 because it is treated as an auxiliary belief whose emphasis is on the ability of leaders to exercise power. In addition, our research focuses on the nature of leadership and behaviour. With regards to whether or not and how leaders achieve their desired goals, further research paying more attention to the P-4 belief is needed.

Three caveats of this research are worth noting. First, our research focuses on China's top leaders, including Hu and Xi. Scholars have suggested that China's foreign policy decision-making process is complex and shows a pluralistic tendency in recent years. In other words, many actors, not exclusively top leaders, may be involved in China's foreign policy decision-making.³⁹ We agree that China's foreign policy decision-making is no longer 'one man's rule'. However, we argue that China's top leaders still play the most important, if not the only, role in making China's foreign policy. As Wang Guangya, China's Vice Foreign Minister from 2008 to 2010, points out, 'control of policy and decision-making in China's foreign affairs has always resided with the country's top leaders: from Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in the first generation, to Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and

³⁸ The original interpretation of P-4 belief is leaders' ability to control historical development. Here we extend it to a leader's personality in making decisions, either decisively or not. Our interpretation is subject to debate.

³⁹ See Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, 'New Foreign Policy Actors in China', SIPRI Policy Paper No. 26, September 2010.

now Hu Jintao'.⁴⁰ Therefore, our research examines Xi and Hu's operational code beliefs while acknowledging the role of other actors in China's decision-making process.

Secondly, Xi officially ascended to power as General Secretary of the CCP and Chairman of the Central Military Committee in November 2012. He took office as President in March 2013. All speeches and statements that we have collected and used for this analysis, however, were made prior to Xi's rise to the top leadership. Therefore, this research only serves as a preliminary test of Xi's operational code beliefs, because politicians may think, speak, or act differently in different power positions or roles. In addition, due to China's authoritarian political system, it will be no surprise to observe great similarities between Xi and his predecessor, Hu Jintao, because it would be unwise for Xi, a would-be leader, to directly challenge Hu, the incumbent, before assuming the top position. However, we can still rely on operational code analysis to capture certain nuanced belief differences between Xi and Hu that may shed light on China's future foreign policy orientation.

Thirdly, operational code analysis is an 'at-a-distance' approach to examining leaders' belief systems. The 'at-a-distance' approach means that 'we assess the psychological characteristics of individuals from a distance without having direct access to them'.⁴¹ In this research, we rely on Chinese leaders' speeches and statements to infer their psychological beliefs. There are certain issues associated with this 'at-a-distance' method in general and with the operational code analysis in particular. For example, scholars may question the authorship of speeches and leaders' possible deceptions or manipulations of them for 'impression management'.

An extensive discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this article.⁴² However, we would suggest that operational code analysis and the VICS scheme examine cognitive information—information that has been consciously processed. In other words, even though speeches and statements may have been prepared by speechwriters rather than the leaders themselves they still reflect leaders' views on specific policy issues. In other words, leaders will not deliver speeches and statements that do not have their consent. As for deception and manipulation of speeches, this may, realistically speaking, occasionally happen. However, the VICS focuses on the large numbers of verbs they contain and uses their general pattern to infer a leaders' belief system. Leaders may use a few phrases or verbs to deceive

⁴⁰ Cited by Robert Lawrence Kuhn, *How China's Leaders Think: The Inside Story of China's Reform and What This Means for the Future* (Singapore: John Wiley & Son (Asia) Pte Ltd, 2010), p. 376.

⁴¹ Mark Shafer and Stephen Walker, 'Operational Code Analysis at a Distance: The Verbs in Context System of Content Analysis', p. 26.

⁴² For an extensive discussion, see Mark Schafer, 'Issues in Assessing Psychological Characteristics at a Distance', *Political Psychology* Vol. 21, No. 3 (2000): 511–28.

the public. For example, in order to show their peace-loving ideology, leaders may choose cooperative words to justify starting wars. However, war is war, and leaders are unable to change a war scenario no matter how carefully they choose their words. Therefore, through examining whole speeches VICS indices will ‘swamp few intentional deceptions’.⁴³

Research Design and Results

We have collected both Hu and Xi’s public speeches and statements on foreign affairs. Owing to their differing positions of power in the CCP and the PRC government, Hu’s speeches and statements span the decade from 2002 to 2012, while Xi’s data collection covers the years 2007 to 2012. Hu became Vice President of the PRC, and set out on his succession of Jiang Zemin, in 1998. Xi was selected to enter the Standing Committee of the Politburo in 2007, and appointed Vice President in 2008. The major sources of these speeches and statements are the LexisNexis news database and the Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry website. All speeches and public statements are published in English from official government sources. Data include 90 of Hu’s speeches and statements and 18 of Xi’s. Xi’s speeches were mainly delivered in his capacity as Vice President of the PRC from 2009 to 2011. The sample size of his speeches is consequently smaller than Hu’s, because as president during the first decade of the 2000s Hu had more opportunities to deliver foreign affairs-related statements and speeches.

Purposeful rather than random sampling was applied to selecting from their available speeches, which usually exceeded one thousand words, and to analysing the aggregated sample frame. We have run Profiler Plus to code the VICS indices in Hu and Xi’s speeches and to quantify the key operational code beliefs, P-1, I-1, and P-4, of Hu and Xi.

The following are the four sets of questions we try to answer:

- (i) Will Xi have a different P-1 belief from Hu? Who has a more cooperative worldview?
- (ii) Will Xi have a different I-1 belief from Hu? Who is more likely to adopt an assertive policy to achieve his strategic goal?
- (iii) Will Xi have a different P-4 belief from Hu? Who is the stronger and more decisive leader in exerting control over historical development?
- (iv) How did Hu’s belief systems change over time during his tenure? Could we rely on Hu’s belief change trajectory to make inferences with regards to Xi’s future belief changes?

⁴³ Mark Shafer and Stephen Walker, ‘Operational Code analysis at A Distance: The Verbs in Context System of Content Analysis’, p. 47.

Table 1 summarizes the mean comparisons of Hu and Xi's operational code beliefs. We analyse the belief differences between Hu and Xi using an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test to compare the means for each VICS index. The result shows that there are no significant statistical differences in the two key beliefs (P-1, I-1); however, there are some significant differences in the P-4 belief and certain instrumental beliefs with respect to the utility of different ways of exercising power (see I-5 utility of mean scores). Using the means for the P-1 and I-1 indices, we can locate both Hu and Xi into the

Table 1 A Comparison of the Operational Code of Xi Jinping (2007–2012) and Hu Jintao (2002–2012)

		Xi Jinping Mean scores (N = 18)	Hu Jintao Mean scores (N = 90)
<i>Philosophical Beliefs</i>			
P-1	Nature of Political Universe (Conflict/Cooperation)	.64	.68
P-2	Realization of Political Values (Optimism/Pessimism)	.46	.48
P-3	Political Future (Unpredictable/Predictable)	.21	.21
P-4	Historical Development (Low Control/High Control)	.12	.18*
P-5	Role of Chance (Small Role/Large Role)	.97	.96*
<i>Instrumental Beliefs</i>			
I-1	Strategic Approach to Goals (Conflict/Cooperation)	.68	.72
I-2	Intensity of Tactics (Conflict/Cooperation)	.36	.35
I-3	Risk Orientation (Averse/Acceptant)	.35	.43
I-4	Timing of Action Conflict/Cooperation	.31	.26
	Words/Deeds	.50	.40
I-5	Utility of Means		
	Reward	.19	.11
	Promise	.13	.08
	Appeal	.51	.35*
	Oppose	.09	.11
	Threaten	.01	.06
	Punish	.06	.28*

Note: *Significant level at $p < .05$ level (two-tailed test).

'moderate-status quo' category in the leadership/state typology (cell 4 in Figure 1). This suggests that both Xi and Hu hold cooperative worldviews, and that their strategies to achieve goals are likely to be moderate.

The significant variance in their P-4 historical control scores reflects that Xi and Hu have significantly different perceptions of controlling historical development. Hu's P-4 belief (.18) is stronger than Xi's (.12). This implies that, with regards to making decisive and tough decisions, Xi has a weaker personality or leadership style than Hu. This may be because Hu was the top leader (for the better part of the speech selection period) while Xi was still in the subordinate position. However, from the tough decisions Hu made during the 1989 Tibet riots, and his decisive retirement in 2012, we can see that Hu has a relatively strong personality with regards to controlling historical development.⁴⁴ We do not know how strong Xi will be in the future due to absence of evidence.⁴⁵

One other interesting finding from the comparison between Xi and Hu of operational code beliefs is that Xi displays significant differences ($p < .05$) from Hu in two I-5 beliefs (utility of means). The I-5 belief index assesses how leaders use different means to achieve their goals. The different types of means of exercising power include 'reward', 'promise', 'appeal', 'oppose', 'threaten', and 'punish'. The VICS index for I-1, the strategic approach to goals, is an aggregated index that does not pay close attention to the intensity of tactics (I-2), risk orientation (I-3), timing of action (I-4), and the type of means (I-5). Although Xi's I-1 belief is statistically similar to that of Hu, which indicates a cooperative strategic orientation, the different I-5 belief indices reveal what means Xi is most likely to use to achieve his cooperative goals.

Table 1 shows that two of Xi's I-5 indices, 'appeal' and 'punish', differ significantly from those of Hu. Xi shows higher values for 'appeal' (.51) than Hu (.35), which suggests that Xi is more likely than Hu to use the means of 'appeal' to achieve his (cooperative) strategic goals. On the other hand, Hu displays a higher value for 'punish' (.28) than Xi (.06), which indicates that Hu is more likely than Xi to employ the means of punishment to achieve his (cooperative) strategic goals. Hu's punishment-preferred orientation is coincident with his relatively stronger P-4 belief—the decisive leadership style—in comparison with Xi.

The belief differences in the means of strategy may also reflect Hu and Xi's different positions in the CCP system. Top leaders are more likely to behave

⁴⁴ For Hu's decision to suppress the 1989 Tibetan uprising, see Willy Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Hu Jintao Era: New Leaders, New Challenges* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2006); and Kerry Brown, *Hu Jintao: China's Silent Ruler* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2012).

⁴⁵ The P-5 index—role of chance—beliefs between Hu and Xi are also different statistically. However, since P-5 belief is calculated as a residual of P-4, the statistical difference between Hu and Xi may be led by their P-4 beliefs since the values of the two leaders' P-5 beliefs are similar (.96 versus .97).

in a decisive or conflictual way, e.g. using punishments, whereas subordinate leaders may incline towards a cooperative way, e.g. using appeals and rewards, to achieve their goals. It is not clear whether or not Xi will keep to this cooperative preference with regards to the means of fulfilling his goals when he consolidates his top power position after 2013. If he does, this suggests that Xi is most likely to use, or be amenable to, cooperative approaches to achieve his goals, even though Xi's general strategy orientation (I-1) may move in a more assertive direction.

The similarity between Hu and Xi of key belief system indices may be attributable to two reasons. First, it suggests that Xi's belief system, especially his worldview (P-1) and strategies (I-1), is indeed similar to Hu's. This implies that more continuities than changes will feature in China's foreign policy under Xi. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, Xi may not have revealed his different worldview and belief in strategies in his capacity as a successor in the Chinese power chain. It is hence too early to tell with certainty which interpretation is correct with respect to these key beliefs.

However, if we take a closer look at the values of both leaders' P-1 and I-1 beliefs, we discover certain nuanced differences between them that indicate a possible direction for future changes. In Table 1, we see that Xi's P-1 belief (worldview) shows a lower score (.64) than Hu's (.68). Although the difference is not significant statistically, it signifies that Xi holds a less cooperative worldview than Hu. Xi's I-1 belief (strategic approach) also shows a lower value than Hu's (.68 versus .72). Still, the difference is not statistically significant. But it suggests that Xi is more likely than Hu to adopt a relatively conflictual or assertive approach to achieve his strategic foreign policy goals.

As earlier mentioned, due to Xi's subordinate position as Hu's successor in the CCP during the period when speeches and public statements were collected, it is not surprising that no significant difference existed between Xi's belief system and Hu's with regards to key beliefs. It is reasonable to believe that Xi's belief system will change when he consolidates his power after 2013, the interesting question being exactly how and in which direction. We do not have enough data to examine any changes in Xi's belief systems because he only came to power in 2013. Therefore, we perform instead a comparison test of Hu's belief changes over time. The pattern of Hu's belief change may shed some light on how Xi's beliefs will change in the future.

Table 2 shows an ANOVA test of changes in Hu's operational code beliefs over the two terms of his tenure. Based on his position in the CCP, we divided Hu's speeches into two time periods: the first term (2002–2007) and the second term (2008–2012). The results show that Hu's P-1 and I-1 beliefs did not change significantly over these two terms. This means that Hu's worldview and his strategy were stable over time. Hu's P-4 beliefs,

Table 2 Hu Jintao's Operational Code Belief Changes from 2002 to 2012 (Two Terms)

		First Term 2002–2007 (N = 38)	Second Term 2008–2012 (N = 52)
Philosophical Beliefs			
P-1	Nature of Political Universe (Conflict/Cooperation)	.65	.70
P-2	Realization of Political Values (Optimism/Pessimism)	.45	.51*
P-3	Political Future (Unpredictable/Predictable)	.21	.21
P-4	Historical Development (Low Control/High Control)	.15	.20*
P-5	Role of Chance (Small Role/Large Role)	.97	.96*
Instrumental Beliefs			
I-1	Strategic Approach to Goals (Conflict/Cooperation)	.74	.70
I-2	Intensity of Tactics (Conflict/Cooperation)	.37	.34
I-3	Risk Orientation (Averse/Acceptant)	.44	.41
I-4	Timing of Action		
	Conflict/Cooperation	.26	.26
	Words/Deeds	.41	.39
I-5	Utility of Means		
	Reward	.03	.17*
	Promise	.03	.12*
	Appeal	.08	.55*
	Oppose	.19	.06*
	Threaten	.10	.02*
	Punish	.58	.06*

Note: *Significant level at $p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

however, changed significantly from .15 (the first term) to .20 (the second term). This change implies that Hu's ability to control historical development strengthened during his second term. These shifts are understandable, because Hu consolidated his power in his second term but was still constrained by Jiang Zemin in his first. Although Hu's I-1 (strategic approach) did not change, all his I-5 belief (utility of means) changed significantly in the second term. From the changes of utility of means, we see that Hu was more likely to use 'reward', 'promise', and 'appeal', and less likely to employ

'oppose', 'threaten', or 'punish' to achieve his goals in the second term than in the first. This also confirms Hu's strengthened control of historical development (P-4) in the second term.

Although Hu's P-1 and I-1 beliefs did not change, we can see some nuanced patterns of change over time. In the second term, Hu's P-1 belief moved towards a more cooperative direction (from .65 to .70) and his I-1 belief became more conflictual (from .74 to .70). As mentioned above, these changes are not significant. They show, however, that after Hu consolidated his power in the second term and his worldview became more cooperative, his strategy for achieving goals took a more assertive/conflicting direction. Based on Hu's trajectory of belief changes, we can infer that after Xi has consolidated his power in the future, his belief in the nature of the political universe (P-1 belief) may also move towards a more cooperative direction, but his strategy to achieve goals (I-1 belief) may become more assertive or conflictual in nature. Still, this is just a limited inference based on Hu's pattern of belief change. Further research is needed to test this hypothesis.

Discussion and Conclusion

China's rise has become one of the defining events in international politics. How China behaves in the next 10 years will shape and influence world peace and stability. As a new leader, Xi will play an important and decisive role in China's foreign policy. Given the less transparent nature of Chinese politics and the communist regime, the outside world knows little about Xi and his possible foreign policy orientation.

Most IR and foreign policy scholars rely on structure-based IR theories, realism, liberalism, and constructivism to make sense of China's foreign policy orientations. Although the existing approaches are valuable to a certain extent, we suggest that it is time to 'bring the leaders back in' to the study of Chinese foreign policy. We contend that leaders' beliefs, especially their worldviews (P-1 beliefs) and approaches to strategy (I-1 beliefs) not only shape the nature of a state as a revisionist versus a status quo power in the system, they also dictate the policy choices of the state in pursuing strategic goals, either assertively or moderately.

Through applying operational code analysis, we have compared and contrasted the belief systems of Xi and his predecessor Hu. The statistical results show that Xi has a belief system similar to Hu. This signifies that Xi's foreign policy will not depart significantly from Hu's. However, Xi seems less optimistic about the nature of the political universe, and his strategy to achieve goals tends to be more assertive in comparison with Hu's. Since China's diplomacy is widely perceived as more assertive since 2009, the tough international environment may have contributed to Xi's less optimistic worldview and more assertive strategic orientation.

Since 2009, China's foreign policy under Hu has taken an assertive turn with regards to diplomacy, especially towards the United States. As many scholars have suggested, certain domestic factors in China, such as surging nationalism, the miscalculation of power disparity and the insecurity of leadership transition, may well have contributed to this dramatic change in foreign policy.⁴⁶ However, one missing link here is the US factor. The turning point of China's assertiveness in diplomacy can be traced back to Obama's 2009 visit. Although diplomatic quibbles had occurred between the two nations, United States–China relations maintained a positive trend after Obama came to power in early 2009. Obama's visit to China in November 2009 vindicated the optimistic tone of bilateral relations between the two nations. During the visit, China and the United States signed a joint statement emphasizing that 'respecting each other's core interests is extremely important to ensure steady progress in US-China relations'.⁴⁷

However, slightly more than a month after this 'honeymoon', Obama authorized an arms sales deal with Taiwan and met with the Dalai Lama in the White House. For Chinese leaders, this amounted to political betrayal, as the Taiwan and Tibet issues are regarded as the very 'core interests' of China that Obama had so recently made commitments to respect. Chinese reactions were hence furious. China blamed the United States for violating its commitments and also threatened to impose sanctions against US companies involved in sales of arms to Taiwan.⁴⁸ For the United States, China's reaction was 'unexpected', or alarmingly assertive, since this was not the first time a US president had either authorized arms sales to Taiwan or met with the Dalai Lama.

There are certain expectation gaps and misunderstandings with respect to the 'core interest' commitments between China and the United States.⁴⁹ This dramatic event, however, reveals a deep-seated level of strategic distrust between the two nations. As Kenneth Lieberthal and Jisi Wang point out, in Chinese leaders' eyes, US policies towards Tibet and Taiwan prove that 'the ultimate goal of the US is to maintain its global hegemony . . . [and] seek

⁴⁶ For various discussions on China's assertive diplomacy, see David Shambaugh, 'The Chinese Tiger Shows its Claws', *Financial Times*, February 17, 2010; James Mann, 'Behold China', *The New Republic*, March 17, 2010; Nick Bisley, 'Biding and Hiding No Longer: A More Assertive China Rattles the Region', *Global Asia*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2011), pp. 62–73; Jane Perlez, 'Beijing's Exhibiting New Assertiveness in South China Sea', *The New York Times*, May 31, 2012; Edward Carr, 'Friend or Foe: A Special Report on China's Rise', *The Economist*, December 4, 2010; Andrew Small, 'Dealing with a More Assertive China', *Forbes*, February 8, 2010; Suisheng Zhao, 'Understanding China's Assertive Foreign Policy Behaviour during the Global Financial Meltdown', *The European Financial Review*, December–January 2011, pp. 40–3.

⁴⁷ The White House, 'US-China Joint Statement', November 17, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-china-joint-statement>

⁴⁸ See Keith Bradsher, 'US Deal with Taiwan has China Retaliating', *The New York Times*, January 31, 2010.

⁴⁹ See Nina Hachigian and Yuan Peng, 'The US-China Expectations Gap: An Exchange', *Survival*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (2010), pp. 67–86.

to constrain or even upset China's rise'.⁵⁰ In this context, it is not difficult to understand just how negatively Chinese leaders have viewed Obama's 'pivot towards Asia' policy since 2011.⁵¹ According to Yan Xuetong, a more worrisome reason for an enduringly unstable relationship between China and the United States is that both states not only ignore this deep-rooted distrust, but also sometimes pretend to be 'friends'.⁵² This only deepens, rather than alleviates, the expectation gap and misunderstanding between the two nations. Therefore, the US factor is, at least to Chinese leaders' minds, as important as domestic reasons in accounting for China's assertive policy towards the United States after 2010. It suggests that even though Chinese leaders hold a cooperative and optimistic worldview about the political universe and intend to maintain the status quo, they will behave assertively when facing serious external challenges. This is exactly what Hu did before he left office.

Our research suggests that Xi will do the same, probably in an even more assertive direction. A more detailed analysis of Xi's beliefs with regards to the utility of different means shows that Xi prefers cooperative means, such as appeals, to conflictual ones, i.e. punishments, to achieve his goals, in comparison with Hu. This spells both good and bad news for policy makers in Washington and other capitals. The good news is that they need not worry about China's revisionist ambitions, because Xi is still positive and optimistic about the existing international system and the political universe, which he will have no intention of overturning. In addition, he is more likely than Hu to use cooperative means to achieve his goals. The bad news is that they may need to review or revise their existing policy towards China, should they have adopted or intend to adopt one of containment. Although Xi prefers cooperative to conflictual means to get things done, a severe external environment may force him to pursue a more assertive policy. In other words, a rising China may not be a threat. But an angry China indeed will be.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Leiberthal and Jisi Wang, 'Addressing US-China Strategic Distrust', John L. Thornton China Center, The Brookings Institution Monograph Series, Number 4, March 2012, p. viii.

⁵¹ See Zhong Sheng, 'Goals of US "Return to Asia" Strategy Questioned', *People's Daily*, October 18, 2011, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90780/7620216.html>. For an excellent survey of Chinese views on the US pivot, see Michael D. Swaine, 'Chinese Leadership and Elite Responses to the US Pacific Pivot', *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 38 (2012). <http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/CLM38MS.pdf>.

⁵² Yan Xuetong, 'The Instability of China-US Relations', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2010), pp. 263–92. For an exchange, see Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Stability and Instability in Sino-US Relations: A Response to Yan Xuetong's Superficial Friendship Theory', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2011), pp. 5–29.