Chinese Diplomacy and the Social Imaginary of Chineseness

by

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Abstract

With China's rise as a world power, understanding what the country's political elite thinks is no longer a matter that just concerns China or China scholars. This thesis contributes to knowledge of China's future political elite through long-term research among students at the China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU), whose graduates form a key talent pool for China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These students’ attitudes, ideas, and convictions will, therefore, in the not too distant future, have a direct impact on the behaviour of China's foreign affairs establishment.

This research pairs a Constructivist approach to International Relations Theory with Political Anthropology, particularly the Anthropology of the State, as a means of studying up processes of power and thus enriching the positivist approaches currently dominant in explaining and interpreting China's global activities.

In circumstances where people are being intentionally trained as representatives of the state, understanding how they conceptualise what the state is and does is critical to understanding how that state will operate in the international arena. Based on interactions with CFAU students, this research explores the ‘social imaginary of Chineseness’ that permeates every aspect of students’ worldview. Through the subjects in the curriculum and the control of the practices of their everyday lives, the CFAU experience teaches students both what worldviews are appropriate for future foreign policy officials, and at the same time carefully precludes other ways of seeing the world. The thesis examines students’ views of history; obligation and social relations; power and governance in the nation-state; and China’s role in the world.

The research concludes that prevalent views of China’s foreign policy, which uncritically accept the ‘reality’ of the state as a central actor, neglect the innumerable variations of what a ‘state’ can mean to the people who constitute it. While my students at CFAU did share many views in common with this understanding of international relations and diplomacy, their views diverged dramatically regarding why states would act in certain ways in the international system. My students were...
convinced that a unique ‘Chineseness’ fundamentally underpinned China’s international behaviour.

The thesis reveals how this shared sense of Chineseness is created and maintained among China’s future elite and shows that the clear geo-political entities imagined by dominant approaches to international relations are not universal, but held together by convention and shared belief.
Statement of candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Merriden Varrall
June 2013
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of interest, and answered my odd questions about what their dormitory looked like. Thank you for giving me your time and responding so openly and frankly. I do not want to name you here, but I hope you know who you are.

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Without all of this support, patience, kindness, understanding and jolly good ideas, I
could never have made this work. Thank you all, and thank you and sorry to anyone I
forgot to mention here. Please don’t take it personally, just get in touch and I’ll buy
you a drink and thank you face-to-face!
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Notes on the Text

All Chinese names and words are romanised according to the pinyin system. All Chinese participants’ names have been changed. As my CFAU students chose their own English names later in life, and have given this choice considerable thought, I have tried to reflect the sense of their name in my selection of pseudonyms.
Chapter One –
Citizens of the Nation, then Students:
An Introduction to Being Chinese at the China Foreign Affairs University

We students at CFAU are citizens of the nation first, and then students.
- Cello, International Economics major

China is becoming a global superpower, and its role in the world is a topic of great interest in international relations and foreign policy discussions. However, mainstream debates tend to overlook the training of the elite professionals who will staff the Party-state and make decisions in the international realm. This thesis examines some of the people and ideas behind China’s international behaviour and sheds light on international debates around China’s role in the world: scholarly, political and popular. The research takes an anthropological approach to analysing the education, training, and institutionalisation of a group of around 150 students at the China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU, Zhongguo waijiao xueyuan: 中国外交学院) in Beijing, and their perceptions of their own and China’s role in the world.

The anthropology of the state understands the state and its associated processes of power to be empirical questions to be examined in and of themselves, rather than as a priori fixed and pre-existing entities. Within this framework, my analysis is theoretically premised on Foucauldian notions of governmentality and discipline-as-power, and Pierre Bourdieau’s theory of practice. According to Michel Foucault (1975), institutions such as hospitals, schools, military institutions, factories and prisons are all aspects of a vast network of disciplinary organisations which serve to subjectify the individual in an ongoing and imperfect process. Schools and universities like the CFAU serve to inculcate certain acceptable forms of knowledge about what it means to not only be educated, but also civilised, ‘proper’ members of a society. In the process, approved and taboo ways of thinking and practices are produced and reproduced. These can eventually form a coherent ‘social imaginary’ (Taylor 2004) which comes to be seen as quite natural, rather than a specific
articulation of a unique set of circumstances. Following Bourdieu, this social imaginary at CFAU is particularly powerful as the subjectification of the university experience was reinforced through the control of temporal, spatial and linguistic practices.

Prior to undertaking this research, my study was in International Relations (IR) at post-graduate level in Australia. I also worked in the Australian Public Service as a policy analyst in an international area. I found that in both fields, discussions of China’s role in the world were largely premised on assumptions from the Realist school of IR theory. This reflected trends across broader Western academic and policy literature. According to this approach, China as a rising power is accepted as a given. In IR’s state-centric approach, China is in itself conceived of as a monolithic and unitary actor, and all of its foreign policy and international behaviour is understood as based on the pursuit of its pre-determined national interest. According to the Realist approach, this national interest is by definition the increase in state power relative to other states, within an anarchic system of sovereign, bounded nation-states, that is, a structurally induced ‘will to power’.\(^1\)

However, if, as the Constructivist School of International Relations contends, behaviour in the international system is not simply an automatic function of structural constraints, and rather, ‘ideas matter’, explaining China’s behaviour in the international realm requires an understanding of the people and ideas behind the decisions. Using Constructivism as an entry point to a more empirically informed study of international relations (both theory and practice), allows a focus on the worldviews of the people behind the state which adds depth and breadth to the existing literature on China’s role in the international system. Through analysing the role of the national logic in CFAU students’ social imaginary, and how the practices of their everyday lives (de Certeau 1984) produce subjects of and for the Chinese state, we can better understand how these elites-in-training understand their own, and China’s, role in the international system. This information is of value not just in what it may add to anthropological understandings of the state. It also has a more

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\(^1\) While the Realist school tends to be the most dominant in political discussions of China’s role in the international system, and holds considerable influence with politicians and policy-makers, the IR scholarship on China is becoming increasingly diverse with insightful work arising from the English School and the Constructivist School, among others.
immediately practical use in challenging the conventional wisdom about China’s role in the world in International Relations theory and foreign policy conversations more broadly. Realist assumptions overlook the contribution that an understanding of Chinese policy-making elites’ views of the Chinese nation-state and China’s role in international relations can offer. This research aims to address this analytical lacuna. Examining training practices is an entry point for better understanding the “opaque and mysterious world of the people in China who staff the Party-state and rule the country” (Pieke 2009b,1).

**Introducing Buddy**

Unlike most major Chinese universities such as Peking and Tsinghua, the CFAU is managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) rather than the Ministry of Education. Until a few decades ago, only students from CFAU could become MFA diplomats and even now, the university retains a particular connection to the Ministry. I first met Buddy when he was a junior student at CFAU. Buddy had come to Beijing from his hometown in Xiamen to study diplomacy at the CFAU because he wanted a career in the Chinese foreign service. We met one evening in mid-October 2008 at a café/bar near Houhai in the centre west of Beijing. He was attending an English-language discussion group I had established to talk about issues around international relations. He had come along, he said, to perfect his (already excellent) English to help him achieve his primary goal – to pass the public service exam and work for the MFA. He had heard that people had failed the exam because their English had not been good enough.

Buddy seemed just the type of young man to be selected as one of the few graduates to work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was focused, diligent, hard working, with excellent English and firm career goals. He pursued every opportunity to extend himself in fields related to working with foreigners or learning about foreign relations, both for his own satisfaction as much as for his resumé. Buddy was also a good example of the young modern Chinese man. He was the lead guitarist and singer in a rock band which had done well in several big competitions, and he enjoyed

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2 All names in this thesis have been changed to protect the identity of the students.
spending time listening to music and watching live bands with his friends and girlfriend. He was also a keen basketball player. At the same time, he was committed to Chinese tradition, particularly Confucianism, which he saw very clearly as underpinning contemporary everyday Chinese life, as well as China’s behaviour in the international system. Buddy was a big fan of Chinese traditional medicine, particularly acupuncture, and he had a dream of working with his mother, an acupuncturist in Xiamen, and travelling with her around the world to treat great sporting stars in anything from healing a sprained ankle to curing cancer. Buddy had also heard that the MFA preferred students straight from university and without a Masters degree, as time spent studying for a Masters could encourage too much independent thought and questioning, inappropriate for the Chinese foreign service. Buddy was therefore also undecided about what to do when he graduated. He was not sure whether to pursue further study, which he very much wanted to do, or apply for the MFA. Ultimately, he decided not to take the risk and chose to postpone study and begin his career straight out of university.

Buddy was a fascinating interlocutor because of the way in which he framed his beliefs and life goals within a national discourse. In conversations with Buddy, I became aware of how much he identified with the Chinese nation-state. He felt personally defensive about foreign criticisms of any aspect of China, because, as he saw it, “humiliation by foreigners” had disrupted China’s long history as a great country, and Western countries continued to bully and victimise China. Buddy explained China’s behaviour in the international system as based on traditional Chinese values, which were shared by all of “us Chinese”. I was struck by the way in which Buddy tended to conceive of the world as ‘China’ and ‘outsiders, and view anything which was not China as one imagined community of ‘foreign’. The only exception seemed to be the distinction between ‘the West’ and ‘other developing countries’ – understood to also be victims of Western imperialism, like China. Buddy told me about the ‘China threat theory’, which he saw as the Western world’s prevalent framework for understanding China’s growing international role. He explained to me how this was an extension of the West’s fear of China, and how it formed the basis of Western policies to control and diminish China’s role in the world. He stressed however how misguided this ‘China threat theory’ was, as all of China’s domestic and international behaviour had always been and would always be
founded on a traditional Chinese philosophy of peaceful development and a harmonious world. Overall, I was impressed by the strength and coherence of the national logic underpinning Buddy’s imaginary of what it meant to be Chinese. Through talking to Buddy, it became evident to me that the existing frameworks dominating Western analyses of China were theoretically insufficient for explaining the difference in Chinese worldviews and how they could influence international behaviour.

When I met Buddy, I had been in Beijing for just over a month, and was keen to get started on my fieldwork – the difficulty was getting access to a field. I had been trying for months in Australia to connect with research institutes in Beijing, but to no avail. Particularly around the time of the Olympics in Beijing in August 2008, it was difficult for foreigners with unclear research goals and no particular academic stature to get visas into China. Indeed many foreigners in Beijing at that time were unable to extend their visas and had to leave the country. When I arrived in Beijing, I began building networks of contacts from which I could develop my research. I tried repeatedly to make contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce, including through tenuous connections from friends, all of which amounted to nothing. However, I was able to conduct a number of interviews with scholars and researchers in Beijing and Shanghai, including at Fudan University, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

In an effort to broaden my contacts and get in touch with more ‘everyday’ perspectives, I began putting notices up at universities around Beijing advertising English-language ‘discussion groups’ on the topic of China’s international relations. Buddy was one of several people who responded to these notices. Other participants included a young journalist who had studied communications in New Zealand; an HR employee from the Sheraton hotel who just had a general interest in the topic; a senior student from the Beijing International Studies University who wanted to know more about the relationship between East and West; a young woman who worked for an NGO for the visually impaired; and an English teacher at Peking University who had majored in American Studies. For about three months, I held two or three discussion groups a week, with between three and five people in each group. I set up a group
email account, and each week posted a reading for us to discuss in the next meeting, ideally with one of the participants giving a brief presentation and overview to get the conversation started. In the first week, Buddy volunteered to present a topic of his own choice, the role of China in East Asian integration.

In the course of a month or two, I had successfully applied for a teaching position at CFAU, which I began in September 2009. During first semester, I taught a class on Culture and Context in Foreign Policy, based on readings from Valerie M. Hudson (ed., 1997); Stephanie Lawson (2006); Lin Yutang (1998 [1935]); and Pál Nyiri and Joana Breidenbach (2009), among others. During second semester, I taught a class on Theories of Aid, Assistance and Development. Readings in this class included Heinz W. Arndt (1989); Colin Leys (1996); John Williamson (2004); excerpts from Amartya Sen (1999); and commentaries on Joseph Stiglitz (Friedman 2002). My classes were based on student presentations of reading material, followed by guided discussion. During both semesters, I also gave lessons on essay writing skills and debating. Assessment in both semesters was based on class participation and mid-semester and end-of-semester essays. I taught six classes of 20 to 30 third- and fourth-year students across three majors: International Law (two classes); International Economics and Trade (two classes); Diplomacy (one class); and one special class of external students who had already obtained a degree elsewhere. I taught the same students, except for the external students, for both semesters.

I initially expected that teaching in a Party-state system in an institution managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would mean I would have considerable restrictions placed on what I could teach the students. In fact, I was quite free to teach any subject I wanted, and give the students whatever material I chose. However, as I later realised, my work and the students’ participation were being constantly monitored. I discovered by chance that classes were recorded when the secretary-manager of the staffroom, who spoke no English and with whom I only communicated in Chinese, said that she had heard that the English of my fellow teacher, from Germany, was better than mine. I asked how she knew this, and she said matter-of-factly that she and others had been listening to the recordings. I am not sure I was not more shocked by the claim about my language skills than the probably unsurprising revelation that our classes were recorded. Although I had initially presumed that I would be under some
surveillance and had already been engaging in what Erika Evasdottir describes as ‘self-directed self control’ (2004, x), I noticed that I increased my own self-monitoring after I made this discovery.

During my time teaching at CFAU, some students told me that they and their classmates had, like Buddy, held “a burning goal” to join the MFA when they applied for CFAU. Buddy worked harder than most students to achieve that goal, both in class and in his pursuit of extra-curricular activities. He was regularly involved in meeting and hosting visiting foreign dignitaries, including African diplomats, and American university professors. His efforts during university paid off. In his final (fourth) year at university, Buddy sat the extremely competitive public service entrance exam and got a job with the Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), an organisation dedicated to people-to-people diplomacy. After several weeks of compulsory military training, Buddy started working in the Department of Asia, Africa and Latin America, arranging and hosting forums and visits by foreign dignitaries.

Other students, however, were not so fortunate. For example, despite being a bright pupil at the top of the class, with a reputation for earnestness, diligence, and a conservative stance on most issues, Buddy’s classmate Yellow did not pass the public service examination, although he made two attempts. Yellow was always quietly confident in his own abilities, and that his views, while more conservative than his classmates, were ultimately correct. Yellow firmly believed that Chinese foreign policy, like the rest of contemporary Chinese culture, was built on Confucianism, although a version of Confucianism that had “adjusted to fit the modern era”. He, like most of his classmates, simply presumed that he would be a natural candidate for the MFA. Ultimately, however, Yellow’s academic abilities and conservative beliefs were not considered appropriate for the MFA. Yellow went on to take a job helping Chinese students with their applications for overseas universities, something which other students felt that he probably hated, but with the job market being as competitive as it was, he really had little choice.

In contrast to Buddy and Yellow, I also taught students like Cello, a young woman in the International Economics major from Jilin province, who said from the outset that
she had no desire at all to work for the government. Rather, Cello wanted to travel the world and write newspaper columns and magazine articles. Cello was a hard-working, analytical, curious student, who stood out from her peers for her unconventional and sometimes controversial comments in class, for example, about the role of the Chinese government in censoring the media. She also made an impression because she would occasionally ask me questions in breaks and after class, as she said that she could get into trouble if she asked in front of her classmates. She often asked me for advice on what to read on topics like political philosophy, as she felt she could not ask for that information from her Chinese classmates or teachers. Cello was rather unsatisfied with university life at the CFAU, as it was “so small, and so political”, and the atmosphere was “not very open,” but rather “pure and conservative, and not very tolerant”. A number of other students had made similar complaints, and they, like Cello said they wished life at CFAU was “more lively, like at Peking University, where students participated in all kinds of different activities”. Cello illustrated this with a reference to participating in the Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989, quickly clarifying that she was not saying that this “was a good thing”. She felt that unfortunately students at CFAU were expected to be citizens of the nation first, and students second.

Like Cello, Primo was intelligent, insightful, and analytical, and had no desire to work for government. A young man from a small village in Heilongjiang province, right next to the river that delineates the border between China and Russia, Primo was enrolled in the International Law major. My first impression of Primo was when he came into the classroom in the first week of semester and reacted with considerable shock to how I had moved the chairs and desks from their usual straight columns and rows into a circle. He asked hesitantly whether we were going to be doing this every week, and seemed rather disappointed when I said yes. He said he had tried moving the classroom around like this before, and the results were “quite... interesting”. He cheered up later however, saying that he was happy as long as they would not have to “recite socialist theory”, or indeed “recite anything at all”. Primo had originally chosen ‘Stanley’ as his English name, but subsequently decided it was too old fashioned, and changed it to something “more simple and modern”. At the same time as holding this desire to appear modern, Primo, like almost all the students, was certain that Chinese culture was too ancient and too deeply ingrained for any Chinese
person to ever become fully Westernised. Primo also felt that “Western-style democracy” would not be suitable for China in the current period, or for a long time to come, and that in fact a “Confucian government by gentlemen” model would be more appropriate for China.

Of course there were also students in my classes whose primary concerns were about simply graduating and getting a good, comfortable job so that they could get married, have a child (or two), and live in financial security and comfort. This sometimes translated into wanting to get a job in government, but based on motivations of lifelong job security rather than a “burning goal” to pursue a career in the Ministry. Ricky, for example, a Beijing local in the International Economics major, said he had “few dreams” apart from wanting to “live a happy life”, and had no particular career ambitions. Ricky was a fun, good-humoured student, but as his English level was not as good as his classmates, he preferred to sit in the back corner of the classroom and not engage in class discussions. Ricky asked me once when we were having lunch with a couple of his classmates where I thought would be best for him to study philosophy, as he said he felt that philosophy provided the best way to understand anything in the world, including economics. He confessed that he felt rather torn because he would soon have to decide whether he wanted to pursue making money or what he was really interested in – since there was certainly no money in that. Ricky’s friend suggested that he become a professor, but Ricky replied that he had “no patience for trying to teach stupid people things that are obvious and easy for him, so that wouldn’t be any good”.

Ricky provides a good example of the not insignificant number of my students who had enrolled in CFAU for reasons outside of a desire to forge a career in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These students’ views provided a foil to those of the ambitious enthusiasts such as Yellow and Buddy, as well as to the views of the more cynical students like Cello and Primo. However, despite the differences in the dreams, ambitions, life goals, or degree of openness or cynicism of my students at CFAU, they all shared certain fundamental views. Ultimately, all of my students saw themselves as being part of the great shared imagined community of ‘we Chinese’, with the very particular meanings that entailed. They understood themselves as co-members of an identity community of ‘Chineseness’ that they could never really
leave behind, and which I, or any other foreigner, could never truly comprehend. They knew themselves as part of an almost tangible, but at the same time inexplicably essential, Chinese culture which stretched back continuously for thousands of years, and which continued to shine forward into the future. They saw historical facts clearly as facts, with no room for debating the truths of the past or the realities of the present which arose from them.

As the students explained, they, the unified Chinese people, had always been peace-loving and would therefore always be peace-loving. Following the same positivist line of argument, they argued that the Japanese had always been imperialist and untrustworthy, and would therefore always be so. Likewise, Westerners would always desire to maintain their own power at the cost of others, fear China as a threat, and try to control China’s ‘peaceful rise’. My students all shared the understanding that the relationship between themselves as individuals and the government was different from that in ‘the West’, in which society was pitted against the state. My students conceived of the state-society relationship in China as akin to a family, in which faults were accepted and excused because that is what love of family means. They felt that the state was not an object external to themselves, exercising unilateral power over them, but was rather like a father, sometimes strict, but always acting in the people’s own best interests. If the strict father made a mistake or misjudgement, this was to stay within the family, and not to be discussed or examined in any public arena. In my students’ social imaginary, they understood their obligation to others as following a complex and ever-shifting pattern of give and take, in which the ultimate emotional appeal and attachment was to China (Hoffman also discusses this dynamic interplay between responsibilities to the self, one’s family and one’s country, 2010, Chapter Four, particularly pp. 99-100; see also Fong 2004).

The initial observations I had made based on earlier discussions with Buddy were borne out during my time teaching at CFAU, and I became increasingly fascinated by the powerful coherence of the students’ belief system. My year at CFAU reiterated my earlier impressions that a logic of the national was the central identifying feature of students’ worldview. Students’ propensity to explain what, how and why they thought and behaved in terms of a national logic was apparent across every class, regardless of students’ major, gender, hometown, or career goals. From a background
in International Relations, I struggled to reconcile this observation with prevalent IR theories about China’s putative rise and role in the world. These perspectives posit that China will behave in entirely predictable ways, just as any other country in the same situation would. Viewing China as a ‘rising power’, the dominant IR discourses presume that it would naturally seek to maximise its own power not only in real terms, but more importantly, relative to all other international actors. Anthropology provided an ideal means for recognising the role of cultural distinctiveness in national interest formation, a factor typically disregarded in Realpolitik analyses of how the international system functions.

My research goal was, therefore, to investigate how this national social imaginary had been and was continuing to be formed, why my students maintained such loyalty to it, and what implications their strongly held worldview had for prevalent understandings of China in the international system. To do so, I studied the ‘life world’ of my students for the 12 months that I taught them, and have remained in regular contact with four of them and sporadic contact with another five since then. I have also developed an ongoing friendship with two female CFAU students through my post-fieldwork employment in Beijing, where they were participating in internship programmes, and their views are also taken into account in this research.
The China Foreign Affairs University

Figure 1: The author and two former CFAU students, at the main entrance of CFAU, in front of the statue of General Chen Yi, August 2012

The CFAU is a useful example of Foucault’s characterisation of the school as an arena for creating the ideal citizen-subject. As the feeder university for the MFA, CFAU students are carefully trained to take on the role of foreign policy officials. As the website proudly announces on its homepage,

China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU) is the only institution of higher learning which operates under the guidance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. It aims at preparing high calibre personnel
who are competent to discharge their official duties in fluent foreign
languages in the fields of foreign service, international studies, and
international business and law. (CFAU n.d.)

The CFAU evolved from the Department of Diplomacy of the Chinese People’s
University, which was founded in September 1955, at the suggestion of Premier Zhou
Enlai. The university was established in response to the perceived need for China to
develop new and capable diplomats to represent its interests internationally. The
university prides itself on having “earnestly implemented the Party’s guidelines for
education” in order to “turn out ethically qualified and professionally competent
personnel for foreign service, namely, ‘Unswerving Loyalty, Mastery of Policies,
Professional Competency and Observance of Discipline’” (CFAU n.d.). The values
and capabilities seen as most critical for students to develop in order to be effective
officials include “patriotism, esprit de corps, principles of socialism, awareness of
current national conditions, and the fostering of sense of discipline” (CFAU n.d.).

Around 2400 students are enrolled across CFAU’s undergraduate Departments of
Graduate Studies; Diplomacy; English and International Studies; Foreign Languages,
International Law; International Economics; and Basic Education. There are also
around 100 international students, including from various African and Eastern
European countries. Many CFAU graduates, according to the university website, go
on to serve in China’s diplomatic corps, or perform other official government roles:

More than 30 have been charged with ministerial responsibilities, more than
200 have served in the capacity of ambassadors to foreign countries, more
than 1,000 have been made counsellors in the Chinese embassies abroad or
directors of governmental departments or agencies other than the Foreign
Ministry or professors or scholars with senior professional titles”. (CFAU
n.d.)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a preferential arrangement for recruiting students
to its graduate programme, taking around 50 graduates from CFAU each year. As the
website goes on to proudly state, “These alumni have become the backbone force for
new China’s diplomacy, foreign affairs and international studies, and have made tremendous contributions to China’s cause of diplomacy” (CFAU n.d.).

Unlike some of Beijing’s other important (and older) universities like Beida (Beijing or Peking University [PKU]) or Tsinghua (or Qinghua), CFAU is not located on a grand old campus. Despite its important role in training future international officials, the CFAU’s small campus is situated in the inner west of the city, just outside the north-western corner of the second ring road. Unlike the elite universities, many taxi drivers do not know where it is, and I almost always had to give directions based on nearby main roads or subway stations. The main gate is relatively imposing, and has the requisite statue of an important political figure in the forecourt in front of the Stalinist facade of the main building. The north gate is a different story – coming in this way past the unenthusiastic guard, one walks through several rows of apartment buildings, with pretty rose gardens between them, in which people, mostly elderly, a large number looking after young children, wander about, or sit and chat or play checkers. An overpriced fruit stall stands on the left, one of the very few shops on campus – the others being several student canteens and a small stationery shop which also sells a range of snacks like chocolate cream-filled buns and plastic-wrapped frankfurts, which students buy and bring to class for breakfast.

The main building has four stories and is U-shaped, with a smallish and unimpressive entrance foyer. The dim space has a large digital noticeboard with weather and date details, and a smaller sandwich board at the back of the room which announces, on paper posters, if famous international or Chinese scholars are visiting or due to give presentations. On the back wall is the school motto, “Unswerving Loyalty, Mastery of Policies, Professional Competency and Observance of Discipline”, inscribed into marble with gold script.

Along the shiny, slippery, faux-marble corridor leading off to the left of the main foyer are the main meeting rooms, with imposing mahogany doors, usually closed. The large meeting room was furnished with the ubiquitous overstuffed, square armchairs, with lace antimacassars and arm rests, teacups with lids. The whole

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1 Land in the far north-west of the city has been bought for a new campus, and from mid-2012, first and second year students will not be based at the old campus.
atmosphere was stilted, stiff and sombre. Also along this corridor were the offices for foreign affairs, the *waiban* (*waiguo shiban gongshi*: 外国试办公室), in which three or four young women worked to coordinate all the foreign teachers that came and went each semester, including arranging contracts; accommodation; visas; salaries; excursions, such as to the Shanghai Expo; and ‘foreign expert’ events, including a formal dinner at the Great Hall of the People at which foreign teachers were thanked for their great efforts in building China.

When I first walked in to one of the classrooms at CFAU, I was most immediately struck by how shabby the facilities were, apart from the IT podium to the side of the teacher’s desk which allowed students and teachers to give Powerpoint presentations. The curtains were torn off from the curtain rails, the desks and chairs were dirty (several students brought handy wipes with them to clean the desks and chairs before they sat down), and the desks and chairs were old, uncomfortable, chipped and broken. The classroom offered no fancy whiteboard or electronic teaching devices, only a blackboard and broken sticks of chalk which left a heavy layer of chalk dust covering everything. At the front of the long, narrow room, sometimes on a slightly raised stage, was a bare wooden table and chair for the teacher, which faced rows and rows of individual (very occasionally double) wooden tables and wooden chairs. In summer, the lack of air-conditioning meant that the rooms were stiflingly hot, and in winter, the heating was minimal, so the rooms were very cold.

CFAU is one of the smallest and least well-funded of the Beijing universities. The lack of funding is particularly noticeable in comparison with the vast and modern training facilities that other ministries enjoy. Students explained that the CFAU received far less funding than PKU or Tsinghua, which they believed was because their university was not managed by the Ministry of Education. CFAU students had access to very few resources for learning and research – at least that they were familiar with how to use. Electronic journal databases for non-Chinese journals seemed to be non-existent, and students were often unable or at the least very unused to using the CNKI (Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure) database of Chinese sources. Almost all academic resources – where they were employed at all – in student essays came from books that they had free partial access to online. Much information was sourced whole from online encyclopaedias. Students used to study at
the local McDonald’s as it was open 24 hours a day, whereas their library and study rooms were not, so the fast food restaurant provided a quiet place for them to keep working when their dorm-mates wanted to go to sleep. Overall, I found it difficult to reconcile the CFAU’s poor physical infrastructure with the status of the university as the training ground for future elites, government officials and diplomats.

At the CFAU, students studied a range of subjects, including core topics which were compulsory regardless of a student’s major, core topics specific to each major, and some electives. A large proportion of courses focused on English language skills, as English was a particular emphasis of the diplomatic training. Core compulsory subjects in first or freshman year included Modern Chinese History; Modern Western Culture and History; Protocols and Etiquette; and National Defence Education. As sophomores, in second year, students studied China’s Economic Diplomacy and Strategy; Modern Chinese Diplomatic History; Marxist Philosophy; and Chinese Socialist Theories. All students were also required to undertake two weeks of military training. In third and fourth years, the curriculum concentrated more on the electives specific to the major, however students were required to study another unit of Chinese Socialist Theories. It was also compulsory for all students to undertake a professional internship. The division of the curriculum shows that while specialised subjects occupied the majority of students’ time, subjects in which they learned the state’s ideology and the correct language in which to express it also formed a significant part of their education. In contrast, there was little time for students to pursue optional subjects. Indeed, students lamented the narrow range of electives available at the CFAU compared to other, larger universities.

The Chapters and Their Themes

Using an ethnographic approach, this research shows how an education at the CFAU provided students with an intense and explicit training in how to be a ‘good’ Chinese diplomat. The following chapter of the thesis (Chapter Two) will introduce the literature and theoretical context of the research. In Chapter Three, I examine the importance of history as a tool for making the past serve the present in the formation of students’ national identity. In this chapter, I aim to move beyond the notion held by
many Western and Chinese commentators that understanding China’s past is the key to understanding China’s present. While this explanation of Chinese behaviour is not without value, China’s relationship with the world cannot be understood by simply projecting Chinese history onto the present. This chapter examines the way Chinese history is produced and subsequently used in ideas and practice within the social imaginary of CFAU students, and how they understand the relationship between the past, the present and the future.

Chapter Four investigates how my students at CFAU understood their relationship with the state. The chapter begins with a discussion of the concept of the state in the Chinese context. It then explores three key pillars considered by the Party-state as critical to the wellbeing of the Chinese people and nation: territorial integrity, economic growth, and a unifying ideology of integrated Chinese identity. The chapter focuses on the third of these pillars, as identifying as part of a greater imagined community of Chineseness was an important and recurring theme among my students at CFAU. The chapter then examines how the Chinese Party-state presents and produces itself, examining in particular how language is used by the state to conduct “perlocutionary acts”, that is, using language to produce certain consequential effects upon people’s feelings, thoughts and actions (Austin 1962, 101). Situated within a Foucauldian understanding of the university as an institution in which the state’s power is omni-present and pervasive, the analysis follows Evasdottir’s notion of ‘obedient autonomy’ (2004). I argue in this chapter that my students adopted what Evasdottir terms “self-directed self-control” (2004, x) as the most effective means for achieving success within the system in which they operated.

Chapter Five of the thesis looks at how students constructed understandings of themselves, outsiders, and obligation and reciprocity in their national logic. Following Foucault’s conception of the school as a site to construct ideal citizens, the chapter argues that at university, CFAU students learned how to be the kind of person most suited to serve as a government official, not just through the subjects taught in the curriculum, but also through the structures of university life that regulated their daily existence. The chapter focuses on how students lived in their dormitories; how they studied in their classrooms and the timetable to which their lives were rigorously adhered; the structures of peer monitoring and authority in the class monitor system;
and interactions with outsiders. In this chapter I examine how all of these experiences taught students to understand themselves in relation to those around them, to whom they were obliged, and when, in what ways, and for what purpose. This chapter argues that these concepts were normalised through the process of sedimentation until ideas of who was included and who was excluded from the group identity of Chineseness became unquestioned. Students at CFAU demonstrated a distinct common sense of what degree and what kind of obligation they owed to those around them. This logic, based on a concentric circles model of social obligation, extended into discussions about how they understood China’s relationships with other countries.

Chapter Six draws on the observations of the three preceding chapters, and the students’ discussions, presentations, essays and exam papers, to present their views and perceptions of China’s role in the world. The chapter looks at how the students used discourses of nationalism in terms of history, relations of power, and notions of insiders and outsiders in their understandings of where China is situated in the international context, and what they believed China’s role should be. In this chapter I analyse my CFAU students’ understandings of China’s role in the world in order to argue that their interpretations have come about as a result of the processes of sedimentation in creating ‘the logic of the national’ that is discussed in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

The concluding chapter synthesises the main themes discussed in the thesis and examines the implications of the findings for existing Western perspectives on China’s role in the world. Fundamentally, I find that my CFAU students understood China to be a peaceful, internally-focused state with no will to power as Realists presume. I argue that this ideology is not simply a thin facade of training over the top of deeper, more Realist goals, but that this national identity was so deeply embedded in CFAU students’ social imaginary that they could not imagine the world, and China’s role within it, in any other way. While mainstream IR scholars tend to see identity as a distraction, I argue that it is a central issue that frames Chinese elites’ approaches to foreign policy and international relations (see also Callahan 2010, 13). Through the Constructivist approach to International Relations theory, I hope this
research will be able to add new perspectives to existing debates about China and its role in the world.

A Broader Context

The findings from my fieldwork at CFAU were complemented by and contextualised within other experiences investigating China’s international behaviour and local and international responses to it, both in China and overseas. For example, I spent six months between September 2009 and March 2010 working part time and in an unpaid capacity at the International Poverty Reduction Centre of China (IPRCC) in Beijing, with the aim of seeing what ideas and perceptions operated within a Chinese institution with a specific international poverty reduction mandate. The IPRCC is a relatively new organisation, jointly established in December 2004 by the Chinese Government State Council, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other international organisations. The IPRCC falls under the management of the State Council’s Leading Group on Poverty Reduction and is understood to have been the personal project of President Hu Jintao.

According to the website, “The IPRCC is designed to provide a platform for knowledge sharing, information exchange and international collaboration in the areas of poverty reduction and development. Specifically, the Centre’s work is focused on four key areas: research, exchange, training and cooperation” (IPRCC n.d.). One of the IPRCC’s chief roles is to improve dialogue about poverty reduction between China and other nations in the Global South. In my time at IPRCC, I had the opportunity to see how educated Chinese people with a specific interest in the field of development saw and understood the world, and to see how well this matched, or, to what extent and in what ways it differed from, the understandings of the students at the CFAU. For the most part, I was struck with the similarity in perspectives.

In addition to this time at IPRCC, I have also conducted two research trips to the area of a Chinese mine development in Madang province, Papua New Guinea, to try and

4 The Leading Group on Poverty Reduction (LGOP) is one of an unknown number of supra-ministerial bodies established on an ad-hoc basis to coordinate among several agencies and provide the central government with advice around policy direction. The LGOP is responsible for economic development in poor areas of China.
gain more of an understanding of how Chinese actors overseas understand their own as well as China’s broader role internationally. The first visit was in August 2008 and the second in October 2010. My aim was to meet with Chinese white-collar workers at the state-owned enterprise (SOE) China Metallurgical Corporation (MCC). I wanted to better understand how these individuals conceptualised their roles as implementing agents of Chinese overseas economic development projects, and compare their notions with those of my Chinese students at CFAU, and employees at IPRCC.

From the discussions and meetings I had in PNG, I learned a great deal about how the actors in Chinese overseas development projects understood their role within the greater discourse of international relations. It appeared to me that the less individuals’ activities were linked with the state, the less they identified themselves and their role overseas in terms of a national discourse, demonstrating Hobsbawm’s hypothesis that national consciousness develops unevenly (1992, 12). I observed a particularly noticeable difference between the CFAU students and Chinese entrepreneurs overseas in their manner of speaking about their relationship with the Chinese nation-state. The private entrepreneurs I spoke with in Port Moresby demonstrated no particular allegiance to China, and I got no sense that they had at any time viewed the world through a national lens in the same way that my CFAU students did.

Unlike the CFAU students and employees at IPRCC, and to some extent the employees of MCC, the Chinese private entrepreneurs in PNG understood themselves first and foremost as businesspeople. Their allegiance and affection, expressed as the purpose of their business in PNG, was to their family members back home. They rarely, if ever, spoke of their presence in PNG in terms of a larger national logic of ‘Chineseness’. As one female Chinese entrepreneur who had been in PNG for 30 years put it to me: “Actually, Chinese people from different provinces doing business here don’t trust each other. And the old Chinese don’t trust the new Chinese. There is no loyalty between different types of Chinese”.5 The MCC employees, however, occupied a middle ground. While they identified their purpose in PNG as being part of a broader Chinese effort, their rhetoric seemed more pragmatic than CFAU

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5 Prominent Chinese entrepreneur, in a meeting at her office in Port Moresby, July 2008
students and IPRCC officials. This difference between individuals who have been trained to represent the state and those who have not suggests that the subjectification through the content and style of education and the practices of everyday life at CFAU is quite specific.

During the course of my research, I also met with Chinese scholars and researchers from think tanks such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), and the China Development Research Foundation (CDRF). I interviewed a number of academics both within CFAU and from a range of other universities, including Fudan, Renmin, and Tsinghua. Additionally, I interviewed officials from Western bilateral and multilateral government and non-government agencies to gain insights into how they understood China’s overseas activities. This group included high-level Australian Government representatives from AusAID and Treasury in PNG and Cambodia, as well as a number of embassies and bilateral and multilateral aid agencies in Beijing, for example, representatives from AusAID; the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID); and a high-level representative of the UN’s World Food Programme in Beijing.

From mid-2011, I undertook a full-time internship at the UNDP in Beijing, in the area of South-South cooperation. This position provided me with an opportunity to meet with officials from diverse Chinese ministries, including the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST). While the discussions at the meetings I attended and correspondence I entered into are confidential, and I will keep the participants anonymous, getting to know the people within the system at least a little has been extremely helpful in this research. These interactions confirmed my observations at CFAU that national-level officials, particularly those with a role in China’s international interactions, are trained to prioritise the Chinese nation-state as the central and most fundamental guiding principle. This training, as I saw at CFAU, is so comprehensive that the national logic has become internalised as ‘doxa’ among those government elites with international responsibilities.
These activities over the course of my PhD are not the primary focus of this thesis, which specifically investigates the ideas and perceptions of the students I taught during my year working at the CFAU. However, the experiences I had and the knowledge I gained without doubt have given me a broader and deeper contextual framework in which to better understand my primary fieldwork at CFAU.
Chapter Two –

CFAU Students and National Logic: What, how and why?

This chapter sets out the theoretical approach my research employs to analyse the national logic so prevalent among the CFAU students in my study. In order to provide new insights into the existing debates around China’s involvement in international affairs, this thesis turns to the analytical potential provided by political anthropology, particularly the anthropology of the state. It uses an anthropological approach to interrogate the beliefs, ideas and values that constituted a coherent worldview among my Chinese students at CFAU as they were being trained to become China’s future foreign policy officials. I begin with an overview of the dominant debates in politically influential English-language International Relations (IR) literature to establish the prevailing scholarly understanding of China’s role in the world that provides the context and rationale for this research. The majority of Western analysis of China’s global behaviour tends to overlook the cultural context within which politics is both enacted and interpreted. Misunderstandings about the actors, modalities and processes of Chinese foreign policy underpin a perspective known in China as the ‘China threat theory’.

Having set out the conventional wisdom within politically influential academic literature on China’s role in the world, I then introduce the theoretical approach I take in this research, political anthropology, and more specifically, the anthropology of the state. An approach informed by the anthropology of the state allows new insights into the issues. While dominant approaches to IR theory assume that the structure of the system dictates state interests and behaviour, the Constructivist IR school posits that ‘people and ideas matter’. This approach to understanding international relations provides space for investigating how people come to hold certain worldviews as undisputable, and particular actions or behaviour as viable or inconceivable. These are questions to which an anthropological approach can provide insights. I argue that applying an anthropological analysis of how future diplomats are produced through university training provides insights into how China acts in the world and can therefore be of value to IR scholars, commentators, and foreign policy actors.
The Myth of the China Threat: The dominant debates on China’s role in the world

International attention to China’s growing role in the global system has increased over the past decade or so. Since the early 1990s, when China’s economy started growing at an astounding speed, an increasing amount of literature has been concerned about the decline of the West and the concomitant rise of China. These discussions have been particularly prevalent since the third round of the high profile Ministerial-level Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing in 2006. At the Forum, the attention of the international development community was drawn to China’s increasingly high-visibility presence in Africa. The financial crisis of 2008 further cemented concerns about China’s rise by upsetting the West’s certainty around formerly prevalent economic and political norms exemplified by the Bretton Woods Institutions. As Callahan points out, it is “commonsense now to say that the world is in the midst of a grand shift of power from the West to the East” (2012, 33).

A common theme of the burgeoning ‘China’s rise’ literature is whether to understand China’s increasing importance in international affairs as a threat or an opportunity for the system itself, for international security, and for power relations overall. Much of this China as threat or opportunity debate is predicated on whether an increasingly powerful China is likely to destabilise regional and global security and broader international norms in the near future (e.g. Roy, 1996). One idea in particular has gained considerable ground in the collective imaginary of the West. This is that the United States’ role as sole superpower may be replaced by a system in which China also holds considerable power (e.g. Garrett, 2010) or in which China and the US represent a ‘G2’ (e.g. Steinfeld, 2010). In these visions, the US is often represented as little more than a customer and borrower of Beijing.

As far as international political relations are concerned, one implication of following either the ‘threat’ or the ‘opportunity’ perspective is the tendency to adopt either a

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‘hawkish’ (such as that proposed by Mearsheimer and Ikenberry) or alternatively more conciliatory approach (e.g. Shambaugh) in which deeper mutual understanding can identify the best way for ‘managing’ China. While these two positions diverge in their understanding of the extent to which China’s rise poses a threat, the assumptions underlying both are firstly that China is inevitably ‘rising’, that is, becoming economically stronger; secondly, that this economic strength will naturally translate into a desire for corresponding increases in political power; and thirdly, that this transformation needs to be managed by existing powers in such a way as best protects their interests. As such, many authors focus on technical approaches for how particular countries or regions should best ‘deal with’ or ‘manage’ China’s apparently inevitable rise: for example, in relation to the US (Christensen 2006); Australia (e.g. White 2005 or Tubeliiwicz 2010); the United Kingdom (UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2010); the European Union (Men, Jing and Barton, 2011); East Asia (Ross 2006), Japan (Mochizuki 2007); India (Bhattacharya 2005); and Africa (e.g. Michel and Beuret 2009; Raine 2009). The United States’ Congressional Research Service has conducted inquiries into ‘Comparing Global Influence: China’s and US Diplomacy, Foreign Aid, Trade, and Investment in the Developing World’ (CRS 2008) and the implications of Chinese foreign aid activities in Africa, Latin America and Asia (CRS 2009). The Australian government, likewise, has established a Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee to investigate the implications of China’s emergence for Australia (Australian Senate 2006).

These ‘technicalised’ debates in which ‘what to do about China’ has become the central problematic are by no means purely theoretical. Popular opinion around the Western world often echoes this question, and can have powerful political implications. The debates around China being a “responsible stakeholder” in the international system, a phrase coined by former World Bank head Robert Zoellick in 2005, is an excellent illustration. Media and political leaders alike have taken up this call, with the emphasis firmly on how the goal can be achieved and little reflection on what it means. Journalists around the world readily perpetuate the ‘rise and manage’ problematic, further legitimising the assumptions.

The theoretical foundation on which much of the ‘China rise’ literature is premised is the positivist approach to International Relations theory represented by the Realist
and Liberal Institutionalist schools. Realism in particular has considerable influence in foreign policy making in many status quo powers, particularly the United States. Like much of the broader literature, positivist approaches to IR theory tend to accept China’s rise as inevitable. High profile scholars and commentators such as William Overholt (1994); Michael Brown (et al. 2000); G. John Ikenberry (2008); John Mearsheimer (2005, 2006, 2010) and Nicholas Kristof (1993) have argued for some time that China’s economic strength means it is destined to become a major political power by the second decade of the twenty-first century. Scholars in this field then concentrate on analysing the implications of China’s rise. While some scholars argue that China’s increasing role in the world offers the best hope for transforming authoritarian China into a democracy (e.g. Overholt 1994), many see China’s rise as posing an unavoidable threat to US global power; the stability of the international system as it stands; and liberal democratic norms around the world. Ikenberry argues that China’s rise will inevitably bring the United States’ unipolar moment to an end (2008). Mearsheimer states quite plainly that as all states are rational actors with the fundamental goal to survive, China simply cannot rise peacefully (2005, 2006, 2010). Indeed, he argues that “intense security competition” will inevitably arise between China and the US because China, for security reasons, will want to be the dominant power in Asia, and achieving this will require pushing the US out (2010).

These analyses are drawn from a particular understanding of how the international system operates; what nation-states are; what interests they seek to achieve; and how they interact in order to achieve them. In the positivist conceptualisations, territorially bounded nation-states are taken as the basic unit of analysis – what Wimmer and Schiller describe as “methodological nationalism” (2003). Each state is understood to exist in discrete distinction from other nation-states, and the ultimate interest of each is a function of the anarchic system in which it operates, that is, the pursuit of increased power relative to other states. As such, any given nation-state will have a

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7 This thesis focuses on the literature in the West, however, the phenomenon of China’s rise has also been the subject of considerable discussion in Chinese academic circles, for example, Yan, Xuetong (2001); Ding, Sheng (2008) and Liu, Mingfu (2010). For an analysis of the trend over the past two decades of seeking Chinese-style solutions to global questions of international politics and its theories, see Cunningham-Cross (2012). Cunningham-Cross particularly focuses on the seeming tension between Yan Xuetong’s realist position of the universal applicability of international relations theory, and his substantial work utilising ancient Chinese thought or ‘traditional culture’ as the basis for a ‘Chinese school’ of international relations theory.
priori interests due to its position in the international system. Realists therefore see any rising state as an inherent threat to existing relations of power, as its interests will by definition be expansion and increasing foreign influence.

Liberal Institutionalism accepts the same fundamental assumptions about the anarchic state of the international system, the primacy of the nation-state as an international actor, and the will to power. However, it concludes that deep webs of interlinkages can develop, through, for example, international trade, which create enough interdependencies to counter the threat of hostility Realists take for granted. Despite the focus on interlinkages, the Liberal Institutionalist analytical approach remains within a framework which does not question what a nation-state is or how it comes to exist. Like Realism, issues of what constitutes a nation, a state, a citizen, a bureaucrat, politics or culture are rarely interrogated. This limits the ability of both Liberal Institutionalism and Realism to sufficiently account for learning and the role and influence of social or cultural norms.

The current dominance of positivist approaches means that there has been little examination of shifts in China’s priorities and behaviour in relation to the leadership’s interpretations of changes to domestic and external circumstances. An exception to this is the attention devoted to China’s history. As is discussed in Chapter Three, much Chinese and Western scholarly analysis is focused on how China’s past helps to explain its current international behaviour. However, China’s history is often used to support an existing position within the analytical framework established by positivist IR theory. For example, in Martin Jacques’ 2009 monograph *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*, the author analyses China’s past to argue that contemporary China is the product of its uniquely long and continuous history. Jacques concludes that convergence with the West is impossible. Callahan criticises this conclusion as being drawn from a “thin” understanding of history and tradition in which “history is looted for episodes and ideas that support the ‘China’s rise/the fall of the West’ thesis in ways that are remarkably similar to official writings in the PRC” (2012, 36).

Based on positivist understandings of how the international system works, the tendency of many Western commentators is to try and understand Chinese foreign
policy and behaviour within the power-maximising paradigm they consider as universally applicable. Analyses of local philosophy, culture or history are considered irrelevant, there is little reflection of subjectivity, and cultural lenses through which they themselves are analysing and critiquing tend to be dismissed. For example, Mearsheimer asserts that serious analysts of China should not pay any attention to people who employ a methodology of “talking to people” (2010). However, his Realist position overlooks the critical point that politics occurs in culturally inflected way (Spencer 2007, 5-6), and is analysed and understood through a cultural lens. Like politics, policy ideas and ultimately policy decisions are never free from social contexts. Rather, they “begin in social relations in institutions and expert communities, travel with undisclosed baggage and get unravelled as they are translated into the different interests of social/institutional worlds and local politics in ways that generate complex and unintended effects” (Mosse 2011, 3).

As Hasenclever et al. explain,

Rationalist … explanations of international regimes are at best incomplete and need to be supplemented or even supplanted by a mode of analysis which focuses on the way the ‘distribution of knowledge’ constitutes the identities, and shapes the preferences as well as the perceived options, of state actors. (1997, 136)

More recently, Vivien A. Schmidt has called for an increased emphasis on the role of ideas in understanding political action, and the dynamics of continuity and change (2008). Ultimately, the positivist approach of the prevalent and influential Realist and Liberal Institutionalist schools obscures the complex array of actors and agents, and the various views, perspectives and interests which underpin China’s role in the world.

In contrast, Constructivist approaches to IR theory allow for these elements to be considered in analyses of global processes, and thereby have richer explanatory potential. Constructivist IR scholars argue that “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt, 1992), and that ideas matter (e.g. Adler 1997; Barnett 2001; and Reus-Smit 2002). Constructivism focuses on the dynamics of knowledge, ideology, identities,
and communication, thereby providing useful insights into the workings of the international system. Constructivists argue that relations among states are affected by “perception, misperception, the capacity to process information, and learning” (Haggard and Simmons, 1987, 510).

Like the mainstream Realist approach, Constructivism is not homogenous. Some Constructivist scholars, whom Hasenclever terms ‘weak,’ position their analysis as complementary to rationalist accounts. They conceive states as rational actors, but seek greater consideration for the impact of knowledge that is ‘irreducible to material structures’ (Hasenclever, et al., 1997, 138). ‘Strong’ Constructivists, positing an alternative to the dominant theories about how the international system functions, argue that knowledge must be considered at a more fundamental level: shaping the identities of states and their self-understanding in relation to other social actors. According to this approach, international behaviour is not simply a function of an external structure which dictates what principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures are available to states. Rather, it is “the product of an ongoing process of community self-interpretation and self-definition in response to changing context” (Neufeld, 1993, 55).

I argue that the Constructivist approach can be productively paired with political anthropology, more particularly an anthropology of the state, as a means of enriching the positivist Realist and Liberal Institutionalist approaches currently dominant in explaining and interpreting China’s global activities.

**The View from Below: Studying up, political anthropology and the anthropology of the state**

Thirty years ago, Laura Nader called for anthropologists to ‘study up’, that is, to study “the colonisers rather than the colonised, the culture of power rather than the culture of the powerless, the culture of affluence rather than the culture of poverty” (1972, 289). When she wrote ‘Studying Up’, she noted that literature based on fieldwork in the United States was “relatively abundant” when it came to studying the poor, minority ethnic groups, and the disadvantaged, but little existed on the middle class,
and very little first-hand fieldwork had been done that focused on the upper classes (ibid., 289). Nader referred to an “urgency” to study power anthropologically to better understand those “who shape attitudes and actually control institutional structures” as a means of enhancing quality of life (ibid., 284). She argued that the insights gained from studying up (not instead of but at the same time as studying ‘down’ and ‘sideways’) have broad and resounding implications for humanity. This was particularly true for questions about change and resistance to change, and bureaucratic and institutional conservatism, far more so than the “conservatism of peasantry” (ibid., 289). Indeed, Nader warned of serious consequences of not studying up, as well as in other directions, particularly in terms of developing adequate theory and description. By refocusing the research question to examine those “who have responsibility by virtue of being delegated power, then the questions change” (ibid., 290). For example, if anthropologists acknowledge that “groups and institutions not physically present in the tribal area influence the behaviour of the people in it” rather than focusing on a unit or community as bounded and discrete (Mitchell 1966), we can better understand to what extent external determinants affect social structures and behaviours, and poverty and affluence. We can also see how much they are “determined by cultural transmission within the group” (Nader 1972, 292), or the interaction between the two.

Nader’s call at the time was a controversial one. As she noted, although good reasons existed for studying up, there were also significant obstacles, including a prevailing attitude of disdain towards conducting fieldwork at home, as well as practical problems of accessing those in power. Despite a shift in attitudes so that fieldwork at home has become increasingly acceptable, George Marcus and Michael Fischer argued in 1986 that Nader’s appeal remained substantially unrealised when they wrote of the need for a critical analysis of processes of power and domination over a decade later. More recently, Hugh Gusterson argued that developments in anthropology, including the permutation of Marxist and feminist perspectives, and the infusion of Foucault’s theories of power, have provided new theoretical tools for studying up (1997). Indeed, Thomas Hansen and Finn Stepputat argued that Foucault helped reinvent the anthropological study of politics in the 1990s which had until then been “steeped in an ahistorical mode of analysis” of “kinship, sacrifice and ritual in ‘primitive societies’” (2006, 296). While not representative of a major turn in
anthropology, some significant studies of power and governance have been undertaken in recent years: for example, Bruno Latour’s study of scientific institutions in France (1996); Frank Pieke’s research into the training of Communist cadres in Chinese Party Schools (2009a, b); Brenda Chalfin’s work on Ghanaian customs service officials (2010); and Evasdottir’s study of Chinese archaeologists to introduce a new ‘obedient autonomy’ approach to conceptualising the dynamics of social relations among intellectuals in the Chinese danwei system (2005).

Political Anthropology

This research applies Nader’s upward gaze to the study of the processes and practices of power in the subjectification of my students at CFAU, using the approaches provided by political anthropology. This section will outline some of the classical perspectives on the state as a sovereign actor, as despite coming under considerable criticism from dependency theorists and globalisation scholars, among others, this understanding continues to inform much of the debate in international relations and international politics. The chapter will then present anthropological perspectives on the state, and how these can be used as an analytical tool to better understand how and why CFAU students are socialised into a national logic, and with what implications.

Classical understandings of the state

The tendency within International Relations to theorise states as individual, rational actors in the pursuit of power reflects a broader approach across most dominant branches of political science (Humphrey 2004, 418). The international system of states, established with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, provides the fundamental notions for classical perspectives of the modern state in international politics. These include the Weberian understanding that a (successful) state has the “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Weber 1991 [1919], 78) and that public authorities are able to “exercise effective control within the borders of their own polity” (Krasner 1999, 4). In addition to these internal characteristics of a

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8 This view of the state as a sovereign actor in a Westphalian system also underpins the long-held Chinese notion of respect for sovereignty, territoriality, and the commitment to non-interference, as set out in the mid-1950s by Premier Zhou Enlai in the Five Principles of Co-existence.
sovereign state, external aspects such as recognition by other states which are themselves sovereign entities (Lake 2003, 205) and the ability to prevent external actors from interfering in domestic affairs are critical (Krasner 1999, 4). In this system, when these conditions are met, all states, regardless of size, are considered to be formally equal and independent actors in the international system (Lake 2003, 306). Understanding the state in this way discounts the role of people and ideas, processes and change, and fixes it as an eternal entity, “a force to be resisted, with more or less heroism, by the plucky subjects of our field research” (Spencer 2007, 102).

Dependency theory, arising in the early 1970s largely as a response to modernisation theory, critiqued the practical reality of this notion of sovereign equality. Dependency theorists argued that less developed countries (or those of the ‘Third World’, or more recently ‘Global South’) were trapped in an association of dependency in relation to the economically advanced Western countries (Menzel 1993, 209ff). The dependency perspective lost some of its explanatory strength in the face of the economic success of the ‘East Asian Tigers’ before the financial crisis of 1997. It was also criticised for trivialising complex processes of interaction and domination, as well as lacking a sophisticated discussion of different local settings (Luig 2002, 76).

Globalisation theories of the 1990s posited that the entire system of nation states was being eroded and undermined by rapidly increasing transnational flows of money, goods, and people. For example, Susan Strange argued that:

> The authority of the governments of all states, large and small, strong or weak, has been weakened as a result of technological and financial change and of the accelerated integration of national economies into one single global market economy”.

(1996, 14)

Anthropologists such as Arjun Appadurai, drawing on Benedict Anderson’s (2006 [1983]) notion of imagined communities, claimed that new “imagined worlds” were

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9 Despite her concern about the demise of the state, Strange can be considered as a Realist IR scholar in that her concerns regard the nature of power – where it lies, what is its nature, and who benefits. However she moves out of traditional Realist IR theory in her concern that IR as a discipline is in need of new approaches, methodologies, and indeed, an entirely new ontology (Cox 2007, 366-67).
being created by global flows, which were able to “subvert the legitimacy of the territorial boundaries of nation states” (1996, 8, 33). However, sociologist Peter Evans observed that strong and capable states are essential for global flows to occur effectively, and that in fact, open domestic economies and extensions of the state apparatus often go side by side, and that state eclipse is neither a necessary nor likely outcome of globalisation (1997, 68). Similarly, Aihwa Ong noted that state governments are able to be more creative in their responses to these challenges than is widely thought, and thus able to “maintain strategic controls over resources, populations and sovereignty” (1999, 21).

As Robert H. Jackson argues, certain scholars within IR theory argue that some states lack the internal institutions and structures to be considered fully-fledged states (1990). These scholars utilise the term ‘quasi-states’ to describe post-colonial entities which consisted “not of self-standing structures with domestic foundations – like separate buildings – but of territorial jurisdictions supported from above by international law and material aid” (ibid., 5). These quasi-states have been granted the right to self-determination by the international community and hence possess juridical sovereignty. But this authority “is a mere ‘negative sovereignty’ since these states clearly lack empirical statehood” (ibid., 529).

Many key Chinese scholars of international relations are also strong proponents of the Westphalian model in that they assume the immutability and universality of territorially distinct sovereign states as their basic unit of analysis.10 This commitment to the state is in line with the Chinese government’s official position, clearly

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10 Some of my students at CFAU noted that there had been four models for the international system over the past few centuries: the Westphalia, Vienna, Versailles and Yalta. As Summer from the International Economics major wrote in her mid-semester essay, “Successful models for international system, such as Westphalia, can keep the world peaceful for a long time. It is the result of a suitable model, which fitted the situation of the countries in Europe at that time. Big powers kept balance and most countries got their benefits. The failure of the Washington-Versailles model, which pushed Germany to the edge of sheer precipice, is the most important reason for the outbreak of the Second World War. Even the Westphalia System was replaced by the Vienna Model for the reason that the countries in Europe had changed a lot. There should be a new model for the international system. The last model, the Yalta System, was suitable for the structure of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union declared the end of the Cold War. Russia is not as powerful as the Soviet Union was, given its weak domestic economy. It is more important that Russia is no longer an enemy to the United States. Although the United States is the only super-power, it has some problems. It acted as the leader of the whole world and launched wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq. And during the financial crisis, the US suffers from economic recession. It is the right time that a new model should replace the Yalta System”.
articulated in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and Eight Principles of Foreign aid. Central tenets of both of these proclamations are respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. Despite this official position, a tension exists in Chinese debates of international relations (see Callahan 2012 for a review). The hyper-Realist obsession with state-bound territoriality and sovereignty co-exists with a deeply held belief that a Chinese approach to international relations offers a new and distinct approach to understanding the world, based on China’s own unique history and culture – a presumption that most Western Realists would find difficult to accept. For example, tianxia (天下), usually translated as ‘all under heaven’, is common in many prominent Chinese IR scholars’ conception of the world. As Elena Barabantseva notes, tianxia is often invoked as the concept that best represents China’s traditional worldview (2009, 131), forming the foundation of the popular argument that China’s behaviour on the world stage cannot be understood solely by applying Western concepts and principles (see for example Shih 1993; Zhao 2005 and 2006). Chinese proponents of this perspective posit that uniquely Chinese understandings of global affairs can offer an alternative model to the largely dysfunctional organisation of the world today. Yan Xuetong from Tsinghua University is a good example of this approach. Yan is a self-professed Realist who also argues that China’s behaviour in the world should be governed by its own historical traditions (Yan 2011).

**Anthropological approaches to the state**

From an anthropological perspective that studies the practices of the state in day-to-day life, the clear entities imagined by positivist approaches to IR are revealed to be fragile, held together not in fact but by convention and shared belief. Jonathan Spencer argues that despite its apparent absurdity, the very question of what we even mean by ‘the state’ needs to be anthropologists’ starting point (2007, 101). Political anthropology offers an approach to understanding the state that does not gloss over or ignore the processes of power and politics, or differences in values and history. Nor does it presume that those differences are fixed, impermeable, or simply and clearly cut along lines drawn on a map. Instead, the anthropological approach grapples with the problematic of how to define something that is so often taken for granted. For example, Spencer notes the difficulty of pinning down a definition, and asks whether it is a matter of scale – in that states are huge, translocal institutions, and
anthropologists are by definition minitiarists – or if the indeterminacy inherent to the concept itself makes it “good for dreaming” but resistant to neatly defining (2007, 101). This section will outline what an anthropological approach to understanding politics and the state looks like, and how these theoretical tools can be usefully applied to understanding how the CFAU students in my study are socialised into a particular nationalist logic and social imaginary.

Several scholars from within political anthropology have observed that it is only recently that the modern nation-state has re-emerged as a major concern for anthropologists (Bierschenk 2009; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Spencer 2007). According to Spencer, for example, in the late 1980s, concerns with power and politics “moved back to the centre of the anthropological argument”, following global political developments such as the resurgence of ethnic and religious conflicts across various parts of the world in the post-Cold War era (Spencer 2007, 3). In addition, this theoretical move was reinvigorated by Marxist and feminist theories, and the insights of Foucault. Before the 1980s, classical political anthropology had tended to understand politics as “calculated instrumentality”, a “certain mode of conduct, either conceived in a positive light – ‘judicious, expedient, skillfully contrived’ – or more negatively, ‘scheming, crafty, cunning’ – rather than as linked to the ‘science and art of government’ and the state” (ibid., 15). While a “spectacularly successful” approach in the short term, in the long run it became “predictably banal and un-anthropological”, as after a while very different locales and field sites began to look the same, simply as variants of a “single theme of political strategising” (ibid., 15).

Additionally, this emphasis on ‘small-p politics’ assumed field sites in which societies were without or unrelated to states, and in which understanding people was seen to have little to do with broader structures and processes of power. The lack of attention to the role of state power in people’s lives became an increasingly difficult position to justify during the era of decolonisation after the Second World War. In recent years, established forms of social organisation, including those associated with the nation and state, have increasingly become the subject of scholarly study (Skey 2011, 4). The increasing importance of the role of the state is also prominent in the

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11 Citing the Oxford English Dictionary definitions of ‘politics’ (OED, s.v. politic B.3 pl. and A.2)
work of other political scientists (e.g. Migdal 2001; Schlichte and Migdal 2005), who advocate for a ’state-in-society’ approach.

The recent emergence of a “self-conscious anthropology of the state” (Bierschenk 2009) provides an alternative paradigm for theorising how the state comes into being, how it is constructed in relation to its presumed opposite, civil society, and how the state comes to assume its position of supreme authority (Sharma and Gupta eds. 2006, 9). As Sharma and Gupta suggest, the disciplinary distinctiveness of an anthropology of the state approach to understanding power and politics can provide insights and contributions that go beyond that of philosophers, political scientists, sociologists or historians in several ways: through focusing on everyday practices; foregrounding cultural differences; and utilising a micro-level ethnographic approach.

Firstly, a focus on “multi-layered, contradictory, translocal” and “pluri-centered and fluid” everyday practices shows how the often taken-for-granted boundary between state and society is constructed, contested and deconstructed (Sharma and Gupta 2006, 6, 10). Complementary to this attention to everyday practices when studying the state is the focus on the representational practices of the state itself. The “public cultural representations and performance of statehood” (ibid., 18) can often obscure the porous and nebulous nature of the boundary of the state, and “successfully represent [the state] as coherent and singular” (ibid., 10), as having clear boundaries, and as forming the ultimate manifestation of society.

The second way in which an anthropology of the state can enlighten, according to Sharma and Gupta, is by foregrounding “the role of cultural difference in forming and informing states” (ibid., 10). States are not assumed to be naturally occurring entities, but understood as “cultural artefacts” (ibid., 5), with a “deeply cultural nature” (ibid., 6), and as the “effects of cultural processes” (ibid., 10). An anthropological approach to understanding the state takes into account the images and cultural representations of the state as they circulate through the public sphere through newspapers, government reports, and “ceremonial rituals” like military parades, all of which influence people’s perceptions of “what the state is” (ibid., 18). Representations of the state, particularly in the form of “organisational charts, official seals and photographs of state leaders”, all common at CFAU, lend an air of order and coherence to the
organisation of the state, obscuring any inconsistencies or messiness endemic to the daily workings of the state (ibid., 19).

Thirdly and lastly, Sharma and Gupta suggest that an anthropological approach to the state could offer new insights because of the way it is based on ethnographic methodology as a means of critical political engagement. The anthropology of the state is constituted by a micro-level perspective and a focus on “everyday practices and representations (of particular bureaucrats) as modes through which the state comes into being (ibid., 27)” and bases its insights on institutional ethnographies of specific state bureaucracies, inquiries into the micro-politics and daily practices of these institutions, and a quest to understand their relation to the public (elite, subaltern, or both) that they serve (ibid., 27).

One of the key questions an anthropology of the state addresses is the boundary between the political and the social. How my CFAU students perceived this border is explored in more detail in Chapter Four when I examine their relationships with the Chinese Party-state. Timothy Mitchell argues that instead of perceiving the boundary between the two as predetermined, it is better understood as a “structural effect” of complex social practices. As such, the state “should not be examined as an actual structure, but as the powerful metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist. In fact, the nation-state is arguably the paramount structural effect of the modern social world” (1991, 94). As Mitchell explains it, this ongoing making and remaking of the boundaries is part of a wider pattern of modern disciplinary power, and the resultant ‘state-effect’ is just one instance of a wider production of ‘abstraction’, as is, for example, ‘the economy’ (ibid., 91). Following Foucault, Mitchell suggests that what we refer to as ‘the state’ is in fact of secondary importance to understanding the pervasive modes of discipline, regulation and surveillance that characterise modern forms of power. The state itself, particularly the illusion of a separate, bounded entity that stands discrete from society, is rather an effect of these disciplinary practices – indeed the illusion itself holds the practices together. Mitchell argues that identifying the problems arising from the empirical separation of ‘the state’ from ‘society’ is not particularly challenging (ibid., 90). What is of more interest is the impermanent nature and shifting location of the nebulous boundary between society and the state. While this boundary “never marks a real
exterior”, it all the same has very real effects and implications, being “itself a mechanism that generates resources of power” in the way that it is able to exclude and include particular topics and activities from being considered as the explicit responsibility of the state (ibid., 90).

Building on the idea that the borderline between state and society is nebulous and inconstant, Joel Migdal and Klaus Schlichte propose the notion of state-in-society as a means to conceptualise the relationship and border between the state and society (2005). Frank Pieke however argues that even this remains insufficient, and suggests instead that the state is society (2004, 533). He argues that the starting point of investigation and analysis should be the processes of power, the “shifting and changing sediment of social action” (ibid., 533). By studying these, which will be discussed in more detail shortly, rather than merely focusing on “a set of institutions existing in society”, we can move beyond the debate of whether any putative ‘state’ does or does not exist separately from and above ‘society’. Rather the focus can be on how the state constitutes itself, and to what extent and how the state exists in various circumstances can “be treated as an empirical question rather than as a matter of principled debate” (ibid., 534).

Further, the anthropology of the state also offers a useful analytical distinction between the state as a bundle of practices, or state-as-system, and the state-as-idea. This conception did not originally emanate from within the discipline of anthropology, but rather can be found in the work of French philosopher Louis Althusser (1971, 135–139; among other early political geographers). After being taken up by British sociologist Philip Abrams (1988 [1977]), an Althusserian model was then used by political scientists like Mitchell to criticise the assumption, widespread in his own discipline, that the political was “clearly distinguishable from its social environment” (1991, 80).

Spencer describes the notion of state-as-system as a complex set of practices, institutions and procedures (2007, 99), or what Abrams called an “apparatus” or “palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centred in government and more or less extensive, unified and dominant in any given society” (1988 [1977] 82). The world as it is now does involve borders, frontiers, checkpoints, and other sites at
which we encounter the very tangible delineations of states. In going about our daily lives we are constantly, albeit subtly, reminded that we exist in a nation-state of our very own that has a distinct boundary with other nation-states. Our postage stamps, banking transactions, road rules, electricity, water and gas services, all depend on a state system. Indeed despite not being able to quite pin down what they are, nations and states are real enough to be considered worth going to war and dying for (Billig 1995). We are also reminded constantly that that our daily lives are “steeped in power” (Butler and Spivak, 2007, 9) in that we are able to access medical and health services, education, police and legal protection, and other benefits of the state to which only people of ‘our’ nationality are entitled.

The anthropology of the state has less to say about the analytical concept of state-as-idea. This is perhaps because so far the epistemic structures and programs of the discipline, like in the social sciences overall, have been shaped by the contemporary Western experience of state-formation in which state/society relations of power, rather than nationalism, has been the central problematic (Wimmer and Schiller 2003, 577). While approaches such as Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-system theory and Marxist political economy focus on the transnational, these views remained heterodox, and have not shaped the social science program, which as a result has tended to focus on the operations of state power (ibid., 577). However, the distinction between the state as an ideological symbol and vehicle for the political imagination and the state as a palpable apparatus is also helpful when asking how nation and nationalism relate to the state. It is often difficult to separate the state-as-idea from the nation, particularly in China where the Party-state has been explicitly promoting the conflation of the two. The way in which my students at CFAU conceived of the state-as-idea was virtually indistinguishable from the idea of the nation as an imagined community of idea and practice (Anderson 1983). Distinguishing between state-as-system or apparatus, and state-as-idea as aligned with the concept of nation, allows an even deeper analysis of how the nation-state is constructed, etched, experienced, adored and loathed. Moving beyond analytical categories, the distinction also helps to explain why my students could on the one hand be critical of the daily functions and processes of the state-as-system, for example, corrupt officials, traffic, or pollution, while still maintaining such loyalty to the state-as-idea.
Like the definition of ‘state’, while the term ‘nation’ may seem at first blush to be self-evident, as Walter Bagehot as early as 1887 and Eric Hobsbawm (1992), Benedict Anderson (2000 [1983]), Ernest Gellner (1983) and others have noted, it is a notoriously slippery concept: “We know what it is when you do not ask us, but we cannot very quickly explain or define it” (Bagehot 1887, 20-21). However, “the last two centuries of the human history of planet Earth are incomprehensible without some understanding of the term” (Hobsbawm 1992, 1). Indeed, “nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (Anderson, 2000 [1983], 3). However, attempts to establish common criteria for what constitutes ‘a nation’, or definitions of ‘nationalism’, have proven fruitless. Theorists usually turn to language, common territory, common history, or some other common cultural traits to define it. For example, Joseph Stalin’s well-known definition runs: “A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture” (1934 [1912]). However, objective criteria are themselves “fuzzy, shifting and ambiguous, and as useless for purposes of the traveller’s orientation as cloud-shapes are compared to landmarks” (Hobsbawm 1992, 6). Hugh Seton-Watson notes that he has been “driven to the conclusion that no ‘scientific definition’ of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists” (1977, 5). But if objective criteria cannot be established, can subjective grounds prove more effective? A subjective approach also appears unhelpful, as defining a nation according to “its members’ consciousness of belonging to it is tautological and provides only an *a posteriori* guide to what a nation is” (Hobsbawm 1992, 8). Hobsbawm concludes that neither objective nor subjective definitions are satisfactory, and recommends a position of agnosticism. This very ambiguity, he argues, is what makes the idea of the nation so ideal for propaganda (ibid., 6), as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Anderson, similarly, prefers to understand the term ‘nation’ as having “multiple significations”, and ‘nation-ness’ and ‘nationality’ as “cultural artefacts of a particular kind, that have come into historical being through certain processes, and whose meanings have changed over time” (1983, 4). Anderson describes the nation as an ‘imagined community’ in which a national imagination comes to exist, that is, a sense of identity that is collectively imagined by all those going to the same kinds of school, viewing or listening to the same media, visiting the same museums, and in other ways
developing and sharing the same mental map of what it means to be part of a particular ‘nation’. Anderson argues that there is thus nothing immanent or original about the nation – it is a construct, similar everywhere, only using different symbols. However, each nation always considers itself as being unique and antique, creating its own narrative about where it comes from, what it represents now, and what its vision of the future is. By ‘imagined’ Anderson means not so much that it is an invented or fabricated community, but rather an entirely real sense of connection to other people who the individual citizen has never seen (1983, 6-7). State-as-system, state-as-idea, and nation may well all be constructions, ongoing processes that continuously produce and reproduce the world as a world of nation-states (Skey 2011, 10), not unlike ‘the economy’ in its representation as “a nonmaterial totality that seems to exist apart from the material world of society” (Mitchell 1991, 91). However, their effects and implications are real and natural to those within them – indeed in 1951 Hannah Arendt struggled to find a mode of belonging that could be rigorously non-national (1994 [1951]).

Real as their effects may be, this research is founded on the understanding that neither ‘the state’ nor ‘the nation’ are primary or unchanging entities, thanks to the developments in political anthropology and the anthropology of the state. Both are historically, culturally and politically contingent, and rely on “artefact, invention and social engineering” (Hobsbawm 1992, 10) to be produced. What Spencer suggests, therefore, is a recognition of the cogency of the idea of the state as an ideological power, and, like Pieke, treating that in itself as a compelling object of analysis (Spencer 2007, 105). It is in this regard that the recent emergence of a “self-conscious anthropology of the state” (Bierschenk 2009) is a useful tool for theorising what the state is, what the nation is, and how they exist in relation to society.

**The Social Imaginary of Chineseness**

In this thesis I utilise a range of theoretical insights to understand the coherent set of views shared among my CFAU students, that is, “what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society” (Taylor 2004, 2, emphasis added). My assumption that the CFAU is an arena of discipline and subjectification comes from Foucault’s work
on the roles of institutions in governance (1975, 1991). The way in which I understand the quotidian activities and arrangements of students’ lives as creating state-centred agents is drawn from Bourdieu’s notion of a theory of practice, habitus and doxa (1977) and Charles Taylor’s concept of a ‘social imaginary’ (2004). How these notions become ‘reality’ for people, in this case, how students learn the primary loyalty to a national logic, is explored through concepts such as Michael Billig’s ‘banal nationalism’ (1995), and Edmund Husserl’s exploration of ‘sedimentation’ to create a Lebenswelt, or ‘life-world’ (1970 [1936]).

Pieke discusses how cadre training at Party schools in China takes place in an “anti-structural” environment separated from normal life as a means to facilitate students’ forgetting about “their position, rank and normal obligations and privileges of family and work” (2009a, 37). In a similar way, living and studying at CFAU removes students from wider ‘normal’ life and produces citizens who see it as being for their own good to align themselves politically, morally, and socially with the Chinese national identity and who therefore do so by their own will. Utilising Foucault’s model of the state and its disciplinary power allows a deeper and clearer understanding of the subjectification mechanisms at work at CFAU and how they function. Foucault’s study of the panopticon, a prison surveillance and control system initially proposed by Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century, illustrates the relationship between practice and state control, in the way that order and discipline are internally and reflexively enforced. The state does not operate as a force external to and acting on ‘society’ or ‘people’ who are clearly delineated as separate from its power. Rather, state power is generated, manifested and maintained through the process of subjectification, that is, the meticulous organisation of space and time which serves to internalise the political order, such that, as Pieke describes, the “state is society” (2004, 533).

As Andrew Kipnis observes, Foucault’s concept of governmentality (1991) is useful for “almost any anthropologist wishing to develop an anthropological vantage on governing, ‘the state’, or policy” (2008, 277). Paraphrased as “the conduct of conduct” (Dean and Hindiss, 1998, 2), the theory of governmentality allows a shift from the presumption that only elite state agents exercise power over others to an understanding that governing is carried out by everyone who attempts the conduct of
conduct: “To govern means to act on the actions of subjects who retain the capacity to act otherwise” (Li 2007, 17). Tania Murray Li posits that governmentality, ascertaining “the well-being of populations at large” is distinct from Foucault’s concept of ‘discipline’, that which “seeks to reform designated groups through detailed supervision in confined quarters (prisons, asylums, schools)” (2007, 5). I argue, however, that these two processes are both present and necessary in the subjectification of students at CFAU. Through the disciplinary nature of the university environment, governmentality’s education of desires and configuring of habits, aspirations and beliefs are enacted. The detailed supervision and management of students’ daily lives in their confined campus quarters allows conditions to be set “artificially so arranging things so that people, following only their own self-interest, will do as they ought” (Scott, 1995).

In his theory of governmentality, Foucault differentiates between the purpose of government, the conduct of conduct, and that of sovereignty, which is to confirm and extend the power of the sovereign, with absolute authority to command, punish, deprive and bestow. In contemporary China, the state combines the sovereign-like Party with administrative governance apparatuses. The Party-state’s continued sovereignty, its legitimacy to hold might and authority, is “best confirmed – and secured – by ensuring the well-being of the population and augmenting its prosperity” (Li 2007, 12). Discipline in education institutions like CFAU ensures that the constructed and subjectified individual student learns that it is in his or her own interest to serve the broader well-being of the population, which in turn perpetuates state power and legitimacy. Of course, wherever there is power and subjectification, there exists the opportunity for resistance, as the three concepts are inextricably linked. Bourdieu’s theories of habitus, practice, and doxa provide a useful way to illustrate how CFAU students cannot simply be understood as power’s passive objects. Evasdottir’s conception of obedient autonomy (2004) and Sherry Ortner’s arguments regarding ‘ethnographic refusal’ (1995) are also key to understanding students’ relationship with power, as will be explored in Chapter Four.

A critical component of the process of the subjectification of my students at CFAU was the discipline of being deeply, constantly and intensely immersed in their controlled and structured university environment. The aspects of everyday life they
practiced (de Certeau 1984) ultimately served to create individuals who knew not only the desirable facts about the world and their role within it, but also how to behave and respond ‘appropriately’ in a range of circumstances. Bourdieu conceives of ‘practices’, a person’s acts or behaviours, as being produced by an individual’s ‘habitus’, the system of “durable, transposable dispositions” (1977, 72). The habitus enables “agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations” (ibid., 72), although Bourdieu does not elaborate on how habitus leads to practices. Habitus incorporates a ‘practical sense’ or a ‘feel for the game’, a sense of what behaviour is appropriate in certain circumstances, based on doxa, the core values and principles which are taken for granted. As a result of the dispositions that form people’s habitus, therefore, individuals tend to act in socially and culturally similar ways to those of the past, because habitus shapes understanding of the possibilities for action. Practices, therefore, are always socially informed.

Habitus is acquired through an individual’s social and cultural experiences, but that is not to say that the idea is a structuralist one in which only external factors matter in accounting for behaviour. Indeed Bourdieu directly argues against this “grandiose and desperate undertaking of the anthropologist, armed with fine positivist courage” (1977, 73), rejecting both structuralist and individualist/phenomenologist approaches in favour of a more complex explanation of human behaviour. The concept of habitus alone cannot provide a full account of practice. Habitus is formed, and in turn influences behaviour, only in concrete social contexts or ‘cultural fields’, that is, particular sites of cultural practice which render certain ways of thinking and acting as acceptable. In this way, Bourdieu allows for the influence of social and cultural structures on individual behaviour, while at the same time leaving open the possibility that individuals may act otherwise than in accordance with the dictates of those structures. Individuals remain free to behave in different and unpredicted ways, and will do so in response to changing external conditions, be they economic, social, political or otherwise. Additionally, the cultural field itself is a site of continuous contestation and negotiation, and is therefore not a fixed or static entity, but is in a constant state of flux. Despite these opportunities for change and new ideas, however, Bourdieu argues that cultural fields generally reproduce existing patterns and processes of power, tending to perpetuate the dominant power relations.
Not dissimilar to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as a means of understanding behaviour and action is Taylor’s notion of ‘the social imaginary’ (2004). Rather than the aloof and detached intellectual schemas or social theories people may entertain when they have the luxury to reflect on their existence, the social imaginary is how ordinary people imagine or understand “their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” on a quotidian, mundane basis (Taylor 2004, 23). A social imaginary comes to exist through a complicated dialectic of ideas and practices. The relationship between ideas and practice is not uni-linear, but rather mutually constitutive, with the former at times perhaps having more influence, and at other times, the latter. Indeed,

The only general rule in history is that there is no general rule identifying one order of motivation as always the driving force. Ideas always come in history wrapped up in certain practices… But the motivations that drive toward the adoption and spread of these packages may be varied; indeed, it is not even clear that we have a typology of such motivations (economic vs. political vs. ideal, etc.) that is valid throughout human history. (Taylor 2004, 33)

According to Taylor, the social imaginary allows and similarly disallows certain ways of thinking and acting. Our understandings of the world delimit and define what we see as threats or opportunities, and what we conceive of as being appropriate or outrageous responses. A given group in society which shares a social imaginary, similar to what Foucault might understand as an ‘epistemic community’, has available at its disposal a repertoire of common actions and ideas with which all are familiar. The repertoire is based on “an implicit map of social space” (Taylor 2004, 25) covering the understandings required to carry off particular actions, knowing how and when and who to speak to and under what circumstances, and so on. Taylor gives the example of organising a demonstration: first, the decision to do so means that this act is in our repertoire, and is deemed acceptable. We know what to do, and where the limits lie, “we understand the ritual” (ibid., 26). The act makes sense in the wider context of the world as we know it, in which we see ourselves as having certain relations with others, including with power, that makes it acceptable to address them in this way rather than another, say, petitioning the central government. It also makes
sense according to certain understandings of history, in the narrative of how we became who we are now (ibid., 25).

**Chinese Nationalism**

As set out in Chapter One, my students at CFAU demonstrated a strong propensity to identify with a national logic. The question then arises as to why my students continued to ultimately align themselves with the official narrative of the national given the wide range of associations with which they could identify. Nationalism should not be misunderstood as simply one form of identity that can be chosen over any other by people as rational actors making rational choices about what serves their interests best. The ‘imploding’ of categories such as nationalism runs the risk, as historian Prasenjit Duara has observed, of resembling positivist, rational choice theory, resting on the notion of the maximisation of individual or group utility (1995, 8). Duara argues that nationalism occupies “a privileged position within the representational network as the master identity that subsumes or organises other identifications, it exists only as one among others, and is changeable, interchangeable, conflicted, or harmonised with them” (ibid., 8). As Herzfeld observes, national identity, once created, “subordinates smaller identities – kin group, village, religion – to the encompassing collective good” (1992, 35). For my CFAU students, aligning with a national logic was doxa, an ideological consciousness in which nations, national identification, and national homelands appeared to be utterly natural. The world of nations was understood by my students to be an innate moral order, a means of understanding the entire world (Billig 1995, 10).

It has been more than twenty years since the Chinese government’s post-Tiananmen ‘patriotic turn’ put analysing Chinese nationalism back on the international academic agenda (Hughes 2011, 601). The past decade in particular has seen considerable scholarly attention dedicated to nationalism in China and the fundamental understandings of what the Chinese nation means that underpin it (e.g. Callahan

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12 Duara goes on to say that in his view, “utility is itself defined by a discourse, and even more importantly, it is often confounded by the play of multiple discourses or representations that constitute the individual or group.” I follow the position he takes in his book that “instances of multiplicity, changeability, and ambiguity will be encountered in the representations of the self, which is often mediated or disguised by the polysemic quality of language” (1995, p. 8).
Despite this, in much of the debate, little or no investigation has been made into the complex relations between state-as-idea and state-as-system, and consequently loyalty to the one is understood as interchangeable with loyalty to the other (Guo 2004). However, significant challenges have been made in China to both the official configuration of the nation and the state’s monopoly on the right to name the nation since 1989. Therefore, a deeper analysis of Chinese nationalism is required, which examines disjunctions between the people and the state, and the relationship of each to the nation (Guo 2004).

The period since 2008 has been distinguished by a continuing rise of popular nationalism in China. Pressure on the government to be more decisive in standing up to what is seen as foreign ‘bullying’ has been increasing, from the army, other establishment nationalists, and the population at large. For example Michael Swaine notes that in 2009 alone, China officially criticised US economic policy; questioned the dollar’s status as the international reserve currency; imposed greater constraints on foreign companies in China; discriminated in favour of China’s ‘national champion’ firms; increased the amount of cyber-attacks on foreign firms, as well as responded strongly to Western complaints on the issue; took a more activist stance at international economic meetings such as the G-20; defied US pressure to devalue the Renminbi; took an “obstructionist and insulting stance” at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen; and resisted UN Security Council sanctions against Iran for its nuclear activities (2010, 3). These actions were followed in 2010 by the very high-profile incident between Japan and China in waters off the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in which Japanese coast guards arrested a Chinese fishing boat skipper who was accused of ramming their boats for patrolling in “Chinese waters”. China also applied economic sanctions, including suspending the export of rare earth minerals and suspending Chinese tourist visits to Japan. The publication and popularity of works such as Wolf Totem by Jiang Rong (2004), Unhappy China by Song Xiaojun and colleagues (2009); China’s Maritime Rights by Zhang Wenmu (2009); and China Dream by People’s Liberation Army (PLA) colonel and professor at the China National Defence University Liu Mingfu (2010) echo this trend of rising popular nationalism in China (Hughes 2010; see Callahan 2012 for an analysis of these publications).
Since Chinese nationalism became a topic of renewed interest, there have been a number of theories proposed about how to best characterise its current form/s; understand its origins, and analyse its political implications. A differentiation exists in Western scholarship between those who see Chinese nationalism as ‘primordial’ and timeless (e.g. Fong 2004, 631-58 and Gries 2001, 25-43), and those who understand it as ‘constructivist’, or state-manipulated (e.g. Guo 2004 and Zhao 1998, 290-91).

Scholars such as Peter Hays Gries and Vanessa Fong argue that the foundation of Chinese nationalism is the belief that the Chinese nation-state is ‘primordial’, that is, that it has always-existed. Certainly, Chinese official narratives present the nation and the state as mutually constitutive and timeless. As Ann Anagnost richly depicts, the key element represented in the official Chinese ‘nationscape’ as embodied in the “Splendid China” model in Shenzhen is the “totality of the nation in time and space.” The Chinese nation is presented “as a total concept, a timeless essence” (Anagnost 1993, 586). Pal Nyiri et al. describe the primordialist approach to analysing Chinese nationalism as tending “to focus on the historical grievances from which anti-Western and anti-Japanese sentiments are believed to spring” (2010, 26). For example, Fong argues that the nationalist protests following the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 were an expression of ‘filial nationalism’. That is, because of their belief in the timelessness of the Chinese state, Chinese youth were naturally shocked and disappointed by China’s apparently inferior position within the community of nations. They felt they had to love the nation as they loved their parents – despite of, and perhaps because of, these imperfections (Fong 2004). The primordial approach to understanding nationalism in China also forms the foundation of what other scholars see as a change that has taken place in recent years in which nationalism is now more positive, based on national pride (Zheng 2005).

Alongside the primordialist approach, the other major line of Western analyses of Chinese nationalism “focuses instead on the relationship of Chinese nationalism to the state and to the various élites that stoke and direct this nationalism” (Nyiri et al. 2010, 26-27). Nyiri et al. argue that both these approaches “focus on nationalism as a belief system, whether genuinely held or imposed and manipulated”, but neither has “paid sufficient attention to the framing of nationalism within popular culture”. As
such, both are ultimately insufficient to explain the spread of nationalism among a cohort of young people known in China as the ‘post-1980 generation’ (80-hou: 八零后) (Nyiri et al. 2010, 26).

Regardless of which approach to understanding Chinese nationalism Chinese and non-Chinese scholars take, most agree that it remains a powerful force in China and is still used by the state as a means to legitimise Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule, particularly after the 1989 events in Tiananmen Square (Zhao 2004). In a later work, Zhao Suisheng also argues that the state can and does exploit grass-roots nationalist sentiment, and when it does so, it is generally in a pragmatic way, tempered by diplomatic prudence (Zhao 2005). In a similar vein, Chen Zhimin posits that nationalism is a key driving force shaping Chinese foreign policy over the past century, and this is set to continue in a more positive form as China increasingly integrates itself into the globalised world (Chen 2006). However, the question arises as to whether the state will be able to continue to rein in nationalist sentiment or whether it will begin to “accelerate out of control” (Zhao 2005).

Insofar as the CFAU students in my study were concerned, the term ‘nationalism’ had rather negative connotations of being inwardly-focused, angry, and irrational. It was conceived of as quite different from patriotism, which was considered to be more positive and outward-looking (more on this in Chapter Four). Despite this semantic distinction, my students shared a deep ‘logic of national thinking’ in which they believed that self-identifying as part of a national group in a day-to-day way was a perfectly sensible ontological position, and not just reserved for those loud and obvious individuals wearing their country’s flag around their shoulders generally characterised as ‘nationalists’ (Skey 2011, 5).

This tendency is not unique to China. As work by Michael Skey suggests, the unthinking acceptance of ideas such as that the world is divided into clearly identifiable and mutually exclusive nation-states; that each person belongs to one of

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13 Neil Diamant however questions the very existence of the growth in Chinese nationalism that tends to be taken for granted by Western analysts. He focuses on the “deep horizontal comradeship” element of Anderson’s definition of nationalism, and argues that China has not seen a great increase in the phenomenon in recent years (2009).
those nation-states; and that an individual’s nationality has some influence on how they think and behave, is extremely commonplace (2011, 5). However, some analysts describe attachment to the state in China as akin to ‘statism’ (guojia zhuyi: 国家主义) – that is, the worship of the state, as distinct from nationalism (minzu zhuyi: 民族主义). For example, Xu Jilin argues that since the turn of this century, there has been a strong trend of ‘statism’ in China’s intellectual world, privileging the state as central; and positing that enhancing state prosperity and capacity is the core objective of modernity (2011). The state is seen to represent the fundamental interests of the people and hold the highest sovereignty – it is supreme, indivisible and non-transferable (Kelly 2011).

The idea of the nation-state as an object of religious-style devotion has also been explored by Michael Herzfeld, who discusses the phenomenon of ‘nation-statism’, noting that “nationalism certainly exhibits an enormous capacity to worship itself in the form of a code: language, manners, dress, art, morals” (1992, 34). Herzfeld applies Durkheim's famous argument about religion as society worshipping itself (1915) to the nation, and suggests that this thesis may indeed work even better for nationalism than it does for religion. Herzfeld goes on to argue that a Durkheimian view of nation-statism allows the rationality of “bureaucratic identity management” to be treated “as a refraction of the sacralised national order” (1992, 35). In this way, once national identity is created, it becomes “both a moral fact and a collective representation in the clearest Durkheimian sense” (ibid., 35).

**How and Why a National Logic?**

In addition to allowing a move away from discussions about whether the state does or does not exist outside of society, the anthropology of the state also offers insights into why it is that the concept of the nation-state, rather than any other, so powerfully captivates political and moral imaginations (Skey 2011; Spencer 2007) – as it has done among the CFAU students at the centre of my research. Why has being ‘Chinese’ above all else become ‘common sense’? This thesis will examine why national logic remained in the realm of the undisputed for my students at CFAU, despite opportunities for them to imagine the world and their role in it in other ways. I
ask how we can theorise the continuity and ongoing production of national identity among the students at CFAU and how we can understand why a national form of identification, one allegiance among many that the students can draw on, is invoked in certain circumstances, and for what purposes.

In order to ask why my students aligned themselves with official discourses of being Chinese requires some understanding of why the logic of the national in general holds such appeal. One of the ways in which the anthropology of the state can serve as a useful analytical tool is by providing a means to understand this kind of attachment through a focus on the ways in which the nation and the state-as-idea are both literally and discursively flagged on a daily basis (Billig 1995, 93). Michael Billig proposes the notion of ‘banal nationalism’ as a means to understand how certain dimensions of national discourse are employed to create a very real social imaginary. In Billig’s conceptualisation, ‘nationalism’ is brought back from the extremes and peripheries, and away from special occasions, to be understood as something in which we all participate. For example, the media, corporate interests and civil society organisations routinely address audiences in a national way, like dividing the news into ‘national’ and ‘world’, or campaigns to ‘buy Australian made’ (e.g. Higgins 2004; Madianou 2005; and Yumul and Özkirimli 2000).

Skey argues that the overarching answer to the question of ‘why nationalism’ is actually quite simple: because it matters, and it does so in two key ways (2011, 35). Firstly, practical benefits arise from being classified as a national citizen in an established, democratic nation-state which would entitle the individual to certain political and welfare rights, as well as familiarity with a whole range of social and institutional arrangements that orient the individual and allow him or her to engage in the activities of daily life with relative ease. These benefits would include the education system, health system, media, ways of doing business, and legal frameworks. By identifying and being identified with a particular nationality, an individual can far more easily undertake the countless activities that constitute everyday life with relative ease (Skey 2011, 6).

In addition to the material benefits provided by identifying with the national, an individual also gains psychological benefits, as research over the past two decades
suggests (see for example Carey 1989; Giddens 1990; Kertzer 1988; and Misztal 1996). Everyday language, habits and social organisation, often framed in national terms, can underpin an ongoing and relatively settled sense of place and identity (Skey 2011, 6). Understandings of how established discursive frameworks of the national provide individuals with a sense of security, and therefore further explain the ongoing significance of national identification, can usefully draw on the work of Anthony Giddens’ concept of ‘ontological security’ (1990, 92). This concept “refers to the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action” (ibid., 92). That is to say, the repetition of everyday practices – in this case, particularly those pertaining to and reliant on the idea of the nation as an organising principle – generate a sense of familiarity and comfort. Individuals are able to feel that they can rely on things that they understand today being similarly comprehensible tomorrow, and thereby being negotiable in the same familiar ways. As Giddens notes, the “predictable routines and encounters” of “ordinary day-to-day social life” underpin a sense of ontological security (ibid., 64). Skey posits five key elements as underpinning a sense of ontological security arising from identifying with the national, namely, spatiality; temporality; culture; power/politics; and ourselves/outsiders (2011, 11, 24).

The first element, the notion of space, is important to building a sense of group identity both materially and psychologically. The concept of territory in particular has long been acknowledged as a means of providing both a physical base for sustaining social life and managing the physical environment through the repetition of particular material features, as well as a secure and familiar psychological space (Hopkins and Dixon 2006). While territorial boundaries are, of course, historical constructs, the implications and consequences of their construction are very real indeed, particularly in the realm of power and politics by virtue of their ability to define zones of inclusion and exclusion. As I observed in a great number of cases, my students reacted with great emotion and passion to perceived threats to or questions about China’s ‘territorial integrity’; the concepts of space and territoriality are critical to understanding the nationalistic tenor of their perceptions and worldviews.

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14 Skey refers to the fifth element as self/other, but as my Chinese students so often used the terminology of “ourselves” and “outsiders” I will follow their usage.
Daily practices around time also enhance a sense of psychological security. As Eviatar Zerubavel observes, “the temporal structure of our environment … adds a strong touch of predictability to the world around us, thus enhancing our cognitive well-being” (1981, 12). Psychological research suggests that a “perceived collective continuity” (Sani et al. 2007) is highly associated with a sense of social well-being, pride, and, often, a feeling of ‘symbolic immortality’ – that is, a feeling of transcendence in relation to death through belonging to a group with a long and continuous history (Anderson 1991, 10-12; Sani et al. 2009).

The third element of national discourse Skey identifies as creating a sense of ontological security is culture and cultural systems, through the way in which they generate a sense of meaningful order and stability (2011, 25). As David Kertzer argues,

The world out there confronts each individual with an infinite number of stimuli, yet no one can deal with all of them. [A degree] of order is … provided by the symbol system we learn as members of our culture … Such … systems provide us with a shield against terror. (1988, 4)

Shared cultural systems underpin a perception that the nation to which an individual understands her- or himself as belonging is a concrete and unified entity, what social psychologists such as Condor term ‘entitativity’ (Condor 2006). This term refers to the way in which a range of psychological benefits derives from perceiving one’s group as a coherent entity. These include self-esteem (Luhtanen and Crocker 1992), reduction in uncertainty (Mullin and Hogg 1999), increased confidence in the group’s ability to successfully face new challenges (Sacchi et al. 2008) and a willingness to stigmatise those outside of the group (Yzerbyt 2004).

The way in which our selves and outsiders are conceptualised is another dimension of the ontological security that national discourse provides. These ‘common sense’ understandings of who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ must be recognised as being constructed understandings which not only marginalise some, but also serve the interests of others, whose perceptions of these concepts have so far been under-researched. In terms of the nation-state, closer study of those in power and their
interests in constructing certain understandings of self and outsider allows a clearer view of how elite groups go about justifying their dominant status in an environment in which increasing pressures challenge their legitimacy (Kaufmann 2004). These conceptualisations of inclusion and exclusion lead into the critical role which institutions of power play in organising, managing and promoting the acceptance of national frameworks. Institutions are critical for establishing limits, setting normative frameworks, and generating hierarchies of knowledge and status that create and exclude alternatives.

In examining how and why CFAU students adhered so strongly to a national logic to understand the world, it is also useful to reflect on the issue of individual agency. The CFAU students in my study were neither disempowered subjects of control and manipulation nor rationally calculating agents freely selecting a particular position based on an objective analysis of the potential costs and benefits to ontological security and material wellbeing. The notion that particular frameworks of understanding are “enacted with regularity” points to the role for “individuals in perpetuating or challenging already existing discourses, and shaping those of the future” (MacDonald 2003, 23). The role for individual agency reflects the important point that, borrowing from Kipnis, the ‘governing complex’ does not represent a social whole in any functional sense of the term. Instead it can be conceived of as “a plethora of potentially interacting and overlapping social practices and imaginaries” which demonstrates considerable congruencies (2011, 90-91). The CFAU functioned as a governing complex in which students’ daily lives were saturated with mutually reinforcing practices and ideas. At the same time, spaces existed in which students could negotiate their epistemological and ontological positions.

However, for the most part, my students closely aligned themselves with official, state-sanctioned narratives. There are a number of possibilities for explaining this observation, including that they were simply lying to me as the outsider, foreign teacher. However I argue that a critical element of my students’ training as diplomats at CFAU was the internalisation of the belief that their own best interests were aligned with promoting the best interests of the Chinese state. For my students, believing was both a personal and professional imperative. They had strong incentives to conform with official versions of truth, and, as a result of the conflation
of their interests with the state’s, were participating in producing their own conformity. For my students, not believing would not provide any benefits.

What students said in class, to me, their foreign teacher and in front of their classmates, was not simply a matter of professing whatever opinions they thought would make their peers respect them, or help them get good grades. Following Alexei Yurchak’s position that articulated views are more than a case of ‘private truths and public lies’ (2006), I argue that my students adopted an approach of ‘self-directed self-control’ as the most effective means for achieving success within the system in which they operated. While students occasionally debated issues situated within the realm of opinion, they never disputed the doxa that working within the system was the most effective means for enhancing the country and themselves. Students chose to align themselves with the prevailing discourses of the state for their own good.

Skey notes that while the notion of flexibility and choice in regard to social categories is important, theories that emphasise this aspect, and the ability of individuals to shift between different identities according to context and need, deserve scrutiny (2011, 21). In their privileging of “the psyche of the categorising individual”, these theories tend to underplay how much “established social relations and structures constrain processes of imagination and identification” (Billig 1995, 68). Billig observes that in this way, “identity is understood as an inner response to a motivational need”, a calculated and rational response to external factors, rather than as an ongoing and complicated process of interaction and negotiation (ibid., 68).

When considering how CFAU students continuously produced social formations, two issues need to be taken into consideration: the availability of certain resources, and the degree of reflection they undertook as they carried out their lives (Skey 2011, 14). Regarding the first aspect, the extent to which an individual student could, in fact, produce a ‘social life’ relied on a set of resources that are not only socially constituted for the most part, but also often defined and limited by existing social relations. “Our languages, cultures, traditions, social roles, and so on are given to us: we are natives in this land, not creators of it” (Rothenbuhler 1998, 58). As Billig notes, the reproduction and representation of the nation requires a vast and complex set of beliefs, habits, assumptions and practices (1995, 6). In this reproduction, space and
gaps for disruption and change can be found, but the comfortable normality that national logic enjoys in our worldview – indeed as our worldview – in combination with the array of minutiae in our daily lives that recreate the national norm, and the lack of a linguistic conception to express it in all its banality, makes it very difficult to think of an alternative.

This leads to the second point. Following Bourdieu’s idea of ‘the field of doxa’, that is, “that which is taken for granted … [or] beyond question” (Bourdieu 1977, 166), it is important to note the extent to which many aspects of my students’ social lives were lived according to habit, routine, or based on precedent, with little or no reflection or critique. While a “universe of discourse (or argument)” exists in which people explicitly question and form opinions, outside of that is the “universe of the undisputed (undisputed)” (Bourdieu 1977, 168-169). Because the field of doxa consists of “that which is beyond question and which each agent tacitly accords by the mere fact of acting in accord with social convention” (ibid., 169), alternative ways of understanding or behaving in the world are not so much actively considered and adopted or rejected, but simply carried out. Bourdieu’s doxa resonates with Foucault’s ‘regimes of truth’, in which societies create historically specific discourses of ideas, writings, theoretical foundations and language according to their beliefs, values and mores, which come to function as if true (Foucault 1980, 133). These “taken-for-granted mental assumptions or modes of procedure that actors normally apply without being aware that they are applying them” (Sewell 1992, 22) should not be underestimated, as they function as a particularly powerful means of orientating people in the world (Skey 2011, 14). The natural, inarticulable, ‘unwaved flag’ of ‘banal nationalism’ Billig (1995) speaks of is part of the undisputed universe of doxa. Until, that is, some form of crisis necessitates the questioning of what had been taken for granted, and awakens political consciousness (Bourdieu 1977 169-170). This naturalisation of what is and can be known and disputed has implications for the maintenance of existing power relations. As Bourdieu notes, the ‘dominant classes’ have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa by maintaining the boundary between the universe of opinion and the universe of the undisputed so that the arbitrariness of that which is taken for granted is not exposed (1977, 169). Arising from doxa comes the ‘practical sense’ of what behaviour is appropriate in certain circumstances, or habitus, as was discussed in the Introduction.
In this way, as these two points suggest, by using analyses of the significance of national forms of identification, we can move beyond the idea of CFAU students as self-evaluating individuals rationally selecting one particular framework for self identity over another. We can also avoid the assumptions of power and resistance that have underpinned much of anthropology in recent decades (see for example Ortner, 1995).

**Normalisation Through Sedimentation**

One way of understanding the process by which the national logic comes to be seen as objective or natural rather than just one possible way of making sense of the world is through the concept of sedimentation.\(^\text{15}\) Originally introduced by Husserl, the notion has been more recently utilised in efforts to conceptualise ongoing struggles to fix meaning (see for example Laclau 1990b, and Laclau and Mouffe 1985). The term does not imply that a particular meaning has become fixed or beyond contestation, nor that it cannot be overturned. Rather, the concept draws attention to the way in which certain meanings come to be partially fixed to the extent that “the system of possible alternatives tends to vanish and the traces of the original contingency to fade” (Laclau 1990a, 34). Seeing how some forms of knowledge and practice become ‘sedimented’ rather than others requires an understanding of both micro and macro processes and structures, so as to acknowledge both how particular frameworks are rendered normal through daily routines as well as the impact of wider structural changes and their potential to undermine and challenge as well as reiterate and reinforce established social orders (Skey 2011, 9).

The micro-level realm of daily life is where my students experienced and made sense of the world and the other people they encountered (Berger and Luckman 1991, 33; Tomlinson 1999, 9). In regard to the repetition of rhythms and routines through which their lives became structured and manageable (Young 1997), Skey builds on Umut Özkirimli’s work (2005, 175-90), to posit that several key elements have been identified as particularly relevant in the process of producing a relatively consistent

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\(^\text{15}\) While anthropology has been particularly influenced by insights from Bourdieu and Foucault, IR theory and political science have utilised other formulations such as those discussed here from Skey and Özkirimli. Ultimately these authors offer similar insights using different terms.
and therefore taken-for-granted realm (2011, 11). Firstly, the shared knowledge and assumptions expressed through language and social practice provide individuals with “the reference schema necessary for [the]…organisation of the surrounding world (Schutz and Luckmann 1973). At the root of daily interactions is a particular linguistic framework and a sophisticated set of conventions and understandings that guide their use and interpretation (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 33; Tomlinson 1999, 51). Following this idea, Garfinkel has analysed the ways in which assumptions of what is important to express and what can be left unsaid creates a “real society for members” (2004, 53). Participation in rituals and practices also works to create social meaning and cohesion (Narvaez 2006, 57). At CFAU, these shared communication resources and interactional-level social practices and rituals served to “unite participants in a way that promotes order and predictability” (Gergen 2001, 18), which in turn created a consistent sense of reality.

Secondly, students’ social practices were located within particular spatial limits, the features of which came to form a familiar backdrop against which they could orient themselves in relation to other people, and to the norms and values of that particular space and time (Skey 2011, 16). Similarly, the temporal settings and regularities within which students lived served to create a sense of shared experience and community. Not unlike Bourdieu’s or de Certeau’s formulations on practice, Zerubavel argues that “sequential structures, fixed durations, standard temporal locations and universal forms of recurrence” are the key elements which “contribute to establishing and maintaining the normal, temporal world” (1981, xii-xiii). His work on “temporal regularity”, which he understands as being “the structuring of social life by forcing activities in fairly rigid social patterns,” (ibid., xii-xiii) is a useful tool for understanding how certain forms of knowledge and everyday practice are normalised. Both temporal and spatial aspects of my students’ everyday life at the CFAU were highly controlled and regulated, creating and reiterating a strong sense of shared identity and common purpose, as I explore in more detail in Chapter Three.

The fourth element Skey identifies as being salient in the process of producing a relatively consistent realm of reality is institutional settings. Henri Lefebvre drew early attention to the wider processes through which many aspects of daily life are regulated and managed by powerful institutions (1991). Following on from Foucault’s
conceptualisation of discipline-as-power, institutions such as hospitals, schools, the military, factories and prisons can all be seen as part of a vast network of disciplining institutions. Not that the preceding factors are outside of power processes, but the institutional aspect in particular brings to the fore that doxa, or the ‘common sense’ forms of knowledge described by Schutz and Luckmann (1973), does not simply happen to exist, but is the result of ongoing social, political and economic processes over time – what Achille Mbembe terms “the banality of power” (2006, 381). Bourdieu notes that the drawing of the line between the field of opinion and the field of that which is beyond question, doxa, is a fundamental objective at stake in the “struggle for the imposition of the dominant systems of classification” (1977, 169). As such, it is in the interests of the dominant classes to resist the exposure of “the arbitrariness of the taken for granted” and in “defending the integrity of doxa” (ibid., 169). Considerable research has suggested the importance of the role of institutions in establishing limits, setting normative frameworks, and generating hierarchies of knowledge and status, including Philomena Essed (1991), Edward Said (1994), and Michael Savage et al. (2005). At the CFAU, as a certain set of institutions, or dimensions of national discourse, across a range of domains – social, economic and political – were enacted with regularity (Alba 2005, 26), alternatives became excluded, or, indeed ‘unthinkable’, following Bourdieu’s notion of doxa. Being enacted with regularity as part of the process of sedimentation is important in the way it indicates that it was not just external structures that shaped or perpetuated students’ national worldview, but that there was a critical role for “individuals in perpetuating or challenging already existing discourses, and in shaping those of the future” (MacDonald 2003, 23).

Schools and universities like the CFAU inculcate particular forms of knowledge about what it means to not only be educated, but also civilised, ‘proper’ members of (Chinese) society. In the process, approved and taboo ways of thinking and practices are produced, and can eventually, when experienced along with temporal, spatial and linguistic ideas and practices, come to be seen as quite natural, rather than a specific articulation of a unique set of circumstances. Rather than a simple process of ‘becoming acclimatised’ to some a priori reality, institutions play a key role in normalising and perpetuating many aspects of everyday life (Skey 2011, 17). As Ann Swidler writes, “individuals … come to act in culturally informed ways, not because
their [values] … are shared, but because they must negotiate the same institutional hurdles” (1995, 36).

These ways in which both micro-level practices and understandings of everyday life as well as macro-level structures and institutions both play critical and mutually reinforcing roles in normalising – sedimenting – particular forms of knowledge and practice applies also for the national logic. While other categorisations of identity, such as gender, class, age, hometown or socio-economic status, were still relevant, in many cases and in certain contexts, my students tended to define themselves in national terms. There has been considerable research into how different social groups routinely define themselves and others in this way. This ranges from what might be presumed could elicit a response in national terms, such as in answering questions about identity and belonging (see Condor 2000; Phillips and Smith 2000; and Wodak et al. 1999) to more quotidian activities one might not intuitively associate with the nation, for example, dancing (Askew 2002), driving (Edensor 2004), queuing (Fox 2004), and even doing the washing up (Linde-Laursen 1993).

Education for sedimentation

China has a long history of using education as a technique of governing, in the Foucauldian sense (Bakken, 2000), which continues into the present day in the training of young people to become proper citizens of the Chinese state, through both the content of the curriculum and the organisation of the practices of students’ everyday lives (Hansen 2012). Børge Bakken describes Chinese education as a process of governing in which the main purpose appears to be to produce citizens who will unthinkingly follow the models of thought and behaviour put forward by the government (2000). The implication of the rote-learning approach in which imitation is the key to learning is that imitation becomes the conceptual heart of social order (ibid., 127) and consequently, education is as much about ruling as about teaching (ibid., 96).

As Kipnis points out, Foucault’s concept of governing, the ‘conduct of conduct’, and particularly its focus on how the governing is carried out rather than on who is doing the governing, is applicable to an anthropological study of education in several ways.
Firstly, while acknowledging that national governments are significant actors, a Foucauldian approach rejects a top-down vision of power relations in which a small group of elites enacts its will on the rest of society. Governing is rather carried out by a range of representatives of the state, including “teacher and parents, by children vis-à-vis one another, and by everyone vis-à-vis him or herself” (Kipnis 2011, 5). This pattern was certainly the case at the CFAU, as this thesis will discuss. Secondly, this emphasis on the how of governing allows reflection on specific disciplinary techniques, along with manipulations of the wider social environment. Thirdly, the production of a governable subject, what some anthropological theorists term ‘subjectification’ (Foucault 1983, Rabinow 1984), and the types of subjects educational techniques are designed to create are usually quite explicitly articulated. For example, officials concerned with political education have demanded that ‘ideological quality’ (sixiang suzhi: 思想素质) should be a key focus of the schooling system. This category includes items as diverse as loyalty to the CCP, love of country, respect for the law, the ability to resist bourgeois liberalisation, a Marxist worldview, and an atheistic worldview, among others (Kipnis 2011, 73). Lastly, while political ideology is integral to education, educational policy is at the mercy of a diverse range of political goals. Rarely does the state present a clear and united front, leading to gaps from which alternative subjectivities can emerge.16

Despite all of the shocking political ruptures China has endured over the twentieth century, there are notable continuities in the development of education as a means of governing and building the nation. The steady and deliberate spread of basic primary school education to every corner of China has allowed the long-held tradition of rote-learning and memorisation of what the teacher presents as useful knowledge (the word ‘to study’, xue: 学, means to imitate a model in a process of internalisation) to continue as the main pedagogical method as it has done for centuries (ibid., 22-23, 91). The Qing dynasty connection between education and official positions also remains strong. From the beginning of CCP rule until the early 1990s, tertiary graduates were assigned urban government jobs, under the system of compulsory job

16 Kipnis also argues that theorists of governmentality who consider applying Foucauldian concepts to non-Western contexts as inappropriate base their concerns on incorrect assumptions. Although he acknowledges differences between Western and Chinese traditions of writings on governing and statecraft, comparisons are not impossible, and Foucauldian analytical tools are indeed highly appropriate and illuminating (2011 6-7).
assignments. Even when this system ended, a tertiary qualification was still essential for a career in the highly competitive urban public sector. In the case of the CFAU, these two factors are explicitly linked, the CFAU being the key source of graduates for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the Party’s mode of governance has not remained unchanged over its recent history. As Pieke, among others, has pointed out, both the practice and ethos of administration, as a means of governance, has been radically overhauled and modernised in the past two decades, particularly after the Tiananmen movement of 1989 (Pieke 2009a, 25). However these reforms should not be mistaken for a ‘retreat of the state’, as Lisa Hoffman (2010, 11-13) explains. Pieke argues that reforms in public management, the rule of law, strengthening of the non-state public sector, and social security and fairness by no means indicate a weakening of the Party’s commitment to governance (2012, 2009a). Rather, “they have been firmly co-opted into a statist corporatist strategy to strengthen and professionalise the rule of the Party in line with the requirements of a rapidly developing capitalist economy and society” (Pieke 2012, 160).

Governance via almost universal education based on a centrally-approved curriculum across China means that rigorous control of CFAU students’ daily lives through which national culture becomes sedimented begins at a very young age, and continues intensively for years. Children all over the country have their daily habits ‘standardised’ (guifanhua: 规范化) and learn a homogenised way to solve problems, and understand literature, art, social science, science and morality. Teachers must not only teach the same lessons from the same curriculum in pursuit of high scores on exams, but they are also pressured to use exactly the same ‘correct’ methods for teaching this pre-set package of knowledge (Kipnis 2011, 110). Students’ value not just as students but also as good and moral people is assessed through nationally standardised exams, further increasing the uniformity in what is understood as true and good across the country. As Kipnis notes,

The civilising mission in Chinese schools today is a matter of the installation of a national culture that includes speaking standardised Mandarin, writing proper Chinese characters, and practicing good study habits, proper hygiene, proper posture at the desk, and proper forms of politeness in student-teacher and student-student interaction”. (ibid., 28)
The Chinese government purposefully and increasingly utilises the school curriculum as a tool to build a national citizen who believes in unity, patriotism and the Chinese nation-state above all else (ibid., 93).

While national identity formation is already universal at a certain level in China, the training of those who are expected to play a role in the ruling elite is naturally even more intensive. As Pieke observes, the training of Party cadres at specially designated cadre schools is a “rapidly moving and actively debated policy area that puts some of the fundamental issues and choices that confront the Party in especially sharp relief”. Therefore, a study of cadre training “yields a direct insight into how the CCP views and acts upon itself” (2009a, 27). And, not unlike conditions at the CFAU, the goal of producing the proper cadre at Party schools is achieved not only by the content of what is taught, but also “by engineering a transformative experience of seclusion, study, reflection, and residence at the school”, in many ways, akin to “undergoing a rite of passage” (ibid., 36).

This governance-focused pedagogical approach does not automatically lead to the production of unquestioning pro-Party subjects. A number of studies show that secondary and tertiary students do not simply accept the view that they should love the Party in all its glory and beneficence (Nie 2008; Rosen 1989, 1994). Nevertheless, as Kipnis notes and as my own research at CFAU attests, despite the spaces for difference that exist, the content and style of teaching across China does have nation-producing effects (2011, 111). What my students knew of history, science, technology, politics, and even what constitutes a good and satisfying life tended to be quite uniform. While narratives of Party members as model patriots might be questioned, the larger discourse of patriotism was certainly embraced as an ideal.

**The Anthropology of the State: What can it add to dominant debates about China in international relations?**

Recent academic work both within anthropology and across the social sciences has developed understandings of how the nation is experienced, embodied and imagined
through daily activities, but so far a coherent analytical framework for making sense of these processes remains elusive. There have been a growing number of studies acknowledging national belonging and identity throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, much of this literature has tended to focus on those who are marginalised or whose relationship with the dominant paradigm of national identification is tense and troubled. This focus on the marginalised extends to analyses of China. As Pieke observes, “anthropologists have long been inclined to view China from the perspective of a state-society dichotomy” (2004, 517). This results in an assumption that the state, being outside and above society, exists as a separate entity against which ‘the Chinese people’ must attempt to assert their rights and resist oppression. The focus on the negative aspects of national belonging derives from a vision of the moral order most clearly set out in the new theories of Natural Law as they emerged in the seventeenth century and the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, in which the state is understood as the object of humanity’s distrust and sometime resistance (Taylor, 2004, 3). However, this understanding of state as power set against its people does not account for the complex and multi-directional interactions and negotiations between people and power in China and elsewhere.

Political anthropology is a useful framework for complicating the tendency to dichotomise state and society, with its central concerns of the changes and continuities in processes of power. It questions rather than accepts what ‘a state’ is, how or to what extent the state is external to ‘the people’, and when and where ideas of nations, states, and individuals as political subjects and citizens are utilised, by whom, and for what ends. As Spencer notes, the power/subject dichotomy is not only unconvincing in the way it presumes that we all know what ‘the state’ ‘is’, but also vastly oversimplifies the complicated way in which people may find their own interests best met by having a stake in the state (2007, 102). While not focusing on China, Emma Tarlo’s work in a slum colony in Delhi on memories of the 1970 Emergency also moves away from the familiar script of biopower and resistance, and examines instead the collisions among official plans, local politics, and the tendency of the people concerned to act in thoroughly unpredictable ways in response to what had been planned for them (Tarlo 2000, 2001, 2003). An excellent example of an analysis of the multi-directional interactions between people and power in a China-
specific context is Evasdottir’s ethnography of the world of Chinese archaeology studies, *Obedient Autonomy* (2004). Utilising a similar argument, Hamilton and Zheng argue that the state in China is not ‘an organisation’ that can be understood as existing outside of and separate to the individual. Control is not a top-down system that manipulates each individual’s actions. Rather, “the means of control is located in the institutionalised networks of relationships” (1992, 29). My students at CFAU were both within the state and outside of it. At the same time as they were learning a state-approved curriculum within a state institution, the ways in which they enacted and performed their everyday lives perpetuated and extended the state – to some extent, the students themselves are the state.

We can see how it is that a particular discourse, in this case that of the nation, comes to be seen as a normal and natural understanding of identity, through a process of sedimentation of both macro and micro-level factors, the interplay of which renders certain (national) forms of knowledge and practice so deeply embedded into people’s everyday lives that they no longer question it. However, while the notion of sedimentation provides insights into how certain meanings become naturalised, it does not sufficiently account for how any given discourse becomes established over any other. In addition to offering an account of how any set of ideas can become normalised, the anthropology of the state provides a useful framework for understanding how the logic of the national in particular held a place so close to my CFAU students’ hearts. The way in which different models of the state were invoked, how they were used, and under what circumstances the students brought forth an image of the state as an identity marker, or the focus of particular desires, can perhaps be better understood through an “ethnographic mapping of the rhetorics” of state-making, during which language is pressed into the service of the state-as-unitary-presence (Spencer 2007, 102, drawing on Battaglia’s research on the self [1995]). These rhetorical devices can be used across a number of dimensions to create and perpetuate a national logic. Özkirimli argues that where and when the dimensions of national discourse form part of a mutually reinforcing and stable framework, the likelihood that the nation will be viewed as if it was an actually existing entity greatly increases (2005, 177-190).
Conclusion: We Chinese Students... a social imaginary built on the logic of the national

The school is a convenient and well-tested institution that provides authorities (educational, political and religious) with a means to create socially appropriate units out of people. Foucault’s understanding of schools as arenas for discipline in the training of human beings underpins my research focus on CFAU as a site at which young Chinese individuals are socialised into a particular nationalist social imaginary. The CFAU achieved this subjectification not only through the academic curriculum provided, but also by the very way in which it taught students how to live. All universities teach the academic knowledge and the organisational and life skills thought to be required to make them more professional and competitive in the job market (e.g. Hoffman 2010). However universities like CFAU do not only prepare Chinese young people for the job market. By virtue of reflecting and embodying the institutional norms and constructs of the state, preparing students for an employment market also serves the function of simultaneously preparing students for successful life as a well-functioning citizen of the Chinese state. In Chinese universities, and the CFAU in particular, students are selected on the basis of their already-demonstrated ability to abide by social rules – otherwise they would not have been able to pass the series of stressful examinations that allow them to enrol. CFAU students are then further immersed in the kinds of behaviours and epistemologies that will allow them to responsibly and appropriately work for the Chinese foreign affairs system domestically, and represent China internationally. The CFAU does so not only through the explicit training it provides but also in the way it structures students’ use of time and space.

When circumstances in Europe after the medieval religious wars meant that the old “warrior caste” needed to be replaced with “a new service nobility” with a focus on being “pleasing and persuasive”, training was required for the elites to fulfil their new role (Taylor 2004, 34). A new globalised Chinese citizen was similarly required when Deng began the ‘reform and opening up’ (gaige kaifang: 改革开放) period in the late 1970s. This became even more of a necessity after the instigation of the ‘going out strategy’ (zouchuqu zhanlue: 走出去战略) in the mid-1990s. In China’s new position in
the international spotlight, the country is regularly called on to play more of a role as a ‘responsible stakeholder’. To fulfil these international demands, as well as respond to domestic political imperatives, the Chinese state requires government officials who are not only intellectually sophisticated but also absolutely loyal to the Chinese nation-state. In this case, while not wishing to overemphasise the imperatives of structural demands, it would seem that changing material conditions both internationally and domestically have given rise to the necessity to create a group of officials with a firmly nationalist social imaginary: a “pacified elite” (ibid., 2004, 39).

As part of the ‘patriotic education campaign’ relentlessly promoted after the Tiananmen incident in 1989, my CFAU students also learned the appropriate ways of understanding narratives of time and Chinese history, suitable constructions of self and other, and the correct relationships between individuals and power. In my students’ ‘realm of the undisputed’, placing primary loyalty with the Chinese nation-state was in their own best interests, so they did it without further thought.

An anthropology of the state approach provides the analytical tools to investigate why the logic of the national so effectively captured the imagination of the CFAU students in my study. It posits two key possibilities for explaining this phenomenon: psychological benefits, that is, the ontological security that comes from identifying as part of a national group; and material benefits, such as being able to access healthcare and education. However, rational calculations of self-interest cannot fully explain the attachment my students at CFAU had to the state (as idea). Power, of course, also had a role to play. But the anthropology of the state allows us to move away from the classical, Hobbesian notion of the Leviathan, as well as the more recent conception in which state-society relations are seen as power and resistance, as based on Western Enlightenment ideas of the social contract.

As discussed earlier, studying up through using the analytical tools provided by political anthropology offers insights into questions of power, change and resistance. For the most part, current studies of Chinese foreign policy tend to be based on assumptions from a Realist approach to International Relations, which denies that people or ideas have any role in decision-making. Political anthropology in general, and the anthropology of the state approach more particularly, allows an analysis of what ideas of the nation, the relationships between the state and the people, the
institutions of power, and the conceptions of time and space, were held by my CFAU students, many of whom are likely to one day be have influential roles in Chinese politics. By understanding more about the recurring themes that permeated the discourses of the national that underpinned and were so commonly expressed in the narratives employed by the students in my study, the conventional wisdom surrounding Chinese foreign policy can be examined and reinvigorated.
Chapter Three –

Symbolic Immortality: One Long History of the Chinese Nation

China has a very long history, long enough for our people to form some really deep popular opinions. The opinions become habits, buried deep into our heart, our soul.

- Chad, International Economics Major

Rather than simply accepting the conventionally held wisdom that we can better understand China’s present behaviour in the international system by examining China’s history, this chapter argues that history in China is actively used as a tool for producing loyalty to the Chinese national vision, and that my students at CFAU understand history in this manner. As Anderson contends, although nation-states themselves are widely conceded to be new, the “nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future” (2006 [1983], 11-12). While teaching at CFAU, I noted that my students shared a common vision of the relationship between the past, present and future, in which there were four particularly resonant aspects that combined to produce a narrative in which the Chinese nation arose from an immemorial past and would move smoothly into a limitless future.

First, my students conceived of China’s history as a single, linear trajectory, reaching back thousands of years and stretching forward into the future, a continuous and unbroken line of unified Chinese culture and civilisation that was the longest in the world. This perception of historical depth led to the second point: students saw this history as directly underpinning their own, and indeed all Chinese people’s, ideas, morals, beliefs and behaviour. As such, students saw Chinese traditions in general, but Confucianism in particular, as the fundamental elements on which the present social and political order has been built.

Thirdly, students understood this continuing line of history to have been radically disrupted due to incursions by Western imperial powers in the mid-1800s. However, students felt strongly that the thread of Chinese culture had not been ‘broken’ as it had been elsewhere, for example in Africa. In this way, students understood Chinese
history and culture to be ‘continuous’ in a way that others were not. This perception of continuity led to the fourth point: that the past provided the blueprint for how the future would unfold. Following the naturally linear trajectory of time from the past into the future, my students felt confident that China would recover its lost dignity and fulfill its eternal destiny as the peaceful and harmonious great state that it was always meant to be. They believed that the Chinese Communist Party’s victory and establishment of the ‘New China’ in 1949 had set China back on its correct path, and China was now being restored to its former glory, rightful position, and status in the world. In the era of peace and stability that the CCP has ushered in domestically and which it is working hard to achieve regionally and globally, students felt that China could now re-claim its rightful role as a central and important global actor (for more on these discourses see Callahan 2012; Duara 1995; Fong 2004; Gries 2004; Zhao 2004, and Wang 2012).

**History and the Nation: using the past to serve the present, using the present to shape the past**

Overall, my students at CFAU embodied a blend of the traditional and the contemporary. My students came from a diverse set of backgrounds and had a wide range of life goals. However, all of them owned a mobile phone, and most also had a top-of-the-line laptop computer – female students would decorate these with sparkly stickers and dangly ornaments. At the same time that they adopted these trappings of modern youth, the majority of my students tended to understand themselves and their worldviews in terms of traditional Chinese values, particularly Confucianism. Many of the students mentioned the critical importance of traditional Chinese notions such as ‘face’ or respecting the elderly in contemporary Chinese culture, and in their own lives.¹⁷ Coming into class, students would set out on their desks glass jars with hot water and various dried flowers and leaves, just as the elderly people playing mah-jong in the parks would do. Students did not like to drink cold water as a rule, especially during winter, as according to traditional Chinese understandings, this could make you very ill. Buddy, the lead singer and guitarist in a rock band, was also

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¹⁷ This latter point was usually raised to illustrate a contrast they perceived with Western societies, in which aging parents and grandparents were allegedly put in homes and ignored as the younger generation focused on their own lives.
a firm believer in the power of traditional Chinese medicine and dreamed of helping his mother, an acupuncturist, travel the world treating elite athletes and cancer patients. Even students like Primo, who had previously chosen a different English name and then rejected it for something “more modern”, explained that traditional Confucian values were at the heart of the moral and ethical codes of what it meant to be a contemporary Chinese individual. Just as students explained their own attitudes as the product of traditional Chinese values, so did they also describe China’s behaviour in the international system as based on ancient Chinese ideas. Their perspectives closely reflected China’s own official position, as does the majority of Western literature on the topic.

Much Western literature on the subject argues that “one can better understand China’s external relations, even today, by turning back the pages of history to ancient times” (Kornberg and Faust 2005, 7. See also Dittmer et al. 1993; Fairbank 1968; Guo 2008 Liu 2004; Mancall 1983; and Scott 2007). For example, John K. Fairbank, in his classic work on the Chinese vision of world order, states that “modern China’s difficulty of adjustment to the international order of nation-states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has come partly from the great tradition of the Chinese world order”. Similarly, David Scott argues that “China’s past is very much at play in the present, concerning Chinese attitudes and world view on war and peace” (2007, 8). In addition to the many Western scholars who take this approach, several prominent Chinese scholars also draw causal links between the past and present. For example, in 2011, Peking University professor Li Anshan wrote of how contemporary Chinese foreign policy is fundamentally underpinned by four ancient Confucian notions: benevolence (ren: 仁), forbearance (shu: 礼), trustfulness (xin: 信) and equality (pingdeng: 平等) (2011, 41-60). Li posits that the link between traditional Chinese culture and contemporary policy is critical, as “all foreign policy embodies historical tradition, social values as well as political ideology of the nation-state concerned – it therefore has a direct linkage with the culture of that country” (ibid., 41). Yan from Beijing’s prestigious Tsinghua University is well-known for his work on how ancient Confucian ideals fundamentally underpin how China sees the world, and his argument that they should play even more of an explicit role in China’s overseas engagement (e.g. 2011). Overall, the conventional wisdom among many prominent Chinese and non-Chinese scholars and analysts is that it is only through knowing
China’s history that an observer can truly understand China’s present and predict its future behaviour intelligently.

However, history is always political. As Billig notes, “the reproduction of nation-states depends on a dialectic of collective remembering and forgetting” (1995, 10). Political scientist Patricia M. Thornton explains this politics well:

States fashioned histories not merely to preserve those events that must not be forgotten but also to obliterate that which should not have occurred. The nexus of writing and authority… serves to conceal, to reveal, and above all, to reproduce the power of the state in a broad array of documents compiled and authorised by central authorities down to the contemporary period. (2007, 16)

Certainly, Chinese Communist Party hagiography is a well-established form designed to ensure the past serves the present (see for example Unger 1993, Thornton 2007, Wang 2012). Indeed the phrase “using the past to serve the present,” is widely ascribed to a letter written by Chairman Mao Zedong in 1964 (guweijinyong, yangweizhongyong: 古为今用，洋为中用，‘use the past to serve the present, use the foreign to serve China’).18 China’s efforts to ensure that history is a tool of the present are particularly noteworthy. Thornton argues that:

The extraordinary investment of the Chinese state in the production of texts – historical, literary, and ritual – arguably is unparalleled in human history… The persistent power of the written word as a technique of rule is evident in the commitment of successive Chinese regimes to the careful compilation of canonical texts and standard histories (zheng shi), as well as the suppression of unofficial and alternative accounts. (2007, 15)

Likewise, Wang Zheng argues that while China is not alone in this regard, “Chinese people’s historical consciousness and its complex of myth and trauma are the dominant ideas in Chinese public rhetoric” (2012, xiii). Because of this politicisation

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18 While Mao is now understood as the architect of this concept, the idea of ‘using the past to describe the present’ in China has a long tradition before Mao. For example, the royalist reformers in the late 19th century had a very similar slogan.
of history, the analysis in this chapter follows Elena Barabantseva’s contention that China’s relationship with the world cannot be understood by simply accepting the declarations of Party hagiography and projecting Chinese history onto the present (2009, 130).

As Duara argues, the tendency to (mis-)conceptualise history as “a transparent medium of understanding” has to a large extent precluded an analysis of China’s past as “a discourse enabling historical players to deploy its resources to occlude, repress, appropriate, and, sometimes, negotiate with other modes of depicting the past, and thus, the present and the future” (1995, 5). Duara states that in general, the Chinese state uses history in such a way as to “secure for the contested and contingent nation the false unity of a self-same, national subject evolving through time” (ibid., 4). Since the Republican Revolution of 1911, a linear and teleological narrative of history has been hegemonic in China, in which any conflicting narratives are repressed and excluded. This approach to China’s past has secured the concept of the Chinese nation as a self-contained subject of history, transforming not only perceptions of the past, but also present meanings of the nation and the world (ibid., 5-6). Over the last two decades, the Chinese Party-state has embarked on a concerted effort to strengthen this understanding of Chinese and world history. It has done so by reiterating a seamless account of depoliticised predestination, wherein the present is simply a natural continuation of the past, and in which the future, also, will simply play out in its historical inevitability.

In this account of national history, the Chinese Communist Party is the essential actor for the successful facilitation of the vision of a destiny unfolding. A key element apparent in current CCP history is that in order to build China’s greatness, the Party needs to be at the heart of the political life of the country, representing a unifying ideology (Brown 2011, 2). This theme is regularly deployed in Chinese state-owned media. For example, as The China Daily noted in an article on how China would best achieve human rights: “We must stick to the leadership of the CPC to ensure we go in the correct direction and follow the right road…. Ninety years of history indicate only the CPC can guarantee the true realisation of human rights in the country” (Wang 2011). The trope is also evident in political speeches and official pronouncements. For example, in Jiang Zemin’s speech celebrating the 80th anniversary of the founding
of the Communist Party, Jiang clearly enunciates the CCP’s ‘master narrative’ of the central role of the Party in overcoming humiliation and division to steer China into a successful future:

The comparison of the two periods of 80 years has made the Chinese people and all the patriotic forces of the Chinese nation fully aware that it is precisely the leadership of the Communist Party of China that has enabled the country to materialise the great historical transformation from the most miserable circumstances to a situation that promises a bright future. Without the Communist Party, there would have been no New China. (Jiang, 1991)

This naturalisation of the Communist Party’s role in history brings to mind the work of James Ferguson on the depoliticisation of development in Lesotho (1994). In his analysis, Ferguson describes the apparatus of planned development as an ‘anti-politics machine’. In a similar way, the ‘technicalisation’ of historical narratives in China depoliticises the Communist Party’s place in the Chinese state, and renders things as they are as things as they have always been, and will always continue to be.

Rather than add to the existing research into how China’s past affects its perception of its role in the world and its present international behaviour, this chapter follows Barabantseva’s and Duara’s lines of argument. The analysis of students’ perceptions is based on the understanding that contemporary historical narratives appropriate dispersed histories according to present needs, and thus, as Duara posits, the present shapes the past (1995, 5).

**Historical Beliefs: One true (apolitical) history**

Despite their diverse backgrounds, my students had notably similar convictions that Chinese history as they had learnt it in school and through broader socialisation processes was the only true account of knowable facts and events. Indeed, the very idea that Chinese history could be in any way constructed or produced was simply laughable. When the idea of historical truth as a relative concept arose in one class (the Diplomacy major) in which a quiet student named Simon articulated his belief
that there may be no ultimate truth, to my surprise, the rest of the class began to giggle quietly. When Simon sought to expand on his remark by adding that there are only beliefs that are true for each person, the other students began to laugh out loud. Another student, Corinne, asked, “What’s the point of us all sitting around like this talking about whether there is or isn’t such a thing as a true history”? When a third student, the always highly-fashionably dressed Simone, sought to support her classmate Simon, and replied that it was important to understand what actually constituted ‘truth’ or ‘facts’, the rest of the class collapsed into helpless mirth. While most students could quite readily accept that historical accounts of past events in other countries, particularly Japan, could be constructed to support political projects, they seemed unable to transfer this awareness to their own history. The great majority of students were convinced that there was only one truth, which derived from the correct account of the facts. This conviction fitted neatly with the oft-cited government phrase that genuine knowledge could only be achieved by ‘seeking truth from facts’ (**shi shi qiu shi**). Among my students, virtually no one was prepared to consider the possibility that Chinese history could be a political construct, written in a way that promoted and perpetuated certain understandings of how the world was, is and should be.

Their conviction that there was only one true version of history was clearly illustrated in classes in which we discussed Japan. Students’ version of the past as doxa within the realm of the undisputed was particularly evident when the issue of Sino-Japanese relations arose. In these classes, students almost without exception would raise the story of how successive Japanese governments rewrote history textbooks to promulgate a version of events during the First and Second World Wars and the Sino-Japanese War different from that set forth in the Chinese narrative — and therefore incorrect. My students accepted as fact that the Japanese government supported the wholesale revision of history textbooks so that any mention of the Japanese atrocities

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19 The value of seeking truth from facts is well-established in Chinese ontology, first appearing in the **Hanshu** (Book of Han: 汉书) in AD111. Originally, the term described an attitude toward study and research. It became a key element of Maoism, first quoted by Mao during a speech at the Sixth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1938, in reference to pragmatism. The concept was also later promoted by Deng as a central tenet of Socialism with Chinese characteristics, and is now used to support the current focus on ‘scientific development’ in which the state is able to ‘engineer’ sustainable development through ‘tested’ and ‘proven’ methodologies of governance. The term was formally added to the CCP’s Constitution at the 17th Party Congress in October 2007.
committed against Chinese citizens during these conflicts was omitted. My students passionately decried what they saw as this ongoing crime against ‘the real truth’ which they believed was the foundation of continued tensions in the Sino-Japanese relationship. As Maisie in the International Economics class noted, “another reason that China doesn’t like Japan” is that the “Japanese government and people don’t admit to history, they change their history books, and this hurts Chinese people a lot. They deny it, they say the war is just”. Students felt strongly that until the Japanese government changed the textbooks to reflect ‘the truth’, and apologised sincerely and in writing to the Chinese people, relations could never be improved.

In one class in which the issue of Japanese textbooks arose, Harry, who had been listening quietly as his classmates criticised Japan’s disregard for historical truth, suddenly interjected, “maybe Chinese history books have also been changed by the government”. Harry had hardly managed to finish his sentence before the class erupted into chaos – some students jeered at Harry’s remark, some laughed, and some tried to shout questions at Harry to test his logic. Harry’s classmates were outraged, arguing that such a thing simply could not be possible. Echoing the majority of the students’ views, Rick wrote in his essay that, “all the Chinese hate Japanese, especially when it comes to the Nanking Massacre – in which nearly 340,000 Chinese were killed and 80,000 were raped”. Rick went on to note however, that while the Chinese people could,

Of course force the Communist government to throw a nuclear bomb on Tokyo, but it would be useless. As two neighbouring countries, we both need each other for our long-term development in the future. And my evidence shows that in the past thirty years, instead of treating each other as enemies, the ice is gradually melting and the spring is coming.

Rick concluded his essay on a positive note, saying, “No one will be our enemy forever because harmony is always the eternal state that the whole world needs. One less enemy also means one more friend”. Harry’s radical suggestion that perhaps China changed its textbooks, and Rick’s positive views about a ‘thaw’ with Japan were, however, the exception. Most students unquestioningly concurred with the perspective put forward by a student from the Diplomacy major, who when
discussing why so many Chinese people seemed to hate Japan, said simply that “they cannot blame us for not stopping blaming them”.

None of the students in the classes in which the question of historical authenticity was raised were aware that in 1995, at the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, then Prime Minister of Japan Tomiichi Murayama did indeed make an official verbal and written statement proclaiming his and Japan’s “deep remorse” and “heartfelt apology”. My students’ apparent lack of awareness of these events reflects official Chinese positions. Former Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji asserted in 2000 that he had never seen a written statement of apology from Japan. When I told students about Japan providing a written apology, they seemed sceptical, and one asked me where I had sourced this information. Displaying a similar propensity to maintain existing beliefs even when offered alternative viewpoints, Harry said that although he was aware that “actually the Japanese gave a lot of aid to China, I know I also hate Japanese people”. Students’ views of China’s ‘true history’ reflected officially sanctioned versions of international relations in which China has been and continues to be the victim of other countries’ ruthless pursuit of their own interests. In this way, certain views were reiterated and strengthened: specifically, that Japan had always been untrustworthy in the past, and therefore, would always be so in the future.

Just as with Japan, discussions of Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang among my CFAU students also indicated the emotional depth of the values of the nation as communicated by the Party-state, and how despite students’ own observations and experiences, these values remain central. Incidents and comments like these demonstrated the extent to which, despite being aware of others’ propensity to adjust history, my students could remain certain that Chinese history as they knew it was in fact the one and only true version of events. These examples of students’ inability or unwillingness to apply what they knew of other countries’ use of history as a political tool to their own case indicates the strength and coherence of their social imaginary.
Symbolic Immortality: Official narratives of Chinese history and CFAU students’ views

Stories about the past can be deployed in different ways to create particular kinds of national identity. For example, despite the contemporary presentation of Chinese history as linear and continuous, this has not always been the narrative chosen by the CCP. Unlike in Mao’s time, Chinese politicians of the current era endeavour to construct a long and unbroken history that both legitimises the contemporary situation and precludes any conception of an alternative future. In both cases, the single trajectory means that no other path has been or will be possible. However, throughout much of the twentieth century, Chinese political leaders and intellectuals tended to view ‘traditional Chinese culture’ with hostility, and as fundamentally incompatible with modernity, thereby contributing to the country’s ‘backwardness’ (Pye 1993, 128). The following section will examine the four key themes I identified in students’ understandings of history and explore how they reproduced official Party-state discourse.

The first theme: A continuous and linear history – one true China and one true Chinese people

The first of the themes that emerged from discussions with my students at CFAU was that China as a unified nation-state enjoys a continuous and lengthy history – the longest unbroken history in the world. This belief in a unique continuity was critical to the pride associated with Chinese history. For example, the China National Tourist Office prefaces its operations with the assertion that “China, with a recorded history of 5000 years, was one of the world’s earliest civilisations” (Gordon, 2010). What is emphasised here and was also key to my students’ understanding is that China has the longest continuous civilisation in the world. My students pointed out that while other cultures may have existed from the same time, or even earlier, unfortunately their cultures had been disrupted beyond recognition by foreign powers. The belief that other cultures were not continuous, as China’s was, applies, for example, to cultures on the African continent, including the Egyptians. One of the major implications of this belief in the long history of one true China was the way in which China was
imagined as an eternally constant physical entity. China’s territorial integrity was therefore not simply an issue of geo-strategic calculations but an integral part of what it meant to be Chinese.

The imagined community of China based on certain mappings of territory was a key aspect of the narrative of unified Chineseness that featured regularly in class discussions at the CFAU. Andrea explained in her mid-semester essay that any meeting “with the Dalai Lama is bound to cause dissatisfaction of the Chinese people, affecting … relations” because,

The Dalai Lama is a separatist. He has openly advocated that ‘Tibet is an independent country’. When the Dalai Lama visited Britain, he told the press that ‘Tibet is the world’s biggest occupied country.’ The Communist Party of China and the Chinese government has consistently adhered to the policy of reunification of the motherland, national unity and social stability, in both words and deeds. Premier Wen Jiabao has said that if the Dalai Lama would give up the idea of independence, recognising that Tibet is an inalienable part of Chinese territory, and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory, the door is always open to him. But the Dalai Lama, showing no remorse, continues his pursuit of division. The Chinese government has always advocated social stability, ethnic unity, and the people’s interests above everything. Tibet is part of China and Chinese territory, the Tibetan people enjoy equal rights protected by the Chinese government, no one has the right to split it, nor undermine, the territorial integrity. The Dalai Lama is the destroyer of a harmonious society.

Ken expressed similar views in his essay, arguing that,

In these years, we are sorry to see that the Western countries always criticise the government of China for not giving enough freedom and human rights to people. But when they talk about human rights they always mean the issue of Xinjiang and Tibet. As we know, Xinjiang and Tibet are inalienable parts of China. There are some radical people who want to separate Xinjiang and Tibet
from China. But our government will not let it happen and will punish the betrayers of the nation (italics added).

Anthropomorphising comments like Ken’s and Andrea’s were common among my students. Emotive language in which the state was imbued with rights or feelings that could be betrayed indicated the extent to which unity was a deeply held and emotionally resonant aspect of their sense of national identity.

My students also used the motif of the family to convey the indivisible unity of the Chinese nation, as exemplified in the proverb ‘the state and the family are the same’ (jiaguo tonggou: 家国同构) (see also Fong’s 2004 work on filial nationalism). For example, as one student from the Diplomacy major argued in her essay, “the 56 ethnic groups are always viewed as one family, including the Zang [Tibetan] people. For the Chinese, Dalai Lama’s actions suggest that Zang people may leave the family, which is unacceptable”. As Andrea went on to say in her essay, “With such context, the government’s reactions to Dalai Lama are reasonable”. By conflating family and country to such a degree, emotional and unreflective responses to geopolitical issues are rendered quite natural. In this way, the Chinese government has a vast pool of ready and passionate opinion that it can, for the most part, use to legitimate and perpetuate its particular vision of the Chinese nation.

The tendency to describe the Chinese nation as a family ran very deeply among my students and was particularly noticeable in discussions of Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang, all understood as members of the greater family of China. The issue of Taiwan, for example, was usually discussed in terms of a “return to the motherland”. Based on this framework for understanding the nation-state as a family, when discussing a potential conflict with Taiwan over unity or independence, one student described any violence that might ensue as “fratricide”. As Eagle explained in her essay,

> It is the common aspiration of the Chinese people as a whole to achieve reunification of the country by peaceful means through contacts and negotiations. People on both sides of the Straits are Chinese. It would be a great tragedy for all if China’s territorial integrity and sovereignty were to be
split and its people were to be drawn into a fratricide. Peaceful reunification will greatly strengthen the cohesion of the Chinese nation.

Similarly, Ricky argued that “both sides can not live without each other, it’s none of other countries’ business, it’s a relationship just like fighting brothers”. As Ricky articulated, my students saw issues of China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity very much as ‘family’ issues, and not anything in which the international community had any right to be involved.

In addition to these emotional conflations of the Chinese state with a family, students often simultaneously deployed more pragmatic reasons to explain why Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang were integral parts of a unified China. As Eagle went on to argue in her essay, unity “will facilitate Taiwan’s socioeconomic stability and development and promote the rejuvenation and prosperity of China as a whole”. Annie, a quiet, unassuming girl studying International Law, gave her opinion in class discussion on what factors may affect Chinese foreign policy. She argued that reunification with Taiwan is a key priority of foreign policy, and that while “we will try to resolve the question by peaceful means, we will never give up the possibility of violence”. A number of other students also noted that support for the return of Taiwan was one of the key motivations for Chinese aid to Africa. As Kerry explained, “now China gives a lot of financial aid to African countries, and that’s mostly to get their support to recognise Taiwan as part of a unified China”. James from the Diplomacy major explained the strong feelings he had about territorial integrity by drawing on a farming analogy from the past:

Chinese citizens never want to lose a piece of land, because of their character as farmers. In the past, they preferred to be farmers, which was regarded as a higher position than a businessman, a worker or even an engineer. In foreign affairs, those concerned with anti-secession are seriously treated and territory issues are not so easy to make concessions. Moreover, they even treat those who leave their land as the ones who were abandoned.

Most of my students at CFAU held views in line with those of Ken and Andrea. Despite the intensity and often very emotional nature of these convictions, however,
students generally preferred not to describe themselves as ‘nationalists’, a term which was seen to have negative associations with violence and narrow-mindedness. Overall, students discussed the critical importance of unity and territorial very calmly and rationally, preferring to describe themselves as ‘rational nationalists’.

My students’ commitment to ‘rational nationalism’ should be contextualised within the broader public sphere in China, as my students’ views are not necessarily representative. The ‘rational’ approach to nationalism has been explicitly promoted within mainstream media since the pro-China Olympic torch rallies around the world in 2008 (see Nyiri et al. 2010). However, within China’s digital spaces there is a great deal of contestation about China’s global role, much of it passionately decrying China’s ‘weak’ responses to perceived insults. Hughes describes how “whenever tensions rise with Washington, Tokyo or Taipei, Chinese internet bulletin boards are bombarded by correspondents demanding their government adopt a tougher stance” (2006, 1). Nyiri et al. also observe how young people who consider themselves to be open-minded and cosmopolitan, and emphasise that they are not acting on behalf of the government, use digital spaces to express angry and emotional nationalist sentiments. For example, during the Olympic torch relay in 2008, Chinese students in France wrote of how they were “ready to die defending the country” against the “damned French hairies” (Nyiri et al. 2010, 31). My students had internalised the official rhetoric that ‘rational nationalism’ was the desired expression of love for the country, but they were well aware of ‘angry nationalism’. They usually discussed it in terms of it being a regrettable reality for less-educated others. However, it was evident that despite their rhetorical adherence to ‘rational nationalism’ or patriotism, anger lay just below the surface for them, also, and arose quickly when issues like Tibetan autonomy or Taiwanese independence were raised. In these cases, reactions would be swift and emotional, drawing on images of the family, and describing the shape of the Chinese state in quite anthropomorphic language.

Despite their rhetorical adherence to ‘rational nationalism’, my students felt that Chinese nationalism overall “comes from anger” based on past experiences of territorial incursions. In particular, students believed that the events of the Opium Wars were the basis of their own sentiments: “During the 1840s, foreigners were robbers, using guns to take what they wanted…This is how the sense of nationalism
arose, that is, fighting for our country… If we don’t fight back, we will die!” In another class, Layla, pointed out that:

Yes, you can say that the basis of Chinese nationalism is sensitivity to other countries not respecting us. It is because China has been strong, it has pride and face to protect. Emotionally we cannot just accept not being strong, we want to protect China, so our desire to protect becomes the source of our nationalism.

In her mid-semester essay, Melanie wrote:

It should be pointed out that China’s nationalism and nation-state nationalism in the West are not entirely the same. China’s nationalism is produced from the perils in the Qing Dynasty; we must resist foreign aggression.

Comments such as these clearly demonstrate the power of the collective national identity arising from the conviction that China as a single and sacred territorial entity had been brutally abused by Western powers during the ‘Century of Humiliation’.20

My students held a teleological view of Chinese history which reified the physical space of China and underpinned their passionate commitment to China’s territorial integrity. At the same time, they also imagined being Chinese as being a member of a vast de-territorialised cultural community. These two themes wound in and around each other to form a single and strongly-held belief in which Chineseness was somewhat paradoxically related both to the geographical entity of China and an intangible cultural essence (for a discussion on territorial and deterritorialised conceptions of the Chinese nation, see Barabantseva 2010, particularly Chapter Four).

Students were not always able to give a succinct articulation of what it meant to be culturally Chinese, but they felt very strongly that Chineseness was an inherent characteristic, an essential element of themselves that they could not unlearn, and

20 The ‘Century of Humiliation’ (bainian guochi: 百年国耻) described the period beginning with the first Opium War in 1839 to the Communist’s victory in the Chinese civil war and the founding of the New China in 1949.
which could never be learned by others. Students were clear that no matter how long a Chinese person was outside of China, he or she could never stop being Chinese. Fundamental to this was growing up in the Chinese historical tradition. An outsider could never become Chinese as he or she would not share this history. As Elena from the Economics major noted, “most Chinese feel that foreigners don’t understand us” as “we have such a long history, so many things happened, it is very hard for a foreigner to understand”.

We discussed the question of how foreigners could not understand Chinese concepts in class most thoroughly in the week we read chapter six of Lin Yutang’s book, My Country, My People. In this chapter, ‘Social and Political Life’, Lin examines how principles of obligation and responsibility inform Chinese politics. The chapter discusses the implications of the ‘female triad’ of ‘Face, Fate and Favour’ (1998 [1935] 190-198). In their presentation on the chapter, Bobby and Simon from the fourth year Diplomacy major argued that it is “impossible to destroy the effect of face, it still now has important effects in Chinese life”. Lin describes ‘face’ as being untranslatable and undefinable:

It is like honour and it is not honour. It cannot be purchased with money, and gives a man or woman a material pride. It is hollow and is what men fight for and what many women die for. It is invisible and yet by definition exists by being shown to the public. (ibid., 195)

My students also strongly believed that face was a critical concept in Chinese culture, but one that was difficult to define or translate into English. Face was ascribed considerable importance by my students across all classes. For example, a student in the International Economics and Trade major argued that in political negotiations, “the ruling position of face hasn’t changed, we always try to maintain our own face, and at the same time give others face in communication”. My students understood that Chinese policy-making in general was very much influenced by the concern to save face, in that decisions were often made because “China has her pride and her face to protect”. For example, the large amounts of money spent on the 2008 Olympics and the 60th Anniversary of the Establishment of the New China in 2009 were seen as clear cases in which face had driven government behaviour. Another
student argued that the amount of money spent on the anniversary celebrations was “reasonable because when there is a conflict between economy and dignity, we Chinese choose dignity”.

Most students held views similar to Elena’s. However, when Elena was making her comments, she was interrupted by a bright and reflexive student named Shane who called out that the idea that China was impossible for an outsider to truly understand provided “a very convenient excuse for always being on the defensive”. Shane asked Elena whether she thought she herself truly understood China. Elena replied that, yes, she did. She then hesitated briefly before she finished her sentence with, “at least … more than a foreigner”. While Shane questioned Elena’s sense of certainty, he did not go so far as to disagree with Elena’s position. This brief exchange reflected the shared view among my students that China’s long history and continuous civilisation meant that the Chinese people were ‘exceptionally exceptional’ and no outsider could ever understand them.

The second theme: The past in the present

The second of the themes that emerged from my discussions with students at CFAU was the way in which they understood China’s history to underpin its present, both for individuals in their day-to-day lives, and in the way the Chinese state operates. In their presentation on the definition of culture in the second week of semester, two students argued that China’s long, glorious and peaceful history is the basic constitutive component of the contemporary Chinese national character. Just as my students understood China’s cultural past and present to be causally related, so too were other countries’ past behaviours seen as signifiers of natural cultural tendencies. For example, students would tell me things about foreign countries such as, “as we all know, Americans have always emphasised freedom of religion”.

This presumption of the inevitable continuity of cultural essence was particularly true for Japan. Students believed that Japan’s national character was inherently imperialistic and expansionist, and that how the country had behaved in the past clearly demonstrated natural tendencies that would naturally underpin its behaviour in the present, warranting an ongoing distrust. In discussions of how Japanese culture
affects foreign policy, students tended to share the assumption that “once Japan gets enough power, it will become an aggressor again”. For example, Primo asked, “do you think Japanese nationalism has really changed, or has it just dropped the militarism part, just because they can’t act on it right now”? He answered himself by saying that to predict how Japan might act in the future, he “would look at its tradition of aggression, it’s been aggressive since the seventeenth century... I don’t think that its cultural traditions have changed.” The one student who expressed an alternative to this position was the presenter, Karen, who had spent some time in Japan, and who said she had also used to “hate Japan” before she went there herself. Karen asked, “May I predict too?,” before going on to argue that:

There are always some people in Japan who want to interfere in other countries’ internal affairs, but that will not actually take place in the near future. Militarism used to be popular because of people being illiterate and badly educated, but now, it’s a different era, people are educated.

Primo retorted that “they may seem more civilised, but it won’t make any difference. We must be cautious about appearances of cultural change”. These essentialised views of both China’s and other countries’ histories provided students with a coherent framework for explaining behaviour in the present.

*We know Confucianism is behind everything...*

Within the broader belief that traditional wisdom underpins China’s present and future, the relevance of Confucianism for contemporary China was a particularly striking theme among my students. Valerie Niquet describes the revitalised use of Confucianism and the promotion of ‘Confu-talk’ in domestic and international propaganda in recent years (Niquet 2011). My students had internalised this recent official rehabilitation of Confucianism in narratives of Chinese past, including in the international arena.21

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21 See for example Niquet’s 2011 discussion of state-constructed ‘Confu-talk’; Callahan’s 2012 examination of how Chinese leaders have recently begun deploying a Confucian vocabulary in their foreign policy discourse; and Guo 2003.
Although in recent years Confucianism has been enjoying a revival, when Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution a key element of the iconoclasm was a campaign calling for the total destruction of the feudal thinking and social practices associated with the Confucian tradition. As described in the *People’s Daily* on 1 October 1967 (National Day) the “struggle against Confucius, the feudal mummy, and thoroughly eradicate…reactionary Confucianism is one of our important tasks in the Great Cultural Revolution” (Gardner 2012). During the Cultural Revolution, Confucius’ ancestral home was destroyed, and bodies of long-dead descendants were exhumed and publicly displayed. The anti-Confucian enmity culminated in the “Criticise Lin, Criticise Confucius” campaign of 1973 which attempted to utilise Maoist theory to re-interpret Chinese history, by means of which these formerly revered figures from the past were attacked.

Although this rupture with the past is no longer representative of the state-sanctioned narrative of history, the revival of Confucianism in official Chinese socio-political imaginings is by no means a fait accompli. On the one hand, the construction of over 300 Confucius Institutes around the world since 2004, sponsored by the Chinese government, suggests that a ‘revival’ of Confucian values is a well-accepted state position. The official rhetoric around the Confucius Institutes is that they provide a means of sharing Chinese culture and Chinese perspectives with the world. By doing so, “misunderstanding and hostility” can be “quenched.” “Once [the world’s people] come to know the Chinese people better, they will find out that harmony is an essential part of Chinese tradition and a country that values harmony poses absolutely no threat to the rest of the world”. Most of my students seemed to agree with this official position. As one student argued,

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22 Confucius Institutes are overseen by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), a non-profit organization affiliated with the Ministry of Education and the United Front Work Department, itself an agency under the Central Committee of the CCP. Its main function is to ensure that various non-CCP groups are supportive of CCP official positions.

23 Du Ruiqing, Former President of Xi’an International Studies University, quoted in *China Daily*, cited in Don Starr (2009, 66). While other nation-states (such as France, Britain, Germany and Spain) have been funding similar cultural and language promotion projects for decades, it is argued that the difference between the new Confucius Institutes and other state-backed institutions is that Confucius Institutes are established within pre-existing educational institutions, raising suspicions that “these institutes are aimed less at fostering interest in China and Chinese culture itself, and more at ensuring that such interest is guided along lines approved of by the Chinese party-state” (Churchman, 2011).
These overseas Confucius Colleges can promote the education and exchange of Chinese language and culture. Through learning China-related subjects, foreign students can come to realise the essence of Chinese culture and gradually abandon the ‘China threat theory’.

On the other hand, a giant bronze statue of Confucius was removed from in front of the National Museum of China on the eastern flank of Tiananmen Square in the middle of the night in January 2011, just days after its installation. This suggests a lack of consensus within the Chinese Party-state as to the appropriate role Confucian teachings should play within China (e.g. Wen Liao, 2011). Despite unfinished debates in official circles regarding how appropriate it is to venerate Confucius, my students frequently referred to Confucius and Confucian values as the fundamental basis of contemporary Chinese morality and social organisation. Indeed, my research shows that my students had already internalised the official Confu-talk discourse. “We adore the Confucian system”, enthused Hannah, a young woman in the third year International Economics major. As is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, my students firmly believed that what it meant to be Chinese in the present often hinged on what they understood to be traditional Confucian traits such as diligence, politeness, honesty, collective thoughts, tolerance, harmony, taking the middle road, and avoiding conflict.

As an extension to the understanding that Confucian values formed the basis of individual morality, they were also seen to underpin China’s approach to foreign policy and international relations. Even Deng Xiaoping’s famous maxim prescribing correct behaviour in the international system of biding one’s time and hiding one’s light behind a bushel was attributed to Confucius. As Maisie noted,

The first typical Confucian idea is Deng’s advice to hide one’s capacities and bide one’s time. Dating back to ancient China, many politicians believed in this and behaved according to it. It’s very hard to find a Chinese making a showy display of his or her capacity.

Following a similar logic, Yellow argued that:
China will never be number one, because as Confucius says, one should never seek first place; so we will never claim leadership even if we are the most powerful, because others will then see us as their rival and enemy, and threaten the nation’s security, and that’s not what China wants.

In another class, in a small group discussion, one male student told me that “Chinese foreign policy is of course based on Chinese national characteristics, like wanting to avoid conflicts”. His friend added, “Yeah, we Chinese prefer harmony”. I asked where this preference came from, and the first student replied emphatically, as if it were quite obvious, “Confucianism! Confucianism teaches to avoid extremes and to take the middle way”.

Many of my students also believed that China had always adhered to an international policy of peace which stemmed from Confucian values:

As a nation under the influence of Confucianism from the ancient times, China consistently pursues a good-neighbourly and friendly foreign policy, and bears no desire for territorial expansion.

Which values in particular constituted Confucian ideology tended to change from one individual to the next. For example, one student suggested that:

The basic idea brought up by Confucius in public governance is ‘to rule by benevolence’, and ‘harmony should be highly cherished’.

However, his classmate Chad thought that it was Confucian peace and friendship ceremonies that most directly underpinned China’s peaceful stance:

As most of us know, every time when a new policy is made, part of the old one will remain. That is partly because it is too good to be changed, and partly because it is the custom of the country. China has a very long history, long enough for our people to form some really deep popular opinions. The opinions have become habits, and are buried deep into our hearts, our souls. So, as long as the maker of the policy is one of Chinese people, he will never
be able to get rid of the accustomed thoughts. For example: China has been a country of ceremonies for thousands of years, which makes peace and friendship important in our culture, and also affects our foreign policy. ‘The arrival of a friend is such a happy thing!’ said Confucius, a famous thinker, educator, and statesman in Chinese history. So, in the 21st century, China is unlikely to change its attitude toward the maintenance of peace around the world.

Another student argued that:

Confucianism, one of the most influential traditions in Chinese history, inevitably affects China’s foreign policy. The core idea of Confucianism is harmony, which is also tied with kindheartedness and tolerance and emphasises the balance between human and nature, interpersonal friendliness and international peace, rather than conflicts or wars.

My students cited similar perspectives within Chinese literature as evidence to support these views. For example, one student referred to Wang Sheng-Wei’s book, *China’s Ascendancy: An Opportunity or a Threat (What Every American Should Know About China)* (2007), and argued that,

The author has concluded that China has always been a country deeply committed to peace, harmony, and loving others as they love themselves. This concept derives from Confucianism, which still has a profound influence on China’s political philosophy.

Despite the enthusiasm for Confucianism over any other possible cultural influence on Chinese worldviews, many students did not actually seem to know much detail about what Confucianism entailed. Layla summed up a conversation about the topic by acknowledging:

Actually, we’re not very sure what Confucianism is, we really only have a basic knowledge about him. But though we’re not consciously aware, we still know Confucianism is behind everything.
Her classmate added that “most Chinese will choose to like Confucianism because it's safe, it doesn’t have many risks, and, it’s good for you to behave like this”. These comments demonstrate how CFAU students chose to privilege certain schools of thought and particular truths and simply discard others when they did not fit neatly with the prevailing views.

In addition to Confucianism’s primary role, a small minority of students also noted that other belief systems played a role in China’s foreign policy, but were comparatively unimportant. As Maisie argued,

> Other semi-religions such as Taoism, Legalism\textsuperscript{24} and so on all have some kind of effects on China’s foreign policies making – more or less. Ideas such as Zhouyi and the Eight Trigrams\textsuperscript{25} weigh a lot in Chinese traditional culture. But since they are not the major impacting factors, I just leave them out.

My students’ enthusiastic assertions that they “adored Confucius”, and the certainty with which they argued that Confucianism was the fundamental root of contemporary China, despite admitting that they knew very little about the philosophy, demonstrates just how effectively they had internalised the message of Confu-talk via the subjectification process.

The importance my students allocated to history in general and Confucianism in particular did not mean that they believed that Chinese society and culture had not changed at all over time. Many of them felt that there had indeed been significant changes in some aspects of China’s culture. For example, as an earnest young woman in the International Economics major, Glennis, pointed out when discussing Lin’s My Country and My People (1998 [1935]),

> I’m worried that foreigners who read this book might get confused about China. They may not see the current situation, how things have changed.

\textsuperscript{24} Legalism (\textit{fa jia}: 法家) is a utilitarian Chinese political philosophy for governing the state which was one of the main philosophical currents in the Warring States Period (475BC-221BC). Han Feizi (韩非子) was one of its leading proponents.

\textsuperscript{25} The \textit{Zhouyi} (周易) or \textit{Yijing} (易經) known in English as ‘The Book of Changes’ is a classic Confucian text, but also deeply rooted in Daoist thought.
That’s why Western people get the wrong idea, and say China lacks democracy. But if you see the 60th anniversary, you can see everyone loves our country. Even in my hometown, everybody voluntarily bought a flag. I feel very proud of that.

Glennis’ remark exemplifies how students’ conviction of a long and continuous culture co-exists with the notion that China has evolved and modernised greatly since the Communist Party founded the New China in 1949. Several other students also noted that undesirable aspects of Chinese culture had changed since Lin wrote this seminal work, including that “while the ruling position of ‘face’ hasn’t changed, the role of ‘fate’ in Chinese people’s lives had lost its power a long time ago”. The conclusion to this particular class discussion was that “even though we make a lot of progress, we still have a long way to go. Mr Lin’s impression given to the outside world isn’t good, so our task is to represent a new image of China to the world”.

There were some areas of Chinese culture in which students felt that more change was necessary. They were particularly concerned about the existing social system leading to elitism and nepotism, which many of them said they had experienced themselves when trying to get a job. However, suggestions for change in China were only considered acceptable if they came from within China, and not from external commentators. And while students did feel that some parts of Chinese culture could benefit from change, there was a very strong sense overall that cultural change due to the influence of external factors was a negative thing, as it risked diluting the purity of what it meant to be Chinese.

The vast majority of my students felt that Confucian values provided a positive moral framework for everyday people to live their lives as well as for leaders making important decisions. There was however a case in which one student, in an essay rather than in a class discussion, put forward some rather different views. James, from the Diplomacy major, did not share his classmates’ love of Confucianism. James tended to sit up in the back corner of the classroom and sleep through most of the classes, but when he woke up (when prompted), he would usually be able to deliver thoughtful questions or comments. James wrote in his mid-semester essay that, “At the beginning, theories of these Confucian scholars aimed at convincing the kings to
follow their ideas on governance. And unfortunately it became a tradition”. When I first read this sentence, I thought it must have been a typing mistake, as it was so far from the usual expressions of loyalty and love for Confucius. However, I went on to read:

However, the essence of Confucianism is pretence. The only and most powerful weapon of Confucians is words. Although it is hard to understand why wise ancestors chose such a stupid school to respect as the only one, the thing happened as it was and the current government has been learning much from it. They tried to act more friendly when they found they had to. They treated their foreign friends well even though they didn’t know what they could gain. They just repeated monotonous words which they thought were sufficiently wise.

James’ disaffection with Confucianism provided an example of how discourses of disciplinary power designed to subjectify students into citizens of the nation-state always left spaces for individual interpretations of the dominant narratives. Despite having some of the highest grades in the Diplomacy major, James was also one of the least interested in joining the public service, and thus seemed to feel less obliged to adopt the official discourses of the nation-state.

The third theme: Chinese immortality disrupted – humiliation and victimhood at the hands of the West

The third motif my students at CFAU very commonly deployed was that of the ‘Century of Humiliation’ (bainian guochi: 百年国耻). Students frequently used this motif to describe how China’s long, glorious and unified history of peaceful development and harmonious relations with the outside world had been ruptured by the shock of Western invasions in the mid-1800s. This theme of humiliation and subjugation has been a central element of contemporary Chinese identity for some time. As one American commentator put it in 1959,
The Chinese have one very broad generalisation about their own history: they think in terms of ‘up to the Opium war’ and ‘after the Opium war’; in other words, a century of humiliation and weakness to be expunged. (Harris 1959, 162)

During the Mao era, the narrative of humiliation was not the primary ideological tool or source of legitimacy. During this time, class rather than nationality was the foundation of political identity (Wang 2012, 87). Indeed, between 1947 and 1990 there were no books on the subject of ‘national humiliation’; published in China (Callahan 2006). Since the Patriotic Education campaign of the early 1990s, however, official discourse across many fields has been firmly predicated on a victimisation narrative that lays the blame for China’s suffering firmly at the feet of the West (Wang, 2012, 102). For example, history textbooks today divide Chinese history into before and after the Opium Wars. Visitors both Chinese and other to historic sites are reminded of these events by signage at prominent tourist sites – part of the patriotic education campaign as set out in the 1991 ‘Notice about Conducting Education of Patriotism and Revolutionary Tradition by Exploiting Extensively Historical Relics’. In 1995, 100 sites were selected as ‘national-level demonstration bases’ for patriotic education, forty of which are sites commemorating China’s past conflicts or wars with foreign countries. There are now more than ten thousand such sites (Wang 2012, 105-107). The cities of Shanghai, Tianjin and Beijing bore the brunt of the Allied Forces’ incursions in the 1800s, and public sites such as the Old Summer Palace in Beijing almost without exception display signs – in English and Chinese – to remind the visitor how glorious the site had been before the Allied Forces destroyed it. Likewise, the Shanghai Expo website notes that:

Since 1840, Western powers have intermittently invaded this huge but weakened country, nearly eliminating China. But China is a country with a legacy of talent. Confucianists believed in cultivating their moral character

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26 There is no doubt that the Allied Forces of English, French and other Western countries wreaked considerable havoc in these Eastern cities. The ruins of the spectacular pleasure garden Yuan Ming Yuan (Gardens of Perfect Brightness), or the Old Summer Palace, razed to the ground twice, first in 1857 and again in 1860, attest to this. However the signs outside these sites explaining their demise do not note the events which led up to the sacking, including the torture and murder of French and British emissaries who had come to Beijing to negotiate a truce in the Second Opium Wars.
and maintaining a well-ordered state. Their bravery protected the country from ruination.

Remembering the weaknesses and losses of the past are critical aspects of forging a unified national identity in China’s ongoing nation-building project. As Callahan points out, understanding China as a ‘pessoptimist’ nation, that is, in which both negative and positive are inextricably intertwined in the humiliation narrative, is critical to understanding China’s rise and its role in world politics (Callahan 2012, 8-10).

In many of my classes at CFAU, students were adamant that remembering these negative events, and learning about history was the best means “to prevent it happening again”. They were convinced that enshrining the memory of past events was the only way to regain China’s, and their own, dignity. Despite many students feeling that taking a history major at university was “boring” and unlikely to lead to the high results many students valued above all else, knowing at least what were considered to be the ‘key facts’ of the past was considered essential. As one student explained in class, “if we don't know about the past humiliation, we could be too naïve. Others might want to hurt us again. To have a sense of history for self-protection is important”.

The way students interwove this sense of victimisation with the narrative of humiliation meant that injustices to the state were conflated with injuries to the Chinese people themselves. Students understood criticism of China as both an insult to the nation and to Chinese individuals. They quickly became defensive if they thought an outsider was criticising China, responding as if it was a personal slight. Again, a good example of this tendency was students’ reactions to reading Lin’s chapter about Chinese society. Lin strongly criticises the extension of what he calls “the family mind” to the state (1998 [1935], 169-208). To see if my students would react any differently depending on whether they thought criticism was coming from ‘inside’ or ‘outside’, I gave the reading without revealing the author’s identity. Students’ responses clearly indicated how defensive they were towards outside criticism. They told me that “we were so angry when we read it”, but that “we
changed our feeling when we realised it was written by a Chinese”. As the often-cynical young man, Dart, explained it:

Quite a few of us felt offended because we thought it was written by a foreigner who didn’t know anything about China, and seemed only to see shortcomings. Now we know that it was written by Lin Yutang. If we knew it was a Chinese person, we would have had more of an attitude of self-checking, but not when we thought it was external criticism. Outsiders criticising us makes us feel defensive.

When I asked why exactly the same comments would cause anger if they were written by an outsider, the students explained that it was because China was like a family, in which it is alright to criticise your own parents or siblings, but you would always feel protective and defensive if someone else made the same point.

This tendency to explain the state in terms of a family structure was part of a larger conceptual framework in which the state does not exist in opposition to the individual as it is understood to be in much Western political discourse (as is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four). Students extended the conflation of state with individual to situations outside of China, as the following excerpt from a student essay illustrates. Toni was arguing that an auction in France of bronze statues “looted from the Old Summer Palace in Beijing” in the 1800s has,

Strained the relationship between China and the French. What both countries’ people should do is to improve the relationship and get mutual benefit. But the auction of the bronze animal heads has just aggravated the situation.

Although the statues were in the possession of a private individual, not the French state, students understood the auction in terms of a national-level incident which brought dishonour not just to the individual involved but also to the state of France:

The auction happened in exactly the place which played such an important role in the European Renaissance; the place which has an honourable cultural tradition; the place which nurtured the great writer Hugo who distinguished
right from wrong and fought for justice; the place which is called France. This auction can’t bring any honour to the country and the result is exactly the opposite.

Emotional understandings of the past in which China as a state and the Chinese people themselves were personally humiliated are recurring themes in Chinese popular discourse, including within the media. For example, Chinese journalists often use the phrase “hurt the feelings of the Chinese people”. This emotionally charged response is deployed, with varying degrees of vitriol, when, for example, a foreign politician meets with the Dalai Lama. In another case, singer Bob Dylan was warned not to hurt the feelings of the Chinese people when he toured China before he had even arrived in the country. In a similar vein, my Chinese friends and colleagues would tend to react with great emotion if they felt that China was being criticised by an outsider – even in regard to topics like the weather or the traffic. This prickly sensitivity to perceived or real insult created a strong sense of collective identity as all slights were offensive to all Chinese people and the Chinese nation-state when interpreted through the prism of the great national humiliation. The experience of being offended together served to enhance the sense of unity so essential to students’ national identity.

Students believed that the past behaviour of certain Western powers meant that China had to be constantly on its guard against future threats to its sovereignty. They understood that all states, like China, acted on the basis of their own individual and immutable cultural characteristics. Because foreigners had once deliberately carved up strategic Chinese ports to divide among themselves “like a melon” (guafen: 瓜分) for their own gain, foreigners were “fundamentally rapacious, greedy and aggressive” as far as international relations were concerned (Kaufman 2010, 15). Therefore, Western powers could not help but continue to protect their own power by encircling and diminishing China – in whatever way possible. In this worldview, any external

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27 Recent research into this phenomenon found that an internet search on the phrase: ‘hurt the feelings of the Chinese people’ resulted in 17,000 hits, as compared to replacing the ‘Chinese people’ with the ‘Japanese people’ (the next many hits, at 178) or 17 other possible wordings which came up with zero hits (Mair, 2011). In an earlier search on google.cn of the terms ‘humiliation’ or ‘bullying’ (qifu: 起伏) and ‘disrespect’ or ‘looking down’ (kanbuqi: 看不起), Pal Nyiri (2006) found 623,000 entries with the term ‘qifu Zhongguo’ (bullying China) and 521,000 with ‘kanbuqi Zhongguoren’ (looking down on Chinese people).
criticisms of China could be interpreted simply as a continuation of inevitable Western bullying.

In response to the need for unity in the light of the humiliation of the past and the understanding that foreign powers were continuing to “bully” China, my students felt that it was critically important to fend off “foreign incursions” of all sorts, physical and cultural. Students saw being alert to the risk of the dilution of cultural purity as key to China re-establishing itself in its rightful role. For example, some students argued that China should not celebrate Western festivals, as doing so could be seen as a kind of “cultural invasion” which would not only mean losing China’s own culture, but could also “weaken our nation”. Students explained that restrictions existed around when Japanese cartoons could be shown on television, as they were a form of soft power, that is, a means of exporting Japanese values to shape Chinese preferences so that Chinese people will want what Japan wants (see Nye 1990). They, as well as other foreign cartoons, could not be played during prime time, “mostly to prevent Japanese cultural influence”.

The constant reference to the weakness in China’s past may seem peculiar in a country whose rise on the world stage is considered by most commentators as an indisputable fact. One explanation is that humiliation is a key “part of a narrative of loss and redemption” in which the Party is credited with “pulling China out of this nadir and into a globally prominent position” (Adcock 2010, 3). The shared sense of humiliation allowed my students to retain a vivid sense of national pride at the same time as identifying as a country still in transition to developed status. This worldview also produced a logic of exceptionalism in which students saw ‘we Chinese’ as existing in opposition to the imagined community of indistinguishable Western imperial powers. This differentiation from the West simultaneously re-produced an affiliation with other developing countries, such as those in Africa, although this should not be misunderstood as African countries enjoying hierarchical equality with China. Despite calls for an international system based on full sovereign equality in which every state enjoys equal sovereign rights, the exceptionalist perspective underpinned my students’ belief that China as a nation-state on the world stage was fundamentally unlike all others.
The fourth theme: Regaining former and rightful world status

The fourth key theme among my students was that China was now at a point where it could realise its original and eternal destiny and resume its former position in the world. Official discourses explain how this pre-ordained future will unfold in terms of China’s past. In the “embellished biography” (Anderson 2006 [1983], 204) of the Chinese nation, traditional Chinese cultural elements of harmony and peace are presented as the foundations of the Chinese nation which will continue to underpin China’s approach to interrelating with the world in the future. Central to these narratives is the idea that throughout its history, China has been a peaceful actor on the international stage, never using aggressively expansionist tactics to increase its empire. The evolution and changing shape and size of the state of China is understood to have come about through entirely peaceful means – or, when violent conflict is acknowledged to have occurred, it is explained as being because the rulers of China at that time were not the peace-loving Han people, but the invader dynasties. In the conception of history hegemonic in China, China’s future role in the world is therefore understood logically to be a simple extension of these past trends.

The opinions of the students I taught at CFAU echoed this official narrative. The idea that in the past China had never acted in anything but a peaceful way on the world stage arose often in essays and class discussions. For example, in her mid-semester essay, Melanie wrote:

Historically, China has always had a focus on peace. In the prosperous Western Han dynasty, they followed pro-peace policies. During the Tang period, Princess Wen Cheng, not the army, was sent to Tibet. In the Ming dynasty empire, Zheng He’s fleets made seven ocean voyages, not bringing aggression, but the gift of great power and dignity. The only exception to this peacefulness was the ruling Mongolian Yuan regime. The bloody killing and conquering shocked Europe, but history has proven that such a regime in China is bound to be short-lived – the Mongolian regime only survived for 97 years before it was overthrown.
Like Melanie, many students deployed the story of fifteenth century sailor Zheng He to illustrate how the Chinese people are and have always been harmonious and peace-loving, and have never instigated conflict. Most students understood that Zheng He only ever used his maritime power for diplomacy and trade, and never for invading territory. As another student explained,

As the most powerful country in the world at that time, China did not bring cannons or colonisation, but friendliness to Africa. Accordingly, they did not bring back gold or slaves but giraffe as a symbol of auspice. It is just the same today whenever there is a problem.

By drawing on the few historical stories available to them when discussing issues of international relations, students reinforced their own and their peers’ existing convictions that Chinese culture had always been and would therefore always be peace-loving.

The trope of China’s glorious past was fundamental to students’ predictions of how China would behave in the international system in the future. Overall, the expectation was that China would resume its former position in the global order, and “go back to where every country respects us”. As Charity explained,

Because China has always pursued an independent foreign policy of peace, China hopes that we can have a long-term peaceful coexistence with other countries. And we want to get a peaceful and stable international environment. Our country’s implementation of this policy is solemn, sincere and will not change in the long-term, because it conforms to Chinese people’s fundamental beliefs. Peace-loving Chinese people abhor aggression very much and will never impose such suffering on others.

Students were adamant that while China certainly wanted more respect in international relations, China “did not want to become number one”, and in no way posed any sort of threat to the international system.
According to this understanding, traditional Chinese culture explained how any Chinese shows of strength were no more than demonstrations of renewed dignity. When one student posed the hypothetical question of whether the recent increase in military expenditure may have been motivated by a desire for China to be a strong military power with genuine deterrent capabilities, her classmates at once argued that the issue at stake was actually one of “dignity and face-saving”. Following the same line of argument, Charity wrote an essay about the US-India military exercise conducted just after China’s 60th Anniversary celebrations in October 2009. The 60th Anniversary celebrations were an impressive demonstration of China’s wealth and power, and had many Chinese people in tears of emotion. Described in some Western media as “a spectacular display of national pride” (Anderson, 2009), over 100,000 people participated in the country’s largest-ever military parade. Shortly afterwards, India and the US began joint military exercises in Uttar Pradesh state involving 320 US servicemen. Charity argued that the purpose of this exercise was “very clear”, and that it was “just a demonstration, a demonstration against China!” However, Charity felt that this response was “really not necessary” as,

China’s parade is just the Chinese government wanting to show their country as wealthy and strong to their people. China wants to tell their people that our country is better now, we are not that sick man of Asia anymore. China has made great progress, social progress, Chinese people can live a good life. We do not need to constantly fear others’ aggression, the days of the Nanjing Massacre will never return again!

She continued emphatically,

China has absolutely no intention of demonstrating our power to the world, and we never want to become the world’s hegemon. The Chinese people came from a war, we have had so many terrible and horrible experiences during that war. So China will not bring ourselves into a war again, or put Chinese people into such difficult circumstances. China will not be aggressive or impose this kind of pain on other people around the world, because the Chinese people love peace, and the Chinese government’s foreign policy of peace will never change!
Charity’s remarks demonstrate the extent to which students believed that traditional Chinese characteristics of peacefulness and harmony would continue to underpin its behaviour in the international system in the future.

Like Charity, many other students also argued that because of past experiences of invasions, China would never want to experience conflict again:

As a nation that has only recently broke away from foreign intrusion and control, China consistently adheres to an independent foreign policy and works hard to build a peaceful international environment for its economic and social construction.

Students often talked about how China was now ready to resume its rightful role as a dignified and peace-loving great nation. This determination to undo the humiliations of the past – while at the same time remembering them to prevent them from ever happening again – was always linked with the caveat that others had nothing to fear, as Chinese culture had always and would always be one of peace and harmony.

Conclusion

Since the Republican Revolution of 1911, a linear and teleological narrative of Chinese history has been hegemonic in China, and secured the concept of the Chinese nation as a self-contained subject of history, transforming not only perceptions of the past, but also present meanings of the nation and the world (Duara 1995, 5-6). Communist Party leaders have historically been determined to “control the messages imparted in works of history – to bend those messages in ways favourable to official policy lines and to extirpate any manifestation of dissent or opposition” (Unger 1993, 2). In 1981, a new Party Resolution on its own history was drawn up which largely followed the “stereotyped and monotonous” patterns of official history written before Mao’s death in 1979 (Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 2003, 151). Like what came before it, official history is motivated by expediency and particularly by the need for unity and stability (Barmé 2003, 262). This official nationalist discourse of history has been
actively transmitted through education (see for example Callahan 2012; Fong 2004; Gries 2004; Guo 2003; Hoffman 2010; and Wang 2012). My research shows how much this state-sanctioned discourse was internalised by my CFAU students.

My students demonstrated a strong commitment to the notion that China as a social, political, cultural and geographical entity represented an immortal and eternal embodiment of some intangible but essential Chineseness. Students understood that there was only one true version of Chinese history, in which the past leads directly to the present, underpinning their contemporary moral and social imaginary, and then stretches forwards into the future. This otherwise seamless trajectory was mortifyingly disrupted by foreign incursions beginning in the 1840s. The result of this has been an ongoing sense of victimisation and a strong distrust of the intentions of the outside world. Equally strong was the belief that it is only through having a stable and united country that China can resume her former, and rightful, position as a peace-loving, harmony-promoting, and internationally respected nation-state. Although many of my students argued that understanding history was critical for China to avoid being a victim again in the future, the history my students had internalised rarely went beyond this broad and sentimental sketch of certain highly selective events and themes. With some exceptions, like James and his views on Confucianism, my students’ opinions offered little suggestion that they had reflected on history outside of official narratives.

Barabantseva observed that “China’s relationship with the world must be understood through the interplay between history and present, and thus through the particular uses of history in practice” (2009, 129). How China deals with its past is of interest not only to non-Chinese commentators analysing China in the international system, but also has implications for international stability and security. This is particularly true of the unstable way in which positive and negative emotions and knowledge are intermeshed in the ‘pessoptimistic’ national humiliation narrative (Callahan 2010, 27-28). How history was used in practice among my students at CFAU has implications for both China’s own domestic sphere and, thanks to the increasing role China is playing in world affairs, the international system. As former US President Clinton told a joint sitting of the Australian Parliament as long ago as 1996, “the way [China] defines its greatness for the future will help decide whether the next century is one of
conflict or cooperation” (Huiskens, 2011). Odd Arne Westad argues along similar lines, positing that China’s future in the international system could be unstable if China in the present uses its historic legacy without coming to terms with it (Westad 2012, 16).

My CFAU students’ understanding of history gives rise to an ‘us and them’ mode of thinking that fits neatly with the official government discourse of an integrated identity. The way in which students constantly reproduced a unified ideology of Chineseness against the rest of the world, particularly the imagined community of ‘the West’, meant that they continued to define themselves as ongoing victims of external persecution. This victim mentality in turn underpinned fierce emotional responses to the issues of Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan. Likewise, during discussions about Japan, only on a very rare occasion would a student not express his or her passionate hatred for that country – always very emotionally, and not at all as a simple rhetorical exercise. To the CFAU students I taught, these geographical locations did not merely represent accidents of history with potential geo-strategic advantages. Discussions about territorial integrity, independence and liberation were not framed within a rational interest discourse as the Realist school of International Relations theory would posit. On the contrary, these issues were at the very heart of my students’ national identity. They are intensely emotional, and the object of fierce loyalty and obligation, akin to a familial obligation to supporting one’s own, no matter what that individual has done.

Chinese political elites today draw on the victimisation and humiliation discourse as a starting point for their views on how China should interact with other nations (Callahan 2010, Kaufman, 2010). Discussions among Chinese foreign policy actors about the nature of the international system, why nations fail or succeed, the prospects for global peace and cooperation, and what China’s role should be, are predicated on beliefs that China’s behaviour and attitude on the global stage should and does draw on the experiences and lessons from the past. A Realist approach to understanding international relations is common among high-profile Chinese foreign policy commentators – even many of those who align themselves with the Constructivist school build their analyses on the assumption that today’s international system has not changed in its essence from the 19th century.
For my students, the linear nature of history and China’s subjugation by Western powers from the mid-1800s, marking an irrevocable break from its historical destiny, is unquestioned. These views of interrupted continuity provided the framework for a coherent system of beliefs about how the world works and the dynamics of international relations which shaped my students’ perspectives on how China should negotiate the international system. The environment in which my students were being disciplined and subjectified reinforced the broader social discourses about China’s history, and strengthened their existing worldviews, creating a powerfully coherent social imaginary. As such, students were not offered the opportunity, and did not seek, to genuinely reflect on or critically analyse China’s historical position and its role in the international system.
Chapter Four: Students and the State

Power is a key dimension of the national logic central to my CFAU students’ worldview. Understanding how my students perceived power relations, particularly those between people and the state, provides a means for better appreciating how they perceive China’s role in international relations. The chapter begins with a discussion of the concept of the state in the Chinese context, and how it differs from the Western European model. I then investigate how my students at CFAU understood their relationship with this particular construction of the state. To do so, I examine three key pillars in the Chinese Party-state’s construction of what ‘China’ and ‘being Chinese’ means. These are: territorial integrity, economic growth, and a unifying ideology of integrated Chinese identity. The chapter focuses on the third of these pillars, as identifying as part of a greater imagined community of Chineseness was a prevalent theme among my students at CFAU. In this chapter I discuss how my students’ views aligned with the Chinese Party-state’s self-representation as an extension of the family. The analysis uses Evasdottir’s (2004) notion of obedient autonomy and Bourdieu’s (1977) idea of doxa to explain how my students seemed to be able to simultaneously agree and disagree with certain orthodoxies.

The State – But not as we know it

Disciplines such as International Relations take the state as their analytical point of departure. However, as Spencer argues, an anthropological approach begins by asking what we mean by the state, despite the question’s apparent absurdity (2007, 101, italics added). What then is ‘the state’ in China, and what differences and similarities does it have with its Western European cousin? As set out in Chapter Two, one of the analytical foci of the anthropology of the state is how the state is constructed and experienced by people, including the semi-permeable boundary between people and state. Using this analytical approach allows us to examine the relationship between CFAU students and state power that moves away from a presumption of the “feel-good dystopia” of state versus people (ibid., 111).
Recent studies of state-making in China have noted how different the trajectories of state-formation between China and Western Europe have been (Thornton 2007, 6; see also Pye 1992). As Thornton (2007, 2) explains, the modern Chinese state-making process has been very different to that in Western Europe, where states evolved as “war machines” (Tilly 1990), focused largely on achieving military goals. Focusing on the state’s repressive or coercive capacities results in the presumption that “it is the monopolisation of power that produces legitimacy rather than the possibility that the monopolisation of legitimacy might in turn produce power” (ibid., 2-3). For example, Weberian or Marxist approaches to the state understand it as the entity that holds the monopoly on the legitimate use of force, or as the ruling class’s primary instrument of repression. Thornton argues that the Chinese process has been less driven by competition for trade and territory, and thus it was less concerned with mobilising troops and material resources for war. Rather, modern Chinese leaders’ socio-ethical agendas were the primary factor, and Chinese state-making rested more on “the recurring need to define and redefine the centre as a moral agent – in fact, the moral agent – in modern Chinese history” (Thornton 2007, 2).

Moving away from Weberian and Marxist notions of the state that have arisen from the Western European experience allows a view of state power relations beyond the state/society dichotomy. The notion of the state as the object of humanity’s distrust and resistance prevalent in Western discourses is a philosophically and historically specific one, deriving from a vision of moral order based on ideas of Natural Law in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe (Taylor 2004, 3). The contemporary Chinese moral order is very different. The Chinese state is not a ‘thing’ that exists external to society, brooding and ominous. The fundamental nexus of governance is not a “jurisdictional top-down system that controls the actions of every individual through the imposition of rules” (Hamilton and Zheng, 1992, 29).

To understand state power in China, we not only need to move beyond the idea that the state is outside of society, but also the idea that it is ‘in society’, as Migdal argues (2004, 116). Rather, as Pieke prefers to explain it, the state is better viewed as society (Pieke 2004, 533, emphasis added), and this is certainly how my CFAU students experienced it. By reconceptualising the state in this way, subalterns can be seen as having an “authentic, and not merely reactive” response to power (Ortner 1995, 181).
As in many other societies, the complexity of the way power works in China means that it is difficult to clearly delineate and define terms such as ‘state’, ‘nation’, ‘party’, and ‘government’. Certainly, the technologies of power in China are by no means well understood by the outside world. Even within China the terms are not clear. The issue remains vexed despite the considerable debate attempting to define the responsibilities and roles of the Party and the state since the reform process began in 1978 (Brown 2011, 3).

One of the key difficulties in understanding politics in China is that it is virtually impossible to separate the relationship between government administration and the politically focused Party system. Indeed, “it is the absence of strict authority boundaries or elite boundaries between the Party and non-Party institutions together with the primacy of the Party” that has for so many years given “politics in communist systems its distinctive character” (Perlmutter and Grande 1976, 778). In China, technologies of administrative and political power are not so much parallel and intertwined as inextricably interwoven in complicated and unclear ways. ‘The Party’ is not parallel to other state and administrative structures, it is rather intrinsically interwoven into them to the most local level. There are 41,636 Party Township Committees and 780,000 Village Committees monitoring and reporting on people’s daily lives (McGregor 2010, vi). Every senior government minister or official is a Party member, with a few symbolic exceptions. The Party controls staffing in government ministries and agencies through a complicated and opaque appointments system and guides them on their political posture and correct policy position through committee meetings (ibid., 15).

In Washington or Westminster systems (or, as in Australia, the hybrid ‘Washminster’ system), the term ‘the government’ refers to the people whose clearly stated political views or ideologies steer the policies of the administrative and bureaucratic sector. In China, ‘the government’ could therefore be understood to mean the Chinese Communist Party, in that it is the organisation that directs the administration of the country. However, the Chinese government is a combination of Party and administrative bureaucracy: the Party does not exist outside of the bureaucracy, rather, the Party is an inseparable part of it.
Given the ongoing debate on the issue, providing categorical distinctions between and definitions for these modes of power is outside the purview of this thesis. However, for some clarity, in this chapter ‘state-as-system’ is used to refer to the organisations of bureaucratic and administrative power including the State Council and its departments and ministries, and the processes and practices employed for discipline, surveillance and regulation. ‘Nation’ is used to describe the ‘imagined community’ of China and being Chinese, the ‘state-as-idea’ as introduced in Chapter Two. The term ‘Party-state’ is deployed to refer to the intertwined zone in which technologies of power are inextricable from the idea of China.

Many non-Chinese observers and commentators, particularly those in the West, tend to try and make sense of the Chinese Party-state system through more recognisable prisms. However, using familiar nomenclature to describe Chinese political structures does not so much clarify as oversimplify and subsume important differences. For example, Xi Jinping and his predecessor Hu Jintao are widely described in Western discussions as ‘President’, a term associated with a particular set of roles and responsibilities. However, the highest position in Chinese politics, which Xi currently holds, is as General Secretary of the Communist Party, a role with no direct equivalent in Western politics. Simultaneously, he is Chairman of the State Council and head of the Central Military Commission of the People’s Republic of China. Without holding all of these roles simultaneously, an individual cannot be China’s Head of State. As Brown points out, the CCP is not simply a political party but rather the embodiment and institutionalisation of politics itself in China and “shares very few characteristics with political parties in Liberal democracies”. Therefore, “trying to see it simply as a political party along the same lines as them creates immediate conceptual problems” (Brown 2011, 3). Politics, power, and the relationships among the mechanisms of control and the people in China are in many fundamental ways simply not comparable to Western notions of the same.

A common misperception in Western commentary that arises from the application of Western models to explain Chinese politics is the way in which commentators tend to understand reforms in China’s central planning as the ‘retreat of the state’. This commentary usually includes a concomitant celebration of the restoration of individual agency in which Chinese people will now “have the opportunity to be who
they really are” (Hoffman 2010, 11). However, contentions that state authority is being supplanted by liberal reforms, such as those put forward by Strange (1996), overestimate the retreat of the state. As Hoffman argues, changes and reforms should be interpreted not so much as “the onset of freedom” but rather as a “different but equally present technique of governing adopted by the post-Mao government” (2010, 12).

One effect of this governmentalisation is the way in which desires are educated, habits are configured, and aspirations and beliefs are moulded to align with the goals of the state. An increasing number of issues are now in the realm of the disputable in which debate is acceptable, such as media censorship. However, these debates tend to be about technical questions, the ‘how to’ of running the state. While my students generally felt comfortable discussing these subjects, the vast majority tended to adopt an orthodox position and agree with the official line, to think and do as they ought, in their own self-interest (Li 2007, 5). For example, in a discussion about media controls, Cello said that she felt that “our government is way too sensitive, it acts like a baby, no, a child of three, it is not mature, it has to see that problems do exist, they won’t just disappear”. She had carefully prefaced this remark with, “I’m not anti-government, this is just a useful suggestion for improving”. Despite this, a classmate asked whether her comments meant she would consider herself “anti-government.” Cello hastily replied, “no, no! I’m critical of… I’m anti-corrupt government, I’m anti-manipulative government”. Cello’s remarks show how while some students were aware of the way power operated around them, and were prepared to critique this control to some extent, they ultimately limited themselves to making their criticisms in the form of technicalised suggestions for improvement. At the same time, themes particularly fundamental to the Party-state’s construction of China and being Chinese, such as the legitimacy of the Party-state system, or the nation-state as a family, remained firmly within the realm of doxa.

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28 For debates about the relationship among economic reform (liberalisation), the rise of the public sphere, and democratic political movements, see for example Embong (ed.) (2001); Goldman (1995), and (1999); Madsen (1993); Pearson (1997); Pun (2005); Saich (1994); and Wakeman (1993). However, a number of recent studies have questioned the direct link between economic liberalisation and political opposition (such as Wang, 2004), although they tend to use this process, the chances for political evolution, and the search for the political “will to act” to frame their analyses, for example Pearson (1997, p. 27); and also Goodman (1996).
State reforms and an increasingly sophisticated governmentality do not equate to a rollback of the state, or deny the existence of palpable state power to which CFAU students are subject. As Pieke points out, the vertically integrated hierarchical state “is much more than a loose configuration of bureaucratic institutions and practices” (2004, 532). In China, the Party-state, in both dressed up and flag-waving as well as banal, quotidian, intangible ways, exercises demonstrable and daily control over people’s lives. However understanding who or what constitutes state power is not as simple as pointing a finger at the imposing buildings behind Tiananmen Square that house the leadership, or familiarising oneself with the Constitution. While ‘the state’ does exist, and it does have obligations to ‘the people’ on which its legitimacy rests, the state is not always clearly distinguishable from the Party, the country, the family, or indeed, according to the perceptions of many of my students, the individual. Conceptualising power as state opposed to the individual underestimates the depth to which my students themselves embodied and articulated institutions of social control both over themselves as well as over others around them.

The way in which my students understood their relation with state power is fundamentally related to the idea of the ‘concentric circle’ model of social relations as set out in Chapter Five. In the ‘relationship-based social formation’ which characterises Chinese social life, roles, responsibilities, obligations and privileges shift constantly according to context (Evasdottir 2004; Fei 1992 [1947]; and Yang 1994, 296-298). In network-style, mutually interdependent relationships, as was the case for students living on campus at CFAU, power is not only transmitted from the powerful to the powerless. It is also intricately resisted, reshaped, co-opted, absorbed, re-issued, and owned by all actors within the social group. Evasdottir argues that in such situations, “the very definitions of concepts such as hierarchy, authority, power and autonomy must change” (2004, xi). Power is everywhere, but not only in the sense that the state is panoptically watching and controlling the students. The students are also watching and controlling their peers, and themselves. This complex inter-relationship of power is, I argue, a way to understand the concept of ‘state as family’, or guojia (国家). In my CFAU students’ social imaginary, their relationship with the state was conceived of as analogous to that of a family unit, with the Party-state as parent. In this conceptualisation, boundaries between the state and the individual
student are extremely nebulous and inconstant. In many ways, the students are the state (e.g. Fong’s ‘filial nationalism’ [2004]).

**How the Chinese Party-state Defines Itself**

Understanding power in China is further complicated because the Party has radically transformed the definition of its role over the course of its history, both in and of itself as well as in relation to other institutions (Brown 2011, 1). From its foundation in 1921, the CCP has evolved from being a party of revolution and change, up to the founding of the New China (the PRC) in 1949, to one of governance. Having been an institution dedicated to the primary cause of class struggle, after Mao’s death the CCP entirely transformed its mantra under Deng Xiaoping to promote economic productivity as its key performance benchmark. During the nine decades of its existence, the CCP has faced some extraordinary challenges that have required it to take radical changes in direction, which have then needed to be justified and explained. As Pieke notes, “At the heart of the CCP’s strategy lies the fact that it is prepared to reinvent itself, while retaining core Leninist principles that guarantee its authoritarian leading role over state and society” (2012, 150).

To find new approaches to managing and strengthening the state, Chinese leaders, academics, and other political actors have “mined societies of the developed world (above all the United States) for clues, ideas, and models – many of them ‘neoliberal’ – that may help make China a better place” (ibid., 150). To better suit the contemporary purpose, external concepts have been reinvented and reinvigorated through a careful blending with Chinese-style socialism and traditional Chinese ideas and practices. These adjustments in ideological position are seen not as a revision of previous stances, but as theoretically justifiable continuations of a single narrative. My students considered this adaptability quite appropriate and even necessary, as, according to how they explained Marxism, ideology should be determined by society’s material conditions. While the Party has changed ideological tack and injected foreign concepts into its lexicon, it has always and consistently deployed narratives of longevity and continuity to maintain its legitimacy. In these narratives, the Party characterises itself as the entity which unified, pacified and developed China.
to arrive at where it is today, and as the only means through which China’s recent peace and stability can continue into the future.

My students understood that the Party can and should adjust its ideology and role in response to changing times, and likewise accepted that the key themes of its propaganda messages can, and should, also change. During the Mao era, in the context of revolution, propaganda and thought work focused on China’s social transformation. However, when Deng instigated radical economic reforms in the late 1970s after Mao’s death, politicians deemed this approach no longer appropriate, and rejected it as destructive and divisive – although what was to replace it was the subject of considerable controversy within the Party (Brady 2009, 448). From 1991, the Party identified a number of central themes to justify the apparent about face from the policies and ideology of the Mao era, and encourage people to embrace the new economic order of market liberalism. Indeed, the CCP had an explicit policy to “indoctrinate the masses” with economic-related ideology, such as awareness of the successes of Deng’s Opening Up and Reform policy, and the importance of science, law, competition and efficiency (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2011, as cited in Brady 2011, 448).

**Today: The three pillars**

Today, the CCP presents itself as the guardian of a timeless Chinese state and the unified Chinese people. Three key pillars are critical to this construction, namely: territorial integrity; economic growth; and a unifying ideology of integrated identity (Kallio 2011, 12-13). I will particularly focus on the third pillar as my CFAU students very commonly deployed this motif to explain what the Chinese state-as-idea meant to them. Following Li, Evasdottir and Hoffman, among others, who discuss recent shifts in techniques of governmentality in China, I argue that students can agree or disagree with certain technical questions as long as they choose to accept that other questions remain in the realm of doxa, undiscussed and undisputed. In this following section, I will discuss my students’ understanding of these three pillars of the Party-state message within this analytical framework.
For my students, the physical and geographical imagining of China was an essential and non-negotiable component of what it meant to be Chinese. The importance of territorial integrity in their national identity rested on the central role of events such as the Century of Humiliation and the unification of the country after the war with the Japanese in narratives of Chinese history. It was clear in class discussions in which the topics of Tibet, Taiwan or Xinjiang arose that China’s territorial integrity was a deeply held value. Indeed, this was the topic around which nationalist declarations most readily arose. The ‘love for country’ (*ai guo* 爱国) that is such a prominent trope in official discourse is predicated on the idea that China has always been the same shape and size as it is now, and this is what constitutes what is ‘rightfully’ China. The extent to which the long and proud existence of the Chinese civilisation is linked to territorial integrity means that the issue of a separate, autonomous Tibet, for example, is not simply a question of practical preference or geo-strategic advantage, but is rather a fundamental factor in Chinese national identity. If any one of Tibet, Xinjiang or Taiwan were to become an independent state, it would not simply be a physical change to mapping, but a deep and psychological loss. It would also signal inexcusable failure on the part of the CCP, and represent a serious threat to the perception that the Party was a true representative of the Chinese people’s interests and values (Kallio 2011, 13).

Figure 2: A car parked in a side street of central Beijing, clearly indicating the importance of territorial integrity in the Chinese national logic. Photograph taken by the author, March 2011

My students felt that China’s territorial integrity was such an important component of what it meant to be Chinese that anger at past and potential territorial incursions had
become the foundation of Chinese nationalism. It seemed from class discussions that students strongly believed that nationalism in its angry form had developed since the Century of Humiliation, based on rage about foreign incursions. There was considerable discussion among my students about the different kinds of love for country, and which was the “right one”. As they explained, the term ‘nationalism’ entailed negative connotations of anger and defensiveness. On the other hand, ‘patriotism’, like rational nationalism, was understood to hold a different and more positive meaning.

Students preferred to describe themselves and their own love of China in ‘rational nationalist’ terms. Students argued that anger at incursions into Chinese territory was no longer the basis of their own ‘rational’ nationalism. They suggested that while anger over territorial disputes may still well form the basis of some people’s Chinese nationalism, it should not, because staying angry about “invaders of previous centuries” was unhelpful. These students pointed out that “continuous anger won’t help, nationalism shouldn’t be presented like this, we should remember the past, but we need to move past the anger”.

Their differentiation between a proper, rational love of China and angry nationalism neatly reflected government efforts since the early 1990s to promote a positive, country loving kind of ‘patriotism’ (Zhao 1998, 290-291). As Layla pointed out,

According to Western media, nationalism is a very negative term, so we need to be careful how we use the word, and the government needs to be careful how it uses the idea. It is not a stable sentiment, it can be dangerous, but … we should have love for country, but…love for country doesn’t have to be negative.

In response to this remark, the one non-Chinese student in the class, a young Russian man, asked Layla whether she thought that nationalism in China might be “unstable” because it was founded on anger and humiliation. Buddy argued that actually Chinese

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29 ‘Patriotism’ is officially understood to mean supporting the political status quo, the Party-state system, and the leadership role of the CCP in Chinese society. Zhao (1998, 290-291) argues that since 1992, CCP leaders have increasingly stressed patriotism (aiguo zhuyi 爱国主义), “loving the state”, being the “Communist state”, as a means to give people something to believe in.
nationalism “is a little bit exaggerated [by Western media] because the Chinese government wants to use patriotism, not nationalism, as its preferred choice”. Another student, a thoughtful young woman, Wendy, argued that,

Now the Chinese government suppresses the trend of nationalism because it will make people irrational, like during the Olympic years, there was too much anger against Westerners. I read a book that says that Chinese people never believed in Gandhi’s way of changing the world – they believed no violence, no revolution.

Despite their claims to ‘rationality’, when I asked students as a group how they would feel if someone suggested that Xinjiang be a separate state, there was no doubt that their immediate reaction was very angry indeed. Although my students claimed to hold a form of nationalism more well-considered and intellectualised than the ‘angry nationalism’ of ‘other people’, it was evident that they held a passionate anger just below the surface.

Some students seemed to recognise this tension between the ideal of rational nationalism and the existence of very strong anger at the root of their love of China. Song posed a question in class about whether it was possible to be a nationalist and not be angry. Wendy, replied that yes, it was possible, but it was not at all easy. She went on to describe how she had noticed herself becoming angry when she was collecting images in preparation for her presentation for class on whether nationalism was a factor in foreign policy (based on readings by Gries 2004 and Starr 2001 [1997]). Below are two of the slides from her presentation, which came with the heading “My View”, which she showed to illustrate her argument that nationalism was indeed a critical component in Chinese foreign policy. As the examples demonstrate, Wendy chose to represent Chinese nationalism with images of China as weakened, beaten and humbled; followed by Chinese people adopting powerful stances while expressing anti-American sentiments.
Figure 3: Slide taken from Wendy’s class presentation on Chinese nationalism, November 2009

Figure 4: Slide taken from Wendy’s class presentation on Chinese nationalism, November 2009
Attitudes towards Japan were another lens through which I was able to observe my students’ sentiments about territorial integrity. Edward Friedman has argued that when Deng came to power in 1977, “anti-Japan nationalism became a great legitimating glue to hold the society together” (in an interview with Bernard Gwertzman, 2008). However, the Hu administration sought better relations with Japan since the early 2000s, and pursued the careful control and management, rather than indiscriminate stoking, of anti-Japanese sentiment. Regardless, anti-Japanese sentiment remained very strong among my students at CFAU. In a number of my classes, when the discussion turned to attitudes towards Japan, students would call out their opinions and comments in an unusually unhesitant way. Any student who did not express his or her passionate commitment to China’s territorial integrity by vehemently loathing Japan was roundly and angrily criticised by his or her classmates. Students would only present any apparent interest in the country in terms of how it could be used as a lesson to further China’s interests. As far as my students were concerned, China’s ongoing troubled relationship with Japan was premised on a long and complicated history. It was a particularly intractable situation, as they argued, because Japan would not satisfactorily acknowledge the atrocities it committed in the Sino-Japanese War.

The strength of my students’ anti-Japanese sentiments and their justification for their feelings demonstrated their commitment to the idea of territorial integrity. Their anti-Japanese fervour was a sentiment that remained squarely in the realm of undisputed doxa. Indeed, I got the sense that some of my students were deliberately avoiding reflecting on the issue, for fear of reaching a conclusion that did not fit well with the prevailing narratives. Students had many opportunities to explore other perspectives on the issue of Sino-Japanese history in particular and territorial disputes in general. The virtual uniformity in their expressed views illustrates the extent to which they had internalised the belief that participating in the nationalist discourse of anti-Japanese sentiment was for their own good.

*Economic growth*

The second pillar of the Party-state’s construction of Chineseness was economic growth. Wealth and financial security were regarded by my CFAU students as both
prerequisites for and results of social and political stability. Since Deng began the Reform and Opening Up process in 1978, the foundational principle of CCP policy has been that poverty is the cause of social dissatisfaction and unrest. The strategy undertaken to prevent social instability has therefore been to encourage wealth acquisition. Deng’s famous saying that “it doesn’t matter if the cat is black or white so long as it catches mice”, meaning that how wealth is made is not so important as just making it, comes from this time. However, while economic growth has increased remarkably in China over the past three decades, it has occurred very unevenly. For the most part, the eastern coastal regions of the country have benefited, but far less development has been seen in the central and western areas thus far. This is not surprising as Deng’s programme was to develop the east first, based on the rationale that wealth would ‘trickle down’ from the coastal regions and eventually reach the poorest regions and segments of the population. However, the Chinese government has recognised that rising levels of inequality are a serious and growing problem. The most recent (2011) Five Year Plan has a “pro-poor” approach focusing on smoothing out the economic disparities through “human-centred development”. This seems to reflect a broadly accepted assumption that if growth slows or stagnates, and the existing wealth is not distributed more evenly, the economic discrepancies will continue to widen and have the potential to create major unrest (Kallio 2011, 13).

My students at CFAU argued that widespread poverty, tragic famine and terrifying chaos were still prominent in many Chinese people’s memories. They believed that it was therefore not surprising that most people’s primary goal in life, including themselves, was to enjoy a peaceful life with somewhere secure to live and enough to eat. In the first week of class, during self-introductions, many of the students set out their life goals in exactly this way. They described their ideal futures in terms of getting a job that would allow them to earn enough to have economic security and marry well. Cherie, for example, explained that her career goal was “to be an office worker, then manager or chairman, to earn lots of money, and then I can just be happy every day”. In the same vein, many of the girls described their perfect marriage partner as someone who could take care of them financially. As Kathy answered in

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30 According to the most widely accepted measurement of inequality, the Gini coefficient, China’s economic inequalities puts the country into a high-risk category for social unrest.
response to a question about her ideal husband, she was looking for someone who was:

Not necessarily handsome, but able to be responsible for my family and me. He must be between 1.75 and 1.88 metres tall, he must love me and treat me very well, and he will need a good economic basis, so he must be more educated than me.

It was evident that the government priority of economic wealth as a prerequisite for social wellbeing was also important to the CFAU students in their everyday lives.

In addition to this belief in the necessity of wealth and economic stability at a personal level, students also discussed how economic growth and strength were critical elements of China’s national interests in the international realm. As Primo noted in his mid-semester essay,

The national interest of China has been redefined and reshaped. Now, the most important components are economic interests and political interests, both of which are especially important for China’s national security.

Students saw China’s pursuit of its national interests as occurring both in the domestic sphere and internationally, as these two realms were closely interlinked. According to students, domestic growth and strength (both economic and psychological) would lead to international recognition and dignity, which would in turn bring benefits back to China.

Overall, my students tended to accept the proposition that economic growth was centrally important to China’s stability, both domestically and internationally, and that a strong economy was a fundamental element of China regaining its rightful position on the world stage. Students spoke of how China must expand and develop its economy in order to “catch up with others” and as a “matter of national pride” to show other countries that China was no longer weak, as it had been in the nineteenth century when it was “invaded”. Students across all my classes made the same points, arguing that “we do place economic development as first priority”, and that a “strong
domestic economy helps us become stronger, and gives us the power to defend our rights in international society”. Students saw China’s domestic economic strength as a critical element in the country’s quest to overcome the Century of Humiliation and regain its lost dignity both domestically and in the international arena. Students also argued that becoming more economically powerful and taking its place in the world would enable China to contribute to global peace, as “in our heart we want to devote ourselves to protecting the world”.

At the same time as students saw building China’s economic growth as a means to re-establish its international dignity, they also saw regional and international stability and security as critical to China’s domestic developmental interests. Students broadly understood that a peaceful international environment was a prerequisite for China’s own continued economic growth. Regional stability was considered particularly important for China’s development. Students emphasised the great lengths to which China went to ensure that countries geographically close to China did not feel threatened by its growing economic power. To this end, students saw China’s development assistance to other countries, especially those in China’s immediate region, as a means of ensuring broader stability and security, which in turn, would secure China’s own domestic interests. As Johnny explained it,

China’s extreme growth might make other countries feel uncomfortable and envious. So if China still focuses too much on economic development, it could cause instability. The Chinese government is aware of this, and that’s why it gives aid to stop other countries feeling threatened by its growth.

Johnny was perfectly correct in his understanding, as within the roughly equal distribution of its assistance between Africa and Asia, China does focus its aid on countries with which it shares borders.31 However, several China analysts argue that China’s efforts to use development assistance to support the economic growth of neighbouring countries and thereby create a peaceful and secure regional environment, are inchoate at best, if not actually counter-productive (see for example Fenby 2012; and Varrall 2012).

31 As explained to me in a telephone conversation with a Chinese aid official from the Ministry of Commerce, Beijing, June 2012
While students seemed to accept the importance of economic growth as a means of achieving stability within China, security in the immediate region, and peace on a broader global scale, many of them also suggested that there were more direct political implications within China itself. For example, the student who commented on “economic development as first priority” made the point in the context of a discussion about Party legitimacy. Another student remarked that she had read,

An article which said that the difference between China and other countries is the CCP. That is, in China, everything serves the Party, the army is the Party’s army, the economy is a tool for legitimacy to prove what the Party has done.... Well, I guess this makes some sense. We do place economic development as first priority, but it is a means to an end, the legitimacy of the Party.

Students considered this situation in which “everything serves the Party” to be unproblematic. For example, Benny responded to the above remark by saying, “I agree, and I think the ends do justify the means”. Similarly, a student in the other International Economics class talked about the importance of economic development, as without it, the CCP’s legitimacy would be at risk. In another class on the same theme, Ken laughingly said that “if Harry was here, he would say that the media has brainwashed us!” I asked Ken if he thought Harry might be right, to which he replied, “well, maybe a little bit right…”. These exchanges show that for students, discussing Party politics and political motivations for policy behaviour was acceptable. Just as in many of the other topics in the realm of the disputable, students largely accepted the official discourse and aligned themselves with the orthodox position. In this case, while they seemed comfortable in discussing the motivations and implications of growth, they all agreed that economic growth was essential for stability, and stability was understood in terms of continued CCP leadership. No student ever questioned whether stability under the CCP was the ideal social situation, suggesting that this was thoroughly within the realm of undisputable doxa.

*Integrated identity*

Projecting unity and coherence is a core task of state-making anywhere. In China, the
state’s projection of itself as a moral actor with the ultimate right to define what constitutes Chineseness has played a central role in the state-building process (Thornton 2007, 12,14). A unifying ideology is the third pillar of the CCP’s construction of the Chinese national identity. According to this ideology of unified Chineseness, the Party, the state, the country and the people are all foundational elements of an overarching and mutually constitutive common identity, in which if one dimension of the whole fails, the entire structure is in danger of collapsing. As such, each part of the unified whole relies on the continued existence of all the others. A critical element in the CCP’s narrative of its own continuity and ongoing legitimacy is engendering a sense that each individual is Chinese above all else, sharing a particular and agreed Chinese history, experiencing a certain Chinese present, and moving forward into a greater Chinese future (on nationalism as a unifying ideology in China, see for example Wang 2012, 119-120). This sense of integrated identity underpinned my students’ conception of what it means to be a good Chinese citizen. Students explained to me that the essence of this sense of being a part of a greater Chinese whole is contained in the Chinese word for country or state: guojia (国家), made up of the character for country (guo:国) and the character for family (jia:家). For these students, the integrated identity of Chineseness transcends ethnic boundaries, and links to the state-sponsored image of a strong, rich and unified China.

On many occasions, Chinese friends and colleagues, as well as CFAU students, explained to me that the nature of the relationship between the Chinese state and the people is fundamentally different from that in the West. For example, while at a conference in Papua New Guinea on Asia’s growing role in the Pacific, I was talking to a young, male Chinese professor from the Chinese Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) who had been sent to the conference to present China’s perspective. After a couple of drinks over dinner one night, Professor Wang and I began talking about the differences in perspective between China and ‘the West’. He raised the topic of Chinese writer Liu Xiaobo winning the Nobel Peace Prize, and said that while basically most Chinese people understood that human rights and democracy were good and important, pushing the issue “in that way, from the outside” would not work: “Doing so just serves to make the Chinese government angry and the people upset”. He then asked me whether it was the same when...
Western countries got criticised by outsiders. I said that when Australian government policy was criticised internationally, it generally did not make Australians feel ‘hurt’ in our hearts in the same way Chinese people seem to react when China was criticised. He asked why, and I said I thought it was probably something to do with the separation of the people and the state. He looked extremely interested and said, “because, you know, so many people don’t understand things like how the relationship between people and state in China is... is...like a family”. I said, “do you mean guojia?” A smile lit up Wang’s face, and he said enthusiastically, “yes! Yes, exactly!”

My students at CFAU felt very strongly that the idea of guojia, or ‘country-family’ expressed the relationship between people and the state in China very well. They believed that the term encapsulated a relationship that is different from the traditional Western understanding of a social contract between two mutually exclusive, rational, self-interested entities. Indeed, one student in the Diplomacy major argued that guojia traditionally meant “the whole of society”, that is, “that society is the state, and the state is society”. This intermeshing between people and the state arose on several occasions in my CFAU classes. For example, in one lesson focused on the role of culture in Chinese foreign policy, we discussed what constitutes Chinese culture. The reading for the week was ‘Social and Political Life’, chapter six of Lin’s book, My Country and My People (1998 [1935]). In this chapter, Lin argues that Chinese society is based on obligation to family rather than society, and thereby individuals seek interests and honour for themselves and their family sometimes at a cost to society at a larger level, in the form of corruption and nepotism. From discussing the issues raised by the chapter, several points about how the students understood their relationship with the state and country as being part of an integrated whole emerged.

Lin’s chapter explained how Chinese society was based on “the family mind” rather than “the social mind”. As one student explained, the term ‘family mind’ implied that the “family system is the spring for the whole social system, including the government”. Other students understood the family mind to mean that just as in a

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32 As explained in Chapter Three, I had given students the Lin Yutang reading without revealing the identity of the author, and the overall reaction was very negative until students discovered that Lin was in fact a Chinese writer.
family, where relationships mattered more than rules and regulations, so it was in the larger ‘family’ of the Chinese nation-state. In this larger family, the government (not clearly defined as being either the Party or the administrative system) took the role of parent, and the Chinese people were the children. As such, students explained, “strict parenting” was appropriate and also necessary. As one female student observed,

Some parents let their children decide and choose for themselves. The government should be.... well, it depends on how old the child is. I mean, if they are babies, well of course the parents have to have more control. Chinese people are teenagers. We are trying to fight for the ability to be adults, but sometimes we are immature, so we need the government to tell us how to behave.

Most students tended to agree with this position, saying that, for example, “children, the Chinese people, still have to check with their parents, the government, to approve things” (e.g. Fong 2004). In another class, Ricky argued that “as Confucius says, if the family was well, the country will be well. So, if the leaders treat the country as a family, the country will get better”. His friend Ken added,

Controlling the country is just like cooking a meal. The idea is that you can’t treat it too ‘luan’, I mean, let it be too chaotic, it has to be more ordered. Ricky means the family is the basic unit of society, if one family is stable, many families are stable, society is stable. Everyone is related. The government is the parent or the chef.

According to this characterisation, students believed that it was right that the government, in a parental role, should exercise control over the “immature” people for the benefit of society as a whole.

Students’ attitude towards media censorship is a useful illustration of the way in which they conceived of society and state as forming a family unit. That the Chinese media exercises censorship was a well-accepted fact among my students, however, to what extent the government ought to be controlling access to information was hotly debated. Most of my students felt that it was appropriate for the government to censor
and control the availability of information to protect the Chinese people. Generally, students saw media censorship as good parenting, and argued that while perhaps the government should move towards less censorship, the transition should be slow and careful. For example, in one class in which we were discussing the media, one student commented that he hated censorship in any media system. Immediately, his friend Ricky joked that “it’s Chinese culture to censor the media, a Chinese characteristic to ask the media to stabilise society”. Laura replied that,

Any country has censorship, it’s necessary, it’s fundamental. We need it in order to prevent confusion in the mind of the people, to prevent chaos. The government needs to control culture via the media to keep things clear.

Ken added rather ominously, “social elites have more experience, they know what will happen...”.

Carolyn noted that she thought that government control of online opinions was a good thing, as people without proper knowledge could otherwise just say whatever they liked and stir up trouble. She felt that it “would be disastrous to be completely open”. Several students agreed that lifting government controls over the media too quickly would indeed be “disastrous.” Further, students said they felt that government media controls are important as, “if anybody can access all the facts all at once, we can’t accept them; so the government should open up our access to information slowly”. Another student, Sebastian, argued that,

It is very important to dominate [people’s] minds, to make sure their minds go along with the mainstream… I think allowing views on the net is a good way to let out emotion, but whenever a country can’t dominate people’s minds, problems appear. This is the most important thing, because China has such a unique context, like its large population, so if everybody thinks the same way, the force goes in a straight line, China is more powerful.

At this point, Cello shot back, “that is extremely frightening to me”, to which Sebastian responded, “maybe Cello misunderstood me, what I meant was that in a larger sense, it is important to stay together, that is how to make China strong”. Like
Sebastian, many students saw the censorship of the media as a necessary, if at times annoying, means to ensure social unity and stability. These broader social goals were considered far more important than any individual’s ability to access the media at will.

Despite the general trend among students to adopt the prevailing orthodoxy on issues like media censorship, this did not mean that students were not able to express any negative views or criticisms at all. I noticed a remarkable difference between the students I had taught in Tianjin in 1999 and my CFAU students in 2009-2010 regarding their willingness to discuss government policy. In 1999, students were observably afraid to even mention the topic of media censorship. Over a decade later, my students at CFAU were able to express dissatisfaction with the Party-state regarding particular topics, as long as they did not go beyond the accepted parameters. Another example was how my students quite comfortably railed against what they saw as isolated incidences of local corruption. They seemed to regard corruption among local officials as a well-known fact. This suspicion extended to some higher-level officials – though never to Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, who they understood as ‘clean’.

Students’ willingness to discuss issues like media censorship and Party corruption reflects a new government approach to monitoring and control. For example, in the media, the government is no longer as concerned with politically critical content as perceived encouragement to translate criticism into real-life action (King et al. 2012). This sophisticated system of “controlled flexibility” in the blogosphere aims censorship at “curtailing collective action” rather than focusing on expressions of political opinion. It does so by focusing on “silencing comments that represent, reinforce, or spur social mobilisation, regardless of content” (King et al. 2012).

The approach of controlled flexibility reflects Hoffman’s analysis of new modes of governmentality in China. She argues that in this new model, while the state appears to be loosening its restrictions, it is rather shifting to an emphasis on self-governance in which self-directed self-improvement moves the locus of control from central authorities to subjects (2010, 11-13). Pieke makes similar observations about the changes in the presence of government in contemporary Chinese society, describing it
as “more powerful and resourceful and less direct and invasive” (2012, 149). This “flexible authoritarianism” is representative of a sophisticated shifting of the mechanisms of governmentality as a means of more effectively maintaining state power (Cabestan 2004, 2-7). My students’ negotiation of topics that had formerly been in the realm of the undiscussed reflected how extensively they had internalised this model of controlled flexibility.

My students’ ability to express views that not so long ago would have been unthinkable reflects the Party-state’s sophisticated management of integrated identity. Certain technical aspects of how the state should be run are now situated in the realm of the debatable. Being aware of and frustrated with government corruption and media censorship are just two examples of issues which have been allowed to move from the field of doxa into a realm in which students could choose to locate themselves somewhere between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. For the most part, my students chose to align more closely with the orthodox perspective. However, their belief in the importance of unity and coherence remained firmly within the realm of the undisputed. It was very difficult for them to conceive of themselves as anything other than unchangeably Chinese, and being Chinese as being part of a family in which the state was a firm but fair parental figure. Any suggestion to the contrary was met with emotional and inarticulate responses, often anger, suggesting the extent to which these notions had not been thought about or any position consciously decided upon.

The Difference Between “We Chinese” and You, the Rest of the World:

One of the implications of the integrated identity discourse was how students conceptualised anything or anyone not Chinese. Because my students did not conceive of the state and society as separate, discrete elements, but rather as being inextricably linked within a metaphorical family unit, everything and everyone not Chinese was simply part of a single imagined community of “outside China”.

I came across this sense of “we Chinese” (women Zhongguoren: 我们中国人) as a unique category that “you outsiders” (nimen waiguoren: 你们外国人, you [mostly always undifferentiated] foreigners) could never hope to genuinely understand on
many occasions during my time in China. During my fieldwork at CFAU, and in casual conversations with friends, shopkeepers, hairdressers, taxi drivers, or university professors, many new or apparently inexplicably ‘Chinese’ things were described (not explained) to me by calling on this trope of difference. Fong found that the Chinese citizens in her study “often experienced and discussed the developed world as if it were one imagined community” (2011, 6). She describes how her Chinese interlocutors contrasted “how things were done in China…by Chinese people” with how “foreigners” did things in “foreign countries”, as if all “foreign countries were part of one single country, and all the foreigners shared the same nationality” (ibid., 6-7). Similarly, when my friends and students explained how “we Chinese” did things, they usually did so with the assumption that I would not be able to understand, and they were rather simply demonstrating that how Chinese people saw and did things was fundamentally different from the West. For example, when travelling by taxi in Beijing, we were almost hit by another car, but the driver did not respond at all. I asked him whether he was not angry, and he said, of course he was, but that “we Chinese” do not express our anger over something we cannot change. In the same way, my students at CFAU would explain their reluctance to do the readings I set them and participate in class discussions in terms of “we Chinese don’t study in this way”.

One particularly distinctive example of how ‘the outsider’ could never truly understand ‘the Chinese’ was in relation to ‘face’. The concept came up many times in my classes at CFAU, often in relation to how it underpinned political decision-making, both domestically and in regard to China’s role in the international arena, now as well as in the past. In conversations across all the classes in which we discussed the concept of face, I noticed a very strong tendency for students to assume that because I was a foreigner, I would never be able to understand what face really meant. They told me that there was simply no equivalent word in English, and as soon as we started to use English words to try and describe the concept, the term lost its essential sense.

Students’ epistemological position in which concepts and ideas existed that were common only to Chinese people led into discussions about what made a person ‘Chinese’, whether Chinese people could ever stop being Chinese, and whether
outsiders could ever become Chinese. Students considered it possible that people born overseas of Chinese parents could become citizens of another country, but that this did not equate to them becoming not-Chinese. Students used the term ‘ABCs’ or ‘BBCs’ to describe individuals with Chinese heritage born overseas. The acronyms stand for American/Australian or British-born Chinese, that is, despite being born elsewhere, still fundamentally Chinese. Similarly, it was inconceivable to my students that foreigners born and raised in China could ever become Chinese. Indeed, the very notion met with furrowed brows and confused shaking of heads. My students’ first reaction, for the most part, would be to laugh at such an absurd notion. As one student explained, “foreigners can’t become Chinese because they believe in God, okay, well, even if they don’t believe in God, that idea has too deeply influenced them”. Even if an individual was born in China from parents who themselves were born in China, students did not believe they could really be considered truly Chinese. When I tried to clarify why this was the case, students once again seemed unable to express themselves. As when discussing nationalism and anti-Japanese sentiment, knowing what constituted Chineseness was difficult for students to articulate. The students had so internalised the immutability of Chineseness that they simply knew that only Chinese people could ever be Chinese, and could never stop being Chinese.

In the preceding section, I argued that the Chinese Party-state represents itself as guardian of three key pillars, namely territorial integrity, economic growth, and a unifying ideology of integrated Chinese identity. Overall, my students articulated views very closely aligned with these official discourses. Rather than a retreat of the Chinese state in how and what Chinese people think, I argue that questions not deemed existentially fundamental, but rather dealing with the technicalities of how to govern better, have been moved from the realm of doxa to the realm of the discussed. Despite being open to debate, however, my students tended to err on the side of orthodoxy although they had ample access to contending views. It remained in the realm of the undisputable that students would resist the orthodox view because of the benefits of conforming. For my students, professional and personal success was a strong incentive to ensure their beliefs on those issues deemed debatable were appropriate. How the Party-state maintained and controlled what was in the universe of the disputable and what remained unthinkable required considerable efforts, as the next section will discuss.
Mass Persuasion: How the Chinese state presents itself as a technique of governance

As Bourdieu argues, every established order tends to produce “the naturalisation of its own arbitrariness”, or field of doxa, in which knowledge of the social world comes to be seen as self-evident and undisputed (1977, 164). When internalised norms and values fit neatly with objective structures and external norms, the “established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, i.e. as one possible order among others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned” (ibid., 166). In producing doxa, Bourdieu notes the importance of highly stable objective structures which “reproduce themselves in the agents’ dispositions”. The more they do so, “the greater the extent of the field of doxa, of that which is taken for granted” (ibid., 165-166). Reproduction and reduplication in every possible sphere of socialisation helps “the world conform to the myth”, so that “between the child and the world” there is nothing that intervenes or “disenchants”, but rather the “whole universe of ritual practises, and also of discourses, sayings, proverbs” are all structured to concord with the doxa (ibid., 167). To be able to create this self-reinforcing universe of truth requires “the dominant classes” to very deliberately prevent the exposure of the “arbitrariness of the taken for granted”. Those in power must diligently toil to “defend the integrity of the doxa” (ibid., 169).

Bourdieu’s ideas of how doxa is created and maintained can be complemented by more recent work targeted particularly at understanding how the nation is constructed. As Ann Anagnost points out, the discourse of ‘the nation’ can be understood as a narrative that tries to draw and hold together an otherwise “impossible unity” that “must be narrated into being in both time and space” (1997, 2). Likewise, Judith Butler writes, “the nation-state can only reiterate its own basis for legitimation by literally producing the nation that serves as the basis for its legitimation” (Butler and Spivak 2007, 31). In different points of time and space, how the Chinese “national community” has been “imagined”, in the words of Benedict Anderson (2006 [1983]), has changed remarkably, as have the discourses and practices involved in creating, transmitting and perpetuating that imagined entity. The structures and processes of
power, the means of communicating ideals, and the contestations and negotiations of meaning have seen remarkable and often radical shifts in direction in China over the past 60 years. By virtue of the nature of narrative itself, the project of creating an imagined nation-state can never be completed. The very performativity of language precludes the existence of any fixed meaning of who or what the national community is (Anagnost 1997, 3). The gaps and inconsistencies that narratives of nations work so hard to bridge over and fill in can always hold the potential to reappear in a moment of crisis. In a rapidly changing environment, such as China’s, this potential is very real indeed.

The Chinese Communist Party must exert considerable ongoing efforts to “produce the nation” across all of the three pillars set out above and clearly articulate the Party-state ideology and political programme in order to retain the support of the people (Brown 2011, 1). There is a long list of institutions whose job it is to analyse these very issues, including but not limited to, the Party History Teaching and Research Department at the Central Party School; the Party History Research Centre, the Party Literature Research Centre and the Party Building Bureau Policy Research Office in the Central Committee; the Party Building Research Institute; the General Office in the Central Commission and Inspection, CCP; and the Research Office of the Publicity Department of the CCP Central Committee. However despite all this research activity, garnering agreement on a consistent narrative acceptable across all the “wings and flanks” of the CCP has been a challenge, both in the current time and throughout the Party’s history (Brown 2011, 1).

Considerable skill is required to communicate these shifting messages at the same time as maintaining the continuity of the other narratives central to the Party-state’s continued relevance. As Brown points out, the Party-state not only has to meet the challenges of running the country, but also needs to simultaneously communicate its achievements to “an impossibly complex constituency” (2011, 3). The vast differences within the Chinese population in geographical location, ethnic identity, and increasingly disparate socio-economic levels create considerable difficulties in communicating in a way that appeals to the majority of the population. Of late the Party has found that the language it has traditionally used to “deliver propaganda about economic achievements” has been judged as “stilted and formulaic”, and
lacking in emotional appeal. The CCP is reportedly “deeply frustrated at how its message is not getting through – not only to the rest of the world, but to many of its own people” (ibid., 1). Brown’s research, conducted with David Shambaugh, suggests that the Party is looking for a new kind of language with which to capture people’s imaginations and reconnect with them (ibid., 3).

This frustration regarding effective communication comes despite concerted efforts to build popular support for Party rule through what Brady terms “mass persuasion” (2009), particularly after the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989. Citing internal Party documents, Brady argues that the current Chinese government recognises the importance of communication – propaganda and thought work – as integral, the “life line” (shengmingxian: 生命线) of the Party-state. She notes that since 1989, considerable resources have been deployed to update CCP ideology so that it better matches China’s rapidly changing social and economic environment (ibid., 453).

Many in the CCP blamed the events of 1989 on too much of a focus on ensuring support through performance (economic growth) and neglecting the importance of strategic communication – a reaction to the decreased emphasis on ideological control after Mao’s death in 1976. In the years following, the CCP began to very deliberately adopt a ‘two-handed’ approach, in which both performance-based and persuasion-based legitimacy were deemed equally important. To strengthen its ability to persuade, since 1989 the CCP has deliberately deployed methods of political public relations, mass communication, social psychology, and other modern techniques of mass persuasion commonly used in Western societies (ibid., 434). As in Mao’s era, the Party-state today uses the full range of available resources to transmit its message to the Chinese people, working on the theory that the more popular a medium is, the more it can “get into their ears, their brains, their hearts” (rue er, ru nao, ru xin: 入耳入脑入心), as Ding Guang’en, propaganda chief from 1992 to 2002, was fond of saying (ibid., 442). All aspects of Chinese popular culture, including films, songs, poems, and books, were targeted as part of the patriotic education campaign (Callahan 2010, 16; Wang 2012, 108).

The media play an important role in imagining the nation-state and communicating what it is to be a proper Chinese. In the 1990s, the Central Propaganda Department
designated television as the key tool for domestic and foreign audiences alike, making it the preferred medium for presenting propaganda and delivering indications about correct attitudes (Landsberger 2010, 567). Three per cent of prime time advertising space was required to be allocated for sophisticated, well-made institutional television ‘partymercials’ in order to support general propaganda themes such as national unity or stressing the central and historically inevitable role of the CCP in China’s development (ibid., 567). One particularly good example of how television has been used to subtly but effectively transmit norms and values is the Beijing TV series, “Golden Wedding” (Jin Hun: 金婚). The series allowed viewers to see a highly selective version of China’s political history through the lives of a married couple (Brady 2009, 442). While in the late 1970s, there was only one television set per 1000 people in China, by 2007 the rate of television ownership was almost 100 per cent. Thanks also to a government project to donate televisions and extend satellite coverage to all corners of China, even the most remote communities could watch these government-made, normatively-loaded partymercials and prime time soap operas.

In addition to how information is managed in the arena of television, far from being a means of contesting power, text messaging and the internet have functioned to strengthen the Party’s mass communication work. As part of a carefully considered response to the Colour Revolutions calling for political change in Eastern Europe, in December 2005 the government stepped up its vigilance, and text messaging is now monitored closely by 2800 surveillance centres (Brady 2009, 443). The CCP has also embraced internet technology and developed a system of controls which it regularly updates as part of its vigilant surveillance. Various government agencies, including the Ministry of Public Security, the State Council Information Office, and the newly established State Internet Information Office, all carry responsibilities for regulating the internet in China.

Besides overseeing the content of various forms of media, the Party-state is also attentive to the way in which language itself is deployed in official messages to create the national imaginary. Since the first days of the People’s Republic of China, and well before, Chinese leaders have been acutely sensitive to the power of the word. As Thornton argues, “the persistent power of the written word as a technique of rule is
evident in the commitment of successive Chinese regimes to the careful compilation of canonical texts and standard histories, as well as the suppression of unofficial and alternative accounts” (2007, 15). This concern has a long history, for example, in pre-modern China, political philosophers paid extensive attention to the use of language. Confucius argued in the *Analects* that when names are not correct – and what is said is therefore not reasonable – the affairs of state will not culminate in success, and the common people will not know how to do what is right. As such, “the Prince is never casual in his choice of words” (Confucius).33

The concern with linguistic form in ensuring “the common people know what is right” is particularly noticeable in CCP political communications since 1949. Michael Schoenhals argues that while the leadership of the CCP agrees on few issues, they have achieved a remarkable consensus about the crucial role of ‘perlocutionary acts’34 in gaining, consolidating and retaining Party legitimacy (1992, 5). Mao was well known for choosing his words with extreme care to avoid the dangerous causal relationship between “erroneous formulations”, “confused notions” and, ultimately, “inappropriate practices”. As he said in 1963, “one single [correct linguistic] formulation, and the whole nation will flourish; one single [incorrect] formulation and the whole nation will decline. What is referred to here is the transformation of the spiritual into the material” (ibid., 6).35 Certain formulations with their associated fixed forms are approved as being correct and scientific – referring to their political utility in producing the desired results, rather than being scientifically verifiable (ibid., 9). Regulations stipulate that synonyms may not replace approved words, should their utility be affected. I had first hand experience of the inflexibility of official linguistic formulations when editing the English translation of President Hu’s speech at the Seventeenth National Congress of the CCP. I was instructed that certain highlighted phrases were not to be revised. For example, I was not to make any changes to the following passage:

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33 *Analects*, 12, iii, 5-6
34 John L. Austin uses this term to describe the intentional use of language to produce consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts and actions of people (1962, 101)
35 This particular example of how “erroneous formulations” in language ultimately lead to “inappropriate practices” comes from the winter of 1978-79, when the CCP leadership reversed its previously positive verdict on Mao’s final decade.
…thoroughly apply the Scientific Outlook on development, continue to emancipate the mind, persist in reform and opening up, pursue development in a scientific way, promote social harmony, and strive for new victories in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

What is critical in the use of words is a certain and carefully considered formalisation through what some have termed as a kind of “linguistic impoverishment”, in which political language is limited to a selection of options which constitute a restricted code for conveying meaning (ibid., 1). British anthropologist Maurice Bloch’s (1975) analysis of political oratory in traditional society in Madagascar provides a useful set of tools for understanding the importance of how Chinese politicians express themselves, as much as what it is they say. As Bloch notes, the formulation of how things are said is a far more powerful means of control than simply creating a list of taboo topics. The reason that correct formulation is more effective is that “by defining and regulating the manner [in which things are expressed] the content is also, albeit indirectly, restricted”, and “this type of restriction is…much more powerful than a direct one on content, since it goes right through the whole range of political responses” (1975, 5). The use of prescribed linguistic formulations (tifu: 提法) is the topic of constant and ongoing strategic deliberation in the very highest levels of the CCP (Schoenhals 1992, 3; see also Nyiri 2006).

Communication to produce a collective national imaginary requires an audience for and by whom it is conjured into being. The effectiveness of the nation-state’s message is mediated and negotiated by the audience, rather than having a uniform effect on public minds, as Brady’s analysis of propaganda in China has been criticised as implying (Reny 2010). The constantly changing environment and new challenges require ever more sophisticated and finessed responses – for example, to the issue of the increasing gap in socio-economic inequality. Many of my students at the CFAU had a sophisticated awareness of the machinations of power and control going on around them, particularly media censorship – but for the most part, they seemed to choose to align themselves with the orthodox perspective that national unity and stability and CCP legitimacy are the most important social goals. For example, most of my students knew of at least one proxy server through which they could access ‘sensitive’ internet information. However, most of those who used proxy servers and
VPNs (virtual private networks) to access sites outside of China were not seeking information on politics or foreign affairs, but were logging on to social websites such as Facebook and YouTube. But even that was rare, given the popularity of the Chinese equivalents. Students strongly believed that media censorship was, ultimately, valuable in the pursuit of greater social stability.

The CCP leadership is aware of and greatly frustrated by the ongoing difficulty of communicating effectively in fast changing times to a rapidly diversifying audience – both domestic and international. However, the Party-state-sponsored national logic was reflected in the explicit worldview of most of the CFAU students I taught. Among that group, Chinese government efforts to create an undisputable realm of doxa have been successful.

**Conclusion**

This chapter opened with the question of how my students at CFAU related with the particular construction of the state in the Chinese context. Central to this construction was their perception of the relationship between the state and the people. For my students, this relationship was not one of dominance and subordination, but rather a family in which the Party-state took the role of the omniscient parent.

The Party-state presented itself as the guardian of three key pillars of Chinese identity, namely: territorial integrity; stability through economic growth; and an integrated identity. My research suggests that these three pillars were unquestioned in my students’ social imaginary. The great majority of my students at the CFAU felt passionately about the Chinese state and what it meant to be part of the unified ‘Chinese’ identity. They became angry when these notions were questioned or challenged, but were unable to clearly articulate the logic of their opinions, suggesting that these beliefs were deeply emotionally ingrained. Where topics were open for discussion in the realm of the debatable, students tended to align themselves with the orthodoxy.
However, there were a number of incidents outside of the classroom in which students did express views that went against the prevailing discourses. I noticed a discrepancy between what students would express in the classroom and among their peers, and what they would say to me directly. Each group generally had at least one student who would come up to me in the break or after the lesson to tell me that he or she did not agree with the sentiments that were being expressed by his or her classmates, but that he or she had not wanted to put forward a different opinion in class. For example, Cello spoke to me after class following her outburst about manipulative government to tell me that she had wanted to say more, but she felt that she would be best to not cause any trouble with her classmates.

After one class, a student lingered, cleaning the blackboard while his classmates packed up their books and went to lunch. After the room had emptied, he said that he wanted to tell me that he had not agreed with what his classmates had been saying about Japan and he was sorry that he had not put forward his point of view in class. He was anxious for me to know that this was not because he had not carefully considered the issues, but rather because he was afraid of what his classmates might say. I asked what he was afraid of. He replied with great sincerity that while perhaps nothing negative would happen now, he was scared of what could happen in another twenty or thirty years if there was another Cultural Revolution, and his classmates remembered him as the one who had disputed Party authority, or disagreed with government policy. He said he simply could not take the risk. This confession came as quite a shock to me because of the depth of insecurity and fear he seemed to feel. These students were illustrative examples of Evasdottir’s notion of obedient autonomy, in which success in a system of interdependence such as at CFAU relied on participating in self-directed self-control. In this way, the complex and multi-directional processes of power, the state as society, were experienced and lived in students’ daily lives.

On other occasions, some students explicitly acknowledged that they were choosing to align with the orthodoxy. For example, I asked two of my students outside of class how much they genuinely believed that China had been carved up by Western imperialists, and that regaining Taiwan was paramount to China’s national pride.
One, a class monitor, replied casually that he believed it to be true “about 8 out of 10”. He said,

> It’s part of the education system, it’s what we’re all taught. The history we’re taught is very shallow, it’s just a few dynasties, a few events, a few dates, there is never any analysis or deep reflection. In fact, history is not a hot topic or major to choose at schools, nobody wants to do it – it doesn’t get you anywhere. Nobody really believes that old ‘if you don’t know history you’re doomed to repeat it’ line.

As these rare cases suggest, at least some of my CFAU students were ambivalent about their relationship with the dominant narratives. Some chose to align themselves with the orthodoxy because, as one student said, it was the best thing to do. However, none of my students ever went so far as to suggest that problems facing contemporary China could have been related to the inherent structure and functioning of the Party-state system. The majority of students never strayed outside the universe of the debatable, the parameters of criticism tolerated by the Party-state as a ‘safety valve’ for discontent. Dissatisfaction never went so far as criticising the uppermost levels of Party-state power. Critique was limited to individual cases usually at local level, and not seen as symptomatic of a more systemically institutionalised phenomenon. Ultimately, students seemed to perceive China’s Party-state system as an inevitability that remained outside the realm of critique.

Paul Willis’ classic work *Learning to Labour* addresses how relationships of power involve a mixture of both penetrations of power and the limitations on those penetrations (1977). Resistance, likewise, has its limits, which derive from culturally specific understandings of order, justice, success, and the like (Ortner 1995, 180-181). As Yurchak argues in regard to late-socialist Soviet Russia, understanding the ‘performative’ dimensions of ritualised speech acts is central to moving beyond binary understandings of state/people relations as repressive-resistive (2006). What can seem to be contradictory views within my students’ social imaginary can be more helpfully understood as a “paradoxical mix of alienation and association with the ideals and realities of socialist life” (Ganguly 2007, 51). As Perry and Selden also point out, Chinese patterns of resistance are “rooted in historic contests and display
time-honoured beliefs and behaviours” (2000, 3). Following Bourdieu’s notion of doxa as the system of beliefs which are taken for granted to the extent that no other possibilities can be even conceived of, it appeared that a conceptual framework for thinking critically about the structures and functions of the Party-state was simply not a part of students’ perceptual architecture. As Ortner argues, “in a relationship of power, the dominant often has something to offer, and sometimes a great deal (though always of course at the price of continuing in power). The subordinate thus has many grounds for ambivalence about resisting the relationship” (1995, 175). Incidents like these few outlined above led me to conclude that while most of my students accepted the messages with which they had been socialised, there were some who do not – however they chose to say nothing at all.

Because of the complex and multi-directional relationship between state power and the students at CFAU, students did not simply fully accept the message communicated by the state. Rather, they had internalised the utility of self-directed self-control, an ambivalence towards resisting power. The reason for doing so is neatly explained through what Evasdottir terms ‘obedient autonomy’, that is, getting ahead by accepting and working within the confines of power and control (2004). While fear of retribution did certainly play some role in students’ reluctance to publicly dispute the official doctrine, intimidation was only one of many complex elements that explain why CFAU students for the most part made great efforts to demonstrate their alignment with the dominant discourses of the state. Equally, or I would argue, more importantly, was the complex system of social relations and obligations in which students are enmeshed, as will be further outlined in Chapter Five. I argue that the way in which my students participated in rather than resisted orthodoxy, regardless of whether they genuinely believed it or not, is based on these social relations.

Ortner’s (1995) argument that specific cultural factors play an important role in how individuals resist or absorb power can elucidate why students tended to align themselves with the dominant narratives of the state. One key aspect is the respect a civil service career commands. Chinese society has long admired the civil servant as a

36 Ortner defines the terms ‘dominant’ and ‘subaltern’ not as single or unitary, but always within psychologically ambivalent and socially complex settings (1995, 175).
model of what it is to be a good and successful person. In addition, the career is considered very secure, with many non-salary perquisites. Being a civil servant also allows an individual to participate in a complex network of social and professional contacts from which his or her family can perhaps benefit. A fellow teacher (Chinese) at the CFAU explained the importance of this network to me when she described how angry and perplexed her family and friends were when she announced her decision to resign from the civil service and follow a career as an academic instead. When I asked why it mattered so much to them, she said that they thought she had been extremely selfish in her choice, because while the change might have suited her own goals, the new position would do her husband, her daughter, her nieces and her nephews no good at all. In her family’s eyes, she had thrown away an opportunity for all of them, not just herself. My CFAU students would have been operating under similar assumptions from their family members. However, in the contemporary Chinese society into which my CFAU students have now graduated it is notoriously difficult to gain entrance to a career in the civil service. As in the case of Yellow, many students have had to take any job that they can get, at low starting salaries of around RMB3000 (approximately USD500) per month, despite their intelligence, diligence, and loyalty to the Chinese Party-state.

As Kipnis points out, young people in China today may have a better chance of well-paid employment if they follow vocational training instead of tertiary studies at university (2011, 84-85). Despite this well-known difficulty, Kipnis describes the almost universal desire for young people to enrol in university education across rural China (ibid.). He depicts the lengths to which parents will go in order to provide their children with the opportunity for tertiary study. Fong portrays a similar phenomenon in the desire to study overseas (2011). Even members of the extended family will take out loans, or scrimp on their own standards of living, to help send a young person to university. The social value of a university education is so high that all such sacrifices are deemed worthwhile. In addition to the social status, however, is the expectation that the money spent will represent a good investment. Students are all burdened with the knowledge of how much their families have given up for them to study at university. In the context of obligation and reciprocity outlined in more detail in the next chapter, students are in no position to squander the opportunity they have been
offered. Rather, they seek the most effective ways to succeed, and, as Evasdottir argues, this is often through maintaining the system as it currently exists.

Evasdottir discusses how power relations work in an interdependent environment, that is, a context in which “it is taken as a given that a person cannot be (and would not desire to be) subjected to a separation from society but is instead always immersed in a web of social rules, hierarchies, structures, stereotypes, and norms” (2004, ix). Such an environment, as is the case at the CFAU, gives rise to “a self-directed control over change that takes effect only through the concerted effort to achieve and maintain a discourse of order and immutability” (ibid., x). That is, those hierarchically junior individuals seeking to become successful within the system have the most compelling incentives to maintain the stability of the system as it stands. Change, where it is required or desired at all, comes from participating in rather than challenging or resisting this system (ibid., x).

Over the past decades, the Chinese Communist Party has been trying to transform itself into a Weberian bureaucratic machine. As Pieke has argued, after the shocking revelation in 1989 of just how weakly the state’s vision for China had permeated society, the Party began to actively create a Weberian state with a rule-bound bureaucracy that had never really existed before. The state building project in China is predicated on a process of “selective borrowing and mixing, producing a unique and evolving governmental rationality” that Pieke has termed “neo-socialism” (Pieke 2012, 150). Under this model of government, the communist utopia of the decades up until Mao’s death “has been replaced by a technocratic objective of a strong, peaceful, and modern China that is almost synonymous with strong, effective, and forward-looking government” (ibid., 150). Strategic communication, or propaganda, and national education have been key elements in achieving this new approach to governmentality in China.

The diversity in students’ attitudes towards the notion of guojia; the debates in class around topics such as media censorship and control; and the way in which some students chose to participate in the mainstream discourses of power despite their personal feelings, suggest a relationship between people and power in China that is far more complex and nuanced than some commentators on China would allow.
While the Chinese Party-state in all its institutionalised forms of coercive power is forceful enough, it is the alignment with the idea of the state that “silences protest, excuses force and convinces almost all of us that the fate of the victims is just and necessary” (Abrams 1988, 81). For most of my students, the national logic was the most meaningful and beneficial form of identification. The ambivalent relationship my students had with state power brings to mind Ortner’s concept of ‘ethnographic refusal’ (1995). Ortner observes that studies of resistance often position subalterns as monolithic heroes dedicated to a struggle against power. She writes that “resistance studies are thin because they are ethnographically thin: thin on the internal politics of dominated groups, thin on the cultural richness of those groups, thin on the subjectivity – the intentions, desires, fears, projects – of the actors involved in those dramas” (ibid., 190). The understanding that state and society are *a priori* in clear and culturally unspecific relations of power and resistance very much disallows for the great complexities in the way the state, the Party, and the people are inextricably interrelated in China.
Chapter Five – Ourselves and Outsiders:
Who is Obliged to Whom, and Why?

Chinese people tend to label everything into different groups, including themselves. The criteria for classification may vary from one to another, however all will end up with two groups, i.e. ‘zijiren’, ourselves, and ‘wairen’, outsiders. For those in the category of wairen, he can enjoy the utmost courtesy from the Chinese counterpart, yet he will always be carefully guarded against at the same time. Chinese people will only entrust zijiren with the deepest secrets.

- Candy, Diplomacy Major

This chapter will explore how the quotidian aspects of students’ university lives perpetuated their understandings of who constituted insiders and outsiders, and ideas of obligation as appropriate to a CFAU student in training to become a proper Chinese person and diplomat. It follows from work on how schooling in China creates Chinese national citizens by, for example, Mette Halskov Hansen (2012); Pieke (2009a; 2009b); and Sum Chun-Yi (2010). The chapter asks how students’ national logic interrelated with norms of who should be included and excluded, under what circumstances, and what moral responsibilities this interrelationship implied. This perspective provides an entry point for explaining how Chinese policy-makers understand China’s international role, and allows for a reconceptualisation of China’s interests that existing Realist narratives preclude.

One of the key elements of identifying with a national logic is the notion of insiders and outsiders, and what social obligations that understanding entails. A sense of belonging to a group, and concomitantly knowing that others are outside of the group, are important aspects of the ontological security that underpins an ongoing emotional attachment to the nation. My students at CFAU came from a wide range of social backgrounds and by no means constituted an homogenous group. This chapter argues that despite this variation, students shared a notably similar ‘common sense’ of how an individual related to others, who was included and excluded, what kind of obligation they owed to those around them, and above all, what they owed to the state. While studying at CFAU, my students underwent a process of socialisation in
which principles of ultimate loyalty to the Chinese nation-state became deeply internalised. Consistently and correctly demonstrating this loyalty within social relations of close and ongoing interdependence in the regulated parameters of the CFAU was not simply a matter of adopting a certain ‘correct’ manner. Rather, as modes of association among individuals were constantly shifting, students were required to develop a sophisticated ability to negotiate changing audiences and situations in order to play the ‘correct’ role. While living on campus, the practices of students’ everyday lives were regulated and controlled in ways that sedimented these values and norms, and importantly, gave students opportunities to apply their skills in negotiating the complex web of social relations and perform their appropriateness most correctly.

This chapter analyses how the CFAU students demonstrated the proper ‘self’ by playing a role, drawing on Clifford Geertz’s (1983) notion that the self is a cultural form based on historically contingent constructs. In his classic analysis of different senses of self in Morocco, Bali and Java, Geertz argues that in each case, what is supposed to be a human being is quite different. His examination of the Balinese sense of self is of particular interest here, in that the conception of a person in that setting was defined from the outside, and that public representation was what mattered; not dissimilar from the sense of self held by my students at CFAU. Like in Geertz’s Balinese studies, at CFAU, “It is dramatis personae, not actors, that endure, indeed, it is dramatis personae, not actors, that really exist” (ibid., 62).

Using analytical insights from Bourdieu and de Certeau, this chapter explores a key mechanism by which the logic of the national was rendered primary within students’ social imaginary. As Duara notes, modern nationalism very deliberately seeks to appropriate “pre-existing representations into the mode of being of the modern nation” (1995, 27). This chapter explores three examples of practices of CFAU students’ everyday lives, the regular repetition of which acted to sediment certain norms about who they were, how they should conceive of and behave with the people around them, and what they owed to whom, and why. The first of these factors was the physical use of space, that is, how students lived in their dormitories and how they studied in their classrooms. In the student dormitories, privacy was non-existent in rooms in which six to eight students shared a space of around 18 square metres. In the
university classroom, however, thirty to sixty one- or two-person desks were lined up in rows in a long, narrow room, facing the lecturer who taught from behind a wooden desk or lectern at the front, sometimes on a raised platform. While the two spatial configurations seem to contradict each other, with one creating cohesion and the other creating division, in fact they worked together to sediment particular ideas of social interaction, reciprocity and obligation. The second example is the controlled use of time through strict timetabling. Thirdly, the chapter looks at the class monitoring system. Class monitoring operated on structures of peer surveillance and served to ensure that social relations, and obligations thereof, were carried out in a framework appropriate to a proper Chinese person.

The chapter then goes on to provide two examples in which these norms of social obligation played out in practice. The first case is an interview I conducted with a Professor at the CFAU. In this interview I was struck by how the interaction was shaped by particular understandings of the obligations owed to an outsider. In that instance, I was accompanied by a CFAU student who had set up the meeting as a means to demonstrate his own value and trustworthiness to me. The meeting proved disappointing in terms of gathering the kind of information I had set out to discover. However, it served as a valuable learning experience in understanding what was owed to whom, and when. The second case is the teacher-student relationship, based on my in-class experiences, and student feedback I received about my teaching. It examines the struggle I had in negotiating the norms of hierarchy and authority while teaching at CFAU. In both these cases, retrospectively applying the concepts of self and other and the social obligations they entail that I discuss in this chapter greatly assists in explaining circumstances that at the time seemed very difficult to comprehend.

The analysis in this chapter is based on insights from Foucault’s theories of power, discipline, and subjectification (1975, 1982, 1983), and Bourdieu’s idea of doxa (1977), through which we can better understand how certain truths became unquestioned and indeed unquestionable. The chapter also uses insights from Evasdottir’s research on obedient autonomy and the audience that matters (2004, 17-21); Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong’s notion of chaxu geju, (差序格局: differential modes of association) (1992 [1947]); and Li Jing’s argument that the Chinese self must be seen as relational (guanxi xinde: 关系心得) (Li 2002). These frameworks all
help in understanding students’ ideas of what constitutes self and outsider, and what obligations these categories entailed. An enhanced awareness of these perspectives could nuance the conventional wisdom about how and why Chinese foreign policy decision-makers make particular choices.

**Social Relations and Obligations: The ever-changing ‘audience that matters’**

Tang Wenfang argues that in China, social relations and care extend only to an inner circle of family and close friends, clearly delineated from a vast and amorphous outside world to which an individual has no social relation or obligation (2005, chapter 5; see also Madge 1977). This sharp distinction between inner and outer circles is often explained by referring to Confucian ideology, which emphasises the primary importance of family relations as the basis of a social framework in which the family is the focal point of all obligation (Fleischer 2011, 303-04). As Fei notes, “The person who only sweeps snow from his own door is still regarded as having high social ethics” (1992 [1947], 60). Applying this logic in one way can result in society as a whole being effectively looked after. As everyone is part of a family, if everyone cares for their own family, society will take care of itself. Although as Fei and Lin both observe, this logic can have the negative result of making “a man throw his refuse outside his neighbour’s door” (Lin 1998 [1935], 180; Fei 1992 [1947], 60). While charity and philanthropy exist and have a long tradition in China, support and welfare were generally given by extended family, kin and community networks, which in many places often constituted one and the same thing (Fleischer 2011, 304).

Social relations in China have undergone profound and radical disjunctures over the past 60 years, not least because of the campaign by the Communist regime to replace existing networks of obligation with new, revolutionary relations, particularly after 1949 until the end of the Cultural Revolution (Vogel 1965). However, the importance of the concept of the family as the central social unit and resource has never been entirely superseded (Fleischer 2011, 305; Yan 1996, 16). What has changed, particularly in the case of the students in my study, is the extent to which the Party-state has been discursively conceptualised as a natural extension of the family unit. For my students, being a ‘good Chinese’ meant extending one’s loyalty to family to one’s loyalty to China.
In the case of the CFAU students that I taught, the university experience built on broader existing social, cultural and political discourses that conflated the state with the family. This is not a new phenomenon – as Lin observed in 1935,

In the Confucian social and political philosophy we see a direct transition from the family, chia [jia] to the state, kuo [guo]… The nearest equivalent to the notion of society is then a compound of the two words, kuochia [guojia], or ‘state-family’. (1998 [1935], 169)

At CFAU, pre-existing factors that had defined a student’s identity – his or her gender, socio-economic background, and regional origin – were unpicked and replaced with a new sense of self as a CFAU student in training to represent China in the world. Four years of repetition of certain regulated practices of everyday life removed each student from his or her pre-existing arrangements of social obligation in order to recreate him or her as an individual whose primary loyalty was to the Chinese state. This project is also not new, as the goal of creating ‘The New Man’ to best serve the needs of the state has been a key aspect of the Communist narrative of human malleability and perfectibility for over a century (Cheng 2009). The efficacy of these subjectification processes were evident in the way my students deployed the concept of guojia, precisely as Lin described it, to explain state-society relations, and in how their loyalty to the state was articulated in very familial terms. Just as Fong concludes from her research, my students had a strong sense of loyalty to China, based on “the idea of an imagined family in which China was identified with a long-suffering parent who deserved the filial devotion of her children, despite her flaws” (2011, 52). These processes served to construct an oppositional conception of ourselves and outsiders in which ‘we’ meant being Chinese, and ‘other’ consisted of the vast and undifferentiated imagined community of ‘non-China’.

Within this primary level of a national logic of insider-outsider relations, CFAU students’ daily interactions among other Chinese were governed by secondary levels of inclusion and exclusion. In these quotidian interactions, relations with and obligations to others were dependent on complex webs of interactive, overlapping and sometimes conflicting responsibilities and roles. As this chapter will set out, the ‘self’
among the CFAU students I taught became inextricably embedded in a network of social relationships as a result of the practices of their everyday lives.

My students’ views of insiders and outsiders, and of the obligations that arose from these understandings, need to be recognised as products of specific social and philosophical circumstances. As is accepted in anthropology, but less so in dominant discourses of international relations, conceptions of social relations and obligation are culturally and historically specific. As Hamilton and Zheng explain, networks of personal obligations in Chinese social structures are defined by relationships in a way that is substantially different from those in Anglo-Saxon societies (1992, 25). The broader Chinese philosophical trajectory has evolved along different lines from that in Western traditions. Recent political and social history in China has reinforced this specific philosophical and cultural heritage. For example, the establishment of the New China in 1949; the years under Mao, including the Cultural Revolution; the 1989 repression, and the years since, in which economic growth was offered at the expense of both social justice and political freedom, have resulted in a distinct public morality. The differing relations and obligations among individuals and between individuals and the state are often characterised by very high levels of distrust.

The Chinese saying that one should just sweep the snow from one’s own doorstep can be interpreted in many ways, but I have heard it most often used to mean one of two things: firstly, that if we all sweep our own doorsteps, all the snow will be cleared and all will be well; and/or, there is no need to go poking your ‘broom’ into other people’s ‘doorsteps’. As Fei observes, the path of obligation “runs from the self to the family, from the family to the state” (1992 [1947], 66). Those external to these in-groups are considered to be strangers, and the behavioural norms and moral values that apply to the in-group are not relevant for those outside these networks (Yan 2009b, 19). Fei argues that in the “Chinese system of morality, there is no concept of ‘love’ such as that exists in Christianity – universal love without distinctions” (1992 [1947], 76), and therefore obligation is also differentiated. Evasdottir’s ideas of obedient autonomy and the audience that matters (2004) support Fei’s conclusions. Other theorists who follow Fei’s argument include Mark Elvin (1985); Robert E. Hegel and Richard C. Hessney (1985); and Hu Hsien Chen (1944). As a point of comparison, a
liberal Anglo-Saxon sense of obligation tends to be universal in the way in which individuals are encouraged to think of all other people as having the same rights to state protection and care in order to fulfil their unique potential.

My observations from living in China suggest that this idea of differentiated obligation permeates Chinese world-views from bottom to top. In daily life, not becoming involved in your neighbour’s affairs is the norm. Based on a discourse that helping others can often lead to you becoming embroiled in their problems leads many people to prefer to turn a blind eye to suffering or need, and can regularly be taken to what many might consider an extreme. In October 2011, for example, a two-year-old girl was struck by a vehicle in a backstreet of Guangzhou. She was ignored by more than a dozen passers-by who walked up to her, around her, and then away from her, as she lay critically injured on the road, and she subsequently died from her injuries. This event was by no means simply accepted by the broader Chinese community as reflecting how things are in China. The shape and reach of Chinese morality were intensely debated in media and internet discussions following the event (e.g. Levy 2011). Shortly after this incident, pictures of a young girl holding an umbrella over a beggar in a rainstorm were released on the internet. Public discussion ranged from accusing the girl and the photographer of deliberately staging the event for personal status, to many commentators who were palpably relieved that “even in our numb society,” “there are still lots of good people, it’s just that sometimes good people are afraid to be good people” (Fauna, 2011). Yan writes about the changing moral landscape in contemporary China, relating 26 incidences of “extraordinary extortion”, including the story of a high school student who helped an injured lady to hospital and paid her fees, only to be later blamed for causing the accident that had left her injured (2009b). On no occasion in these 26 cases did the police or the judge question the argument that if the Samaritan had not been guilty, he or she would not

37 Most Chinese people I have spoken to about the matter cite ‘the Nanjing ruling’ of 2006 in which a passerby stopped to help an injured person, who then accused the passerby of causing the accident. When taken to court in Nanjing, the judge is famously said to have ruled in favour of the plaintiff, saying that if the passerby had not been guilty, he would not have stopped to help. The plaintiff was made to pay all costs of the injury and the court case (although later this was reduced to ten percent). In another incident in 2011, an elderly man slipped and died from an easily preventable cause, and when the event was first reported on the internet, 29,892 users of Sina.com wrote comments in which almost all said they understood why the onlookers did not help the man, and many admitted that they would have done the same if they were there. (Liu 2011; see also Yan 2009, 14 for a discussion of this ‘Nanjing ruling’).
have helped, revealing a strongly held preconception that no one would “go an extra mile to help a stranger” (ibid., 14). As Yan argues, a new consensus is emerging, albeit unevenly, that “in today’s world it is both unwise and unsafe to help a stranger in a public place” (ibid., 11-14; see also Jankowiak 2004; Li 2006; Thelle 2004; and Weller 2005 and Wonacott 2004).

The strength of belief in moral obligation only to the ‘in-group’ and not to those outside the immediate family was also indicated by my students’ approach to volunteering. My research suggested that my CFAU students undertook unpaid community activities for more instrumental purposes. There appeared to be little sense of social obligation underpinning student participation in community work or volunteering. Fleischer argues that volunteering in China (as elsewhere) is framed by the government in such a way as that it becomes a technology of power in order to nurture self reliant and socially responsible individuals that serve the interests of the state (2011). Rather than volunteerism being an expression of an abstract feeling of community obligation or altruism, my students perceived it as an addition to a resumé that would improve competitiveness in the job market, or a means of seeking some kind of purportedly lacking moral framework (ibid., 316).

Modes of association and the role of the ego

There are two key factors in broader Chinese social relations that help explain the foundational conceptions of insiders and outsiders, onto which subjectification processes at CFAU were reinscribed. The first factor is the “differential modes of association” between Western and Chinese societies that Fei describes in his seminal work *From the Soil: the foundations of Chinese society* (1992 [1947]). Fei compares Western and Chinese societies and argues that members of Western societies “are equivalent, just as all straws in a bundle are alike”. However, in Chinese modes of association, social relations are like “ripples formed from a stone thrown into a lake, each circle spreading out from the centre becoming more distant and the same time more insignificant” (Fei 1992 [1947], 65). As Yang explains it,
One’s immediate natal and nuclear family is the strongest kinship tie, followed by the extended family and consanguineal relations, and then the more distant set of affinal relatives. (1994, 112)

Each individual has more than one set of concentric circle relationships, and while the individual is at the centre of every set, in every social circumstance, he or she is faced with entirely different social obligations dependent on who else is sharing the interaction. As Fei asserts, depending on circumstances, “the Chinese would sacrifice their families for their own self-interests, their party for their families’ interests, their country for their party’s interests, and the whole world for their country’s interests” (1992 [1947], 69). This leads to the second key factor, the way in which each individual’s circles of association are interrelated and overlapping, and how “one touches different circles in different times and places” (ibid., 63).

In her research following Chinese university students on their journey to become archaeologists in an interdependent and bureaucracy-saturated environment, Evasdottir follows Fei’s logic in arguing that Chinese social relations are not fixed (2004, chapter three). She explains the social system as being unlike the Anglo-Saxon model in which orbits of planets, others, are fixed around the central point of the sun, the self. In China relations are changeable, because where the actor is positioned in the system, either by others or by his or her self, is constantly changing. Every individual has many different social roles, such as sister, teacher, mother, daughter, and boss, all of which will come to the fore at different times and require different obligations. As Taylor explains, a moral position, the knowledge of what is ‘good’, is a critical element of the self, and key to understanding it. “Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes” (1989, 3). The moral appropriateness of any behaviour in a network-based society like the CFAU is never based on a pre-conceived and abstract or essential sense of self, but is always contextually determined. Evasdottir observes from her research how this creates an incredibly complex and unpredictable social context, requiring considerable skill to navigate successfully.

In opposition to widely-held views of Chinese society as one in which individuals are subservient to the greater good, Fei points out that the ego is in fact the most
important concern in any situation, and describes Chinese society as ‘egocentric’, as opposed to the Western ‘individualistic’ model (1992 [1947], 22-37). While Lin uses different terminology, arguing that “the Chinese are a nation of individualists” (1998 [1935], 169), he makes a similar point, namely, that the needs of the individual are the primary motivating factor in behaviour. Lin argues that the tight-knit family unit is not the object of individual efforts, but the means to achieving personal benefits: “They [the Chinese people] are family-minded, not social-minded, and the family mind is only a magnified form of selfishness”. While Lin made that argument well before the founding of the New China and the social upheavals that followed, Yan Yunxiang has argued more recently along the same lines, stating that:

The individual in modern [Chinese] society seeks her or his interest and happiness through the working of the family… they are seeking shunxin (satisfaction/happiness) and fangbian (convenience/ freedom) in family life, both of which are defined from a personal perspective. (2009a, xxiv)

Where the state is conflated with the family, as it was by my students, loyalty to the nation-state and the vision of a unified identity of Chinese[ness] ultimately becomes a means to achieve personal benefits. This understanding helps elucidate why my students shared a common view that was closely aligned with the official national logic. My students faced considerable challenges to achieving progress in a social system of such liquidity, so ‘being true to yourself’ by adopting a heterodox position on an important issue was not only undesirable but also likely to be disadvantageous.

**Implications**

Under interdependent conditions in which social relations are not fixed, both one’s own role and who constitutes the audience are constantly in flux. Evasdottir posits that in such circumstances, one’s reputation in the eyes of an always-shifting other is of far more relevance than an individual’s genuine motivation. Therefore, individuals are required to judge their obligation according to each specific and individual set of circumstances. Evasdottir argues that in the context of Chinese scholarly training in particular, true intentions are far less important than being perceived as appropriate by those around one at any given time – the audience that matters. Whether a
performance is considered successful, that is, whether an individual is deemed as being ‘good’, depends on the evaluation of that audience in those circumstances in regard to their expectations of how that role should be played. In this situation of interdependence, an individual’s reputation in the eyes of an audience is important not only because the approval of the audience is the source of one’s identity, but also because harm done to a reputation in one instance will almost certainly negatively impact chances of success in other situations (Evasdottir 2004, 17-21).

The audience that matters is a particularly useful concept for explaining how Chinese students at CFAU behaved under certain circumstances. My CFAU students were trained during their time at university to see themselves as individuals whose primary loyalty was to the state, and that the pursuit of personal goals should be seen not as virtuous in and of itself, but rather as a means to strengthen and support China. Fong also notes this tendency in her study of students from Dalian, China, observing that there was a strong focus on the responsibility to remain loyal to the Chinese state, rather than on the rights of the individual citizens. Indeed, in Fong’s study, one of the students’ main motivations for further study was to enhance China’s social, cultural and economic standing and to aid China’s integration with the global economy (2011, 53). Yan and Lin’s observations that seeking benefits for the family is a means for obtaining individual happiness suggests that my students’ conflation of the family with the nation-state meant that they understood their efforts to think and act in ways that benefited China as ultimately advantageous to themselves as individuals. With my CFAU students, the national logic of loyalty to China was not simply an end in and of itself, but rather a means to secure ontological security, as well as more fundamental forms of social and financial benefits.

Fei suggests that in the Chinese pattern of social organisation, there exists “no ethical concepts that transcend specific types of human relationships” (1992 [1947], 74). Following this logic, I argue that the CFAU students in my study did not hold abstract conceptions of moral obligation outside of specific relational contexts, either in the ideas or the practices of their everyday lives. Relations between a student’s self and any outsider, and therefore the degree of obligation to outsiders, were not governed by an abstract notion of what was ‘good’, or a profound conviction of a particular personal identity, but were changeable depending on who constituted the ‘other’ in
each case, as this chapter will demonstrate. The same value was not ascribed to ‘genuinely’ being a good person in the same way as it is in more individualistically focused social contexts (Evasdottir 2004, 46). A CFAU student’s identity as an appropriately behaved person rested not on any internal conviction that he or she should strive to meet an abstract concept of virtue that applied at any time and in any place, but rather on external validation from other actors in a range of circumstances. Therefore, students learned to perform their appropriateness differently in different situations.

**Time and Space and the National Logic**

The structuring of time and space was key to the training through which students learned to whom they were obliged, and how they could most effectively negotiate their social relationships. Based on the arrangement in which students lived with either their immediate classmates, or students from the same major in another class, students spent almost every moment of every day with a newly assigned group of similarly socially dislocated young people. At CFAU, around 50 per cent of classes (depending on year of seniority) were compulsory, and the possible choices for elective classes were quite limited due to the small size of the university. As a result, students within a particular major had almost exactly the same class schedule as their peers. Additionally, as their dorm-mates were taken from the same group, this small set of students not only studied, but also ate, slept and relaxed together as well. Their compulsory participation in two weeks of military training at the beginning of their second year further strengthened their socialisation as national subjects. Evasdottir argues that in her study, the combination of these practices and structures “force students to see themselves as an interdependent group based on what appears to be an incontrovertible, ‘essential’ similarity’” (2004, 51). While the students in Evasdottir’s study were grouped together on the basis of age, for my students, the interdependent group mentality was based on being a CFAU student in training to officially represent the nation. Within this group context, students learned and practiced the skills of consenting to the control of their seniors, and of policing each other to enforce conformity as strategies to achieve self-interest (ibid., xii).
Space

Since the 1990s, anthropology, like other disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, geography, and history, has demonstrated a renewed interest in foregrounding the spatial dimensions of culture. While descriptions of natural landscapes and conditions of everyday life have long been a feature of anthropological studies, the tendency has been to treat space as a kind of backdrop to events, rather than seeing it as an essential component of socio-cultural theory (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, eds., 2003, 1). Work by Foucault (1975, 1986) notes the relationship between spatial arrangements and power, describing architecture as a technology for manifesting the concerns of government in order to create a “docile body” (1975, 198). Foucault draws on Bentham’s panopticon, in which all individuals must presume they are under surveillance at any and all times and thereby become their own controllers. Foucault argues that architecture and planning function as strategies of power, including the control and surveillance of the body in space. Michel de Certeau addresses a lacuna in Foucault’s approach by investigating how people resist power by reappropriating space (1984, xiv). For de Certeau, if the strong use power to demarcate territories, classify, delineate and divide, then the weak use tactics of mobility and furtive movement, manipulating spaces in ways for which they were not designed (Cresswell 1997, 363).

This section of the chapter will focus on how space was constructed in my students’ lived environment at CFAU, and to what extent students used the tactics de Certeau describes. I found that CFAU students very rarely, if ever, ‘snuck’ into spaces where they should not have been, or used spaces in ways for which they had not been designed – far less than I would have expected. This compliance suggests that getting ahead through resisting and rebelling was not in the universe of the thinkable for students. Instead, they used the rules and norms regulating their lives as a mechanism for achieving their own goals.

The student dormitory

The first spatial dimension for creating acceptable social networks that this chapter will examine is the dormitory living arrangements at CFAU. Most of my students at
CFAU lived on campus, and shared dormitory rooms. Dorm buildings at CFAU were strictly enforced as same-sex, with visitors from the opposite sex forbidden to enter under any circumstances. Dorm rooms slept six to eight students, in three or four sets of bunk beds, and students shared a common bathroom. Each student had a tiny workspace, so for the most part they preferred to work in the library, or a special study area, or the local McDonald’s, instead. Each dorm room had small cupboards or shelves on which students could put their few personal possessions. Students hung curtains from makeshift rails to give themselves some semblance of privacy, but for four years, this flimsy fabric was all that separated them from their peers. Every student knew which of his or her friends stayed up late playing computer games instead of studying, or chatting to a boyfriend or girlfriend on their mobile phone or computer. They knew if their classmates spent a long time getting ready, doing their hair or choosing their clothes, or using special skin creams or medications for problems they might have been having. There was simply very little individual privacy.

Figure 6: Female dorm for seven students. Photograph taken by a friend of the author, December 2011.
When students arrived at the beginning of their first year, they were assigned a room and room-mates generally from their own class or within their own major, or another similar department. Students had no say at all in deciding the people with whom they would share this small space for the next four years. Neither did they have any real opportunity to change the arrangements, exceptions being very rare and only in the most extreme circumstances. Generally, if a student found his or her living conditions intolerable, the only option would be to move out and rent privately, either on campus, or further afield. Private rental was so much more expensive than staying at the dormitory that for most students it was not an option.

How students managed their relationships throughout four years in the same small dormitory room with six or seven other people not of their own choosing, with virtually no option to change, may be difficult for a Westerner to comprehend. Evasdottir’s idea of the audience that matters helps explain how my students at CFAU negotiated these circumstances. In a situation of interdependence such as the student dormitory, one’s reputation in the eyes of one’s dorm-mates was important, not only because the approval of the audience was the source of one’s identity, but also because harm done to a reputation in one instance would almost certainly negatively impact chances of success in other situations. However, both a student’s own role and who constituted the audience were constantly in flux. A student at any given time had many different social roles, therefore, whether a performance was considered successful depended on the evaluation of the particular audience in regard to their expectations of how the role should be played (Evasdottir 2004, 17).

Friendship in Contexts of Interdependence:

Dorm life is a key element for understanding how my students at the CFAU understood the relationship between themselves and outsiders. One day after the academic year had finished, I had lunch with Rebecca, a senior CFAU student who was then balancing her studies with an internship at the United Nations. Rebecca

38 The CFAU campus, already small, has a good number of apartments within its grounds, rented by people who apparently have nothing to do with the university. Foreign teachers live in the Foreign Experts building for free (although they can choose to rent in the private market, but the monthly income would barely cover the cost of a ‘decent’ apartment), and while some of the Chinese teachers live on campus, generally the more junior level ones, some choose to rent their campus apartment out and live with their family in an apartment of their own choosing somewhere close by.
explained to me that one reason many students felt dissatisfied with the CFAU was not to do with the curriculum or quality of teachers, but because of it being such a small university: “the small group of students really limits the opportunities for job offers”. When Rebecca first mentioned this, I did not quite understand what she meant. She explained:

Actually, university classmates are more like colleagues. The benefits of relationships are too important, so what happens at university are not just pure friendships… some are, of course, but most are more about potential networks. You know, the best way to get a good job is to know a classmate or someone from a higher year, or in the alumni, who can introduce you.

This comment caused me to reflect more on how affective relationships like friendships among my students were constituted, and how that might contribute to a better understanding of their conceptions of themselves and outsiders, and the obligations these then entailed.

In anthropological literature, friendship has tended to be considered secondary to the question of kinship (Yan 1996, 108). However, in more recent years, interpersonal relations of other kinds have become a focus of scholarly attention (Yan 1996, 223). Yan notes that after the Communist Revolution in 1949, and even more so after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, making ‘best friends’ on the basis of sentiment and morality began to emerge in China and become a widely accepted social practice among Chinese young people (Yan 1996, 108). In her comprehensive exploration of social relationships in China, Mayfair Yang talks about the different kinds of friendship in Chinese society. She sets out three different categories: ‘heart-to-heart friends’ (zhixin pengyou: 心心朋友), friends who use each other (huxiang liyong: 互相利用), and ‘ordinary friends’ (yiban pengyou: 一般朋友). Yang argues that heart-to-heart friendships are rare because they take so long to establish and to build the necessary trust, and thus most people tend to have more ‘ordinary friends’, with whom one could share a good time; or ‘instrumental friends’, who may be able to help each other out if not now, perhaps in the future (1994, 117). Certainly, negotiating friendship at CFAU was a complicated task. Fong also noted that many of the young people in her research on desires to study overseas cited the complexity of negotiating
these social expectations and pressures of friendship as part of their reason for wanting to go abroad (2011,185).

While a clear distinction between emotive and instrumental does not make the same sense in the context of interdependence (Evasdottir 2004, 17) at the CFAU, I had found already that the concept of friendship in the Chinese people I met was not the same as my own. In my experiences and observations, the word ‘friend’ (pengyou: 朋 友) is introduced into relationships at a very early stage, quickly and lightly, and in many situations in which it would not apply in English, between people who have only just become acquainted. I was more than once surprised when my expectations of my Chinese friends were not met. In my understanding, we had over time developed a true and genuine friendship. In some cases, they had invited me to their homes, sometimes even on overnight trips, or to spend Chinese New Year with their family. An invitation to spend Chinese New Year is the equivalent of inviting a friend to spend Christmas with one’s family in Australia and it is generally considered to be a sign of the greatest inclusion and generosity. However, the majority of my Chinese friends did not maintain contact when their life circumstances changed. The experience of an abrupt cessation of friendship is anecdotally the case for other foreigners in China as well. On later reflection I came to believe that there is a fundamental difference in what friendship means and what requirements it entails. I also observed this in the relationships among students at CFAU. Friendship was, like obligation, not an abstract principle that an individual adheres to regardless of circumstances, but rather was dependent on roles and social positions.

For example, I had spent time with Buddy socially on numerous occasions before I began teaching at CFAU, and then for a brief period afterwards. He had also provided me with considerable support and assistance in my research. After graduating from CFAU at the end of 2010, Buddy was successful in making it through the arduous rounds of tests to be employed as a public servant in Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), an organisation associated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since then, his responses to my emails became briefer and rarer, until six months after he began his new job, he stopped writing to me altogether. We met once for dinner when I came back to Beijing in late 2011, and while it seemed to me that we had a pleasant dinner with open conversation, and agreed to meet again soon, I
have not heard from him since. Perhaps my attempts to maintain a relationship in circumstances in which he owes more to his new career and life than to me are destined to be unsuccessful.

At a small university like the CFAU, the possibilities for developing the kinds of networks that would help a student find good internships or work after graduation are severely curtailed. Additionally, the university does not have the kind of reputation that Peking or Tsinghua Universities enjoy, which can serve as an advantage in job applications, though this was not necessarily true for careers in the public service. The onus was therefore on students to use every relationship, including friendships, as a means to build and enhance career networks. Among CFAU students, friendship did not necessarily mean a relationship in which one student would do something for another for altruistic purposes, with no expectation of a return favour. On the contrary, friendship tended to imply the bringing together of two people who had the potential to be mutually helpful. The necessity to understand dorm-mates as potential contacts to some extent helps explain why relations in dorm rooms were so smooth, or at least seemed to be. Students were acutely aware that their dorm-mates were not necessarily heart-to-heart friends, but that these relationships could hold the key to wider options for the future after graduation. Although small grievances about where someone left their shoes or hung their coat did arise, the complexity of the relationship among the students and the importance of behaving appropriately as a good and trustworthy person generally over-rode the value of speaking one’s mind.

The classroom

In what appeared to me at first as a stark contrast to the enforced intimacy of the dorm rooms, CFAU classrooms were physically arranged in such a way as to separate and individualise students during their formal learning time. CFAU classrooms were set up so that students’ desks formed straight rows of single or occasionally double units facing the teacher, who sat behind a desk or stood behind a podium, which was sometimes on a raised platform, at the front of the room. My classes on average had around 25 students, and students tended to sit in roughly the same positions each week, with the attentive students at the front, and the less involved students in the back corner.
I was not an experienced teacher, and the idea of conducting a senior level university discussion class in this lecture style format was somewhat anathema to me, so in my first week, I asked the students to rearrange the classroom furniture so that we were all sitting in one large circle. I hoped that in this way we could move beyond the lecturer-lectured relationship, and have discussions in which we could all try out new ideas, raise and discuss questions, and share knowledge. However, this rearrangement caused considerable consternation among my students. In the first class in which I tried this approach, students responded with hesitation and confusion, so I helped them to move the tables and chairs. The students seemed torn between wanting to perform their role as good students by following their new teacher’s instructions, and not quite understanding what exactly the new teacher had asked them to do, or why. During the rest of the week, in the first lesson with each of the other classes, I made the request and observed how the students went about reorganising the room. Students’ reluctance and confusion suggested that most of them had never had a class in which they sat facing each other and their teacher, and the entire concept was quite strange to them.

At the end of the first week’s classes, I was asked several times with some apparent anxiety if I was going to ask students to rearrange the furniture every week. I cheerily smiled and said yes. Students from three out of my six classes took the time to speak to me after class and explain with great respect that perhaps it might not be “convenient” for them to do this every week, as it would be necessary to reset the classroom to its former order every time. In several of the classes, this reluctance to move the furniture into a circle continued throughout the whole year. I would enter the classroom every week to find that the students had already sat themselves in their neat rows, as if hoping I might not notice and just carry on. Oftentimes, the students would move the desks so that they formed two straight parallel lines, in some places two or three desks deep, and we would have to start again so that each person was in the single layer circle.

Apart from a possibly universal reticence to do any more than necessary at university, it seemed evident to me that students were very unclear about the point of the exercise. When I asked them why they thought I had wanted them to rearrange their classrooms, and what their opinion was of it, several simply shrugged, neither
knowing nor really caring. A few students seemed to understand what my goal was, and said that they felt that the class had been more interactive and relaxed than their other classes. However, despite my assumption that a more interactive and relaxed class environment would constitute a positive change, some students thought otherwise. The difference in opinion was not just the case for those who would have evidently preferred to sit up the back and snooze, or send text messages on their mobile phones, or study for an exam in another class. In fact, some of the most diligent students felt that the change was not necessarily a positive one. Apart from being a departure from their normal study practice with which they naturally felt more comfortable, committed students also seemed to have felt that the proper relationship between them and the teacher had been distorted (for more on the proper roles of university teachers, see Evasdottir 2005, 38-43). They were not able to demonstrate their diligence through the accepted practices, such as sitting in the front row, and communicating their status by performing the physical behaviours of a good student. To do so required the correct spatial context, that is, the teacher in the appropriate position in relation to the students. The upset of these physical arrangements undermined one of the students’ primary means of performing their role correctly, as I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Although delineated and divided in the classroom, and living in cramped dormitories with no private space, students rarely, if ever, resisted these technologies of power by reappropriating the spaces. Classrooms were always used for study, even when not supervised by teachers. When wandering around campus, I mistakenly walked into a ‘study hall’ in which dozens of students sat silently at their desks, reviewing their work. No teacher or other authority figure was present. Likewise, boys were not allowed into girls’ dormitories, and vice versa, and students’ boyfriends or girlfriends did not sneak into other dormitories. Outsiders like myself were not allowed into any dormitory, at any time, and while several students said they would love to show me their room, there was simply no question of trying to break the rules. No one could be asked; special permission did not exist. No one secretly smoked behind buildings at the edges of the campus, and there was little to no chance of stumbling accidentally across two young people trying to have a private moment alone.
Despite the apparent divergence between the lack of individual space and privacy in the dormitory, and the segregation and individuation of the classroom, the two spatial arrangements both ultimately served to subjectify each student as a ‘docile body’. The spatial configuration of both the dormitory and the classroom were such that students were under surveillance at all times, by other students as much as any external figure of authority. Students had internalised the presumption that they were being monitored and, as Foucault describes, had therefore become their own controllers. However, while students did not resist by using the tactics that de Certeau describes, their ‘self-directed self-control’ (Evasdottir 2004) helped them navigate power and make choices to achieve success within the system.

The student dormitories at CFAU formed the centrepiece of the spatial dimension of students’ everyday lives that constructed their subjectivities as ideal Chinese citizens and appropriate civil servants. Shared living in dormitories taught students the value of subsuming their own particular individual wishes not so much for the collective good, but as a means to perform the role of trustworthy and reliable friend and potential future colleague. In addition to the way students negotiated space as a technology of governance, students’ repeated interactions with these particular landscapes in everyday life created a realm of the known, the embodied, and the habitual, which was shared with their peers. The spatial features which students daily traversed formed a tangible and reliable presence in which students learned to orient themselves in relation to other people, and behave according to the moral norms for what was appropriate in given places (Skey 2011, 16). As students coordinated their activities and practices across particular locales, they came to recognise each other as members of a community with a shared national identity that was being simultaneously reinforced in other ways (Auburn and Barnes 2006). The (re)production of students’ ‘here’ through their practices of everyday life was inextricably linked with the shared experience of time, the ‘now’ (Skey 2011, 16), as this next section will discuss.
Timetable

The temporal regularities within which students lived their daily lives at CFAU created shared experiences and a sense of community that reiterated group membership and social obligation. Like space, the control and management of time was also a method through which students were subjectified as individuals with a primarily national logic. Examining how students’ time was structured deepens understanding of how the national was naturalised through everyday practice (Skey 2011, 17). As Zerubavel argues, “sequential structures, fixed durations, standard temporal locations and universal forms of recurrence” are key to “establishing and maintaining the normal, temporal world” (1981, xii-xiii).

The schedule for the students at CFAU was tightly packed, and rarely did students have time to leave campus to go further afield other than for lunch outside the university canteens, or to buy books and more specialized school supplies than offered at the small shop on campus. Morning classes at CFAU started at 8.00, marked by an electronic bell, and students stumbled in ten to fifteen minutes before class began, bleary-eyed and clutching their steamed buns or spongy chocolate and cream cakes and hot milk tea. Many of them would have been awake until very late the night before, studying, reading, preparing for class, playing computer games, or chatting online with friends on the very popular ‘QQ’ service. Each class ran for 100 minutes, made up of two 45-minute sessions with a ten-minute break between. At 9.40 the bell rang again to signal students to move to their next classroom and next class. Lunch began at 11.40 and ran until 13.10 when classes recommenced, and, depending on subjects and timetable, in some cases did not finish until 21.30. Most of the little spare time available was easily filled with the kinds of activities designed to enhance a student’s personal development and ultimate professional employability. Choices about how to use spare time most effectively were underpinned by a clear understanding that graduation would be a sharp and shocking introduction into a world in which these elite students were simply a few among millions of well-educated jobseekers. As Rebecca told me,

39 ‘QQ’ is China’s largest online network for instant messaging.
During the first two years, due to the tight arrangement of classes, we have relatively little spare time. Many of us will spend most of our time on study even after the classes or on the weekends.

Although my third- and fourth-year students did not have a full day of classes every day, time throughout the day was carefully regimented. While students in junior and senior years were not expected to be on campus as much as younger students, they were not in a position to enjoy leisure time either:

In the senior year, lives will change significantly. They will spend more time on internships and spend less time staying at school. When everyone starts to prepare for their next life stage, they will spend large amount of time on preparing for graduate school exam, GRE, TOEFL\(^\text{40}\) or internships and have less time on entertainment. Spare time is a squeeze then, too.

When students did set aside the time to enjoy social activities, they liked to “play computer games (especially the boys), go shopping, go on dates with their girlfriend or boyfriend, hang out with friends, play sports, or sing karaoke at KTV”. Rebecca told me that these extra-curricular activities were generally undertaken with classmates from within the same major, as they had the same schedule, thus reinforcing their sense of collective identity.

Regular extra-curricular activities such as participating in sport tended to be judged in terms of utility. As Buddy explained, students asked themselves whether the possible advantages for brain development or demonstrating teamwork abilities would be worth the time away from the books. Students weighed up whether participating would increase the competitive advantage in the search for a job. The risk of an accident which could sideline study was also carefully considered. Similarly, editing the university newspaper, participating in the university radio station, or taking on volunteer work were all weighed up in terms of how good they would look on a CV. Some things were considered to have more utility than others. For example, Buddy told me that he felt that his participation in the basketball team kept his brain fresh.

\(^{40}\)GRE and TOEFL are popular English-language tests
and alive, and would also serve to demonstrate his ability to work as part of a team on his resumé.

As the tight schedule demonstrates, each student spent almost all of his or her waking and sleeping hours in structured, regulated activities with the same group of people, particularly in the first two years. Students from any given course, say for example, International Economics and Trade, which had around 90 students enrolled in the year I taught at CFAU, were divided into class groups of around 30. This group attended most of their classes together. The people with whom students shared their dorm rooms were taken from the same year group, if not from the same class. Variations in ethnic background, family status, and regional or provincial differences were subsumed under the greater identity of being a CFAU student and Chinese national. For four years most students, except those few who came from in or around Beijing, only saw their families once a year at Spring Festival (Chunjie: 春节).

In the meantime, students’ immediate social and emotional support network was made up of their new friends. Their former identities, like being the daughter of the bank clerk in a small town in Sichuan or the son of the Vice-Mayor of a large city in Guangxi, were unpicked and replaced with the identity of being a student at CFAU. However, previous identities were acknowledged and referred to. For example, students expected that Harry would be more entrepreneurial than studious because he came from Guangzhou (the south-eastern part of China where much of China’s economic growth first occurred); and that Ricky would be more laid-back because he was from Sichuan.

For the most part, however, the tightly scheduled university model of everybody living and learning according to the same repeated rhythms meticulously deconstructed and rearranged former ties. It removed students from their former orientations in order to recreate them as model Chinese citizens. The individual student’s physical self became an object upon which the school as an institution inscribed state-approved understandings of insiders and outsiders, loyalties, obligations and notions of reciprocity.

There were in fact few different ethnic groups in my classes; the vast majority of (non-overseas) students were Han Chinese, though there were also a handful of Uighur students.
Foucault observed that “time penetrates the body, and with it, all the meticulous controls of power” (1977, 180). The majority of my students appeared in the classroom at least ten minutes before class commenced, and in general venerated punctuality. Younger students whose grades depended on results from exams which were based on being able to recall what the teacher had taught in class were extremely prompt. If students in the final year could avoid coming to class, they would, but this was not because they were indulging in idle pastimes. Rather they were desperate to find time to participate in career-enhancing activities like internships, or special English-language courses, or take external exams that could demonstrate their abilities in a number of other fields. Teachers and students alike generally accepted that in senior year students would focus on building professional experience, and teachers generally did not expect full attendance in the final year. As was true of my students’ respect for CFAU’s spatial arrangements, students also tended to comply with the complex regulations and rules of time to demonstrate their appropriateness and make the most of the system.

As Anderson explains it, repetitions of practice in space and time, that is, “collective rituals”, promote “a consciousness of connectedness” of the nation as an imagined community (2006 [1983], 56). Likewise, Mitchell argues that the “powerful, metaphysical effect of practices” such as the meticulous organisation of space and time make the state appear to exist (1991, 94). These ongoing rhythms required students to perform appropriate social behaviours at the correct times, drawing them together in a contemporary reality in which they knew themselves to be part of a shared identity of Chineseness. The regulated repetitions in students’ use of time and space also enabled them to feel a sense of ontological security as it provided them with a stable and predictable environment in which to achieve their goals.

**Peer Surveillance: class monitors**

The institutional setting at CFAU was a microcosm of larger Chinese social structures of power, control and responsibility. In this environment, students were not simply recipients of external power projections, but active participants in an intricate process of consenting to, and enabling, a web of power relations. Within this multidirectional complexity, students’ behaviour and attitudes were not only controlled by external
means imposed upon them such as the regulation of time and space. They were also observing and being observed, monitored and policed by their peers to ensure conformity to the socialisation process. Through these processes they learned to monitor and control their own behaviour so that it would be read as appropriate by whoever constituted the audience at any given time. One key aspect of this institutional training was the system of class monitors, who were chiefly responsible for reporting on and mediating between students and the university authorities.

It was not until some students explained the class monitoring system to me that many small moments began to make sense as part of a larger pattern of social organisation. For example, in some of the breaks between classes, one student would pass slips of paper around, and his or her classmates who had been separated into their neat rows of individualised desks would merge in and out of groups, sitting on tables or leaning on each other’s shoulders, consulting and whispering. While moments before, the teacher-student dynamic had been fixed and formal, within this fifteen-minute period, I became entirely redundant and almost actively excluded as students undertook the management of their university activities. When I intruded on one group to ask what was happening, students provided me with a polite but cursory explanation. Only then did I understand that this was an activity for which the class monitor was responsible. While I never fully understood quite what was happening, to the best of my knowledge, these slips of paper being passed around, scribbled on, and collected, were, at different times, for students to cast their vote for spring break locations, best student award, or nominations for Party membership.

In addition to organising these events and activities, the class monitor’s primary role was to communicate and liaise between teachers, the school administration, and students. He or she was responsible for organising events like sports meetings, and excursions; noting student attendance and performance in class; attempting to resolve conflicts among students in class affairs before they became serious enough to need taking to official level; when necessary, reporting any inappropriate behaviour to the administration; intervening in personal affairs if they began to affect school work; and communicating between the Department Dean, the staff and the students. This final role generally involved bringing messages from top to bottom, and was rarely the other way around.
As well as having a class monitor, every class also had four other student officers under the leadership of the monitor who were in charge of different affairs. One was responsible for study, class performance, and connections between students and teacher; one was for sports and activities; one was for lifestyle, such as collecting money to buy school books; and one was for the Communist Youth League, whose job it was to find new and ‘develop’ existing Party members. How seriously these roles were taken depended on each class and the individual characteristics of each class monitor and official. Some class monitors and officials were more proactive than others, whereas for others, as students explained, “you just forget they have official positions”. To some extent, these positions were more symbolic than representative of responsibility to any great degree.

Quite soon after CFAU students arrived in first year, elections were held to decide on class monitors. Both students and teachers participated in a secret ballot vote to choose the students who would be publicly recognised as the leaders among their peers. In this way, teachers and students worked together to legitimise and reinforce the particular characteristics considered appropriate for maintaining and perpetuating structure and order, and those which should be de-valued. Motivations for running for the position of class monitor varied, but when I spoke to Rebecca about it, she told

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42 At CFAU the Youth League holds meetings every Wednesday afternoon. As Yi explained, most CFAU students are members of the Youth League – she herself joined in middle school. Yi outlined the procedure for becoming a member: “In each class, we elect the first few candidates. They would go through some so-called investigation – just asking the opinions of some teachers. Normally no teachers would reject it. Then, maybe one semester later, we would have a second-round election for more candidates, following the same procedure. New members should be recommended by existing Youth League members, who have to write a letter of support. I think most students would be admitted to the League before graduating from middle school, or at least before graduating from senior high.” Yi contextualised joining the Youth League in terms of not wanting to stand out as different from the group by not demonstrating loyalty to the Party: “It’s also the Party thing. It is not really whether we want to join or not, it is kind of like you would only not join because you want to be different, or you want to cause trouble. It is very easy to join the Youth League, you won’t have any extra obligations, except a very small amount of money as a fee. But if you are not a member, it means you are not active, you don’t want to be close to the Party, and as a result you will be excluded from all honours, scholarships, and other opportunities. So, most students won’t fight to become a member, but they wouldn’t refuse it either. The purpose is to show that the youth respect our Party and want to be a Party member. Yeah, if you want to be a Party member, you have to join the League first. It is more complex and difficult to become a Party member than to be a member of the Youth League”. Rebecca explained that at the CFAU it takes around a year to become a Party member, and the process involves considerable effort, including writing regular reports on thoughts and behaviours. She noted that by third year, about one third of her class were Party members, however when she started at CFAU, only about 1 or 2 people had been members. Rebecca believed that over time students chose to join the Party because they believe it might be useful when applying for jobs with government, although government employees are not officially expected to be Party members.
me that she had run for the position “just because I want to build up a closer relationship with my classmates and be more engaged in class affairs”. Unfortunately, however, Rebecca had not been successful, missing out by one vote, a result which she said disappointed and annoyed her greatly at the time. Rebecca also noted that for reasons she could not explain, in some cases lots of people vied for the position, whereas in others, there was only one candidate.

When I asked Rebecca what qualities students looked for when they voted for class monitor, she looked surprised at the question. Actually, she explained, generally students who got along well with everyone and seemed to be pro-active would get the job. At the beginning of junior (third) year, elections would be held again. Rebecca explained that in these junior year re-elections, almost no one wanted to be class monitor, as at that time there were too many competing demands on a student’s time which outweighed potential benefits to the resumé. However, there would always be some students who felt that their resumés lacked the ‘comprehensive experience’ that was needed for Masters applications, and they would apply. For the most part, the existing class monitors were more than happy to pass the job over to them. At the beginning of junior year, in addition to the monitor for each class, a monitor for each major was also chosen, who held a more powerful, overarching role, under which the class monitors operated. Despite, or perhaps because of there being so many class officials, the division of labour was such that each individual’s job was quite small. Indeed, Rebecca argued, perhaps just a little bitterly, that really the most important thing for them to do was to discuss and arrange the annual spring outing.

In the third year International Economics major, the class monitor, Dan, was an outgoing and diligent young man. After semester had ended, we went for dinner with a couple of colleagues from other classes in the same major, one of whom, Mark, was also the monitor for his class. Over the course of the evening, Dan and Mark told me how being class monitor had really been very hard work, and neither of them had enjoyed it very much. However, as they described it, neither felt they had had much of a choice as their peers and teachers had insisted they take the position. As a result, both of them had been class monitor for several terms. As they described it, the job was fraught, however, it was considered to have enough advantages to make it worth doing, certainly including mentioning it in a resumé or application.
Later that year, Dan drafted a letter of recommendation for me to sign for his application to a US university. In the letter, Dan described how his role as class monitor had rewarded him with far-reaching benefits. He gave an example of what skills he had relied on as class monitor, through which, as he put it, he was able to capably navigate the ‘natural’ miscommunications between the foreign teacher; the Chinese students; and the Chinese university system. Writing the recommendation letter on my behalf from what he imagined would be my point of view, he said:

Due to different cultural backgrounds, there were always misunderstandings and disagreements between the students and me in the class discussions. Dan knew a lot about Western culture and was quick to comprehend. Whenever there were misunderstandings he would explain both sides. He could understand me immediately and offer his own ideas worthy of further discussion. For almost a year, Dan acted as the unofficial coordinator of the course and greatly helped me with his exceptional coordinating skills. In the middle of the course, I decided to readjust the lecture content but it was a bit difficult for students to accept the decision for they had previewed a lot according to the original schedule. I first discussed this with Dan and he passed the message to the students and came back to my office with some feedback from the students and his own advice. After the negotiation, the readjustment was finally decided by the whole class and me. Because of Dan’s effective coordination, the course was on schedule and I enjoyed the one year’s teaching.

I am not sure Dan entirely believed his own glowing report of his role as class monitor, but he rightly indicated the delicate line class monitors walked between not only the university and the students, but also the students and the teacher.

The expectations around the class monitor role among the students I taught are illustrative of a larger theme about how these young Chinese elites were trained to think of others. The class monitoring system established an understanding that people at the same level, of the same age, and in the same circumstances, were simultaneously agents of and for power. An apparently illogical situation existed – despite the very close relationships developing from the deliberate creation of a
coterie through four years of shared existence, there seemed little real sense of camaraderie or loyalty to others among the students I taught. Instead, the way in which time and space were regulated served as an extremely effective method of institutionalised monitoring.

Rather than forming enduring bonds of friendship, I argue that the four years of close proximity at CFAU fostered the abilities to observe and simultaneously knowingly be observed, to discipline and at the same time knowingly be disciplined. These are critical skills necessary to perform the role of one-within-a-collectivity that is essential for achieving the benefits that come from pursuing obedient autonomy in an interdependent social system. The apparent absence of critique or resistance to these power and control structures did not so much indicate the triumph of power over resistance, but rather an acceptance of the utility and benefits that flowed from participating in this system.

**(Failing to) Apply the Rules: Negotiating claims to authority**

Daily repetition of strictly regulated practices of space, time, and learning how to observe others, all taught students how to behave appropriately in changing roles under conditions of continual observation. This sedimented certain key norms into students’ social imaginary about what it meant to be a good CFAU student and ultimately, a good Chinese person. In addition to learning to monitor and observe themselves and their peers, students learned about their obligations to those hierarchically above them. They also learned how to position themselves within the hierarchical order through knowing what constituted a legitimate claim to authority, and what behaviours were expected of those who had and could exercise authority. They learned to practice the skills of performed reliability, respect, trust, and usefulness in ways that were comprehensible to others trained within the same system.

Evasdottir’s research examines the concept of authority among scholars and practitioners of archaeology in China, particularly what it is, and when and how it is validly claimed (2004). She posits that a claim to authority arises when an individual,
group or organisation has a command over resources, such that the claimant is able to choose how, when and to whom resources are distributed. Further, valid claims to authority require a certain “quality of performance … that convinces the audience that matters that the claim to authority is legitimate” (ibid., 199). Evasdottir goes on to say that in this way, claiming authority is a particularly complex and elaborate process of ritualised behaviours, as the success of the claim depends not only on the judgments of the performance by the audience that matters, but also on the eventual appearance of the promised resources (ibid., 198-199). My observations at the CFAU suggest that similar ontological stances underpinned the behaviour not only of my students, but also of the professors as will be explored more below.

Evasdottir identifies three key strategies through which a Chinese actor venturing into a new site can claim authority: through blending, respect, or authoritarian insularity (ibid., 200-204). Strategies of blending involve the new arrival acting in every way as much like everyone else as possible. The second tactic, respect, often requires the actor to appear to use the strategies of blending. However, while the methods that are used in this approach aim to show deference and compliment the locals by showing interest in their lives, there is no attempt to disguise differences and inherent superiority/inferiority. The third strategy, authoritarian insularity, is based on the incoming individual’s understanding that all parties already know who is superior in the situation. If the ‘superior’ gets his or her ‘hands dirty’, all participants would perceive the situation as bizarre. Ultimately, the reliability and trustworthiness of the outsider as able to produce the expected resources would come into question. My lack of training and understanding in these complicated operations and techniques of authority led to misunderstandings and confusion on several occasions. Two particularly illustrative examples were my meeting with the CFAU’s Dean of Diplomacy before I began teaching at the university, and later, the challenges that arose from my approach to managing the classroom.

**Meeting the Dean**

I met the CFAU’s Dean of Diplomacy, Professor Wu, in mid-2009, before I had started teaching at the CFAU. The meeting was remarkable – but not because of the new and unique insights about Chinese diplomacy I gleaned, as I had hoped I would.
On the contrary, the meeting was strained, uncomfortable, and insofar as learning about Chinese diplomacy, largely useless. However, I did learn a great deal more about how CFAU students, and their professors, understood obligation, authority and hierarchy.

In the regular discussion groups I had been holding before I began teaching at the CFAU, we had been talking about the structures of power behind Chinese foreign policy decision-making. Walking together to the bus stop after a meeting, Buddy suggested to me that if I was interested in this topic, his Dean Professor Wu would be an excellent source of information. He told me several times that she was “the expert” in the Chinese political system and had an excellent reputation, and “if she didn't know the answers, no one would”. He said that he thought he might be able to arrange a meeting between us. Buddy seemed very pleased and proud of his initiative and ability to draw on his high-level connections in order to do this. In this way, Buddy was able to demonstrate his reliability and utility to myself as well as the Dean of his department. In my case, I represented a Western scholar-in-the-making, a connection with whom may well be useful in later study or career opportunities. At the same time, the meeting provided an opportunity for Buddy to demonstrate his diligence and his capability to the Dean through utilising his connections with ‘foreign experts’.

Yang describes several examples in her fieldwork in China in the 1990s of the sudden and intensive networking and obligation-reciprocation activity which ensues after an individual makes a remark about wanting to be able to access a certain good or service (1994, 91-99). Reading this description some time after my meeting with the Dean brought home to me the extent to which Buddy must have worked behind the scenes to achieve what I misunderstood as a simple chat. At the time I did not appreciate the amount of personal and academic capital Buddy must have deployed in order to arrange this meeting with a rather unknown and junior foreign scholar. Neither did I understand the risk to his own reputation among his professors and peers at CFAU, nor the implications it could have for his application to work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Arranging this meeting would not have been a matter of simply knocking on the Dean’s door or sending her an email to ask if she would be free. Hierarchy in Chinese universities is very strict, and Buddy would have almost
certainly needed to call on a number of well-connected friends and teachers to ask this favour of the Dean.

What impressed me most about Professor Wu when I met her was her awkwardness when talking with me and answering my questions. We met in the ‘good canteen’ on the CFAU campus, the one where tables had tablecloths, and waitresses took orders from menus, as opposed to the plastic benches, metal trays, and queuing with special payment cards system of the other canteens. Students could eat there, but for the most part, it was frequented by staff. It was also the venue for banquets for entertaining foreign visitors and dignitaries. Prior to this, I had met with and talked to other scholars in the main canteen area, but Professor Wu asked for a private room for us. She was nervous from the start, and I wondered why she seemed so uncomfortable. I had gone into the meeting with a hand-drawn diagram of how I understood foreign policy-making to work, pieced together from readings and interviews and media reports, and had hoped to ask her to fill in some of the gaps or correct me where I was wrong. I thought that this was the most efficient way to ensure nobody’s time was wasted. Being so well-prepared for a meeting was just the sort of approach that would be met with approval in Australia, and as Professor Wu was an internationally renowned expert on China’s diplomacy, I thought that frankness on my part would not cause any problems.

During the meeting, Professor Wu confirmed a number of the ideas and concepts I had read or heard elsewhere, for example, about the role of the Foreign Affairs Small Group in foreign policy setting. However, when I probed more deeply into the issue of foreign policy decision making in China, Professor Wu said she “frankly did not know who makes decisions”, apart from postulating that perhaps two or three people in the Standing Committee of the Politburo were likely to be in charge. When I pressed further, she said she thought they might be Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, with perhaps Wen Jiabao also taking a role – that is, the best-known three names of the group. Similarly, she said she also had no idea about the implementation of policy decisions. We talked a little about a recent incident in the South China Sea (March 5 2009), involving the US navy ship The Impeccable, and again, Professor Wu seemed to know little about it. Her lack of knowledge on this topic seemed quite extraordinary to me given the high profile the event had in both international and
Chinese media. As I asked more questions that she was not able or willing to answer, her initial discomfort increased. I felt very keenly that she was aware that she was not answering my questions, and to explain herself, she began to insist that “in China, politics and diplomacy are separate”, and thus in her role as a diplomatic expert she did not know anything about the politics of decision-making. When I asked, “but isn’t diplomacy political?” both Professor Wu and Buddy laughed and said, “of course!” but moved swiftly on without saying more than that “at university in China, you can’t study both of them at the same time”. Buddy explained that in China, politics students don’t understand diplomacy, and vice versa.

During the course of the meeting, I realised with frustration that my initial approach – to be well-prepared and focused – simply was not working, but was rather being met with head-shaking and apparent confusion. I decided to change tack, and ask more general questions, for example, about the kind of philosophical background that might have an effect on Chinese foreign policy decision-making. Professor Wu’s answer to this was quick and certain – “ideology has no role to play at all”. I responded that I had not meant ideology in particular, but was rather just interested in the general background cultural ideas that might underpin how and why policy was made. Professor Wu answered, switching to Chinese, that China does indeed have a strong culture and philosophy, which would influence leaders to some extent. Professor Wu gave the example of the way in which China’s historical experiences have shaped how the Chinese government relates with others internationally. She noted that, for example, that China had become cautious in its foreign policy because of past events:

> Between friends, relations are kind and trustworthy, but in international relations, China finally found that there is no such thing as ‘forever friends’. China has learned instead how to deal with that state of affairs.

Professor Wu’s answer largely aligns with the dominant discourse in which China’s past as a victim of foreign incursions and other international imbalances has left it isolated and uncertain in the international arena.\(^43\)

\(^43\) I had also heard this view expressed by other Chinese academics, such as Professor Jiang Shixue in the Institute of Latin American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and author of ‘The Chinese Foreign Policy Perspective’ (in Roett and Paz, (eds.), 2008, 27-43). In an interview at
While Professor Wu provided vague answers that reflected official discourses, Buddy was eager to please both myself and the Professor, but at the same time, demonstrate his reliability to the professor. The importance for Buddy to perform in this way was quite understandable given that the next two or three years of his life would be under Professor Wu’s supervision. On the other hand, how his and my relationship would evolve was unknown. Like Professor Wu, Buddy said nothing controversial or outside of accepted discourse during the meeting. However, at the same time, I got the very strong sense that he was uncomfortable with the way the meeting was going, and acutely aware of my disappointment with the lack of answers being provided, given that he had promoted this meeting to me as an opportunity to find out some useful facts. He responded by doing his best to intervene where appropriate to shore up Professor Wu’s credibility by demonstrating that her apparent lack of knowledge was not a shortcoming on her part, but rather a simple reflection of the great mystery of the Chinese system. For example, he took pains to ensure I understood how complex and unknowable the system is, repeatedly using terms like “black box” and explaining that “nobody knows what’s going on except the top members.”

As I realised later, for Buddy and the Dean the meeting was far more than three people sitting down at lunch to chat about some issues in which we were all interested. However, immediately following the meeting, I was both disappointed about what I had learnt about how Chinese foreign policy mechanisms worked, as well as perplexed – how could I apparently know more about the structures of foreign policy making in China than the Dean of Diplomacy at the Foreign Affairs University? The Dean mentioned, in fact, that she was rather surprised that I knew so much myself already. The only way to make sense of what was overall a very strange meeting was to place it within a larger context of social obligation. While I was disappointed with the meeting at the time, on reflection, what Professor Wu told me, and just as importantly, why she did not tell me anything more, was enlightening. The

the CASS offices in Beijing in October 2008, Professor Jiang told me about ‘white-eyed wolves’, that is, countries which China had helped in the past but which later demonstrated that they were not ‘friends of China’. He cited the examples of Albania and Vietnam. In the case of Vietnam, China had given considerable amounts of foreign aid and weapons to the Communists in support of the international Communist struggle, but in the late 1970s Vietnam is purported to have used those very weapons to fight a war against China. Comments like this by Professor Jiang contextualised Professor Wu’s comments as quite commensurate with the accepted public discourse in China about China’s victimisation in the international arena.
meeting demonstrated the degree to which obligation is contextual, rather than the expression of an abstract sense equally applicable across different social situations. Indeed, the way in which Professor Wu explained Chinese aid – that it depended on friendship, which in turn depended on not making China angry, illustrated this understanding of social relations. Obligations were based on fixed and clearly understood rules and criteria, and if these were not met, no obligation existed.

**Teacher-student relationships**

Evasdottir notes that “Questions of comportment are … always important” to successfully earning authority. “Should the seeker of authority choose a strategy of blending in or standing apart? How should she or he act to demonstrate the validity of his or her claims? … Above all, how will … actions be interpreted…?” (2004, 200). Teachers in China usually adopt a strategy of authoritarian insularity for claiming authority. Teachers are endowed by their students with considerable hierarchical status as experts, the gatekeepers of knowledge, and power-holders, the final arbiters of a student’s academic success. As the spatial arrangement of the classroom is designed to reiterate, teachers are expected to face their students and provide the information that students needed to pass their exams. Students are expected to recall what the teacher had told them as accurately as possible in the exam. Teachers would then judge to what extent students had successfully memorised the facts they had been taught. Discussion, debate, and alternative or critical views are generally not encouraged. Indeed, the very notion of giving students a reading in order to critique it was, as one student told me, considered rather a waste of time. If it was wrong, why would she want to waste her time with it? In addition, as the ultimate power-holders, the givers of grades, it was not at all unusual for teachers at CFAU, as in other universities in Beijing, to have their students provide unpaid research assistance for their own work, and even run personal errands like shopping for groceries or taking care of children. Students tended to assent to this situation with wry realism, understanding that it was simply how the system worked, and hoping that in the end cooperation would result in a more favourable grade. In return, it was generally accepted that students could expect their teachers to be available for them after hours and at home. Indeed, on several occasions my students telephoned me late on a Sunday evening to talk about the following morning’s class.
As part of the same deference to the authoritarian insularity model of hierarchical legitimacy, I noticed a very strong tendency for students to automatically grant teachers or visiting lecturers from prestigious American universities like Harvard or Yale far greater respect than those from non-Ivy League institutions. They, by definition, held a superior status. Older male teachers also tended to be accorded more legitimacy. As a younger, female, Australian foreign teacher from a non-Ivy League establishment, I felt that I had to continually prove and demonstrate gravitas and authority. I felt that I needed to compensate for my youth, gender, and insufficiently famous university background. As a result, I went to considerable effort to ensure I looked as severe and professional as I could. I wore a suit and high heels to every class. I also ensured that my classes were very well-prepared and clearly structured, more so than many of the other foreign teachers I met there.

Ironically, I undermined my own efforts to generate authority by exhibiting several behaviours that did not demonstrate my hierarchical superiority. In particular, my decision to ask students to drag their desks around the classroom to rearrange it such that they would all be equal among their peers, and that I would be equal among them, immediately weakened the authority I was trying to assert. In addition to the unintended consequences that arose from my relaxing the norms around hierarchical uses of space in my classes, I also weakened my claim to authority through my style of teaching. In my classes, I chose not to deliver lectures but instead provided students with material to read before class as the basis of class discussions on certain themes. I also undermined the proper relationship by asking that the students call me by my first name, rather than ‘Professor’. Throughout China it is a mark of respect to address someone by his or her professional title, such as ‘doctor’, ‘teacher’, or ‘driver’. My students were reluctant to move away from this mode of address as it was not customary to address teachers by their first names. After some negotiation, they tended to call me ‘Miss’. My primary reason for not wanting to be called ‘Professor’ was that I would have felt like a fraud, masquerading as someone of far higher rank. However, like my request to move the furniture, I also wanted to create an atmosphere unimpeded by hierarchy where students could feel comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions and debating issues.
My attempts to create a comfortable space for free discussion and debate did not work out as I had hoped. While students did over time appear to relax and feel more comfortable in disagreeing and debating, their lack of practice in doing so sometimes led to sessions in which a student presenter came under verbal attack from his or her classmates for the comments or suggestions he or she had made. Rather than open and constructive debate, some students used their newfound freedom to direct scathing criticisms at their classmates. In one case, a student gave a presentation on Japanese culture. The student giving the presentation, Karen, had travelled in Japan, and noted reflectively that the trip had changed her perceptions and understandings of the Japanese people. The response to Karen’s comment, which I considered quite innocuous, was sudden and very emotional. In a radical departure from the norm, many students began shouting out and interrupting each other to tell Karen that she was absolutely wrong.

From numerous conversations I have had with students, foreign teachers at CFAU and other universities in Beijing, and others, I learned that it is generally understood that high school is the arena in which students are pushed the hardest to perform. There was a sense that after students had passed their extremely competitive university entrance exam, they would be able to relax somewhat. As neither teachers nor institutions wanted the loss of face associated with students achieving low grades, most students were able to do well with minimum effort. Anything below 90 percent was considered a bad grade, and in fact, I was asked by the university administration to re-mark papers in which students had scored lower than this – although they had not failed. In some cases I was told to simply add marks across the board so that all students got a higher grade. The necessity to achieve high grades was difficult for students to balance with the need to develop professional work experience. It was generally accepted at CFAU that students in senior years needed to focus on finding and undertaking professional internships opportunities that would allow them to enhance their resumés and ultimately make them more employable in the highly competitive market after graduation. Actual face-to-face study and learning was largely considered to be of secondary importance. My insistence on setting a workload that I felt was appropriate for fourth-year students at an Australian university became another area of struggle between my students and I. Unlike many if not most of their Chinese lecturers, I based a considerable part of my students’ grade
on class attendance and active participation, rather than on performance in the final exam.

Throughout my time teaching at CFAU, I received both positive and critical feedback on my teaching style. The negative feedback I received reflected not so much the content of the course I was teaching but the method in which I taught it. The negative and positive aspects of the feedback formed two sides of the same coin – fundamentally, I had departed from the normal teaching style, and while some students found this to be a positive experience, others found it to be inappropriate and unhelpful. Positive feedback came through students talking to me after class or during breaks and expressing their interest in ideas and concepts I had introduced that they had not been exposed to before. Negative feedback, however, was more common. For example, some students took a kindly approach and tried to help me adjust to the new environment by giving advice about how to structure my classes and how much material was suitable for them to be given to read (generally less). Early in the first semester, I received a handwritten note on the back of some homework, suggesting that I reduce the reading load and discussion time, and spend more time teaching in class. Shane wrote:

Regarding the course of this semester, after three weeks of class, I have some suggestions. Just one little one, actually. Since the academic content has deepened this semester, I have found it a little overwhelming. Thus I’d like it if you could provide more guidance in class instead of leaving discussions in our hands. I don’t think the free discussion can be very productive. I’d rather listen to you talk and teach.

Formal feedback through the foreign affairs office in charge of recruiting and monitoring the foreign teachers reflected this view and suggested that other students had complained through official channels. My mid-year feedback email, received in January 2009, pointed out that:

It is also suggested that in a course like yours, discussion should be based on serious, important topics and regular published or confirmed information.
Hearsay and rumour should be ruled out, as unbecoming of a school like CFAU.

The negative feedback I received on my teaching style demonstrated not only the commitment to a traditional hierarchy between teacher and student, but also the structure of the relationships among students. Students’ resistance to calling me by my name and my rearrangement of the classroom likewise reflected how I had upset their expectations of how teachers and students should interact. The correct positioning of the teacher vis-à-vis the students, and the students in relation to each other, were both essential elements for the educational system to function effectively, and my attempts to circumscribe this system were viewed, for the most part but certainly not by all, with scepticism and irritation. My role as a teacher was to help students get through university, and demonstrate my credentials as a useful contact for the future. As my methods were not focused on teaching them things that they could use to pass their final exams, or the civil servant exam, and I was not in and of the system in which most of them would be operating in the future, my methods were of dubious utility.

**Conclusion: To whom are CFAU students obliged?**

The cohort model developed at the CFAU taught students not only how to associate with others but also with whom to associate, and for what reasons. Through schooling, the students learned that fitting seamlessly into a larger whole was the most comfortable, appropriate and useful way of interacting. As the discussion in this chapter suggests, obligation was understood as being context-dependent in the daily lives of the CFAU students I taught, based on what roles any individual inhabited as being changeable across time and space. As the students were fundamentally embedded in interdependent social relationships, and were “emotionally tied to personal obligations as defined by those relationships” (Hamilton and Zheng, 1992, 25), each individual was required to demonstrate obligation according to constantly changing roles.

Through both the content of their classes as well as through the repetition of practices in their daily lives, my students at the CFAU were learning to understand themselves
first and foremost as Chinese, with their primary obligation to the nebulous Chinese
state-as-idea. To achieve this, the concentric circles model of social relations and
related social obligations was reconceptualised so that loyalties to other identity
markers were subsumed to that of the state. While living and studying at CFAU,
students were physically removed from all pre-existing social networks and placed in
an environment in which they were both subject to hierarchical power as well as
objects and agents of peer-level techniques of surveillance and discipline in the
classroom. Students’ only chance to come together with peers in anything like a
private setting was when timetables and physical circumstances permitted, and yet
even within their dormitories, students learned to deliberately and consciously
subsume their own interests and needs to the greater collective good. Students needed
to be able to coexist with their peers in such a way as to demonstrate not only that
they were reliable and trustworthy individuals to ensure a smooth experience in the
present, but also to establish networks and contacts for the future. Within this
framework, students’ experiences taught them to understand other relationships and
obligations in instrumental terms – that is, to what extent any interaction would
improve an individual’s ability to achieve his or her personal goals, framed in
patriotic terms of strengthening China.

This instrumental understanding of the nature of relations and interactions came to the
fore on a number of occasions while I was teaching at CFAU. I was surprised to find
that, despite living and studying almost constantly as one tightly knit group, students
did not necessarily trust one another. Relationships based on fulfilling social roles
rather than inherent individual characteristics meant that trust was developed on the
basis of performing roles appropriately in the present and being able to be relied upon
to provide access to resources in the future. Students adopted an approach of ‘self-
directed self-control’ to negotiate the complex network of relationships and
demonstrate their appropriateness.

Like Foucault’s prisoners in his discussion of Bentham’s panopticon, the arrangement
of students’ time and space was such that they knew they were always being watched.
Ultimately, they watched over themselves. However, unlike Foucault’s prisoners, in
this circumstance where “the dichotomy of oppressor and oppressed is merged instead
into an image of mutual interdependence” (Evasdottir 2004, xi), struggle against
authority was not the most effective means to negotiate power. As a student’s identity arose from how he or she was judged in the eye of the beholder, resisting discipline and control and achieving his or her own goals came by means of becoming more connected and more involved. Students achieved autonomy through obedience, by participation, rather than resistance. Obedience to, rather than struggle against, the strict and multitudinous rules and regulations allowed access to the system’s benefits and incentives (ibid., x-xi).

On more than one occasion while I was teaching at CFAU, students approached me individually after class or by sending an email, wanting to try and explain to me that their lack of participation in class (participation being the basis of the highest possible grade in my classes) was not for want of opinion, but for fear that their views would be taken badly by other students. Indeed, their fears were not unfounded. In the example given earlier in which one student’s presentation about Japan resulted in a sudden display of emotion, after the class, the presenter, Karen, approached me to say that she would have liked to have said more about the changes she thought had occurred in Japan, but that she felt that her classmates would have become too angry, and they would not have been able to forgive her or forget what she said. She explained that if she had said more, it might have consequences for her later in her working life. Similarly, a student said to me in a break after a class in which we were discussing the issues of media censorship that while there was much more he had wanted to say in class, he felt that he couldn’t. He said that whilst perhaps his classmates were his friends now, if the situation changed in ten, or twenty, or even thirty years, and he was remembered as “the guy who was critical”, his life could be turned upside down in an instant. In another case, a young woman with a growing interest in Western political science and philosophy said much the same thing – her classmates could not be expected to understand, and they might use it against her later.

At the CFAU, revealing too much about oneself was not considered wise or desirable. Proximity and cohesion did not engender friendship in the way that I had anticipated that they would. Students built allegiances, networks, associations and guanxi, but this did not necessarily equate with openness and trust. Indeed, it was the deliberately cultivated lack of trust that worked as the foundation of social relations among my
students at the CFAU. This point was made in a very poignant way when one student equated openness and honesty with mental illness during her self-introduction in the first week of class. I had asked each student to ask another student a question (which did not necessarily have to be answered). Pansy said to her male classmate,

I know I have a mental problem and I am like a child both physically and mentally, I want to be mature, do you have any tips on how to hide yourself deeply and not give everything away?

According to Pansy’s conception, the maturity needed to succeed both at the CFAU and in life more broadly rested on not revealing too much about one’s own inner beliefs and feelings. This understanding seemed to be widely shared. Being ‘true to yourself’ by following your own ideas and goals, so highly valued as a characteristic in Anglo-Saxon cultures, did not appear to be considered a virtue at all in the same way among CFAU students. Instead, hiding yourself deeply in order to “not give everything away” was the ideal.45

Only when the rules of interaction were known and understood could individuals have a framework on which to base decisions on what to do and how to behave, and just as importantly, how to interpret others’ actions and behaviours (Evasdottir 2004, 56). The dormitory living arrangements, the classroom structure, the regulated schedule, the peer-surveillance class monitoring system – all of these were important mechanisms through which CFAU students learned to negotiate the roles and obligations necessary for being good Chinese people. At the same time as the peer-surveillance and monitoring inherent in CFAU students’ daily life taught them to merge and blend with others, just as important was recognising and following an immutable and deeply internalised hierarchy. Evasdottir terms this combination of cohesion and hierarchy “differentiated similarity”, and she argues that it is an ideal

44 As Graeme Smith argues in his paper ‘Tiba or not Tiba’ (2011), it is the everyday politics of envy in every individual cadre’s quest for political career advancement that determines group allegiances and motivates behaviour. A similar vein runs through how the CFAU students relate with each other. The threat of competition and the inescapable fact that there are far fewer good jobs than university graduates creates a latent underlying competitiveness and distrust of those around them.

45 This choice of words refers to Deng Xiaoping’s famous “24 character” guideline for China’s foreign policy from the early 1990s: “keep a low profile and achieve something” (taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowe: 韬光养晦有所作为).
way in which to channel differences into an appropriate organisational structure as a means of providing practical experience on how to understand and manage social relations both within university and in the broader realm (ibid., 56).

While at university, CFAU students were in an environment in which the national was held up as the ultimate social organisation, a conflation and extension of the concept of family. The nation-state therefore warranted an extension of the primary obligations traditionally owed to family. Likewise, anything outside of the guojia unit did not warrant obligation. Students tended to see other countries, particularly developed nations, as part of a greater ‘non-Chinese world’, in which all particularity was subsumed within the catch-all term ‘abroad’ (waiguo:外国) (see Fong [2011, 6] for a discussion of Chinese citizens’ views of the developed world as one imagined community). When considered at all, this realm of ‘non-China’ tended to be understood only in the light of how it related to China. Other countries were conceived of as peripheral entities, little more than distant specks, relevant only in terms of how they may or may not relate with China. As demonstrated by Candy’s quote at the start of the chapter, Chinese people will only entrust those considered as “insiders” “with the deepest secrets”.

At CFAU, my students were socialised to understand that their primary loyalty was to the Chinese nation-state. Students negotiated changing audiences and situations in order to play the ‘correct’ role and act in a way that would be interpreted as being a good and appropriate Chinese citizen. While living on campus, the practices of students’ everyday lives were regulated and controlled in ways that sedimented these values and norms, and importantly, gave students opportunities to apply their skills in negotiating the complex web of social relations and perform their appropriateness most correctly. As Evasdottir observes, while there is nothing particularly Chinese about the strategies of obedient autonomy, “the implications, meanings and goals of such strategies are unique to the Chinese context” (2004, xiv). Applying Candy’s logic of social relations and obligation to the macro-level suggests that existing discourses around China’s role in the world insufficiently address the implications of Chinese elites’ approaches to achieving their interests.
Chapter Six –
CFAU Students’ Views of China’s Role in the World

This chapter examines how my students called on narratives of the nation when discussing history, relations of power, and notions of self and other, in their explanations of where China is situated in the international context, and what they believe China’s role should be. It examines students’ views of how the international system should look, and their preference for a multipolar order. I discuss students’ normative understandings of what role and responsibilities China should take on in this ideal world order, particularly focusing on their sense of China’s obligations to global development. In this chapter, I analyse my CFAU students’ understandings of China’s role as a peaceful and responsible actor in the world, with no desire to increase its global influence at the cost of existing power relations. I argue that my students’ perspectives on the international system and how China should fit within it are a result of the processes of sedimentation at the CFAU which create and privilege ‘the logic of the national’.

Dan, from the International Economics major, was a particularly quick and active student. He had a keen interest in Chinese politics, both domestic and international, and wanted to pursue a career in government. His motivation for doing so was, as he said, “to serve his country”, like his mother, a government official in the Shanghai Foreign Affairs Bureau. Dan told me one night over dinner after semester had finished how much he admired his mother. Although she was always being offered gifts or cheap housing from real estate developers in exchange for quickly approving their applications, she never accepted, as her own former Red Guard parents had raised her to believe that the most important thing was to serve the country honestly. Dan said he wanted an opportunity to do the same. Dan’s mid-semester essay was entitled, ‘Rise and Peace’, and in it he outlined the issues he felt faced the international system. Dan’s paper showed his understanding of what the international system should look like, what China’s role within it should be, and why China takes this particular approach:
China always pursues an independent foreign policy of peace. The fundamental goals of this policy are to preserve China’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, create a favourable international environment for China’s reform and opening up, modernisation, maintaining world peace, and propelling common development. We oppose hegemonism and contribute to the establishment of a new international political and economic order, and develop good-neighbourly relations of friendship with the surrounding countries. Also we take an active part in multilateral diplomatic activities. China’s foreign policy so far has brought tighter relationships and prosperity to the country.

Dan’s brief paragraph is packed with ‘correct’ formulations for understanding China’s role in the world. Like Dan, my other students have also been socialised into this worldview from a young age, and their education at CFAU serves to intensely reiterate it as undisputable. Dan’s paragraph refers to two recurring themes among my students. Firstly, his presumption that history and past behaviour underpins the present was a very common trope. Secondly, he implicitly acknowledges the three CCP-defined pillars of Chineseness: territorial integrity; economic growth; and an integrated Chinese identity. The third pillar of integrated identity is demonstrated in the way in which he conflates ‘we’ students and the Chinese state. Dan criticises past imperialism and present systemic disparities with his reference to opposing hegemonism and the desire for a new, fairer world order. These values are all framed within the ultimate goal, conceived of in national terms – prosperity for the country. Dan’s comment neatly encapsulates the perspective of most of the students I taught at CFAU.

**A New Model for the International System: The virtues of multipolarity**

In November 2009, in the course on the role of culture and context in foreign policy, I asked my students to write an essay outlining their opinion on any of the topics we had discussed so far in class. Across the wide range of issues students addressed, certain key themes were repeated. In particular, students were keen to discuss the problems inherent in the current international system, what a better system should
look like, and what China’s role in that system should be. Their main concerns regarding China’s role were what part it could play in environmental protection, global peace and security, and international development. They were also keen to emphasise the role China already played, which they felt was often unrecognised and under-appreciated by Western commentators. Like Dan, most students raised the importance of creating a more representative multipolar model for global governance.

Summer, a young woman majoring in International Economics, had strong opinions about what a new international system should look like, and what China’s role in it should be. As she argued in her essay, ‘A new model for the international system with a rising China’, the US was no longer in a position to be able to shoulder the world’s responsibilities alone, particularly after the financial crisis. Most other students held similar views. As Yellow put it more explicitly,

Since the financial crisis broke out in late 2007, the world is processing a difficult time. For the international community, the monopole system no longer works to make the world work properly. The United States has been seriously hit by the financial crisis and its troops in Iraq and Afghanistan drag its economy recovery.

Summer explained that the existing model was evidently no longer tenable:

The last model, the Yalta System, was suitable for the structure of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union declared the end of the Cold War. Russia is not as powerful as the Soviet Union was, given its weak domestic economy. It is more important that Russia is no longer an enemy to the United States. Although the United States is the only super-power, it has some problems. It acted as the leader of the whole world and launched wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq. And during the financial crisis, the US suffers from economic recession.

Based on these elements, Summer, like other students, felt that it was “the right time for a new model to replace the Yalta System”. Her conviction was based on what she saw as two main material facts: that the end of the Cold War had left the world with a
unipolar system in which the US was the sole superpower; and that the increasingly
globalised environment and the financial crisis in 2008 meant that the US was no
longer able to bear this burden alone. Most students agreed that the need for a new
model of international system had become more acute after the global financial crisis
of 2008. Indeed, the crisis was seen to have already changed the system irrevocably.
Ken, for example, felt that, “After the financial crisis, the international system has
changed to a new style which is better adapted to the new phenomena”. In addition to
the United States’ perceived lack of capacity to continue to dominate as hegemon,
students accepted that the “main trend of the world in the new century” was the
inevitability of further globalisation. They also tended to agree that the twenty-first
century was going to be ‘the Asian Century’ in which, “the core of the world is
moving from the West to the East – especially in recent years, and the development in
the Asia-Pacific is remarkable”. As a consequence of all these factors, students felt
that the international system needed to allow for a wider range of voices to be heard,
rather than just representing the interests of the status quo powers.

Whichever of these reasons, or combination thereof, that students put forward as their
rationale, all students called for a new style of international system. The new system
most students envisaged was one in which the US-led ‘unipolar moment’ of the post-
Cold War era would be replaced by a different formation of power. Like Summer,
most students did not see the new scenario as a bipolar moment in which China
formed a ‘G2’ with the US. They rather promoted a system of multipolarity in which
five ‘poles’ would balance power among them: the United States, Russia, Europe,
Japan, and China. Students believed that in this way, China would have more voice
than in the current regime, and through it, other developing countries would also be
better represented. As Ken explained,

    The structure of the world is changing, we can hear more voices from
different countries. Just like the G8 has grown to the G20. Developing
countries are more and more important around the world.

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46 This expression is thought to have first appeared in a 1985 US Senate Committee on Foreign
Relations hearing, and to have first been used by Asian leaders in a 1988 meeting between Deng
Xiaoping and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.
Students expressed strong views that it was no longer appropriate for “one or a few countries to be the centre of the international system. The international system is maintained by all the countries in the world”. They saw the promotion of equality and mutual respect as the rationale behind a multipolar model, asserting that the “validity of an international system must be built on the bases of national sovereignty and equality”.

As Yellow put it,

It can be concluded that there will be a new international model, and China will probably play an important role in it. It is not only a transfer of the international patterns of politics, but also a way to keep peace and stability. This new model is not like the previous models, which are models of hierarchy, but a kind of ‘democratic’ international model.

He went on to explain why more of a role for China would result in a less hierarchical system, drawing on official narratives to illustrate how and why this system would be superior to what currently exists:

Since China used to be a weak power in international politics, its people and leaders are deeply concerned about the suffering of less developed countries; they also realise that if a certain country needs to develop its economy, a good international environment is essential. On the other side of the coin, a good international environment is not a zero-sum game; it would help the developed countries have more chance to make their economic and social development better. So China would probably act its best to create an international stage where each country can have a role. This new model will in that sense be a ‘democratic’ one, which means every country has the right and ability to figure out what it wants. It’s certain that this kind of new international model will promote and sustain peace as well as stability all around the globe, just as President Hu said in the Report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China: a harmonious world.
China’s past suffering at the hands of other powers was accepted as an indisputable fact among my students. They considered China’s history of humiliation as a guarantee that China would protect and promote the rights of less powerful states in the future, ideally multipolar, international system.

**Multilateralism**

In addition to the importance of multipolarity in my students’ vision of an ideal international system, students also stressed the critical role of genuinely representative multilateral organisations. Students felt that fair and equal representation through multilateralism provided the most appropriate framework for the future international system. Underpinning their normative view of what the world should look like was a widely held view of history in which China’s dignified and peaceful past, and trajectory into a similarly dignified and peaceful future, had been disrupted by foreign imperialist incursions. Students felt strongly that this kind of bullying of weaker states should never again be allowed. Based on the perception that previous permutations of the international system had failed weaker states in the past, students argued that an ideal international system was one in which weaker states were protected as each sovereign nation held equal power and voting rights:

We stand for establishing a new international political and economic order that is fair and rational. Politically, all countries should respect and consult one another and should not seek to impose their will on others. Peace and development are the themes of our era. To preserve peace and promote development is for the wellbeing of all nations.

Similarly, another student asserted:

All countries, strong or weak, rich or poor, are equal members of the international community and have equal rights to participate in world affairs. No country or group of countries has the privilege to place itself above the international community. They have the equal power to cooperate with each other and help each other. There should be mutual cooperation, equality and
mutual benefit, and common progress between countries, especially between
the developed countries and the developing countries.

In general, students felt that while the United Nations system may be imperfect, it
enjoyed a legitimacy that other organisations, such as the IMF or World Bank, did
not, because of its ‘one country, one vote’ principle. As Alison argued, “History has
proven that strong international institutions are a precondition for building any
successful international cooperation”. Students felt strongly that China was already an
active supporter of a multilateral system, noting the different multilateral institutions
in which it was a constructive member. Katerina argued for example that:

China is eager to open itself to the world and deepen multilateral cooperation
with global counterparts. In 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was
founded, with its mission to promote peaceful coexistence and development
on the basis of mutual trust, respect, benefits, and consultation. Apart from
SCO, China is taking a more and more active lead in ASEAN, APEC, G20
and other international cooperative organisations and projects.

Students believed that, unlike China’s genuine support for multilateralism, how the
US acted in the global arena was the cause of many of the problems within the
existing multilateral framework for global governance. They believed that China was
behaving differently in the same circumstances because inherent Chinese cultural
characteristics guided Chinese political behaviour. As Tony posited, “The United
States keeps a vague relation with the United Nations. The Yankees put influence on
the conference round-table for their own interests at the cost of other nations”. Tony
then argued that China would never undermine the UN system in this way, but would
rather fully support and participate in its multilateral approach to global governance.
He noted that, “China is aware of the importance of joining in the world family. That
can benefit China a lot. We believe that ‘so long as you live in the house, you have to
keep it clean’”. While the Realist school of IR posits that any state will behave
according to the constraints of its position, my students firmly believed that China
would behave very differently to traditional powers, according to its own cultural
beliefs and worldviews.
The Future Shape of the International System

In the past, particularly during the Mao era, China had emphasised a revolutionary ideology which underpinned the goal of overthrowing the prevailing international norms in order to extend the Communist revolution internationally (see Zhao 1996, 54-55; and Janos 1964). Official discourse has changed dramatically since Mao’s time, and the views and goals expressed by my students at CFAU were certainly very different from this previously explicit Chinese position. Students tended to argue that the inexorable trend of globalisation drawing China into the world had greatly benefited the country, eradicating any interest in overthrowing the system.

My students understood that the current international system, while imperfect, had allowed China to develop quickly in the last three decades. They saw further economic cooperation and globalisation as the country’s best chance to continue to grow economically. They believed that further global integration in which China could become economically stronger would lead to a future characterised by “peace and development, not revolution and war”. Cooperation and participation were not only seen as advantageous for all states across the system, but also as ultimately having a beneficial impact on China. As Bobby from the Diplomacy major argued:

International cooperation is emerging and deepening. China is obviously part of this complex interdependence and actively participates in the cooperation, especially economic cooperation. Therefore, China is gradually becoming a beneficiary of the international system and changes its aim from changing the system to taking part in the system and gaining interest from it. At the same time, the development of international economic cooperation makes China develop quickly without invading or expanding in to any other countries.

Another student noted the benefits China had enjoyed from joining the WTO in 2001:

When China joined the WTO, it made its economic policy based on the principle that all member countries are equal and what is done towards one must be done to them all. Whenever there is a commercial dispute among
members, negotiations are held under WTO supervision. WTO accession also has made the Chinese economy more open, more transparent and more integrated into the world economic system.

The role of the international system was seen by my students to be, ideally, to “maintain international order, encourage the development of the global economy, melt different kinds of culture together, and push ahead the communication of scientists from all over the world”. Students felt that it was therefore in China’s interests to maintain and protect the stability and security of the current system, but at the same time, ensure that the system better represented the interests of non-traditional powers.

Students were, overall, very optimistic about the future: “The world is marching toward brightness and progress, the road is tortuous, but the future is bright, the forces for peace, justice and progress are invincible after all”. In a stirring conclusion to her mid-semester essay, Katerina argued that it was the responsibility of herself and her peers as young Chinese to change the world by working towards a new and fairer international system:

As part of the new generation, I absolutely think the world needs change. Some countries which neglect international law should be punished, and some countries’ role as the world’s police should change. We need a new international system, and there should be one. As a Chinese, I think that China has both obligations and responsibilities to play a relatively important role, and I have confidence in my motherland.

Students felt strongly that the bright global future they saw for the world required the US to rescind its unilateral hold on power, as indeed it could not hold on to its hegemonic status even if it sought to. They believed the most appropriate model for the ‘new era’ of peace and development was a multipolar system in which China shared control with several other major powers, working in a fair and representative multilateral decision-making environment.
China’s Role in an Ideal World

Admittedly, as a rising power, we cannot avoid playing a role in the new world system, and assuming more responsibilities. But play a leading role? Definitely not!

- Karen, International Law

In addition to understanding what the international system does and should look like, one of the central tenets of my students’ training was how a proper Chinese official ought to view what role China should play within the global order. Students envisaged one of China’s key roles as being the representative voice for developing countries, as the only developing country among the five poles among which global power would be divided. That China may soon not constitute a developing country was never raised. My students believed that the new ‘democratic’ world system had a key role for China. However, they stressed that having a central role did not equate to China taking on a primary leadership position. Rather, as Lily argued,

China will continue to improve and develop relations with developed countries; China will broaden the converging points of common interests and properly settle differences on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, including differences in social system and ideology. China will develop exchanges and cooperation with political parties and organisations of all countries and regions on the principles of independence, complete equality, and mutual respect for each others’ internal affairs. China will stand for establishing a new international political and economic order that is fair to Africa.

The two key rationales behind Karen’s argument that China would never play a leading role were widely shared among my students. Firstly, their historical determinist perspective meant students believed that because China had never in the past sought global dominance, it would never do so in the future. Students understood certain Chinese cultural traits as fundamental and inherent to all Chinese people throughout time. Their belief in historical precedent as the explanation for China’s behaviour in the international arena, both now and in the future, is also common
among highly respected scholars, such as Li Anshan from Peking University. Li Anshan argues that ancient Confucian notions are central to Chinese external relations (Li 2012, 41-60). This view is also the central tenet of Yan’s book, *Ancient Chinese Philosophy, Modern Chinese Power* (2010). Yan, from Tsinghua University, argues that ancient Confucian ideals fundamentally underpin how China sees the world, and should play a more explicit role in China’s overseas engagement (2010).

The second factor underpinning students’ insistence that China would never play a leading global role was also based on historical determinism, but was rather more pragmatic. This view was based on a cyclical understanding of history in which states grew strong, stretched too far, and declined – something China wanted at all costs to avoid. For example, in Buddy’s mid-semester essay entitled ‘China, a Participant but Not a Changer’, he argued that:

China’s rising is just another rise-and-fall in world history like before. There will be no fundamental change to the international system itself, but it’s undoubted that China will certainly play a more and more important role in world affairs. But we should not play too much of a role.

This sentiment reflects the official position, as indicated by the Chinese government television broadcast of a popular 12-part series entitled, *The Rise of the Great Nations* (*Daguo Jueqi: 大国崛起*).47 This television miniseries catalogued the rise – and subsequent fall – of many of the world’s great empires, with a clear message that imperial overstretch inevitably leads to downfall. My students had internalised this message, arguing that China preferred to chart a modest course in which its dignity and material wellbeing were assured, but with no designs on international power over and above that.

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47 *The Rise of the Great Nations (also known as the Rise of the Great Powers)* was a 12-part series aired in 2006 which took three years to make, following a study session of the Politburo in 2003. As one commentator observed, “the narrator presents the emergence of the nine countries analysed as achievements worthy of emulation, reviewing the globe-spanning colonies of the imperial powers in admiring terms. The documentary also stresses historical themes that coincide with policies Chinese leaders promote at home. Social stability, industrial investment, peaceful foreign relations and national unity are presented as more vital than, for example, military strength, political liberalization or the rule of law”. The series was broadcast twice in immediate succession, covering 24 consecutive nights (Kahn, 2006).
Overall, my students demonstrated a strong desire to support the existing international system. However, they agreed that allowing more voice for developing countries was critical, especially to balance what they described as unilateral US hegemony. None of my students expressed the view that China should challenge the US to take on the role as single predominant world power. The certainty with which students believed that China would never want to take over the US’ role in the international system underpinned their strong belief that the West’s fear of a rising China was so misguided that it could only be part of a deliberate political strategy to limit China’s growth. Students believed that a new multipolar system in which China had an active, but not primary role, would usher in a long period of peace and harmony conducive to the wellbeing and development of all – not least for China itself.

**The right to a role**

The notion that China was once a great power that was ready to re-emerge as an active participant on the world stage was a strong theme for many students. For example, as Yellow noted,

Historically, China had been a leading power of the world, judged by economy and military force, for hundreds of years. It lost its position in the 19th century when beaten by Western powers. Since then, the Chinese people have been trying to let their motherland hold such a position again.

Like Yellow, most of my CFAU students understood China’s rightful and appropriate position in the world order as pre-established by historical precedent. According to this view, history demonstrates that China has always been a central player in international relations. Students’ historical determinism equated this past with how the future should naturally unfold. However, they understood this natural schema to have been radically disrupted by the incursions of Western imperial powers in the 1800s, commencing with the Opium Wars and ushering in the Century of Humiliation.

Many students felt that in addition to the Chinese people’s own desire for China to resume its position, other countries also wanted China to play an increasing role. As
Katerina argued, “with China’s development in the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the calling becomes louder for China to take a more decisive role in international affairs”, at the same time as there were “more and more complaints about America who is used to leading the world on the basis of force.”

Ultimately, students felt that the time was ripe for China to play more of a role in the world. For example, Karen felt that in the crisis of the current international system, the old Chinese adage that “heroes always appear in the age of changes”, was very apt. She argued that China represented a refreshing change for the better, compared with existing powers:

> When you look around the world, besides those old powers and trouble-makers, you see China, a rising power, with a huge population, a large potential market, rich resources, good location, and a strong eagerness to develop. It turns out to be the hero in many people’s eyes.

While all students felt that China had the right to more voice in the international system, most argued that China should not play a leading role. However, there were one or two students who felt that China could step up and take a more important position. For example, as Katerina argued:

> After the Cold War, the world’s situation has largely changed. Since the Soviet Union’s disintegration, the so-called ‘balance of power’ has disappeared. In recent years, the US has become the solo superpower in the world, (in terms of a country, the EU isn’t included). According to history, there needs to be another superpower to balance the world’s interest. And China has the potential.

However, these views were rare, and were generally framed not so much in terms of a desire for China to assume a global leadership position, but rather a perceived need to balance the skewed system of US hegemonic power.
Responsibility

Many students argued that China should take on more of a role in the international system because it had a right to, because it had a duty to, and because of the beneficial impact it would have. As Summer put it, China is “a responsible country, who respects sovereignty and doesn’t interfere with other countries’ domestic policies when dealing with international affairs”. The concept of responsibility is a strong trope in international relations. The ‘responsibility to protect’ was formally adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in July 2009. Even before then, the question of China behaving ‘responsibly’ in the international system had been a theme since Robert Zoellick asked “the essential question”: “How will China use its influence?” (Zoellick 2005). Zoellick exhorted the US to “urge China to become a responsible stakeholder in the [international] system” in his 2005 remarks to the National Committee on US – China Relations, entitled, *Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?* (ibid.).

My students were very aware of this discourse and formulated numerous arguments to show how China was already and would continue to be a responsible power – according to its capabilities. In addition to the sense that China had a natural and historical right to adopt a more prominent position in international affairs, CFAU students overall tended to stress that China’s increased power behoved it to take on more responsibility. Students like Candy expressed a belief that as “China plays a more and more important role on the international stage”, the Chinese people would accept “our duty to improve the world and deal with the global issues”. Some students noted that China was already responsible, as Summer’s remark, above, indicates.

This sense of responsibility in Chinese international relations was seen as appropriate for a “rising country with a long history” and was also attributed by some students, like Maisie, to Confucian values:

The second Confucian idea that has a great effect on China’s foreign policy-making is that ‘if you live a life of hardship, you just manage yourself alone, but if you are powerful enough, you should also take more care of the world’.
The way in which students understood China’s history not only emphasised the righteousness and naturalness of China’s ‘recovery’ to its rightful position. At the same time, it also granted China a certain ‘exceptionalist’ identity in opposition to Western imperial powers, and a concomitant identification with other developing countries. For my students, it was a logical step to conclude that as China regained its rightful role as an active participant in global affairs, it would share its experiences with other developing nations, and always retain a natural distrust of Western powers. My students believed that China therefore had a responsibility to align itself and its interests with those who had supported it in the past, for example, in regaining UN recognition and recovering its position in other ways.

However, while CFAU students agreed that China should be responsible, what that specifically entailed was not clearly articulated. Despite the use of the same English terminology in both Chinese (English language) and Western discussions, the fundamental expectations of what ‘global responsibility’ implies in practice may not be the same. For my students, China’s increased responsibility meant that the country could influence global norms to “provide an effective alternative for global governance” including “constructively critiquing global unfairness, injustices and abuses in the international system” as part of “promoting a harmonious world”. In students’ understanding, this meant, for example, continuing to take a lead role in Six Party Talks with North Korea, and increasing participation in the UN Security Council and the UN more broadly. Responsibility was also seen to imply that China should play more of a role in “helping countries that are not so strong get heard, mediating in conflicts on their behalf, and fighting for their rights on the international stage”. As another student argued, “as the biggest developing country, China must play an important role in the international system, not only for the benefit of China but also for the stability of the whole world”. Due to their belief that China was already an active international participant, my students felt that comments like Zoellick’s about China taking on a more responsible international role were not only unfounded and unfair, but represented yet another example of Western efforts to diminish China’s positive participation in global affairs and undermine its credibility in the international system.
Taking on responsibility one step at a time

While students felt that China could and should play a role of some sort, some argued that the country should be cautious about taking on too much responsibility too quickly. Students saw two key and interrelated reasons for this: fear of imperial overstretch, and Chinese tradition and culture, in which not interfering in others’ affairs is a central tenet. The conclusion they drew from these factors was clear: it is not wise to get involved beyond one’s own borders. One student of Diplomacy, James, from Sichuan, who wanted to pursue a career in politics “for a while”, argued that China’s role in the world should be based on its traditional understanding of interaction and obligation:

Traditional Chinese families believe problems and conflicts between their family members should only be settled in the family. It is obvious that China’s foreign policy holds a similar principle, as is shown in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. In the Darfur issue, China follows an invisible custom and chooses to respect its paterfamilias first and not to interfere. So what if China gains more power in the new century? We can see China has been sending many soldiers into the UN Peacekeeping Force, but no more than enough. They can try to prevent some severe situations, but will not try to interfere too much.

Regarding the fear of overstretch, Buddy argued in his mid-semester essay that:

The reason that China is not willing to stand at the top of the world is that China knows its own capability and the reality of the world politics. China has won a lot of friendship, but that’s not the same as authority. Getting more involved in international affairs means more cost in IR. For China, its capability is limited. China also knows that the more power you have got, the greater responsibility you have to take; the more you get involved, the quicker you decline.

Buddy went on to say:
That’s why the decline of superpowers is unavoidable. Maintaining both internal and external interests makes more cost for the states, which adds more and more burden to its shoulders. There are many examples in history: Napoleon’s France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union all declined. If China follows in the same tracks, it will do too.

Students’ belief that China should not extend beyond its own borders but at the same time take on a more responsible global role seems like a contradiction, if based on an assumption that responsibility requires external projections of material strength. However, students resolved this apparent tension through the proposition that China could do the most good for the world by attending to its own development, security and stability: “It is never exaggerated to say that if China is in a stable and harmonious state, the world will benefit”. Additionally, they did not see China fulfilling its responsibilities as causing an issue of over-extension, because China always worked according to its capabilities, through multilateral channels, and with the full consent of relevant stakeholder governments.

Most students at CFAU felt that China could play a constructive role in the international system without risking its own stability and harmony in several ways. As Summer neatly outlined, the key areas in which “China could take on more responsibility in the international system are environmentally; by promoting international security, including anti-terrorism; and in utilising China’s own poverty reduction experience to further global development”. The following sections of the chapter will examine these areas.

**China and the Global Environment**

My students generally accepted that environmental issues were a cause for concern, both domestically and in terms of global public goods. Overall, they understood these problems to have been caused by already developed nations as an inevitable consequence of the industrialisation process. This belief in the Western origins of environmental problems strongly coloured students’ views of how the issues should best be resolved. For example, as Katerina noted, “No country in history has emerged
as a major industrial power without creating a legacy of environmental damage that can take decades and big dollops of public wealth to undo”.

Students also understood that China had already undertaken a raft of reforms to reduce and ameliorate the effects of climate change, and felt that the rest of the world should recognise these as important steps. As one student explained,

China has recognised the obligation that it should try its best to reduce air pollution and seek cooperation with other countries to work out a solution for climate change. China has joined the United Nations–China Climate Change Partnership Framework Project. China has made great efforts in eco-system protection, biodiversity conservation, pollution control, and managing the tourism industry, based on the goal of protection and respect for the global environment.

Likewise, another student argued,

Recently the Chinese government has set up many regulations to reduce emissions and conserve energy. Export subsidies for polluting industries have disappeared. Different campaigns have started to close illegal coalmines and shut some heavily polluting factories. Major initiatives are underway to develop clean energy sources like solar and wind power. At the meeting in Copenhagen, China promised to reduce CO2 emission per capita of total GDP, and this action was praised by other countries. I think big emitting countries such as China and the US are being paid a lot of attention. So politically or ethically China should behave well to meet the world’s expectations. For this goal, China has a lot to do in the new international system.

Ken noted that,

During the UN climate change summit, China’s President Hu Jintao announced plans to cut emissions significantly by 2020, and to vigorously develop renewable and nuclear energy to show that China is a responsible country in protecting the environment.
However, despite students’ acceptance that the global environment was an issue that warranted China’s active engagement, it was clear that most felt that China should not be obliged to take on the same degree of responsibility as industrialised nations, for example, the US. As Matt argued, “China’s position has been consistent, that is, common but differentiated responsibility”. The two reasons students gave for this position were that firstly, those who created the problems and had thereby arrived at a state of development should take responsibility for their actions; and secondly, China itself was a developing country and needed more flexibility with environmental regulations in order to “complete its transition” to full development.\(^{48}\)

How China should correctly address domestic and global environmental challenges was seen to derive from China’s traditional values and a continuation of historical norms. As Glennis explained,

> Chinese traditional culture has played a significant role in all aspects of social and cultural life of Chinese people, including when it comes to the harmony between human and nature. China still takes the responsibility of protecting the environment.

My students’ comments on environmental issues indicate that although they believed that existing global environmental problems were not of China’s making, they accepted that China’s own rapid development could have significant environmental implications, unless managed properly. Students felt confident that China was already taking measures to minimise negative environmental impacts domestically, and was also participating constructively in international fora to mitigate the effects of climate change. A key principle, however, was that China’s efforts would not go beyond its capacity, and would be in accordance with its responsibility for causing the problems.

\(^{48}\) This trope of ‘shared but differentiated responsibility’ also appears in many other fields of China’s international engagement, including in its South-South development cooperation. It is a principle to which Chinese negotiators will firmly adhere – as was seen in Copenhagen, as well the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in 2011, and the fifth Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing in July 2012.
Global peace and security

Students argued that in addition to how traditional Chinese values underpinned China’s active role in environmental protection, Chinese values also meant that the country could and should participate in protecting and promoting broader global peace and security. Glennis’ classmate, a quiet and thoughtful girl who had opted to use her Chinese name, Wang Yi, argued that “China is playing a bigger role in maintaining global security”, and explained how this was “generated from Chinese ancient philosopher Confucius because a big country should take the responsibility to keep a balanced situation among countries”. In terms of how that obligation to protect global security played out in practice, Summer saw China’s role as primarily one of collaboration and cooperation, operating very firmly within multilateral frameworks and under United Nations leadership. Most students saw multilateralism as critical for achieving global security, arguing that, “we must uphold multilateralism to realise common security”. Summer cited the example of the Middle East peace process:

China is gradually beginning to play an important role as a mediator in international conflict. The practice of mediation in the Middle East conflict reflects the maturity of China’s political mentality. Problems and conflicts in the world are not direct threats to China’s interests, but in the view of responsibility for world peace, for universal values of human and concern for the humanitarian crisis, China must do something to help solve the problems and mediate the conflicts.

Her classmate Diamond agreed, positing that:

Politically, China is also becoming an important player on the world stage. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a nuclear weapons state, the expanding economy results in a growing global political influence. From the ‘Six-Party Talks’ to energy security; from Iran, South Korea to Sudan; China is almost everywhere.

These students’ comments demonstrate a very different perspective from that in mainstream Western discussions regarding how constructive China’s involvement is
in international diplomacy. This divergence in views was also evident in discussions of China’s role in regional peacekeeping. My students believed that China was an important and constructive player, both because of its traditional approaches to dealing with international affairs, as well as its pursuit of contemporary strategic concerns. James from the Diplomacy major, for example, argued that:

In today’s world, great powers like the US try to turn other countries into ones that are similar to them. They think that will be safer. They regard neighbours as opponents first. China doesn’t, however, and adheres to a policy that regards neighbours as partners to help them. In today’s foreign policies, China keeps an unvarying strategic pattern which includes ‘the neighbourhood comes first’. In 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was set up. And recently, China decided to give zero tariff status to ASEAN countries and also play an active role in the Great Mekong Sub-region Organisation and the Tumen River sub-regional development plans. These regional and sub-regional cooperation practices will build a connecting circle around China, which may go further in the future.

Ken noted how rather than trying to forcefully transform other countries into replicas of itself as the US was seen to do, China’s traditional approach of good-neighbourliness had resulted in tangible benefits for peace and security,

During the Six-Party Talks, China has struggled to use its close relationship with North Korea to persuade them not to develop nuclear weapons. Basically, China used its regional power to keep peace in eastern Asia.

Like Ken, most students saw China as playing a central role in attempts to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis. As Annie explained,

Many diplomatic efforts have been made to convince or cajole the Northern regime to give up this quest, and all have so far failed. Since 2003, a new multilateral approach – the Six-Party Talks involving the Koreas, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States – has raised hopes anew. These hopes are
based largely on China playing an active role. China’s role in the Six-Party Talks is to promote peaceful talks.

Maisie also argued that “Chinese diplomats were instrumental” in the North Korean peace process, reflecting the view among my students that China’s experience and wisdom in international negotiations was critical for peace in the East Asian region.

In addition to this positive influence in regional affairs, many students also saw an increased role for China working alongside international agencies in the global arena. As Ken explained,

China is aware of its responsibilities as a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations. In recent years, China played a more and more important role in keeping the peace of the world. After 9/11 China worked together with other countries to fight against violence, terror and crime. During the Iraq War, China, Russia and the French blamed the United States for breaking the peace, bringing the nightmare to the Iraqi people, and intensifying contradictions between Western and Eastern cultures. Additionally, China has sent more than 6000 peacekeeping troops to Congo (Republic) and Haiti to help the government keep the situation peaceful and stable. In 2009 the Chinese government sent two battleships and a supply ship to fight against the Somali pirates and recover the confidence of marine transportation. With its developing economy and the increase in military expenditure, China is one of the most important peacekeeping countries in the world.

Students saw this extension into global security as a critical element of China playing more of a role in the global arena. They did not consider it as presenting a danger of eventual decline through overstretching beyond China’s own borders, as the emphasis was firmly on involvement according to China’s capabilities. Nor was participating in global security regarded as constituting interference in other countries’ sovereignty, as China would only be involved in operations conducted through internationally sanctioned multilateral organisations.
Students felt that a central role China could play in achieving global peace and security was to represent the voice of other, less powerful developing countries, or to negotiate between major powers, like the US, and less powerful nations. In particular, students saw China facilitating relations between East and West. As Ken argued,

China plays an important role in the connection between West and East. As we know, most developed countries are Western countries and most Eastern countries are still developing countries. The different between West and East is not only about rich and poor but also modern and traditional, openness and exclusion, there is even a difference in sense of worth. But China is an open Eastern country. Other countries can find both Western culture and the Eastern culture mix together and deal with each other well. You can enjoy material life in Western style, at the same time you can deal with life in Eastern style. Western countries will see not all the Eastern people are terrorists who carry a bomb with them every day. On the other hand Eastern countries can see that not all the Western people are capitalists who only care about money. So China is a perfect example of how to make West and East understand each other better, and without misunderstanding, our world will become more and more harmonious.

Ken’s remark reflects the cultural determinism common among students in which both East and West have their own inherent characteristics, and in which the West is generally considered to be one virtually indistinguishable imagined community (Fong 2004, 6). Ken’s comment encapsulates students’ tendency to conceive of China’s role in protecting and promoting global security as the altruistic behaviour appropriate for a responsible state, and not related to protecting China’s interests – as Summer also explicitly stated.

49 Despite its economic strength, China continues to define itself as a ‘developing country’, based on its comparatively low GDP per capita, rather than its impressive total GDP.
**China’s Responsibility to Develop (Others)**

One of the strongest themes that came out in class discussions and students’ essays was China’s role in development, both internationally and domestically, as this was seen to have global implications. For example, as Lily argued,

> China will promote the development of economic globalisation in a direction conducive to common prosperity, draw on its advantages and avoid its disadvantages so that all countries, particularly developing countries, can benefit from the process.

Lily was tapping into an issue that has become an increasingly public topic of discussion in China, particularly since the first White Paper on China’s Foreign Aid was released in April 2011. My students often raised the issue of China’s care for other developing countries, particularly in Africa. Given the importance this topic seemed to have for students, and the complex interactions the issue has with the tropes of nationalism discussed earlier in the thesis, the next section will focus on how students understood China’s responsibility in promoting global development.

The majority of my students felt that as China grew economically, it was appropriate for the country to play a concomitantly greater role in international development. This belief was particularly strong regarding assistance to other developing countries with which students believed China shared past experiences of colonisation, and which were seen to have supported China in its re-ascendance on the world stage. Assisting other countries’ development was seen not as a new expansion of the country’s global role but simply as a continuation of how China has always behaved in the international system. For example, as Margaret explained,

> Helping each other is our basic policy in foreign affairs. Our government did its utmost to help the African countries, and donated ten million dollars to India. All these examples suggest that China shoulders its responsibility all the time.
Glennis also noted how “China provides not only technological, but also monetary support to African countries, which started in the 1950s and never stopped, no matter how hard the Chinese situation was”. Glennis’ comment reflected a broader view among students that China had always been a friend to those countries that were, like itself, left behind as the Western countries grew economically and politically more powerful.

Development with Chinese characteristics

Students believed that development itself was culturally specific, and no universal model existed. They felt that “inherent Chinese characteristics” and China’s own historical experiences shaped what development meant in China, how development should best be achieved, and particularly, who should implement development projects. The combination of these characteristics and experiences were understood as the foundations of former Premier Zhou Enlai’s famous ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence’, articulated in India in 1954. Building on these principles, in 1964 the Chinese government declared the ‘Eight Principles for Economic Aid and Technical Assistance to Other Countries’. The core content of these Eight Principles reiterated the importance of equality, mutual benefit, a ‘no strings attached approach’ to development and territorial sovereignty.\(^50\) Both proclamations are still officially cited as the cornerstone of China’s international engagements.\(^51\) My students understood

\(^50\) While a more recent adherent to the nation-state principles arising from the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, China has since adopted the notions of state sovereignty with considerable vigour, particularly since the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949. In the same way as China absolutely and emotionally resents and condemns any incursion into its own sovereign affairs – such as criticism of its human rights, or discussions of autonomy for Tibet, Taiwan or Xinjiang – it utilises the rhetoric of state sovereignty and territorial integrity in all its international dealings.

\(^51\) The Five Principles are: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. The Eight Principles are: 1. The Chinese government always bases itself on the principle of equality and mutual benefit in providing aid to other countries. It never regards such aid as a kind of unilateral alms but as something mutual; 2. In providing aid to other countries, the Chinese government strictly respects the sovereignty of recipient countries, and never attaches any conditions or asks for any privileges; 3. China provides economic aid in the form of interest-free or low-interest loans, and extends the time limit for the repayment when necessary so as to lighten the burden on recipient countries as far as possible; 4. In providing aid to other countries, the purpose of the Chinese government is not to make recipient countries dependent on China but to help them embark step by step on the road of self-reliance and independent economic development; 5. The Chinese government does its best to help recipient countries complete projects which require less investment but yield quicker results, so that the latter may increase their income and accumulate capital; 6. The Chinese government provides the best-quality equipment and materials manufactured by China at international market prices. If the equipment and materials provided by the Chinese government are not up to the
that these principles would ensure that Chinese overseas aid would always be “based on mutual equality, mutual benefit, and respect for sovereignty”.

My students believed that China should play a role in overseas development, but two streams of opinion existed about how that should best be achieved. Echoing discussions about China’s overall responsibility in the world, some students felt strongly that China should concentrate on resolving its own poverty and inequality challenges. They felt that China’s responsibility to help others would be best achieved by focusing on China’s own economic development. In fact, not doing so could cause development challenges around the world. As Charity argued,

And why do we say that China will bring troubles to other countries if we do not concentrate on our development? China has more than 1.3 billion people, if we do not develop our economy, not only our domestic environment will become turbulent, but also Chinese people will escape to other countries because of hunger and poverty.

She went on to say how,

On this issue, on December 13 1999, the Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) pointed out that China's development has never threatened others. On the contrary, if China does not concentrate on our development, China will bring many troubles to other countries.

Similarly, Charity’s classmate Melanie argued that a peaceful international environment “is inseparable from sustained economic development” and therefore China’s own domestic development remained the primary means for achieving “China’s desire for world peace”.

agreed specifications and quality, the Chinese government undertakes to replace them or refund the payment; 7. In giving any particular technical assistance, the Chinese government will see to it that the personnel of the recipient country fully master the technology; 8. The experts dispatched by China to help in construction in recipient countries will have the same standard of living as the experts of the recipient country. The Chinese experts are not allowed to make any special demands or enjoy any special amenities.
However, the majority of students felt that China had an obligation to help other developing countries by actively engaging in economic cooperation and providing development assistance. As Lily set out,

China will promote the development of economic globalisation in a direction conducive to common prosperity, draw on its advantages and avoid its disadvantages so that all countries, particularly developing countries, can benefit from the process.

This obligation to help others develop was seen by students to be a smooth continuation of China’s past role in the world, both in recent history since the 1950s, and according to ancient Chinese tradition. Yellow explained that:

The reason that China may hold a deep concern for the economic development of the neighbouring countries is because China has a tradition of the ‘kingdom of heaven’ and will take care of those surrounding countries just as brothers take care of each other. The concept of family has a deep root in Chinese culture so that China will never let his brothers fall down.

In the more recent past, as Li argued, development assistance to Africa was provided not because of China’s wealth and greatness, but at the time when China was at its poorest, indicating the extent to which it was motivated by altruism. Li, from the Diplomacy major, a young man who had been brought up in Hong Kong, also noted China’s assistance in sending soldiers and supplies during the Korea and Vietnam Wars, and referred to seventy other countries China had assisted with “personnel, infrastructure building, health care, education, and disaster alleviation”. Li concluded that it was long-held cultural values that have continued to underpin Chinese development behaviour in recent history:

We must not neglect the Chinese values that underlie what China does. Being a developing country, China always generously helps other developing countries, even during the 1960s when the majority of Chinese were suffering from poverty and natural disaster.
While some students argued that global development would be best served by China taking care of its own affairs, and others felt that China should (continue to) play a more active role, all students tended to understand development assistance in terms of state-to-state, rather than individual-to-individual, or even state-to-individual, relations. For example, students noted how the development support provided by the Chinese state has since the early 1950s been repaid by African loyalty and support in the international system, including voting for UN representation to be returned to Beijing from Taipei in 1971. As Maisie observed,

On October 26th 1971, China regained its rightful seat in the United Nations with 76 affirmative votes, 35 dissenting votes and 17 abstention votes. Most of the affirmative votes are from third world countries, especially African countries. Clearly it was a reflection of China’s intimacy with Africa. Nowadays China still keeps a good relationship with African countries and has much cooperation.

Katerina also explained the relationship in state-level terms:

Leaders of African countries love China’s help, because unlike the Western world, China gives aid without the demand for political or economic reform. In this way, we have a lot of African friends, and they are sort of our alliance, because we are all developing countries. In the UN councils, China struggles for developing countries benefits using its power, and in turn, African countries support China’s suggestions.

These understandings reflect Chinese official development discourse and behaviour in which the Chinese state works exclusively with partner country national governments to decide what assistance will be provided and where. While on occasion, “the people” might be “grateful”, ultimately, the interests of the individual are conflated with those of the state, as this comment from Ricky suggests:

China built the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, raw minerals were carried out with the help of China, and it was China that built the necessary infrastructure
facilities. African people thanked us from the heart. These facilities indicate the friendship between China and Africa.

Students extended their assumption that ‘China-the-state’ was a proxy family member to the international realm. The rhetoric of brotherhood and friendship that peppered students’ discussions about international development was also applied to nation-states. The tendency to anthropomorphise the state was also evident in the way most students applied the notion of the state as an extension of the family, and also as a friend, to their discussions of international development. The strong trope of ‘brotherhood’ seen to connect China with other developing countries tended to be most commonly employed when talking about Africa. The discourse around this relationship often called on motifs of friendship and fraternity. Tony, for example, described China’s debt cancellation in Africa as “cancelling the debt for our black buddies”.

That my students thought that international development assistance was the responsibility of the state rather than individuals could suggest the kind of state-individual dichotomy prevalent in the West. I argue however that students saw the state acting on behalf of individuals, as their comments above demonstrate. My students had little conception of international assistance being provided by individuals. As a result, they did not see state-sponsored aid as opposed to individual aid, as it often is in the West. Instead, students’ conflation of themselves as individuals with the Chinese state meant that state-sponsored aid was simply a projection of their own desire to help the international family of poor countries. Just as students viewed Western countries as a single imagined community, so they also understood developing countries as one group, united by their experience of colonisation and exploitation at the hands of the West as Western powers pursued their own development.

Despite this insistence on “friendship” and “brotherhood” in both official discourse and among my students, the way in which students talked about other developing countries suggested a certain sense of superiority. As Callahan observes, “the diplomatic discourse of friendship is trickier. It implies equality, but does not state it outright; indeed, friendship means very different things in different languages” (2012,
Wang Gungwu refers to this use of the terminology of family and friendship as reflecting a trend among Asian leaders to prefer “the softer hierarchy implied in terms like family and friends” over the harder Westphalian language of international law (2010, 222). Kelvin Cheung explains how the application of Confucian family values to the state results in the moral hierarchy in a society being extended to international relations (2012, 212-213).

Although the terminologies of brotherhood and friendship do not necessarily imply equality, they do imply obligation. Cheung’s explanation fits the way my students explained China’s obligation to developing countries as brothers and friends as part of the responsibilities and obligations that these relationships demand. As discussed in Chapter Five, helping others in an interdependent environment of differentiated modes of association is a demonstration of role-appropriate behaviour. This demonstration is accompanied by expectations about how the benevolence will be reciprocated. As Yang argues, in Chinese society, helping others carries with it an inherent “obligation to repay” (1994, 139-145). Yang’s ethnographic research suggests there are two basic reasons for this imperative: firstly, one’s standing in public opinion (shehui yulun: 社会舆论), to avoid losing face in the eyes of others; and secondly, with a “certain sense of self-interest and material benefit in mind” (ibid., 140). She quotes a worker who explains that “if one does not… spend some effort to keep up good relations… a day is bound to come when one needs to cross the same river again, but will find no bridge left” (ibid., 140).

Because of the way students personified the state as a rational agent, and projected family values onto the international realm, they tended to conceptualise development assistance as part of an ongoing instrumentalist friendship at a global level in which ‘one good turn deserved another’. Students believed that China owed African countries a debt of gratitude for Africa’s past support. Based on this, and a sense of shared history, students felt that China had an important role in assisting state-led growth in Africa and in other developing countries.
"What ‘developed’ means"

Most of my CFAU students felt that China had a responsibility to assist the development of other countries. Therefore, exploring how they understood ‘development’ and its ultimate goal of ‘being developed’ elucidates how they believed China could best achieve this obligation.

Overall, my students tended to adopt what they described as a Marxist approach to development, in that the material base was seen to provide the foundation for the political and social superstructure. They regularly referred to a triangular conception of development in which the broad base of fundamental physical and material needs had to be met before subsequently addressing other needs. In this vision, economic growth and investment in infrastructure were seen as the key factors for achieving developed status. In a class discussion on the topic, Buddy leapt out of his seat to draw a picture of a triangle on the blackboard, sketching in the components of development to illustrate his point more clearly. Students often used this understanding of development to explain the importance of prioritising physical needs before political or social needs. This method of focusing on the material elements of development has been a fundamental tenet of China’s approach to its own development, as well as its overseas development assistance.

During one class, I wrote the word ‘developed’ on the blackboard and asked students to come up and write their ideas of what the term meant. Words like ‘progress’, ‘skyscrapers’ and ‘big TVs’ were scrawled on the board. Some students wrote that the Birds Nest Stadium, the Water Cube, and other buildings constructed for the 2008 Beijing Olympics were symbolic of how China had progressed to become a developed and modern country. Similarly, the architecturally wondrous CCTV Tower on the east side of Beijing was cited as an example of how China was now able to show the world that it was no longer backwards. As we talked about these ideas during the class, it became evident that students associated being developed and modern with physical and material factors, often designed to demonstrate a proud national image to the Chinese people themselves, as well as to outsiders.
This materialist vision of what a developed future should look like formed the foundation of students’ views of the correct role for China in the development of other countries. Less tangible ideas, such as those underpinning Amartya Sen’s notion of ‘development as freedom’ (1999) or the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals of ‘reducing poverty’ which represent the ideal among ‘traditional’ donors, were far less evident. The majority of my students believed that development should be based on material factors before concerns about ‘softer’ aspects were attended to, like citizens’ rights. It was only in the 2011 Twelfth Five Year Plan that the Chinese Government explicitly adopted a more inclusive approach to growth. To what extent this domestic shift will be reflected in China’s international development assistance remains to be seen.

**China’s Rise is No Threat**

*Many countries hope China will pursue a ‘Peaceful Rise’, but none will bet their future on it.*

- Robert Zoellick, former head of the World Bank, 2005

*A theory like ‘China threat’ is irrational and worthless.*

- Dan, International Economics major

Some traditional donors see China’s increasing role in international development as constituting a threat, undermining the long-term sustainability of their own development efforts. Much Western commentary and analysis presents China as appealing to some recipients because of factors such as a lack of transparency, less stringent environmental requirements, the policy of ‘non-interference’ and its disinterest in promoting ‘good governance’ (see for example Henderson and Reilly 2003; Naim 2007a, b; Shie 2007; and Skehan 2009). Moises Naim, editor of *Foreign Policy*, famously wrote in his article accusing China (among others) of providing “rogue aid”, “What’s wrong with the foreign aid programs of China, Venezuela, and Saudi Arabia? They are enormously generous. And they are toxic” (2007b). He described China’s aid efforts as “development assistance that is non-democratic in origin and non-transparent in practice, and its effect is typically to stifle real progress
while hurting ordinary citizens”. Criticism is also levelled at the development impacts of China’s overseas assistance in terms of whether it constitutes a tool for increasing China’s geo-political power, that is, soft power (for a discussion of China’s aid as a tool of soft power, see Varrall 2012).

My students at CFAU firmly believed that China’s increased role in international development should not be perceived as a threat, either to traditional donors’ development goals or to the international political status quo (see Brant 2012 for an analysis of the impacts of Chinese development assistance on the international aid regime). There were several reasons for their certainty that China did not pose a danger, but two key themes emerged. Firstly, students argued that other developing countries welcomed Chinese aid as a means to balance dependence on traditional donors with their stifling requirements for changes in governance and economic management. The second key theme in countering the negative perceptions of Chinese aid was the conviction that China never had nor never would have any intention of trying to accumulate power or undermine the existing international system through its provision of assistance.

The ‘China threat theory’

In addition to traditional donors’ fears about China’s overseas aid, China’s overall increasing global role is also a topic of heated discussion in Western foreign policy and international relations literature, as detailed in Chapter Two. Commentators debate whether the potential implications are positive or negative across a number of fields. My students characterised these discussions as representative of what they referred to as the ‘China threat theory’.

The sense that the West was desperately clinging to obsolete views of China and “an outdated Cold-War mentality” of how the world worked was a very regularly recurring theme in my students’ papers, presentations and essays. While they were optimistic about the future of the international system and China’s role within it, they also perceived the international realm as an unfriendly place in which China continued to be the victim of “unreasonable and humiliating crack-downs” from external forces trying to undermine its success.
Despite students’ conviction that China’s peace-loving nature in the past clearly indicated how China would behave in the future, there was a strong sense that the process of China regaining its rightful place in the world was already causing international tensions, and would continue to do so. As one student noted, even though the Chinese people knew that China was motivated by national pride and not geo-strategic power considerations, and China always maintained its “low profile”, these facts did nothing to “change other countries’ views”. Other countries insisted on treating China’s rise with suspicion because, as one student explained it,

They still feel that China is a threat, there is always this deep sense of insecurity in their minds, they feel insecure because they don’t understand why a country wouldn’t want to be number one. They think that you are no different and they can’t trust you.

Students often expressed frustration and confusion about why Western countries continued to misunderstand China and see its development as a threat when its message of peace and harmony was so clear:

Morally speaking, China has done a great deal ever since we stepped into the world. Though we were distressed in our early days, we tried our best to give aid to more than 110 countries and regions. Still, Western countries constantly question China’s human right issues. Twice we played a responsible and positive role in economic crises. Frustratingly, we suffer all kinds of trade sanctions and discriminations from capitalist countries. We are criticised for expanding our military budget all the time, yet Chinese troops have become an indispensable part in peacekeeping and anti-terrorism missions. With its efforts to show responsibility in international affairs, and its vital role in the world economy, China hopes that outsiders will gradually move away from simple ideological opposition and become more rational.

Students believed that this fear and distrust was not an amorphous and unstructured reaction to China’s rise, but rather a deliberate and strategic theoretical position
propounded by those who wished to undermine China’s development and maintain their own power position.

Most students believed that the popularity they understood the China threat theory to hold in the West was largely due to the economic and geo-political advantages seen to derive from stifling China’s rise. In addition to the perceived threat to traditional norms and practices in international development, the threat theory was seen to have three main components: fear of China economically; militarily; and as a threat to world energy security. However, one student asserted a more fundamentally ideological rationale: because China was a non-Christian country, in which Chinese people are considered “devils because they don’t believe in God”.

Students had mixed views on how and where the theory originated. Heaven argued in her mid-semester essay that the China threat theory began in Japan. Indeed, she even cited the source:

In 1990, a Japanese scholar first put forward this theory in an essay named ‘Regard China as a Potential Threat’, published in the magazine Seito Shokun, however, it is the US which now takes the lead in keeping the theory alive.

Other students also saw a Japanese-US alliance at play, arguing that “the mainstream attitude toward China in US society after 9/11 is to try to cut the throat of China by joining hands with Japan”. According to one student, Kerry, the theory:

Dates back to the late 19th century and was first proposed by the United States. The anti-Chinese sentiments mainly arose after the Cold War when the threat from the Soviet Union disappeared and China was on its way to prosperity.

Kerry then goes on to describe how the China threat theory returned in three waves:

The first wave of intensive ‘China threat’ theory reached its peak in 1992 and 1993. The second wave of anti-Chinese sentiment came in 1995 and 1996. This was sparked by the Taiwan Strait Crisis. In 1998 and 1999 came the third
wave. The *Schork Report* is a memorable account of the reasoning behind this bout of the anti-Chinese epidemic. ‘China is the serious threat to US security,’ ‘China gathers information via Chinese scientists and students,’ ‘China intends to bribe the US government’ were some of the arguments of the era. When China joined the WTO and became a new member in 2001, a report from an official referred to the ‘China threat’ theory again.

Students saw the theory as a political tool, perpetuated by the Western media by continuously, and often deliberately, misrepresenting China’s international activities and promulgating partial truths and outright lies. As Harriet explained:

The outsiders spread the ‘China threat theory’ mainly through the media like newspapers, magazines, and TV programs. The stories are all under the name ‘justice and democracy’ to reveal the dark side of China. From time to time, some ‘facts’ were proved wrong, because the media is always used as a tool to make political gains for a certain party or nation. It is sometimes led by politics instead of facts. To give an example, what happened in Xinjiang this July [2009] gave those outsiders a good excuse to complain about China’s human rights and democracy situation. Misleading pictures and articles could be seen on foreign newspapers and TVs. That’s what happened after the Chinese allowed the foreign journalists to report the event, and before they were allowed, they demanded their right to report it. In the end, it was not about the true facts of the event, but the event itself was just an opportunity to demonise China’s international image.

While many students blamed Western politicians and media for the spread of the theory, several also felt that the majority of the Western public followed the same line of thinking:

In my opinion, the most important motive behind Western countries’ theory is to artificially create an imaginary enemy for the purpose of enforcing the league within the Western countries themselves, especially after the downfall of the superpower, the Soviet Union. Another determinant motive is to intentionally make China’s developmental needs seem unimportant in the
international environment. Obviously, Western public opinion vigorously advocates the ‘China threat theory’ and deliberately creates an atmosphere of tension to contemptibly drive a wedge between China and the world, provoking China’s neighbours’ concerns about China’s normal military defence and economic development, thus implementing a ‘soft-suppressed’ system at last.

Ultimately, that the West would fear China and try to thwart its rise was seen not only as an incontrovertible fact, but also as largely unavoidable. Students’ historical determinist view of cultural continuity meant that they believed that Western countries by their very nature had always wanted to carve China up for themselves, and would therefore continue to do so. They believed that regardless of what efforts China might make, it would be impossible for China to change the West’s very nature, or prevent past trends from continuing into the future. However, other developing countries were not seen to be proponents of the China threat theory. As one student in the International Economics major argued, “outsiders who see China as a potential threat and try to prevent China from developing are mainly from developed countries”. Students felt that the vast majority of “third world countries supported China’s rise” and the foreign policy decisions China made. Kerry, like other students, felt that:

These third world countries take a positive view of China’s growth because they are seeking another superpower to balance the US and strengthen themselves. China, as a socialist country, always following a peaceful development strategy, fits the demands of these countries well.

Students felt a very powerful compulsion to counter the China threat theory. They argued very strongly that the West’s fear of China was entirely unwarranted, as “China does not have enough strength or power to threaten the world”, nor did it have any “ambition to seek hegemony”. Many of my students used the opportunity of their mid-semester essay to explain why the China threat theory was entirely unfounded and indeed downright dangerous for international security. While my CFAU students felt that China did have a role to play in shaping a new, fairer, and more representative international system, they went to great pains to clarify that this did not
imply that China was in any way a threat to the existing system, particularly US hegemony, and that in fact China did not want to take on any kind of leadership role.

To strengthen their case, students drew liberally on national discourses of history which showed how “ancient China was known for its warm hospitality in the world”. As they understood it, during its “past period of glory, China never invaded its neighbours”. Throughout the “thousands of years of glorious leadership in the world” in which China represented “the most advanced economy and society, the most popular culture, and the main source of inventions”, the “Great Kingdom” saw its neighbours as “socially, culturally and politically inferior barbarians”, and as such, chose to help them with “kindness and assistance rather than the hostility of invasion”. The Han and Tang Dynasties were often noted as a peak in “friendly international economic, cultural and educational relations with North Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and other countries”.

China’s long history of glorious peacefulness was understood to have had the effect of “converting some ideas into traditions widely accepted by citizens and completely integrated into our behaviour”. Students argued that Chinese policy-makers still drew on these “ancient ideas of fairness and justice”, and “unconsciously presented their conservative side, that is, considering ancestral ideology and traditional meanings, when faced with major foreign policy affairs”.

As one student explained,

Because of experiencing thousands of years of war and peace, the Chinese people firmly believe that ‘peace is precious’, and beneficial to both sides, whereas war will harm both. Today China’s traditional culture and harmonious view of the world means that China’s main state of mind is the process of peaceful development. The rise of China will not pose a threat to the world.

Li noted that a key characteristic of China’s role in the world would be the pursuit of harmony in diversity, again seen as predicated on the ancient teachings of Confucius.
These traditional characteristics meant that China would “never cause conflict based on different approaches to political or social systems”. Li argued that:

Chinese think gentlemen are those who are in harmony with each other in spite of differences between them. Bad persons are those who are in disharmony with each other in spite of uniformity among them.

Li went on to explain how this

Understanding and conception is part of the motivation that drives China to seek a diverse and colourful world in a peaceful environment, and advocate multilateralism in world affairs. Specifically speaking, China’s foreign policy clearly points out that each country has the right to independently choose its own social system and road to development.

Li then cited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as saying that to “have only one model for every nation-state was impossible, and the difference in social systems and values should not be the reason or excuse for conflict”.

Most students felt that in fact, rather than posing any kind of threat, China had been fulfilling its obligations as an emerging economic power, bearing in mind its capacity constraints as a developing country with a natural focus on pursuing its own development. Students felt that despite what they saw as Western attempts to delimit China’s international position, China was behaving responsibly and negotiating its rise skillfully. As Kerry explained,

China has embraced a peaceful diplomatic ideology. It’s true that China’s rapid and sustained development will influence world politics and the economic order. However, the nation will not endeavour to threaten the world but to foster and strengthen ties with all countries in the world, to promote its own development and common prosperity in the world, and pursue cooperation with other countries.
Students also felt that international events supported the legitimacy of their claim that China’s peace-loving nature formed the core element of its approach to international relations, and would continue to do so in the future. For example, Charity argued that despite the US continuously “causing trouble for China”, China had consistently met these provocations with fairness and wisdom:

China has cast aside those old scores with the United States. In the past, the United States helped Chiang Kai-shek to fight the Chinese Communist Party, and fought the war in Korea. In recent years, the United States has interfered in China’s sovereignty and territorial issues many times. China has many reasons to ignore the economic crisis of United States. But China did not! China knew very well that the US dollar was in a non-stop depreciation, and China continued to purchase US treasury bonds to support the United States’ economy. I think everyone in the world can see China’s performance in this economic crisis. The Chinese people are so peace-loving, constantly extending a helping hand.

Students explained increases in China’s defence expenditure which have caused concern around the world in terms of peace-keeping and building security. For example, Lily argued that,

To eliminate negative concerns, China has been trying to reassure the whole world that China’s defence modernisation is just to maintain its own security and regional security. As Asia’s largest country, its military modernisation is definitely conducive to Asia’s stability and prosperity, and more broadly, world peace. In practice, China has devoted itself to making every effort to adopt multilateralism in international negotiations to resolve disputes. When actively participating in the United Nations, China also plays an important role in the field of arms control, as well as compliance with international safety regulations, and opposition to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Students also explained China’s increased military expenditure as being a means of regaining self-respect and national pride. For example, as Kerry put it,
As we all know, stronger military policy is becoming more and more important. We all know that in 1999, NATO bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, so it is necessary for China to develop its military power to show that that can’t happen again.

Another classmate, Glennis, concluded that, “yes, it’s a national pride issue. It’s because we were weak in the nineteenth century and we got invaded”.

Students insisted that it was wrong for overseas analysts to construe these kinds of material manifestations of power as threatening. Rather, students explained that their primary purpose was to encourage and invigorate the domestic population and convince them that China was well on the way to recovering from past weakness and resuming its dignity.

The reasons that China did not pose a threat now were seen to hold just as strongly in a future in which China had fulfilled its destiny and resumed its status as a great country. As Dan explained,

There are doubts, since the policy is made while China is still developing, will it still be effective when the country becomes a super power in the world? The answer is yes. China will never seek hegemony even after it becomes a developed country in the future, just as Chairman Jiang stated ten years ago.

Students seemed to hold a particularly deeply shared perspective when it came to the issue of China’s positive and constructive role in the global system. However, they also felt strongly that China would not bow to international pressure to change its policies or behave in certain ways. Issues of pride and dignity based on China’s long history as a great nation were prominent in these discussions.

Pursuing an independent policy of peace

To whatever extent China takes on an increased role in the world system in the future, a common theme among students was that China would always continue to “pursue
an independent foreign policy of peace”. The desire to counter the West’s perceived concerns about China’s rise was tempered with an equal measure of national pride and dignity – China should and would not be seen as pandering to its critics by changing its policies to please them. China’s foreign policy of peace was a product of its cultural heritage and would be, as it had always been, independently derived.

Despite this determination to resist external pressure, an official change was made in the terminology from ‘peaceful rise’ to ‘peaceful development’ in order to ameliorate international misunderstandings. Official discourse about China’s role in the world was amended from describing ‘China’s peaceful rise’ in 2002 to ‘China’s peaceful development’ in 2004.\(^{52}\) The main reason cited in public discourse for this change was the undertones of the Chinese word for ‘rise’ – \textit{jueqi} (崛), which has implicit within it the sense of a sudden, abrupt rise to a towering position. As Katerina noted,

> With its motto of ‘keeping a low profile’ in mind, the phrase of ‘China’s peaceful rise’ was replaced by ‘China’s peaceful development’ to avoid further misunderstanding about China’s ambition in the future.

Despite this change in rhetoric, Matt argued that Chinese policy itself had not shifted:

> Unfriendly opinion pushed China to change the term from ‘Peaceful Rising’ to ‘Peaceful Development’. However, China’s foreign policy did not change after the expression had been changed to ‘Peaceful Development’, and unsurprisingly, the change had little effect of improving China’s image in outsiders’ eyes.

Matt’s comment also demonstrates the depth to which historical inevitability was understood to play a role in all actors’ behaviour in international relations. His remark draws on a strong thread of opinion that despite China’s best efforts, ‘outsiders’ (Westerners) had changed little from the Opium War days and remained determined to thwart and exploit China at every turn, perpetuating the notion of China as a victim of deliberate Western bullying.

\(^{52}\) See Lynch 2009 for a discussion of the difference between how Zheng Bijian presents peaceful rise and peaceful development to Chinese and foreign audiences. See also Glaser and Medeiros 2007, 293
Ultimately, national pride underpinned students’ position that China should and would not compromise its growth and development or change its foreign policies because of external pressures, but would instead demonstrate by its actions that other countries had nothing to fear. For example, Hannah posed the rhetorical question of whether:

This threat theory will have any effect on China’s policy, especially on China’s foreign policy? Well, my answer is a definite no! In my opinion it is the national opinion and global environment that influence the policy making, not foreigners’ views.

As Dan argued, “will China compromise to those untenable theories? Never! What China should do is to tell the world through actions that she is not a threat and will rise peacefully”. Likewise, Harriet asserted that,

China cannot get rid of the threat theory as it is becoming stronger each day. What it should do is to stand up and be counted, do what should be done unhesitatingly. Like the old saying goes: stand straight and never mind if the shadow inclines. Time will tell that China has not departed from its basic foreign policy essence.

As Dan stated forcefully,

It’s fine for foreigners to consider China a dangerous threat, so what? The world can’t part with China. We may take outsiders’ views into consideration when making a decision, but only friendly and justified ones.

While most students held a similarly strong commitment to independent policymaking and prioritising factors within China’s national borders, some felt that “despite the independence policy [for foreign policy making], China’s government has to change these negative views of China, and make foreign policy decisions adapt to it [the China threat theory]”. For example, Primo argued that in fact the China threat theory would have a distinct impact on China’s foreign policy decision making:
China does have the intention to adjust its foreign policy after this theory emerged. On one hand, this theory may be an obstacle in the process in which China tries to get involved in the international economic and political affairs; on the other hand, the cultural and historical features of China lead it to avoid such an annoying theory. Basically, this theory has the possibility to change the decision-making of China only because it may lead to confrontation, and that’s what China hates most, especially in this era of globalisation. To avoid being isolated in this connecting world, to avoid the economic downturn thereof, China will naturally change its foreign policy to make itself more acceptable around the world.

Unlike Primo, most other students saw the China threat theory as having no bearing on China’s’s foreign policymaking. They felt strongly that China was a mature and experienced international political actor, and it was a matter of national dignity that Chinese leaders made policy without interference. They also saw independent policy-making as a necessity, firstly because other countries attempting to influence China were doing so to protect their own interests, and secondly because experience had demonstrated that despite China’s positive and constructive efforts in the global arena, Western powers would not be convinced that China was not a threat. Many agreed that under these circumstances, it was ‘soft power’ that offered China the best hope for ameliorating the negative impacts of the apparently all-pervasive China threat theory.

The Role of Soft Power

Soft power is a contested concept, even within Western discussions. In Joseph S. Nye’s original explanation, soft power means exporting values and norms to shape others’ preferences in order to get them to want what you want, not as a means of getting others to do or give you what you want (1990). It is the opposite of ‘hard power’, or using coercion or force to achieve goals. Nye’s understanding of soft power was brought up on many occasions by my students as China’s best technique to convince the world of its benign intentions. For example, Candy argued that,
Instead of threats and military force, a nation wins influence abroad by persuasion and appeal. Soft power, mainly including culture, education and diplomacy, is mentioned frequently nowadays. Just as Joseph S. Nye, a Harvard University Professor, said: ‘Success depends not only on whose army wins, but also on whose story wins’.

The concept and practice of soft power are not new to China. In fact, “using virtue” to attract others goes back hundreds of years (Ding 2008, 24). As Katerina explained,

In the conduct of China’s diplomacy in international affairs, China has always cared a great deal about image building, by following the universally acknowledged principles, upholding international laws and providing humanitarian support to less developed countries. With a strong sense of self-discipline in mind, rarely will China come across the border or violate a promise. She’s earnest to win a good reputation and favourable impression by lending out the renqing [人情, human spirit] to other countries, such as the huge sum of donation to tsunami or hurricane-suffered countries and technical teams to least developed countries.

As Katerina’s comment suggests, students saw international aid as one method for China to increase its soft power and ameliorate the China threat theory. For example, as Candy argued, while it is “our duty to improve the world and deal with the global issues”, China should also adopt this course because a “China contribution” is a “big attack to the China threat”. This role for soft power was seen as holding particularly true for other countries in the developing world, especially those on China’s peripheries. Government officials acknowledge that, although Chinese aid is distributed in a “balanced” fashion around the world, with about 40 percent going to Africa and roughly the same going to Asia, within that amount, countries bordering China “do get more of a share”.

While some students saw aid as a tool of soft power that could rebut the China threat theory, others saw Chinese culture itself as the best means of undermining the power

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53. Telephone conversation between author and Ministry of Commerce official, Beijing, June 2012
of the China threat theory. As Kerry argued, citing Wu Jianmin, President of the China Foreign Affairs Institute, “if China’s ideas on the concept of a harmonious society and a harmonious world are better understood, fewer people will believe in the ‘China threat’”.

That China has the cultural appeal necessary to win influence was undisputed by students. For example, Katerina argued:

“Almost everyone in the world has at some time been charmed by the charisma of Chinese culture with its unique philosophical origins,” said historian Tang Yin Bi. Yeah, this really reflects today’s situation with Chinese culture. China with a history of more than 5000 years and 27 World Heritage sites in the country, hopes to enthral the whole world with her unique culture, known for its dragon-shaped lanterns, Peking Opera, Wu Shu or martial arts, and even chopsticks. Especially nowadays, Confucianism is very popular among other nations. And the representative book of Confucianism called ‘Lun Yun’ has already been translated into English.

However, while my students considered China to have no lack of the raw materials required for increasing soft power, they felt that modern China had so far not been able to harness the benefits that this approach could provide. One student argued that “soft power, which is defined as the ability to obtain what a country wants through co-option and attraction, is something that China should learn to use better”. In this way, she argued, “the Chinese government can build a better reputation for China”. Annie felt that the lack of success to date in promoting China’s soft power was due to communication problems with Western powers. She saw these problems in communication arising from the “scarring of the Chinese people’s hearts when Britain compelled China to open its doors to opium through the Opium War of 1840-1842”. Annie argued that these events had led to Chinese people being “scared to communicate with Western powers. It’s just like a person who fears the bullies who beat him up. Consequently, avoidance has brought misunderstanding and conflicts”. In this way, students placed responsibility for what they saw as the ongoing difficulties facing China in the international arena at the feet of Western powers. They
portrayed China as the ongoing victim of Western bullying, one of the key elements of which was the West’s deliberate perpetuation of the China threat theory.

**Conclusion**

Overall, my CFAU students viewed the future of the international system, and China’s role within it, with great optimism and a profound certainty of China recovering its “rightful position”. They felt that the unipolar moment in which the US held hegemonic status was no longer tenable, and that a multipolar system in which China took a key position was the direction in which the system was evolving. In this multipolar world, China would represent the voices of other developing states as the largest, and only, developing country at the table. Students felt that China would be, and was already being, a responsible player in this system.

Students’ optimism coexisted simultaneously with the strongly held sense that Western powers were inevitably going to continue to harass and bully China, and try to contain its growth no matter what China did. My students interpreted almost every Chinese pronouncement or behaviour as China doing its very best to demonstrate its good intentions to the world. At the same time, drawing on and reinforcing the view of China’s victimised status in the world, almost everything Western countries did in relation to China was viewed with suspicion and distrust. These beliefs closely mirrored official narratives. For example, former President Hu warned in a 2004 speech on the primary role of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA): “Western hostile forces have not given up the wild ambition of trying to subjugate us, intensifying the political strategy of Westernising and dividing up China” (Hu 2004).

Students went to great lengths to counter views that China’s inevitable rise may be any cause for concern, and to show that China would not pose any threat. They demonstrated a deep sense of frustration that this message was not being received clearly outside of China, and blamed Western politicians for perpetuating the notion, and Western media for its biased reporting on China and Chinese issues.
Students’ experience at CFAU intensely reinforced the socialisation process that had already been underway since their early years. The practices of their everyday lives, their interactions with their peers, and what they learnt at the university deepened and consolidated the sedimentation of the national logic. Ideas of who constituted insiders, and who therefore constituted outsiders, and what obligations these ideas entailed, gave rise to views of how China should behave in the international realm. My students were certain that China was a responsible great nation who would show the world how ancient traditions and Confucian ideals combine to create a harmonious society and a harmonious world – just as before the Century of Humiliation.

That China’s history fundamentally underpinned its behaviour in the present and would continue to do so was also undisputed. As Amelia argued, for example,

The most significant influence [in foreign policy decision making] is that all the thoughts are coming from the thinkers’ context and background, which are influenced by the environment where they grew up, their education and so on. Moreover, for Chinese decision-makers, the environment they live in and education they get are full of Chinese culture. As a result, with these context and culture, the decision-makers’ decisions are all about the pursuit of these values.

Students felt strongly that as China had always been peaceful, and had experienced such disruptive shocks from foreign incursions, it would always respect the sovereignty of other nations. Students also extended their understanding of the relationship between state and society to China’s role in the world. They held a highly Westphalian conception of international relations as interactions among geographically bounded states which represented and were part of their country’s society, in the same way as they understood the Chinese state to be part of Chinese society. Overall they projected their ideas of immanent cultural characteristics, the predictive power of history, the relationship between people and power, and their views of self and other onto the international system. As this chapter illustrates, students particularly emphasised the critical importance of China’s unique history and culture in its foreign policy decision-making.
These aspects of my CFAU students’ worldview undermine presumptions among American or European foreign policy-commentators that Chinese foreign policy decision-makers understand the international system or China’s role within it in the same way as it is understood in the West. My students saw the global system as one in which harmony and peace could prevail when the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity were genuinely respected, and tensions were resolved through dialogue and discussion, rather than forceful ‘interference’ which they believed characterised the US approach. Of particular significance to dominant views in international relations is that my students did not see the global system as an anarchic realm in which power is finite and to be viewed in zero-sum terms, in which one state’s rise automatically equates to another’s demise. My students saw China as a responsible international actor in regard to issues of global public goods, such as the environment, global security, and international development. They felt that China, conceived of as the biggest developing country, already acted as a representative for the developing world, and would increase its role in this regard given the opportunity to have more of a voice. Critically, they felt unanimously certain that China posed no threat whatsoever to existing power relations, as the Chinese people had no interest in replacing the US as sole superpower, or even in being part of a ‘G2’ arrangement of power.

The students in my study represent an extreme case of conformity with official narratives of the nation. This does not imply that other students would necessarily display the same profile. However, given that my students were in training managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to become official representatives of the Chinese state, the way they saw the international system has implications for Realist presumptions regarding China’s increased international involvement, and the tendency to conclude that China’s rise will inevitably lead to a clash with existing powers. As noted earlier, Realists like Mearsheimer argue that, based on the unchangeable exigencies of the international system, China simply cannot rise peacefully. Mearsheimer and other Structural Realists, whose views form the intellectual core of many nation-states’ foreign policy approach, assert that as China becomes more powerful, the country will inevitably want to dominate the world system: “You can rest assured that as the country gets more and more powerful, and its military more formidable in 20 or 30 years... you don’t think they won’t push
when they’ve got muscle?” (Mearsheimer 2010). I argue that external parties interacting with China would do well to question Realist understandings of China’s motives as pre-ordained due to it being ‘a rising power’ in an anarchical world system. Rather, analysts and commentators need to be more aware of the psychological and emotional elements underpinning Chinese decisions and policy behaviour when dealing with what may seem to be simple geo-strategic issues.
Chapter Seven – Conclusion

Much popular, media and scholarly attention is focused on China’s rise and whether it constitutes a threat or opportunity, raising concerns about the potentially negative implications for traditional and non-traditional security across a number of areas. Most of these debates tend to be based on assumptions from mainstream IR theory, particularly the dominant Realist approach. According to the Realist approach to understanding international relations and foreign policy, all states are functionally alike and exist in an anarchic realm with no overarching ultimate authority – sometimes characterised as being like billiard balls. Therefore the Chinese state, like any other state, is conceived of as a unitary and monolithic actor, whose behaviour is constrained and pre-determined by the exigencies of its position within the international system. The approach promoted by Realist scholars such as Ikenberry (2008) and Mearsheimer (2005, 2006, 2010) presumes that structure dictates behaviour, and that because the international system is anarchic, and the amount of power is fixed and limited, states have no choice but to maximise their relative power in a zero-sum game.

Realists, and the many foreign policy commentators who accept these assumptions, therefore see the development of a state such as China in terms of a ‘rise’ or ‘emergence’ into a space that is already occupied. China is thus understood as an inherent threat to existing relations of power. Realists contend that because of the structure of the international system, China will naturally desire to maintain and maximise its relative power once it has ‘risen’. However, Realism, and the other mainstream approaches that derive from the same basic assumptions, have limitations in analysing Chinese foreign relations. Taking the state as central actor as a given, these theoretical approaches tend to neglect the innumerable variations of what a ‘state’ can mean, and how it can be constituted.

My Chinese students at the China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing shared many views in common with the Realist approach to understanding international relations and diplomacy. They accepted that the territorially bounded sovereign state was the primary organisational unit in the international system. They also followed other key
tenets of Realism, such as that all states are functionally alike, and that the state is a unitary and rational actor. However, where their views diverged dramatically from Realism and the dominant debates in international relations was regarding the question of how and why states would act in certain ways in the international system. My students were convinced that states’ actions were a function of their specific cultural, political, social, economic and historical circumstances. As my students saw it, the presumption that China would simply have no choice but to pursue the maximisation of its power relative to other states, thereby posing a threat to the existing arrangements of power, was fundamentally incorrect. Their certainty that China’s circumstances were unique meant that they believed China would behave in very different ways from those presumed in the conventional wisdom prevalent in mainstream understandings of international relations.

Unlike Realism and the other schools of IR theory which accept its presumptions, a Constructivist approach to understanding international relations argues that the nature of the international system does not fully explain state behaviour. Constructivists do not accept the Realist assumption that all states are functionally alike (Waltz 1979), but famously posit that ‘anarchy is what states make of it’ (Wendt 1992). That is, Constructivists argue that the system may be as it is, but what happens next depends on the worldviews and perceptions of the actors within states. People and their ideas matter in assessing and explaining state behaviour. As Constructivism understands the state as a socially produced entity and focuses on the people and ideas that constitute it, a Constructivist perspective provides a way to ask what we mean by the state in China. Understanding how Chinese citizens conceptualise what the state is and does is critical to understanding how China will operate in the international arena. Because Constructivism treats the ‘reality’ of the state as a “question in need of an answer” (Pieke 2004, 532; see also Hobsbawm 1992, 9), it allows an opportunity to better understand Chinese diplomatic behaviour.

If a Constructivist approach to international affairs questions the pre-existent reality of the state, and rather understands it as a question in need of an answer, the anthropology of the state offers the analytical tools to begin to provide the answer to the question. To genuinely understand the “causes, direction, and consequences” of the state, it is essential to treat the state as a “configuration of communities of
practice” (Pieke 2004, 533). By doing so, we can better understand not only what, but also why a state behaves in certain ways. Following Pieke’s call to understand the state as society (ibid., 533), my research has focused on the specific role of education in the ideology formation of the Chinese diplomatic community. I have investigated what the state means as imagined and experienced by the students being carefully trained to be its representatives. This training is a critical element in configuring the community of practice that constitutes the Chinese state. Drawing on Foucault’s notions of governance and discipline through institutions, this research has examined how the CFAU functioned as a technology of governing in the formation of national-minded citizens. By living and studying together for four years, the practices of my students’ daily lives at CFAU confirmed and reinforced the practices of the other members of the group, constantly reduplicating the self-evidence of that social imaginary (Bourdieu 1977, 167). The modern form of socialist governance of education through the CFAU provided both the institutional and structural environment for disciplining students in how to properly conduct themselves as ideal citizens and Chinese diplomats (see Hoffman 2010, 145).

The opportunity to understand the processes of power provided by turning the anthropological gaze upwards, what Nader described as “studying up” (1972), allows us to observe how the educational institution of the CFAU shapes students and their views. Through the subjects in the curriculum and the control of the practices of their everyday lives, the CFAU experience taught students both what worldviews were appropriate for future foreign policy officials, and at the same time carefully precluded other ways of seeing the world.

Through the processes and techniques of governance at the CFAU, my students developed a social imaginary in which aligning oneself with the national logic became doxa, firmly within the realm of undisputable (Bourdieu 1977, 164-169). Bourdieu describes how every established order produces the naturalisation of its own arbitrariness which “is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to the established order” (1977, 164). At CFAU, my students were being trained to be the state, to internalise the national logic as their primary tool for understanding the world, the Chinese nation-state, and their own social roles. Therefore what my students were
being taught to think about the state is critical for understanding how the Chinese state functions in the international arena.

As has been explored throughout this thesis, there were several key themes that my students took as being absolutely self-evident. As they saw it, the natural social order was one in which being Chinese was synonymous with the Chinese nation-state. They understood China to be a timeless and eternal entity, as I discussed in Chapter Three. Students’ shared vision of history and the relationship between the past, present and future combined to produce a narrative in which the Chinese nation arose from an immemorial past, and would glide into a limitless future. For my students, it was an unquestionable truth that Western powers subjugated China in the Century of Humiliation from the mid-1800s, marking an irrevocable break in China’s historical destiny. Students understood their commitment to principles of territorial integrity and national sovereignty as deriving from these past experiences. They firmly believed that because of what China had suffered at the hands of Western powers in the past, China would never interfere in the sovereignty of other countries now or in the future. It was also undisputable that China had a natural role as one of the world’s great nations, and should, and would, resume this position.

Due to the way in which students understood the past to causally underpin the present and the future, they also were in no doubt that China’s tradition as a peace-loving country would continue to provide the model for its behaviour in the future. Based on the same logic, students also believed that Western powers would continue to exhibit the same suspicion of China and determination to counter its rise regardless of what China said or did to contradict this fear. Students also regarded Japan with great enmity because of past events, and firmly believed that just as China’s inherent love of harmony and peace underpinned its behaviour and would continue to do so, so would Japan continue to be untrustworthy in the future. Both what was taught and what students experienced in their everyday lives at CFAU reinforced the broader social discourses about China’s history, and strengthened their existing worldviews.

Another truth my students considered to be undisputable was that state was not distinct from society, as they understood it to be in the West. As this thesis has highlighted, the students believed that the relationship between the people and the
Chinese nation-state was best represented by the concept of *guojia* (country-family). In their view, the state was an extension of the family, and should therefore be accorded all the obligations and loyalty traditionally due to family. On many occasions my students described the state as being like a parent, and that it was therefore right for the state to be strict and firm at times in order for the family as a whole to prosper. My students felt strongly that while it was acceptable for them or other Chinese people to comment on shortcomings or mistakes of the Chinese nation-state, it was entirely inappropriate for those outside the *guojia* unit to do so. Indeed, students took external criticism of China very personally, explaining their often emotional response in terms of being “offended”, or of experiencing hurt feelings. The belief that the nation-state was an extension of the family was part of a broader unifying ideology of integrated Chinese identity. For my students, being Chinese meant being part of the Chinese *guojia* unit. They considered this Chineseness as an inherent characteristic that they could not unlearn, and which outsiders could never learn.

My students felt that China’s existing governance structures were the best arrangement for managing the country, and ensuring China continued to develop and progress in the future. Students considered development and becoming “more modern” as synonymous, and unquestionably positive. The Party-state system was seen as the only model able to provide the stability so essential for the future prosperity of the country. Students felt strongly that any threat to stability was a danger to China achieving its destined re-emergence as a great and respected member of the international community. They believed that the Party-state was right to take measures to prevent instability. For example, there could be too much media freedom, and in the wrong hands, this could lead to social unrest. Similarly, while they believed that democracy was important, they explained that it needed to be appropriate for specific Chinese circumstances, and introduced slowly as many Chinese people had never experienced democracy and “might not know how to use it properly”.

Another undisputed element in my students’ social imaginary was the necessity of performing particular social roles depending on the audience and situation. Students did not regard being true to themselves regardless of circumstances as a valid claim to social worth. Such an approach seems at first glance to “violate most if not all tenets
of Euro-American theories of morality and agency” (Evasdottir 2004, xii). However, for my students, performing correct social behaviours according to specific social circumstances was the only way to demonstrate reliability and trustworthiness. In the interdependent environment at the CFAU, striking out on one’s own and doing things differently was not an option for my students. Through the curriculum and daily practices at the CFAU, students learned to correctly “play the role of ‘student’ in relation to teachers and fellow students” and at the same time learn to view the performance of these roles as essential resources for pursuing his or her own interests (ibid., xii). For my students, it was unthinkable to envisage one’s self as a self-contained unit, unchanged and unaffected by circumstances. Rather, relationships depended entirely on who occupied each position in any given scenario and what the external factors surrounding the exchange were.

For the students in my study, the ideas set out above and examined throughout the thesis were self-evident and firmly within the field of doxa. However, as this thesis has explored, all of these themes contained aspects which the students were able to discuss and on which they were comfortable in presenting their opinions. For example, students were at ease in class conversations about what degree of media censorship was appropriate; or how political corruption should be dealt with. My students believed that they had a more sophisticated awareness of the complex challenges facing modern China than did the average Chinese citizen.

However while these subjects were in the universe of argument, my students adopted an orthodox position. Their comments never criticised the existing Party-state structure, or implied that the challenges facing the country could be in any way systemically related to the existing processes of power. Their suggestions were without exception apolitical and technical propositions for how the Party-state could govern more effectively. The students themselves strove to exhibit the attributes that they believed the modern Chinese Party-state required for China’s continued success. It was inconceivable that improvement in those areas which were acknowledged to warrant attention could be achieved through direct resistance. It was never disputed was that an individual student’s fundamental interests, both personally and professionally, would be best served by aligning with the state-sanctioned official narratives of the nation.
In her concept of “ethnographic refusal” Ortner observes that studies of resistance often position subalterns as monolithic heroes dedicated to a struggle against power (1995). She writes that “resistance studies are thin because they are ethnographically thin: thin on the internal politics of dominated groups, thin on the cultural richness of those groups, thin on the subjectivity – the intentions, desires, fears, projects – of the actors involved in those dramas” (ibid., 190). The understanding that state and society are a priori in clear and culturally unspecific relations of power and resistance very much disallows for the great complexities in the way the state, the Party, and the people are inextricably interrelated in China.

Through the CFAU’s role as a mechanism for the reproduction of the social order, students learnt that aligning with the national logic and contributing to the national good was in their own interest and thus they did so by their own will (Hansen 2012); what Evasdottir describes as ‘obedient autonomy’ (2004). It was unthinkable for them that they could or would want to actively resist adopting that position.

My CFAU students’ collective awareness of what constituted acceptable ways of thinking and speaking and their knowledge of which topics and subjects existed in the realm of the undisputable were part of a larger subjectification process in which they were trained to understand the Chinese state in certain acceptable ways. When my students talked about citizenship or the role of the state, they drew from a social imaginary developed from the training they had experienced both in order to be accepted at the CFAU, and the further sedimentation of those ideas while at the university. This included the peer surveillance, self-monitoring, and other informal technologies of power highlighted throughout the thesis.

Bourdieu argues that the ideas in the realm of doxa are not easily shifted into the universe of argument. This is because the “dominant classes”, those with vested interest in perpetuating the status quo, have a considerable interest in “defending the integrity of doxa” and ensuring that the “arbitrariness of the taken for granted” is not exposed (1977, 169). Bourdieu’s position is perhaps not the most accurate reflection of the relationship between subaltern and power in the case of my CFAU students. Evasdottir demonstrates that in conditions of ongoing interdependence, as
characterise the CFAU, success and progress is only achieved by working within the existing channels and relations of power (2004). My students were already well-versed in using order to achieve their goals. To even be studying at the CFAU they have had to negotiate a complex system by adopting a strategy of obedient autonomy.

As I have outlined in this thesis, there may appear to be a tension between whether my students genuinely held these views or whether they simply expressed them because they thought they were expected to do so. However, this perspective is predicated on an image of the world divided into oppressor and oppressed. In this thesis I have argued that such a view is “thin” because it insufficiently accounts for internal politics, cultural richness, and the subjectivity – intentions, desires, fears, projects – of the actors (Ortner 1995, 190). When the state is understood not as a power to be resisted, but as society, as it was among my students, strong incentives exist to consent to and operate within power rather than struggle against it. As Evasdottir explains in her work, when “the dichotomy of oppressors and oppressed is merged instead into an image of mutual interdependence”, as was the case for my students at CFAU, “the very definitions of concepts such as hierarchy, authority, power and autonomy must change” (2004, xi). Students believed that success could not come from resistance or struggle against the system. Connection and participation, rather, provided the most benefits. For students, doing and saying what was expected of them was deeply held doxa. In their social imaginary, not conforming would not yield any positive results. Because benefits derived from maintaining social order, students consented to consent.

Having been so deeply integrated into a system in which success comes from consenting to control, including self-control, I would argue that my students are unlikely to upset the order which they understand will help them best achieve their goals. They are, to use Bourdieu’s terms, simultaneously the dominant and the dominated class. In this way, students have no incentive to challenge what is undiscussed and bring it into the arena of discussion, and thus, unthinkable topics remain in the field of doxa. Students were not encouraged to question or critique the social order which they took so much for granted. Even where they had the opportunity to do so, such as accessing news from foreign websites, they tended to view the information they received from these channels with great suspicion. They
saw any criticism of China as part of a deliberate Western strategy to delimit China’s rise and curtail its international influence. Given the coherence of their worldview, it is feasible to conclude that my students’ views of the state will not be easily dislodged or overturned regardless of what exposure to alternatives they are offered in the future.

As this thesis demonstrates, how my students understood the state was very different from mainstream discussions of international relations in general, and China’s role in the world system in particular, in a number of aspects. In particular, my students believed that the Chinese state and society were not discrete and oppositional entities, but part of a coherent whole. They felt that China’s history and tradition meant that China would have no interest in challenging existing powers in order to become sole superpower, or even sharing global leadership in a ‘G2’ with the US. China had no interest at all, in their view, in accumulating relative power gains at the cost of other international actors. As China became more economically influential, my students believed the country would use this strength for the good of the world, particularly by representing and providing a voice for other developing nations in international fora. Woven throughout students’ discussions of China’s role in the world was the sometimes incoherent and emotional ‘pessoptimism’ arising from their fundamental belief in the narrative of national humiliation.

In order to understand how China fits into the world, we need to move away from the usual dichotomous question of whether China’s rise will constitute a material threat or opportunity for the international system, and ask who China is, and how it socialises itself into a particular view of itself and the world (Callahan 2010, 193). Combining the Constructivist argument that national identity needs to be foregrounded for a rich understanding of foreign policy motivations and behaviours, and the worldviews of future Chinese diplomats offered by an anthropological approach, allows a timely re-assessment of the dominant discourses around China’s rise.

For my students, beliefs about what being Chinese meant, and how Chinese characteristics would influence China’s behaviour in the global arena were far more than studied attitudes; their views were deeply internalised and firmly within the realm of doxa. Based on the premise that state is not just in society but is society, and
given that my students were being carefully trained to embody the Chinese state as future foreign policy officials, their perspectives of the Chinese nation-state are critical to understanding how China functions in the international arena.
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Appendices

Appendix One: Ethics Approval Letter

23 February 2010

Ms Merriden Varma
Department of Anthropology
Division of SCMP
Macquarie University

Reference: HE25JUL2003-D05990

Dear Ms Varma

FINAL APPROVAL

Title of project: Clashing developments: what can an ethnographic comparative analysis of Chinese and Western foreign aid and development policies, help us to understand about international hierarchies of power?

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Human Research Ethics Committee and you may now commence your research. This approval is subject to the following condition:

1. Please forward, when available, the name of a local contact person who participants can contact regarding ethical concerns about the research.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct the research:

Mr Pat Nyiri & Associate Prof Christopher Lyttleton- Chief Investigators/Supervisors
Ms Merriden Varma- Co-Investigator

Please note the following standard requirements of approval.

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports. Your first progress report is due on 23.02.2011.

If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report on the project.

Progress Reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethicsforms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for this project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approval allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).
4. Please notify the Committee of any amendment to the project.

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at: [http://www.research.mq.edu.au/policy](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/policy)

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project, it is your responsibility to provide Macquarie University’s Research Grants Officer with a copy of this letter as soon as possible. The Research Grants Officer will not inform external funding agencies that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Officer has received a copy of this final approval letter.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Dr Karolyn White
Director of Research Ethics
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

Cc: Mr Pat Nyiri, Department of Anthropology