Waiting for the rising power

China’s rise in East Asia and the evolution of great power politics

Björn Jerdén
Waiting for the rising power

China’s rise in East Asia and the evolution of great power politics

Björn Jerdén
To Cinzia
This dissertation consists of introductory and concluding framing chapters and five self-contained articles. Articles 1, 2 and 4 are published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Article 5 has been reviewed by a peer-reviewed scientific journal with the decision to revise and resubmit. Article 3 is a manuscript that has not yet been submitted to a journal. Articles 2 and 4 are co-authored. I am the principal and corresponding author of article 2. I had the main responsibility for the research design and data collection, and my co-author had the main responsibility for the research problem and relation to existing research. We shared the responsibility for the analysis and conclusions. I am the second author of article 4. I had the main responsibility for the data collection, method and the first draft of the analysis, and my co-author had the main responsibility for the research problem, relation to existing research, and rewriting the method and analysis. We shared the responsibility for the conclusions.

Abstract of the dissertation

Many political scientists expect the advent of rising states to bring about shifts in the international distribution of power, on the one hand, and competitive policies to improve one state’s power relative to a targeted state or coalition, known as “balancing,” on the other. Focusing on China’s rise in East Asia in 1993–2016, this dissertation challenges both these assumptions and offers a reassessment of the links between rising states, power shifts, and balancing in international relations. First, I demonstrate that the gap between the United States and China in exercising control over the security and alignment policies of secondary states has become wider, not narrower. Second, to explain this, I present two new mechanisms that reduce shifts in power from established to rising powers: the power effects of expertise and the anti-power effects of status seeking. Third, I show that there has been much less balancing from both China and Japan than is commonly assumed. Fourth, under certain conditions—dominant moderate policy discursive positions and status seeking with the objective of peer-recognition—I have demonstrated that enmity is able to coexist with policies of non-balancing and even accommodation. Finally, by revealing tacit but fundamental differences in the purposes for which scholars employ the balancing concept, I reconcile some of the disagreements about whether balancing is taking place in the wake of China’s rise.
Abstracts of the individual articles

1. The assertive China narrative: Why it is wrong and how so many still bought into it

Dissenting assaults on the conventional wisdom that China’s foreign policy became more “assertive” in 2009–2010 have intensified. In this article I develop this revisionist critique in three ways. First, to make the most valid and cumulative assessment of the accuracy of the “assertive China narrative” to date, I conceptualize its key empirical claim as a case of the general phenomenon of “foreign policy change.” Second, based on this framework, I present a range of new empirical evidence that, taken as a whole, strongly challenges the notion of a new Chinese assertiveness. Third, since academic China and Asia experts played a pivotal role in creating the narrative, I raise a comprehensive explanation of why a great many scholars so strikingly went along with the flawed idea.

2. Rethinking Japan’s China policy: Japan as an accommodator in the rise of China, 1978–2011

For the last four decades Sino-Japanese relations have been characterized by steadily growing economic and sociocultural interactions. Yet, greater interdependence has developed in tandem with bilateral tensions. Many analysts have attempted to explain the latter as a result of Japan trying to balance or contain the burgeoning growth of Chinese capabilities. In this article, we question and qualify this widespread understanding of Japan’s response to China’s rise by examining how Japan has handled China’s rise between 1978 and 2011. More precisely, how has Japan dealt with China’s long-term core strategic interests, which are embodied in the post-1978 Chinese “grand strategy” that is believed to have been instrumental to China’s rise? Our main finding is that to a significant degree Japan has accommodated the rise of China rather than balanced against it.

3. The limits of Chinese influence in East Asia: Status seeking and rising power stagnation

Contrary to many earlier expectations, China’s influence over the security and alignment policies of its East Asian neighbors has weakened in recent years. Regular outbursts, rigid and vitriolic official statements, high-handed and capricious policy measures, and a belligerent and insular domestic foreign policy discourse feed into misgivings that China’s rise will be less peaceful than advertised. Other states in the region are thus presented with compelling reasons to keep Beijing at a distance and strengthen the US military presence. In this article, I use “status theory” to advance a new explanation of China’s failed attempts at reassurance, and hence its limited influence in the East Asian security system. I revise previous research on China’s status seeking to argue that China primarily pursues higher status by emulating
US great power behavior in search for recognition as an equal by the United States. The United States has staunchly refused to recognize China’s status claims, however, and China’s unsuccessful attempts to pass as a first-tier great power reduce trust, raise threat perceptions, deepen territorial disputes, and thus inhibit China’s ability to reassure its neighbors. Put simply, China’s ardent desire to become a highest-ranking great power prevents it from reaching this objective.

4. Understanding fluctuations in Sino-Japanese relations: To politicize or to de-politicize the China issue in the Japanese Diet
From the late 1990s to the late 2000s, scholarly literature and media analysis shifted from representing the Sino-Japanese relationship as generally “good,” to portraying it as generally “bad,” and then back to describing it as generally “good” again. This article aims to make sense of what could thus be construed as fluctuations in Sino-Japanese relations and Japan’s China policy, through employing discourse analysis as foreign policy theory. The aim is operationalized by analyzing Japanese China discourse as it has played out in the Diet. The article demonstrates that there is a fault line between a “radical representation,” epitomizing further politicization of a prevalent Japanese sense of insecurity about China, and a “moderate representation,” reflecting de-politicization of the same phenomenon. Furthermore, it shows that in the period examined (a) China has come to be discussed more frequently, and (b) a greater variety of aspects of the relationship have reached the political agenda. Together, these two changes have been conducive in altering the relative position of the two representations. In 2008 the moderate representation was still dominant, but less so than in 1999. The main argument of this article is thus that recent fluctuations in Japan’s China policy—and by implication Sino-Japanese relations—can be understood in terms of an increasingly open Japanese China discourse.

5. Legitimizing hierarchy in international politics: The case of “The Asia-Pacific Epistemic Community”
Many states partially relinquish sovereignty in return for physical protection from a more powerful state. Mainstream theory on international hierarchies holds that such decisions are based on rational assessments of the relative qualities of the political order being offered. Such assessments, however, are bound to be contingent, and as such a reflection of the power to shape understandings of reality. Through a study of the remarkably persistent US-led security hierarchy in East Asia, this article puts forward the concept of the “epistemic community” as a general explanation of how such understandings are shaped and, hence, why states accept subordinate positions in international hierarchies. The article conceptualizes a transnational and multidisciplinary network of experts on international security—The Asia-Pacific Epistemic Community—and demonstrates how it operates to convince East
Asian policymakers that the current US-led social order is the best choice for maintaining regional “stability.” The role of this community is illustrated using the recent US “pivot” to the Asia-Pacific—the biggest reinforcement of US security hierarchy in the region since the 1960s.
Contents

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................. 13

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 15

Research questions ...................................................................................................................... 22

Rising states, power shifts, and balancing: The state of the art ............................................... 24

Rising states and power shifts ................................................................................................. 24

Rising states and balancing ....................................................................................................... 35

International Relations theory ................................................................................................. 45

Method ....................................................................................................................................... 50

Upper-layer case ......................................................................................................................... 50

Lower-layer cases ....................................................................................................................... 53

Roadmap .................................................................................................................................. 57

Article 1:  The assertive China narrative: Why it is wrong and how so many still bought into it

Article 2:  Rethinking Japan’s China policy: Japan as an accommodator in the rise of China, 1978–2011

Article 3:  The limits of Chinese influence in East Asia: Status seeking and rising power stagnation

Article 4:  Understanding fluctuations in Sino-Japanese relations: To politicize or to de-politicize the China issue in the Japanese Diet

Article 5:  Legitimizing hierarchy in international politics: The case of “The Asia-Pacific Epistemic Community”

Conclusions

References

Appendix: TAPEC members
Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENP</td>
<td>Elements of national power (method)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPC</td>
<td>Foreign policy change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross domestic product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IR</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTT</td>
<td>Power transition theory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

Individual achievement depends on a lot of people. I am first and foremost greatly indebted to my supervisors for their cheerful and steadfast guidance along the way. Linus Hagström recruited me as an undergraduate and encouraged me to take on gradually more challenging tasks. I can think of no better education. Without his support I would probably never have tried this out, much less finished it off. Hans Agné provided supreme criticism that always stimulated me to discover previously hidden paths, and Jan Hallenberg reliably pointed out the direction when I came across forks in the road.

I am immensely grateful to the doctoral student contingent and my other colleagues at the Department of Political Science at Stockholm University for their cordial and clever company. My cohort companions, Jasmina Nedevska, Magna Robertsson and Eleonora Stolt, as well as Kristina Boréus, Lenita Freidenvall, Lasse Lindström and Thomas Sommerer all helped me to flesh out the earliest versions of the dissertation, and Idris Ahmedi, Henrik Berglund, Niklas Bremerberg, Tarek Oraby, Gustav Ramström and Jonas Tallberg carefully reviewed previous versions of the manuscript. Lena Helldner, Bror Lyckow and Pernilla Nordahl skillfully helped out with a myriad of diverse matters.

Heartfelt thanks also go to all of my co-workers at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, who have been lending tremendous support from the beginning. Several current and former colleagues, Fredrik Doeser, Johan Eriksson, Ulf Hanssen, Johan Lagerkvist, Astrid Nordin, Joakim Kreutz, and Mikael Weissmann have given detailed feedback on parts of the work. Stefan Borg and Tom Lundborg have supplied criticism as well as countless hours of inspiring conversations. Besides my supervisors, Karl Gustafsson is the person who has read and commented on most of the dissertation.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to a number of people who gave me opportunities to spend time abroad. Caroline Rose invited me to the Sino-Japanese Relations Research Network and three wonderful conferences in Leeds. Nagashima Akihisa, member of Japan’s House of Representatives, hosted me for an internship in 2011. “Daigishi,” Takumi Yutaka and the other members of the staff selflessly shared precious insights into the Japanese political process, in the Diet as well as on the ground in Tachikawa. Kuo Cheng-tian graciously opened the door to the Department of Political Science at National Chengchi University, and Tang Ching-ting hosted me for a most memorable stay in Taipei in 2012. The next year, Shih Chih-yu arranged for me to
stay as a Taiwan Fellow at the Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University. Chih-yu, Huang Chiung-Chiu and Syu Rongjen offered friendship, and Peter Chang and colleagues at the Center for Chinese Studies at the National Central Library provided first-class research support. I spent the final year of writing as a Princeton-Harvard China and the World Pre-doctoral Affiliate with the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University. My sincere thanks to Michael Szonyi and the rest of the people at the Fairbank Center, and to Alastair Iain Johnston who made the stay possible.

Robert Adcock, Galia Press-BarNatan, Andrew Bennett, Sara Bondesson, Steve Chan, Félix Grenier, Stefano Guzzini, Niklas Nilsson, Paul O’Shea, Pan Chengxin, Oliver Turner and John Åberg have all provided detailed and helpful comments on parts of the work. Feedback from several other colleagues is acknowledged in articles 1, 2 and 4. I am moreover thankful to Petter Cohen for the cover art and Andrew Mash for meticulous editing.

My research has been enabled by generous financial support. Torsten and Ragnar Söderberg Foundation covered expenses during the first three years, and the Taiwan Fellowship and the Sweden-America Foundation allowed longer overseas stays in Taiwan and the United States. Stockholm University Forum for Asian Studies, Sweden-Japan Foundation, Helge Ax:son Johnson Foundation, and K&A Wallenberg’s Foundation all provided valuable travel or dissertation grants.


Lastly, I want to thank to my loved ones for having been there for me all along. My parents, Berit and Lars spurred my interest in international relations from an early age and tirelessly extended all kind of moral and practical support during my studies, and my siblings, Maja, Petter and Erik prepared me for life in academia with a decades-long merciless intellectual boot camp. My wife and my greatest inspiration, Cinzia has showed mind-blowing sympathy, patience and encouragement through thick and thin. I dedicate this work to her.

Cambridge, Massachusetts, April 30, 2016
Introduction

The advent of a number of mostly non-Western states with growing economic capabilities and a credible potential to exercise critical influence on regional and global governance—so called rising states—has been identified as one of the defining features of present day international politics (Huntington 1996; Zakaria 2008; Kupchan 2013; Schweller 2014; Reich and Lebow 2014). Conventional political science approaches have expected this development to bring about, among other things, two specific outcomes: shifts in the international distribution of power, on the one hand, and competitive policies to improve one state’s power relative to a targeted state or coalition, known as “balancing,” on the other. Focusing on China’s rise in East Asia, this dissertation aims to challenge both these assumptions and offer a reassessment of the links between rising states, power shifts, and balancing in international relations. This aim is implemented in four pairs of research questions, to which the dissertation’s five individual articles provide answers. The first pair of questions asks whether China’s rise has led to a shift in the distribution of power in East Asia, and the second pair considers the reasons for the outcome. The third pair assesses whether China’s rise has led to increased balancing in East Asia, and the final pair explores how this situation has come about.

China’s rise

The idea of China’s rise made its major breakthrough in 1993. In a gripping article in *Foreign Affairs*, Nicholas Kristof, a former Beijing correspondent for *The New York Times*, urged his audience to open their eyes to the political and military ramifications of the Chinese economic boom: “When historians one hundred years hence write about our time, they may well conclude that the most significant development was the emergence of a vigorous market economy—and army—in the most populous country of the world” (Kristof 1993: 59). Banker William Overholt’s bestseller *The Rise of China: How Economic Reform is Creating a New Superpower* was published the same year. The author anticipated that China’s economic progress, “promises to reshape the politics of Asia and perhaps the world” (Overholt 1993: 28). Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to the US President Jimmy Carter, concisely endorsed the argument on the book’s back cover: “The next giant on the world scene will be China.”
When it came to predicting how China’s rise would affect international security, the hype of 1993 was often mixed with gloom. In his immensely influential “Clash of Civilizations” article in *Foreign Affairs*, Harvard University’s Samuel Huntington asserted that, “Buoyed by spectacular economic development, China is rapidly increasing its military spending and vigorously moving forward with the modernization of its armed forces. … Its military buildup and assertion of sovereignty over the South China Sea are provoking a multilateral regional arms race in East Asia” (Huntington 1993: 47). Another political scientist, Richard Betts, put forward an equally dim view in *International Security*: “Even by the conservative estimates, the prospect of China as an economic superpower is not remote. … With only a bit of bad luck in the evolution of political conflict between China and the West, such high economic development would make the old Soviet military threat and the more recent trade frictions with Japan seem comparatively modest challenges” (Betts 1993/94: 53–54).

This view on China’s rise—largely conceived in the United States—has not lost its grip on the world’s imagination. When going through these and other early writings on the subject, one is struck by how little the fundamentals of the discussion have changed on the past two decades. The fascination for China’s economic development is practically indistinguishable, but so is the general pessimism about some of its consequences—down to particular flash points such as the situation in the South China Sea. Moreover, all along the debate has been more concerned with what is about to happen than what is happening right now. China’s rise seems always to be just around the corner. In this sense, we all keep waiting for the rising power.

For the first half of its almost 70-year existence, however, the People’s Republic of China was generally not described as “rising.” After the communist revolution in 1949, the newly formed republic started out as a staunch junior ally of the Soviet Union. The officially proclaimed brotherly loyalty between the socialist comrades started to crumble in the late 1950s, however, and their definitive split was a fact by the early 1960s (Westad ed. 1998; Chen 2001: 49–84; Lüthi 2008; Hopf 2009; Li 2012). Next followed a tenuous period during which China found itself an enemy of both the Cold War superpowers. In the late 1960s, China was facing the genuine danger that ongoing hostilities with both the Soviet Union on its northern border and the United States over North Vietnam would escalate into full-scale wars (Chen 2001: 239–249). China’s isolation finally ended in the early 1970s, when leaders in Beijing and Washington took the path-breaking decision to begin talks that eventually led to a normalization of diplomatic relations (Kirby, Ross, and Li eds. 2006; MacMillan 2007). In just 15 years, China had thus gone from siding with the Soviet Union against the United States, to confronting both superpowers, to a de facto joining forces with the United States against the Soviet Union.
It was this international context that the Chinese leaders encountered when Mao Zedong passed away in 1976. The person who, after some initial changes, emerged as the new head of the one-party state, Deng Xiaoping, firmly believed that China’s development model was in need of radical change. Taking advantage of the détente with the United States, China launched a new grand strategy that fused domestic economic development with foreign policy. The plan set out to reform the economy through an opening up to trade, investment, development aid, and science and technology transfers from the most advanced capitalist states. Without letting go of China’s Leninist one-party rule, this development path eventually transformed the country’s economic governance model and foreign relations (Breslin 2007; Shambaugh 2008; Vogel 2011: 217–690; Lampton 2014: Ch. 2).

While this outcome tends to be attributed to clever policies by Deng, an alternative view is that the Communist Party finally got out of the way, to some extent, to let the Chinese people reform and modernize the economy. China’s economic output has grown at an astonishing rate in most years since, resulting in a cumulative gross domestic product (GDP) growth since 1980 that is by far the highest in the world (World Bank 2016a). That is to say, China’s economy has been growing relatively to all other states. In East Asia, it has drastically expanded compared to both the United States—the region’s dominant military power—and the US ally Japan—which was the region’s biggest economy for the entire post-war period (excluding the Soviet Union), until China surpassed it in 2010. In addition to this economic expansion and its concomitant military buildup, China has the ambition as well as conceivably the potential to play a leading role in the region. This is the basic meaning of what I understand as China’s rise in East Asia.

The historian John King Fairbank (1987) has described the reforms under Deng as the latest step in the “Great Chinese Revolution”—China’s tumultuous attempts since the early 19th century to get to grips with internal division and stagnation, a “modernity” of foreign origin, military incursions by the United States, Japan and the Europeans, and the end of the Qing Dynasty and the Sino-centered international order in East Asia. This experience, while in many aspects unique to China, has several parallels with the history of many parts of the non-Western world. The latest step in China’s 200-year long revolution also reflects a wider phenomenon. China is being joined by a number of states with growing economic capabilities and a credible but as yet unfulfilled potential to exercise critical influence on regional and global governance. Development in these new rising or emerging states—which include Brazil, Germany, India, and Turkey, among others—is far from unproblematic. While their destinies are by no means preordained, however, they are all credible candidates for undisputed great power status or, in some cases, even superpower status.
Rising states in the 21st Century

The society of states is small—today consisting of around 200 members. The number of very powerful states is smaller still, and changes in their number, character, and internal relations have historically had a huge impact on the overall structure of international relations (Kennedy 1989; Buzan 2004). A familiar story runs through much academic writing on the topic. Economic growth increases the rising state’s power, which it uses to push for concessions. Newfangled assertiveness breeds fear and anxiety in the international system, and enmity and competitive polices begin to characterize the rising state’s relations with the outside world. This sets in motion a dynamic that often spirals into arms races, security dilemmas, and—in many cases—war. Variations of this narrative make up a clearly distinguishable node around which many political science debates on rising states take place. Far from everybody accepts the causal chain as a useful heuristic to describe, explain and predict events, but all have to relate to it in one way or another.

Like much else in the discipline, the narrative stems from theories based on historical episodes believed to be analogous to what we are witnessing today. States have risen many times before, so history provides a rich record that can inform our thinking on the subject. The last time rising states appeared on a large scale was with the emergence of Germany, Japan, Russia and the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and these turbulent instances have had prominent roles in shaping the various theories behind the narrative (e.g. Mearsheimer 2001; Walt 1987; Lindemann 2011; Tammen et. al. 2000: Ch. 2; Wolf 2014). However, while these episodes deliver many important historical lessons, few political science theories are able to travel through time unaltered. The structure of international relations has changed quite a bit since these states rose about a century ago. And if the context changes, explanations with universal pretentions can lose their utility.

A number of factors complicate intra-temporal extrapolation of the dynamics of power shifts and balancing during the emergence of rising states. As norms on legal sovereignty and national self-determination have become widely accepted, aggression and colonialism are no longer commonly acceptable great power behavior (Lake 2009: 36–40). In addition, progressively denser webs of economic dependence between states (Keohane and Nye 1977), the diminished economic value of the possession of land compared to the control of processes and services (Rosecrance 1999), the multiplication of international institutions and regimes (Krasner 1983), and the advances and proliferation of conventional and nuclear weapon technology (Herz 1957; Jervis 2001/02: 47–48; Waltz 1990) have all served to reduce the benefits relative to the costs of military expansion. As a consequence, military coercion, despite ongoing conflicts in Syria, Ukraine, and elsewhere, is less of a common currency in world politics. “The world stage”, as Giulio Ga-
larotti observes, “has become less amendable to Hobbesian brutes” (2010: 38–39). In this respect, earlier rising states appeared in a context that was different in certain respects from the current period, and the common narrative on the topic might be less useful this time around.

Judging from previous catastrophic outcomes of the emergence of rising states, the stakes are high for those decision makers who are trying to cope with the present situation. In order to be useful, scholarly advice should be based on up-to-date theorizing that does not shy away from examining taken-for-granted assumptions. At the very least, the changes in the structure of international interactions over the past century prove the need to seriously test, amend, and generate theory in order to offer helpful explanations and predictions for how this round of emerging states might affect world politics. This dissertation does this by taking on two assumptions that are central to the prevailing narrative on the topic: first, that rising states change the international distribution of power; and, second, that states react to the new situation by balancing—targeting each other with competitive policies to reduce a rival’s relative power. China’s rise is the closest to a textbook example of the emergence of a new rising state in a long time, and thus presents an excellent setting to try out and improve on these assumptions. This case serves as the focus of the dissertation, as well as the backdrop to the discussion over the next few pages.

Rising states and power shifts

We begin with the first assumption: that rising states shift the international distribution of power. The potential to join the ranks of the world’s most powerful states is what separates rising states from non-rising ones. What is meant by a state’s power, however, is not straightforward. Rising states, due to their relative increase in economic and military capabilities, are commonly referred to as “rising powers.” The fact that these attributes grow is believed to make rising states more powerful by definition. Adherents to an alternative tradition, however, have noted that power is inherently context-dependent; what functions as power varies with the situation in which it is exercised. Hence, capabilities that can be associated with a state—such as a large and dynamic economy, nuclear weapons, an advanced scientific community, or a booming cultural industry—are not invariably resources of international power. There is no shortcut around detailed studies and careful theorizing to assess power relations in specific contexts (see Baldwin 1979: 165; 2012; Hagström 2005). According to this perspective, a rising state can only be said to become more powerful if it attains the proven capacity to produce wider and stronger effects. To underscore this, I talk about rising
states, and not rising powers. Similarly, if an alleged declining great power produces the same effects as it has always has done, it is not getting less powerful—even if the relative size of its capabilities is diminishing.

Although capabilities are not power, they may constitute resources of power (Baldwin 2012: 278, 280). The correlation between big, wealthy states and powerful states suggests a relatively high success rate in converting economic growth into power. This connection provides one of the main reasons for studying rising states in the first place—their growing economies and big populations hint at the possibility of rising power. How well the translation actually works out in specific contexts is a crucial but largely unexplored research agenda (Walt 2002: 223). The effect of rising states on international power distributions is thus an analytical end goal of this study, not a starting point. To what degree are the current rising states able to convert their growing economic capabilities into power? If a power shift from the United States and Japan to China were in the making, we would expect effects to show up in relevant issue-areas.

In the literature on rising states, one of the central power contexts is what can be called “regional security control.” A state achieves this by convincing states in a particular region—with or without the threat or use of force—either to relinquish parts of their sovereignty in return for protection or to refrain from aligning with other great powers (Lake 2009: 52–55). At the time when China’s rise began to get noticed in the early 1990s, the temporal baseline of this study, several states in littoral East Asia had forfeited so much authority over their own security policies that they could be understood as subordinate states to the United States. When scholars talk about a possible power shift in the region, they generally seem to take it to mean that China will set up its own alignment network or that several of the US subordinates will abate or end their alignment agreements.

In the past, rising states commonly achieved regional security control through forceful means, and many observers have expected China to resort to similar tactics (Betts 1993/94; Roy 1994; Mearsheimer 2006). The outcomes of international power struggles, however, are not decided solely by force. US dominance in the East Asian security system is a good illustration. Washington has in recent decades phased out rule by overt coercion in favor of military agreements and basing and port rights voluntarily entered into by independent nations. This reflects a type of power that is not coercive, but seen as legitimate among its subjects (Weber 1978 [1922]; Morgenthau 1954 [1948]: 56–58; Gramsci 1971; Lukes 2005 [1974]; Nye 2004; Nabers 2010; Berenskoetter and Quinn 2012). In the current age, with the decreased attraction and utility of coercive policies, legitimate power might have replaced

---

1 In some of the individual articles I nonetheless use the term rising powers. The reason for this is opportunistic; rising powers is the preferred term in much of the literature, and using it improves the chances that the articles show up in database searches.
coercive power as the most feasible way for rising states to exercise security control in their home regions. It is therefore relevant to note that several of the new rising states have been quite inept at convincing neighbors to accept their leadership (Schirm 2010: 198–199, Destradi 2010: 907; Flemes and Wojczewski 2010; Buzan 2011: 20; Prys 2011). This works to the benefit of established great powers, and thus moderates global shifts in power. The sources of international legitimacy, and why rising powers lag behind, require more sustained attention. When it comes to China, moreover, many experts have expected its legitimate power to track the growth of its economic and military capabilities (Shambaugh 2004/05: 99; Beeson 2009: 100; Yan 2006; Zhang 2013; Kang 2007). The benefit of hindsight should allow us to investigate whether these predictions have come true, and thus offer clues about rising states’ power and the sources and limitations thereof in the current international system.

Rising states and balancing

The next assumption of the conventional narrative is that the emergence of rising states leads to balancing—competitive policies to improve one state’s power relative to a targeted state or coalition. China’s rise in East Asia has been accompanied by persistent animosities. China is caught up in disagreements with several neighbors over ownership of territorial sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction (Fravel 2014; Hagström 2012). Bitter memories of imperialism and wars with Japan, the United States, and Vietnam continue to shape Beijing’s foreign relations (Shambaugh 1991; Womack 2006; Gustafsson 2011; Wang 2012). The futures of Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula, in which China is heavily invested, are as uncertain as ever (Cha and Kang 2005; Bush 2013). Threat perceptions are rampant and growing between China and several other actors (Tan ed. 2015), and recent decades have seen several military incidents involving China (O’Rourke 2015). Balancing is arguably the most developed research agenda which links enmity—threat perceptions, anxieties, fears and tensions—with the emergence of contemporary rising states, and questions of balancing have been absolutely central to the debate on China’s rise in East Asia.

Political scientists have theorized balancing policies to be primarily motivated by either the rising state’s appetite for greater influence (Organski and Kugler 1981; Gilpin 1981) or the opportunities bestowed on it by greater wealth to alleviate the chronic insecurity of international life (Morgenthau 1954/1948: 189–190; Mearsheimer 2001); the desire of other states to quell the threatening growth of the rising state’s military capabilities (Waltz 1979; Walt 1987); the social production of hostile identity constructions (Campbell 1998/1992; Hopf 2002); or struggles over social ranking order (Ringmar 2008/1996; Lebow 2008; Lindemann 2011). Drawing on these diverse theories, the enmity following China’s rise has been described as either an indication, or a harbinger, of policies amounting to balancing (Mearsheimer
In spite of the massive interest in balancing, however, there are more attempts to explain why balancing takes place than to investigate whether balancing really is actually happening. Comprehensive studies are needed of whether China’s rise has really led to balancing by China or other states. However, such studies are complicated by the fact that the balancing concept is used in different and often contradictory ways. We need to decide which policy measures, and what degree of effort with which these measures are being carried out, should count as balancing. Moreover, almost all the work on balancing adopts the substantive approach to power criticized above; a state is seen to be balancing if it tries to reduce another state’s relative capabilities. It is high time to apply the relational power approach to studies of balancing. Enmity, furthermore, is often understood either as an indication of balancing, or as an intervening factor between power shifts and balancing. However, enmity may or may not be evidence of existing or impending balancing policies. The abundant enmity associated with China’s rise might thus have been confused for balancing, resulting in exaggerated estimates of the amount of balancing going on. But how is it that enmity sometimes coexists with a state of non-balancing?

Research questions

Much of the political science literature assumes that the emergence of rising states leads to power shifts, which are in turn characterized by balancing policies. In between, enmity often functions as an intervening factor. This dissertation aims to challenge these assumptions through a study of China’s rise in East Asia. This aim is implemented through four pairs of research questions, to which the dissertation’s five individual articles provide answers. I test assumptions empirically and offer new explanations for the connection between economic growth and power shifts, on the one hand, and enmity and balancing, on the other. This provides a foundation for reassessing the links between rising states, power and balancing in international relations, a task which is developed in the concluding chapter.

This is a compilation dissertation, and there is thus a certain divergence in the wording and arrangement of questions and results between the framing chapters and the individual articles. The introductory and concluding chapters translate, so to speak, the content of the individual articles into a common analytical language. The first pair of questions takes on the first assumption by asking whether China’s rise has led to a shift in the distribution of power, defined as control over secondary states in the regional security system.
1a. Has China’s rise increased its power in the East Asian security system since 1993?

1b. Has China’s rise decreased US power in the East Asian security system since 1993?

Both these questions are answered negatively, as is shown below. In fact, US power has increased while China’s power has stagnated or even decreased. The second pair of research questions considers the reasons for this outcome.

2a. What explains the stagnation of China’s power in the East Asian security system?

2b. What explains the growth of US power in the East Asian security system?

The third pair of questions engages with the second assumption of the narrative. I employ two case studies to assess whether China’s rise has led to increased balancing in East Asia. A popular claim holds that China started to balance more actively in 2009–2010, so I choose to study this period to assess China’s behavior. For a number of reasons, Japan might be expected to be the state in East Asia most likely to balance China’s rise, and Japan’s overall China policy, from the year when China launched its strategy of reform and opening up in 1978 until 2011, the year the sub-study was completed, therefore constitutes the case of possible balancing against China.

3a. Did China move closer to a distinct balancing policy directed against the US-led alignment network in 2009–2010?

3b. Did Japan balance China in 1978–2011?

The answers to questions 3a and 3b are also negative, which is explained below as well. Despite persistent enmity, China’s rise has not led to much balancing in East Asia. The final pair of questions explores how this situation has come about.

4a. Why has China’s foreign policy continuity persisted despite the enmity in its relations with the United States and its allies?

4b. Why has Japan’s policy of accommodation of China persisted despite widespread Japanese portrayals of China as an adversary?
Rising states, power shifts, and balancing: The state of the art

This dissertation challenges common assumptions that rising states bring about power shifts, which in turn set off balancing policies. In this section, I catalogue and criticize the empirical and theoretical foundations for these two assumptions, and thus provide a basis for the concluding chapter’s reassessment of the links between rising states, power and balancing in international relations.

Rising states and power shifts

The point of departure for scholarly interest in emerging states is their potentially transformational effects on the distribution of international power. In this section I start by criticizing the dominant elements of national power (ENP) method of international power analysis, and instead defend the relational approach. The context of power is crucial to this approach; so I go on to define regional security control as the relevant context for the present study. There are two main ways to acquire regional security control—coercive power and legitimate power—and I advance the argument that the latter is more important in present day international politics. Based on this assumption, I discuss what makes regional security control legitimate to subordinate states, and how this interacts with the relations between rising and established states, in general, and China and the United States, in particular. Toward the end of the section I clarify power’s main role as a dependent variable in this study.

Defining power

The definition of state power is an issue of much contention, as will become clear presently, but many political scientists would probably accept a starting definition similar to the one suggested by Richard Henrey Tawney, to whom power is “the capacity of an individual, or group of individuals, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in the manner which he desires” (Tawney 1931: 75; for similar definitions see Lasswell and Kaplan 1950: 75–76; Dahl 1957: 202–203; Lukes 2005[1974]: 27; Baldwin 2012: 273).

The international power of states is most commonly analyzed within a framework that has been called elements of national power (Baldwin 2012: 274). ENP is based on a “substantive” approach to power analysis, in which power is understood as an actor’s possession of capability (Friedrich 1937: 13). Based on the assumption that international politics comprises a single

---

2 This approach has also been called the “property approach” and “power-as-resources’ approach” (Baldwin 2012: 274). However, since no term is universally accepted, I stick with Friedrich’s term, which is the earliest one I have found.
power hierarchy, ENP is a method of calculating the aggregate power of states. Measures either focus on one supreme kind of power—typically military power—or, more commonly, combine different kinds of power into a single index (Schmidt 2005). The most widely used indicators are population size, national economic product and military spending, but additional factors are also sometimes included, such as policy competence, scientific progress, technological inventiveness, and cultural attractiveness. The substantive approach is based on the understanding that these capabilities equal control over outcomes (Hagström 2005: 395–396). Although the exact measures used may affect the understanding of power relations between rising and established states in specific circumstances (e.g. Beckley 2011/12; Layne 2012), the basic importance of rising states to ENP is clear—growing economic and military capabilities by definition shift the international distribution of power.

It is difficult to overstate the influence of ENP, inside and outside of academia. In China, for example, state research institutions and leading scholars have promoted the study of “comprehensive national power,” along standard ENP lines, as the preferred way of understanding the country’s rise (Huang 1999; Yan 1996, 2006; Wang 1996). Studies based on ENP commonly employ the distribution of capability as a variable to explain international outcomes. The idea that power is shifting in East Asia has thus been used as an important factor to predict a number of consequences for the region’s security environment, such as a withdrawal of US forces (Samuels 2007: 151; Cha 2000: 283–284; White 2012: 102), Chinese hegemony (Kang 2003: 71, 2007: 201; Pyle 2007: 346), competitive policies to alter the distribution of power (Heginbotham and Samuels 2002; Medeiros 2005: 148–153; Mochizuki 2007: 739), and security dilemmas and military conflict (Friedberg 1993; Betts 1993/94; Roy 1994; Mearsheimer 2001: 4; 2010: 389–390; Calder 2006: 129–130).

A power resource is something with the capacity to create power. The problem with ENP lies in the assumption that a resource that creates power in one context will do so in another. Power resources, however, are intrinsically context-specific (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950; Baldwin 1971a, 1971b, 1979; Keohane and Nye 1977; Guzzini 1993; Hagström 2005). Their utility varies both with issue-area and the values of the actors involved. Issue-areas in international relations can be quite narrow. “War fighting,” for example, is not a very useful conceptualization of an issue-area, since different wars require different resources, as the history of US military operations in the past century clearly demonstrates. For example, the United States dwarfs all other countries in terms of military spending, and is extremely powerful in terms of conventional warfare, but it has failed to prevail 15 years into the so-called war on terror. Hence, US military capabilities apparently do not translate into extraordinary power in the context of subduing decentralized and transnational terrorist networks. In addition, in order to know whether
power is exercised the objectives of the actors involved also have to be studied (Friedrich 1937: 12–14). Even though power-creating capabilities are mutually reinforcing in some situations, in other cases they are not very convertible. Something that creates power in one context might even reduce or ruin power in a different context. This means that a power resource can metamorphose into an anti-resource when the context changes (Baldwin 1979: 166).

Combined with the assumption that no issue-area of power is fundamental in international politics (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950), the weaknesses of the ENP approach have implications for the present study: to compare the power of states—such as China and the United States—in a general sense is analytically trivial. Much of the literature on China’s rise in East Asia nevertheless relies on such calculations, which leads to imperfect assessments of power relations, and weakens policy explanations and predictions based on these assessments. A more valid approach is to study the specific contexts in which power is exercised. Power is the actual or potential relationship in which an actor’s behavior, interests or identity are altered. Rather than a possession, power is here seen as a type of causation (Baldwin 2012: 274). When making statements about power, one should thus state who is exercising power, over whom the power is being exercised, and the issues that are involved (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950: 75–76), that is, to specify the context of power. It has been argued that this so-called relational approach precludes general statements about power distribution (Guzzini 2013: 53–55). However, the contexts can be defined more or less narrowly depending on the specific analytical aim (Baldwin 2012: 277). The wider the definition of a context, of course, the higher becomes the demand to demonstrate that it really is a relevant context.

This relational approach avoids confusing power with capabilities, but it is also important to avoid the opposite fallacy of confusing power with its exercise. Power is dispositional; it does not have to be exercised in order to exist (Morriss 2002: 15). A professor who does not flunk any students in a particular course still has the power to do so. Although the United States and the Bahamas have not engaged each other in conventional warfare, we can still convincingly argue that the former has the greater power in this particular context. Such statements, in order to be valid, have to be based on observations about the values of the actors involved, as well as empirically tested theories and/or counterfactual reasoning. Studies based on ENP, however, generally do not engage in this kind of rigorous power analysis.

---

1 Margaret and Harold Sprout—pioneers of relational power analysis in international politics—call this a “policy-contingency framework” (Baldwin 2012: 277). However, this cumbersome phrase has not caught on, and I simply call it “context.”
Regional security control

One of the most pressing contexts in power relations between rising and established states is the control over alignment and security policies of secondary states in regional systems. The strongest type of regional security control is a “hierarchy,” in which one or several subordinate states yield parts of their sovereignty by agreeing to abide by certain of the dominant state’s commands (Lake 2009: 8–9). In David Lake’s conceptualization, hierarchy in dyadic state relationships is measured through two indicators: (a) the dominant state’s troop presence in the subordinate state, where more troops equals more hierarchical relations; and (b) the number of the subordinate state’s independent alliances, where fewer alliances equals a higher level of hierarchy (ibid.: 68–71). These indicators might miss nuances in the exercise of security control, but are a useful starting point for comparisons across time and region.

A “sphere of influence” represents a weaker type of regional security control. The dominant state’s power is here limited to preventing other states from becoming subordinate states in rival hierarchies (ibid.: 54). Ukraine’s international fate illustrates the difference between the two. If Ukraine were to become a NATO member or sign far-reaching bilateral military agreements with the United States, it would enter into the US-dominated security hierarchy in Europe. Russia is trying to prevent this outcome. If it succeeds, Russia will have secured Ukraine as part of its sphere of influence. A hierarchy provides ample opportunities to fix power inequalities in the form of vested interests and path dependencies that constrain and influence policymakers in the subordinate states (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990). Spheres of influence allow greater autonomy for subordinate states and do not freeze policies to the same extent. A hierarchy, while harder to establish, is thus more durable than a sphere of influence.

At the moment, the United States is the only state that dominates larger regional hierarchies, of which littoral East Asia is one. I define littoral East Asia, or just East Asia, as Japan, China, Taiwan, the Koreas, Australia, New Zealand, the western Pacific Islands, and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. The permanent US military presence in the region stretches all the way back to the formation of its navy’s East India Squadron in 1835 (Henson 1982). Since the Second World War, the United States has been able to exercise substantial control over regional developments through the so-called hub and spokes network of bilateral alliances and partnerships (Cha 2009/10). Few international power contexts are fully zero-sum; the increase in one state’s power does not always happen at the

---

1 However, the issue of NATO membership was not a defining issue when the Ukraine crisis began in late 2013. What gave rise to the Euromaidan movement, and eventually President Viktor Yanukovych’s downfall in February 2014, was Yanukovych’s opposition to an association agreement with the European Union.
expense of its rivals (Baldwin 1979: 186–187). Nonetheless, the hierarchy variant of regional security control comes pretty close. For instance, it is not common for a state to offer military bases to two rival great powers, although exceptions exist, such as Djibouti. Spheres of influence, however, can overlap; and such zones are called buffer states. In any case, US power would be threatened if rising states started to exercise substantial control over their neighbors, in East Asia and elsewhere. Such a development would amount to a more fragmented power distribution in this critical context. New “poles” could emerge, thereby signifying a departure from the international alignment structure that we have lived with since the end of the Cold War. The East Asian security system also has a zero-sum component: the United States is seeking to boost its military presence in the region (Obama 2011) while China wishes it to be reduced, or at least not expanded (Xi 2014).

I criticized above the ENP approach to understanding the power of rising states. While capabilities are not power, however, they can serve as resources of power. There is a strong correlation between big economic capabilities and the exercise of power in many contexts. The conversion rate between economic growth and regional security control is not preordained, as assumed by ENP. Instead, the connection makes up a major research problem in the relation between rising and established states. This is especially true for the current group of rising states. Harold Lasswell and Abram Kaplan explain: “As patterns of valuation in a culture are modified, and changes come about in the social order and technology, now one form of power and now another, plays a fundamental role” (1950: 94). The values, practices, technologies, and organizational settings of world politics have been in flux for the past century, and it is not obvious which mechanisms of influence are most important. Which types of power play the fundamental role in regional security control today?

Coercive power

Throughout history, rising states have sought to achieve international control through the threat of violence, brute force, occupation, colonization, and annexation (Organski and Kugler 1981; Kennedy 1989; Mearsheimer 2001; Tammen et al. 2000). For the sake of simplicity I collectively call such policies “coercion.” I am not concerned here with the question of whether coercive policies can be morally correct in some situations, but simply understand them as a type of statecraft. The Athenians are famously said to have explained the power logic of coercion to the Melians in 416 BCE: “the powerful exact what they can, and the weak grant what they must” (Thucydides 1883: 399). If coercive policies are effective, I call them “coercive power.” Coercion has possibly existed as long as polities have, but it went global

5 Violent measures with strong support in international law—such as those endorsed by the United Nations Security Council—are not part of my definition of coercive policies.
with the start of the European expansion about 500 years ago. When the European colonial empires fell apart after the Second World War, the nascent superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—both claimed to lead a global movement of national liberation from colonial oppression. Nonetheless, their actual policies in many parts of the world departed little from the imperialist path established by their predecessors (Westad 2007: 397). Since the end of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union’s successor state, Russia, have resorted to coercive strategies more than once, as most clearly seen in the US-led war against Iraq in 2003, and Russia’s wars against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014.

This tells us that states with large militarily capabilities are still ready to resort to coercive policies. However, it does not answer the question of whether US and Russian actions should be primarily understood as the result of ingrained domestic foreign policy traditions and path dependencies—if they are the last vestiges of coercion, as it were—or, rather, if they simply reflect the eternal proclivities of great powers. If the latter is true, the new rising states, including China, are likely to follow suit. John Mearsheimer puts his finger on the relevant question: “Why should we expect China to act any differently from how the United States did?” (2006:162). The answers to this question are not only of intellectual interest, but also have important implications for how to shape policies to respond to the evolving situation. So let us consider seriously the possible reasons why we should expect new rising states, such as China, to act differently from rising states in the past, such as the United States.

First, norms of legal sovereignty and national self-determination have done much to discredit coercion (Lake 2009: 36–40). Coercive policies still occur, of course, but are harder to justify, to both domestic and international audiences. Second, international institutions and regimes have multiplied (Krasner 1983), thus offering a range of mechanisms to alleviate tensions before they escalate. Third, coercive policies have become a less profitable means of wealth creation. Territorial expansion is not as attractive as it used to be due to the decreased economic value of land relative to the control of processes and services (Rosecrance 1999). Moreover, international trade and investment flows have increased tremendously, making states more vulnerable to disruptions in stable relations (Keohane and Nye 1977). Fourth, technical advances and the proliferation of nuclear and conventional weapons have strengthened deterrence, at least in situations where the interests of other militarily strong states are involved (Herz 1957; Jervis 2001/02: 47–48; Waltz 1990). Fifth, force has never been an easy way to establish stable security control over larger regions, and it has been further complicated. The appeal of nationalism makes foreign rule hard to digest, and norms against excessive violence limit the available range of policies tolerable to domestic and international audiences. Many superpower military interventions ended in failure during the Cold War (Westad 2007), and recent decades display a
similar pattern. The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya have not succeeded in establishing stable pro-Western regimes. While Russia has broken up Georgia and Ukraine and installed puppet regimes in parts of their territories, other governments in Eastern Europe—including those in Tbilisi and Kiev—have not yielded to Russian dominance by agreeing to enter into a security hierarchy or a sphere of influence. In an international order forced through by coercion, moreover, subordinate states might jump ship as soon they get a chance, as happened in Central and Eastern Europe when the Soviet Union collapsed.

To sum up, a consolidation of a number of developments over the past century has altered the cost-benefit ratio of coercive policies. It would be both naïve and potentially dangerous to rule out that a new wave of coercion could occur. In fact, a 13-year trend for a decreasing number of wars worldwide was broken in 2014 (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015) and it remains to be seen whether this is the beginning of a new worrying development. Nonetheless, barring new and drastic changes in the structure of international society, we would expect the new rising states to be less likely than their predecessors in the past two centuries to resort to coercive policies; and, if they do, that this will be unlikely provide them with a successful model with which to dominate their regions. Coercion can thus be expected to be less common and less likely to produce the desired effects than in previous instances of rising states.

Legitimate power

Not all security control is coercive in nature. The transformation of the US-led hierarchy in East Asia is a case in point. From the middle of the 19th century to the late 20th century, the United States expanded its regional presence by fighting other great powers, and by colonizing, attacking and forcing unequal treaties onto weaker states (LaFeber 1997; Hunt and Levine 2012). The beginning of this period coincided with the heyday of European imperialism, and Washington by and large abided by the prevailing great power norms of the time. More recently, however, the mode of US control has changed. Washington recognized the independence of the Philippines, South Korea and Japan in 1946, 1948 and 1952 respectively, returned Okinawa to Japan in 1972, and withdrew from Indochina in 1975. Today, most East Asian states—both formal allies and states with looser alignment relationships—welcome the US military presence in the region; in other words, the US-led hierarchical order has become legitimate.6

6 An exception is Guam in the Pacific, which hosts several US bases. Guam is an “unincorporated territory” in the United States—which in earlier times probably would have been called a colony—and its subordination should therefore not be understood as voluntary, but coercive.
In a legitimate international order, unequal patterns of rule are based on consent by elites in subordinate states, who see the order as desirable compared to the alternatives (Lake 2009: 8–9; Ikenberry 2011: 74). Legitimacy, as I understand it here, is not found in the views of the general population, but in government policies and attitudes among policy elites. For example, the US security hierarchy is legitimate in Singapore because it has the support of the country’s leadership, despite the fact that the authoritarian nature of the Singaporean state makes it difficult for the public to contest government policies. (Agreement among the wider population, however, can make legitimacy more robust in both democratic and non-democratic states.) Given the reduced utility of coercive policies outline above, it is my belief that legitimate power is the most promising way for the new rising states to exercise lasting control in their home regions. Since international legitimacy exists by virtue of the voluntary compliance of subordinate states, this assumption directs the analytical searchlight to the subjects of power. The study of legitimacy thus begins with reasons for consent, rather than the traits of the actors whose rule is seen as legitimate.

Some approaches understand legitimacy as grounded exclusively in non-instrumental motives (Hurd 1999), but I also see instrumental reasons as possible bases for legitimate rule (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015: 455). It is possible to identify four principal ideal-type reasons for a state’s conferral of legitimacy on another state’s rule: identification, esteem, appetite, and protection. These reasons are not mutually exclusive, and a dominant state’s legitimacy can be expected to rely on a combination of them. States are aggregate actors, and stable government policies tend to be the result of domestic actors agreeing a common line through non-identical motives. Stable authority relationships can thus be expected to offer different types of benefits to different groups in the subordinate state. If one reason loses its appeal, other reasons may have to become more appealing to keep the policy in place. The availability of each of the four reasons varies with historical context and the specific relation between the states involved, and differentiating between them and theorizing their relative appeals in the current international system allows us to better understand the exercise of legitimate power by established and rising states, and identify under what conditions power shifts are likely.

The first reason, identification, denotes a sense of sameness. Identification is a cognitive process that blurs the perceived boundary between the self and the other (Wendt 1999: 229). Resemblance to another state might encourage voluntary deference to its rule. Political ideology is one basis for such feelings. Western Europe partly welcomes US security dominance due to the notion of shared liberal, democratic, and market economic values (Risse 2002). Community feelings might also be religious in character; Iran’s authority in the eyes of Lebanon’s Hezbollah movement and Iraq’s Islamic Dawa Party in part stems from their common Shia denomination of
Islam (Nasr 2007). A related basis is cultural, ethnic, racial or civilizational affinity, which helps account for US authority within both NATO (Williams and Neumann 2000) and the partly institutionalized “Anglosphere” (Vucetic 2011). Regardless of whether the basis for identification is primarily ideological, religious, or cultural, legitimacy is grounded in a feeling of being like the dominant state. Resemblance breeds trust; if someone is like me, she probably thinks and behaves like me, and I know what to expect from her. Social psychological research shows that identification correlates with affection and cooperative behavior (Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002: 587; Nye 2011b: 92). Sameness, in addition, can serve to magnify one’s accomplishments and social importance. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are not great powers, but affiliation with the Anglosphere allows them to piggyback on current US status and past UK status. In sum, identification with a high-status state might make one feel secure and good about oneself. Identification is not a necessary ingredient of legitimacy; for example, it seems to be a minor factor behind US legitimacy in East Asia, at least when compared to Europe. There is not much evidence that East Asians identify strongly with the United States, but they nevertheless welcome the US presence (see Katzenstein and Okawara 2001/02: 169–170; Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002). As for China, some scholars have expected feelings of cultural sameness to create legitimate power for it in East Asia (Kang 2009: 6).

The second reason for legitimacy, esteem, is a sense of attraction to exemplary behavior or character. Hans Morgenthau noted how “the conquest and control of the minds of men” can serve as an instrument that “impresses the intellectually influential groups of a foreign country with the attractive qualities of a civilization until these groups tend to find the political objectives and methods of that civilization equally attractive” (1954 [1948]: 56, 58). Developing Joseph Nye’s (2004: 6) definition of “soft power” as “the ability to attract,” Alexander Vuving (2009) presents three generic traits that cause attraction in international politics: brilliance (excellence in deeds), beauty (moral virtue), and benignity (responsiveness to a client). Esteem, as we can see, might thus be a response to both moral (beauty and benignity) and non-moral (brilliance) exemplarity. Moreover, it does (benignity) or does not (brilliance and beauty) need to be based in a direct social relation between the performer and perceiver of the exemplarity. Vuving’s triad provides a nice fit with the three emotions that social psychological research (Algoe and Haidt 2009) has found exemplary individuals install in others: admiration, elevation and gratitude. If we connect the three traits of the per-

---

7 “Civilization,” of course, had a broader meaning in Morgenthau’s days than how the term generally is used today.

8 Vuving’s traits correspond fairly well to Max Weber’s (1978: 215) classic definition of the three foundations of “charismatic authority”: heroism (brilliance, to Vuving), sanctity (beauty), and exemplary character (benignity).
former of exemplarity with the three emotions in the perceiver of exemplarity, brilliance can be said to lead to admiration, beauty to elevation, and benignity to gratitude. All of these emotions may favor legitimacy. Esteem is sometimes conflated with identification. Unlike identification, however, esteem does not depend on a sense of sameness. One can feel esteem for a state without feeling close to it. At the same time, esteem can lead the perceiver to develop a sense of community with the performer through emulation of its traits and behavior that brings about a changed self-image. Depending on which reason is stronger, distinguishing between identification and esteem might tell us something about the fate of rising states. Various traits are able to cause esteem in international relations (Nye 2011b: 86; Gallarotti 2010: 25). The upward status trajectory of rising states is one such source. The alleged ability of China’s authoritarian development model to provide growth and international stability has been described as causing admiration throughout much of the developing world (Halper 2010). The beauty of one’s political values may also cause elevation in others, which has been described as an important foundation of US authority worldwide. As for China, elevation had some international appeal during the Maoist period, but today seems lacking.

The third reason for legitimacy is appetite, or the desire for economic benefits. A state might invite foreign rule if it believes that such action would provide the means for wealth creation. A relationship entered into because of appetite is based on a social contract (Hurd 1999: 385). A subordinate state driven by appetite holds purely instrumental views toward the relationship with the dominant state. The legitimacy of unequal rule exists as long as the subordinate state decide that the benefits in form of wealth creation outweigh the costs in form of reduced sovereignty. There is thus no identification involved (Wendt 1999: 240), which renders relationships built on appetite inherently fickle (Hurd 1999: 387). Appetite in itself can build legitimacy, but not loyalty. Appetite was a significant source of US legitimacy in East Asia in the decades after the Second World War. However, it has diminished in recent years, as many countries in the region have grown increasingly dependent on China’s economy. This decline has led some to foresee a crisis for US authority and a potential source of Chinese authority.

The final reason is protection. The desire for protection is a response to fear for the state’s security and autonomy. Fear can pit states against each other (Lebow 2008: 88–93) but it can also draw them together. The anarchic nature of international politics means that states face a perilous environment. Benefiting from a powerful state’s tutelage might be sufficient reason to accept significant limits on one’s sovereignty. David Lake (2009) advances a rationalist theory of security-based deferral to authority. The subordinate state accepts foreign authority if the security order being offered is objectively better than the next best alternative. In an anarchic world, the next-best alternative is expected to be the state of nature. Legitimacy in exchange for
protection should be distinguished from rule forced through by coercion. In David Kang’s theory of hierarchy, for example, the subordinate state complies because the cost of balancing is too high due to (presumably military) power discrepancy (Kang 2003: 166). This describes a coercive order, and not a legitimate one. The historical experiences of Chinese supremacy have been predicted to lead South East Asian states to seek security under Chinese domination (Stuart-Fox 2004: 133). Today, however, protection is the main reason for the legitimacy of US power in East Asia, an argument developed in article 5.

The four reasons of legitimacy can be grounded in a general theory of national interests. Alexander Wendt (1999: 233–238) builds on earlier work by Robert Keohane and Alexander George (1980) to construct a fourfold typology of national interests: autonomy, physical survival, economic wellbeing, and collective self-esteem. These interests are objective in the sense that they place behavioral constraints on a state-society complex in order for it to reproduce itself (Wendt 1999: 234, 237). Which interest a state will prioritize in a given situation is contingent on its identity and external factors, and cannot easily be predicted. Consent to another state’s commands, by definition, always reduces a state’s freedom of governance, which counteracts the interest of autonomy. The other reasons make up for this by meeting one of the other interests. The interest of physical survival generates the reason protection. A decision to defer might in this way be motivated by a desire for autonomy, based on the belief that withholding the protection that deference entails would be even more harmful to one’s self-determination. The interest of economic wellbeing (which in today’s world generally manifests itself as economic growth) is the basis for the reason appetite. Collective self-esteem, the need for a positive view of oneself, generates the last two motives—identification and esteem—through the mechanisms described above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National interest</th>
<th>Reason for legitimacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical survival</td>
<td>Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic wellbeing</td>
<td>Appetite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective self-esteem</td>
<td>Identification; Esteem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Legitimacy and national interests

Explaining with power or explaining power?
The flaws in ENP restrict its aim of describing an ontologically objective single power hierarchy in international politics (Baldwin 1979: 193; Guzzini 2013: 48–51). This, in turn, greatly complicates approaches, such as structural realism, that rely on single-dimension power distributions to explain international relations. Power can be used to explain outcomes, but only after an initial investigation of the circumscribed power context that is to serve as
the explanatory variable (Keohane and Nye 1977: 18). In other words, only after treating power as a dependent variable can it be used as a valid independent one. In many cases, moreover, the research aim might stop at the first task (Baldwin 2012: 288). This is also how power is used in this dissertation; instead of explaining policy outcomes with power, I try to explain who has power and why.

Rising states and balancing

Balancing has been nominated as “arguably the most frequently used term in the field of international relations” (Schweller 2004: 166). This might be a slight exaggeration, but balancing no doubt scores high on the IR word frequency list. The appeal of balancing stems from the desire to identify a general mechanism of enmity-fueled competition that covers the gap between diplomacy (understood broadly) and war. As inter-state war has become less common, moreover, balancing understandably receives more attention. In this subsection I first arrive at a minimal definition of balancing. I next present different theories about how the enmity in China’s foreign relations can be understood as either signs of or prerequisites for balancing. I then reopen the discussion about how to define balancing by presenting a number of conceptual ambiguities that are contested or ignored in the literature, but are critical in order to assess the assumption that balancing tends to follow the emergence of rising states. The final subsections show how these problems manifest themselves in the balancing literature on China’s rise, and outline the research agenda for this dissertation.

Defining balancing

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the regular usage of balancing, it is often unclear what the term actually denotes, and what role it plays in research. In some cases, references to balancing seem to function as shorthand to avoid spelling out what instances of security contention really look like. This makes it difficult to decide whether balancing is taking place, and thus to evaluate theories of balancing. Some definitional groundwork is therefore necessary. To begin, balancing is not the same as “balance-of-power.” While balance-of-power refers to outcomes of the distribution of power among units in an international system, balancing takes place when a state through its behavior seeks to improve its power relative to another state or coalition (Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann eds. 2005: 2). The existence of power equilibrium is not balancing, although balancing might have played a role in causing it. Nor is balancing a desire or an intention, including related terms such as interest, preference, and motive. The fact that state leaders want to, or plan to, balance may lead to balancing, but is in itself not balancing. This leads to an important reminder: the fact that enmity characterizes attitudes in a state dyad is not necessarily an indication that balancing is present as well.
Balancing is not an intention: but does balancing require intentionality? Some argue that balancing consists of all behaviors that bring about outcomes that correspond to the optimal result of a hypothesized intentional balancing policy (Art 2005/6; Ross 2006: 361). In other words, balancing is not always intentional. Two arguments support this view. First, it is far from the case that all political behavior is caused by intentions (Hopf 2010). Requiring intentionality therefore excludes habitual behavior that brings about the same outcomes as intentional balancing policies. Second, the lack of direct access to the minds of other people makes it difficult to differentiate intentional action from non-intentional behavior. It is often demanding and sometimes even impossible to decide whether an actor intended to do something or just did it out of habit or by accident.

These arguments notwithstanding, there is an even stronger reason for including intentionality in the definition. The Swedish Government and opposition parties agreed in April 2015 on an increase in national defense spending by a total of SEK 10.2 billion for the period 2016–2020 (Defensenews 2015). The increase can be expected to improve Sweden’s military capabilities relative to other countries in the Baltic region. However, does this mean that Sweden, which is a non-aligned state, is balancing against all of its neighbors? Such a claim would seem odd, since the budget increase was explicitly intended as deterrence against Russian aggression, as Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist explained: “We are living at a time when the European security order is being disturbed through the illegal annexation of Crimea. We want to signal that we relate to what is happening and signal that Sweden is prepared to contribute to security and peace in our part of Europe” (SVT Nyheter 2015). The measure was thus clearly aimed against Russia, and it would be strange to take it to mean that Sweden was also balancing against other states, which is the implication of leaving intentionality out of the definition. (Whether Sweden’s modest military spending could really constitute balancing is not at all clear, which is further discussed below, but let us for now assume that Sweden balances Russia.) The consequences for relations between Sweden and, let us say, Belarus that result from the budget increase might be useful to take into account when studying power relations between these countries, but should fall outside the balancing concept.

The analytical utility of balancing vanishes without intentionality, making it almost impossible to falsify theories that predict balancing (Schweller 2006: 9; Nexon 2009; Chan 2010; He 2012). Although power analysis should also include non-intentional behavior (Guzzini 1993; Hagström 2005), not all state behavior that alters power relations is balancing. Balancing has to be directly targeted at another state or coalition. Ascribing balancing to an actor thus requires interpretation of its intentions, which can be complicated, but no more so than other policy analysis. Moreover, talk about “balancing behavior” might sow unnecessary confusion, since the broader term “behavior” includes both intentional and unintentional doings. “Balanc-
“balancing policy” and “balancing strategy” are less ambiguous choices, since policies and strategies require intentions. To sum up, the discussion so far leaves us with the following minimal definition: balancing is a competitive state policy to improve one’s power relative to a targeted state or coalition. A number of conceptual problems remain, however, which I confront below.

**Balancing theories**

Several theories provide alternative explanations for why the emergence of rising states often coincides with balancing. I suggest mapping these theories according to two dimensions, which results in a framework that covers many, although not all, theories of balancing. The first dimension is the assumed objective of balancing: do states balance in order to alleviate threats or to gain power? The second dimension is the social ontology posited by the analyst: is interpretive analysis necessary to explain balancing? Or is it possible to search for universal factors that compel states to balance? According to this framework, four groups of theories explain balancing, which are shown in the table 2. All four perspectives are able to account for the enmity in East Asia as either a prelude to, or an indication of, balancing, which helps to explain why so many have expected balancing and even overstated its presence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social ontology</th>
<th>Objective of balancing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter-subjective</td>
<td>Gain power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alleviate threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power shift theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Realist theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identity theories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2 Balancing theories*

**Realist theories**

The first perspective regards the desire to minimize security threats as the prime cause of balancing. A security threat is understood as a danger to a state’s physical security and autonomy. One approach understands the distribution of military capabilities as the only relevant component of security threats. Military strength invariably means potential danger—you can never
be sure about even your best friend’s intentions—and prudent states therefore balance against the state with the most military capabilities in the international system (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001). This is “balance-of-power” theory. An alternative approach holds that it is not capability alone, but a number of factors combined that cause security threats. In the most influential account, the target state’s geographic proximity and record of aggressive behavior are added to the distribution of military capabilities (Walt 1987). This approach is called “balance-of-threat” theory. Although their labels might suggest otherwise, both theories agree that states balance against objective security threats, and their disagreement is only about the basis of these threats.

Realist theories posit that threat-constituting factors are universal under the conditions of an anarchical international system. General hypotheses are tested against historical data to expose law-like regularities of balancing. As the research program progresses, according to its proponents, it becomes possible to predict the possibility of balancing with just a limited number of data points. Scholars have theorized different mechanisms through which rising states unleash structural pressures that create strong incentives for various actors to balance. Other states try to contain the rising state due to its growth in capabilities (Waltz 1979). A new security threat is thus created by the rising state’s emergence. For the rising state itself, growing capabilities provide an opportunity to balance in order to reduce the insecurity inherent in the anarchical international system (Mearsheimer 2001; see also Herz 1957: 491). Here, it is not the rising state’s growing capabilities as such that create the security threat. Instead, they provide an opportunity to alleviate a threat that had been there all along.

Realist theories do not award any independent explanatory value to enmity. Enmity is understood as a byproduct of reactions to security threats. Enmity is epiphenomenal—it is an indicator of balancing but does not explain it.

Identity theories

The second perspective agrees that balancing is a response to perceived security threats, but stresses the historical contingency of these threat perceptions. Feelings of threat are not the probabilistic outcome of the distribution of power, geographical proximity or objective aggressiveness, and knowledge of these factors does not allow accurate predictions of whether a state will perceive its security to be under threat. Understanding balancing instead requires awareness of how understandings of the self and the other are formed through articulated discourses and everyday practices. To the rationalist assumption that interests are ontologically prior to action, this perspective adds the claim that identities are ontologically prior to interests (Ringmar 2008(1996): 13; Katzenstein ed. 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Hopf 2002; Wendt 1999; Hagström and Gustafsson 2015). Identity
narratives, however, do not determine action; the aim is rather to show how specific identities enable and preclude policy options (Doty 1993: 298; Campbell 1998[1992]: 5; Holland 2013).

Representing the world serves the purpose of delineating the boundaries of the self (Campbell 1998[1992]: 9). Some scholars understand identity as primarily grounded in processes of differentiation to other actors. We make sense of who we are in contrast to difference. Foreign policy, since it continuously constructs the other, is thus central to state identity formation (Campbell 1998[1992]: 3). Collective identities come into being by attributing contrasting properties to other actors, and positive traits to the self. Balancing is enabled by the representation of the other as a threat in the process of constructing the self. Other scholars put a stronger focus on discourses of the country’s past self in an international context (Clunan 2009).

Enmity is not an independent cause of balancing in identity theories, but it might be a condition for balancing policies to occur. Once enmity begins to characterize a bilateral relationship, worst-case assumptions about the other’s intentions are likely to take root. Enmity becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, akin to what has long been described by IR theorists as a “security dilemma.” Construction of the self through differentiation from other imagined actors and historical memories is thus what enables security dilemmas and balancing. In particular, dyads in which threat representations appear on both sides will be characterized by enmity, thus creating favorable conditions for balancing.

**Power shift theories**

The third approach moves away from threat alleviation to the appetite for gains as the main motive of balancing. The “power transition theory” (PTT) has spurred the most extensive research program devoted to this kind of explanation. (This section draws on Tammen et al. 2000, which offers the most complete overview I know of the theory.) PTT is designed to explain war, but it can also be used to understand the causes of policies amounting to balancing. Power is central to PTT, and it adopts versions of the ENP method to posit a singular international power hierarchy. The three components of power are population size, economic product and the government’s ability to extract resources from the population. Rising states differ with regard to their degree of satisfaction with the international order, and dissatisfaction is grounded in an unmet appetite for greater power. Some rising states are incorporated into the dominant power’s regime, and are thus generally able to rise within the hierarchy—and even sometimes overtake the dominant power—without causing disruptions. One example is the power transition between Great Britain and the United States in the early 20th Century. When a dissatisfied state rises, however, it creates conditions for discord. The critical moment takes place when a dissatisfied rising state reaches power parity, calculated at 80 percent of the dominant state’s power. During this transition
period, enmity can turn into tensions and even war between the rising and dominant state. Most variants of the theory study global power hierarchies and not regional ones. However, PTT has a special relevance for East Asia, since a global Chinese challenge to the United States, if it arrives, is likely to start here. PTT has accordingly informed the debate on China’s rise, and Jack Levy believes that it is “probably … most widely used by scholars seeking to understand the likely dynamics and consequences of the rise of China in the contemporary international system” (2008: 18).

**Status theories**

The final perspective understands balancing as an outcome of struggles over international status. The underlying theoretical assumption is that humans—and by extension, states—care deeply about maintaining a positive self-image, and that much of what they do is a result of this desire (Lebow 2008: 61–72, 509). All societies, including international ones, value traits according to more or less agreed formulas, and members are ranked according to their possession of these traits. This ranking is called “status.” The approach differs from power shift theories since the content and possession of status criteria vary between international societies as well as among individual actors. Interpretative analysis is thus necessary to know how actors perceive what constitutes status, and who wants and has what kind of status. In international society, material capabilities are one important generally recognized criterion for great power status (Neumann 2014: 87). Since the economic and military capabilities of rising states increase at a fast pace, they are often immensely concerned with recognition of their self-perceived advancement in the international status hierarchy (Hurrell 2006: 2; Suzuki 2008; Lebow 2008: 437; Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 2014).

States primarily compare themselves to, and care about recognition from, a reference group of one or more states similar in one or more dimensions to themselves that they value (Bendix 1978: 292; Collins 1986: 162; Larson and Shevchenko 2010: 68–70). Rising states typically see the most powerful states in the international system as their reference group, and adopt one of three ideal types of status-seeking strategies to achieve recognition (Larson and Shevchenko 2010: 70–76; see also Lebow 2008: 542–544). The first approach is to emulate traits of the reference group in order to be accepted as a member. However, status is limited by its nature—if everybody has status nobody has it—and great powers are thus rarely willing to deflate their own status by letting newcomers into their ranks. As a second approach, the rising state may instead seek to recast international status criteria in order to better tally with its own strong suits. Getting other states to shift their perceptions of status criteria requires both skill and luck, however, since they tend to be intertwined with persistent identity narratives, and high status members also attempt to counter such attempts. Both of these paths of status seeking therefore tend to produce uphill struggles. The feeling of having
one’s status claims unfairly rejected breeds frustration, which is one condition of international enmity. Rising states, as a result, often end up choosing a third approach—seeking to overthrow the current status hierarchy through violent means. Status frustration favors aggressive policies in order for the rising state to demonstrate its worth as a great power and force its reference group to rethink its resistance. Balancing and war are thus important mechanisms by which rising states seek international recognition (Ringmar 2008[1996]; Lindemann 2011; Larson and Shevchenko 2010; Lebow 2010; Thompson 2014).

Four conceptual problems
Even if we agree with the minimal definition of balancing suggested at the beginning of this section, a number of disagreements and ambiguities persist in the balancing literature. This complicates research on balancing and rising states. It is a matter of substantial debate whether balancing is taking place in the wake of China’s rise, which complicates comparisons of how well the expectations of competing theories correspond to events.

The first problem concerns the means of balancing. While everybody recognizes military mobilization and alignment with other states to be balancing, the inclusion of non-military measures is a point of much controversy. The debate originates in the balance-of-power research program. During the Cold War, balance-of-power scholars generally agreed that only military measures were balancing. When the dissolution of the Soviet Union left the world stage with only one superpower, several leading theorists deduced that second-tier states had very strong incentives to balance against the United States (Layne 1993; Waltz 1993, 2000; Mearsheimer 1990, 2001). As the years went by with little obvious military balancing, however, some scholars coined the term “soft balancing” to account for how China, France, Germany, Russia and others were constraining US unilateral power by non-military means (Pape 2005; Paul 2005). Others have rejected soft balancing as concept stretching and unfit as evidence for balance-of-power theory (Brooks and Wohlforth 2005; Lieber and Alexander 2005: 125, 130–133). The issue has relevance beyond balance-of-power theory. Confronting or challenging another state using non-military means will no doubt affect power relations: but is it balancing? The answer seems to hinge on what is actually meant by the concept.

The second problem is about the effort required for balancing to exist. Effort can be defined as the degree of proximity by which policies meet the state’s maximum balancing capacity. To return to the Swedish example from above, the 2015 announcement of the increase in defense spending came against a background of repeated cuts in the budget since 1993. Sweden devotes the lowest share of GDP to military expenditure of all the countries in the Baltic region, and the figure is predicted to decrease even further to only about one percent of GDP by 2020, despite the recent increase in
spending (FOI 2015: 12–14). If the Swedish Government really wanted to, there is no obvious reason why it could not devote larger financial resources to deter Russia. Does a state balance even when its policies are far from its maximum potential? Some argue that effort is not essential. Balancing is not a binary concept, the argument goes, but a gradual one (Mikalsen Grønning 2014: 3). States can balance a little or they can balance a lot. But placing the bar for balancing this low might seem to dilute the core meaning of the concept—that balancing should be costly for the balancer (Lieber and Alexander 2005: 119). Can lukewarm policy efforts with little potential to affect power relations also be balancing?

The issue of inconsistent policies presents us with a third problem, which is relevant for all definitions that also accept non-military measures as balancing. Imagine that state A targets state B by building up its own military capabilities and aligning with other states. At the same time, however, state A consciously acts in a way that enhances the capabilities of state B. This might seem like nonsensical behavior but is not that rare, not least in East Asia. Taiwan, for example, persistently tries to procure more advanced weaponry from the United States with the overt aim of balancing China’s growing military capability. At the same time, the government in Taipei enthusiastically supports Taiwanese investments in and technology transfers to China. While Taiwan balances China militarily, it has consistently acted in a way that increases the financial and technological resources available to the Chinese Government. If one accepts that non-military measures can also constitute balancing, this seems to imply that Taiwan balances and accommodates China at the same time. It is unclear, however, how such an outcome could constitute evidence to evaluate balancing hypotheses.

A final problem emanates from the conceptual discussion on power from earlier in this section. Balancing is tightly caught up with power, but more or less the entire balancing literature defines power in terms of the substantive approach. These studies thus repeat the serious shortcoming of this method—they measure not power but capabilities, which may or may not function as resources of power. A state that balances another state’s capabilities might not balance its power, and vice-versa. The relational approach has been adapted to analyze foreign policy (Hagström 2005), but not, as far as I am aware, to tease out the implications for the research program on balancing.

Balancing and enmity during China’s rise in East Asia

The balancing literature on China’s rise is large and theoretically diverse, but also muddled by the problems in the balancing concept. The relation between China and the US-led security order in East Asia has shaped the two main questions in this literature. The first question is whether China is balancing against the United States and its subordinates. There is no doubt that enmity has played a large role in China’s relations with the outside world in
recent decades, but whether it has also balanced the US-led alignment network is a different issue. The available answers can be divided into two ideal-type positions that see China as oriented toward either preserving or revising the US-led order. The relative popularity of these two positions has fluctuated a great deal over the years. As the debate on China’s rise surfaced in the early 1990s, many expected a revisionist foreign policy to take form (Betts 1993/94; Roy 1994). Although China speeded up its economic integration with the outside world in subsequent years, events such as the Taiwan Strait Crises in 1995–1996 and the Chinese reaction to the US bombing of its Belgrade Embassy in 1999 left many uneasy about its future direction (Shambaugh 1999/2000). Writing in 2000, for example, one scholar wrote that China was “clearly counterbalancing the United States” (Owen 2001/02: 119).

A few years into 2000s, however, the debate took a new turn. The strong revisionism assumption received criticism for theoretical, empirical, and normative reasons. It was seen as uncritically accepting the deterministic view of international politics in offensive realism and variants of power transition theory, exaggerating aggressive aspects of China’s behavior and helping to turning the fear of a security dilemma into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Descriptions of China as a supporter of the status quo, at least for a time, became customary (Kang 2003; Johnston 2003; Acharya 2003/04; Shambaugh 2004/05; Gries 2005; Goldstein 2005; Nye 2005; Deng 2008; Feng 2009; Friedberg 2005; Lieber and Alexander 2005: 121–123; Fravel 2010). Although some remarked that China was obstructing or buffering US power in less overt ways—such as through cooperation with ASEAN (Gries 2005: 407), South Korea (Pape 2005: 39–40) and Russia (Paul 2005: 60–64), this was generally presented as a qualification, not a rejection, of the dominant view that China was not explicitly calling the US-led regional order into question. Nonetheless, some criticized the more optimistic account for ignoring confrontational Chinese behavior, such as its strained relations with Taiwan and Japan (Khoo and Smith 2005), while others held on to the view that the emergence of more overt Chinese revisionism was just a matter of time (Mearsheimer 2006; Goldstein 2005; Friedberg 2005).

At the turn to the 2010s, the rough consensus that China was upholding the status quo suddenly crumbled. China’s leadership, most observers now agreed, had in the preceding year or so decided to depart from its previous policy of reassurance. Diplomatic solutions to common problems were said to have been discarded in favor of blunt confrontation, and China was believed to be actively challenging US power across the board in East Asia (Economy 2010; Rozman 2011; Dittmer 2011; Bisley 2012; Christensen 2011; Friedberg 2011; Nye 2011a; Ross 2012; Shambaugh 2010; Soeya 2010; Wang 2011; Westad 2013; Chen and Wang 2011; Hughes 2011; He and Feng 2012; Scobell and Harold 2013; Yahuda 2013; Zhao 2013; Saunder 2014). Although descriptions of China’s alleged new behavior took on
the adjective “assertive,” this was essentially an updated version of the revisionism argument from the early 1990s. The academic consensus from the 2000s that China was pursuing a reassuring grand strategy was now seen as obsolete. However, most of these studies concentrated on explaining China’s alleged policy change, while relying on anecdotal evidence to establish that it had indeed taken place. The assertiveness narrative is moreover based on a folk concept—few works offer a precise account of how assertiveness should be understood within the context of theories on the foreign relations of China and other rising states. The narrative also reflects problems that have been visible in the debate on China’s rise since the early 1990s: there is no consensus about what type of policies should count as balancing, how much effort is necessary for balancing to exist, and how enmity interacts with balancing. The power concept applied in most of these studies, moreover, generally consist of variations of the ENP tradition, and thus give insufficient attention to actual effects in different power contexts.

The next question in the literature is whether states in East Asia balance against China. The equivalent to the revisionism/status quo split is opposing attitudes toward the hypothesis that other states will build up their military power, forge and strengthen alliances, and work in other ways to counter China’s rise. A substantial empirical literature, consisting of both cross-country comparisons and single country case studies, has taken form since the mid-2000s (Kang 2003, 2007; Acharya 2003/04; Chan 2010; Manicom and O’Neil 2010, 2012; McDougall 2014; Kuik 2008; Reeves 2012; Reeves and Pacheco Pardo 2012; Khoo 2011; Murphy 2011; Chen and Yang 2013). The general finding in this body of work is a relative lack of balancing against China. Japan, however, has been described as an outlier that is actively engaging in balancing (Mochizuki 2007; Wan 2007; Hughes 2009; Khoo 2011). This is pertinent, since Japan has a population of over 125 million, the third largest economy in the world, and a political system with a good capacity to extract resources from its citizens. Japan also has close ties with many states in the region, and is thus the state in East Asia with arguably the greatest potential to frustrate China’s rise by forming the core of a latent anti-China alliance in Asia.

The conceptual vagueness about what actually constitutes balancing is apparent once again. There has been a lot of enmity and what look like competitive policies, but the research program offers no generally accepted basis on which to decide how much these policies amount to balancing. Balancing is about power, but more or less the entire literature understands power according to the substantive approach. A common argument moreover holds that East Asian states are “hedging” against China. Hedging can be seen as “balancing light”, as it allows for a wider array of policy means and less effort. Hedging, if it exists in East Asia, could arguably save some balancing theories by narrowing the scope of conditions for the phenomenon. But hedging, as it is commonly used, seems to describe policies that exert no real
costs on the states that pursue them, which should lead to hesitation about the concept’s utility for meaningfully analyzing policies of international contention. It also makes theories of hedging hard to falsify; is it even possibly to imagine a situation in which states in East Asia that are not aligned with Beijing do not “hedge” against China?

The way forward
This critique of the balancing literature sets the stage for the investigation. The first step is to investigate two potential cases of balancing: China’s foreign policy in 2009–2010 and Japan’s China policy. The second step is to enquire into the relation between enmity and balancing. Enmity has a role in all of the explanatory theories of balancing presented above: for realist theories it is an indicator of threat perceptions, but without any independent explanatory power; for identity theories it is constitutive of the discursive processes that enable balancing; and for power shift and status theories it is—in the form of dissatisfaction and status frustration, respectively—an intervening variable between power shifts and balancing. However, the degree of enmity in East Asia does not seem to be matched by balancing, which leads to the question: under what conditions can enmity coexist with a lack of balancing? Moreover, when we challenge the notion that the emergence of rising states signifies international power shifts, the role of enmity also becomes more uncertain. I deal with these first two steps in the individual articles. The third step, which I pursue in the Conclusions, is to consider the results of the studies in relation to the conceptual ambiguities and oversights in the balancing literature.

International Relations theory
International Relations (IR) theory is often taught as comprising a number of traditions or “isms.” The fault lines between them partly reflect disagreements about metatheory—theory about theory. My position in this dissertation is part of the tradition known as constructivism. In the broadest sense, IR constructivists are unified by an interest in the construction of social reality (Jackson 2010: 202–203). All constructivists reject a strong naturalism—the view that social science can and should proceed in the same way as natural science. People, unlike the objects of study in the natural sciences, are not only objects but also subjects with the capacity to create their own reality (Risjord 2014: 34). People have consciousness with first-person ontology as well as intentionality, which is sometimes regulated by free will. Free will allows people to intervene in their environment in ways that are impossible to accurately predict from a third person perspective. Mental states are not causally reducible to covering laws, and the desires, beliefs and actions of people can therefore not be anticipated as if they belonged to
computers or zombies. Although some constructivists believe that there are strong regularities in international relations, all of them deny the existence of covering laws. The social world is seen as contingent.

A constructivist position has a number of implications for this investigation. Structures in international politics are also intersubjective—they consist of shared norms and beliefs—and are thus more susceptible to unexpected change than realists and liberals assume (Wendt 1992). Transformations in intersubjective structures provide an additional reason not to assume that past empirical regularities of balancing and power are certain or even necessarily likely to reappear in the present context. Constructivism, moreover, espouses a wider understanding of power that also includes the capacity to affect understandings of the self and the environment (Lukes 2005[1974]; Guzzini 1993; Barnett and Duvall 2005; Hagström 2005; Hagström and Jerdén 2014). Legitimacy in regional security control is thus socially constructed.

To see the “isms” in IR and political science as metatheoretical standpoints can be deceptive, as Mark Bevir points out: “For [metatheoretical] debates to be couched in terms of traditions, the traditions would have to contain coherent and stable philosophical ideas. But traditions generally include philosophical ideas that need not logically go together” (2010: 49). This is also the case with the constructivist tradition, which is far from unified metatheoretically. These internal differences become obvious by dividing constructivism into a matrix of positions, according to ontological and epistemological divisions.

The first division is ontological and concerns the makeup of the social world. We may distinguish between two types of facts (Searle 1995). Brute facts exist independently of the mind of human observers. This dissertation, for example, has existed in its physical form since it left the presses, regardless of anyone’s beliefs. Institutional facts, on the other hand, exist only by virtue of people treating them as real. This pile of paper is a “dissertation” because of human agreement; it stops being a dissertation if we stop believing that it is one.

The radical ontological position sees institutional facts as existing entirely or almost entirely independently from brute ones. In defending this view, Stefano Guzzini argues, “constructivism claims either to be agnostic about the language-independent world out there, or simply uninterested—it often is irrelevant for the study of society” (Guzzini 2000: 160; see also Checkel 1998: 326). The position is either idealist (human consciousness is all that exists in international relations) or reductionist (we can explain all that matters in international relations by focusing on its most important component: human consciousness). In actual research, both views treat institutional phenomena as radically cut off from brute ones. A practical advantage of the radical ontological approach is that it facilitates parsimonious research: dis-
courses become more susceptible to analysis if we disregard how they might be affected by observer-independent factors.

I subscribe to the alternative moderate ontological position, which denies that institutional phenomena exist detached from brute ones. In other words, psychological predispositions and environmental constraints can have independent effects on social facts (Sperber 1996: Ch. 1; Lukes 2006: 8; Mercer 2014: 357–358; see also Hymans 2010). Emmanuel Adler explains this view: “Constructivists believe that International Relations consist primarily of social facts, which are facts only by human agreement. At the same time, constructivists ... believe not only in the existence of the material world, but also that ‘this material world offers resistance when we act upon it’” (Adler 1997: 323). Neuroscience, cognitive science, cognitive psychology, social psychology and other disciplines have identified predispositions of human behavior. To adopt the radical ontological position implies that all these findings are spurious, and that human psychology and behavior are infinitely malleable. Moreover, a radical position also means that the external environment does not pose any constraints on the human mind. A common line of argument in favor of this view is that even something as seemingly tangible as a nuclear weapon attack does not have any objective effects; it can be given different meanings, such as an act of genocide, a necessary prevention of the rival’s aggression, or a divine punishment. This objection is correct. However, I maintain that a nuclear attack is more likely than something that does not cause mass destruction to be interpreted as an act of mass destruction. In sum, social reality is divided into two kinds of facts, and we cannot collapse one kind into the other, as both rationalists and radical ontological constructivists do.

The scientific understanding of human consciousness is still limited, and there is no compelling general theory of the relation between observer-relative and observer-independent properties of reality. Those of us who adopt the moderate approach are therefore left to proceed pragmatically with a keen eye on empirical context. Institutional facts can sometimes be expected to be extremely dependent on brute facts, sometimes less so. The best way to handle this uncertainty is to draw on general theories of natural phenomena and social and psychological behavior. The difficulty in teasing out the connection in specific settings can make this “rump materialism” (Wendt 1999: 110) seem arbitrary. To a certain extent this charge is true. Nonetheless, I regard it as the least bad choice, since the radical position relies on ontological commitments that constructivists who subscribe to the moderate position have strong reasons to doubt.

This moderate ontological standpoint has a couple of implications for this dissertation. First, I take seriously theories that posit international relations to consist solely of brute facts, such as IR realism. This would be nonsensical for constructivists who hold the radical ontological view, since they do not believe that brute facts can have independent effects. In their view, real-
ist theories are based on a mistaken ontology, and there is no need to test and refine hypotheses derived from these theories. While my position, like all constructivists, rejects the determinism of realism and other rationalist theories, they can offer many useful observations, since the social world is full of strong and resilient empirical regularities. Second, while I make no attempt to theorize the relation between observer-dependent and observer-independent factors on a general level, the connection shows up in places in the analysis. In Article 3, for example, I draw inspiration from general theories on psychological dispositions to generate a hypothesis that purports to explain why status seeking can curb the power of rising states.

The other metatheoretical divide among constructivists is epistemological and concerns what we can claim to know about the social world. Is it possible to make statements about the world that truthfully correspond to facts about the world? “World,” here, refers to parts of reality beyond the mental state of the person making the statement.

The radical epistemological position denies that it is possible. According to Friedrich Kratochwil, “There is simply no going behind our concepts or theories, and no direct appeals to the things themselves ... concepts and theories ... are our creations and not some neutral description of how things are” (Kratochwil 2008: 82). Factual claims cannot be said to be true or false, more accurate or less accurate, or based on how well they correspond to facts. Evaluating hypotheses—which requires describing properties of reality as they are—is thus impossible (Jackson 2010: Ch. 5). Science, as a consequence, is not explanatory. This position corresponds to the general understanding of the term constructivism in social theory, and some political science and IR scholars have called for their colleagues to embrace this understanding of the word (Guzzini 2000; Kratochwil 2008; Jackson 2010). This desire is understandable, since it would improve conceptual resonance with other social science disciplines. However, the radical epistemological position simply does not correspond to all common usage of constructivism in IR. Many self-professed constructivist works explicitly reject it, including several of the most often cited ones.

This moderate epistemological position, to which I also subscribe, maintains that it is possible to make objectively true statements about the world. Jeffrey Checkel represents this view: “constructivists do not reject science or causal explanation; their quarrel with mainstream theories is ontological, not epistemological” (Checkel 1998: 327; see also Hopf 1998). The evident successes of the natural sciences lend strong support to this truth-correspondence theory (Wendt 1999). Knowledge is socially constructed, but knowledge claims can nonetheless correspond truthfully to facts. Moreover, there is no qualitative difference between describing observer-independent or observer-relative facts; one kind is not less real or less susceptible to description than the other. We can thus also make objectively true statements about institutional reality (Searle 1995: 4), and it becomes possi-
ble to evaluate political science hypotheses. When it comes to research method, however, the moderate position agrees that there is an important difference from the natural sciences. Institutional facts are based on first person ontology, and hermeneutic method is necessary to describe them (Hopf 1998: 198).

The moderate epistemological position has two concrete consequences for the dissertation. First, I evaluate and generate hypotheses. Second, I take some beliefs to be truer than others. Since reality pushes back against false beliefs, spreading them is a stronger feat of discursive power. From my perspective, it would be a mistake to argue that, “to know if social reality is really real makes no analytical difference” (Pouliot 2004: 330). In fact, the objectivity of social reality makes a big difference to studying the thing that constructivists care most about: the politics of the reification of social facts. Spreading false or uncertain beliefs is a least likely case of discursive power. The beliefs that China became more assertive in 2009–2010 and that the US military presence stabilizes East Asia, which I discuss in articles 1 and 5, respectively, are examples of such widely accepted but false (the assertiveness narrative) and uncertain (the stability belief), notions.

The metatheoretical diversity among IR constructivists is summarized in table 3, together with representative works on the different positions. My own location is in the upper left corner.

**Ontology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Radical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wendt</strong> 1999</td>
<td><strong>Checkel</strong> 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pouliot</strong> 2004</td>
<td><strong>Guzzini</strong> 2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3 Constructivism**
Method

This dissertation is a work of positive political science. I am not primarily concerned about the normative implications of the study, such as providing policy advice or reflecting on possible looping effects on the social world. However, some normative issues are discussed as implications of the individual studies. I exclusively use qualitative research methods. Nothing in my moderate constructivism is at odds with quantitative methods, and a number of the research questions could be approached to good effect through such methods. My disregard of statistical tools should thus be understood as the result of personal inclinations and training, rather than rejection on methodological grounds.

A “case study” investigates one instance of a class of phenomena with the objective of generalizing the results into knowledge of the whole class (George and Bennett 2005). It is not easy to produce generic knowledge in political science, due to the complexity of all social systems (Jervis 1996). As discussed above, moreover, human reflectivity precludes the search for meaningful covering laws in political science. Nonetheless, it is both possible and productive to identify empirical regularities, provided that we bear in mind that they are probabilistic, subject to randomness and complexity, and contingent on fickle human consciousness. This dissertation pursues a two-layered case study approach. On the upper layer, China’s rise in East Asia is an instance of the international relations of rising states in their home regions. The details of this argument are mainly developed in the framing chapters. On the lower layer, the individual articles contain a number of within-case and comparative case studies that shed light on various phenomena connected to balancing and power during the regional emergence of rising states.

Upper-layer case

Rising states

I treat China’s rise in East Asia as a case of how rising states affect international relations in their immediate regions. The general phenomenon is thus the “rises,” and not the rising states per se. This class has a number of properties. First, the rising state has a realistic and growing potential to exercise more power than most other states in its home region, and possibly also on a global scale. The power should ideally be found in several issue-areas of great importance to international relations, such as trade, finance, diplomacy, security, science and culture. There is no foolproof method for deciding what is “realistic potential”, but a number of factors are useful to take into account.
(A) The rising state’s economic performance is increasing at a high rate relative to other states, especially relative to the established great powers. It is not uncomplicated to associate economic performance with state actors (Pan 2014: 395–400), but proximate assessments should be possible. Perfect accuracy is anyway not necessary for the present purpose; economic performance is not an indicator of power, but a capability, which can potentially translate into resources of power in different contexts. How the rising states take advantage of economic growth is also relevant; investments in critical sectors, such as infrastructure, education, research and innovation, increase power potential.

(B) A big population is a significant advantage. More people allow the state to amass greater economic and human capabilities, which could function as power resources. At the same time, population size is not essential. Sweden became a European great power in the 17th century, despite its small population. It was Japan, and not its much bigger neighbor China, that emerged as the most powerful state in East Asia in the late 19th century. Moreover, there is no compelling reason to assume that populous states are destined to become great powers, although the globalization of the industrial revolution (Tammen et al. 2000: 18–19) and decolonization have increased the correlation between population and power.

(C) An increasing military capacity is significant due to the traditional role of military prowess as a basis for great power status.

(D) It is crucial that the central government of the rising state has consolidated its rule over territory and population. Even if the population and economy of a state are large in aggregate, a government that lacks authority and control has little chance of concentrating resources in order to exercise power internationally.

(E) The rising state should demonstrate its increased power in some issue-areas. Although the concept of a rising state implies that its ultimate power potential is as yet unfulfilled, a lack of real power effects is likely to mean that its alleged potential is overrated.

Second, the class is limited to international relations in the immediate regions of the rising states. Historical experience shows that rising states often start by influencing their own neighborhood (Buzan 2004; Ross 2006: 392; Thompson 2014). A rising state’s foreign relations in its home region can help us to identify characteristics that might be replicated if the state increases its presence in more distant regions. However, the pattern of a state’s interactions in its home region might differ from how they play out in other parts of the world. It should thus not be taken for granted that a state’s foreign relations in its home regions will be replicated globally.

Third, the class consists only of events in recent decades. Several structural characteristics impede comparison with historical instances of rising states, as was argued above. At the unit level, moreover, most of the current
emerging states are non-Western, and we could expect a greater variety of interactions than during previous rises in the past two centuries, which were mostly intra-Western affairs. A consequential sign of this variation is seen in the reluctance of several rising states to adopt the political model advocated by the West (Kupchan 2013: Ch. 5).

To sum up, the class of cases has three properties: the power potential of the rising state, the geographical focus on the immediate home region of the rising state, and the temporal focus on the post-Cold War era. In addition to China’s rise in East Asia, other possible cases would be the regional emergence of Brazil, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Turkey, Russia, South Africa and Saudi Arabia. This list is not an attempt to reach a definite conclusion on the makeup of current rising states; it is up for discussion whether all these examples meet the criteria, and there might arguably be other states that fit the conditions.

China’s rise
A study of China’s rise in East Asia should be helpful in producing generic knowledge about the regional effects of emerging states in the current international system. China has started to produce effects in different power contexts (see e.g. Chung 2015) but, more importantly, China has power potential. China has the biggest population in the world. Chinese GDP at market prices grew 52-fold between 1981 and 2014 (World Bank 2016b), and it became the world’s second largest economy in 2010 (Barboza 2010). China’s labor productivity and technological sophistication have advanced, although it still lags far behind the economically most advanced countries (Naughton 2007; Lin 2011). China’s military spending is today the second largest in the world (SIPRI 2016). China’s government has consolidated power within the country. China has for much of its history been the most powerful state in its region (Fairbank et al. 1968; Mancall 1984), and China’s leaders have an ambition to secure undisputed great power status (Medeiros and Fravel 2003; Lanteigne 2005; Deng 2008; Suzuki 2008; Larson and Shevchenko 2010; Wang 2012).

China has the greatest power potential among the new cluster of emerging states. It has also exercised more power than many of its rising state peers, which allows us to look into situations that might be replicated in other cases down the road. Moreover, China’s immediate region in East Asia comprises two states with a strong sense of ownership of the current international order—Japan and the United States, the latter being a regional state by virtue of its alliance network. A focus on East Asia should thus reflect the interaction between rising and established states. The time frame of the study starts in 1993, the breakthrough of the narrative about China’s rise, and ends in early 2016, when the dissertation was completed.

In addition to this general relevance for theory development, the case also has an intrinsic historical importance. China is the world’s most populous
country in the world’s most populous and economically dynamic region. China’s rise in East Asia will affect billions of people directly and the rest of the world indirectly. Case-specific importance should not be overlooked in case selection (Goertz and Mahoney 2012: 185). Real-world political relevance also means that the results of the dissertation could inform wider policy discussions.

Lower-layer cases

Case selection in the individual articles
The lower-level case studies employ two main tools of theory development: the testing and generation of hypotheses. Articles 1 and 2 use small-n case studies to test two hypotheses derived from balancing theories to answer research questions 3a and 3b. Skeptics argue that studies without cross-case observations provide little leverage in hypothesis testing (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994: 208–211; Risjord 2014: 248–249). Others maintain that careful case selection increases confidence in the result. I follow the latter advice by picking cases according to the “most likely” method of case selection (Eckstein 1975). Since I doubt the accuracy of the hypotheses to be tested, I am generous toward them. Both of the cases that I choose to analyze should intuitively have a high probability of containing balancing. One case is the China policy of Japan, the state most likely to balance China; the other case is China’s foreign policy in 2009–2010, a period during which a great majority of China experts claimed to see growing assertiveness. If the theories cannot even pick these low-hanging fruit, it should decrease our confidence in their predictive powers. When using single-case studies to test hypotheses, the most-likely method of case selection and its twin, the “least likely” method, arguably provide the most leverage (Gerring 2007). Most likely case studies are also employed to answer research questions 1a and 1b. China’s economic rise has been truly spectacular, and important limitations in its power would contradict the thesis that international power is determined by economic strength. In Article 1, I assess whether China’s foreign policy changed in 2009–2010, by comparing the alleged instances of assertiveness in China’s policy in these years with comparable instances in previous years. Article 1 can thus be seen as a comparative study of the “before-after” design (George and Bennett 2005: 166–167). Since no big changes took place in China’s external international environment in these years, other factors can be held constant, allowing the testing of the hypothesis that China’s leaders decided to change its overall foreign policy posture.

Case studies can also serve as a tool of theory building by generating new hypotheses and causal mechanisms to be tested and refined in future research (George and Bennett 2005: 75). I do this in a number of the articles. Article 1 generates six hypothesized causal mechanisms for how academic China
experts came to accept the narrative of growing Chinese assertiveness on an individual basis. I arrive at these hypotheses fully inductively and make no attempt to test them in this dissertation. I leave that for future research. Articles 3 and 5 use within-case studies to generate the respective hypotheses of rising power stagnation and the expert power of epistemic communities in security hierarchies. In Article 4, my coauthor and I develop the idea that the politicization of deep distrust, rather than the distrust itself, is a critical enabling condition for balancing policies.

Methods and material in the individual articles
The five articles use a number of qualitative research methods to carry out the case studies. Here I explain the choice of methods and materials, and discuss attempts to mitigate the limitations of each method. The methods all fit together with my moderate constructivist approach.

Congruence method
The congruence method allows causal analysis by comparing the hypothesized outcome of a theory with the observed effects in a case (this section draws on George and Bennett 2005: Ch. 9). The method in itself is not based on cross-case comparisons, and thus precludes strong causal inference. However, there are several ways to strengthen its utility: the congruence method can be based on a well-tried general theory, show an especially high fit to the case relative to competing theories, and be combined with additional research methods, such as counterfactual analysis and detailed analysis of the causal chain between independent and dependent variables—so-called process-tracing. When employed as part of a systematic research strategy, the congruence method makes it possible to study one case in order to test a theory—ideally through crucial cases—or refine the theory for future research. The congruence method is used in a number of the case studies. Article 2 engages in theory testing of a hypothesis derived from established realist theories by comparing how well Japan’s China policy has met China’s professed interests over a number of indicators. In Article 3, the congruence method is used to propose the new hypothesis that status seeking can account for a rising state’s failed reassurance policy, and hence limited power. Being based on fairly developed international relations theories of status seeking, which in turn draw on social psychological research, strengthens the method.

Discourse analysis
A discourse is a system of meanings given to the world. Discourses shape both images of the self and understandings of the outside world, and thus enable and constrain foreign policy behaviors. By analyzing the content of discourses, we can explain how certain policies became possible, how others become out of the question, and what kind of policies to expect for the near
future. Intersubjective structures of meaning consist not only of spoken and written utterances, but also of everyday practices and habits (Neumann 2002; Hopf 2010; Adler and Pouliot 2011). A focus on non-linguistic discourse can reveal the production and contestation of meanings in international politics that an approach concentrated on statements misses. In this dissertation, however, linguistic discourse analysis is employed.

Article 4 uses discourse analysis to explain Japan’s China policy. The article investigates the structure of the China discourse in the Japanese Parliament between 1999 and 2008. The parliamentary debate is chosen not due to its closeness to centers of political decision-making, but to offer a view that is as representative as possible of the elite political discourse in Japan. The data of the analysis is made up of minutes from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives. This committee deliberates about a wide range of issues, which makes it more representative of the discourse compared to committees with a more narrowly defined responsibility. The article analyzes the minutes from committee meetings in four separate sessions in 1999, 2000, 2005 and 2008. The deliberations were downloaded in the original Japanese from the parliament’s webpage. The analysis maps: what keeps the discourse together, a sense of distrust in China; what splits it into different parts, the degree of politicization of this distrust; and temporal change, the radical position drew closer to the dominant moderate one in terms of quantity of statements over the time span.

Some IR discourse analysts argue that a focus on wider discourses in a society, rather than policy discourses by elites, provides greater leverage for understanding foreign policy identities (Hopf 2009). The benefit of such an approach is to unearth more stable layers of identity. If particular foreign policy-related content is assumed to have a strong salience for an identity, it should also show up in discourses that do not directly concern foreign policy. If the idea were to study the role of China in Japan’s identity, a wider choice of discourses would arguably have been preferable. However, Article 4 seeks to account for policy fluctuations over a relatively short period of time, and elite discourses provide the opportunity to capture more rapid discursive changes and how they relate to policy.

**Counterfactual analysis**

When no comparative cases are available to check a causal hypothesis, it is possible to invent a case. Through analytical imagination, a counterfactual case can serve as a comparative basis for causal inference. This method is sometimes the only available choice, and can then play an important role. However, there are a number of possible pitfalls with the method, which it is important to consider (George and Bennett 2005: 168–169). When searching for Chinese foreign policy change in Article 1, I use counterfactual reasoning in instances where real comparable cases are absent. For example, in 2009 Vietnam and Malaysia made submissions to the UN Commission on
the Limits of the Continental Shelf that countered China’s claims in the South China Sea. However, this was a one-off event—similar submissions had not been possible before—and counterfactual reasoning becomes necessary to decide whether China’s response was a policy change.

**Concept formation**

To refine and reinterpret concepts, and sometimes create new ones, is an integral part of political science. Growing attention to both quantitative and qualitative methods has greatly benefited the study of international politics in recent decades, but this trend has not been followed by an equal interest in concept formation (Mearsheimer and Walt 2013). Concepts, however, are building blocks of theories and thus central to all theory development. Concepts can only be understood within theories and metatheoretical commitments. Criteria for conceptual adequacy consist of familiarity (harmony with established word usage in both natural and scientific language); resonance (captivating and catchy wording); parsimony (compact definition); coherence (a consistent relationship between conceptual attributes); differentiation (transparent and distinct relations to related concepts); depth (the number of properties shared by the phenomena described by the concept); theoretical utility (function in theory development); and field utility (keeping the reordering of related concepts to a minimum). Rather than a rules-bound, recipe-like approach that strives to fully meet each requirement, concept formation is better understood as an inherently imperfect process of navigating and acknowledging the tradeoffs between these criteria (Gerring 1999).

One type of conceptual development is to take a folk concept, a commonly used term that has not been made into a concept, and make a clear concept of it. In Article 1, I conceptualize the popular but imprecise Chinese assertiveness narrative as a claim of foreign policy change. This allows us to understand what is at stake in the debate over Chinese assertiveness more clearly in the context of explanatory theories of foreign policy. Article 5 uses the epistemic community concept to pin down a powerful collective agency in the field of East Asian security expertise. I do not develop the concept, but use it to describe a transnational and multidisciplinary community of security experts, which—to my knowledge—has not been done before. In the framing chapters, moreover, I develop the balancing concept by clarifying its different uses.
Roadmap

After this introductory chapter follows the five individual articles of the dissertation. Articles 1 and 2 answer research questions 3a and 3b, respectively, by investigating whether China’s foreign policy became more assertive in 2009–2010, and whether Japan balanced China in 1978–2011. Article 3 points out limitations in China’s power in the East Asian security system and explains this as an unintended consequence of China’s status seeking, thereby answering questions 1a, 2a and 4a. By analyzing the debate about China in the Japanese parliament, Article 4 shows how Japan’s accommodation of China’s rise has been able to coexist with widespread portrayals of China as an adversary, which gives an answer to question 4a. Article 5, finally, answers question 1b by showing that the US power in the East Asian security system has increased. The article explains the outcome as partly the result of the epistemic power of a transnational and multidisciplinary network of security experts, thus answering question 2b as well. The dissertation ends with a concluding chapter, which describes the findings of the articles and develops the implications for the literatures discussed in the state of the art section.
Conclusions

Through a study of China’s rise in East Asia, this dissertation scrutinizes assumptions that the emergence of rising states lead to power shifts and balancing policies. Four pairs of research questions were derived from this aim. The first section of this concluding chapter presents how the individual articles arrived at answers to these questions. In the succeeding section, I build on these findings to develop the implications for the theoretical debates from the state of the art section, and thereby provide a reassessment of the links between rising states, power shifts, and balancing in international relations.

Findings

Here I present the findings of the four pairs of research questions, as answered by the five articles of the dissertation; this ratio means that a number of the articles answers more than one question.

Finding I: US power in East Asia’s security system has grown between 1993 and 2016.

What is the international power of growing economic capabilities in today’s world? Applied to the topic of this dissertation: Is China’s rise changing the power distribution in East Asia? Research question 1a takes on this problem by focusing on the power of the United States in the region. Power depends on the context in which it is exercised. Regional security control—operationalized as control over the alignment and security policies of secondary states—is a relevant context in which to assess whether China’s rise has brought about a shift in the distribution of power in East Asia, and many studies addressing the issue of a power shift in East Asia have explicitly or implicitly operated in this context. My results show that US power in this context has grown stronger in the analyzed time period.

I use two indicators to measure the level of US security hierarchy (the stronger form of security control): the dominant state’s military deployment in the subordinate state and independent alignment relationships entered into by subordinate states (Lake 2009: 68–71). Article 5 shows that the United States has increased its score on both these indicators. In 1993, the security policies of six of the 17 states in littoral East Asia were in a subordinate position to the United States: Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore,
South Korea, and Thailand. As China’s economic rise has gone on, the US hierarchy has become stronger. The treaty ally Australia, which previously had not hosted any substantial number of US military personnel, agreed in 2011 to host 2500 US troops by 2016–2017 (McCaffrie and Rahman 2014: 104). In 2014, Washington and Manila signed an agreement that is set to increase the US force deployment in the Philippines by a yet undecided but probably significant amount (Lum and Dolven 2014: 15–16). As for the second indicator, none of the seven US subordinates have entered any independent alliances during the period.

These indicators are designed to facilitate maximum temporal and spatial comparison and therefore provide only a rough measure. A closer look reveals further enhancement of US security hierarchy. First, Japan’s doctrinal and technical military integration with the United States has deepened significantly in recent years (Mikalsen Grønning 2014: 6–9). Second, Singapore’s agreement in 2012 to host US littoral combat ships on a permanent basis strengthens the island nation’s distinctive role as a US forward operating site in the region (Rahman 2014: 120–121). Third, despite Chinese opposition, South Korea declared in early 2016 that it considers deploying a US Theater High Altitude Area Defense ballistic missile defense system in the country (Manyin et al. 2016: 2). Finally, Malaysia, New Zealand and Vietnam, although not US subordinates, have in recent years taken important steps to align their security policies closer with Washington (Manyin 2014; Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart 2016; Vaughn 2013).

In sum, US security hierarchy in East Asia is stronger in 2016 than it was in 1993. The period since 2011, in particular, has seen considerable upgrades in US security relations with five subordinates (Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore and South Korea), as well as three non-subordinates (Malaysia, New Zealand and Vietnam). These decisions are set to amount to the first noteworthy increase in the level of US security hierarchy in East Asia since the 1960s. This finding confirms other observations of the continued strength of US power in different domains in East Asia (Friedberg 2011: 203–213; Shambaugh 2014), and calls into question the assumption that changes in regional security control closely track relative economic strength. In other words, the finding displays weaknesses in the dominant elements of national power approach for understanding how the emergence of rising states affects international power relations.

---

1 My post-2016 projections are based on formal agreements. For graphs on historical levels of US security hierarchy in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia see Lake (2009), pages 87 and 90, respectively. However, my argument comes with a caveat. The period 2000–2009, on which I partly base this comparison, is not covered in Lake’s study. Nonetheless, while there have been minor enhancements of the hub-and-spokes system during these years, I have not been able to locate any increase in US security hierarchy that is comparable to the post-2009 developments.
Finding II: China’s power in East Asia’s security system stagnated between 1993 and 2016.

Concerning the other side of Sino-US power relations, none of China’s neighbors have aligned their security relations closer to Beijing during the years concerned. China, despite its growing capabilities, has not moved closer to becoming a dominant actor in East Asia’s security system, as Article 3 shows.

A number of qualifications are in order. First, this finding is only applicable to the circumscribed power context of regional security control, and I do not dispute that China has become more powerful in other contexts. Just to pick one example, when China launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015, it was able to get the United Kingdom aboard as a founding member, despite public protests from the United States (Parker et al. 2015). Controlling the agenda setting in institutions like these, moreover, allows China to promote its interests, and thus opens the door to even more power down the line. Second, a relevant counter-argument would be that China does not wish to forge closer relations with other states, due to its no-alliance strategy. However, it is unclear how much this strategy explains China’s policies, and how much it is a result of China’s difficulties in getting other countries to rally behind its causes. If China’s neighbors had actively sought closer relations, it is possible that China might have modified the policy. After all, the People’s Republic has never stayed away completely from close alignments. Moreover, two of the few states with intimate relations with China, Myanmar and North Korea, have not moved closer to China in recent years, rather the opposite (Berger 2013; Tun 2013; Kim 2013; Cathcart 2014). My conclusion also becomes more convincing in the context of China-US power relations. China has openly opposed a reinforced US military presence in the region, but it has not been able to influence the choices of its neighbors on this issue. Third, another counter-argument is that a power shift in the East Asian security system is just a matter of time. It is possible to imagine that China’s power is experiencing an U-shaped development, where other states are turning away from it at the beginning of its rise, only to eventually realize that bandwagoning with Beijing is their safest bet for the future. While this conjecture is worth considering seriously, the temporal scope of my investigation ends in early 2016.

To sum up, the finding challenges expectations that China should be able to gradually increase its influence in East Asia (Shambaugh 2004/05: 99; Yan 2006: 1; Kang 2007: 16; Deng 2008: 61; Gill 2007: 156; Zhang 2013: 323), and instead corroborates findings from studies of other rising states’ limited power in their home regions (Schirm 2010: 198; Destradi 2010: 907; Flemes and Wojczewski 2010). Taken together, findings I and II go against the assumption that the distribution of economic and military capabilities determines the level of power over the security and alignment policies of secondary states. During the time period covered, from 1993 to 2016, the
power gap between the United States and China has become wider, not narrower.

Finding III: The stagnation of China’s power is partly an unintended consequence of its status-seeking.

Article 3 takes on the question of how to understand China’s limited power in the East Asian security system. The proximate cause is China’s failure to reassure its neighbors, which harms the legitimacy of Chinese potential leadership. The article starts from the assumption that the desire for social recognition of the collective national self-image is an important motive for state action. A state will compare itself to a “reference group,” consisting of one or more states that are similar in several of the characteristics that are central to that state’s self-image. China’s self-image stresses Chinese centrality in world affairs, and its reference group consist of only one country—the United States. This has two consequences for China’s foreign relations. First, China emulates US great power behavior—entitlement to a sphere of influence, military buildup and naval expansion, and a selective and inconsistent adoption of international norms—which threatens China’s neighbors. Second, China tries to resolve disputes in the region by focusing on getting peer recognition from the United States, rather than approach its smaller neighbors on an equal basis. Since the United States does not recognize China’s self-image, China’s relations in the region deteriorate. These two mechanisms contribute to a sustained high threat perception of China among its neighbors, which presents them with a reason to bolster the US-led security hierarchy in East Asia. China’s quest for status hampers its international influence and contributes to preventing a power shift in East Asia. This account challenges alternative explanations of China’s failed reassurance as the result of a reactive defensive policy, or an offensive attempt to overturn the US-led hierarchy in East Asia.

Finding IV: US legitimate power is partly created by “The Asia-Pacific Epistemic Community.”

The US military presence in East Asia depends on the active invitation of regional governments. Article 5 explores the basis of the legitimacy of the US-led hierarchy. When East Asian policymakers explain their support for this arrangement, they tend to draw heavily on a cause-and-effect claim about the workings of international security: US military supremacy is described as the indispensable guarantor of regional “stability.” If we compare this claim to my framework of reasons for deference to another’s states rule, the main basis of US legitimacy in East Asia is thus protection, rather than appetite, esteem, or identification. The “stability belief” behind US legitimacy, however, is plagued by a number of ambiguities, deficiencies and uncertainties—the analytical merit of the belief fails to live up to its immense popularity.
Article 5 explains US legitimate power by investigating how the stability belief is constituted as an authoritative knowledge claim. I conceptualize a transnational and multidisciplinary network of experts on international security—The Asia-Pacific Epistemic Community—and demonstrate how it operates to convince East Asian policymakers that the current US-led social order is the best choice for maintaining regional stability. TAPEC members share the causal knowledge claim that the US military stabilizes East Asia, or the stability belief. TAPEC members see the US military as a necessary, although not necessarily sufficient, factor for regional stability. By safeguarding regional stability, the US military presence is perceived to be serving not only the US national interest, but also the interests of the region as a whole. TAPEC’s normative claim is that since stability is a good thing, the United States should maintain, and preferably strengthen, its security leadership in East Asia for the foreseeable future. Flowing from these claims, TAPEC’s policy enterprise is to bolster the US military presence in the region. Members promote this objective in various ways: (a) by advising policymakers, either in direct communication or through the policy recommendations in their research outputs; (b) by attempting to influence the general public and other relevant audiences through the mass media and social media; and in some cases (c) by making policy themselves (9–10).

By internalizing the stability belief, providing it with epistemic authority, channeling it into policymaking circles and, in some cases, making policy themselves, TAPEC members help to convince East Asian policymakers that the current US-led social order is the best choice for maintaining national and regional security. TAPEC is thus a resource of expert power that creates legitimacy for the idea that the US presence provides necessary protection. By bringing in the power of expert knowledge as one basis of US legitimacy in East Asia, this finding complements and partly challenges previous accounts that have assumed that the stability belief is fully based on objective realities of international security (Lake 2009; Goh 2013).


After lying dormant among most China scholars for some years, the belief that China’s leaders were set to fundamentally revise the East Asian international order resurfaced in late 2009. This year would indeed seem to be a logical timing for Beijing to overhaul its attempts at reassurance. While China had managed to steer clear of the direst consequences of the global financial crisis, the United States was in the midst of its deepest economic troubles since the 1930s. The narrowing of economic capabilities between the two had thus accelerated, which by some theories could be seen as affecting objective relative power, and by others to affect the perception of relative power. Confrontational behavior moreover might be thought to have been suppressed in the years leading up the Beijing Olympics in 2008, sometimes
described as China’s “coming-out party” as a great power with global ambitions. In sum, 2009 could be seen as a most likely moment for the arrival of a more assertive Chinese attitude to the US-led alliance system in East Asia. The idea of a more assertive China quickly received general acceptance, and the academic debate came to be preoccupied with explaining this alleged outcome.

In Article 1 I take one step back to ask whether we really have sufficient evidence to declare that China’s foreign policy became more assertive in 2009–2010. The article defines assertiveness in contemporary Chinese foreign policy as the tendency to achieve goals and resolve common problems involving the United States and its allies and partners by confrontational, as opposed to diplomatic, means (49). Assertiveness could thus be understood as balancing. I set up criteria for how to assess an increase in assertiveness, conceptualizing it as a “Foreign Policy Change” (FPC). I then pick eight most likely cases of alleged new Chinese assertiveness in 2009–2010. The article goes on to look at each case in detail, drawing on official statements, media reporting, elite interviews, and previous research on China’s foreign policy. As a whole, the eight cases display few instances of FPC, from which I reach the conclusion that China’s foreign policy did not change in 2009–2010.

Contrary to the dominant understanding in the field, China did not become more assertive in 2009–2010, thus negating the existence of growing Chinese balancing. At the same time, the article provides several glaring examples of assertive Chinese behavior in the decade before 2009, which speaks to continuity in China’s foreign policy. Ever since China’s rise started in the early 1990s, it has been “assertive” in the sense that it has never shrunk from confronting the United States, and declined to go along with it and its allies on a number of issues. Whether this means that China has balanced the US-led alliance system all along is an issue to which I return in the Implications section.

Finding VI: Japan accommodated China’s rise in 1978–2011. The international relations literature has found a tendency in East Asia of not balancing China’s rise. However, Japan is often portrayed as an exception. Several theories would expect to see Japanese balancing. Threat perceptions of China have grown in Japan. Japan has previously warred against China, and the two countries are currently involved in an unresolved territorial dispute. Japan has the necessary material resources to try to match China, and it could employ its military alliance with the United States to frustrate Chinese interests. Japan is thus a most likely case in East Asia for balancing against China’s rise, and Japanese balancing would lend support to the theories that expect the phenomenon to occur.

Article 2, coauthored with Linus Hagström, begins by identifying China’s “grand strategy,” defined as a set of collectively held elite ideas about how
to pursue a state’s long-term strategic interests by employing, combining, and enhancing its military and civilian capabilities (221). The overriding goal of China’s grand strategy is identified as achieving great power status. The means to achieve this goal were altered during the post-Mao leadership’s radical redefinition of national priorities. The strategy has since consisted of three subgoals: (1) secure the unity of China under Communist Party rule; (2) develop the economy through integration into the global economic system; and (3) rise “peacefully” as a regional power (223). Japan’s policy is compared against nine indicators that operationalize how China is expected to prefer other countries to act in relation to different aspects of these three subgoals. The article goes on to assess the level of correspondence for each indicator between Japan’s policy and China’s professed interests. The analysis shows a largely consistent pattern of Japanese respect for China’s key goals. In other words, Japan has helped China to increase its capabilities and the Communist Party’s hold on political power.

Since the study is set up as a most likely test of the hypothesis of East Asian balancing against China, the result of the article partly disconfirms these theories and corroborates earlier findings of a general lack of balancing in East Asia. However, since the publication of the article in 2012, some studies have appeared that partly contradict the finding of Japanese accommodation (Pugliese 2014; Hornung 2014; Mikalsen Grønning 2014; Liff 2016). The issue of Japanese balancing is thus not yet resolved, and I return to it in the Implications.

Put together, Findings V and VI underscore the importance of paying attention to the dependent variable in explanatory studies. The first step in this type of research is to correctly describe the thing that is being explained (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994: 34; Elster 2007: 15), but many studies are not particularly meticulous in this task. Much research thus attempts to explain things that do not exist, which is a waste of scholarly resources, hampers theory development, and produces suboptimal policy advice.

Finding VII: China’s status seeking has enabled the enmity in China’s relations with the US-led alignment network to coexist with Chinese foreign policy continuity.

As we saw in article 1, China has pursued a fairly consistent level of assertiveness in its policies toward the US and its East Asian allies and partners in recent decades. China has not challenged the US-led order, but it has also not managed to ease its neighbors’ worries about its future direction. What explains China’s mix of reassurance and provocation? Article 3 explains how it has been possible for constant and even growing enmity to exist side by side with a fairly stable level of competitive policies between China and the states in the US alliance network. The key is that China’s provocative behavior is evidence not of balancing, but of status seeking. China seeks recognition from the United States as an equal, rather than challenging US status.
China is frustrated by the lack of US recognition. Historically, frustrated rising states have often gone to war to prove their desired status. However, China has not so far resorted to war as an outlet. The findings thus present one outcome of frustrated status-seekers under conditions of relative international peace—enmity without intensified security competition.

Finding VIII: The continuing dominance of a moderate position on China policy in the Japanese political debate has enabled adversarial portrayals of China to coexist with a policy of accommodation.

Japan’s China policy is ambiguous. Japan has not balanced against China in 1978–2011, despite having the greatest potential in East Asia to do so. But Japan’s growing dependence on economic relations with China has at the same time not compelled it to take serious steps to improve the bilateral relationship. Sino-Japanese relations have fluctuated a great deal—periods of diplomatic friendship and overt enmity have intermingled. Many theories, including constructivist ones, expect threat construction to create conditions for balancing, but the more apparent Japanese threat construction of China has not brought about such policies. Article 4, coauthored with Linus Hagström, tries to make sense of Japan’s China policy by employing discourse analysis.

Assuming that discourse has a structuring effect on foreign policy, the article analyzes the China discourse in the Japanese Parliament between 1999 and 2008. The analysis demonstrates a dividing line between radical and moderate representations. Both representations share a sense of insecurity and lack of trust about China. However, the radical representation advocates the politicization of that insecurity, while the moderate one seeks its depoliticization. Two important shifts took place in the discourse in the time period. First, China came to be discussed more frequently. This should be understood as a necessary but not sufficient condition for increased politicization. Second, more aspects of the relationship showed up in the discussions, and the insecurity about China increased. As a result of these changes, the radical representation became more prevalent. The moderate representation was not as dominant in 2008 as it had been in 1999 (723–724).

The Japanese discourse thus changed to include more competition between camps striving for politicization and de-politicization of the widely held distrust about China. The article thereby provides a framework for understanding the fluctuations in Japan’s China policy, and by extension in the bilateral relationship. The discursive dominance of a moderate policy position—although based in distrust—is one condition in which enmity can coexist with accommodation. The article does not attempt to explain specific foreign policy decisions, but makes the negative prediction that qualitative and long-lasting improvement in the relationship will remain fairly limited. Subsequent events since publication in 2010 have not disconfirmed this forecast.
Implications

The previous section presented answers to my research questions. This section builds on the findings to flesh out the contributions to the theoretical literature on power and balancing from the state of the art section. The general implication consists of a reassessment of the links between rising states, power shifts and balancing in international relations.

Rising states and power shifts: Means and barriers to legitimate power

The analysis in this dissertation corroborates previous findings on the difficulties for rising states in gaining legitimate power in their home regions (Destradi 2010: 907; Prys 2011). I made a wager above that given the decreased attraction and utility of coercion, legitimate power should be the most fruitful way for rising states to acquire regional security control. Moreover, I identified four sources of international legitimacy. Subordinate states relinquish parts of their sovereignty to a dominant state because of identification, esteem, appetite and protection. Reflecting on the relative and changing importance of these four reasons helps to enhance the understanding of power shifts, or lack thereof, from established to rising states. We can hypothesize a number of factors that moderate shifts in the distribution of legitimate power. Many states are still dependent on the United States and other established states for financial assistance, trade ties and military protection, which feeds into the reasons of appetite and protection. Esteem and identification, the two other reasons, are both based on feelings that are tightly intertwined with identities, and therefore resist quick and easy change. Non-democratic rising states, moreover, have difficulties in drawing on identification among democratic states. In addition, this dissertation presents two new factors that under certain conditions can mitigate legitimate power shifts from established to rising states: the power of expertise and the unintended consequences of status seeking.

Rising states and the power effects of expertise

The first factor is the power to shape expert knowledge about international security. When the main reason for legitimacy is protection, hierarchical relationships are based on a social contract. The dominant state provides security guarantees to its subordinates, and these states, in turn, relinquish parts of their sovereignty to the dominant state (Lake 2009). Extant research on hierarchical order in general (ibid.), as well as the US-led order in East Asia (Goh 2013), presupposes that policymakers in subordinate states have perfect understandings of the tradeoffs inherent in the choices they make. Based on these understandings, they are expected to weigh the costs and benefits of entering into or withdrawing from hierarchical alignment rela-
tionships. This is obviously a simplification: policymakers, like everyone else, do not act on perfect understandings of reality. The question is whether the simplification is analytically justifiable. One could argue that it is, since an anarchical world of tense security competition allows little room for mistakes. Reality will bite back and punish states that make irrational choices about security alignment. The problem with this argument, however, is that knowledge claims about protection are often based on conjectures the validity of which is difficult to put to the test. Especially in international contexts characterized by relative peace, as in contemporary East Asia, it is often impossible to know whether a particular security arrangement really provides more security than the alternatives.

In Article 5, I try to demonstrate this by showing the uncertainties surrounding the belief that the United States guarantees the stability of East Asia. East Asian policymakers, when they argue that the US stabilizes the region, engage in counterfactual reasoning. Another example is found in Sweden, which at the time of writing is having a heated debate about whether to abandon its long-running non-alignment policy and apply for NATO membership. Participants on both sides of the debate appeal to causal knowledge claims based on general theories of international security (Olsson 2014; Hagström and Lundborg 2015). Whichever course Sweden ends up taking, however, a situation of continuing peace in the Baltic region would make it difficult to evaluate these arguments. For instance, many supporters of membership rely heavily on the following contingency planning: in the event of a Russian attack on the geographically vulnerable Baltic States, a parallel invasion of the Swedish island of Gotland would greatly impede efforts by other NATO members to extend military support. In order to deter Russian policymakers from pursuing such a strategy, Sweden needs to become a NATO member (Johansson 2016; Jönköpingposten 2016). Yet, no matter whether Sweden joins NATO or stays outside, there will be no plausible way confidently to assess this claim unless Russia actually attacks the Baltics.

The beliefs of policymakers can be wrong and often involve a great deal of uncertainty. Sometimes such truth claims come to exercise significant influence over international politics (Greenhill forthcoming). Legitimate power in hierarchical relationships is thus partly constituted by contested knowledge claims of uncertain accuracy. No matter what their accuracy and clarity, moreover, beliefs are subject to contestation. Legitimate power is not merely the justification of power, but the creation of it. Legitimacy is based on the four reasons outlined above, but appears through processes of negotiation, persuasion, and manipulation that affect beliefs, desires, and identities ( Morgenthau 1954[1948]: 56–58; Knorr 1975: 9–10; Hart 1976: 291–292; Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990; Adler and Haas 1992; Adler and Barnett 1998: 39; Hopf 1998: 277–280; Manners 2002; Barnett and Duvall 2005: 52–55; Berenskoetter 2007: 10–12; Nabers 2010).
One way to influence understandings of international security is through “expertise.” The individuals who produce expertise—the security experts—consist of academics, think-tankers, journalists, public intellectuals and former government officials. Their social role is to “define what is risky and what a threat is, what should be dealt with as a security issue and what not” (Villumsen Berling and Bueger 2015: 1). The uncertainties and complexities of international politics give experts the capacity to inform and legitimize policy decisions (Adler and Haas 1992: 380; Cross 2012: 15–17; Haas 1992: 12–16). Expertise also produces background knowledge about security that underpins policy (Adler and Bernstein 2005; Bueger 2014; see also Eriksson and Norman 2011: 422–423). What distinguishes expertise from other forms of discursive power is the reputation of objective knowledge. Claims to expertise may allow one to bypass ideological and interest-based disputes, and thus to depoliticize issues. If the expert-status of actors is questioned, they lose this power. The struggle to be recognized as producing expert knowledge is thus one important facet of the power of expertise. Expertise does not determine policy, and leaders may discount the advice of experts. In his Middle East policy, US President Barack Obama has discarded dominant views of the Washington D.C. security expert complex (Goldberg 2016). China’s president Xi Jinping is said to have little trust in the advice of Chinese security experts.2 With his support for Japan and South Korea developing nuclear weapons (CNN 2016), Donald Trump, candidate for the Republican nomination for President of the United States in 2016, has confronted close to uniform opposition among US experts.

Expertise informs all four reasons, but protection the most. It is difficult to provide compelling arguments for protection without rooting them in theories of international security. Even folk theories tend to appeal to cause-and-effects claims that are presented as objective facts of international security. Identification and esteem rely heavily on emotions that are less susceptible to being altered by expertise, although this does not mean that expertise is totally independent of emotions. Identification is about who you are, esteem is about who you look up to, but expertise influences how you believe that the world works. Identification and esteem are also contested, but the causal knowledge claims provided by experts have relatively less impact. The counterfactual reasoning behind much security policy makes expertise crucial for protection, arguably more so than for appetite. A relatively peaceful international environment provides few reality checks against which to contest dominant security expertise.

---

2 A sentiment expressed by Chinese international relations scholars in conversations with the author in the United States, April 2016.
Rising states and the anti-power effects of status seeking

The second factor that impedes power shifts is the consequences of status seeking dynamics. Research has noted that emerging states tend to fail to consider the interests of their neighbors (Schirm 2010: 198–199; Flemes and Wojczewski 2010: 26). Article 3 offers one explanation for why they fail to do so. The case study of China generates a general hypothesis for how rising powers’ status seeking affects international politics under conditions of general inter-state peace. A frustrated rising power that does not go to war is likely to encounter increasing power stagnation, or the halt or decline of its influence over secondary states. Leadership is crucial in today’s world (Nabers 2010), but the strong desire among some rising states to achieve a higher status makes it difficult for them to adopt the policies needed to convince others to acknowledge their visions. For rising states to increase their status relative to established great powers, it might be effective to focus less on great power relations, and more on building trust with smaller states. This is easier said than done, however, since status strategies are not only instrumental, but also hinge on self-image. A counter-intuitive implication of Article 3 is that the states with the greatest ambition for power might encounter the most such difficulties. China, with its self-image as entitled to great power second to none, could have created the conditions for great power in East Asia with less pronounced ambitions. Brazil and India, states with less grandiose self-images, could have faced more limitations on their power if their ambitions were higher. In this way, China is an extreme case. The case study is useful for theory development since it clearly outlines the causal mechanisms of rising power stagnation, but more research on other rising states is needed to refine the scope conditions of the hypothesis. The international relations literature on status, respect, and recognition has concentrated on explaining war (Paul, Larson and Wohlforth 2014; Lebow 2010; Lindemann 2011; Lindemann and Ringmar 2014). However, another implication of Article 3 is to show how status seeking can also affect international power relations. Especially under conditions of relative international peace, research on status should also explore non-conflict outcomes.

Rising states and legitimate power

Recent decades have seen two major ideas that perceive identification to be of growing importance for international legitimacy. The first is the “end of history” narrative. After the demise of a great number of dictatorships in the end of the 20th Century, Francis Fukuyama (1992) argued that liberal democracy had proved to be the only viable mode of government for the future. In this sense, history had ended. John Ikenberry (2011) provides a theory that links this idea to identification as a source of legitimate international power. The United States has been instrumental in creating a “liberal order” in large parts of the world since the end of the Second World War. The core
members of this order share a commitment to core values of democracy, liberal governance, and market economics. This creates mutual trust and a sense of common belonging. Identification with the United States is thus one reason why members of this order support US leadership. By expanding this order, identification with the United States grows as a source of legitimate power. However, the arrival of non-Western rising states has strained the expectation of the end of history narrative. For two or more centuries a majority of the most powerful states have belonged to the cultural community of Western civilization. Many rising states do not identify with this community and reject parts of the core values of the liberal order (Kupchan 2013: Ch. 5). Identification based on a liberal identity can be expected to play a more limited role in an international society with a thinner common political culture.

The second narrative is that of a “clash of civilizations.” Samuel Huntington (1993, 1996), the main architect behind the idea, expected international alignment to develop along civilizational lines after the disintegration of global ideological fault lines that followed the end of the Cold War. On one level, Huntington argued that identification with the United States and the West was of limited salience for non-Western states, along the lines of the criticism against the end of history idea. On another level, however, civilizational “core states” were expected to use deep cultural identification to attract followers within their own cultural spheres. Both these popular narratives thus emphasize the utility of identification as a tool of legitimate power in world politics, but differ in the number of major actors working as magnets of identification. For Huntington, the process is not global with a Western core, but takes place simultaneously in a number of separate regions. The clash of the civilizations narrative, however, has a hard time accounting for recent events. The ability of rising states to function as hubs of cultural identification has shown itself to be quite limited. Article 3 gives one explanation for this situation; whatever civilizational potential China might have to tap into in East Asia, its attempts at reassurance are hampered by its status seeking, and threat perceptions of China thus make the protection provided by the United States a more important factor for secondary states in the region.

In sum, the shortcomings of these two narratives caution against exaggerating the potential for identification to cause legitimacy in the present international system. Identification is one reason for legitimacy, but not the only or even sometimes a very important one. When identification matters less, the other reasons—esteem, appetite and protection—might become more relevant. When protection matters relatively more, moreover, this should make expertise more important. Structures of expertise—like TAPEC—take time, skill, and energy to develop. Many rising states have undeveloped social scientific communities, few resourceful think tanks with reach beyond their own borders, insular policy discussions, and little authority in international debates. Expertise thus seems to be a relatively “sticky” power re-
source. General questions for future research on international legitimacy in the security sphere should include whether expertise is becoming more important and, if so, whether this development favors the power of established states and restricts the power of rising states.

Rising states and balancing: Balancing as a variable

The balancing concept shows up frequently in the political science literature about rising states, and one aim of this dissertation is to sharpen the discussion. Findings V and VI reveal less balancing from Japan and China than many have predicted or claimed to perceive. However, finding VI is contested by more recent studies that insist that Japan is balancing China. When it comes to the question of Chinese balancing, moreover, Finding V shows that China did not start to balance more in 2009–2010, but the question remains over whether it is actually pursuing balancing policies. These debates can hardly be settled solely by improving the validity and reliability of balancing studies, moreover, since one implicit point of disagreement is about the analytical role that balancing should play. A conceptual discussion is needed to move beyond this uncertainty and these partly contradictory claims; after which I revisit the issue of Japanese and Chinese balancing.

Breaking up the balancing concept

Balancing is closely associated with realism, but the concept has expanded beyond this tradition to engender several non-realist balancing theories. Balancing is still a crucial component of realism, but it is no longer an exclusively realist concept (Nexon 2009: 355). Thus far, I have presented the main theories that attempt to explain the occurrence of balancing. The discussion has therefore concerned balancing as a dependent variable. However, not all scholars who study balancing are interested in testing, refining or creating such theories. For instance, one of the most often cited works on balancing in the wake of China’s rise is Denny Roy’s article “Southeast Asia and China: Balancing or Bandwagoning?,” published in Contemporary Southeast Asia in 2005. Roy claims to identify low-intensity balancing against China from Southeast Asian states, but he does not once consider the implications of this finding for explanatory theories of balancing. In this article, and in many other works on China’s rise, balancing is simply not employed as a dependent variable. What, then, one might ask, is the value of relating to balancing in these works? The answer is that balancing here is understood as a variable to explain international outcomes; in other words, balancing is not only used as a dependent variable, as in structural realism, but also as an independent one. As an independent variable, moreover, balancing is used to explain not one phenomenon but two distinct phenomena: power distributions and the probability of military conflict. Roy’s study belongs to the first category. The author takes the tendency of Southeast Asian
states to align with the United States to suggest that they “would not passively accept Chinese domination,” and that the United States “can remain an influential country in Southeast Asia as long as it wishes to” (2005: 319–320). To Roy, balancing thus explains power—the other way around from structural realism, in which power explains balancing.

These divergent interests in power and conflict have consequences for how to resolve the four general problems in the balancing concept. First, does balancing consist of only military policies or both military and non-military ones? Second, how much effort is needed for a policy to constitute balancing? Third, how can a situation be evaluated in which a state seems to balance another state militarily but accommodate it economically at the same time? Fourth, what would be the consequences of adopting the relational approach to power analysis? Since the literature uses the concept of balancing to explain two different phenomena—power and conflict—there is no compelling reason for them to stick to the same definition. There are in fact good arguments for why the two approaches should untangle each of the four ambiguities in different ways. The failure to arrive at a generally accepted definition of balancing might not be that big a problem after all. However, it is necessary to recognize this duality and explicate the different uses of what is collectively known as balancing. As a first attempt in this direction, this subsection makes a distinction between “power balancing” and “military balancing,” which explain power and conflict, respectively. I do not suggest that scholars need to adopt these new terms. My objective is instead to raise awareness of real but often tacit differences in actual research interests among balancing scholars. Hopefully, this can help to reduce the number of unnecessary arguments over whether balancing is taking place, and thus advance progressive research on competitive policies of power and contention. Moreover, the distinction is also relevant for explanatory theories of balancing—some of them are primarily interested in power and others in conflict. In these studies, balancing is not an independent variable, but an intervening one.

First, “power balancing” consists of policies that seek to improve one’s power relative to another state or coalition. Balancing is thus a mechanism that affects international power distributions. Some approaches are only interested in military power, and do not recognize soft balancing. Many are not, however, and here attention should also be paid to non-military measures. Soft balancing is included in such cases. Effort is crucial in all power balancing; policies do not need to achieve the intended outcomes, but they have to come close to a state’s maximum balancing capacity. This is because balancing concerns the intentional aspect of state relations and should be costly for the balancer. Power balancing might not be binary, but nor is it as gradual as some claim. Far from all military policies targeted against another state involve power balancing. Uneven and weak internal
mobilization, and external alignment that primarily has a signaling effect are not power balancing, since they do not affect power relations a great deal.

On the issue of inconsistent policies—when it appears that state A both balances and accommodates state B’s power at the same time—the distinction between the substantive and relational approaches to power becomes significant. According to the substantive approach, as used in the elements of national power method, state A cannot do both simultaneously. If it accommodates state B economically while pursuing aggressive military policies targeted at the same state, the analyst must decide how the combined polices affect power relations. This is because ENP operates with an aggregate measure of state power. One might end up with mixed results which, since balancing requires effort, means that balancing is not taking place. Using the relational power approach, however, the analysis becomes trickier. Since power is contextual, so is power balancing. A state can balance another state in one context but accommodate it in another. With this approach, moreover, the analyst cannot add all power contexts together into an aggregate measure of balancing, although contexts can be defined more or less broadly.

Some theories stress the pacifying effect of power balancing. A military balancing coalition might deter an expansionist state from undertaking further coercive policies. Balance-of-threat theory, for example, argues that aggressive behavior comes at a price, since aggressive actions will invite a balancing coalition (Walt 1987: 27). For these theories, power balancing reduces the risk of war by imposing costs on aggressors. Chinese balancing against the United States increases the costs of US unilateralism, and Japanese balancing against China increases the cost of Chinese revisionism.

Second, policies that constitute “military balancing” explain the probability of military conflict. Military balancing aggravates international tensions, thus making military conflict more likely. The “steps to war” theory (Vasquez 1987: 117) describes the logic by which military balancing increases the risk of war. Leaders grow increasingly concerned with security threats from another state. This leads them to resort to coercive tactics, including threats. Such policies are prone to result in crisis situations, which are met by internal mobilization and alignment with other countries. When this occurs on both sides of a dyad, an arms race ensues. In such a tense situation, disputes easily escalate into war. Internal mobilization and external alignment are thus important steps on this ladder. By studying when and for what deep reasons these policies occur, scholars can identify an important stage in interstate conflict escalation.

Military balancing consists of military measures, or aggressive political and economic measures. Policies known as soft balancing are not military balancing. The degree of effort by which policies are carried out is not crucial, as long as the relevant actors—policymakers in the balancing state and the target state—perceive that targeted, competitive policies are being carried out. Military balancing sidesteps the definition of power, since military
balancing is not studied to explain changing power distributions. Some realist theories are interested in explaining conflict. Offensive realism expects that rising and established states tend to balance each other. This policy proclivity often ends up in war. In a situation involving rising states, therefore, the theory expects increased risk of war when it detects military balancing. When John Mearsheimer (2010) identifies reinforcements in the US hub-and-spokes system in East Asia, he thus takes it as a sign of a development with substantial potential for war.

The two types of balancing are distinct but can feed into each other. The costs of an arms race or war often have a massive influence on power relations. Economic containment can decrease interdependence, which in turn can increase the risk that military balancing escalates into armed conflict.

**Balancing and China’s rise**

Let us now return to the issues of possible Chinese and Japanese balancing that were addressed by research questions 3a and 3b. Article 2 characterizes Japan’s China policy in 1978–2011 as one of accommodation. A number of more recent works, however, maintain that Japan is balancing China (Mikalsen Grønning 2014; Pugliese 2014; Hornung 2014; Liff 2016). In one, Bjørn Elias Mikalsen Grønning (2014: 3–9) details a number of reforms in Japan’s foreign and security policy since mid-2010. The author takes changes in doctrine and force disposition, as well up upgrades of its alliance relations with the United States, as evidence that Japan is increasingly balancing China (ibid.: 15). The time frame differs between his study and Article 2, but the results still seem partly to contradict each other. How to assess Japan’s policy in light of the distinction between military balancing and power balancing? Mikalsen Grønning’s study shows that Japan is intentionally targeting China with its military policies. China, for its part, also believes itself to be the target of provocative Japanese measures. For example, China’s Foreign Ministry Spokesperson remarked on July 21, 2015, “Japan’s actions of deliberately intervening in the South China Sea issue and playing up regional tensions run counter to regional peace and stability, and severely undermine the political and security mutual trust between China and Japan” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China 2015). Japan is thus balancing China militarily; the dynamics between the two countries increase the risk of military conflict.

For theories of power balancing that use the ENP method to measure power, however, balancing has to impose costs to alter power relations. These costs have to be substantial and also cover non-military areas, since economic resources are the basis of military strength. So, based on the power concept espoused by these theories, Japan does not seem to be balancing China’s power. However, things get more equivocal if we adopt the relational approach to power. Japan is working hard to reinforce the US-led hierarchical order in East Asia, which indicates that it is balancing China’s power.
in the context of regional security control. At the same time, Japan is not balancing China’s power in other relevant contexts, as was demonstrated in Article 2. Mikalsen Grønning acknowledges arguments that Japan’s security policies could decrease as well as increase the risk of conflict between Japan and China (ibid.: 14). My distinction suggests that the latter is more likely. Japanese balancing of China’s power is not sufficient to improve deterrence, but provocative enough—from China’s perspective—to intensify tensions between the two countries.

Article 1 shows that the level of Chinese assertiveness did not increase in 2009–2010, but does not show whether China all along has been balancing against the US-led alignment network in East Asia. While other countries see themselves as targets of Chinese assertive Chinese policies, China stresses the alleged peaceful nature of its rise, and this situation can thus not be characterized as military balancing. If China were to see itself as engaged in intense security competition, it could propel conflict dynamics. This helps to explain why enmity has not escalated into overt conflict in recent decades. Moreover, China is encouraging economic growth and stable relations with its neighbors and the United States. China can therefore hardly be said to be power balancing according to the substantive approach to power analysis. According to the relational approach, China seems to be balancing in some areas but not in others. In the context of control over islands and shoals in the South China Sea, China has significantly increased its military presence in the region. This can be expected to improve China’s hand in a number of possible contingencies, and China is thus balancing against the US-led alliance network. In the context of security control, however, China is not balancing. Beijing’s policies are not hurting the US-led security hierarchy by attracting followers in the security sphere, as findings I and II demonstrate.

To sum up, based on the conceptual discussion in this section, both Japan and China are balancing in some ways but not in others. The distinctions between military balancing and power balancing, as well as that between the substantive and relational approaches to power help to reconcile some differences in the debate about how competitive policies intertwine with power and conflict during the emergence of China and other rising states.

The evolution of great power politics: Rising states, power shifts, and balancing

Scholars have asked a number of questions about the emergence of new rising states: How will their influence develop? In which issue-areas are they getting stronger? Where are they lagging behind? How are neighbors responding to their emergence? Is the largely Western-originated normative structure of the global order up for revision? Are the rising states destined to confront US military supremacy? Is the unipolar international structure about
to give way to a multipolar one? Might great power war finally be a risk again? A common narrative serves as the node of the discourse on the international security effects of rising states: Greater economic resources equal greater power. This increases fear and enmity in the international system. Competitive policies—balancing—start to characterize the foreign relations of rising states. This propels security dilemmas and arms races, and in many cases ends up in war. This dissertation breaks all the links in this chain, and thus offers a reassessment of the links between rising states, power shifts and balancing in international relations.

First, my constructivist position is sensitive to changes in international contexts, including intersubjective changes, which means that I do not assume that current events will resemble those in previous times. Great power politics evolve. Based on a number of contextual changes, I make the assumption that the end of the chain—war—is less likely today than during previous instances of emerging states. Second, based on my empirical and conceptual analysis, I challenge the first link in the chain: that great economic growth translates easily into great power. China, like a number of other rising states, has huge problems increasing its legitimate power. I offer two mechanisms that reduce shifts in power from established to rising states: the power effects of expertise and the anti-power effects of status seeking. Third, enmity has an important function in many balancing theories, but the link between enmity and balancing is less clear than is often assumed. Under certain conditions—dominant moderate policy discursive positions and status seeking with the objective of peer-recognition—enmity is able to coexist with policies of non-balancing and even accommodation. Finally, there has been less balancing from both China and Japan than commonly assumed. At the same time, balancing is a slippery concept. Studies of balancing and rising states should spell out whether they are trying to explain conflict or power, and if they are interested in the latter, whether they are using the substantive or relational concept of power. For studies that use the relational concept, moreover, statements about balancing must be confined to certain power contexts. This makes it harder to make general statements about balancing, but helps to reconcile debates in the balancing literature. To conclude, this dissertation does not offer a new grand narrative of rising states in international relations. By challenging the dominant narrative on the issue and offering explanations of more limited phenomena, however, it can hopefully aid progressive theory development.
References


Sweden raises defense budget amid Russia concerns

Sweden raises defense budget amid Russia concerns, April


Economy, EC. 2010. The game changer: Coping with China’s foreign policy revolution, Foreign Affairs, 89(6).


Foreign Policy, Boulder: Westview, pp. 217–238.


Greenhill, KM. Forthcoming. Whispers of war, mongers of fear: The origins of threat perception and proliferation.


Hopf, T. 2010. The logic of habit in international relations. *European Journal of International Relations,* 16(4), 539–561


Ross, RS. 2012. The problem with the pivot: Obama’s new Asia policy is unnecessary and counterproductive. *Foreign Affairs*, November/December.


32


