

# NAVIGATING THE “FOREIGN” IN 21ST CENTURY FOREIGN POLICY: THE ROLE OF AREA STUDIES IN UNDERSTANDING THE FUTURE OF US-CHINA RELATIONS

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**Abstract:** *An Address on the 20th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Department of Area Studies at the University of Oxford. My mission tonight is a simple one: First, how best to define the role of “area studies” and its growing importance in understanding the internal complexity of individual nation states in 21st century international diplomacy. Second, what role must this discipline play in the unfolding contours of US-China relations, the single-most important geo-political and geo-economic relationship in the world, in what I have long-called the present “decade of living dangerously.”*

Until the beginning of last decade, it had become a truism in the academic study of international relations, international political economy and foreign policy that during the age of globalisation, we had seen the gradual collapse of what was once seen as the “great divide” – between the foreign and the domestic, the national and the international, the internal and the external. In part, this was because of the growing significance of international trade, investment, capital, technology and people flows as a proportion of overall national and international economic activity. It was also because we saw a real-world convergence between these two sets of previously distinct policy domains – as national policy decisions could no longer be neatly quarantined from their international consequences. Moreover, decision-makers themselves could no longer be kept in neat, hermetically sealed foreign and domestic policy boxes, as each recognised that the impacts of their decisions increasingly flowed in multiple directions – both at home and abroad.

Most of all, the collapse of this great historical divide between the internal and the external was due to the ideational nature of the globalisation project itself, which became an increasingly common (if often unspoken) policy project across much of the international community – premised in large part on neo-liberal assumptions that were increasingly anchored in the foundational ideas of open markets, societies, and polities. As we all marched happily towards the “end of history,” and became conscripted as “global citizens,” the age of peak globalisation suggested that even the notion of the nation state itself had become just a little passé. Remember that thing called Europe?

## **The Return of the State**

Times have changed. We now see the revenge of geography and the return of the state. We see states (including large states) once again invading other states; the return of xenophobia as foreigners are told they are no longer welcome; the resurgence of protectionism as free trade is deemed to have failed; the rebirth of industrial policy as markets too are deemed to have failed. Most importantly, the intellectual assumptions of the entire globalisation project are now under political assault from both the left and the right, and from states as diverse as the United States of America and the People's Republic of China.

While we may have experienced peak globalisation across the collective West, in Moscow and Beijing, we have instead seen states which are themselves seldom in retreat from the market. Under one form of state capitalism or the other, the authoritarian state, by and large, went from strength to strength. And in China's case, lest there remain any doubt about this, Xi Jinping over the last decade has underscored afresh the absolute centrality of that nation's party state – whatever the dictates and demands of the market might be.

## **Tipping Points**

It is hard to pinpoint when various inflection points in the phenomenon of de-globalisation we now confront began to emerge. Some point to the invasion of Iraq, and others to Russia's brutal invasion and occupation of Ukraine, or the massive market failures of the Global Financial Crisis. Here in the United Kingdom, Brexit in many respects was the symptom of this de-globalisation phenomenon rather than its cause, although we should never discount the power of political leadership to accelerate the underlying forces of societal and economic change, or if it so chose, to reshape it. Meanwhile, in the United States, the election and now re-election of the Trump Administration represents the most explicit disavowal of the underlying economic logic of the globalisation project we have seen in the Western World.

Underlying these critical turning points have been a vast array of forces. These include the slow economic and sociological burn of rising income inequality between the very rich, the poor and the rest. This has been accompanied by the hollowing out of traditional manufacturing across the cities and towns of the collective West through a combination of outsourcing and technological disruption at home. All of this is unfolding at the inception of seismic changes in labour markets that are starting to unfold across the world arising from the artificial intelligence revolution. The brutal forces of challenge and change will move from the blue-collar workforce to white collar employees. It is the latter who have become the targets of this increasingly relentless Fourth Industrial Revolution. Meanwhile, turbocharging this vast array of political, social and economic forces has been the unprecedented international movement of people across national borders – as innocent civilians seek to escape violence, flee poverty, or simply seek a better life. For all these reasons, we see the return of the state as citizens now turn to their governments to protect them from these convulsions that either in reality, or only per their perception, impact their daily lives.

## **Impact on Foreign Policy**

The reason for this short peroration on the overall state of the globalisation project (and now what we might call the de-globalisation project) is that it defines the overall context in which we are operating. Foreign policy does not occur in a vacuum, nor do US-China relations. As these are the explicit subjects of this lecture, it's important to be mindful from the outset of the changing global environment in which these traditional fields are now located. The uncomfortable truth is that policy decision-makers are now operating across a complex, shifting and increasingly uncomfortable terrain where many find that several of the assumptions of the last 35 years no longer apply. This makes the hard business of strategy and diplomacy even harder than before, given that policymakers generally crave stability, certainty and predictability, above all in times of pronounced change.

So, for the democracies at least, and to quote that great enemy of democracy, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "what then is to be done?" I believe it is useful for policymakers to focus on three core challenges. First, to safeguard the values that continue to animate us as democracies. Freedom, for example, is one such animating value. So too is political freedom, as expressed through the various forms of the democratic process, as are the wider set of values articulated carefully in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These are no small things. Each has been hard-fought over the centuries. There are many who still seek to extinguish them. But if we begin to compromise on these values, we become lesser people because we cease to be true to ourselves.

Second, we need to be clear-sighted in defining our core national interests – interests which are shaped in large part by the values for which we stand. We must be clear about the principles of territorial integrity, political sovereignty, building prosperity, and sharing its fruits. We need to be clear about planetary sustainability, the international rules-based order, and the norms, institutions and processes that have been created to give them effect. We must be clear too in our commitment to defending these institutions when they are under attack, while continuing to reform them to make them more effective, because if we allow the order to falter, fail or fall, it will be difficult to rebuild. History teaches us that international orders are hard to create, and easy to dismember – rarely dramatically – but usually through death by a thousand cuts.

Third, as we shape national strategies to realize these values and interests, we must be equally clear-eyed about the worldview of those around us, rather than assuming they see reality as we do. This applies in relation to our strategic partners, regardless of how familiar they may have been to us in the past. Most importantly, it applies to our strategic competitors as well as our potential adversaries. This is where the discipline of area studies has a new and vital role to play in foreign policy in navigating the complexity of the changing international terrain in which policy decision-makers must now operate.

## **Utility of Theoretical Frameworks: The Role of Foreign Policy Analysis**

I am relatively familiar with the dividing lines between the various claims to theoretical hegemony across the various disciplines of international relations theory: the realist

school and its various sub-schools – of states maximising power at the expense of other states, the balance or imbalance of power between them, and the balancing and ‘bandwagoning’ impact this has on the behaviour of others; the liberal internationalist school from which the globalisation project comes; the structuralist school of Marxist theoreticians (including Chinese Marxists) and the central organising principles of classes rather than states in shaping domestic and international political behaviour; and the constructivist school of international relations, including the English School – and its more nuanced rendering of realism through what my compatriot Hedley Bull described as the concept of “international society”.

As a foreign policy practitioner myself, as a previous Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and professional diplomat, I particularly understand the sub-field of Foreign Policy Analysis (or FPA) as perhaps the most realistic description of the factors that decision makers must weigh in reaching a given decision. Within this framework, one of the most critical domains for foreign policy decision-makers is understanding how the other party thinks, why they think that way, and based on that, how to carve a pathway forward; be it on tariffs, or Taiwan. That is where the field of “area studies” enters the fray, often seen as a poor cousin to the grand theories of the discipline. In my view, this should no longer be the case. In short, the essential organising principle of area studies is to interpret, to understand and therefore to navigate “the other” in the cold hard praxis of foreign policy reality – or as the title of my lecture naively puts it, to put the “foreign” back into “foreign policy.”

Area studies serve first to understand how basic factors such as different constraints and opportunities presented by geography, geology and the allocation of natural resources shape different national perceptions of scarcity and vulnerability; second, how differences in history and historiography shape different popular and elite perceptions of a given international reality; third, how language, literature and culture can sharpen rather than blunt pre-existing assumptions about the “other” in international relations; fourth, how different political philosophies, ideologies and systems can produce radically different conclusions about how to deal with what we may perceive to be a common challenge facing us all; fifth, the domestic drivers of decisions within different polities, rather than breezily assuming that the thing we call “the state” in international relations should be taken for granted, that we need not or cannot interrogate it further, or that it is some sort of dark, mysterious ‘black box’ driven by its own deep logic, rather than the usual types of institutional untidiness made up of conflicting domestic personalities, ambitions and agendas. Finally, underpinning the above, area studies serve radically different assumptions in the eternal debate between “structure” and “agency” in international relations theory and practice.

As a foreign policy practitioner, I have long thought that there is something inherently counter-factual in the dismal fatalism of John Mearsheimer’s version of realism in which structure routinely triumphs over agency. For different reasons, I have also found impractical the cheery optimism of liberal internationalist theorists who believe, a priori, that the inherent “structure” of political and economic liberalism, reinforced by a framework of international institutions, will inevitably deliver a more inter-dependent and less bellicose world. As for the structuralists themselves, the idea that various forms

of historical determinism are driving the world inexorably towards some sort of long-term Marxist paradise is the least persuasive theoretical paradigm of all, although we must be mindful of the fact that it does represent the official ideological orthodoxy of the Chinese Communist Party and therefore the People's Republic of China.

Constructivists at least subscribe to the proposition that it lies within our individual agency as representatives of states to "construct" various forms of global and regional order. Whereas Foreign Policy Analysis, either in its realist or constructivist variants, provides us with a more balanced perspective on the impact of structure and agency on a given foreign policy reality. It recognises, for example, that foreign policy decision-makers are deeply influenced by the complex "structure" of the global forces at work in shaping the emerging international system. At the same time, Foreign Policy Analysis recognises the "agency" of foreign policy decision-makers in capitals as they seek to balance a range of domestic and international factors in charting the way forward.

Once again, this is where "area studies" becomes the natural academic bedfellow of foreign policy analysis, in the critical role it can play in drawing together the disparate insights of political science, economics, history (including diplomatic history), religious studies, comparative cultures as well as through the plain, old fashioned but intellectually taxing study of foreign languages. For these are the academic tools through which we can help define the granular reality of "otherness" in international relations, in support of the practical work of foreign policy decision-makers, rather than blithely assuming the rest of the world somehow thinks and perceives reality as we do. The singular contribution of area studies, as the title of this lecture suggests, is to bring back the "foreign" into the disciplined practice of "foreign policy." It does so not just by analysing the complex external terrain which the foreign policy decision-maker must confront, but also by synthesising the advice that is provided, so that the decision-maker can make sense of how a particular decision is likely to be received. In other words, will the policy decision in question achieve its policy objective? Will it have the reverse effect? Or is it all just a wild shot into the dark where the un-stated objective of a given decision is often to satisfy the needs of domestic political signalling within the decision-making state, as opposed to materially changing the real-world foreign or security policy behaviour of the state that is supposedly the object of that decision.

### **The Application of Theoretical Frameworks to US-China Relations**

How does all this play out in relation to US-China relations under Xi Jinping? How do we best understand China's "otherness?" How do we best define China's "foreignness." Is there, for example, a useful theoretical framework for understanding the Chinese Communist Party's evolving ideological worldview and its impact on China's domestic and foreign policy direction under Xi Jinping? And where do we locate Xi's worldview within a framework that provides insight into the ideological and policy changes that have unfolded over the last decade across Chinese politics, economics, and foreign policy. What I propose to do in the remainder of this lecture is to try to apply the major schools and sub-schools of international relations theory listed above to the unfolding reality of contemporary US-China relations. In so doing, I hope to offer some tentative

conclusions on which of these theoretical paradigms might offer the most productive and predictive insights into the future.

### Realism

Let us start once again with realism. Western “realist”, “neo-realist” or so-called “structural realist” frameworks for interpreting China’s worldview, and the strategic policy settings that flow from it, are in plentiful supply. This applies to both the “offensive” and “defensive” variations of realist theory. The principal standard-bearer for the offensive-realist view of China’s international strategy is John Mearsheimer. This is stated most starkly in the 2014 edition of Mearsheimer’s book, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.<sup>1</sup> This book dedicates its concluding chapter to proving that China, irrespective of the public ideation advanced by its leaders on the question of China’s emerging capabilities and intentions, provides just one further example of what every great power seeks to do: “to maximise its share of world power and eventually dominate the system.”<sup>2</sup>

Mearsheimer argues further that despite American claims to some form of moral exceptionalism, offensive realism is precisely the script that the United States itself followed in its own international policy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It did so by first becoming the uncontested regional great power in the Americas, before then becoming the uncontested global superpower in the post-war era. Mearsheimer sees no reason why China’s regional and global behaviour will be any different:

*“China will want to make sure that it is so powerful that no state in Asia will have the wherewithal to threaten it...Of course, it is always possible that Chinese leaders will conclude that it is imperative to attack another country to achieve regional hegemony. It is more likely, however, that China will seek to grow its economy and become so powerful it will dictate the acceptable boundaries for behaviour for neighbouring countries and will make it clear they will pay a substantial price if they do not follow the rules.”<sup>3</sup>*

Per Mearsheimer’s argument, China will seek to push the United States out of the Asia Pacific region by developing its own variation of the Monroe Doctrine under which the US expelled European powers from the Western Hemisphere. China will also want its great power neighbours in Asia (Japan, India, and Russia) to become weaker and more isolated from sources of international support beyond the region, namely the US.

### Liberal Internationalism

The principal alternative theoretical discourse for explaining China’s evolving international engagement is liberalism, neo-liberalism, or liberal institutionalism. Liberal international relations theorists such as Robert Keohane share several underlying “positivist” assumptions with realists, including the existence of a state of “international anarchy” and the “rational egoism of states” in which states act as rational actors in the maximization of their national self-interests.<sup>4</sup> Where liberalism differs from realism is its underlying Kantian proposition that these interests are best secured not through “self-help”, power maximization, the balance of power and, where necessary, war. But rather through rational decisions in support of peaceful cooperation, the development of an

international “liberal” rules-based system, ultimately anchored in liberal democratic politics, open markets and international institutions that give systematic effect to these values.<sup>5</sup>

John Ikenberry, a prominent exponent of liberal internationalist theory, has argued that there is a logic of “enmeshment and entrapment” into the liberal order that also applies to rising China. According to Ikenberry, “...once such an order is in place, a rising state seeking to replace the existing order faces a daunting task...[because] even if such a China-led international order could be imagined, the sunk costs and system effects that are generated by the existing order create higher barriers to change.”<sup>6</sup> Ikenberry adds that as the liberal international order “gains in global scope, it becomes more powerful and wealthy relative to the alternatives” and that this places rising states seeking to create an alternative at an increasing disadvantage.<sup>7</sup> More broadly, Ikenberry also controversially contends that beyond the accumulated “functionality” of the existing order for all members of that order, including China, the future of the liberal international system is not necessarily contingent on continuing American hegemony. Writing nearly a decade later, however, and already several years into Xi Jinping’s presidency, Ikenberry in 2015 advanced a more cautious analysis in which he concedes the likelihood of a greater “struggle” for the terms of the new global order between China and the US.<sup>8</sup> Ikenberry’s overall conclusions concerning a China-dominated liberal international order of the future nonetheless remained optimistic: “...the United States and China will no doubt struggle and compete over the rules and the institutions of the international order, but this struggle will not be full-scale ideological battle for two divergent visions of twenty-first-century world order.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Structuralism**

The third “positivist” school of international relations theory, beyond realism and liberalism, is Marxism or “structuralism.” Whereas Marxist propositions animated Chinese official thinking about China’s place in the world under Mao’s “Three Worlds Theory,” Mao’s doctrine of permanent revolution and the Maoist practice of international solidarity, these principles had been quietly entombed under Deng, Jiang, and Hu after Mao had passed from the scene. The reason was clear: under Deng, Chinese Marxism, or “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, was now to embrace a socialist “market” economy where despite continued state ownership of land and the continued presence of state-owned enterprises, the “market” was now intended to play the principal role in the allocation of resources. Permanent class struggle (the engine room of dialectical materialism) as a means of securing permanent revolution, either at home or abroad, had been officially abandoned; as had Chinese support, political or material, for international Marxist movements.

This nonetheless presented a marked contradiction between classical Marxist concepts on the exploitative and hegemonic nature of global capitalism on the one hand, and China’s new and active participation in this self-same neo-liberal globalization project on the other. Enter Xi Jinping, whose repeated calls for a return to greater Marxist orthodoxy in China’s domestic ideological debate has probed the question of where Xi might now take all this in any future revision of his international worldview. Indeed, if this ideological revision has happened on the homefront, it also invites a parallel Marxist

critique of the liberal-international abroad, given that Marxism-Leninism is a totalising theoretical framework which seeks to cover the field. Marxist-Leninist perspectives, both as a dialectical methodology, a corpus of ideological conclusions about the ideal end-state of the world and how best to get there, can no longer be ignored as simple political nostalgia in any analysis of Xi's evolving domestic and international worldview. Furthermore, this emerging Marxist critique of critical aspects of China's pre-existing domestic and international model has taken the country further away from Ikenberry's theorized neo-liberal convergence.

### **Constructivism**

Since the end of the Cold War, constructivism as a theory of international relations has increasingly challenged the duopoly of realism and liberalism as the principal explanatory devices for explaining changing international realities. The collective failure of mainstream, "positivist-rationalist" international relations theory to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union and the peaceful end of the Cold War fuelled this change. This opened the door to other approaches, including Alexander Wendt in his *Social Theory of International Relations* in 1992. Wendt challenged the ontological and epistemological assumptions of previous IR theory by invoking a new post-positivist approach to IR drawn from other branches of social theory, most particularly constructivism.<sup>10</sup> Constructivism in international relations theory argues that the idea that international reality was exclusively a material phenomenon was incomplete and that IR was at least equally a social, cultural and ideational phenomenon driven from within states.

### **The English School**

Constructivist contributions to international relations theory have influenced the recent evolution of the "English School" and its advocacy of the concept of "international society." It argues that there are values, norms and rules that form the fabric of an international society which can militate against the worst forms of unilateral action by states, while still falling short of a perfect, liberal rules-based order. The English School also argued that the realism of the "balance of power," and even "limited war," remained as "institutions" in the underlying international order. But these factors did not preclude the evolution of a society of states which, while falling short of the dreams of liberal institutionalists, could nonetheless act to prevent global conflagration.

Andrew Hurrell, influenced by both constructivist IRT and the English School in particular, defines the "threefold nature of the challenge facing international society" as: the need to manage unequal power in international relations, the need to "capture shared and common interests," and the need "to mediate cultural and value conflict."<sup>11</sup> This is a useful typology for describing the challenges we face with China's changing worldview and its changing patterns of regional and global engagement. In answering these three challenges, Hurrell acknowledges the different traditions alive in the English School itself on the relative "thinness" and "thickness" of the rules, norms and values of the international society to be constructed.



This could either take the form of a limited, minimalist society of “pluralist” sovereign states which accepted “a pessimistic view of the constraints of power politics, as well as a deep scepticism regarding the depth of value consensus that is ever likely to exist across the states and societies of the world.”<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, it could take the form of a more maximalist “liberal solidarist” society of states, “capable of fulfilling a broader range of political and moral purposes...that strives to narrow the gap between law and politics, and between law and morality.”<sup>13</sup> In understanding the complexity of these possibilities, both over time and in different geographies, Hurrell also emphasises that “history matters,” “not as an argument about eternal recurrence and endless reproduction,” but instead as the means for the “uncovering of actors’ understandings of international politics and the ways in which these understandings have been gathered into intelligible patterns, traditions or ideologies.”<sup>14</sup>

Based on this view of history, Hurrell also argues that both “material” and “social” structures matter in international relations, and that “international social structures are seen not as ‘natural’ features in world politics, but as produced and re-produced in the concrete social practices of social actors in inter-subjective meanings...embedded in historical practice and in historically constructed normative structures.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, consistent with the constructivist tradition’s particular view of the role of human agency in shaping these social constructions on international relations, Hurrell underlines the powerful “role of ideas in understanding and explaining political action.”

Although Hurrell’s seminal 2007 account of constructivism and the English School does not seek specifically to apply his approach to either China or Asia, it provides a useful theoretical framework that lends itself to the emerging realities of Xi Jinping’s ideological challenge to the current order. Evelyn Goh, however, has explicitly argued the applicability of the principles of the English School, and its evolving constructivist concept of “international society,” in seeking to understand China’s rise within East Asia. Goh argues that “in East Asia, debates about power and order congregate around two looming trends: the changing character of America’s preponderance, and the rise of China, and that these twin concerns give rise to three alternative narratives about the future of the global order and the role of Asia as within it.”<sup>16</sup> Goh specifically rejects the simple binary of US decline and China’s rise as providing an effective understanding of the long-term processes involved in the evolution of any new post-cold-war order in East Asia. Indeed, she argues that we have witnessed a “parallel resurgence” of both American and Chinese power across the region in the decades following 1991, with the former remaining predominant.<sup>17</sup>

This, she contends, has not resulted in any classical “power transition,” but instead has produced a more complex process of interaction between the US, China and regional states as part of “order transition.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than exclusively relying on the exercise of raw power, Goh argues that regional hegemons, such as the US and China, are instead seeking to negotiate varying forms of “social compacts” with non-hegemonic states within their region – compacts which over time elaborate the values, norms, rules and associated mutual expectations of the emerging regional order. This is not a neat linear process as classical “power transition theory” would normally imply. Instead, it is iterative, also involving differing “ideations” on the part of hegemonic powers as to what the order might look like for its various participants and on various issues.

Goh's adaptation of the historical insights of the English School, drawn from the European experience, and applied to the emerging questions of order in East Asia, is innovative and insightful. It helps us understand both the processes in which China's changing worldview is being applied to its immediate region and the American and wider regional response to it. Earlier English School conclusions on the continued cogency of realist concepts of hegemony, "power balancing" and "order" remain active in her analysis. However, Goh also adds to these a specific understanding of "international society" in East Asia – a reflection of what she calls the "fundamentally social nature of the international system." Goh draws explicitly on Hedley Bull's insights on the role of norms, rules and expectations that "constitute, regulate and make predictable international life."<sup>19</sup> She argues that in East Asia, this necessarily involves "ideational and normative" engagement in the construction of the fabric of the order, rather than the simple application of realist brute force by one hegemon or another. I argue this concept of "ideational engagement" also provides theoretical space for the role of ideology – and in China's case the domestic and international expression of China's emerging Marxist-Nationalist worldview.

### **Foreign Policy Analysis**

Finally, Foreign Policy Analysis or FPA, offers a supplementary theoretical framework within the constructivist paradigm for analysing China's changing international engagement under Xi Jinping. FPA agrees with realism that the state is regarded as the "general actor" in international relations. But to understand what is actually happening in foreign policy behaviour, it is critical to look beyond the "black box" of the state and instead look "within" the state to identify the individual human beings that make foreign policy decisions, in addition to the full range of factors that impact the decision-making process.<sup>20</sup> FPA is also an assertion of the primacy of the individual "agent" over the "structure" of the foreign policy process. FPA is concerned too with "multi-dimensional" influences on the foreign policy process. These include the intersection of material and ideational factors, including the role of "ideas" as a determining factor in the choice of specific courses of action. They also include the impact of historical memory, cultural identity, political ideology and domestic political factors on foreign policy decisions. Importantly, they also recognise the "two-level game" of intersecting foreign and domestic political considerations; internal bureaucratic, advisory and interest group competition in decision-making processes; and, most critically leadership types including the psychological profile of individual decision-makers.<sup>21</sup>

In a highly centralised, one-party state such as China, the role of individual leaders within the political system is paramount. Zhang Qingmin, for example, having analysed the impact of both Mao's and Deng's different leadership types on the content of Chinese foreign policy decision-making over several decades, has argued that for IR theory to offer a useful understanding of China's international policy and worldview requires an "integrated approach that brings leadership personality back into the centre of the analysis."<sup>22</sup> Zhang argues that structural realism provides an explanation for some Chinese decisions on strategic balancing between the Soviet Union and the US during the first half-century of the history of the People's Republic. But it does not offer sufficient explanatory power for understanding other decisions: for example, the Sino-

Soviet split, Beijing's equidistance between Moscow and Washington during the 1960s, nor Beijing's failure to rebalance away from the US in the immediate period following the end of the Cold War. Zhang argues that an alternative explanation is necessary to explain these decisions. Given the hierarchical nature of Chinese politics, and the strength of the political personalities of Mao, Deng and Xi, Zhang argues that this can only be achieved by "bridging Western theories of foreign policy analysis with Chinese area studies."<sup>23</sup>

I agree with Zhang's conclusions on this. David Houghton has addressed the wider question of where to locate FPA within the broader inter-paradigm debates of mainstream IR theory, noting that 'for many years, the study of foreign policy analysis has been a type of free-floating enterprise, logically unconnected to, and disconnected from, the main theories of international relations.'<sup>24</sup> Houghton nonetheless identifies specific areas of common ground between constructivism and foreign policy analysis, including the centrality of human agency in constructing social reality, the impact of "ideation" on individual acts of social behaviour, and the importance of "identity" in shaping political decisions.<sup>25</sup> Once again, I agree with Houghton's analysis in seeing FPA as a natural expression of one form of constructivist reality.

## Conclusion

To conclude, I argue that FPA therefore offers a constructivist account of Xi Jinping's worldview, while also recognising the continuing significance of realist understandings of the balance of power. I do so for the following reasons. First, any account of Xi's worldview must accommodate the central role of ideology within the Chinese political system as a means of communicating the policy intent of the leadership to the party and country. Second, Xi's ideological worldview is ultimately indivisible between the foreign and the domestic. Whereas Deng may have sought to accept an international political reality that was significantly at variance from his domestic political-economic circumstances, Xi has indicated that he is no longer willing to do so. Moreover, beyond ideology, there are also other domestic political and economic factors impacting China's decision-making processes which require us to look well beyond the "black box" of the Chinese state. FPA helps give theoretical shape to these critical domestic drivers of Chinese international relations behaviour. Third, unlike a classical constructivist approach which rejects a critical role for realist notions of the balance of power, Foreign Policy Analysis has no such difficulty. Indeed, in China's case, I argue that the CCP's assessments of "comprehensive national power" relative to the US continue to exert a decisive influence on the international policy decisions of the leadership. And no analytical paradigm can reasonably exclude it. Fourth, the advantage of the constructivist tradition of the English School of international relations is that it seeks to bring all these various elements together within a single framework. Fifth, and most importantly for our purposes here this evening, is that an essential ingredient to this overall constructivist approach to understanding, predicting and therefore navigating the unfolding trajectory of US-China relations remains the discipline of "area studies".

Determinist views of international relations (be they realist, liberal institutionalist or structuralist) by and large render "area studies" obsolete. That is because the particularities of national conditions are usually relegated to the margins by these

hegemonic theories of international relations. These grand theoretical frameworks describe a vast array of irresistible forces at work in deeply shaping the structure of the international order, irrespective of the efforts that individual states or their leaders may make in exercising their political agency as effective actors in the international system. By contrast, I argue that the most instructive framework for understanding the future of US-China relations is:

1. First, a constructivist approach as rendered through the English School of international relations theory,
2. Second, an approach that is defined through the disciplines of Foreign Policy Analysis, and
3. Third, one that is refined further through the rigorous pursuit of “area studies” into what lies beneath and behind the “black box” of the Chinese party state.

This approach also allows scholars, within this overall framework, to apply insights from other theoretical contributions including Authoritarian Resilience Theory, Power Transition Theory and its first cousin Order Transition Theory. Most importantly, this broad conceptual approach to understanding and navigating US-China relations recognises the agency of individual political actors. That, for example, is how I went about framing my own contribution to the field by offering a framework of “Managed Strategic Competition” in my book entitled *The Avoidable War*. That framework is based on a recognition of a changing balance of power, the need to construct an order capable of governing the relationship between these two great powers, and to do so in a manner fully mindful of the domestic priorities and external perceptions of both the United States and the Chinese party state. That approach stands in contrast to the stark visions of either heaven, hell or socialist nirvana - offered respectively by liberal institutionalists, Mearsheimerian realists or Marxist determinists.

The reality is that we all have agency. And it is true that some have more agency than others. But we are not helpless, feckless, unwitting pawns in the hands of structural forces beyond our control. And that is why I choose to be a realistic optimist in our ability to navigate the complex shoals that lie ahead in US-China relations in this long, long decade – this “decade of living dangerously”.

## Notes

1. Mearsheimer, John J. "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics", The Norton Series in World Politics. Updated edition. ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014.
2. John Mearsheimer, *Can China Rise Peacefully?*, 2014, p.363.
3. *Ibid.*, p.370.
4. Keohane, Robert O., "After Hegemony", Princeton University Press, 2005.
5. *Ibid.*
6. John Ikenberry, "The Logic of Order: Westphalia, Liberalism and the Evolution of International Order in the Modern Era", In John Ikenberry (ed.), *Power, Order, and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.83-106.
7. *Ibid.*
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