The Multiple Audiences Dynamic of Status Dissatisfaction: Examining China's Shifting Response to the Emerging Global Environmental Regime, 1950-1972

Zikun Yang[1]

Abstract

How does status dissatisfaction shape a state's behavior? Emerging accounts of role status—those that replace valued (material) traits with recurrent action/performance as the source of status—posit that status-sensitive states are more defiant against a regime's collective mobilization when their dominant roles are challenged by the audience. Yet, this unidimensional understanding of international audiences misses an important difference between two groups: those *superiorly* positioned above the state and those *subordinately* positioned below it on the status hierarchy. Focusing on two sources of role status—recognition from above and deference from below—I propose a two-dimensional framework of multiple audiences dynamic that generates four ideal types of role status scenarios. These include *systematic recognition* (high recognition and high deference); *unfair treatment* (low recognition and high deference); *bottom-up provocation* (high recognition and low deference); *systematic exclusion* (low recognition and low deference). I illustrate my framework by examining China's shifting response to the emerging global environmental regime from 1950 to 1972. Beijing's status concerns vis-à-vis the US, the USSR, and the Third World countries induced it to change from initial embracement (1950-52), challenge from within (1953-55); persistent objection (1956-70), to final participation (1971-72) in the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (UNCHE).

Keywords:

Status; Role Theory; China; Status Dissatisfaction

---

[1] PhD candidate in Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge. Email: zy301@cam.ac.uk

In June 2022, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) condemned the US for "applying hypocritical double standard [of] human rights…[to] unscrupulously contain, suppress, and…block China from its role as a major power" (China, 2022). One year later, the US *Ending China's Developing Nation Status Act* received a similar reprimand. "The US is not labeling China a 'developed country' out of appreciation or recognition for China's development success," explained Beijing: "the real motive behind ending China's developing country status is to hold back China's development" (China, 2023). Within three months, President Xi Jinping absented from the 2023 Group of 20 (G20) summit in New Delhi. Some interpreted this move as a message of snub to a rising India, which paid insufficient deference to China's leadership role in the Global South (The Guardian, 2023).

Epitomized in these episodes is China's salient status dissatisfaction. Rather than contesting its position on a hierarchy of valued (material) traits and capacities, Beijing worried more about its performance, authority, and being assigned to a subaltern role vis-à-vis Washington and New Delhi in front of the international community. This role-oriented status concern has rekindled scholars' interest amidst the "relational and behavioral turn" of International Relations (IR) (McCourt, 2016; Jackson and Nexon, 2019). Pioneered by Reinhard Wolf (2019, 2022) and borrowing from role theory scholarship, this literature supplements a material attribute-based hierarchy with an asymmetrical social deference hierarchy, where a state induces its status from behavioral interactions between itself (ego) and other states (alter). It suggests that a state sensitive to "being altercasted into subaltern roles" by audiences would risk defying the collective mobilization, thereby "undercut[ing] this disconcerting pattern of deference" to preserve its superordinate role and international status (Wolf, 2022: 1).

I argue that this emerging role status account, while addressing material reductionism in status literature, warrants further scrutiny for its narrow understanding of role theory. Specifically, the original role theory goes beyond asymmetrical dyadic interactions between two nation-states. It highlights both a state's various and even contradicting roles vis-à-vis multiple significant others concurrently (Wehner, 2016; Malici and Walker, 2016), and domestic actors' heterogeneous conceptions of national roles/counter-roles (Demirduzen and Thies, 2022; Wehner and Thies, 2014; Brummer and Thies, 2016). In other words, while negative altercasting undermines a state's status in a binary relation, it may neither damage its overall status on the multilateral hierarchy nor automatically trigger defiant status-seeking behaviors as some IR scholars posit. An effective

translation of role theory into status literature requires us to delve into complex role configurations and conflicts "toward *multiple alters*" at both the domestic and international levels (Walker, 2017, emphasis added).

Contra "binary role theory" underlined in this role status literature, I propose a multiple audiences dynamic framework to ascertain status implications on foreign policy. My framework applies a social psychological perception of states as anthropomorphic actors in a stratified international society. This setup allows me to focus on *inter-role conflicts* faced by a status-sensitive state when dealing with incongruent expectations from multiple international audiences.[i] I follow Lin (2023) to unpack multiple international audiences into two broad ideal categories: those superiorly positioned above the state and those inferiorly positioned below it on the international pecking order. The state enacts a deference role towards the established powers during dyadic upward interactions, and a dominant one vis-à-vis smaller states during dyadic downward interactions. It is the various degrees of *recognition from above* and *deference from below*—two types of role status markers—that lead to four possible role status scenarios: (1) *systematic recognition* (simultaneous appraisal from both directions); (2) *unfair treatment* (little recognition from above with sufficient deference from below); (3) *bottom-up provocation* (top-down recognition accompanied by little bottom-up deference); (4) *systematic exclusion* (simultaneous disapproval from both directions). Only the last scenario would trigger the state's provocative status-seeking response through defiance.

I illustrate this framework in the case of China's shifting response to the emerging global environmental regime from 1950 to 1972, a period of norm entrepreneurship on balancing economic development and environmental protection. Despite its sovereigntist and anthropocentric worldview, Maoist China motivated by its role status concerns vis-à-vis the US, the USSR, and the Third World countries participated in this nascent regime, a new battlefield of normative legitimacy and resource distribution. My multinational-multilingual archival records reconstruct the process of complex recognition-deference interactions, which unfolded into systematic recognition (1950-52), bottom-up provocation (1953-55), systematic exclusion (1956-70), and unfair treatment (1971-72). These four scenarios thus swung Beijing's attitudinal pendulum between initial embracement, persistent defiance, and final participation in the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (UNCHE). Although absent from the four preparatory meetings (1969-1972), China during the 12-days UNCHE successfully advocated for

its development-first experience and pushed the final Stockholm Declaration to prioritize sovereign rights to development over environmental obligation.

Theoretically, this article facilitates conversations among role theory in foreign policy analysis, status research, and norms studies in IR. By bringing in the original role theory with an emphasis on micro-foundations of state behaviors in social interactions, it enables status scholars to address material reductionism (in trait status) and fixation on great powers (within dyadic relations). It further theorizes the relational, interactive, and multilateral nature of status concerns. Moreover, my framework challenges power transition theory's bellicist thesis of status dissatisfaction. Whether a rising China would resort to provocative revisionism to address unmet role status demand under the Liberal International Order (LIO) depends on this multivocality of role status towards various international audiences. Turning to norms literature, because role status dissatisfaction can now result in cooperation/compliance, norm-taking can no longer serve as a submission-revision yardstick. This framework separates competitive socialization (challenging from within) from conventional cooperative socialization (we-feeling followership), and advances a new pathway to extrapolate the intention, tactics, and agency of China's norm contestation.

Empirically, this is the first article known to utilize multinational-multilingual archival records to reconstruct China's process-level performance in environmental treaty negotiations. It encourages IR scholars to explore global Cold War historical archives (Kinsella and Mantilla, 2020), thereby opening the black box of Chinese foreign policymaking.

This article proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the existing literature on status dissatisfaction and defiance amidst the shift from a trait-based to role-based approach to status conceptualization. Section two scrutinizes the binary role status concept and suggests the multiple audiences dynamic as a feasible corrective framework. Section three compartmentalizes role status dissatisfaction according to this framework and investigates what frustrates a state in the upward and downward social interactions. Section four demonstrates this framework with an archive-based process-tracing of China's environmental foreign policy (1950-June 1972). A discussion of my article's contributions concludes this article.

Status and Status Dissatisfaction: From Trait to Role

Though not a novel concept, status has resurged in mainstream IR in the past two decades. Cognate semantically with prestige, honor, and reputation (Dafoe et al, 2014; Wolf, 2019), it is

typically defined as the collectively believed standing of a (state) actor in the social hierarchy of "valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout)" (Larson et al., 2014: 7).

Status literature is largely anchored to a positional-social psychological dichotomy for conceptualization (MacDonald and Parent, 2021; Götz; 2021). For the former, status is a state's relative ranking measured continuously by attribute possession, or a positional good instrumental for stratified privileges, voluntary deference, and other tangible benefits (Renshon, 2016; 2017). Material attributes, however, cannot directly translate into higher status without the collective belief of referent groups. After WWII, the US and USSR invited France, China, and India rather than materially stronger Japan to join the Big Five (Heimann and Paikowsky, 2022). Thus, a state dissatisfied with the gap between its expected and socially-recognized status can resort to status-quo-defying strategies[ii]: withdrawal from international organizations (Ward, 2013), geopolitical competition (Murray 2010; Fikenscher et al., 2015; Paikowsky, 2017; Lin, 2021), and most intensively war-making (Lebow, 2010; Greve and Levy, 2018; Barnhart, 2016; Murray, 2018; Røren, 2023).

For the latter, this positional reading errs too much on material attributes at the expense of social recognition (Duque, 2018). Instead, this group interprets status as membership of defined groups (e.g., G20 or the UN Security Council, UNSC) with intrinsic values. Since individuals derive self-esteem, prestige, and pride from their ingroup identity vis-à-vis the outgroups (Frank, 1985; Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979), status becomes an intersubjective and affective identity validated by others based on social criteria of evaluation. The Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests that impermissible elite groups within an unfair status hierarchy can incite a dissatisfied state's spoiler conduct (Larson and Shevchenko, 2019; cf. Ward, 2019). Principle among them are relinquishing group memberships—exemplified by Taisho Japan's 1933 exit from the League of the Nations to protest racial discrimination (Ward, 2013)—and defying elite clubs' rules, such as India's 1970 opposition to the Non-Proliferation Treaty that denounced India's great power status earned by its scientific achievements (NMML-1).

While disagreeing on types of status markers (material versus non-material) and how to obtain them, these two frameworks identify the same *source* of status: a consensual rule of valued attributes predetermined by international hierarchy's structure (Mattern and Zarakol, 2016). Both read status off a state's socially-esteemed attributes/characteristics, or its *traits*. Yet, this structural

and trait-based approach leaves several theoretical and empirical gaps. Neither can it capture domestic actors' heterogeneous interpretation and contestation of valued attributes (Ward, 2019; Beaumont, 2020), such as Chinese hardliners' and moderates' disagreements on Beijing's 1960s Vietnam policies (Wang, 2021). Nor can it explain a status-seeking state's revisionist conducts deleterious to its attributes and achievement, a puzzle that abounds in Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and rising powers (Ward, 2017).

A search for non-trait and non-structural approaches to status thus sprouts to address this lacuna.[iii] Material attributes are supplanted by recognition (Ong, 2012; Murray, 2019), moral authority (Wohlforth et al, 2018), and performance (Pouliot, 2016; Subotic and Vucetic, 2019). To better capture social/ideational dimensions of status, which was previously examined in isolation, some apply a Neo-Weberian approach to interpret international hierarchy as a social stratification process with multiple ranks to vertically order states into superordination-subordination (Keene, 2013; 2014; Zarakol, 2011; Shultz, 2019; Duque, 2018; Naylor, 2019; 2022). A state is no longer a self-subsistent entity that comes before social interactions, the source of status vis-à-vis others (Jackson and Nexon, 2019).

This relational logic of status and dissatisfaction is arguably best theoretically and conceptually advanced by Reinhard Wolf (2019; 2022). Wolf posits that a state's status dissatisfaction often stems from being *mistreated* rather than being *misperceived* by the referent groups. Just as China and Russia reprimanded the US reluctance to grant them higher status commensurate to their ascending material capability (Larson and Shevchenko, 2014), Wilhelmine Germany was annoyed at "arrogance and selfishness of the English" that treated it differently from France during the Moroccan crises (GDD-1). Wolf buttresses these empirics with social psychologists' finding of two sources of status: peer recognition based on collective beliefs (trait perception); dominance and deference in interactions (behavioral treatment) (Anderson et al., 2012; Cheng et al., 2014; Halevy et al., 2012; Maner and Case, 2016). Thus, he broadens the conceptual scope to supplant a conventional *trait status* on a prestige hierarchy with a behavior-based *role status* on a deference hierarchy. Whereas the former requires at least three states to have a collective belief, the latter can exist among two actors in a pair of asymmetrical and co-constitutive roles and counter-roles, such as teacher-student and socializer-socializee (Wolf, 2022; Wendt, 1999). This dyadic relation prepares Wolf (2022: 4-5) to introduce role theory insights into status

dissatisfaction: a state prone to altercasting into counter-role would seek defiance to consolidate its superior role status vis-à-vis its counterpart for present and hopefully future interactions.

Though still a burgeoning concept, role status in a deference hierarchy gains traction gradually among IR scholars (He and Feng, 2022; Andornino, 2023; Wood, 2023). Contra trait status' need for proxies to measure collective belief regarding valued attributes, role status relies on observable deference patterns and behaviors in interstate and/or intrastate interactions. This behavioral approach to status—echoing role theory[iv]—grants role status two more advantages. One, it emphasizes both states' and individuals' agency in understanding, enacting, and responding to their roles vis-à-vis the alters, thereby offering a potential solution to address the structure-agent problem (Thies, 2010; Breuning, 2011). Two, because role theory takes both material and ideational factors into consideration (Breuning, 2018), role status can be more eclectic to capture a state's rational and social choices in social interactions.

In short, status literature has experienced an incremental yet crucial transition. From a structural and trait-based approach to a relational and behavioral role-based approach, status has evolved from a function of material attributes to one of social roles with rational, ideational, and emotional-affective significance. Yet, the question remains as to whether this conceptualization effectively imports role theory's insights to status research. The following section scrutinizes Wolf's binary role status framework, suggesting critical and yet underexplored spaces for conceptual refinements.

Revisiting Role Status: From Dyadic to Multilateral

Wolf's role status concept synthesizes the politics of recognition/dignity (2011; 2018) and emotionalized status perception's impact on foreign policy (2017; 2020). To refute the SIT's emphasis on collective belief, Wolf borrows from the "binary role theory" (Walker, 2011; Malici and Walker, 2017; Walker et al., 2021), and identifies "dyadic contests for dominance" as the "most significant drivers of status competition" (Wolf, 2019: 1204). The implication is that, for a state contesting against its counterpart for exclusive rights/privileges entailed by a role on the deference hierarchy, the third-party audience's belief and influence can be arguably irrelevant (Wolf, 2022: 2).

However, this bilateral and unidimensional framework is less satisfactory in at least three ways. First, while examining the ego-alter role conflict in a bilateral and interstate context, Wolf's

framework leaves out the original role theory's emphasis on multiple and even conflictual roles induced from "different sets of established relationships in the world or within a region" (Holsti, 1970: 277). Contradictory role expectations in practice appear widely among dissonant international audiences (inter-role conflicts) and discordant domestic and international audiences (intra-role conflicts) (Cantir and Kaarbo, 2016; Wehner and Thies, 2014; Wehner, 2016; Demirduzen and Thies, 2022). Just as Indonesia swings between promoting domestic and regional democratization and defending authoritarian Myanmar globally, Vietnam enacts diverse roles expected by its population, China, and Western allies (Karim, 2023; Huang, 2020). Wolf's narrow reading of role theory could mislead scholars to reduce a single counterpart/alter into a homogenous entity, thereby repeating the same state-centrism and "fixation on major powers" faced by the trait status framework (Renshon, 2017).

Second, Wolf's framework emphasizes dyads "at the expense of possible influence of third parties" (2022: 2; 2019: 1200). Since asymmetrical deference-dominance patterns can emerge in isolated and private face-to-face encounters (Henrich and Gil-White, 2001; Mazur, 2005; Fiske, 2010), Wolf reads role status as primarily dependent on a state's unilateral acts, and sees the third-party audiences as unnecessary to the outcome of a dyadic dominance contestation. However, role theory researchers have long identified audiences as indispensable yet underexplored components for social interactions (Thies, 2010). Not only can third parties provide cues for actors and influence actors' credibility, but they also shape, validate, and maintain roles and counter-roles over time (Sarbin and Allen 1968: 527–34; Walker, 1979; Breuning, 2011; Harnisch, 2011; Teles Faszendeiro, 2021). Similarly, social psychologists discover that public exposure would intensify an actor's level of humiliation (Klein, 1991; Combs et al., 2010; Fernández et al., 2023; Mann et al., 2017). Take the Sino-Philippines South China Sea dispute as an example. The Philippines' pursuit of international arbitration—an "unilateral act of defiance"—did not overturn the dyadic relationship to make it superior vis-à-vis China, which saw that it "is just a fact…[that] China is a big country and other[s] are small countries" (Washington Post, 2010). Moreover, had the third-party audiences been irrelevant as Wolf predicts, Beijing would not have denounced the US as "the mastermind behind the arbitration [that] ropes in allies to…gang up against China and to exert pressure, and force China into accepting" (China, 2023).

Finally, Wolf's framework suffers from an ambiguous and even contradictory account of the source of status dissatisfaction.[v] Originally defined as "an actor's overall position within

pertinent deference hierarchy" (Wolf, 2019: 1211), role status makes no explicit emphasis on status' zero-sum nature. Roles are not mutually exclusive to each other as one state can take "at least seventeen national role conceptions" simultaneously (Shih, 2012; Holsti, 1970: 273). In practice, role status dissatisfaction often concerns a "perceived" incongruence between self-claimed deservingness and external treatment, or "unfairness" derived from this social stratification's unequal rank order (Welch, 1995: 19). Empirical evidence of unequal treatment, lack of reciprocity, disrespect, and humiliation is observable across time and space: Hitler's annoyance towards the League of Nations' refusal of "grant[ing]…equity of rights…to present-day Germany" (DGFP-1); Russia's discomfort of being unjustly excluded from the G8 (Rathbun et al., 2022); China's frustration of border provocation by Vietnam in 1979 (FRUS-1).

In contrast, Wolf's binary role status (2022) implicitly incorporated exclusivity into an asymmetrical dyad. Since a superior role is relative to an inferior counter-role in a binary relationship, role status dissatisfaction stems from "exclusive privileges" entitled to a superior standing (Wolf, 2022: 4, 8). This zero-sum assumption raises several concerns. One, it cannot address the ideal scenario of balancing when two actors undertake the same role status (Goffman 1956, 479). Two, if an actor is always motivated to maximize exclusive privileges granted by the superior position, why would a superordinate state willingly elevate its counterpart's role status, as demonstrated by the US *Ending China's Developing Nation Status Act*? Even more puzzling is the subaltern state's deliberate selection and preservation of role status disproportionately lower than its self-perceived standing, or role-status minimizing. Besides China's refusal to renounce its developing state's status, it also resisted the "excessive praise" from the West: "We do not consider ourselves as the leader with primacy or an expert on this issue, and we would not take the leadership even when others invite us to do so" (PD-1).

Three, this competition for exclusive rank remains incongruent with Wolf's (2019; 2022) own empirical records. Wolf identified the same trigger of Russia's and Greece's defiance respectively to the US and international creditors of sovereign debt: their perceived subjugation into a subordinate role with little exclusive privilege. However, no explicit reference was made to either Moscow's privilege-maximizing attempt to demote Washington, or Athens's effort to reclaim superiority from international creditors. Instead, Wolf drew a lot from the Kremlin's intolerance for humiliation, refusal of "bow[ing] our head down," lessons to the US on "role equality", and restoration of Western respect (Wolf, 2022; 2019). Similarly, Athens was depicted

as a face-saving defender of its unique role as the "cradle of Western civilization" and its "deprived voice and agency that was due to every EU member (Wolf, 2018; 2020; 2022): "The only thing I care about is not being humiliated by Schaeuble and the rest of them" (Reuters, 2015).

Summarily, though parsimoniously addressing dyadic status politics, Wolf's role status conceptualization applies a narrow translation from role theory and social psychology. It leaves out role conflicts in a triad—an actor, its counterpart, and the third-party audiences on the international and/or domestic levels. Moreover, it risks conflating two fundamental sources of status dissatisfaction: (1) the zero-sum competition for exclusive privileges (on the prestige hierarchy); (2) the non-exclusive pursuit of fair and respectful treatment (on the deference hierarchy). This framework without refinement would misinterpret role status-seeking as a frequent destabilizer in world politics.

A potential response is to put a state back to its social interaction procedures with various alters, but simultaneously zoom in on its counterparts within pertinent dyads. Besides the structural-driven and ego-oriented individual role status, a state also obtains two more types of interactive role status: binary status conferred from bilateral transactions, and "third-party status" induced from multilateral encounters (Ferry and O'Brien-Udry, 2023). Aligning with a growing scholarly interest in how interactions and/or conflicts among these role statuses impact a state's status-seeking response (Pu, 2019; Fung, 2019), I propose my multiple audiences dynamic framework in the following section.

Multiple Audiences Dynamic Framework and Role Status Dissatisfaction

My framework attempts to illustrate the process of a state reconciling its individual, bilateral, and multilateral role status vis-à-vis multiple alters, a common topic of the role theory literature (Tewes, 1998; Harnish, 2011). Scholars in this vein categorize audiences in two broad ways: a horizontal differentiation between the domestic and international audiences; a vertical one between the regional and global audiences (Cantir and Kaarbo, 2016).

Given its anthropomorphic reading of states, my framework aligns with the latter but introduces a neo-Weberian approach to unpack audiences and social interactions. Role status refers to a state's social standing in an international hierarchy— "vertical social ordering of super- and sub-ordination" (Weber, 1968: 927-34). In practice, except for the hegemons on the top or peripheral states at the very bottom of the social ladder, a state could often find itself standing

between the *superiors* above it and the *inferiors* below it (Lin, 2023). This position in the middle of the social hierarchy thus compartmentalizes the state's social interactions into two types of asymmetrical relations with two referent groups.

In upward interactions, the state will appear both materially and socially subordinate to those with higher ranks within this asymmetrical dyad. It may involuntarily succumb to the superiors to avoid deleterious conflicts, instrumentally embrace their domination in exchange for material benefits and services (Lake, 2009; Ikenberry, 2001), and even voluntarily defer to their normative legitimacy and prestige (Johnston, 2008). Regardless of the subaltern's intention, its routinized deference can consolidate the superiors' dominating role as a social fact. This state is likely to articulate this relative inferiority in role enactment, and comply with the expectations of the alter occupying a domineering counter-role. Such bottom-up mimicry and deference in exchange for the superiors' recognition are epitomized in the Sinification of Korea and Japan to obtain a prestigious status as a tributary of China in the 5th Century (Huang and Kang, 2022). Similarly, the 18th-century Russian campaigns against the "barbaric Mongols" were a deference to the European civilized great powers' imperial model (Neumann, 2011).

In downward interactions, the state will occupy the superordinate position in a flipped asymmetrical dyad. As an ingroup member with exclusive rights and privileges to validate the outgroup's status claim, it enacts the dominant role and needs to induce consistent yielding from its counterparts. Thus, to protect this deference-dominance pattern from potential bottom-up defiance, the superior state can highlight outgroups' actions and beliefs incompatible with the social norms—an action of "collectivist stereotyping" (Naylor, 2022: 29-30). Stigmatizing civilizational difference, military defeat, and ideological antagonism can marginalize the social inferiors and impede their claim for a higher social status (Zarakol, 2011; Adler-Nissen, 2014). Furthermore, this superior actor can engage in a more radical form of rejection— "collectivist exclusion" or "social closure"—by granting "all-encompassing negative status" to "a subordinate group of a common character" (Parkin, 1979: 68-69). Instantiated by the League of Nations' refusal to incorporate the Japanese equality clause into its Charter (Ward, 2017), social closure strips away the outgroups' claim to membership and social mobility

Reading social interactions through this multiple audiences dynamic framework, we can thus identify two social arrangements requisite to a state's role status vis-à-vis alters: *upward recognition-seeking* and *downward deference-seeking*. Importantly, these asymmetrical

relationships capture two different status logics mentioned in the previous section. The former highlights a state's quest for social appraisal and fair treatment of its fulfillment of social expectations (Darwall, 1977). The latter turns to its pursuit of exclusivity in power and resource distribution. In an ideal social stratification, top-down recognition should voluntarily impart bottom-up compliance. In practice, however, this recognition-deference incongruence persists widely and constitutes an important yet underexamined source of status dissatisfaction. Different degrees of top-down recognition and bottom-up deference thus constitute four possible role status scenarios—one pleasing and three dissatisfactory demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Four Scenarios of the Multiple Audience Status Dynamic

	High Deference from Below	Low Deference from Below
High Recognition from Above	***Satisfaction: Systematic Recognition*** No negative altercasting Maintain asymmetrical power relations via cooperative socialization Korea and Japan towards Tang China Eastern Europe towards the EU after the Cold War	***Dissatisfaction II: Bottom-up Provocation*** Negative altercasting by the social inferiors Restore asymmetrical power relations via social closure China towards Vietnam and the Philippines 19th-Century Europe towards the "uncivilized"
Low Recognition from Above	***Dissatisfaction I: Unfair Treatment*** Negative altercasting by the social superiors Equalize asymmetrical power relations via competitive socialization (or social competition in SIT) Meiji Japan and Qing China towards the West Imperial Russia towards France	***Dissatisfaction III: Systematic Exclusion*** Negative altercasting by both the social superiors and inferiors Challenge asymmetrical power relations via social creativity in SIT or defiance China's Non-Align Movement towards the US and USSR Militarist Japan towards the international community

(Top-left header cell: "Deference Seeking" / "Recognition Seeking")

Role Status Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction Reexamined

The upper-left quadrant describes a satisfactory scenario of a state enjoying high recognition from above and deference from below. The state enacting a subaltern role can feel its identity loss justly compensated by respectful and equal treatment by the elite clubs. Its exclusive privileges and rights from elite membership are reciprocated and recognized by the subordination of the social inferiors, who demonstrate a collective trust in its authority, competence, and leadership. To preserve this social standing, the state is likely to cooperatively participate in the collective mobilization and support the deference-dominance patterns within each dyad. The more

positive status markers from above and below generated by social conformity, the more embedded it becomes within this social stratification. This integrative and status-quo-preserving socialization is epitomized in former Soviet countries in Eastern Europe's democratization. Affective unease over their identity loss was redressed by their uncontested European membership and normative superiority vis-à-vis Russia (Flockhart, 2005).

The lower-left quadrant depicts the first type of role status dissatisfaction scenario: *unfair treatment* in the state's asymmetrical dyad with its superiors. The discrepancy between the state's self-perceived entitlement and actual social appraisal undermines its "achievement, just rewards," and upward social mobility (Rathbun et al., 2022; Mukherjee, 2022: 63), thereby subjugating it into an even more subaltern counter-role. This negative altercasting compels it to question the rightfulness of this deference-dominance pattern advocated by the elite clubs. However, deference and respect from the smaller states show that the overall hierarchy is still desirable in power and resource distribution. Contra Wolf's prediction of defiance, the state would not terminate its subaltern role vis-à-vis its social superiors, since a total decoupling could induce retaliation from above and even lead to collective social opprobrium from both directions. Instead, it could resist the altercasting by equalizing with or outperforming "the dominant group in the area on which its claims to superior status rest" (Larson and Shevchenko, 2019: 2). Participation in the collective mobilization enables it to challenge the meaning, validity, and applicability of norms from within, thereby impeding the elite groups' role enactment and normative domination. This status-quo fragmenting response is epitomized in the macro-historical experience of non-western countries' interactions with their superior Western counterparts (Kobayashi et al., 2022): the 1868 Japanese Meiji Revolution to "immerse our nation so deeply into this plague…[of] Western civilization… to ensure that our people are accustomed to it" (Watanabe, 2006); Qing China's strategy of "learning merits from the foreign to conquer the foreign" (Hwang, 2021); Russian imperial court's French fluency for better diplomatic performance in European conferences (Fuller, 1992).

Moving to the second column, the upper-right quadrant depicts an elite member state disrespected by its social inferiors. This is the second type of role status dissatisfaction: *bottom-up provocation* in the state's asymmetrical dyad with its subalterns (Lin, 2023). The smaller states' defiance and altercasting are problematic in two ways. One, it bluntly challenges this state's self-assumed and socially esteemed privileges and role to dominate, thereby triggering an ontological insecurity. For instance, Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping sounded the warning bell about

disconcerting Sino-Vietnamese border disputes when meeting President Jim Carter in 1979: "If Vietnam thought the PRC soft" and "is allowed to continue on its unbridled path… the situation will get worse…[and] China must still teach a lesson to…the now extremely arrogant…Vietnamese" (FRUS-1). Two, the social superiors and inferiors all expect the state to tame the provocation and restore the hierarchy. Failure to extract a deferential response from below— Russia's defeat by a militarily weaker Japan during 1904-05 and China's loss to the Philippines in the South China Sea arbitration—leaves a humiliating impression in front of the third-party audiences, who might decide to demote the state's status. Consequently, this elite member state is likely to choose social closure to restore the disrupted dominance-deference pattern. By upholding the collectively shared beliefs and socially prescribed code of conduct, it can claim normative superiority and project social opprobrium onto the alters in the outgroup, as exemplified by the 19th-century European "standard of civilization" against "the barbarians" (Keene, 2013). More importantly, social closure prepares this state to reframe the bottom-up provocation into a contingent and incidental event with little implication on its social standing. In the South China Sea arbitration, Beijing evoked territorial sovereignty as a "deflective mechanism" to shift the audiences' attention from its ineffective subjugation of the Philippines to the US support for the Philippines' territorial expansion (Lin, 2023: 44).

Finally, the lower-right quadrant features the state with few recognitions from above and deference from below. This is the third type of role status dissatisfaction: *systematic exclusion*. Altercasting from both directions exposes an illegitimate hierarchy with vexing normative and distributive problems that induce this state's "offensive reaction…to deter repeated humiliations in the future, restore power and status, [and] to return the situation to a desired state of affairs" (Cooley et al., 2019: 690; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014: 271). There are two possible solutions. One, if this state obtains exclusive and alternative ties to other subgroups, it can reidentify with them for recognition, and derive alternative standards to challenge elite groups' monopoly over status evaluation/attribution. This entrepreneurial move is observed in the non-aligned movements advocated by India and China that engendered a novel repertoire of Asian-African solidarity and appealed to the Third World with colonial pasts as an audience group alternative to the USSR. Two, a state with neither entrepreneurial power nor external connections with alternative subgroups may decide to simply exit the system as an "outlaw"—a strategy of defiance in Wolf's term. This scenario is epitomized in 1930s Japan's imperialist expansion after the West denied its

claim of Manchuria and its Asian inferiors' resistance against its "Pan-Asianism" ideology (Goddard, 2018: 789).

Illustrating the Framework: China and the Emerging Global Environmental Regime, 1950-1972

This section applies this framework of multiple audiences status dynamic to China's shifting response to the emerging global environmental regime from 1950 to 1972. This case is selected for two reasons. First, the Cold War featured two ideological camps' antagonism over the exclusive role of dominance and corresponded to Wolf's dyadic contestation in a "most-likely" manner (George and Bennett, 2004: 120-21). According to Wolf, China's diplomacy ought to be mainly conditioned by US or Soviet treatment. In contrast, this case unpacks the complex and dynamic configuration of social ties between and within the two major camps, and highlights the volatile superordinate-subordinate relations and varying composition of status audiences incompatible with Wolf's model. As shown later, the smaller states played an indispensable role in shaping Beijing's shifting response to the environmental regime.

Second, these two decades witnessed Maoist China waging battles against nature for grain production, poverty alleviation, and Third-Front facilities construction, three main sources of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) legitimacy (Shapiro, 2005: 72-86). "Ultra-leftist" sentiments continuously sidelined the ecologically conscious pragmatists (Zhou Enlai and Li Xiannian), and perceived "environment [a]s a problem of the rich…trying to block our development under the guise of protecting the environment" (UNIHP-1). Therefore, Beijing's sovereigntist and militarized environmental worldview increases our confidence in my framework vis-à-vis alternative explanations (rationalist calculation and domestic politics).

I apply single-case and longitudinal process-tracing to extrapolate "evidence on process, sequence, and conjunctures of events" (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 3-4). Besides Chinese documents compiled exclusively in *HuanJing JueXing* (HJJX), I targeted both day-to-day records on the environmental treaty negotiations and diplomatic exchanges in the national archives of China, the US, and the UK, the UN archives, and the Cold War History Archive of the Woodrow Wilson Center (WCDA). The result contained thousands-pages of conference preparatory documents, diplomatic cables, interagency reports, personal memoirs, and private letters.

In retrospect, China's response evolved into four phrases that correspond to my framework: systematic respect (1950-52), bottom-up provocation (1953-55), systematic exclusion (1953-70), and unfair treatment (1971-72). Each demonstrates China's relational dynamic, status ambitions towards relevant audiences, and consideration of audiences' reactions regarding the emerging environmental regime.

A. Systematic Respect and Initial Embracement: 1950-52

Starting in the 19th century, scientific interest in anthropogenic impact on the ecological system only began to gain public attention in the mid-20th century due to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). In October 1947, the WMO evolved into a full UN agency upon ratification of the World Meteorological Convention by 30 states, one of which was the Republic of China (ROC) under the Kuomintang (KMT) regime.[vi]

On May 7, 1950, the question of whether China should join the WMO officially reached the Chinese MFA. On May 12, then Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai telegrammed UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie requesting "the so-called 'delegates' of the KMT reactionary remanent clique…[to] be driven out from WMO's various organs and meetings." This issue was immediately dispatched to the Central Military Commission (CMC)'s Meteorological Bureau for inquiries (BAMFA-1). The Head of the CMC Changwang Tu suggested that because climate records' exchange and standardization were by nature a global issue, active participation of the WMO was of necessity and "enabled us to propose our opinions and was to our benefits; otherwise, we would have to follow suits and occupy a passive position" (BAMFA-2). Concurring these technical advantages, the MFA cautioned:

> The benefits include: 1. introducing our proposals during meetings to strengthen the standard-setting; 2. learning technical matters. The problem is that, if a state of war exists, using unencrypted codes for weather reports is *militarily disadvantaged*. Without participation, we would still receive unencrypted documents from other nations; however, we need to conform to the international orders on rules and standardization, and will be constrained under a passive position (BAMFA-2, my italics).

> The costs of participation would outweigh the gains (BAMFA-3). Exchanging meteorological intelligence with the WMO is disadvantageous for China's Air Force (BAMFA-4). It would make the enemy more ambitious and undermine our prestige. (WCDA-2)

Consequently, China disregarded the WMO's Secretary General Johnston's invitation to attend the First Congress in Paris as an observer in March 1951 (BAMFA-3; WMO-1). A subsequent telegram invitation from Indian Chairman V.V. Sohoni of the WMO's Regional Association II (Asia) (RA II) on December 24 was left unanswered (BAMFA-4).

However, this rational calculation was dwarfed by *Mao's role status* ambition to revitalize China's historical stature as a prominent international actor. The beginning of the 1950s witnessed a newly established China's successful decolonization and victory against Japan and the KMT, two military stronger opponents. Positioned between the established USSR and the others repressed by imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism, China perceived military revolution to liberate "the Communist parties and people in all oppressed nations in Asia" as an unshirkable "international obligation…[and] one of the most important methods to consolidate the victory of the Chinese revolution in the international arena" (Zhai, 2000: 1). Thus, Mao held dear "the Soviet Union, the People's Democratic Countries, and the proletariat and the broad masses of the people in all other countries" as the crucial status audiences that China "must lean to" (WCDA-3).

Entering 1952, China's revolutionary obligations engendered recognition from above and deference from below. Besides the Soviets that extolled China as a credible and capable revolutionary power, the US National Security Council (NSC) documented Beijing's effective role "in rendering propaganda support to the USSR," its "position of leadership among Asian Communist movements and regimes", "general international acceptance of the Chinese Communist regime,…and an increase of Chinese Communist prestige" (FRUS-2). Similar recognition of Beijing's military and ideological competence appeared both in the US National Intelligence Estimates (DDRS-1) and in NSC's 1952 examination:

> Successful overt Chinese Communist aggression in this area, especially if achieved without encountering more than token resistance on the part of the United States or the United Nations, would have critical psychological and political consequences which would probably include the relatively swift alignment of the rest of Asia and thereafter the Middle East to communism, thereby endangering the stability and security of Europe (NSC-1).

Meanwhile, China's military assistance in the Korean War and the Vietnamese Revolution impressed audiences from below greatly. In his letter to Mao, Ho Chiming wrote:

> I believe this to be a victory of Mao Zedong's revolutionary internationalist road…I must declare that the Vietnamese comrades and people will surely fulfill the lofty expectations and repay the enormous assistance that we have received from our

brothers in the Communist Parties of China…with further endeavors toward a greater and final victory (WCDA-4).

It was against this backdrop that China engaged in *cooperative socialization* and considered entering the WMO as an elite club. Within the first seven months of 1952, the MFA received two positive signals regarding the RA II membership. One, on January 22nd, A. A Solotoukhine, the director of the USSR Hydro-meteorological Service and Vice Chairman of the RA II, informed Chinese officials that the Soviet delegation had passed a motion supported by Poland, Hungry, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and others in April 1951 to replace Taipei with Beijing for the RA II and its subsequent first session (BAMFA-5). During the WMO First Congress, delegates of Norway, Sweden, India, and Byelorussian SSR explicitly recognized Beijing's legitimacy to represent China (WMO-1). Two, Indian Chairman Sohoni was eager to seek China's participation in his invitations on December 17, 1951, and July 7, 1952. India's urge to admit China to the WMO echoed its continuous "pressing for China's admission to the UNSC" (NMML-1). From claiming "recognition of a new China…with whom we have a history of almost immemorial friendship" as "not only inevitable but urgent (NMML-2), to its refusal of US offer of UNSC membership "at the cost of China" (NMML-3), Nehru's consistent deferential responses attracted Beijing to show solidarity in international actions. Consequently, substantial positive esteems from both above (the Soviet Union) and below (Eastern European and Asian socialist countries) encourage the MFA's participation:

> The Regional Association's invitation for us to be a member state was a result of the Soviet effort during the previous meetings. Despite being one of the UN institutions, it remains a technical institution. Given the USSR as a member state, completed evictions of Taipei, and the Indian chairman's invitations, we should seize this right moment to join (BAMFA-6).

> Other UN institutions usually took our disputed membership as an excuse and declined our participation. The RA II was indeed unprecedented. If we obtain the *de facto* participation right, we might break the path dependency and open a precedent for the future (BAMFA-5).

> After consolidating these principles…[and] *given the newly independent democratic countries' enthusiasm* (BAMFA-7, my italics), we will *reply to the Soviet friends with whom we act in accordance,* and then inform India (BAMFA-6, my italics).

B. Social Closure to Expel Provocative Taipei: 1953-55

By December 1952, Beijing started its membership application. However, the actual degree of recognition and deference was not as optimistic as promised by the USSR and India. On the one hand, Taipei was still on the list of participants for the RA II New Delhi meeting, thereby undermining Beijing's sovereignty and institutional privilege. As investigated by Chinese embassies in July 1953, the motion by the USSR and Ukraine on Beijing's WMO membership was rejected with 11 supports, 25 oppositions, and 7 abstentions (BAMF-8). After Sohoni resigned from chairmanship in May 1953, the RA II repeatedly delayed the official meeting notification for Beijing and Moscow throughout 1954.

On the other hand, insufficient deference from below did not escalate into a systematic exclusion. Thanks to the USSR, India, Yugoslavia, and other key "comrades" inside the WMO, Beijing's right to participate was continuously emphasized by Norway and Sweden, whose motion to recognize China's observer status received 19 supports. Importantly, the MFA discovered that opponents to its membership application had little doubt in its sovereign/legitimate ruling of the country. Instead, they were concerned about either technical aspects of the WMO's rule of procedures, or the WMO's institutional integrity given this contentious China question. "Our overriding purpose must be to hold this Organization together," explained Britain: "Her Majesty's Government recognized the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC)…but did not consider it wise or timely to debate the question of Chinese representation at the present time." (WMO-2)

Consequently, this new status dynamic compelled the MFA to resist Taipei's negative altercasting through social closure. Resolving this membership dispute through the WMO's official channels could "expand China's political sphere of influence and create a better environment for the Soviet's struggle from within." (BAMF-10) Thus, Tu telegrammed China's protest of KMT's membership to Acting Secretary General G. Swoboda on January 26 and February 6, 1955, and demanded Taipei's removal in the upcoming Second Congress. Importantly, the MFA decided not to follow the Soviet instruction of immediately ratifying the World Meteorological Convention in exchange for membership. A request for membership as a non-signatory state would cast China into an outgroup newcomer that needed recognition from the majority (two-thirds) of members. It "would leave the impression of weakness" for the smaller socialist states (BAMF-11) that admire the PRC's sovereignty and influence within prestigious

institutions. Thus, Beijing was "anxious to restore Chinese sovereignty over all historically Chinese areas…for both security and prestige reasons" (FRUS-2) and found "it to our detriment to have us in tandem with the KMT bandits" (BAMF-12). Consequently, the MFA specified China's action as a *restoration of legitimate membership* instead of an application for the WMO entry:

> Once the WMO expels the KMT bandits, we can immediately approve the Convention and join this institution. This move highlights the fact that *the institution is liable for* impeding the restoration of our legitimate membership; *it also supports the Soviet's struggle and clarifies our opposition to the two-China question* (BAMF-12, my italics).

C. Systematic Exclusion and Persistent Defiance: 1956-70

By April 1955, this attempted social closure became unfruitful: the Second Congress again kept the KMT's seat and postponed the discussion of Beijing's status. The WMO members' top-down countenancing of this bottom-up provocation led the MFA to pause the scheduled entrance. The sense of systematic exclusion began to surface in 1956. On March 31, Mao sharply criticized Stalin's mistake of "speaking about the subordination of the CCP to the KMT" and seizing the Changchun Railway and Port Arthur when meeting the Soviet Ambassador Pavel Yudin (WCDA-5). Discontent towards the "great power chauvinism" continued to ferment in 1958, when the Khrushchev administration proposed Sino-Soviet collaborations on long-wave radio transmission center compatible with the Soviet submarines in April and submarine flotilla in July. Mao saw the extension of Soviet naval forces to Chinese coasts as a blunt altercasting and humiliating denial of China's leadership in the world communist revolution. "You never trusted the Chinese," outcried Mao when meeting Ambassador Yudin on July 22:

> [To you] the Russians are the first-class whereas the Chinese are among the inferior who are dumb and careless…You have never had faith in the Chinese people... The Chinese were regarded as Tito the Second…[and] as a backward nation. You have often stated that the Europeans looked down upon the Russians. I believe that some Russians look down upon the Chinese (WCDA-6).

Entering the 1960s, the unfair treatment from above gradually induced fragmentation among small socialist states. As the US observed, despite the status-boosting Bandung Conference, China's deference came mainly from "the illegal and militant Communist Parties of Southeast" compared with Moscow's dominance over the "orthodox parties of Europe and most of the Third World" (GRFPL-1). Further hampering limited deferences were bottom-up provocations such as India's hosting of the Dalai Lama in 1956 and the 1962 Sino-India border dispute. India's

provocation condoned and assisted by adversarial Soviets constituted an existential threat and ontological insecurity for the MFA in 1963:

> It laid bare Nehru's true intention of interfering in China's internal affairs…It is extremely distressing to see that Soviet comrades believe in capitalist India rather than socialist China and…even go so far as to make the slanderous claim that the conflict stems from Chinese "nationalism." *By doing so, they are actually siding with Nehru and trying to obliterate the nature of the People's Republic of China as a socialist state and are turning the facts upside down and attempting to foist the responsibility for aggression onto China* (BAMFA-13, my italics).

Striving to replace Moscow as the world revolution's center, Beijing found itself besieged by two hostile superpowers and their proxies among the smaller states exemplified by India, a systematic exclusion. "There were people who asked," addressed Zhou in November 1963: "given that we oppose imperialism [the US], reactionary nationalism [India], and modern revisionism [the USSR], whether we have too many enemies. We don't think so…We should always strike the main enemy so that we…win over the broad masses of people who are waging revolution, about to wage revolution, or sympathetic to revolution" (ZEJSWX-1). Defiance spirits intensified since the Cultural Revolution in 1966. When receiving Zambia President Kaunda in 1967, Zhou reiterated China's distrust of the UN: "The UN must correct its mistakes, be reorganized and reconstructed. Friendly Asian and African countries can initiate revolution from within, and China would stay outside to…establish a new and revolutionary UN" (PD-2).

From 1966 to 1969, Beijing evolved into an isolationist player. Besides continued antagonism with the US and the USSR, Beijing's revolutionary defiance also targeted the Third World countries, including North Korea, India, Burma, Indonesia, and other "reactionary forces." Conflicts broke out between Chinese diplomats and local authorities in Tunisia, Ghana, and other Asian-African comrades (Brazinsky, 2017: 595). At this height of the ideological fever, Mao saw "the UN remains the lecture forum of those capitalist politicians and the tool of the US and USSR, the two hegemons" (Qu, 2000: 318), and believed that "revolutionary upheaval in Asia, Africa, and Latin America was sure to deal the old world a decisive and crushing blow" (PK-1). China's absence from the four UNCHE preparatory meetings (1969-72) was thus unsurprising.

D. Competitive Socialization to Correct Unfair Treatment: 1971-72

From 1970 to 1971, three changes took place to halt China's systematic exclusion. One, abating domestic ideological struggles enabled Beijing's rapprochement with audiences in 25 states from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and even the Western camp (Turkey and Iran) (Brazinsky, 2017: 610).

The second was an influx in the US recognition. In June 1966, a State Defense Report instructed Washington to "try to draw China's activities on the broader world scene where, through the exposition to outside reality, and the successful assumption of international responsibility, she might gain a degree of status and respect which could be substituted in part for her unattainable goals of regional domination and great power status" (FRUS-3). From February 1970 to Kissinger's clandestine visit in July 1971, various high-level exchanges were made between the Nixon administration and Zhou. When receiving Zhou's April 27 note saying that "we [Chinese] needed to fear no humiliation," Nixon and Kissinger discussed China's obsession with its international stature:

> [Beijing was] very sensitive if the US were to show its belief that their willingness to conduct a meaningful dialogue with the US is a sign of Chinese weakness or fear of US-Soviet collaboration against China (FRUS-4).

That the recognition from above could elevate China's international standing was further reckoned in one NSC briefing: Chinese would be willing to "pay a price" and "expecting to make political gains." The "prestige…[would] increase enormously" for the PRC, which ought to "unequivocally become one of the 'big five'" (RNL-1).

The final status booster was China's UN admission in October 1971. "The UK, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, and Italy had all become the 'Red Guard' in revolution against the US," extolled Mao. Moreover, China successfully regained the respect of 19 Asian and 26 African supporters. Mao was particularly proud that 7 Latin American countries voted for China which only had ties with Chile and Cuba. "It was a major issue to see the fire in the US backyard," commented Mao: "It was the Black African brothers who carried us into the UN. China's refusal to enter would be decoupling from the crowd" (Xiong, 1999: 347).

By the end of 1971, Beijing faced a novel status dynamic vis-à-vis the two superpowers and the Third World. "Because China's membership of the UNSC brought her into an increasingly sharp confrontation on a whole range of issues with other 'super-powers'" that "humiliatingly

exposed Chinese powerlessness" (UKTNA-1), observed the British, this unfair treatment would render China "especially radical on colonial and economic issues, placing ideology and propaganda ahead of predictability" (FRUS-5). Meanwhile, the PRC striving to enact the role of the Third World leader needed "to demonstrate that multilateral diplomacy can, with PRC participation, produce results and reach agreements more satisfactory to the Afro-Asian states than those reached prior to PRC entry into the UN" (FRUS-5). A pragmatic response was *competitive socialization* in a UN platform that would satisfy the subordinate Afro-Asian-Latin American followers while simultaneously "replacing…Western and Soviet influence in the Third World" (UKTNA-2). During their debut at the 26th General Assembly (GA) (November 11-December 2, 1971), Chinese delegations were observed to deliberately "divert… the GA…planetary to narrow great power conflicts [and] apparently had strong impacts on smaller delegations" (USDDO-1).

On December 15, then Secretary-General Maurice Strong's invitation letter reached the MFA (Qu et al, 2022, 17), which submitted a *Request for Instructions on Attending the UNCHE* to the State Council for comments:

> Prima facie, the environmental conference is one for technical expertise with a facet of exchanging experience and seeking international cooperation. In reality, it necessarily reflects *a complex political struggle of control vis-à-vis anticontrol* on the global stage. Lots of developing states *haven't foregone the daydream* of receiving technical and financial assistance. We need to firmly stand with the Third World, and strive to win over some medium and small developed countries to collectively strike the US and USSR (HJJX-1, my *italics*).

Therefore, the 12-days UNCHE witnessed an adamant China's anti-hegemonic united front with the Third World to address unfair treatment in three ways. First, unsatisfied with the conference secretariat unwilling to reopen the draft for revision and leaving only six hours for discussion before voting, China approached Algeria, Syria, Pakistan, Argentina, and Venezuela on June 5 regarding its motion to establish a Working Group (WG) for the declaration. Criticizing the lack of representation and transparency in this draft during the informal meeting hosted by Sweden on June 6, Ambassador Bi Jilong on June 7 raised an urgent motion for WG establishment, which passed on June 8 and received praises from Sri Lanka and Mauritania (HJJX-2).

Second, China utilized this South-friendly WG for intensive discursive contestation since June 10. Rather than contesting the norm validity of environmental protection, it expanded this fluid concept to include the US's "ecological war" in Indochina, thereby subjecting the US to intense opprobrium by NGOs and other anti-Vietnam War countries. Despite the US delegates'

response of "UNCHE is not the place to discuss Vietnam" and their attempts to pressure Sweden as the hosting country, the Swedish Prime Minister stood with China, whose "firm representation and defense of the developing world" was heralded by various Asian and African states (HJJX-2).

Finally, Ambassador Tang Ke injected a Chinese input into the preamble of the Stockholm Declaration on June 15. Mao's Quotations were added to principles 3 and 5: "Man has constantly to sum up experience and go on discovering, inventing, creating and advancing; of all things in the world, people are the most precious." Whereas Beijing did not sign the Declaration due to its indecisiveness on a nuclear ban, its capacity and willingness to resist superpower domination and representation of the subaltern states on a prestigious international institution was widely acknowledged by the Third and even the Second World. As documented in a cable: "Western diplomats believe that China has expanded its influence for the first time in an international conference. Its position was to defend the smaller countries." The secretariats further confirmed Beijing's skillful competitive socialization: "China was not going to sabotage the passage of the draft Declaration. It just wanted this opportunity to express its opinions and exert its influence." (HJJX-3) In the end, the UNCHE turned out as a useful platform for Beijing to "create an informal, anti-[western]-hierarchical hierarchy, subtly promoting itself as the first among equals" (Brazinsky, 2017: 22-3).

Conclusion

Discussions on status dissatisfaction have fruitfully moved beyond the materialist conceptualization to focus on what aggravates a state in its social interactions with the alters. Yet, a unidimensional reading of the audience errs too much on the dyadic at the expense of the multilateral relations. This article proposes a framework for multiple audiences dynamic as a promising intervention. Identifying the social superiors and the inferiors as two critical referent groups, I locate upward recognition-seeking and downward deference-seeking are two social arrangements that induce status dissatisfaction, which compartmentalizes into unfair treatment, bottom-up provocation, and systematic exclusion.

Theoretically, this granular reading of status dissatisfaction demonstrates how a state's reconciliation of individual, bilateral, and multilateral role status shapes its reaction to the normative and material foundation of the international hierarchy. Bridging IR and foreign policy analysis, it offers an angle to synthesize status literature, norm studies, and revisionism.

Empirically, China's UNCHE case joins the recent environmental histography to reconstruct historical contexts and trajectories and give voices back to the oft-masked global south in international governance. The temporal and attitudinal variation captured here epitomizes China's subsequent performance in the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, and Conferences of Parties in Copenhagen (2009) and in Paris (2015). For policymakers striving to understand this rising power's intention, this article highlights multivocality in China's social interactions and sheds light on the smaller states as an underexamined facet in Beijing's calculation.

One caveat of my framework is its insufficient attention to the heterogeneous domestic audience looking up and down. While multiple audiences indeed leave room for domestic constituencies, my conceptual alignment with researchers on hierarchy prioritizes a systematic understanding of group relations over a unitary understanding of individual actors (Naylor, 2022; 24; Keene, 2012: 653). Future conceptual and theoretical inquiries may explore whether and/or how group relations, attitudes, and behaviors can be scaled down to capture configurations and ties between domestic social sites. Interactions among domestic constituents, individual decision-makers, bilateral counterparts, and third-party international audiences can further nuance status dissatisfaction scholarship.

References

Adler-Nissen, R (2014) Stigma Management in International Relations: Transgressive Identities, Norms, and Order in International Society. *International Organization*, 68(1): 143–176.

Anderson C, Willer R, Kilduff GJ, and Brown CE (2012) The origins of deference: When do people prefer lower status? *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 102(5): 1077-1088.

Andornino GB (2023) China's pursuit of international status through negotiated deference: an empirical analysis of Italy's parliamentary attitude. *Italian Political Science Review*, 53(1): 85-103.

Barnhart, J (2016) Status competition and territorial aggression: evidence from the scramble for Africa. *Security Studies*, 25(3): 385-419.

Beaumont P (2020) Grammar of Status Competition: International Hierarchies as Domestic Practice (PhD dissertation, Ås: Norwegian University of Life Sciences).

Breuning, M (2011) Role theory research in international relations: State of the art and blind spots. In S Harnisch, C Frank, and H Maull (Eds.), *Role theory in international relations* (pp. 16–35). London: Routledge.

Breuning M (2018) Role Theory in Politics and International Relations. In Alex Mintz, and Lesley G. Terris (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Behavioral Political Science*, Oxford Academic.

Bennett J and Checkel T (2014) *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brummer, K and Thies, CG (2016) Active Independent or Faithful Ally?: The Domestic Contestation of National Role Conceptions in Australia after World War II. In *Domestic role contestation, foreign policy, and international relations* (pp. 40-54). Routledge.

xBrazinsky GA (2017) Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry during the Cold War. University of North Carolina Press.

Cheng, JT and Tracy, JL (2014) Toward a unified science of hierarchy: Dominance and prestige are two fundamental pathways to human social rank. In Cheng JT, Tracy JL, & Anderson CA (Eds.), *The psychology of social status* (pp. 3-27). Springer.

China. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022) Reality Check: Falsehoods in US Perceptions of China. Available at: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjbxw/202206/t20220619_10706059.html.

China. Embassy of the People's Republic of China to the United States of America (2023). Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference, June 9. Available at: http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/lcbt/wjbfyrbt/202306/t20230609_11094406.htm#:~:text=Wang%20Wenbin%3A%20The%20US%20is,to%20hold%20back%20China's%20development.

China. Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines (2023). Remarks of the Spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in the Philippines on the Seventh Anniversary of the So-called Award on the South China Sea Arbitration. Available at: http://ph.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sgdt/202307/t20230712_11112236.htm#:~:text=This%20shall%20under%20no%20circumstances,China%20into%20accepting%20the%20award.

Cooley A, Nexon D, and Ward S (2019) Revising order or challenging the balance of military power? An alternative typology of revisionist and status-quo states. *Review of International Studies*, 45(4): 689-708.

Cristian C and Kaarbo J (2012) Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 8(1): 5–24.

Combs, DJ, Campbell, G, Jackson, M, and Smith, RH (2010) Exploring the consequences of humiliating a moral transgressor. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 32(2): 128-143.

Cantir C and Kaarbo J (2016) Unpacking Ego in Role Theory: Vertical and Horizontal Role Contestation and Foreign Policy. In C Cantir and J Kaarbo (Eds.), *Domestic Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, and International Relations* (pp. 9-13). Oxford: Routledge.

Demirduzen C and Thies CG (2022) A Role Theory Approach to Grand Strategy: Horizontal Role Contestation and Consensus in the Case of China, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 7(1), ogab018.

Dafoe A, Renshon J, and Huth P (2014) Reputation and status as motives for war. *Annual Review of Political Science* 17(1): 371–393.

The Guardian (2023) Why is Xi Jinping missing the G20? 8 September. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/08/why-is-xi-jinping-missing-the-g20#:~:text=There%20are%20some%20suspicions%20that,border%20as%20the%20summit%20proceeds.

Duque M (2018) Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach. *International Studies Quarterly* 62(3): 577–592.

Darwall SL (1977) "Two kinds of respect." *Ethics* 88(1):36–49.

Fikenscher, SE, Jaschob L, and Wolf R (2015) Seeking status recognition through military symbols: German and Indian armament policies between strategic rationalizations and prestige motives. In *Recognition in international relations: Rethinking a political concept in a global context* (pp. 86-103). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Frank RH (1985*) Choosing the Right Pond: Human Behavior and the Quest for Status*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Flockhart T (2005) (ed.), *Socializing Democratic Norms: The Role of International Organizations for the Construction of Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Fernández, S, Saguy, T, Gaviria, E, Agudo, R, and Halperin, E (2023) The Role of Witnesses in Humiliation: Why Does the Presence of an Audience Facilitate Humiliation Among Victims of Devaluation? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 49(1): 32-47.

Ferry L and O'Brien-Udry C (2022) International status: Concept meets measurement.

Fiske ST (2010) Interpersonal stratification: Status, power, and subordination. In: Fiske ST, Gilbert DT and Lindzey G (eds) *Handbook of Social Psychology* (pp. 941–982). Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc,.

Fung, Courtney (2019) *China and Intervention at the UN Security Council: Reconciling Status*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parkin F (1979) Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique, Tavistock.

Goddard S (2018) Embedded Revisionism: Networks, Institutions, and Challenges to World Order. *International Organization*, 72: 763-797.

Götz E (2021) Status Matters in World Politics. *International Studies Review*, *23*(1): 228-247.

Greve AQ, and Levy JS (2018) Power transitions, status dissatisfaction, and war: The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895. *Security Studies*, 27(1): 148-178.

Goffman, E (1956) The Nature of Deference and Demeanor. *American Anthropologist* 58 (3): 473–502.

George A and Bennett A (2004) *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Halevy, N, Chou, EY, Cohen, TR, and Livingston, RW (2012) Status conferral in intergroup social dilemmas: behavioral antecedents and consequences of prestige and dominance. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 102(2): 351–366.

Harnisch S (2011) Role theory: Operationalization of key concepts. In S. Harnisch, C. Frank, and H. Maull (Eds.), *Role theory in international relations: Approaches and analyses*. Routledge.

He K and Feng H (2022) Role Status and Status-saving Behaviour in World Politics: the ASEAN Case. *International Affairs* 98(2): 363–381.

Heimann G and Paikowsky D (2022) Winning a seat at the table: Strategic routes by emerging powers to gain privileges in exclusive formal clubs, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 43(4): 594-621.

Huang CH and Kang DC (2022) State Formation in Korea and Japan, 400–800 CE: Emulation and Learning, Not Bellicist Competition. *International Organization*, 76(1): 1-31.

Holsti, K (1970) National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy. *International Studies Quarterly*, 14: 233–309.

Huang C-C (2020) Interpreting Vietnam's China Policy From the Perspective of Role Theory: Independent Role Versus Interactive Role, *International Relations*, 34(4): 524–43.

Henrich J and Gil-White FJ (2001) The evolution of prestige: Freely conferred deference as a mechanism for enhancing the benefits of cultural transmission. *Evolution and Human Behavior* 22(3): 165–196.

Hwang, Y-J (2021) The births of International Studies in China. *Review of International Studies*, 47(5): 580–600.

Ikenberry GJ (2001) *After victory: Institutions, strategic restraint, and the rebuilding of order after major wars*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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

Jackson PT and Nexon DH (2019) Reclaiming the social: relationalism in anglophone international studies. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32(5): 582-600.

Kinsella HM and Mantilla G (2020) Contestation before Compliance: History, Politics, and Power in International Humanitarian Law. *International Studies Quarterly* 64(3): 1–8.

Karim MF (2023) Role conflict in International Relations: the case of Indonesia's regional and global engagements. *International Relations*, 37(1): 96-116.

Reuters (2015) Angry at Demands, Greeks Rail at German 'Humiliation', 12 July. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN0PM081/.

Klein DC (1991) The humiliation dynamic: An overview. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 12: 93-121.

Keene E (2013) Social status, social closure and the idea of Europe as a 'normative power'. *European Journal of International Relations*, 19(4): 939-956.

Keene E (2014) The standard of 'civilisation' the expansion thesis and the 19th-century international social space. *Millennium*, 42(3): 651-673.

Larson, DW, Paul, TV, and Wohlforth, WC (2014) Status and World Order. In T.V. Paul, DW Larson, and WC Wohlforth (Eds.), *Status in World Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 3–30.

Kobayashi K, Krause K, and Yuan X (2022) Pathways to socialisation: China, Russia, and competitive norm socialisation in a changing global order. *Review of International Studies*, 48(3): 560–582.

Larson DW and Shevchenko A (2014) Russia says no: Power, status, and emotions in foreign policy. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47(3/4): 269–279.

Larson DW and Shevchenko A (2019) *Quest for status: Chinese and Russian foreign policy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lin AY-T (2023) Challenges from Below: Status and Revisionism in Hierarchy. Forthcoming in *International Studies Quarterly*.

Lake DA (2009) *Hierarchy in international relations*. Cornell University Press.

McCourt DM (2016). Practice Theory and Relationalism as the New Constructivism. *International Studies Quarterly*, 60(3): 475–85.

MacDonald PK and Parent JM (2021) The Status of Status in World Politics. *World Politics*, 73(2): 358–391.

Miller JL, Cramer, Volgy TJ, Bezerra P, Hauser M, and Sciabarra C (2015) Norms, Behavioral Compliance, and Status Attribution in International Politics. *International Interactions* 41(5): 779–804.

Mann L, Feddes AR, Leiser A, Doosje B, and Fischer AH (2017) When is humiliation more intense? The role of audience laughter and threats to the self. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8: 495.

Murray M (2010) Identity, insecurity, and great power politics: the tragedy of German naval ambition before the First World War. *Security Studies* 19(4): 656-688.

Murray M (2019) *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maner JK, and Case CR (2016) Dominance and prestige: Dual strategies for navigating social hierarchies. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Elsevier.

Mazur A (2005) *Biosociology of Dominance and Deference*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Maliki A and Walker SG (2017) *Role Theory and Role Conflict in U.S.–Iran Relations: Enemies of Our Own Making.* New York: Routledge.

Mattern JB and Zarakol A (2016) Hierarchies in world politics. *International Organization*, 70(3): 623-654.

Mukherjee R (2022) *Ascending order: Rising powers and the politics of status in international institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Naylor T (2019) *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilised Nations to the G20*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Naylor T (2022) Social Closure and the Reproduction of Stratified International Order. *International Relations*, 36(1): 23-39.

Neumann, IB (2011) Entry into international society reconceptualised: the case of Russia. *Review of International Studies*, 37(2): 463-484.

Ong B (2012) Recognizing regions: ASEAN's struggle for recognition. *Pacific Review*, 25(4): 513-536.

Paikowsky D (2017) *The Power of the Space Club,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pouliot V (2016) Hierarchy in practice: multilateral diplomacy and the governance of international security, *European Journal of International Security* 1(1): 5–26.

Pu X (2019) *Rebranding China: Contested Status Signaling in the Changing Global Order.* Stanford University Press.

Washington Post (2010) U.S. takes a tougher tone with China. 30 July, Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2010/07/29/AR2010072906416.html.

Qu G, Li L, and Lonnroth M (2022) Ocean Currents are Still Protecting Us. Sichuan People's Publishing House.

Qu X (2000) Zhongguo Waijiao Wushinian (Fifty years of Chinese Foreign Policy), Jiangsu Publishing House.

Rathbun BC, Rathbun NS, and Pomeroy C (2022) "No Fair! Distinguishing Between the Pursuit of Status and Equity in International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly*, 66(1): 1–14.

Renshon, J (2016) Status Deficits and War. *International Organization* 70(3): 513–50.

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

Lebow R (2010) *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Røren P (2023) The belligerent bear: Russia, status orders, and war. *International Security*, 47(4): 7-49.

Shapiro J (2001) *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shultz CA (2019) Hierarchy salience and social action: Disentangling class, status, and authority in world politics. *International Relations*, 33(1): 88–108.

Sarbin TR and Allen, VL (1968) Increasing participation in a natural group setting: A preliminary report. *The Psychological Record*, 18: 1-7.

Subotic J and Vucetic S (2019) Performing solidarity: whiteness and status-seeking in the non-aligned world, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22(3): 722–43.

Shih CY (2012) Assigning role characteristics to China: The role state versus the ego state. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 8(1): 71-91.

Tajfel HE and Turner J (1979) An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In: Austin W and Worchel S (Eds.) *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33-47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Tajfel HE (1978) *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. Academic Press.

Thies C (2010) Role theory and foreign policy. In R. Denmark (Ed.), The international studies encyclopedia (pp. 6335–6356). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Tewes H (1998) Between deepening and widening: Role conflict in Germany's enlargement policy. *West European Politics*, 21(2):117-133.

Teles Fazendeiro, B (2021) Keeping a Promise: Roles, Audiences and Credibility in International Relations. *International Relations*, 35(2): 299-319.

Walker S (2017) Role Theory As an Empirical Theory of International Relations: From Metaphor to Formal Model. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.*

Walker S He K, and Feng H (2021) *Binary Role Theory and the Evolution of Cooperation in World Politics. Operational Code Analysis and Foreign Policy Roles: Crossing Simon's Bridge*. Taylor & Francis.

Walker, S (1979) National role conceptions and systematic outcomes. In. L. Falkowski (Ed.), *Psychological models in international politics* (pp. 169-210), Boulder: Westview Press.

Walker S (2011). Binary Role Theory: Reducing Uncertainty and Managing Complexity in Foreign Policy Analysis. In Walker, Stephen G, Malici, Akan, & Shafer, Michael (Eds.), Rethinking Foreign Policy Analysis (pp. 245-266). London: Routledge.

Ward S (2013) Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism in the Early 1930s. *Security Studies*, 22(4): 607-639.

Ward S (2017) *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ward S (2019) Logics of stratified identity management in world politics. *International Theory*, 11(2): 211-238.

Wang Z (2021) The Political Logic of Status Competition: Leaders, Status Tradeoffs, and Beijing's Vietnam Policy, 1949–1965. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 14(4): 554-586.

Welch DA (1995) *Justice and the Genesis of War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wendt A (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Wehner, LE and Thies, CG (2014) Role theory, narratives, and interpretation: The domestic contestation of roles. *International Studies Review*, 16(3): 411-436.

Wehner, LE (2016) Inter-role conflict, role strain and role play in Chile's relationship with Brazil. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 35(1): 64-77.

Fuller WC (1992) *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600–1914*. New York: Free Press.

Wohlforth W, De Carvalho B, Leira H, and Neumann I (2018) Moral authority and status in International Relations: Good states and the social dimension of status seeking. *Review of International Studies,* 44(3): 526-546.

Wolf R (2011) Respect and disrespect in international politics: the significance of status recognition. *International Theory*, 3(1): 105-142.

Wolf R (2017) Identifying Emotional Reactions to Status Deprivations in Discourse, *International Studies Review* 19(3): 491-96.

Wolf R (2018) Debt, Dignity, and Defiance: Why Greece Went to the Brink. *Review of International Political Economy*, 25(6): 829-853.

Wolf R (2019) Taking Interaction Seriously: Asymmetrical Roles and the Behavioral Foundations of Status. *European Journal of International Relations* 25(4): 1186–1211.

Wolf R (2020) "On Monday, Our National Humiliation Will Be Over. We Will Finish with Orders from Abroad": Status, Emotions, and the SYRIZA Government's Rhetoric in the Greek Sovereign Debt Crisis, in: Simon Koschut (ed.): *The Power of Emotions in World Politics*, Abingdon 2020.

Wolf R (2022) Between Deference and Defiance: Hierarchical Status Roles and International Conflict. *International Studies Quarterly* 66: 1-13.

Wood S (2023) Status and the Federal Republic of Germany: An International Exception? *European Politics and Society*, 24(5): 625-647.

Weber M (1968) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press.

Watanabe Y (2006) Nihonjin no ajia ninshiki [Asian awareness of Japanese citizens]', Aoyamajoshitankidaigaku sougoubunkakenkyujo nenpou, 14, 33–54.

Xiong X (1999) *My Intelligence and Diplomatic Life.* Beijing, China Party History Publishing House.

Zarakol A (2011) *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West.* Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zhai Q (2000) China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

---

[i] The domestic audiences left out here are critical for intra-role conflicts when the public and decision-makers disagree with their international audiences on what role should their state enact. See Cristian and Kaarbo (2012).

[ii] Note that status-altering strategies can also include norm compliance to reinforce the status quo order. See Miller et al., (2015).

[iii] Others conceptually development of structural status theories include: refinement of SIT (Ward, 2017); focusing on domestic contestation (Wang, 2021); treating status as a discursive practice in a social hierarchy (Beaumont, 2020).

[iv] Note that Wolf did not explicitly claim a translation of role theory into status literature, but instead cited scholarship by Holsti (1970) and Malici and Walker (2017) specifically for the binary role status argument.

[v] For a comprehensive list of possible categories of status conflicts, see Wolf (2019).

[vi] Whenever referring to Taipei (台北), Chinese MFA used an ideologically-loaded term with a similar pronunciation, Taifei (台匪)— Taiwanese bandits— to highlight the KMT regime's lack of legitimacy to represent China.