

Deconstructing Chinese governmental and academic views on the post-Cold War Japan-U.S. alliance¹

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Abstract

This paper uses the author's PhD project "Chinese Governmental and Academic Views on the Post-Cold War Japan-U.S. Alliance" to illustrate four important issues in designing interdisciplinary research. First, researchers should locate the research focus at the very beginning and lay out the premise for the methodological framework. The major discipline of an interdisciplinary research project should be decided according to the nature of the research and the compatibility of methodology. Second, researchers should try to avoid ambiguous terms that are widely used in various disciplines with different meanings when choosing key words, and clarify important concepts to stress the major research question. Third, theories underlying the analytical framework should be justified by citing their advantages, limitations, and adaptability according to the needs of the research question. Fourth, when it comes to data collection and analysis, methods should be adopted according to the nature of the research as well as feasibility.

Introduction

This paper addresses the methodological challenges that my PhD research project 'Chinese Governmental and Academic Views on the Post-Cold War Japan-U.S. Alliance' is faced with. My PhD project aims to provide a thorough understanding of Chinese governmental and academic views on the Japan-U.S. alliance since the end of the Cold War, explaining their consistency and changes, with the focus on Chinese officials and IR scholars' cognitive framework. I apply discourse analysis to opinions of the Chinese government and IR scholars to provide a systematic description of their views. Then attention will be paid to the points where Chinese officials and IR scholars differ from international mainstream opinions, and the evolution of Chinese governmental and academic views in response to the development of the Japan-U.S. alliance. I will try to explain these characteristics of Chinese governmental and academic views in the light of China's ideology, which constructs China's national identity and the Chinese government's legitimacy, and ordinary Chinese people's epistemology towards foreign affairs. The government-academic interaction which shapes China's policies towards Japan and the U.S. will also be traced to indicate the intellectual flow in the mechanism of Chinese foreign policy making. The

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power transfer between the third and fourth generation of China's leadership is also taken into consideration. For my project, the major challenges in terms of research methodology are locating an interdisciplinary focus, defining key concepts, constructing the theoretical structure, and improving interview techniques.

Disciplinary focus: Foreign policy as the starting point for domestic politics

Disciplinary focus, or the centre of gravity of the research, is the overarching question for the construction of an interdisciplinary methodological framework. Though interdisciplinary research is related to more than one discipline by nature, there is always one discipline to which the project bears more than others. This should be specified at the very beginning of the research, since the disciplinary property defines the research territory, namely the nature of research questions to raise, the type of the methodology to adopt, and the system of discourse to employ. Researchers should always ask themselves an either-or question: which discipline does my research fall into? This question is essential. Without a clear answer to locate the centre of gravity of the research, no stable methodological architecture can be built. Unfortunately, the disciplinary focus of an interdisciplinary research is not as easy to discern as may initially appear.

Taking my project as an example, the centre of gravity has become increasingly clear as I proceed with my research. The study of Chinese governmental and academic views on the post-Cold War Japan-U.S. alliance touches upon several disciplines: it involves the international relations between China, Japan and the U.S., it deals with a cognitive framework that is frequently examined in social psychology, political science, and international relations, and it cannot be completed without investigating the ideological roots from China's domestic situations. At the beginning of my project, my supervisors asked me: what do you want to be, an IR theorist, a political scientist, or a social psychologist? The answer to this question was decided by the choice of research methodology.

The same research question calls for different analytical frameworks when examined in different disciplinary contexts, and the literature review would have a different emphasis accordingly. From an IR perspective, my research could be designed as a strategic analysis including a comparison between China's perspective of the Japan-U.S. alliance and the allies' self-perceptions. In this case, IR theories, realist, liberal, constructive, or eclectic, should be applied during the analysis and the bulk of literature review should be on IR theories and China-Japan-U.S. relations. It would be quite different if it was treated as a project in political science, for in that case, my research should prioritise Chinese political culture and its influence on foreign policies. Concepts including national identity, ideology, state legitimacy, and propaganda, would be central to my research; a review of

scholarly literature on cultural and institutional factors of Chinese politics and foreign policy making would be indispensable in such a study. From a social psychological starting point, however, my project would enter a domain of cognition theories, which should be tested by the case of the Chinese society. Issues including cognitive modes, biases, social categorisation, and social thoughts should be brought under scrutiny, and relevant theories of social cognition and sociology should be reviewed.

The first thing that was clarified was my project studied China, not China-Japan-U.S. relations, though the sample of governmental and academic discourses to be analysed was full of IR vocabulary. The focus of my project emerged not as international relations, but as the Chinese way of understanding international relations. Chinese governmental and academic views on the Japan-U.S. alliance should serve as a case study to reveal Chinese officials' and scholars' cognitive characteristics and pave the way for further analysis.

The next step was to choose between political science and social psychology. My research question can be seen as two consecutive questions: what are the Chinese governmental and academic views, and how do they form against the background of Chinese ideology? The exploration of the cognitive framework is based on a comprehensive description of Chinese governmental and academic views. It was necessary to justify my hypothesis and methodology: as there were many factors that shaped Chinese officials and scholars' views on the post-Cold War Japan-U.S. alliance, I had to identify why specifically I chose only domestic aspects and China's ideological education. Officials and scholars in various states are faced with the same world situation, but usually draw different conclusions from the same pieces of evidence.

These subjective discrepancies can be further divided into two categories: one is decided by China's position in the international system, and the other is cultured by China's domestic political environment; different social cognition theories should apply. To name an example of the first category, the Japan-U.S. alliance serves as a very important mechanism to respond to China's rise since the end of the Cold War. International observers including Japanese and U.S. officials and scholars usually list the Korean Peninsula threat above, or parallel to, China in the alliance's priorities. Chinese officials and scholars, in contrast, assert that China is the Japan-U.S. alliance's major target, and North Korea is tactic and short-term target, or merely rhetoric (8 Chinese officials and 24 Chinese IR scholars, 2013, interviews) This can be easily explained by cognitive theory, or even common sense, that cognitive agents, Chinese officials and scholars in this case, tend to be more alerted when the threat is closely related to them than when it is directed at others.

Yet when looking into the formation of Chinese governmental and academic views, I'm more interested in the second category: characteristic beliefs among Chinese officials and scholars that are in line with Chinese

ideology, rather than cognitive factors that are shared by all human beings. For instance, Chinese officials and scholars tend to see economic power as a more significant factor in international relations than universal values. Although they acknowledge the contribution of the Japan-U.S. alliance to regional stability, they would not mention this unless specifically asked (8 Chinese officials and 24 Chinese IR scholars, 2013, interviews). I am more interested in explaining these characteristics related to the construction of Chinese officials and scholars' cognitive framework and the constraints imposed by China's political system on officials and scholars' expression of opinions. The Communist Party's rule in China has been such a unique case in world politics, and the mechanism of its ideological education as an approach of political socialisation, seems fascinating from an academic research perspective. Therefore, the analytical framework of my PhD project was built in the discipline of political science, selectively adapting some social psychological elements where various methods were combined.

In terms of the adaptation of social psychology to my research, caveats are also necessary. Political-psychological approaches have been fruitful in explaining political phenomena from a psychological perspective, and are traditionally seen as a sub-discipline under political science. The field boomed in the twentieth century with excellent scholars adopting its approaches to examine both domestic politics and international affairs (for a review of the early development of political psychology, see Pye, 1991) Social psychology relies heavily on experiments in verifying hypotheses. Political psychology, on the other hand, can largely be seen as the application of existing social psychological theories to political science without changing the concepts or theories used. The fact that there have been a small number of experiment-based studies in the field of political psychology recently does not undermine the above observation. Political scientists have been expressing incisive concerns about the validity of social psychology theories in a political context, pointing out the discrepancies between experiment subjects (usually sophomores majoring in psychology) and experienced, intelligent, and accountable decision makers, and between artificial experiment designs and complicated and high-pressured real political environment (Holsti, 1976; Jervis, 1976b; Mercer, 2008) Nevertheless, the prevalent approach taken by political scientists and IR experts is to employ social psychology theories in their argument without justifying those theories in their own right. I follow this normal practice when it comes to the adaptation of social psychological theories.

Thus, it was clarified that the disciplinary focus of my research territory would be confined within political science. Priority was assigned to Chinese politics instead of China-Japan-U.S. relations or social cognition; the methodology would be theoretical and explanatory, rather than experimental and exploratory. Accordingly, IR and social psychological elements should serve the purpose of my research as a study of Chinese politics.

Key concepts: Investigating the cognitive framework behind views

The definition of key concepts is critical to any research project, as it determines the accuracy of the analysis by laying out the basis for the analytical framework. It should be treated with special caution in interdisciplinary research. When a term is widely used in various disciplines and demands too much clarification, it might be more practical to avoid the term, especially if it is not the major research question. Instead emphasis should be on other key words.

At first, my project employed the term 'perception', which turned out to be a great challenge. The trend in international political psychological studies of using a fault-finding and fault-correcting thinking has been so dominant that perception and misperception almost become synonymous. Researchers focused on decision makers' perceptions of adversaries' intentions and capabilities, which was usually interpreted as the perception of threat (Jervis, 1976a; Kimmelmeier and Winter, 2000; Stein, 1988). A highly pressured context was often assumed: a great number of relevant studies took the causes of war as their research question (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1997; Jervis, 1988). Another group of studies discussed the causes and solutions for crises. The rest of the studies were also coloured with confrontation and urgency even though a crisis context was not assumed (Shapiro and Bonham, 1973). Scholars made a distinction between 'hot' and 'cold' factors that influenced perception, which referred to emotion and (rational) cognition, respectively (Jervis, 1976b) and academic interest has been increasingly drawn to the latter. In the context of these studies, perception was treated as a given, as background knowledge for, and one of the determinants of, foreign policies. On such a basis, relevant academic works examined different forms of misperception, which was defined as not optimal under given circumstances with the information available (Jervis, 1988; Kim and Mesquita, 1995) Scholars borrowed theories from social psychology to explain different types of misperceptions, as observed in historical events. With regards to changes of perception, a certain set of relatively stable ideas, whether defined as belief system (Holsti, 1962), attitudinal prism (Brecher et al., 1969), operational code (George, 1967; Leites, 1951; Leites, 1953), or schema (Axelrod, 1973; Larson, 1994) was argued to have shaped perceptions related to foreign affairs. I did not follow their approach because they emphasised misperception disproportionately, the occurrence of which was discrete instead of continuous, and the types of which were interrelated or even mutually causal.

'Image', another possible key word, was also ruled out. Scholarly literature related to image depicted the relatively stable impressions states held towards others. Some of the studies looked at decision makers' image of certain states (Bronfenbrenner, 1961), hardly showing any difference from the research on misperception apart from their preferences of key words. The rest of the academic works on image took a perspective of communication and cultural differences, and usually analysed the mass

media or the general public. These studies relied heavily on content analysis of texts of news and statistics from large-scale cross-national surveys, which often ran over decades. The range of contents studied as image was broad, including government performance, policy preference, public opinion, national personality, as well as vaguely defined affections. Leading scholars of research on misperception distinguished 'perception' from 'image', and defined the latter as long-standing ideas held towards certain targets which could be seen as part of the belief system/attitudinal prism/operational code/schema (Holsti, 1976; Levy, 1983) However, the major problem of assuming image to be enduring was that it resulted in indifference towards changes, and the conclusions based on this assumption became essentially arbitrary as they used a constant to explain variables in reality (Cha, 1999)

In short, neither 'perception' nor 'image' was employed in my research as key words as my project focuses more on the cognitive factors behind the views rather than the views themselves. A systematic description of Chinese governmental and academic views is necessary as the premise for further analysis. It should cover various dimensions and present a panorama of the post-Cold War Japan-U.S. alliance with aspects that are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, and reflect consistency as well as changes.

Attention was then shifted to the cognitive framework behind these views. Cognition is the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses. (Oxford dictionaries) Extrapolating from this definition, cognition involves agent(s), sources, a framework, and a result. A cognitive framework is the agent's basic, non-specific ideas that guide and confine the entire cognitive process. A cognitive result can be either specific or general. Social cognition, its competing conceptions aside, relates to cognition in a social context. (Augoustinos et al., 2006; Macrae and Miles, 2012) It involves cognitive processes where social information is interpreted under a certain cognitive framework, analysed for adjustments, and stored in memory for potential retrieval (Pennington, 2000)

A cognitive framework includes world views, principled beliefs, and causal beliefs. World views are ontological beliefs concerning the self and the world. Principled beliefs consist of normative ideas that specify criteria for distinguishing right from wrong and just from unjust. Causal beliefs include ideas about cause-effect relationships which derive authority from the shared consensus of recognised elites.¹ As far as my research is

¹ This typology is borrowed from Goldstein and Keohane's classification of ideas with only slight changes of wording. However, just like we can use odd number/even number to classify 0-99 in one math problem and 1-1000 in another, the universal sets in these two pieces of research are totally different: Goldstein and Keohane classifies ideas related to foreign policy, while this research is classifying ideas that consist of the cognitive framework of a certain cognitive process. While they explored the pathways of ideas influencing foreign policy without digging into the selection of the ideas, this research studies not only how a cognitive framework influences perception, but also how certain

concerned, a cognitive framework is not target-specific. It is constructed only with those fundamental beliefs of ontology and value judgement, and those (as believed by the cognitive agent to be) universally applicable causal beliefs which are generalised from specific cases. For a certain cognitive subject, there is one cognitive framework, various sub-sets (often overlapping) of which are to be activated according to the nature of the cognitive processes. For example, it is unlikely that the same ideas are at work when a person is discussing international relations as are at work when discussing a balanced diet, but the self-categorisation as both politically a citizen of a certain country and biologically a human being are always there as part of the cognitive framework. For convenience, my research uses 'cognitive framework' to refer to the sub-set of ideas at work in a certain cognitive process instead of the entire framework.

The cognitive framework filters out some cognitive sources while colouring others in its own way. The function of a cognitive framework proposed here is similar to that of a belief system/attitudinal prism/operational code/schema, which have been discussed extensively among a growing cohort of political scientists and IR theorists. The advantage of using 'cognitive framework' instead is that it offers a clear boundary between cognitive sources, frameworks, and results in each cognitive process, while other terms enumerated above, often equalled to or connected with image/stereotype, fail to identify the distinction.

Theoretical structure: Self-categorisation theory and attribution mode

According to the self-categorisation theory, group formation is a distinctive social-psychological process: a group exists not only in the sense that it is recognised as a group according to social standards and external judgement, but also in the sense that group members categorise themselves as part of a group, in contrast with an out-group, and think and behave not only as individuals, but also as group members (Turner, 1987) This represents self-categorisation at a higher, more inclusive level of abstraction than the personal self and thus functions to depersonalise individual self-perception and behaviour. The individual can internalise and take on the character of the social whole, not just in behaviour but also in respect of their psychology, their self-identity.

I study the cognitive framework of Chinese officials and scholars on the assumption that they categorise themselves as Chinese as average Chinese people do, and as officials/scholars at the same time. In spite of the increasing pluralisation of Chinese foreign policy's input, I only take the Chinese government and IR scholars as my research objects due to time limitations. Governmental and academic views lie at the core of social

ideas became part of the cognitive framework in the first place (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993).

thoughts and foreign policy making. In China, as in any other society, the elites play a larger role than the general public in laying the foundation of social thoughts and leading mainstream opinions towards domestic and international affairs.

First, though the elites and the general public are usually seen as separate social groups and do have different sources of information and ways of thinking, they are all members of the state-as-group, as they are Chinese not only by nationality, but also by the psychological process of self-categorisation. When elites express their opinions and make foreign policies, they are doing so not as individuals, but as a member of the Chinese group who happen to hold opinion-leading or decision-making positions. They are distinctive from their fellow group members (the general public of China) in their power and influence, but not necessarily in their cognitive process. While social categorisation is easy to observe, the psychological state of self-categorisation is to be confirmed by direct questions during interviews and hints gathered from Chinese officials and scholars' public discourses.

Second, Chinese officials and scholars are not homogeneous groups that hold consensus on every single issue, and there is no exception when it comes to their views on the Japan-U.S. alliance. Differences of opinions can definitely be found within the Chinese government and academic circles, though probably in different forms. The government always has one single official stance even if officials' personal opinions vary. Academics often enjoy more freedom and publicly express their ideas that may conflict with others. Divergence of opinions is one of the research questions that motivate my research. I examine mainstream opinions and the prevailing way of thinking that leads to these opinions, and then investigate non-mainstream ideas and their formation.

Third, the study of governmental/academic interaction alleviates the problem of the categorisation of elites with mixed backgrounds. Some elites have rich experience in both the public sector and academia, but in most cases it is not painstaking to tell their career foci. Under circumstances where it is difficult to classify certain elites, I follow a government first principle and group him/her as officials, since experience in the public sector can have obvious influence on people's way of thinking, especially when it comes to issues in which they have personally been involved. In addition, my research addresses the interaction between the government and academia, and elites with mixed backgrounds are one of the interaction mechanisms themselves.

My research uses social psychological models when analysing the Chinese governmental and academic views on the post-Cold War Japan-U.S. alliance and their characteristics. Most of the Chinese governmental discourses related to the Japan-U.S. alliance are elicited by the alliance's development, and a large percentage of relevant academic discourses are on current affairs as well. In these discourses, the Chinese government and scholars interpreted individual events of the alliance according to their own

understanding of the underlying cause-effect relationships. As these opinions form a great portion of the raw materials from which Chinese governmental and academic views are extracted, it is illuminating to study their logics and patterns.

For this purpose, basic assumptions and hypotheses of attribution theory are borrowed from the discipline of social psychology to classify and explain modes of Chinese officials' and scholars' attributions of the Japan-U.S. alliance's events. Attribution theory is the theory pertaining to how people attribute actions to certain causes. The broad outlines of attribution theory were first sketched in the 1950s, and have been developed over the decades based on experimental findings (Ross and Anderson, 1982). Relevant studies are not confined to the individual level, but also address attributions at the group level.

Social psychologists hold two different attribution theories. One is the traditional actor/situation attribution theory, where actions are explained by citing either the actor or the situation.² One of the key arguments of this theory is confirmative attribution associated with the beliefs of an actor's disposition and derivative expectations: actions that are inconsistent with existing beliefs are more likely to be attributed to the situation, while consistent ones are more often attributed to the actor's disposition (Kulik, 1983).

The other is a relatively new causal history of reasons (CHR) theory, where unintentional behaviours are attributed to causes, and intentional actions are attributed either to reasons or the causal history of reasons, namely factors that preceded and thus brought about the reasons for an action (Malle, 1999).³ Whereas reason explanations entail that the cited explanation content was part of the agent's subjective awareness and deliberation (subjectivity assumption) and provided rational grounds for deciding to act (rationality assumption), CHR explanations entail neither of these assumptions (Malle, 1999). Based on common sense, the Japan-U.S. alliance's development should be intentional, so my research only employs the theoretical mode that addresses the attribution of intentional behaviours.

² Social psychologists commonly use person/situation and disposition/situation to refer to the same typology of explanations of actions. The difference between person and disposition attributions, if they must be distinguished from each other, is that person attribution emphasises the location of an explanation on the actor instead of the situation, while disposition attribution emphasises the enduring traits of the actor (after locating the explanation on the actor). To avoid linguistic misleading, this research adopts the actor as the category of attribution opposite to the situation, which means the same as person attribution and generally the same as disposition attribution (Heider, 1958; Jones and Davis, 1965).

³ In the context of research on the CHR theory, researchers refer to the traditional attribution theory as 'attribution theory' and CHR theory as a more accurate framework than 'attribution theory'. My research categorises both actor/situation attribution theory and CHR theory under attribution theory, because both are frameworks to study people's explanation of actions.

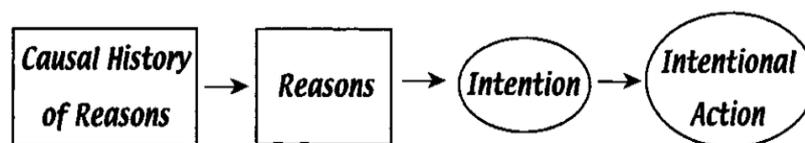


Figure 1: Causal History of Reasons Mode of Attribution (O'Laughlin and Malle, 2002)

As far as my research is concerned, the two attribution theories do not exclude each other. In fact, CHR theorists saw the actor/situation attribution theory as a reductive framework which was validated only in some of the explanation modes (Malle, 1999). While the former makes a distinction between actor and situational factors, the latter analyses attribution according to the emphasis on the actor's subjectivity. It is feasible to modify the actor/situation theory and CHR theory into compatible dimensions of an attribution analysis framework. And actions can be explained by citing four categories of factors: actor causal history of reasons, situation causal history of reason, actor reasons, and situation reasons.

Caveats are needed here. First, there are always both temporal and causal relationships along the CHR-reasons-intentions line. For each action a_x and its actor's intention i_x , there must be a set of reasons r_x preceding and causing it. In turn, for each set of reasons r_x there must be a causal history of reasons h_x preceding and causing it. Yet in the explanations, reasons and CHR are not necessarily cited at the same time. Second, the framework employed here does not represent the actual psychological process of the actor. It is employed to analyse the actor's psychological process as perceived by the explainer, though the actor and explainer are not necessarily different agents. Third, because they are subjective mental states inside the actor, reason attributions are always actor attributions in the absolute sense, and the distinction between actor reasons/situation reasons only refers to the contents of the reasons.⁴ Fourth, CHR and reasons are not paired according to the actor/situation dimension. Actor reasons can be caused by an actor CHR or a situation CHR, and the same applies to situation reasons.

This modified framework will then be employed to study the Chinese government's and IR scholars' interpretations of significant events in the Japan-U.S. alliance's development. Opinions will be categorised. For example, if China explains an event in the alliance's development with reference to Japan's aggressive nature (Midford, 2004) it will be categorised as an actor CHR.

⁴ According to Malle, reasons can be divided into eight categories following a three-dimensional feature space concerning its types (belief or desire), content (person or situation), and forms (marked or unmarked) (Malle, 1999).

Dimension	Causal history of reasons	Reasons
Actor	Japan/U.S. is an aggressive country in nature	Japan/U.S. wants to develop its military power
Situation	The international environment for the Japan-U.S. alliance is compelling	Japan/U.S. felt threatened by North Korea's nuclear development

Table 1: Example of Chinese Officials' and Scholars' Attributions of the Japan-U.S. Alliance's Events

Content analysis will be applied to discern the prevalent mode of Chinese officials' and scholars' attribution of the Japan-U.S. alliance's events. Two social psychological hypotheses are to be tested by the findings. The first is related to the confirmative attribution hypothesis mentioned above. My research investigates whether it is the actors' disposition or other factors that falls under the focus of China's attribution. The second is that explainers use more CHR explanations for group actions than individual actions when two conditions are satisfied. One condition holds when the why-question concerns more than one agent-action unit, namely when it involves one agent performing multiple actions or multiple agents performing one type of action (parsimony principle). The other condition holds when explainers do not have specific information about the particular agent performing the particular action, and they use general information that is available about the type of agent or the type of action performed (information principle). When reasons are offered for aggregate group actions, there is possibility that the explainers believe that the multiple agents comprising the aggregate are very similar to each other and therefore have the same reason for acting. Or, the explainers perceive aggregates (for example, 'African Americans', 'high school students') as coordinated groups who plan their actions together (O'Laughlin and Malle, 2002). Here, Japan and the United States can be seen as a group (alliance) of actors and China is the observer.

Interview techniques: Studying officials and scholars in the Chinese context

After building the theoretical structure, researchers still face challenges concerning many practical aspects of choosing and employing data collection and analysis methods. In this regard, it is important to make decisions by taking into account the research needs, advantages and constraints of different methods, the environment in which the research is conducted, and the researchers' professional training and skills.

I decided not to undertake an elite survey or an expert survey for the following reasons. Firstly, my project investigated the cognitive framework

behind views, which was more indirect and difficult to discern. It would be more likely to elicit clues for Chinese officials' and scholars' deeper beliefs during interviews. Secondly, surveys required a larger sample and therefore more time to conduct, but my time and research resources were limited and should be concentrated on the analysis of cognitive framework rather than the description of views. Thirdly, the response rate of elite survey or expert survey was not likely to be satisfactory. Contacts of Chinese officials and scholars were not usually available online. Moreover, PhD candidates were generally seen as students instead of researchers in the Chinese context, and questionnaires for PhD projects were not very appealing to Chinese officials and scholars. Therefore, it would be more effective to employ interviews for my research.

There were concerns when designing the interview questions as well. One such concern was about making sure that the questions leave enough space for the interviewees to reveal their priorities and what underlies their judgements. It would also be important to ask questions relating to their ways of thinking which would not be confirmed elsewhere. Lastly, it would be illuminating to ask interviewees about their opinions of their peers, which would reflect their level of self-awareness as a group in terms of certain ways of thinking.

In the light of these guidelines, I proposed interview questions in a non-specific manner and divided them into three clusters. The first set of questions investigated the interviewees' beliefs about the Japan-U.S. alliance, including its nature, utility, and the trend of its development. I raised follow-up questions when the interviewees' answers matched my hypothesis. For example, Chinese officials and scholars widely acknowledged the positive aspects of the U.S. presence in East Asia, (Zhang Lili, Zhao Xiaochun, Chinese MOFA official, Chinese Ministry of State Security official, 2013, interviews) but they would tacitly underplay this point in their discourses. In such cases, I would ask about the alliance's contribution to regional stability to confirm their opinions if the interviewees did not mention anything themselves.

The second set of questions explored the interviewees' way of thinking. Chinese officials and scholars are affected by epistemological distractions just as ordinary Chinese people are, including national pride and the influence of the mass media. I asked interviewees about cognitive obstacles to getting a balanced view on international affairs and how they would overcome them. Chinese officials in foreign policy departments and researchers in official and quasi-governmental institutions have the privilege of receiving information distributed routinely from related governmental branches, which has been edited with the 'organisational thinking' (George, 1980; Janis, 1973). Other scholars may suffer less from this kind of subtle influence, but as a result, they complain about insufficiency of information or 'information asymmetry', which weakens their analysis of foreign affairs (Zhang Lili, 2013, interview).

The third set of questions featured the practical constraints on scholars' influencing foreign policy making and conveying opinions among the general public. Confusing usages of words are noises hidden in the background. Terms which should be strictly defined are often used for convenience without clarification, which blurs the meaning and easily causes misunderstanding. 'The West has never ceased plotting against us' is not an unusual statement in Chinese discourses on foreign affairs, though Chinese officials and scholars do not believe it is true. (Ma Licheng, Liang Yunxiang, Zhang Tuosheng, Chinese MOFA official, 2013, interviews).⁵ 'Western countries try to contain China' is another popular argument, while some notice that 'contain' has meanings unique to the Cold War period and neutral words like 'balance' or 'restrict' would be more appropriate for current discussions (Zhang Tuosheng, 2013, interview).

In addition to subconscious discourse confusions, there are conspicuous restrictions on speech imposed by the government. In response to international and domestic situations, the Party issues instructions or guidelines to different categories of elites concerning their discourses on 'sensitive topics' (Wang Xiangming, He Husehng, 2013, interviews). More alarmingly, the majority of Chinese scholars are imposing self-regulation on their discourses. This is more detrimental than the government's direct monitoring, for it extinguishes the desire for free speech. For most 'within system' elites, namely those holding positions in the government, quasi-official institutions, or universities, expressions of opinions are directly linked with life conditions. As long as they rely on the bureaucratic system financially, they are reluctant to displease the government and trouble themselves. This is why Chinese scholars would cautiously keep themselves away from 'sensitive topics' that are not even listed in official guidelines – which is totally unnecessary in the eyes of officials (Chinese Ministry of State Security official, Chinese MOFA officials, 2013, interviews).

Conclusion

In terms of research methodology, I addressed four challenges facing my PhD project on Chinese Governmental and Academic Views on the Post-Cold War Japan-U.S. Alliance. Despite its interdisciplinary nature, my research was defined as a project on Chinese politics, employing IR and social psychological methods when necessary. Cognitive framework, the key concept of analysis, was defined in relation to existing terms like belief system, attitudinal prism, operational code, and schema, while I avoided ambiguous terms like 'perception' that were widely employed in various disciplines. The theoretical structure of my project was built on the basis of self-categorisation theory and attribution theories. When it came to data collection methods, I chose interviews because my research studied Chinese officials' and scholars' cognitive frameworks which were not easily reflected

⁵ "西方亡我之心不死".

in questionnaires, and it may be difficult for PhD students to conduct an elite survey or expert survey in the Chinese context.

To construct an interdisciplinary methodological framework is more a process of choice and exclusion than addition and combination. While borrowing and adapting are necessary and helpful, the essential question remains at the disciplinary focus. Researchers should locate the centre of gravity of the research at the very beginning and lay out the premise for the methodological framework. Only on this basis is it possible to define key concepts, build theoretical structures, and decide data collection and analysis methods. Researchers should try to avoid ambiguous terms when choosing key words, and clarify important concepts to stress the major research question. Theories to be employed in the analytical framework should be justified and adapted according to the needs of the research question. When it comes to data collection and analysis, methods should be adopted according to the nature of the research as well as feasibility.

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