

The PRC's strategic culture and its effects on alliance relationships

Speakers: Dr Catherine Jones, lecturer in international relations, University of St Andrews

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July 13 2023

Australia-China Relations Institute, UTS

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Professor James Laurenceson:

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, let's make a start. Before we begin the proceedings today, and on behalf of all those present, I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation upon whose ancestral lands our beautiful city campus stands. I'd like to pay respects to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land.

Welcome to all UTS staff, students and all friends of the university. My name is James Laurenceson, and I'm the Director of the Australia-China Relations Institute here. In just a moment, I'm going to hand over to my colleague, Dr Lai-Ha Chan, to introduce our speaker today and explain the structure of today's proceedings. But I did just want to begin with the remark that today's event is co-hosted by the Australia-China Relations Institute, and also by the UTS Asia-Pacific Research Group led by Professor Carolyn Cartier and mostly comprised of scholars in our Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. It's one of the big advantages of working at a university. We've got colleagues with a diverse range of expertise spread across a variety of faculties and institutes. Last week we co-hosted an event with the UTS Law Faculty, and the month before that with the UTS Business School.

Look, as for UTS:ACRI, we are not a China studies centre. We've never claimed to be. There's a very good China studies centre down the road at the University of Sydney. UTS:ACRI is focused on the Australia-China bilateral relationship. We seek to inform Australia's engagement with China through research, analysis and dialogue that is grounded in scholarly rigour.

Look, apart from our obvious bread and butter academic work published in peer-reviewed journal publications, at ACRI, we also aim to make an impact. We do that through a variety of non-traditional publications such as commentaries appearing in the mainstream press. And one I would like to emphasise is we also do an annual poll of Australian public opinion towards China. Now the new ACRI poll just came out earlier this week, and in fact on the desk behind you, there's some hard copies of the executive summary. We do that in collaboration with some colleagues in the UTS Business School. I guarantee you, it's the most

comprehensive poll of Australian public opinion available. The executive summary is there, and you can download the full report via our website.

ACRI tries to cover off on a range of areas in Australia's relationship with China. My own background is an economist, so I'll spend a lot of time talking about trade and the broader economic relationship. We also have Dr Xunpeng Shi at the back who is an expert on the clean energy transition. [I'll] point out Associate Professor Marina Zhang as well, who knows more about Australia-China science and technology issues than anyone else I've ever met before. And I'm particularly happy to also welcome a new staff member this week, and that is Professor Wanning Sun. Where are you, Wanning? There you are, hiding there. Professor Wanning Sun of course is [not only] Australia's foremost expert on the Chinese-language diasporic media in Australia, but [also] internationally. And in fact that's just one area Wanning is an expert in.

But look, I must confess international relations is not an area I can claim we've got amazing strength in within the ACRI team. So on that note, it's my pleasure to hand over to a UTS scholar who really does have genuine expertise, and that's Dr Lai-Ha Chan. Over to you, Lai-Ha.

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Okay, thank you. Yeah, thank you everyone for coming to today's talk. So I just try to introduce Catherine, and then the floor will be Catherine Jones' later, a little bit later.

So before I pass the time to Dr Catherine Jones, and let me just introduce her research and her positions first, and then I will lay out the procedure for today.

So Dr Catherine Jones, she's a lecturer in international relations at University of St Andrews in Scotland. Before joining St Andrews, she was a research fellow in East Asia at the University of Warwick, and that's the time we met each other. And in the past few years, Catherine's basically have been a Visiting Research Fellow at different university, different institution. I just name a few: Columbia University in New York, Nanyang Technology University in Singapore, University of Waterloo in Canada, and in Australia – and she's also a Visiting Scholar at the University of Queensland. So I think next time you've got to spend some time at UTS, that's your next visiting position.

And Catherine is a super prolific scholar, and I'm quite often amazed by the topic, the range of her research areas. And just name some of them, which I came across in the past decades or a few years' term.

First, and I can broadly divide it into three different areas basically. So first one is a China and international order. So including China's great power status, a social status seeking international peacekeeping, China's challenge to the liberal international norms and also Belt and Road Initiative.

The second area Catherine also involved or write, publish quite a lot of in this area, is the East Asian politics, including the ASEAN security issue, China-North Korean relations and the security challenge presented by North Korea. And of course right now it's a hot topic about the cross-strait Taiwan issues as well.

So the third area, which also we share quite a lot of research interest is under the UN global government, under the UN system about the international peacekeeping and peace operation and humanitarian assistance. So the research area is very broad, and I can see a lot of the publication and very good citation record as well.

So today, Catherine is going to talk about China, and more specifically about the PRC's strategic culture and its effect on alliance relationships. So particularly in the Indo-Pacific, of course US alliance, including of course Australia as well, and Japan, et cetera. So how those allies manage their relations with China.

So before I hand over the time to Catherine, just a little bit brief housekeeping. For example, Catherine will talk about 20 to 25 minutes roughly, and then we have plenty of time for Q&A, so question time. So if you have any questions, try to wait until she finish her presentation and then we have the Q&A time. And I will try to finish today's talk just a few minutes before – I'll pass the time back to James just a couple of minutes before 1:30. Okay, so welcome Catherine.

Dr Catherine Jones:

Thank you very much, Lai-Ha and James, for those welcoming remarks. And thank you very much to Amy, and Carolyn and all of the team for making this happen. I'm absolutely delighted to be in Sydney today. And as I was explaining to James and Lai-Ha, this is a mini anniversary for me because 17 years ago, I came over to study at the University of Sydney on a student exchange program. And basically, this has started some kind of love affair between me and Sydney that hopefully is going to endure for a lot longer.

But Sydney University also triggered my interest in China. Whilst I was there, I did a module on China and globalisation and that acted as the keystone in directing me towards doing a PhD. During my time of China watching in the last 17 or 18 years, China has clearly moved from having prospects or ambitions, or at least the potential to be a responsible great power.

But more recently, China's position in the world seems to have been decried as being a threat. The United States and numerous US allies have increasingly labelled China as some degree of a threat or a strategic competitor. But that has led to what should have been an opening of questions about understanding what kind of threat. Is it a threat in terms of how China does business, or is it a threat in terms of the objectives that China has? To what is it a potential threat?

Now, much as I dislike the idea of labelling China in any way, shape or form as being a threat, I think actually there needs to be a considerable unpacking of the meaning that is being attributed. Because when we look more deeply at Australia's relationship with the United States, the EU language around China, the UK's language in both the Integrated Review and the Integrated Review Refresh about China, although they seem to adopt a common word, the actual meaning and the implications for policies seem to be quite substantially different.

One of the things I was reading as I was waiting for people to arrive today was some of the work that ACRI has been doing and the publications in relation to UTS. And I actually have the executive summary of the latest poll, and there was just something I wanted to pull out from that, which I think is commonly overlooked when people just focus on China without contextualising what some numbers and meanings have. And so on page seven of the executive summary, the report makes the note of 64 percent of Australians also say that foreign interference in Australia stemming from China is a major problem. But that is down five points from 2022. But it is still higher than concerns about foreign interference stemming from Russia, which is at 62 percent, and the United States at 43 percent. The most shocking thing for me about that brief paragraph on the findings of this latest report, is that 43 percent of Australians are concerned about foreign interference from the United States.

And this is where part of my topic comes from today in terms of thinking about alliances, and the idea of China's strategic culture in relation to alliance relationships. And the bottom line of my argument is the United States' allies in the region are anxious. This is something that's picked up in one of the other reports from ACRI, the copies are at the back. But one of the reasons for this anxiety, from my perspective, is this is because they have very different understandings of what China's strategic culture is, both in terms of the objectives that China might want to achieve and how it might go about achieving them. And huge problems with that is a large-scale importation of Western ideas and Western notions about strategic culture, what it means to be a great power are being imported into some of the Chinese frames. And that is even more problematic when I'm going to take you through a few slides on different commentators' views on China's

strategic culture. In that it isn't just a straightforward, this is what Confucius says, and this is what China does, which I think is a hugely over simplistic reading of these things.

So I'm going to try and touch on three broad questions throughout this presentation. So what are the forms of China's strategic culture within the PRC? And I'm also going to point to the fact that this is not a straightforward topic, and it's not an unproblematic research concept to try and apply, but I still think it's quite useful. How does this strategic culture inform US alliance relationships in the Indo-Pacific? And I'm going to try and tease out some specific examples around Japan but also Australia, drawing from some of the work I've been doing over the last couple of weeks over here. And what are the implications for the foreign policy practice of countries such as Australia?

I'm going to hope that somebody's keeping me honest on time, because one of the other things that I'm really keen to hear is what are all of your thoughts on this? From somebody sitting outside the region in Scotland, aside from the fact that the weather is not quite as congenial, you do get to distance from some of these debates. So what would be really good for me is to hear where you think I've headed with this, and if you think I'm slightly off the mark because of that distance.

So this is the puzzle that I've outlined that seems to be becoming more pronounced. In the 1990s, Western analysts understood China's approach to the use of force. So that's its strategic culture. When and where would China seek to use force as being constrained to respect for sovereignty and non-interference? And these are taglines that you see everywhere about China's foreign policy.

Yet throughout the 1990s, China's use of force seemed to challenge a straightforward reading of those principles. China's involvement in the Korean War was often cited as being: 'this is clearly not China staying out of other people's affairs.' Intervention in Vietnam, the acceptance of UN peace operations. The increasing involvement of China in UN peace operations beyond where it started, which was logistical support, medical support, into – I think Mali was the first UN peace operation where China's peacekeeping contributions started to being able to carry. So we seem to have a statement of China's respect for sovereignty and non-interference. At the same time, we see examples of China's international behaviour, that at least on the surface seems to challenge that more headline relationship between China and the use of force.

And so my question is, can the strategic culture give context to how terms like sovereignty and non-interference should be understood as parameters for action? And if it does, that then should shape how the US and its allies in the Indo-Pacific develop their strategies.

So what is strategic culture? So here's a few quotes that I want to pick out some key elements from. So strategic culture has been a term that's been around in international relations, theories and concepts for a long time.

Jack Snyder in 1977 wrote: 'strategic culture is a set of semi-permanent elite beliefs, attitudes, behaviour patterns socialised into a distinctive mode of thought.'

Ken Booth in 1990 wrote: 'a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, habits, symbols, achievements and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat and use of force.'

Jeanie Johnson later in 2006 wrote: 'Those inherited conceptions and shared beliefs that shape a nation's collective identity, the values that colour how a country evaluates its interests.'

And Ashley Tellis, building on Ann Swindler, pointed out that ‘strategic culture shapes outcomes both by providing ultimate values towards which action is orientated’ and by ‘shaping the repertoire or tool kit of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct strategies or action.’

They’re great definitions.

Does it tell you anything about how Australia, China, Japan, the United States would act? One of the biggest problems I think is actually pointed to you by Jack Snyder’s semi-permanent elite beliefs. Who are these elites? And if they’re semi-permanent, how are we supposed to understand what and when they change?

This seems to suggest that both China’s approach to non-interference and respect for state sovereignty and its more broad understandings of what that might mean can all be covered under these sort of broad definitions of strategic culture.

One of the more famous theorists on China, Alastair Iain Johnston has also written about China and strategic culture. And so I look to him to see if he’s got the silver bullet that’s going to make this concept really acceptable and appealing in order to drive forward some policy. And the answer to that was he did and he didn’t. Most of those who use the term culture tend to argue explicitly or implicitly that different states have different predominant strategic preferences that are rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state. They are influenced to some degree by philosophical, political, cultural and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites. A historical or objective variables such as technology, polarity, relative material capabilities are all of secondary importance. It is strategic culture they argue that gives meaning to these variables.

So one of the things that I think is really useful from Alastair Iain Johnston’s definition as I’ve put it up here is the separation of the sort of fuzzy-wuzzy cultural ideas that may inform decision making from this idea of material capabilities, technology, polarity, the context that seems to him to be of secondary importance. You start first with what objectives you want to achieve and then you engage with the tool kit and capabilities that you might want to deploy in order to use them. But although I think the concept is therefore quite seductive, I also think it’s still problematic even with Johnston’s intervention. It’s problematic because it encompasses both change and stability. We’ve got these set-in-stone principles, cultural values and things that it’s supposed to inform everything that a state does. At the same time, it’s supposed to also be semi-permanent, it’s supposed to be capable of change. And these two things seem to be hugely problematic.

But I think if you make a shift from strategic culture as being determinative to being iterative, it maybe becomes more useful. And therefore I think considering strategic culture as an iterative process rather than a one-time statement is probably useful in terms of applying it as a conceptual tool in international relations and for policy.

And I just want to point out that this isn’t just about strategic culture as a concept. It’s also hugely problematic when people have tried to apply strategic culture and develop it in relation to China. So Zhang wrote a fabulous piece, but it’s a little bit at odds with where Alastair Iain Johnson went because they say: ‘the contemporary version of Chinese strategic culture, though retaining certain elements of its traditional counterpart, is a significant deviation from it and featured mainly on ‘defensive realism’ that stresses more on the material strength and cultural ideational preferences.’

So here we seem to have Chinese strategic culture in the contemporary space is a fusion of all of those traditional ideas from Confucianism, from Sun Tzu, but also mixed with the fact that China has been engaging with the world for a century. And it’s been engaging with a world that has been largely determined by those Western values over that period. So I’m sort of talking from the end of the Second World War, China’s engagement with the Second World War values and dominance of the West.

Later in the same paper they go on to say: ‘the restraints on the use of force, for the imperial China, derive largely from the superiority of the Chinese state vis-à-vis periphery ‘barbarians’’. And the one thing I wanted to point out here is the top quote seems to suggest a slight reordering of Johnston’s primary and secondary objectives in that actually the context in which strategic culture is being deployed is at least equally if not dominantly being determined by what the other is doing rather than your internal narratives of your strategic culture.

The second one I think is even more interesting because it seems to be strategic culture relates directly to hierarchy and China’s position in a hierarchy. So when we think through is China rising, is China risen? Would we end up with two different articulations of China’s strategic culture from China when it believes itself to have met the point of having risen and therefore it expresses its strategic culture through this hierarchical lens? Versus the moments when China is rising, when its articulation of its strategic culture and how it might deploy it might then be different.

Tiewa Liu who’s done a vast amount of work on China, the UN and peacekeeping, has also written about China and strategic culture through that lens of the use of force. And what she says is that this is a tension and she’s very clear about the fact that there is a tension. ‘Compared with ancient times,’ this is the second quote here, ‘even though China still firmly adheres to the principles of state sovereignty, non-interference and the non-use of force, at the same time it has shown more open and active tendency. That is to say it will not hesitate to participate in some multilateral operations which are rectified with UN authority or meet demands to release humanitarian disasters instead of escalating international conflicts.’

So she clearly ties together these traditional thoughts along with a more modern context. But again, what’s interesting here is this is all bounded in there is an external higher authority that can be appealed to grant legitimacy and authority. And there are particular objectives through which you might want to engage with the use of force, humanitarian disasters and avoiding the escalation of conflict.

But even then, these problems of strategic culture is a concept that might be deployed or also remain problematic. And if I just skip back one, there’s still an open question and I’ve had lots of conversations in the last year about what about China’s position on Russia, Ukraine? Surely this is a clear violation of everything I’ve just said about China’s approach to strategic culture and when it is appropriate and right to use force. And maybe we’ll come back to that in the questions. But I think it just helps to articulate that China is not in an easy position in relation to any of these things. And in trying to stand by its principles, it’s also going to be forced into positions where it’s less easy for it to follow those principles.

So this places us in a very difficult position when it comes to China’s strategic culture and especially at this moment because as we see the context in which China is operating and China’s own relative power capabilities are changing. So what we’ve got is trying to evaluate China and China’s strategic culture at a moment when we know there to be change rather than when we know there to be consistency. There is also this tension of a culture that might be derived from Confucianism or ancient Chinese texts versus a Confucianism that has emerged through the presence of Marxism or the experiences China has had within a Western dominated order.

And China’s objectives are also being shaped by the perceived problems of the existing order and these have changed over time. And I think this is one of the issues that I think China is currently grappling with in that many people articulated in the early 2000s, China is not going to try and overthrow the existing order because it’s so dependent on it. It’s dependent on the provision of public goods by the United States. It’s dependent on the stability provided by that US-led international order.

But increasingly as China is engaged more and more proactively with that order, it has also identified that there are significant problems with it and its continuation over time. And so China's experiences have also changed some of its objectives in relation to that order.

And this isn't just a China problem, this is a wholesale problem for almost every state around the world seeking to evaluate and understand what are its objectives in the next five years, 10 years and 20 years. One of the interesting things I got from one of the ACRI publications is maybe Australia made its choice in 1951 when it signed the – ANZUS agreement, thank you very much. Does that mean that there is no change possible, that if you decided something in 1951, that's where you stay? So I don't think that's just a China-related problem. But I think we can turn this sort of fuzzy wuzzy, slightly vacant concept of Chinese strategic culture into something that's a little bit more useful by bringing together a few different elements.

The first one comes from a paper from Miwa Hirono that was published in the Australian Journal of International Affairs in 2020 where she adopts a 'decision unit' approach. One of the things that I've seen numerous different states try and do in relation to China is say we're going to have an economic policy with China that's separate or somehow segmented from our climate change policy. And then we're going to segregate that from our defence and security relationship and we're going to try and treat these as all individual boxes. I have questions as to whether I think that's plausible going forward. But I think the idea of identifying that there is a decision unit, whether that's a ministry, whether that is key actors in terms of state-owned enterprises, whether that is provinces that may be the lead in certain key sectors. I think identifying the decision unit is then a fundamental first step.

And then identifying that decision unit's own strategic culture, that might not be in direct relation to the use of force, but it might inform how they shape objectives, how they go about pursuing those objectives. Are they essentially driven by negotiation? Are they driven by checkbook diplomacy? Are they driven by the attributes that they can give or they can export?

And then identifying the dominant patterns of behaviour within that decision unit and key personalities. I remember watching the reports from China and the changes to the Standing Committee last October, and there were lots of newspapers about all of the individuals involved. Where do they come from? What's their history? What's their background? What's their experience in terms of what they did within the Party previously or within their particular units? And I think identifying those key personalities and especially where do they get their thinking from? Increasingly what we see is that Chinese leaders have done one element of higher education outside of China, but increasingly a lot of them have done all within China. What do those programs of study look like? And therefore, what are the key ideas that have really been fundamental in their thinking? Where have they been posted to? What roles have they fulfilled? How has that shaped their experiences and therefore the strategic culture that they're bringing to that decision unit?

And then identifying the contextual personnel changes that may have shifted. So if you are an external personality, I'm sure many of you have been leaders of whether it's a small level student group or a large scale multinational organisation or anything in between. Just because you come with a different personality and you want to shake things up, doesn't necessarily mean that happens.

And so identifying what is the mix between – I've gone somewhere – identifying what is the mix between these individuals and their personalities and their backgrounds and how that connects to the organisation that they're then running is then fundamental. Now I think that makes it slightly more useful. It also makes it hugely more problematic because when you are coming to the ideas of what does that mean for US allies in the Indo-Pacific, each ally might be engaging with different decision units within China on different policies. And their reception and their receptivity to messages from and to China is also going to change.

But I think this also puts a lot of pressure on the United States to better understand this region. And I don't say that lightly, because the United States has clearly been heavily involved with bilateral partners and multilateral institutions across this region for a long time. But understanding that islands in the Pacific are potentially a lot more concerned about climate change than they are about the presence of Chinese bases propping up in the South China Sea, I think needs to be a bit more prominent in certain US thinking. And that also affects places like Australia who may want to engage with partners in the Pacific, especially small island states, on issues of climate change going forwards. But that's always going to be anchored under that broader umbrella of the US in the Pacific.

And this was a fabulous diagram that I saw. I can't remember where it's from, but one of the things that I thought was fascinating from this – The Times? – is the idea that playing both sides is North Korea. But also we might – this was published in 2018 – we might also want to consider which of these places has shifted, where there have been shifts occurring. And especially that this is a broad brush. This is an overarching umbrella of what's going on in this region. I'm going to skip through some of this and just tip onto the Australia bit and then I'll wrap up.

I was looking at some of the work from the USSC over some other part of Sydney, and one of the things that I found really interesting but also slightly problematic is the *2020 Defence Strategic Update*: 'Bilateral tensions with China were building, and doubts had grown among US allies worldwide about the credibility of US alliance commitments under the Trump Administration.'; '[T]o ensure defence has the right capabilities to meet our growing strategic needs.... pessimistic assessments in the *2020 Defence Strategic Update* have, if anything, hardened since 2020.'

The same report goes on to say, 'There are strong indications that similar shifts are occurring in the views of Australians at large. Public consultations in advance of the *2016 Defence White Paper* revealed that the Australian people felt a profound sense of absurdity regarding the country's security situation. Indeed, an established trend line in the successive polling by the Lowy Institute between 2010 and 2022 has been an increasing feeling of insecurity among Australians and a significant increase of those seeing a threat from China since 2018. Far from abating in 2022, unease about Australia's future security in the Indo-Pacific appears to be the new normal.'

And I've checked the poll data, and this idea that if you talk about China as a blanket of everything, I think these uncertainties and these fears increase. One of the things that I quite like about the latest iteration and the previous poll data from 2021 from ACRI and BIDA is the nuance that the minute you separate this out into sectors, you get a slightly different view of positive relations with China, whether it's on higher education, whether it's on business, whether it's on economic affairs, whether it's on climate change. You get a slightly different view.

I think one of my big takeaways is if we go to this China strategic culture and the different strategic culture existing within different decision units in China, then it makes it more possible and plausible to develop individual policies across these sectors that's more reflective of exactly where public opinion and potential future opportunities lie than just over acting as this overarching 'China is X' view. And it maybe gives some more guts to some of these things.

From that same report, there was a recommendation number four, to focus on interests rather than values: 'Australians acknowledge that while they are living in an era of rapid strategic change. Instinctively they know that the alliance will need to change in the interests of both Australia and the United States. While values-led discussions will always gain traction with some audiences, values do not resonate on their own among younger Australians, as a justification for doing more in the alliance. In fact with significant sectors of the Australian population, a focus on values serves to spotlight significant differences between the two countries, especially on reproductive healthcare, gun laws and societal issues.'

But one of the things that I think is interesting is what is this relationship between interest and values? Can you have interest outside of your values? And if you've got differences at the fundamental base between you and your ally partner on values, how is that later going to inform your interests in the long term?

I think I'm basically out of time, so a few conclusions. Firstly, the US focus in the region seems to be premised on a particular view of China's strategic culture, interestingly not one that's come from that Confucian thought that I started this talk with, but instead of applying certain lessons of what China is going to want to do because it is a rising or a risen great power. We seem to have a US adopting a view that is slightly at odds with any narratives that we could come up with of what Chinese strategic culture is.

In contrast, I think US allies in the region have adopted a much more nuanced understanding to China's strategic cultures and their variation in decision units and key personalities. And I think this is one of the fundamental things that creates this anxiety between places like Australia and the United States over how to deal with China, because they fundamentally view them as following very different strategic cultures, which as we said at the beginning is determining what are your objectives, how are you going to achieve them, what is your approach to action? And I think that sets up key anxieties.

And at the very fundamental level this means that there is a tension between actions that the US views as reassuring the region. Actions that the US might put forward towards Australia in terms of providing greater numbers of troops in developing various parts of the AUKUS agreement with the UK and the United States is premised on a strategic culture that might not be understood to be the same in terms of dealing with China. And that will fundamentally make the prospects for an effective and efficient relationship much more problematic going forwards.

If you as a US ally still want to pursue a relationship, especially with different decision units within China that seek to deviate from those frameworks, that's going to put your attentions not necessarily with China at the end of the day, but with the US as your ally partner. And I think a better understanding of multiple strategic cultures within China that is already accepted, I think, by large numbers of US allies in the region is ultimately where a more productive and positive relationship going forwards can emerge.

And with that I'll stop.

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Thank you very much.

Anyone want to start talking or ask question or comments? Comments or question? Yes.

Audience question:

Thank you for the very interesting topic and research. I just have, first of all, I make a comment. You're talking about contradictories between China's strategic culture and the behaviours. We were talking about Chinese culture this morning. I talk with my colleagues. Chinese culture is very much ambivalent in terms of values. It's not like in the West there's a unified religion where it defines right or wrong. But in China there are actually many shades of values in between, so you can actually do this and you can do that, and that's just obviously might help explain how to resolve the obvious conflicts or contradictions between the strategic values, strategic culture and the behaviours of Chinese government.

And second one is, I won't say – Confucianism, I think one thing that is not stately in any written or strategic culture per se, is rather embedded in assumptions of Chinese people that is 无所不为 (wusuobuwei), literally translating into doing nothing, actually achieving doing everything. For the United States and its allies to

understand what Chinese foreign policy, actually you might just adopt this kind of philosophical values so that is to understand unwritten assumptions embedded in most Chinese people's mind. Thank you.

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Yeah, thank you.

Catherine, do you want to respond?

Dr Catherine Jones:

Yeah. I agree that there's no singular Chinese culture or set of values, but I think that's probably true of absolutely every social grouping you could collect of any group of people in the world. But what strategic culture tries to tease out is the common threads from that collection of diversity, rather than just imposing a particular view on it.

And like I said in one of the quotes, this is accepted as this is not – There are things that I disagree with about what is identified as the UK strategic culture, but it is still an accepted strategic culture. On Confucianism, one of the biggest problems is how do I do research on unwritten philosophical assumptions? One way to do that would-

Audience question:

[inaudible]

Dr Catherine Jones:

One way to do that would be to do surveys or focus groups. But then I end up with this, but have I implanted a bias by the groups that I've selected? Because my obvious initial groups would be to go to Chinese students studying abroad. But they are a self-selecting group of people who have chosen to study abroad, and therefore am I getting a pre-selected group of philosophical assumptions?

One of the things that, on a separate paper on strategic culture colleague and I have been looking at, is do we go back to key philosophical phrases and examine them? One of them was related to if you don't fight, you won't make friends. It's not a great translation. But then we sat there and thought, but is this actually reflecting society as it is now? And so we end up with that how do I research something that's unwritten? How do I research something where I'm not even going to know where I've put the bias into the outcome?

But we might go back and look at that again and see if we can tease out some key framings of philosophy that might have greater resonance. A different way to do it would be to go to a whole heap of university courses that are mandatory for everybody going to university in China and see what's within those. Again, that's only going to give me a slice of the population who've gone through that particular experience. But in relation to this where I want to be talking a lot about elites, that might be helpful. What philosophy were you taught as an undergraduate in various different courses? That might be another part of how to get around that.

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Yes, that's excellent.

In my observation, I quite liked what you have defined at the beginning about this semi-permanent decision making, in particular those elites and how they're thinking, the cognitive idea about a particular thing. That's

because if we are looking at the international relations is basically the decision maker, how they think about that, and so that kind of – the elites, their behaviour, their thinking, the cognitive ideas is important, is the key thing, because if you are looking at – That's one thing I'm really amazed about how you're choosing this topic, because it's very vast, strategic culture.

You think about [inaudible] China, we're talking about few thousand years of history. You have Confucius idea, Tao's idea and all different kinds idea and how we can apply to the current contemporary politics, in particular China's position with the outside world. Or outside world, how they think about China, that is a very difficult topic and so it's very, very good question. Very good response so I learned a lot.

For the next question, or the people, if you ask questions, please briefly explain or introduce yourself, your name and institution. That will be very helpful. Thank you.

Audience question:

Thank you for the talk. It was very interesting. My name is Marina, just a regular citizen.

I find it very perplexing as well as amusing whenever Confusionism gets put on display. Fact of the matter is it was pretty much [inaudible] during the Cultural Revolution. That philosophy suited dynastic rule, very hierarchical societal strata, okay, village life. That no longer applies. China is ahead of the pack in almost everything these days. That's thing number one.

Thing number two, no one has tapped into this century of humiliation that underpin China's unseizing want and dedication and commitment to step out of that shame, to step out of the humiliation. Be good, be bright, be on the top. Don't get stepped on, don't get dumped by opium ship. Year after year, decade after decade, ship out of that treaties being imposed on the country. Silver, gold, land, we must do better than that. And that's what drives the Chinese not to be a dumped nation, not to be cut into concession zones, not to be assaulted by eight European nations trying to divide the country.

That is the driving force, not Confusionism, but to excel, to pass the shame, pass the all those shameful behind and be as good as anyone else. That's what they drive at. That's it. Simple as that. Yep, simple as that.

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Thank you for your comments, yes.

Yes. Any other? Yes, this lady and then Faisal, yep. And maybe we take two questions together and then you respond. You collect two and you, yeah.

Audience question:

Okay. Glenda Korporaal from *The Australian* newspaper.

How does your idea or China's idea, or your thoughts on China's idea of its strategic culture, which I think what you're saying is not interfering in other countries fit in, as you would raise the question, it's backing of Russia, which is very actively interfering with another country. And also what about Belt and Road? That's not military, but that's fairly active trade policy. How does that fit in with your views of China's strategic culture?

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Thank you Glenda, for the question. And Faisal?

Audience question:

Thank you. Mohammed Faisal here. A PhD student here at UTS. My question is related to the Russia and Ukraine conflict, but in a reverse order. During Russia and Ukraine conflict many countries profess neutrality. Now in a conflict over Taiwan when China would expect countries to choose its side, if countries like Pakistan or others would say they are neutral, how would China react to that in that sense? Thank you.

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Yes, thank you. Do you want to take one more question?

Dr Catherine Jones:

Give me a moment to think about how to answer some of this?

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Okay, so maybe we take second round, another round. So we take another maybe two more question, then we are finishing. Okay. So yeah.

Dr Catherine Jones:

Just in response to your comment about semi-permanent elites and how broad this topic is, it's actually a lot broader than that because when you begin to look at strategic culture and you type it into Google Scholar, most of your initial responses come from business. Like strategic cultures of business, rather than international relations necessarily being the bigger hit. So there's something else to be brought into this about where that sort of concept has been more developed.

What drives the Chinese is not being dominated. I agree to a degree, but I think that also informs their views of non-interference. They neither want to dominate nor do they want to be dominated. And I think that sort of is a different reflection of some of those ideas that has maybe been less well understood in some places.

Russia and the Belt and Road. How do these fit in with non-interference? So I think the argument on the Belt and Road is this isn't interference, this is the presentation of various opportunities, and then it's for the other party to accept, negotiate, or reject. That's more a question about the agency of those different parties to be able to negotiate with China a good or better deal on the Belt and Road. But also what we've seen is using the offer of money from the Belt and Road or projects through the Belt and Road then being used by some countries as a lever to get competing offers from other places. And so I think it's less about China interfering directly versus actually creating more competitive spaces, in some of these parts of the world which have been less focused on, especially by Western aid actors, businesses, development partners over a long span of history. And it's introducing an element of competition rather than necessarily interference.

On Russia, I have not brilliant answers because I think China has been monumentally conflicted over Russia and Ukraine. And it has been, certainly from the UK's perspective for a long period of the start of the conflict, it was presented as Russia and China are as close as they could possibly be on this. And there was a clear but persistent narrative that said no, they're not. This is actually creating vast conflicts for China and China's views of how the world should operate. But it's got two sets of conflicts. It's got the: 'We don't want people to interfere in other people's internal affairs.' At the same time: 'We do have a common cause in not wanting to see greater NATO expansion.'

So China has got a whole heap of conflicts and has been trying to, from my perspective, walk this very, very narrow line of not providing huge amounts of support to Russia, but also not being seen to be backing some of the actions of other parties, especially in relation to NATO. I don't think it's always got walking that line right. But I think it has been trying to walk it in a very difficult international context, and actually there maybe should be more appreciation for how difficult a position China has been in over that.

Which leads me to Taiwan. Given that I suspect China's view on Taiwan would be, Taiwan is an internal matter for China. Therefore, if other states just remain neutral and do not interfere with China's internal affairs, I'm not sure they would necessarily see that as a problem. Because neutrality would just mean following the one China policy or the one China principle, which is what they've probably already agreed to, if they're a diplomatic partnership with China, and therefore given that Taiwan is an internal affair for China, then neutrality wouldn't necessarily be the issue. That might be a very positive view.

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Okay, thank you.

So I think one thing I need to admit is academic is very bad in time control. We are running a little bit late, but I already agree. I saw before a couple of hands up, and if I can make the decision, can we push it to a few minutes later – finishing line? So I take two more questions but need to be very, very quick question. Okay. So just two. I saw Stephanie before, she raised her hand, and that gentleman as well. Yeah.

Audience question:

Hi, my name's Stephanie Donald and I work here at UTS. My question follows on from the last question or I think, and also to your response. Which is, is it really doing nothing if you define boundaries that others disagree with and then redefine that as an internal matter. So that could apply to regions in the west of current China. It could also apply to the South China Sea. And we all, I'm sure very much enjoyed the fury over the Barbie map in the last few days, but it's been of some – It's serious for the Philippines, for Malaysia, for Vietnam. It's very serious. And they don't see China as a innocent doing nothing, not crossing borders actor in the South China Sea. They see that as a genuine dispute. So are you really doing nothing and just not interfering with others if you define your borders outside borders that others accept. Which of course does include Taiwan too.

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Good question Stephanie. And that gentleman. Just need to be short.

Audience question:

Yes. Hi, I'm Hercules Chu, I'm a PhD candidate from the University of Sydney. So I appreciate that you try to theorise the ideas for the strategic culture from your representation. So I would like to ask, how do you expand the ideas towards the other areas that the PRC covers? Because I tried to quote the article written by Rana Mitter, from *Foreign Affairs*, that he mentioned: 'Chinese power today is a protean, dynamic force formed by the nexus of authoritarianism, consumerism, global ambitions, and technology'. So I wonder whether the strategic culture you mentioned can be expanded towards those areas to explain it and form a comprehensive framework. Thank you.

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Thank you. Thank you for the question.

I know this is very, very important questions, and we can talk for another half an hour or one hour. So Catherine, do you want to respond in one minute? I challenge you know.

Dr Catherine Jones:

So one of the premises of non-interference and respect for sovereignty is that there has to have been an agreement on sovereignty in the first place. And in the South China Sea and other spaces, the dispute is over where sovereignty lies across different boundaries. And this has always existed as being a problem of, well we cannot interfere once we've got the border written and agreed by both sides. So we know where sovereignty sits. But when there's still a dispute over sovereignty, neither side is going to accept that what the other one is doing is not interfering and not intervening. That's about how you go about negotiating where a sovereign line sits, rather than it being about non-interference in terms of some of these principles.

But it might be that one of the things that the paper needs to then delve into is where does your strategic culture determine when you should use force when there isn't an agreement on sovereignty? Or maybe we should turn this into another paper and say this is a paper of use of force in these circumstances and this is when-

Audience question:

Like Kashmir.

Dr Catherine Jones:

Yeah. And there's several others that you could do. But China is not alone in having disputes over borders that are not accepted by other states. It's just fewer states talk about them and few of them reach international attention in the same way.

Can this be expanded to a comprehensive framework? I'm sure somebody could. I'm not sure it would have great utility in doing that. Because I think you just end up with more and more – I mean you can come up with that sort of expand on the analytical frame of decision units and personalities and contexts. You could apply that as a broad stroke to a number of different contexts. But in terms of turning this into a comprehensive explain more and more things theory, personally I would find that deeply unsatisfying, because I would just see all of the contradictions that I've already spoken about as being even bigger.

And what I want to suggest is that what we need to do is have ways of better understanding the particular, rather than turning everything into bigger and bigger umbrellas, to understanding broad themes. And I suppose that's where my use of strategic culture fits, is in explaining and better understanding, particularly in reference to the broad rather than explaining the comprehensive relationship.

Dr Lai-Ha Chan:

Okay, excellent. Yeah, thank you very much Cat.

So yeah, so I need to pass the forum to Professor Cartier. Because as James earlier mentioned about that this event is [a collaboration] between the Asia Pacific Research Group under the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and ACRI. And so Professor Cartier is the head of the research group, the Asia Pacific Research Group, and I'm also a member of that research group as well. That's the reason I try to chair today's event, and I forgot to introduce myself at the beginning. So apologise for that. And yes, I passed the time for you.

Professor Carolyn Cartier:

Hi everyone. It's great to see everyone today and to be over here on the 18th floor in these lovely quarters, which we don't have, but we have a lively research group over in FASS. And thanks very much to Lai-Ha for organising, especially to Catherine for a lovely talk. Thank you so much. It's very much appreciated. And of course to James for liaising and collaborating as usual. It's great to see everyone once again. And yes, please, please be aware that we also have a talk series in the Asia Pacific Research Group in FASS. It looks like our next one will be scheduled for the first week of August, right at the beginning of the semester – welcome back lunch. And we'll have a visitor who's going to be speaking on Singapore.

But let me stop there and thank you again so much. Great collaboration. Thanks.

Dr Catherine Jones:

Thank you very much.