Anarchy, Technology, and Civilisation:
Assessing Realist Approaches to Cross-Taiwan Strait Security

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*Work in progress – comments welcome*
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Abstract

For many scholars of international security as well as practitioners, the Taiwan Strait remains to be ‘the most dangerous place on earth’, where the prospects of a major war involving nuclear-armed China and the United States is ‘so real’. Some argue that historically the ascendance of a regional power in the absence of an overarching authority in the international system tends to be disturbing for establishing regional order; hence, the compelling logic of anarchy will drive the US-Japan alliance and a rising China into an inevitable security competition, which could end up in a Strait shooting war. Some counter that although China’s threat to Taiwan as well as the region is increasing because of its dramatic, double-digit increase in military spending, this would not necessarily entail a great-power war over Taiwan as long as such a threat can be met by maintaining a defensive advantage in military technology. Others hold that it is Taiwan’s identity shifting away from the Sinic civilisation, as shown in the rise of Taiwanese nationalism, which will inevitably lead to a military invasion from the PRC that will then engulf the US and trigger a Sino-American war. This paper critically examines three sets of theoretical assumptions—usually under the rubric of Realism in security studies—that underpin the above popular assertions. It concludes that the second proposition about the cross-Strait ‘technological peace’ is untenable, yet this does not endorse the inevitability-of-war thesis advocated in the other two perspectives. Moreover, enquiry into the question of war and peace in the Taiwan Strait, both outside and inside the walls of academia, is not insulated from the question of responsibility.

Key words: Taiwan Strait issue; international security studies; offensive realism; defensive realism; cultural realism

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Introdution: One Taiwan Strait, Many Realisms

The end of the Cold War has regrettably not brought an end to the volatility of the security situation in the Taiwan Strait. The events and rhetoric surrounding Taiwan’s two presidential elections in 2000 and 2004, Beijing’s enactment of the ‘Anti-Secession Law’ in March 2005, and Taipei’s decision to scrap its dormant yet symbolic National Unification Council and National Guidelines for Unification in February 2006 all raised fear that accumulated cross-Strait tensions might result in actual warfare between two nuclear powers—the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the United States—over Taiwan.

Against the backdrop of a ‘rising’ China, this precarious situation seems to be even more complicated. In fact, even for those who consider reform-era China as an essentially status quo power that presents economic opportunities rather than a mere threat, the Taiwan issue appears to pose, and indeed is posing, a thorny anomaly against this reserved optimism. Beijing’s refusal to renounce the use of force in ‘solving’ the Taiwan question, as witnessed in the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) firing of missiles around Taiwan (1995-96) and the passage of the above Anti-Session Law authorising the use of ‘non-peaceful’ means to check Taiwan independence movement, has been frequently taken as evidence of a belligerent and revisionist China. It is unsurprising, then, that many analysts and policy makers treat the question of war
and peace in the Taiwan Strait as an empirical question. As William Callahan indicates, it is simply about assessing China’s rising power in terms of the size or growth rate of its gross domestic product (GDP), foreign exchange reserves, defence budget and military modernisation, and even number of ballistic missiles targeting at Taiwan.

Such a preoccupation with the empirical assessment notwithstanding, the choosing of any particular mode of analysis or representation is a theoretical issue. A common assumption is that a rising power like China is inherently dissatisfied with, and eager to challenge, not solely the status of Taiwan but the existing institutions, norms, and international order. Since the PRC has been converting its economic might into military strength, one should be vigilant that the increasing Chinese relative capacities will provide China more options to challenge current power distributions in East Asia by pushing US power out of the region. In brief, economic growth leads to military expansion. In a less alarmist vein, however, one could suggest why this dire scenario involving great-power war may well be exaggerated. Because the ‘China threat’ in relation to Taiwan cannot be meaningfully ‘real’ until military means becomes a feasible option for Beijing to compel unification or at least prevent Taiwan’s move towards de jure independence, what really matters is to maintain the cross-Strait military balance (where technology is the key) in Taipei’s favour. Still, it
has also been alerted that the surge of Taiwanese national identity since the 1990s may eventually lead to Taiwan independence, which will inevitably trigger armed conflict in the Taiwan Strait that will then entail a military showdown between Washington and Beijing.⁵

Consciously or not, the above prevailing assertions regarding the prospects of regional security correspond with three theoretical approaches that are usually under the rubric of Realism in international security studies.⁶ Precisely speaking, they echo with—in this order—offensive realism, defensive realism, and cultural realism. My observation here is not entirely novel. Chih-yu Shih, for example, has pointed out that at least two realist variants can be detected in the literature by Taiwanese scholars on Beijing’s ‘great power diplomacy’ (daguo waijiao) officially appeared in 1997.⁷ Likewise, Callahan has noted that the ‘rise of China’ debate has been colonised by realists on both sides of the Pacific and the manifest political consequences of adopting this particular mode of representation over others.⁸ Whilst these critical voices are mainly concerned with the identity function of IR theory, namely how realism is used for different purposes of identity construction (and accordingly producing different analyses),⁹ my paper aims to investigate this largely under-explored yet significant theory-practice nexus from another angle by using the method of immanent critique. Since in the social world how we understand things conditions how we behave,
theories or discourses, albeit to a great extent false, can still have pernicious effects outside the walls of academia. It is therefore necessary to look closely at the aforementioned realist approaches in relation to the Taiwan issue—so that their hidden contradictions can be revealed step by step, in the process of investigation—as well as consider their normative-praxeological implications.

This paper has three main sections, devoting to the examination of the offensive realism of John Mearsheimer, defensive realism of Steven Van Evera, and cultural realism of Samuel Huntington respectively. Each section begins by outlining theoretical assumptions of the realism in question, how it explains and envisions security situations in the Taiwan Strait, and then moves on to demonstrate how each realism fails in its own project in the context of the Taiwan issue. The offensive realism-defensive realism debate was a key feature of the study of international security (in the United States at least) in the past decade. This debate is different from, but sometimes confused with, the offence-defence balance debate on the validity of offence-defence theory. Strictly speaking, offence-defence theory does not amount to defensive realism; I use these two terms somewhat interchangeably in this paper because the former is the most essential component of the latter. The term ‘cultural realism’ is borrowed from Johnston’s book title, which, I think, can neatly represent Huntington’s conflictual, relational logic of self-other, as shown in his ‘clash of
On the basis of the analysis of these three realist approaches, my conclusion suggests that the second proposition about the cross-Strait ‘technological peace’ is untenable; nevertheless, this does not support the inevitability-of-war thesis advocated in the other two perspectives. Moreover, discussions about the prospects of peace in the Taiwan Strait cannot be separated from the question of responsibility, which is related not solely to decision makers but also to academic specialists who have frequently endorsed those three common, often dogmatic, yet unqualified assertions when thinking about national and regional security.

1. **Offensive Realism and the Perils of Anarchy**

For those who are familiar with, or had at least come across, Waltz’s seminal work *Theory of International Politics*, the first puzzle they would encounter when reading Mearsheimer’s *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* is probably why these two theorists with a similar starting point eventually offer quite divergent explanations and predictions about state behaviour.14

For Waltz, in the international system ‘balance-of-power politics prevails wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive’; in anarchy, ‘[t]he first concern of states is
not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system’. Thus, states run risks if they have either too little or too much of power, and ‘sensible statesmen [should] try to have an appropriate amount of it’. At odds with Waltz’s proposition that the over-accumulation of power will invite other states’ balancing behaviour, Mearsheimer argues that states (especially great powers) always strive to maximise their own relative material power, with hegemony as their ultimate goal if possible. ‘Strength ensures safety’, Mearsheimer declares, ‘and the greatest strength is the greatest insurance of safety’. Whilst exploiting opportunities to maximise their share of world power, great powers also seek to prevent rivals from gaining power at their expense. Buck-passing—to remain on the sidelines, intending to pass the burden of resistance onto some other state that is also threatened by the aggressor—is generally preferred over balancing.

Careful readers may have noticed that the ‘bedrock assumptions’ of offensive realism, namely (1) the international system is anarchic; (2) states inherently possess some offensive military capacity, which gives them the wherewithal to hurt and possibly to destroy each other; (3) states can never be certain about the intentions of other states. Specifically, no state can be certain another state will not use its offensive military capacity against the first; (4) the most basic motive driving states is survival; and (5) states are instrumentally rational can also be found in Waltz’s writings. The
fundamental divergence between these two structural realists is, then, about deductive logic.

Mearsheimer faults Waltz for underestimating the intrinsic uncertainty and fear from which states cannot escape under anarchy; the best way for each state to ensure its own security can only be achieved through self-help and power-maximisation, since the good will of other states (such as security guarantee) can never be certain (and unreliable). Hence, all states always look for opportunities to improve, rather than maintain, their power positions in the international system until they achieve hegemony. From Mearsheimer’s perspective, the ‘status quo bias’ (i.e., if all states are satisfied with, and seek to maintain, their relative positions in the system, then where does the very aggressor come from?) from which Waltz’s theory has been suffering has finally been resolved, without resorting to ad hoc answers from the state or individual level and thus compromising the parsimony of structural realism.

In line with the standard structural realist contention that multipolarity is less stable than bipolarity, offensive realism predicts that the likelihood of instability in post-Cold War Northeast Asia will significantly increase when the regional system contains a ‘potential hegemon’ (which China is cast as the most likely candidate because of its growth) and thereby creates ‘unbalanced’ multipolarity. According to Mearsheimer, unbalanced multipolarity is the most war-prone system: one the one
hand, the potential hegemon will behave even more aggressively over its neighbouring states to achieve supremacy, because ‘it has the capacity as well as the incentive to do so’. On the other hand, other fearful states’ balancing coalition, even though essentially defensive, will be seen as encirclement by the potential hegemon, which in turn will touch off a spiral of fear that is more likely to lead to war.

As the regional hegemon of the Western Hemisphere, the United States has never tolerated, and always seeks to restrain, the emergence of any potential hegemon or ‘peer competitor’, whether being European or Asian, which may jeopardise its security. Thanks to the ‘stopping power of water’, the anticipated security competition between China and the United States would not end up in a US deprivation of Chinese territory; the systemic imperative would nevertheless force these two great powers to engage a shooting war against each other, likely triggered by a Taiwan Strait crisis, since the PRC has a profound interest in controlling Taiwan on its way towards regional hegemony. For Mearsheimer, the tragedy of great-power war over Taiwan is only a matter of time if China keeps on growing. Hence, his recommendation for the US leadership is to abandon the hopeless, counter-productive ‘engagement’ policy (as it adds fuel to the flaming Chinese economy) and ‘do what it can do to slow the rise of China’ before ‘it is not too late’. Likewise, if Taiwan wishes to defend its de facto independence, it has no alternative other than being a US ‘aircraft carrier’ against
However, Mearsheimer’s theory is at best ‘old wine in new bottle’, neither scientific nor realistic as he would like to have us believe. Take his ‘stopping power of water’ thesis for example. The geography factor plays a pivotal role in Mearsheimer’s scheme, which partly explains why the balancing of power is not an iron law in international relations. The immediate problem is that if the English Channel can protect the United Kingdom from Napoleon’s France, why cannot the Taiwan Strait (protect Taiwan from the PRC)? Mearsheimer might neutralise this counter-example by saying that military imbalance across the Strait is inviting the PLA invasion. But, then, it seems that a great power’s revisionist behaviour is actually stopped by the strength of rivals (or even its lack of interest in expansion), not the water. In other words, in order to make his Strait shooting war scenario possible, Mearsheimer would have to give up his geography-related auxiliary assumptions, including ‘offshore balancer with no territorial ambition’, in the first place.

Positioning offensive realism as a ‘general theory’ (which allows for the existence of anomalies and does not intend to explain everything or predict every possible state behaviour) does not help it out. After all, the Taiwan issue is the anomaly that lies at the core of the major prediction of Mearsheimer’s theory—an inevitable Sino–US security competition that is most likely to lead to war over Taiwan.
if China continues to grow. Under scrutiny, offensive realism’s principal hypothesis, namely great powers always look for opportunities to maximise their relative power until achieving (regional) hegemony, also runs the risk of tautology. Any state that desisted from seeking power-maximisation could be said to be solely biding its time; and any war it initiated was counted as ‘empirical evidence’ for its revisionist intention without even knowing how the particular war came about. Moreover, by equating security-maximisation with power-maximisation (in Mearsheimer’s word, states are ‘short-term power maximisers’), offensive realism not only conflates the end with the means but also violates the principle of marginal utility—when a state accumulates power, its marginal costs of further accumulation will increase and/or marginal benefits will decline.

A determined defender of offensive realism might accuse me of having underestimated the potent uncertainty and the unescapable security dilemma that states must face in international anarchy. Irreducible fear will drive all states to adopt aggressive behaviour and, if possible, to dominate their own regions, even if they only want to survive. What cannot go without saying here is that there is no such thing as ‘dilemma’ or uncertainty existing in a world that is populated by all robbers but no cops (this is what I called the Mearsheimerian ‘revisionist bias’, as opposite to the Waltzian ‘status quo bias’). In Mearsheimer’s scheme, each great power’s security
measures pose genuine, not only hypothetical, threats to others because the purpose of arms procurement is essentially for territorial expansion rather than pure self-preservation. There is no misplaced uncertainty that others harbour aggressive designs that drives the security dilemma as Herz formulated (and endorsed by Mearsheimer). An appeal to the security dilemma, then, does not help to explain why the great powers under anarchy must become so fearful that they cannot help but seek power maximisation. Indeed, IR scholars have detected that fear is in no way a natural corollary from a situation of international anarchy. Furthermore, fear deployed in offensive realism is simply assumed to be divisive, but what if fear made states solidified for good rather than divided them for malignant competition? These fatal mistakes could have been avoided if Mearsheimer did pay attention to an extensive literature that has warned researchers of the inappropriateness of seeing the international system as merely anarchical (and disorder-entailing) even before the emergence of structural realism.

Mearsheimer might insist that great powers still have incentive to fear each other under anarchy because ‘nobody answers when states dial 911’; consequently, ‘they must be ready for danger from any quarter’. As Waltz famously puts it, ‘war occurs because there is nothing to prevent it’. What Mearsheimer tends to eschew is that his ‘911’ story is not reserved for the international domain only. This metaphor does not in
fact add any explanatory power to offensive realism, considering that fear is equally irreducible beyond and within the state boundaries (today’s Darfur for example). Here we need to remember that the offensive/structural realist assertion ‘given international anarchy, war is inevitable’ can never be true unless international anarchy is itself sufficient to produce war among states.40

If speculations such as ‘nobody knows what will happen in 2025 should China transforms into a giant Hong Kong’ can even be used to justify the containment policy, as Mearsheimer does, then, is it ‘counter-productive’ for the United States not to contain the European Union, which has been stronger than China regarding material capacities, because one day it may become a mighty and nuclear-armed European Federation? Of course, no one can promise that policies of engagement will render impossible any future clash between China and the United States; nevertheless, denying the open-endedness of history and pursuing a deterministic policy of containment is guaranteed to create an immediate enemy. Once again, Mearsheimer reveals his uncompromising inclination to conflate can with must, difficulty with impossibility.

The upshot of the assessment in this section has alerted us to the danger of policies based on ideas deriving from a fundamentally flawed offensive realism for managing regional security. Next it is necessary to examine defensive realism, which
perhaps has a larger audience in the policy circles.

2. Defensive Realism and the Technological Peace

Like all Waltzian structural realists, for Van Evera, security is the prime goal for states under international anarchy, and the security dilemma is an intractable characteristic of the international system. However, he argues that intense security competition and war stem from several aspects of power (the so-called ‘fine-grained’ structure of power) and perceptions of them, rather than the gross distribution of material capacities among states (i.e., polarity). Since the fine-grained structure of power is more dynamic and malleable than the gross structure, defensive realism questions the prominence of worst-case analysis in offensive realism, where capabilities are always assumed to trump intentions, and holds that under certain conditions the security dilemma can be mitigated and states will opt for co-operation instead of conflict.\footnote{41}

According to Van Evera, easy conquest is the ‘master cause’ of war.\footnote{42} His principal contention is that the relative ease of attack and defence against attack, namely the offence-defence balance, plays a key role in causing security competition and war among states. International conflict and war are more likely when offensive military operations have the advantage over defensive operations, whilst peace and co-operation are more probable when defence has the advantage. In Van Evera’s
definition, ‘offence’ refers to strategic offensive action, which involves the seizing and holding of territory; ‘offence dominance’ (some offence-defence theorists prefer to use the less-misleading term ‘offensive advantage’) means that offence is easier than usual, because it is almost always easier to defend than to attack.\textsuperscript{43} Hence it makes more sense to consider the offence-defence balance as a continuum, rather than an absolute and dichotomous ‘either-or’; what matters is how and to what extent the balance has shifted towards either direction.\textsuperscript{44}

The idea of the offence-defence balance can be illustrated by examples from economy: \textsuperscript{45} when unemployment is high, workers who are willing to accept lower-paying positions will be rewarded by the system through enabling them to find jobs sooner, and those who insist on their expectations will likely be punished by either remaining unemployed or being forced to search for a longer period, even if they are unable to measure the unemployment rate by themselves. Variations in the offence-defence balance, too, cause comparable patterns in international politics. When the balance shifts towards the defence in a given international system, a state that adopts offensive strategies will ‘produce’ its security less efficiently than other states that embrace defensive strategies. All other things being equal (e.g., roughly equivalent material capacities), it will likely be defeated if it goes to war against another state (since it does not have an overwhelming advantage in overall power to
compensate the defensive advantage), regardless of its inability to measure the actual balance.

In this perspective, the severity of the security dilemma—“many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others”—will not be determined until the distribution of capacities is further filtered through the offence-defence balance at any given time. When the balance favours defence relative to offensive, states are more likely to feel secure and act benignly, which in turn mitigates the destabilising effects of the security dilemma. Arms races, wars of expansion, prevention and pre-emption are preventable (in principle at least) through either artificially shifting the balance towards defensive advantage, or seeking to correct the misperceptions of the balance.

It is therefore not surprising that in the last two decades offence-defence theory has attracted much attention in IR scholarship and foreign policy analysis, and it has been applied to explore a collection of hypotheses about the consequences of variations in the offence-defence balance beyond the causes of inter-state war, including arms race, arms control, alliance formation, grand strategy, ethnic and civil conflict, international economic competition or co-operation, military doctrine, the size and number of states in the international system, and so on. However, what is the offence-defence balance anyway? So far various attempts to define the
offence-defence balance have been made;\textsuperscript{49} perhaps the most popular and potentially promising definition is the one developed from Jervis’ conceptualisation based on the relative marginal utility of military spending: the ratio of the amount of resources needed by the attacker to overcome the amount of resources that the defender has devoted in defence.\textsuperscript{50} This balance, it is argued, may change as new technologies emerge and are applied to military operations. Some defensive realists suggest that a broader set of political, economic, and social factors also matter for determining the balance shift.\textsuperscript{51} The profound problem of definition and measurement notwithstanding (I will return to this later), the influence of offence-defence ideas has been spread beyond the literature on international relations and military history into the policy circles. To grasp the above connection, two paragraphs extracted from the 2005 \textit{Annual Report to Congress: The Military Power of the People’s Republic of China} (p. 37) provides a good example:

The cross-Strait balance of power [best understood as the offence-defence balance since China always has more aggregated power] is shifting toward Beijing as a result of China’s economic growth, growing diplomatic leverage, and improvements in the PLA’s military capacities, including those that provide Beijing options short of full-scale invasion ['broad' version of the balance]. Chinese air, naval, and missile force modernization is increasing demands on Taiwan to develop countermeasures that would enable it to avoid being quickly overwhelmed ['narrow' version is more weighted]...In contrast, Taiwan defense spending has steadily declined in real terms over the past decade. Taiwan has traditionally acquired capacities, some asymmetric, to deter an attack by making it too costly [defensive advantages of technology make the conquest of Taiwan difficult, hence preventing Strait war], while buying time for international intervention. Taipei is continuing to acquire such capacities, but the growth of PLA capacities is to outpacing
From a defensive realist perspective, variations in the offence-defence balance of military technology largely decide the intensity of the security dilemma between Beijing and Washington, Tokyo and Taipei in the post-Cold War era. Although the balances of two state dyads—‘China-United States’ and ‘China-Japan’—can be reasonably characterised by defence dominance, Taiwan represents the weakest link in this de facto triple alliance especially since the speeding-up of China’s military modernisation inflamed by the 1995-96 crisis in the Taiwan Strait. The question of how to respond to Taiwan’s eroding military technological advantages without unduly angering the PRC has thus become a both urgent and thorny task after President George W. Bush assumed office. In April 2001, the Bush administration approved a major and unprecedented arms sale package for Taiwan consisting of ballistic missile defence as well as naval systems and platforms, which was designed to protect the island against PLA’s blockade and ballistic missile bombardments. The originally NT$610.8 billion (US$18.25 billion) special budget for these items (known as the ‘Three Major Military Procurement Projects’) has been presented to the Legislative Yuan since June 2004, yet the statute has not been put on the agenda for deliberation due to opposition parties’ boycott (as of May 2006).

In defending its special budget bill, the DPP government drew heavily upon
offence-defence arguments, as one high-ranking official contended: ‘the greatest threat
to stability in the Taiwan Strait is the temptation for the PLA to act because they
perceive that the military balance is tilted in their favor’. To preserve the peace
currently enjoyed by the people of Taiwan, arms procurement that ‘aims at making
such an invasion more costly for China’ is indispensable.\textsuperscript{56} The Ministry of National
Defense in October 2004 even went on to issue a report indicating that once the special
budget is approved and weapons systems (including fighter planes of the next
generation to be acquired during 2020-2035) are deployed, the attack-defence ratio of
naval and air forces between the PLA and Taiwan military will maintain 1.67:1 until
2035, hence being able to ‘prevent Communist China from initiating war recklessly
and secure national security for thirty years’.\textsuperscript{57} This ‘finding’ was repeatedly endorsed
by top officials of the Chen Shui-bian administration, including the Premier and
Minister of National Defense, by claiming that the US arms package would deter
China from waging war and ensure peace for thirty years in the Taiwan Strait, and that
failure to correct the growing military imbalance across the Strait is in fact encouraging
the PLA to attack within five to ten years.\textsuperscript{58} According to this perspective, Taiwan’s
security is at stake because it is ‘unbalancing’ China.\textsuperscript{59}

The danger of the above contention is that the question of war and peace has
been in effect reduced to an \textit{apolitical, mechanistic} one, as if national security policies
derived from offence-defence arguments were sufficient to deliver the ‘technological peace’ in the Taiwan Strait. Of course, designing a workable political arrangement for the cross-Strait context would not be easy, and, I believe, Beijing’s own military build-ups and its refusal to renounce the use of force has been, and will be, unhelpful to reconciliation—in this regard, Taipei’s continuous purchase of arms from the United States is not incomprehensible. But that is different from saying that possessing a qualitative edge over PLA’s weapons and equipment is the only or most fundamental bar to war.

As noted earlier, defining and measuring the offence-defence balance remains difficult and lacks for consensus even among defensive realists. Jervis, for example, admits that ‘no simple and unambiguous definition is possible’; whether a weapon is offensive or defensive ‘often depends on the particular situation—for instance, the geographical setting and the way in which is used’. Nor does Van Evera offer any much needed coding criteria. By testing the mobility-favours-offence and firepower-favours-defence theses, which are criteria accepted by at least some defensive realists, Lieber examines whether four major technological innovations in mobility and firepower since 1850—railroads, the artillery and small arms revolution, tanks, and nuclear weapons—altered military outcomes by making victories more likely for the attacker or the defender, and whether the innovations altered political
outcomes by making leaders more likely to wage war when they believed offence was favoured. His finding, however, shows that both the degree to which the nature of technology shapes military outcomes and the influence that beliefs of offence or defence dominance have on political decisions to war have been overstated. When compared with other variables such as relative capacities, neither actual nor perceived changes in the technological offence-defence balance demonstrate more notable, independent effects on political and strategic behaviour.

Even though we are to accept Van Evera’s principal hypothesis and the feasibility to measure the exact attack-defence ratio needed to create a defensive advantage, there is no guarantee that Taipei will necessarily succeed in controlling the balance to its purposes and Beijing will just wait and see instead of seeking to overturn such a balance. This is particularly true because the technological offence-defence balance is precarious, rational-actor governments will wish to have a margin of insurance against a possible miscalculation of the balance, which might appear threatening for the other side. Of course, the Taiwanese government can keep raising its stakes in this gambling by significantly increasing military spending, but this exactly leads to a result—arms racing—which it pledges not to do in its defence of the special budget bill, and, given Taiwan’s relative capacities, it cannot possibly win.

Furthermore, even if Taipei did manage to manipulate a benign offence-
defence balance by making the conquest of Taiwan difficult, there is still nothing that ordains that such a balance can be perceived correctly by the Chinese leadership, thereby preventing war. This kind of mechanistic account would be too naïve, considering that the PLA’s modernisation and the threat it posed to the security of Taiwan was perceived quite differently (at least until late 2004) by Taipei and Washington.\textsuperscript{64} If threat perceptions can be so divergent even within a close alliance,\textsuperscript{65} why should decision makers be so sure that their signals will be read correctly by adversaries?

It should also be noted that defensive realism provides no definite answer to have us disbelieve a simple but not unreasonable point of view that states might be more cautious when offensive dominance makes devastating defeat more likely;\textsuperscript{66} there is no straightforward reason to conclude that offensive capacities per se must be less capable of ‘freezing’ the status quo than defensive ones. Van Evera does allow for certain situations that offensive capacities can reduce the risk of war, especially when they are possessed by ‘a status quo power that faces an aggressor state’,\textsuperscript{67} but it is unclear how heavily his qualifications weigh. As a result, a good defensive realist is left wondering whether Taiwan should purchase the US arms package aiming at boosting its defensive advantage or concentrate on developing offensive capacities such as missile build-up, if the PRC is a qualified aggressor state. Since the
manipulation of the technological offence-defence balance is no longer as easy as it first appears to be, whether the balance as such is necessarily more manipulable than attitudes towards stakes deserves our serious consideration.  

Most importantly, war can occur without misperception of an actual defensive advantage. Contrary to Van Evera’s belief that no one will initiate a war that appears unwinnable or very difficult to triumph, utilitarian assumptions of this kind are too simplistic to make sense of various political incentives (such as honour or reputation) that make inter-state war possible. When political stakes are significant and supported by innovative strategic schemes, war can still find a way regardless of the actual or perceived technological balance. It is therefore worth noting a special facet of contemporary Chinese strategic thinking that concerns asymmetric warfare (budhicheng zhanzheng), which is designed to counter US technological edges without being pulled into a costly arms race that could destroy its economy. Whether the PLA has successfully possessed the capability of employing relevant techniques is open to question; the point here is that it shows once again how fragile the cross-Strait ‘technological peace’ could be.

### 3. Cultural Realism and the Clash of Civilisations

The observation in the previous section is probably not surprising at all for Huntington,
who, like Mearsheimer, believes the inevitability of international conflict as a historically proven fact, although the primary source of conflict in Huntington’s view will not be material but cultural. As a ‘general theory of state behaviour’, his ‘civilisational approach’ also seeks to make sense of the post-Cold War world—from alignment decisions to the causes of war—but based on cultural identification.\textsuperscript{72}

A civilisation, according to Huntington, is a ‘cultural entity’, ‘the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species’.\textsuperscript{73} Huntington admits that there is not clear-cut boundary existing between civilisations; however, he insists that they are ‘meaningful entities, and while the lines between them are seldom sharp, they are real’.\textsuperscript{74} Whilst states remain the primary actors in current world affairs, Huntington argues, they increasingly define their interests in civilisational terms and their intentions are powerfully shaped by cultural considerations.\textsuperscript{75}

Seven or eight contemporary civilisations—the Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latin American, and possibly African civilisations—are identified in Huntington’s mapping of world politics, yet the justification of this categorisation is missing in his argument.\textsuperscript{76} What interests him is simply why these particular civilisations will produce ‘the most important conflicts of the future’ along the cultural ‘fault lines’ separating them from one another.\textsuperscript{77} Huntington specifically goes on to
develop a framework to account for inter-civilisational conflicts: at the macro level, there are ‘fault line conflicts’ between neighbouring states from different civilisations, between groups from different civilisations within a state, and between groups that attempts to establish new states out of the dissolution of old (e.g., the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia). And these conflicts are ‘particularly prevalent between Muslims and non-Muslims’.  

At the micro level, there are ‘core state conflicts’ among the major states of different civilisations. Direct military confrontations between core states are uncommon, but they could arise from geographical adjacency, the escalation of fault line conflicts between local kin groups, and changes in the ‘global balance of power among civilizations’.  

Using standard realist terms, Huntington anticipates that the rise of Chinese power would lead to bandwagoning behaviour from states in East Asian civilisations but balancing efforts from states that belong to other civilisations, such as the United States. The PRC is described as the core state of ‘Greater China and its Co-prosperity Sphere’; by utilising economic and cultural ties, ‘China is resuming its place as a regional hegemon, and the East is coming into its own’. Over all, although the principal axis of world politics is framed within the conflictual relations between ‘the West and the Rest’, demographic pressures in Islam and the lack of any core Islamic state provide ongoing sources of many relatively small fault line wars; the rise of
China is the potential source of a big inter-civilisational war of core states. Because ‘[c]ommon interests, usually a common enemy from a third civilization, can generate cooperation between countries of different civilizations’, Huntington predicts that the ‘central focus of conflict for the immediate future will be between the West and several Islamic-Confucian states’.\footnote{82}

Accordingly, his policy recommendation for the West is to consolidate its (supposed) sameness/identity, with Europe and North America pulling Eastern Europe and Latin America into its camp, whilst it guards itself against (alleged) difference especially like Confucian and Islamic states.\footnote{83} Nevertheless, in the longer term ‘a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying other civilizations’ and their interests will be needed, because non-Western civilisations that do not share Western values and interests will be likely to acquire economic and military strength sufficient to challenge the West.\footnote{84}

With respect to the Taiwan issue, Huntington anticipates that Taiwan will ultimately become more integrated with mainland China in the early twenty-first century and thus a major East Asian hot spot will be defused.\footnote{85} He nevertheless adds a proviso—‘unless the Taiwanese should renounce their Chinese identity and formally constitute an independent Republic of Taiwan’.\footnote{86} Here it is worth noting that Huntington’s cultural realism has been particularly influential among those who, both
outside and inside Taiwan, are concerned with the problem of difference caused by the rise of Taiwanese national identity and its implication for regional stability. For the former (especially from Beijing’s perspective), the identity change in Taiwan unleashed by democratisation is disturbing for maintaining regional order; for the latter (Taiwanese nationalists in particular), what really upsets peace and security in East Asia is a hegemonic, anti-democratic China, which, unlike Taiwan, has been failing to embrace the surging ‘third wave democratisation’ since the late twentieth century (hence unable to comprehend Taiwan’s pursuit of identity as a ‘subject of history’). Again, this is unsurprising for Huntington, who see China’s Confucian heritage as ‘obstacle to democratisation’ and ‘Confucian democracy’ as an oxymoron. 87

To avoid being absorbed into a hostile, alien China, apart from allying Taiwan with Western democracies, for cultural realists it is necessary (and urgent) to construct a distinct Taiwanese nation. What the Taiwan people need is a strong collective identity, 88 or, as Benedict Anderson puts it, a ‘national imagination’. 89 Taiwanese nation-builders, both intellectuals and activists, have therefore embarked on a comprehensive de-Sinification programme, whose principal aim is to cultivate a sense of Taiwanese subjectivity (Taiwan zhutixing) for the emerging, autonomous Taiwanese nation-state. Of course, lack of zhutixing is not a problem uniquely to the Taiwanese today. Many Japanese thinkers, too, consider their country as lacking in shutaisei. 90
But for Taiwanese nationalists, this is a problem that can result in Taiwan’s permanent ‘peripheralisation’ under the shadow of Greater China.

Since accepting Chinese culture by definition peripheralises and dwarfs Taiwan, it is essential to achieve the cultural renovation (including literature, fine arts, the spatial and temporal landscapes, and even spiritual reformation) to eliminate the Taiwan people’s psychological peripherality and tragic (‘beiqing’) self-perception, if Taiwanese subjectivity is to be defended.\(^9^1\) The new, unique Taiwanese culture, it is suggested, would fuse elements drawing from Taiwan’s Han people who migrated from the mainland’s southeast coast ‘the traditional values of persistence, diligence, and pragmatism’, ‘an appreciation of discipline, social norms, and the rule of law from Japan’, and ‘a scientific and democratic spirit of inquiry from the West’.\(^9^2\) As a consequence, Taiwanese businessmen (Taishang) who invest and work in China are frequently charged with causing great damage to Taiwanese subjectivity and even labelled as ‘Taiwanese traitors’ (Taijian), for thinking only about their personal interests without taking into account the social costs and benefits to Taiwanese workers, suppliers, consumers, and more importantly to the government (which needs taxes to provide national security).\(^9^3\)

From a cultural realist perspective, Taiwan’s identity floating from the Sinic to Western and Japanese civilisations since the end of the Cold War has created a cultural
fault line in the Taiwan Strait; if the Chinese power keeps growing and the trend of this identity change in Taiwan continues, then the fault line is doomed to result in a civilisational war, triggered probably first by a ‘fault line conflict’ between the two sides and escalating into a Sino-American ‘core state conflict’. As a response to protect modern, democratic Taiwan from pre-modern, authoritarian China, the DPP government has been following exactly Huntington’s policy advice that Taiwan should promote its co-operation with the West and Japan (as seen in the intensified US-Japan-Taiwan alignment), meanwhile consolidate its new, non-Chinese identity through removing all disturbing differences within Taiwan, either by assimilation or by virtual exclusion. Cultural explanations like Huntington’s thesis provide a simple, straightforward answer for making sense of a post-Cold War world, from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 to the growing military build-ups along the Taiwan Strait: ‘We are attacked (or will be attacked)’, the mantra goes, ‘not because of what we do, but because of what we are’. ‘Tough’ actions are required, if we are to make sure these events will ‘never happen again’, or to counter Beijing’s bullying.

Huntington’s critics have mainly looked at the empirical discrepancies; here I want to focus on his logical or philosophical fallacies. To begin with, Huntington’s cultural realism is based on a fundamental assumption that the only possible outcome of the interaction of cultures is conflict. This is so because (1) human beings ‘naturally
distrust and see as threats those who are different and have the capability to harm them’; (2) cultural beliefs are central to an individual’s identity—they cannot be compromised.\textsuperscript{96} Whilst many IR scholars occupied with the conception of identity and identity formation do not disagree with the self-requires-other logic, whether this link is negative (as Huntington assumes: ‘We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often when we know whom we are against’\textsuperscript{97}), neutral, or positive is simply an \textit{empirical matter} depending on specific contexts.\textsuperscript{98} A sense of difference can of course be positive, as among the interdependent members of a band. Moreover, only when the definition of identity is, as Huntington suggests, unitary, static, and unchanging can his claim that culture and the identification of a specific culture or civilisation necessarily entails zero-sum conflicts become possible.\textsuperscript{99}

This simplistic, and flawed, treatment of the identity/difference problematique casts some doubts as to whether Huntington is truly interested in exploring inter-civilisational relations in their full complexity or he is in fact obsessed with searching for enemies, trying to locate and justify the next threat.\textsuperscript{100} After all, the historical record of exchange between civilisations has not merely been one of conflict; rather, it has been a multifaceted history of complex encounters, change and mutual transformation. As Ken Booth points out, Huntington’s policy prescriptions remind us of those states and civilisations that have fallen by the wayside, historically have been
those that have adopted a ‘bunker mentality’, and have not learned from others.\textsuperscript{101}

It should be clear by now that Huntington simply replaces inter-state relations with inter-civilisational relations, where identity is associated with individual civilisation, and difference is located at the fault lines between civilisations. In his scheme, civilisations are virtually giant super-states (or the ‘ultimate human tribes’): within these fault lines, cultural kinship moderates friction between states as well as facilitates their adjustment to the rise of their core states. There are changes in the global balance of power among civilisations, too. Because there is no ‘universal civilisation’ (something functionally equivalent to the ‘government of governments’ in inter-state relations) to overcome the destabilising cultural differences between civilisations, they have incentive to fear each other and find it rational to be prepared to fight at all times. This leads to my final point: as demonstrated earlier, international anarchy in the sense of the absence of government from the international sphere (in fact, whatever definition) does not by itself make war inevitable; by the same token, it is equally essential to stress that cultural difference or the absence of universal civilisation from the multicivilisational world does not make clash of civilisations unavoidable.\textsuperscript{102} Even if we are to accept Huntington’s thesis, civilisational war is still underdetermined in his analysis—there is nothing to vary within a multicivilisational system to explain why such a system should move from peace to war.\textsuperscript{103}
A corollary from the above assessment is that those who celebrate Huntington’s assertion that ‘non-Western civilizations no longer remain the objects of history as targets of Western colonialism but join the West as movers and shapers of history’ are mistaken.\textsuperscript{104} This is hardly something to feel happy about, given that non-Western civilisations’ only agency granted by Huntington is the disturbing, conflictual agency of cultural difference.\textsuperscript{105} Unfortunately, this point is mostly overlooked by Huntington’s critics. As one Chinese scholar observes, for many Chinese intellectuals, having been cast as one of the major threats to Western civilisation is an indicator that the Confucian civilisation is finally viewed as at least equal to its Western counterpart; meanwhile it should be their mission to defend Confucianism against the backdrop of ballooning ‘China threat’ theories.\textsuperscript{106} Such a tit-for-tat response has worrying implications,\textsuperscript{107} because it seems to show that not only Taiwanese nationalists but Chinese nationalists are embedded in the same problem field of cultural realism.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Starting with an empirical concern about the prospects of the Taiwan Strait issue, this paper offers a fundamental critique of realism in traditional security studies; it focus on the work of Mearsheimer, Van Evera and Huntington, which underpin three prevailing views among pundits and practitioners of East Asian security. Using the method of
immanent critique, I have demonstrated why each version of realism comes apart on
the basis of its own assumptions. Such failure is not simply a question of theoretical
inconsistency (or realism fails to pass one of its ‘most likely cases’ in the post-Cold
War era), but of responsibility for any peace-minded individual, considering the
immense self-fulfilling potential of these realist perspectives.

By portraying great-power war as a Shakespearian tragedy destined to happen, Mearsheimer
not only neglects the moral implications behind the disastrous series of
events, but also prevents himself (and his audience as well) from coming to consider
what could have been done to change the collision course and thus learns nothing from
the past. Likewise, the problem with Van Evera’s defensive realism in the end is not the
implausibility of the ‘technological peace’, but its lack of interest in the political
substance of issues at stake in conflicts between states as well as state leaders’ moral
responsibility in decision-making. Given the fluidity of culture as public goods
among nations and civilisations, Huntington’s effort to secure a stable, singular, and
unified national identity coterminous with culture and distinct from supposed
differences is also called into question. This does not mean that the desire to possess an
identity (however impossible) will thus become insignificant; nevertheless, it does
show that the attempt to reduce the impasse of the Taiwan issue to the ‘problem of
difference’ (whether China remains undemocratic or more and more people on the
island ‘becoming Taiwanese’) is both theoretically implausible and politically irresponsible.\textsuperscript{110} In this perceptive, it is not cultural difference but ignorance that deserves our vigilance.\textsuperscript{111}

Obviously, challenging the dominant realist representations of the Taiwan issue does not automatically lead to a more emancipatory regional order. I am aware of this limit. However, if responsible scholarship is indeed a precondition of progressive politics, such resistance is both meaningful and necessary. This is particularly true, as I have tried to illustrate in this paper, when one comes to realise how tragedy and scholarship are intimately intertwined.\textsuperscript{112}
Notes & References


2 Recent examples include Steve Tsang (ed.), Peace and Security Across the Taiwan Strait (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Nancy Bernkopf Tucker (ed.), Dangerous Strait: The U.S.-Taiwan-China Crisis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); and Ted Galen Carpenter, America’s Coming War with China: A Collision Course over Taiwan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Whilst Carpenter’s sensational (and slippery) contention is at best a latest attempt to increase pressure on Taiwanese politicians regarding a large US arms package whose budget has not been approved by the Legislative Yuan since June 2004 (see below), it is worth noting the above literature’s inattention to theory-informed discussion, as seen in their preoccupation with the result of China’s rise and its impact on foreign policy.


4 These two contending perspectives are not necessarily incompatible. For instance, Annual Report to Congress: The Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2005 (US Department of Defense) and Defense of Japan 2005 (Japan Defense Agency) adopt both accounts in their analyses of China’s military capacities and cross-Strait security. The first account, whose supporters include the so-called ‘Blue Team’ in Washington, can often be found in commentaries that associate China’s rise with Wilhelmine Germany and Imperial Japan, which typically start with the following statement (or something similar): ‘historically, the rise of a regional power is always destabilising for the maintenance of regional order’. The second account, too, is popular among policy circles and military establishments; as will be discussed later, it provides the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration with the rationale in defence of its special budget for the ‘Three Major Military Procurement Projects’.


6 ‘Realism’ in this paper, as usually deployed in International Relations (IR), has no relationship to its namesake in the philosophy of science and social science.

7 These two variants are structural realism pioneered by Kenneth Waltz and post-war classical realism usually associated with a dominant reading of Hans Morgenthau’s work. As Shih shows, the proposition of ‘great power diplomacy’ later paved the way for the notion of ‘peaceful rise’ (now replaced by ‘peaceful development’) framed in late 2003. Perhaps because of Taiwanese writers’ excessive
preoccupation with realism, Shih notes that they are highly insensitive to how great power rhetoric came into being and how that development (which is arguably liberal in essence) might represent a discursive, and fundamental, change in China’s self-image. See Chih-yu Shih, ‘Breeding a Reluctant Dragon: Can China Rise into Partnership and Away from Antagonism?’, Review of International Studies, 31: 4 (2005), pp. 760-64.


7 Due to space limitations, I focus mainly on these three leading theorists’ work, since they either laid the foundations of the theoretical approaches under examination or made them popular.


11 Both works are associated with ‘structural realism’ in common IR theory mapping. Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979); Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

12 Waltz, ibid., pp. 121, 126.

13 In his scheme, hegemon refers to the only great power in its regional system (such as the United States in the Western Hemisphere). Global hegemony is highly unlikely, unless a state can acquire ‘clear-cut nuclear superiority’. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, p. 145.


15 Ibid., p. xi.

16 Recalling an ancient Chinese proverb: ‘When the snipe and the clam grapple, the fisherman profits’. Ibid., pp. 159-61, 269-72.


18 In Waltz’s account, states are treated as unitary, rational actors which are ‘unsure of one anothers’
intentions’; he also holds the utility of force in the international realm and points out that his structural
theory is built upon ‘the assumption that survival is the goal of states’. See Waltz, Theory of
International Politics, p. 186; and ‘Evaluating Theories’, American Political Science Review, 91:4

22 As exemplified in Mearsheimer’s favorite ‘911’ metaphor—there is no higher authority to which a
threatened state can turn for help. He claims that his logic of anarchy is underpinned by the concept of
the ‘security dilemma’ articulated by John Herz. To be fair, Waltz did not ignore the role of the security
dilemma; in fact, Waltz too offered a Herzenian definition of it. See Herz, ‘Idealist Internationalism and
186-7.


24 Mearsheimer borrows this term from Randall L. Schweller, ‘Neorealism’s Status-Quo Bias: What

International Politics, ch. 8; and Mearsheimer, ‘Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold
proposition here is a simple logical claim that can be directly deduced from their core assumptions; in
fact, empirical reasoning is involved. Hidemi Suga, On the Causes of War (Oxford: Clarendon,

26 Here potential hegemon refers to the most powerful state in its regional system, which has a marked
power gap between itself and the second most powerful state in the system. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy
of Great Power Politics, p. 45.

27 Ibid., pp. 37, 345-6.

28 For Mearsheimer’s discussion about the relationship between regional hegemons and ‘offshore
balancers’, see ibid., pp. 141-3.

29 Ibid., p. 374-5; also see Mearsheimer’s debate with Zbigniew Brzezinski, ‘Clash of the Titans’,
Foreign Policy, 146:1 (2005), pp. 46-50. Such alarmist scenario has in fact been envisaged in some
international relations literature usually associated with ‘power transition theory’. According to this
perspective, hegemons (defined in a looser sense than Mearsheimer’s) often arise and utilise their power
to shape a favourable external environment that at the same time enhances the stability of the system.
Differential rates of economic growth lead to the rise and fall of hegemons. And the probability of a
major war (or ‘hegemonic war’) is greatest at the point when the dominant power fears it will lose its
control over the international system, whereas the rising challenger begins to demand its ‘rightful’ place
in the system. See A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, The War Ledger (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 1980); Robert Gilpin, War and Change in World Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1981); and Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers (New York: Random House,
1987).

30 Mearsheimer, ibid., p. 401-2.

Mearsheimer holds that the reason why Imperial Japan, another notable counter-example, was not stopped by the Sea of Japan is because Korea and China were too weak and hence open for aggression. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 265.


As exhibited in Wang, ibid.

See n. 22.


Ibid., p. 120.

Ibid., p. 118, n. 2.


Glaser and Kaufmann, ibid., pp. 60-1. The disagreement between the above ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’ approach in my view results from each side’s different research focus: one is interested in studying whether there is something unique about technology that affects the likelihood of war and peace, whereas the other is concerned with explaining states’ decisions based on expectations of how structural constraints overall will mold military outcomes.

Strictly speaking, whether the PRC is a dissatisfied or status quo power does not really bother proponents of offence-defence theory. Even if one is proved wrong to understand Beijing’s hidden revisionist intentions (if so, the security dilemma framework would no longer apply), a benign offence-defence balance can still help bar the way to war regardless of motives, as long as the potential aggressor can see that attack cannot succeed. Van Evera, ‘The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War’, *International Security*, 9:1 (1984), p. 105.


Taiwan highly depends on the United States, which is obliged to assist Taiwan in maintaining ‘a sufficient self-defence capacities’ under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, as its principal supplier of weapons and military equipment.

See my ‘Technological Peace or Technological Myth?’ for more detailed analysis of Taiwan’s arms procurement debate and its connection with offence-defence arguments.

Tsai Ming-hsien (former Deputy Minister of National Defense), ‘Peace in Our Time, or Peace in Our Terms?’ *Taipei Times*, 5 October, 2004.

http://www.gov.tw/EBOOKS/TWANNUAL/show_book.php?path=3_004_073. This report draws directly from conventional wisdom that the ratio of forces needed by the attacker in order to overcome for sure its adversary defending fixed positions is 3:1; it defines 1.5:1 as the baseline, the zero-point indicating the transition to a full defensive advantage. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether the popular 3:1 ratio, derived from land warfare experience, is a meaningful indicator for naval and air warfare at all.

See, for example, ‘Defense Chief Sees Mainland Attack in 5 to 10 Year’s Time,’ *China Post*, 10 March, 2005.


This term was coined in Lieber, ‘Grasping the Technological Peace’.


65 In 2005, there were more ongoing US military programmes with Taiwan than with any major US ally. Swaine, ibid., p. 144.


71 Qiao Liang and Wang Xianghui, *Unlimited Warfare (Chaoxian Zhan)* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Press, 1999).


75 Ibid., p. 34.

76 Precisely speaking, for Huntington these civilisations have been, and continue to be, in conflict with one another. As a political scientist, this is a serious, albeit oft-seen, methodological problem of case selection, because some other civilisations that may not support his clash of civilisations thesis have been (deliberately?) left out.

77 Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’, pp. 25-7. Suffice it to note here that there are at least two crucial assumptions underlying his clash of civilisations thesis: (1) sameness/identity promotes order and difference produces disorder; and (2) the distinction between identity and difference and between order and disorder is straightforwardly clear as well as stable.

82 Huntington, Clash of Civilizations, p. 245; ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’, p. 48.

83 Ibid., pp. 48-9. Some readers might question that Huntington’s later work on American national identity (where Mexican immigration are cast as the latest threat to US national/cultural security because of their predominantly Catholic, Hispanic culture and their failure to integrate into ‘mainstream’, i.e., Anglo-Protestant, culture) contradicts his claim here. See Who Are We? America’s Great Debate (London: Simon and Schuster, 2004). Yet, when considered more broadly, both projects (‘clash of civilisations’ and ‘Hispanic challenge/threat’) have always been about how to protect the United States from cultural difference, which is assumed to be debilitating to the purpose of establishing order, not only internationally but nationally. Weber, International Relations Theory, p. 176.

84 Ibid., p. 49. It is unclear why accommodating non-Western civilisations can only be a long-term policy, if the decline of the West is just a matter of time as Huntington assumes. Huntington complains that the question mark in his 1993 essay title was generally ignored and that what he really meant is that ‘clashes of civilizations are the greatest threat to world peace, and an international order based on civilizations is the surest safeguard against world war’. However, given that discussions about the avoidance of major inter-civilisational wars are only mentioned in passing, it is legitimate for Huntington’s readers to disbelieve his disclaimer that this statement is indeed a main theme of his work. See Clash of Civilizations, pp. 13, 316.

85 Unlike Mearsheimer, Huntington in his worst-case scenario points to Vietnam (another Sinic country according to him) instead of Taiwan over which China and the United States will trigger the next world war. Ibid., p. 313. In any event, this is a bizarre speculation against his own thesis because in that scenario (1) Vietnam firmly balances against, rather than bandwagons with, its core country and even turns to Western assistance; (2) the United States decides to come for Vietnam’s rescue not for any ‘cultural kinship’, but for material interests only.

86 Ibid., p. 220.

87 Ibid., p. 238; Huntington, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1991), p. 300. Echoing Huntington, Lee Teng-hui, former President of Taiwan, in his speech at the National Press Club in Washington, D. C. explained the reason why ‘Asian Values’ did not become a major ‘stumbling block’ on Taiwan’s path to full democracy is because ‘the influence of Confucian traditions is not entrenched enough to create this problem’. Curiously, a decade ago Lee had described Taiwan as ‘the inheritor of Confucian thought’ and had identified of roots of Taiwan’s democratisation in its Chinese ‘cultural heritage’ dating back to Kao Yao, Confucius, and Mencius. Lee Teng-hui, ‘Chinese Culture and Political Renewal’, Journal of Democracy, 6:4 (1995), pp. 6-8; ‘Taiwan’s Path to Democracy’, 20 October, 2005, available at http://taiwansecurity.org/News/
Rather than jumping to the conclusion that his 1995 essay and 2005 speech are opposed to one another, perhaps it is more important to recognise that they in fact bring out the ways in which they complement Lee’s larger project and his effort to utilise democracy as a means to assimilate cultural difference inside Taiwan on the one hand and to associate Taiwan with Western democracies on the other.


Likewise, the Kuomintang’s Sino-centric, Greater Han ideology has been removed from high-school history and social studies textbooks since the late-1990s, replacing it with a Taiwan-centred curriculum as reflected in, for example, a more balanced account of the Japanese colonial rule and an elevated status of non-Han aboriginals in the Taiwanese history.

Daniel C. Lynch, ‘Taiwan’s Self-Conscious Nation-Building project’, *Asian Survey*, 44: 4 (2004), pp. 520-6, at p. 521. Proponents of this new culture also wish to avoid some attributes allegedly associated with these cultures: from the West, for instance, ‘a disposition to embrace “extremist” and “corrosive” doctrines such as those of deconstructivism and postmodernism’. Ironically, as Lynch comments, these nationalists are ‘deconstructing China and arguing for its decentering within Taiwan’s moral universe’ (p. 521). In any case, this example casts doubts on the very possibility of constructing a singular, unified identity because those ‘disturbing differences’ seem to always exist within identity.


Here I by no means suggest that resorting to the use of violence (whether killing innocent people or waging war of aggression) to settle disputes can thus become justifiable; on the contrary, I firmly oppose this move.


Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, p. 130.

Ibid., p. 21.

The most recent scholarship sees ‘identity’ as an ongoing process of definition which is always contested, multiple, and incomplete. I find such a conception difficult (and sometimes can be tautological) for making analysis; nevertheless, the existing literature has been capable of disrupting Huntington’s dualistic, conflictual relationship between the ‘self’/us and the ‘other’/them. See Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: ‘The East’ in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 5-15.


Hence, there should be no such thing as ‘remaking of world order’, given that Huntington’s unit of analysis still operate in accord with the structural realist logic of anarchy.


Callahan, ‘How to Understand China’, p. 711.

Mearsheimer argues that states that are merely concerned with their own survival nevertheless have to seek power-maximisation at the expense of other states. ‘This situation, which no one consciously designed or intended, is genuinely tragic’. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 3.

In this regard, if the passage of Taiwan’s controversial arms procurement bill is only a matter of time as President Chen believes, it should be remembered that, after acquiring these weapons systems, there is still a long way to go in order to achieve thirty year’s peace in the Taiwan Strait. Arms procurement does not amount to national defence, and national defence does not amount to national security. ‘Arms Bill has to Pass Eventually, President Says’, Central News Agency, 29 September, 2005.

Difference as such does not necessarily ‘sabotage the peace and stability of East Asia’ as both sides of the Strait frequently charge against each other; consider, for example, it is not unfeasible to reach a twenty- to thirty-year agreed framework for cross-Strait stability by maintaining the current status quo (a situation where Taiwan is neither unified with China nor independent from it) whilst each side’s quest of
identity in principle remains untouched (albeit temporarily on the shelf). The essence of this kind of agreement could be an assurance from Taipei not to seek formal independence for the duration of the agreement in return for a pledge from Beijing renouncing the use of force during the same time frame. Kenneth Lieberthal, ‘Preventing a War over Taiwan’, *Foreign Policy*, 84:2 (2005), pp. 53-63.
