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## The Status of Status in International Relations

Ryan McNamara

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**The Status of Status in International Relations**

By

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Graduate Program in Political Science

*A MA Literature Review submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts*

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## **Abstract**

This literature review provides a comparative analysis of the four main approaches within the status paradigm (social-psychological, rationalist, constructivist, and social immobility) to determine their respective strengths, limitations, explanatory power, and scope conditions. While there are various elements of 'status' that the approaches converge upon, they diverge significantly in their understanding of the motivations and strategies adopted by status-seeking states, how status is a form of power that translates into deference, and whether status-based analyses can be applied beyond rising and established great powers. The review provides five case studies (China, Norway, United States, the UNSC, and Russia) to demonstrate not only whether the strategies advocated by the approaches can accurately explain the status-seeking behaviour of these states, but also to determine if the approach is generalizable beyond its stated scope. Ultimately, it argues that to develop the strongest explanation for status-seeking behaviour, it is necessary to build synthetic accounts that combine insights from multiple approaches. To demonstrate the utility of synthetic explanations, the review provides an argument in favour of synthesizing the social-psychological and status immobility approaches.

**Keywords:** Status, status-seeking, state behavior, soft and hard power, legitimate power, foreign policy, domestic politics, social psychology, Social Identity Theory, rationalism, constructivism, status immobility, social-psychology, material capabilities, revisionism, great power conflict, China, Russia, Norway, United States, and United Nations Security Council reform.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

In international relations (IR) scholarship, status is viewed as an explanatory variable for state behaviour. It is broadly understood as a state's position within or membership in a status community based on the possession of collectively valued attributes and resources. The literature currently identifies four main approaches to status, including the social-psychological approach advanced by Larson & Shevchenko,<sup>1</sup> the rationalist approach advocated by Renshon,<sup>2</sup> the constructivist approach innovated by Murray,<sup>3</sup> and the status immobility approach pioneered by Ward.<sup>4</sup> Despite a growth of literature published under the status paradigm, there remains a lack of works that compare and analyze the four approaches. Therefore, this Major Research Paper (MRP) aims to comparatively analyze the four approaches to provide clarity concerning their application, strengths, limitations, and directions for future research.

Specifically, this MRP will analyze and compare the approaches on three crucial research questions. The first research question asks: *Which approach offers the most convincing explanation for why and how states seek status?* Here, it will be argued that a synthesis of the social psychological and status immobility approaches would offer the most convincing explanation as to why and how states seek status because it would provide actors with the most strategies to pursue status while reducing the reliance on conflict initiation and geopolitical competition as means to achieve status improvements. The second research question asks: *Which approach best theorizes status as a form of power and how it translates into deference?* It will ultimately be argued that the rational instrumental and constructivist approaches offer the most compelling understanding of status as legitimate power – a form of soft power – that confers legitimacy to high-status states.

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<sup>1</sup>Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>3</sup>Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>4</sup>Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Under this understanding, status is treated as the mechanism through which soft and hard power are translated into deference due to the legitimacy that accompanies high status. Finally, it is necessary to ask: *Which approach is the most generalizable across all forms of state-power categorization?* Here, it will be argued that the social psychological approach is the most generalizable because it possesses the broadest scope, providing states of all power categorizations<sup>5</sup> with the most options to pursue status beyond conflict initiation and geopolitical conflict.

Before addressing the research questions, the second chapter of this review provides a baseline definition of status that all four approaches adhere to, and it demonstrates that there is consensus within the literature that status is based on collective beliefs, is a positional and club good, organizes states within hierarchies, and leads to deference from lower-status states. The third chapter begins with an overview of the four approaches explanations for why and how states seek status, followed by a case study of China that highlights how each approach can be used to explain the behaviour of a status-seeking state. The fourth chapter starts with a discussion of how rationalism and constructivism understand status as a form of soft, legitimate power. It proceeds by demonstrating that the two approaches best understand how status translates into deference through the legitimacy that high-status confers to states. The fifth chapter demonstrates that the approaches can be applied beyond their stated scopes through case studies of Norway, the United States (US), the UNSC, and Russia. Finally, the sixth chapter furthers an argument in favour of developing synthesized explanations for status-seeking behaviour.<sup>6</sup> To demonstrate the utility of synthetic approaches, the chapter develops the argument presented in the third chapter in that the best approach to understanding status would be a synthesis of the status immobility and social psychological approaches.

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<sup>5</sup>State power categorizations refer to a state's assignment as a small, middle, regional, great, declining, rising, or hegemonic power.

<sup>6</sup>This argument is made in Steven Ward, "Logics of Stratified Identity Management in World Politics," *International Theory* 11, no. 2 (2019); Elias Gotz, "Status Matters in World Politics," *International Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2021); and Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, "The Status of Status in World Politics," *World Politics* 73, no. 2 (2021).

## Chapter 2: What is Status?

### 2.1 *Converging Understandings of Status*

Although the approaches diverge on several important aspects covered in the preceding chapters, there is consensus among the four main approaches on a basic definition of status. Larson et al. offer the most widely cited definition of status, stating that it is "collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout)."<sup>7</sup> For Renshon, status is defined as "*standing, or rank, in a status community*."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Ward states that "status refers to an actor's position within a social hierarchy,"<sup>9</sup> and Murray claims that status is equivalent to legitimate social standing or recognized identity.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond a shared definition, the approaches further converge on four central aspects of status. First, within the literature, *hierarchies* are "understood broadly as any system through which actors are organized into vertical relations of super- and subordination."<sup>11</sup> Ward's definition of status relates to an actor's position within a social hierarchy, and Larson et al. claim that "status refers to ranking on a hierarchy."<sup>12</sup> Renshon states that status is "an actor's rank or position in a hierarchy composed of the group of actors that a state perceives itself to be in competition with."<sup>13</sup> Lastly, Murray argues that "status is by definition an exclusive, hierarchically organized identity."<sup>14</sup>

Second, the approaches hold that status is indisputably based on *collective beliefs*. For example, Larson et al. define status as collective beliefs about a state's ranking on valued

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<sup>7</sup>Deborah Welch Larson, T. V. Paul, and William C. Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," in *Status in World Politics*, eds. Deborah Welch Larson, T. V. Paul, and William C. Wohlforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>8</sup>Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 4 (emphasis in original).

<sup>9</sup>Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, 4.

<sup>10</sup>Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 6.

<sup>11</sup>Janice Bially Mattern and Alyse Zarakol, "Hierarchies in World Politics," *International Organization* 70, no 3 (2016), 624.

<sup>12</sup>Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," 16.

<sup>13</sup>Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 4.

<sup>14</sup>Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 15.

attributes.<sup>15</sup> Crucially, ‘valued attributes’ does not strictly refer to material resources, but rather “the relevance of a given attribute for status recognition is socially defined: attributes matter because of their symbolic value.”<sup>16</sup> Renshon states that “because an actor’s status position is based on the collective beliefs of their community, states seeking to change their status position must alter others’ *beliefs*.”<sup>17</sup> Murray argues that “who or what a state becomes is the outcome of many intersecting and overlapping sequences of action and response, where through its social interactions with other actors a state’s identity is contested, made and reproduced.”<sup>18</sup> Lastly, Ward states that status is produced and sustained by “generating intersubjective bases for social comparisons between actors.”<sup>19</sup> No matter the approach, collective beliefs determine an actor’s status. As a result, the only way a state can improve its status is if it changes the relevant status community’s beliefs about it.<sup>20</sup>

Third, the authors agree that status can be both a *positional* and *club good*. Status conceived as a club good implies membership in a specific group. For example, a substate group can become a sovereign state without reducing the value of statehood for existing members of the 'sovereignty club.' Larson et al. argue, however, that "status politics does not stop with membership in a given club, for there are less formalized positional rankings within clubs that become particularly salient when they imply some form of primacy, leadership, or 'number one' status."<sup>21</sup> While states seek membership to a certain club, competition over status does not halt once they have been admitted, as there will be 'jockeying for position' within the club. Status as positional means that it is a socially scarce resource in that “one group’s status can improve only if another’s declines,”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Larson et al., “Status and World Order.”

<sup>16</sup>Marina G. Duque, "Recognizing international status: a relational approach," *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2018), 580-81.

<sup>17</sup>Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 24.

<sup>18</sup>Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 42-43.

<sup>19</sup>Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, 13.

<sup>20</sup>William C. Wohlforth, Benjamin De Carvalho, Halvard Leira, and Iver B. Neumann, "Moral authority and status in International Relations: Good states and the social dimension of status seeking," *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (2018), 527.

<sup>21</sup>Larson et al., “Status in World Politics,” 10

<sup>22</sup>Larson and Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*, 12.

referring to a state's position within a hierarchy. Status is thus best understood as membership in (club good) and position within (positional good) a status community.

Finally, regarding the expected outcomes of status-seeking behaviour, there is a consensus that higher status states expect lower status states to defer to them. The authors claim that high status inspires *voluntary* deference from lower-status states to the former's interests and concerns, including respect for spheres of influence, security, institutions, and prosperity, as well as intangible goods such as adherence to norms and ideologies.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, Renshon claims that "status contributes to power (in its broader sense) by clarifying who in a given relationship is expected to defer and to what degree."<sup>24</sup>

### **Chapter 3: Motivations and the Strategy 'Tool Kit' of Status Seeking**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Despite the convergences noted in the previous chapter, the approaches differ in their understanding of *why* states seek status, ranging from intrinsic, instrumental, identity, or obstructed ambitions-based motivations. More importantly, the approaches hold diverging explanations for *how* states pursue increased status, varying from identity management strategies to conflict initiation, recognitive practices, and logic of rejection. After overviewing how the approaches understand the motivations and strategies of status-seeking behaviour, this chapter provides a case study of China to highlight how each approach can be used to explain state behaviour. In the final section, it will be argued that a synthesis of the social psychological and status immobility approaches would offer the most convincing explanation as to why and how states seek status.

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<sup>23</sup>Larson & Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*.

<sup>24</sup>Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 42.

### 3.2 *The Social Psychological Approach*

For advocates of the social-psychological approach, the motivational mechanism behind status-seeking is rooted in Social Identity Theory (SIT), which holds that "people want to feel good about themselves and their group; it is a basic source of self-worth, pride, and overall wellbeing."<sup>25</sup> In transferring SIT to IR, Larson & Shevchenko argue that states care about their standing in the world and possess an intrinsic need for self-esteem and to be respected, positively distinct, and recognized.<sup>26</sup> States, like individuals and groups, compare themselves to a reference group that is equal or slightly higher, and the result of such comparisons determines the state's satisfaction with its status.<sup>27</sup> States are thus motivated to seek status when they are under conditions of status dissatisfaction – the perception that they are not conferred the status they deserve from their relevant state-reference group.

The social-psychological approach holds that when a state is status dissatisfied, its leaders will turn to one of three identity management strategies to improve their relative status.<sup>28</sup> The strategy that a state selects “depends on the group’s beliefs about the permeability of the elite group as well as the security (stability and legitimacy) of the status hierarchy.”<sup>29</sup> When the boundaries of a higher status group are permeable but the hierarchy is stable, states may utilize a *social mobility strategy*, which “emulates the values and practices of the higher status group with the goal of attaining admission into elite clubs.”<sup>30</sup> A *social competition* strategy may be selected when the elite group's boundaries are impermeable and the hierarchy is viewed as illegitimate or unstable. Competition "aims to equal or surpass the dominant group on the value dimension by which its

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<sup>25</sup>Gotz, “Status Matters in World Politics,” 233.

<sup>26</sup>Larson and Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*.

<sup>27</sup>Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to US Primacy," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010), 71; Henri Tajfel, Henri, John C. Turner, William G. Austin, and Stephen Worchel, “An integrative theory of intergroup conflict,” *Organizational Identity: A Reader* 56, no. 65 (1979); John C. Turner and Rupert Brown, “Social status, cognitive alternatives and intergroup relations.” In *Differentiation Between Social Groups*, edited by Tajfel, Henri (London: Academic Press, 1987); and Deborah Welch Larson, "Social identity theory: Status and identity in international relations," In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2017).

<sup>28</sup>Larson and Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*, 5-6.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>30</sup>Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers," 67 (emphasis added).

superior status is measured,”<sup>31</sup> typically involving geopolitical competition. Finally, a *strategy of creativity* occurs when the boundaries are impermeable, but the hierarchy is stable and legitimate. Under creativity, states seek to change socially accepted status markers to ones in which the state excels and could "entail either (1) reevaluating the meaning of a negative characteristic; or (2) identifying a new dimension on which the lower-status group is superior."<sup>32</sup> Although multiple may appear in a state's status-seeking policies, one strategy will typically dominate and alter a state's foreign policy significantly.<sup>33</sup>

### **3.3 The Rationalist Approach**

Proponents of the rationalist approach hold that status-seeking is driven overwhelmingly by instrumental considerations.<sup>34</sup> In general, it is believed that the state with the most status in a particular hierarchy will be the state that governs, receives the greatest amount of deference to its interests, and sets the rules and institutions of international politics.<sup>35</sup> Whether it be a humiliating event or the belief that one's state is not being attributed the status it deserves, states experience 'status anxiety' or 'status dissatisfaction.'<sup>36</sup> Proponents of the rationalist approach argue that “states are likely to initiate conflicts if there is a gap, or mismatch, between the status a state believes it deserves and the status that others confer upon it.”<sup>37</sup> While this might seem overly deterministic, one must consider that the most easily interpretable markers of status are material capabilities, most notably military strength. Thus, if a state is status deficient and the most visible markers of status are forms of military power, the status deficient state is argued to believe that a demonstration of military force is necessary to increase its status.

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<sup>31</sup>Larson and Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*, 9.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>33</sup>Larson and Shevchenko, “Status Seekers.”

<sup>34</sup>Jonathan Renshon, "Status deficits and war," *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (2016); Ahsan I. Butt, "Why Did the United States Invade Iraq in 2003?" *Security Studies* 28, no. 2 (2019); and Thomas J. Volgy, Renato Corbetta, Keith A. Grant, and Ryan G. Baird, *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>35</sup>Allan Dafoe, Johnathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, “Reputation and Status as Motives for War,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, no. 17 (2014); Yuen Foong Khong, "Power as prestige in world politics," *International Affairs* 95, no. 1 (2019).

<sup>36</sup>Butt, “Why did the United States Invade Iraq in 2003?”

<sup>37</sup>Gotz, “Status Matters in World Politics,” 231.

Since status is based on the collective beliefs of the community in which a state belongs, changing one's status is ultimately concerned with changing other states' beliefs.<sup>38</sup> However, Renshon notes that cognitive limitations reduce the ease of updating other states' beliefs. As a result, a 'status altering event' must be highly visible, dramatic, salient, and convey unambiguous information.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Renshon concludes that "status dissatisfaction theory predicts that states are likely to initiate violent military conflicts to shift beliefs about where they stand in a given hierarchy."<sup>40</sup>

### ***3.4 The Constructivist Approach***

The constructivist approach holds that status is best conceived as recognized identity claims.<sup>41</sup> The primary motivation behind status-seeking is identity recognition because, as Murray notes, "recognition gives a state confidence in the value of its particular social identity and provides it with the ontological security it needs to form a coherent set of interests and act on the basis of those interests in the world."<sup>42</sup> To be an actor in the international system, states require a stable identity – "that is, states require *ontological security*: the need to experience and maintain a continuous sense of self over time. Ontological security is a prerequisite for agency that enables states to have confidence in their surroundings and develop means–ends relationships."<sup>43</sup> An absence of ontological security prevents states from forming coherent interests, having confidence in their identity, and realizing their traits and abilities.

Since recognition is based on the perceptions and beliefs of other actors, states are argued to be deeply insecure about their identities as there exists the possibility that their identities will be

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<sup>38</sup>Renshon operationalizes status communities as regional geographic hierarchies and as 'detected communities,' within which the internal diplomatic links are more intense and numerous than those with external states.

<sup>39</sup>Renshon, *Fighting for Status*.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>41</sup>Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*; Vincent Pouliot, "Setting Status in Stone: The Negotiation of International Institutional Privileges," in *Status and World Politics*, eds. T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Anne L. Clunan, "Historical aspirations and the domestic politics of Russia's pursuit of international status," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3-4 (2014).

<sup>42</sup>Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 191. While other authors such as Pouliot and Clunan write on status within the constructivist tradition, Murray is the only author who explicitly links ontological security with status-seeking.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 39 (emphasis in original).

*misrecognized*. Under the approach, misrecognition is conceived as a discrepancy between how a state perceives and constructs its own identity and how others represent and perceive it. In response to misrecognition, “*states resist their social dependence on other states and attempt to take independent control over the meaning of their identities,*”<sup>44</sup> even though it is impossible to independently produce an identity. Two effects emerge from this process. First, states might achieve recognition from a constructed status community. According to Murray, “successful acts of recognition provide self-certainty because they transform a state’s self-understanding into its identity, thereby reflecting back to the state an image of what it already understands that identity to be.”<sup>45</sup> If a state's identity is recognized, it is likely to act as a peaceful status-quo actor, following the order's norms, rules, and institutions.

However, if recognition is not achieved, a state might increasingly ground its identity in concrete material practices. Murray claims that “material practices are an effective expression of an identity because the material world gives substance to the recognition-seeking state’s aspiring social identity and allows the state to experience its social status as a brute fact, rather than as the uncertain effect of an ongoing political practice of social construction.”<sup>46</sup> By grounding identity in material practices, the status-seeking state is basing its status claims on pre-existing, recognized practices of the status community it seeks to join. For Murray, these recognitive practices include *great power voice* (increased role in the management of international affairs), *exemplary military power* (developing military capabilities that can project power internationally), and *spheres of influence* (constructing asymmetrical relations with subordinate states). Together, recognitive practices produce the illusion that a rising power has achieved an identity independent of recognition from the established powers.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 48 (emphasis in original).

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 50.

In response to a rising power's turn to cognitive practices, the established powers likely continue to deny the rising power's claims, intensifying the disrespect and initiating a process of securitization that constructs the rising power as an existential threat. According to Murray, "the ongoing experience of disrespect makes rising powers more confrontational and risk-acceptant in their foreign policies...and more uncompromising and forceful in asserting that identity on the international stage."<sup>47</sup> As long as misrecognition persists, the rising power will increasingly resort to cognitive practices (especially exemplary military power) to prove its status to and compel recognition from the established powers. The increased bellicosity, willingness to resort to force, crisis instigation, and growing military strength that accompanies exemplary military power combine to paint the rising power as a reckless and dangerous entity. The established powers thus "impute malign motives to the rising power, attributing the mere existence of its power as a credible signal of its hostile intentions. Put simply, *securitization constructs the rising power as revisionist*."<sup>48</sup> This leads to further misrecognition, securitization, and competition between the states – a cyclical process that Murray refers to as 'spirals of misrecognition and social insecurity.'<sup>49</sup>

### ***3.5 The Status Immobility Approach***

For Steven Ward, status immobility offers the most compelling explanation for why states adopt order-destabilizing revisionist foreign policies. Gilpin's Hegemonic Stability Theory holds that obstructed demands for incremental changes in the international system incentivize rising states to demand more significant changes.<sup>50</sup> Ward argues that instead of obstructed economic and security ambitions, it is the obstruction of status ambitions that leads states towards revisionist policies. For Ward, status concerns increase in salience as a state's material capabilities rise, and they "expect –

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 78 (emphasis added).

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>50</sup>Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

and demand – convergence in terms of standing, influence, and rights.”<sup>51</sup> However, status recognition often lags considerably behind increases in material capabilities, creating the conditions for status inconsistency. If the established powers repeatedly deny the rising power's status claims, elites and other actors within the former likely come to believe that their status ambitions are incompatible with the status quo order.

Ward terms the perception of status incompatibility as ‘status immobility,’ which “refers to the belief that a state’s status ambitions face an obstacle that is fundamental to the status quo order and cannot be overcome from inside of it.”<sup>52</sup> As a result, the rising power perceives that its exclusion from the status club is *structurally unjust*. Status immobility is essentially a 'status glass ceiling,' as "the problem is not that the rising state has not yet accumulated the requisite markers of status and thus does not deserve membership; it is instead that the state does deserve membership, but other states seem fundamentally unwilling to treat it as a full member of the club."<sup>53</sup> Therefore, states are motivated to seek status when they perceive that they are in a condition of status immobility, facing obstructed status ambitions from an externally imposed, unjust order.

Regarding strategy, Ward argues that the social-psychological approach is missing an account of how states react to an 'unjust, externally imposed, and insuperable obstacle.'<sup>54</sup> Ward builds on the approach by introducing a fourth strategy, ‘the logic of rejection,’ which holds that “if the rules seem to be fundamentally unfair, then playing the game according to the rules will not only be futile, it will also reconstitute the rules, the game, and the unjust social hierarchy these produce. Instead, the condition of status immobility leads to pressure for a response that rejects the

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<sup>51</sup>Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, 39.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 49.

status quo order.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, the logic of rejection does not aim to achieve higher status in the current order but instead completely rejects 'playing by the rules' of the order.

Ward argues that for hardliners, status is deeply significant to their self-esteem, and as a result, conditions of status immobility demand a response. Such a response is argued to be the logic of rejection because of "the notion that overthrowing or revolutionizing the status quo order might destroy whatever element of the system is obstructing the satisfaction of the state's status ambitions."<sup>56</sup> The condition of status immobility "makes it harder to legitimate moderate foreign policies and easier to legitimate aggressive ones, especially policies that seem to reject status quo norms, rules, and institutions."<sup>57</sup>

There are three possible pathways through which leaders respond to status immobility. First, leaders (either moderate or hardliners) will react to status immobility by producing rejectionist policies, motivated by the social-psychological consequences of such conditions. Second, moderate leaders will change course and adopt revisionist policies because sustaining moderate policies becomes politically impossible. Third, moderate leaders will not change course when faced with status immobility and are thus replaced through elections, negotiation, or coups with hardline leaders willing to advance revisionist policies.

Revisionist policies are adopted when actors within the state are either dissatisfied with the distribution of resources in the international system (territory, power, wealth, markets, influence, or any 'valued good) or dissatisfied with the norms, rules, institutions, or relationships – in other words, the foundation – of the order that influences the distribution of resources and regulates interaction. These two forms of dissatisfaction influence three different kinds of revisionist foreign policy. First, a state might be a *distributive revisionist* through policies that aim to achieve fairer

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 56.

material, economic, or social resource distribution.<sup>58</sup> Second, states might be *normative revisionists*, adopting policies that seek to change the normative foundation of the order. Finally, a state might combine distributive and normative revisionist policies to become *radical revisionists*, which simultaneously aim to satisfy distributive ambitions while rejecting or overthrowing the foundation of the order.<sup>59</sup> While distributive and normative revisionism can lead to conflict and competition, Ward claims that radical revisionism is the most dangerous, aggressive, and internationally destabilizing policy orientation. Figure 1 in the Appendix summarizes the four approaches motivations and strategies.

### **3.6 China's Pursuit of Status**

Since the 1990s, the literature has considered China the most status-conscious state in the world due to its rapid and unprecedented economic growth, culture, and increasing military capabilities. The 'China threat,' 'rise of China,' and hegemonic challenger discourse have only aided in making China the most important case study for status-based research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The case study aims to demonstrate the strengths and limitations of the approaches, the most important of which is whether the strategy advocated by each approach can adequately explain China's behaviour.

#### *3.6.1 The Social Psychological Approach: China's Strategy of Creativity*

The social psychological approach holds that since the 1990s, China has consistently utilized a strategy of creativity to improve its status.<sup>60</sup> China refuses to adopt the predominant Western norms of individualism, respect for human rights, transparency, democracy promotion, and humanitarian intervention, adhering instead to traditional norms of sovereignty and nonintervention. In addition, China rejects neoliberal economic principles set in the Washington Consensus' one-size fits all

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 10. For Gilpin (*War and Change in World Politics*), this is referred to as 'incremental change.'

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>60</sup>Deborah Welch Larson, "Status Competition among Russia, India, and China in Clubs: A Source of Stalemate or Innovation in Global Governance," *Contemporary Politics* 25, no. 5 (2019); Larson and Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*; Hai Yang, "The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and status-seeking: China's foray into global economic governance," *Chinese Political Science Review* 1, no. 4 (2016); and Yi Edward Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives in Global Governance Reform Under Xi Jinping," *The Journal of Contemporary China*, no. 128 (2021).

approach, instead adopting the 'Beijing Consensus' wherein 'no strings attached' development policies are moulded to the specific contexts in which they are applied. These factors contribute to what Larson & Shevchenko refer to as a 'reframing tactic' of social creativity, "wherein nominally negative traits (traditional Chinese values which were criticized for obstructing modernization) are reframed as positive in the post-industrial age."<sup>61</sup>

In 2014, China announced the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which specializes in lending for infrastructure development in contrast to the Western-led World Bank's focus on poverty alleviation.<sup>62</sup> The 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) is another important aspect of China's creativity strategy by claiming primacy in a new marker of superior status, infrastructure construction and connectivity.<sup>63</sup> Per Liu, the BRI demonstrates that China is a 'rule innovator,' in that it plays an important role in developing solutions to issues and gaps in the existing order.<sup>64</sup> Even on issues such as human rights, China has adopted a creativity strategy, as it is "working to shift the prevailing international norm from a universal and inalienable human rights standard based on liberal, democratic values to an alternative standard that gives nation states the right to balance individual rights against competing national objectives."<sup>65</sup> Through its creative strategy, China has emerged as the undisputed leader of emerging and developing countries both regionally and internationally; it has initiated new norms and rules in diplomacy, foreign policy, and global governance; and promoted a distinctive model of politics and economic development.<sup>66</sup>

While this case study only covers some of the most important elements of China's status quest through social creativity, it demonstrates two crucial aspects of China's rise. First, "for China,

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<sup>61</sup>Larson and Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*, 194.

<sup>62</sup>Larson, "Status Competition Among Russia, India, and China in Clubs," 557.

<sup>63</sup>Larson and Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*.

<sup>64</sup>Lina Liu, "Beyond the status quo and Revisionism: An Analysis of the Role of China and the Approaches of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to the Global Order," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 29, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>65</sup>Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives," 309.

<sup>66</sup>Shaun Breslin, "The 'China model' and the global crisis: from Friedrich List to a Chinese mode of governance?" *International Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2011); Xiaoyu Pu, "Socialization as a two-way process: Emerging powers and the diffusion of international norms," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 4 (2012); Yan Xuetong, "New values for new international norms," *China International Studies* 38, no. 1 (2013); and Yang, "The Asian Infrastructure Bank and Status-Seeking."

the risk that other states might perceive China as a threat, and respond with a policy to contain China's rise, motivated elites to seek preeminence in an area other than geopolitical might – contributing to world order as a responsible power.”<sup>67</sup> Since China requires recognition from the current established powers, it cannot afford to act belligerently, which could result in permanent status denial. Second, it shows that China still supports the global order because it is not directly competing with the US for hegemony,<sup>68</sup> and, as Liu argues, even though it has become more confident and assertive, “China often insists on its socialization and commitment to the liberal global order, which has been an effective way of promoting its peaceful rise and increasing its reputation and legitimacy.”<sup>69</sup> How this strategy will work in the future depends on how the US and its allies accommodate China and recognize its claims for status. Moreover, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, China may begin to take more aggressive actions (a strategy of competition) in its sphere of influence (most importantly, in Taiwan and the South China Sea) as the response from the West has been perceived as underwhelming and weak.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.6.2 *The Rational Instrumental Approach: China's Desire for Recognition*

While rationalists recognize that China is the most ‘status-conscious’ country in the world,<sup>71</sup> the US and other great powers have historically been reluctant to accord status to China, denying it a true sphere of influence by asserting itself in the South China Sea and procuring arms deals with Taiwan. Furthermore, the ‘China threat theories’ have attributed to China a “harmful, destabilizing, and even pernicious international disposition.”<sup>72</sup> Considering this, why has China not opted for conflict initiation to improve its status as *Renshon's* rationalist argument would suggest?

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<sup>67</sup>Larson and Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*, 229.

<sup>68</sup>Enrico V. Gloria, “The Silk Road Spirit: China’s BRI discourse and its pursuit for great power status,” *Asian Politics & Policy* 13, no. 4 (2021); Liu, “Beyond the Status Quo and Revisionism”; and Bora Ly, “China Quest for Global Governance Overhaul,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 7, no 1 (2021).

<sup>69</sup>Liu, “Beyond the Status Quo and Revisionism,” 105.

<sup>70</sup>Sheila A. Smith, “The United States, Japan, and Taiwan: What has Russia's Aggression Changed?” *Asia Policy* 17, no. 2 (2022); and Oxford Analytica, “Taiwan's China threat rises due to Ukraine crisis,” *Emerald Expert Briefings* (2022).

<sup>71</sup>Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

Of utmost importance to China's reputation is its relationship with the US. As Deng notes, the US "plays a key role for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership's...opportunities for upward mobility in world politics. By virtue of its global leadership position, the US decisively influences the receptivity towards China's rise."<sup>73</sup> In other words, the CCP recognizes that the US has the power to decide who 'thrives and prospers' and who is 'sent to their doom.'<sup>74</sup> As a result, Chinese leaders and analysts have shifted their foreign policy towards moderation and avoided sustained confrontation with the US to reduce uncertainty and suspicions in response to the China threat discourse.

In general, China has attempted to downplay its perceived threat reputation by reassuring the US about its benevolent economic and security aims. Economically, China holds that it is still largely a developing country and that its massive growth and competitiveness result from compliance with market principles – 'blame the game, not the player.' On security, China claims it ranks lower than other major powers (US and Russia) in terms of comprehensive strength while spending significantly less than the US on defence. Despite claims of increased Chinese aggression, the PRC counters by highlighting its peaceful historical record, benevolent Confucian culture, and promotion of economic cooperation and cooperative security policies. Beginning in the 1990s, China has equated its foreign policy with the doctrine of 'peaceful rise,' global responsibility, and even restraint on several issues from Taiwan to the South China Sea, nuclear tests, and arms sales.

While China does perceive itself to be in a status deficit, it recognizes that the only way it can currently achieve status in the international order is by structuring its identity as a cooperative, peaceful, and responsible actor in international society. Although Renshon does not focus on alternative foreign policy options to conflict initiation, a complete rationalist perspective must weigh the relative utility of all available policy options, which is arguably what China has done in

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 110-111.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

choosing to achieve major power status through the doctrine of peaceful rise. Even though the instrumental benefits received from a peaceful rise strategy might be lesser than those of victory in a hegemonic war, China can still receive important benefits including reduced blockades and sanctions, reduced counter-balancing efforts, increased resources diverted to economic development that would have been spent on military capabilities, and even increases in domestic legitimacy.<sup>75</sup> This strategy appears to be paying off, as Thompson notes that other than China, “no state has been accorded great-power status without a fight of some sort.”<sup>76</sup> Since the US and its great power allies ultimately decide the level of status accorded to China, conflict initiation would currently be an incredibly risky and potentially counterproductive strategy to improve its status.

Nonetheless, suppose China perceives its attempts at improving status through peace, responsibility, and cooperation to fail. In that case, the CCP may turn to a more aggressive and potentially violent strategy to achieve its status ambitions. However, several important considerations will prevent China from initiating conflict with the US in the immediate future. First, as Renshon notes, “states target actors they are most likely to defeat [and] also select targets that are commensurate with them in status ranking.”<sup>77</sup> Currently, the US is the closest state to China regarding capabilities. However, it still possesses a distinct advantage militarily in terms of military spending and capabilities, especially in terms of international power projection.<sup>78</sup> As a result, it is unlikely that China will initiate conflict with the US under the rational instrumental approach *until* China can meet and exceed the military capabilities of the US. Even if they become material equals, however, the presence of nuclear weapons might eliminate any chance of conflict, as the consequences would far outweigh any potential instrumental gains. Therefore, it is most likely that

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<sup>75</sup>Yihe Chang, Shuwei Zhang, and Qijun Xue, “Win without battle: why China still needs a peaceful rise?” *The Frontiers of Society, Science and Technology* 3, no. 2 (2021)

<sup>76</sup>William R. Thompson, “Status Conflict, Hierarchies, and Interpretation Dilemmas,” in *Status in World Politics*, eds. T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 219.

<sup>77</sup>Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 151.

<sup>78</sup>Chang et al., “Win Without Battle”; Sadharshan R., “America and China Military Power Comparison, and Who Would Win War between China and the United States of America,” Sabaragmuwa University of Sri Lanka (2022).

China will continue to utilize a strategy of peaceful rise, as the instrumental benefits gained – although less than those received as a hegemon – outweigh the potential annihilation of nuclear war.<sup>79</sup>

### 3.6.3 *The Constructivist Approach: A Misrecognized China?*

If China seeks equal treatment with the US in an increasingly multipolar world, will its leaders resort to geopolitical competition and revisionism to achieve its goal? The first thing to consider is whether China's identity is compatible with that of the established international order. For Murray, China's understanding of its place in the world is defined by its experiences during the Century of Humiliation and the resulting narratives of national humiliation and national rejuvenation.<sup>80</sup> The narrative of national humiliation constructs the relationship with the West as one of subordination, suffering, loss, and humiliation due to Western expansion. Particularly with the United States' pivot to Asia, criticisms of China's human rights record, undermining China's bid to host the Olympics in 2000, arms sales with Taiwan, and increased presence in the South China Sea and mainland Asia, "any attempt by the United States to limit Chinese power is seen as an act of misrecognition and an unjust and aggressive attempt to subjugate China once again...thus placing the maintenance of sovereignty at the centre of China's national identity."<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, the narrative of national rejuvenation is focused on restoring China's status that was lost during the Century of Humiliation. Under this narrative, China is not seeking new status but attempting to regain its previous status as a 'great nation.' As a result, Murray claims that "if China is indeed seeking recognition of its status...then the United States must formulate a foreign policy that responds accordingly, recognizing China's place in the international order."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Chang et al., "Win Without Battle," 45.

<sup>80</sup>Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 214.

Nonetheless, China recognizes that its cultural differences and understandings of superpower roles diverge from those of the established powers and order. For example, “China privileges respect for sovereignty as a central feature of the current international order. Meanwhile, one of the most salient features of US global leadership since the end of the Cold War has been interventionism.”<sup>83</sup> However, since one of the benefits of belonging to a particular status club is the ability to choose who enters the club, China understands that it needs recognition from the US if it hopes to be treated as an equal in the global order. As a result, the rivalry between the US and China is argued to be symbolic and ideational.

China is not a satisfied power: it prefers a multipolar system as opposed to US unipolarity and has engaged in limited balancing mostly within its sphere of influence.<sup>84</sup> China has adopted recognitive practices to gain recognition from the US, including economic initiatives like the Belt and Road and the AIIB (examples of great power voice), developing a blue-water navy (evidence of exemplary military power), and becoming more assertive in the South China Sea, mainland Asia, and Africa (maintaining its sphere of influence). However, China does not seek to replace the US as the hegemonic power; instead, China desires recognition of equal status from the US and other established powers.

While China does not wish to enter direct conflict with the US, it is also systematically excluded from the order by virtue of its identity.<sup>85</sup> Since China wants to be treated as an equal with the US, and because the only way for China to demonstrate its alignment with markers of major power status is through recognitive practices, its attempts at recognition might be misinterpreted. If China perceives that its identity is consistently unrecognized, it will continue to ground its identity in exemplary military power, risking elevated confrontation with the US.<sup>86</sup> To avoid

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 215.

<sup>84</sup>Nicholas Taylor, "China as a status quo or revisionist power? Implications for Australia," *Security Challenges* 3, no. 1 (2007).

<sup>85</sup>Bentley B. Allan, Srdjan Vucetic, and Ted Hopf, "The distribution of identity and the future of international order: China's hegemonic prospects," *International Organization* 72, no. 4 (2018), 3.

<sup>86</sup>Murray, *The Struggle for Status*.

potential conflict and international destabilization, the US must produce and adhere to a foreign policy that is not based on engagement or containment but on recognizing China's identity and aspirations for a greater leadership role in the international order.

### 3.6.4 *The Status Immobility Approach: Is China a Revisionist Power?*

Despite differences in culture, politics, and ideology, China participates (more or less fully) in the institutions and maintenance of the international order. Still, there is some uncertainty about whether China's rise will reinforce or destroy the order. While China has yet to adopt radical revisionist policies, it has engaged in various bouts of minor revisionism. Distributive revisionism is evident in China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea, its unwavering stance on sovereignty and Taiwan, and its creation of institutions such as the AIIB. However, China "is a status quo power, insofar as it benefits *more* from the existing order than any other state – including the hegemon."<sup>87</sup> Since China benefits significantly from open markets, American provision of public goods, and the ability to essentially free-ride and prosper, it makes little sense to drastically challenge the distributive elements of the current order.<sup>88</sup> Normatively, however, China has actively sought revisions to some of the order's foundational elements. For example, in relations with other states, China emphasizes a 'logic of relationships' in contrast with the West's 'logic of transactions,' where it does not use its preponderance of power to benefit asymmetrically, instead using it for mutual benefit.<sup>89</sup> As noted previously, China has begun actively promoting its culturally relative, illiberal model of national development as an alternative international human rights model to the West's universalism.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Andrej Krickovic, "The symbiotic China-Russia partnership: Cautious riser and desperate challenger," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 10, no. 3 (2017), 301 (emphasis added).

<sup>88</sup> Krickovic, "The Symbiotic China-Russia Partnership"; Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*.

<sup>89</sup> Brantly Womack, "China as a normative foreign policy actor," in *Who is a normative foreign policy actor? The European Union and its global partners*, ed. Nathalie Tocci (Brussels: CEPS Centre for European Policy Studies, 2008).

<sup>90</sup> Titus C. Chen and Chiahao Hsu, "China's human rights foreign policy in the Xi Jinping era: Normative revisionism shrouded in discursive moderation," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 23, no. 2 (2021).

China seeks status based on an understanding of membership in the 'legitimate great power club' where China, the US, and other members have equal standing.<sup>91</sup> However, some Chinese leaders and elites do not perceive that their claims to status have been recognized by the US and other great powers. Recognition would thus require the US and other great powers to acknowledge China's position by (1) granting China legitimate authority to act in ways appropriate with great power standing, (2) avoiding actions that signal to China that it does not possess equal rights as the other great powers, (3) recognizing China's geographical sphere of influence, and (4) respecting China's sovereignty by reducing challenges to its human rights record.<sup>92</sup>

However, the prospects for such status accommodation face three main obstacles. First, accommodating China might impact the security interests of other great powers, namely the US. As a result, the US will be faced with a choice: accommodate China and risk security interests or continue asserting itself in the region and risk signalling status denial. Relatedly, the US must also account for alliance politics in East Asia and the South China Sea. As Ward notes, the US might be reluctant to accommodate China's claims to a sphere of influence due to the reactions of key allies, such as Japan and South Korea. Third, China's status claims are arguably incompatible with the identity of the established great powers. Per Ward, the US supports "a range of values that are inconsistent with Chinese status claims. American official support, for instance, for human rights and liberal democracy violate Chinese understandings of what it means to respect sovereignty."<sup>93</sup> Additionally, the US has maintained (or attempted to) an identity as 'exceptional' and 'indispensable,' which does not square well with China's claims to equal rights among the world's greatest powers. To sum, effective accommodation would require the US to not only make serious sacrifices to its vital interests and influence but also redefine its role as a superpower in an increasingly multipolar world.

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<sup>91</sup>Ward, *The Challenge of Rising Powers*, 188.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 189-190.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 192.

Domestically, there is not yet widespread support for policies aimed at rejecting or overthrowing the order, as Beijing remains committed to caution, stability, and moderation in its foreign policy initiatives.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, Chinese public opinion is not belligerent, and there are powerful Chinese groups that have pushed for further integration in the global economy and moderation in foreign policy.<sup>95</sup> However, Ward notes that “the more stridently Western leaders insist that China must accept and contribute to the evolving international legal regime on issues such as human rights and collective defense of democracy, the more convinced Chinese leaders and elites may become that it is impossible to achieve recognition of great power status without fundamentally undermining the regime.”<sup>96</sup> Suppose the US and its allies continue to treat Chinese attempts at minor normative and distributive revisionism as threats to the international order. In that case, it is possible that groups like the Nativists, who oppose Chinese participation in the order, will become more ascendent in foreign policy decision-making. If this were to occur, it is possible that Chinese leaders would become increasingly attracted to radical revisionist policies that completely reject the order.

### ***3.7 Discussion***

Renshon's rationalist approach offers a strong explanation for the role that status concerns play in initiating conflicts. However, doing so narrowly restricts the scope of status-seeking options to conflict initiation. While Renshon does note there are alternative policy options for states to pursue, he gives the reader no indication as to why status dissatisfied states resort to conflict initiation over other status-seeking policies, such as building an aircraft carrier, developing new economic or political norms, or creating new international institutions. In other words, while recognizing that there are alternatives, Renshon does not elaborate on the relative utility of such options. As Gotz rightfully points out, "a rationalist perspective needs to rank-order the range of available status-

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 194, 199, & 202.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 201 & 202.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 196.

seeking policies – and their associated costs and risks – to determine the most cost-effective way for a state to enhance its international standing in a given situation.”<sup>97</sup> As a result, *Renshon’s* conceptualization of a rationalist approach contradicts the basic premise of rationalism in that the author does not say anything about the relative utility of conflict initiation over other means of gaining status. This limitation makes it difficult to apply *Renshon’s* framework to the case study of China, as the state has not engaged in conflict initiation to improve its status.

Furthermore, Renshon does not consider conflict initiation a risky strategy for states to improve their status in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Per Gotz, Renshon does not consider that “the material costs and risks associated with great power conflict have significantly increased in the last century.”<sup>98</sup> Jervis argues that “unless wars are justified by self-defense or the pursuit of widely-shared goals such as preventing genocide, they now lower rather than raise the country’s status.”<sup>99</sup> Lebow claims that “the principal motives responsible for war in the past – *standing*, security, revenge, and material interests – are no longer effectively advanced by war in most circumstances.”<sup>100</sup> Perhaps most importantly, nuclear weapons may be the only reason states such as China and the US do not engage in direct military conflict, even if China eventually catches up to the US regarding military capabilities. Therefore, the rational instrumental approach might hold explanatory power concerning states that use conflict initiation to improve their status. Still, the vast majority of states would benefit greater from alternative strategies that do not require significant expenditures of blood and treasure.

Murray makes a strong argument concerning revisionist state desires for recognition through aggressive recognitive practices and other states’ responses to such behaviour. However, her work within the constructivist framework does not offer a developed understanding of the

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<sup>97</sup>Gotz, “Status Matters in World Politics,” 231.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 231-232.

<sup>99</sup>Robert Jervis, “Fighting for Standing or Standing to Fight?” *Security Studies* 21, no. 2 (2012): 342-343.

<sup>100</sup>Richard Ned Lebow, “Motives, evidence, identity,” *International Theory* 2, no. 3 (2010): 490 (emphasis added).

interactions between material and social factors.<sup>101</sup> Murray claims that traditional wisdom (realism) is *under-socialized* in that "status and prestige are reduced to accurate perceptions of a state's material (and often military) capabilities."<sup>102</sup> Somewhat contradictorily, she then argues that recognition and misrecognition are based on other states' perceptions of a state's material (mostly military) capabilities. For example, Murray provides case studies of Germany and the US during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in which both nations' growing economic and military might led to similar status-seeking behaviour, even though they had noticeably different cultural and historical backgrounds.<sup>103</sup> How this occurred, however, is not addressed. Thus, Chavoshi claims that "while the author identifies the role of social and material factors in states' construction of self-image as the only source of self-realization, discussions of the correlation of material and ideational factors for actors' identity formation are only marginally covered."<sup>104</sup> As a result, Murray's self-proclaimed social understanding of status is infiltrated by material determinants, making it more like Renshon's rationalist approach than Clunan or Pouliot's constructivist analyses.<sup>105</sup>

The most significant issue with the social-psychological approach is its application of SIT to IR.<sup>106</sup> Götz notes that individuals operate within hierarchically organized political communities, whereas states in the international system operate under conditions of anarchy. MacDonald & Parent argue that SIT is an *individual*-level theory that measures attitudes toward group membership and is *not* an attempt to provide a complete account of relations between groups.<sup>107</sup> However, these fundamental aspects of SIT are not addressed in the social psychological

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<sup>101</sup>Gotz, "Status Matters in World Politics"; Siavas Chavoshi, Review of *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers*, by Michelle Murray, *International Affairs* 96, no. 5 (2020).

<sup>102</sup>Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 6.

<sup>103</sup>Gotz, "Status Matters in World Politics."

<sup>104</sup>Chavoshi, Review of *The Struggle for Recognition*, 1413.

<sup>105</sup>Clunan, "Historical Aspirations and the Domestic Politics of Russia"; Anne L. Clunan, "Russia and the liberal world order," *Ethics & International Affairs* 32, no. 1 (2018); and Pouliot, "Setting Status in Stone."

<sup>106</sup>Gotz, "Status Matters in World Politics"; and MacDonald and Parent, "The Status of Status in World Politics."

<sup>107</sup>MacDonald and Parent, "The Status of Status in World Politics."

approach's application of the theory. Thus it is unclear how it can be successfully adapted to the international level without accounting for these issues.

Second, as Götz states, SIT “presupposes that groups have roughly equal material capabilities.”<sup>108</sup> However, states in the international system possess vastly unequal shares of material capabilities.<sup>109</sup> Incorporating such concerns, Larson & Shevchenko posit that “whether or not states resort to military conflict to enhance their status depends on the criteria for status within that context as well as on a *state's relative capabilities*.”<sup>110</sup> If SIT presupposes rough equality in material capabilities, but the international system is inherently unequal, it is conceivable that material capabilities contribute significantly to a state's status-seeking potential. As a result, the social-psychological approach is rather ambiguous regarding how unequal international distribution of material capabilities influences the initiation of status-seeking behaviours.

The most significant issue with Ward's status immobility approach concerns the observation that while rising powers have many reasons to be more status-conscious, they also have expanding interests and growing capabilities, leading to equally aggressive behaviour. In each case study provided, Ward claims that material factors are less important than conditions of status immobility in explaining state behaviour. However, as Bajpai points out, by the end of each case study, Ward recognizes that factors other than status immobility play a significant role in explaining a rising power's behaviours and actions, such as material capabilities or security concerns.<sup>111</sup> In other words, is revisionism the result of status obstructions, or is it the result of interest denial?

While each approach has strengths and limitations, the most encompassing approach concerning the motivations and strategies of status-seeking behaviour would require a synthesis of the social psychological and status immobility approaches. The social psychological approach

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<sup>108</sup>Gotz, “Status Matters in World Politics,” 235.

<sup>109</sup>William C. Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, status competition, and great power war,” *World politics* 61, no. 1 (2009), 30.

<sup>110</sup>Larson and Shevchenko, *Quest for Status*, 242 (emphasis added).

<sup>111</sup>Kanti Bajpai, Review of *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* by Steven Ward, *H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable* 10, no. 27 (2019).

possesses more strategies (3) for status improvement than the rationalist and constructivist approaches combined.<sup>112</sup> However, it faces difficulty when explaining state behaviour that appears to *reject* the order because the strategies of emulation, creativity, and competition occur *within* the existing order. Ward understands status immobility as an extension of the social psychological approach, offering a strategy – the logic of rejection – for actors to use when they face unjust obstructed status ambitions *within* the order, leading them to adopt revisionist foreign policies to gain status *outside* the order, on occasion constituting a new order.

It must be stated that Ward's status immobility is focused on explaining the most extreme cases of revisionism, including Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany, in which such states attempted to destroy and rebuild the international order in their favour.<sup>113</sup> As a result, Ward's approach is less useful at explaining the status-seeking behaviour of states that may be dissatisfied but perceive the order to be legitimate. However, this issue is addressed by combining the social psychological and status immobility approaches, as the former deals with the status-seeking behaviour of states that do not seek major revisions to the international order. Therefore, by combining the status immobility and social psychological approaches, states would have four strategies – emulation, competition, creativity, and rejection – to pursue status both within and outside the international order, encompassing all locations in which status-seeking occurs.

Another benefit of merging the social-psychological and status immobility approaches is that the synthesized approach would be the most opportunistic about conflict avoidance. From the social psychological approach, states can utilize emulation or creativity and thus do not have to resort to competition to improve their status. As Wohlforth et al. argue, "whether status seeking leads to conflict or other suboptimal outcomes depends on strategic choice, with the standard

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<sup>112</sup>Although Murray offers three recognitive practices, they all operate under the logic of competition.

<sup>113</sup>Andrej Krickovic and Zhang Chang, "Fears of Falling Short Versus Anxieties of Decline: Explaining Russia and China's Approach to Status-Seeking," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 13, no. 2 (2020): 226.

assumption being that mobility and creativity may be conducive to system-supporting and potentially less costly or self-defeating behaviour."<sup>114</sup>

While the status immobility approach holds that radical revisionist states will likely initiate conflicts to improve their status, states that resort to distributive or normative revisionism can do so without necessarily causing ‘geopolitical earthquakes’ that lead to conflict and war.<sup>115</sup> In the case study of China, the creation of the AIIB is an example of both normative and distributive revisionism that has not led to conflict and war. The AIIB provides states with an alternative normative framework to Western institutions such as the WB, and it has improved China's influence in the global financial system. While the US might not like the influence China holds in the AIIB, there is yet to be any conflict because of its creation. Therefore, the status immobility approach also offers non-conflictual status-seeking strategies, even when they occur outside the established order. Together, the synthesized approach offers strategies that occur beyond geopolitical competition and conflict initiation, for which the rationalist and constructivist approaches do not convincingly account.

A final point to consider concerns the perceived benefits of increased status. From the social psychological approach, states seek status for the intrinsic benefits that high status confers, including self-worth, positive distinctiveness, superiority, pride, and well-being. From status immobility, instrumental benefits gained through distributive revisionism “often refers to territory or power, but it may also mean the distribution of influence, wealth, markets, ideology, regime type, or some other valued good.”<sup>116</sup> States benefit from normative revisionism by being able to set the norms, rules, and institutions of various elements of the international system. Finally, if a state is a radical revisionist, it will benefit from both realms as it can set the distributive and normative aspects of the entire order.

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<sup>114</sup>Wohlforth et al., “Moral Authority and Status in International Relations,” 530.

<sup>115</sup>Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, 2.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

## Chapter 4: Status, Power, and Deference

### 4.1 Introduction

The literature broadly understands status to be inseparable from power. In fact, most status markers are simultaneously determinants of soft or hard power.<sup>117</sup> Unfortunately, the social psychological and status immobility approaches do not allocate any discussion to understanding status as a form of power. As a result, the following section will focus on the rationalist and constructivist understandings of status as a form of soft power, specifically as an influence multiplier and legitimate social power, respectively. The final section demonstrates how the rationalists and constructivists understand status as a mechanism through which power is translated into deference.

### 4.2 Status as Legitimate Power

Soft power – getting others to *want* what you want – is understood as a form of *attraction*, in contrast to hard power – *ordering* others to do what you want – which is conceptualized as *coercion*.<sup>118</sup> Rationalists view status as a form of soft power by arguing that it is an *influence multiplier*.<sup>119</sup> Volgy et al. assert that powerful states seek status to reduce the costs of being a major power. In other words, "attribution of major power status by the community of states to a handful of others provides members of the club with a form of *soft power with which to complement material capabilities*."<sup>120</sup> As soft power, status reduces the costs of intervention, institutional development, creating cooperation mechanisms, and increases the credibility of threats and commitments. As Khong argues, the state with the most status in a particular hierarchy is "able to translate its power into the political outcomes it desires with minimal resistance and maximal flexibility."<sup>121</sup> When status is viewed as such, it becomes clear why states such as China seek

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<sup>117</sup>For example, aircraft carriers, nuclear weapons, size of the economy, and human rights protection are traditional forms of soft and hard power that also confer status to states.

<sup>118</sup>Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990), 166.

<sup>119</sup>Thomas J. Volgy, Renato Corbetta, J. Patrick Rhomey, Ryan G. Baird, and Keith A. Grant, "Status Considerations in International Politics and the Rise of Regional Powers," in *Status in World Politics*, eds. T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 60-61 (emphasis added).

<sup>121</sup>Yuen Foong Khong, "Power as prestige in world politics," *International Affairs* 95, no. 1 (2019), 120.

increased status for more than its symbolic value, because status reduces the costs of pursuing vital regional and global issues.<sup>122</sup>

While Volgy et al.s. work within the rationalist framework focuses on great powers, is it possible to extend the 'status as an influence multiplier' argument beyond major powers? Nayar & Paul argue that although middle, regional, or small powers might not possess the necessary capabilities to control international outcomes, they do possess the capabilities to influence their local status communities.<sup>123</sup> Thus, nothing intuitively prevents small, middle, or regional powers from pursuing status with the expectation that it will bring greater influence within their relevant reference group.

For Murray, recognitive practices are intended to gain recognition from the established powers. Thus, great power voice, exemplary military power, and spheres of influence are understood as mechanisms of soft power as their intended use is to *attract* other states into recognizing the status that is perceived to accompany such practices. As Barkin argues, “measures of material capabilities can be relevant to specific political contexts, but those contexts are themselves contingent on ideas about what kind of power can and should be used, how it is to be used, and for what ends.”<sup>124</sup> Murray states that “by thinking of material capabilities as 'materialized understandings,' we may find it possible to shed new light on the role that particular forms of weaponry – from nuclear weapons to aircraft carriers to drones – [play] in affecting interstate behaviour.”<sup>125</sup> In other words, while nuclear weapons, aircraft carriers, and drones are traditionally understood as coercive resources, they can be understood as symbolic attributes of high-status states under the constructivist approach.

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<sup>122</sup>Volgy et al., “Status Considerations in International Politics,” 61-62.

<sup>123</sup>Baldev Raj Nayar and T. V. Paul, “Introduction: India and Its Search for a Major-Power Role,” in *India in the World Order: Searching for Major-Power Status* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>124</sup>Samuel J. Barkin, *Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 34.

<sup>125</sup>Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 205.

If a state gains or possesses high status, its possession of status markers is not perceived as a threat but as a legitimate part of its identity. According to Murray, “recognition *legitimizes its power* and, as a consequence, going forward the rising power’s adoption of recognitive practices will be viewed as appropriate and for the purposes of contributing to the international order.”<sup>126</sup> Once recognized as a high-status state possessing legitimate social power, the soft and hard power resources relevant to the domain in which the state has achieved primacy are simultaneously legitimized. Therefore, Murray argues that status is best understood as legitimate social power as it confers the ability to legitimately use hard and soft power resources in ways consistent with a state's standing.

#### **4.4 Status, Power, and Deference**

Both the rationalist and constructivist approaches understand status as a form of *legitimate power*. According to Hofmann et al., legitimate power is evident when “an authority operates through legitimacy of its position, expertise...and its ability to make others identify with it.”<sup>127</sup> At the state level, legitimate power can only be derived from a state's recognized position in formal or informal hierarchies.<sup>128</sup> Since status is fundamentally a state's standing, rank, or membership in groups or clubs, achieving high status is equivalent to the 'position' requirement of legitimate power. States who achieve high status on a particular marker also possess the necessary expertise to fulfill their role successfully because a state cannot hold high status unless it demonstrates primacy on one or more status markers. Legitimate power also requires identification, which is defined as the recognition of the authority's position.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, status is inherently social and requires recognition from the relevant status community. Finally, at the normative level, legitimacy is

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 75 (emphasis added).

<sup>127</sup>Eva Hofmann, Barbara Hartl, Katharina Gangl, Martina Hartner-Tiefenthaler, and Erich Kirchler, "Authorities' coercive and legitimate power: the impact on cognitions underlying cooperation," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8, no. 5 (2017)

<sup>128</sup>Bertram H. Raven and John RP French Jr., "Group support, legitimate power, and social influence," *Journal of Personality* 21, no. 2 (1958); Hofmann et al., "Authorities' coercive and legitimate power"; Helen Milner, "The assumption of anarchy in international relations theory: a critique," *Review of International Studies* 17, no. 1 (1991); and David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in international relations*, (Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>129</sup>Hofmann et al., "Authorities' Coercive and Legitimate Power."

understood as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions."<sup>130</sup> Nicaragua cannot legitimately lead international security initiatives, and China could not legitimately lead a global human rights initiative because they do not possess the position, expertise, communal identification, or normative compliance necessary to hold status – and thus legitimate power - over these domains.

Since deference is understood to be voluntary subordination to a superior actor based either simply on their superior position or because they are perceived as the most prototypical of the status community,<sup>131</sup> a state can only be deferred to if the status community perceives it to be *legitimate*. Tyler et al.'s research demonstrates that "when authorities are viewed as more legitimate, their rules and decisions are more likely to be accepted."<sup>132</sup> If status is a form of legitimate power, states expect increased deference when they pursue improved status, as their position is supposedly viewed as increasingly legitimate. Status thus leads to deference due to the legitimacy of position that possessing high status confers. As Renshon argues, status clarifies who in a specific relationship is expected to defer.<sup>133</sup> For Murray, the role of status is to legitimize a state's power and produce relationships of respect and deference.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, the rational instrumental and constructivist approaches best understand status as a form of soft power that generates voluntary deference through the legitimacy that high status confers.

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<sup>130</sup>Mark C. Suchman, "Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches," *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995), 574.

<sup>131</sup>Reinhard Wolf, "Between deference and defiance: hierarchical status roles and international conflict," *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>132</sup>Tom R. Tyler, Stephen Schulhofer, and Aziz Z. Huq, "Legitimacy and deterrence effects in counterterrorism policing: A study of Muslim Americans," *Law & Society Review* 44, no. 2 (2010), 2.

<sup>133</sup>Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 42.

<sup>134</sup>Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 168.

## Chapter 5: Scope Conditions and Generalizability

### 5.1 Introduction

One of the most common issues raised with the status literature concerns the approaches scope conditions.<sup>135</sup> While Larson & Shevchenko and Renshon do not exclusively limit the scope of the social psychological and rational instrumental approaches, they focus entirely on the status-seeking behaviours of rising great powers. On the other hand, Murray and Ward explicitly limit the scope of the constructivist and status immobility approaches to dissatisfied rising powers because such states are most likely to adopt revisionist policies in international politics.<sup>136</sup> This chapter proceeds by offering four unique case studies to demonstrate that the scope conditions for all four approaches can be expanded to varying degrees beyond a narrow focus on great and rising powers.

### 5.2 The Social Psychology Approach: Norway as a Good Power

Analyzed through the social psychological approach, Norway's most frequent status-seeking strategy has been creativity, by defining new ways through which it can be useful for the great powers and systems maintenance.<sup>137</sup> The hallmark of Norway's foreign policy since the end of the Cold War is its involvement in international peace, security, and humanitarian intervention – domains typically under the purview of great powers. As a result, Norway is consistently referred to as a state that 'performs,' 'dresses,' or 'acts as a great power' in ways that are not typically expected of small states.<sup>138</sup> Norway's signature 'policy of involvement' refers to the belief that "small states could play a 'moral' role which greater powers – especially the US – could not, due to the complex web of their global interests."<sup>139</sup> Schia & Ole argue that because Norway does not have the same

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<sup>135</sup>Gotz, "Status Matters in World Politics"; and MacDonald and Parent, "The Status of Status in World Politics."

<sup>136</sup>Cameron G. Thies and Angguntari C. Sari, "A role theory approach to middle powers: Making sense of Indonesia's place in the international system," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 40, no. 3 (2018).

<sup>137</sup>Peter Viggo Jakobsen, Jens Ringsmose, and Håkon Lunde Saxi, "Prestige-seeking small states: Danish and Norwegian military contributions to US-led operations," *European journal of international security* 3, no. 2 (2018); and Wohlforth et al., "Moral Authority and Status in International Relations."

<sup>138</sup>Benjamin de Carvalho and John Harald Sande Lie, "A Great Power Performance: Norway, Status, and the Policy of Involvement," in *Small State Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing*, eds. Benjamin de Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014); Wohlforth et al., "Moral Authority and Status in International Relations,"

<sup>139</sup>Wohlforth, "Moral Authority and Status in International Relations," 538.

level of identifiable interests or stakes as more powerful states in systems maintenance, they are committed to upholding and furthering the rules established in the UN and other multilateral settings.<sup>140</sup> This strategy is rooted in creativity by establishing a status dimension of 'goodness' or 'moral authority.' As a result, Norway is attempting to be seen as more reliable, 'moral,' 'good,' and 'humanitarian' than other small and middle power states.<sup>141</sup>

During the 1990s, Norway's hosting of the Oslo Process was a significant boost towards its status as a good power. As de Carvalho & Lie state, "when former foreign minister Johan Jorgen Holst shook hands with Clinton, Arafat, and Rabin on the White House lawn in 1993, Norway's policy of involvement had made it a good power – one of the better ones, in fact."<sup>142</sup> Norway's status as a good power was also enhanced through its notable contributions to smaller but highly visible projects such as UN Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations policy of 'Integrated Missions,' within which Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Norwegian NGOs, and research institutions held prominent leadership positions.

Perhaps the most important recognition of Norway's status came from President Obama in 2011, praising Norway's contribution to the humanitarian mission in Libya by stating, "I've said this before but I want to repeat, Norway punches above its weight."<sup>143</sup> In general, Wohlforth et al. argue that "Norwegian diplomats have assiduously carved out roles for Norway as facilitator, interlocutor, and global institution-supporter...a seemingly anomalous role for a middle power in the far northwest of Europe."<sup>144</sup> Therefore, through a strategy of creativity, Norway has achieved entry into clubs typically reserved for powerful states by promoting itself as a state that 'throws

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<sup>140</sup>Niels Nagelhus Schia and Ole Jacob Sending, "Status and sovereign equality: Small states in multilateral settings," in *Small State Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing*, eds. De Carvalho, Benjamin, and Iver B. Neumann (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>141</sup>De Carvalho and Lie, "A Great Power Performance."

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>143</sup>De Carvalho and Lie, "A Great Power Performance," 56.

<sup>144</sup>Wohlforth et al., "Moral Authority and Status in International Relations," 544.

good punches above its weight.’<sup>145</sup> Perhaps most importantly, however, Norway has been able to gain impressive status relative to its size *without* the need to resort to conflict, geopolitical competition, or revisionism, demonstrating that the ‘power of ideas’ can be more effective than coercion when improved status is the objective.

### ***5.3 The Rationalist Approach: The United States’ Performative War in Iraq***

Even though the US remained materially hegemonic after 9/11, its status was fundamentally called into question because a few men, armed with boxcutters and without any state power or technology, were able to destroy symbols of American capitalism and power.<sup>146</sup> Motivated by humiliation and the perceived need to reassert its hegemonic status and generalized deterrence, the Bush Administration needed a ‘performative war’ that would re-establish its credibility and reputation.<sup>147</sup> Although the US was at war with Afghanistan, central figures in the Bush administration perceived it to be inadequate for the goal of reasserting its status. On the night of 9/11, Donald Rumsfeld privately stated that “we need to bomb something else [other than Afghanistan] to prove that we’re, you know, big and strong and not going to be pushed around by these kinds of attacks.”<sup>148</sup> Similarly, Douglas J. Feith wrote in a memo to Rumsfeld on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001, that “single pronged attacks against the smallest state sponsor of the terrorist network may not be sufficient...such a limited attack may be perceived as a sign of weakness rather than strength.”<sup>149</sup>

If not in Afghanistan, where would this war of hegemonic reassertion occur? According to Butt, “Iraq fit the bill...because it represented a festering symbolic wound to American pride...with reminders that said ‘I’m still here,’ an untenable position in a post-9/11 world where the U.S. had

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<sup>145</sup>De Carvalho and Lie, “A Great Power Performance,” 68.

<sup>146</sup>Butt, “Why Did the United States Invade Iraq in 2003?”

<sup>147</sup>Colin Flint and Steven M. Radil, “Terrorism and counter-terrorism: Situating al-Qaeda and the global war on terror within geopolitical trends and structures,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 50, no. 2 (2009).

<sup>148</sup>Butt, “Why Did the United States Invade Iraq in 2003?” 270.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

to clearly enunciate its hegemony.”<sup>150</sup> On September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Rumsfeld stated that in Iraq, “we could inflict the kind of costly damage that could cause terrorist-supporting regimes around the world to rethink their policies.”<sup>151</sup> In January of 2002, Robert Kagan and William Kristol “urged military intervention in Iraq as part of America’s reassertion of global leadership,” stating that “the failure of the United States to take risks, and to take responsibility, in the 1990s, paved the way to September 11.”<sup>152</sup> Paul Pillar would later write that the major purpose of the war was “the exertion of American power as a demonstration of the US ability and willingness to use that power, thereby increasing deference to US interests worldwide and deterring adversaries and would-be troublemakers from opposing those interests.”<sup>153</sup>

In response to 9/11 and the potential rise of other geopolitical challengers (namely China), the 2002 National Security Strategy asserted that the US would need to retain global military superiority: “we must build and maintain our defences beyond any challenge...Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.”<sup>154</sup> In line with Renshon’s argument that a conflict must be dramatic, salient, and convey unambiguous information to demonstrate a state’s rightful status, the US utilized a strategy of ‘Shock and Awe’ to deter any challengers, whether it be terrorists, failed states, or rising powers.<sup>155</sup> Accordingly, Rumsfeld stated that the invasion of Iraq would be “of a force and scope and scale that has been beyond what has been seen before.”<sup>156</sup> Therefore, rationalists hold that the Bush administration perceived a performative war in Iraq as the most utility-maximizing option to not only reassert and demonstrate its strength and position

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 271.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 274.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 272.

<sup>154</sup>Cited in Barry Buzan, “Will the ‘global war on terrorism’ be the new Cold War?” *International affairs* 82, no. 6 (2006), 1114.

<sup>155</sup>Diana Taylor, “Bush’s Happy Performative.” *The Drama Review* 47, no. 3 (2003).

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 6.

as global hegemon but to signal to potential challengers that the US would remain the most powerful state in the international system.

#### ***5.4 The Constructivist Approach: Identity in the UNSC Reform Debates***

Historically, countries seeking permanent seats in the UNSC couched their claims in their contributions to international peace and security. However, since the early 2000s, status claims based on hard power and output legitimacy have 'lost their traction,' shifting towards input-legitimacy and democratic values.<sup>157</sup> As Hurd argues, "by virtue of being made in the international public sphere, the interests that these arguments serve must be presented in reference to generalizable values of the community."<sup>158</sup> Status-seeking within the UNSC was thus channelled through this new normative framework, informing and constraining the positions that states take on key issues in the reform debates.

Perhaps the most visible example of the shifting normative structure of the UNSC reform debates is the discussions about the criteria for new members. Pakistan, Nigeria, and the G4 (India, Brazil, Japan, and Germany) focus on 'equitable geographic distribution' to 'reflect current geopolitical realities.'<sup>159</sup> Other states, such as Italy, Iceland, Singapore, and Denmark, advocate a more prominent role for small to medium-sized states. India and Pakistan claim that developing states should have a more significant role in the UNSC, and Nigeria combines this claim with the need for permanent African representation. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) argues for representation of the 'main forms of civilization,' calling on cultural and political diversity and regional representation.

Another visible area in which the normative shift is evident is in the principles that a reformed UNSC should supposedly embody. For example, Pakistan, Brazil, the Arab League, the

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<sup>157</sup>Pouliot, "Setting Status in Stone," 203.

<sup>158</sup>Ian Hurd, "Myths of membership: the politics of legitimation in UN Security Council Reform," *Global Governance* 14 (2008), 200.

<sup>159</sup>Pouliot, "Setting Status in Stone," 204-206.

African Group, and Nigeria explicitly call for increased representation as a fundamental objective of a reformed UNSC.<sup>160</sup> South Korea argues that reform should enhance the transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness of the UNSC, and the Philippines advocates adherence to democratic practice, due process, the rule of law, fairness, justice, and equity. The Arab League, for its part, claims that a reformed UNSC should be “more capable of reflecting the realities of our era, as well as the interests and aspirations of all the countries and peoples of the world, including those of over 300 million Arabs.”<sup>161</sup> Canada, Mexico, the African Group, and the S5 advocate accessibility, transparency, accountability, and equity principles, linking them to increased credibility and effectiveness.<sup>162</sup>

This case study is important for three main reasons. First, it demonstrates that a normative shift – from output legitimacy to input legitimacy – produces a shift in the understanding of power – from hard power (military and economic contributions) to soft power (culture, political organization, and demographic composition). Second, it highlights how the 'game of status seeking' is both an identity affirming and identity transforming process. Finally, and related to the previous points, Pouliot argues that “even countries that strive for a permanent seat for themselves have come to couch their bids in democratic terms, often to the point of downplaying their unique assets in contributing to international peace and security.”<sup>163</sup> Renshon’s rationalist approach, which bases status aspirations on material capabilities, would have difficulty explaining why powerful states, who have a clear advantage in military and economic capabilities, would instead couch their claims in the current democratic normative context.

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 209.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., 202.

### ***5.5 The Status Immobility Approach: Russia's Status Glass Ceiling?***

Although a shadow of its former self, Russia still possesses the second largest nuclear arsenal and conventional military capabilities, the world's largest energy reserves, massive territory that borders both Europe and Asia, a permanent seat on the UNSC, and leading roles in BRICs and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).<sup>164</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, Russia's foreign policy was oriented towards retrenchment, reassurance, and abandonment of competition to advance its status. However, consistent US action to establish influence in Russia's sphere of influence, NATO and EU expansion, and the 'color revolutions' (Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, and Kyrgyzstan in 2005), posed direct challenges to Russia's historical status.<sup>165</sup>

By the 2000s, Russia had realized that its status as a great power was not only being challenged by the West but also rejected. For Krickovic, "as it is a declining power, the United States and the West are under no pressure to address Russia's grievances or to change the order to accommodate Russia's interests and status."<sup>166</sup> As a response to perceived status immobility, Russia became 'desperate' to change the international order to ensure that it preserved its status and influence in global politics. In its revised international order, Krickovic states, "Russia would like to see the return of a great power concert system wherein the United States shares power with other global powers. The new rules of the game would reaffirm a hard Westphalian notion of sovereignty that precludes interference in each other's internal affairs."<sup>167</sup> It would also include respect and non-interference in the great power's spheres of influence, which means special rights in the post-Soviet space for Russia.

Due to Russia's perceived status immobility, the civilizationists and other nationalists were able to shift foreign policy towards their aims.<sup>168</sup> According to Mazloomi et al., "as associated with

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<sup>164</sup>Krickovic, "The symbiotic China-Russia partnership."

<sup>165</sup>Esmail Mazloomi, Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh, and Mohd Aminul Karim, "From status inconsistency to revisionism: Russian foreign policy after color revolutions," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 3 (2018), 490.

<sup>166</sup>Krickovic, "The Symbiotic China-Russia Partnership," 311.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., 310.

<sup>168</sup>Mazloomi et al., "From Status Inconsistency to Revisionism."

pro-communist politicians and their sympathizers, civilizationists have permanently perceived Russia's distinctive character in the world via the prism of a cultural opposition between Moscow and the Western powers...they portray Russia as culturally anti-Western, an independent unit in a generally hostile world."<sup>169</sup> Throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, nationalists and civilizationists constantly belittled Russia's moderate political and military leaders. The perceived threats to Russia's status further discredited the moderates in Russian leadership, increasing support for revisionist nationalists who would lead Russia into competition with the West. For Ward, this revisionist foreign policy direction was the root cause of the 2008 Georgian and 2014 Ukrainian crises.<sup>170</sup>

While Russia has experienced a turn to more aggressive foreign policies, it hardly holds unlimited revisionist aims. Although Russia may be dissatisfied, it begrudgingly accepts the legitimacy of the international order and has not adopted any radical revisionist policies to supplant the US at the top of the global hierarchy.<sup>171</sup> As Krickovic & Chang argue, "Russian leaders are well aware of their country's limited capabilities and recognize that it could never be restored to the superpower status it enjoyed in its Soviet heyday."<sup>172</sup> Even Russia's early 2022 invasion of Ukraine can be understood in terms of distributive revisionism, as its leaders believe that it is entitled to greater influence over the post-Soviet space. However, rather than allowing Russia to take on a more significant leadership role in its sphere of influence, the West has consistently pushed back, compelling increasingly aggressive and violent policies to prevent further status declines.<sup>173</sup> As a result, continued containment policies may contribute to Russia's sense of status immobility, inspiring the belief that the only way to achieve their status ambitions is to pursue increasingly revisionist policies.

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid., 501.

<sup>170</sup>Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, 210.

<sup>171</sup> Krickovic and Chang, "Fears of falling short versus anxieties of decline," 250-251.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid.

## 5.6 Discussion

While it is possible to analyze non-great or rising power states through the constructivist and status immobility approaches, there is a significant limitation that hinders their ability to be applied to small or middle powers in that rising or established great powers are most likely to be revisionist states. For example, small states from Morocco and the Maldives to middle powers such as Canada and Italy could not realistically pursue major revisionist policies because they simply do not possess the capabilities to fundamentally alter the international order. It should be noted, however, that such states could pursue limited redistributive or normative revisionism to, for example, increase their regional influence or introduce new norms to international or regional institutions. Therefore, while the constructivist and status immobility approaches can be applied beyond the scope set by the authors to include declining powers and small and middle powers with limited revisionist aims, it is difficult to apply the approaches beyond their stated scope because small, middle, and even great powers do not either possess the capabilities or motivation to engage in substantial revisionist policies that would fundamentally alter the international order. As a result, the constructivist and status immobility approaches should, in most cases, be applied in analyses of revisionist states.

Elsewhere, Renshon claims that the rationalist approach can be applied beyond major powers because the relevant status community that a state compares itself with is comprised of similar states.<sup>174</sup> As a result, small powers seeking improved status will not initiate conflict with middle or great powers, but they could theoretically do so against other small powers. However, there is currently an absence of literature that analyzes conflicts between smaller powers for status improvement. So, while stating that the rationalist approach can be applied to smaller powers, Renshon does not provide enough evidence to support this claim. Proponents of the rationalist

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<sup>174</sup>Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 42.

approach must provide evidence before it can be concluded that the approach is generalizable beyond the most powerful states in the international system.

Of the four approaches outlined in this review, the social-psychological approach is the most generalizable because it offers the widest variety of strategies for states to pursue status. Emulation is not only viable for smaller states such as Norway, which cannot directly compete with more powerful states, but has also been used by powerful states such as China. While competition might seem limited to great powers, it is also a viable strategy for small and middle powers because such states compete with similar states in their relevant status community. For example, while Norway has adhered chiefly to creativity, elements of competition exist in that it is competing with similar powers (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Canada) to be the most 'moral,' 'good,' and 'humanitarian' state.<sup>175</sup> Finally, creativity is a valuable strategy for any state because it does not (1) rely on the possession of high material capabilities, (2) involve competition with higher-status states, and (3) involve emulation, which is not an attractive option for many states such as China or Russia. As evidenced in the case studies, states ranging from China to Norway have adopted creativity to improve their status.

Juxtaposed with the other approaches, the social-psychological approach simply grants states more agency in their pursuit of status. As a result, the scope of the social psychological approach is much broader because it explains the status-seeking behaviour of a more significant number of states. In other words, the social-psychological approach is the most generalizable because it does not narrowly restrict the status-seeking options of states to conflict initiation, geopolitical competition, and revisionism, as do the rationalist, constructivist, and status immobility approaches.

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<sup>175</sup>Wohlforth et al., "Moral Authority and Status in International Relations."

## Chapter 6: Developing a Synthetic Explanation

### 6.1 Introduction

This review has demonstrated that each approach offers a compelling explanation as to why and how states seek status in the international system and that they best operate at different levels of state power. However, to further the literature's explanatory power and theoretical consistency,<sup>176</sup> it is necessary to develop synthetic status-based explanations for state behaviour. This chapter demonstrates that the most logical and plausible synthesis would be of the social psychological and status immobility approaches due to their shared basis in Social Identity Theory.

### 6.2 *Synthesizing the Social Psychological and Status Immobility Approaches*

Gotz makes an important point in asserting that there is a lack of works published within the literature that apply multiple approaches to one or more case studies. Most status analyses compare their findings with geopolitical, normative, or domestic explanations without reference to other status approaches.<sup>177</sup> However, different status-based approaches offer diverging – and sometimes similar – explanations for the same international event or foreign policy decision. In general, the argument is that future works within the status framework should comparatively analyze the different approaches in a wider variety of case studies to develop a broader understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, and scope conditions.

To do so, Gotz convincingly argues that future work needs to adopt theory-testing process tracing, which involves examining source material (elite deliberations, internal government reports, diplomatic cables, and public discourse) to determine whether the causal mechanisms promoted by each approach are present. However, when the causal mechanisms of multiple approaches are present, "researchers need to weigh the existing evidence, through a quantitative analysis (e.g., counting the frequency with which policymakers refer to instrumental, social-psychological, or

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<sup>176</sup>Gotz, "Status Matters in World Politics."

<sup>177</sup>Ibid.

identity-based motivations [as well as obstructed status demands]), a qualitative analysis (e.g., identifying key diplomatic moments and critical decision-making junctures), or a combination of both."<sup>178</sup> For example, if Chinese leaders consistently refer to obstructed status demands as the motivation for revisionist foreign policy in their internal reports but do not reference ontological security or social-psychological factors, the status immobility approach would provide the best explanation for China's status-seeking behaviour. However, if discourse of both obstructed status demands and ontological security is referenced, it would be necessary to employ the above-mentioned quantitative and/or qualitative methods to determine which approach holds more explanatory power over the other.

Unfortunately, undertaking such a task is beyond the scope of this review. However, this paper has demonstrated that it is possible to merge the insights from social-psychology and status immobility into an integrated approach. Not only does it make sense to synthesize the two approaches due to their basis in SIT, but also because each approach offers insights into areas in which the other requires additional explanation. As stated in the third chapter, Ward views status immobility as an extension of the social psychological approach. However, Ward expresses concern with how the social psychological approach has applied SIT to international politics, arguing that SIT is an *individual*-level theory that has been used by IR scholars such as Larson & Shevchenko to explain the behaviour of states as *unitary* actors. As a result, he argues that "reframing the question from one about variation in state behaviour to one about variation in *individual* responses to perceptions of national status is a useful first step in addressing these problems."<sup>179</sup> Bringing the level of analysis back to the individual minimizes the mutation of SIT and highlights the importance of the domestic political environment in foreign policy decision-making, which cannot be captured by treating the state as a unitary actor. As a result, the

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<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 241.

<sup>179</sup>Ward, "Logics of Stratified Identity Management," 233 (emphasis in original).

synthesized approach would return to the roots of SIT, transferring the focus from "how states react to status dissatisfaction to how individuals – with different psychological profiles, different interests, and different positions within the national community – react to anxiety about the status of the state with they identify."<sup>180</sup>

### ***6.3 The Benefits of a Synthesized Approach***

As argued in the third chapter, the main benefit of a synthesized approach would be that it offers the best explanation concerning the strategies states utilize to pursue status. As stated, the synthesized approach would possess four strategies for actors to select when pursuing improved status (creativity, competition, emulation, and rejection). Although the focus of the synthesized approach would be transferred from the state as a unitary actor to individuals within the state, nothing is preventing the strategies of emulation, competition, and creativity from being adopted by actors within the state.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, Ward provides a fourth logic, through which “individuals can promote collective efforts to reject the norms, rules, and institutions that constitute and are productive of the interstate status hierarchy as a means of expressing resentment and signalling the illegitimacy of the status quo.”<sup>182</sup> As a result, the synthesized approach would not only offer a robust analysis of state behaviour when status is sought within the rules, norms, and institutions of the existing hierarchy but also when status is pursued through rejection of what is perceived to be an unjust and hopelessly unfair externally imposed order. Figure 2 provides a summary of the synthesized approach's strategy selection process.

Furthermore, the rationalist and constructivist approaches do not account for the status-seeking behaviour of actors that do not neatly fit within the categories of conflict initiation or geopolitical competition. While geopolitical competition and conflict initiation are evident within

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<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 211.

<sup>181</sup>Ward refers to the strategies as emulation, identification change, and transformation in “Logics of Stratified Identity Management.”

<sup>182</sup>Ward, “Logics of Stratified Identity Management,” 212.

social competition and radical revisionism, the synthesized approach provides states with the option to pursue strategies of emulation, creativity, and normative and/or distributive revisionism, which do not predetermine violent outcomes. Thus, the synthesized approach benefits greatly from not only providing actors with the most available options to pursue status but the agency to determine whether conflict initiation or geopolitical competition is essential in the pursuit of status.

Another benefit of the synthesized approach is that it would offer the most encompassing understanding of the benefits of improved status. As previously stated, the social-psychological approach perceives the main benefit of improved status to be the intrinsic psychological desires allocated once actors obtain high status, including positive distinctiveness, superiority, and deference. For the status immobility approach, the perceived benefits of achieving high status can be either instrumental or intrinsic. Ward states that "whether [status discourse] is purely instrumental or reflects real beliefs is inherently difficult to determine, but also not crucial since the appearance of talk about status indicates at the very least the presence of a discursive environment that requires or rewards it."<sup>183</sup> As a result, actors could pursue status for the intrinsic psychological benefits mentioned above. On the other hand, they could pursue status for the benefits associated with a radically, normatively, or distributionally revised order, which could be both instrumental and intrinsic.

One of the main strengths of Ward's approach is that it focuses on the process through which actors translate status concerns into foreign policy, which none of the other approaches – including the social psychological approach – do convincingly. As argued earlier in this chapter, Ward's proper understanding of SIT requires that the state be treated not as a unitary actor but as an entity comprised of individuals who elevate status concerns to actionable foreign policy. There is nothing inherently preventing emulation, competition, and creativity from being treated the same way

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<sup>183</sup>Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, 63.

because actors within the state could logically conclude that any one of the four strategies is the most effective way to improve their state's status, depending, of course, on whether they face conditions of status mobility or immobility.<sup>184</sup> By synthesizing the status immobility and social psychological approaches, Ward's insights into the proper application of SIT can be applied to all four status-seeking strategies, and it would thus possess the most substantial understanding of how status concerns at the individual level are translated into foreign policy at the state level.

Finally, the synthesized approach would possess the broadest scope conditions. As argued in the fifth chapter, the social-psychological approach is the most generalizable of the four because it can be applied in analyses of states of all power categorizations. It was also argued that the status immobility approach was one of, if not the least, generalizable of the four approaches because it focuses on rare cases of extreme revisionism, such as Interwar Germany and Imperial Japan. However, regardless of the status immobility approach's lack of generalizability, the combined approach would possess the broadest scope for two reasons. First, the approach would benefit significantly from the generalizability that the social psychological approach brings to the table. By providing states with the most agency in strategy selection, actors within small, middle, and great powers can utilize whichever strategy will improve their status in their relevant reference groups. Second, while the status immobility approach's generalizability may be a weakness on its own, when combined with the social psychological approach, it offers a solution to the latter's limitation in dealing with actors that seek status *outside* of the status quo order. Although such cases are rare, their inclusion improves the synthesized approach's generalizability.

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<sup>184</sup>Ward, "Logics of Stratified Identity Management."

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

### 7.1 *The Status of Status*

The purpose of this review has been to comparatively analyze the four main approaches to status to determine their strengths and weaknesses. Specifically, the review posed three research questions that address fundamental aspects of the broader status paradigm. Before concentrating on the research questions, the second chapter demonstrated that the four approaches converge on multiple aspects of status, including a basic definition and understanding of status as inherently hierarchical, as a positional and club good, based on collective beliefs, and pursued with the expectation of deference.

The third chapter focused on the first research question: *Which approach offers the most convincing explanation for why and how states seek status?* Ultimately, it was argued that a synthesis of the social psychological and status immobility approaches would offer the most convincing explanation as to why and how actors seek status because it would not limit status seeking to conflict initiation and geopolitical competition as the rationalist and constructivist approaches do. The fourth chapter asked: *Which approach best theorizes status as a form of power that translates into deference?* For the rationalist and constructivist approaches, status is understood as legitimate power because it confers legitimacy to high-status states based on their position, expertise, and recognition. Under this understanding, status translates to deference due to the perception that high-status states possess legitimacy, reducing the reliance on coercion to influence favourable outcomes.

To address an important issue raised with the broader literature, the third research question asked: *Which approach is the most generalizable across all forms of state-power categorization?* While all four approaches can be applied beyond the authors' stated scopes, as evidenced by the case studies in the fifth chapter, it was ultimately argued that the social psychological approach is the most generalizable across all state-power categorizations because it offers small, middle, and

great powers the most options to pursue status, which does not narrowly restrict their options to initiating conflict, geopolitical conflict, or revisionism as the constructivist, rationalist and status immobility approaches do.

Chapter six argued that the best approach to understanding state behaviour through the status paradigm would be a synthesis of the social psychological and status immobility approaches. Such a synthesis would require that the focus on states as unitary actors be transferred to individuals who identify with the state so that it would be in line with the theoretical basis of SIT.<sup>185</sup> The synthesized approach would significantly benefit from its generalizability, relying the least on conflict as a means of improving status, possessing the widest variety of strategies for states to pursue status, and the most encompassing understanding of the benefits of improved status.

### ***7.2 The Future of the Status Paradigm***

While many of the approaches' strengths and limitations have been highlighted, there are still several areas in which the status framework requires further development, including measurement, power, determinants of status aspirations, and competitive theory testing. First, although each of the four approaches offers a different method of measuring status concerns, levels, and/or deficiencies, it must be noted that measuring status is inherently difficult. To begin, Renshon is the only author who applies quantitative measures through diplomatic representation and 'sending state importance' to measure a particular state's status rank among relevant status communities. However, being the most connected state in diplomatic networks is not equivalent to status but is arguably the result of wealth and the possession of other material capabilities, where wealthier states can afford to send more diplomats while simultaneously attracting more diplomats. It is also possible that the decision of one state to send diplomats to another is the result of interests or ideology – thus reflecting choice, not deference – and in some cases, even coercion.<sup>186</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>185</sup>Ward, "Logics of Stratified Identity Management."

<sup>186</sup>MacDonald and Parent, "The Status of Status in World Politics," 10.

if material capabilities and interests cannot be accounted for through diplomatic recognition, it is difficult to determine whether status drives recognition.

Alternatively, the social-psychological, constructivist, and status immobility approaches rely upon qualitative measurements of status, which seek to discover status *ex-post* through the discourse and actions of policymakers and elites. However, a significant issue with using qualitative measures to gauge status is that leaders and elites rarely use the term 'status' as the approaches conceptualize it. Instead, leaders may utilize terms that seem to *evoke* status – honour, prestige, greatness, and superiority – but have little to do with status as a positional or club good.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, such discourse can be used for domestic strategy by conveying strong emotions such as pride to garner domestic support, which has little to do with improvements to a state's relative position within international hierarchies.

The most significant issue with existing measurements concerns measuring deference, as most of the analysis provided by the approaches focuses on the *pursuit* of status, *not deference* to it. As MacDonald & Parent argue, “we need to see evidence that other states at least recognize and likely defer to those at the top of the totem pole. The problem here is that states align their policies with the preferences of the powerful for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with status,”<sup>188</sup> including security, trade, or other instrumental interests. While the literature successfully demonstrates that states such as China, Russia, Japan, Germany, and the US have engaged in multiple bouts of status-seeking, they provide little evidence that the pursuit of status leads to deference. Perhaps this is because there is not yet a way to measure status *ex-ante* and *ex-post*, complicated even further by the difficulty of disentangling power-based status improvements from status seeking-based status improvements. If we find that lower-status states do not defer to higher-status states (the purported main benefit of status-seeking behaviour), then the pursuit of status is

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<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 12.

chimera. Future work should focus not only on developing more robust methods of measuring status but on capturing deference to high-status states.

Second, while all four approaches agree that deference is an important benefit of status-seeking, the social psychological and status immobility approaches do not discuss the relationship between status and power nor explain how increased status translates to deference. Furthermore, although the constructivist and rational instrumental approaches provide a plausible explanation of how status is a form of legitimate power that translates into deference through the legitimacy that high-status accords, they provide very little evidence of cases in which status irrefutably led to increased deference from lower-status states. As a result, the literature needs to strengthen its understanding of the relationship between status, power, and deference by (1) developing a clearer understanding of status as a form of power, (2) theorizing how status as a form of power translates into deference, and (3) providing evidence to support the argument that status does lead to increased deference.

Third, the approaches tend to focus either entirely on material or intrinsic structures, processes, and benefits as the major determinants of a state's status aspirations. However, the broader literature provides ample evidence that status ambitions are co-determined by both material and intrinsic factors.<sup>189</sup> Perhaps the best explanation for diverging status-seeking strategies is that material factors set the constraints from within which states operate, but how exactly they operate within these constraints is determined by the historical, cultural, and identity-based narratives developed by the state and prominent actors. Future work would benefit significantly from a developed understanding of the motivations behind status ambitions. A refined explanation would account for intrinsic and material factors while addressing the divergence in strategies adopted by states with different material capabilities, identities, cultures, and histories.

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<sup>189</sup>Gotz, "Status Matters in World Politics," 242.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, future work should focus on determining which approach holds the most explanatory power and on demonstrating how the insights from one approach can be integrated into another, with the end goal of developing a more refined, integrative account of status-seeking behaviour in the international system. As the sixth chapter demonstrated, it is possible to synthesize the social psychological and status immobility approaches due to their shared basis in SIT. It should be stated that the purpose of synthesizing is not to create a unified status approach, as this would result in a loss of theoretical diversity. Furthermore, the approaches are – except for social-psychology and status immobility – based on different ontological assumptions, limiting the possibility of merging various approaches in the first place. As a result, aside from the synthesis presented in this review, future work should only combine various perspectives when it aids in the explanation of a particular case study. For example, Renshon's focus on conflict initiation as a result status dissatisfaction might contribute important insights into how states enter conflict through social competition or how securitization leads to war after failed adoption of recognitive practices. Therefore, future work should give credence to developing integrated status-based explanations for state behaviour only when it is needed to provide a stronger understanding of specific events and cases.

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## Appendix A

**Figure 1. Overview of Approaches**

Approach	Motivations	Strategies	Potential for Conflict	Status as Power	Prominent Case Studies
Social Psychological	Intrinsic psychological Benefits	Emulation, competition, or creativity	Redistribution of power, could lead to peace or conflict	Likely soft power	Russia (1990-2000, mid 2000-present), China (1990s-present), Norway (1970s-present), North Korea (1990s-present), Scramble for Africa (1880s-1910s), UNSC (1990s-2010)
Rationalist	Instrumental Benefits	Conflict initiation	Infrequent destabilizing conflict	Soft power as an influence multiplier	US (2001-2010), China (2000-present), post-Cold War Russia
Constructivist	Ontological security	Recognitive practices (great power voice, exemplary military power)	Frequent destabilizing conflict	Soft power as legitimate social power	UNSC (1990s-2010), North Korea (1990s-present), China (1990s-present), post-Cold War Russia
Status Immobility	Obstructed status ambitions	Logic of rejection through radical, normative, or distributive revisionism	Frequent destabilizing conflict	Likely soft power	Wilhelmine Germany, Interwar Germany, Imperial Japan

**Figure 2. Synthesized Approach**

Strategy	Description	Issue	Solution	Examples
Emulation	Seek entry into elite clubs by emulating its norms and institutions.	Competition and Creativity are not necessarily viable, but the hierarchy is perceived as legitimate and permeable.	Recognition by relevant status community of reformed hierarchy.	Post-WW2 Germany and Japan, Soviet Union (1920s), Post-Cold War Russia, UNSC (1990s-2010)
Competition	Seek higher status through geopolitical competition on markers dominant states appear to have achieved primacy over.	Hierarchy is perceived as impermeable and illegitimate, rendering emulation ineffective. Emulation is perceived as undesirable.	Recognition by relevant status community of reformed hierarchy.	Russia (late 1990s-2000, mid 2000s-present), late 1890s Germany, China (late 2010s-present), North Korea (1990s-present)
Creativity	Seek higher status by introducing new and changing previous understandings of status markers.	Hierarchy is perceived as impermeable yet legitimate and competition or emulation are not necessarily viable.	Recognition by relevant status community of the legitimacy of new criteria for status.	Norway (1970s-present) China (1990s-present), Cold-War India, UNSC (1990s-2010)
Rejection	Seeks to protest, overthrow, or delegitimize the norms, institutions, and rules of the current order.	Hierarchy perceived as unfair, unjust, and obstructive of a state's status ambitions.	Minor revisionism (distributive or normative) to radical revisionism (overthrown, protested, or delegitimized order) to remove obstructions.	Wilhelmine Germany, Imperial Japan, Interwar Germany