

Chapter 8

Social Constructivism

The Social Construction of Power Politics

The International Relations and Security Network (ISN) has interviewed Professor Stefano Guzzini about the constructivist view of power. Listen to the podcast and discuss the merits and weaknesses of the constructivist view.

Professor Guzzini on the constructivist view of power:

<http://www.video.ethz.ch/campus/isn/7d69e000-c5a0-4530-bb7d-bf778e29ebd7.html>

Case Study: The US and China

The relationship between the United States and China is 'mutually beneficial and a win-win relationship rather than a zero-sum game' according to Zhou Wenzhong, Chinese ambassador to the United States (http://www.china.org.cn/international/2009-03/27/content_17513402.htm). Others disagree (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/13/opinion/avoiding-a-us-china-war.html?_r=0). Recall Alexander Wendt's constructivist analysis of the end of the Cold War: Gorbachev's New Thinking dramatically re-assessed the US-Soviet relationship and thus 'unilaterally and almost overnight'¹ terminated the Cold War. Following that view, how should we look at the current relationship between the United States and China; are they 'friends', 'rivals', or 'enemies'?

Assignments:

1. Try to design a constructivist analysis of the United States/China relationship. How would you evaluate the degrees of amity or enmity between the two countries?
2. Consider the following objection to constructivist analysis: "The U.S./China relationship is more than the ideas or the thinking about it. It also rests on the relative distribution of economic and military power. Without further investigation of those aspects of the relationship, any overall evaluation of it would be incomplete." Discuss.

References

¹ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 375.