Global: Jurnal Politik Internasional

Volume 24 | Number 1 Article 1

July 2022

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Global: Jurnal Politik Internasional Vol. 24 No. 1. Page 1-34. DOI: 10.7454/global.v24i1.706
 E-ISSN: 2579-8251

CHINA'S STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY ON THE ISSUE OF AUTONOMOUS WEAPON SYSTEMS

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Submitted: 25 November 2021; accepted: 25 April 2022

Abstrak

Tulisan ini membahas mengenai faktor yang melatarbelakangi ambiguitas sikap Tiongkok dalam isu senjata otonom dan keterkaitannya dengan situasi kebangkitannya. Pada tahun 2016 di United Nations on Certain Conventional Weapons (UN-CCW), Tiongkok merupakan satu-satunya negara Permanent Five (P5) yang menyerukan pelarangan dan pentingnya protokol mengikat mengenai senjata otonom. Melalui makalah posisinya, Tiongkok menyatakan bahwa karakteristik senjata otonom tidak sesuai dengan prinsip dalam Hukum Humaniter Internasional (HHI), kekhawatiran akan perlombaan senjata, hingga ancaman peperangan. Kendati demikian, di tahun 2017, Tiongkok justru memunculkan New Generation of AI Development Plan' (AIDP) yang menjadi basis dari pengembangan senjata otonom Tiongkok. Tindakan tersebut menciderai komitmen mereka di UN-CCW karena melalui AIDP maka Tiongkok telah merencanakan penggunaan, pengembangan dan produksi senjata otonom. Dengan menggunakan kerangka "technologically innovative imperative" dan konsepsi ambiguitas strategis, tulisan ini berargumen bahwa ambiguitas sikap Tiongkok merupakan sebuah kesengajaan strategis, hasil dari respon terhadap ketertinggalan teknologis dan hambatan sistemik yang tengah dihadapi Tiongkok. Tulisan ini berkesimpulan bahwa; (1) ambiguitas sikap Tiongkok ditujukan untuk menjaga konsistensi narasi "China's Peaceful Rise"; (2) menghadapi dinamika "technologically innovative imperative"; (3) membantu Tiongkok dalam meraih "China's Dream" untuk mencapai status sebagia negara besar ("great power").

Kata kunci:

Ambiguitas strategis, senjata otonom, techno-politik, transformasi militer Tiongkok.

Abstract

This paper discusses the factors behind China's ambiguous stance on the issue of autonomous weapons and its relationship with China's rise. In 2016 at the United Nations on Certain Conventional Weapons (UN-CCW), China was the only Permanent Five (P5) country to call for the prohibition and importance of a binding protocol on autonomous weapons. Through its position paper, China stated that the characteristics of autonomous weapons are not in accordance with the principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), fears of an arms race, to the threat of war. However, in 2017 China issued the New Generation of AI Development Plan (AIDP), which became the basis for China's development of autonomous weapons. This action violates their commitment at the UN-CCW because, through AIDP, China has planned the use, development, and production of autonomous weapons. Using the framework of the technologically innovative imperative and the conception of strategic ambiguity, this paper argues that China's ambiguous stance is a strategic intention resulting from a response to technological lag and systemic barriers that China is currently facing. This paper concludes that China's ambiguous stance is; (1) aimed to maintain the consistency of China's Peaceful Rise; (2) dealing with technologically innovative imperatives dynamic; (3) helping China in achieving China's Dream to achieve a Great Power status.

Keywords:

Strategic ambiguity, autonomous weapons, techno-politics, China's military transformation

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI)[1] has become one of the essential features for a country in this contemporary era. The development of new autonomous technologies, AI, and robotics has an extensive application in society, bringing risks and opportunities. Concerning technological sophistication and increased automation, many countries have begun to develop military weapons that no longer require humans to operationalise. Autonomous systems in weapons formed through AI's sophistication are also called Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS) (UNODA 2017, p.2). According to the ICRC (in UNODA 2017, p.2), autonomous weapons are any weapons systems with autonomous capabilities that can select (search, detect, identify, track) and attack (use force to fight, neutralise, damage, or destroy) targets without meaningful interference from humans. This definition of AWS includes all weapons systems and vehicles that can select and attack targets independently, including existing weapons and potential future systems (UNODA 2017, p.6). According to Stop Killer Robots (in HRW n.d, p.1), countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China, Australia, South Korea, and Israel are already developing and starting to compete in AWS. The U.S. was the first country to include AI in its military, followed by China and Russia, which have also made efforts to prevent lags in the development of AWS (Arif 2019, p.1). Sander and Meldon projected that global military spending on AWS will reach $16 billion by 2025 (Sander and Meldon 2014, p.5). The importance of developing AI, especially in the military, has been expressed by President Vladimir Putin. Putin highlighted that "AI is the future, not only for Russia but also for all of humanity. It comes with colossal opportunities and threats that are hard to predict. Whoever becomes a leader in this field will become the ruler of the world" (Arif 2019, p.1).

AI as a dual use technology can bring significant security risks to individuals, state entities, organisations, industries, and the future of humanity. Any new development or innovation in AI can be used for beneficial and destructive purposes. Pandya stated that any single algorithm capable of providing critical economic applications could also lead to producing an unprecedented mass destruction on a scale that is difficult to comprehend (Pandya 2019, p.1). As a result, concerns about AI-based automation of weapon systems are increasing. Various regulatory options have been proposed to overcome the challenges that arise from this weaponry, ranging from international negotiations on pre-emptive international treaties to strengthening existing international laws. However, until now, there is still no international consensus that can regulate the issue of AWS. The U.S.

and Russia are the two prominent actors preventing negotiations on the ban on AWS (Busby 2018, p.1). The U.S. and Russia, and other major military powers, including South Korea, Israel, and Australia, also blocked progress towards an international agreement on the ban on AWS at the 2018 conference in Geneva, which also involved the United Nations (UN) (Busby 2018, p.1). The blocking was based on the application of AI in the military in the contemporary era, which can provide various advantages. The aforementioned states believed that AWS, which was being developed and designed by the world's major powers, would; (1) have a much higher degree of autonomy with the ability to detect targets, operate independently to make their own decisions to shoot or kill without human intervention; (2) has a much greater ability than humans to collect and process complex information at an extraordinary speed; (3) be able to operate more precisely, quickly and flexibly; (4) not be affected by physical or emotional limitations like humans, who can carry out tiring, protracted and dangerous routine tasks because this system lacks emotions to cloud their judgment, such as fear, anger, selfishness, hysteria, revenge, frustration, exhaustion or hunger (Geneva Academy 2014, p.1).

On the other hand, the development of AWS has been rejected by various parties because AWS can pose a significant risk and has the potential to violate international law, especially the law regarding armed conflict, due to the lack of meaningful human control over these weapons (Sharkey 2012, p.1). Countries that have a position against and disagree with the development and use of AWS, such as countries in parts of Africa and Asia, state that the issue of AWS is very closely related to ethical issues, where human life is said to have no value when machines are used to make the decision to kill (Sharkey 2012, p.1). In addition, AWS is believed to be able to change the pattern of war to be unfair, disproportionate, and brutal (Sharkey 2012, p.1). Not only the majority of developing countries reject the use or development of AWS, but more than 100 non-governmental organisations, especially in the fields of human rights and humanitarian law, have also joined in voicing their criticisms of AWS, including concerns about operational risks, accountability, and compliance with the requirements of proportionality and the law of armed conflict (Sharkey 2012, p.1).

The interesting thing about this issue is that China is showing an ambiguous stance.[2] This ambiguous stance on AWS can be seen through the position paper of China as a High Contracting Party to the United Nations on Certain Conventional Weapons (UN-CCW) at the Group of Governmental Experts Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (GGE-LAWS) negotiations.[34] At the GGE-LAWS negotiations in 2016, China

was the only permanent member (P5) of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that called for establishing a new international protocol that specifically regulates AWS (Mohanty 2017, p.46). In its position paper, China stated that:

> *"As a hi-tech product, the use of AWS will lower the threshold and cost of war, thus making the outbreak of wars easier and more frequent. Such systems cannot effectively distinguish between soldiers and civilians and can easily cause indiscriminate killing or wounding of the innocent"* (China. Delegation to CCW 2016, p.1).

In its position paper, China committed to support the implementation of the prohibition, restriction, and control of AWS in the military revolution (China. Delegation to CCW 2016, p.1). However, this commitment did not last long because, in 2017, China issued the 'New Generation of AI Development Plan' (AIDP) released by the Chinese Parliament, which became the basis for China's development of AWS (Webster et al. 2017, p.1).[5] According to the AIDP, China will develop various levels of technology, especially the use of AI in the military. It will develop the so-called Hybrid New Intelligent Architecture and New Technologies, which are innovations that combine AI technology and weapons to become fully autonomous. China's action to issue AIDP has violated their commitment to the UN-CCW because by issuing AIDP, China has planned the development and production of AWS. This action has given rise to ambiguity in the international community.

In response to this, in 2018, China supported the negotiation on the creation of a new CCW protocol on AWS. However, different from the 2016 meeting, China this time confirmed and further explained that the prohibition on AWS would be limited to their "use" and not their development or production (Stop Killer Robot 2018, p.1). Table 1 shows countries' position on the development of AWS protocol:

Table 1. Blocs in Development of Autonomous Weapons System (AWS) Protocol

States Who Support Treaty to Ban AWS	Ambiguous Stance	States Who Opposed Treaty to Ban AWS
Algeria	China	Australia
Argentina		Belgium
Austria		France
Bolivia		Germany
Brazil		Israel
Chile		Republic of Korea
Colombia		Russia
Costa Rica		Spain
Cuba		Sweden
Djibouti		Turkey
Ecuador		United States of America
Egypt		United Kingdom
El Salvador		
Ghana		
Guatemala		
Holy See		
Iraq		
Jordan		
Mexico		
Morocco		
Nicaragua		
Pakistan		
Panama		
Peru		
State of Palestine		
Uganda		
Venezuela		
Zimbabwe		

Source: Stop Killer Robots (2019, p.1).

In the 2018 UN-CCW meeting, the Chinese delegation stated that China supports the ban on the use of – but not the development of – AWS. China views that issues related to AWS are humanitarian issues. Therefore, it was necessary to establish international rules that control the issue. China is the only country to take this stance. China has also stated that such weapons would not comply with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and are therefore inherently illegal.

At the meeting of the First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2019, the Chinese delegation gave a statement regarding the discussion on Conventional Arms Control. China reiterated that AWS could raise international humanitarian, ethical, and legal issues. Thus, it was vital to establish an international legally binding instrument on AWS to prevent automated killings by machines (UN.org 2019, p.1). Not much different from previous years, at the 2020 CCW meeting, the UN-CCW Report shows that China continued to express its concern over AWS' ability to comply with the principles of

proportionality and accountability in IHL. Together with Sri Lanka and the Philippines, China has again called for the establishment of a legally binding instrument on AWS (CCW Report 2020, p.1). At the 2021 CCW meeting, according to official commentaries submitted by the delegation of China, China continued to call for the importance of international legally binding instruments in regulating the AWS. China's position was countered by the Republic of Korea, who argued that it was too early to discuss legally binding norms at this point (CCW Report 2021a, p.1). At that time, China and countries who support treaty to ban AWS underlined that AWS could not comply with the principles in IHL, such as the principle of distinction, proportionality, and precaution (CCW Report 2021b, p.1). Some analysts, such as Elsa B. Kania (2018) and Felix Sippel (2020), also agreed that the position taken by China in the issue of AWS is considered an ambiguous stance. The Position Papers prepared by China for the GGE-LAWS meeting at the UN-CCW since 2016 indicate an interesting evolution in China's diplomatic posture, characterised by its ambiguous, biased, and double-standard policy stance.

Some articles discussing China stated that after more than three decades of economic reform and development, China can now stand as the world's economic giant and is still growing. Some welcome China's participation on the world stage and its emerging leadership in regional and global affairs, but some worry that China may rise to avenge the past vengeance and humiliation it received at the hands of Western countries (Kai 2017, p.1). With a total of 2.25 million soldiers, China has formed the most significant armed forces globally (Dellios 2005, p.1). With its growing economy and military, China has been identified as a rising power (Dellios 2005, p.1; Cordesman 2019; Silver et el. 2019; Lendon 2021; Lemahieu 2019). Barry Buzan asserted that "China can definitely present the most promising profile of a potential superpower and the one whose degree of alienation from the dominant international society makes it the most obvious political challenger" (Buzan 2004, p.70).

The rise of China has been named the main news story in the 21st century by the Global Language Monitor, measured by the number of appearances in the global print and electronic media (Global Language Monitor 2019, p.1). Many academicians have also referred to China as an emerging "Second superpower" with global power and influence on par with the U.S. (Wood 2000, p.155). Some consensus concludes that China has reached the level of qualification of superpower status, citing China's growing political power and leadership in the economic sector, which has given China a new position in the international community. Despite its competent capabilities to challenge

U.S. domination, China seems to prefer to play it safe and not be assertive, in the sense that China's response and position on strategic issues looks very cautious and vague.

Previous articles on strategic ambiguity have only focused on how the state benefits from this ambiguous attitude in general. Baliga and Sjostrom (2008, p.1023) argued that states sometimes try to create ambiguity regarding their military capabilities to maximise their interests. Maximising the interests obtained through strategically ambiguous policies is an effort to prevent aggression without risking negative sanctions. However, the state may still possess weapons that are prohibited under international norms. Furthermore, Yu's writing on China and Strategic Ambiguity explains that since the end of the Cold War, Western military leaders and strategists have consistently pressured China to answer the question: "What is your intention to build a military on a large scale?" (Yu 2018, p.1). This practice has proven the extent to which China has succeeded in creating strategic ambiguity to obscure its motives to militarily challenge the U.S., the only country that can militarily stop China's growing ambition. The policy of strategic ambiguity that China uses is aimed at maximising profit potential and avoiding conflicts and tensions that trigger losses (Yu 2018, p.1).

The author of this article aligns with Baliga and Sjostrom's (2008) and Yu's (2018) explanations. They concluded that an ambiguous stance is an intentional act aimed at maximising potential interests and avoiding tensions that trigger losses for the state. However, studies on China's stance on AWS are still limited. The inadequacy of the available literature raises the need to explore several alternative factors that can provide a satisfactory answer regarding the correlation between strategic ambiguity and rising powers' interests, especially in the case of China and AWS. This article is based on questions regarding "Why has China taken an ambiguous stance in the issue of AWS? To what extent is this stance related to China's interests as a rising power?"

In order to answer the research questions, first, this article will begin with a description of the historical studies on China's strategic ambiguity practices and China's perspective on technologically innovative imperatives in the context of its rise. The second section is about China's rapid development of AWS and its strategic constraints. The third section elaborates the argument that China's ambiguous stance is an intentional strategy amid the AWS dynamics. This paper argues that although China is seen as the most promising potential superpower and is said to be able to challenge the status-quo power, China is not immediately trying to challenge U.S. hegemony. China is still cautious and not yet firm in taking policies and positions on certain strategic issues. China

still often tries to take a safe response or position on strategic issues to avoid contention with the status quo power. In this case, China's ambiguous stance regarding the issue of AWS is related to the dynamics of the technologically innovative imperative, especially during its term as a rising power. First, China still finds itself in some technological lags and systemic constraints resulting from its interaction with the U.S. as the dominant state. Second, this lag prompted China to take peaceful measures to avoid circumstances that could potentially trigger counter-productive tensions for China's innovation activities. Third, China wants to ensure that its innovation efforts will not hinder its rise. Therefore, along with its rising and the emergence of complexity in AWS development, China faces several constraints and pressures, and the ambiguous stance finds its justification.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Rising Power and Innovative Imperative

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar world order have marked a transitional era of global governance. Twenty years later, there is still a lack of consensus on the distribution of power in this multipolar world (Tank 2012, p.1). However, it can be seen that new powers have emerged, seeking a global political role in proportion to their increasing economic influence (Tank 2012, p.1). Countries that have significant rapid economic development, political influence in the world order, cultural influence, military power are countries classified as rising powers or new powers (Tank 2012, p.1). Rising powers will change the dynamics of power in the international system by seeking voice, exerting significant influence in international institutions, and building political ties through regional organisations (Tank 2012, p.1). Rising power can exist to challenge the status-quo power to reach the top of the hierarchy.

International Relations scholars have long recognised that technological innovation plays a crucial role in the transition of power and, more broadly, international politics (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.555). Starting from the 1970s, Robert Gilpin emphasised that significant advances in technology enable new states to achieve political prominence (Gilpin 1981, p.182). Gilpin (1975, p.182) also added that the emerging powers became dominant countries because they succeeded in developing innovations in new industries or leading sectors that could sustain the dominant state's economic vitality and military power (Gilpin 1981, p.182). The theory of the Technologically Innovative Imperative means that rising power faces the need to acquire and develop new technologies to overcome the structural challenges it faces and continue its international

ascent to become a dominant state (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.556). The power transition theory recognises that economic resources are the foundation of military power and many other forms of power (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.556). When it emerged, technological innovation was believed to be the saviour and driver of economic enhancement for rising power (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.555). This implies that rising power must be able to face the challenge of catching up and not only relying on technology created by the dominant state but also must be able to become more efficient in innovating new technologies, including in production, industrial processes, and transactions (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.555).

Economic theory explains that innovation is essential to sustain sustainable economic growth to achieve excellence. Therefore, rising states must pursue innovation as a primary national interest (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.555). IR scholars view the critical role of technological advances in explaining the transition of power but have so far ignored the challenges it poses to a rising power. Recognising these challenges would allow us to consider how the need for technology and pursuing technology can limit rising power in sustaining its rise. In addition, it would also allow us to consider the domains of technology and innovation as a unique locus of great powers interaction, to the extent that rising power's innovation activities can directly affect the strategic interests of the dominant country.

Kennedy and Lim (2018, p.556) saw that new technological innovations by rising power can be carried out in three stages, namely; (1) "create" in which the rising power will support domestic manufacturers to develop new technologies; (2) "transacting" in which the rising power will conduct commercial transactions with foreign entities that result in technology transfer, due to the limitations of the rising power in mastering the technology; (3) "take" which requires the acquisition of existing technology from the outside world through non-transactional means. This includes actions aimed at accelerating the general diffusion process, in which knowledge naturally spreads from high-tech countries to low-tech countries over time (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.555).

Great Powers Interaction in the Realm of Innovation

The dominant country might welcome the rising power's desire for technology innovation. In this case, firstly, a dominant country which is also a world technology leader will be in the best position to take advantage of technology sales to a rising power. Secondly, the dominant country can also increase opportunities for cross-border

collaboration in R&D with the rising power. However, at the same time, the innovation activities of rising power can challenge the strategic interests of the dominant country. These two characteristics of shape the relationship between technology and strategic competition. Kennedy and Lim (2018, p.558) identify external effects closely related to the strategic relationship between a rising power and the dominant country, namely *security externalities*. Security externalities are defined as security implications that arise as a by-product of economic interactions and can take various forms (William 2016, p.12). It is stated that various trades with potential adversaries will result in negative security externalities. Externalities associated with trading in 'dual use' technology – commercial technology with potential military applications are likely to generate tension between the great powers (William 2016, p.12).

Kennedy and Lim (2018, p.558) stated that negative security externalities caused by the activity of rising power can result from two conditions. First, when there is concern from the dominant country regarding the possibility of military conflict with the rising power. While it is clearly possible, it is not always the case. For example, just as the U.S. cared less about fighting Japan during the Cold War or against Brazil and India today (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.558). Second, the acquisition of certain technologies by rising powers can increase their relative war capability or decrease the capability of the dominant country. It generally occurs at a time when military technology is dual use in nature, and acquisitions made by rising powers do not offer security benefits to the dominant country (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.558).

In addressing security externalities, the dominant country is likely to act directly to cut off the supply of relevant technology to the rising power. This will involve market intervention to limit or prohibit certain transactions that cause concern, at least when the technology is unavailable from other countries (Mastanduno 2017, p.289). Under the two aforementioned conditions, the rising power approach in innovative imperative will result in negative security externalities for the dominant country. This will further urge the dominant country to take appropriate responses.

The innovative imperative illustrates the importance of emerging countries acquiring and developing new technological systems to increase their influence and overcome the structural challenges they face (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.556). This paper conceptualises the innovative imperative as an innovation in weapons technology development. Technological innovation can be projected by integrating AI capabilities in the military sector.

AI is considered the third revolution in warfare, leading to significant changes in international affairs (Arif 2019, p.1). AI in the military sector is realised with the development of AWS. According to the ICRC (2016 in UNODA 2017, p.1), AWS is any weapon with autonomous capabilities that can select (search, detect, identify, track) and strike (use force to fight, neutralise, damage, or destroy) targets without any direct and meaningful interference from humans. This study will attempt to analyse China's ambiguous attitude on the issue of AWS and the importance of this weapon technology innovation for China's interests in the context of its rise.

The Conception of Strategic Ambiguity

Utilising the frameworks of rising power and technologically innovative imperative, this article explores the utilisation of strategic ambiguity by a state. Strategic ambiguity is the form of a 'hazy middle ground' position or a 'blurred middle ground.' This position seems missing, too complex, or contradictory (Mandel 2019, p.68). This position reflects the provision of inaccurate information that is vague and open to various interpretations or appears to contradict statements and actions. Given that ambiguity makes it difficult for the receiver to determine the correct signal interpretation, ambiguity has an important role in 'deceptive communication' (Mandel 2019, p.73). The objectives of strategic ambiguity are carried out with the explicit aim of maximising interests, triggering protection goals, and minimising the impact of uncertain situations (Mandel 2019, p.227). The specific purpose of strategic ambiguity in noisy environments allows actors to leave others in doubt. When in a conflicting situation and not in line with the actor's interests, strategic ambiguity provides a way out by placing the actor in a safe middle ground position. Eisenberg (1984, p.35) also explained that when a country faces a conflict and systemic obstacles, clarity is not always the best solution. On the other hand, an ambiguous stance will allow the international community to defend their interpretations while believing that collective action can be achieved.

Looking at China's empirical behaviour, it can be seen that there is a clear relevance between the dynamics of the innovative imperative, the interaction of great powers in the realm of innovation, and the ambiguous stance regarding the issue of AWS. China as a rising power attaches great importance to the technologically innovative imperative aimed at acquiring and creating new technologies to meet short-term and long-term growth goals in both the economic and military sectors. As Kennedy and Lim (2018, p.558) described, transactions are essential when a rising power tries to obtain new

technological innovations. While it innovates, especially in AWS, China conducts commercial transactions with foreign entities because its ability to master certain technology components is still limited. This point will be elaborated in the discussion.

This situation causes China to rely on technology transactions, mostly dependent on imported technology originating from the U.S. (Fedasiuk 2020, p.20). Amid this situation and the debate between the two major groups in the UN-CCW (countries that reject and support AWS), China has instead taken the middle path. Being in a hazy middle ground, China stated that it prohibits the use of AWS but not its development. This position shows a contradiction. On the one hand, China firmly supports the development of AWS, but on the other hand, China strongly prohibits its use. This strategic ambiguity is carried out to trigger protection objectives, minimise the impact of uncertain situations, and maximise interests.

This paper argues that China’s strategic ambiguity is not a mere coincidence. However, it is a rational choice that China has calculated to meet its interests of the innovative imperative, especially as a rising power. At the same time, its position that rejects the use of AWS is because China still has a technological lag in a situation of innovation. Therefore, China tends to take peaceful and compromised ways to ensure a stable environment while trying to catch up. China's stance is relevant to the explain the rising power's interest in the dynamics of the technologically innovative imperative and the interaction of great powers in the realm of innovation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is explanatory research that aims to understand the factors behind China's strategic ambiguity regarding the issue of AWS and to see how far this position is in line with China's interests as a rising power. Explanative research is a type of research in which the researcher explains the causal relationship (cause and effect) between two or more variables (Sugiyono 2011, p.1). In this study, the variable analysed and explained is China's strategic ambiguity regarding the issue of AWS, and the explanatory variables are the conception of the innovative imperative and the interaction of the great powers in the realm of innovation.

The scope of this research is the period between 2016 and 2021 when China began to show an ambiguous stance regarding the issue of AWS. However, the explanans from the explanandum of this study may refer to previous years. This study uses primary and secondary data sources where the primary sources in this study are government documents, official statements in government speeches, and official UN reports.

Meanwhile, secondary sources are books, journals, articles in books, newspapers, working papers, position papers, publications conducted by credible think tanks and institutions, and other references correlated with the research topic. In elaborating the argument and answering the research questions, the author of this article uses qualitative analysis techniques that emphasise the author's interpretation of the data sources that have been obtained.

DISCUSSION

China's Rising Power Strategy and Strategic Ambiguity in Practice

Along with the emergence of China as a rising power came the perception of the 'China threat,' which has been commonly debated since the 1990s (Wang 2009, p.1). China understands that without effectively addressing the issue of the "China threat," its rising will be hampered and would not be well received by the international community (Wang 2009, p.2). Intending to allay these concerns and suspicions, the Chinese political elite created the idea of Peaceful Rise, which means that the rise of China will be peaceful and beneficial not only for the Chinese but also for the whole world (Wang 2009, p.2). China's Peaceful Rise can also be interpreted as China's strategy or way of ensuring a peaceful condition in the midst of its rising, catching up, and responding to systemic limitations (Yu 2018, p.1). At this point, China has always issued peaceful narratives in the sense that China does not want to be involved in the conflict and emphasises that China will not go to war at this time (Yu 2018, p.1). However, this does not guarantee that China will not go to war in the future.

China usually adopts two approaches to achieving strategic ambiguity, both inherited from China's strategic ruse and are currently studied in many Chinese military and defence universities (Yu 2018, p.1). The first is "Hide a dagger in a smile" as one of The Thirty-Six Strategies, which means "reassure the enemy to make him slack, work in secret to subdue it" (Yu 2018, p.1). This is a method of hiding strong will under a compliant appearance or, as China's supreme leader Deng Xiaoping put it, as an overall national policy, "*Hide your strength, bide your time*" (Xiaoping in Yu 2018, p.1). Second, "Battle of Pride," which refers to the tactic of showering the enemy with flattery to soften his vigilance against his plans (Yu 2018, p.1). Thus, China's senior military leaders and defence officials often issue narratives of peace and compromise to avoid raising concerns about China's power until the right time comes, and lags have been overcome. When China is still catching up with the gap or lag, it will tend to choose peaceful or compromise way rather than controversial ways. China's Peaceful Rise is actually in line with the

stance of strategic ambiguity, which often shows a contradiction between China's narratives in international forums and the actual activities.

China's Ambiguous Stance on Autonomous Weapon

Contemporary warfare innovation should lead to intelligent operations and focus on new types of combat forces, including AI and AWS. At the same time, China has expressed concern about AWS in several international fora, like UN-CCW and UNGA. However, China's normative response is in stark contrast to its empirical behaviour. This section will elaborate on China's ambiguous position on issues related to AWS.

First, at the UN-CCW meeting, China stated that it was essential to uphold "human involvement, judgment, control and responsibility" in war (Hynek and Solovyeva 2020, p.89). In the 2016 UN-CCW meeting, according to its position paper, China supported the development of a legally binding protocol on the prohibition of AWS. It appeared that China was the only P5 country that did not support the development and presence of AWS (China in CCW 2016, p.1). However, in its 2018 UN-CCW position paper (China in UN-CCW 2018, p.1) and statement by the Chinese Delegation at the Thematic Debate on Conventional Weapons at the First Committee of the 73rd Session of the UNGA (UN.org 2018, p.1), China did not mention in writing its support for an agreement. The new position paper also justified China's actions in developing AWS as a form of anticipation of the threat of AWS to civilians. Instead, China clarified that the ban on AWS would be limited to its use, not its development (Kania 2017, p.12). Despite explicitly stating the importance of human control and human dignity, the statement regarding compliance with Chinese ethics and norms remained shrouded in ambiguity, chosen by China as an effective strategy to reconcile normative pressures and preferences for strategic flexibility in developing these weapons.

Second, China stated in its position paper at the 2016 UN-CCW on point II[6] (China. Delegation to CCW 2016, p.1), 2018 point III[7] (China. Delegation to CCW 2018, p.1), and China's 2018-2019 statement at the Thematic Discussion on Conventional Arms Control at the First Committee of the 73rd and 74th Session of the UNGA (UN.org 2018, p.1; FMPRC 2019, p.1), that as a method of warfare, the use of AWS should in principle be regulated by IHL, such as the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the two 1977 Additional Protocols, including the principles of limitation, distinction and proportionality. However, in its application, AWS presents considerable uncertainty, that these weapons are not capable of; (1) distinguishing between enemies and civilians; (2) taking proportional decisions; (3) creating difficulties regarding the accountability of its use

(China. Delegation to CCW 2016, p.1). However, in 2017 China issued AIDP, which became the basis for China's development of AWS (Roberts et al. 2020, p.59). China's action to issue the AIDP has violated its commitment to the UN-CCW, because by issuing the AIDP China has planned the development, production and use of AWS. While calling for a ban on the use of AWS, political elites in China are carrying out an AI-based military transformation that causes fundamental changes in military unit programming, operational styles, equipment systems, and combat power generation models, which will eventually lead to a profound military revolution to deal with intelligentised warfare in the future (Kania 2017, p.12).

Third, China supported weapons control mechanisms for AI systems in military robotics because AI-related arms control will be challenging. After all, AI can be disseminated and cannot be monitored easily (Allen 2018, p.5). At the Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2013, China highlighted the potential for AWS that could disrupt the international strategic balance and affect arms control (HRW 2020, p.1). However, China also sees the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as a lucrative market for AWS sales. China has aggressively offered and exported cheap but low-quality AWS, such as the Chang Hong-3 and CH-4 UCAVs to that region (Romaniuk and Burgers 2020, p.1). In addition, weapons such as the Wing Loong I proved ideal for MENA states given the threat from local insurgents and the government's intention for a rapid and effective response (Romaniuk and Burgers 2020, p.1).

Fourth, China's ambiguous stance towards AWS can also be seen through its participation in The Campaign to Stop Killer Robot.[8] Since 2018, China has committed to supporting the campaign even if it does not stop the development of these weapons (CSKR 2018, p.1). China's behaviour contradicted other AWS developer countries, which those countries tend to reject and not get involved in several international campaigns regarding the issue on AWS.. In Stop Killer Robots, China believes that the rise of AWS is a humanitarian problem, so there needs to be international rules that control this issue (CSKR 2018, p.1). On the other hand, China feels the need to develop and produce AWS to become a world leader in AI by 2030 (CSKR 2018, p.1). While continue developing and producing AWS, China maintains its rhetorical commitment to supporting a ban on the use of such weapons in combat.

China's Point of View on Technologically Innovative Imperative and Autonomous Weapon

Since 2013 China has published several national policy documents that reflect its

intention to develop and implement AI in various sectors. First, in 2015, China released a 10-year plan guideline, 'Made in China 2025,' which was released to turn China into a dominant player in global high-tech manufacturing, including AI (McBride and Chatzky 2019, p.74). President Xi Jinping wants China to be one of the most innovative countries in the world by 2020 and a leading global science and technology power by 2049 (Dominguez 2015, p.1). Made in China 2025 is considered China's version of Industry 4.0 concerning the 'Chinese National Destiny' (Zhou and Wang 2019, p.1). Second, the Communist Party of China's (CCP) Five-Year Plan was published in March 2016. The document mentions AI as one of the six critical areas for developing the country's burgeoning industry and as an essential factor in promoting economic growth. The documents and the framework of strategic objectives demonstrate China's grand ambition to become a major player and global leader in the AI sector. Third, the establishment of the 'New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan' (AIDP) in 2017 which sets out strategic goals and describes the overarching goal of making China a world leader in AI by 2030 and making AI the main driving force for China's industrial upgrading and economic transformation (China. Department of International Cooperation: Ministry of Science and Technology 2017, p.44).

The enthusiasm of China in developing AI is also because AI has become a new focus in international competition (McBride and Chatzky 2019, p.75). The official AIDP document shows a longitudinal perspective on China's strategic situation regarding AI, including its comparative capabilities, opportunities, and potential risks. The document has highlighted strategic areas where AI can make a substantial difference in China, including international competition, economic development, and military transformation. First, in the realm of international competition – AIDP stated that, "For China, the military AI R&D is seen as a possible and easy way to challenge the American military hegemony" (AIDP in Ozdemir, 2019, p.18).

Although China and the U.S. are described as geopolitical rivals, the military budgets of the two powers are still significantly different. China has the second-largest military budget globally, with $175 billion allocated in 2019, but its spending is still only one-third of the U.S.'s budget (Chan and Zhen 2019, p.45). Rather than spending money on conventional weapons, China sees investment in AI as an opportunity to make radical breakthroughs in military technology and thus compete with the U.S. (Chan and Zhen 2019, p.45). This emphasises that China must be able to take advantage of the strategic opportunities provided by AI to make 'leapfrog developments' in its national capabilities. The desire to rival the U.S. is echoed in statements from China's political and military

leadership, such as President Xi Jinping stating in 2017 that, "Under a situation of increasing fierce international military competition, only the innovators win" (Xi Jinping 2017 in Kania 2020, p.2).

Second, on economic development the AIDP stated that AI would be the driving force behind a new round of industrial transformation that will inject new kinetic energy into China's economic growth. A report by PwC (2017, p.1), *Sizing the Prize,* shows that China is the country that will benefit the most from AI, with a 26% increase in GDP by 2030. This forecast also shows that AI could facilitate a 12% increase in employment over the next two decades (PwC 2017, p.1). In 2018, the investment value in China's AI industry reached 131.1 billion RMB, an increase of about 67.7 billion RMB compared to 2017 (Daxue Consulting 2020, p.8). The scale of the investment gives China the first position in the world ranking in AI investment (Daxue Consulting 2020, p.8).

Third, in the 2019 Defence White Paper or China's National Defence in the New Era (CNDINE), China has positioned itself as a country capable of achieving Great Power status. It was stated that one of China's aspirations is to achieve "informatisation" and "mechanisation" for its military (CNDINE 2019, p.8). In terms of the PLA reforms, China has developed a new unit, namely the Strategic Support Force, a unit tasked with testing out new military technology before it is applied to specific dimensions (CNDINE 2019, p.8). China also expressed its desire to integrate disruptive technological developments with its military and strives to always be at the forefront of empowering the latest technologies (CNDINE 2019, p.9). Xi Jinping has called for "strengthening the military through science and technology" while highlighting the unique opportunities and challenges resulting from the current global military revolution (Kania 2017, p.12). Xi Jinping urges that China seize the highest place and vigorously advance military innovation, which requires technological innovation. Integrating AI in the Chinese military will support command decision-making, defence equipment, the reduction of military personnel, and other areas. Lieutenant General Lui Guozhi, director of the Central Military Commission for Science and Technology, stated that the world is in a scientific revolution, and technological progress is entering the intelligence era (Kania 2017, p.13). Therefore, it is necessary to anticipate AI to accelerate the process of military transformation, causing fundamental changes in military unit programming, operational style, equipment systems, and combat power generation models, which will eventually lead to a profound military revolution.

Therefore, we can conclude that China, as a rising power, gives a positive response to technological innovation and views that the need for innovation is a top national

priority. This is because significant breakthroughs in critical areas can substantially change the balance of economic and military power in the future. While in the 1990s, China was only the assembly centre for many high-tech products, it has emerged as an important player in technological innovation over the last decade. This change reflects a clear shift in China's national priorities. Its efforts dramatically increased in the 21st century, demonstrating a strong belief that China must improve the economic value chain. There is a positive correlation between technological innovation, scientific and technical strength, and China's economic strength. The prominence of the Chinese economy in the global competition is mainly determined by its technological innovation capabilities. Thus, technology is an endogenous driving force behind overall changes in global politics and the economy. Therefore, big countries, including China, strengthen their economic capacity through continuous technological innovation, giving them strong bargaining power and absolute competitiveness.

The PLA's great pursuit of innovation is an element of China's national strategy to utilise science and technology to pursue great power status. Currently, there are various military and civilian research institutes focusing on the development of China's AWS, including; (1) China Electronic Technology Group Companies (CETC); (2) China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC); (3) UAV Technology Research Institute; (4) National Key Laboratory of Robotic Systems and Engineering of Harbin Institute of Technology; (5) Tsinghua University; (6) Beihang University; and (7) Northwest Polythetic University (Kania 2017, p.24). Furthermore, the Chinese Ministry of National Defence established two new research and development organisations in 2018 under the National University of Defence Technology (NUDT), namely the Unmanned System Research Centre (USRC) and the Artificial Intelligence Research Centre (AIRC). China's capacity to develop AWS is estimated at an annual budget of $250 billion and $4.5 billion for drone technology by 2021 (SIPRI 2019 in Haner and Gracia 2019, p.333). In addition, Chinese companies have tested swarming technology by synchronising more than 1,000 drones (Haner and Gracia 2019, p.333).

In line with the three strategic areas where AI can make a substantial difference in China, this paper highlights two significant drivers for China to develop AWS; (1) China's concern towards Intelegentised Warfare; and (2) AWS as a new promising industry which can booster China's economy. First, China views that Intelligentized Warfare in the future is considered a stage beyond informatisation that will require a significant change in its approach to force development and modernisation (Wang 2015, p.76). China's 'information revolution' has progressed through three stages; (1)

digitisation, (2) network, and (3) intelligence (Wang 2015, p.76). The PLA has actively pursued AI-enabled systems and autonomous capabilities in its military modernisation efforts. The PLA has fielded more advanced unmanned robotic and missile systems (Kania 2020, p.3). China's defence industry is building a visible force of armed drones and missiles to introduce greater autonomy in operations and exploration. China also utilises the application of AWS in its defence industry, where China has built ballistic missiles through automation (Kania 2020, p.5). The Chinese military has revamped older tank models and fighter variants that initially operated via remote control and now have some degree of autonomy. Here are some examples of AWS being developed by Chinese AI companies:

Table 2. China's Development of Autonomous Weapons

Company	Example of Autonomous Weapons
AVIC	GJ-11 Sharp Sword UCAV; ASN-301 Loitering Munition.
CASC	CH-901; WS-43 Loitering Munition.
NORINCO	Cavalry; War Wolf; Sharp Claw; King Leopard UGVs.
Yunzhou Intelligence	SE40; TC40; Unmanned Surface Vehicles (USVs).

Source: Slippery Slope 2019, p.8.

Zeng Yi, a senior executive at a Chinese defence company, described China's hopes for AWS on a futuristic battlefield. Zeng stated that, "In future battlegrounds, there will be no people fighting" (Zeng in Allen 2019, p.8). Zeng predicts that by 2025 AWS will become very common and believes that the increasing use of AI in the military is inevitable. In the future intelligentised wars, the AI system will function as a warrior (Allen 2019, p.6). The supremacy of intelligence will be at the core of future warfare. AI can completely transform the current command structure, which humans dominate, into one dominated by 'AI clusters' (Allen 2019, p.6).

China increasingly refers to intelligent or 'intelligentised' military technology as a hope for future warfare bases. China places great emphasis on Military Intelligentisation or the development of Military Intelligent, which focuses on AI-enabled autonomous systems in its operational aspects. China's military initiatives in AI are also motivated by the awareness of global trends in military technology and operations; concerns about falling behind the US military, which is considered and often characterised as a "powerful adversary"; and recognition of the potential opportunities inherent in military

transformation through these technologies. Through modernisation, China's military transformation is consistent with its efforts to achieve great power status. When taking power as China's 'Fifth Generation' leader in 2012, President Xi sought to achieve the 'China's Dream' (*Chong Meng*) – a strong and prosperous China that will gain great power status in 2049. In Xi's vision, military transformation is fundamental to actualise the 'China's Dream' and achieve the main national objectives; (1) the unparalleled authority of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); (2) modernity – sustainable economic progress; and (3) sovereignty – the integration of the claimed territory with the homeland (Gen 2020, p.1). Thus, the PLA's pursuit of innovation is an element of China's national strategy to utilise science and technology to pursue great power status.

Second, regarding a new promising industry – currently, China has led the export of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) systems (SIPRI 2020, p.1). Chinese UAVs such as the Wing Loong platform of the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) and the CH-4 developed by the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) are actively marketed for export. China's CASC has even succeeded in opening factories for the CH-4 platform in Myanmar, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia (SIPRI 2020, p.1). The ASN-301 autonomous weapon system produced by AVIC was shown for the first time in Abu Dhabi in 2017 (Slippery Slope 2019, p.23). The CH-901 and WS-43 produced by China Aerospace Long-March (ALIT) were first publicly displayed at the 2016 Defence Service Asia Exhibition (DSA) in Malaysia and in Jordan in 2018 (Slippery Slope 2019, p.23). The weapon system on display can deliver a payload of up to 20 kg at a distance of up to 60 km and can track and attack both moving and static targets. To date, China is one of the major players exporting AWS. Zeng Yi, a Chinese Defence Company senior executive, said that China had exported many military aerial drones to Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Allen 2019, p.10). The drones exported are the latest armed drones with significant combat autonomy capabilities (Allen 2019, p.10). Ziyan, a Chinese military armed drone manufacturer, has sold the A2 Blowfish model to the UAE. In November 2019, Ziyan was reported to be negotiating with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan for a contract to sell the A2 Blowfish (Zeng in Allen 2019, p.10). Equipped with missiles, AK-47 automatic machine guns, or mortar-sized ammunition, the Blowfish A2 is able to autonomously conducts combat on complex missions, including time detection, fixed range reconnaissance, and precision-targeted strikes (Allen 2019, p.10). Blowfish A2 has been operating and exported in various Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa (Xuanzun 2019, p.1).

Strategic Constraints and Great Powers Interaction in the Realm of Autonomous Weapon

Despite the various advantages offered, there are several constraints that China is currently facing in the development of autonomous weapon. China's 2018 White Paper on Artificial Intelligence Standards shows that China's AI ecosystem is lagging in several key areas:

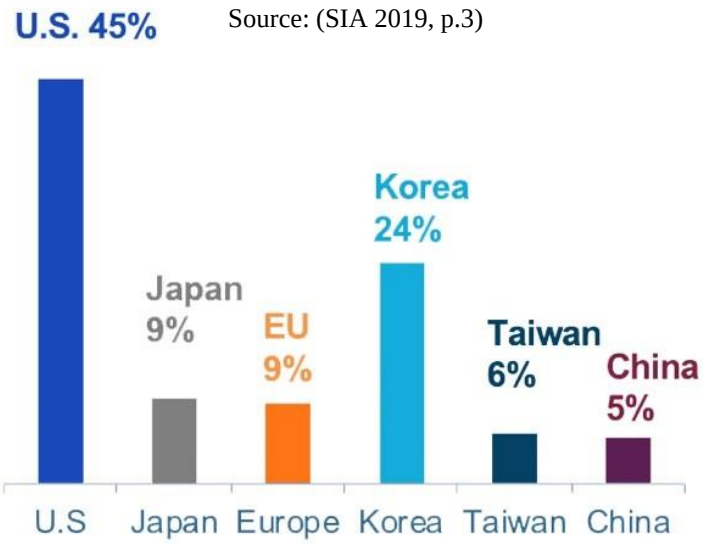
> *"China's strengths are mainly shown in AI applications and it is still weak on the front of core technologies of AI, such as hardware and algorithm development, China's AI development lacks top-tier talent and has a significant gap with developed countries, especially the U.S., in this regard"* (White Paper China 2018, p.12).

There are several comparative weaknesses in China's AI ecosystem. However, this paper will focus on three main things that are most related to the development of autonomous weapon, namely: (1) AI Top Talent; (2) Software Frameworks and Platforms; and (3) Semiconductors. First, a report by China's Tsinghua University describing global AI talent distribution concluded that at the end of 2017 there was a top international talent pool of 204,575 individuals, with the U.S. having 28,536 individuals and China in second place with 18,323 (Kai-Fuu and Matt 2018, p.1). However, China ranks eighth in the world regarding top AI talent, with only 977 individuals compared to the U.S.'s 5,518 individuals (Kai-Fuu and Matt 2018, p.1). Second, China's CAICT AI and Security White Paper shows that to date, research and development of domestic AI products and applications has been primarily based on Microsoft and Google (CAICT 2018, p.37). Although most of the world's consumer electronics products are now labeled 'Made in China,' many of these are assembled with high-value semiconductor chips designed in the U.S. and manufactured in South Korea or Taiwan (Allen 2019, p.13). In fact, in the autonomous drone weapons market, where leading Chinese company DJI Technologies enjoys a 74 per cent share of the global market, 35 per cent of bill materials on each of those drones are U.S. content, mainly semiconductors (Allen 2019, p.13). Third, China is still struggling in critical core technologies, including semiconductors and AI, which are essential for AWS development (Wu et al. 2019, p.1). Semiconductors enable autonomous weapon to carry out missions, targeting, data processing, and attacks with autonomy (Karr 2013, p.3). As mentioned by Karr, there are several essential

functions of semiconductors in AWS, including: (1) targeting systems; (2) industrial control systems; (3) microelectronics throughout; (3) flight software system; (4) database; (5) identify friend or foe systems; (6) communication system; and (7) controller area network bus (Karr 2013, p.3).

It is common knowledge that Chinese companies cannot manufacture advanced semiconductor devices capable of running the complex neural networks required for military-grade systems. It is estimated that over 90% of China's high-end chips depend on imports, 100% of DRAM memory, 99% of CPU, and 93% of MEMS sensors all rely on imports from countries such as the U.S., South Korea, and Japan (Fedasiuk 2020, p.20). China's lag in the semiconductor industry, compared with the U.S., can be seen in the graphic below. U.S. semiconductor companies have maintained a leading position in R&D, design, and process technology (SIA 2019, p.3). They also have the largest market share with 45 per cent, compared to other countries' industries that have between 5 and 24 per cent of the global market share (SIA 2019, p.3). The Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) also reported that the U.S. is still the largest producer of semiconductors since 1993 (SIA 2019, p.3). Meanwhile, China still occupies the lowest position compared to other large semiconductor-producing countries.

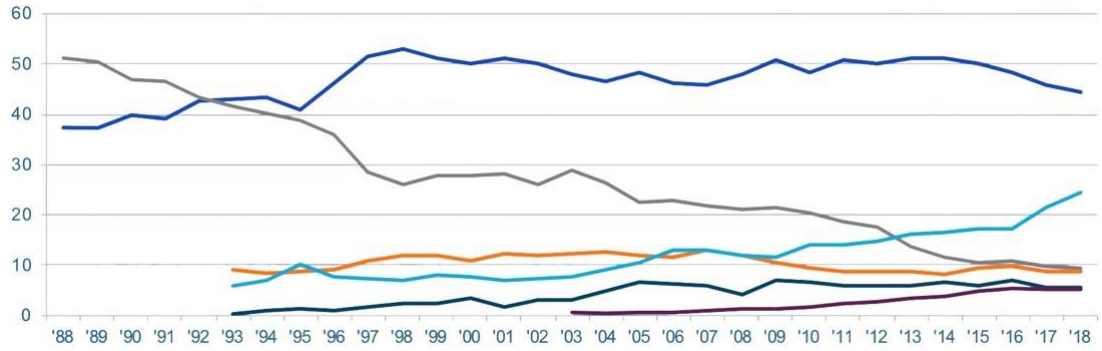
Figure 1. Global Market Share for Semiconductor Industry in 2018



Source: (SIA 2019, p.3)

Source: (SIA 2019, p.3)

Figure 2. Global Producers of Semiconductor



Source: (SIA 2019, p.3)

The graphics above show that China still has a significant lag, especially in the semiconductor industry, which forces China to depend on imported components from countries to develop AWS. It can be seen that China is still growing and has not been able to conquer the competition of AWS due to China's inability to master critical technologies in the development of the weapon system.

In addition to the technological lag that causes China's dependence on foreign products in developing its AWS, a systemic constraint arises from China's interaction with a dominant country in the realm of technology innovation. China's foreign investment in foreign technology assets is an essential element of China's response to innovation imperatives and has increased rapidly in recent years. From 2005 to 2016, Chinese companies made 90 investments totaling over US$56 billion in various foreign companies (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.555). The U.S. is a popular destination for Chinese investment, reflecting the active support of the Chinese authorities. However, China's technology investment efforts have resulted in negative security externalities for the U.S., especially at a time when the U.S. views that trade in 'dual use' technology—commercial technology with potential military applications—could raise the possibility of military conflict with China and that China's acquisition of semiconductor technology could increase its relative war capabilities. Moreover, a final report created by the U.S. National Security Commission on AI warned that China could soon replace the U.S. as the world's "AI superpower" and expressed there are severe military implications to consider, even though at the current status quo China is still far behind in terms of Global Competitiveness (The U.S. National Security Commission on AI 2021, p.2). Third, China's increased number of arms sales to potential U.S. adversaries could threaten U.S.

values and interests. There are also concerns that these sales could accelerate the proliferation of capabilities of non-state actors.

Although the U.S. is generally open to foreign investment, the U.S. government does consider the national security implications of some of the investments included in the Committee of Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) (Kennedy and Lim 2018, p.556). Chaired by the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, CFIUS is authorised to review transactions that may result in foreign control of U.S. business to determine the effect of such transactions on national security. When there is clear evidence that a transaction will threaten U.S. national security, the committee can recommend that the president block it. Following the advice of CFIUS, in 2017, the U.S. blocked several investment attempts by Chinese entities. For instance, the blocking involved China's Fujian Grand Chip Investment Fund from acquiring Aixtron, a German semiconductor company with a subsidiary in California (U.S. Department of Treasury n.d, p.1). Aixtron is known for producing systems for making semiconductors with Gallium Nitride (Gan), which have military applications, including in anti-ballistic missile systems, due to their resistance to heat and radiation (Paul and Perlez 2016, p.1). Another blocking involved the Chinese consortium Canyon Bridge Capital Partners from acquiring Oregon-based Lattice Semiconductor. The U.S. National Security and Defense explained that:

> *"The national-security risk posed by the transaction relates to, among other things, the potential transfer of IP to the foreign acquirer, the Chinese government's role in supporting this transaction, the importance of semiconductor supply chain integrity to the United States Government, and the use of Lattice products by the United States Government"* (U.S. National Security and Defense 2017, p.1).

While President Xi stated that China's goal is "Being the master of its technologies," insecurity seems to be a natural sentiment for the U.S. The U.S. is facing threatening competition from China's plans to become the leader of high-level technological innovation that is believed to have substantially threatened U.S. global hegemony. Secretary of State Pompeo called on U.S. technology companies to stay away from any business with China that might strengthen the Chinese military, "tighten the regime's grip repression," or help "power a truly Orwellian surveillance state" (U.S. Department of State 2020, p.1). In addition, taking a strategic stance is very important in

this critical situation, which is further reflected in China's strategic ambiguity in the issue of AWS.

China's Strategic Ambiguity Stance as a Result of Technologically Innovative Imperative Dynamics

It can be seen that China has shown an attitude of ambiguity which according to Mandel is a form of a 'hazy middle ground' stance where this stance seems to be missing, too complex or contradictory (Mandel 2019, p.8). However, the ambiguous stance becomes clear and rational when factors influencing it are examined. This paper concludes that there are at least several main factors are the reasons behind China's strategic ambiguity stance on the issue of AWS.

The ambiguous stance is taken because China needs to maintain the consistency of the Peaceful Rise narrative by following international forums that exist within the framework of peace and humanitarianism. The consistency of the China Peaceful Rise narrative must be maintained as a strategy so that China is not perceived as a threat by the international community, which can ultimately hinder China's rise. From grand strategy to sectoral strategy, China has taken a similar approach. This approach implies that while China is still lagging behind, it needs a peaceful situation. China does not want to be involved in war and emphasises that countries do not need to see China as a threat. China has a tradition that to catch up the gap, it tends to choose peace or compromises over controversy while it is still developing its strength. This is intended so that the rise of China will not be hampered or hindered systemically. In addition, to support consistency in its narrative of peaceful rise, China has also often stated that its development of AWS is focused on the defensive aspect.

Despite having big ambitions in AI innovation, especially in weapons systems, China is still not capable of conquering or dominating this new weapon system due to restricted access to core technologies. This paper argues that China's ambiguous stance regarding the issue of AWS is related to the current dynamics of the technologically innovative imperative in the context of China's rise. First, China still finds itself in some technological lags and systemic barriers resulting from its interaction with the U.S. as the dominant state. Second, this lag prompted China to take peaceful measures, especially by actively contributing to several international forums. These peaceful measures are essential to avoid a position that could potentially trigger counter-productive tensions to China's innovation activities. Third, China wants to ensure that its innovation efforts will

not hinder its rise. Therefore, amidst its interest as a rising power and the emergence of complexity in AWS innovation, as well as the obstacles and pressures China faces, the ambiguous stance finds its justification. Thus, through this strategic ambiguity, China can maximise its interests in the realm of AWS innovation and be prepared for future warfare.

This paper shows how China contradicts its position – especially when China is aggressively developing AWS and actively contributing at the UN-CCW or other international forums to voicing the threat of AI arms race. However, paying attention to the arms race dynamics while aggressively participating in it is a common story in the history of international relations. This ambiguous and rhetorical move allowed China to receive positive media attention for its support to global restrictions while masking the hypocrisy of China's development of military autonomy and more advanced industries. The Chinese regime has successfully projected strengths while hiding weaknesses by controlling information leaving their borders. As a researcher, it is essential to distinguish between the image that China seeks to present and the reality it faces.

CONCLUSION

This study has elaborated the arguments regarding the reasons behind China's ambiguous stance on the issue of AWS. It has explained that China's ambiguous stance is a form of strategy in dealing with the innovative imperative dynamics, especially AI-based AWS that are in line with the China's fast-growing status as a rising power. AI-based weapon innovation, especially AWS, has been essential in this situation. With these innovations, China can boost its economy, military modernisation and achieve the Chinese National Destiny and China's Dream to become a great power. This, in turn, encourages China's grand ambition to develop AWS and become a Global Leader of AI as reflected in the various policy issued by its government. However, amid its need to develop AWS, China has been active in various international forums such as the UN-CCW and the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots in which it echoed the ban on these weapons. This shows a contradiction and ambiguous stance made by China, especially as it is promoting the Peaceful Rise narrative.

China provides explanations regarding the need for innovative imperatives in the context of the China's rise through speeches, official statements, position papers, national policy, and state documents such as its white paper. From the findings above, it can be seen that; First, China tends to act peacefully with the Peaceful Rise Narratives as its power continues to rise. Second, China's strategic ambiguity is also based on historical

strategic understanding. Third, China has a positive response to technological innovation and argues that its ambition to become a Global AI Leader is part of its Chinese National Destiny. Fourth, as explained in the National Defence white paper, China has positioned itself as capable of achieving great power status. One way to achieve this stage is by strengthening the military through science and technology. Fifth, China shows strategic ambiguity in issues related to AWS and in its involvement in international forums. This ambiguity is a deliberate act that can strategically help China maximise its interests and face the challenges in innovation dynamics. Sixth, China views AWS as essential in modernising the military to deal with Intelligentised Warfare and as a new prospectus industry. Seventh, despite having grand ambitions and efforts in AI innovation, it can be said that China is still in the growing stage and has not yet reached the conquering or dominating stage. This is seen through the several lags and systemic constraints that China faces. Eighth, China faces systemic constraints due to its rivalry with the U.S. in 'dual use' technological innovation. Due to the negative security externalities perceived by the U.S., the U.S. seeks to impede China from assessing U.S.' technology. Ninth, with its strategic ambiguity, China seeks to maintain the consistency of China's Peaceful Rise, gain legitimacy for its AWS development while creating a situation where it can put limits on the development of more advanced U.S. autonomous weapon.

The author realises that this paper focuses on China's ambiguous stance and does not elaborate further on how other countries, like the U.S., view this ambiguous stance. This creates a new space for further research, which can focus on responses from the U.S. and the international community to China's ambiguous stance and how this stance impacts the prospect of global security, especially in the realm of new weapons development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without exceptional technical and consultative assistance from my research supervisor, Joko Susanto, S.IP, M.Sc., from the Department of International Relations, Airlangga University. His willingness to give encouragement and helpful critiques of this research work has been very much appreciated.

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Note:

[1] According to Nils J. Nilsson (2020, p.1), "AI is that activity devoted to making machines intelligent, and intelligence is that quality that enables an entity to function appropriately and with foresight in its environment."

[2] Strategic ambiguity is a form of a 'hazy middle ground' position where this position seems to be missing, too complex (too complex) or contradictory (contradictory) (Mandel 2019, p.68).

[3] UN-CCW is a body under the United Nations which is a forum for every international actor to discuss or form regulations on international weapons issues.

[4] GGE-LAWS was formed under the UN-CCW in 2016 which contains technology experts and representatives from each country to examine issues related to autonomous weapons in the context of the objectives of the UN-CCW.

[5] The document contains the strategic goal of making China as the world leader in AI by 2030 and making AI the main driving force for China's economic and military transformation.

[6] Point II Of China Position Paper in UN-CCW 2016 stated that "as a method of warfare, use of LAWS should be governed in principle by international humanitarian laws, such as the 1949 Geneva Convention and its two 1977 Additional Protocols, including the principles of restriction, distinction and proportionality. However, such weapons systems present, in the application of the above principles, considerable uncertainties: 1. Whether such a weapons system is capable of distinction remains doubtful; 2. Such a weapons system is incapable of proportionate decisions; 3. Such a weapons system presents difficulty in terms of accountability for its use" (China. Delegation to CCW 2016, p.1).

[7] Point III of China Position Paper in UN-CCW 2018 "as means of warfare, LAWS should, in principle, be subject to international humanitarian rules set out in the 1949 Geneva Convention and the two Additional Protocols of 1977, including the principles of precautions, distinction and proportionality. However, as such weapon systems are concerned, application of the above-mentioned principles is confronted with a great deal of uncertainties. Firstly it is doubtful whether this type of weapon systems possess any capability of distinction; secondly this type of weapon systems lack the capability of making decisions concerning proportionality; thirdly, it is difficult to establish accountability when this type of weapon systems are used. It is therefore necessary, when exploring LAWS- related legal issues, to have full consideration of the applicability of general legal norms to LAWS" (China. Delegation to CCW 2018, p.1).

[8] The Campaign to Stop Killer Robot is a form of global community rejection of autonomous weapons (killer robots), initiated in May 2008. This coalition of non-governmental organizations has urged the government and the United Nations to adopt policies that prohibit the development and use of autonomous weapons systems.