

World Order with Chinese Characteristics:  
The Development of Chinese International Relations Theory and  
Implications for China's Foreign Policy

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation critically examines the development of Chinese International Relations theories in the wake of China's rise, the perception of international order held by China's Communist Party and government elites and scholars, and the mutual implication and constitution of domestic ideas and foreign policy. The question at the heart of this project is: How do Chinese international relations scholars understand international order and how is this related to China's approach to international order? In answering this question, this dissertation will argue that social conditions shape the development of international relations scholarship according to locally meaningful ideologies. In making this claim, I argue against the field of international relations as a universal discipline engaged in the objective analysis of an autonomous realm of global politics. Instead, I argue that as a socially conditioned body of knowledge, international relations theory is fundamentally a discourse about who and what the nation is and what its role in global politics should be. For the case used in this dissertation - China and the development of Chinese theories of IR - this has involved a reconstitution of China's role in international and regional order in an attempt to breakaway from Western discourses and ascribe a new locally meaningful identity to the nation and its relation to others. Furthermore, these counter-hegemonic discourses are increasingly being adopted by the state as it seeks to define its role as a great power and to legitimate its hegemonic position in Asia. This study will contribute to debates on rising powers and international order, the role of ideas in foreign policy, and the sociology of the discipline of international relations.

## Acknowledgments

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# 1

## Introduction

*'[C]entral to the lives of all empires have been the ways in which they have been constituted through language and their own self-representations: the discourses that have arisen to describe, defend, and criticize them, and the historical narratives that have been invoked to make sense of them.'*<sup>1</sup>

*- Jennifer Pitts*

Every great power needs a theoretical lens to justify its version of order. One of the more fascinating aspects of China's dramatic accumulation of power at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the development of Chinese theories of international relations (IR). Drawing upon traditions more familiar to students of Chinese history, from imperial philosophies of Confucianism and Daoism to ideologies of ruling 'all-under-heaven', rather than the history of Westphalian Europe, the effort to develop unique Chinese IR theories epitomizes the epochal transformation in world order as material power moves away from the global North-West to China. Historically, power shifts have been accompanied by a restructuring of the principles that make up international life as new powers seek to legitimize their rule.<sup>2</sup> As an effort to 'rethink the world,'<sup>3</sup> the creation of indigenous Chinese theories of IR reflects the intimate relationship between political power, knowledge, and representation in global politics.

What originally began as my own personal interest in an esoteric development of non-Western IR theory has taken on larger importance in light of the recent metamorphosis in China's diplomacy. As Mark Beeson writes, 'China has begun to

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Pitts, "Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (May 2010): 226.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Tingyang Zhao, *天下体系: 世界制度哲学导论* ('*The Tianxia System: A Philosophy for the World Institution*') (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), 16.

enunciate an alternative vision of development and international order,'<sup>4</sup> in an attempt to solidify its own hegemonic position at the centre of a new regional system in Asia, at the expense of the United States. Some may dismiss China's rhetoric of seeking to build a 'community of shared future for mankind'<sup>5</sup>, or its vision of a regional order in Asia underpinned by Chinese values of 'amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness' as marginal to the deeper reality of power politics or mere ideological covering for the relentless pursuit of national interests. But as the most formidable competitor to the United States since it assumed a position of global hegemony at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, China increasingly legitimates its behaviour, and that of others, in light of its own historical memories and governance traditions. China's authoritarian party-state state has not only encouraged the indigenization of social science and philosophy as part of its 'discursive struggle' with the liberal West, but has actively adopted a new conceptual grammar in its diplomacy. Understanding this ideational development, and what it means for China's diplomacy in a post-Western world, is the core aim of this dissertation.

This dissertation critically examines the development of Chinese IR theories in the wake of China's rise, the perception of international order held by China's Communist Party (CCP) and government elites and scholars, and the mutual implication and constitution of domestic ideas and foreign policy. The question at the heart of this project is: How do Chinese international relations scholars understand international order and how is this related to China's approach to international order?

In answering this question, this dissertation will argue that social conditions shape the development of international relations scholarship according to locally meaningful ideologies. In making this claim, I argue against the field of international relations as a universal discipline engaged in the objective analysis of an autonomous realm of global politics. Instead, I argue that as a socially conditioned body of

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Beeson, "Hegemonic Transition in East Asia? The Dynamics of Chinese and American Power," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 2009): 100.

<sup>5</sup> "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind - Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China At the United Nations Office at Geneva," January 18, 2017, <http://english.cri.cn/12394/2017/01/19/53s950074.htm>.

knowledge, IR theory is fundamentally a discourse about who and what the nation is and what its role in global politics should be. For the case used in this dissertation - China and the development of Chinese theories of IR - this has involved a reconstitution of China's role in international and regional order in an attempt to breakaway from Western discourses and ascribe a new locally meaningful identity to the nation and its relation to others. Furthermore, these counter-hegemonic discourses are increasingly being adopted by the state as China seeks to define its role as a great power and to legitimate its hegemonic position as a civilizational state at the heart of Asia.

This introductory chapter is organized as follows. Part 1 reviews the sociological and historiographical literature to conceptualize two factors that influence the development of IR theory: national ideology and shifts in the balance of power. Part 2 builds on insights from both of these literatures to develop my explanatory model. Finally, Part 3 includes methodological considerations as well as a roadmap for this dissertation.

## 1. Theory and Literature Review

In the years since Stanley Hoffman famously described international relations as an 'American social science', scholars have analyzed the field's development in light of Western political, ideological, and epistemological biases.<sup>6</sup> This has followed the belated recognition that Western international theory has long rested on parochial, racist, and imperialist foundations that work to reify the superiority of Western civilization.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Stanley Hoffman, "An American Social Science: International Relations," *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 41-60; Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, "Knowing Encounters: Beyond Parochialism in International Relations Theory," in *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, by Yosef Lapid and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Critical Perspectives on World Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 73-91; Darryl Jarvis and Robert Crawford, eds., *International Relations — Still an American Social Science? Toward Diversity in International Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*, *The United States in the World* (Ithaca: Cornell

This introspection has been accompanied by an interest in the potential of ‘non-Western’ international relations theory and the myriad ways that global politics is conceived around the world.<sup>8</sup> There have been various attempts to ‘provincialize Europe’ by offering alternative ways to conceptualize and organize world politics that avoids drawing from the Western historical experience – from Islam and Sikhism, to Kautilya in ancient India and tributary relations in Asia.<sup>9</sup> In particular, China has emerged the most advanced site for constructing alternative approaches to world politics, making it a crucial case for broadening our understanding of international relations theory production.<sup>10</sup>

The Eurocentric critique and the growing production of non-Western IR theory imply two distinct processes at work in disciplinary development. First, that IR theory takes on distinct characteristics in relation to particular local conditions. Second, that the global power shift currently underway, particularly the rise of China, has implications for knowledge production.

This study joins a growing body of English-language literature on Chinese IR that consists of two broad approaches. The first investigates China’s rise not so much as a theory testing event, but a theory generating one.<sup>11</sup> Given that mainstream IR theories are overwhelmingly based on Western experiences, understanding regional IR in Asia can ‘expand[s] the conceptual tools for theorizing about IR more

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University Press, 2015); Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver, eds., *International Relations Scholarship around the World, Worlding beyond the West* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009); Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds., *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Shani, “Toward a Post-Western IR: The Umma, Khalsa Panth, and Critical International Relations Theory,” *International Studies Review* 10 (2008): 722–34; Deepshikha Shahi, *Kautilya and Non-Western IR Theory* (Palgrave, 2019); David C. Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*, *Contemporary Asia in the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Yongjin Zhang and Teng-Chi Chang, eds., *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations: Ongoing Debates and Sociological Realities* (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016); Nele Noesselt, “Revisiting the Debate on Constructing a Theory of International Relations with Chinese Characteristics,” *The China Quarterly* 222 (June 2015): 430–48; William A. Callahan, “China and the Globalisation of IR Theory: Discussion of ‘Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics,’” *Journal of Contemporary China* 10, no. 26 (February 2001): 75–88.

<sup>11</sup> Chengxin Pan and Emilian Kavalski, “Theorizing China’s Rise in and beyond International Relations,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 18 (2018): 289–311.

generally.’<sup>12</sup> As such, scholars have explored the ontological and epistemological foundations of nascent Chinese theories to explore the potential for alternative knowledge production beyond the West.<sup>13</sup> Pan Chengxin, for instance, borrows from holographic ideas in quantum physics and traditional Asian thought to offer a new ontology of global politics as holographic relations, challenging those who treat China as a homogenous and self-contained entity.<sup>14</sup> Posed against the agent-centric approach in mainstream IR, Emilian Kavalski draws on the Chinese concept of ‘guanxi’ to explore the relationality of global politics.<sup>15</sup> Hagstrom and Nordin argue that premodern Chinese thinking on harmony has the possibility of informing more peaceful relations between self and other, although they recognize that discourses of harmony have often been deployed to legitimize the use of coercive and violent hard power.<sup>16</sup> Among this group the argument is that various Asian practices, concepts and thought have the potential to contribute to mainstream Western IR and in so doing offer new ways of thinking about international politics.

The second approach investigates China’s identity-building process through strategic narratives.<sup>17</sup> Particularly relevant is China’s accrual and deployment of ‘soft power’.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, “What (If Anything) Does East Asia Tell Us About International Relations Theory?,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 15, no. 1 (June 2012): 56.

<sup>13</sup> Tickner and Wæver, *International Relations Scholarship around the World*; Acharya and Buzan, *Non-Western International Relations Theory*; Zhang and Chang, *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations*; Hun Joon Kim, “Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics Be a Powerful Alternative?,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9, no. 1 (March 2016): 59–79; Feng Zhang, “The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 73–102.

<sup>14</sup> Chengxin Pan, “Toward a New Relational Ontology in Global Politics: China’s Rise as Holographic Transition,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 18 (June 2018): 339–67.

<sup>15</sup> Emilian Kavalski, “Guanxi or What Is the Chinese for Relational Theory of World Politics,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 18 (June 2018): 397–420; Emilian Kavalski, *The Guanxi of Relational International Theory* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Linus Hagström and Astrid H M Nordin, “China’s ‘Politics of Harmony’ and the Quest for Soft Power in International Politics,” *International Studies Review* 22, no. 3 (2020): 507–25.

<sup>17</sup> Niv Horesh and Emilian Kavalski, *Asian Thought on China’s Changing International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> William A. Callahan and Elena Barabantseva, eds., *China Orders the World: Normative Soft Power and Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011); William A. Callahan, “Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?,” *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (December 2008): 749–61; Kelvin Chi Kin Cheung, “China’s Rise and the International Politics of East Asia: The Development of Chinese IR Theory,” *China: An International Journal* 12, no. 2 (2014): 31–45; Linus Hagström and Chengxin Pan, “Traversing the Soft/Hard Power

As China becomes an ever larger political and military presence in Asia it needs its own ideas to pave the way for a 'peaceful rise' and soothe its neighbours about its benign future intentions. In practice, Pan and Hagström argue, 'soft' and 'hard' power are entangled as the former legitimizes and enables the use of the latter.<sup>19</sup> For Nele Noesselt, Chinese IR primarily serves a discursive function while the actual conduct of Chinese foreign policy remains pragmatic and more usefully explained by existing approaches in Western IR.<sup>20</sup> In his dissertation, Jyrki Kallio explores the revival of traditional thought in China through National Learning (*guoxue*), in particular Confucianism, to argue that the Party is composing a new narrative that legitimizes chosen policy paths to domestic and international audiences.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Nadège Rolland studies Party documents and discourses and finds that Chinese elites are drawing inspiration from traditional Chinese thought and historical images in their attempt to control the formulations and ideas underpinning international order.<sup>22</sup> Rolland places efforts by Chinese intellectuals to develop a Chinese School of IR in this broader quest to define a new world order on China's own terms.

Despite this growing and important body of research on Chinese IR, this literature suffers several weaknesses. First, it lacks clarity on the relationship between academic narratives and the state narratives. It is frequently assumed or indirectly suggested that Chinese scholars are answering the call by political authorities to contribute to the Party's ideology building.<sup>23</sup> This study rejects the simplistic linkage between regime priorities and IR development. Instead, I develop a contextualist model of intellectual development that places Chinese IR in conversation with both

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Binary: The Case of the Sino-Japanese Territorial Dispute," *Review of International Studies* 46, no. 1 (2020): 37-55.

<sup>19</sup> Hagström and Pan, "Traversing the Soft/Hard Power Binary: The Case of the Sino-Japanese Territorial Dispute."

<sup>20</sup> Noesselt, "Revisiting the Debate on Constructing a Theory of International Relations with Chinese Characteristics," 444.

<sup>21</sup> Jyrki Kallio, "Towards China's Strategic Narrative: On the Construction of the Historico-Cultural Roots of China's National Identity in the Light of the Chinese Debate Relating to the Rise of Traditional Schools of Thought" (University of Lapland, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Nadège Rolland, "China's Vision for a New World Order" (National Bureau of Asian Research, January 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Rolland; Daniel Tobin, "How Xi Jinping's 'New Era' Should Have Ended U.S. Debate on Beijing's Ambitions," § U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2020).

'external' factors like political conditions as well as 'internal' factors of scholarly debates and especially Western IR. Drawing from the sociology of knowledge literature, this introductory chapter lays out my approach that theorizes how external conditions determine intellectual developments *indirectly* rather than directly as is typically assumed.

Second, while this study shares with this literature a commitment to centering the role of culture in IR theory and practice, there is a tendency in existing works to overemphasize China's traditional Confucian heritage and especially the *Tianxia* ideal at the expense of China's other traditions.<sup>24</sup> Contra this literature, I show how China is developing a discursive framework for its diplomacy that is rooted in its own *multiple* traditions (pre-modern civilizational and post-1949 socialist revolutionary) that define its role as an international actor in locally meaningful terms. This is not to downplay the revival of traditional values in China. Like Kallio and Rolland, I show how the Party selectively instrumentalizes traditional thought like Confucianism to serve its own interests.<sup>25</sup> But in deconstructing China's identity-building process, this study also points to China's socialist-revolutionary tradition as an important source of legitimation, resulting in a more complicated and at times contradictory worldview.

### ***National Ideology and IR Theory***

In his magnum opus *Ideology and Utopia*, Karl Mannheim developed a concept of ideology that went beyond the traditional understandings of the term either rooted in propaganda or the Marxist approach of class consciousness being a function of a one's position in the economic relations of production.<sup>26</sup> Mannheim went further by attributing all knowledge, including that of the social scientist, as grounded in concrete social conditions. The production of knowledge takes place and only functions meaningfully within a definite social milieu that gives meaning to certain

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<sup>24</sup> Rolland, "China's Vision for a New World Order"; Kallio, "Towards China's Strategic Narrative."

<sup>25</sup> Kallio, "Towards China's Strategic Narrative."

<sup>26</sup> Mannheim called the former the "particular" conception and the latter the "total" conception of ideology. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1954), 49-57.

ways of thinking and being.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, ideology refers to the holistic worldview held by a concrete social group or within a historical epoch. This has important consequences for social science, the foundations of which evolve as broader socio-political structures change: 'every epoch has its fundamentally new approach and its characteristic point of view, and consequently sees the "same" object from a new perspective.'<sup>28</sup>

The sociology of knowledge understands that ideas develop and function meaningfully under particular social conditions.<sup>29</sup> A sociological approach emphasizes that IR theory is grounded in and responds to particular circumstances and therefore may reflect cultural and ideological assumptions. Implied here is the nature of knowledge producers as individuals embedded within environments that condition the salience of particular questions, forms of knowledge, and normative goals, making truly objective or neutral analysis impossible. As Robert Cox warns, 'theory is always for someone and for some purpose.'<sup>30</sup> The result is the diversity of patterns of knowledge across time and space.

There is a growing literature on the varied patterns of IR theory in different countries or regions that suggests location matters in knowledge production.<sup>31</sup> Foreign policy studies in Canada have been concerned with establishing Canada's place in the international system and its role as a 'middle power'.<sup>32</sup> International relations

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<sup>27</sup> Mannheim, 71.

<sup>28</sup> Mannheim, 243.

<sup>29</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966); Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Robert W. Cox, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 87.

<sup>31</sup> Tickner and Wæver, *International Relations Scholarship around the World*; Farhang Rajaei, "Paradigm Shifts in Muslim International Relations Discourse," *Studies in Contemporary Islam* 1, no. 1 (1999): 1–13; Jeremy Paltiel, "Constructing Global Order with Chinese Characteristics: Yan Xuetong and the Pre-Qin Response to International Anarchy," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 4, no. 4 (2011): 375–403; Andrei P. Tsygankov and Pavel A. Tsygankov, "National Ideology and IR Theory: Three Incarnations of the 'Russian Idea,'" *European Journal of International Relations* 16, no. 4 (December 2010): 663–86.

<sup>32</sup> Kim Richard Nossal, "Home-Grown IR: The Canadianization of International Relations," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35 (2000): 95–114; Andrew F. Cooper, Richard A. Higgott, and Kim Richard Nossal, *Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993).

scholarship in Russia is shaped by the national ideology of being a Eurasian great power, Russia's civilizational history, and its relationship with the West.<sup>33</sup> And as this dissertation will show, the development of international relations in China is also shaped by locally meaningful debates, including China's 'rise' vis-à-vis the West, its socialist and civilizational histories, and its role as a regional great power at the heart of Asia. This is not to argue that there are coherent 'national schools' of IR<sup>34</sup>, but rather that dominant conceptions of the national Self and its appropriate role in world affairs serve as the social milieu in which IR theorizing takes place and functions meaningfully.

The notion that there is no Archimedean point upon which one can analyze global politics is not a new one. The field of post-colonialism has recognized that Western representations of the non-Western Other serve to produce ideological justifications for cultural dominance.<sup>35</sup> The power-knowledge nexus is also implicated in IR studies. As E.H. Carr remarked in 1977, 'the study of international relations in English speaking countries is simply a study of the best way to run the world from positions of strength.'<sup>36</sup> Carr continued, prognosticating: 'The study of international relations in African and Asian Universities, if it ever got going, would be a study of the exploitation of the weaker by the stronger.'<sup>37</sup> Implied here is that knowledge about international relations is conditioned by an understanding of one's position in relation to others.

Following Tsygankov and Tsygankov, this dissertation will use national ideology to refer to the systematic presentation of Self, Other and their relationship to each

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<sup>33</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein and Nicole Weygandt, "Mapping Eurasia in an Open World: How the Insularity of Russia's Geopolitical and Civilizational Approaches Limits Its Foreign Policies," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 02 (June 2017): 428-42; Tsygankov and Tsygankov, "National Ideology and IR Theory"; Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Self and Other in International Relations Theory: Learning from Russian Civilizational Debates," *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (December 2008): 762-75.

<sup>34</sup> Tony Porter, "Can There Be National Perspectives on Inter(National) Relations?," in *International Relations – Still an American Social Science? Toward Diversity in International Thought*, by Robert Crawford and Darryl Jarvis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> Cited in: Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, "The Postcolonial Moment in Security Studies," *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 2 (April 2006): 349.

<sup>37</sup> Barkawi and Laffey, 349.

other.<sup>38</sup> National ideologies emerge from a complex interplay of national value systems, individual leaders, power capabilities, historical narratives and interactions with other states. Role theory investigates the identity that the state attributes to itself and others, and how these images of 'ego' and 'alter' are enacted in foreign policy.<sup>39</sup> Men Honghua, for instance, distinguishes China's national roles to include: a new type of socialist great power, developing great power, civilizational great power, responsible great power, and Asian great power.<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that national roles are not static, but change over time as input factors change and one's existing role becomes untenable or no longer 'fits'.<sup>41</sup> A socio-constructivist approach is sensitive to the process of change in national roles and investigates where images of Self and Other come from.<sup>42</sup>

National ideology plays an important role in shaping the development of IR theory around the world. Muthiah Alagappa argues that the 'birth' of IR in Asia took place in distinctive social circumstances: the principal concern was national and regime survival in a world dominated by Western powers.<sup>43</sup> Out of this positionality, and with the public sphere dominated by a strong state that provides government funding for research, Asian IR has taken a largely practical orientation that seeks to understand the external world in order to devise suitable national responses.<sup>44</sup> In regards to the particular social factors that have shaped the distinctive trajectory of IR studies in China, scholars have pointed to Chinese exceptionalism<sup>45</sup>, civilizational

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<sup>38</sup> Here I follow Tsygankov and Tsygankov. See: Tsygankov and Tsygankov, "National Ideology and IR Theory," 664.

<sup>39</sup> Kal J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1970): 233–309; Stephen G. Walker, ed., *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in: Nele Noesselt, "China's Contradictory Role(s) in World Politics: Decrypting China's North Korea Strategy," *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 7 (August 9, 2014): 1311.

<sup>41</sup> Ralph H. Turner, "Role Change," *Annual Review of Sociology* 16 (1990): 87–110.

<sup>42</sup> Noesselt, "China's Contradictory Role(s) in World Politics."

<sup>43</sup> Muthiah Alagappa, "International Relations Studies in Asia: Distinctive Trajectories," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11, no. 2 (2011): 193–230.

<sup>44</sup> Geeraerts and Men come to the same conclusion. Gustaaf Geeraerts and Jing Men, "International Relations Theory in China," *Global Society* 15, no. 3 (July 2001): 251–76.

<sup>45</sup> Lu Peng, "Chinese IR Sino-Centrism Tradition and Its Influence on the Chinese School Movement," *The Pacific Review* 32, no. 2 (March 4, 2019): 150–67; Feng Zhang, "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 2 (June 2013): 305–28.

culture<sup>46</sup>, epistemological traditions<sup>47</sup>, and the state's evolving national identity and role in world order.<sup>48</sup> This rich body of literature suggests that to understand local diversity of IR scholarship, we should 'study social science as a form of social action shaped by locally meaningful ideological debates'.<sup>49</sup>

To summarize, as a systematic image of the relationship between Self and Other, national ideology influences knowledge production through an interplay of metanarratives, institutions and material resources.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Rising powers and knowledge production***

Conceptualizing the role that national ideology plays in shaping the trajectory that IR theory takes gets us halfway to our intended destination. The remaining question involves China's rise and its relationship to knowledge production. As the balance of world power continues to shift away from the West, will IR theory production in the peripheries soon challenge the intellectual hegemony of the Western core? As the most important rising power in the international system, with growing political, economic, military and cultural influence, will China become a 'theorizing power' that shapes the dominant ideas employed in international relations?<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Benjamin Tze Ern Ho, "About Face—the Relational Dimension in Chinese IR Discourse," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 98 (March 3, 2016): 307–20; Salvatore Babones, "Taking China Seriously: Relationality, Tianxia, and the 'Chinese School' of International Relations," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, by Salvatore Babones (Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.602>.

<sup>47</sup> Yaqing Qin, "Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China's International Strategy," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 3 (2014): 285–314; Peng Lu, "理解中国国际关系理论的两种构建途径 (Two Approaches to Chinese IR Theory: A Historical Review and Evaluation)," *World Economics and Politics* 1 (2018): 73–93.

<sup>48</sup> Noesselt, "Revisiting the Debate on Constructing a Theory of International Relations with Chinese Characteristics."

<sup>49</sup> Tsygankov and Tsygankov, "National Ideology and IR Theory," 666.

<sup>50</sup> Tsygankov and Tsygankov have a similar tripartite framework: "interpretation of historical events, institutional arrangement, and funding". Tsygankov and Tsygankov, 667; Alagappa refers to "master narratives, intellectual predispositions, and institutional settings". Alagappa, "International Relations Studies in Asia."

<sup>51</sup> Waever claims China is "the most obvious candidate for an independent IR tradition". See: Ole Waever, "The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (October 1998): 696.

The link between power and knowledge, and more specifically *rising* powers and knowledge production, has long been assumed in the field. For Stanley Hoffman, the ‘rise of the United States as a world power’ acted as a facilitating condition for the development of post-World War II international relations.<sup>52</sup> With the augmentation of American dominance over world affairs in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the discipline continued to reflect and reinforce Western hegemony.<sup>53</sup> It seems intuitive, then, that efforts to develop a distinctive ‘Chinese school’ of IR is the fruit of China’s rising position in the global hierarchy of powers.<sup>54</sup> As one theorist at a Shanghai think-tank told me during an interview: ‘China is rising and we need theories because of this. We need a Chinese theory. We already have realism and liberalism, which came from the West. Creating a Chinese theory is a historical trend.’<sup>55</sup>

We should be cautious about uncritically positing a relationship, especially a causal one, between broad and often amorphous socio-political structures and internal developments in social science. Brian Schmidt criticizes the pervasive tendency of ‘contextualism’ in which scholars seek to explain the disciplinary development of IR in reference to exogenous events in global politics.<sup>56</sup> This criticism could be directed at the ‘theorizing rising powers’ thesis. After all, it is not ‘rising powers’ that create IR theories, but individuals with their own professional and personal commitments. Taking a sociological approach that combines internal and external factors, Kristensen and Nielsen argue that Chinese IR has developed primarily due to internal

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<sup>52</sup> Hoffman, “An American Social Science: International Relations,” 43.

<sup>53</sup> Steve Smith, “The United States and the Discipline of International Relations: ‘Hegemonic Country, Hegemonic Discipline,’” *International Studies Review* 4, no. 2 (2002): 67–85; Steve Smith, “Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11,” *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2004): 499–515.

<sup>54</sup> Following this materialist logic, Tickner and Blaney find “efforts to create local schools of IR thought only in those countries that exercise substantial or rising international influence, i.e., China and Russia.” Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney, eds., *Thinking International Relations Differently* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 8.

<sup>55</sup> Interview, Shanghai, May 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Brian C. Schmidt, “On the History and Historiography of International Relations,” in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 11–13.

factors such as intellectuals pursuing prominence and attention vis-à-vis their peers.<sup>57</sup>

Post-positivist and reflexivist scholars have responded to the contextualism problem by collapsing the internal/external distinction. Peter Kristensen draws from science and technology studies to develop a 'co-productionist' framework that seeks to understand how knowledge is both a product of socio-political development and works to constitute forms of social life.<sup>58</sup> Kristensen's framework compares how the 'external' condition of both China and India as rising powers is manifested differently in the thinking of Chinese and Indian scholars. As he writes, 'Rather than looking for causal links between "external" political conditions of [a rising power] and the internal dynamics of science [...] the [socio-political condition of 'risingness'] manifests itself "inside" science as a sensibility that scholars use to make sense of their own situatedness and justify their practices.'<sup>59</sup> In other words, the world of science and the external world co-produce each other as individuals, through the production of knowledge, constitute, modify, and legitimate the external world.

Insights from reflexivist theory can shed light on how Chinese scholars internalize China's rise. However, the importance of national ideology in China as well as the dominance of the authoritarian party-state means that these insights must be combined with a sociological approach that places ideas in a local environment shaped by external realities.<sup>60</sup> Adopting a framework that distinguishes between the external and internal does not necessarily commit us to reducing social scientific developments to mere epiphenomenal reflections of socio-political trends.

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<sup>57</sup> Peter M. Kristensen and Ras T. Nielsen, "Constructing a Chinese International Relations Theory: A Sociological Approach to Intellectual Innovation," *International Political Sociology* 7, no. 1 (March 2013): 19–40.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Marcus Kristensen, "States of Emergence, States of Knowledge: A Comparative Sociology of International Relations in China and India," *European Journal of International Relations*, 2019, 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066119829804>; See also: Sheila Jasanoff, *States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and the Social Order* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

<sup>59</sup> Kristensen, "States of Emergence, States of Knowledge," 2–3.

<sup>60</sup> It is notable that in Kristensen's illuminating article comparing the development of Chinese and Indian IR, there is not one mention of the CCP. Kristensen, "States of Emergence, States of Knowledge."

My epistemological and ontological starting point is to maintain the distinction between internal and external factors that drive disciplinary development, but to do so in a way that is indirect. The following section combines national ideology and rising power into an explanatory model that will be used in this dissertation.

## 2. Explanatory Model

In *The Sociology of Philosophies*, Randall Collins seeks to explain rare bursts of intellectual creativity throughout history without resorting to the meme of brilliant individuals working in lonely isolation.<sup>61</sup> Instead, Collins uses the efflorescence of ancient Greek and Chinese philosophy to develop the idea of network structures, or social links among thinkers that are passed down to later generations. Periods of great creativity, Collins argues, occur when there are relatively centralized organizational structures combined with well-defined intellectual positions where scholars are in continuous active debate with one another. The idea of networks allows Collins to avoid the reductionism of externalist accounts of intellectual development and instead shifts focus to the micro-dynamics of knowledge production, including the strategic moves and connections made by leading theorists, contending positions, debates and rivalries.

Collins' social model of idea production is comprised of three causal layers that move inside out, from the personal networks of individual scholars to the broader political and economic structures that encase them. Collins suggests that a sociological approach to intellectual development should:

consider first [...] the clustering of ideas and the social networks among those who produced them; second, the changing material bases of intellectual production which undergirded [the theoretical development]; and third, the surrounding political-economic context which generated these organizational changes.<sup>62</sup>

The first layer, the micro-core, is made up of individuals and the networks they form. Theory development is an inherently creative enterprise that takes place by status-

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<sup>61</sup> Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*.

<sup>62</sup> Collins, 622.

craving individuals through dialogue and persuasion within a marketplace for ideas with a limited attention space. In other words, it is social. In China, as elsewhere, individuals are required to distinguish themselves in an academic field that is highly competitive and prizes theoretical originality.

Making slight modifications to Collins' model, the second layer is national ideology. This includes metanarratives as well as the material base of institutions and funding. Political-institutional dimensions at this intermediate level, which provide material support for intellectual life, include universities, think tanks, journals, funding, and other institutions that together constitute what Duncan Bell calls the 'knowledge-complex'.<sup>63</sup> This organizational base allows for the buildup of scholars and fosters creativity in the first layer. In China, the Communist Party must be understood as the central institution in the development of social sciences. Unlike American IR, which has developed in a relatively free and open environment where scholars pursue topics with few constraints, social sciences in China are developing within a tightly controlled Leninist political system that heavily shapes research agendas. The Party, as an overseer of how and which knowledge is produced, disseminated, and enacted into public policy, has the ability to define legitimate academic discourses and confer scholarly accolades. The rapid increase in national power that has occurred over the past four decades and China's now global interests has produced a need for specialist knowledge of global affairs that IR scholars hold and has produced an explosion of research funding available for social scientists. The rapid growth of the political-institutional base in China has made the country one of the largest IR communities in the world, second only to the US.<sup>64</sup>

The metanarrative aspect in the second layer refers to state-led national identity discourses, the interpretation of material and normative elements of international order and the state's place in it, domestic ideologies, as well as forms and patterns of

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<sup>63</sup> 'Knowledge-complexes' are 'the ecologies – institutions, networks, organizational structures, or "assemblages" of all these – in which knowledge is fertilized rendered intelligible, and disseminated.' See: Duncan Bell, "Writing the World: Disciplinary History and Beyond," *International Affairs* 85, no. 1 (2009): 3–22.

<sup>64</sup> Kristensen, "States of Emergence, States of Knowledge," 13.

intellectual discourse. In China, important metanarrative elements include: China's rise and 'national rejuvenation', the thinking of top leaders and its reflection in foreign policy practice, the transition away from Marxism-Leninism as a state ideology and the revival of traditional Confucian values, an international order characterized by Western hegemony and liberal norms, and establishing a distinctive normative frame for acting as a great power. These ideational debates form the social circumstances in which local IR production is rendered meaningful.

The third and outermost causal layer is the larger economic-political structure, including the global balance of power. Changes in the balance of power, which are ultimately shifts in material resources on a grand scale, shape the organizational base at the intermediate level. As Collins explains:

In sociological theory, at the outermost causal layer, the geopolitical and economic rise or fall of states shifts the location of resources, expanding the material bases for some intellectual networks at the expense of others. Networks realign; new philosophical positions appear.<sup>65</sup>

It is important to note that the relationship between the outer layer and the inner layers is not one of direct causation. Unlike previous generations of the sociology of knowledge that attempted to explain intellectual history in terms of the underlying material conditions of a particular period, Collins' model does not reduce the inner layer of knowledge production to a simple causal response to external political and economic structures. 'External' economic-political conditions determine intellectual developments *indirectly* by changing the material-ideational organizational base of intellectual production at the intermediate level, which in turn supports the micro-core of individuals and networks within them. As Collins writes:

One layer does not reduce to another; least of all do the contents of the philosophies reduce to the outermost material and political conditions. Intellectuals maneuver within their own attention space, reshaping the tools at hand from past and current controversies internal to their own

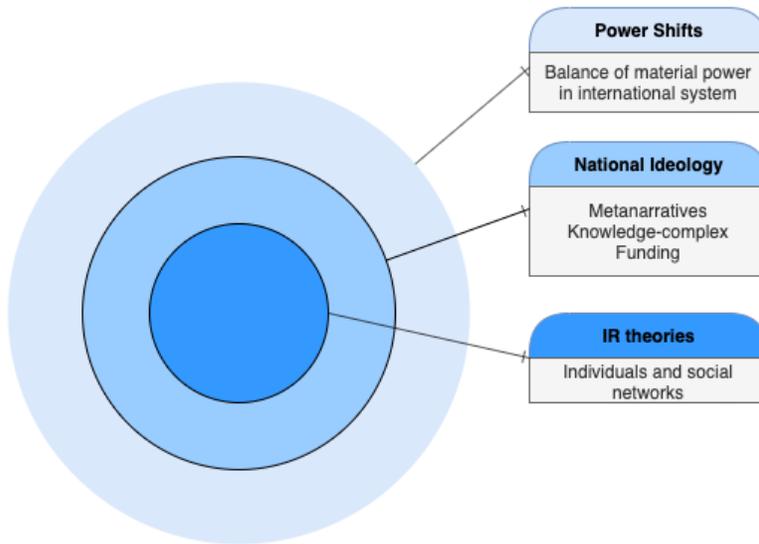
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<sup>65</sup> Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, 623.

sphere, while energized by the structural opportunities opening up in the material and political world surrounding them.<sup>66</sup>

The three-layer explanatory model is visualized below.

Figure 1: Explanatory model



### **IR theory, rising powers, and international order**

As a counter-hegemonic discourse, the Chinese School movement is developing a new conceptual grammar for the nation's foreign policy. By breaking away from Western discourses and reframing political action in discursive frameworks more familiar to China's traditions of governance, these scholars are developing new ideas of the national Self and its role in international order. Like international relations scholars elsewhere, Chinese IR theorists do not only 'interpret' the changing world around them, but also seek to inform foreign policy debates and influence policymakers about a preferred course of action.

Chapter 2 will conceptualize international order as the outcome of a struggle for discursive hegemony. The shift in the balance of power away from the West has dislodged previously fixed identities and meanings and has provided an opportunity for rising powers to define a new political order. In engaging in this discursive

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<sup>66</sup> Collins, 622.

struggle, China’s diplomatic actors draw from IR scholarship to shape and define foreign policy and to develop ideational and discursive frameworks for international order and regional order. This is particularly pronounced in Asia, where China has developed a distinct vision for the region, characterized in part by civilizational discourses developed by IR theorists, that it demands other states publicly acknowledge.

In other words, in the explanatory model above, the causal arrows do not just move from the ‘outside-in’, but also from the ‘inside-out’. Changes in the external world of power shifts and national ideologies affect the generation of new ideas of global politics, but there is a concurrent process of ideas being deployed by sentient actors in order to shape the discursive and ideational framework of Chinese foreign policy.

The next and final section of this introductory chapter offers some methodological considerations as well as a roadmap for this dissertation.

### 3. Methodology & Overview of the Argument

This introduction and theory chapter argues that social conditions shape the development of international relations scholarship according to locally meaningful ideologies. The following empirical chapters examine this hypothesis using the case of China.

<i>Chapter-by-chapter roadmap of this dissertation</i>			
<b>Ch.</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Claim</b>	<b>Evidence and Method</b>
<b>1</b>	Introduction & Theory	Social conditions shape the development of IR theory	Literature
<b>2</b>	Chinese IR theory development	Chinese IR is a counter-hegemonic discourse	Literature
<b>3</b>	Three Chinese theories of IR	Two civilizational ideologies shape Chinese IR: hierarchy & pluralism	Newly available literature, interpretive analysis
<b>4</b>	Foreign policy & scholar-policy linkages	Scholars are instrumental in interpreting changes in official diplomatic discourse	‘Major country diplomacy’ case study; genealogy

5	International order	Two national ideologies shape China's vision for order: civilizational & socialist	Key leadership commentaries; discourse analysis
6	Regional order in Asia	China's regional strategy relies on asymmetric benevolence	Party documents, Ministry of Foreign Affairs data, interpretive analysis
7	Conclusion	Ideas and discourse are key to understanding Chinese foreign policy	Summarizing

Chapter 2 places the development of Chinese international relations theory in the context of the domestic ideology of 'reform and opening', the broader external condition of a shifting balance of power and China's rise, and in conversation with an established body of Western IR theory. Functioning meaningfully in and responding to these social conditions, it argues that Chinese School movement is a counter-hegemonic discourse that seeks to represent world politics with respect to China's own identity and experiences.

Chapter 3 critically analyzes three Chinese theories of international relations: Yan Xuetong's *moral realism*, Zhao Tingyang's *tianxia*, and the 'Shanghai School' of *gongsheng-symbiosis*. It uses newly available literature, particularly the recent development of *gongsheng-symbiosis*, which has not yet been discussed in the English-language literature, to show that China's international relations scholars are developing distinctively Chinese understandings of power, harmony, and order. Building on this discursive reframing, Chinese IR scholars are building a vision for international order that is both *hierarchical* in terms of rights and responsibilities and *pluralistic* in cultural values and socio-political systems.

Moving away from abstract theories of global politics, Chapter 4 explores the role of China's international relations scholars within powerful Party and government institutions. Looking at the case of Xi Jinping's 'major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics', this chapter uses 40 academic articles that expound on this new guiding concept to show how international relations scholars intertwined in powerful central Party and government institutions and are instrumental in interpreting the

'real-life' effects of important political concepts promulgated by the central government. It identifies seven themes that emerge from the major country diplomacy concept: temporality, relative national power, grand strategy, reforming the international system, a non-Western path to modernization, benevolent developmentalism, and enduring realism.

Chapter 5 uses a unique dataset comprised of 72 speeches and commentaries by high-level Party and government leaders between December 2012 and September 2018 to examine China's approach to international order under Xi Jinping. Through a critical discourse analysis of these key texts, it argues that there are two self-constructed traditions that shape China's vision for international order: pre-modern civilization and post-1949 socialist revolutionary. Moreover, these two traditions are embodied by contradictory ideals of pluralism and hierarchy, which are unified in an ideal vision of international order that privileges China's status as a moral leader that respects diversity and sovereignty as long as its core interests are deferred to.

Turning to regional order in Asia, Chapter 6 uses central Party documents, analysis from international relations scholars, and data from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to show that after 2012 China began to understand itself as responsible for actively managing and shaping its periphery, and China frames and legitimize its role as the regional hegemonic power by employing a mix of moralistic narratives, economic coercion, and connectivity projects. The emerging China-led regional order in Asia relies on a discursive and ideational framework that is hierarchical, transactional, and reflects newly emerged status distinctions. Xi Jinping's neighbourhood strategy rests on an asymmetric bargain: respect China's core interests in exchange for benevolence.

Each chapter is self-contained, but ultimately the goal of this dissertation is to bring out the particular conditions under which international relations is studied, conceived, and practiced in China. By examining the micro-foundations of international relations scholarship in the context of national ideology, this

dissertation draws attention to where ideas come from, how they travel and are commandeered by powerful actors for their own purposes.

## The Rise of China and International Order

*Who is the Chinese nation, what is China vis-à-vis the Western-dominated international system and how can China achieve its national goals of becoming a powerful and prosperous nation? These are the fundamental questions and major concerns of the Chinese International Relations (IR) community.*

- Qin Yaqing<sup>67</sup>

Beginning in the early 2000s, a number of Chinese scholars began to develop new critiques of Western International Relations (IR) theory. This body of scholarship, collectively referred to as the ‘Chinese School’ (*zhongguo xuepai*) movement, signals an epochal transformation of international order. The political-cultural locus of power is shifting away from the traditional heartland of the global North-West to ‘rising’ powers like China, giving way to new struggles to represent the past, present, and future of world politics. While Western IR theory is unequivocally pessimistic about the prospects of China’s peaceful rise, this new body of theory offers a decisively optimistic, even quixotic, assessment of China’s role in the world.

This chapter surveys the social conditions in which this new body of theory was produced. Following the theoretical framework set out in the introductory chapter, the Chinese School movement must be placed in the context of locally meaningful ideological debates about China’s national Self and its relation to a series of Others. National identities are never fixed and stable, but continuously revised and reinterpreted as individuals fight to ascribe their preferred identity to the state, a practice in which IR theories and theorists have an important role to play.

In this chapter, I argue that the Chinese School movement is a counter-hegemonic discourse that seeks to represent world politics with respect to China’s own identity

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<sup>67</sup> Yaqing Qin, “Development of International Relations Theory in China: Progress through Debates,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11, no. 2 (May 1, 2011): 232.

and experiences. As such, the development of Chinese IR theory should be understood in three distinct but interrelated ways: 1) As a scientific endeavor that seeks complement Western IR theory, which has long been a parochial discipline that ignores non-Western histories and sensibilities; 2) As a product of and tool in China's 'discursive struggle' with the West; and 3) As an process of identity building working to legitimate a new great power ideology for the state.

I develop these arguments in three parts. Part One conceptualizes international order as a contest over who gets to represent world politics. Part Two explains how three prominent schools of Western IR theory (realism, power transition theory, and the English School) understand what the rise of China means for international order. It shows that Western IR maintains a 'conflict or converge' logic whereby China's rise is marked by the increasing probability of war unless China adopts Western liberal institutions. Finally, Part Three provides an analysis of the emergence of the Chinese IR and the Chinese School movement, paying particular attention to the social context that has shaped its development.

### **International Order**

International order refers to the outcome of the struggle for discursive hegemony.<sup>68</sup> Different sentient agents, including state leaders, policymakers, scholars etc. seek to represent world politics in a particular way that can then be universalized and considered to be 'normal' state of affairs. A hegemonic discourse is one that is able to ascribe order to a collection of disparate actors each with their own unique experiences, endowing them with common meaning and identity, often by pitting them against a common other. Examples include the post-World War II 'liberal order' and China's pre-1911 imperial 'tributary order'.<sup>69</sup>

Since it remains a contested term, I would like to distinguish my understanding of international order (as a pattern of discursive practices) from another one that is

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<sup>68</sup> Thorsten Wojczewski, "Global Power Shifts and World Order: The Contestation of 'Western' Discursive Hegemony," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 31, no. 1 (January 2018): 33–52.

<sup>69</sup> John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

common in the literature, namely the understanding of international order as a set of *consensual* rules or institutions. This is the view taken by English School scholars, who understand international order as concerned with maintaining the ‘primary goals’ of a society of states.<sup>70</sup> It is also the view taken by prominent liberals such as John Ikenberry, who imagines international order as the ‘governing arrangement’ among states in the form of ‘the settled rules and arrangements between states that define and guide their interactions’.<sup>71</sup> This is a ‘boardroom’ understanding of international order, where at formative moments (e.g. after a destructive war), great powers come together, negotiate peacefully and arrive at a mutually agreeable set of rules between them.<sup>72</sup>

The popular understanding of international order as a set of consensual rules or institutions makes the analytical mistake of attributing a stable ontology to something that is profoundly unstable. In actuality, international order is constantly in the process of formation as individual actors with agency seek to endow their behaviour and that of others with meaning. Understood in this way directs our attention to the dynamic, performative, and even quotidian nature of international order.<sup>73</sup> In this sense, international order should be understood as a verb (‘to order’) rather than as a noun.<sup>74</sup> Great powers are important as ‘orderers’ in world politics. As Daniel Nexon writes, “The pre-eminent power [...] establishes and enforces “rules and rights” that govern international economic and political relations, as well as sets

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<sup>70</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1977), 8; Evelyn Goh, *The Struggle for Order: Hegemony, Hierarchy, and Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>71</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 12; Richard Haas also defines world order as a “stable distribution of power and broad acceptance of the rules that govern the conduct of international relations.” See: Richard Haas, “How a World Order Ends,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-12-11/how-world-order-ends>.

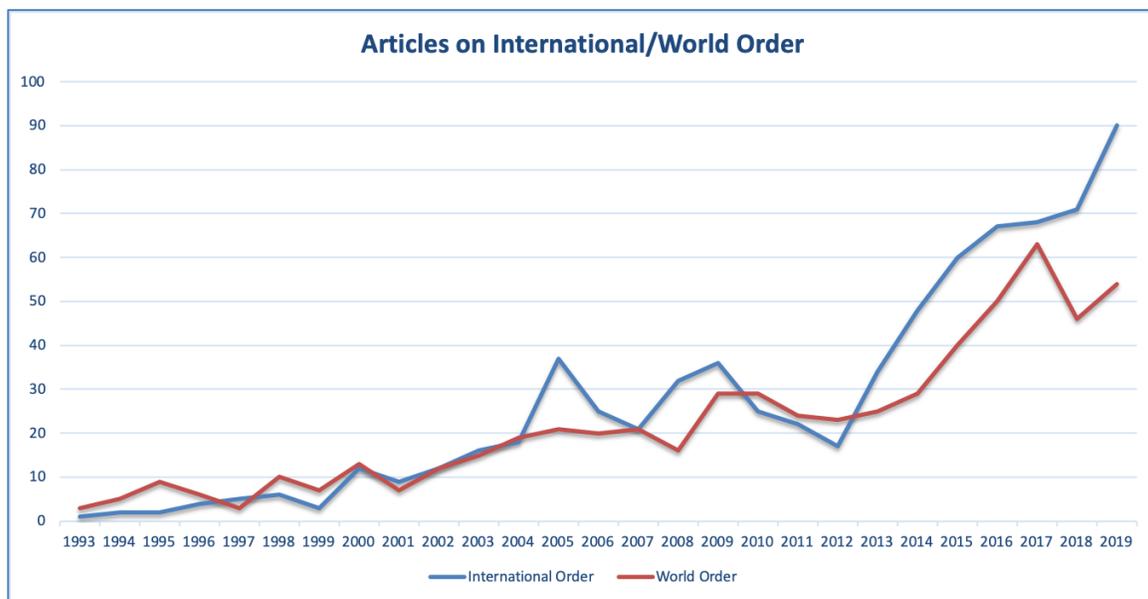
<sup>72</sup> Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace 1812-22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

<sup>73</sup> Bentley Allan, *Scientific Cosmology and International Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Randall L. Schweller, “The Problem of International Order Revisited: A Review Essay,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 161–86.

<sup>74</sup> Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony: The Unraveling of the American Global Order*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), chap. 2.

standards of relative prestige among states.’<sup>75</sup> As China’s power increases its self-perceived ‘right’ to enforce order has naturally become more salient. Indeed, following China’s emergence as a de facto great power there has been a sharp and sustained uptick in Chinese scholars discussing international order. A search on China’s national database shows that before 2011 the number of scholarly articles on ‘international order’ or ‘world order’ averaged 14.7 per year. After 2012 that number *more than tripled* to 56.9.

Figure 2



Source: Search on CNKI for subject ‘guoji zhixu’ and ‘shijie zhixu’, core journals only, February 8, 2020.

As a set of ongoing practices, international order has no true ‘essence’, but rather is continually produced and reproduced through the discursive practices of those actors who speak about, fight over, and legitimate their actions on the basis of some particular political order. International order is, to employ a term used by poststructuralists, an ‘empty signifier’. That is, it is a signifier without a clear and specified signified. Empty signifiers can accommodate multiple meanings, allowing different actors to identify with the same political project while holding contending,

<sup>75</sup> Daniel H. Nexon, *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe: Religious Conflict, Dynastic Empires, and International Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 30–31.

even contradictory, interpretations of it.<sup>76</sup> It is this emptiness that permits space for competing narratives of regional order in Asia. While the US security establishment envisions ‘a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order’, Chinese elites instead present China as a peaceful ‘participant and contributor to the global and regional order’.<sup>77</sup>

It then follows from my definition of international order as the outcome of the struggle for discursive hegemony that power shifts mean something radically different than is typically presented in the literature. In the now copious writing on power transitions and the US-China rivalry, power shifts are typically ‘measured’ in quantitative, zero-sum material resources: population, extractive capacity, GDP, military capability, etc.<sup>78</sup> By contrast, in my reading power shifts entail not just a transfer of material power from one part of the globe to another, but take on a discursive dimension whereby the existing order of fixed meanings becomes dislodged and there proceeds a struggle to define a new political order. China’s remarkable ‘rise’ and its challenge to the ‘liberal order’ then becomes a struggle to fix identities and meanings in this new constellation of power, a contest in which ideas and public rhetoric take centre stage.

### **Western IR theory and the Rise of China**

This section focuses on how China’s rise is conceptualized by three prominent IR theories: realism, power transition theory, and the English School. I do not pretend that these three theories represent the whole Western IR literature. Instead, they are chosen because they are popular frameworks that deal very directly with the issue of international order and great power relations. What emerges is worrying. These three theories are unequivocally pessimistic about the future of China’s peaceful

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<sup>76</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 69.

<sup>77</sup> “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>; “China’s Role in the Global and Regional Order: Participant, Facilitator and Contributor--Speech at the Luncheon of the Fourth World Peace Forum By H.E. Foreign Minister Wang Yi,” June 26, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/2461\\_663310/t1276595.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1276595.shtml).

<sup>78</sup> David Rapkin and William Thomson, “Power Transition, Challenge and the (Re)Emergence of China,” *International Interactions* 29, no. 4 (2003): 315–42.

engagement with the West. There is one caveat: China's peaceful rise hinges on its transition to a westernized, liberal polity. The Chinese School movement cannot be understood outside of this context of Western IR as a hegemonic discourse that both insists that culturally alien rising powers destabilize international order and that the only path to peaceful rise is through a transition to Western liberal modernity.

### *Realism*

The dominant approach for studying interstate behaviour comes from realism. In the realist tradition, world politics remains an arena of ruthless and lonely power competition where states do what they can to ensure their survival. Consider E. H. Carr, writing on the eve of the Second World War in 1939, 'Politics are, then, in one sense always power politics [...] While politics cannot be satisfactorily defined exclusively in terms of power, it is safe to say that power is always an essential element of politics.'<sup>79</sup> In the decades since Carr, realism has branched into different types.

Since the 1980s, structural realism or 'neorealism', has come to dominate the study of patterns of state behaviour. Neorealists start from the assumption that states are functionally undifferentiated 'like-units' that uniformly seek to maximize utility, which is typically defined as material power or capabilities.<sup>80</sup> In this framework, it is structural factors such as the distribution of material capacities in the international system that drives state behaviour, not sub-systemic factors such as political systems, ideologies, cultural traditions, or leadership preferences. Kenneth Waltz, the most prominent neorealist, conceives of state behaviour taking place in an anarchical system with no higher authority, which puts similar constraints on state behaviour

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<sup>79</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1946), 102.

<sup>80</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, Ill: Waveland Press, 2010); John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

across time and space, leading to predictable outcomes: states inevitably seek to balance each other.<sup>81</sup>

From neorealist frameworks that prioritize the incentives and constraints generated by the international system structure, different behavioural logics can follow. 'Defensive realists' suggest that given the balancing logic inherent in an anarchical system, states will undertake moderate and defensive strategies. As Waltz writes, 'The first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system.'<sup>82</sup> Likewise, another defensive realist, Jack Snyder, writes that 'international anarchy punishes aggression; it does not reward it.'<sup>83</sup> According to this view, China may seek to alter the balance of power without necessarily adopting an aggressive expansionist foreign policy. On the other hand, 'offensive realists' argue that international anarchy entices states to seek security by developing ever-greater capabilities. Falling in this camp, John Mearsheimer argues that China's rapidly growing material capabilities mean that it 'would not be a status quo power, but an aggressive state determined to achieve regional hegemony.'<sup>84</sup> China's growing material power, in turn, will elicit not just fear, but an attempt to balance Chinese power by its smaller neighbours.<sup>85</sup> Mearsheimer is blunt: 'China cannot rise peacefully.'<sup>86</sup>

The debate between offensive and defensive realists need not be static. Tang Shiping convincingly argues that there was an evolution from offensive realism to defensive realism in China's grand strategy as the CCP leadership transitioned from Mao Zedong

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<sup>81</sup> 'Balance-of-power politics prevail wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive.' See: Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 121.

<sup>82</sup> Waltz, 126.

<sup>83</sup> Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Cornell University Press, 2013), 11.

<sup>84</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 402.

<sup>85</sup> John Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 4 (December 1, 2010): 382.

<sup>86</sup> Mearsheimer, 382.

to Deng Xiaoping.<sup>87</sup> In doing this, Tang betrays the structural logic of neorealism and, like other defensive realists, shifts behavioural explanation instead to leadership preferences and domestic ideology. The very real shift in Chinese foreign policy that Tang points to suggests that we should not assume the outcome of China's rise by structural factors alone. Mark Beeson is right in commenting that there are 'grounds for questioning whether such predominantly state-centric analyses capture the complex nature of "China's" incorporation into the contemporary international order'.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Beijing's complicated relationship with the liberal international order, a topic that will be discussed in Chapter 5, suggests that domestic politics, leadership preferences, and ideological changes have an important role to play in shaping state behaviour.

While neorealists share an acultural and asocial framework for understanding state behaviour, some realists take seriously the role of culturally constructed ideas in constituting power politics. Alastair Iain Johnston's path-breaking book *Cultural Realism* studied the use and interpretation of classic strategic texts by foreign policy elites during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) to show that ancient China had a *parabellum* or hard realpolitik strategic culture that prioritized dealing with security threats by eliminating them through the use of force.<sup>89</sup> By grounding realpolitik in cultural and textual artifacts rather than in a determinative external structure like neorealists do, Johnston's study encourages us to look 'inside' the state, particularly at the relationship between foreign policy elites and the symbolic resources they use to justify behaviour.

There is also a strand of realism that engages with the social factor of legitimacy in international order. Here I want to focus on the writing of Henry Kissinger, who is both a prolific theorist and, through his time as U.S. National Security Advisor and

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<sup>87</sup> Shiping Tang, "From Offensive to Defensive Realism: A Social Evolutionary Interpretation of China's Security Strategy," in *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, by Robert S. Ross and Feng Zhu (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 141–62.

<sup>88</sup> Beeson, "Hegemonic Transition in East Asia?," 96.

<sup>89</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

Secretary of State to Presidents Nixon and Ford, a major practitioner of international relations. In many ways Kissinger is a prototypical political realist. His 1957 book *A World Restored*, a masterful study on the Concert of Europe told through biographies of the two statesmen Klemens von Metternich and Lord Castlereagh, explained how balance of power diplomacy assured a near century of peace among Europe's ambitious great powers after the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1815.<sup>90</sup> The role of pragmatic great powers in ensuring peaceful world order remains a continuous theme in his work.

Kissinger argues that there are two preconditions for any stable order: a balance of power and a 'generally accepted legitimacy' among the major states.<sup>91</sup> Here, power is understood in the purely material sense, as military force, while legitimacy is ideational and refers to a 'set of commonly accepted rules that define the limits of permissible action'.<sup>92</sup> There is thus a normative component to Kissinger's realism and a persistent tension between power and legitimacy. When a new power rises the 'old rules' are naturally called into question.

Kissingerian realism is often contrasted with Wilsonian idealism, or the belief that American power should be used to further liberal democratic values around the globe. As one reviewer of his 2014 book *World Order* writes, 'Kissinger pleads for a kind of multicultural tolerance when it comes to international relations.'<sup>93</sup> But underneath this pragmatism is a deeper assumption that some degree of cultural homogeneity is a necessary precondition to arrive at a legitimate order in the first place. In 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, the focus of much of Kissinger's work, borders and loyalties were fluid as diplomats routinely served monarchs of other nationalities while working in a milieu made up of shared moral codes regarding honour and duty. This 'common European outlook'<sup>94</sup> served to buttress the stability of the international

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<sup>90</sup> Kissinger, *A World Restored*.

<sup>91</sup> Kissinger, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 9.

<sup>93</sup> Jacob Heilbrunn, "Kissingerian Realism," *American Review*, August 24, 2015, <https://www.ussc.edu.au/analysis/kissingerian-realism>.

<sup>94</sup> Kissinger, *World Order*, 38.

order that followed the 1814 Congress of Vienna. Kissinger concedes that it is easier to arrive at a consensus on the balance between power and legitimacy 'the smaller geographic area to which it applies and the more coherent the cultural convictions within it.'<sup>95</sup> This concession will become important when it comes to China. The inverse of the cultural unity thesis is made explicit: a group of states 'unrelated to each other by history or values [...] is likely to generate conflict, not order.'<sup>96</sup>

It is here where civilizational essentialism rears its head. A key question in world order building, Kissinger argues, involves 'unifying principles'.<sup>97</sup> These are akin to distinct worldviews embedded in civilizational histories. For Enlightenment Europe, a central principle was the development of rationality, scientific knowledge, and individual reason to acquire and systematize empirical truths about the universe.<sup>98</sup> This new way of thinking about the world, free from the blind dictates of religious faith or imperial fiat, had revolutionary effects not just in the natural sciences, but also on the politics of international order. As Kissinger writes, 'The Westphalian peace represented a judgment of reality – particularly realities of power and territory – as a temporal ordering concept over the demands of religion.'<sup>99</sup>

This distinction between a modern sensibility, where rational analysis is used to recognize the real balance of power, and one based on tradition or faith forms for Kissinger, the 'cardinal distinction between Western and non-Western approaches to order.'<sup>100</sup> That is to say, the very possibility of stable and legitimate order between the major European powers depended itself on a more fundamental notion of how individuals within Western civilization understand reality, one that was absent elsewhere. In the other great civilizations – Islamic, Confucian, Hindu – 'reality was

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<sup>95</sup> Kissinger, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Kissinger, 9–10.

<sup>97</sup> Kissinger, 363.

<sup>98</sup> Kissinger, 38.

<sup>99</sup> Kissinger, 363.

<sup>100</sup> Kissinger, 363.

conceived as internal to the observer, defined by psychological, philosophical, or religious convictions.’<sup>101</sup>

The dualism between European rationality and Oriental traditionalism becomes clearer when Kissinger turns his focus to China. ‘Of all conceptions of world order in Asia,’ Kissinger writes, ‘China operated the longest lasting, the most clearly defined, and the one furthest from Westphalian ideas.’<sup>102</sup> Drawing from the Fairbankian School of Chinese historiography, Kissinger conceptualizes pre-modern Asia’s international relations as one of a millennia-long Sinocentric tribute system.<sup>103</sup> In this isolated Chinese world order, there was no notion of equal sovereigns competing for power, as in Europe. Instead, the Chinese empire, complacent in its cultural supremacy, conceived the political universe as a universal hierarchy with the Chinese emperor atop. When smaller ‘barbarian’ kingdoms engaged in tributary relations with the empire, they participated in elaborate symbolic rituals that signified their deference and submission to the Chinese emperor.<sup>104</sup> The unifying principles that Kissinger identifies with this international order – hierarchy, cultural superiority, ceremony, tributary relations – animated China’s behaviour with other powers well into its violent entry into European international society in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>105</sup> This notion of a unitary, self-enclosed Chinese world order is a problematic concept that has come under heavy criticism by modern historians.<sup>106</sup>

Given Kissinger’s association with *realpolitik* based on an unsentimental pursuit of the national interest, it is surprising to see such a prominent place given to culture in

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<sup>101</sup> Kissinger, 363.

<sup>102</sup> Kissinger, 213.

<sup>103</sup> Kissinger, 213–20.

<sup>104</sup> Kissinger, 213–16.

<sup>105</sup> Kissinger, 213–25.

<sup>106</sup> James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Pamela Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); James A. Millward, ed., *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004); Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power, and Connections, 580–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

his discussion of China's rise and the future of international order. This stems from his normative understanding of order, which ultimately requires not just a balance of material power but a degree of common legitimacy among its members. It is in the building and maintaining of legitimate rules at the inter-state level where local values and histories matter. The power shift from the Global North to China and the developing world, then, makes garnering legitimacy for the contemporary international order an exercise in cross-cultural dialogue. But Kissinger's understanding of cultures as coherent, essentialized, territorially-bounded units organized around a set of deeper unifying principles, in the end, hinders any imagination of a future non-Western centred international order.

### *Power Transition Theory*

Power transition theory, a research agenda spawned from the 1958 publication of A.F.K. Organski's *World Politics*, tackles the problem of power shifts from a contrarian perspective. While realists, including Kissinger, generally assume that a balance of power among states is conducive to peace while asymmetry is conducive to war, Organski and his followers claim precisely the opposite: the highest risk of war occurs when a dominant power faces a dissatisfied rising power.<sup>107</sup> In the decades since its origin, power transition theory has produced a lively and ongoing research agenda on the dynamics of great power transitions in world politics.<sup>108</sup>

Power transition theorists conceptualize the international system as a pyramid-shaped hierarchical structure with a single dominant power sitting at its apex, a number of lesser great powers below it, and a greater number of middle and small powers below that.<sup>109</sup> The dominant state uses its superior economic and military power to order international systems: they 'establish the rules of the game; provide impure public, club, and private goods – such as security and trading systems; allocate

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<sup>107</sup> A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1958); A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>108</sup> Ronald L. Tammen, Jacek Kugler, and Douglas Lemke, *Foundations of Power Transition Theory*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.296>.

<sup>109</sup> Organski, *World Politics*, 365.

status and prestige; and even shape “domestic politics” in subordinate polities’.<sup>110</sup> As a potential challenger increases in power it attempts to change the rules governing the system.<sup>111</sup> It is a dynamic model where, due to uneven growth rates, the state sitting at the apex of the global hierarchy is constantly changing. The British Empire declined in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century as global dominance was ceded to the United States, while theorists predict another inevitable power transition to China sometime in the second half of this century.<sup>112</sup>

Power transition theory posits three causal variables that determine the likelihood of war occurring between a rising power and the dominant power: parity, overtaking, and satisfaction. The first two factors, parity and overtaking, are measures of relative material power, which in most formulations is a function of national GDP and political capacity to extract resources. A condition of parity is defined as another state having

Figure 3: Share of US GDP, at peak <sup>113</sup>		
<b>USSR</b>	1976	51%
<b>Japan</b>	1991	54%
<b>China</b>	2018	60%

80 percent of the power of the dominant state and continues until the overtaker’s power becomes more than 120 percent of the former dominant state, after which parity ceases.<sup>114</sup> Importantly, within this zone of

parity the likelihood of war between the dominant power and rising power is highest.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Daniel H. Nexon and Iver B. Neumann, “Hegemonic-Order Theory: A Field-Theoretic Account,” *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 3 (September 2018): 3.

<sup>111</sup> Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 187.

<sup>112</sup> Tammen and Kugler forecast that China will overtake the US somewhere between 2025 and 2035, and will become the leading nation in the international system by 2075. Ronald L. Tammen and Jacek Kugler, “Power Transition and China–US Conflicts,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 1 (2006): 75.

<sup>113</sup> USSR figures, which are figured in constant 1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars, come from: Jutta Bolt et al., “Maddison Project Database, Version 2018,” 2018, <https://www.rug.nl/ggdc/historicaldevelopment/maddison/releases/maddison-project-database-2018>; Japan and China figures: World Bank, “GDP (Constant US\$),” February 12, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>.

<sup>114</sup> Ronald L. Tammen et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House, 2000), 31; Rapkin and Thomson use a simpler metric for power: GDP. Rapkin and Thomson, “Power Transition, Challenge and the (Re)Emergence of China,” 323.

<sup>115</sup> Tammen et al., *Power Transitions*, 31; Organski, *World Politics*, chapter 14; Andrew Q. Greve and Jack S. Levy, “Power Transitions, Status Dissatisfaction, and War: The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895,” *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 148–78.

While power transition theorists define a ‘challenger’ as a rising power that has acquired 80 percent of the capabilities of the dominant state, in their assessment of the logic of American hegemony, Chinese strategists have pointed to a much lower threshold: 60 percent. Ruan Zongze, scholar and advisor to the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, notes that America has met two potential hegemonic challengers before: the Soviet Union and Japan.

In both instances, when the challenger’s economy grew to more than 60 percent of America’s, the dominant state struck back - in the former case the United States upgraded its containment policy, and in the latter case it responded with the Plaza Accord. For Ruan, the lesson is clear: as soon as a potential challenger crosses the 60 percent threshold, a milestone that the World Bank estimates China broke through in 2018, America will ‘ruthlessly attack its challenger’.<sup>116</sup>

Power transition theorists hold that two of three causal factors for war will be present in the Sino-American relationship: parity and overtaking.<sup>117</sup> Given China’s massive population (1.3 billion as of 2018) and rapidly growing economy, the question of overtaking seems not to be *if* but *when*. The potential power of a fully industrialized China awed Organski, who in 1958 wrote: ‘Her power potential is almost incalculable. [...] she is so large that with even a modest improvement in economic efficiency she will pass Russia (population, 230 million) with ease. And she will eventually pass the United States as well. The question is not whether China will become the most powerful nation on earth, but rather how long it will take her to achieve this status.’<sup>118</sup>

In addition to parity and overtaking, the third condition for war is the level of satisfaction the rising power has with the rules, institutions and status ranking that make up the extant international order. A dissatisfied challenger that has achieved

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<sup>116</sup> Zongze Ruan, “中国还能韬光养晦吗 (Can China Still Keep a Low Profile?),” *Global Times*, May 11, 2018, <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/hqpl/2018-05/12009869.html?agt=15435>.

<sup>117</sup> Jack S. Levy, “Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China,” in *China’s Ascent*, ed. Robert S. Ross and Feng Zhu (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 17; Rapkin and Thomson, “Power Transition, Challenge and the (Re)Emergence of China,” 324; Tammen et al., *Power Transitions*, 19; Organski, *World Politics*, 484–89.

<sup>118</sup> Organski, *World Politics*, 486.

parity is expected to seek to overthrow the old order in favour a new one that better reflects its power, interests, and new status.<sup>119</sup> Unsurprisingly, the effort to gauge whether China has revisionist intentions or is a status quo power has spawned an enormous amount of research.<sup>120</sup>

One would assume that given power transition theory's mechanical and deterministic understanding of world politics that culture has no role to play in the rise and fall of great powers. Indeed, a 2017 summary of the research programme by its core researchers contains nearly no reference to ideas, culture, worldviews or religion.<sup>121</sup> This is despite 'satisfaction' being a deeply psychological notion. Perhaps due to power transition theory's ambitions to be a 'scientific' theory of world politics, theorists have instead attempted to use other quantifiable proxies to gauge satisfaction, including measuring the associations among alliances, the buildup of arms, the transfer of arms, and the movement of money.<sup>122</sup>

But it is precisely in the causal factor of satisfaction where deeper cultural assumptions emerge. The satisfaction-grievance continuum is a function of both economic benefit and institutional similarity. That is to say, power transition theory assumes rising powers that share common social, political, and cultural institutions with the hegemon are more satisfied with international order than they would be otherwise. Consider the two key modern cases for power transition theory: the Anglo-American power transition in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Anglo-German transition in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In both cases a challenger state overtook the dominant state, but in the first case the transition from British to American

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<sup>119</sup> Greve and Levy, "Power Transitions, Status Dissatisfaction, and War."

<sup>120</sup> Steve Chan, Weixing Hu, and Kai He, "Discerning States' Revisionist and Status-Quo Orientations: Comparing China and the US," *European Journal of International Relations*, October 31, 2018; Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 5-56; Suisheng Zhao, "A Revisionist Stakeholder: China and the Post-World War II World Order," *Journal of Contemporary China* 27, no. 113 (2018): 643-58; Barry Buzan, "China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 5-36; Scott L. Kastner and Phillip C. Saunders, "Is China a Status Quo or Revisionist State? Leadership Travel as an Empirical Indicator of Foreign Policy Priorities," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2012): 163-77.

<sup>121</sup> Tammen, Kugler, and Lemke, *Foundations of Power Transition Theory*.

<sup>122</sup> Tammen, Kugler, and Lemke.

predominance was peaceful while the Anglo-German transition ended in the First World War. What explains this discrepancy in outcomes? The key difference, Jack Levy notes, is that 'the United States shared British political and economic institutions, liberal democratic culture, and the British vision of the desirable political, economic, and legal international order.'<sup>123</sup> In other words, politico-cultural similarity served as a lubricant for the peaceful transition of international order by helping to determine the degree to which the dominant state's new order was seen as legitimate by other lesser powers. Because a rising America accepted the basic contours of the existing Anglo-French international order, England was willingly to peacefully cede its dominant position.

Power transition theory's static view of culture and international order means that the likely peacefulness of the certain Sino-American power transition depends to a large degree on the westernization of China.<sup>124</sup> Tammen and Kugler, who understand the Sino-US dyad as one of the only possibilities for major war, rest their policy prescriptions on forcing China's convergence with the 'prevailing rules and norms' of international order.<sup>125</sup> The alternative is violent conflict. For example, Lemke and Tammen assert that if China surpasses the United States in power, but it holds 'deep-seated grievances against the West, its culture, and its imposed international rules and norms, then the probability of war rises dramatically.'<sup>126</sup>

This does three things. First, it presupposes a unified and homogeneous 'West', and its corollary 'Western culture', without interrogating the myriad coexisting, and often contradictory, traditions within the West. Indeed, as the violent Anglo-German power transition in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century shows, states within the European cultural zone can have unbridgeable differences in political culture, national mythologies, and visions

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<sup>123</sup> Levy, "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China," 12; Organski came to the same conclusion. See: Organski, *World Politics*, 362.

<sup>124</sup> Tammen and Kugler, "Power Transition and China-US Conflicts," 53-55.

<sup>125</sup> Tammen and Kugler, "Power Transition and China-US Conflicts."

<sup>126</sup> Douglas Lemke and Ronald L. Tammen, "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China," *International Interactions* 29, no. 4 (2003): 270; Elsewhere, Rapkin and Thomson explain that 'Dissimilarities in race, institutions, and economic organizing principles, and ideology aggravate conflicts between system leaders and their challengers'. Rapkin and Thomson, "Power Transition, Challenge and the (Re)Emergence of China," 320.

of ideal community. Second, power transition theory assumes a unidirectional relationship between Western powers (especially the United States) and the post-war international order whereby American-preferred institutions were enforced upon the non-West.<sup>127</sup> It logically follows that a culturally alien China will challenge this order when it becomes powerful enough. This assumption, however, elides the manifold ways in which non-Western actors, including China, have been instrumental in driving the development of the post-war international order, including its key pillars of sovereignty, non-intervention, universal human rights and multilateralism.<sup>128</sup>

Third, and most relevant here, is power transition theory puts the onus of cultural adaptation on China. The probability of future war is determined by the willingness of China to accept Western ideas and practices, not the ability of Western powers to adjust themselves to China. Writing in China's most prominent English-language political science journal, Tammen and Kugler remarkably call on the international community to lead in the 'modernization of Chinese society' by 'bringing with them to China the concepts of tolerance for diverse ideas, equal treatment under the law [...] and the responsibility of world citizenship.'<sup>129</sup> Elsewhere, Jack Levy explains that China's level of satisfaction with the current international order is, in part, a function of it adopting liberal democratic institutions.<sup>130</sup> In other words, the uncompromising extension of Western political institutions into China, and the latter's adoption of liberal modes of governance, forms the basis for a peaceful power transition.

### *The English School*

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<sup>127</sup> Tammen and Kugler, "Power Transition and China-US Conflicts," 39; Rapkin and Thomson, "Power Transition, Challenge and the (Re)Emergence of China," 326-27.

<sup>128</sup> On China and sovereignty, see: Jeremy Paltiel, *The Empire's New Clothes: Cultural Particularism and Universal Value in China's Quest for Global Status* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); On the role of the global South, see: Amitav Acharya, "Studying the Bandung Conference from a Global IR Perspective," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 70, no. 4 (2016): 342-57; Ahmad Rizky Mardhatillah Umar, "Rethinking the Legacies of Bandung Conference: Global Decolonization and the Making of the Modern International Order," *Asian Politics & Policy* 11, no. 3 (2019): 461-78.

<sup>129</sup> Tammen and Kugler, "Power Transition and China-US Conflicts," 54.

<sup>130</sup> Levy, "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China," 17.

For the English School, cultural unity serves as the *sine qua non* of a stable and legitimate ‘international society’, which, in its classic formulation, ‘exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, forms a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.’<sup>131</sup> The emergence, expansion, and interaction of different regional international societies throughout history are a core concern of the English School. While culture has not always been the primary focus of English School writers, as Jacinta O’Hagan notes, ‘assumptions about culture are woven into the discussion of the constitution, maintenance, and purpose of international society.’<sup>132</sup> This section discusses some of these assumptions while maintaining a particular focus on China.

At the heart of the English School’s story of global politics is the formation of an international society in Christian Europe and then its expansion around the world.<sup>133</sup> Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century, complex and historically contingent events like the Renaissance and the Reformation broke down the universal authority of the Catholic Church as power was transferred downward to sovereigns within separate territorial boundaries. The practice of *cuius regio, eius religio* (‘whose realm, his religion’) was adopted by these new states along with its corollary principle of absolute sovereignty and non-interference in each other’s affairs. From the initial formation of this society until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Western Europe was dominated by five states: England, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and France. While these states had intensive contact with other civilizations through trade, colonialism and war, membership in this international society remained restricted to Christian Europeans until 1856 when the Ottoman Empire joined the Treaty of Paris that concluded the Crimean War, formally marking the expansion of European international society to

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<sup>131</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 13.

<sup>132</sup> Jacinta O’Hagan, “The Question of Culture,” in *International Society and Its Critics*, ed. Alex J. Bellamy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 209.

<sup>133</sup> Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

the non-Western world.<sup>134</sup> The spread of European rules and institutions continued, often underwritten by force, and by the First World War there emerged a truly global society of states.

For the early writers of the English School – Martin Wight, Hedley Bull, Adam Watson, and Gerrit Gong – a shared culture served as the fundamental ingredient to the emergence and maintenance of an international society. In his *Systems of States*, Martin Wight claimed that ‘a states system will not come into being without a degree of cultural unity among its members’.<sup>135</sup> Wight included comparative case studies on three distinct states-systems, each of which ‘arose within a single culture’: the Western, the Greco-Roman, and the Chinese during the Warring States period.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, Hedley Bull writes that historical examples of international systems like the Greek, Chinese, and the states-system of ancient India, ‘were all founded upon a common culture or civilization, or at least on some of the elements of such a civilization: a common language, a common epistemology and understanding of the universe, a common religion, a common ethical code, a common aesthetic or artistic tradition.’<sup>137</sup> This is similar to Kissinger’s ‘unifying principles’. A shared cultural framework facilitates the intersubjective definition of rules and institutions, as well as reinforces a shared sense of common interests, which impels states to accept these rules and institutions.<sup>138</sup>

There are two conceptual issues here. First is the English School’s understanding of culture as a set of unitary and consensual values. For Bull, culture is a society’s ‘basic system of values, the premises from which its thought and action derive.’<sup>139</sup> Here, cultures have ‘essences’ that determine not just individual behaviour, but a given

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<sup>134</sup> Thomas Naff, “The Ottoman Empire and the European States System,” in *The Expansion of International Society*, ed. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 143–69; Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 14.

<sup>135</sup> Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), 33.

<sup>136</sup> Wight, 33.

<sup>137</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 15.

<sup>138</sup> Bull, 15; The idea that a common culture was the first step in the formation of an international society can be traced back to A. H. L. Heeren, and was influential in the British Committee meetings. See: Barry Buzan, “Culture and International Society,” *International Affairs* 86, no. 1 (2010): 1.

<sup>139</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 61.

society's socio-political institutions. Adda Bozeman presents culture as a substratum of 'certain primary structuring ideas' that determines the 'general cast' of a given society's religions, art styles, dispositions to the outside world, and range of political systems that a given society can create or accept if imposed from the outside.<sup>140</sup> What logically follows is that Chinese culture is incompatible with an international society that has grown out of Judeo-Christian European culture.

Second is the conception of regional international systems as clustered around a dominant civilization from which springs that system's distinctive rules and institutions. Presaging Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, Bull and Watson posited five regional international systems that existed prior to the global spread of European international society: medieval Latin Christendom, the Arab-Islamic system, the states-system of the Indian subcontinent, the Mongol-Tartar civilizations in Eurasia, and the Mongol-dominated Chinese system.<sup>141</sup> Each of these self-contained civilizational clusters, outside of which 'lay areas of less developed culture', were characterized not only by distinct languages and religious traditions, but also common pools of memories, ways of thinking, and moral codes that not only shape the outcome of inter-civilizational contact, but linger long after.<sup>142</sup>

These two conceptions of culture and international society come together in China's violent experience with European international society. Gerrit Gong, the early English School scholar that deals most extensively with China, like Kissinger, frames the traditional Chinese-centred states-system as a Confucian hierarchy with the Chinese emperor at its apex, where lesser kingdoms offer tribute to the emperor in a ritual performance of submission. Gong posits the Chinese emperor presiding over an all-encompassing cosmic-moral order inclusive of both 'civilized' and 'barbarians', the latter who could become civilized by adhering to proper Confucian standards of

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<sup>140</sup> Adda Bozeman, "The International Order in a Multicultural World," in *The Expansion of International Society*, ed. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 387.

<sup>141</sup> Bull and Watson, *The Expansion of International Society*, 2.

<sup>142</sup> Bull and Watson, 2; For example, Naff writes that although the Muslim Ottoman Empire formally joined Christian European international society in 1856, 'Values, outlooks on life, behaviour patterns, and beliefs remained culturally disparate.' See: Naff, "The Ottoman Empire and the European States System," 169.

behaviour. The arrival of British plenipotentiary Lord Macartney to Canton in 1792, and his famous refusal to perform the 'full' kowtow to the Qianlong emperor (kneeling three times and bowing one's head to the ground thrice during each repetition), is posited ultimately as a clash of cultures, the meeting of two 'fundamentally irreconcilable standards of "civilization"' after which the self-contained Sinocentric states-system collapsed as China was forced into European international society.<sup>143</sup> As such, China's forced entry into international society, including its adoption of previously alien concepts of international law and sovereign equality, fits into the English School's narrative of the expansion of European institutions around the world throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Barry Buzan complicates this narrative by introducing the transformation to liberal modernity that occurred in leading Western states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing from Justin Rosenberg's *The Empire of Civil Society* and Douglass North and colleagues' *Violence and Social Orders*, Buzan re-conceptualizes the evolution of international society as one of a modernization from 'natural states' to 'open access orders'.<sup>144</sup> The former refers to authoritarian states characterized by 'dispersal of control over the means of violence, personal relationships (patron-client), and preferential access to rents for elites.'<sup>145</sup> Natural states, on the other hand, are products of the world historical transformation that occurred first in the production process and then in the social composition inside states, and are marked by 'centralization of control over violence, impersonal (i.e. contractual, rule-governed) relationships, giving people rights and allowing mass access to rents, big government, and a general openness to the creation of private (and public) organizations that are long-lived in their own right.' The story of the expansion of European international society then becomes one of a global transformation to liberal modernity as open-access orders in the Western core expand outward into the old, authoritarian natural states in the non-West.

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<sup>143</sup> Gerrit W. Gong, "China's Entry into International Society," in *The Expansion of International Society*, ed. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 172.

<sup>144</sup> Buzan, "Culture and International Society."

<sup>145</sup> Buzan, 15.

Failing to move beyond the cultural unity thesis of classical English School writers, Buzan repackages its logic for a new generation of theorists grown up on modernization theory. China's conflictual relationship with the West is couched not in terms of an insular civilization with an irreconcilable worldview, but rather on its failure to adapt to liberal modernity. Buzan posits China as state that has, since the late 1970s, embraced market reforms but not all elements of liberal modernity, particularly western political institutions, and thus remains a 'natural state', but one that is in a period of transition to liberal modernity. Moreover, the future prospect of peaceful international society is linked to China's acceptance or rejection of the westernization process. If China evolves, then there will be enough cultural unity to stabilize international society. If however, Buzan writes, 'rather than trying to come to terms with western liberal values', China decides to stick with 'its priorities of sovereignty, non-intervention, regime security, cultural distinctiveness, nationalism, and managed economic development', then international society will likely slip into a two-tier structure of regionalism based around civilizational nodes.<sup>146</sup> Cultural transmission is thus a one-way street, with liberal modernity from the Western world bearing down on a recalcitrant Chinese state.

#### *Pillars of a hegemonic discourse*

It is not difficult to read these theories in a Coxian light. Grown out of the desire to preserve the existing political order in which the West holds a privileged place, the hegemonic discourse of Western IR generally assumes two outcomes for China's rise: conflict or conversion. This rests on the following key assumptions regarding international order and rising powers: 1) Stable and legitimate international order requires an underlying shared culture; 2) China is becoming a great power in an international order constituted by liberal powers, norms and institutions. Liberal modernity is the shared culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; and 3) The likelihood of China's peaceful rise depends on its transitioning to liberal modernity.

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<sup>146</sup> Buzan, 22.

## The counter-hegemonic discourse: Indigenizing IR Theory in China

The trajectory of IR theory in China has followed dramatic shifts in domestic ideology and their effects on social science. Between 1949 and 1954 the CCP abolished political science as an independent discipline due to its suspected 'bourgeois' tendencies.<sup>147</sup> Research on world politics during the first decades of the PRC relied on Marxism-Leninism and concepts derived from Mao Zedong's worldview. It was not until the beginning of 'reform and opening up' in the late 1970s that independent scientific studies of international relations could genuinely begin. In the spring of 1979, newly ensconced as China's paramount leader and eager to modernize the country, Deng Xiaoping issued instructions that the field of world politics, including political science and legal studies, 'had to make up for lost time'.<sup>148</sup>

During the post-1978 reform period, efforts to indigenize IR theory in China have gone through two stages.<sup>149</sup> During the first stage, starting in the mid-1980s, Chinese scholars tried to develop what they referred to as 'IR theory with Chinese characteristics'.<sup>150</sup> A watershed in this indigenization process happened in August 1987 when the first nationwide gathering of international relations scholars in the history of the PRC took place. The impulse for this unprecedented confluence of scholars was a series of consequential changes in Beijing's international relations that occurred during the reform period, including peaceful relations with the Soviet and American empires and the new emphasis on economic modernization. The most pressing issue was the possibility of developing a theoretical system for predicting changes in international relations in order to formulate correct strategy and policy. Such a theory, Huan Xiang proposed, should 'be based on China, face the world and

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<sup>147</sup> Jon R. Taylor, "Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom, Let One Hundred Thoughts Contend: Political Science with Chinese Characteristics," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 16, no. 3 (September 2011): 326.

<sup>148</sup> Shoude Liang, "论国际政治学理论的'中国特色'(International Political Theory with 'Chinese Characteristics')," *外交学院学报 (Journal of Foreign Affairs College)* 2 (1997): 41.

<sup>149</sup> Peng, "Chinese IR Sino-Centrism Tradition and Its Influence on the Chinese School Movement."

<sup>150</sup> Yuliang Zhao, Xiaochun Zhao, and Shulong Chu, "关于建立有中国特色的国际关系学体系 - 上海国际关系理论讨论会纪要," *Contemporary International Relations* 4 (1987): 3-6; Liang, "International Political Theory with 'Chinese Characteristics.'"

analyze the objective development laws of the shifts in international politics from a Chinese perspective.’<sup>151</sup>

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the Western IR canon was translated into Chinese and filtered into PRC academia, quickly becoming the dominant framework to interpret China’s foreign affairs. Calls for a unique Chinese IR theory began to grow louder. By 2007, research using realism, liberalism and constructivism filled Chinese publications, causing consternation among scholars.<sup>152</sup> Citing the dominance of Western approaches in the way IR was studied in China, two scholars, Mei Ran of Peking University and Ren Xiao of Fudan University, both called for the development of a ‘Chinese School’ of IR (*zhongguo xuepai*).<sup>153</sup>

During the second stage, beginning in the early 2000s, Chinese scholars have embarked on an ambitious attempt to create a unique Chinese School of IR.<sup>154</sup> Four notable theories emerged from this movement and have been subject to intense debate: Zhao Tingyang’s *Tianxia*, Yan Xuetong’s *moral realism*, Qin Yaqing’s *relationality*, and the ‘Shanghai School’ of symbiosis. A critical and in depth reading of these theories will be provided in Chapter 3. Here I want to suggest three ways to understand the Chinese School movement: as a scientific enterprise, as a discursive struggle, and as identity construction.

### 1. Theory as Scientific Enterprise

In the first instance, the effort to depart from Western political science and develop Chinese theories is a natural and expected product of disciplinary development. Indigenization and ‘methodological nationalism’, derided by more cosmopolitan-oriented scholars, are not abnormal and should not be rejected out of hand.<sup>155</sup> Nor is

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<sup>151</sup> Xiao Ren, “走自主发展之路—争论中的‘中国学派’ (‘The Road of Independent Development: The ‘Chinese School’ Debate’),” *International Politics Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2009): 17.

<sup>152</sup> Qin, “Development of International Relations Theory in China,” 245.

<sup>153</sup> Ran Mei, “该不该有国际政治理论的中国学派?——兼评美国的国际政治理论 (‘Should There Be a Chinese School of International Political Theory? A Discussion of American Political Theory’),” *Studies of International Politics*, 2000, 63–67; Ren, “走自主发展之路—争论中的‘中国学派’ (‘The Road of Independent Development: The ‘Chinese School’ Debate’).”

<sup>154</sup> Zhang and Chang, *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations*.

<sup>155</sup> Daniel Chernilo, “Social Theory’s Methodological Nationalism: Myth and Reality,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 1 (February 2006): 5–22.

the phenomenon unique to China. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the study of political science in the United States was drawn primarily from European, particularly German, sources.<sup>156</sup> But within a generation, political science had been indigenized, focusing on the study of American politics.<sup>157</sup> At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, dominant frameworks for understanding international politics are overwhelming based on European history and practice and are likewise seen as lacking relevancy to managing China's rise today. Under Xi Jinping, the state has accelerated this trend of indigenization by modifying incentives for scholars.<sup>158</sup>

Chinese scholars remain skeptical of the universal validity of Western IR. Nevertheless, most scholars retain the goal of developing indigenous theories not to replace Western IR theories but rather to enrich them.<sup>159</sup> The search for a Chinese School of IR means reflecting on the lessons provided by Chinese history and philosophy to answer contemporary problems.<sup>160</sup> It is about finding problems that Western IR theory fails to explain, or cannot provide satisfactory answers to, and looking back to the Chinese experience to search for better answers. In 2005, Qin Yaqing posited that a Chinese School could be built around the core problématique of a great power peacefully integrating into international society.<sup>161</sup> This would serve as a counter to neorealist scenarios that foresee an inevitable conflict between rising powers and established powers.

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<sup>156</sup> John G. Gunnell, *The Descent of Political Theory: The Genealogy of an American Vocation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>157</sup> Taylor, "Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom, Let One Hundred Thoughts Contend," 329.

<sup>158</sup> Yojana Sharma, "China Shifts from Reliance on International Publications," *University World News*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200225181649179>.

<sup>159</sup> Some scholars certainly do not view Western theories as benign and thus decry China's dependent relationship to Western social science. See: Lanxin Xiang, "'Waijiao Yanjiu Buneng Kao Xifang Lilun' ('Research in International Relations Must Not Depend on Western Theory')," *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times)*, December 29, 2009.

<sup>160</sup> Zhang, "The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations," 80.

<sup>161</sup> Yaqing Qin, "国际关系理论的核心问题与中国学派的生成 ('The Core Problems of International Relations Theory and the Birth of a Chinese School of International Relations')," *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue (Social Sciences in China)*, no. 3 (2005): 175.

As Lu Peng argues, two different approaches to knowledge making underlie the theoretical output of the Chinese School movement.<sup>162</sup> The first begins with ancient and modern Chinese thought to arrive at a unique understanding of the ontology of world politics. Here China's contribution to IR theory draws from local sources of thought including Confucian philosophy, Sinicized Marxism, and PRC leadership strategic thinking. Emblematic is the 'Tsinghua Approach', a research programme inaugurated by Yan Xuetong that applies the scientific method to the empirical study of pre-Qin interstate relations and political thought.<sup>163</sup> Also drawing on Chinese thought is the Shanghai-based symbiosis theory, which applies an eclectic combination of Marxist-Leninist theory, PRC diplomatic history, and the Confucian tradition of pluralism to the study of China's historic and modern ordering practices.<sup>164</sup>

One distinctive characteristic of Chinese IR building is the inclusion of the strategic thinking of PRC leaders as a legitimate object of study. For example, both Hu Jintao's 'harmonious world' and Xi Jinping's 'community of shared destiny' are seen as offering alternatives to Western visions of international order, while their underlying idealism is said to counter the realist assumption that the rise of new powers are violent affairs.<sup>165</sup>

A second approach to knowledge making begins with traditional Chinese logic of social practices to arrive at a unique way of making sense of the world. Notable here is Qin Yaqing's theory of relationality, which starts with the assumption of actors existing in a social world of relationships that shape, enable and constrain

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<sup>162</sup> Lu, "Two Approaches to Chinese IR Theory."

<sup>163</sup> Zhang, "The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations"; Jin Xu and Xuefeng Sun, "The Tsinghua Approach and the Future Direction of Chinese International Relations Research," in *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations: Ongoing Debates and Sociological Realities*, ed. Yongjin Zhang and Teng-Chi Chang, 2016, 162–76.

<sup>164</sup> Xiao Ren, ed., *共生: 上海学派的兴起 (Gongsheng: The Rise of a Shanghai School)* (Shanghai: 上海译文出版社, 2015).

<sup>165</sup> Liang Cai, "共生国际体系的优化: 从和平共处到命运共同体('Optimizing the Gongsheng System: From Peaceful Coexistence to Community of Common Destiny')," *Shehui Kexue* 9 (2014).

behaviour.<sup>166</sup> Drawing from Chinese dialectics, Qin posits that actors-in-relations are in a continuous process of formation. In this way, the ontology of global politics shifts away from discrete and separate actors to relations themselves, thereby reimagining international relations as an agglomeration of processual relationships.

While the discipline heeds calls for 'Global IR', there still remain foundational questions about the universalizability of IR theory.<sup>167</sup> Indeed, the Chinese School movement suggests that social science theory is culturally and politically bounded. The impetus for the first wave of indigenization of IR theory in China stemmed from the belief that social science, and especial the study of international relations, is always self-interested and infused with power relations.<sup>168</sup> These foundational debates about science, a regular fixture of Western debates, naturally divide Chinese scholars as well. Following his understanding of IR theories emerging from particular national circumstances that shape the social milieu of theorizing, Qin Yaqing advocates that a Chinese School begin from China's evolving identity in international society.<sup>169</sup> On the other side, Yan Xuetong has been a vocal opponent to the Chinese School movement.<sup>170</sup> Instead, Yan seeks a systematic theory of IR that can be universalizable, which he attempts to do in his theory of moral realism.<sup>171</sup> Other prominent theorists like Tang Shiping, whose theory of social evolutionism barely engages China, share this desire for universal science.<sup>172</sup>

The ideal of social science as uncovering objective and universal truths sits uneasily with the dominant epistemology of the still officially Marxist PRC.<sup>173</sup> According to the

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<sup>166</sup> Yaqing Qin, "A Relational Theory of World Politics," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (March 2016): 33–47.

<sup>167</sup> Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at Its Centenary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>168</sup> Zhili Tian, "国际关系理论讨论会综述," *CASS Journal of Political Science*, no. 6 (1987): 55.

<sup>169</sup> Qin, "The Core Problems of International Relations Theory."

<sup>170</sup> Xuetong Yan, "再论为何没有"中国学派"," *Quarterly Journal of International Politics*, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>171</sup> Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>172</sup> Shiping Tang, *The Social Evolution of International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>173</sup> On this, see: Noesselt, "Revisiting the Debate on Constructing a Theory of International Relations with Chinese Characteristics," 437–38.

Marxist understanding, 'theory' is not a search for some abstract truth nor is it an effort to explain the world; it is a guide to revolution. Or as Marx himself put it, 'philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.'<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, knowledge is not acquired by disengaging and standing apart from social life (the way modern social scientists attempt to do), but is deeply embedded in class struggle. In one of Mao Zedong's most famous essays – *On Practice*, written in 1937 – he posited a dialectical relationship between theory and practice: that is, knowledge both informs and is informed by social practices.<sup>175</sup> The task of revolutionary leaders is to offer new theories as society evolves from one stage of development to the next. Xi Jinping's China has inherited this Maoist legacy. In practical terms, this means that in China the development of philosophy and the social sciences are considered 'ideological work' that must be 'guided' by political authorities.<sup>176</sup>

As a putatively scientific endeavor, the Chinese School movement has yet to produce convincing new frameworks to understand international politics. Indeed, some critics charge that it is a crudely unscientific endeavor. When asked about the Chinese School movement in an interview, one prominent Shanghai academic replied sardonically: 'Some people say you are just amusing yourself. Of course you can write whatever you want but you could not change the IR system.'<sup>177</sup> Moreover, while Western IR grapples with its Eurocentric background, Chinese theorists are creating new Sinocentric frameworks that unduly bias China as the central normative actor in world politics. In addressing this epistemological bias, Lu Peng does not mince words: 'the Chinese School Movement has become a pseudoscientific enterprise that has not yielded scientific output.'<sup>178</sup> But contributing to the global science of international

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<sup>174</sup> Karl Marx, "Theses On Feuerbach," 1845.

<sup>175</sup> "On Practice," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, 1937.

<sup>176</sup> "习近平: 在哲学社会科学工作座谈会上的讲话 (全文) (Xi Jinping: Speech at the Philosophy and Social Sciences Work Conference)," *Xinhua*, May 17, 2016, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-05/18/c\\_1118891128.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-05/18/c_1118891128.htm).

<sup>177</sup> Interview, Shanghai, April 2019.

<sup>178</sup> Peng, "Chinese IR Sino-Centrism Tradition and Its Influence on the Chinese School Movement," 151.

relations is only one aim of the Chinese School movement. Another is to engage in the strategic battle for ideas with the West.

## 2. Theory as Discursive Struggle

As explained earlier, international orders are made up of actors competing to represent and define world politics according to their preferences. When thinking about the 'distribution of ideas' that structures international order, we can distinguish between the ideational content and their general production pattern.<sup>179</sup> Content refers to the agreed frameworks, common and tacit knowledge, and core concerns of a given body of ideas. Pattern refers to the creation and dissemination of ideas. The content of Western IR, a subject of the first half of this chapter, is shaped by a particular historical consciousness shared by its theorists, notably the history and political thought of European civilization.<sup>180</sup> The rich tradition of statecraft, philosophy, and political thought in China's civilizational history provide ample resources to construct alternative understandings of international life. Some of these sensibilities may not find parallels in the West, for example 'all-under-heaven', 'humane authority', and 'harmony without uniformity'. One task of developing Chinese theories of IR is to bring indigenous concepts into dialogue with Western IR, which has so far remained parochial in its engagement with the non-West.

In addition to the content of ideas that structure international relations is their general pattern of production and dissemination. Many intellectuals understand China's participation in the global knowledge regime to be incommensurate with its new great power status.<sup>181</sup> China is increasingly vocal about increasing its 'discourse power'.<sup>182</sup> Compounding this imbalance of discursive or ideational power is China's

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<sup>179</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 104; This particular phrase comes from Mark Blyth. See: Mark Blyth, "Structures Do Not Come with an Instruction Sheet: Interests, Ideas, and Progress in Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 4 (2004): 700.

<sup>180</sup> Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*.

<sup>181</sup> Jiemian Yang, "中国走向全球强国的外交理论准备——阶段性使命和建构性重点 ('Preparing Theory for China's Great Power Diplomacy')," *World Economics and Politics* 5 (2013): 4–14; Paltiel makes the same point. See: Paltiel, "Constructing Global Order with Chinese Characteristics," 380.

<sup>182</sup> Zhao, *The Tianxia System*, 2; "Xi Jinping: Speech at the Philosophy and Social Sciences Work Conference."

status as a non-Western 'Other'. According to John Hobson, Western international theory maintains a 'positivist myth' of value-free, objective analysis.<sup>183</sup> In reality, the underlying Eurocentric metanarrative of international theory seeks to position Western civilization as the highest or ideal normative referent in global politics, a hierarchy that is self-evident to Chinese scholars. As Yang Jiemian writes in a 2013 article, 'Even now, dominant Western international relations and diplomatic theories not only continue to view China with arrogance and prejudice, but also frequently exclude and attack [China].'<sup>184</sup> The effect is that the story of global politics is written from the perspective of the West, discursively framing China's rise as a threat to the Western-led international order.

There is a further distinction to be made between shared ideas and knowledge existing apart from material power, independently shaping how individual actors behave, and discourse power as something to be accrued, deployed and fought over. In the former instance, more akin to constructivist conceptualization of norms in international society, states operate in a world of shared ideas that constitute their identity and interests, and when these change, strategic interaction between actors change.<sup>185</sup> In the second case, more akin to Gramscian hegemony, states are constantly engaged in a 'discursive struggle' with each other by developing narratives that legitimate their own behaviour with recourse to values and particular notions of morality, while delegitimizing the behaviour of others.<sup>186</sup> It is in the latter sense that language becomes essential as a discursive and symbolic resource.

It is through strategic discourses that power is enacted, maintained, and legitimated in social interactions.<sup>187</sup> The kind of power acquired through controlling discourse is

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<sup>183</sup> Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, 16–18.

<sup>184</sup> Yang, "Preparing Theory for China's Great Power Diplomacy," 5–6.

<sup>185</sup> Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, *International Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.

<sup>186</sup> Yida Zhai, "Discourse Power: Sovereignty Claims over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands," *Territory, Politics, Governance*, November 15, 2019, 1–19; Guozuo Zhang, "关于'话语权'的几点思考 ('Some Thoughts on 'Discursive Power')," *Qiushi*, June 26, 2009, [http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2009/200909/200906/t20090609\\_1829.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/zxdk/2009/200909/200906/t20090609_1829.htm).

<sup>187</sup> Teun A. Van Dijk, "Structures of Discourse and Structures of Power," *Annals of the International Communication Association* 12, no. 1 (January 1989): 18–59.

different from the traditional understanding of power as the ability to control others (for example, by using force or persuasion). Instead, the control of language and meaning provides what Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall refer to as constitutive power, or the power to define what others are, and consequently, what they have the *power to do*. As Barnett and Duvall write, constitutive power includes establishing:

Identities of the occupants of social positions...affecting the behaviour of others...setting the terms of their very self-understandings...[affecting] actors' subjectivities and self-understandings...fixing what actors are as social beings...[and defining]...the meaningful practices in which they are disposed to engaged as subjects.<sup>188</sup>

The condition for the exercise of constitutive power, then, becomes the control over discourse and discourse production itself.<sup>189</sup> Theories of global politics, although objective and neutral on the surface, exist within an ecosystem of already existing power relations, making some ideas more influential than others while also serving to legitimize the rule of the powerful over the powerless. Popular theories by prominent American scholars such as Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History*, Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, and Graham Allison's 'Thucydides trap' not only serve as signifiers of continuing Western dominance over the world of ideas, but also serve to set the terms of China's engagement with the West.

Under these conditions, ensuring state sovereignty, an acute concern of the PRC, becomes not just about protecting territorial borders from external threats, but extends into controlling the production and dissemination of ideas. In the introduction to his important work offering a Chinese vision of world politics based on the concept of *tianxia*, the philosopher Zhao Tingyang writes, 'the historical significance of "rethinking China" lies in recovering China's own ability to think, reconstructing its worldviews, values and methodologies, and thinking about China's future, Chinese concepts about the future and China's role and responsibilities in the

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<sup>188</sup> Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, "Power in International Relations," *International Organization* 59 (2005): 46–47.

<sup>189</sup> Van Dijk, "Structures of Discourse and Structures of Power."

world.<sup>190</sup> As a practitioner in the community trying to build a Chinese theory of world politics, Zhao shares the goal of recovering Chinese traditions and reshaping governance norms into a discursive frame that is more culturally familiar.<sup>191</sup> But Zhao's evocative language of 'recovering' the nation's ability to think also suggests a deeper aim of redressing the imbalance in the global distribution of ideas that privileges the West. It is in this sense that the prominent international relations scholar Yang Jiemian refers to the construction of Chinese IR as a kind of 'historical rectification' (*lishi jiuzheng*).<sup>192</sup> Building a Chinese School of IR theory then becomes intertwined with revising or controlling the idea of China in international theory, a practice of discursive sovereignty.

### *The State, Ideological Security, and Social Science*

China's dismal influence over normative frameworks of international politics is not merely an academic or linguistic issue; it is one of political security. It is difficult to emphasize how threatening Xi Jinping understands ideological decay in the face of Western values, a core lesson the Party took from the fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>193</sup> During a December 2015 speech extolling Party cadres to uphold their faith in Marxism, Xi spoke of the 'hostile forces' that work to weaken the nation's official ideology: 'We have some people, even some comrades within the Party, who can't see clearly the profundity of this influence, believing that since Western "universal values" have been around for centuries, what's the harm in endorsing them? Why not borrow some concepts from Western political discourse? [...] Some people accept Western theory and discourse as an infallible law, unwittingly becoming buglers trumpeting Western capitalist ideology.'<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Zhao, *The Tianxia System*, 7.

<sup>191</sup> Pichamon Yeophantong, "Governing the World: China's Evolving Conceptions of Responsibility," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 329–64; Paltiel, "Constructing Global Order with Chinese Characteristics."

<sup>192</sup> Jiemian Yang, ed., *构建中国国际关系理论体系-纪念1987年“上海国际关系理论讨论会”25周年论文集* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2012), 2.

<sup>193</sup> François Bougon, *Inside the Mind of Xi Jinping* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018), chap. 2.

<sup>194</sup> Jinping Xi, "在全国党校工作会议上的讲话 ('Speech at the National Work Conference of Party Schools')," *Qiushi*, September 2016, [http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2016-04/30/c\\_1118772415.htm#](http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2016-04/30/c_1118772415.htm#).

This fear of Western cultural hegemony is amplified by the distribution of ideas in the international system that heavily favours the West. Speaking at the Philosophy and Social Sciences Work Conference in May 2016 in which President Xi announced greater state support for the country's intellectuals, he lamented: 'the voices of our philosophy and social sciences are still small in international society'.<sup>195</sup> To emphasize his point, Xi listed a roster of great minds that fueled Western civilization: from Plato, Aristotle and Cicero to Copernicus and Galileo, from Shakespeare and Thomas More to Kant, Hegel and Montesquieu. Although Chinese history is, of course, replete with its own celebrated thinkers, Xi Jinping worries that present-day China is marked by quantity without quality: 'we have experts but lack grand masters'.<sup>196</sup> Xi's concern, however, is less about advancing the global cause of humanism than it is about commandeering philosophy and social sciences to serve state power. The development of Chinese theories are embedded in the national project of 'building a socialist cultural great power, increasing cultural soft power, and improving China's international discourse power'.<sup>197</sup>

One year later, Xi's directives were codified when the CCP's Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform released a document on further developing and indigenizing philosophy and social sciences. Among other things, it stressed the need to 'use Chinese theories to interpret Chinese practice, use Chinese practice to refine Chinese theories, innovate in foreign discourse expressions, and enhance [China's] international discourse power'.<sup>198</sup>

The Party's focus on discourse power is not entirely new. President Hu Jintao (2002-2012) also stressed the need for the country to develop its own discourse system and

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<sup>195</sup> "Xi Says Marxism Scientific, Robust," *Xinhua*, May 19, 2016, <http://www.ecns.cn/2016/05-19/211067.shtml>.

<sup>196</sup> "Xi Jinping: Speech at the Philosophy and Social Sciences Work Conference."

<sup>197</sup> "Xi Jinping: Speech at the Philosophy and Social Sciences Work Conference."

<sup>198</sup> "中共中央印发《关于加快构建中国特色哲学社会科学的意见》('Issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China: Concerning Acceleration of the Construction of Philosophy and Social Sciences with Chinese Characteristics')," *Xinhua*, May 16, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-05/16/c\\_1120982602.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-05/16/c_1120982602.htm).

emphasized the situation of ‘strong West, weak China’ (*xiqiang woruo*).<sup>199</sup> Liu Jianfei, the director of the Institute for International Strategic Studies at the Central Party School, notes more than two-thirds of the countries in the world use the ‘Western model’ political system and that there are more than 130 democracies worldwide.<sup>200</sup> Given this imbalance, Liu cautions the country from engaging in an ideological battle with the West. However, Xi Jinping himself has embraced nativist exceptionalism through concepts such as the ‘China path’ (*zhongguo daolu*) and the ‘China solution’ (*zhongguo fangan*) while extending the struggle for discourse power outwards into the normative infrastructure of global governance. As one interpreter of Xi’s diplomatic thinking notes, ‘the struggle over rule-making and the direction of the international order is increasingly prominent, and it relates to the size of each party’s discursive power.’<sup>201</sup>

In between the Party’s quest for ideological security and its pursuit of international influence lies the importance of sinicizing social science. According to Xi, philosophy and social science serve as the ‘foundation supporting the discourse system. Without our own system of philosophy and social science, there will be no discourse power.’<sup>202</sup> The nation’s international relations scholars have taken up this struggle for discourse power. Noted IR scholar Wang Yiwei asserts that ‘If we cannot build our own guiding ideology, discourses and academic systems of philosophy and social sciences, we will never gain confidence in our path and socialist system.’<sup>203</sup>

### 3. Theory as Identity Building

Finally, the Chinese School movement can be understood as an exercise in identity building that seeks to represent world politics with respect to China’s own identity

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<sup>199</sup> Sebastian Veg, “The Rise of China’s Statist Intellectuals: Law, Sovereignty, and ‘Repoliticization,’” *The China Journal* 82 (2019): 23–45.

<sup>200</sup> Jianfei Liu, “新时代中国外交既需韬光养晦也要奋发有为 (In the New Era, China’s Diplomacy Must Both ‘keep a Low Profile’ and ‘Strive for Achievement’),” *Chinese Cadres Tribune* 1 (2019): 46–48.

<sup>201</sup> Xiaofeng Song, “习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想探析 (Analysis of Xi Jinping’s Thoughts on Great-Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics),” *Socialism Studies* 5 (2018): 20.

<sup>202</sup> Xi, “Speech at the National Work Conference of Party Schools.”

<sup>203</sup> “To Increase Confidence, China Steps up Building Its Own Philosophy,” *Xinhua*, May 17, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/17/c\\_136292768.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/17/c_136292768.htm).

and experiences. As an interpretive community, the scholars involved in building Chinese IR engage in differentiating the China's national Self from a series of Others, defining who China is and what it wants. Here it is important to note the particular social conditions within which Chinese IR has evolved. As Alagappa notes, IR theory in China has a largely normative-constitutive function that seeks to construct the world from a Chinese perspective in order to govern it.<sup>204</sup> With this in mind, it is interesting that in his closing remarks at a 2012 conference on constructing IR theory with Chinese characteristics, Yang Jiemian drew a parallel between the Chinese IR community and the prominent American political thinkers George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau.<sup>205</sup> Just as both men laid the foundation for political realism to guide American interactions with the Soviet Union, Yang exhorts his colleagues to lay the ideological foundation to guide China's diplomatic transition to global power.

Here I want to return to my conceptualization of international order as a struggle for discursive hegemony. Great powers order world politics according to certain culturally constructed ideas and norms, which are deployed in an effort to fix meanings and identities. Shifts in the global balance of material power are important not only because they dislodge the old political order, but also because they give new powers the material base necessary to shape the outcome of the struggle to define a new order.

Going beyond the conflict or conversion binary found in Western IR, three themes emerge from Chinese IR texts related to China's identity and the future of world order. The first is the emergence of a multipolar world with China as one of the main poles. In this reading, while the immediate post-Cold War period was characterized by American hegemony as the American-led international order was expanded around the world, the relative decline of the United States as a global power in recent years combined with the rise of China means that world politics is once again entering a

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<sup>204</sup> Alagappa, "International Relations Studies in Asia."

<sup>205</sup> Yang, 构建中国国际关系理论体系, 4.

period where multiple great powers compete for global governance.<sup>206</sup> In Asia, America's influence is on the decline as China re-emerges as the region's central power presiding over an order marked by multilateralism and co-existence.<sup>207</sup> Chinese scholars are careful to note that Asia is not following the integrationist path of the European Union, but a regional order in which interconnectivity is combined with a fundamental emphasis on sovereignty, with China's Belt and Road Initiative embodying and driving this trend.<sup>208</sup>

The second is Chinese exceptionalism based on its unique civilizational history and culture. In this reading, China is a rising power whose diplomacy does not follow the 'old road' of aggressive expansionism predicted by realism. While the history of Western diplomacy is one of 'tyranny' (*badao*), China's history of statecraft is 'on the whole' characterized by 'benevolent rule' (*wangdao*).<sup>209</sup> While Chinese exceptionalism is often attributed to China's supposed peaceful Confucian culture, others go further by attributing to Chinese people a particular harmonious way of thinking that is essentially different from the West.<sup>210</sup>

The rehabilitation of China's civilizational culture into IR theorizing follows domestic political developments in the PRC, where post-Mao China has witnessed a 'return to tradition' (*huixiang chuantong*) in policymaking.<sup>211</sup> Xi Jinping himself has been particularly active in promoting Chinese culture. During the first four years of his first

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<sup>206</sup> Yaqing Qin, "世界秩序刍议 ('Humble Observations on World Order')," *World Economics and Politics* 6 (2017): 4–13.

<sup>207</sup> Xinbo Wu, "论亚太大变局 (On the Changing Asia-Pacific)," *World Economics and Politics* 6 (2017): 32–69; Yunling Zhang, "中国的周边区域观回归与新秩序构建 ('The Return of China's Peripheral View and Constructing a New Order')," *World Economics and Politics* 1 (2015): 5–25.

<sup>208</sup> Changhe Su, "互联互通世界的治理和秩序 ('Governance and Order in an Interconnected World')," *World Economics and Politics* 2 (2017): 25–35.

<sup>209</sup> Xiangyang Chen et al., "王道与现今中国之外交：改造务实王道外交 古为今用," *Yifeng*, April 15, 2011, [https://culture.ifeng.com/huodong/special/wangdaoluntan/shendu/detail\\_2011\\_04/15/5769768\\_0.shtml](https://culture.ifeng.com/huodong/special/wangdaoluntan/shendu/detail_2011_04/15/5769768_0.shtml).

<sup>210</sup> Yaqing Qin, "International Society as a Process: Institutions, Identities, and China's Peaceful Rise," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 129–53; Xuefei Chen, "博鳌时间, 全新共生体系是可能的吗? ('During Boao, Is a New Symbiotic System Possible?')," *Guancha*, March 26, 2015, [https://www.guancha.cn/ChenXueFei/2015\\_03\\_26\\_313692.shtml?web](https://www.guancha.cn/ChenXueFei/2015_03_26_313692.shtml?web).

<sup>211</sup> Gloria Davies, "Homo Dissensum Significans, or The Perils of Taking a Stand in China," *Social Text* 29, no. 4 109 (December 1, 2011): 30.

term in office, Xi quoted the Confucian classics on more than 300 occasions.<sup>212</sup> In explaining the successes of the China's modernization programme, the propaganda arm of the Party exhorts citizens to embrace the 'three confidences': confidence in China's development path, the theory of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', and the one-party system.<sup>213</sup> These constitute the unique institutions that the CCP emphasizes are responsible for the ending of the 'century of humiliation' of semi-colonial subordination, and the ultimate economic revitalization in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In July 2016, at a celebration commemorating the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party, Xi Jinping put forward a fourth confidence – Chinese culture. Xi emphasized, 'cultural confidence is an even more foundational, extensive, and deep self-confidence.'<sup>214</sup> The CCP has not yet decided to replace Marx with Confucius, but it is increasingly relying on 'Chinese culture' to boost its ruling legitimacy among its citizens at home while legitimizing a new great power identity internationally.

The third is the belief that China has successfully followed an autochthonous development path. Positioned against Western liberal modernity in which 'development models and governance modes around the world are extremely influenced by Western culture and ideologies'<sup>215</sup>, this vision sees global politics evolving to a multipolar system of states with heterogeneous political and economic systems.<sup>216</sup> The 'China model' – or what is referred to in official discourse as the 'China solution' (*zhongguo fangan*) – serves as a signifier of the historic transition to a post-Western order where China plays a central role in offering an alternative to liberal capitalist development.<sup>217</sup> In explaining and justifying this evolution in world

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<sup>212</sup> Zicheng Ye and Quanlin Long, *华夏主义-华夏体系 500 年的大智慧* ('Huaxia: The Wisdom of the 500 Year Old Huaxia System') (Renmin chubanshe, 2013), 012.

<sup>213</sup> '四个自信': 道路自信, 理论自信, 制度自信. A 'fourth confidence' – cultural confidence (文化自信) – was added by Xi Jinping in 2016.

<sup>214</sup> Pengzhi Feng, "从'四个自信'到'四个自信'" (From 'three Confidences' to 'Four Confidences'), *Study Times*, July 7, 2016, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0707/c49150-28532466.html>.

<sup>215</sup> Canrong Jin, *China's Wisdom: China's Diplomacy since the 18th CPC National Congress*, trans. Jianxin Wen, *Recognizing and Understanding China*, 2017, 23.

<sup>216</sup> Su, "Governance and Order in an Interconnected World."

<sup>217</sup> Zhiyong Li and Zhengqing Yuan, "大国外交的中国特色之论 (On Chinese Characteristics of Great-Power Diplomacy)," *Pacific Journal* 23, no. 2 (2015): esp. pg 24.

order building, the Chinese School serves to legitimate China's non-Western development model while denouncing liberal democracy.<sup>218</sup> This goes beyond the conversion scenario forecasted by Western IR whereby China 'evolves' into liberal modernity and instead forecasts a future of co-existence between different socio-political systems. Here is how one prominent theorist explained their decision to develop Chinese IR theory during an interview:

Because I believe the existing problems in today's world have resulted from something contrary to value pluralism – this is what I call value monism. This is that there is one best model, one superior set of values or culture, etc. It is also believing that people in other parts of the world should change their model to become the same as that model. That kind of value monism has led to many kinds of disasters – as an example the Iraq War.<sup>219</sup>

It is important to note not just the role that America plays as China's ultimate Other, but also the belief that new ways of thinking drawn not from Western history and culture but China's own can somehow provide a countermeasure to the violence of modern day world politics. Here, the work of reconstructing China's identity based on its own conceptual language, a project that the Chinese School movement is ultimately about, is necessary to China's great power diplomacy. The alternative, relying on Western ideas, is to court disaster. As one theorist writes: 'If we don't engage in comprehensive strategic planning from the angle of cultural rejuvenation and develop a "Chinese" view of world order, it is very likely that we will go down the old road of Western colonialism, the wicked road of great power hegemony, and the crooked road of neo-interventionism'.<sup>220</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the development of Chinese IR theory, and the Chinese School movement in particular, should best be understood as a counter-hegemonic

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<sup>218</sup> Cai, "Optimizing the Gongsheng System"; Changhe Su, "从关系到共生-中国大国外交理论的文化和制度阐释 (From Guanxi to Gongsheng-A Cultural and Systematic Explanation of China's Great Power Diplomacy)," *World Economics and Politics* 1 (2016): 5-25.

<sup>219</sup> Interview, Shanghai, May 2018.

<sup>220</sup> Chen, "During Boao, Is a New Symbiotic System Possible?"

discourse that seeks to represent world politics with respect to China's own identity and experiences. Seeking to overcome the conflict or converge logic prevalent in Western IR, the Chinese School movement at once contributes to IR as a scientific discipline, engages in a discursive struggle with the West, and contributes to the conceptual grammar of the nation's foreign policy identity.

In what follows, Chapter 3 will critically examine three prominent theories that are outputs of the Chinese School movement – Yan Xuetong's *moral realism*, Zhao Tingyang's *tianxia*, and the 'Shanghai school' of *symbiosis*. These should be read in the spirit of the analysis presented in this chapter, i.e. not as pure academic theories, but rather as political projects engaged in a struggle to define who and what the Chinese nation is and what kind of international order it wants.

## Building a Chinese School of International Relations Theory

*Many Chinese scholars are also working on the theoretical basis for future order.*<sup>221</sup>

- Fu Ying 傅莹

Seeking to break away from what was once decried as an ‘American social science’, China’s International Relations (IR) scholars have begun to conceptualize the discursive and ideational foundations of a new international order in which China has returned to preeminent status, not only in Asia but the entire world. The Chinese School movement comes at a critical historical juncture in global politics as the power balance shifts away from the global North-West, dislodging previously fixed meanings and identities as the contours of a new political order are fought over. The previous chapter argued that the Chinese School movement should be understood as a counter-hegemonic discourse that seeks to represent world politics with respect to China’s own identity and experiences. With this framework in mind, this chapter will critically analyze three specific Chinese international relations theories: Yan Xuetong’s *moral realism*, Zhao Tingyang’s *tianxia*, and the ‘Shanghai school’ of *gongsheng-symbiosis*.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Fu Ying is a Chinese politician and diplomat who served consecutively as the PRC’s ambassador to the Philippines, Australia, the United Kingdom, as the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the chairperson of the National People’s Congress Foreign Affairs Committee. Ying Fu, “Under the Same Roof: China’s View of Global Order,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 2016): 45.

<sup>222</sup> Lu Peng notes that Chinese IR is made up of two streams. The first takes ‘Chinese thought’ as the basis of theory construction to come to a Chinese understanding of the world, and includes moral realism and Gongsheng theory. The second uses ‘Chinese logic’ to create new epistemological frameworks for the study of global politics, and includes Qin Yaqing’s relationality theory. Since this chapter focuses on alternative ontologies of world politics, I will not discuss relationality theory. See: Lu, “Two Approaches to Chinese IR Theory.”

Each of the theorists included in this chapter differ on foundational questions of ontology, epistemology and the possibility of a universal science of politics. But all share a commitment to China's rise – to recovering the nation's past, reflecting on its present, and divining its future in order to find the proper place for China in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. All are engaged in their own way in 'imagining' China. Chapter 2 argued that the Chinese School movement should not only be understood as a scientific endeavor that seeks complement Western IR theory, but also as a political project in China's 'discursive struggle' with the West, as well as an identity building project working to legitimate a new great power ideology for the state. Since these three theories tell us less about the 'reality' of global politics than they do about who and what China is, I have subsumed them into three ideal images of China's national Self: benevolent, *paterfamilias*, and tolerant.

Going beyond critical deconstruction, this chapter compares common themes within the Chinese School movement in order to draw out a shared discursive and ideational framework for China's current and future role in international order. It does this by asking the following two questions: First, is there a set of core ideas and ideals that constitute the distinctiveness of Chinese IR theory? And second, is there a coherent vision for international order that can be drawn out of these rather disparate theories?

The answer to the first question is yes. China's international relations scholars are developing distinctively Chinese understandings of power, harmony, and order. The concept of power is expanded to include not just the capability to coerce others, but includes the cultivation of good governance towards one's citizens and the practice of morality and benevolence towards weaker and smaller states abroad. Harmony is understood not as equality, nor as shared values among states, but rather a hierarchy among states with different responsibilities based on power capabilities. Order results not from a balance of power, but from a well-enforced hierarchical system in which the strong practice benevolence toward the weak while the weak voluntarily defer to the strong. There is, of course, considerable overlap between these understandings of power, harmony and order with concepts already found in Western IR theory. Therefore, instead of viewing the Chinese School movement as

developing unique or new theories of international politics, this chapter understands the Chinese School movement as breaking away from Western discourses and realigning concepts of power, harmony, and order into discursive frames more familiar to China's local traditions and ideologies.

The answer to the second question is a qualified yes. Building on the discursive reframing above, Chinese IR scholars are building a vision for international order that is both *hierarchical* in terms of rites and responsibilities and *pluralistic* in cultural values and socio-political systems. It is qualified because the two ideals of hierarchy and pluralism exist in tension and at times contradiction. Nevertheless, they are unified in a discursive and ideational framework for international order that privileges China's status as a great power and where smaller powers defer to its interests in exchange for respect.

This chapter considers these arguments in two parts. Part One includes a critical analysis of three prominent Chinese IR theories: *tianxia*, *moral realism*, and *gongsheng-symbiosis*. The aim of this section is to explore what 'Chinese' solutions they offer for global order and how they differ from concepts found in Western IR. Part Two examines the potential contribution of the Chinese School movement to Western IR theory through three reframed conceptions of power, harmony, and order. Following this, it explores the tensions that exist between the two core normative ideals that constitute the emerging Chinese framework for international order: hierarchy and pluralism.

### ***Part One: Three counter-hegemonic discourses***

#### **1. China the Benevolent Hegemon: Yan Xuetong's *moral realism***

One period of Chinese history that provides exceptionally rich resources to build a theory of IR is the pre-Qin era, a period of internecine conflict between feudal states before the unification of China under the Qin Dynasty in 221BC. The pre-Qin era holds similarities with Westphalian Europe – an important historical source and testing bed for Western theories of IR. In both, a collection of states competed ruthlessly for

regional hegemony. The pre-Qin era was also a period in which Chinese philosophy flourished, with the nation's most celebrated philosophers such as Confucius, Mencius and Laozi appearing during this time. In 2005, a group of scholars at Tsinghua University in Beijing, led by Yan Xuetong, began a project exploring the political thinking during the pre-Qin era to probe for possible applications to IR theory.<sup>223</sup> Their research was consolidated in an English edited volume published by Princeton University Press in 2011 entitled *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, bringing the pre-Qin project to international attention.<sup>224</sup>

Yan Xuetong is a well-known figure inside China. As the Dean of the Institute of International Relations at Tsinghua University, Yan is influential among academics, within policymaking circles, and among the general public. *Foreign Policy* magazine named him one of the world's leading intellectuals in 2008.<sup>225</sup> Yan has also made a reputation as one of the country's leading hawks, often advocating for hardline policies on issues such as Taiwan.<sup>226</sup> He has been a central figure encouraging Chinese scholars to develop a theory of international relations. Like many IR scholars, Yan's interest is not strictly limited to theory. He also seeks to develop a normative basis for China's anticipated future role as a leading global state. His effort to develop an indigenous theory of IR is also meant to aid China's strategic decision making.<sup>227</sup>

The theory associated with Yan Xuetong's pre-Qin project is called moral realism. It combines the hard power politics of realism with the moral philosophy of pre-Qin philosophers. In its understanding of global politics, the international arena remains an arena of potential conflict with states competing for hegemony but it introduces an emphasis on normative power to augment material power, the practice of morality as an important variable in comprehensive state power, an international system

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<sup>223</sup> Xu and Sun, "The 'Chinese School' Debate," 162.

<sup>224</sup> Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*.

<sup>225</sup> "Top 100 Public Intellectuals," *Foreign Policy*, May 15, 2008, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2008/05/15/top-100-public-intellectuals/>.

<sup>226</sup> Xuetong Yan, "武力遏制台独法理独立的利弊分析 ('The Pros and Cons of Using Force to Constrain Law-Based Taiwan Independence')," *Zhanlue Yu Guanli (Strategy and Management)* 3 (2004): 1-5.

<sup>227</sup> Xuetong Yan, "借鉴先秦思想创新国际关系理论 ('Borrowing Pre-Qin Thought to Innovate IR Theory')," *Guoji Zhengzhi Kexue (Quarterly Journal of International Politics)*, no. 19 (2009): 153-54.

characterized by structures of hierarchy, and the Confucian ideal of 'humane authority'. Its core research problem is how a rising state is able to displace a materially dominant hegemon. Its answer is that the rising state has a stronger 'political leadership' than the hegemon.<sup>228</sup>

Moral realism differs from mainstream Western IR in two ways. First, legitimate and stable order requires political leadership with sufficient moral authority. Second, the international system contains, and is stabilized by, hierarchical structures. Both of these differences are explored below.

### *Power and Moral Authority*

Pre-Qin thinkers had a nuanced understanding of power, which they understood to be constituted by both material and social elements. In the Confucian political tradition, there is a distinction made between *wangdao* 王道 ('the kingly way' or 'humane authority') and *badao* 霸道 (hegemonic rule). The former depends on the use of virtue (*de* 德) in the exercise of benevolent rule; the latter is understood as *realpolitik* statecraft. The earliest exponent of *wangdao* was the philosopher Mencius (372-289 BCE), who in his eponymous text makes the distinction between types of rulership: 'One who uses force while borrowing from benevolence will become leader of the feudal lords (*ba*)... [whereas] one who puts benevolence into effect through the transforming influence of morality will become a true King (*wang*).'<sup>229</sup> The first chapter of *Mencius* further distinguishes *wangdao* as a leader who practices benevolence (仁 *ren*) and righteousness (义 *yi*), from the hegemonic practice of seeking only profit (利 *li*).<sup>230</sup> Put simply, hegemony is the use of force to maximize the material interests of the state. *Wangdao*, on the other hand, relies on good governance and the distribution of material benefits to ensure willing cooperation by subjects.

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<sup>228</sup> Xuetong Yan, "Political Leadership and Power Redistribution," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9, no. 1 (March 2016): 1-2.

<sup>229</sup> D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* (New York: Penguin, 1970), 35-36.

<sup>230</sup> Lau, book 1, part A.

The distinction between *wangdao* (henceforth 'humane authority') and hegemony is one of the most distinctive potential contributions of pre-Qin political philosophy to modern IR theory. What sets humane authority apart from hegemony is the former's basis in moral and ethical excellence; a state that is a humane authority is, above all, a moral power that due to its virtuous behaviour has received a mandate to rule by weaker states. Pre-Qin thinkers understood that enduring and stable order required social recognition of the right to lead.

To attain the status of humane authority, in addition to having unsurpassed military strength a state must also possess 'political power' (政治势力 *zhengzhi shili*).<sup>231</sup> Political power as understood by pre-Qin philosophers is a broader conception of power than is understood in mainstream IR, which by realists and liberals alike is generally considered to be a reflection of material power – the sum of a state's economic and military assets. To pre-Qin thinkers, political power instead rests on the correct practice of virtue or morality. It is a combination of both material power and virtuous behaviour that establishes a base of legitimacy for rule. What is considered virtuous behaviour is, of course, hardly agreed upon and evolves over time and across cultures. For Confucius, a leader behaved justly when he acted in accordance with Zhou era notions of proper rites. For Mencius, a policy was considered just if it was in accordance with the wishes of the people. In the post-Cold War period, democracy has become nearly universally accepted as a system that ensures political legitimacy. However defined, political power expressed through the correct practice of morality was for pre-Qin philosophers, 'the critical element in the rise and fall of states.'<sup>232</sup>

For pre-Qin thinkers, the greatest questions in political ethics revolved around how an individual ruler should govern. The preoccupation with how elites should act is a natural outgrowth of Confucian ethics, which understands the self as one part of larger cosmos; the self is the centre of outwardly expanding concentric circles that

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<sup>231</sup> Haibin Wang, "《吕氏春秋》的国家间政治思想 (Inter-State Political Thought in the 'Lü Spring and Autumn Annals')," *Quarterly Journal of International Politics* 1 (2009): 69.

<sup>232</sup> Wang, 69.

extend through ones family and friends, to society, to the state, and ultimately the universe at large, and where individual actions radiate outwards. A state's leader, by holding the most important position in society, is thus the lynchpin and most important determinant of ethics society wide. 'What makes a country secure or endangered, good or bad, is determined exclusively by its ruler and not by others.'<sup>233</sup> It follows from this that a central concern for Confucian thinkers is how a ruler can act as a moral authority by setting an example for others to follow.

Yan follows this Confucian tradition of leadership ethics in distinguishing humane authority from hegemony in his addition to modern IR theory. Humane authority is not the same as Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power', which is basically an instrumentalist extension of a state's cultural and diplomatic resources to influence the decisions of others.<sup>234</sup> Instead, humane authority requires a significant internal component. It refers to a leader that is morally self-cultivated and enacts just policies at home, which in the Confucian understanding, will attract others to imitate. Humane authority at home results in a stable, prosperous domestic society. And since moral behaviour radiates outward, humane authority extends into interstate relations, cultivating a stable international society. Thus, the stability of the international order not only depends on a hegemon that organizes and maintains order, but it fundamentally depends on the nature of the hegemon itself. Yan systematized this thesis in his 2011 article 'International Leadership and Norm Evolution', in which he uses Xunzi's typology of humane authority, hegemony, and tyranny as independent variables to hypothesize how the nature of the international system's leading state will influence the direction of evolution of international norms.<sup>235</sup> Yan shows that international norms do not only progress towards a Kantian culture of friendly and peaceful relations<sup>236</sup> but can be regressive depending on the nature of the hegemon.

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<sup>233</sup> Xuetong Yan, "Xun Zi's Thoughts on International Politics and Their Implications," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 139.

<sup>234</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

<sup>235</sup> Xuetong Yan, "International Leadership and Norm Evolution," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 4, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 233-64; Xuetong Yan, *世界权力的转移: 政治领导与战略竞争* (*The Transition of World Power: Political Leadership and Strategic Competition*) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2015), 87-90.

<sup>236</sup> Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.

For example, during the Warring States (475-221 BC) period the state of Qin conducted a ruthless campaign of extermination against neighbouring states. The Qin became seen by other states as a predatory state that did not adhere to treaties and annexed other states, which caused other states to adopt similarly violent actions towards the Qin.<sup>237</sup>

In addition to the role of imitation, humane authority also involves the benevolent distribution of goods to maintain acquiescence of order by smaller states. 'Humane authority is the principle which encourages Chinese rulers to adopt a benevolent foreign policy to their neighbours in expectations that recipients of such benevolence will express gratitude for the benefits ensuing from such leadership.'<sup>238</sup>

While the practice of benevolence remains important, for moral realism the role of imitation remains the crucial variable in the spread of norms and the willingness of smaller states to voluntarily submit to higher authority remains an ideal of harmonization of order among states. Constructivists argue that actors follow international norms for three reasons: coercion, self-interest, or because they perceive them to be legitimate.<sup>239</sup> Moral realism argues that while coercion and self-interest are both important in the spread and acceptance of norms, more important is the ability of a hegemon to lead by example. In order to encourage the spread of its preferred norms internationally, a rising state must 'practice what it preaches and promises, namely, to set itself as an example to other states in international society.'<sup>240</sup> Thus, the path to a more harmonious world is through the self-cultivation of the hegemon. It follows from this that for China to overtake the United States to become the world's leading state (the central concern of moral realism), it does not necessarily need to overtake the United States in military or economic capabilities,

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<sup>237</sup> Yan, "International Leadership and Norm Evolution," 244.

<sup>238</sup> Xuetong Yan, "Chinese Values vs. Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order?," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 11, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 17; see also: Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, 43, 47-51, 86-88.

<sup>239</sup> Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics," *International Organization* 53, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 379-408.

<sup>240</sup> Xuetong Yan, "Political Leadership and Power Redistribution," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9, no. 1 (March 2016): 22.

nor does there need to be a hegemonic war where China defeats the United States. What is necessary is for China to increase its 'political power' by practicing humane authority both at home and abroad.<sup>241</sup> By one day taking up the role of humane authority, Yan imagines a world in which China's superior moral excellence radiates outwards, serving as a model for other states and its benevolent actions inspire deference all around the world.

Yan's moral realism is ultimately a project to aid in China's quest for global leadership vis-à-vis the United States within a framework of a normative order.<sup>242</sup> He argues that a rising power will shape the norms of international system to better align with its interests, creating a new world order based on its own values. To that end, Yan offers 'Chinese' norms that when combined with modern norms could offer a possible replacement to 'Western' norms that have underpinned post-World War II US hegemony. Drawing norms of behaviour from Confucian thought, Yan posits that benevolence, righteousness, and rites, could be combined with liberal values of equality, democracy, and freedom, in order to arrive at a new synthesis of higher order values - fairness, justice and civility – that together constitute a new system of values 'that transcends the American values' and can garner support and followership for China's rise internationally.<sup>243</sup>

### *Hierarchy, Benevolence, and Stability*

In the Westphalian international system there is a persisting contradiction between the legal equality of sovereign states and the reality of differences, in some cases massive differences, in size, wealth and power. If one believes, as Yan does, that all states 'fight ceaselessly to attain equal power', this tension between *de jure* equality and *de facto* inequality is a source of instability and conflict.<sup>244</sup> 'Focusing on equality without taking these distinctions into consideration is equivalent to advocating the

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<sup>241</sup> Xuetong Yan, "How China Can Defeat America," *New York Times*, November 20, 2011.

<sup>242</sup> Paltiel, "Constructing Global Order with Chinese Characteristics," 389.

<sup>243</sup> Xuetong Yan, "New Values for New International Norms," *China International Studies* 38, no. 1 (2013): 15–28; See also: Yan, *The Transition of World Power*, 91–97.

<sup>244</sup> Yan, "Chinese Values vs. Liberalism," 11.

jungle law of unquestioned equal rights and zero distinctions between the advantaged and the disadvantaged.’<sup>245</sup>

One ‘Chinese’ solution to ameliorating this tension is by employing the Confucian norm of benevolence (*ren*) – the principle that calls the powerful to empathize and care for the weak.<sup>246</sup> As a norm that produces ‘harmony’, benevolence calls upon the strong to provide material goods in exchange for acceptance of order on the part of weaker states. Historically, successive Chinese courts used the practice of benevolence via bestowing imperial gifts on visiting tributaries to secure recognition of the superior status of the emperor vis-à-vis its interlocutors. In the modern international system the duty to care for weaker states obliges stronger states to undertake more responsibilities over global governance. Yan argues that benevolence can find application ‘in the management of relations between the strong and the weak’.<sup>247</sup> Advocates of the practice of benevolence in China’s foreign policy, understood as the provision of foreign aid, also have an evident self-interest - it would help China close the gap between its material power (as the second largest economy in the world) and its comparatively low social power in global politics.<sup>248</sup> By giving material benefits to smaller states there is an expectation that recipients of benevolence will willingly submit to the authority of the hegemon.

The equation of social hierarchy with social stability has lineages in pre-Qin political thought. Consider this from Xunzi, quoted in Yan’s exploration of the ideas of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC philosopher:

If [humans] form a society in which there are no class divisions, strife will develop. If there is strife, then there will be social disorder; if there is social disorder, there will be hardship for all. Hence, a situation in which there are no class divisions is the greatest affliction mankind can have. A situation in which there are class divisions is the most basic benefit under Heaven. And it

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<sup>245</sup> Yan, 11.

<sup>246</sup> Benevolence has a parallel in Western paternalism. See: David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, eds., *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations*, SUNY Series in Global Politics (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

<sup>247</sup> Yan, “Chinese Values vs. Liberalism,” 11.

<sup>248</sup> Ru Sun, “推进‘王道’外交正当其时 (It’s Time to Adopt Humane Authority Diplomacy),” *Global Times*, April 1, 2013, [http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion\\_world/2013-01/3486363.html](http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_world/2013-01/3486363.html).

is the lord of men who is the indispensable element wherewith to 'arrange the scale' of the classes of men.<sup>249</sup>

For Xunzi, similar to the power transition theory of Organski and Gilpin, establishing a hierarchical system is a prerequisite for maintaining order. Imperial Chinese courts would extend this principle outwards in managing the empire's relations with neighbouring states. After the unification of China under the Qin dynasty in 221 BC, subsequent Chinese dynasties would arrange their practice of foreign relations in a hierarchical fashion, with diplomatic relations premised on the acknowledgement of the superiority of the emperor.<sup>250</sup>

While social hierarchy remains the ideal normative framework to ensure order, Yan recognizes that in the modern period sovereign equality has become a 'universal norm of the contemporary world' that 'cannot be replaced'.<sup>251</sup> Yan argues that combining the norm of equality found in contemporary international relations with the norm of hierarchy advocated by pre-Qin thinkers offers a more stable alternative to the current international order.<sup>252</sup> Curiously, equality here is taken to mean 'states with the same power enjoy the same international rights, while states of different grades respect the implementation of common regulations.'<sup>253</sup> This is a gradated understanding of equality where states of similar status are considered equals, not complete sovereign equality among all states. It is the transposition of Xunzi's ideal domestic society into the international, whereby states are organized into classes based on size and where those in similar classes enjoy the same rights. To Yan, the norm of hierarchy means 'the strong should undertake greater international responsibilities while the weak respect the implementation of discriminatory

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<sup>249</sup> Yan, "Xun Zi's Thoughts on International Politics and Their Implications," 156.

<sup>250</sup> When Chinese power waned vis-à-vis its neighbours – as it did with the Hsiung-nü during the early Han dynasty and with the Liao during the Song dynasty – the norm of hierarchy continued to structure diplomatic relations, but China was relegated to a submissive status. The international society of Asia was thus marked by what Kwan calls 'adaptable hierarchy'. See: Alan Shiu Cheung Kwan, "Hierarchy, Status and International Society: China and the Steppe Nomads," *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 2 (June 2016): 362–83.

<sup>251</sup> Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, 204.

<sup>252</sup> Yan, 104–6.

<sup>253</sup> Yan, 214.

international rules.’<sup>254</sup> This combination of hierarchy in decision-making and sovereign equality – what Gerry Simpson calls ‘legalized hegemony’<sup>255</sup> - has been present in international society in varying degrees since the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and implies a special role for Great Powers in world affairs.<sup>256</sup> Consider the United Nations Security Council, an international organization that formally institutionalizes hierarchical relations, with the United States, Russia, France, UK and China having extraordinary rights and responsibilities over global security affairs.

In the closing pages of *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, Yan details how his imagined future Chinese order would be different from the American liberal order. Based on the distinction that pre-Qin philosophers made between humane authority and hegemony, he proposes: ‘First, China should promote an international order that takes as its principle a balance between responsibilities and rights. [...] Second, the more developed countries should observe international norms more strictly than the less developed ones.’<sup>257</sup>

This vision of the future global order is ultimately a hierarchic one where great powers have more responsibility over global affairs and where benevolence is exchanged for the acceptance of ‘harmonious’ order by smaller states. Yan seeks to institutionalize hierarchical norms more deeply among states because he takes it to be a normative goal – hierarchical relations equal stability. Although he makes it clear that his project is not one of pure hierarchy à la the tribute system,<sup>258</sup> it is a blend of hierarchical norms with existing norms of equality. What Yan sees is the success of hierarchical institutions in promoting stability within states and is calling for that success to be further replicated in relations between states internationally.

## **2. China as *Paterfamilias*: Zhao Tingyang’s *Tianxia***

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<sup>254</sup> Yan, 213.

<sup>255</sup> Gerry Simpson, *Great Powers and Outlaw States: Unequal Sovereigns in the International Legal Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68.

<sup>256</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*.

<sup>257</sup> Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, 219.

<sup>258</sup> Yan writes that reinstating the tribute system would weaken China’s political power. See: Yan, 104.

At the root of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's myriad problems – frothing nationalism, populism, ever-widening inequality, environmental degradation, terrorism - are not failed states but a 'failed world', argues Zhao Tingyang. These problems emerge from a world in which our thinking is limited by our nation-state worldview. We live in a Westphalian world where communities are organized into territorially bounded nation-states, which, given the anarchical nature of the international system, compete ruthlessly with each other for power, for status, and for supremacy. What is necessary, according to Zhao, is to overcome this inter-state system, which breeds conflict instead of nurturing harmony. For this he turns to the pre-modern Chinese concept of *Tianxia* (天下).

A distinguished scholar at the Institute of Philosophy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, Zhao put forth his Chinese solution to these global problems in a 2005 book *The Tianxia System: A Philosophy for the World Institution*, which made him an intellectual star within Chinese academia.<sup>259</sup> He further expanded his Tianxia philosophy in a series of papers and books.<sup>260</sup> His ideas were condensed and published in two English language articles, which brought his name to an international audience.<sup>261</sup> His theory has generated considerable discussion and controversy both inside and outside of the country.<sup>262</sup> While many IR scholars insist that he is not an IR theorist and thus his theory should not be included in any inventory of Chinese IR theories, since Zhao's Tianxia has implications for IR theory,

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<sup>259</sup> Zhao, *The Tianxia System*.

<sup>260</sup> Tingyang Zhao, *坏世界研究: 作为第一哲学的政治哲学* (*Investigations of the Bad World: Political Philosophy as the First Philosophy*) (Beijing: Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 2009); Tingyang Zhao, *天下的当代性* (*A Possible World of the All-under-Heaven System*) (Beijing: China CITIC Press, 2016).

<sup>261</sup> Tingyang Zhao, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-Heaven' (Tian-Xia)," *Social Identities* 12, no. 1 (January 2006): 29–41; Tingyang Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy in Terms of All-under-Heaven (Tian-Xia)," *Diogenes* 56, no. 1 (February 1, 2009): 5–18.

<sup>262</sup> For some of the most notable criticism see: Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order"; June Teufel Dreyer, "The 'Tianxia Trope': Will China Change the International System?," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96 (November 2, 2015): 1015–31; Zhaoguang Ge, "对'天下'的想象: 一个乌托邦想象背后的政治、思想与学术," *Sixiang* 29 (October 14, 2015), <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/92884-4.html#>; Jianxin Xu, "天下体系与世界制度-评天下体系: 世界制度哲学导论 (Tianxia System and World Institution: Reviewing The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of World Institution)," *Quarterly Journal of International Politics* 2 (2007): 113–42.

explicitly deals with issues typically related to the international sphere, and given Zhao's 'strong impact on popular culture and state policy'<sup>263</sup>, I include it here as a potential Chinese contribution to global IR.

Before discussing the specifics of Zhao's theory it is helpful to note the goal of his project. Out of the major theories of Chinese IR surveyed in this chapter, Zhao's project is the most ambitious in that he attempts to transcend the system of nation-states in order to bring about a peaceful and harmonious new world order for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Following European thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Zhao seeks a system to guarantee 'perpetual peace' among all states. In refashioning the nearly three thousand year old idea of Tianxia, Zhao seeks to 'rethink China' by using indigenous concepts from China's own cultural and philosophical traditions. While modern China has become a manufacturing powerhouse and has joined the club of great powers on the world stage, Zhao laments that in the world of ideas China remains a 'small country'.<sup>264</sup> By 'rethinking China' Zhao hopes to make Chinese concepts such as Tianxia into an integral and foundational part of the global system of ideas.

Zhao's project is also an attempt to imagine a future role for China, one where it has more responsibility over global affairs. The dominant narrative that has accompanied China's rise – the 'China threat' theory – adds even more urgency to this project, since such narratives are not only externally imposed and write the story of China's rise from a Western perspective, but also predict an unavoidable future of great power conflict. Zhao's project seeks a way out of this realist-inspired rise and fall of great powers. As he writes in the opening pages of his 2005 book, the contribution of China to the world 'is to become a new type of great power, a great power that is responsible for the world, a great power that is unique from all empires that have come before.'<sup>265</sup> Thus, in reading Zhao's book it becomes clear that 'rethinking China' is not his final

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<sup>263</sup> Ban Wang, ed., *Chinese Visions of World Order: Tianxia, Culture, and World Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>264</sup> Zhao, *The Tianxia System*, 2.

<sup>265</sup> Zhao, 3.

goal; the ultimate purpose of this project is to ‘rethink the world’.<sup>266</sup> It is in this spirit that he turns to the Chinese idea of Tianxia.

Tianxia (literally ‘all-under-heaven’) is one of the most important and enduring concepts in Chinese political thought.<sup>267</sup> It has served as the framework for China’s understanding of its place in the world and proper governance for thousands of years. It has also been used as a point of discussion, debate and inspiration for political thinkers from Confucius in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE to Sun Yat-sen in the 20<sup>th</sup>. As a discourse, Tianxia has recently been revised and rethought in Chinese academic circles not only by Zhao, whose work has made him closely associated with the concept, but it is a common point of discussion in any discussion of ‘Chinese’ contribution to political theory.<sup>268</sup> It is also an encompassing and vague term, which, like all broad and historical terms, is open to different contending interpretations.

The concept of Tianxia has three different meanings: first, the Earth or all lands under the sky; second, a common choice made by all peoples in the world, or a universal agreement in the ‘hearts’ of all peoples (*minxin*); and third, a political system for the world with a global institution to ensure universal order.<sup>269</sup> Therefore, the Tianxia system has three constitutive parts which include a geographic or territorial world (land), and two normative elements of a psychological world (general sentiment of the people), and an institutional world (world institution).

For a real-world example of the Tianxia system in action one can look to the Zhou dynasty (1046BC-256BC), a period during which multiple feudal sub-states existed, competed, fought and cooperated all under the broader authority of the Zhou royal house. Zhao summarizes the Zhou dynasty Tianxia system as<sup>270</sup>:

- 1) A monarchical system with some aristocratic elements;

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<sup>266</sup> Zhao, 16.

<sup>267</sup> ‘Tianxia’ has multiple meanings (‘all-under-heaven’, ‘the world’, and sometimes ‘China’). For a historical view of its evolving meaning see: Yuri Pines, “Changing Views Of ‘Tianxia’ in Pre-Imperial Discourse,” *Oriens Extremus* 43 (2002): 101–16.

<sup>268</sup> Babones, “Taking China Seriously.”

<sup>269</sup> Zhao, *The Tianxia System*, 41, 123–24; Zhao, “A Political World Philosophy,” 9.

<sup>270</sup> Zhao, “A Political World Philosophy,” 8–9.

- 2) An open network consisting of a general world government and sub-states;
- 3) A world government in charge of universal institutions, laws and world order, and which is responsible for the common wellbeing of the world, upholding world peace and justice; the world government is in charge of leading punitive expeditions when one or more sub-states breaks universal law or order;
- 4) Sub-states which are independent in all forms of life – economic, culture, social – except political legitimacy and obligations, which they owe to the higher world institution;
- 5) An institutionally-established balance between sub-states and world government to maintain long-term peace; and
- 6) The freedom for individuals to migrate to, and work in, any state they like.

Zhao makes it clear that he does not seek to replicate the Zhou-era system today.<sup>271</sup> Nevertheless, this Zhou dynasty Tianxia ideal forms the inspiration and base of his thinking for a 21<sup>st</sup> world philosophy.

#### *A World Institution*

The most distinctive aspect of Zhao's theory compared to the other theories surveyed in this chapter is his explicit call for a world government. A Tianxia system of world government is necessary because, in Confucian fashion, the order of smaller units depends on the order of larger units.<sup>272</sup> The opening passages of *The Great Learning*, which remain the core of Confucian philosophy and which Zhao draws from, instructs that: "The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom (Tianxia), first ordered well their own States. Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons."<sup>273</sup> This relationship also works in reverse, where the moral actions of individuals filter up through the family, to the state and ultimately to the world.<sup>274</sup> Implicit in this family-state-world continuum is the causal relationship between internal and external order. If there is disorder at one level then it will cause disorder at other levels. That is, disorder in Tianxia will cause disorder among states, disorder

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<sup>271</sup> Zhao, *The Tianxia System*, 106.

<sup>272</sup> Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy," 13.

<sup>273</sup> James Legge, *Confucius: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 357.

<sup>274</sup> This concept has been shortened to the pithy and well-known "修身齐家治国平天下".

among states will cause disorder among families, and disorder in the family will cause disorder within the individual. By viewing the world through this lens, the disorder and chaos of international politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can thus be attributed to some degree to the lack of effective order externally, whereby there exists no supranational political authority to regulate order among states, which in turn necessitates a world government.

It is this tradition of Chinese political philosophy that did not take the state to be the highest political unit but itself subsumed under the larger unit of Tianxia that provides an opening for Zhao's theory. Zhao argues that because of its lack of theorizing from the perspective of the world, Western thought is incapable of solving problems of world order. Those ideas that dealt with world harmony, such as Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, merely transposed one national idea (republicanism) into the international sphere.<sup>275</sup> It remains an ideology that is wedded to the nation-state. Instead, the world needs to transcend the Westphalian system of nation-states competing in the pursuit of individual interests. The Tianxia system can overcome this problem, Zhao argues, because it takes the world as the highest political unit, and as such, it can lead to a harmonious and orderly world. In this sense the Tianxia system is a utopia.

Utopian visions of perpetual peace are of course not the sole purview of 21<sup>st</sup> century philosophers. More than a century before Zhao published his *Tianxia System*, the Qing dynasty reformer Kang Youwei in his 1902 book *The Great Harmony* proposed that world development proceeded through three stages: 'uncivilized', followed by an intermediate phase of 'xiaokang' (little prosperity), and then finally to the Great Harmony.<sup>276</sup> Kang's utopian vision was based on a commitment to radical equality. It was only by abolishing states and ultimately even the family that individual

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<sup>275</sup> Kant is just one example of European thinkers calling for a world government. I highlight him here given the centrality of Kant to Zhao Tingyang's work.

<sup>276</sup> Daniel Bell, *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 40.

selfishness could be eliminated and a global society to which all was shared could emerge.

In contrast to Kang Youwei's vision of an egalitarian future in which even the family structure is eliminated, Zhao Tingyang seeks to remodel the world based on the structure of the family, whose hierarchical and paternal mode of governance ensures order and stability.<sup>277</sup> In Zhao's words, 'world peace is impossible if world governance does not follow the family model.'<sup>278</sup> Besides the patriarch's ability to enforce order, world governance on the paternalistic family model has another advantage. Given that in the family-state-world continuum shown above the order of one level depends on both order in the level above and below, consistency among all levels is the most effective way to ensure universal order. The problem with democracy, both at the state level and international democracy, Zhao argues, is precisely because it makes the political model at each level inconsistent. With Tianxia based on a family model each level is aligned, what Zhao calls *transitivity*, and it is this uniformity which results in a harmonious whole: 'All political levels [...] should be essentially homogenous [...] so as to create a harmonious system.'<sup>279</sup>

An obvious question is what about the United Nations? It is a global institution above the nation-state that deals with global problems of peace and order. It could be considered a modern version of Tianxia. However, Zhao argues that the capacity of the UN to handle global problems is limited because its worldview is based on nation-states.<sup>280</sup> It is merely an institution to discuss and debate national interests.<sup>281</sup> Zhao compares the ideals of the UN – international democracy and rational communication – to the agora of ancient Greece. The problem today is that the agora of the UN is not matched with an effective polis, an effective and authoritative institution. There are indeed wide-ranging discussions between a plurality of states within the UN, but major decisions are dependent on the will of the great powers who control the

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<sup>277</sup> Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy," 11.

<sup>278</sup> Zhao, 13.

<sup>279</sup> Zhao, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-Heaven' (Tian-Xia)," 33.

<sup>280</sup> Zhao, *The Tianxia System*, 151–55.

<sup>281</sup> Zhao, 154.

Security Council and without whose assent significant action is impossible. In short, the UN does not have 'substantial power to govern the world'.<sup>282</sup> Without effective political institutions, the ideal of an international agora of democracy and rational communication among nation-states becomes 'chaotic and confused'. The supreme political authority of the Tianxia system, with its ideology of globalism, overcomes these problems.

*No Outside, No Other*

It is popular for Chinese scholars to claim that Chinese thinking is more inclusive and tolerant of the Other than Western thought. According to the Tianxia worldview, distinctions such as Self/Other are more fluid and relational than in Western thought.<sup>283</sup> Zhao argues that in the Tianxia system there is no 'outside'.<sup>284</sup> Indeed, since Tianxia covers *all* under heaven then it by definition does not have an outside. A consequence of the Tianxia system including everyone and excluding no one is that there is no concept of 'foreign' or 'pagan'. To show how imperial China harmoniously dealt with its barbarian neighbours he points to the 'tributary system'.<sup>285</sup> The normative structure of this system was built on concentric circles of relationships emanating out from the emperor. The first concentric circle was composed of the emperor's loyal ministers and feudal states, followed by tributary states and extending outwards to the rest of the barbarian world. In this system one's rights and duties depended on one's proximity to the emperor.

The distinction between Chinese/barbarian in the Tianxia system was primarily cultural, not racial – one was a barbarian if one did not follow Chinese cultural practices. From this it follows that distinctions in this system were fluid and not absolute. Contrasting Tianxia thinking with Carl Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction, Zhao argues that in the Tianxia system the dichotomy between inside/outside and

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<sup>282</sup> Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy," 16; Zhao, *The Tianxia System*, 151.

<sup>283</sup> Xiao Ren, "论中国的世界主义 (On China's Cosmopolitanism)," *World Economics and Politics* 8 (2014): 36, 39.

<sup>284</sup> Zhao, *The Tianxia System*, 14, 30.

<sup>285</sup> Zhao, 53, 59–61.

Self/Other was relative and not absolute. Since it was based on cultural distinctions one could move 'inside' by adopting Chinese cultural practices. Zhao claims that unlike the West, China's 'magnanimous' thought does not reject the other.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, since Chinese/barbarian distinction was cultural, those 'outside' could be transformed (化 *hua*) through peaceful cultural exchange, rather than military conquest.<sup>287</sup> Zhao thus follows other Chinese writers in extolling Chinese exceptionalism. Zhang Weiwei, for instance, argues that since China is a 'civilizational state' it does not rely on military expansion to buttress its rule.<sup>288</sup> For Zhao, Tianxia thinking represents the fountainhead of Chinese exceptionalism and the only hope for a peaceful future world order. While 'Western thought can ponder conflict, only Chinese thought is able to ponder harmony.'<sup>289</sup>

There is a strong hierarchical, elitist and anti-democratic element to Zhao's Tianxia system. He maintains that there are several intractable problems with the democratic process, most importantly that people vote for their individual interests rather than the collective (or world) interest, that the decisions of the masses are not stable, and that masses are susceptible to the negative effects of propaganda, fashionable trends and misinformation.<sup>290</sup> He disparages common people as 'blind followers, selfish, irresponsible, foolish, and vulgar.'<sup>291</sup> The decision of the masses therefore does not necessarily equal that of all the people's hearts (*minxin*, a core element of Tianxia).<sup>292</sup> Reminiscent of both China's imperial past and its Leninist present, Zhao advocates that Tianxia needs to be guided by elites that can determine the general will. Since 'people do not really know what is best for them, but that the elite do, so the elite ought genuinely to decide for the people.'<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Zhao, 13.

<sup>287</sup> Zhao, 15.

<sup>288</sup> Weiwei Zhang, *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State* (Hackensack, N.J: World Century, 2012).

<sup>289</sup> Zhao, *The Tianxia System*, 15.

<sup>290</sup> Zhao, 28–29.

<sup>291</sup> Zhao, 27.

<sup>292</sup> Zhao, 28.

<sup>293</sup> Zhao, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-Heaven' (Tian-Xia)," 32.

Tianxia remains an ideal and inspiration for world order not only for scholars, but for policymakers as well. President Hu Jintao (2003-2012) had his vision of ‘harmonious world’, which meant a world where all civilizations coexist peacefully on the basis of shared interests such as peace and development. Yu Keping, a close advisor to Hu, explicitly linked Hu’s proposal with Tianxia, writing that ‘harmonious world’ is a ‘new take on the development of the ancient Chinese dream of Tianxia Datong (great harmony of the world).’<sup>294</sup> Zhao Tingyang praised the foreign policy initiative as an effective use of the resources of ancient Chinese thought.<sup>295</sup> More recently, at a meeting in Beijing attended by all of China’s overseas ambassadors, President Xi Jinping instructed his diplomats to ‘cherish the motherland as well as Tianxia’.<sup>296</sup>

The vision of world order described in Zhao Tingyang’s Tianxia system is an ideal Chinese model of world order that is a borderless and harmonious world political system whereby a transcendental world government manages states, institutions and law to maintain harmony and uphold universal order. The Chinese solution that Zhao offers to ameliorate the problems of world order is primarily a conceptual one – Tianxia offers a way to think beyond the nation-state and thus provides the first step to escaping the Westphalian world of consecutive tragedies of great power competition.

Both Zhao Tingyang’s Tianxia and Yan Xuetong’s moral realism struggle on the question of establishing norms in a diverse world and the proper role and recognition of the Other. Both ignore the question of what can be done with rebellious smaller states by simply assuming that smaller states will willingly subordinate themselves to China’s benevolence or be culturally transformed by the awesome nature of

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<sup>294</sup> Yu Keping, “We Must Work to Create a Harmonious World,” *China Daily*, May 10, 2007, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2007-05/10/content\\_869406.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2007-05/10/content_869406.htm).

<sup>295</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “关于和谐世界的思考(‘Some Thoughts on the Concept of Harmonious World’),” *世界经济与政治 (World Economics and Politics)* 9, no. 1 (2006).

<sup>296</sup> “深入推进中国特色大国外交 (‘Thoroughly Advance Major Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics’),” *People’s Daily*, December 29, 2017, <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1229/c1002-29735259.html>. Here Xi is drawing on a passage from *Mencius*: “穷则独善其身，达则兼善天下” or “cultivate the self when utterly deprived, and provide for the world when fully endowed.” (*Mencius* 13.9).

Chinese culture. The issue of interaction in a pluralist world is taken up by the next theory: Gongsheng-Symbiosis.

### 3. China the Tolerant Power: *Gongsheng-Symbiosis*

The two aforementioned theories are closely associated with the work of one scholar – Yan Xuetong has his *moral realism* and Zhao Tingyang has his *Tianxia*. The latest theoretical development has come not from an individual, but from a collection of scholars across several different institutes and disciplines. Contributors are not limited to IR specialists, but include sociologists, economists and intellectual historians who are located at universities and research institutes in Shanghai. Their work is collected under the name ‘gongsheng’ (共生), or in English, ‘symbiosis’.

Symbiosis, is a concept originally found in evolutionary biology. It refers to the long-term interaction of different organisms in the same environment. The German botanist H. A. de Bary (1831-1888), great-uncle to the famed sinologist Wm. Theodore de Bary, originally used the concept to explain the mutualistic relationship between fungi and higher order plants. He defined symbiosis as ‘the living together of unlike organisms.’<sup>297</sup>

The symbiosis concept was brought into Chinese social sciences by Hu Shoujun, a sociologist at Fudan University.<sup>298</sup> Hu was driven to find a guiding explanatory framework for Chinese society that could replace class struggle - then the dominant framework for analyzing China’s societal development. Hu was frustrated by the antagonistic nature of class struggle, which breeds societal divisions by pitting one class against another.<sup>299</sup> A new framework based on the equality of the individual regardless of class (or any other status) was necessary. In 1998, Hu used the concept

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<sup>297</sup> “De Bary, (Heinrich) Anton,” in *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, accessed March 6, 2018, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/science-and-technology/horticulture-biographies/heinrich-anton-de-bary>.

<sup>298</sup> Hu himself borrowed the concept from a Japanese scholar, who used the concept to explain interpersonal relations. See: 尾关周二, 共生的理想 (中央编译出版社, 1996).

<sup>299</sup> Shoujun Hu, “让我们倡导‘社会共生’” (Speech, Speech given at Fudan University, reprinted in People’s Daily, February 25, 2007), <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/49167/5412501.html>.

of symbiosis to explain the evolution of societies, putting forth the idea of ‘social symbiosis’.<sup>300</sup> Hu summarizes the concept in the following manner:

What is social symbiosis? Social symbiosis theory takes individual equality as its premise. Every life is equal. No matter belief, class, sex, occupation, age, or any another biological or social difference, only if one respects others’ civil rights then one also possesses the same rights. Individuals have different interests, classes have difference interests, of course there will be conflict and competition, but conflict and competition does not have to eliminate the other, but rather coexist.<sup>301</sup>

According to gongsheng-symbiosis, the natural state of society is not, as Thomas Hobbes would have it, ‘a condition which is called warre; and such a warre as is of every man against every man.’<sup>302</sup> Hu Shoujun’s usage of symbiosis here recalls the ideas of Russian anarchist thinker Peter Kropotkin, who was responding to the then fashionable social Darwinian view of societal evolution. Promoted by the likes of Thomas Henry Huxley and Herbert Spencer, social Darwinism envisioned nature as a brutal war against all, best encapsulated in the famous Spencerian slogan ‘survival of the fittest’. Published in 1902, Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* offered a different account of evolution. As the title suggests, he argued that the ‘struggle for existence’ in the natural world led more often to cooperation than to violent conflict, and those species that could reciprocate best ensured their survival.<sup>303</sup>

Unit relations in a gongsheng-symbiosis system have three characteristics. First, they are endogenous. That is, all aspects of society including its political, economic, and cultural manifestations are the product of individuals and their practices. It follows that every society develops according to its own local conditions. Second, they are mutualistic. That is, between agents and structures there is not a linear, unidirectional

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<sup>300</sup> Shoujun Hu, Shijin Wang, and Youzhong Li, “共生哲学论纲,” in *共生: 上海学派的兴起 (Gongsheng: The Rise of a Shanghai School)*, ed. Xiao Ren (Shanghai: 上海译文出版社, 2015), 13.

<sup>301</sup> Shoujun Hu, *走向共生 (Towards Gongsheng)* (Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2002), 22.

<sup>302</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Project Gutenberg, 1651), chap. 13, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm>.

<sup>303</sup> Peter Alekseevich Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (Project Gutenberg, 1902), <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4341/pg4341.html>.

relationship, but rather each is conditioned by the other. Third, they are symbiotic. That is, agents depend on each other for existence.<sup>304</sup>

After its introduction by Hu Shoujun, the gongsheng-symbiosis concept caught the attention of Shanghai-based IR scholars, who noticed its applicability to an international system with many different types of political systems, cultures, religions, and modes of development. In 2012, the Shanghai International Relations Society, headed by Yang Jiemian, brother of the PRC's then-foreign minister Yang Jiechi, convened a conference to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Shanghai Conference on International Relations Theory held in 1987, which brought together both Shanghai-based IR and non-IR scholars, including Hu Shoujun.<sup>305</sup>

The previous secretary-general of the Shanghai International Relations Society, Jin Yingzhong, published a series of articles on gongsheng-symbiosis theory, applying the concept to international society.<sup>306</sup> Jin, a senior scholar in the Chinese IR community, took the lead in using the gongsheng-symbiosis concept as a potential 'Chinese' contribution to IR theory and was responsible for bringing other Shanghai academics into the project.<sup>307</sup> Ren Xiao, professor at Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, published an edited volume in 2015 that brought together contributions by the various scholars working under the gongsheng-symbiosis umbrella.<sup>308</sup>

There are two distinct streams of gongsheng-symbiosis theory, each going back to different intellectual traditions and empirical sources for theory building.<sup>309</sup> The first is an eclectic mix that draws from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the Confucian classics, Chinese leaders' speeches, traditional Chinese thinking on

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<sup>304</sup> Hu, Wang, and Li, "共生哲学论纲," 19–21.

<sup>305</sup> Ren, *Gongsheng*, 3.

<sup>306</sup> Yingzhong Jin, "国际社会的共生论-和平发展时代的国际关系理论 (Coexistence Theory of International Society-International Relations Theory in an Era of Peaceful Development)," *社会科学* 10 (2011): 12–21; Yingzhong Jin, "为何要研究'国际社会共生性'-兼议和平发展时代国际关系理论," *国际展望* 5 (2011); Yingzhong Jin, "共生性国际社会与中国和平发展 (Symbiotic International Society and China's Peaceful Development)," *International Review* 4 (2012): 43–49.

<sup>307</sup> Interview, Shanghai, May 2018.

<sup>308</sup> Ren, *Gongsheng*.

<sup>309</sup> Lu, "Two Approaches to Chinese IR Theory," 83.

'harmony' (*he*), historical materialism, and the foreign policy practice of the PRC.<sup>310</sup> This stream overwhelmingly approves and legitimizes current government policies such as the official 'peaceful development' discourse while harboring deep skepticism and even antagonism toward Western political theory. PRC white papers on peaceful development are taken as 'proof' that China's rise does not conform to realist predictions of rising powers seeking hegemony.<sup>311</sup> The second stream probes traditional China's foreign policy practices, focusing on the pre-modern tributary order of East Asia, contrasts Chinese value pluralism with Western value monism, and explores the possibility of a gongsheng-symbiosis international system emerging after the Cold War.<sup>312</sup> This stream, while still supportive of current government policies and skeptical of Western theory, is more rigorous and slightly less normative in its theorizing and remains focused on building gongsheng-symbiosis theory as an explanatory theoretical framework for global politics.

Three foundations of theorizing are notable for gongsheng-symbiosis: the 'natural state' of society, which is taken to be pluralistic; the ideal order of states, which is taken to be heterogeneous; and the East Asian international system, which is taken to be a peaceful gongsheng-symbiosis system.

### *Society's natural state: Plurality*

Gongsheng-symbiosis scholars take as their starting point the fact that the world is naturally diverse. It is full of myriad differing cultures, religions, values, and political

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<sup>310</sup> Yang, "Preparing Theory for China's Great Power Diplomacy"; Liang Cai, "共生性国际体系与中国外交的道、术、势('China's Foreign Policy Path, Method, and Influence in a Gongsheng International System')," *Guoji Guancha* 1 (2014): 52-62; Cai, "Optimizing the Gongsheng System"; Shengyu Yuan, "共生型国际体系: 理论与挑战('Gongsheng International System: Theory and Challenges')," *Shehui Kexue* 6 (2014): 13-18; Jin, "Symbiotic International Society and China's Peaceful Development."

<sup>311</sup> Jin, "Symbiotic International Society and China's Peaceful Development."

<sup>312</sup> Xiao Ren, "论东亚'共生体系'原理 (On the Principles of the 'System of Symbiosis' in East Asia)," *World Economics and Politics* 7 (2013): 4-22; Ren, "On China's Cosmopolitanism"; Xiao Ren, "论国际共生的价值基础-对外关系思想和制度研究之三 (On the Foundational Values of International Gongsheng-Foreign Relations Thinking and Institutions, Part Three)," *World Economics and Politics* 4 (2016): 4-28; Changhe Su, "共生型国际体系的可能- 在一个多极世界中如何构建新型大国关系? ('The Possibility of a Gongsheng International System-How to Construct a New Type of Great Power Relations in a Multipolar World?')," *World Economics and Politics* 5 (2013): 4-22; Su, "From Guanxi to Gongsheng."

systems. 'It has been [diverse] in the past, it is now, and will continue to be in the future.'<sup>313</sup> It is within a system characterized by plurality that all things interact. The international system is also marked by diversity, with numerous state and non-state actors that vary, sometimes quite considerably, in size, wealth and values. A core problematique then emerges: in a pluralist world, how should states best interact to mutually develop while preserving order?

One starting point for gongsheng-symbiosis is to adhere to the basic principle of sovereignty. Sovereignty, together with its twin concept of non-intervention, ensures and promotes coexistence among states. A state of coexistence between states based on the principle of sovereignty is the nascent level of gongsheng-symbiosis. But the sovereignty principle that constitutes the Westphalian order, Jin Yingzhong argues, has been neglected by America and the European powers, who insist on their own sovereignty but do not recognize this right for developing states.<sup>314</sup> Thus, as a method to improve the stability of the international order, gongsheng-symbiosis emphasizes non-interventionism as a virtue.<sup>315</sup> Gongsheng-symbiosis also believes that international society should uphold the right of all states to pursue self-realization (自我实现 *ziwo shixian*) – that is, the right to follow one's own development path.<sup>316</sup> If a society's political and economic institutions are the product of individuals and their practices within a distinct cultural sphere, then it follows that there cannot be a universal development model suitable for all states to adopt.<sup>317</sup>

But gongsheng-symbiosis is not limited to a mere state of coexistence. Within an environment of plurality, willing interaction among states can lead to a higher level of cooperation. Yang Jiemian divides the progressive evolution of the international system into three stages: peaceful coexistence (which he equates directly to the PRC's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence), to 'peaceful gongsheng', and finally to

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<sup>313</sup> Xiao Ren et al., "多元世界的共生之道('Gongsheng in a Pluralistic World')," *Wenhui News*, May 5, 2017, [http://www.cssn.cn/zx/201705/t20170505\\_3508974.shtml](http://www.cssn.cn/zx/201705/t20170505_3508974.shtml).

<sup>314</sup> Jin, "Co-Existence Theory of International Society," 16.

<sup>315</sup> Su, "From Guanxi to Gongsheng," 12.

<sup>316</sup> Jin, "Co-Existence Theory of International Society," 14.

<sup>317</sup> Ren, "On the Foundational Values of International Gongsheng."

'harmonious gongsheng'.<sup>318</sup> Exemplifying the legitimating function of Chinese IR, the progressive stages of the international system are tied to Beijing's harmonious foreign policy.<sup>319</sup> Xi Jinping's foreign policy slogan of building a 'community of common destiny' is pronounced as the ultimate embodiment of gongsheng-symbiosis.<sup>320</sup> Going even further, some zealous scholars assert that gongsheng-symbiosis represents a 'new system of international relations theory' that will ultimately replace the current Western international system.<sup>321</sup>

Putting aside differences and seeking cooperation based on common interests is an ideal for gongsheng-symbiosis.<sup>322</sup> How to achieve such an ideal? Gongsheng-symbiosis scholars put forward the possibility of a regional order based on economic integration without political integration. In a 2016 article published in *World Economics and Politics*, Su Changhe explores the cultural factors underpinning China's traditional foreign relations and how they are reflected in the PRC's current foreign policy. According to Su, China has historically tried to build a gongsheng-symbiosis order by pursuing economic integration with its neighbours without political integration based on one political model.<sup>323</sup> This makes China different from Western powers. While China has a culture of community (共 *gong*) and 'togetherness' (和 *he*), the West's divisive (分 *fen*) logic leads it to promote 'divide and conquer' tactics in Asia.<sup>324</sup> China's great power diplomacy, infused with 'gongsheng culture' is best for managing a region such as Asia, where levels of development and national cultures differ significantly. A regional collectivity of states respecting sovereignty and disregarding value differences while still cooperating in managing regional affairs is an example of gongsheng-symbiosis in action.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Yang, "Preparing Theory for China's Great Power Diplomacy," 4.

<sup>319</sup> Cai, "Optimizing the Gongsheng System."

<sup>320</sup> Cai, "China's Foreign Policy Path, Method, and Influence in a Gongsheng International System," 53.

<sup>321</sup> Yuan, "Gongsheng International System," 15.

<sup>322</sup> Yingzhong Jin, "社会共生研究的当代性('The Contemporary Relevance of Social Gongsheng Research')," *Journal of Chang'an University* 18, no. 3 (2016): 64.

<sup>323</sup> Su, "From Guanxi to Gongsheng," 14.

<sup>324</sup> Su, 19.

<sup>325</sup> Su, "Governance and Order in an Interconnected World."

### *An ideal order of states: Heterogeneous*

Depending on the degree of similarity between units interacting under a condition of plurality, there are two ideal-typical models of a gongsheng-symbiosis order – homogenous and heterogeneous. When there is a high degree of similarity among the units this is a homogenous order; on the other hand, when there is a low degree of similarity among units this is a heterogeneous order.

Gongsheng scholars interpret the modern international order that China was brought into as homogenous (同质 *tongzhi*).<sup>326</sup> Since its inception in Western Europe four centuries ago, the great powers that have constituted the core of the international order have shared similar values, culture and political systems. Furthermore, not content to allow other countries to develop as they wish, the Western powers, led by the United States, sought to expand this order by remaking developing states in their own image.<sup>327</sup> This imperial impulse was propelled by the value monism of liberal internationalism, a belief in one version of modernity, namely that the liberal order is the only possibility for international order. As one of the most prominent American liberals writes, ‘A grand alternative does not exist.’<sup>328</sup> Chinese scholars certainly disagree. ‘Has history ended with Western-style “liberal democracy”?’ Ren asks. ‘Absolutely not!’<sup>329</sup>

For many Chinese scholars, liberal internationalist discourses such as Fukuyama’s ‘end of history’ thesis are part of a broader effort by the West to contain China’s rise. Liberalism is viewed not only as a threat to China’s own one-party political system, but it remains a missionary ideology that is the cause of a string of global disasters, particularly since the end of the Cold War. Prefacing with a list of recent American interventions abroad – the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in the aftermath of the

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<sup>326</sup> Yuan, “Gongsheng International System,” 16; Ren, *Gongsheng*, 164.

<sup>327</sup> G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Forging A World Of Liberty Under Law: U.S. National Security In The 21st Century - Final Report of the Princeton Project on National Security,” 2006, <http://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/report/FinalReport.pdf>.

<sup>328</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “The Liberal International Order and Its Discontents,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (May 2010): 511.

<sup>329</sup> Ren, *Gongsheng*, 3.

September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, and the Crimean crisis of 2014 – Ren writes ‘Western-style “liberalism” has not solved many of the world’s problems; on the contrary, in many circumstances it has sown even more chaos.’<sup>330</sup> The wanton application of liberalism, whether in the form of market privatization under the banner of the ‘Washington Consensus’ or in the insistence on electoral democracy as the only legitimate form of governance, is not suitable to ameliorate the complex problems countries face in a globalized world, illustrated by the violent record of the post-Cold War period of American hegemony. Of particular concern is taking democratic institutions, or the progression towards democratic institutions, as the basis for membership in international society and punishing states that deviate from this path, like the PRC was punished after the Tiananmen incident in 1989. ‘For [the West], a premise of admitting the other [into the Western order] requires that the other first thoroughly reform and remold oneself, becoming homogenized in the image of the West. Thus, transforming the other becomes [the West’s] “historical mission”.’<sup>331</sup>

An order of politically homogenous states clashes with threads of Chinese traditional thought that emphasize the universality of difference. In their discussion of the possibilities of moving toward a more pluralist international order, Ren Xiao and his co-authors point to a quote from the Confucian classics: ‘It is the nature of things to be different’.<sup>332</sup> The quote, drawn from Mencius (372-289 BC), refers to the natural and harmonious state of diversity among all things. Mencius continues: to disregard difference and to reduce all to the same standard is the cause of disorder (乱天下 *luan tianxia*). Chinese president Xi Jinping is fond of referencing the phrase, using it during engagements with foreign audiences, including in an interview with the Wall Street Journal prior to visiting the United States and during a visit to the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.<sup>333</sup> At the 2015 Boao Forum, themed ‘Asia’s New Future: Towards a Community of Common Destiny’, Xi employed Mencius’ quote to advocate

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<sup>330</sup> Ren, “On China’s Cosmopolitanism,” 32.

<sup>331</sup> Ren, *Gongsheng*, 164–65.

<sup>332</sup> “夫物之不齐，物之情也” See: Ren et al., “Gongsheng in a Pluralistic World.”

<sup>333</sup> “习大大博鳌讲话引经据典：‘夫物之不齐，物之情也’ (Xi Dada Quotes the Classics at Boao: ‘It Is the Nature of Things to Be Different’),” *China Daily*, March 28, 2015, [http://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/2015-03/28/content\\_19939296.htm](http://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/2015-03/28/content_19939296.htm).

his signature vision for the region. Xi followed the quote with a call for cultural pluralism: 'between civilizations there is no relative superiority or divisions between superior and inferior.'<sup>334</sup>

Offering a counter-narrative to scenarios that predict a clash of civilizations, gongsheng-symbiosis theory argues that heterogeneous states can peacefully interact and mutually develop without the need to eliminate difference. In the third part of his trilogy published in the journal *World Economics and Politics*, Ren contrasts gongsheng-symbiosis pluralism with value monism. Described by Isaiah Berlin as 'the ancient belief that there is a single harmony of truths into which everything, if it is genuine, in the end must fit'<sup>335</sup>, value monism posits that there is one best way to organize society, that there is a hierarchy of values of which some must be prioritized over others. As a counter to value monism, gongsheng-symbiosis scholars point to the value pluralism in Chinese culture by referencing the Confucian maxim of 'harmony without uniformity' and the Taoist maxim of coexistence: 'All things are nurtured together without their injuring one another.'<sup>336</sup> In its modern Western form, monism manifests itself in the 'end of history' thesis, market fundamentalism and the blind faith in one form of democracy. But this particular ordering of values – where the individual's right to vote prioritized over other competing rights – may not be appropriate for China at its current stage of development, argue gongsheng-symbiosis scholars. China, as the largest developing country in the world, values the overall socio-economic development of its citizens as one of its primary values, while countries in the West give priority to individual freedom. As a *People's Daily* editorial put it, 'China's values are allowing its citizens to achieve a basic level of development, to become well-off, to have a dignified life, to allow its 1.3 billion citizens to realize freedom through comprehensive development.'<sup>337</sup> This reasoning is also behind the

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<sup>334</sup> "Xi Dada Quotes the Classics at Boao."

<sup>335</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "The First and the Last," *New York Review of Books* 45 (May 14, 1998).

<sup>336</sup> "萬物并育而不相害，道并行而不相悖" Ren, *Gongsheng*, 165.

<sup>337</sup> 辛鸣, "中国理论, 贡献独特, 焉不自信," *People's Daily*, March 20, 2015, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2015/0320/c40531-26723069.html>.

PRC's effort to promote the 'right to development' alongside international society's traditional focus on individual human rights.

An international society in which diversity among its members – cultural, ideological, institutional, etc. – is not resolved by force but through mutual respect and engagement is one that promises to be more stable. A heterogeneous order thus remains the ideal type of international society, one that not only garners legitimacy among a diverse coalition of states, but also preserves stability and order among its members. As one author writes, 'A good international order should not insist that all members have the same political system.'<sup>338</sup> In this sense, gongsheng-symbiosis represents a cosmopolitan vision, one that insists on individuals' equal moral worth and seeks space for autonomous development based on mutual respect.<sup>339</sup>

*Order in East Asia: Rethinking the 'tribute system'*

Most mainstream Western IR continues to rely on the Westphalian system for empirical reference and theoretical basis. But there have been other international systems besides Westphalia throughout history.<sup>340</sup> The pre-modern Sinocentric order in East Asia is one alternative whose long history provides a reservoir of data for scholars to explore in order to theorize alternative institutional arrangements for inter-state relations. In 2013, Ren Xiao and Su Changhe, separately published articles about gongsheng-symbiosis theory in *World Economics and Politics*.<sup>341</sup> 'For a long time' Ren begins his article, 'writing on international relations has taken Europe as the core, IR theory has often used the European historical experience as the foundation [of theorizing].'<sup>342</sup> An excessive reliance on European history and ideas has served to embed certain concepts that are central to the field – balance of power

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<sup>338</sup> Su, "Governance and Order in an Interconnected World," 31.

<sup>339</sup> David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (London: Polity, 2010).

<sup>340</sup> Ringmar provides two alternatives to Westphalia: the Sinocentric system and the Tokugawa system. While the former is describe as a 'hierarchy' the latter is something between Westphalian anarchy and Sinocentric hierarchy. Erik Ringmar, "Performing International Systems: Two East-Asian Alternatives to the Westphalian Order," *International Organization* 66 (2012): 1–25.

<sup>341</sup> Ren, "On the Principles of the 'System of Symbiosis' in East Asia"; Su, "The Possibility of a Gongsheng International System."

<sup>342</sup> Ren, "On the Principles of the 'System of Symbiosis' in East Asia," 4.

politics, hegemonic competition, individualism and conflictual relations. As such gongsheng-symbiosis scholars turn their analysis away from Westphalian Europe towards the traditional East Asian order.

The paradigmatic description of the East Asian Order – the ‘tribute system’ – was initially developed by the eminent historian John King Fairbank and his collaborators in his well-known volume *The Chinese World Order*.<sup>343</sup> In the Fairbankian account, the tribute system is presented as a Sinocentric, hierarchical order that was organized around the supreme authority of the Chinese emperor. Surrounding states ‘if they were to have contact with China at all, were expected and when possible obliged to do so as tributaries.’<sup>344</sup>

Gongsheng-symbiosis scholars critique the Fairbankian view, which has long been influential in the field, for its presumption of Sinocentrism and overemphasis on the duties of tributary states to China while simultaneously underemphasizing the duty of China to its tributaries. The correct interpretation of this order is important not just for idle historical or theoretical interest, but has real implications for how we view the contemporaneous return of China to great power status and the effects it has on the international system. Important here is philosopher Ian Hacking’s notion of *historical ontology*. Historical ontology refers to the origin and diffusion of ideas, concepts, institutions and classifications, each of which emerge in a specific historical and social context. Hacking reminds us to understand ‘how these various concepts, practices, and corresponding institutions [...] disclose new possibility for human choice and action.’<sup>345</sup> The construction of the tributary system as Sinocentric and hierarchical has captured the imagination of not just scholars, but policymakers as well, leading to the consternation of some Chinese scholars who seek to dispel worries that a rising China will seek to re-establish a new tributary system in the region. Even the name given to this order – the ‘tribute system’ – has become the

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<sup>343</sup> Chinese scholars point out that the Chinese language does not have a word for ‘tribute system’ and its linguistic creation by Fairbank has influenced the discourse of East Asia’s traditional international order as excessively Sinocentric. See: Ren, 132.

<sup>344</sup> Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order*, 4.

<sup>345</sup> Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4.

standard nomenclature to describe imperial China's foreign relations. But there is no equivalent word in Chinese; it was, as one historian of this system notes, a 'Western invention for descriptive purposes'.<sup>346</sup> In a widely-read article reconceptualizing the East Asian international system as one of coexistence between powers big and small, Su Changhe writes that the Fairbankian interpretation, 'has led to misleading, even negative influence, to the outside world, especially neighbouring regions, about China's foreign relations.'<sup>347</sup>

According to Ren Xiao, the traditional order in East Asia is better understood not as a Sinocentric tributary order but as a gongsheng-symbiosis order, whose long and peaceful tenure must be to a certain extent be attributed to its consensual nature based on status roles.<sup>348</sup> Consensual is the operative word here. Many studies that take the tribute system as the organizing principle for regional relations assume the hegemonic position of China afforded it unilateral power to impose its vision of order on neighbouring states.<sup>349</sup> Through a historical study of the core institutions of the tribute system, Ren emphasizes that this was not the case. To a significant degree, the function of interstate relations in East Asia depended on Confucian notions of morality, rites, and virtue, which formed the normative framework in which actors conducted international relations. A state's identity, which was determined by Confucian status roles, served as the framework for understanding correct (or rational) behaviour. What were the essential elements of East Asia's pre-modern gongsheng-symbiosis order? Ren points to five: multiple forms of mutual interaction, tributary trade, voluntary relations, peaceful coexistence, and shared legitimacy. Most relevant for discussion here is Ren's claim that this hierarchical order was consensual. Overall, Ren argues, this order was generally peaceful because among the major states in the region, and between big and small, strong and weak states, there was general compliance with norms dictating appropriate behaviour according to

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<sup>346</sup> Mark Mancall, "The Ch'ing Tribute System: An Interpretive Essay," in *The Chinese World Order*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 63.

<sup>347</sup> Su, "From Guanxi to Gongsheng," 23.

<sup>348</sup> Ren, "On the Principles of the 'System of Symbiosis' in East Asia."

<sup>349</sup> Yuan-kang Wang, "Managing Regional Hegemony in Historical Asia: The Case of Early Ming China," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 129-53.

one's status, chief among them was the exchange between small states of the recognition of the Chinese emperor as the ruler of all-under-heaven for the guarantee of ruling legitimacy and non-interference at home.<sup>350</sup> If neighbours accepted the Chinese emperor as monarch (君 *jun*) and themselves as subject (臣 *chen*), this would be an 'appropriate' relationship.<sup>351</sup>

Despite the obvious unequal nature of the traditional East Asian order, gongsheng-symbiosis scholars frame it as a structure of 'formal inequality but informal equality' where small states had considerable freedom. 'Informally equal' means that hegemonic China and its smaller neighbours both had mutual responsibilities to each other; while the main responsibility of small states was providing public deference to the Chinese emperor, China had responsibility for providing security and access to its large markets. In this order, Ren summarizes, peace prevailed when 'small respected big, and big tolerated small'.<sup>352</sup> When asked about the contradictory nature of 'formal inequality but informal equality' during an interview, Ren expanded:

When a big power feels it is respected it may not want to use its power to bully or invade or annex; when a small country shows its respect for a big country, it may win itself security and welfare. So equality does not have to be equality like the UN. In the UN it is 'one country, one vote' – this is based on something developed in the West. It appears very equal, very democratic, but in essence it is not like that. In East Asia they were unequal. There was a Chinese emperor and a king of a small state. With an exchange of credentials the king looked at the emperor as his superior. In this respect it was unequal. But if we look at the essence, they were equal.<sup>353</sup>

This is the lesson that gongsheng-symbiosis has drawn from the East Asian order: the natural inequalities among regional states were mitigated by a China that was a tolerant (包容 *baorong*) great power, institutionalized hierarchy acted as the basis for long-term stability, and an order of hierarchy provides an alternative to Westphalian sovereign equality. In this sense the idealized workings of the tribute system share

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<sup>350</sup> Ren, "On the Principles of the 'System of Symbiosis' in East Asia," 149.

<sup>351</sup> Ren, "On China's Cosmopolitanism," 40.

<sup>352</sup> "小国尊大, 大国容小" See: Ren, *Gongsheng*, 4.

<sup>353</sup> Interview, Shanghai, May 2018.

much in common with moral realism's notion of humane authority. The role of the hegemon is to manifest benevolence in exchange for the acceptance of order by smaller states.

Exploring the institutional mechanisms of the East Asian hierarchical order is not just of historical interest, but offers insights into how China should manage its contemporary rise to hegemonic status without causing instability in the region. Meng Weizhan explores Ming-Korea relations to explain how hierarchical relations are created.<sup>354</sup> Meng argues that in the process of forming hierarchies, both material power and culture are important. Meng distinguishes between authority (权威 *quanwei*) and power (势力 *shili*), noting that the former has an ideological component. Authority rests on a contract: The leading state provides the dependent state with order, ensures property, security and territorial integrity, while the dependent state transfers some of its sovereignty to the leading state – thereupon both states 'gain mutually'.<sup>355</sup> This, of course, assumes that dependent states will willingly forfeit sovereignty. Like gongsheng-symbiosis scholars, Meng maintains that tributary relations were defined by formal inequality but were informally equal.<sup>356</sup> There is a lesson for contemporary China in Meng's analysis. He argues that China should attach equal weight to power and morality, it should provide security guarantees to Asian states, as well as build its cultural soft power, all for the purpose of increasing its ruling legitimacy.<sup>357</sup>

The reconceptualization of the East Asian order as a consensual gongsheng-symbiosis order has been met with criticism, most pointedly about the use of Confucian culture to explain the absence of power balancing during a time period when the Chinese empire was regarded as the most powerful state on earth. Historian Edward Dreyer captures the awesome power of the Ming dynasty, noting a 1393 census which recorded the empire's population at 60,545,812, which far outstripped Portugal's one

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<sup>354</sup> Weizhan Meng, "古代东亚等级制的生成条件 (Factors Producing the Ancient Hierarchical System of East Asia)," *Quarterly Journal of International Politics* 1, no. 3 (2016): 91-124.

<sup>355</sup> Meng, 93.

<sup>356</sup> Meng, 93.

<sup>357</sup> Meng, 91.

million and England's five million during the same period.<sup>358</sup> Xiong Lili emphasizes this power imbalance in the region in his critique of gongsheng-symbiosis. Even if the East Asian order was peaceful compared to Westphalian Europe, Xiong argues, this was 'the result of the power ratio, not because of some innate Confucian culture.'<sup>359</sup> In a similar vein, Chen Xuefei of China Foreign Affairs University faulted Ren Xiao for misunderstanding the nature of power in this regional order.<sup>360</sup> Ren's response echoes the concerns of other Chinese scholars who worry about the hegemony of American theories: 'I've consistently opposed the simplified, vulgar viewpoint of "realism", especially the offensive realism of John Mearsheimer...Chinese scholars must have the courage and the ambition to overcome this [type of theorizing].'<sup>361</sup>

The foreign relations of imperial China continue to provide Chinese IR scholars with inspiration. Xue Li and Cheng Zhangxi, both at the Institute for World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, argue that a future Chinese order will be governed by the concept of *li* 礼 - propriety or ritual - which refers to proper behaviour given one's status. Similar to the discursive framing of 'give more but take less' (薄来厚往 *bolai houwang*) used by imperial China, Xue and Cheng argue that the PRC's latest grand strategy, the Belt and Road Initiative, is not merely a strategy to further China's economic interests, but by 'not placing business interests first' and thereby adopting 'the correct view of righteousness', it is also a method to cultivate relationships, encourage development in China-friendly neighbours, and fulfill its role as a major power.<sup>362</sup> China is thus imagined as a benevolent hegemon guided by Confucian practices of moral governance.

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<sup>358</sup> Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405-1433* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), 8.

<sup>359</sup> Lili Xiong, "共生型国际体系还是竞合型国际体系—兼议亚太地区国际体系的历史与现实 (Symbiotic or Competitive International System - Looking at the History and Reality of the Asia-Pacific Regional System)," *学术争鸣* 4 (2014): 38.

<sup>360</sup> Xuefei Chen, "中国应建立文明导向的世界秩序观 (China Should Establish a Culturally-Oriented Worldview)," *学术争鸣* 4 (2014): 41-44.

<sup>361</sup> Ren, *Gongsheng*, 160.

<sup>362</sup> Li Xue and Zhangxi Cheng, "What Might a Chinese World Order Look Like?," *The Diplomat*, April 13, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/what-might-a-chinese-world-order-look-like/>.

## *Diverse World, Tolerant China*

To summarize, gongsheng-symbiosis theory offers a way to return to the pluralism of the natural world. By rejecting the search for one 'correct' mode of thinking, type of political-economic institution, or development model, gongsheng-symbiosis encourages the return to a more pluralist international order. By reconceptualizing Asia's pre-modern tribute system as a harmonious order built on consensual relations between powers big and small, gongsheng-symbiosis theory imagines China as a tolerant power, one that accepts value difference and does not unnecessarily intervene in the affairs of its smaller neighbours as long as they show due deference to the hegemon. In this way, tolerant China is contrasted with a proselytizing America, who seeks to reshape others in its own image. For gongsheng-symbiosis theory, the rise of China portends the coming of a more pluralist international order, one where a diverse collection of heterogeneous actors interact on the basis of equality and mutual respect, and where dichotomies of liberal/illiberal fall by the wayside. While a cursory look at the two aforementioned Chinese IR theories *moral realism* and *tianxia* are fundamentally hierarchical, the development of gongsheng-symbiosis theory suggests that there also exists an important cosmopolitan element of equality and value pluralism in the Chinese School movement.

### ***Part Two: - Forming a Chinese vision for international order***

The introduction asked two questions: First, is there a set of core ideas and ideals that constitute the distinctiveness of Chinese IR theory? And second, is there a coherent vision for international order that can be drawn out of these rather disparate theories? Based on the analysis in Part One, it is possible to see the contours a shared discursive and ideational framework for China's current and future role in international order emerging.

### **Reframing Power, Harmony and Order**

Regarding the first question, the Chinese School movement has provided a local understanding of three core concepts used to conceptualize international politics: power, harmony and order.

Power is expanded to include not just the capability to coerce others, but includes the practice of morality and benevolence towards weaker and smaller states. It also includes the cultivation of good governance at home, which provokes mimicry by others. The reframing of power into a more locally recognizable form is most evident in the typology of humane authority (*wangdao* 王道) vs. hegemony (*badao* 霸道) provided by moral realism.

Harmony is understood not as equality, nor as shared values among states, but rather a hierarchy among states with different responsibilities based on power capabilities. The reframing of harmony as stable hierarchical relations is provided by moral realism's emphasis on the benevolent distribution of material goods in exchange for deference, as well as the ideal of world governance on the paternalistic family model found in Zhao Tingyang's *Tianxia*. Meanwhile, the embrace of value pluralism and multiple modernities found in *gongsheng-symbiosis* theory frames international harmony into a distinctly Confucian frame of pluralistic coexistence.

Order results not from a balance of power, but from a well-enforced hierarchical system in which the strong practice benevolence toward the weak while the weak offer deference to the strong. In all three contributions to the Chinese School movement, the ideal of a powerful state sitting atop a well-defined social hierarchy serves as the ultimate political order.

There is considerable overlap between these understandings of power, harmony and order with concepts already found in Western IR theory. The value of the Chinese School movement thus lies less in contributing new concepts to global IR, and more in offering a conceptual grammar of global politics in discursive frames more familiar to a Chinese audience. And in recent years, especially under Xi Jinping, these discourses have gained importance for the state, as it seeks a distinctive and indigenous identity in a post-Western world.

From this, is there a coherent vision for international order that can be drawn out of these rather disparate theories?

### **Hierarchical Pluralism: An emergent Chinese vision for international order**

Building on the discursive frames above, Chinese IR scholars are building a vision for international order that is both *hierarchical* in terms of rites and responsibilities and *pluralistic* in cultural values and socio-political systems.

#### ***Hierarchy***

The three contributions to the Chinese School movement surveyed in this chapter all understand hierarchical relationships to be a legitimate, effective and superior way to ensure stable order. Yan Xuetong endorses and encourages the Chinese government to promote an international order that balances the rights of states with their responsibilities to the international community. Zhao Tingyang advocates that a world government be established to manage the relations among smaller states with global governance being modeled on the structure of the family. Gongsheng-symbiosis scholars explore the tribute system to explore what institutional mechanisms existed in order to facilitate peaceful and durable relations between big and small states. In their own ways, these theories explore the relevance of hierarchical relations as a normative principle to underpin a new Chinese-led international order.

A hierarchical order means one where China has extraordinary responsibility over regional governance given its size, wealth and historical position as the regional hegemon. Given its greater responsibility it is also granted extraordinary rights of rewarding and punishing smaller states to uphold regional stability. Smaller states, if they wish to participate in the regional order, must defer to China's core interests.

In the theories examined in this chapter, hierarchy is expressed in three Confucian concepts for ameliorating the problems of world order. First, the concept of a humane authority, who acts as a stabilizing force both by virtue of its capabilities and its virtuous character, and is tasked with maintaining order among smaller states.

Second, the concept of benevolence, which is deployed in order to ameliorate disparities between big and small states. By distributing material benefits the humane authority not only expresses its virtue, but also more importantly ensures the compliance of order by smaller states. Third, the concept of status distinctions. One's rights and responsibilities are determined by one's status. Great powers are tasked with the responsibility of maintaining order while smaller states must remain compliant.

In the three theories examined in this chapter, a Chinese-led harmonious order imagined has two hierarchical characteristics. First, a leading role for China. The future that Chinese scholars are imagining is one in which China has returned to its status as a preeminent power and manifests its culture of harmony for the benefit of all nations. That China is the *paterfamilias* of Asia, the one responsible for maintaining regional order and stability is taken for granted as a natural phenomenon. One can see this in Yan Xuetong's assertion that, due to its newfound power, China has assumed political responsibility over adjacent countries.<sup>363</sup> Or in another influential scholar's view that China has 'returned to its position at centre stage of the region' and that this represents the 'rightful balance of things'.<sup>364</sup> Despite the fact that China now deals with other states on the basis of sovereign equality, the sense that it is the centre to which all of Asia revolves remains stubbornly persistent.

Undoubtedly Chinese policymakers state often and clearly that China does not seek to reinstitute a hierarchal order in the shape of its imperial relations and insist that China takes all countries, big or small, as equal members of the international community. But occasionally the Sinocentric hierarchical worldview emerges as it did in March 2014 when foreign minister Wang Yi declared that 'there is no room for compromise' on territorial disputes with Japan, which he followed up with by castigating China's neighbours in Southeast Asia over contested maritime claims in

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<sup>363</sup> Xuetong Yan, "China's First Step Forward in Its 'Harmonious World-Oriented' Diplomacy," *People's Daily*, December 19, 2006, [http://en.people.cn/200612/19/print20061219\\_333955.html](http://en.people.cn/200612/19/print20061219_333955.html).

<sup>364</sup> Yunling Zhang, "China and Its Neighbourhood: Transformation, Challenges and Grand Strategy," *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016): 838, 842.

the South China Sea: 'we will never accept unreasonable demands from smaller countries.'<sup>365</sup> Or when, at an ASEAN meeting in 2010 again regarding contested claims in the South China Sea, then-Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, speaking to Singapore's foreign minister George Yeo, said bluntly 'China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that's just a fact.'<sup>366</sup>

The second hierarchical characteristic imagined in a future Chinese-led order is a gradated system of rights and responsibilities. Larger and more powerful states have more responsibility over global governance and, as a trade-off, more rights entitled to as it takes on more responsibility. During an interview, one think-tank scholar described differentiated rights and responsibilities by giving an allusion of a corporation: 'In a corporation there are different positions each bearing varying levels of responsibility. Some individuals are workers and someone is the CEO. Each position requires different responsibilities and therefore some individuals, like the CEO, get higher pay because their responsibilities are greater.'<sup>367</sup>

Here a point can be made about the obvious tension between the hierarchical practices that governed imperial China's foreign relations and the modern international system based on the principle of sovereign equality. Most Chinese scholars emphasize that the hierarchical practices of the tributary system cannot and will not be replicated by the PRC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Party and government authorities, too, have been eager to correct 'misinterpretations' of China's foreign policy. In February 2018 the CCP's official mouthpiece, the *People's Daily*, issued an editorial castigating scholars that interpret Xi Jinping's signature vision for international order - the 'Community of Common Destiny' - as an updated version of the imperial Tianxia system.<sup>368</sup> Indeed, as many Chinese scholars realize, with the

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<sup>365</sup> Edward Wong, "China's Hard Line: 'No Room for Compromise,'" *New York Times*, March 8, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/09/world/asia/china.html?partner5\\_rssnyt&emc5rss&\\_r51](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/09/world/asia/china.html?partner5_rssnyt&emc5rss&_r51).

<sup>366</sup> John Pomfret, "U.S. Takes a Tougher Tone with China," *Washington Post*, July 30, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/29/AR2010072906416.html>.

<sup>367</sup> Interview, Shanghai, May 2018.

<sup>368</sup> Yonghong Yang, "防止对人类命运共同体理念的曲解 (Prevent the Misinterpretation of the Community of Common Destiny Concept)," *People's Daily*, February 23, 2018, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0223/c40531-29829411.html>.

spread of the nation-state and international law, 'the world may have changed too much from the days of the Tianxia system.'<sup>369</sup> Clearly the pre-modern Sinocentric Tianxia system goes against the PRC's contemporary diplomatic rhetoric of defending sovereignty and championing equality.<sup>370</sup>

One way that Chinese scholars overcome this contradiction is by emphasizing 'fairness' over absolute equality. This is particularly prominent in moral realism. An example of taking the principle of fairness over equality is the practice of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' principle embodied in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol which mandated different emissions targets for developed and developing states.<sup>371</sup> Another example is efforts to rethink the tribute system as a consensual order that was 'formally unequal, but informally equal'. Central to the tribute system is the importance of status roles; if one correctly acted out one's appropriate role – whether providing security and markets as a great power or giving deference as a small power – this would ensure regional stability. Whether China increasingly advocates fairness over equality in global governance will be an indication of its preference for an order based on the norm of gradated rights and responsibilities.

### ***Pluralism***

If the construction of a Chinese-led international order were simply hierarchical, with itself given a special status, this would not be unusual. After all, which great power doesn't wish for a privileged position in international affairs? But the imagining of a hierarchical political order co-exists with another normative ideal: pluralism.

An interstate order based on the norm of pluralism means the accommodation of a collection of heterogeneous states each pursuing their individual self-interests on the basis of mutual respect and non-interference. It is different from the liberal

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<sup>369</sup> Pang Zhongying and Hongying Wang, "Debating International Institutions and Global Governance: The Missing Chinese IPE Contribution," *Review of International Political Economy* 20, no. 6 (December 2013): 1208.

<sup>370</sup> Shaojun Li, "论中国文明的和平内涵: 从传统到现实—对'中国威胁'论的回答 (The Peaceful Orientation of Chinese Civilization: From Tradition to Reality: A Response to 'China Threat' Theory)," *国际经济评论 (International Economic Review)* 1 (1999): 30–33.

<sup>371</sup> Yan, "International Leadership and Norm Evolution," 11–12.

international order in the sense that political legitimacy is not tied to any political or socio-economic model or particular shared values. Instead, a pluralistic order entails each state pursuing an autonomous model of development depending on its particular historical and local conditions.

In the Chinese theories surveyed in this chapter, pluralism is systematized in one key way: An international order is composed of a heterogeneous collection of states. In contrast to the liberal internationalist policies of the United States after the end of the Cold War, China does not seek to create an integrated political order based on shared values. Instead it insists on the right of each member of the international community to self-determination in accordance with its own local circumstances. A pluralistic order rests on the principle of non-interference, at least as it involves the promotion of certain values. Intervention for the preservation of stability is of course always an option, as it is one responsibility of a 'humane authority'. But pluralism insists on the absence of absolute values that are universally applicable.

### **Conclusion**

In light of the analysis presented in this chapter, two conclusions are warranted. First, as a counter-hegemonic discourse that seeks to represent world politics with respect to China's own identity and experiences, the Chinese School movement, exemplified by the three IR theories in this chapter, have developed distinctively Chinese understandings of power, harmony, and order. As a scientific endeavor contributing to global IR, the Chinese School movement offers alternative 'non-Western' understandings of these key concepts for the analysis of global politics. At the same time, as part of the discursive struggle against the West to fix meanings and identities, Chinese IR is contributing to the conceptual grammar of the Chinese state as it defends and legitimizes its role in global politics. The deployment of these discursive and ideational resources into the PRC's official foreign policy discourse will be taken up in Chapters 5 and 6.

Secondly, this chapter argues that the Chinese School movement has a shared discursive framework conceptualizing China's current and future role in an

international order defined by *hierarchical pluralism*. This vision is both hierarchical in terms of rites and responsibilities and pluralistic in cultural values and socio-political systems. These contradictory ideals are unified in a discursive and ideational framework for international order that privileges China's status as a great power and where smaller powers defer to its interests in exchange for respect. This framework congeals with China's own historical memory and traditions of governance as well as its strategic interests as a rising power in a Western-led international system.

The next chapter will move away from abstract theories of international relations to explore the role of China's international relations scholars within powerful Party and government institutions.

## Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics

*What has happened to the world and how should we respond? The whole world is reflecting on this question, and it is also very much on my mind.*<sup>372</sup>

- Xi Jinping, Geneva, 2017

*The complete rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, or what some call the rise of China, is right before our eyes [...] Within this historical backdrop and call of our times, Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics is like a red sun, slowly rising over the theoretical horizon.*<sup>373</sup>

- Lu Cao

Political concepts are a crucial resource in the study of China's foreign policy. They signal the basic orientation of China's Communist Party (CCP) and government leadership to the international order, and at the same time they set the boundaries for how individuals can 'legitimately' think and talk about Beijing's foreign policy.<sup>374</sup> As Holly Snape notes in her illuminating study of domestic governance concepts, official political discourses are often vague and sometimes contradictory and this serves two important purposes: it creates space for scholars to use official discourses as a channel for political participation while also facilitating the use of official discourse as a technique to govern its users.<sup>375</sup> This chapter examines interpretations

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<sup>372</sup> "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind - Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China At the United Nations Office at Geneva."

<sup>373</sup> Lu Cao, "试论中国特色大国外交的理论内涵与思想创新 (On the Theoretical Content and Innovative Thinking of China's Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics)," *Guoji GuanCha* 6 (2015): 75.

<sup>374</sup> Holly Snape, "Social Management or Social Governance: A Review of Party and Government Discourse and Why It Matters in Understanding Chinese Politics," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24, no. 4 (December 2019): 685-99.

<sup>375</sup> Snape.

of one political concept – ‘major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics’ (中国特色大国外交, henceforth Major Country Diplomacy) – in order to analyze changes in the Party’s thinking on foreign policy.

The role of scholars in China’s foreign policymaking has attracted a considerable amount of attention in recent years. Jeffrey Reeves finds that ideas and innovations in terrorism-related scholarship have preceded and influenced structural innovations in Beijing’s counter-terrorism policies.<sup>376</sup> Pascal Abb finds that China’s foreign policy think tanks have undergone an increase in professionalization, have dramatically increased publication output, and have a more prominent role in the media.<sup>377</sup> Elina Sinkkonen argues that scholars are both ‘opinion leaders’ influencing society as well as mediators of public views to top leaders.<sup>378</sup> Similarly, James Reilly argues that research institutions and well-known scholars have gained indirect influence over policy by shaping public opinion.<sup>379</sup> Liao Xuanli argues that Chinese think tanks have acquired direct and indirect influence over policymaking.<sup>380</sup> This growing body of research suggests that there are deep linkages between epistemic communities and top leaders in China’s foreign policymaking.

Less attention has been paid, however, to how political concepts emerge, how they are interpreted, and how they evolve over time. In the Chinese political system, broad strategic guidelines are often first announced by top leaders in short, vague declarations or signaled in subtle changes in political keywords in central documents and which are then subsequently filled in with meaning slowly and incrementally.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Jeffrey Reeves, “Ideas and Influence: Scholarship as a Harbinger of Counterterrorism Institutions, Policies, and Laws in the People’s Republic of China,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28, no. 5 (2016): 827–47.

<sup>377</sup> Pascal Abb, “China’s Foreign Policy Think Tanks: Institutional Evolution and Changing Roles,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 93 (2015): 531–53.

<sup>378</sup> Elina Sinkkonen, “Rethinking Chinese National Identity. The Wider Context of Foreign Policy Making During the Era of Hu Jintao, 2002–2012.” (University of Oxford, 2014), chapter 2 & 4.

<sup>379</sup> James Reilly, *Strong Society, Smart State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), chapter 5.

<sup>380</sup> Xuanli Liao, *Chinese Foreign Policy Think Tanks and China’s Policy Towards Japan* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2006).

<sup>381</sup> Jinghan Zeng, “Constructing a ‘New Type of Great Power Relations’: The State of Debate in China (1998–2014),” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 18, no. 2 (2016): 422; Jinghan Zeng and Shaun Breslin, “China’s ‘New Type of Great Power Relations’: A G2 with Chinese Characteristics?,” *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016): 773–94.

As Yu Keping notes, ‘using Chinese political keywords as a starting point to analyze shifts in politics and the changes in political discourse to observe real-life political processes, is an especially important perspective for analyzing real politics in China.’<sup>382</sup> Scholars are central in this process. They act as thought entrepreneurs in offering ‘preliminary exploration’ (初探) of leadership thinking, interpret vague and encompassing concepts (often adding their own favoured interpretation), and regularly assess the effectiveness of particular strategic doctrines. A great example is Deng Xiaoping’s dictum to ‘keep a low profile, but do some things’ (韬光养晦，有所作为), which was laid out by China’s paramount leader in the late 1980s and early 1990s in a series of internal speeches. The guideline, ambiguous and open to interpretation, was used by subsequent Chinese leaders even as its meaning expanded and evolved.<sup>383</sup> The same is true for Xi Jinping’s Major Country Diplomacy. International relations experts are tasked with clarifying and adding meaning to this official discourse. This chapter offers the first comprehensive analysis of the discursive construction of Xi Jinping’s guiding strategic doctrine for foreign policy.

When analyzing scholarly interpretations of official discourses, it is necessary to note that the relationship between academia and policymaking in China is not unidirectional. While ideas can and do ‘travel’ from scholarship to official policy, the prerogative of policymakers heavily shapes research agendas. The role that Chinese international relations experts are expected to fulfill can be divided into two types: an ‘input’ role and an ‘output’ role. The former is the traditional role of social scientists. They are tasked with conducting research on the latest trends in political affairs, providing policy advice for securing China’s national interests, and offering private criticism of policies when warranted. The latter involves increasing China’s ‘discourse power’ and spreading China’s ‘voice’ to the outside world.<sup>384</sup> As the Party’s

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<sup>382</sup> Quoted in: Snape, “Social Management or Social Governance,” 686.

<sup>383</sup> Dingding Chen and Jianwei Wang, “Lying Low No More? China’s New Thinking on the Tao Guang Yang Hui Strategy,” *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (2011): 195–216.

<sup>384</sup> Yilin Qu et al., “国家高端智库建设试点工作启动：中国智库建设跨入新时代 (Pilot Scheme to Build National High-Level Think Tanks Begins: Building Chinese Think Tanks Has Entered a New Age),” *Guangming Daily*, December 3, 2015, [http://www.cssn.cn/zx/yw/201512/t20151203\\_2739527\\_2.shtml](http://www.cssn.cn/zx/yw/201512/t20151203_2739527_2.shtml).

powerful Central Committee directed in 2015, think tanks and experts should ‘use mass media and other methods to disseminate mainstream ideology and values and concentrate positive social energy.’<sup>385</sup> It is in this output role that Chinese intellectuals most resemble what Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci termed ‘organic intellectuals’, legitimizing, justifying, and serving the interests of state/party power.<sup>386</sup> While this chapter mainly deals with the input role of international relations experts, their role as ‘guides’ of fickle public opinion is increasingly important.<sup>387</sup>

What is striking about official discourse in China is the ambiguity and evolving nature of political concepts. This in turn creates space for actors to insert their own interpretations, sometimes in stark contradiction of the original intention of concepts while hiding them in official language. The effect is a multiplicity of meanings that coexist in the sphere of debate over strategy while still using very similar political language. For this reason, it is helpful to think of scholarly input surveyed in this chapter as a form of political participation.<sup>388</sup> The result is that research into Beijing’s foreign policy that uses the official language of Major Country Diplomacy often differs on fundamental questions of the pattern of global order, China’s position in it, and the strategic policies that it should adopt.

This chapter begins by outlining the contours of China’s knowledge regime and the channels that connect scholars with the top leadership. It shows that Chinese scholars where political authority flows from the top and is centralized around maintaining Party rule and that international relations experts are intertwined in powerful central Party and government institutions. This suggests that scholars are instrumental in interpreting and expanding on the real-life effects of political concepts. It then traces

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<sup>385</sup> “关于加强中国特色新型智库建设的意见 (Opinion on Strengthening the Building of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics)” (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China General Office, January 21, 2015), [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-01/20/content\\_2807126.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-01/20/content_2807126.htm).

<sup>386</sup> Zhidong Hao, *Intellectuals at a Crossroads: The Changing Politics of China’s Knowledge Workers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

<sup>387</sup> Pascal Abb, “Leaders or ‘Guides’ of Public Opinion? The Media Role of Chinese Foreign Policy Experts,” *Modern China* forthcoming (2019).

<sup>388</sup> Snape, “Social Management or Social Governance.”

the emergence of the Major Country Diplomacy concept and surveys the different interpretations of this discourse in the Chinese-language literature. In these, seven themes are prominent: temporality, relative national power, grand strategy, reforming the international system, a non-Western path to modernization, benevolent developmentalism, and enduring realism. In exploring these themes, the purpose is not to offer a definitive answer to what Major Country Diplomacy is, but rather to use contending interpretations to explore the fundamental values and policy directions that populate the space offered by this vague and ambiguous political concept. Ultimately, the pluralism among Chinese international relations experts, while politically constrained, suggests that China's great power foreign policy orientation is both an ongoing process and one with open possibilities.

### **A Supermarket of Ideas**

What is the role of international relations experts in Xi Jinping's China? How do ideas 'travel' from universities and think tanks into official government policies?

Before discussing particular agents of influence, it is first necessary to conceptualize China's *knowledge regime*. As Campbell and Pedersen explain in their book *The National Origins of Policy Ideas*, every country has a particular organizational and institutional machinery that generates ideas, data, research, concepts, and policy recommendations that influence public debate and policymaking.<sup>389</sup> Differences in national knowledge regimes help to explain divergent patterns of policy generation and adoption across countries.

China's knowledge regime is centered around the Communist Party, which is the country's most important organizing body. The PRC's knowledge regime is one in which political authority flows from the top and is highly centralized around maintaining and improving Party rule. Owing to the state's Leninist political structure as well as the long cultural tradition of the Confucian scholar-bureaucrat (*shidafu* 士

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<sup>389</sup> John L Campbell and Ove Kaj Pedersen, *The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany, and Denmark*, 2017.

大夫) in Chinese history, Zhu Xufeng conceptualizes China's 'politically embedded knowledge regime' as one in which 'political power is deeply embedded in administrative and personal networks between bureaucratic decision-makers and their professional consultants'.<sup>390</sup> As a result, contemporary China lacks a mature marketplace of ideas as is typically understood in liberal democratic societies: individuals competing publically to have their ideas heard and accepted.<sup>391</sup> For Chinese social scientists, personal connections to powerful CCP elites is the most important factor for institutions and individual scholars to exert influence. China's politically embedded knowledge regime also means that scholars prefer administrative channels to influence policy rather than resorting to public opinion shaping.<sup>392</sup>

### Key Actors

One notable difference between the Xi Jinping regime and that of his predecessor Hu Jintao (2002-2012) has been the rapid expansion and funding of official and semi-official think tanks. In 2013, at the Party's third plenum, the Chinese leadership announced its intention to build what it calls a 'new-type of think tank with Chinese characteristics'.<sup>393</sup> As knowledge producers, think tanks are not only a way for the CCP to improve, legitimize and justify its rule at home, they also serve to smooth the path for China's rise to superpower status by engaging in the global battle for ideas with the West. President Xi emphasized that 'constructing a new-type think tank with Chinese characteristics is to develop scientific decision-making, democratic decision-making, China's national governance and modernization, as well as strengthen China's soft power'.<sup>394</sup> In the immediate years after Xi's announcement the country

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<sup>390</sup> Xufeng Zhu, "Think Tanks in Politically Embedded Knowledge Regimes: Does the 'Revolving Door' Matter in China?," *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, July 5, 2018, 2, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0020852318776362>.

<sup>391</sup> Zhu, "Think Tanks in Politically Embedded Knowledge Regimes."

<sup>392</sup> Zhu.

<sup>393</sup> Haibin Li and Dongtao Qi, "The New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics: Development and Challenges," *China: An International Journal* 16, no. 2 (May 2018): 3-11.

<sup>394</sup> "习近平: 建设有国际影响力的高端智库 (Xi Jinping: Build Internationally Influential High-End Think Tanks)," *Beijing News*, October 28, 2014, <http://www.bjnews.com.cn/news/2014/10/28/339014.html>.

underwent what has been called a ‘think tank fever’; By 2015, China was ranked second in the world to the United States with 435 think tanks.<sup>395</sup> Three years later the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences calculated that number had risen to 509.<sup>396</sup> In February 2015, the Propaganda Department of the Party’s Central Committee selected a pilot group of 25 ‘high-end’ think tanks and provided each of them with RMB10 million annually to support research.<sup>397</sup> In the global battle for ideas, Chinese think tanks are intended to compete with American knowledge powerhouses such as the Brookings Institution, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Rand Corporation.<sup>398</sup>

Differing from American think tanks, which are mostly financed by private capital often donated by corporations or wealthy individuals, the majority of China’s think tanks are heavily dependent on government funding and are directly subordinate to a higher-level state or Party body. This mechanism helps to ensure Party supervision and influence over the general direction of research. The country’s most influential think tanks shaping China’s foreign policymaking, as well as the superordinate body that they are responsible to, are listed in the table below.

**Figure 4: China’s most influential foreign policy think tanks, 2018<sup>399</sup>**

Rank	Name	Affiliation
1	China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations	Ministry of State Security
2	China Institute of International Studies	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
3	Shanghai Institutes for International Studies	Shanghai municipal government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (informal)
4	National Institute for Global Strategy, CASS	State Council, supervised by CCP Propaganda Department

<sup>395</sup> Half of which are based at universities. Li and Qi, “The New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics: Development and Challenges,” 4, 8.

<sup>396</sup> “2018 年中国智库报告 (2018 China Think Tank Report)” (Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Think Tank Research Center, March 2019), 25.

<sup>397</sup> Abb, “Leaders or ‘Guides’ of Public Opinion? The Media Role of Chinese Foreign Policy Experts.”

<sup>398</sup> Lin Zhang, “访谈魏礼群院长: 智库建设影响国家的未来 (A Discussion with Director Wei Liqun: Building Think Tanks Influences the Nation’s Future),” March 5, 2015, [http://www.china.com.cn/opinion/think/2015-03/05/content\\_34960665.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/opinion/think/2015-03/05/content_34960665.htm).

<sup>399</sup> “2018 China Think Tank Report,” 43.

5	Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Peking University	Ministry of Education
6	Xinhua Center for World Affairs	CCP Central Committee (?)
7	China Institute for International Strategic Studies	CCP Central Military Commission (?)
8	China Center for Contemporary World Studies	CCP External Affairs Department
9	Institute of International Relations, Tsinghua University	Ministry of Education
10	Center for American Studies, Fudan University	Ministry of Education

In addition to these ten prominent institutions, other influential think tanks that specialize in foreign policy research include: the Institute for World Economy and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Institute of International Relations at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, the Institute for International Relations at China Foreign Affairs University, the Institute for Strategic Studies at National Defense University, and the Institute for International Strategic Studies at the Central Party School. Naturally, not all institutions have equal clout. In the PRC's politically embedded knowledge regime, a crucial factor in think tanks getting their ideas heard is not just the quality and expertise of their researchers, but the administrative rank (*xingzheng jibie* 行政级别) of their institution.<sup>400</sup> For example, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has a ministerial rank (*bu* 部) while the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences has a bureau rank (*ju* 局), one lower. In general, the higher the rank of an institution the better administrative linkages to policymaking elites it has and consequently the more likely it can influence policy.

Like social scientists everywhere, funding sources help to determine research trajectories for Chinese intellectuals. An important source of funding for think tank scholars and university professors conducting policy-related research comes from the National Social Science Fund of China (NSSF), a fund managed by the National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science, a body that is institutionally nested

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<sup>400</sup> Xufeng Zhu, "The Influence of Think Tanks in the Chinese Policy Process: Different Ways and Mechanisms," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 2 (2009): 341–42.

within the Party's Central Propaganda Department. Every year the NSSFC releases a public call for research proposals based on a guideline of several dozen to over one hundred very specific topics. Think tank and university researchers orient their research around these guidelines.

A look at a sample of the 2019 NSSFC guidelines under the category 'international affairs' show some of the state's priorities for its scholars: 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era', 'global governance and the Community of Common Destiny', 'the Belt and Road Initiative and global governance innovation', 'internationalization of the Renminbi', 'lessons from how ancient China governed its periphery', 'the post-American century', 'far-right political parties', and 'color revolutions'.<sup>401</sup> The inclusion of leadership thinking in the NSSFC guidelines shows the central role that international relations experts have in the interpretation of China's diplomatic concepts. Indeed, the very first topic for research projects in the 2018 NSSFC guidelines on international affairs was 'research on General Secretary Xi Jinping's diplomatic thought'.<sup>402</sup>

### *Channels of Influence*

There are four main channels that link international relations experts and their ideas to official government policymaking: scholarship, policy advisory, media, and personal relationships.

#### *1. Scholarship (productive power)*

The first channel is traditional scholarly output. As they publish books, articles, and hold conferences, international relations experts are engaged in the constant negotiation and renegotiation of China's national identity.

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<sup>401</sup> "2019 年度国家社会科学基金项目申报公告 (Announcing the 2019 National Social Science Fund Projects)," *National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences*, December 25, 2018, <http://www.npopss-cn.gov.cn/n1/2018/1225/c219469-30487263.html>.

<sup>402</sup> "2017 年度国家社会科学基金项目申报公告 (Announcing the 2017 National Social Science Foundation Project Report)," *National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences*, December 16, 2016, <http://www.npopss-cn.gov.cn/n1/2016/1216/c220863-28956126.html>.

The Party pays close attention to scholars and has been known to adopt their ideas for its own purposes. One prominent example is the academic debate that began in the early 1990s surrounding the concept of the 'national interest'. Before this there was no concept of a holistic national interest. Given that Marxism – the PRC's official ideology - understands the interest of the state as the interest of the ruling class, the Chinese government had long proclaimed the 'interest of the Chinese people' and the 'interest of the people of the world' as the national interest. The CCP's critical attitude to the concept of the national interest hindered scholarship on the topic and most scholars followed the government position. Forwards to IR textbooks referred to the national interest as 'a capitalist international relations concept' and would equate the national interest to the interest of the ruling class.<sup>403</sup> In 1996, Tsinghua University's Yan Xuetong published with great difficulty a book called *Analysis of China's National Interest*, which challenged academic and official orthodoxy with his claim that the national interest belongs to all people in the country and is irrelevant to class nature.<sup>404</sup> The Chinese government would eventually adopt Yan's position.<sup>405</sup> But this should not be understood as a unidirectional academic influence over policy. During the 1980s the CCP had already shifted its framework for foreign policy away from class struggle and revolution towards economic modernization. As such, the Party's interest had shifted towards a more holistic nation-based rather than class-based understanding of the national interest. After the timely publication of Yan's book officials saw the concept of national interest as a way to justify a policy change and to give it an ideological basis.<sup>406</sup> Yan has confirmed that he has never written a policy report that advocated his ideas on the national interest.<sup>407</sup> Xu Jin concludes that 'it was the decision makers who actively sought new theories to match the changes in

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<sup>403</sup> Jin Xu, "Debates in IR Academia and China's Policy Adjustments," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9, no. 4 (2016): 468–70.

<sup>404</sup> Xuetong Yan, *On China's Interests* (Tianjin People's Publishing House, 1997).

<sup>405</sup> Xu, "Debates in IR Academia and China's Policy Adjustments," 468–70.

<sup>406</sup> Interview, Beijing, May 2019.

<sup>407</sup> Xu, "Debates in IR Academia and China's Policy Adjustments," 470.

diplomatic practice'.<sup>408</sup> In other words policymakers reached into the world of academic debates and selected a concept to help justify a new policy.

In a broader sense, the role of scholars as knowledge producers help to shape the dominant ideas that are used to describe, imagine and debate China's role in the world. In recent years, the concept of '*Tianxia*' as a Chinese world order, popularized by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' philosopher Zhao Tingyang, has generated enormous interest throughout society. Embodying the productive power of scholars, William Callahan notes that Zhao's ideas are indirectly influential in that 'he has been able to set the agenda, and thus productively generate a powerful discourse that sets the boundaries of how people think about China's past, present, and future'.<sup>409</sup> In this sense, new ideas and theories often originate among scholars and then radiate outwards into society, shaping how the nation's identity is imagined. The same can be said for the concept of *wangdao* (benevolent rule) a term popularized and brought into international relations theory by Yan Xuetong and now widely used to imagine China's current and future trajectory as a great power.

## 2. *Policy Advisory*

Chinese international relations experts are routinely called upon to provide policy advice to the government.

*Internal reports.* The most routine and common way for scholars to express their views and make suggestions on policy is to write internal reports (*neican* 内参). China has a well-established system whereby all major research institutes collect academic research and policy advice and forward these reports to higher-level institutions, and, occasionally, directly to the top leadership.

The efficacy of the *neican* channel depends on the ranking of the institution and personal connections, especially of the institution's leader. CICIR, the government's main civilian intelligence agency and the most influential foreign policy think tank in

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<sup>408</sup> Xu, 470.

<sup>409</sup> Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order," 758.

the country, has direct channels to all members of the Politburo Standing Committee.<sup>410</sup> The Xinhua Center for World Affairs can submit its reports directly to the Politburo.<sup>411</sup> Reports written by university scholars are first sent to the Ministry of Education and then they are forwarded to higher authorities.<sup>412</sup> Glaser and Saunders note that the various international relations institutes under the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) do not play a significant policymaking role.<sup>413</sup> This was confirmed to me when one well-connected scholar at SASS estimated that ‘if you write some policy recommendations, 75% or 80% are useless’.<sup>414</sup>

Researchers themselves, even at the most elite institutions, never know if their policy suggestions are effective or even heard. At the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences, for example, the General Office compiles all the material for internal reports and distributes them up the food chain to policymakers without researchers themselves being involved in the process.<sup>415</sup> The only way for a researcher to know that their suggestions have been received is if their report is handed back with a comment (*pishi* 批示) from a high official, a rare event. This secrecy makes it nearly impossible for analysts to accurately judge the efficacy of the *neican* channel. The efficacy of writing internal reports varies by one’s institutional affiliation, individual reputation, as well as issue area. Sino-American relations is one area where international relations scholars are known to play a more important role.<sup>416</sup>

Despite the opaqueness of the *neican* system there are examples of internal reports influencing major policies. The idea for China to establish the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) came from the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, a Beijing-based think tank led by former Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan. In April 2013 the think tank submitted a report to the CCP Central Committee and the

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<sup>410</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser and Phillip C. Saunders, “Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes: Evolving Roles and Increasing Influence,” *The China Quarterly* 171, no. 3 (2002): 599.

<sup>411</sup> Sinkkonen, “Rethinking Chinese National Identity,” 132.

<sup>412</sup> Sinkkonen, 131–32.

<sup>413</sup> Glaser and Saunders, “Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes,” 600.

<sup>414</sup> Interview, Shanghai, April 2019.

<sup>415</sup> Abb, “China’s Foreign Policy Think Tanks,” 541.

<sup>416</sup> Interview, Shanghai April 2019.

State Council top leadership suggesting the establishment a multilateral finance institution for infrastructure development in Asia.<sup>417</sup> The proposal received written comments (*pishi*) from both Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, a sign of their approval.<sup>418</sup> Later that year the two leaders traveled to South-East Asia and formally proposed the establishment of the multilateral bank.

*Study sessions.* First established in 2002 under Hu Jintao, Politburo study sessions are meetings where the country’s top experts in a chosen field are invited to give a lecture to the top leadership. Study sessions typically last two hours and consist of two 40-minute lectures delivered by two experts followed by a 30-minute group discussion and ending with a 10-minute summary by the general secretary.<sup>419</sup> These are not idle lectures. Their purpose is multifold: to forge consensus among leaders, legitimate new policies, establish links between leaders and scholars, while also performing important symbolic and image building functions. They also serve as a way to discover talent: several experts chosen to lecture the Politburo have later been given senior government posts.<sup>420</sup> Of the forty Politburo study sessions held between the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012 and the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2017, eight were directly relevant to foreign policy.

**Figure 5: Selected study sessions of the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee Politburo**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Lecturer</b>
January 28, 2013	Planning the domestic-international situation	-
July 30, 2013	Becoming a maritime great power	Zeng Hengyi (China Maritime Petroleum Company); Gao Zhiguo (National Maritime Administration)
December 30, 2013	Improving the nation’s cultural soft power	Shen Zhuanghai (Wuhan University);

<sup>417</sup> Wenling Chen, “‘一带一路’战略决策的发展潜能及深远意义 (The Potential and Deep Significance of the ‘One Belt One Road’ Strategy),” October 8, 2015, <http://www.71.cn/2015/1008/841082.shtml>.

<sup>418</sup> Chen.

<sup>419</sup> Yiyi Lu, “The Collective Study Sessions of the Politburo: A Multipurpose Tool of China’s Central Leadership” (China Policy Institute, University of Nottingham, October 2007).

<sup>420</sup> For example, Jiang Xiaojun, a Chinese Academy of Social Sciences researcher who lectured the Politburo in 2003, was later appointed to deputy director of the State Council’s Research Office. See: Lu, 8.

		Huang Zhijian (National Publicity Cadres Academy)
August 29, 2014	New trends in global military development	Xiao Tianliang (National Defense University)
October 12, 2015	Pushing for a more just and fair system of global governance	Qin Yaqing (China Foreign Affairs University)
April 29, 2016	The 'Silk Road' and 'Maritime Silk Road' in history	Li Guoqiang (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences)
September 27, 2016	The G20 and global governance reform	Gao Fei (China Foreign Affairs University)
October 9, 2016	Becoming an internet great power	Wei Shaojun (Tsinghua University)

Qin Yaqing of China Foreign Affairs University, who lectured the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee Politburo's 27<sup>th</sup> study session on global governance reform in October 2015 just as the AIIB was set to begin operations, has lectured the Politburo twice, a sign that the top leadership acknowledges and takes seriously his work and views. When Qin first lectured the Politburo in 2004, then during the tenure of Hu Jintao, after he prepared a draft of his lecture on 'world order and China's security environment', officials in charge of overseeing the study session did not appreciate the use of the term 'global governance' – a term long considered euphemism for American hegemony – and tried to convince Qin to change the text. Qin however insisted on leaving it in his lecture and afterwards the term became widely used among scholars and officials.<sup>421</sup> This shows that these study sessions are an important channel for ideas to 'travel' from academia into official policy. At the Politburo study session on global governance reform in September 2016, the second session held on the topic in one year, signaling its importance to the leadership, Gao Fei (高飞) of China Foreign Affairs University gave the lecture. Besides knowledge exchange, Politburo study sessions are also one way that Party elites make use of scholars with which they share some ideas to legitimize or justify policy decisions.

*Formal commissions.* In 2008 the foreign ministry established the Foreign Policy Advisory Group (FPAG) for experts to offer suggestions on international affairs.<sup>422</sup> As

<sup>421</sup> Sinkkonen, "Rethinking Chinese National Identity," 133.

<sup>422</sup> 外交政策咨询委员会.

recently as 2014 the body membership had nine international relations scholars including Wang Jisi (Peking University), Qin Yaqing (China Foreign Affairs University), Cui Liru (CICIR) and Zhang Yuyan (CASS). The FPAG was subsequently rearranged and the current 19-member body is made up of 17 former ambassadors and two international relations experts: Yang Jiemin (SIIS) and Zhu Yinghuang (Translators Association of China).<sup>423</sup>

### 3. *Media*

While not a direct channel linking experts to policymakers, top leaders are known to pay close attention to the media. Secretaries or assistants of leaders routinely collect and summarize information from social media to present to their leader.<sup>424</sup> This channel also works in the reverse direction – from policymakers to the public. Prominent international relations experts have been known to test out concepts or new policy positions before an official change in the government’s line. By using academics, policymakers can gauge the opinion of intellectuals and the broader public to a proposed change before it is made.<sup>425</sup>

### 4. *Personal relationships*

In China’s politically embedded knowledge regime, personal relationships between top leaders and individual academics are an important source of transmission of scholarly ideas to official policy. As such, the political rise and fall of powerful patrons is a significant factor in the chances of scholars getting their ideas heard. Glaser and Medeiros have documented the role of political theorist Zheng Bijian, a former executive vice-president of the Central Party School and confidante of Hu Jintao, in the formulation of ‘China’s peaceful rise’ discourse.<sup>426</sup> Another example during the Hu

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<sup>423</sup> “Expert Members” (外交政策咨询委员会 Foreign Policy Advisory Group), accessed May 9, 2019, <http://fpag.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/zwhjj/zwhwy/zjwy/>.

<sup>424</sup> Interview, Beijing, May 2019.

<sup>425</sup> Peter Hayes Gries, “China’s ‘new Thinking’ on Japan,” *China Quarterly*, December 2005, 831–50; Reilly, *Strong Society, Smart State*, 168–69.

<sup>426</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, “The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of ‘Peaceful Rise,’” *The China Quarterly* 190 (June 2007): 291.

Jintao era (2002-2012) is Wang Jisi, a leading foreign policy advisor who held significant influence. In 2012, Wang, who was then the President of the Institute of International and Strategic Studies at Peking University, advocated that China shift its geopolitical orientation to the Eurasian heartland, away from its eastern borders where American power is concentrated.<sup>427</sup> Wang's idea of a 'geopolitical rebalance' was taken up by the top leadership and later evolved into what is now known as the Belt and Road Initiative. Wang Jisi's influence during the Hu era was due to his personal relationship with Dai Bingguo, then the country's top foreign policy official. With the passing of leadership from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping in late 2012 and the exit of Dai Bingguo from official policymaking, one scholar told me that Wang Jisi will no longer play any role in policymaking.<sup>428</sup> Although this cannot be confirmed, it highlights the crucial function that personal relationships play in the PRC's knowledge regime.

During the Xi Jinping era, several scholars have personal relations with the leadership that may give them a voice in policymaking. One prominent example is Yang Jiemian who was the long-term president of the Shanghai Institute of International Studies, a well-regarded think tank with informal ties to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Yang is the brother of the country's top official in charge of foreign affairs, Yang Jiechi. This familial connection has given scholars at SIIS better access to policymakers.<sup>429</sup> Some scholars speculate that Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University may have a personal relationship with President Xi Jinping.<sup>430</sup> In 2012, Tsinghua University, with assistance from the Chinese People's Institute for Foreign Affairs, initiated the World Peace Forum, a non-governmental high-level forum on international security issues held under the approval of the State Council. Yan Xuetong serves at the Forum's secretary general. Xi Jinping, then Vice-President, attended the Forum in 2012 and the Forum has subsequently served as a platform for high-level officials to announce

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<sup>427</sup> Jisi Wang, "‘西进’，中国地缘战略的再平衡 (Go West, China's Geostrategic Rebalance)," *Global Times*, October 17, 2012, [http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion\\_world/2012-10/3193760.html](http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_world/2012-10/3193760.html).

<sup>428</sup> Interview, Shanghai, April 2019.

<sup>429</sup> Sinkkonen, "Rethinking Chinese National Identity," 128.

<sup>430</sup> Interview, Shanghai, April 2019.

important foreign policy changes.<sup>431</sup> Yan has been at the forefront of advocating a more muscular Chinese foreign policy. According to his theory of great power competition, a crucial factor in helping a rising power to overtake an established hegemon is the rising power's cultivation of 'strategic credibility', which he associates with providing security guarantees and bestowing economic benefits on other states.<sup>432</sup> Yan has advocated China to form an alliance with Russia to counter American hegemony, a proposal that was deliberated by Chinese international relations scholars but was rejected.<sup>433</sup> Some scholars speculate that the diplomatic concept of 'being more proactive' (*fenfa youwei* 奋发有为) may have been borrowed from Yan's own writing on Chinese strategy.<sup>434</sup>

Other institutions maintain influence through personal connections to the Party elite. For example, the Central Party School has direct personal linkages to high-level policymakers through its role as a training ground for party cadres. Xi Jinping was President of the Central Party School from 2007 until his ascension to the post of Party general secretary in 2012.

### *A supermarket of ideas*

Given the various direct and indirect channels that exist to facilitate the transmission of ideas from think tanks and universities into policymaking as well as the multiple examples of successful transfer, it is tempting to conclude that Chinese international relations scholars increasingly have the ability to directly influence policy. We should be careful in making such a conclusion. The interests of the Party remain paramount. According to one well-known scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 'China's academia is something like a supermarket, it sells all kinds of goods and the government goes into the supermarket to choose. It depends on himself [the

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<sup>431</sup> For example, at the 2013 World Peace Forum, FM Wang Yi announced that China was 'actively exploring a path of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics'.

<sup>432</sup> Xuetong Yan, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 2 (2014): 160.

<sup>433</sup> Interview, Shanghai, April 2019.

<sup>434</sup> Interview, Shanghai, April 2019.

government] to choose this one or that one.’<sup>435</sup> In other words, direct academic influence over foreign policymaking in Xi Jinping’s China is low. But that is not to say that international relations experts are unimportant. International relations experts are intertwined in powerful central Party and government institutions and they remain crucial conduits for expert advice that policymakers increasingly rely on as Beijing’s interests go global. They serve as important incubators for ideas that can later be adopted by policymakers when they align with the interests of the Party.<sup>436</sup> Finally, scholars are instrumental in interpreting and expanding on the real-life policy implications of changes in official discourse, a subject to which we will now turn.

### **Xi Jinping’s New ‘Major Country Diplomacy’**

During his first major meeting on foreign affairs in late October 2014, newly ensconced President Xi Jinping announced ‘we must be more proactive in promoting diplomacy with our neighbours, should strive for a sound environment around China, and make China’s development benefit neighbouring states even more’.<sup>437</sup> Keen observers of CCP politics immediately noticed a new phrase: be more proactive (*fenfa youwei* 奋发有为).<sup>438</sup> With the insertion of these four characters, the new leader seemed to indicate the end of the doctrine known as ‘keeping a low profile’ (*taoguang yanghui* 韬光养晦) - a strategy dictated by three generations of Chinese leaders and one that had guided Beijing’s global posture since the early 1990s. In its place came something new. The following year, the president directed his diplomats to conduct foreign affairs work with ‘distinct Chinese characteristics, Chinese style, and Chinese manner’ and announced his desire that ‘China must have great power diplomacy with

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<sup>435</sup> Interview, Beijing, May 2019.

<sup>436</sup> In this sense, scholars serve as an important source for “replacement ideas”. See: Jeffrey W. Legro, “What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power,” *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 3 (September 2007): 515–34.

<sup>437</sup> “习近平在周边外交工作座谈会上发表重要讲话 (Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech at the Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery),” *People’s Daily*, October 25, 2013, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/1025/c1024-23332318.html>.

<sup>438</sup> Yan, “From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement.”

its own characteristics.<sup>439</sup> This signaled an important shift in Beijing's foreign policy strategy.

To understand the gravity of this shift requires it to be put in historical context of China's grand strategy under Deng Xiaoping. The late-Cold War period provided a unique set of threats to the CCP regime. Domestically, China was undergoing a process of capitalist modernization under the guise of 'reform and opening' that was initiated by paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in 1978. Like all modernization programmes, rapid social and economic change created resistance and instability. The 1989 Tiananmen student and worker movement that began in the spring and increased in fervor until the bloody crackdown on June 4, almost brought down the regime. Internationally, the stunning collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe starting in December 1989 with the fall of the Ceausescu regime in Romania and culminating with the collapse and dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 deepened the Party's sense of sense of insecurity and isolation. CCP elites worried that they would be the next target of the global revolution against socialism. Deng reportedly said in 1990 that 'everyone should be very clear that under the present international situation all enemy attention will be concentrated on China. They will use every pretext to cause trouble, to create difficulties and pressure for us.'<sup>440</sup> The fragile position of the regime required it be cautious in dealing with the West.

Within this background, an aging Deng Xiaoping, already well into his 80s and grooming his successors, gave a series of internal speeches on China's future strategy. The main thrust was to be cautious. As the paramount leader instructed in September 1989: 'In brief, as for the international situation, it can be summarized in three sentences: First, observe coolly. Second, hold our ground. Third, be cool-headed. Don't be impatient. Be calm, calm and more calm, and quietly immerse ourselves in

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<sup>439</sup> "中央外事工作会议在京举行 习近平发表重要讲话 (The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech)," *People's Daily*, November 30, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/1130/c64094-26119225.html>.

<sup>440</sup> Quoted in: M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 133.

practical work to accomplish something – something for China.’<sup>441</sup> Deng’s thinking was later condensed into a 28-character principle for Beijing’s diplomacy: observe coolly (冷静观察), hold our line (稳住阵脚), deal calmly (沉着应付), keep a low profile (韬光养晦), guard weaknesses (善于守拙), never take the lead (决不当头), and do some things (有所作为).<sup>442</sup> These principles would guide China through a threatening international scene. The core of this 28-character guide was further distilled to an 8-character principle, namely: ‘keep a low profile and do some things’ (韬光养晦, 有所作为), which acted as China’s tacit grand strategy from the early 1990s onwards. This strategy was defensive, concerned primarily with maintaining the Party’s rule. As Taylor Fravel notes, ‘the objective of the policy was not to balance against any one state but rather to balance against the threats to the regime’s authority and control.’<sup>443</sup>

There were three distinct aspects to Deng’s ‘keep a low profile’ doctrine. First, focus on development. Deng wanted the country to avoid foreign entanglements that would impede domestic economic modernization, which had become the primary national interest. That Deng’s ultimate goal was development is evidenced by something he said in 1992: ‘We will only become a big political power if we keep a low profile and work hard for some years; then the weight of our speech internationally will be different.’<sup>444</sup> The second aspect to Deng’s strategy was to eschew ideology. After Deng became paramount leader, China began to stop conducting foreign policy according to socialist systems and ideology, and instead proceed from the national interest of economic development. The strategic goal of foreign policy then became not global revolution against imperialism, but maintaining a peaceful environment conducive to economic growth. In a June 1985 speech to his top generals on the priorities of China’s

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<sup>441</sup> 邓小平文选 - 第三卷 (*Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, III*) (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1993), 321.

<sup>442</sup> There is another ‘24-character’ version of the principle that does not include ‘guard weaknesses’. Both the 24-character and 28-character principles are used interchangeably among scholars. Xu, “Debates in IR Academia and China’s Policy Adjustments,” 478.

<sup>443</sup> Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, 135.

<sup>444</sup> Rong Leng and Zuoling Wang, eds., 邓小平年谱 (*Chronology of Deng Xiaoping*) (1975-1997) (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2004), 1346.

foreign affairs, Deng told the audience, ‘we used to believe that war was inevitable and imminent [...] after analyzing the general trends in the world and the environment around us, we have changed our view that the danger of war is imminent.’<sup>445</sup> Deng now believed that ‘peace and development are the two outstanding issues in the world today.’<sup>446</sup> The third aspect of Deng’s strategy was to refuse leadership. According to Deng: ‘some countries in the Third World want China to be the leader, but we must not be, and this is a fundamental national policy. We cannot be the leader and we do not have enough power’.<sup>447</sup> Deng was resolute. ‘China should never seek leadership’.<sup>448</sup>

### *Towards a new Great Power doctrine*

As China’s interests expanded, Deng’s official doctrine underwent piecemeal revisions. In 2009, Hu Jintao amended the original 8-character strategy to be ‘*persevere in keeping a low profile, while proactively doing some things*’ (坚持韬光养晦，积极有所作为).<sup>449</sup> After the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in November 2012, there was another shift in the nation’s diplomatic language. First, during a speech at the World Peace Forum at Tsinghua University in June 2013, Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced that China is ‘actively exploring a path of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics’.<sup>450</sup> Second, at an important meeting in November 2013, Xi Jinping used a new phrase to define his country’s diplomacy towards its periphery:

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<sup>445</sup> Xiaoping Deng, “Speech at an Enlarged Meeting of the Military Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China,” *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Vol. 3, 1982-1992*, June 4, 1985, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2010-10/21/content\\_29714467.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2010-10/21/content_29714467.htm).

<sup>446</sup> Deng.

<sup>447</sup> *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, III*, 363.

<sup>448</sup> *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, III*, 363.

<sup>449</sup> Jin Xu, “新时代中国特色大国外交理念与原则问题初探 (Major-Country Diplomacy with Distinctive Chinese Features in the New Era),” *Contemporary International Relations* 3 (2018): 5.

<sup>450</sup> Yi Wang, “Exploring the Path of Major-Country Diplomacy With Chinese Characteristics,” *Remarks by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Luncheon of the Second World Peace Forum*, June 27, 2013, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/2461\\_663310/t1053908.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1053908.shtml).

'be more proactive' (奋发有为).<sup>451</sup> These four characters, as one scholar writes, 'portends the arrival of a new era in China's diplomacy.'<sup>452</sup>

During his first term, a new guiding ideology for foreign policy began to crystallize around Xi Jinping's thinking. Foreign Minister Wang Yi made two discursive leaps. First, during a speech in May 2016 he used the phrase '*theory of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics*', turning the previous 'concept' into a 'theory'.<sup>453</sup> Second, in the very same speech Wang used the term 'Xi Jinping Thought on diplomacy' (习近平总书记外交思想) for the first time.<sup>454</sup> Other top officials quickly followed suit. In a January 2017 editorial in the *People's Daily*, Yang Jiechi, the country's top foreign policy official, called 'Xi Jinping thought on diplomacy' a 'scientific, systematic, and complete' system of thought that is a 'guide' for the PRC's foreign policy.<sup>455</sup> By the summer of 2018, 'Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy' had become established as the theoretical guide for China's diplomacy.<sup>456</sup> The multiple concepts that constitute 'Xi Jinping Thought', to be discussed in more detail later, are understood in the context of global competition over discursive power. Left out of the English translation of Foreign Minister Wang Yi's comments, but still in the original Chinese, is that Xi Thought supplies 'theoretical and ideological weapons' for China's diplomacy.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> "Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech at the Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery."

<sup>452</sup> Xu, "新时代中国特色大国外交理念与原则问题初探 (Major-Country Diplomacy with Distinctive Chinese Features in the New Era)," 4.

<sup>453</sup> The 'theory' comes later on in the speech: "习近平总书记提出的新思想，新理论，新观念，正在形成有中国特色的大国外交理论". See: Yi Wang, "践行中国特色大国外交理念 (Practicing the Idea of Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics)," *China CPPCC*, May 4, 2016, [http://cppcc.china.com.cn/2016-05/04/content\\_38377875.htm](http://cppcc.china.com.cn/2016-05/04/content_38377875.htm).

<sup>454</sup> Wang.

<sup>455</sup> Jiechi Yang, "以习近平总书记外交思想指引对外工作航向 ('General Secretary Xi Jinping's Diplomatic Thinking Guides the Direction of External Work')," *People's Daily*, January 14, 2017, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0114/c1001-29022766.html>.

<sup>456</sup> Xiangyang Chen, "习近平外交思想指引新时代中国特色大国外交 (Xi Jinping Diplomatic Thought Guides China's Great Power Diplomacy in the New Era)," 中国网, August 9, 2018, [http://www.china.com.cn/opinion/2018-08/09/content\\_58290909.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/opinion/2018-08/09/content_58290909.htm).

<sup>457</sup> Yi Wang, "在习近平总书记外交思想指引下开拓前进 (Forge Ahead under the Guidance of General Secretary Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy)," *Study Times*, September 1, 2017, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1489118.shtml>; The official English translation is here: Yi Wang, "Forge Ahead under the Guidance of General Secretary Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy,"

One year after the foreign minister’s speech, at the November 2014 Central Conference on Work Related to Foreign Affairs, President Xi Jinping confirmed this foundational shift in China’s foreign policy by announcing that ‘we must have a major country diplomacy with our own distinctive traits’.<sup>458</sup> ‘The nation’s diplomacy’, the General Secretary continued, ‘must have distinct Chinese characteristics, Chinese style, and Chinese manner’.<sup>459</sup> The General Secretary’s comments set off a major effort among the country’s foreign policy experts and practitioners to interpret, expound on, and fill in the meaning of Major Country Diplomacy. In the following sections I survey this internal debate.

To gather data for this analysis, I searched the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the country’s premier academic database, for journal articles with the subject ‘major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics’ (中国特色大国外交). The results were filtered by ‘core journals’ only, a widely used and authoritative journal index in China whose journals are considered the most

reputable and influential in the country. The search yielded a total of 124 results.<sup>461</sup>

**Figure 6: Articles with ‘major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics’ 中国特色大国外交 as subject<sup>460</sup>**

2010	0
2011	0
2012	0
2013	3
2014	4
2015	16
2016	18
2017	30
2018	47

A brief analysis of the search results shows that there was no mention of the term Major Country Diplomacy before 2013. This is unsurprising as the concept didn’t enter Chinese lexicon until Foreign Minister Wang Yi first mentioned it in June 2013. But interest in the concept didn't genuinely take off until it received a stamp of approval from the very top.

September 1, 2017,

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/2461\\_663310/t1489143.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1489143.shtml).

<sup>458</sup> “The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing.”

<sup>459</sup> “The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing.”

<sup>460</sup> China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). [www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net). Filtered for core journals only.

May 16, 2019.

<sup>461</sup> As of May 16, 2019.

After President Xi Jinping used it in November 2014, signaling it had become an official concept, there was a sharp rise in scholarly output.

A quick look at the most active scholars on theorizing the concept shows that several well-known individuals are responsible for a sizeable portion of the articles. Yang Jiemian, the long-time president of Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, was the most productive with six publications, followed by Tsinghua University's Zhao Kejin (4), Foreign Minister Wang Yi (4), and the Central Party School's Luo Jianbo (4). The rest of the list includes well-known names: the Central Party School's Liu Jianfei (3), China Foreign Affairs University's Gao Fei (2), China Institute of International Studies' (CIIS) Su Ge (2), and CIIS's Ruan Zongze (2). These are some of the country's most influential international relations scholars and practitioners. The intermingling of both university academics and policymakers (including the foreign minister) shows that this is not just an academic debate but is driven by policy needs.

In terms of where this debate has unfolded, the largest amount of articles were published in the CIIS affiliated journal *China International Studies* 国际问题研究 (22 articles or 17.7% of the total), the *People's Daily* journal *People's Tribune* 人民论坛 (10; 8.1%), the CICIR journal *Contemporary International Relations* 现代国际关系 (8; 6.5%), the CASS Institute of World Economics and Politics journal *World Economics and Politics* 世界经济与政治 (6; 4.8%), the CASS Institute of West-Asian and African Studies journal *West Asia and Africa* 西亚非洲 (6; 4.8%), and the Party's flagship theoretical journal *Seeking Truth* 求是 (3; 2.4%).

A look at the institutional breakdown of the author affiliations shows that nearly half of the articles were published by experts concentrated in ten well-known institutions. The best-represented institution was the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), whose experts were responsible for 10 articles or 8.1% of the total. This is mainly due to the outsized efforts of its director Yang Jiemian who published more than half of them. The rest of the articles published on Major Country Diplomacy are by authors who belong to the country's elite institutions: China Foreign Affairs

University (8; 6.5%), the Central Party School (8; 6.5%), Tsinghua University (6; 4.8%), Wuhan University (5; 4%), Jilin University (5; 4%), Fudan University (4; 3.2%), China Institute for International Studies (4; 3.2%), and Renmin University (4; 3.2%).

The following section will analyze points of agreement as well as fault lines among international relations experts regarding the meaning and significance of Xi Jinping's Major Country Diplomacy. To carefully read 124 academic articles is unmanageable so I further narrowed this selection down to those articles that have been downloaded more than 1,000 times, approximating the most influential articles, yielding a total of 40 articles.<sup>462</sup> These 40 articles, the information of which is provided in Appendix A, form the core of the following analysis. In these, seven themes are prominent and will be discussed in turn: temporality, relative national power, grand strategy, reforming the international system, a non-Western path to modernization, benevolent developmentalism, and enduring realism.

### 1. Temporality: Periodizing the PRC's foreign policy

In the first instance, Chinese scholars have used the Major Country Diplomacy discourse to re-periodize the history of the PRC's foreign policy in three cumulative stages. At the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2017, the twice-per-decade meeting to pick a new top leadership and set policy priorities for the coming years, Chinese President Xi Jinping pronounced that China had entered a 'new era' and that it was time for the country to take 'center stage in the world'.<sup>463</sup> Party historians quickly reassembled the timeline of modern Chinese history – the first thirty years of the PRC would be henceforth known as the Age of Independence, the second the Age of Prosperity, and the current one, aligned with the ascension of Xi, the Age of Might.<sup>464</sup> Li Zhiyong and

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<sup>462</sup> As of May 16, 2019

<sup>463</sup> Chris Buckley, "China Enshrines 'Xi Jinping Thought,' Elevating Leader to Mao-Like Status," *New York Times*, October 24, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-communist-party.html>.

<sup>464</sup> "高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜，为决胜全面小康社会实现中国梦而奋斗," *People's Daily*, July 26, 2017, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0728/c64094-29433645.html>; See also: Angang Hu, "中国进入'强起来'的新时代," *Qiushi*, October 29, 2017, [http://www.qstheory.cn/2017-10/29/c\\_1121871948.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/2017-10/29/c_1121871948.htm); Shigong Jiang, "Philosophy and History: Interpreting the 'Xi Jinping Era' through Xi's Report to the Nineteenth National Congress of the CCP," trans. David Ownby, *Open Times*

Yuan Zhengqing's periodization, shown in the chart below, is emblematic of this periodization.

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*开放时代* 1 (January 2018), <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/jiang-shigong-philosophy-and-history.html>.

**Figure 7: China's Diplomacy: An Evolutionary-Historical Comparison<sup>465</sup>**

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Diplomatic Form</i>	<i>Fundamental Objective</i>	<i>View of International Order</i>	<i>Main Objective</i>	<i>Ideal Objective</i>	<i>Diplomatic Foundation</i>	<i>Diplomatic Method</i>
<i>1949-1978</i>	<i>Revolutionary Diplomacy</i>	<i>State Survival</i>	<i>Challenge through Revolution</i>	<i>Diplomatic Recognition</i>	<i>Revolutionize</i>	<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Strategic Alliances</i>
<i>1979-2009</i>	<i>Development Diplomacy</i>	<i>Economic Development</i>	<i>Rationally Integrate</i>	<i>Attract Investment</i>	<i>Modernize</i>	<i>Domestic Development</i>	<i>Keep a Low Profile</i>
<i>2010-</i>	<i>Major Country Diplomacy</i>	<i>China's Rise</i>	<i>Actively Reshape</i>	<i>Great Power Responsibility</i>	<i>Harmonize</i>	<i>National Identity</i>	<i>Comprehensive Diplomacy</i>

<sup>465</sup> The original (in Chinese): Li and Yuan, "On Chinese Characteristics of Great-Power Diplomacy," 21.

Three things are worth noting here. First is the discursive framing of the general orientation of China's foreign policy as progressive in nature. That is, the practice of diplomacy depends on an objective assessment of the national conditions and the external environment and when these two conditions change then behaviour enters into a new, upgraded stage. This accords with the Marxian understanding of the progressive nature of history. It is common therefore for the analyses included here to stress the 'theme of the times', 'holding a correct view of history', and 'deeply grasping international trends and laws of evolution'.<sup>466</sup> In this sense, Major Country Diplomacy is a response to the evolution of the laws of international relations, which the Party believes entered a new stage somewhere between 2010 and 2012.

Second, the Leninist organization of the PRC's political system ensures that national ideology is highly dependent on the nature of the Party leader. Most observers date the arrival of a new phase of diplomacy not to 2010, as Li and Yuan do above, but to 2012, when Xi Jinping assumed power.<sup>467</sup> That year marked, Su Ge writes, 'a new historical starting point' for China's foreign policy.<sup>468</sup> Several interviewees also pointed to Xi Jinping's personality as one of the two or three most important factors in China's new assertive foreign policy. As one CASS scholar told me: 'Xi Jinping is a guy with great ambition. He just wants to be Xi Jinping the Great'.<sup>469</sup> And another said, '[Xi] wants to be a powerful leader, a more powerful leader than President Hu and Jiang'.<sup>470</sup>

Third, national role conceptions are highly consequential to the actual practice of foreign policy. The evolution to Major Country Diplomacy as the nation's official diplomatic doctrine portends an evolution in China's grand strategy from a passive,

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<sup>466</sup> Song, "Analysis of Xi Jinping's Thoughts on Great-Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics," 15–16.

<sup>467</sup> Jianfei Liu, "Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics Reflects Trends of the Times," *China International Studies*, June 2017, 28–44; Ge Su, "Xi Jinping's Strategic Thought Guiding Chinese Diplomacy," *China International Studies*, December 2016, 11–37; Ge Su, "The Great Historic Journey of Chinese Diplomacy," *China International Studies*, December 2017, 5–39.

<sup>468</sup> Su, "The Great Historic Journey of Chinese Diplomacy," 28.

<sup>469</sup> Interview, Beijing, March 2019.

<sup>470</sup> Interview, Beijing, May 2019.

defensive realism inherited by Deng Xiaoping to a more assertive and ideational strategy. Li Zhiyong and Yuan Zhengqing, summarized in the table above, argue that China's view of international order has evolved to a desire to reshape its main features and the nation's fundamental objective has become China's rise. Other prominent scholars have noticed this subtle but important shift in China's fundamental objective.<sup>471</sup> Yan Xuetong argues that China's grand strategy is now driven by the desire for 'national rejuvenation', which in his terms refers to 'China's efforts to catch up with the United States in terms of comprehensive national power.'<sup>472</sup> Given this evolution, Yan believes competition between the US and China for global hegemony is inevitable.

## 2. Relative National Power

That China is now a global power is undisputed. In terms of national GDP, China is the second largest economy in the world, a milestone it reached in 2010; it contributes more than 30% of the global economy's annual growth; it is the largest contributor of peacekeeping troops out of all the UN Security Council members; and in 2019 it became the second largest contributor to the United Nations' annual budget.<sup>473</sup> This rapid increase in national power has provoked bold predictions about China's power position. In his 2013 book *Inertia of History*, Yan Xuetong predicted that China would become a superpower and the international system would form a bipolar structure between China and the United States before 2023.<sup>474</sup> The appearance of 'major country' or 'great power' (大国) into official discourse signifies the Party leadership's

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<sup>471</sup> Kejin Zhao, "解读中国特色的大国外交 (Interpreting Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics)," *Study Times*, July 8, 2013, [https://www.wxyjs.org.cn/zgtsshzylltxyj\\_569/201307/t20130712\\_142674.htm](https://www.wxyjs.org.cn/zgtsshzylltxyj_569/201307/t20130712_142674.htm); Jianwei Wang, "Xi Jinping's 'Major Country Diplomacy': A Paradigm Shift?," *Journal of Contemporary China*, July 2018, 1–16.

<sup>472</sup> Yan, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," 164.

<sup>473</sup> Qingmin Zhang, "理解中国特色大国外交 (Understanding Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics)," *World Economics and Politics* 9 (2018): 74; "China Rises to 2nd Largest Contributor to UN Budget," *Xinhua*, December 24, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-12/24/c\\_137696281.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-12/24/c_137696281.htm).

<sup>474</sup> Xuetong Yan, *历史的惯性 (Inertia of History)* (Beijing: CITIC Press, 2013).

recognition of this important change in the global balance of power. Here is how one CASS scholar explained it during an interview:

The difference is that in the past, China formulated its policies in response to the foreign policy of the other great powers. For example, in the 1970s there was what we call triangular diplomacy between the Soviet Union, the United States and China. At that time the Soviet Union and the United States are two superpowers in the Cold War, and we called China a great power but actually China was weak at that time. So China is like a weight, if you put the weight on this scale, [that power] will win, if you put the weight on the other scale, [the other power] will win. We made a policy targeting the great power competition between the Soviet Union and the United States. But nowadays things have changed. China is a scale, not a weight.<sup>475</sup>

This increase in relative power has had important consequences for policymaking as it meant that Beijing was automatically engaged in global issues, rather than choosing whether to become engaged as in the past. In this sense, Deng Xiaoping's guiding doctrine of 'keep a low profile' was no longer tenable.<sup>476</sup> As this scholar continued:

From China's perspective, besides America, no other country is a great power; they are all middle or small powers. Now that China is a scale, it's very difficult to use the problems between other countries to make policy, because now we are the problem. So President Xi is now talking about a new phrase: 'big changes unseen in a century' (百年未有之大变局). What is its meaning? For example, in the past, the two World Wars, the Cold War, or the important things happening in international society had no direct connection with China, or China wasn't forced to be involved in those affairs. But nowadays things have changed. In the future, global affairs will have a direct connection with China or China will initiate those important things. China is now actively involved these things, it is not forced to be involved.<sup>477</sup>

Chinese experts nevertheless remain of diverse opinion on how much capacity the country has to manage global or even regional order. Zhang Qingmin of Peking University notes that although China is undisputedly a 'great power', given that its per capita GDP remains relatively low China should also be classified as a 'developing

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<sup>475</sup> Interview, Beijing, May 2019.

<sup>476</sup> Xu, "新时代中国特色大国外交理念与原则问题初探 (Major-Country Diplomacy with Distinctive Chinese Features in the New Era)," 5.

<sup>477</sup> Interview, Beijing, May 2019.

country'.<sup>478</sup> Indeed, there is value in questioning the common practice of using national GDP to approximate a state's comprehensive power. In national GDP terms China now ranks second in the world, next only to the United States. But when China's huge population is factored in its status as a developing country becomes evident. In 2018, the IMF estimated China's per capita GDP at \$9,608, putting it 67<sup>th</sup> in the world.<sup>479</sup> Moreover, China's national wealth is spread extremely unequally.<sup>480</sup> This problem with unbalanced development, and the destabilizing political effects it generates, impacts Beijing's approach to global governance. Luo Jianbo of the Central Party School argues that because China's most pressing concerns remain internal, it should be cautious about assuming too many responsibilities over global governance.<sup>481</sup> Here he is echoing Wang Jisi, who nearly a decade ago encouraged Chinese strategists to focus on domestic development problems rather than the nationalistic project of surpassing the United States in global power.<sup>482</sup>

### 3. Grand Strategy

The absence of Deng Xiaoping's 4-character dictum 'keep a low profile' (韬光养晦 *taoguang yanghui*, henceforth 'TGYH') from the Party leadership's discourse after 2013, and its seeming replacement by 'be more proactive' (奋发有为 *fenfa youwei*, henceforth 'FFYW') by Xi Jinping, set off speculation of changes to Beijing's grand strategy. As a governance tool, this shift in official language opened up a restricted channel for political participation by the country's international relations experts to

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<sup>478</sup> Zhang, "理解中国特色大国外交 (Understanding Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics)," 74; Pin Pu, "新时代中国特色大国外交的内涵研究 (On the Connotation of Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era)," *Jiaoxue Yu Yanjiu* 9 (2018): 80.

<sup>479</sup> "World Economic Outlook Database" (International Monetary Fund, April 2019), <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2019/01/weodata/index.aspx>.

<sup>480</sup> In 2017, the country's National Bureau of Statistics estimated that China's Gini Coefficient, the most commonly used estimate of inequality, was 0.4 – a level that the bureau's head Ning Jinzhe described as 'relatively serious' and above a level that the UN-Habitat defines as an 'international alert line'. See: "China's Gini Coefficient Exceeded 0.4 in 2017," *People's Daily Online*, February 6, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0206/c90000-9424307.html>.

<sup>481</sup> Jianbo Luo, "中国特色大国外交: 新理念, 新战略与新特色 (Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics: New Concepts, Strategy and Characteristics)," *West Asia and Africa* 4 (2017): 47.

<sup>482</sup> Jisi Wang, "中国的国际定位问题与'韬光养晦、有所作为'的战略思想 (The International Positioning of China and the Strategic Principle of 'Keeping a Low Profile While Getting Something Accomplished')," *China International Studies* 2 (2011): 8–9.

debate the broad contours of China's strategy by interpreting this discourse. As expected, the ambiguity of this new term allowed for a diversity of interpretations based on individual scholars' own favoured policy.

Xu Jin of CASS argues that FFYW signaled a 'directional' (*fangxiangxing*) and 'doctrinal' (*yuanzhexing*) adjustment to China's foreign policy and signified a new judgment on China's international position.<sup>483</sup> The precondition of the previous TGYH strategy was one of relative material weakness – a condition of 'you're strong and I'm weak', while China's new diplomacy is conducted under the precondition of relative strength.<sup>484</sup> This shift in strategy is manifested in prioritizing relations with nations on China's periphery, developing a new moral and benevolent diplomatic discourse, and participating even more actively in the reform of the international system.<sup>485</sup> The abandonment of the TGYH language confirms the Party leadership's desire for superpower status. Although the Party proclaims 'peaceful development' as its intention, it never previously declared the end point; the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese people', a favoured slogan of Xi Jinping, by contrast is much more declarative: 'it demands China ultimately becomes the world's most powerful country, or at least one of the two most powerful.'<sup>486</sup> Xu does not mince words for what the Party leadership is signaling to international society: 'all countries that are willing to jointly realize the Chinese Dream [of rejuvenation] are our friends; each and every one of those that do their utmost to thwart our Dream, these are our enemies.'<sup>487</sup>

Others remain skeptical of such a fundamental transformation in Beijing's grand strategy. Qu Xing, a long-time advocate of Deng Xiaoping's TGYH, argues that Deng's original intention was to avoid ideological conflict with the West while continuing to

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<sup>483</sup> This position is shared by Yan Xuetong. Yan, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement."

<sup>484</sup> Jin Xu, "中国外交进入'奋发有为'新常态 (Chinese Diplomacy Has Entered 'strive for Achievement' New Normal)," *Chinese Cadres Tribune* 12 (2014): 41–42.

<sup>485</sup> Xu, 42.

<sup>486</sup> Xu, 41.

<sup>487</sup> Xu, 41.

modernize, and this fundamental policy is unchanged.<sup>488</sup> In his dissection of official concepts, Liu Jianfei of the Central Party School doubts any fundamental changes in the global balance of power: ‘We must clearly recognize that in terms of the China-West power ratio, the fundamental state of “strong West, weak China” remains unchanged.’<sup>489</sup> In particular, Liu notes that more than two-thirds of the countries in the world use the ‘Western type’ of political system and there are more than 130 democracies worldwide.<sup>490</sup>

To judge the present efficacy of the TGYH strategy, Liu offers his interpretation of Deng Xiaoping’s vague and ambiguous dictum, singling out two components: guard weaknesses (善于守拙), never take the lead (决不当头). The former, Liu asserts, meant not getting into ideological battles with the West while the latter referred to those suggesting China replace the Soviet Union as the head of the Comintern. Given the emphasis that Liu puts on ideological defensiveness, he advocates the continuing relevance of the TGYH strategy. This for Liu does not contradict the official discourse of FFYW, which remains relevant in two areas: issues involving China’s core national interest and reforming the international system.<sup>491</sup>

The shift in official diplomatic language from TGYH to FFYW under Xi Jinping, and its connection to Major Country Diplomacy, has offered a productive channel for international relations experts to participate in the debate surrounding China’s grand strategy, while also facilitating the use of official language as the ‘legitimate’ way for individuals to talk about Beijing’s diplomacy.<sup>492</sup>

#### 4. Reforming the international system

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<sup>488</sup> Xing Qu, “理念更新为中国外交注入新活力 (‘Updated Concepts Inject Energy into China’s Diplomacy’),” *世界知识 (World Affairs)* 24 (2013), [http://www.ciis.org.cn/chinese/2014-02/07/content\\_6650485.htm](http://www.ciis.org.cn/chinese/2014-02/07/content_6650485.htm).

<sup>489</sup> Liu, “In the New Era, China’s Diplomacy Must Both ‘keep a Low Profile’ and ‘Strive for Achievement,’” 47.

<sup>490</sup> Liu, 47.

<sup>491</sup> Liu, 48.

<sup>492</sup> Privately some scholars have reservations about Xi Jinping’s abandonment of TGYH but have not spoken or written publicly due to the change in official language. Source: Interview, Shanghai, October 2018.

Chinese elites hold a Marxist understanding of the international system, whereby the core Western powers run the main institutions and set the rules for global governance, benefitting their own interests at the expense of the developing non-Western world.<sup>493</sup> A core element of Xi Jinping's Major Country Diplomacy, as two scholars write, is to 'guide the orderly transformation of the international order'.<sup>494</sup> In 2013, shortly after the transfer of power to the new leadership at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Foreign Minister Wang Yi noted that China would 'more actively participate in the reform and improvement of the international system'.<sup>495</sup> One year later, at the 2014 Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, Xi Jinping said China should 'work to reform the international system and global governance, and increase the representation and say of China and other developing countries'.<sup>496</sup>

To this end, Beijing has adopted a dual strategy of reforming old international institutions and creating new ones. One analyst has it that China has initiated or been a major partner in the creation of at least twenty-two multilateral institutions, which together serve to constitute a 'parallel order' next to Western-initiated and dominated institutions such as the World Bank and IMF.<sup>497</sup>

### 5. A Non-Western Path to Modernization

China's impressive economic modernization over the past four decades has inspired confidence in its own development strategy – based on massive state-funded infrastructure projects to spur industrial development – as an alternative to the neo-liberal consensus that characterized post-Cold War development thinking. In his first speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2015, Xi reiterated: 'It is important

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<sup>493</sup> Zhicheng Wu and Yu Wu, "习近平全球治理思想初探 (Analysis of Xi Jinping's Thought on Global Governance)," *国际问题研究* 3 (2018): 29; Jingjing Ren, "构建人类命运共同体与当代中国外交的创新性发展 (Constructing a Community of Common Destiny and Modern China's Diplomatic Innovative Developments)," *China Socialism Studies* 6 (2017): 50.

<sup>494</sup> Wu and Wu, "Analysis of Xi Jinping's Thought on Global Governance," 30.

<sup>495</sup> Wang, "Exploring the Path of Major-Country Diplomacy With Chinese Characteristics."

<sup>496</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing," November 29, 2014, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1215680.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml).

<sup>497</sup> Oliver Stuenkel, *Post-Western World: How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016), 99–100.

for us to use both the invisible hand and visible hand to form synergy between market forces and government function and strive to achieve both efficiency and fairness.’<sup>498</sup> The emphasis on both the private market and state-led development policies is congenial to China’s own development path since 1978, and holds attraction for developing states that are weary of neo-liberal policies. The ‘China model’ offers the dynamism of private markets without the state relinquishing the commanding heights of the economy. It is an alternative pathway to modernity. In 2017, Xi said that China’s successful socialist modernization ‘gives a new option to those nations and peoples who want to speed up their development while maintaining their independence.’<sup>499</sup> One should be careful to note that although China has more confidence in its development experience it shows no interest in forcefully ‘exporting’ its model of development to other nations. It is content to be looked upon as a successful case of non-Western development.

In celebrating China’s modernization programme, the propaganda arm of the CCP exhorts citizens to embrace the ‘four confidences’: confidence in China’s *path* (socialist development), *theory* (socialism with Chinese characteristics), *system* (one-party) and *culture* (Marxism + Chinese civilization).<sup>500</sup> These constitute the ‘unique’ institutions that the Party emphasizes are responsible for ending the ‘century of humiliation’ of semi-colonial subordination in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the modernization in the second half. On first reading, this idealism appears to be largely defensive. The very notion of the state promoting ‘confidence’ among citizens in its own politico-economic system suggests a very low level of support among Chinese

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<sup>498</sup> “Chinese President Advocates New Type of Int’l Relations,” *Xinhua*, September 28, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/29/c\\_134670372.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/29/c_134670372.htm).; The ‘China Model’ in this respect is the latest example of the developmental state in East Asia. See: Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925 - 1975* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Stephan Haggard, *Pathways from the Periphery: The Politics of Growth in the Newly Industrializing Countries* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1990)..

<sup>499</sup> Jinping Xi, “决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告 (Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era - Report to the 19th Congress of the CCP),” *Xinhua*, October 27, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/27/c\\_1121867529.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/27/c_1121867529.htm).

<sup>500</sup> Feng, “从‘三个自信’到‘四个自信’ (From ‘three Confidences’ to ‘Four Confidences’).”

citizens to begin with. Indeed, since the founding of the PRC in 1949, the CCP has consistently sought to defend itself from 'hostile forces', both internally and externally, pushing for democratization.

But in recent years a new understanding of China's experience, one that is potentially very significant for international society, has appeared. According to this understanding, China's development experience offers a new, 'non-Western' path to modernization for other late developing states. Prefacing with the 2008 financial crisis and the continuing flow of power away from the global North-West to China and other developing states, Yang Jiemian writes: 'the Euro-American Model and liberal thought, which in the long post-war period have been considered natural, have faced a tremendous challenge; meanwhile, China's path, system, theory and culture have provided strong lessons for international society.'<sup>501</sup> Here, China's story of revolution, resistance, and localization destabilizes the primacy of Western intellectual traditions and norms of development.

To highlight this shift towards a more confident assertion of China's development model into one that may be generalizable to the 'non-West', below I quote at length a discussion of China's contribution to what scholars and officials call the 'global governance deficit'. Note the way that China's contribution is framed here – as not just material but ideational. In this reading, China's unique experience as a successful non-Western case of development could potentially be shared among other developing states.

Global governance requires Chinese participation, even more it requires Chinese concepts, Chinese solutions. Most approaches to global governance used today are products of the Western development experience and when these governance approaches are used in the non-Western world they often fail, producing the opposite of desired results - not only are they unable to solve problems, sometimes they even become the origin of [new] problems. Acting as the representative of East Asian civilization that has gone through around 200 years of contact with the West, China has followed a road based on our own national conditions.

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<sup>501</sup> Jiemian Yang, "新时代中国外交的战略思维和谋划 (China's Diplomatic Strategic Thought and Planning in the New Era)," 外交评论 1 (2018): 8.

Since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, international society's heated debates about the 'Beijing Consensus' and the 'China Model' as well as Africa and Latin America's interest in China's governance experience has amply demonstrated that, undergoing experiences common to developing countries, China's experience is likely more enlightening and more valuable for the vast majority of developing states than is the Western experience. Thus, global governance in an era of transnational threats not only requires China's actual participation, even more it requires China to contribute its governance solutions to the world in order to improve the existing approaches of global governance.<sup>502</sup>

So what we have is not just a *sui generis* Chinese development model, but also one that is potentially a guide for other post-colonial, developing states. China's 'solution' is not only its growing material contributions to global governance, but it is also offering a 'non-Western' blueprint for development. Or in Yang Jiemian's terms, China is offering the world 'a "new and updated" choice of development path that is suitable for the national conditions of the majority of countries'.<sup>503</sup>

But there is an important contradiction here. If China's 'model' grew out of its own unique national conditions – a history of semi-colonialism, a brutal war with Japan followed by civil war, victory of the Communist Party, not to mention its territorial, demographic, and cultural inheritances - how can this model be generalized to other states, each with their own equally unique national conditions?

One answer is that China is merely offering late-developing countries a form of state-led industrialization that, while an essential but forgotten part of the story of Western development, China has more recently gone through. Writing in the journal *West Asia and Africa*, Luo Jianbo argues that China's development, one in which it borrowed both from the Soviet model as well as from the Western development experience, has achieved many successes in promoting economic modernization, increasing state capacity, and 'molding social consensus', and offers underdeveloped states 'a new road to realize modernization'.<sup>504</sup> Luo provides an example: 'Africa is experiencing a

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<sup>502</sup> Li and Yuan, "On Chinese Characteristics of Great-Power Diplomacy," 24.

<sup>503</sup> Jiemian Yang, "新时期中国外交思想,战略和实践的探索创新 (Exploration and Innovation of Theories, Strategies and Practices in China's Diplomacy in the New Period)," *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* 1 (2015): 21.

<sup>504</sup> Luo, "Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics," 45.

tidal wave of “re-industrialization”; China can, by sharing the experience of “Made in China” and through bilateral production cooperation, impel the African continent to realize “Made in Africa”.<sup>505</sup> This developmentalism forms a core element of Xi Jinping’s Major Country Diplomacy, reflected in discourses such as ‘win-win cooperation’ and an insistence on ‘inclusive development’ (*baorongxing fazhan*).

But there is more to this than economic modernization. China’s contributions to global development are increasingly framed as a challenge to the primacy of Western norms of socio-politico-cultural governance. The 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report identified ‘multi-polarity, economic globalization, IT application, and cultural diversity’ as major trends in global development.<sup>506</sup> In each of these areas, Yang Jiemian writes, developed and developing countries alike are looking for China’s contribution, in ‘thinking culture, theorizing strategies, and guiding public opinion’.<sup>507</sup>

Precisely what exactly these ideational goods are, however, remains an open question. While some authors point to rosy ideals of ‘harmony’ and ‘win-win cooperation’, the reassertion of rigid Party control that is the hallmark of Xi Jinping’s politics, mixed with a statist mentality that prioritizes collective security over individual security, potentially leads to the diffusion of China’s authoritarian mode of political governance globally. As Yang Jiemian writes, ‘facing turbulent situations in North Africa and West Asia, as well as increasing threats caused by extremism and terrorism, China, in its diplomatic thinking, attaches greater importance to the Party’s leadership, pays more attention to the country’s overall national security and shows more confidence in the path it has taken and in the theory, the political system and

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<sup>505</sup> Luo, 45.

<sup>506</sup> “Full Text of Xi Jinping’s Report at 19th CPC National Congress,” *Xinhua*, November 3, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c\\_136725942.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm).

<sup>507</sup> Yang, “Exploration and Innovation of Theories, Strategies and Practices in China’s Diplomacy in the New Period,” 20.

the culture.<sup>508</sup> This statism is not limited to China. ‘China’s diplomatic thinking has presented new alternatives for the international community.’<sup>509</sup>

One example is the Middle East. The region’s turbulent post-Arab Spring era and China’s potential contribution to regional governance is discussed in detail by Li Weijian, an SIIS researcher who also serves as the vice-president of the Chinese Association of Middle Eastern Studies.<sup>510</sup> Preceded by a discussion of the major changes that have occurred in the region since 2010, including the early election victories of Islamist parties in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt in the wake of the Arab Spring, the return of strongman politics, the breakdown of Syria into civil war, and careful reforms in Algeria, Morocco, and Jordan, Li writes that the region is gradually moving ‘from unrest to rule’ (*youluan dao zhi*).<sup>511</sup> During this process, people have come to realize that compared to the complex factors of geopolitics, religion and culture, and foreign intervention, ‘bad governance is the most fundamental cause of social turmoil’.<sup>512</sup> In these states, ‘whoever can lead the country’s development, whoever is able to effectively manage and control the myriad political, economic, social, and religious problems that emerge in the process of transformation, is the person who can obtain the genuine support of the people.’<sup>513</sup>

With the region mired in bad governance, China’s own modernization experience – where the CCP prioritized economic development while tightly controlling social and political demands – holds resonance. Li continues: ‘China’s thinking and experience with state governance undoubtedly has importance for countries in the Middle East’.<sup>514</sup> Indeed, Beijing has expressed its willingness and desire to act as a

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<sup>508</sup> Jiemian Yang, “Constructing Discourse Power in Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics: Mission and Challenges,” *China International Studies*, 2016, 43.

<sup>509</sup> Yang, 43.

<sup>510</sup> 中国中东学会。Information on this group is sparse, but it has informal ties to the MFA. Its current president is Yang Fuchang (杨福昌) the previous Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>511</sup> Weijian Li, ““一带一路”视角下构建合作共赢的国际话语体系 (Construction of Win-Win International Discourse System from Perspective of “The Belt and Road”),” *West Asia and Africa* 5 (2016): 85–86.

<sup>512</sup> Li, 86.

<sup>513</sup> Li, 86.

<sup>514</sup> Li, 86.

governance teacher to those states that need it. As the country's 2016 Arab policy paper states: 'China respects choices made by the Arab people, and supports Arab states in exploring their own development paths suited to their national conditions. We hope to enhance the sharing of governance experience with Arab states.'<sup>515</sup>

Figure 8: Serve the revolutionary people of the world



Source: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe, *Serve the Revolutionary People of the World*, 1971, 1971, <https://chinese posters.net/posters/e39-614.php>.

### 6. Benevolent developmentalism

What emerges at the core of Major

Country Diplomacy is something that can be termed *benevolent developmentalism*.<sup>516</sup>

This includes China's great power role as (1) a catalyst of global development and reforming the system of global governance in a more 'just' direction; (2) responsible for 'bringing' development to late-developing states; and (3) uniquely caring about smaller powers and non-Western states.

Benevolent developmentalism forms a central aspect of China's new great power diplomacy and is reflected in the country's major foreign policy strategies, including the ambitious 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI). According to Gao Fei, who lectured a Politburo collective study session on global governance reform in September 2016, the BRI is the 'platform' for implementing Xi's GPDCC.<sup>517</sup> Underscoring the global ambitions of China's new benevolent developmentalism, Liu Jianfei observes: 'Implementing the "Belt and Road" initiative [...] is a grand project to bring benefits

<sup>515</sup> "Full Text of China's Arab Policy Paper," *Xinhua*, January 2016, [http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2016/01/13/content\\_281475271412746.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2016/01/13/content_281475271412746.htm).

<sup>516</sup> Here my use of the concept 'benevolent developmentalism' is adapted from Shaun Breslin who uses a similar term – 'asymmetric benevolent developmentalism'.

<sup>517</sup> Fei Gao, "中国特色大国外交视角下的'一带一路' (The 'Belt and Road Initiative' from the Perspective of China's Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics)," *Jingji Kexue*, 2015, 10.

to the people all around the world.’<sup>518</sup> China’s benevolent developmentalism is also embodied in Liu’s casual claim that ‘in its relations with developing countries, China attaches particular importance to Africa, the continent that for people around the world is the most impoverished, backward, unstable, and turbulent.’<sup>519</sup>

The PRC has long engaged in ‘goodwill diplomacy’ in the Third World. Perhaps the most obvious example is the TAZARA railway. Constructed between 1970 and 1976, the 1,800km railway connects landlocked Zambia and Tanzania. The railway was funded by \$500 million in an interest-free loan – then the largest single foreign-aid project undertaken by China. Besides its contribution to development, the railway had an important political-ideological goal: to compete with the Soviet Union for influence in the Third World and to secure support from African countries for the PRC’s bid to reclaim its seat in the United Nations. Built during the height of superpower competition during the Cold War, the TAZARA railway served as a potent ideological signifier of China’s link to Africa and the Third World in the global struggle against imperialism and colonialism. This revolutionary ethos is evident in the 1971 propaganda poster above, celebrating the construction of the railway, which reads ‘serve the revolutionary people of the world’.<sup>520</sup>

China’s new benevolent developmentalism is different from its previous goodwill diplomacy in several important ways. First, it is stripped of revolutionary content. Far from seeking to overthrow the Western capitalist international order, Beijing now seeks to reform and increase its position in the existing global governance system. Nor are development projects based on ideological concerns; the BRI is not linked to ‘world revolution’, but to China’s great power responsibility, forcing the transformation of the international system and ultimately bringing about a Chinese-led regional order. Chinese developmentalism, rooted in unique national conditions, insists on an understanding of progress that is culturally differentiated, pluralistic,

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<sup>518</sup> Jianfei Liu, “新时代中国外交战略 基本框架论析 (Analysis of the Basic Framework of China’s Diplomatic Strategy in the New Era),” *World Economics and Politics* 2 (2018): 17.

<sup>519</sup> Liu, 15.

<sup>520</sup> Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe, *Serve the Revolutionary People of the World*, 1971, 1971, <https://chineseposters.net/posters/e39-614.php>.

and non-linear. In this understanding, modernization is not a stepping-stone to the inevitable arrival of Western liberal democracy. It lacks the political paternalism that characterized classic liberal thinkers like John Stuart Mill, who posited self-rule as the highest form of government to which all societies were evolving. Nor does Chinese developmentalism offer a crude one-size-fits-all model of development. If early American modernization theorists like Walt Rostow sought a universal development model to explain how ‘traditional’ societies evolve into modernity, Chinese elites embrace an open-ended pluralism that insists ‘There is more than just one path leading to modernization.’<sup>521</sup> In this sense, China’s modernization path, now ‘proven’ successful after seven decades of practice, is just one of many legitimate models that countries are free to choose from. At the same time, this inclusive pluralism is mixed with the resolute determination to resist the West. As the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report stated: China’s successful socialist modernization ‘gives a new option to those nations and peoples who want to speed up their development while maintaining their independence.’<sup>522</sup>

Second, China’s benevolent developmentalism has expanded from a limited number of ideologically similar states in the Third World to encompass a large number of states that range widely in political systems, geography, and level of development. China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ – a key site of this benevolent developmentalism – now encompasses 70 countries. Towards the developing world, Xi Jinping asserts that China behaves according to the ‘correct view of righteousness and benefit’ – a term with Confucian origins that suggests China is not solely concerned with profit. According to one interpretation, the Western-led system of global governance is underpinned by the capitalist value-system of absolute profits, which has, according to one scholar, ‘triggered many unhealthy tendencies in international politics’.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> “President Xi’s Speech at Arab League Headquarters: Full Text,” *Xinhua*, January 22, 2016, <http://english.cri.cn/12394/2016/01/22/4182s914033.htm>.

<sup>522</sup> Xi, “Report to the 19th Congress of the CCP.”

<sup>523</sup> Wu and Wu, “Analysis of Xi Jinping’s Thought on Global Governance,” 32.

This new benevolent developmentalism discourse, framed in locally familiar traditions and ideologies, is appearing as China is searching for an identity to justify its expanding global interests. As one CASS scholar explained:

China after 1840, after the First Opium War, after that time China lost its centre-ness in the world. [For] more than 170 years China doesn't have any experiences or lessons. [...] China is trying to regain the knowledge of how to be a leader. China has to learn again how to be a leader.<sup>524</sup>

### *7. Enduring Realism*

If there appears to be a new element of idealism in China's Major Country Diplomacy, an enduring theme is the realist concern with protecting and enhancing sovereign power. At the same time that Xi Jinping has proclaimed 'win-win' cooperation at the heart of his vision for diplomacy, he has overseen a dramatic centralization of power in order to eliminate any perceived security threats to the regime.

In December 2014, a *People's Daily* editorial made clear that 'China's diplomacy must uphold the leadership of the Communist Party of China and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics'.<sup>525</sup> At the June 2018 Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference, Xi emphasized that 'diplomacy reflects the concentrated will of the nation, authority over foreign affairs must remain in the hands of the Party Central Committee'.<sup>526</sup> At the same conference Xi also listed a 10-point summary of China's diplomacy in the 'New Era'. The very first point was 'strengthen the Party's centralized and unified leadership over foreign affairs work'.<sup>527</sup> At the same time that Xi has injected idealism into China's vision for global community, he has doubled down on a realist prioritization of state security.

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<sup>524</sup> Interview, Beijing, May 2019.

<sup>525</sup> "人民日报评论员: 中国外交必须具有自己的特色 (People's Daily Commentator: China's Diplomacy Must Have Its Own Characteristics)," *People's Daily*, December 1, 2014, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n/2014/1201/c1003-26121550.html>.

<sup>526</sup> "习近平: 努力开创中国特色大国外交新局面 (Xi Jinping: Persist in Pioneering the New Phase of Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics)," *Xinhua*, June 23, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-06/23/c\\_1123025806.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-06/23/c_1123025806.htm).

<sup>527</sup> "Xi Jinping: Persist in Pioneering the New Phase of Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics."

Three institutional changes were especially important in centralizing the Party's control over foreign affairs. The first was the formation of the National Security Commission (NSC), which was established in January 2014 and held its first meeting in April 2014. Like the American National Security Council, the Chinese NSC was set up to better coordinate national security decisions among different bodies. Unlike the American NSC, China's NSC is a *party body* (not government), which is headed by the general secretary of the CCP and focuses on foreign and domestic crises that could threaten regime stability. To date, it has been primarily concerned with domestic issues.<sup>528</sup> Second was the reorganization of five civilian maritime agencies into a newly created State Oceanic Commission and a renewed State Oceanic Administration (SOA), and the creation of the China Coast Guard under the jurisdiction of the SOA in June 2013.<sup>529</sup> These bodies are responsible to the Leading Small Group on Central Maritime Rights Protection, which is responsible for China's maritime policy, including its actions in the hotly contested South China Sea, and is headed by General Secretary Xi Jinping. Third was the creation of the Leading Small Group for Cybersecurity and Informatization. Initiated in December 2013 and formally established in February 2014, this body, which is also chaired by Xi, is responsible for coordinating and centralizing policies to better control information that could threaten the regime.

Alongside these institutional changes has been a shift towards centralization and personalization in high-level decision-making processes. Evidence suggests that Xi Jinping has moved sensitive discussion of reforms, national security, cybersecurity, and finance away from the powerful 25-member Politburo to the major leading small groups.<sup>530</sup> In these groups, most of which Xi acts as head and has stuffed with trusted subordinates, Xi faces only two or three other Politburo Standing Committee

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<sup>528</sup> Estimates are the NSC deals with domestic crises 60% of the time and cross-border crises 40%. See: Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "China's Institutional Changes in the Foreign and Security Policy Realm Under Xi Jinping: Power Concentration vs. Fragmentation Without Institutionalization," *East Asia* 34, no. 2 (June 2017): 117.

<sup>529</sup> Cabestan, 120.

<sup>530</sup> Wen-Hsuan Tsai and Wang Zhou, "Integrated Fragmentation and the Role of Leading Small Groups in Chinese Politics," *The China Journal*, March 25, 2019.

members, reducing the chances of his decisions facing pushback. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a government body whose head has a low formal ranking in the Party nomenklatura system, is shrinking in influence, a process formalized under Xi Jinping.<sup>531</sup> This development, a reversal of Deng Xiaoping's efforts to professionalize and delegate greater decision-making power to the foreign ministry since the early 1980s, has been subject to thinly veiled criticism by some of China's top international relations scholars.<sup>532</sup>

Some experts, like the Central Party School's Liu Jianfei, have justified this centralization by arguing that Party leadership over all affairs is the most prominent advantage of China's political system.<sup>533</sup> Liu writes that strengthening Party control over foreign policy offers 'political assurance' (*zhengzhi baozhang*) that the implementation of the country's diplomatic strategy will not deviate from its stated goals.<sup>534</sup> Similarly, Wang Cungang, the Vice-President of the Institute for China Strategic Studies at Tongji University, argues that Party leadership provides certainty in a world that, for Beijing, is increasingly uncertain. According to Wang, China's certainty comes from the Party's scientific thinking, its deep understanding of the laws of history, correct judgment about the world's basic conditions, and a firm belief in its own development path.<sup>535</sup>

## Conclusion

In light of the analysis presented in this chapter, two conclusions are warranted. The first is in regards to the role of international relations scholars in Xi Jinping's China. While this chapter is unable to disclose a direct linkage between the policy advice provided by scholars and changes in China's foreign policy, it shows that there are multiple channels for scholars to influence policy and that international relations

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<sup>531</sup> Jing Sun, "Growing Diplomacy, Retreating Diplomats – How the Chinese Foreign Ministry Has Been Marginalized in Foreign Policymaking," *Journal of Contemporary China* 26, no. 105 (2017): 419–33.

<sup>532</sup> Zhang, "理解中国特色大国外交 (Understanding Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics)," 76.

<sup>533</sup> Liu, "Analysis of the Basic Framework of China's Diplomatic Strategy in the New Era," 19.

<sup>534</sup> Liu, 20.

<sup>535</sup> Cungang Wang, "更加不确定的世界, 更加确定的中国外交 (A More Uncertain World, A More Certain China's Diplomacy)," *World Economics and Politics* 9 (2018): 43–63.

experts are embedded in powerful Party and government networks. Further research should be conducted on particular policy entrepreneurs, mapping personal relationships between scholars and top officials, and examples of successful idea transmission. This chapter also shows that scholars, while subordinate to Party authority, have an important role in the interpretation of official concepts and expanding on what they mean for Beijing's foreign policy practice. Further research should be conducted on how China's 'great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics' is assessed, revised, and expanded in following years.

Second, the appearance of the concept Major Country Diplomacy in official discourse signifies recognition by Party elites that the global balance of power has undergone an epochal shift and Beijing's foreign policy must also evolve to meet a changing external environment. In particular, the emergence of idealism in Beijing's diplomacy, and its discursive positioning against the West, as well as the stated desire to reform the international system of global governance, are two important new elements in China's foreign policy discourse under Xi Jinping. These ideational changes may have significant effects on the expanding interests of the Chinese state. In particular, they may presage a more activist, and perhaps ideologically combative, foreign policy vis-à-vis the major Western powers. This identity evolution has potentially significant implications for international society, including the possibility for China's authoritarian mode of governance to be 'exported' to other states.

Nevertheless, key questions of foreign policy orientation remain unresolved. Instead, the ambiguity of the Major Country Diplomacy concept has offered a restricted space for international relations scholars to voice their concerns about the future direction of the country in contending and sometimes contradictory ways. This suggests that China's national identity is neither stable nor unitary, nor is their consensus among domestic actors. Instead, the construction of China's great power identity is a contingent, continuously evolving, and contested process. It follows that China's great power diplomacy is both an ongoing process and one with open possibilities.

The next chapter will turn to China's programmatic ideals for international order. Like other rising powers in history, China has developed and begun offering the world a competing vision of world order, one based on its own higher-order values and sense of community. An amalgamation of different Chinese traditions, this vision is nebulous, propagandistic, and full of contradictions. But it has a clear target: the West and global liberalism.

## The China Solution to International Order

*Our nation has arrived at a new historical starting point. Socialism with Chinese Characteristics has entered a new phase of development. Our major accomplishments mean that the Chinese people, who have experienced such difficulties since the dawn of the modern era, have now made historic leaps through The Age of Independence and The Age of Prosperity to The Age of Might. [...] We can contribute our China Wisdom to solving the problems of humanity; we can offer The China Solution.<sup>536</sup>*

*- Xi Jinping, 2017*

As China re-emerges as a central player in global affairs it increasingly views itself not only as an economic and military great power, but also as a normative one, with its own governance traditions that it believes could ameliorate problems of global order. As Chapter 4 has argued, Xi Jinping's Major Country Diplomacy includes efforts to use China's power to reform the Western-led international order as well as offer Chinese concepts that can serve as new, non-Western normative referents for international relations. This chapter explores China's ideal visions for international order by conducting a historical ontology of three political concepts: 'Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit (正确义利观)', 'New Type of International Relations (新型国际关系)', and 'Community of Common Destiny (命运共同体)'. In light of the conceptualization of international order as the outcome of a struggle for discursive hegemony provided in Chapter 2, these concepts should be understood as attempts to fix identities and meanings in a new China-centred order.

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<sup>536</sup> “高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜，为决胜全面小康社会实现中国梦而奋斗”；This passage is translated by China Heritage: “Homo Xinensis Ascendant,” September 16, 2018, <http://chinaheritage.net/journal/homo-xinensis-ascendant/>.

Vivien Schmidt distinguishes between three levels of generality for ideas: individual policy ideas, policy programs, and underlying public philosophies.<sup>537</sup> Compared to capricious and frequent shifts in particular policy ideas, programmatic ideas are more broad shifts in the goals, objectives, instruments and core ideas in entire policy sectors. Philosophical ideas are even deeper and longer lasting and are not confined to the policy sphere but exist in the political sphere as ideology, worldviews, and public philosophies that frame appropriate behaviour in reference to higher order principles of morality and visions of society and the nation. The ideas charted in this chapter – as they involve agents’ conceptions about the nature of international relations and the nation’s place in it – sit somewhere in between the second and third level as programmatic or philosophical ideas.<sup>538</sup>

As I use an interpretive approach to understanding China’s vision for international order, I rely on speeches by high-level Party officials at key domestic and international events, as well as authoritative commentary on these speeches in state media and the Party’s official journals. Studying leadership speeches is a staple of constructivist approaches that seek to understand identity and its role in political practice.<sup>539</sup> This is even more so in the case of China, where the absence of an independent media and the murky nature of leadership politics forces analysts to ‘read the tea leaves’ of official state media. Publications such as *People’s Daily* and *Xinhua* are known to be authoritative in the sense that they offer the Chinese leadership’s official consensus on any certain issue.<sup>540</sup> This chapter uses an original dataset made up of 74 unique speeches and commentaries by high-level officials (that

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<sup>537</sup> Vivien A. Schmidt, “Speaking of Change: Why Discourse Is Key to the Dynamics of Policy Transformation,” *Critical Policy Studies* 5, no. 2 (July 2011): 106–26.

<sup>538</sup> Schmidt notes that the second and third level of ideas are often not neatly separable given that some programmatic policy ideas can become so ingrained into society that they resemble a public philosophy.

<sup>539</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): 839–69.

<sup>540</sup> Alice L. Miller, “Valedictory: Analyzing the Chinese Leadership in an Era of Sex, Money, and Power,” *China Leadership Monitor* 57 (2018): 1–17.

is, Foreign Minister and higher in rank), between December 2012 and September 2018. A full dataset is provided in Appendix B.

Speeches of top Chinese leaders are repetitive, obtuse, and full of jargon. Slogans, once they emerge and are given official approval, are quickly adopted and repeated *ad nauseam* in uniform fashion by all media. Often the direct content of top-level speeches is unavailable and analysts are forced to rely on summaries in official state media. These limitations forces analysts to employ an interpretive approach to elite discourses that focuses closely on how slogans are used, their context, linkages with other texts, and their evolution over time. This chapter uses such an interpretive approach in critically examining changes in China's programmatic and philosophical ideas concerning international order.

This chapter begins by situating China's official visions for international order in the recent transformation of China into a normative actor in world politics. It then traces the emergence and embedding into official language three concepts – Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit, New type of International Relations, and Community of Common Destiny – and shows how these ideas are discursively linked to two distinct traditions: China's pre-modern civilizational history, and its more recent socialist revolutionary history. It shows that Chinese universalism under Xi Jinping relies simultaneously on Confucian moral ideals of 'harmony without uniformity', 'balancing righteousness and interest' and the 'Grand Unity' of the world as well as the revolutionary-era ideal of Five Principles of Co-existence. This suggests a desire among China's Party and state leadership to offer a normative vision for international order that is based on the nation's own self-constructed traditions. I argue that the three concepts studied in this chapter are embodied by contradictory ideals of pluralism and hierarchy, which are unified in an ideal vision of international order that privileges China's states as a moral leader that respects diversity and sovereignty as long as its core interests are deferred to.

### **The China Solution and the emergence of Chinese Idealism**

The democratic neoliberal consensus that emerged out of the end of the Cold War never sat well with Chinese leaders. Famously described as the ‘end of history’ by Francis Fukuyama, this ideology holds that representative democracy is the highest form of government and free-market capitalism the ultimate form of economics.<sup>541</sup> These twin ideals are connected. As states ‘modernize’ the process of economic liberalization is expected to put into motion a concomitant process of political liberalization.<sup>542</sup> In the post-Cold period, the United States not only valorized its preferred values, but the promotion of democracy and free markets around the world were an important part of its grand strategy.<sup>543</sup> This ideology still enjoys strong support among the great powers of international society today.<sup>544</sup>

A core element of China’s Major Country Diplomacy, as explained in Chapter 4, has been the desire to offer a Chinese vision for international order. Many analysts argue that the PRC does not have any norms or values that are attractive enough to be adopted by international society. John Ikenberry, America’s foremost liberal scholar, writes that China ‘does not have the ideas, capacities, or incentives to tear down the existing international order and build a new one’.<sup>545</sup> Similarly, Suisheng Zhao writes that China ‘cannot effectively articulate distinctive values to underwrite the rules and norms’ of global order and that its ‘visions of the Sinocentric hierarchy hardly appeal to its neighbours’.<sup>546</sup> In a major study regarding the distribution of identity among great powers, Allan, Vucetic and Hopf find that China’s ‘insular, nationalist, and propagandistic’ national identity discourses make it unlikely that its values could be

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<sup>541</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

<sup>542</sup> Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>543</sup> Ikenberry and Slaughter, “Forging A World Of Liberty Under Law.”

<sup>544</sup> Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf, “The Distribution of Identity and the Future of International Order,” 19–20.

<sup>545</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China, the United States, and the Future of the Liberal International Order,” in *Tangled Titans: The United States and China*, by David Shambaugh (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 55.

<sup>546</sup> Zhao, “A Revisionist Stakeholder: China and the Post-World War II World Order,” 644.

shared by other great powers or challenge the current Western democratic neoliberal consensus to form the basis of an alternative order.<sup>547</sup>

Certainly Chinese leaders see this differently. Yang Jiechi, the country's top foreign policy official, writes that China's foreign policy embodies the socialist values of 'peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom' – all candidates for values to build consensus around.<sup>548</sup> Many Chinese scholars, too, are sanguine about the potential for new 'Chinese' values to take hold. One well-connected scholar writes that China's promotion, and the international adoption, of fairness, justice and civility – modern embodiments of the traditional Confucian values of benevolence, righteousness and rites – will 'facilitate the establishment of a better international normative order'.<sup>549</sup>

The effort to offer a Chinese vision for international order is perhaps best illustrated by the recent appearance in official media of the phrase 'Chinese Solution' (*zhongguo fangan* 中国方案). The phrase, which preceded Xi<sup>550</sup>, is a commentary on China's 'unique' modernization experience as well as a call for the international community to make space for Chinese norms in global governance. The phrase China Solution became embedded in China's foreign policy discourse in mid-2016 after Xi used it during a speech marking the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. Xi spoke forcefully. 'All party members must remember, what we are building is socialism with Chinese characteristics, not some other "ism". History has no end, nor can it be [forcefully] ended...members of the CCP and the Chinese

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<sup>547</sup> Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf, "The Distribution of Identity and the Future of International Order," 23.

<sup>548</sup> Jiechi Yang, "推动构建人类命运共同体 (Promoting the Construction of a Community of Common Destiny for Mankind)," *People's Daily*, November 19, 2017, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1119/c1003-29654654.html>.

<sup>549</sup> Yan, "Chinese Values vs. Liberalism," 21.

<sup>550</sup> The term first entered PRC discourse in early 2012, the last year of the Hu Jintao administration. See: Sheng Zhong, "实现普遍核安全的路线图 (Roadmap for Achieving Universal Nuclear Security)," *People's Daily*, March 28, 2012, [http://opinion.china.com.cn/opinion\\_67\\_38167.html](http://opinion.china.com.cn/opinion_67_38167.html).

people have complete confidence in offering the China Solution to humanity's search for better social systems.'<sup>551</sup>

The phrase 'China Solution', and the nationalist hubris that it evokes, has drawn rebuke from some scholars within China, most notably from Tsinghua University's Qin Hui who has likened it to German triumphalism of the 1930s.<sup>552</sup> Its nationalistic ethos is palpable in this speech Xi gave in the lead up to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress:

Since the Eighteenth Party Congress [in November 2012, when I rose to power], on the basis of the major achievements from the founding of the People's Republic, and in particular since the Open Door and Reform policies [first mooted in December 1978], a historical transformation has overtaken the enterprise of the party-state. We are at a new historical starting point. Socialism with Chinese Characteristics has entered a new phase of development. Our major accomplishments mean that The China Race, which has experienced such difficulties since the dawn of the modern age [which we date from the First Opium War of 1839-1842], has now passed through the Historical Leaps of The Age of Independence and The Age of Prosperity to The Age of Might. This signifies that Socialism in China has been reborn; it is evolving exponentially. It signifies that Socialism with Chinese Characteristics can offer a way for other developing countries to achieve modernity. We can contribute our China Wisdom to solving the problems of humanity; we can offer The China Solution.<sup>553</sup>

Despite some internal grumbling, that the phrase has become embedded in China's foreign policy discourse signals a willingness to rework some fundamental aspects of global governance, including its political, economic and cultural norms with reference to China's own developmental experience.

This idealism is combined with an effort to reshape the Western-led international order. At an internal national security conference in February 2017, Xi put forth the

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<sup>551</sup> “习近平:在庆祝中国共产党成立 95 周年大会上的讲话 (Xi Jinping Gives a Speech at the Event Celebrating the 95th Anniversary of the Establishment of the CCP),” *People's Daily*, July 2, 2016, [http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/zts\\_wblyxz/lanmuseven/201607/20160701358783.shtml](http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/zts_wblyxz/lanmuseven/201607/20160701358783.shtml).

<sup>552</sup> Hui Qin, “Does the China Solution Resemble National Socialism?,” trans. David Kelly, *Speech to Seminar on the 'China Solution', Schwarzman College, Tsinghua University*, September 30, 2016, <https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/publications/does-the-china-solution-resemble-national-socialism/>.

<sup>553</sup> “高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜，为决胜全面小康社会实现中国梦而奋斗”；This passage is translated by China Heritage: “Homo Xinensis Ascendant.”

concept of ‘two guidances’ - China as a guiding force in global governance and international security.<sup>554</sup> This signifies Beijing’s intention to take up a more proactive role over global governance. Shortly after Xi’s speech, a commentary in the *People’s Daily* asserted that ‘China possesses the will, the capability and the opportunity to become a leader of globalization.’<sup>555</sup> Another commentary more zealously proclaimed that ‘the Western-led world order is coming to its end, non-Western countries are beginning to construct a new framework for world affairs.’<sup>556</sup> To better understand its position in an international system marked by a changing balance of power, the politburo held two ‘study sessions’ in 2015-2016 on the topic of global governance reform. At the first session, following a lecture by Professor Qin Yaqing of Foreign Affairs University, Xi said that reform of the global governance system is ‘inseparable’ from the guiding role of ideas and concepts, and that China should continue to promote the innovation of governance concepts, including unearthing ‘the way of life and governance concepts from Chinese culture’.<sup>557</sup> The ‘great rejuvenation’ of China is not merely about the increasing material prosperity of its people and the nation, but above all the recovery of uniquely Chinese traditions of morality and justice and their acceptance around the world.<sup>558</sup> At the second study session, held a year later, Xi emphasized that China should increase four capacities over global governance:

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<sup>554</sup> The two guidances (两个引导) are: “引导国际社会共同塑造更加公正合理的国际新秩序” and “引导国际社会共同维护国际安全”. This was the first time Xi used the concept. “习近平主持召开国家安全工作座谈会,” *Xinhua*, February 17, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-02/17/c\\_1120486809.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-02/17/c_1120486809.htm).

<sup>555</sup> “中国具备全球化引领者的意愿、能力和机会 (‘China Possesses the Will, Capability and Opportunity to Be a Leader of Globalization’),” *People’s Daily*, March 16, 2017, [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2017-03/16/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20170316\\_4-03.htm#](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2017-03/16/nw.D110000renmrb_20170316_4-03.htm#).

<sup>556</sup> “习近平首提‘两个引导’有深意 (‘The Profound Meaning of Xi Jinping’s Two Guidances’),” *学习中国 Learning China*, February 20, 2017, [http://news.cnr.cn/native/gd/20170220/t20170220\\_523611364.shtml](http://news.cnr.cn/native/gd/20170220/t20170220_523611364.shtml).

<sup>557</sup> “习近平：推动全球治理体制更加公正更加合理 (Xi Jinping: Promote a More Just and Equitable Global Governance System),” *Xinhua*, October 13, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-10/13/c\\_1116812159.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-10/13/c_1116812159.htm).

<sup>558</sup> Fangbin Gong, “中华民族伟大复兴究竟复兴什么 (What Is the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation?),” *Xinhua*, March 2, 2016, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-03/02/c\\_128768004.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-03/02/c_128768004.htm).

rule-making (规则制定), agenda setting (议程设置), opinion shaping (舆论宣传), and overall coordination (统筹协调).<sup>559</sup>

During his speech when he first announced Beijing's intention to pursue a new Major Country Diplomacy, and speaking alongside the presidents of Sierra Leone and Surinam, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that the problems of global governance are not just about development, but that the world is 'going through a deep crisis of thinking and culture in modern civilization.'<sup>560</sup> In response to this crisis, he continued, China hopes 'to promote, through our diplomacy, the Chinese culture, contribute Chinese wisdom to the handling of international relations, share China's governance experience and offer Chinese solution to improve global governance'.<sup>561</sup>

The following section traces the emergence and embedding into official discourse three concepts: I) Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit; II) New Type of International Relations; and III) Community of Common Destiny - while exploring how they are discursively linked to China's pre-modern civilizational ideals of 'harmony without uniformity' and 'Grand Unity' as well as the revolutionary-era Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Together, these concepts suggest the desire and intention among China's Party-state leadership to offer a distinctively Chinese vision of international order.

### ***I. Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit 正确义利观***

It would be a mistake to call the highly moralistic discourse of the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit a new concept. The ideal of practicing righteousness in individual life can be traced back several thousand years to China's most celebrated philosophers.<sup>562</sup> Meanwhile, the idea that the nation must practice a righteous

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<sup>559</sup> “习近平：加强合作推动全球治理体系变革 共同促进人类和平与发展崇高事业 (Xi Jinping: Strengthen Cooperation on Reforming the Global Governance System, Jointly Promote the Sublime Undertaking of Human Peace and Development),” *Xinhua*, September 28, 2016, [http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2016-09/28/c\\_1119641652.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2016-09/28/c_1119641652.htm).

<sup>560</sup> Wang, “Exploring the Path of Major-Country Diplomacy With Chinese Characteristics.”

<sup>561</sup> Wang.

<sup>562</sup> Chung-ying Cheng, “On Yi as a Universal Principle of Specific Application in Confucian Morality,” *Philosophy East and West* 22, no. 3 (1972): 269–80.

diplomacy that is not limited to selfish interests can be traced back to the Republican period (1912-1949) and the scholar-official Yu Youren (1879-1964). A gifted calligrapher, Yu presented Chiang Ching-kuo, the eldest son of Republic of China leader Chiang Kai-shek, a couplet in 1961 encouraging him to think of the nation's long-term benefit when crafting policy.<sup>563</sup> Xi Jinping would use Yu Youren's words, which became Chiang Ching-kuo's maxim, in a speech to the Indonesian parliament in October 2013, but repackaged for a different purpose: to upgrade the China-ASEAN free trade area, to expand bilateral trade, and to discursively fix Southeast Asia as a hub in China's 'Maritime Silk Road'.<sup>564</sup>

The official formulation of the PRC practicing the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit came seven months earlier. In March 2013, a week after he had been inaugurated as President of the PRC, Xi took the first trip in his official capacity to Africa. The visit came at a time when there was growing criticism of ballooning Chinese investment on the continent, with some critics, including the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, labeling Chinese firms' extractive policies a new form of imperialism.<sup>565</sup> Xi sought to dampen some of this criticism when during a speech in Tanzania he put forward the concept of the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit.<sup>566</sup>

### *Civilizational Roots*

The question of how to balance the ideal of doing what is righteous (*yi* 义) with individual interest is a long running debate in Chinese philosophy. In the *Analects*,

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<sup>563</sup> "When counting benefit, count it for the entire world; when seeking fame, seek fame that could last for thousands of generations" (计利应计天下利，求名当求万世名). It is speculated that Yu Youren borrowed this maxim from the Japanese Meiji restoration politician Itō Hirobumi.

<sup>564</sup> "Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament," *ASEAN-China Centre*, October 3, 2013, [http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c\\_133062675.htm](http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm); See also: Amy Li, "What Message Is Xi Jinping Sending by Quoting Former Taiwan Leader Chiang Ching-Kuo?," *South China Morning Post*, October 4, 2013, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1324280/xi-jinping-quotes-democracy-champion-taiwan-chiang-ching-kuo>.

<sup>565</sup> Lamido Sanusi, "Africa Must Get Real about Chinese Ties," *Financial Times*, March 12, 2013, <https://www.ft.com/content/562692b0-898c-11e2-ad3f-00144feabdc0>.

<sup>566</sup> Yifei Chai, "中国外交的一面旗帜: 正确义利观 (The Banner of China's Diplomacy: Correctly Viewing Righteousness and Benefit)," *People's Daily*, August 11, 2016, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0811/c64094-28627513.html>.

Confucius says: ‘The superior man holds *yi* to be the superior principle [of action]’.<sup>567</sup> The ideal of righteousness (*yi*) as a principle of action is contrasted with *li* 利 - profit or material gain. ‘If not in accordance with *yi* I become rich and elevated, I regard [these gains] as floating clouds’.<sup>568</sup> As one scholar notes, ‘this implies that material gains are acceptable only when *yi* is present’<sup>569</sup>. While different philosophers attach different attribution to righteous behaviour, as an ideal, righteousness remains ‘a principle of action independent of consideration of self-interest and material profit’.<sup>570</sup> This is not to say that one should disregard individual interests or always prioritize righteousness over benefit. It is not utopian. To take a Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit is to attend equally to righteousness and individual benefit and to balance them in one’s action.

Chinese officials and state media use the concept Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit with regards to two sets of countries: developing nations and smaller nations on China’s periphery. That Beijing would emphasize the benevolent nature of its policies towards these two groups is a natural response to their apprehensive view of China’s growing power. In this sense, Xi Jinping’s instruction to his diplomats to promote ‘amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness’ as regional norms is a ‘soft power’ tool to shape foreign opinion in order to secure a more peaceful external environment for China’s continued rise.<sup>571</sup> It also reflects Chinese ideas about stable hierarchy requiring the distribution of material benefits in order to secure acquiescence of order among weaker states and produces ‘harmony’ among asymmetric states. Commentaries on the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit concept highlight Chinese benevolent policies to these two groups of states.<sup>572</sup> In

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<sup>567</sup> Cheng, “On Yi as a Universal Principle of Specific Application in Confucian Morality,” 270.

<sup>568</sup> Cheng, 270.

<sup>569</sup> Cheng, 270.

<sup>570</sup> Cheng, 273.

<sup>571</sup> Xiangyang Li, “‘一带一路’建设中的义利观 (The Viewpoint of Righteousness and Benefit in the ‘BRI’ Initiative),” *World Economics and Politics* 9 (2017): 8, 12.

<sup>572</sup> Chai, “The Banner of China’s Diplomacy.”

exchange, developing countries have ‘resolutely supported’ China’s stance on its core interests of Taiwan and Tibet.<sup>573</sup>

In the ‘humane authority’ (*wangdao*) tradition, it is the responsibility of the strong to be a morally upright in order to protect the interests of the weak. In his discussion of the concept of ‘righteousness’ and its potential to be a Chinese norm for the international community, international relations scholar Yan Xuetong writes that ‘since imbalance in strength between countries is a reality, it is necessary that the strong ones adopt benevolent policies toward the weak ones, and to do so, the strong ones must uphold justice.’<sup>574</sup> This civilizational background is emphasized by some officials, who note that practicing the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit reflects China’s ‘outstanding traditional culture’.<sup>575</sup>

#### *A Benevolent Great Power*

It wasn’t until late 2013 that the concept became widespread in Chinese foreign policy discourse. This timing suggests its intended audience. Two important events happened in the fall of 2013: the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ was first announced and the Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference was held. In September 2013, during a speech at Nazarbaev University in Astana, Kazakhstan, Xi Jinping promulgated what would come to be known as the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI). The BRI is a series of major infrastructure projects – oil and gas pipelines, sea ports, hydroelectric dams, airports, railways - in countries spanning South East Asia, Central and South Asia,

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<sup>573</sup> For example, one commentary in September 2013 by Foreign Minister Wang Yi highlights concrete examples of ‘righteous’ practices in China’s diplomacy in the developing world, including: the Tanzam Railway, built in the early 1970s to connect Tanzania and landlocked Zambia at considerable financial and human cost, the dispatching of Chinese medical teams to over 66 nations, the training and education of over 140,000 individuals from developing nations, over 2,200 assistance projects in the developing world, and not devaluing the renminbi, its currency, during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Other examples dispatching Chinese warships to the Gulf of Aden in 2008 to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia, its 2015 commitment to set up a 3.1 billion USD fund for developing nations to combat the effects of climate change, and Xi’s pledge to offer, in the form of government assistance, 60 billion USD to selected African countries to aid development. Yi Wang, “坚持正确义利观 积极发挥负责任大国作用 (Persist in the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit: Actively Exhibit Responsible Great Power-Ness),” *People’s Daily*, September 10, 2013, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n/2013/0910/c1003-22862978.html>.

<sup>574</sup> Yan, “New Values for New International Norms,” 22.

<sup>575</sup> Wang, “Persist in the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit.”

North Africa, the Middle East and Europe. It has been called China's 'Marshall Plan' and China has the funds to back it up.<sup>576</sup> High estimates run into the trillions of dollars of investment, which will undoubtedly reshape global trade by linking recipient countries closer to the Chinese economy.<sup>577</sup> By May 2018, a total of 70 countries have signed on to the BRI.

The second major event of fall 2013 was the central work forum on diplomacy toward the 'periphery' (*zhoubian*).<sup>578</sup> This was a high-level meeting – notably attended by all seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee, the most powerful decision-making body in the country, as well as State Counselors, various organs of the Central Committee, and Chinese ambassadors to peripheral countries – to plan China's diplomatic strategy towards its neighbouring countries. It was the first forum dedicated to peripheral diplomacy since the establishment of the PRC in 1949.<sup>579</sup> The meeting sought to 'establish the strategic objectives, basic principles, and overall setup of the peripheral diplomatic work in the next five to ten years, and define the line of thinking on work and the implementation plans for resolving major issues facing peripheral diplomacy.'<sup>580</sup>

China's relationship with peripheral countries deteriorated in recent years as a result of its own actions taken in the South China Sea, including expansionist territorial claims and the militarization of several islands. At the work forum Xi emphasized that in its relations with peripheral nations China should be guided by a 'amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness' (亲诚惠容), and China should try to find the 'confluence point' of individual national interests and 'firmly uphold a correct view of righteousness and benefit'.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> "China's 'Marshall Plan,'" *Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 2014, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-marshall-plan-1415750828>.

<sup>577</sup> Jonathan E. Hillman, "How Big Is China's Belt and Road?," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-big-chinas-belt-and-road>.

<sup>578</sup> "Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech at the Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery."

<sup>579</sup> Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 44 (Summer 2014): 1–43.

<sup>580</sup> "Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech at the Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery."

<sup>581</sup> "Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech at the Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery."

Xi expanded on what he meant by ‘righteousness’ and ‘benefit’:

‘Righteousness’ reflects a concept of Communist Party members and socialist countries. In today’s world, some people do very well while others don’t. It is not a good phenomenon. Genuine happiness is collective happiness. We desire the collective development of the entire world, and we especially wish that the great number of developing countries can speed up their development. ‘Benefit’ is to scrupulously abide by the principle of mutual benefit, it is not ‘I win, you lose’, it is achieving a win-win situation. We have a duty to impoverished nations to help as much as we can, and sometimes that means foregoing material gain in the name of what is just.<sup>582</sup>

After Xi first announced the concept during his Africa tour in March 2013, the concept of the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit gradually made its way into the PRC’s official foreign policy discourse through a series of important policy forums and international speeches. At both the 2014 and 2018 Foreign Affairs Work Conferences, the country’s top meeting on the direction of foreign affairs, Xi instructed his diplomats to ‘persist in correctly viewing righteousness and benefit’ in their diplomatic work.<sup>583</sup> He has also used a series of high profile events to unveil the concept, including speeches during a June 2014 speech to mark the commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, a July 2014 speech at Seoul National University, a January 2017 speech at the United Nations, and a September 2018 speech at the annual Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in

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<sup>582</sup> This is recounted by his foreign minister: Wang, “Persist in the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit.”

<sup>583</sup> “The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing”; “Xi Jinping: Persist in Pioneering the New Phase of Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics.”

Beijing.<sup>584</sup> In October 2017 the concept was written into Xi's report to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, cementing its status in China's foreign policy discourse.<sup>585</sup>

### *Between National/Community Interests*

The 'righteousness/benefit' concept is more complicated than mere hierarchical ordering practices. The emergence of the concept in PRC foreign policy discourse has followed a series of internal theoretical debates structured around a set of what are known in Marxist terminology as 'dialectics', or two poles that oppose one another. Qin Yaqing, Dean of the Foreign Affairs University in Beijing, explains the three core dialectics facing contemporary Chinese foreign policy in the 'new era': 1) pursuing a policy of peaceful development vs. safeguarding China's core national interests; 2) realizing collective prosperity vs. promoting China's own development; and 3) defending humanity's common interest vs. China's individual interest.<sup>586</sup> In each of these cases, the poles may contradict one another. For example, pursuing China's 'core interest' of national reunification with Taiwan may very likely contradict China's stated policy of peaceful development. Qin himself argues that when certain 'red lines' are crossed, for example on China's core interests of sovereignty, security or development, then China's national interest trumps the policy of peaceful rise. But given China's close integration with the global economy over the past four decades, the poles in each of these dialectics do not necessarily have to contradict, or, in Beijing's terms, be 'zero sum'. For example, China's economic development has clearly benefitted other states. By realizing both its individual interest and collective interest,

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<sup>584</sup> “习近平在和平共处五项原则发表 60 周年纪念大会上的讲话 (Xi Jinping's Speech at 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' 60th Anniversary),” *People's Daily*, June 28, 2014, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/0628/c1024-25213331.html>; “习近平主席今年首次出访，这个理念值得重温,” *CRI Online*, July 19, 2018, <http://news.cri.cn/20180719/b0a1a06e-85d9-bca4-fad6-7968deee81fe.html>; “习近平：共同构建人类命运共同体 (Xi Jinping: Jointly Build a Community of Common Destiny),” *People's Daily*, January 18, 2017, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0120/c64094-29037658.html>; “携手共命运 同心促发展,” *People's Daily*, September 4, 2018, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0904/c1001-30270899.html>.

<sup>585</sup> Xi, “Report to the 19th Congress of the CCP.”

<sup>586</sup> Yaqing Qin, “正确义利观: 新时期中国外交的理念创新和实践原则 (Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit: The Concepts and Practices of China's New Diplomacy),” *Qiushi*, June 16, 2014, [http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2014-06/16/c\\_1111103905.htm#](http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2014-06/16/c_1111103905.htm#).

the dialectic can be ‘unified’ and Beijing can claim to be acting in according with a Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit.

The concept is frequently invoked when Chinese officials visit Africa. For example, when FM Wang Yi met his counterpart in Equatorial Guinea in January 2015, he asserted that ‘the correct viewpoint of righteousness and benefit is the common value pursued by both China and Africa.’<sup>587</sup> Similarly, when Li Zhanshu, China’s top legislator, visited Ethiopia in May 2018 he said that China’s Africa policy is guided by ‘sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith, and the correct viewpoint of righteousness and benefit’.<sup>588</sup> These are attempts to discursively fix a set of China-defined shared values and identities with the Global South.

The degree to which China is actually able to sufficiently balance its own material interest and ‘righteousness’ in specific actions such as the BRI is up for debate. In some spheres, particularly security, contradictions will continue to deepen and spur resistance as China’s security state expands as Xi implements China’s ‘dream of a strong military’ that ‘must be able to fight and be able to win’<sup>589</sup>. But the embedding of the Correctly View of Righteousness and Benefit into the PRC’s foreign policy discourse reflects Xi’s understanding of China as a moral power that, governed by its own traditions, is uniquely able to balance its own interests with that of the community, and therefore, can rise to great power status while also continuing to provide for developing and peripheral nations through its unremitting beneficence. This self-understanding is at odds with much mainstream Western IR, which sees the rise of China as the *cause* for instability in the region.<sup>590</sup> Indeed, Chinese policymakers

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<sup>587</sup> “Wang Yi: Correct Viewpoint of Righteousness and Benefit Is the Common Value Pursued by Both China and Africa,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, January 15, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1228846.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1228846.shtml).

<sup>588</sup> “China’s Top Legislator Meets AU Commission Deputy Chair, Eyeing Closer China-Africa Cooperation,” *Xinhua*, May 13, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/13/c\\_137175842.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/13/c_137175842.htm).

<sup>589</sup> “习近平:坚持富国和强军相统一 努力建设巩固国防和强大军队 (Xi Jinping: Persevere in Making the Country Wealthy and the Military Strong, Strive to Build and Consolidate National Defense and Strong Troops),” *People’s Daily*, December 13, 2012, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2012/1213/c64094-19880301.html>.

<sup>590</sup> Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm,” December 1, 2010; Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

and scholars understand their country's rise in the complete opposite – that China's rise is good for it and the world.

## ***II. A New Type of International Relations 新型国际关系***

A second ideal that has gained prominence under Xi Jinping, this one more expansive, is Beijing's effort to create and practice what it calls a New Type of International Relations.<sup>591</sup> Unlike the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit, which is rooted in China's pre-modern Confucian tradition, the New Type of International Relations is firmly rooted in the PRC's post-1949 socialist revolutionary history.

### *Socialist Roots*

China's declaration of a New Type of International Relations first appeared after the 1954 Geneva Conference, a seminal international gathering that formally concluded the First Indochina War, marking the end of the French empire in Southeast Asia and, in its wake, the creation of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.<sup>592</sup> Upon conclusion of the three month conference, Zhou Enlai, China's premier and lead negotiator in Geneva, made his way back to Beijing via the socialist capitals of Berlin, Warsaw, Moscow and Ulan Bator. An article in the August 1954 issue of *World Affairs* commented on the conference and Zhou's diplomatic travels, hailing the newly established PRC's relations with the socialist world as a 'new type of international relations'.<sup>593</sup> An article published two years later in the same journal added that while 'economic relations of capitalist countries are antagonistic and competitive, where the strong exploit and enslave the weak [...] relations among socialist countries are equal and mutually beneficial'.<sup>594</sup> The countries in the socialist camp 'not only care about their own development, but also that of others'.<sup>595</sup> From the beginning, then, Beijing's

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<sup>591</sup> Xi, "Report to the 19th Congress of the CCP."

<sup>592</sup> Peter Mattis traces the concept back to the 5 Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, but the record shows the concept goes back to the immediate conclusion of the Geneva Conference. Peter Mattis, "Nothing New About China's New Concept," *The National Interest*, June 3, 2013, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/nothing-new-about-chinas-new-concept-8559>.

<sup>593</sup> 半月述评, "新型国际关系的新发展," *世界知识 (World Affairs)* 15 (1954).

<sup>594</sup> Bingrang Xu, "社会主义阵营各国的互助合作," *世界知识 (World Affairs)* 10 (1956): 12.

<sup>595</sup> Xu, 12.

declared intention to practice a New Type of International Relations was a reference to the socialist world standing in solidarity against the hegemonic politics of the capitalist-imperialist world. The language of ‘equality and mutual benefit’ is strikingly similar to contemporary PRC foreign policy discourse, although the socialist/capitalist categories have changed. Following China’s integration into the global capitalist system and its eager adoption of economic liberalism over the past four decades, China now stands in solidarity with other ‘emerging markets and developing countries’<sup>596</sup> against the ‘Western developed countries’.<sup>597</sup>

Given this socialist history, one cannot miss the fact that Xi Jinping chose to first announce his desire to ‘promote a new type of international relations with win-win cooperation at its core’ during a speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations on March 23, 2013.<sup>598</sup> In the capital of what was once the leader of the ‘socialist camp’ during the Cold War, Xi preceded his call for a New Type of International Relations with a progressive understanding of world history that has entered a new epoch:

The tide of the world is vast and mighty, those that follow it will prosper while those go against it will lose. It is vital to keep pace with the advancing era, one cannot have one’s body in the 21<sup>st</sup> century while one’s brain is still stuck in the past, stuck in the old era of colonial expansion, stuck in the rigid framework of Cold War thinking and zero-sum games.<sup>599</sup>

The phrase New Type of International Relations implies that there is an ‘old’ type of international relations. For China, the old type of international relations is characterized by (Western) great power hegemony, the formation of military alliances, and ideological camps. During his remarks in Moscow, Xi said that the world has advanced to a new era – the ‘old colonial system has crumbled’ and the Cold War

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<sup>596</sup> Yi Wang, “Toward a New Type of International Relations of Win-Win Cooperation,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, March 23, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1248487.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1248487.shtml).

<sup>597</sup> Xingtang Wu, “关于构建‘新型国际关系’的几点思考 (Some Reflections on Building a ‘New Type of International Relations’),” *当代世界 Contemporary World* 7 (2013): 19–22.

<sup>598</sup> “习近平在莫斯科国际关系学院的演讲 (Xi Jinping’s Speech at Moscow College of International Relations),” *People’s Daily*, March 24, 2013, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/0324/c1024-20892661.html>.

<sup>599</sup> “Xi Jinping’s Speech at Moscow College of International Relations.”

period of antagonistic blocs no longer exists.<sup>600</sup> But he suggested that elements of the old Hobbesian world still exist, including ‘power politics’ and ‘neo-interventionism’.<sup>601</sup>

After Xi first mentioned a New Type of International Relations in Moscow, the concept quickly made its way into official PRC foreign policy discourse. Over the next three years Xi would mention it in official speeches and documents more than 50 times.<sup>602</sup> At the November 2014 Foreign Affairs Work Conference, Xi instructed that China should ‘seek to establish a new type of international relations with win-win at its core’.<sup>603</sup> His foreign minister Wang Yi later praised the ‘important exposition of President Xi Jinping’ for not only enriching China’s diplomatic thought, but also because it ‘added a new dimension to realism-based traditional theory of international relations.’<sup>604</sup>

### *Solidarity with the Global South*

Beyond a general exhortation to resist ‘hegemony’, however, following its socialist roots the New Type of International Relations has a more specific target – the Western developed nations that make up the core of the global capitalist system. Xi linked China’s New Type of International Relations to China’s relations with the developing world in a speech on June 28, 2014 to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The five principles – mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence - were first agreed to in 1954 between China, India and Myanmar and then later endorsed at the Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian states in 1955. Among the newly independent states, which had suffered varying degrees of colonial violence, they were meant to offer a more principled approach to

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<sup>600</sup> “Xi Jinping’s Speech at Moscow College of International Relations.”

<sup>601</sup> “Xi Jinping’s Speech at Moscow College of International Relations.”

<sup>602</sup> “寻求‘合作共赢’的中国方案 (Seeking the ‘win-Win Cooperation’ China Solution),” *People’s Daily*, April 18, 2016, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0418/c49150-28282895.html>.

<sup>603</sup> “The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing.”

<sup>604</sup> “Full Text of FM Wang Yi’s Speech on China’s Diplomacy in 2014,” December 26, 2014, [http://english.gov.cn/state\\_council/ministries/2014/12/26/content\\_281475029808332.htm](http://english.gov.cn/state_council/ministries/2014/12/26/content_281475029808332.htm).

international relations. At a major ceremony commemorating the Five Principles held in Beijing, with Myanmar's President Thein Sein and India's Vice President Mohammad Ansari sitting in the audience, Xi called the Five Principles a 'historic contribution for promoting the establishment of a just and reasonable new type of international relations' and that they 'embody the essential characteristics of a new type of international relations'.<sup>605</sup>

While the concept has expanded beyond China's relations with the initial group of Bandung states – by the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in October 2017 the concept was used to describe the PRC's diplomacy in toto – it still retains the 'Bandung Spirit'.<sup>606</sup> That is, solidarity with the Global South in an effort to reforming the global governance system in the interest of China and other developing nations. It reflects a deep and continuing frustration with the structure of the international system, which since the end of the Second World War has been established, expanded and maintained by the Western powers, especially the United States. Of particular concern is the Western control over global financial system. As one party scholar explains:

Western developed nations still occupy the dominant position in the global economy, the old international economic order and rules are formulated by the Western developed nations to benefit their economic development. Economic globalization develops on this unbalanced and unfair foundation. Western developed nations do their utmost to acquire individual benefit from economic globalization, while at the same time passing on economic crises to developing countries.<sup>607</sup>

The push for a New Type of International Relations, then, also insists on renegotiating the extant system of global governance to better reflect China's size and status. When the concept was written into Xi Jinping's report to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in October 2017, its wording changed slightly from its initial formulation in Moscow. China would promote the building of a 'new type of international relations based on mutual

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<sup>605</sup> "Xi Jinping's Speech at 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' 60th Anniversary."

<sup>606</sup> Wenping He, "万隆精神'与新时代的亚非合作 (The 'Bandung Spirit' and Asia-Africa Cooperation in a New Era)," *People's Daily*, May 12, 2015, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2015/0512/c40531-26988594.html>.

<sup>607</sup> Wu, "Some Reflections on Building a 'New Type of International Relations,'" 20.

respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation'.<sup>608</sup> Foreign Minister Wang Yi later expanded on the meaning of 'fairness' (*gongping*) and 'justice' (*zhengyi*), which include expanding the 'representation and right of speech of developing countries' and 'reforming the international order in a more just and reasonable direction'.<sup>609</sup>

China seeks to reform the major institutions that constitute the international economic, security and political orders, which were all constructed by 'America or the Western powers headed by America'.<sup>610</sup> China sees itself as leading the push for a more equitable global governance system, one where it and the rest of developing world have a greater influence over writing the rules of global governance. As one Party scholar writes: 'China has the responsibility and the duty to push the global governance system in a more just and reasonable direction, in order to better protect the common interests of China and the developing world.'<sup>611</sup>

But it is not just inequalities in material power that concerns Chinese elites. The old type of international relations is 'permeated with Western values and concepts'.<sup>612</sup> Perhaps more than any other Western concept used to explain the PRC's rise, Chinese scholars and policymakers pushback against the idea of a 'Thucydides Trap'. Popularized by Harvard's Graham Allison, the concept refers to the increasing likelihood of conflict between a rising power and an established power.<sup>613</sup> After the concept was first mooted by Allison in 2011 it became of considerable interest, and consternation, to Chinese scholars.<sup>614</sup> A search in China's largest database shows that while there were no mentions of the concept before 2012, 'Thucydides Trap' now

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<sup>608</sup> Xi, "Report to the 19th Congress of the CCP."

<sup>609</sup> Yi Wang, "以习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想引领中国外交开辟新境界," *People's Daily*, December 19, 2017, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1219/c1001-29714534.html>.

<sup>610</sup> Shuguang Chen, "向世界贡献中国方案 (Offer the China Solution to the World)," *Guangming Daily*, October 10, 2018, [http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2018-10/10/nw.D110000gmrb\\_20181010\\_1-11.htm](http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2018-10/10/nw.D110000gmrb_20181010_1-11.htm).

<sup>611</sup> Chen.

<sup>612</sup> Jianfei Liu, "新型国际关系'新'在哪里," *Study Times*, April 16, 2018, <http://dzb.studytimes.cn/shtml/xxsb/20180416/32590.shtml>.

<sup>613</sup> Allison, *Destined for War*.

<sup>614</sup> "The Thucydides Trap," *New York Times*, January 30, 2011, <https://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/the-thucydides-trap/>.

garners well over sixty publications per year.<sup>615</sup> It was perhaps the most talked about, analyzed and critiqued Western IR paradigm during Xi Jinping's first term. On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017 the *People's Daily* dedicated an entire page to 'Eliminating the "Thucydides Trap" myth', suggesting the concept is a concern to top leaders.<sup>616</sup> During his January 2017 speech to the United Nations, in a quite remarkable moment of self-awareness by a rising power, Xi said that as long as 'great powers respect each other's core interests and major concerns' then 'the "Thucydides Trap" can be avoided'.<sup>617</sup>

Despite its socialist roots, some commentators link the New Type of International Relations to China's imperial world ordering practices. Wang Mingjin, the vice-president of the School of International Relations and Diplomacy at Beijing Foreign Studies University, writes that China's rise provides an opportunity to replace the old Westphalian system, which, based on 'individualism, universalism and binary thinking' breeds conflict, and offers an opportunity to explore Chinese traditions of all-under-heaven (*tianxia*) and the East Asian tributary order.<sup>618</sup> Senior officials also liken the concept to China's pre-modern traditions. The 'new type of international relations with win-win at its core is not an apple that accidentally fell on our head', said Foreign Minister Wang Yi, but it comes out of the 'wide ranging and profound' Chinese civilization.<sup>619</sup> During a speech to the Pakistani parliament in April 2015, Xi himself promised a new type of international relations by appealing to the Confucian dictum of self-restraint drawn from the *Analects*: 'Do not do to others what you would not want done to yourself'.<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Search on CNKI with subject '修昔底德陷阱', November 12, 2018.

<sup>616</sup> "破除'修昔底德陷阱'的迷思 (Eliminate the "Thucydides Trap" Myth)," *People's Daily*, December 10, 2017, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1210/c1003-29696416.html>.

<sup>617</sup> "Xi Jinping: Jointly Build a Community of Common Destiny."

<sup>618</sup> Mingjin Wang, "东方智慧的世界主义-中国追求什么样的新型大国关系 (Cosmopolitanism in Oriental Wisdom: On the New Great Power Relationship China Pursues)," *学术前沿 Frontiers* 6 (2013): 68.

<sup>619</sup> "王毅: 中国倡导并践行'解决热点问题三原则' (Wang Yi: China Advocates and Practices 'Three Principles for Resolving Hot Spots')," *People's Daily*, March 23, 2015, <http://world.people.com.cn/n/2015/0323/c1002-26737563.html>.

<sup>620</sup> "习近平在巴基斯坦议会的演讲 (Xi Jinping's Speech at Pakistan's Parliament)," *Xinhua*, April 21, 2015, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-04/21/c\\_1115044392.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-04/21/c_1115044392.htm).

In declaring its pursuit of a New Type of International Relations, China is signaling its status as a moral leader, one that follows a principled approach to foreign affairs and cares about weaker states. China's vision for international order aims to, in the words of Foreign Minister Wang Yi, 'abandon the law of the jungle that leaves the weak at the mercy of the strong'.<sup>621</sup> This noble goal, Wang continues with hubris, 'makes China's foreign policy and philosophy occupy the commanding heights of human morality, and shows that Chinese Communists are able and willing to make contributions to solving problems facing mankind.'<sup>622</sup> The phrase 'occupy the commanding heights of human morality', which only entered PRC foreign policy discourse in late 2017 after the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, suggests that China not only sees itself as a normative power, but one that has a more principled vision for international order than the West.

### *De-Centering the West, Re-Centering China*

The popularization of the New Type of International Relations concept reflects the desire to find alternative discourses to describe China's rise that can avoid the historical determinism of the 'Thucydides Trap' and other Western concepts, which Chinese scholars fear may 'misguide' policymakers.<sup>623</sup> The plethora of 'new' in contemporary Chinese foreign policy discourse is, on the one hand, a sign of the times. The country's integration into the Western-led liberal order has resulted in a China that is mutually dependent on international society. Without a 'new' type of international relations that is based on mutual gain instead of individual gain, and the eradication of alliances that are ultimately aimed at maintaining the status quo of American hegemony, China's continued rise will ultimately be hampered. It is too integrated into the global capitalist economy for an easy and painless exit. And so, naturally, in response to increasing pressure against globalization in the West,

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<sup>621</sup> "Wang Yi Talks about General Goal of Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics in New Era," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, October 19, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1503758.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1503758.shtml).

<sup>622</sup> "Wang Yi Talks about General Goal of Major Country Diplomacy."

<sup>623</sup> "Eliminate the 'Thucydides Trap' Myth"; Likewise, the concept of "New Type of Great Power Relations", almost exclusively used with the US, is intended to "break the traditional pattern of great power conflict." See: "Seeking the 'win-Win Cooperation' China Solution."

especially after the global financial crisis of 2008 and the discontentment that it brewed in middle classes, ultimately leading to the election of populist leaders across the democratic world, Chinese leaders have put themselves at the centre of a ‘new’ globalization.<sup>624</sup>

But Xi Jinping’s call for a New Type of International Relations is the manifestation of much grander ambitions. Concomitant with China’s rise and the domestic project of ‘the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’, it represents an effort to rewrite the narrative of global international relations and to place China at the center of it. On the one hand, this involves resisting and challenging the classic narratives of power politics like the ‘clash of civilizations’, the ‘Thucydides trap’, and the ‘end of history’, which write the history of global politics from the perch of the West. In response to these Western-centric discourses Chinese elites seek to discursively position China’s rise in a new Sinocentric framework, one that stresses harmony and cooperation over civilizational conflict and hegemonic politics. In the eyes of many Chinese elites global politics is on the cusp of a new Chinese century. The financial crisis of the 2008 and the political crises of 2016 exposed the decay at the heart of the Western order and serve as signposts in the civilizational decline of the West. And in this century it is China, not the West, which will be at the centre of the ‘new’ global politics.<sup>625</sup>

### ***III. Community of Common Destiny 命运共同体***

The third and last concept reviewed in this chapter, the Community of Common Destiny<sup>626</sup>, is the grandest, most encompassing, and idealistic. It is the stated final goal (*zhongji mubiao* 终极目标) of China’s Party leadership for international society.

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<sup>624</sup> Angang Hu and Yu Wang, “推动实现‘新全球化’是大势所趋 (Promoting the Realization of ‘new Globalization’ Is an Irresistible Trend),” *Liberation Daily*, January 3, 2017.

<sup>625</sup> Hao Su, “走向‘新大陆时代’-新型国际关系建构的地缘基础 (Towards the ‘New Continental Era’-The Geo-Foundation of New International Relations Construction),” *Frontiers*, December 2017, 58–67.

<sup>626</sup> The official English translation has evolved from ‘community of common destiny’ to ‘shared future for mankind’. The Chinese, however, has remained the same. For convenience I stick to the original translation throughout this chapter, which more accurately captures its Chinese meaning.

## *Xi Jinping's Grand Vision*

In justifying their policies and explaining their vision for the future, PRC leaders often make references to a soon-to-come harmonious utopia. Consider this from Mao Zedong, written on June 30, 1949, just months before the founding of the People's Republic of China:

China can develop steadily, under the leadership of the working class and the Communist Party, from an agricultural into an industrial country, and from a new-democratic into a socialist and communist society, can abolish classes and realize the 'Great Unity' (*datong*).<sup>627</sup>

Later PRC leaders had their own characteristic utopian visions. Jiang Zemin (1989-2002) revived the Confucian concept of *xiaokang shehui*, 'moderately prosperous society', while Hu Jintao (2002-2012) had his vision of 'harmonious society' at home and 'harmonious world' abroad. Mao, Jiang and Hu were all appealing to a common mythology that can be traced back to one of the most famous passages in Confucian literature, the 'Great Unity' (*datong*) passage in the Book of Rites:

When the Great Way was practiced, the world was shared by all alike. The worthy and able were promoted to office and men practiced good faith and lived in affection. Therefore they did not regard as parents only their parents, or as sons only their own sons. [...] Therefore all evil plotting was prevented and thieves and rebels did not arise, so that people could leave their outer gates unbolted. This was the age of Grand Unity.<sup>628</sup>

This mythical Golden Age of prosperity and harmonious social relations of an immemorial past remains a powerful appeal for many of China's elites.<sup>629</sup> Xi Jinping continues in this tradition by offering a rebranded version of an old Chinese ideal. Here is how state media portrayed his signature vision for world order:

Thousands of years ago, China envisaged a world where people live in perfect harmony and are as dear to one another as family. Today,

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<sup>627</sup> The English translation uses "Great Harmony". Zedong Mao, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960),

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/index.htm>.

<sup>628</sup> Wm Theodore de Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 176.

<sup>629</sup> William A. Callahan, "History, Tradition and the China Dream: Socialist Modernization in the World of Great Harmony," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96 (2015): 983-1001.

President Xi Jinping has given the world a new name – a community of common destiny.<sup>630</sup>

While the concept Community of Common Destiny is virtually unknown in the West, within China it has been subject to a staggering amount of analysis. During the first nine months of 2018 alone, there were 2,265 articles and commentaries published on the concept.<sup>631</sup> It appears in flagship journals, as topics for major conferences, and almost daily editorials in state-owned media. In October 2018, after Xi Jinping had ‘thoroughly pondered major issues facing humanity, such as “what kind of world we want to build and how”’, an entire book of his speeches on the Community of Common Destiny was published.<sup>632</sup>

The intellectual origin of the concept is intriguing. In high-level PRC politics, a Community of Common Destiny was first used to refer to China-Taiwan relations. Xi Jinping’s predecessor, Hu Jintao, during his 2007 report to the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, declared that the 1.3 billion Chinese mainland citizens and 23 million Taiwanese citizens form a ‘community of common destiny’ that are ‘of the same blood’.<sup>633</sup> After that it was written into China’s 2011 White Paper on ‘Peaceful Development’.<sup>634</sup> But as Christopher Hughes notes, its lineages go back further. In August 1991, as a way to distinguish Taiwan from China, Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui proposed that a concept of *Gemeinschaft* (命运共同体) was needed to unite the people of Taiwan with a shared sense of national identity.<sup>635</sup> At the time, Chinese writers were highly critical of the Taiwanese president using the term, seeing it as another attempt at secession

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<sup>630</sup> “Xi’s World Vision: A Community of Common Destiny, a Shared Home for Humanity,” *Xinhua*, January 15, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/15/c\\_135983586.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/15/c_135983586.htm).

<sup>631</sup> CNKI search with the subject ‘community of common destiny’ (命运共同体) on October 15, 2018.

<sup>632</sup> “Book of Xi’s Discourses on Building a Community with a Shared Future for Humanity Published,” *People’s Daily*, October 15, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/1015/c90000-9508219.html>.

<sup>633</sup> Jintao Hu, “高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜, 为夺取全面建设小康社会新胜利而奋斗——在中国共产党第十七次全国代表大会上的报告 (Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive for New Victories in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All - Report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the CCP),” October 15, 2007, [http://www.qingdaonews.com/qxw/content/2007-10/25/content\\_45705.htm](http://www.qingdaonews.com/qxw/content/2007-10/25/content_45705.htm).

<sup>634</sup> “China’s Peaceful Development” (Information Office of the State Council, September 2011), [http://english.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2014/09/09/content\\_281474986284646.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284646.htm).

<sup>635</sup> Christopher R. Hughes, *Taiwan and Chinese Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1997), 97.

from the Mainland.<sup>636</sup> Lee had taken the concept from Taiwanese dissident Peng Ming-min, the intellectual father of the pro-independence movement in Taiwan, who himself had taken it from Ernest Renan's theory of the nation.<sup>637</sup> Peng promoted the concept of 'community of shared destiny' (命运共同体) among Taiwanese. Peng and other dissident writers 'were claiming that a national identity depends not only on blood, language and culture but also on subjective loyalties to a "community of shared destiny"'.<sup>638</sup> The origins of the concept in the Taiwanese independence movement are, of course, not acknowledged by PRC leaders.

Xi adopted the phrase immediately after he took power following the 18<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress in November 2012. On December 5<sup>th</sup>, during his first diplomatic activity as CCP General Secretary, he used the phrase 'community of common destiny' during a meeting with foreign experts at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.<sup>639</sup> Over the next three years he would use the concept 62 times to refer to China's relations with other countries, especially its immediate neighbours and other developing countries.<sup>640</sup> In quick succession, Chinese leaders referred to a China-ASEAN Community of Common Destiny,<sup>641</sup> a China-Pakistan Community of Common Destiny,<sup>642</sup> a Lancang-Mekong River Community of Common Destiny (comprising the countries along the river, namely China, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam),<sup>643</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> Biao He, "略论'台湾命运共同体,'" *Taiwan Studies* 2 (1994): 61-64.

<sup>637</sup> Christopher R. Hughes, "When Big Powers Pivot, the Little States Roll: Southeast Asia Between China and Japan," *The Asan Forum*, December 1, 2014, <http://www.theasanforum.org/when-big-powers-pivot-the-little-states-roll-southeast-asia-between-china-and-japan/>.

<sup>638</sup> Hughes, *Taiwan and Chinese Nationalism*, 97.

<sup>639</sup> Xishi Nan, "习近平与外国专家: 记习总书记首场外事活动 (Xi Jinping and Foreign Experts: General Secretary Xi's First Activity of Foreign Affairs)," *American TESOL Institute*, December 5, 2012, [http://tesolsh.com/m/news\\_content.asp?id=1593](http://tesolsh.com/m/news_content.asp?id=1593).

<sup>640</sup> Xieyuan Chen, "Chinese Terminology: Community of Common Destiny," *CGTN*, October 27, 2017, [https://news.cgtn.com/news/31497a4e32597a6333566d54/share\\_p.html](https://news.cgtn.com/news/31497a4e32597a6333566d54/share_p.html).

<sup>641</sup> "Xi Jinping's Speech at 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' 60th Anniversary."

<sup>642</sup> Yi Wang, "Successful Practice of Building Community of Common Destiny with Neighboring Countries and Advocating New Type of International Relations," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, April 25, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/xjpdjbstjxgsfwbfdnxycxyfldrhyhwlyh60znjnhd/t1260791.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpdjbstjxgsfwbfdnxycxyfldrhyhwlyh60znjnhd/t1260791.shtml).

<sup>643</sup> Xu Wang, "China Proposes Lancang-Mekong River Community of Common Destiny," *China Daily*, April 7, 2015, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-04/07/content\\_20016571.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-04/07/content_20016571.htm).

and a China-Africa Community of Common Destiny.<sup>644</sup> With the Global North-West, Xi's language changes slightly. When meeting the French Prime Minister and speaking to the English parliament he described China's partnership with the two European powers as a 'community of common interests' (利益共同体).<sup>645</sup> By restricting this community to shared economic interests, Xi continued the PRC policy of identifying with the developing world, which it believes constitute 'natural allies' of China.<sup>646</sup> Nevertheless, by 2015 the concept had expanded to encompass the entire world. On September 28<sup>th</sup>, in his first speech to the UN General Assembly as president of the PRC, Xi called upon all nations to establish a 'community of shared future for mankind'.<sup>647</sup>

### *Leadership of Asia*

Despite this universalization, when Chinese leaders speak of creating a Community of Common Destiny they refer primarily to China's periphery, which has historically been its greatest source of external threat. Indeed, the concept became ubiquitous in Chinese foreign policy discourse after 2014. In the fall of that year, the Chinese leadership sought to establish 'the guidelines, basic principles, strategic goals and major mission of China's diplomacy'.<sup>648</sup> When Xi listed his diplomatic priorities for the coming years, the first one was to 'turn China's neighborhood areas into a

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<sup>644</sup> "China, Africa Have Always Been Community of Common Destiny," *Xinhua*, December 4, 2015, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-12/04/c\\_134886013.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-12/04/c_134886013.htm).

<sup>645</sup> "习近平会见法国总理瓦尔斯 (Xi Jinping Meets French Prime Minister Valls)," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, January 30, 2015, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cedk/chn/zgwj/t1233024.htm>; "习近平在英国议会发表讲话 (Xi Jinping's Speech at England's Parliament)," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, October 21, 2015, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1307733.shtml>.

<sup>646</sup> "广大发展中国家是我国在国际事务中的天然同盟军". "Xi Jinping: Persist in Pioneering the New Phase of Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics."

<sup>647</sup> Jinping Xi, "Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-Win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, September 29, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1305051.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1305051.shtml).

<sup>648</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing"; One well connected analyst called the meeting "a diplomatic manifesto to secure the Chinese dream". See: Xiangyang Chen, "A Diplomatic Manifesto to Secure the Chinese Dream," *China-US Focus*, December 31, 2014, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/a-diplomatic-manifesto-to-secure-the-chinese-dream>.

community of common destiny'.<sup>649</sup> That tying the region closer to China remains its priority was evident at the May 2014 Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) summit, a collection of 26 mostly Asian states, when Xi said that 'we all live in the same Asian family. With our interests and security so closely intertwined, we will sink or swim together and we are increasingly a community of common destiny.'<sup>650</sup>

How a theory of the nation can be used to describe a regional collection of sovereign nation-states has not been explained. But the origins of the phrase in nationalism suggests, as William Callahan notes, 'Xi thinks of the regional community as an extension of the Chinese nation, or at least as informed by the values of Chinese civilization.'<sup>651</sup> The attempt to create an affective link between the Chinese nation with those surrounding it was confirmed in October 2013, when Xi called upon his diplomats to unite the 'Chinese Dream' with the dreams of all peoples in peripheral nations.<sup>652</sup> And in an April 2016 Politburo study session, Xi said that 'our "Belt and Road Initiative" carries forward the Silk Road Spirit, it unites China's development with that of countries along the route, it unites the China Dream with the dreams of all the peoples in countries along the route'.<sup>653</sup>

That the collective realization of individual dreams sounds very egalitarian seems less so when the meaning of 'China Dream' is unpacked. While it initially was subject to much speculation – is it the dream of individuals? the collective? - Xi clarified that the China Dream is the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation', which means 'achieving a rich and powerful country, the revitalization of the nation, and the people's

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<sup>649</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing."

<sup>650</sup> "习近平在亚信峰会作主旨发言 (Xi Jinping Gives Keynote Speech at CICA Summit Meeting)," *People's Daily*, May 21, 2014, <http://world.people.com.cn/n/2014/0521/c1002-25046183.html>.

<sup>651</sup> William A. Callahan, "China's 'Asia Dream': The Belt Road Initiative and the New Regional Order," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 1, no. 3 (September 1, 2016): 235.

<sup>652</sup> "Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech at the Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery."

<sup>653</sup> "习近平主持中共中央政治局第三十一次集体学习 (Xi Jinping Chairs the 31st Politburo Collective Study Session)," *CRI Online*, April 30, 2016, <http://news.cri.cn/20160430/72d2520c-7384-45bc-f174-86452f49efb0.html>.

happiness'.<sup>654</sup> But it goes beyond the wealth of the nation to include Xi Jinping's vision of China as a great military power. As he later explained during an inspection tour of the China's Southern Theatre Command in Guangzhou, the China dream is 'also the dream of a strong military' that 'must be able to fight and be able to win'.<sup>655</sup> By linking the 'China Dream' with peripheral nations in this new regional 'community of common destiny', Xi understands the periphery in service of, and subservient to, the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

### *Value Pluralism*

As an ideal order, China's Community of Common Destiny distinguishes itself from the Western liberal order most clearly in its understanding of diversity. China's vision of a future world order is a pluralist one where heterogeneous civilizations coexist and where order is not premised on 'universal' liberal values of individual rights nor on a shared commitment to democratic governance. In a series of speeches in 2014, Xi explained his vision by making reference to the Confucian ideal of 'harmony without uniformity'. On March 27<sup>th</sup>, during his first trip as PRC president to Europe, Xi gave a speech at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. In the short speech he mentioned civilization (*wenming*) 79 times.<sup>656</sup> Xi listed his three principles toward civilizations: First, civilizations are diverse; second, they are equal; and third, they are inclusive.<sup>657</sup> Diversity, equality, and inclusiveness here should be understood not only as respect and tolerance for different cultures, which is hardly disagreeable, but also, crucially for the CCP, different sociopolitical systems, including China's own authoritarian system.<sup>658</sup> For all of its outward confidence in its own one-party system, the spectre of liberalism continues to haunt Chinese leaders. A commentary on Xi's

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<sup>654</sup> "习近平在第十二届全国人民代表大会第一次会议上的讲话 (Xi Jinping's Speech at the First Meeting of the 12th National People's Congress)," *People's Daily*, March 17, 2013, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/0318/c64094-20819130.html>.

<sup>655</sup> "习近平:坚持富国和强军相统一 努力建设巩固国防和强大军队 (Xi Jinping: Persevere in Making the Country Wealthy and the Military Strong, Strive to Build and Consolidate National Defense and Strong Troops)."

<sup>656</sup> "习近平在联合国教科文组织总部的演讲 (Xi Jinping's Speech at UNESCO Headquarters)," *People's Daily*, March 27, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0328/c64094-24759342.html>.

<sup>657</sup> "Xi Jinping's Speech at UNESCO Headquarters."

<sup>658</sup> "Xi Jinping's Speech at UNESCO Headquarters."

UNESCO speech by Wang Jiarui, then head of the International Liaison Department of the CCP, in the Party's flagship theory journal *Qiushi*, remarked that China's successful development opens up a new road, 'in taking this road, China will not fall into the "trap" of Western democracy, it will break through Western-centric cultural superiority'.<sup>659</sup>

These ideas are not new. Back in 2003, China's then-premier Wen Jiabao lectured his American audience at Harvard University on the benefits of 'harmony without uniformity'.<sup>660</sup> Hu Jintao often spoke of the inherent diversity of cultures and the need for coexistence among civilizations.<sup>661</sup> And half a century earlier, Zhou Enlai used the concept of 'seeking common ground while setting aside differences' (*qiutong cunyi*) to successfully manage the young PRC's relations with India. Xi has followed the lead of his predecessors in linking his community of common destiny with the Confucian principle of 'harmony without uniformity'.<sup>662</sup> The principle can be traced back to the *Analects*, where, in a famous passage, Confucius instructs that 'the superior man harmonizes but does not seek sameness, whereas the petty person seeks sameness but does not harmonize'.<sup>663</sup> In the Confucian tradition, harmony (*he*) is distinguished from sameness (*tong*).<sup>664</sup> Confucius instructs us that the 'superior man' does not agree with others for the sake of agreement. Nor is uniformity an unqualified good. In fact, uncritical uniformity can lead to terrible outcomes. One can imagine the effects of a leader being surrounded by ministers that don't offer differing opinions. As an antonym for sameness, harmony in the Chinese tradition is premised on diversity and is the result of the mutual complementarity of diversity. In this sense, a harmonious

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<sup>659</sup> Jiarui Wang, "推动文明交流互鉴, 促进世界和平发展 (Promote Civilizational Exchanges, Advance the Development of World Peace)," *People's Daily*, July 15, 2014, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/0715/c1001-25285022.html>.

<sup>660</sup> "温家宝总理哈佛演讲: "把目光投向中国" (Premier Wen Jiabao's Harvard Lecture: 'Look Towards China')," *People's Daily*, December 11, 2003, <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shehui/1061/2241298.html>.

<sup>661</sup> Baishi Wen, "胡锦涛主席为何强调'尊重多样文明'? (Why Does Chairman Hu Jintao Emphasize 'Respect for Civilizational Pluralism?')," *People's Daily*, April 15, 2011, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/GB/14403084.html>.

<sup>662</sup> "Xi Jinping's Speech at UNESCO Headquarters."

<sup>663</sup> *Analects*, 13.23.

<sup>664</sup> Chenyang Li, "The Confucian Ideal of Harmony," *Philosophy East and West* 56, no. 4 (2006): 583–603.

world is not the one envisioned by Fukuyama in the end of history, rather it is one constituted by heterogeneous polities coexisting in mutual complementarity. It should be noted that harmony does not mean the absence of sameness, but it is a rejection of the 'over-presence' of sameness and the forced imposition of uniformity.<sup>665</sup>

Beijing's preference for value pluralism also serves the more immediate interest of insulating the Party from external ideological pressures. In political terms, 'harmony without uniformity' in Xi's Community of Common Destiny means an order that preserves sovereignty and the right of every nation to choose its own system of governance. In June 2014, Xi repeated his call for cultural pluralism in a speech marking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The five principles – mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence - were first announced in 1954 between the governments of India, Myanmar and China and later endorsed at the historic Bandung Conference in 1955. At its commemoration, Xi instructed how cultures should interact in his Community of Common Destiny. After referencing the Confucian maxim of 'harmony without uniformity', he made a call for cultural pluralism by employing a quote from the pioneering sociologist Fei Xiaotong: 'Every form of beauty has its uniqueness, precious is to appreciate other forms of beauty with openness, If beauty represents itself with diversity and integrity, the world will be blessed with harmony and unity.'<sup>666</sup> Xi is clear: the new China-centered regional order need not be based on identical values.

A commentary that later expanded on the speech directly counter-posed Fei Xiaotong's cultural pluralism with Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*.<sup>667</sup> In his thesis on the post-Cold War order, Huntington famously argued that future conflict

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<sup>665</sup> Li, 590.

<sup>666</sup> '各美其美，美人之美，美美与同，天下大同', see: "Xi Jinping's Speech at 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' 60th Anniversary."

<sup>667</sup> "各美其美，美人之美 (Every Form of Beauty Has Its Uniqueness)," *Xinhua*, April 21, 2015, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-04/21/c\\_127715746.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-04/21/c_127715746.htm).

would increasingly be between civilizations rather than nation-states, with Islamic and Sinic civilizations being the two major ‘challenger civilizations’ to the West. Huntington’s thesis remains a thorn for Chinese elites. Xi sees the spread of Chinese values of coexistence as uniquely able to overcome Huntington’s thesis: ‘If all civilizations can uphold a spirit of inclusiveness, there won’t be any “clash of civilizations” and the harmony of civilizations will become a reality.’<sup>668</sup> But some commentaries on Xi’s speech go further than Huntington and the post-Cold War period, tracing ‘conflictual culture’ right back to the origins of Western civilization. ‘Western civilization’ one commentary notes, ‘has its origins in the maritime industrial-commercial civilizations of the Mediterranean and Aegean seas [...] This kind of industrial-commercial culture appeals to a spirit of freedom but is also naturally competitive, it advocates equality but at the same time is naturally expansionist.’<sup>669</sup> By contrast, Chinese civilization, as agricultural civilization where self-sufficient clans lived together, values stability, harmony, order and peace.<sup>670</sup> By linking together the Confucian maxim of ‘harmony without uniformity’, the revolutionary-era Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the more recent community of common destiny, Xi tapped into this self-constructed civilizational characteristic of co-existence.<sup>671</sup> What connects all of these concepts is a commitment to value pluralism – eschewing cultural superiority and the imposition of one’s social values elsewhere. Ironically, at the same time the Party sees the trend of de-ideologization at home as an existential threat and has responded by intensifying ideological work, internationally it seeks the opposite.<sup>672</sup> When asked about the Community of Common Destiny during an interview, one scholar from CASS responded this way:

It’s like Fukuyama’s *End of History*. What is his end of history? It is liberal democracy. It’s something like that. But the difference is liberal democracy

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<sup>668</sup> “Xi Jinping’s Speech at UNESCO Headquarters.”

<sup>669</sup> “Every Form of Beauty Has Its Uniqueness.”

<sup>670</sup> “Every Form of Beauty Has Its Uniqueness.”

<sup>671</sup> “Xi Jinping’s Speech at ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ 60th Anniversary.”

<sup>672</sup> Zengdong Yang, “去意识形态化思潮的成因与实质 (The Factors and Essence of the ‘de-Ideologization’ of Thought),” *The Paper*, January 12, 2019, [https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_2841894](https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2841894).

has an ideological character, while the Community of Common Destiny does not have any ideology. We do not care if another country is capitalist or communist or Buddhist or Islamic. [The Community of Common Destiny] is a de-ideologizing concept.<sup>673</sup>

### *Moral Leadership*

Civilizational equality does not imply equal roles in global governance. In Xi's vision for world order, China and its ruling party hold a leading role. This was on display at an unusual meeting in December 2017. Called the 'CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting', it was held in Beijing from December 2-4, 2017, just weeks after the conclusion of the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, and brought representatives of more than 300 political parties from more than 120 countries to Beijing in order to 'brief guests on the Party congress as well as Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.'<sup>674</sup> Intended to be a 'new model of party-to-party relations', it was notable because of its attendees. It not only included party representatives from other socialist countries or the developing world, but from Western democracies as well. There were delegates from the Austria, New Zealand, the UK, and there was even a high-level delegate from the US Republican Party - Anthony Parker, the treasurer for the Republican National Committee - as well as former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. After the triumphalist tone of the 19th Party Congress, Xi sought to reassure the audience of China's benign intentions. He told the delegates 'the CPC will neither import foreign models nor export the Chinese model'.<sup>675</sup> It was also a plea for pragmatic cooperation under the leadership of the CCP. Xi said:

Since ancient times, we Chinese have always held these beliefs dear: 'all people under the heaven are of one family', 'the unity of nature and man', 'harmony among all nations', and the Grand Unity (*tianxia datong*)[...] I believe that despite the differences between countries, and even the unavoidable appearance of disagreements, the people of all countries live

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<sup>673</sup> Interview, Beijing, May 2019.

<sup>674</sup> Yunbei Zhang, "Beijing Dialogue to Draw Leaders of World's Parties," *China Daily*, November 25, 2017, [http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-11/25/content\\_34964967.htm](http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-11/25/content_34964967.htm).

<sup>675</sup> "习近平在中国共产党与世界政党高层对话会上的主旨讲话 (Xi Jinping Speech at the CPC in Dialogue With World Political Parties High-Level Meeting)," *People's Daily*, December 1, 2017, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1202/c64094-29681332.html>.

under the same blue sky, share one planet, and belong to one and the same family. The peoples of all nations should be guided by the vision of the world as one family, embrace each other with open arms, enhance mutual understanding, and seek common ground while putting aside differences.<sup>676</sup>

In a document passed at the conclusion of the three-day event, the delegates agreed that they ‘highly evaluate the immense efforts and the important contributions of the Communist Party of China with General Secretary Xi Jinping as the core and the Chinese government in promoting of the construction of community of common destiny for all mankind’.<sup>677</sup>

While the ideals underlying the Community of Common Destiny are not new, China’s now global stature allows it to spread its values and institute its vision for a new Sinocentric order. In 2011, China was the largest trading partner for 124 countries while the US claimed 76.<sup>678</sup> By 2017, China’s gross domestic product in PPP terms, a more accurate measure of a country’s economic strength, reached \$23 trillion, making it larger than United States’ \$19 trillion and the largest in the world.<sup>679</sup> Besides Canada and Mexico, China is now the largest trading partner for *all* of the countries in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>680</sup> These raw figures matter. Through its external investments its practices shape the normative anatomy of the regional order in Asia, a topic that will be taken up in the following chapter.

### **Chinese Values vs. Liberalism**

In 2018, Yan Xuetong published a provocative article in which he asked: which ideology will shape the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Chinese values or liberalism? Like other Chinese elites, Yan understands China not only in a competition with the West for economic

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<sup>676</sup> “Xi Jinping Speech at the CPC in Dialogue With World Political Parties.”

<sup>677</sup> “中国共产党与世界政党高层对话会 北京倡议 (CPC in Dialogue With World Political Parties High-Level Meeting, Beijing Initiative),” *People’s Daily*, December 3, 2017, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1204/c64387-29683937.html>.

<sup>678</sup> “中国超过美国成为多数国家最大贸易伙伴 (China Overtakes US to Become the Largest Trading Partner of Most States),” *Sina Finance*, December 3, 2012, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/world/20121203/155413878413.shtml>.

<sup>679</sup> “GDP, PPP (Current International \$)” (World Bank, 2018), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.PP.CD>.

<sup>680</sup> Wu, “On the Rapidly Changing Asia-Pacific,” 38.

and military power, but also to shape the normative fabric of international order. While liberalism is framed as the hegemonic ideology of the West, and given Western material power, of international society, Yan admits that China’s normative preference is more nebulous.<sup>681</sup> As this chapter has shown, Chinese elites increasingly appeal to its pre-modern civilizational past to justify its behaviour. As Chapter 3 has shown, international relations scholars like Yan are unearthing and modernizing traditional Chinese concepts for application in diplomacy. In this sense, China’s rise has provoked a return to pre-modern history in order to imagine a post-Western future. Xi Jinping’s appeal to the Confucian ideals of ‘harmony without uniformity’ and ‘Grand Unity’ are part of this incremental and selective recovery of Chinese traditional culture to serve its great power ambitions.

But tradition is not limited to China’s imperial past. As this chapter shows, for Xi Jinping it is also the PRC’s more recent socialist revolutionary history. This tradition, born out of China’s violent experience with semi-colonization at the hands of imperial powers in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and its eventual victory of independence, extolls justice and equality in international relations. By the end of Xi’s first term these two traditions have become fused into one syncretic ideology that extolls distinctly hierarchical norms of virtuous leadership, benevolent governance and the strong caring for the weak, while at the same time emphasizing moral autonomy, independence and equality among all nations. These two contradictory traditions are unified into a grand vision of a new Sinocentric order that privileges China’s status as a moral leader that respects diversity and sovereignty as long as its core interests are deferred to.

**Figure 9: China’s Two Traditions**

	<b><i>Civilizational</i></b>	<b><i>Socialist Revolutionary</i></b>
<i>Source of identity</i>	Pre-modern imperial Confucian history	Post-1949 revolutionary history, semi-colonialism
<i>China’s unique role</i>	Benevolent rule Leadership of Asia	Solidarity with developing world

<sup>681</sup> Yan, “Chinese Values vs. Liberalism.”

		Leading reform of international system
<i>Pattern of international order</i>	Hierarchy Value pluralism	Equality/Sovereignty Value pluralism Global South vs. North
<i>Relationship to the West</i>	Ambivalent	Antagonistic struggle

## Conclusion

In light of the analysis presented in this chapter, two conclusions are warranted. First, in formulating its programmatic-philosophical vision for international order, China's Party and state elites draw upon two 'Chinese' traditions: pre-modern Confucian civilization and post-1949 socialist-revolutionary history. These multiple traditions embody distinct, and at times contradictory, understandings of China's national identity, its role in international affairs and relationship to the West. China's great power identity remains relational, defensive and combative, and is ultimately framed by China's competitive relationship with the liberal West. Meanwhile the deployment of Chinese 'tradition' is mainly used to contrast China against the contemporary West. In explaining its ideals to the world, China's rhetoric concerning international order will continue to be a complicated patchwork of extolling pluralism, solidarity with the global South and antagonistic struggle vis-à-vis the West, as well as an emerging civilizational discourse emphasizing benevolent rule over smaller neighbouring states in Asia.

Second, the emergence and embedding of moralistic discourses into Beijing's official diplomatic language suggests a desire and intention among China's Party and state leadership to offer a normative vision for international order that is based on China's own heterogeneous traditions. While the discourses analyzed in this chapter are unlikely to garner significant purchase among other states in international society, they reflect Beijing's understanding that power is not only material but must be based on a set of higher-ideals and that a rising power must offer a moral vision for international order.

The next chapter will turn to China's regional ordering practices in Asia. As Chinese networks of power and authority reach into its periphery, China's neighbours feel its influence the most. As it seeks to re-assume its position as the hegemonic power of Asia at the expense of the United States, China has developed a regional strategy that depends simultaneously on enticement and coercion, of providing much needed infrastructure projects and markets while punishing states that violate its core interests. Xi Jinping's regional strategy rests on an asymmetric bargain: respect China's core interests in exchange for benevolence.

## Harmonizing the Periphery

For two days in late October 2013, the seven men that make up the Politburo Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, the most powerful body in the country, gathered in Beijing with the nation's top officials in charge of foreign affairs to discuss a pressing topic – China's strategy towards its periphery.<sup>682</sup> This was an unprecedented gathering. It was the first major meeting on peripheral diplomacy since the founding of the country in 1949.<sup>683</sup> After decades of focusing its efforts on managing relations with the great powers, and in particular the United States, it marked the return of China to the historical focus of its foreign affairs – its periphery. Chaired by General Secretary Xi Jinping, the Party leadership sought to 'establish the strategic objectives, basic principles, and overall setup of peripheral diplomatic work in the next five to ten years'.<sup>684</sup> China's peripheral diplomacy fits into a top-level design (*dingceng sheji*) and it thus embedded within a broader strategy to secure Beijing's overall national goals. Peripheral diplomacy, Xi stressed to his cadres, is to 'comply with and serve the realization of the "two centenary" goals and achieve the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation'.<sup>685</sup>

As the Chapter 5 argued, China has developed a highly normative discursive and ideational framework for international order that is couched in its two traditions of pre-modern Confucian civilization and post-1949 socialist revolutionary culture. Moreover, these new concepts are embodied by contradictory ideals of pluralism and

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<sup>682</sup> A modified version of this chapter was published in the journal *Pacific Review* in 2019. See: Stephen N. Smith, "Harmonizing the Periphery: China's Neighborhood Strategy under Xi Jinping," *The Pacific Review*, August 15, 2019, 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2019.1651383>.

<sup>683</sup> Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy."

<sup>684</sup> "Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech at the Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery."

<sup>685</sup> "Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech at the Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery."

hierarchy, which are unified in an ideal vision of international order that privileges China's states as a moral leader that respects diversity and sovereignty as long as its core interests are deferred to. This chapter shows how these discourses are deployed in China's diplomacy by focusing on China's regional ordering practices in Asia. China's immediate region is where its influence is being felt the most. At the global level China remains what David Shambaugh terms a 'partial power'.<sup>686</sup> In Asia, however, China has already emerged as the region's economic powerhouse while Xi Jinping has embarked on an ambitious quest to build a 'community of common destiny' under Chinese leadership.

This chapter looks at China's peripheral diplomacy after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012, a watershed in which relations with its smaller neighbours took on a heightened importance in Beijing's overall diplomacy.<sup>687</sup> While there has been some excellent research done on China's peripheral diplomacy both with individual neighbouring states and regions such as the South China Sea <sup>688</sup>, I wish to bracket for a moment the many important differences among regional states and understand China's periphery as a holistic unit. Indeed, this is how Chinese leaders now see it. One feature of China's new peripheral diplomacy is that neighbouring states are understood as an organic unit crucial to China's rise to great power status.<sup>689</sup> This holistic understanding was evidenced at the October meeting, when Xi linked the region together with normative guidelines (amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, inclusiveness), a geopolitical strategy (Silk Road Economic Belt and 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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<sup>686</sup> David L. Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>687</sup> Xuetong Yan, "中国外交, '周边'比美国更重要 (In China's Diplomacy, 'periphery' Is More Important than America)," *Guancha*, January 13, 2015, [https://www.guancha.cn/YanXueTong/2015\\_01\\_13\\_306107.shtml](https://www.guancha.cn/YanXueTong/2015_01_13_306107.shtml).

<sup>688</sup> Lei Yu, "China–Australia Strategic Partnership in the Context of China's Grand Peripheral Diplomacy," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2016): 740–60; Huasheng Zhao, "Afghanistan and China's New Neighbourhood Diplomacy," *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016): 891–908; Fangyin Zhou, "Between Assertiveness and Self-Restraint: Understanding China's South China Sea Policy," *International Affairs*, no. 92 (2016): 869–90.

<sup>689</sup> Zhang, "China and Its Neighbourhood."

Maritime Silk Road), and a future vision (Community of Common Destiny) fitting within a grander strategic goal (Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation).

As Chapters 4 and 5 argued, China's national identity is plural, evolving and contradictory. One scholar admirably summarizes China as a 'developing socialist great power with a long civilization', with each adjective containing distinctive rites and responsibilities.<sup>690</sup> Men Honghua similarly argues that China has multiple coexisting identities: 1) a new type of socialist great power; 2) developing great power; 3) civilizational great power; 4) responsible power; and 5) Asian great power.<sup>691</sup> These overlapping identities are particularly relevant to China's peripheral diplomacy. As China becomes a more 'responsible' power, taking up greater leadership over regional affairs, it understands and defines its own responsibility – and that of neighbouring states – in light of its historic role as the great civilization at the center of Asia. As Zhang Yunling, one of the country's foremost experts on regional strategy, notes, China is on the way to returning 'to its traditional place in the geopolitical order of the region' and in the process, is introducing new ideas and strategies in order to 'create a new international order'.<sup>692</sup> China's multiple identities can also conflict and contradict each other. China's role as a 'responsible great power', with the attendant power to manage regional affairs, conflicts with its post-1949 socialist exhortation of equality between all states. These tensions come together in its peripheral diplomacy.

This chapter makes two specific arguments. First, after 2012 China began to understand itself as responsible for actively managing and shaping its periphery. Beijing consequently developed a peripheral strategy that includes: institution building and integrating neighbouring states under Chinese leadership via the 'Belt and Road Initiative', consolidating strategic partnerships, offering a set of norms to guide regional diplomacy, and employing developmental statecraft. China's

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<sup>690</sup> Li, "The Viewpoint of Righteousness and Benefit in the 'BRI' Initiative," 7.

<sup>691</sup> Honghua Men, "全球化与中国国家认同 (Globalization and China's Identity)," July 26, 2013, <http://news.hexun.com/2013-07-26/156515566.html>.

<sup>692</sup> Yunling Zhang, "Return of China's Regional Concept and Construction of a New Order," in *Looking for a Road: China Debates Its and the World's Future*, ed. Binhong Shao (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 33, 11.

neighbourhood strategy no longer rests on mere engagement, but proactive efforts to manage regional order and knit together an integrated region under Chinese leadership. Moreover, China frames and legitimize its role as the regional hegemonic power by employing a mix of moralistic narratives, economic coercion, and connectivity projects. Second, relations between China and its neighbours are now marked by clear power asymmetry and managing this asymmetry is a crucial task of China's new peripheral policy. The emerging China-led regional order relies on norms that are hierarchical, transactional, and reflect newly emerged status distinctions. Xi Jinping's neighbourhood strategy rests on an asymmetric bargain: respect China's core interests in exchange for benevolence.

### **The return of China's peripheral consciousness**

China's periphery has long been central to its worldview. The eminent historian John Fairbank noted that the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) divided the world into three concentric circles – a Sinic Zone of nearby culturally similar tributaries, an Inner Asian Zone consisting of ethnically and culturally non-Chinese peoples, and the Outer Zone of barbarians.<sup>693</sup> All were expected to send tribute to the Son of Heaven. In popular memory, the peaceful Sinocentric world order crumbled after the invasions of the imperial powers in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, marking the beginning of China's 'century of humiliation'.<sup>694</sup> As a waning Qing dynasty shifted the focus of its energies to battling Japan and the other Western imperial powers, its 'peripheral consciousness' disintegrated.<sup>695</sup>

In the PRC's post-1949 foreign relations, the concept of 'periphery' is a very recent one. Diplomatic concepts are deliberate political constructions that change over time. In its early days, China divided the world into a socialist camp led by the Soviet Union

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<sup>693</sup> Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order*, 2.

<sup>694</sup> William A. Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism," *Alternatives* 29 (2004): 199–218; Xiaoming Zhang, "中国与周边国家关系的历史演变:模式与过程 (The History and Evolution of China's Relations with Peripheral States: Models and Process)," *International Politics Quarterly* 1 (2006): 57–71; Zhang, "The Return of China's Peripheral View and Constructing a New Order."

<sup>695</sup> Zhang, "The Return of China's Peripheral View and Constructing a New Order," 8.

aligned against an imperialist camp led by the United States and in June 1949 Mao Zedong announced his intention to ally with the socialist camp.<sup>696</sup> After the Sino-Soviet split that began in the mid-1950s and culminated in a border conflict in 1969, China's diplomatic conceptual framework included Mao's Three Worlds Theory, which divided the world into the first world (the two superpowers: the US and the Soviet Union), second world (Western and Eastern Europe, Canada, Australia, and Japan), and third world (the developing world, including China, Asia, Africa and Latin America).<sup>697</sup> It wasn't until the end of the Cold War that policymakers dropped these ideological categories. In 1988, Premier Li Peng's report to the 7<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress identified the concept of 'periphery' (*zhoubian*) for the first time.<sup>698</sup>

How is China's periphery defined today? While official sources do not specifically define its extent, a strict definition refers to the fourteen states that butt against China's 24,000 km land border. Some scholars use a more expansive notion, including countries that do not directly border China but concern its vital interests, for example Turkmenistan, Cambodia, and Thailand.<sup>699</sup> Still others point to an even grander understanding of China's periphery. Reminiscent of the ancient *tianxia* system, one well-connected scholar, Yuan Peng of China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, explains China's periphery in terms of three concentric circles expanding away from China.<sup>700</sup> The inner ring consists of China's fourteen neighbours. Extending beyond this is a middle ring that includes maritime states stretching from the Western Pacific through the Indian Ocean and onwards to the Middle East, as well as those overland states extending away from China's western border through Central Asia and Russian borderlands. The outer ring expands to encompass Africa,

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<sup>696</sup> John W. Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (Oxford University Press, 2016), chap 1.

<sup>697</sup> Garver, 327–28.

<sup>698</sup> Peng Li, "1988 年政府工作报告 (1988 Government Work Report)" (Central Government of the People's Republic of China, March 25, 1988), [http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/16/content\\_200865.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/16/content_200865.htm).

<sup>699</sup> Bowen Liu and Changping Fang, "周边伙伴关系网络与中国周边安全环境 (Partnership Networks and the Security Environment in China's Periphery)," *Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies* 3 (2016): 73.

<sup>700</sup> Peng Yuan, "关于新时期中国大周边战略的思考 (Thoughts on China's Grand Periphery Strategy in the New Period)," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 10 (2013): 31.

Europe, the Americas, and finally extending to the polar regions. In this way the entire world becomes China's 'grand periphery' (*da zhoubian*).<sup>701</sup>

This chapter follows the common usage among Chinese scholars and applies a medium-sized understanding of China's periphery, which includes those states that either share a direct land or maritime border with it or are considered near enough to be within its sphere of influence.<sup>702</sup> It does not include states in the Middle East such as Turkey and Iran, nor does it extend to Oceanic states such as Australia and New Zealand. China's 'neighbourhood diplomacy' therefore includes relations with its 14 land neighbours and its 6 maritime neighbours<sup>703</sup>, plus Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, bringing the total to 28 states.

### *Continuity and change*

Xi Jinping's neighbourhood strategy has roots in guidelines set by his predecessors. Three critical junctures are particularly relevant. The first was the late Cold War. In China's eyes, the collapse of the bipolar structure of the US and Soviet Union did not usher in an era of 'unipolarity' as Americans believed, but rather it initiated a trend towards multipolarity, which in its initial formulation meant the emergence of five poles in the global order (USA, Russia, Europe, Japan, and China). This concept of multipolarity, originally attributed to Deng Xiaoping and his chief foreign policy advisor Huan Xiang, was written into Party strategy at the 14<sup>th</sup> party congress in 1992.<sup>704</sup> This world order conception, the trend of multipolarity, suggested that as

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<sup>701</sup> Yuan, "Thoughts on China's Grand Periphery Strategy."

<sup>702</sup> Liu and Fang, "Partnership Networks and the Security Environment in China's Periphery"; Lei Wang, "中国周边安全形势评估 (An Assessment of the Security Situation in China's Periphery)" (Institute of World Economic and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, February 3, 2019), [http://www.iwep.org.cn/xscg/xscg\\_sp/201902/t20190203\\_4822903.shtml](http://www.iwep.org.cn/xscg/xscg_sp/201902/t20190203_4822903.shtml).

<sup>703</sup> Land: North Korea, Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam. Maritime: South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Brunei.

<sup>704</sup> Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.

the United States and Russia retreated from Asia, the region would increasingly coalesce around China and Japan.

The second critical juncture was the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. The crisis, which started in the heart of the capitalist world and left the United States and Europe reeling, had a profound effect on Chinese perceptions of their comprehensive national strength, confirming to elites that the global balance of power was shifting from the West to the East as the world moved toward multipolarity. That Beijing came out of the crisis relatively unscathed sparked a newfound confidence in the 'China model' and belief that China's 'unique' path of state-planned capitalism was 'superior' to the Western economic model of free-market capitalism. In 2010, China overtook Japan to become the world's second largest economy, a milestone of particular satisfaction for many Chinese, further fueling confidence that it was returning to its traditional role as the central locus of Asia.<sup>705</sup>

The third critical juncture was the decision of the Obama administration to increase Washington's military, economic and diplomatic resources in Asia (the 're-balance') that was launched in the fall of 2011, a move that took Chinese officials by surprise.<sup>706</sup> Chinese strategists quickly concluded that it was a strategy of containment against Beijing.<sup>707</sup> Beijing responded by increasing the priority of peripheral diplomacy in its broader strategy.

Meanwhile, China's status in the global balance of power has changed dramatically, with important consequences for policymaking. As Chapter 4 showed, the new guiding concept of Major Country Diplomacy suggests recognition among Party leaders of China's changed position in the world. Here is how one scholar described that change during an interview:

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<sup>705</sup> Zhang, "China and Its Neighbourhood," 838.

<sup>706</sup> Xinbo Wu, "Cooperation, Competition and Shaping the Outlook: The United States and China's Neighbourhood Diplomacy," *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016): 861.

<sup>707</sup> CASS, "中国周边安全形势未根本逆转—中国社科院 2013《国际形势黄皮书》要点 (The Security Situation on China's Periphery Has Not yet Completely Reversed - Essential Points from CASS' 2013 International Situation Yellow Book)," *Decision and Information* 2 (2013): 13.

China has reached such a point of development that China needs to think about the role in general China should play. We have such a long history and continuing civilization. We have inherited many things from our history. There is a moral dimension. There is an element of morality in Chinese thinking. [...] [There is a] strong element [of morality] in China's international behaviour. China did not have the qualifications (*zige* 资格) to talk about responsibility when we were weak – in the 60s, 70s, 80s, and even the 90s. [...] Now have some capabilities to help other countries in terms of development, peace building, conflict resolution. Maybe we are entering a new phase in China's relations with the world.<sup>708</sup>

States learn when they adjust their behaviour or goals in response to new information or experiences. Learning can be simple or complex. The former happens when a state simply changes means to achieve the same goals, while complex learning results in deeper changes to end goals and even total worldviews.<sup>709</sup> China's evolution into a de facto great power has brought about a rethinking about its appropriate role vis-à-vis its smaller neighbours. Given the now global reach of Chinese interests, the guiding doctrine of 'keep a low profile', which has acted as Beijing's tacit grand strategy since the early 1990s, is no longer tenable.<sup>710</sup> But what comes next is still unclear. As one CASS scholar told me during an interview: 'China after 1840, after the First Opium War, after that time China lost its centre-ness in the world. [...] China is trying to regain the knowledge of how to be a leader.'<sup>711</sup>

As it has risen to great power status, China's thinking regarding its periphery has evolved from a region to merely engage with to one that must be actively managed and shaped from Beijing. This can be seen in the evolution of language related to periphery diplomacy in the Party's most important document – the Party congress work report. The 15<sup>th</sup> Party congress report (1997) put forward the concept of 'friendly neighbourhood' (*mulin youhao* 睦邻友好) for the first time as well as the principle of 'seeking common ground while setting aside differences' (*qiutong cunyi*

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<sup>708</sup> Interview, Shanghai, May 2018.

<sup>709</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "Nuclear Learning and U.S.-Soviet Security Regimes," *International Organization* 41, no. 3 (1987): 380.

<sup>710</sup> Xu, "新时代中国特色大国外交理念与原则问题初探 (Major-Country Diplomacy with Distinctive Chinese Features in the New Era)," 5.

<sup>711</sup> Interview, Beijing, May 2019.

求同存异).<sup>712</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> Party congress report (2002) announced China's intention to 'persist in building good-neighboring relationships' and to 'step up regional cooperation'.<sup>713</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> Party congress report (2007), in similar fashion, says 'we will continue to follow the foreign policy of friendship and partnership, strengthen good-neighbourly relations and practical cooperation with them, and energetically engage in regional cooperation in order to jointly create a peaceful, stable regional environment featuring equality, mutual trust and win-win cooperation'.<sup>714</sup> The theme here is increasing economic cooperation based on mutual benefit and equal relations.

This changed by 2012, when the Party went through an important evolution in its national role conception. It began to look at China's role vis-à-vis its periphery as one of a great power responsible for its smaller neighbours. The 18<sup>th</sup> Party congress report (2012) notes: 'We will continue to promote friendship and partnership with our neighbours, consolidate friendly relations and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with them, and ensure that China's development will bring more benefits to our neighbours'.<sup>715</sup> The key phrase here is 'bring more benefits' (惠及 *huiji*), a phrase that has not appeared in previous reports. It suggests China's recognition of a responsibility to provide for the wellbeing of its smaller neighbours. Xi would reiterate at the October 2013 conference that to achieve China's goal of national rejuvenation, 'we must [...] make our country's development bring more benefits (*huiji*) to peripheral countries'.<sup>716</sup> This rhetorical change is important. While past

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<sup>712</sup> Zemin Jiang, "高举邓小平理论伟大旗帜 把建设有中国特色社会主义事业全面推向二十一世纪 (Hold High the Great Banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory for an All-Round Advancement of the Cause of Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics to the 21st Century: Jiang Zemin's Report to the 15th Party Congress)," September 12, 1997, [http://www.most.gov.cn/jgdj/xyd/zlzx/200905/t20090518\\_69740.htm](http://www.most.gov.cn/jgdj/xyd/zlzx/200905/t20090518_69740.htm).

<sup>713</sup> Zemin Jiang, "全面建设小康社会，开创中国特色社会主义事业新局面 (Build a Well-off Society in an All-Round Way and Create a New Situation in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: Jiang Zemin's Report to the 16th Party Congress)," November 8, 2002, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cech/chn/xwss/t115277.htm>.

<sup>714</sup> Jintao Hu, "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive for New Victories in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All: Hu Jintao's Report to the 17th Party Congress," October 15, 2007, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/congress/229611.htm>.

<sup>715</sup> "Full Text of Hu Jintao's Report at 18th Party Congress," *People's Daily*, November 19, 2012, <http://en.people.cn/102774/8024789.html>.

<sup>716</sup> "Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech at the Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery."

leaders have often framed trade initiatives, for example the China-ASEAN FTA, as Beijing intentionally bestowing benefits to regional states, the codification of *huiji* in the Party's guiding document signified a more activist developmental policy towards its neighbours. As Li Xiao and Li Junjiu note in a widely read article, after 2012 China's peripheral strategy underwent an evolution from 'engaging the periphery' to 'stabilizing and harmonizing the periphery'.<sup>717</sup>

It was in this context that the Party leadership held the October 2013 work forum on diplomacy toward the periphery, highlighting the new importance of the region to China's great power ambitions. Since 2002 the CCP has formulated and followed the strategy of 'big powers are the key; neighbours are paramount; developing countries are the foundation; and multilateralism is an important stage'.<sup>718</sup> This implies a clear hierarchy in Beijing's foreign affairs, whereby relations with peripheral nations were subordinate to relations with other major powers such as the US, Russia and the EU. In recent years, China's relations with peripheral nations have increased in importance, arguably equaling that of its relations with other great powers. While China continues to prioritize relations with great powers, especially in light of the growing Sino-US strategic rivalry, China's small and middle power neighbours have emerged as a vital site to secure its national development goals.

The Party leadership's enhanced focus on peripheral diplomacy has followed an assessment of geo-political trends. Six of China's top ten trading partners are now located in Asia.<sup>719</sup> In 2014, China's Vice Foreign Minister noted that the country's trade with East and Southeast Asia totaled '\$1.4 trillion, more than China's trade with the United States and European Union combined.'<sup>720</sup> And according to the Asian Development Bank, the share of Chinese FDI going to the 'rest of developing Asia' now

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<sup>717</sup> Xiao Li and Junjiu Li, "'一带一路'与中国地缘政治经济战略的重构 ('One Belt, One Road' and the Reshaping of China's Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Strategy)," *World Economics and Politics* 10 (2015): 50.

<sup>718</sup> Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy," 3.

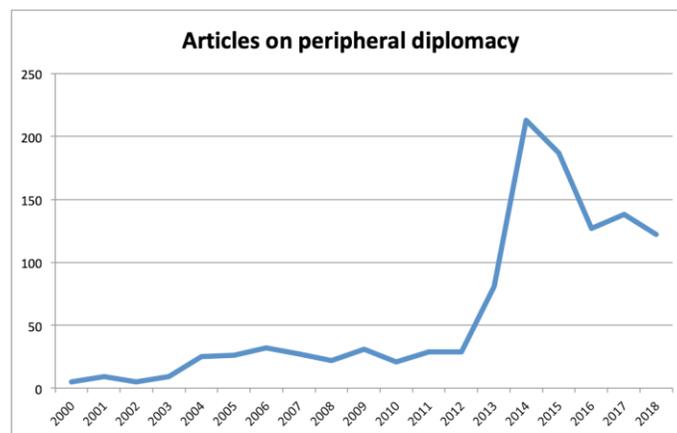
<sup>719</sup> "China Exports, Imports and Trade Balance By Country 2017" (World Bank, 2019), <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/CHN/Year/2017/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/by-country>.

<sup>720</sup> Quoted in: Timothy Heath, "China's Big Diplomacy Shift," *The Diplomat*, December 22, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/12/chinas-big-diplomacy-shift/>.

makes up 60% of its total outbound investment, up from an average of 40% during 2011-2017.<sup>721</sup> If the emerging Sino-US strategic rivalry continues, China's relations with peripheral nations will grow in significance.

Figure 1 shows that, consistent with the leadership's new emphasis on the periphery, Chinese academic publications on peripheral diplomacy experienced a sharp and sustained increase in 2014, the year following the October 2013 work forum, as scholars sought to better understand how to manage a complex region.

Figure 10



Source: CNKI search, 'peripheral diplomacy' (*zhoubian waijiao*), May 2019.

### **China takes responsibility**

Xi Jinping's upgraded efforts to shape China's regional milieu has come primarily through four mechanisms: new institutions and regional integration, strategic partnerships, normative binding, and benevolent developmentalism.

#### *Institution building & regional integration*

With its burgeoning national coffers - by June 2014 Chinese foreign exchange reserves had swelled to almost \$4 trillion<sup>722</sup> - Beijing has emerged as more willing to

<sup>721</sup> "Asian Development Outlook 2019" (Asian Development Bank, April 2019), 26-27, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/492711/ado2019.pdf>.

<sup>722</sup> Peter Ferdinand, "Westward Ho—the China Dream and 'One Belt, One Road': Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping," *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016): 941.

take an active role in leading regional governance in a bid to centralize its role in a post-American global order. In the fall of 2013, Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang both traveled to Southeast Asia and proposed the establishment of a new regional development bank, the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), an idea that originated from the Beijing-based think tank.<sup>723</sup> Initially proposed to have \$50 billion in capital, in June 2014 China proposed doubling the amount to \$100 billion, with itself supplying half.<sup>724</sup> Headquartered in Beijing, the AIIB came into operation in 2015. The same year, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa jointly established another multilateral development bank, the New Development Bank (NDB). Headquartered in Shanghai, the bank began operations with \$50 billion in subscribed capital. China's active role in reshaping global governance spread beyond international finance and into trade. In the wake of growing trade tensions with the United States as well as the recently ratified Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), China has pushed for an early conclusion to the 16-member Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is based on the five existing ASEAN+1 free trade agreements. These are all evidence of China's nascent but influential regional leadership role. Reflecting the significant rebalance of the global order away from the traditional Western powers, in 2019 China became the second largest contributor to the United Nations budget.<sup>725</sup> And under the nationalistic slogan, the 'China Solution' (*zhongguo fangan*), Xi has signaled Beijing's intention to take up an even greater role in shaping the institutions and norms underpinning regional order in the years to come.

Meanwhile at home Beijing has embraced a national narrative that recalls the glories of its imperial past. The greatest dream of all Chinese, Xi pronounced as he toured the Road to Revival exhibit at the National Museum in Beijing, is the 'great rejuvenation

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<sup>723</sup> China Center for International Economic Exchanges. See: Chen, "'一带一路'战略决策的发展潜能及深远意义 (The Potential and Deep Significance of the 'One Belt One Road' Strategy)."

<sup>724</sup> Xiao Ren, "China as an Institution-Builder: The Case of the AIIB," *The Pacific Review* 29, no. 3 (May 26, 2016): 437.

<sup>725</sup> "China Rises to 2nd Largest Contributor to UN Budget."

of the Chinese nation'.<sup>726</sup> While Xi's predecessor Hu Jintao had his uninspiring vision of 'harmonious society', the China Dream is an evocative and appealing call for China to resume its rightful place as an unrivalled political and military power. The exhibit where Xi chose to announce the China Dream tells the Party-sanctioned story of the modern history of China, beginning with the Opium Wars in 1840 and the humiliation suffered at the hands of imperial powers and ends with China's victory of independence and modern return to great power status. The fusion of China's imperial past and its future ambitions are presented to visitors at the start. The hall leading into the Road to Revival exhibit displays two giant murals: one called Ancient Glory and the other Contemporary Resplendence. In between is a sculpture entitled 'For the Great Revival of the Chinese People'.<sup>727</sup>

For the Communist Party, the road to the 'Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation', while an expansive and nebulous concept, has very concrete goals. In an act of what James C. Scott calls high modernism<sup>728</sup>, the Party directs the bureaucracy to pursue the 'two centenary' goals. The first centenary comes in 2021, marking one hundred years since the founding of the Communist Party of China in 1921, when the country should 'finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects'.<sup>729</sup> The very specific objective is to double 2010 per capita GDP by 2020.<sup>730</sup> The second centenary comes in 2049, one hundred years since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, when China should be built into a modern socialist country that is 'prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious'.<sup>731</sup> Maintaining an external environment conducive to economic development remains a primary concern for Chinese leaders and the *raison d'être* of foreign policy. These

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<sup>726</sup> "Xi Calls for Persistently Pursuing Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation," *Xinhua*, September 26, 2017, [http://english.gov.cn/news/top\\_news/2017/09/26/content\\_281475885658450.htm](http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2017/09/26/content_281475885658450.htm).

<sup>727</sup> Kirk A. Denton, "China Dreams and the 'Road to Revival,'" *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective* 8, no. 3 (December 2014), <http://origins.osu.edu/article/china-dreams-and-road-revival>.

<sup>728</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>729</sup> "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress."

<sup>730</sup> Bo Liang, "'两个一百年'奋斗目标是中华民族伟大复兴的重要里程碑 (The 'Two Centenary' Goals Are a Major Milestone of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation)" (State Council Information Office, June 21, 2017), <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/10/Document/1555727/1555727.htm>.

<sup>731</sup> "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress."

domestic timelines act as markers for Beijing's external policy. Planners at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences estimate that the region will be marked by big power competition until 2035 – the mid-point between the 'two centenaries' – at which time Beijing's peripheral diplomacy strategy should show its final results.<sup>732</sup>

Accompanying this evolution in China's national role conception has come a series of new policies. First, in September 2013, Xi traveled to neighbouring Kazakhstan to announce the Silk Road Economic Belt – an ambitious plan to weave together China, Central Asia, and South Asia by building infrastructure, expanding trade and increasing cultural exchanges. A few weeks later Xi traveled to Indonesia to unveil its twin – the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road – which similarly aims to integrate China with South East Asia, Oceania, North Africa and, ultimately, Europe. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is of mind-boggling scope – by May 2018 it included 70 countries and has a time frame set in decades, not years. A study by the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University sets the timescale for building the first stage of the project at 35 years.<sup>733</sup> This is not an accidental timescale. That would take the initial stage of the project up to 2049, marking the second 'centenary' of China's planned national rejuvenation.

While resolving domestic economic challenges is a crucial motivator of the BRI, one long-term strategic goal is to better integrate China's peripheral regions into a holistic unit under Chinese leadership. This goal was given bureaucratic initiative at the Party's third plenum in November 2013, when it passed a resolution that instructed: 'Establish an open financial system, speed up the integration of peripheral countries

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<sup>732</sup> Shengli Ling, "新时期中国周边外交战略 (New Period in China's Peripheral Diplomatic Strategy)," *Journal of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, January 11, 2018, [http://ex.cssn.cn/gj/gj\\_hqxx/201801/t20180111\\_3811176.shtml](http://ex.cssn.cn/gj/gj_hqxx/201801/t20180111_3811176.shtml).

<sup>733</sup> Ferdinand, "Westward Ho," 950; See also: "读中国首部丝路经济带蓝皮书的三大理由," *Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China*, October 16, 2014, [http://rdcy-sf.ruc.edu.cn/index.php?s=/Index/news\\_cont/id/7764](http://rdcy-sf.ruc.edu.cn/index.php?s=/Index/news_cont/id/7764).

and regional infrastructure connectivity, advance the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road, form a holistic and open new structure.<sup>734</sup>

### *Consolidating strategic partnerships*

During Xi's first term (2012-2017) China rapidly consolidated diplomatic relations with peripheral countries. In the three years following the 18<sup>th</sup> Party congress in November 2012, Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, the Party's second in command, visited 14 countries in China's periphery.<sup>735</sup> Of the days the two leaders spent outside of China's borders, more than half were spent in peripheral nations.<sup>736</sup> Unique from the other great powers, China does not have formal alliances. Instead, it maintains a set of 'partnerships', of which it categorizes into four main types: cooperative, comprehensive, strategic, and comprehensive strategic.<sup>737</sup> 'Strategic' partnerships are bestowed on those states that recognize China's core interests. Following the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012, China established or upgraded relations with several peripheral states.<sup>738</sup> In 2013, it established a strategic partnership with each of the three Central Asian states Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, as well as with Sri Lanka. In 2014, China upgraded its relations with Mongolia to a comprehensive strategic partnership and established separate comprehensive strategic partnerships with Australia and New Zealand. In 2015, it upgraded its relations with Indonesia to a comprehensive strategic partnership. In 2016, it upgraded its relations with Uzbekistan to a comprehensive strategic partnership and established a comprehensive strategic partnership with Bangladesh. Most recently, in 2018 China established a strategic partnership with Brunei. A visual comparison of China's

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<sup>734</sup> State Council Information Office, "中共中央关于全面深化改革若干重大问题的决定 (Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform)" (State Council Information Office, November 15, 2013), [http://www.scio.gov.cn/tt/Document/1350709/1350709\\_6.htm](http://www.scio.gov.cn/tt/Document/1350709/1350709_6.htm).

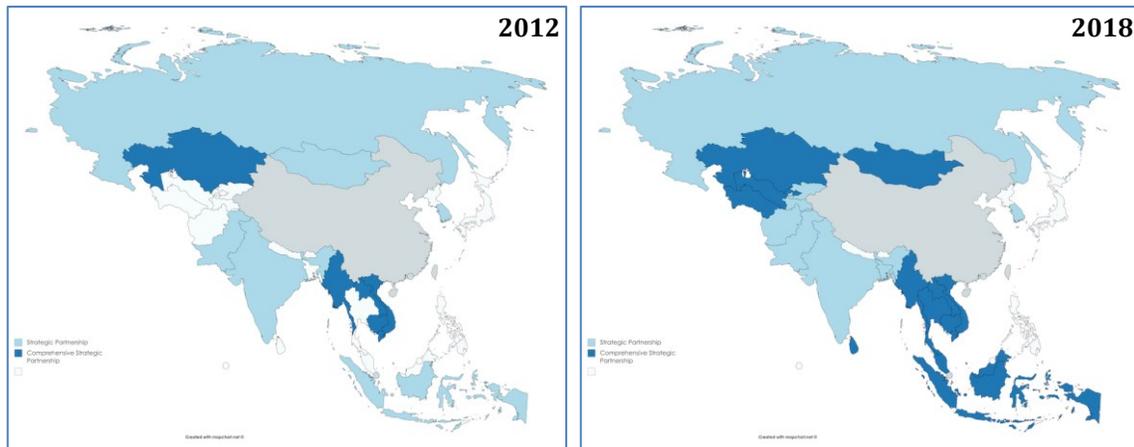
<sup>735</sup> "十八大以来习近平李克强已到访 14 个邻国 (Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang Have Visited 14 Neighbouring Countries since the 18th Party Congress)," *Beijing Youth Daily*, November 23, 2015, [http://news.cnr.cn/native/gd/20151123/t20151123\\_520570674.shtml](http://news.cnr.cn/native/gd/20151123/t20151123_520570674.shtml).

<sup>736</sup> "Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang Have Visited 14 Neighbouring Countries."

<sup>737</sup> He Zong, "中国有哪些伙伴关系 (What Kinds of Partnerships Does China Have)," *People's Daily*, March 31, 2014, <http://world.people.com.cn/n/2014/0331/c1002-24778739.html>.

<sup>738</sup> The following data comes from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/>

Figure 11: China's strategic (light blue) & comprehensive strategic partnerships (dark blue)



Source: PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs

partner diplomacy at the beginning of 2012 and the end of 2018 show the extent to which China has deepened cooperation among its periphery in Xi's first term, especially in two areas: Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

These are not just word play, but come with concrete policies to deepen the five links (*wutong*) of policy coordination, infrastructure construction, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people exchanges.<sup>739</sup> In the case of China-Mongolia relations, for example, a series of policy linkages followed the upgraded relationship, including coordinating law enforcement, border policy, judges, anticorruption agencies, military training, China funding the construction of rail lines (conditional on Mongolia using international gauge rails in line with China's domestic rail system, instead of its extant domestic gauges which adhere to Russian standards), increasing the volume of currency exchange, allowing the People's Bank of China (PBOC) and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) to open branches in Mongolia, increasing student exchanges and even China building a children's hospital in Ulaanbaatar.<sup>740</sup> These links serve to integrate the region more closely with China,

<sup>739</sup> Wen Xin, "什么是'五通'? (What Are the 'Five Links?)," *China Youth Daily*, April 13, 2017, [http://news.cyol.com/content/2017-04/13/content\\_15932620.htm](http://news.cyol.com/content/2017-04/13/content_15932620.htm).

<sup>740</sup> Jeffrey Reeves, "Mongolia's Place in China's Periphery Diplomacy," *The Asan Forum*, April 7, 2016, <http://www.theasanforum.org/mongolias-place-in-chinas-periphery-diplomacy/#8>.

reshaping peripheral states' interests and identities more in line with Beijing's preferences.

While the economics of Beijing's peripheral strategy usually takes prominence, there is an important, and arguably growing, military component. In 2013, leaders of the Central Military Commission and General Headquarters visited Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka as part of peripheral diplomacy. Meanwhile, ministers of defense and military leaders from neighbouring Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Mongolia visited China.<sup>741</sup> Recent revelations of a Chinese paramilitary presence in neighbouring Tajikistan, where Chinese troops monitor Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor nearby, confirm that Xi's objective of shaping regional order has a military component.<sup>742</sup> The internationalization of the PRC security state will continue as Beijing seeks to protect its expanding commercial interests around the world.

#### *Normative great power*

Befitting the role of a great power, Beijing has initiated a set of normative concepts to 'guide' regional diplomacy. At the October 2013 work forum on peripheral diplomacy, Xi put forward a set of four basic principles: 'amity' (亲 *qin*), 'sincerity' (诚 *cheng*), 'mutual benefit' (惠 *hui*), and 'inclusiveness' (容 *rong*).<sup>743</sup> This four-part philosophy, which some scholars have linked to Chinese 'traditional culture'<sup>744</sup>, was repeated the following year at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, the leadership's highest-level diplomatic planning session.<sup>745</sup> These concepts, Xi stressed,

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<sup>741</sup> Daguang Li, "习近平军事外交思想内涵与特色 (The Content and Characteristics of Xi Jinping's Military Diplomacy Thinking)," *People's Daily*, February 18, 2014, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/0218/c367550-24393699.html>.

<sup>742</sup> Gerry Shih, "In Central Asia's Forbidding Highlands, a Quiet Newcomer: Chinese Troops," *Washington Post*, February 18, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/in-central-asias-forbidding-highlands-a-quiet-newcomer-chinese-troops/2019/02/18/78d4a8d0-1e62-11e9-a759-2b8541bbbe20\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.6ceca38ea3be](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-central-asias-forbidding-highlands-a-quiet-newcomer-chinese-troops/2019/02/18/78d4a8d0-1e62-11e9-a759-2b8541bbbe20_story.html?utm_term=.6ceca38ea3be).

<sup>743</sup> "Xi Jinping Gives an Important Speech at the Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery."

<sup>744</sup> Liju Xing, "从传统文化角度解析中国周边外交新理念-以'亲,诚,惠,容'为中心," *International Studies* 3 (2014): 9-20.

<sup>745</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing."

would help 'turn China's neighbourhood areas into a community of common destiny'.<sup>746</sup> That China is taking the initiative to put forward regional norms is emblematic of China's evolution from a reluctant power to a proactive one under Xi Jinping. These were the first new peripheral diplomacy concepts developed since the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2002.<sup>747</sup>

These concepts signal China's intentions vis-à-vis its neighbours and legitimize 'appropriate' behaviour in a China-led order. They are, of course, defined by, and in the interest of, China. For example, one element of 'amity' in peripheral relations is to 'keep watch and defend one another' (*shouwang xiangzhu* 守望相助), a Mencian slogan that Xi cited in the 2013 peripheral diplomacy conference. Yang Shaowu writes that one 'successful model' of this type of amity is China-Cambodia relations, where China has provided economic development aid to Cambodia in exchange for Cambodia 'opposing the South China Sea issue being taken up by ASEAN, maintaining complete uniformity with China's position'.<sup>748</sup> Interest in this admittedly isolated statement comes as China increasingly has the capacity to define, alter, or exclude from international society. One could draw a comparison between Beijing's concept of 'amity' – which is officially defined as 'consolidating friendship marked by geographical proximity and intimate relations'<sup>749</sup> – with the post-Cold War concept of 'rogue states'. The states that get this label are typically those that have tenuous relations with the United States – Cuba, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Venezuela, etc. China's evolution into an institution builder brings it similar constitutive power to redefine appropriate standards of behaviour, affecting actor subjectivities and their associated practices. One can imagine Beijing using 'amity/non-amity' in a similar manner to the

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<sup>746</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

<sup>747</sup> Shaowu Yang, "“亲诚惠容”周边外交理念的内在联系及其实践 (The Internal Relationship and Practice of the Concept of Sounding Relations Through the Principle of Amity, Sincerity, Mutual Benefit and Inclusiveness)," *Zhengzhi Yanjiu*, 2017, 69.

<sup>748</sup> Yang, 71.

<sup>749</sup> Guangjiang Pei and Di Wang, "王毅:坚定不移走和平发展道路 为实现中华民族伟大复兴营造良好国际环境 (Wang Yi: Steadfastly Take the Path of Peace and Development, Create A Good International Environment for Chinese Nation's Great Rejuvenation)," *People's Daily*, November 22, 2013, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/1122/c40531-23621992.html>.

American promotion of ‘rogue states’: those that show deference to China’s interests are ‘amicable states’, while those that resist are not, and may be punished.

Another example is the concept ‘inclusive’, a word whose meaning is so broad to be almost meaningless. But in the Chinese context it has a specific meaning directly related to the Party’s core interest of regime survival. Visiting the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in March 2013, Xi told the audience ‘we must respect the right of the people of every country to select their own development path [...] it is the people of a country that are in the best position to judge the path of development they have chosen for themselves.’<sup>750</sup> Xi is clear that ‘inclusiveness’ means respecting different politico-economic systems, including China’s own authoritarian system whose power is monopolized by the CCP.

As a discourse governing a China-led regional order, then, ‘inclusiveness’ (*rong*) encourages states to be open to pragmatic cooperation that does not insist on shared values. Beijing’s vision is a distinctly communitarian one that affords priority to self-determination and sovereignty as the basis for order and does not make moral distinctions between regime type. This pluralism, rooted in respect for difference, resonates with the tradition in Anglophone thought that David Hendrickson calls ‘liberal pluralism’.<sup>751</sup> It also finds affinity with the strand of Chinese thought discussed in Chapter 3 that is premised on the co-existence and complementarity of difference, not its elimination.<sup>752</sup> These ideas are not new. As Chapter 3 also showed, past Chinese leaders such as Wen Jiabao and Hu Jintao were fond of stressing the inherent diversity of cultures and the need for coexistence among civilizations.<sup>753</sup>

But there is another understanding of the character *rong*, besides the official Party translation of ‘inclusive’. It can also mean tolerance. As some Chinese scholars point out, tolerance can be used to manage tensions that inevitably emerge between big

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<sup>750</sup> “Xi Jinping’s Speech at Moscow College of International Relations.”

<sup>751</sup> Quoted in: Jackson Lears, “Imperial Exceptionalism,” *New York Review of Books*, February 7, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/02/07/imperial-exceptionalism/>.

<sup>752</sup> Xing, “从传统文化角度解析中国周边外交新理念-以‘亲,诚,惠,容’为中心,” 17–19.

<sup>753</sup> “Premier Wen Jiabao’s Harvard Lecture: ‘Look Towards China’”; Wen, “Why Does Chairman Hu Jintao Emphasize ‘Respect for Civilizational Pluralism’?”

and small powers. Lu Guangsheng and Xu Liping use this interpretation as a lens to frame China's peripheral strategy, drawing on the writing of the American Christian theologian A. J. Conyers to argue that tolerance demands big states 'accept pertinent criticism, show empathy for the natural anxieties of small states, and maintain some self-restraint when faced with the "transgressions" or "intransigence" of small states.'<sup>754</sup> In this sense, tolerance (*rong*) acts not only as a horizontal norm ensuring pluralism and respect for difference between states, but also as a vertical norm governing and harmonizing relations marked by power asymmetry. Chinese elites recognize that Beijing cannot wantonly employ excessive force if it seeks a stable and harmonious periphery. Paradoxically, one could interpret the 2012-2014 South China Sea tensions as an exercise in tolerance whereby China refrained from pursuing even harsher actions against the Philippines for fear that it could incite further balancing or even military conflict. While Beijing's brazen behaviour was widely condemned as the actions of an assertive great power provoking instability, Chinese elites understood their behaviour in the exact opposite – that stability and Chinese authority was best preserved by the show of limited force.<sup>755</sup>

Of course, China's great power toleration is not unlimited. As China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying has warned: 'small states should not make unreasonable demands'.<sup>756</sup> Hua was echoing Foreign Minister Wang Yi's statement that, in regards to issues of territory and sovereignty, the PRC would protect every inch of Chinese soil while 'not accept[ing] small countries to kick up a row'<sup>757</sup>. Such big power hubris reveals an understanding of regional order that is based, to some degree, on a gradated hierarchy of status roles. China, as a big power, has a responsibility to maintain order while small states have a responsibility to be compliant. Left undefined in these comments is what behaviour Beijing deems 'unreasonable'. But

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<sup>754</sup> Guangsheng Lu and Liping Xu, "周边外交'亲诚惠容'新理念及其实践 (The New Concepts and Practice of Amity, Sincerity, Mutual Benefit and Inclusiveness in the Periphery Diplomacy)," *Journal of International Relations* 4 (2014): 54.

<sup>755</sup> Zhou, "Between Assertiveness and Self-Restraint: Understanding China's South China Sea Policy."

<sup>756</sup> "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on January 22, 2015," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, January 22, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/t1230645.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1230645.shtml).

<sup>757</sup> Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy," 12.

the emergence and promotion of tolerance (*rong*) as a diplomatic norm nevertheless suggests that Chinese elites take seriously the problem of ensuring a sense of security for peripheral small states.

China's interventions into its neighbourhood, where its vital interests are located, are not costless. Beijing's open violation of international law in its island building and militarization in the South China Sea in particular have fed fears that it seeks unchallenged hegemony. A 2018 survey of 1,000 Southeast Asians reports that less than one in ten respondents (8.9%) see China as a 'benign and benevolent power'.<sup>758</sup> Country level data paints the same picture. Only four countries in Southeast Asia even break into the double-digits in viewing China as a benign power: Laos (13.8%), Myanmar (13.1%), Cambodia (12.5%), and Indonesia (12.3%).<sup>759</sup> When asked about China's Belt and Road Initiative most respondents (47%) thought that it would 'bring ASEAN countries into China's orbit', while most (45.4%) believe China 'will become a revisionist power with an intent to turn Southeast Asia into its sphere of influence'.<sup>760</sup> As China is finding out, wealth and power do not automatically confer trust. Asia is the site of complex relations, where nations jealously guard their sovereignty, and where American primacy has long been taken for granted. China's deepening commercial and security relations in the region will make it the target of new resistance.

### *Benevolent developmentalism*

Since Beijing's 'peaceful rise' rhetoric has done little to assuage smaller states about its growing asymmetric power, it has turned to economic largesse. Recalling its imperial role of 'giving more but taking less' (*bolai houwang* 薄来厚往) to tributary states, a discourse central to the theory of moral realism and practicing humane authority, China's new role as a responsible power is defined in terms of 'bringing'

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<sup>758</sup> ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, "State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey" (ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, January 7, 2019), [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ASEANFocus%20FINAL\\_Jan19.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ASEANFocus%20FINAL_Jan19.pdf).

<sup>759</sup> ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

<sup>760</sup> ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

economic benefits to smaller developing states. Here is how Xi himself described Beijing's 'righteous' foreign policy when speaking at the State Great Hural in the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar in August 2014:

China is willing to provide neighbouring countries including Mongolia with opportunities and space for common development. All countries are welcomed to board the train of China's development. Either for a fast ride or for a free ride is welcome. In cooperation with developing countries, China will stick to correct idea of righteousness and benefit.<sup>761</sup>

China's provision of public goods via the BRI is framed in distinctly civilizational terms described in the previous chapter. Chinese elites assert that they abide by the Confucian ethical principle of 'correctly viewing righteousness and benefit', benevolently foregoing their own immediate interest for the sake of community-wide prosperity, which some more zealous commentary asserts is a higher moral principle than the 'Western concept' of self-interest <sup>762</sup>. Putting aside these questionable frames, there is a clear logic in Beijing's economic statecraft: Distributing economic benefits will win friends.

But 'boarding the train' of China's development does not come without responsibilities for small states, as Mongolia painfully found out in 2016. In November, while the Mongolian government was negotiating a US\$4.2 billion loan from Beijing, the Dalai Lama visited a monastery in Ulaanbaatar.<sup>763</sup> Geng Shuang, the spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, chastised Mongolia for its 'erroneous action' and asked the Mongolian side to 'earnestly respect' China's core interests.<sup>764</sup> The following week, Chinese authorities cancelled talks on the loan and closed a key border crossing, preventing hundreds of trucks from the mining

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<sup>761</sup> "Xi Jinping Delivers an Important Speech at the State Great Hural of Mongolia," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, August 22, 2014,

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1185662.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1185662.shtml).

<sup>762</sup> Li, "The Viewpoint of Righteousness and Benefit in the 'BRI' Initiative"; Qin, "Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit."

<sup>763</sup> "Dalai Lama's Visit to Mongolia Could Fray Its Ties to China," *New York Times*, November 19, 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/world/asia/mongolia-dalai-lama-china.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/world/asia/mongolia-dalai-lama-china.html?_r=0).

<sup>764</sup> "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang's Regular Press Conference on November 23, 2016," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, November 23, 2016, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/t1418010.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1418010.shtml).

conglomerate Rio Tinto from moving copper into China.<sup>765</sup> The Mongolian government quickly apologized, and promised that the Dalai Lama would no longer be permitted to enter the country. Discussions on the much-needed loan were re-started and the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi said that he hoped Mongolia had 'learned its lesson'.<sup>766</sup>

Beijing's relations with its smaller neighbours uses a simple calculus: respect China's core interests and you will be rewarded, if not you will be punished. Over the long term, and if repeated enough, this performative diplomacy serves to socialize peripheral states to accept China's view of its core interests, an explicit directive that Xi gave at the October 2013 periphery diplomacy meeting.<sup>767</sup>

There is a potential contradiction between respecting China's core interests and safeguarding regional states' own interests. This tension has grown more acute under Xi, who has placed unprecedented emphasis on safeguarding China's core interests and territorial and maritime rights in peripheral areas, encapsulated in the recent concept of 'bottom-line thinking' (*dixian sixiang* 底线思想). As the previous chapter showed, the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit discourse is a response to the growing contradiction between China's individual interest and the community interest. The simultaneous attending of both individual/community, China/world is how Xi understands the Belt and Road Initiative. As he said at a Politburo study session on the BRI in April 2016 after listening to a lecture given by a scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences:

China is the architect and champion of the 'BRI initiative', but building the BRI is not our task alone. The BRI should not merely focus on China's own development, but it should take China's development as an opportunity for more countries to 'board China's development express' and help them

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<sup>765</sup> "China 'blocks' Mongolia Border after Dalai Lama Visit," *Al Jazeera*, December 10, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/china-blocks-mongolia-border-dalai-lama-visit-161210060313417.html>.

<sup>766</sup> "China Says Hopes Mongolia Learned Lesson after Dalai Lama Visit," *Reuters*, January 24, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-mongolia-dalailama/china-says-hopes-mongolia-learned-lesson-after-dalai-lama-visit-idUSKBN158197>.

<sup>767</sup> Timothy Heath, "Diplomacy Work Forum: Xi Steps Up Efforts to Shape a China-Centered Regional Order," *China Brief* 13, no. 22 (2013): 6–10.

realize their own development goals. As we develop our own interests, we must simultaneously consider and attend to the interests of other countries. We must insist on the Correct View of Righteousness and Benefit, give priority to righteousness, simultaneously develop righteousness and benefit, and not seek instant benefit.<sup>768</sup>

Chinese scholars share a similar view. In a widely read paper in *World Economics and Politics*, Li Xiangyang of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences writes that the BRI embodies the values of righteousness, and that these mutualistic values are set apart from the “carrot-and-stick” concept in the economic diplomacy of Western powers.<sup>769</sup> Similarly, Xue Li and Cheng Zhangxi write that with BRI infrastructure projects, China is ‘not placing business interests first’ but instead following a ‘traditional Chinese approach’.<sup>770</sup> Such an approach is necessary as China is now a major power responsible for global governance.

### **Managing asymmetry in the periphery**

On the surface, China’s policies toward small and middle powers in its periphery are still guided by the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the insistence to treat ‘all countries as equals regardless of their size’. In reality, newly emerged power asymmetries between China and peripheral states have become, as one Chinese scholar notes, a ‘major problem’.<sup>771</sup> According to estimates by SIPRI, China’s annual military expenditure, which bloated to nearly \$230 billion in 2017, is now larger than all other countries in Asia combined.<sup>772</sup> China has re-emerged as the region’s dominant state and clear power asymmetries have appeared between China and its neighbours. Whether the region can come to a modus vivendi on managing a stable, peaceful order otherwise marked by asymmetry remains an important question.

#### *Lessons from history*

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<sup>768</sup> “Xi Jinping Chairs the 31st Politburo Collective Study Session.”

<sup>769</sup> Li, “The Viewpoint of Righteousness and Benefit in the ‘BRI’ Initiative,” 4.

<sup>770</sup> Xue and Cheng, “What Might a Chinese World Order Look Like?”

<sup>771</sup> Ling, “新时期中国周边外交战略 (New Period in China’s Peripheral Diplomatic Strategy).”

<sup>772</sup> This does not include Russia. SIPRI, “SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2019,” 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

Chinese scholars have in recent years begun looking back to China's historic ordering practices to search for clues to the problem of managing Asia's power asymmetry today.<sup>773</sup> The hierarchic tributary order in East Asia has provided a fertile and contested ground on which scholars have sought to explain the empirical puzzle of stable and peaceful relations between a powerful Chinese empire and its smaller neighbours - between the founding of the Ming dynasty in 1368 and the start of the Opium Wars in 1839, a period of nearly five hundred years, there were only two wars among the major states of the region.<sup>774</sup> One interpretation privileges the constraining effect of shared culture and hierarchical status roles.

As Chapter 3 showed, Ren Xiao and the theory of gongsheng-symbiosis argues that this order was generally peaceful because among the major states of the region there was a general adherence to Confucian norms dictating appropriate behaviour according to one's status. Chief among these was the asymmetric exchange between small states of recognition of the Chinese emperor as the ruler of all-under-heaven for the guarantee of ruling legitimacy and non-interference at home.<sup>775</sup> Through the diplomatic process of investiture the Chinese court formalized a superior-inferior relationship while recognizing the legitimate authority of regional kings at home. In this asymmetric relationship both parties required something, imperial China needed deference to its superior status while its smaller neighbours required a tacit promise of freedom from aggression. Despite the obvious power asymmetry in the traditional East Asian order, scholars contend that it was a structure of 'formal inequality but informal equality'.<sup>776</sup> That is, as long as small states recognized their unequal status, they had considerable latitude in their behaviour.<sup>777</sup> In this order, Ren summarizes, peace prevailed when 'small respected big, and big tolerated small'.<sup>778</sup>

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<sup>773</sup> Meng, "Factors Producing the Ancient Hierarchical System of East Asia."

<sup>774</sup> Kang, *East Asia before the West*, 2.

<sup>775</sup> Ren, "On the Principles of the 'System of Symbiosis' in East Asia," 18-19.

<sup>776</sup> Ren, 20; See also: Meng, "Factors Producing the Ancient Hierarchical System of East Asia," 93; Kang, *East Asia before the West*, 2.

<sup>777</sup> David C. Kang et al., "War, Rebellion, and Intervention under Hierarchy: Vietnam-China Relations, 1365 to 1841," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 4 (April 2019): 896-922.

<sup>778</sup> Ren, "On the Principles of the 'System of Symbiosis' in East Asia," 14.

### *Managing asymmetry today*

It is useful to ask whether Asia's historic management of asymmetry helps to frame contemporary China's thinking regarding its periphery. China's peripheral diplomacy seems to reflect and reproduce the ideal that Ren Xiao identifies. Not only does China's developmental statecraft embody the Confucian ideal of benevolence, but the rituals of partnership diplomacy, through the performance of repetitive and seemingly hollow joint statements, serve to acknowledge status roles, clarify the bounds of appropriate behaviour, and deepen trust between asymmetric powers. For example, in November 2015 China and Mongolia released a joint declaration on 'deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership', just one year after the two countries formally upgraded their bilateral ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership. In the joint declaration, the Chinese side 'reaffirmed respect for Mongolia's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity' and 'respect for the development path chosen by the Mongolian people on the basis of their national conditions'.<sup>779</sup> In exchange, the Mongolian side reaffirmed its intention to 'resolutely pursue the One China principle, support China's position on Taiwan, and the issues involving Tibet and Xinjiang'.<sup>780</sup> These joint statements act as positive reinforcements to complement negative reinforcements of economic sanctions placed on countries that intrude on China's core interests, as Mongolia would do one year later with the Dalai Lama.

For its part, China, as in the past, desires smaller states defer to its conception of regional order. This was on display when Foreign Minister Wang Yi, during a visit to Laos in March 2018, told the Laotian prime minister that 'both sides should [...] earnestly implement the community of shared future'.<sup>781</sup> The reference to Xi's

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<sup>779</sup> "中华人民共和国和蒙古国关于深化发展全面战略伙伴关系的联合声明 (Joint Statement on Deepening the Development of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the People's Republic of China and Mongolia)," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, November 11, 2015, [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-11/11/content\\_2964503.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-11/11/content_2964503.htm).

<sup>780</sup> "Joint Statement on Deepening the Development of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the People's Republic of China and Mongolia."

<sup>781</sup> "Wang Yi Meets with Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith of Laos," *Embassy of the People's Republic in Singapore*, March 31, 2018, <http://www.chinaembassy.org.sg/eng//jrzg/t1547617.htm>.

signature vision for regional order and the desire for small states to defer to it was again evidenced in January 2019 when General Secretary Xi met with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, and called for 'joint efforts to build a community of shared future with strategic significance between China and Cambodia'.<sup>782</sup> In exchange, Xi acknowledged the legitimate rule of Hun Sen, who himself heads a brutal one-party regime at home, by reaffirming his support for Cambodia 'in following a development path in line with its national conditions'.<sup>783</sup> Seen in light Asia's historic management of asymmetric relationships, these seemingly hollow declarations take on a renewed importance as performative acts that reassure weaker states of aggression from China and provide recognition of legitimate rule at home, while small states defer to China's core interests and conception of order. Cambodia and Laos are two relatively minor actors and therefore this pattern cannot be generalized across all of China's peripheral diplomacy. But this type of asymmetric relationship could be an embryonic form of a future Chinese-led order.

Xi's desire for submission to his version of order has created space for smaller states to bargain. Hierarchies, after all, are created not by fiat but through negotiation. Sino-Malaysia relations are illustrative. After replacing Najib Razak in May 2018 in an election campaign where ballooning Chinese investment was a central issue, newly-elected Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad publicly warned about China's 'debt-trap' diplomacy, a 'new version of colonialism', and suspended Chinese-backed infrastructure projects worth nearly \$20 billion, including the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) – a 688-kilometer passenger and freight railway line that connects the country's west coast to its east.<sup>784</sup> After nine months of re-negotiations over the megaproject, the new government came to a 'mutually beneficial agreement' with

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<sup>782</sup> "Xi Calls for Building of China-Cambodia Community of Shared Future," *Xinhua*, January 21, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-01/21/c\\_137762900.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-01/21/c_137762900.htm).

<sup>783</sup> "Xi Calls for Building of China-Cambodia Community of Shared Future."

<sup>784</sup> Amanda Erickson, "Malaysia, Fearing Bankruptcy, Cancels 2 Massive Chinese Projects," *Washington Post*, August 21, 2018; Kinling Lo, "Malaysia's Mahathir Backs China's Belt and Road but Insists on Open Trade Routes," *South China Morning Post*, April 26, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3007874/malaysias-mahathir-backs-chinas-belt-and-road-insists-open>.

Beijing whereby the cost of the ECRL was reduced by a third and the involvement of Malaysian firms was increased.<sup>785</sup> Shortly after, Mahathir attended the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing and gave his approval for Xi's signature foreign policy initiative, noting during his speech that 'I am fully in support of the Belt and Road Initiative. I am sure my country, Malaysia, will benefit from this project'.<sup>786</sup>

It is important here to ask whether there is a contradiction between the practice of building hierarchical relationships and the stated goal of creating a regional 'community of common destiny'. A close reading of Xi's speeches suggests that there is not. Indeed, it appears that a Chinese-led benevolent hierarchy serves as his ideal order in Asia. Consider the following, from an August 2018 work forum marking the five-year anniversary of the BRI:

Jointly building the "Belt and Road Initiative" is the platform for promoting the construction of community of common destiny for mankind, it stems from China's Reform and Opening and long-term development, and it accords to the Chinese people's ideal of the Grand Unity (天下大同 *tianxia datong*), as well as the Chinese worldview of caring for those far away (怀柔远人 *huairou yuanren*) and harmonizing all nations (和谐万邦 *hexie wanbang*), and it also allows us to occupy the commanding heights of international morality.<sup>787</sup>

Xi's usage of Grand Unity here is notable. While it wasn't the first time that Xi had publicly used the term *tianxia*<sup>788</sup>, it was the first time that he had clearly and deliberately connected the PRC's major diplomatic initiatives with the old Chinese ideal. Two points are worth noting. First, in using the term, Xi is recognizing that China is not just an economic power but also a moral one whose normative behaviour will be felt beyond its borders. In Xi's mind, China is a benevolent power that is

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<sup>785</sup> Kate Mayberry, "China Signals Belt and Road Shift with Malaysia Rail Project," *Al Jazeera*, April 15, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/china-signals-belt-road-shift-malaysia-rail-project-190415072550955.html>.

<sup>786</sup> Lo, "Malaysia's Mahathir Backs China's Belt and Road but Insists on Open Trade Routes."

<sup>787</sup> "习近平：推动共建'一带一路'走深走实造福人民 (Xi Jinping: Promote Mutually Building the 'Belt and Road Initiative')," *People's Daily*, August 27, 2018, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0827/c1024-30254173.html>.

<sup>788</sup> For example, on December 29, 2017 he instructed his diplomats to 'cherish the motherland and *tianxia*'. See: "深入推进中国特色大国外交 ('Thoroughly Advance Major Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics')."

uniquely capable of bringing to fruition a harmonious order of coexistence where countries, regardless of ideological differences, work together to solve common problems of global governance. If the Western liberal order is based on value monism then the vision of world order promoted by China is thoroughly pluralistic. In this sense, the ‘community of common destiny’ represents a surprisingly cosmopolitan vision, one that insists on people’s equal moral worth and seeks space for autonomous development based on mutual respect.<sup>789</sup>

But at the same time one cannot miss the fact that China remains the ‘core’ of this community. It is through its multi-billion dollar BRI that it binds together this pluralistic collection of sovereign nation states, and it is China who is responsible for ‘caring’ for and ‘harmonizing’ other nations. To Chinese elites the road to a harmonious world runs through Beijing. Following the Confucian tradition, *tianxia* requires a constabulary, a central force that not only ‘harmonizes’ peripheral nations with its benevolence, but also maintains order through the harsh use of punishment.

Second, the notion of *community* suggests a common mores, a shared sense of duty to something larger than one’s individual interest. Ernest Renan, the 19<sup>th</sup> century French historian for whom the concept of a community of common destiny can originally be traced back, argued that a nation is not a common language, religion, blood or even common interests, but that the nation is a soul – it is ‘a great solidarity constituted by the feeling of sacrifices made and those that one is still disposed to make’.<sup>790</sup> In this sense, the community that Xi proposes then takes on a different meaning. It demands a shared loyalty and responsibility to the collective. And given that the ‘community of common destiny’ is the external companion to the domestic China Dream, one’s moral obligation in Xi’s community becomes the duty to advance the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.

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<sup>789</sup> Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities*.

<sup>790</sup> Ernest Renan, “Qu’est-Ce Qu’une Nation? (What Is a Nation?),” trans. Ethan Rundell (Paris: Sorbonne, March 11, 1882), [http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What\\_is\\_a\\_Nation.pdf](http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf).

On the one hand, Beijing is well aware of its current limitations in material power and thus accepts a position of collective leadership by the great powers in Asia. This is reflected in a January 2017 White Paper published by the State Council Information Office laying out China's vision for the future regional security order.<sup>791</sup> Reflecting what one Singaporean scholar calls a 'hierarchical mind-set'<sup>792</sup>, the White Paper classifies five states as 'major Asia-Pacific countries': China, US, Russia, India, and Japan. These five major countries are counseled to 'respect others' legitimate interests and concerns' while 'small and medium-sized countries need not and should not take sides among big countries.'<sup>793</sup> This hierarchical vision of order was reiterated by Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin in his remarks to the 2014 Xiangshan Forum when he made divisions between 'major' countries and 'middle' and 'small' countries, suggesting that each has a distinct responsibility appropriate to their status.<sup>794</sup> While in theory this approach gives small states room to maneuver among the big powers, in practice as the region becomes more integrated under Chinese leadership Beijing will gain greater leverage to enforce deference to its core interests.

But over the long-term, Beijing intends to replace the United States as the principal constructor and maintainer of the regional political, security and economic order in Asia. These revisionist intentions are not secret, nor are they debated among Chinese elites.<sup>795</sup> China's peripheral worldview has deep historic roots. While most Chinese IR scholars disavow the formal inequality that marked imperial China's worldview, the ideal of a benevolent China that reigns but does not rule over a Sinocentric order remains a dominant frame to view the PRC's peripheral strategy.<sup>796</sup> To many Chinese,

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<sup>791</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation," January 11, 2017, [www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1429771.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1429771.shtml).

<sup>792</sup> Daljit Singh, "China's White Paper on Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region and Chinese Grand Strategy" (Singapore: ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, April 7, 2017), [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2017\\_22.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2017_22.pdf).

<sup>793</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation."

<sup>794</sup> Zhenmin Liu, "Uphold Win-Win Cooperation and Promote Peace and Stability in the Asia-Pacific," October 17, 2015, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/t1306891.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1306891.shtml).

<sup>795</sup> Xiangyang Li, "抓紧运筹新时期中国国家安全战略," *People's Daily*, December 2, 2013, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/1202/c40531-23718303.html>.

<sup>796</sup> Meng, "Factors Producing the Ancient Hierarchical System of East Asia"; Ren, "On the Principles of the 'System of Symbiosis' in East Asia"; Zhang, "The History and Evolution of China's Relations with

the reordering of 21<sup>st</sup> century Asia is less about the perennial rise and fall of hegemonic powers, but rather represents the return of China to its 'natural' position at the centre and apex of the region. Here is how Zhang Yunling, the director of the Institute of Asia Pacific Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, defined the 'real challenge' of China's rise:

Having lost much in the century of decline and humiliation, China hopes to recover what was seized from it when it becomes strong. It feels that it is unreasonable for it to tolerate these historic losses any longer. In the Chinese view, this is not about revenge but rather represents a return to the rightful balance of things.<sup>797</sup>

This sentiment speaks to the immaterial goals of China's rise – Beijing not only pursues interests or power, but it also craves status, recognition and a milieu in which it feels comfortable. It also confirms that memory of a pre-Western order, however idealized, remains an important element constituting China's peripheral worldview. This does not mean that Beijing seeks to re-institutionalize the tributary relations that characterized its imperial foreign relations. But Beijing's now dominant material position, its new sense of responsibility for regional order, mixed with the historical legacy of its past status, may mark a shift away from post-Deng Xiaoping norms of equality and sovereignty towards more paternalistic, interventionist policies as Beijing seeks to 'harmonize' its periphery.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter finds that China underwent an important evolution in its national role conception in 2012 when it began to understand itself as responsible for managing and shaping its periphery. Xi Jinping has overseen an evolution in China's neighbourhood strategy that is no longer content with mere engagement, but insists on proactive efforts to manage regional order and knit together an integrated region under Chinese leadership. Efforts to achieve this goal have come primarily through four mechanisms: institution building and regional integration, strategic

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Peripheral States: Models and Process"; Zhang, "The Return of China's Peripheral View and Constructing a New Order."

<sup>797</sup> Zhang, "China and Its Neighbourhood," 842.

partnerships, normative binding, and benevolent developmentalism. Ultimately, Xi Jinping's neighbourhood strategy rests on an asymmetric bargain: respect China's core interests in exchange for benevolence.

If Xi has his way the regional order will be one that privileges China's status as the paterfamilias of Asia, and one in which China's self-constructed civilizational values of humane authority inform the practices of regional diplomacy. Of course, Sinicization now takes place in an open and porous region where it competes with other civilizational processes. China's dreams of great power revival are in competition with other would-be regional powerhouses – India, Iran, Japan, Turkey, Russia – all with their own national 'dreams'. How these manifold civilizational processes interact will mark regional relations for years to come.

## Conclusion

*There are spheres of thought in which it is impossible to conceive of absolute truth existing independently of the values and position of the subject and unrelated to the social context.*

- Karl Mannheim<sup>798</sup>

The implication of rising powers on the stability and pattern of international order is a core concern of international relations theory. The manifold effects that rising powers have on world order have become topic *du jour* in light of China's dramatic accumulation of material power at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The most common way to address this issue is to look at material capabilities and the rational strategic options facing rising powers. In the structural realist tradition in which all states seek to maximize power or security, the stage is set for an inevitable tragic drama between the rising power and the established hegemon. In contrast to this popular approach, this study has attempted to look inside the 'black box' of the state to better understand how Chinese elites think about international order and China's place in the world. Once done, it provides a more nuanced picture of China's rise than is typical presented by structural realism and power transition theories.

Using a quote from Karl Mannheim, the founder of the sociology of knowledge, as the epigraph for this concluding chapter is fitting. This study followed Mannheim's pioneering approach of placing intellectual developments within a broader historical, social and cultural milieu. It took a contextual approach to the relationship between rising powers and IR theory development, and to ideas of international order and how they are deployed in foreign policy. That is to say, it explained the development of IR theory in China with reference to the environment that surrounds China's IR scholars

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<sup>798</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 70-71.

– in particular, national ideology and the dominance of the authoritarian party-state. The question at the heart of this project is: How do Chinese international relations scholars understand international order and how is this related to China’s approach to international order? As the balance of power shifts away from the West, this question has importance for global politics for two reasons: First, the return of China is not just a material phenomenon but also a social and cultural one that is likely to have profound impacts on knowledge and representation in global politics; Second, a resurgent China is bound to have impacts on the existing pattern of international order and in some areas may challenge this order and the expense of the Western powers at its core.

The following pages will summarize the main arguments and findings in this study, review what this study contributes to the theoretical literature, and point out the limitations and suggest directions for future scholarship that emerged in the process of researching and writing.

### **Main arguments and findings**

This study investigated the processes and mechanisms of ideational change in a rising power. Instead of understanding the field of international relations theory as a universal discipline engaged in the objective analysis of global politics, it has argued that as a socially conditioned body of knowledge, IR theory is also a discourse that seeks to ascribe a coherent identity to the national self and its significant others, and define the nation’s appropriate role in global politics. This study sought to do two things: provide a novel explanatory framework for how power shifts affect idea generation and how ideas about international order are deployed in foreign policy. The main arguments and findings are summarized below.

First, this study used the case of IR theory development in China to show that social conditions shape the development of international relations scholarship according to locally meaningful ideologies. Through a discussion of the development of IR theory in post-1978 China, Chapter 2 showed that the Chinese School movement functions meaningfully in and responds to social conditions such as China’s rise vis-à-vis the

liberal West. In contrast to the traditional understanding of IR theory as a scientific endeavor that seeks to objectively understand the autonomous realm of global politics, this study identified two other understandings of IR theory in China: as a product of and tool in China's 'discursive struggle' with the West, and as an process of identity building working to legitimate a new great power ideology for the state. Seen in this way, the Chinese School movement is a counter-hegemonic discourse that seeks to represent world politics with respect to China's own identity and experiences and fix new a meaning and identity to the nation and its relation to others.<sup>799</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 3, China's international relations scholars are 'Sinicizing' the concepts of power, harmony, and order. Power is expanded to include not just the capability to coerce others, but includes the cultivation of good governance towards one's citizens and the practice of morality and benevolence towards weaker and smaller states abroad based on the ideal of 'humane authority'. Harmony is understood not as equality, nor as shared values among states, but rather a hierarchy among states with different responsibilities based on power capabilities. Order results not from a balance of power, but from a well-enforced hierarchical system in which the strong practice benevolence toward the weak while the weak voluntarily defer to the strong. Building on this discursive reframing, Chinese IR scholars are building a vision for international order that I have characterized as *hierarchical pluralism*, or an ideal order in which rites and responsibilities are differentiated on the basis of power capabilities and heterogeneous in cultural values and socio-political systems. While some analysts understand China as an illiberal power whose world vision is starkly hierarchic,<sup>800</sup> this finding suggests that there is an important element of pluralism in China's diplomatic thought.

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<sup>799</sup> Here I am in agreement with Noesselt, who argues that 'the search for a "Chinese" paradigm of IR theory thus finally reveals itself as part of China's global positioning ambitions.' See: Noesselt, "Revisiting the Debate on Constructing a Theory of International Relations with Chinese Characteristics," 444.

<sup>800</sup> Christopher A. Ford, *The Mind of Empire: China's History and Modern Foreign Relations* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 2010).

Second, this study showed in its empirical chapters how these discursive and ideational frameworks flow into policymaking and are expressed in China's official foreign policy discourse. As discussed in Chapter 4, in China's politically-embedded knowledge regime, where political power is deeply embedded in administrative and personal networks, there are four main channels connecting scholars to policymakers: scholarship, formal and informal policy advisory bodies, media, and personal relationships. While this study was unable to disclose direct causal evidence linking specific scholars to concrete policy outcomes, it does show deep linkages between epistemic communities and top leaders in China's foreign policymaking. This is a top-down process where powerful Party and government decision-makers treat academia as a supermarket for ideas and expert advice. Furthermore, by using the case study of Xi Jinping's 'major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics', this study shows that an important role for international relations scholars is to interpret the meaning of vague official political concepts and to provide advice to policymakers on areas of global politics.

This suggests an important finding about China's plans for international order. While realists argue that rising powers inevitably seek hegemony, and some area-studies specialists argue that China in particular has a long-term plan to become a global superpower<sup>801</sup>, China's top international relations experts differ to a remarkable degree on fundamental questions of the pattern of global order, China's position in it, and the strategic policies that it should adopt. There is no consensus in Beijing about where we are headed. This pluralism suggests that China's grand strategy is both an ongoing process and one with open possibilities.

Third, this study showed how China is developing a discursive and ideational framework for its foreign policy that is not rooted in Western discourses, but rather its own self-constructed traditions that define its role as a great power and legitimates its hegemonic position in Asia in locally meaningful terms. As discussed

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<sup>801</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*; Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2016).

in Chapter 5, it argues that there are two traditions that shape China's vision for international order: pre-modern civilizational and post-1949 socialist revolutionary. This challenges the idea that China has a unitary worldview, and in particular those analyses which focus solely on China's civilizational past in order to divine its future intentions for international order.<sup>802</sup> Instead, China's worldview contains multiple contending traditions. Moreover, these two traditions are embodied by contradictory ideals of pluralism and hierarchy, which are unified in an ideal vision of international order that privileges China's status as a moral leader that respects diversity and sovereignty as long as its core interests are deferred to.

The socialist-revolutionary tradition in particular suggests something important about China's relationship to the West. China's socialist identity, which is often ignored by analysts in favour of China's more attractive Confucian civilizational history, has a central characteristic of antagonistic struggle with the liberal West. One finding that came out of this study is the importance that Chinese President Xi Jinping places on discursive or ideational struggle with the West, which is one reason he has encouraged the indigenization of social science and philosophy. This suggests that China may decide to increasingly engage in ideological competition with the West and the United States in particular, a phenomenon that has not been seen in Chinese foreign policy in the post-Mao Zedong period or on a wide-scale in international relations since the Cold War.

Chapter 6 showed how China has developed a new discursive and ideational framework for regional order in Asia. In light of the shifting balance of power and the effect that this had on leadership thinking, after 2012 China began to understand itself as responsible for actively managing and shaping its periphery. Moreover, China developed a framework that legitimizes its hegemonic position over neighbouring states by employing a mix of moralistic civilizational narratives, economic coercion, and connectivity projects. The emerging China-led regional order in Asia relies on a

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<sup>802</sup> Andreas Bøje Forsby, "An End to Harmony? The Rise of a Sino-Centric China," *Political Perspectives* 5, no. 3 (2011): 5-26.

discursive and ideational framework that is hierarchical, transactional, and reflects newly emerged status distinctions. Ultimately, Xi Jinping's regional ordering strategy rests on an asymmetric bargain: respect China's core interests in exchange for benevolence.

This finding suggests something important for regional order in Asia. Realists argue that China's rise will inevitably be met with 'balancing' by its smaller neighbours who will seek security by either building up their own armaments or seeking alliances with outside powers such as the United States. The realist argument therefore claims that China's rise will be a cause for instability in the region.<sup>803</sup> This study challenges this claim by suggesting that China's regional strategy may preserve the stability that Asia has witnessed in the post-Cold War period if this social contract of exchanging core interests for benevolence is met. China's dual strategy in Asia of providing much needed infrastructure projects and markets while occasionally 'punishing' states that violate its core interests may prove to be a viable long-term calculus that preserves regional stability while ensuring China's hegemonic position. The contours of the emerging Sinocentric regional order may be an indication that regional states are beginning to replicate the traditional hierarchic nature that defined inter-state relations in Asia for centuries. Whether this is true or not over the long-term is a question for future research, but the pattern of regional relations shown in Chapter 6 suggests that David Shambaugh is correct in his claim that 'both the logic and application of offensive realism [in China's case] are...unsustainable'.<sup>804</sup>

### **Contribution to literature**

This study has theoretical implications and contributions to four different literatures. First, it contributes to the literature on civilizations in world politics. What Mannheim suggested for individuals – that perspectives about the world depend on one's social and cultural positionality – is also true for large collectivities like states. In examining

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<sup>803</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 4 (December 1, 2010): 381–96.

<sup>804</sup> David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order," *International Security* 29, no. 3 (January 2005): 94.

the worldview of China, and analyzing how cultural traditions shape self-understandings of its role in the world, this study contributes to the ‘civilizational turn’ in IR theory. But contrary to some culturalists who understand civilizations as bounded entities with timeless characteristics<sup>805</sup>, this study does not assume a monolithic and unchanging cultural or civilizational worldview. There is no such thing as ‘cultural DNA’. Instead, this study contributes to the more recent understanding of civilizations as a set of discursive processes of differentiation and culture as evolving, full of contradictions, and multiple traditions.<sup>806</sup> The critical analysis provided in Chapter 5 of China’s *multiple* co-existing traditions exemplifies this approach and contributes to this literature.<sup>807</sup>

Furthermore, one finding of this study – that China increasingly self-identifies as a civilizational power – complements studies that point to the recent resurgence of civilizational politics based on ancient worldviews.<sup>808</sup> In this sense China is not unique. Putin’s Russia appeals to its historical greatness of its Tsarist and Soviet past, and crafts policy in light of its self-understanding as the great power at the ‘centre of Eurasia’.<sup>809</sup> Similarly, Turkey has witnessed a revival of neo-Ottoman civilizational greatness and ambitions to lead the Islamic world, where Recep Tayyip Erdogan calls modern Turkey ‘a continuation of the Ottomans’.<sup>810</sup> This study, particularly Chapter 6, which examined the formation of a new discursive and ideational framework that legitimizes China’s hegemonic position as a uniquely benevolent civilizational power at the heart of Asia, contributes to this literature.

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<sup>805</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

<sup>806</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010); Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *Civilizing the Enemy: German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

<sup>807</sup> Here I agree with Barabantseva: “Chinese images of the world and China’s role in it are subject to constant negotiation and dispute”. See: Elena Barabantseva, “Change vs. Order: Shijie Meets Tianxia in China’s Interactions with the World,” *Alternatives* 34 (2009): 133.

<sup>808</sup> Maximilian Mayer, “China’s Historical Statecraft and the Return of History,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 6 (2018): 1217–35.

<sup>809</sup> Katzenstein and Weygandt, “Mapping Eurasia in an Open World.”

<sup>810</sup> Jonathan Gorvett, “Turkey’s Outreach Hints at Ottoman Revival,” *Asia Times*, February 18, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/article/hold-sunday-put-check-turkey-reaches/>.

Second, this study also has relevance for the constructivist literature on ideas and foreign policy. This literature typically assumes that worldviews, or the broad philosophical orientations that guide state behaviour, usually go through a process of 'collapse' in the face of contradictory results before a new replacement idea can take its place.<sup>811</sup> This study has identified a much different process that is defined by incremental layering in a piecemeal fashion. In particular, the chapter on China's Major Country Diplomacy showed that the broad conceptual guides of foreign policy, which are usually expressed in pithy slogans and official formulations, are not marked by clean breaks as orthodoxy collapses, but instead go through a process that cultural sociologists and ideational theorists call *bricolage*, where new elements are added to old ideas.<sup>812</sup> Furthermore, the case of China shows that discursive evolution is a much more contested and political process that is intimately tied to political power and legitimizing elite rule than the literature on discursive institutionalism, which usually focuses on democratic polities, typically assumes.<sup>813</sup> Given this finding, 'bringing China in' to the ideational theory literature may nuance our understanding of the complex interaction between political power, ideas, and decision-making.

Third, this study contributes to the burgeoning literature on rising powers and international order. A central theme in the now copious writings on the rise of China forecasts coming conflict between the Western liberal order and China. This challenge is often framed as a binary choice whereby China will either accept the Western liberal order or it will not.<sup>814</sup> This study points to a different conclusion. Chapter 5 showed that in formulating alternative visions for global politics, particularly the New Type of International Relations and Community of Common Destiny discourses, Beijing has signaled both partial acceptance of some areas of international order and

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<sup>811</sup> Legro, "What China Will Want."

<sup>812</sup> Martin B. Carstensen, "Paradigm Man vs. the Bricoleur: Bricolage as an Alternative Vision of Agency in Ideational Change," *European Political Science Review* 3, no. 1 (February 25, 2011): 147–67.

<sup>813</sup> Vivien A. Schmidt, "Speaking to the Markets or to the People? A Discursive Institutional Analysis of the EU's Sovereign Debt Crisis," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 16, no. 1 (February 2014): 188–209.

<sup>814</sup> Kevin Rudd, "The West Isn't Ready for the Rise of China," *New Statesman*, July 11, 2012, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/international-politics/2012/07/kevin-rudd-west-isnt-ready-rise-china>; Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009).

partial reform of others. This suggests that research on whether China is a 'status quo' or 'revolutionary' rising power should be refined to focus on what areas of international order China seeks to reform and which ones it finds acceptable.

Recent constructivist research suggests that rising powers like China face two choices when signaling their intentions vis-à-vis the international order: legitimize their behaviour by appealing to international norms, thereby assuaging concerns about how they fit into the existing order, or cave to domestic pressure and engage in nationalistic rhetoric, risking being perceived as a revolutionary power by the established hegemon.<sup>815</sup> The ideational evolution charted in this study, complicates this status-quo/revolutionary binary. In particular, Chapters 5 and 6 showed that China legitimizes its behaviour in new rhetoric that does not conform to traditional international norms but is instead couched in its own moralistic language. But given Beijing's continued insistence on norms of sovereignty and non-interference, its behaviour is not necessarily inconsistent with traditional norms of Westphalian international order. This study therefore nuances the status-quo/revolutionary binary by suggesting that rising powers may legitimate their behaviour according to locally meaningful ideologies, therefore signaling to the international community a commitment to the status quo while simultaneously satiating domestic pressures.

Finally, this study contributes to the sociology and historiography of the field of IR. In particular, by developing a novel framework drawn from the sociology of knowledge, this study contributes to the discussion of why IR theory develops the way it does in different societies by adding a crucial non-Western case: China.<sup>816</sup> By combining internal and external factors in a non-causal relationship, and by combining both micro foundations of individuals and networks with macro socioeconomic trends, it preserves the creative agency of individuals while showing how national conditions shape the development of IR theory. This novel framework can be applied to other

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<sup>815</sup> Stacie E. Goddard, *When Right Makes Might: Rising Powers and World Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>816</sup> Waeber, "The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline."

non-Western cases to study the distinct trajectory of IR theorizing in different local settings.

### **Future research agenda**

In examining how Chinese scholars and elites look at the changing world around them, this study made an impact on the crucial question of what China wants. No study of a question so complex can ever be complete. In the process of researching and writing, several important questions emerged that due to time or other research constraints remain necessary to leave for future scholarship.

First, there is a nascent research paradigm of China's foreign policy that is scholar-focused and that begs for further research.<sup>817</sup> Just as this study did, this paradigm studies China's IR scholars in a multi-method way in order to draw inferences about the future directions of Chinese foreign policy. While promising, this paradigm suffers the same empirical problem as this study: establishing a causal link between scholars and policy. This was perhaps the issue that frustrated me the most in the research and writing of this dissertation. While this study was ultimately unable to uncover such a link, it perhaps provides a path forward for future research with its socially grounded, multi-method approach to knowledge and IR theory generation in rising powers.

The concept of *politically embedded knowledge regime*, which was used in Chapter 4, could be pushed further to address specific issue-areas. For example, in some policy areas or specific regional hot-spot issues, certain scholars may have significant influence on shaping policymaker thinking, or be instrumental in signaling policy intentions through their writing. Chapter 4 provided a list of the most influential think tanks in the country, but specifying which think tanks are more influential in certain policy spheres would further nuance our knowledge of the scholarly-policy linkage. Chapter 4 also provided a list of scholars that have lectured the Politburo, suggesting

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<sup>817</sup> Huiyun Feng and Kai He, "The Study of Chinese Scholars in Foreign Policy Analysis: An Emerging Research Program," *The Pacific Review*, March 18, 2020, 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2020.1738538>.

that the Party viewed those individuals as somewhat representative of their views. A closer accounting of whether the views of those particular individuals were implemented in policy practice, although admittedly difficult to research, would be a fruitful endeavor. Finally, while this study focused on the role of scholars and their ideas in foreign policymaking, better mapping out personal relationships and social networks among scholars, think tanks, and research institutes in China is needed.

The second area for future research is in China's evolving diplomatic practice. This study focused heavily on discourses and ideas. While it found that China has undergone a significant change in how it legitimizes itself by referencing its civilizational identity, analyzing the concrete effects of this on the practice of Chinese diplomacy was outside the scope of this study's research question and theoretical framework. The practice of Chinese diplomacy however remains the most crucial question in the study of rising powers and international order. Further research should explore what the official concept of Major Country Diplomacy means for China's policies towards its neighbouring states, the developing world, and perhaps most importantly the United States and the other great powers. Moreover, putting China's regional foreign policy into a comparative framework such as Sandra Destradi's typology of regional power strategies of empire, hegemony and leadership<sup>818</sup> would help to further our understanding of China's changing regional strategy by providing a cross-national comparison among other regional powers such as Brazil, India, Iran, Russia and the United States.

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<sup>818</sup> Sandra Destradi, "Regional Powers and Their Strategies: Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership," *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 04 (October 2010): 903–30.

## Appendix A

40 most-cited academic articles on 'Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics' between 2012-2018. Data set used for Chapter 4.

#	Author	Title	Journal	Year
1	Song Xiaofeng 宋效峰	Analysis of Xi Jinping's Thoughts on Great-Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics 习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想外交思想探析	Socialism Studies 社会主义研究	2018
2	Pu Pin 蒲停	On the Connotation of Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era 新时代中国特色大国外交的内涵研究	Teaching and Research 教学与研究	2018
3	Wang Cungang 王存刚	A More Uncertain World, A More Certain China's Diplomacy: The Overall Thinking of China's Diplomacy Since the Reform and Opening Up 更加不确定的世界,更加确定的中国外交——改革开放以来中国外交的整体性思考	World Economics and Politics 世界经济与政治	2018
4	Zhang Qingmin 张清敏	Understanding Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics 理解中国特色大国外交	World Economics and Politics 世界经济与政治	2018
5	Hu Kaibao 胡开宝 & Li Chan 李婵	Translating and Disseminating the Discourse on "Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics": A Study of the Undertaking's Substantive, Methodological and Axiological Aspects 中国特色大国外交话语的翻译与传播研究:内涵、方法与意义	Chinese Translators Journal 中国翻译	2018
6	Zhao Kejin 赵可金 & Shi Yan 史艳	The Theory and Practice of Building a New Type of International Relations 构建新型国际关系的理论与实践	The Chinese Journal of American Studies 美国研究	2018

7	Wu Zhicheng 吴志成 & Wu Yu 吴宇	Analysis of Xi Jinping's Thought on Global Governance 习近平全球治理思想初探	China International Studies 国际问题研究	2018
8	Hu Kaibao 胡开宝; & Chen Chaojing 陈超婧;	The Reception of the English Translations of Chinese Diplomatic Terms in Britain , USA and India —with the English Translation of Yidai Yilu as a Case in Point 中国特色大国外交术语英译在英美印等国的传播与接受研究——以“一带一路”英译为例	Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education 外语电化教学	2018
9	Shi Yunxia 石云霞	On the Scientific System of Xi Jinping's Thoughts on Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind 习近平人类命运共同体思想科学体系研究	Studies on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics 中国特色社会主义研究	2018
10	Chen Haiyan 陈海燕	Analysis of Strategic Thinking of Xi Jinping's Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era 习近平新时代中国特色大国外交战略思想探析	Theory Journal 理论学刊	2018
11	Xu Jin 徐进	Major-Country Diplomacy with Distinctive Chinese Features in the New Era 新时代中国特色大国外交理念与原则问题初探	Contemporary International Relations 现代国际关系	2018
12	Yan Xing 闫兴	Analysis of Win-Win Great Power Diplomatic Thinking in Xi Jinping's Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era 习近平新时代中国特色社会主义合作共赢大国外交思想探析	Journal of Fujian Provincial Committee Party School of CPC 中共福建省委党校学报	2018
13	Liu Jianfei 刘建飞;	Analysis of the Basic Framework of China's Diplomatic Strategy in the New Era 新时代中国外交战略基本框架论析	World Economics and Politics 世界经济与政治	2018
14	Yang Jiemian	Strategic Thinking and Planning For China's Diplomacy in the New Era	Foreign Affairs Review	2018

	杨洁勉	新时代中国外交的战略思维和谋划	外交评论(外交学院学报)	
15	Liu Haixia 刘海霞	New Situation in Great Power Relations and Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics 大国关系调整的新态势与中国特色大国外交	Red Flag Manuscript 红旗文稿	2018
16	Ren Jingjing 任晶晶	Constructing a Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind and Innovations in Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy 构建人类命运共同体与当代中国外交的创新性发展	Studies on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics 中国特色社会主义研究	2017
17	Su Ge 苏格	The Great Historic Journey of Chinese Diplomacy 中国外交的伟大历史征程	China International Studies 国际问题研究	2017
18	Wang Yin 王寅	Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind: Contents and Constructive Principles 人类命运共同体:内涵与构建原则	China International Studies 国际问题研究	2017
19	Xiao Xi 肖晞	Building the Framework of Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics Theory <sup>[1][2]</sup> 构建中国特色大国外交理论体系的框架	World Economics and Politics 世界经济与政治	2017
20	Luo Jianbo 罗建波;	Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics: New Concepts, Strategy and Characteristics 中国特色大国外交:新理念、新战略与新特色	West Asia and Africa 西亚非洲	2017
21	Yang Jiemian 杨洁勉	Theory Building Orientation of China's Diplomacy as a Major Country in the World 中国特色大国外交理论的构建方向	Contemporary International Relations 现代国际关系	2017
22	Liu Jianfei 刘建飞	Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics Reflects Trends of the Times 中国特色大国外交的时代特色	China International Studies 国际问题研究	2017

23	Li Weijian 李伟建;	Construction of Win-Win International Discourse System from Perspective of "The Belt and Road" “一带一路”视角下构建合作共赢的国际话语体系	West Asia and Africa 西亚非洲	2016
24	Su Ge 苏格	Xi Jinping's Strategic Thought Guiding Chinese Diplomacy 习近平外交战略思想全面领航	China International Studies 国际问题研究	2016
25	Yang Jiemian 杨洁勉	Constructing Discourse Power in Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics: Mission and Challenges 中国特色大国外交和话语权的使命与挑战	China International Studies 国际问题研究	2016
26	Yang Luhui 杨鲁慧	Rising China's Unique Great Power Diplomacy 中国崛起的特色大国外交	Theoretical Investigation 理论探讨	2016
27	CICIR Research Group 中国现代国际关系研究院课题组	The "Big-Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics" Strides Forward 中国特色大国外交全面发力	Contemporary International Relations 现代国际关系	2016
28	Ruan Zongze 阮宗泽;	Forging a Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind: The "Global Dream" of China 人类命运共同体:中国的“世界梦”	China International Studies 国际问题研究	2016
29	Cao Lu 曹绿	On the Theoretical Content and Innovative Thinking of Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics 试论中国特色大国外交的理论内涵与思想创新	International Review 国际观察	2015
30	Liu Xuelian 刘雪莲 & Li Xiaoxia 李晓霞;	Great-power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics and Its Feature of Promotion in East Asia 中国特色大国外交及其在东亚地区的推进特点	Northeast Asia Forum 东北亚论坛	2015

31	Mo Jiqiong 万吉琼	An Exploration of Comrade Xi Jinping's Thinking and Practice of Great Power Diplomacy 习近平同志大国外交思想与实践初探	Maozedong Thought Study 毛泽东思想研究	2015
32	Chen Zhimin 陈志敏	Globalism, National Paths and Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics 全球主义、国家路径和中国特色大国外交	The Journal of International Studies 国际政治研究	2015
33	Su Changhe 苏长和	The Strategic Layout of "The Four Comprehensive" and the New Diplomatic Pattern for Great Powers “四个全面”战略布局和大国外交新格局	Studies on Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theories 毛泽东邓小平理论研究	2015
34	Gao Fei 高飞	The 'Belt and Road Initiative' from the perspective of Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics 中国特色大国外交视角下的“一带一路”	Economic Science 经济科学	2015
35	Yang Huang 杨煌	The Road to Overcoming 'Strong Powers are Hegemonic' - The Innovation and Significance of Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics 超越“国强必霸”的老路——中国特色大国外交的创新及其意义	Contemporary World and Socialism 当代世界与社会主义	2015
36	Ruan Zongze 阮宗泽	Toward a New Type of International Relations: Transcending History to Win the Future 构建新型国际关系:超越历史 赢得未来	China International Studies 国际问题研究	2015
37	Kong Genhong 孔根红	Great-Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics: Paying More Attention to Ten Important Relationships— Experience of Learning Important Speech about Diplomacy Given by General Secretary Xi Jinping	Studies on Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theories 毛泽东邓小平理论研究	2015

		中国特色大国外交:应着力处理好十个重要关系——学习习近平总书记关于外交工作重要讲话的体会		
38	Li Zhiyong 李志永 & Yuan Zhengqing 袁正清	On Chinese Characteristics of Great - power Diplomacy 大国外交的中国特色之论	Pacific Journal 太平洋学报	2015
39	Yang Jiemian 杨洁勉	Exploration and Innovation of Theories , Strategies and Practices in China's Diplomacy in the New Period <sub>[17]</sub> 新时期中国外交思想、战略和实践的探索创新	China International Studies 国际问题研究	2015
40	Wang Yi 王毅	Exploring the Path of Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics 探索中国特色大国外交之路	China International Studies 国际问题研究	2013

## Appendix B

Speeches and commentaries used in Chapter 5.

#	Date	Who	Type	Location
1	October 30, 2012	-	Commentary	People's Daily
2	December 5, 2012	Xi Jinping	Speech	Beijing, meeting with foreign experts
3	December 13, 2012	Xi Jinping	Speech	Guangzhou
4	March 2013	Xi Jinping	Speech	Africa
5	March 17, 2013	Xi Jinping	Speech	1 <sup>st</sup> session of the 12th National People's Congress
6	March 24, 2013	Xi Jinping	Speech	Moscow College of International Relations
7	April 4, 2013	Xi Jinping	Speech	Boao Forum
8	June 27, 2013	Wang Yi	Speech	World Peace Forum, Tsinghua University, Beijing
9	July 30, 2013	-	Commentary	People's Daily
10	August 28, 2013	-	Commentary	People's Daily
11	September 7, 2013	Wang Yi	Commentary	People's Daily
12	September 10, 2013	Wang Yi	Commentary	People's Daily
13	October 3, 2013	Xi Jinping	Speech	Indonesian parliament
14	October 9, 2013	Wang Yi	Commentary	People's Daily
15	October 25, 2013	Xi Jinping	Speech	Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery
16	January 10, 2014	Wang Yi	Speech	Senegal
17	March 26, 2014	-	Commentary	People's Daily
18	March 27, 2014	Xi Jinping	Speech	UNESCO Headquarters, Paris
19	March 27, 2014	Xi Jinping	Speech	Meeting Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of China-France Diplomatic Relations, Paris
20	March 28, 2014	Xi Jinping	Speech	Korber Foundation, Germany
21	April 1, 2014	Xi Jinping	Speech	College of Europe, Bruges

22	March 21, 2014	Xi Jinping	Speech	Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia summit, Shanghai
23	May 22, 2014	-	Commentary	People's Daily
24	June 28, 2014	Xi Jinping	Speech	Meeting commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Beijing
25	July 15, 2014	Wang Jiarui	Commentary	Qiushi
26	July 15, 2014	Xi Jinping	Speech	Interview with Latin America media
27	July 15, 2014	-	Commentary	People's Daily
28	July 15, 2014	-	Commentary	People's Daily
29	September 16, 2014	-	Commentary	People's Daily
30	September 19, 2014	Xi Jinping	Speech	Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi
31	October 14, 2014	Xi Jinping	Speech	18 <sup>th</sup> Collective Study Session of the Politburo
32	November 30, 2014	Xi Jinping	Speech	Central Affairs Work Conference
33	January 15, 2015	Wang Yi	Speech	Equatorial Guinea
34	March 23, 2015	Wang Yi	Commentary	People's Daily
35	April 21, 2015	Xi Jinping	Speech	Pakistani parliament
36	April 25, 2015	Wang Yi	Speech	60th anniversary of the Bandung Conference
37	September 28, 2015	Xi Jinping	Speech	United Nations General Assembly, New York
38	November 23, 2015	Yang Jiechi	Commentary	People's Daily
39	December 4, 2015	Xi Jinping	Speech	Johannesburg, South Africa
40	April 30, 2016	Xi Jinping	Speech	31 <sup>st</sup> Collective Study Session of the Politburo
41	May 4, 2016	Wang Yi	Speech	Beijing
42	May 31, 2016	Wang Yi	Commentary	People's Daily
43	June 20, 2016	Wang Yi	Commentary	Study Times
44	July 1, 2016	Xi Jinping	Speech	95 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Communist Party, Beijing

45	September 2, 2016	-	Commentary	People's Daily
46	September 5, 2016	-	Commentary	People's Daily
47	January 14, 2017	Yang Jiechi	Commentary	People's Daily
48	January 15, 2017	-	Commentary	Xinhua
49	January 18, 2017	Xi Jinping	Speech	United Nations, Geneva
50	February 6, 2017	-	Commentary	People's Daily
51	February 11, 2017	-	Commentary	Xinhua
52	July 17, 2017	Yang Jiechi	Commentary	People's Daily
53	September 1, 2017	Wang Yi	Commentary	Study Times
54	October 19, 2017	Xi Jinping	Speech	Report to the 19th Congress
55	October 19, 2017	Wang Yi	Speech	Following 19th Party Congress
56	November 19, 2017	Yang Jiechi	Commentary	People's Daily
57	November 27, 2017	-	Commentary	People's Daily
58	December 1, 2017	Xi Jinping	Speech	World Political Parties Forum, Beijing
59	December 19, 2017	Wang Yi	Commentary	People's Daily
60	December 29, 2017	Xi Jinping	Speech	2017 Foreign Envoys Work Conference, Beijing
61	January 24, 2018	-	Commentary	People's Daily
62	January 25, 2018	-	Commentary	People's Daily
63	February 26, 2018	-	Commentary	People's Daily
64	April 16, 2018	-	Commentary	People's Daily
65	May 13, 2018	Li Zhanshu	Speech	Ethiopia
66	June 23, 2018	Xi Jinping	Speech	2nd Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference, Beijing
67	June 23, 2018	Yang Jiechi	Speech	2nd Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference, Beijing

68	July 19, 2018	Xi Jinping	Speech	Seoul
69	August 27, 2018	Xi Jinping	Speech	5 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing
70	September 4, 2018	Xi Jinping	Speech	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Beijing
71	September 6, 2018	-	Commentary	People's Daily
72	September 10, 2018	Wang Chen	Speech	Meeting between NPC and legislators from other developing countries, Beijing

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