



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

**Master's Degree**  
**in Comparative International Relations – Global Studies**  
ex D.M. 270/2004

Final Thesis

乱七八糟 *luàn qī bā zāo*  
*“In great disorder”*

The Dragon's path towards a  
new global order that  
distinguishes from the West

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MAURIZIO PROFETA

Matriculation Number 974946

**Academic Year**

2021 / 2022



*To Venice, my harbour.  
Por Sevilla, la flor de mis daños.  
To the beauty of diversity.  
To my grandpa.  
To changes, and to my future.*



## Abstract

Se si volesse dare una forma alla scena globale odierna, il mondo potrebbe apparire descritto e illustrato nella maniera più nitida da un puzzle, un gioco dove ogni pezzo deve trovare il suo perfetto incastro, ma che nel panorama internazionale odierno, invece, stenta ad incontrarlo. Tante e di svariata e mutevole natura sono le sfide globali di oggi, in un mondo che sembra aver rimandato quel momento che Francis Fukuyama aveva chiamato la “*fine della storia*”. Il modello statunitense, che ha incorporato l’Occidente con i suoi valori liberali e democratici, e che si è espanso anche nel resto del mondo, ha concesso a molti paesi una crescita economica per certi versi notevole, un appoggio alla governance per traghettare alcuni paesi verso la democrazia e lo sviluppo. Tuttavia, il sogno americano si è rivelato fallimentare, o per lo meno non ha soddisfatto le aspettative e le sfide del nuovo secolo. Molti paesi si sono svegliati in un incubo, non hanno retto l’impatto di due crisi finanziarie, prima quella di fine anni Novanta e poi la crisi del 2008, che hanno lacerato, soprattutto il tessuto sociale anche dei paesi sviluppati. La crisi dei valori democratici e del modello liberale statunitense ha condotto negli ultimi anni molti paesi a un bisogno di protezione, di deglobalizzazione, di riparo dagli shock esterni. Tuttavia, nel completo disordine, un paese si affaccia sulla scena globale dal lontano oriente. La Repubblica Popolare Cinese, che a partire dal 1978 ha messo in moto un processo di riforme e di apertura inaugurato dal presidente Deng Xiaoping e ripreso con tenacia e spinta futuristica fino all’attuale amministrazione Xi Jinping, scuote le dinamiche mondiali, si inserisce in un disordine proponendo un suo, personale modello per ridisegnare l’ordine mondiale. Un paese dalla cultura millenaria, agli occhi del mondo quasi ancestrale, si fa strada nel panorama accademico delle relazioni internazionali e riscrive la teoria del *balance of power*. Come analizzato da Organski, uno dei primi studiosi a fornire una teoria sistemica delle relazioni internazionali, la corsa al potere sarebbe insita nella natura umana, e la distribuzione di questo potere nella scena globale non è automatica, ma dipende da numerose varianti, naturali e sociali, che caratterizzano ogni Stato. Il mantenimento dell’equilibrio, quindi il bilanciamento del potere, sarebbe condizione essenziale che garantisce pace e stabilità all’interno dell’ordine internazionale. Essendo, tuttavia, la distribuzione del potere un meccanismo non automatico e piuttosto dinamico, gli Stati si trovano a contendersi il primato, il ruolo egemonico, nel più ampio perseguimento dei loro obiettivi nazionali (*national goals*), sfociando, spesso, nel

conflitto. La teoria della stabilità egemonica sostiene che, nel momento in cui un singolo stato detiene il primato di superpotenza, il sistema internazionale è destinato a rimanere stabile. Tuttavia, la fine di una egemonia e una possibile transizione di potere, sono causa di instabilità. Nel mondo contemporaneo, generalmente dominato, a partire dalla fine della cosiddetta Guerra Fredda, dall'egemonia statunitense, il ruolo della Repubblica Popolare Cinese, sempre più presente nelle dinamiche internazionali, che persegue i suoi obiettivi nazionali e che testimonia una crescita economica e uno sviluppo sociale senza precedenti, trova nell'approccio teorico realista una corrispondenza perfetta. Essa costituirebbe, pertanto, la potenza emergente il cui potere destabilizzerebbe l'ordine mondiale. Tuttavia, come affermato da Qin Yaqing, una teoria delle relazioni internazionali di stampo cinese sarebbe in corso di costruzione. La Cina non solo dimostra la sua ascesa come potenza mondiale attraverso i dati economici, ma si serve della sua cultura millenaria così come della sua filosofia e dei precetti del Confucianesimo per proporre alla comunità internazionale una propria alternativa, un suo modello, una sua visione dell'ordine mondiale che passerebbe dal concetto di *Tianxia*, un concetto più inclusivo dell'ordine mondiale, certamente gerarchico ma che tenga conto delle necessità di ogni singolo Stato appartenente alla comunità internazionale. Quella tra Stati Uniti e Cina viene spesso vista, soprattutto alla luce dei numerosi e accreditati studi occidentali sulle relazioni internazionali, come la nuova sfida del mondo contemporaneo. Il potere statunitense sarebbe in crisi, l'era Trumpiana di protezionismo viene spesso classificata come un periodo che ha concesso vantaggio alla Cina di Xi Jinping che senza troppi problemi e con una forte e decisa propaganda persegue il suo "*sogno cinese*". L'assalto a Capitol Hill del 6 Gennaio 2021, perdipiù, ha piegato ulteriormente la resistenza dei valori liberali e democratici diffusi dal modello statunitense, ha generato in molti paesi una risposta preoccupata, e ha spostato l'ago della bilancia dalla controparte cinese, che offre vantaggi economici, reti di scambio, ma soprattutto libertà di governance e protezione dagli shock finanziari. L'eccezionalismo americano sembra lasciare posto a quello cinese, un nuovo modo di fare politica, una proposta differente che, sebbene ritenuta dannosa per il mondo intero, una minaccia alle economie e alla democrazia, si rivela poi essere funzionale. Quella tra Cina e Stati Uniti è stata considerata dalle ultime amministrazioni americane come una vera e propria sfida, nel più grande quadro di una ormai assodata egemonia statunitense all'interno della scena globale. Studiosi come Graham Allison applicano alla lettera le teorie occidentali realiste delle relazioni internazionali, classificando il conflitto sino-americano come un confronto "*destinato alla guerra*".

L'interpretazione di questa relazione che intercorre tra Cina e Stati Uniti attraverso la "trappola di Tucidide", un concetto che analizza la storia e la cultura per tracciare le linee descrittive di una delle questioni di rilevanza internazionale più importanti del mondo contemporaneo, paragona questo confronto-conflitto a quello tra Sparta ed Atene nella Grecia Antica, che terminò con una sanguinosa guerra e la vittoria di Sparta, indebolita. Allo stesso modo, attingendo dalla storia, Allison fa luce sulla "minaccia Cinese" studiando le mosse del *Dragone*, proprio per invitare i due paesi a non rischiare di cadere nella stessa trappola che anche in altri momenti della storia ha coinvolto due potenze. La Cina guidata dalla figura ferma e determinata del Presidente Xi Jinping, però, risponde con una pacata attitudine alle considerazioni americane e occidentali che necessariamente vedrebbero quello tra Stati Uniti e Cina come un conflitto destinato alla guerra. Quella cinese è una strategia differente. Il Partito Comunista Cinese guidato dal presidente Xi ha costruito a partire dal 2013 un progetto politico senza precedenti, ambizioso, concretamente sognante, che si serve sì della propaganda, ma che raccoglie l'eredità delle precedenti amministrazioni per giustificare l'ascesa pacifica della Repubblica Popolare Cinese e il suo riscatto storico. In nome della sua appartenenza alla comunità internazionale, la Cina avrebbe, quindi, tutto il diritto e la legittimità di partecipare alle dinamiche internazionali. Per di più, cosciente del suo potere e dell'importanza acquisita a livello internazionale nel corso degli anni a partire dalla fine degli anni Settanta dopo l'attuazione di un massiccio processo di riforme, avrebbe la possibilità e il diritto di proporre la sua visione del mondo, applicare un suo modello di sviluppo e di politica, togliendosi di dosso le direttive stringenti del modello americano ma senza invadere la sovranità e l'integrità degli altri Stati. La Cina è un paese che gli Stati Uniti hanno spesso definito "senza precedenti", fuori dall'ordinario, un paese che, seguendo una propria strategia e una personale linea, è riuscita a risollevare un paese da una condizione di povertà estrema, ha raggiunto una crescita economica che la Banca Mondiale ha definito esorbitante e non convenzionale. Il Confucianesimo, come base culturale e come tradizione dalla quale il progetto politico di Xi Jinping attinge, fornisce una solida base per giustificare le mosse di Pechino e del partito comunista, che, al di là della propaganda, hanno dato i loro risultati. Questo lavoro documenta, analizza e argomenta attraverso studi e dati come soffermarsi sul "modello cinese" per analizzare la scena globale contemporanea possa costituire un elemento essenziale per guardare da una diversa prospettiva le sfide globali che attendono il pianeta, per fornire una nuova e originale soluzione e una più articolata risposta ai bisogni di una società sempre più varia e

stratificata. Analizzare il modello cinese dalla sua prospettiva non significa rompere con il modello americano-occidentale, né giustificare la propaganda cinese e il suo sistema autocratico. Significa, piuttosto, utilizzare un approccio comparato in un mondo dove la globalizzazione ha portato culture, usanze ed economie ad incrociarsi e a contagiarsi, e dove un approccio globale basato sulla cooperazione risulta sempre più necessario. Per utilizzare le parole del presidente Xi Jinping, il mondo è una “*comunità dal destino comune*”, che ha bisogno, quindi, di risposte comuni. All’interno degli studi di relazioni internazionali si aprono nuovi filoni interpretativi e nuove teorie, che, in contrasto alle classiche teorie realiste, tengono conto degli aspetti del mondo contemporaneo. Il *modello multiplex*, ad esempio, fa capo alla diversità e alla varietà della scena globale contemporanea e delle sfide globali che ormai vanno oltre i meri confini nazionali. Allo stesso modo, il modello geoeconomico tiene conto dell’economia di mercato mondiale come una delle principali dinamiche che muove il mondo contemporaneo, e che necessariamente scatta l’immagine di un ordine globale dove non esistono superpotenze, ma in cui ogni paese fornisce il suo contributo. In un mondo nel completo disordine, il “modello cinese” potrebbe fornire una nuova risposta per una reinterpretazione dell’ordine mondiale alla luce di un mondo che cambia.





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## INTRODUCTION

*“The longer I lived in China, the more I sensed that the Chinese people have outpaced the political system that nurtured their rise. The Party has unleashed the greatest expansion of human potential in world history—and spawned, perhaps, the greatest threat to its own survival”.*<sup>1</sup>

*Evan Osnos*

In Chinese language, the expression 亂七八糟 “*luàn qī bā zāo*” is a *chengyu*<sup>2</sup>, i.e. a four-character sentence equivalent to an idiom. Generally, *chengyu* deeply identifies Chinese culture and history, for no kind of sentence better suits the need to convey a very intrinsic meaning bound to its relative unraveling. “*In great disorder*” is the significance that gives the title to this work, with the ambition of narrating and analysing, through the instruments of international politics, a new world panorama increasingly shaken by internal and external dynamics that interact with each other, a world in disorder in which, contrariwise, People’s Republic of China is seeking its own order, its own position. The established *pax americana*<sup>3</sup>, which carries with it its distinguishing liberal-democratic values, seems to be walking on thin ice tracks these days, and the moment that Francis Fukuyama called “*the end of history*”<sup>4</sup> seems now to be a new, distant, future date, eternally rescheduled by the advent and affirmation of new forces, new policies, new ways of understanding the global scene. China, a remote culturally distant country, governmentally different from the established and now taken-for-granted Western democracy, generally appears as an evil, austere *Dragon* that seems to purge an already established and guaranteed order. In antithesis to the Western narrative that customarily views China as a threat to the dogma embodied by the US, this

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<sup>1</sup> Osnos, E. (2015). *Age of Ambition. Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

<sup>2</sup> *Chengyu* is one of the most profound expressions of ancient China. These idiomatic phrases, often consisting of just four characters, have become part of everyday speech over centuries, but they are in fact the result of a great historical, philosophical, or literary tradition. (see Trentin, G. (2017). *Chengyu. Cento Aforismi della Tradizione Cinese. Vol. 1*. Macerata, Quodlibet.)

<sup>3</sup> *Pax Americana* is the term used to describe the status of relative peace and order after the end of World War II, by which United States of America exercised economic, political and military influence overseeing the so-called “Western bloc”. (see Nye, J. (1990). “The Changing Nature of World Power”. *Political Science Quarterly*. 105 (2): 177–192)

<sup>4</sup> Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York, Free Press.

project presents itself as an alternative path to a too often one-sided view of global relations, seeking to untangle, as far as possible, the complexity of the *Chinese dream* (中国梦 *Zhōngguó mèng*)<sup>5</sup>, its precise and defined identity, and its internal order that so perturbs. Furthermore, in contrast to a perspective that foresees the advent of a new *Cold War* between the US and China, this work sets out to consider the new geopolitical perspectives, especially on the Chinese side, which although they require an analysis that considers past history, inevitably adapt themselves to a changed, different, globalised world in its most peculiar facets.

The main title of this work is composed of two outstanding as well as noteworthy historical events: the “Rebellion of the Seven Kingdoms” expressed by number seven (七 *qī*), and the “Rebellion of the Eight Kings” expressed by number eight (八 *bā*). Linked together to form the *chengyu*, and buttressed by the adjectives 乱 *luàn* and 糟 *zāo* meaning “*in disorder, in confusion, turbulent*”<sup>6</sup>, the use of this classical expression props up the complexity of the theme that will be developed. As these two rebellions in ancient Chinese history, which took place during the Western Han dynasty, seriously threatened the central authority and the system of values created by the Chinese culture, the state of disorder can be transferred to the contemporary history that recounts the contemporary world, a world that appears once again flustered by conflicts, crises, and uncertainty.

The assault on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. on January 6, 2021 by a mobilisation of more than two thousand supporters of former U.S. President Donald Trump has become a confirmed symbol of the crisis hitting the values of democracy, right there in the bastion of the West.<sup>7</sup> Seeking to overturn the 2020 presidential election literally disrupting the session of Congress that would have formalised President-elect Joe Biden's victory, the upheaval has largely turned into an outstanding historical event that concretely confirms

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<sup>5</sup> *Chinese dream* (中国梦 *Zhōngguó mèng*) is the slogan used by PRC's president Xi Jinping to describe a project of rejuvenation of the nation, a moral, philosophical and material package of reforms aiming at stimulating the transition towards a socialist market economy (see Chai, W., Chai, M., (2013). “The Meaning of Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream”. *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 20 (2): 95-97).

<sup>6</sup> Trentin, G. (2017). *Chengyu. Cento Aforismi della Tradizione Cinese*. Vol. 1. Macerata, Quodlibet.

<sup>7</sup> Allin, D. (2021). “The Assault on the Capitol and American Democracy. *International Institute of Strategic Studies*, January 8, 2021. Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/survival-blog/2021/01/capitol-assault-american-democracy>

a crisis of conventional values and unipolarity of the West, as well as of a democracy tarnished by a world that seems powerless in the face of new challenges.<sup>8</sup>

In the old continent, the wind of populism is blowing strong, and has become more alive and powerful in recent years. It has awakened with its renewed freshness a form of nationalism that fights against an excessive globalisation, a disproportionate submission to financial and economic values, and protects its borders from anyone who tries to cross them. The Brexit event, indeed, marked a watershed even in the European Union, a modern, progressive, futuristic project whose foundations are being eroded by certain countries that do not share a single, all-encompassing vision of the new global challenges. As the Italian journalist and analyst Federico Rampini writes in the preface to a special edition of his book “*Le Linee Rosse*” (*Red Lines*), “*the democratic West appears to us to be discouraged, exhausted, unsure of everything. The authoritarian regimes are pressing at our borders and are sending out a disturbing narrative: we are now decadent, they have the future in their hands*”<sup>9</sup>. The attack to Ukraine by Russian Federation erupted on 24 February 2022, moreover, seems to echo the glory of old empires, a return to the past that seems to have lost its historical significance, and which allows to fully understand the fragility of interdependence and the crisis of the aforementioned values.

The Middle East stands out as a disputed and dusty battleground, between the great powers during the Cold War and now proceeding to be configured as one of the largest crisis areas on the international stage. After the attack of 11 September, the so-called *war on terror*<sup>10</sup> produced a further deterioration of the regional context. Iraq at war almost uninterruptedly since 1980, Iran and its nuclear programme posing a serious threat not only to the region but to the stability of the whole world, Afghanistan far from being pacified, Lebanon paralysed by the specter of civil war, Palestinian Authority with faltering solutions to the conflict with Israel. Middle East, along with its wealth of natural

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<sup>8</sup> Eglitis, A. Follain, J. (2021). “NATO Chief says U.S. Capitol Attack shows Democracy under Threats”. *Bloomberg*, March 13, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> See Rampini, F. (2022). *Linee Rosse*. Milan, Mondadori. Preface to the special edition for *Corriere della sera*.

<sup>10</sup> The term “war on terror” was coined by former US President J. W. Bush in an official speech to the US Congress, generally referring now to the ongoing international military campaign launched by the United States after September 11 attacks to Islamist groups (see Bazinet, K. R. (2001). “A Fight vs Evil, Bush and Cabinet tells U.S”. *Daily News*, September 17, 2001. Available at:

[https://web.archive.org/web/20100505200651/http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/news/2001/09/17/2001-09-17\\_a\\_fight\\_vs\\_evil\\_bush\\_and\\_c.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20100505200651/http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/news/2001/09/17/2001-09-17_a_fight_vs_evil_bush_and_c.html))



resources, continues to jeopardize the world order from outside and inside, in a chess game where the last move appeared to be slow in coming.<sup>11</sup>

The map of the world looks like a puzzle to be re-constructed and put in order, where each piece, although apparently complete, struggles to fit with the other ones. From one of the towers of the Great Wall, one of the oldest rock faces in history and symbol of defence, separation, but also of engineering, there from the far East, China looks at the world from its own original perspective. “*America is back*”<sup>12</sup>, the catchphrase pronounced by US President Joe Biden has been replacing former president Donald Trump’s motto “*America first*”<sup>13</sup>, though its concrete application is still to be completely unraveled. On the global stage, meanwhile, People’s Republic of China is stepping forth as superpower, thus affecting the old American prevalence and *exceptionalism*. The balance of power between the two countries results to be increasingly delicate, and while China is enacting its policies and investments through its peculiar instruments throughout the world, the US president Biden is every day and continuously trying to shape his own signature policy to cope with what is dubbed as “*The China Challenge*”<sup>14</sup>. The *Dragon* is carving out its own path, a path that appears to be orderly, precise, with great ideas reflecting its age-old culture, its philosophy, and shaking up a precarious world balance. China is on everyone’s lips, and has become a difficult pill to swallow. A country that is slowly re-emerging from a recent past of humiliation is now convulsing the financial markets, it is transforming itself from being the “factory of the world”<sup>15</sup> to a great power that wants to count and be counted. A new, determined, tough, modern China that contrasts with the conventional American model by making it appear worn out, and with the veiled intention of wanting

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<sup>11</sup> Danner, M. (2005). “Taking Stocks of the Forever War”. *The New York Times*, September 11, 2005. Available at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180329125623/http://mondrian.die.udec.cl/~mmedina/Desvarios/Files/Danner-TakingStockOfTheForeverWar.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> The White House (2020). *Inaugural address by Joseph R. Biden, Jr.* January 20, 2021. Web Archive. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/01/20/inaugural-address-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr/>

<sup>13</sup> Blake, A. (2017). “Donald Trump’s full inauguration speech transcript annotated”. *The Washington Post*, January 20, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Policy Planning Staff (2020). *The Elements of China Challenge*. U.S. Office of the Secretary of State, November 2020. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> The Chinese economy is commonly defined as a production powerhouse, and many of the objects we commonly use report the label “Made in China” for its manufacturing. For more information: Hanson, G. H., (2012). “The rise of middle kingdoms: Emerging economies in global trade”. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 26(2) (2012).

to if not replace it but challenge it. To enter the Dragon's head may convey a new pattern of interpretation to describe China and the contemporary world stage. This work poses itself with the well-documented aim of wanting to understand and unravel the new dynamics that move the world today, without necessarily having to relate the new patterns to classical interpretations, rather using them to provide new mindsets. A Chinese perspective on international relations will be argued within this thesis, trying to succeed in the humble endeavour of looking at the world from different viewpoints in order to understand it better, and to unravel its most tangled knots. I entered "*the head of the dragon*"<sup>16</sup> a few years ago as a simple Chinese student at Beijing Normal University, and that year of experience gave me the opportunity to notice how Chinese society looks at the world in a different, futuristic, new and unexpected way. Despite the social differences that emerge to a greater or lesser extent, China seemed to me to be really projected towards a peculiar way of conceiving the world, society, and the purposes of politics. It would therefore be reductive to summarise the rise of China only in an anti-American light, as this would neither honour nor enhance the historical and cultural foundations that lie down on both sides of the two countries.

In the first chapter, a theoretical and foundational perspective about the balance of power will be presented, to understand how the power distributes itself, how countries are correlated with it and how power is exerted. The rise of China can practically re-balance the power that US possessed so far. The *power transition theory* by A. F. K. Organski provides one of the most successful structural theories in world politics to describe the interaction between war and peace acted by nations and can be utilized as main instrument of interpretation to analyse how effectively China can surpass the US as the world's most powerful state, and how it can affect the international system. To pursue power is natural for human beings, but of course its intensity depends on how much emphasis is put upon it. A new perspective on international relations and the way of understanding the global scene that has emerged from recent studies on the Chinese side will also be presented. China, for its part, is also committed to giving its own view of things, studying and

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<sup>16</sup> Giada Messetti, an Italian journalist, gives one of her essays the title *In the Head of the Dragon*, mindful of her experience in China and providing the image of literally entering into the heart of the country, classically represented by a dragon, to grasp its most hidden essence (see Messetti, G. (2020). *Nella Testa del Dragone*. Milan, Mondadori)

reinterpreting the world in the light of its culture and the philosophical values that have characterised one of the world's oldest civilisations for millennia.

In the second chapter will be analysed the Western public opinion, and US policy above all, together with how it tackles with China's ascent, how they tackled it in the recent past, and how US policy-making is striving to find a new balance inaugurating a "China challenge". The *pax americana* that has long established a world order seems to be teetering on a razor's edge, new global challenges are undermining the values that have been built up and consolidated since the Second World War, and the *American dream* seems to have already been realised. Perhaps the *Chinese dream* is the one the world is hoping to have in a new night, which seems to usher in a new phase of international relations in which China is asserting itself. By tracing the history of international relations between the US and China in the light of cultural, philosophical and even linguistic factors, the Chinese view of relations between the two countries and how they intend to handle their acknowledged role as a superpower will be presented in parallel to the American-Western one.

In the third chapter, clues and an interpretation about a possible "new Cold War" will be provided, a quite common view by many scholars from which to start to analyse and unravel how the relationship between US and China is going to evolve. The containment policy that the United States once used towards the former Soviet Union now seems to be shifting towards China. It almost seems to be taken for granted that a comparison between China and the United States is a must, one that traces the former rivalry between the USSR and the US, but it would probably be appropriate to consider the facts not only from a historically new perspective, but also taking into account the new dynamics that now characterise the modern world and the international community. While the US believed to win a cultural, ideological and political battle that shifted the needle of the world's scales to its side, the Asian continent, and China in particular, are walking on a new track, breaking every classical pattern. In particular, the thesis of the Thucydides trap propagated by the political scientist and analyst Graham Allison will be refuted, providing the Chinese counter-perspective which, referring to some of the dogmas of its culture, sees no possibility of a clash between the great powers, other than a collaboration that, in the light of a changing world, takes into account the needs of individual countries and a trade-off to be sought.

The fourth and final chapter will be reserved to China. Going back on the track of the main assumption that drives the whole work, it will be confuted, especially with a Chinese

perspective, that China is pursuing its own path, its own project, which does not really consider confrontation with the United States to be a priority. The *Chinese Dream* is the political programme of the Xi Jinping's administration which, despite its points of clash with the conventional Western culture from which we are used to analysing geopolitical situations, is reflected and deeply rooted in the Chinese tradition. Perhaps history, as cyclical as it is, is now passing through China, in the same way that it did last century when it forged the *exceptionalism* of the US. What if that of China was a game of chance? What if the glorious past that lived on route on the Silk Road had only come to a halt and is now in a position to resume its course? In what many describe as a worldwide crisis of the values of capitalism and democracy, a "*Chinese model*" is proposed, and perhaps imposed, as an alternative model for reinterpreting the world. Even in the characters that designate the country in its language, namely 中国 (*Zhōngguó*), China may carry, in a sense, the destiny of the entire planet, but at the same time many are the perspective that, politically speaking, set new balances of power. New geopolitical and geo-economic perspectives are now opening up within the studies of international relations, theories that no longer seem to be merely oriented towards the West, but which take into account the strong presence and relevant role of Asia, particularly China, within the global scene. A new way of managing and securing the world order.



## CHAPTER 1

### 乘风破浪 (*chéng fēng pò làng*)

#### ***“To have high ambitions”. Power Transition theory and the rise of China.***

*“The world's most colourful characters stride its stage. The world's most significant events make up its history. Relations between nations have been exceptionally turbulent in the years since 1914. Two great world wars have shaken us to our roots, and we dread that somehow we will set off a third. These same years have seen the United States rise so rapidly in wealth and power that almost nonchalantly we have taken over the leadership of the world from Britain, only to find that what was grasped without effort may require great effort to hold, for new and jealous giants are growing up beside us”.*<sup>17</sup>

A.F.K. Organski

A change of enormous proportions is taking place in the political and social system of the world today. Already since the 1970s and 1980s, as E. J. Hobsbawm states, a period of universal or world crisis has opened up. According to his analysis, in fact, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist regimes would have produced political uncertainty, instability, chaos, a civil war over an enormous area of the planet and, at the same time, would also have *“destroyed the system that had stabilised international relations over the last [...] years and laid bare the precariousness of the internal political arrangements of individual states, which were based on that international stability”*.<sup>18</sup> Although the race for power is understood to be inherent in human nature, and thus by inference in the very nature of a nation-state, power itself changes, varies, in its intensity, its position, its exercise and application. Power tidies up, organizes, pacifies, but at the same time destabilises, generates deep crises that change the direction of the world itself. *Power transition theory* by A.F.K. Organski can convey the most suitable theoretical framework to investigate how power is exerted by states, how it can vary and how it can

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<sup>17</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Hobsbawm, E. J. (1995). *The Age of Extremes. A History of the World, 1914-1991*. New York, Vintage.

be transferred. In what is labeled as “*the business among powerful nations*”<sup>19</sup>, the United States and China now occupy the position of protagonists, on that stage that in the past, from the time of the Roman Empire, had been the battlefield of the world's greatest powers. *Power Transition Theory* supports the target of this thesis, and at least helps, if not to understand in a comprehensive way, to sketch out how hegemonies and planetary balances change. International politics theories act as a toolkit to understand and unravel why something occurs and occurred in the international relations, providing guidelines to analyse relations between states and the cause and effect of the events that take place in the polyhedral world in which we are living in.

Nevertheless, a risk of falling into the trap of unipolarity when analysing an assumption that is extremely delicate, because of its great scope, is too often encountered. Unraveling the new perspectives that are opening and will open up in the field of contemporary international relations is a process that necessarily requires multiple points of view, which take into account the cultural substratum of the country under consideration. Even in the case of the analysis of the relations that exist and will exist between the United States of America and the emerging Chinese power, it would be opportune not to consider the United States as the only possible perspective to interpret the facts. Undoubtedly, as Qin Ya Qing<sup>20</sup>, professor of the Foreign Affairs University of Peking, affirms, a Chinese-labeled theory of international relations is “*in the making*”<sup>21</sup>, a theoretical framework that can unquestionably draw on Western theories to interpret global assumptions, but conserves within its framework a five-thousand-year-old culture, a vision of a China that has become aware of its role on the world stage, and that necessarily seed down from its own culture the roots for a new way of seeing the path that the planet will undertake. The world chaos that has led the nowadays world into a state of complete disorder may, hence, emerge for an improper perspective to view the

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<sup>19</sup> Lai, D. (2011). *The United States and China in Power Transition* (pp. 5–28), p. 5. Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12113>.

<sup>20</sup> Qin Ya Qing is President and Professor of International Studies of China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU) and Chancellor of the China Diplomatic Academy, two of the institutions born in the framework of the attempt of creating a Chinese-labeled version of International Relations’ theory, and started in 1953 the establishment of the Department of Diplomatic Studies at Renmin University of China (see Yaqing, Q. (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales” / “Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 100, 67–90).

<sup>21</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales” / “Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 100, 67–90. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41803504>

world itself. A new concept of order must be shaped, which necessarily lead to new world structures, a “*very modern solution to the very modern problem of world order*”.<sup>22</sup>

### **1.1. *World politics. The drive for power in human nature* by A.F.K. Organski**

If a theory “*is always for someone and for some purpose*”<sup>23</sup>, it is possible to state that the theoretical framework concerning International Relations is a West-labeled, or, better to say, that International Relations is a western discipline. This statement appears to be highly noteworthy when discussing the “*Eurocentrism*” or the Western matrix embedded in this academic discipline, as it underline that any other theoretical approaches was developed at certain times and for certain reasons. What is generally called as the “West” possesses geographical and ideological connotations, as it refers to the topographical western part of the world and to those set of ideas and meanings brought by the Cold War conflict between the West and the East, and by the need of the West to define itself in accordance with another entity<sup>24</sup>. Dualism as a philosophical framework, indeed, has always characterized the western way of thinking. The bias of International Relations theories could be explained by the fact that the discipline of IR originated in the West as a tool aimed at advising policy-makers to manage the maintenance of peace and also conflict prevention.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the West was and is still conscious about the sense of “*international-ness*”, a concept that, besides its geographical connotation, underlies the structure of an *ego* that stands with a *other*.<sup>26</sup> As a matter of fact, the primary focus of analysis for the mainstream International Relations theories is the State, that are not seen as collective representations of their peoples, but as depersonified entities, which act and take decisions on their own.

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<sup>22</sup> Callahan, W. A. (2008). “Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?”. *International Studies Review*, 10(4).

<sup>23</sup> Cox, R. W. (1981). “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory”. *Millennium*, 10(2), p.207 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298810100020501>

<sup>24</sup> Abrahamsen, R. (2007) “Postcolonialism” in Griffiths, M. (eds.) *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century. An Introduction*. London, Routledge, pp. 111-122.

<sup>25</sup> Chernoff, F. (2005) *The power of international theory: reforging the link to foreign policy-making through scientific enquiry*. London, Routledge.

<sup>26</sup> Hall, D. L., & Ames, R. T. (2005). *Anticipating China: Thinking through the narratives of Chinese and Western culture*. Chinese edition. Shanghai, Xuelin Press.



In his essay “*On the History and Historiography of International Relations*”, Brian C. Schmidt reconfirms the “*overwhelming and continuing dominance of the American International Relations scholarly community*”<sup>27</sup>. Since the post-World War II, in fact, the development of this specific discipline was principally guided and organized by scholars of American institutions that contributed to give shape to what is labeled as “liberal international order” or “US-led international order”, namely the *ensemble* of rules, structures and relationship that portrait and personalize the contemporary world’s patterns and stability<sup>28</sup>. This normative worldview, that indicates what the world ought to look like and how it might, became the set of policies and institutions, as well as of established practices that characterises the at-the-moment pace of the world. It was not presented and applied as continuation of an imperialist way of acting, though as a new, ordered system based on universalistic principles and “*applicable to all regardless of race, colour or history*”<sup>29</sup>.

From the Peace of Westphalia, signed in 1648, a world of independent sovereign nations was constituted, in which each state exerts its own sovereignty over its territory. Considered by most of the political scientists to be the beginning of the modern international system, the watershed marked by the Westphalian system highlighted the meaning of “power” as multifaceted concept, basically establishing that external forces should avoid interfering in another country's domestic affairs.<sup>30</sup> There is always an uneven distribution of power, and some nations are inherently more powerful than others. Over the ages, indeed, big nations have sought dominance in the international system. As Organski observes, “*at any given moment the single most powerful nation on earth heads an international order which includes also some other major powers of secondary importance and some minor nations and dependencies as well*”<sup>31</sup>. The drive for power,

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<sup>27</sup> Schmidt, B.C. (2012). “On the History and Historiography of International Relations”. *Handbook of International Relations*, p.4. Available at:

<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.456.6348&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Parmar, I. (2018). “The US-led liberal order: imperialism by another name?”. *International Affairs*, 94(1), pp. 151-172. Available at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200506231453/https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/18211/3/Parmar%20REVISED%20LIO%20article.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Cox, M., Stokes, D., (2012). *US Foreign Policy*. Oxford, Oxford University press, pp. 14-15.

<sup>30</sup> Osiander, A. (2001). “Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth”. *International Organization*, 55(2), 251-287. Available at:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-organization/article/abs/sovereignty-international-relations-and-the-westphalian-myth/33B6B7773432BE494F31518952ABE881>

<sup>31</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf, p. 194.

hence, concretely depends on how much emphasis every state can assume on it, in their realist quest “*to be free of external control*”<sup>32</sup>. States are free agents, crafting alliances, pursuing peculiar interests, establishing their own most accurate policies.

### *1.1.1. Power and balance of power*

Power configures as the ability to influence the behaviour or the attitude of another entity in accordance with one’s own objectives. It is not just a thing, but it is an essential part of the relationship existing among individuals or groups, in this specific case between states. Power lies and endures as an aspect to every relationship, and

“[...] *whether two nations are friends or enemies or merely potential allies, whether they fight together, trade together or have only certain cultural interests in common, each nation cares what the other is doing, and the minute one nation cares, the other has the power to influence it*”.<sup>33</sup>

The political relations among independent nations are traditionally explained by the concept of ***balance of power***, a cornerstone principle of international relations, as well as a “*fundamental law of politics*”<sup>34</sup>. According to Organski, the maintenance of the equilibrium is necessary for peace and stability to be guaranteed, that equilibrium enshrined in the Westphalian system and supported by the *1815 Vienna Congress* that, albeit at European level, remarked the attempt to create a first, real, balanced international order to sustain peace and cooperation among the great powers.<sup>35</sup>

The main assumptions of the theory of the balance of power can be set forth as follows: when there is a large number of nations with varying amounts of power that seek to maximize it, there is a fundamental tendency for the entire system to be in balance. That is to say, some nations are thus able to gather themselves together in a way that no single nation or other group of nations is enough powerful to overwhelm the others, thus power results balanced by that of some opposing group. Should this balance be preserved, there is peace, and the independence of small nations is assured. Basically, Organski underlines

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 66.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 104.

<sup>34</sup> Wight, M. (1946). *Power Politics*. London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, pp. 45-46.

<sup>35</sup> Dakin, D. (1979). “The Congress of Vienna, 1814-1815 and its antecedents” in *Europe’s Balance of Power 1815-1848*. London, Macmillan, pp. 14-33.

the difference between two kinds of existing balance of power: a simple one, and a multiple one. While in the first kind only two nations or large group of nations with approximately equal strength are involved, the second category, conveyed with the image of a chandelier, involves many nations and many groups of nations balancing one another and with further balances within balances, “*where the members of one of the major world blocs balance off each other as far as minor disputes within the bloc are concerned*”<sup>36</sup>.

Nevertheless, an underlying assumption is enshrined in the foundation of the theory: as their interests differ and because each one pursue the maximisation of the power, nations are in conflict with each other. According to S. M. Walt, professor of International Affairs at Harvard University, alliances are, in fact, crafted by states to protect themselves from those whose major or superior resources could pose a threat to their own existence and functioning.<sup>37</sup> In the international system, moreover, it doesn’t endure a univocal definition of alliances. H. J. Morgenthau, considered one of the founding fathers of the realist school of international relations, argued that alliances are properly a way of manipulating the existing balance, and of jeopardising it, in a competitive system dominated by anarchy and in a perpetual state of war.<sup>38</sup>

### *1.1.2. Determinants of power and Power Transition Theory*

Balancing is a dynamic affair, as continuous adjustments to this balance are necessary in order to preserve an equilibrium. States act, move, shape, far from being static. In the same way, as Organski highlights, the distribution of power is certainly not an automatic mechanism. The distribution of power does not balance itself. It depends, though, on natural determinants and social determinants that peculiarly outline a nation. “*The major determinants of national power are population size, political efficiency, and economic development*”<sup>39</sup>. Any shift or change in one of these areas can lead to a consequent change in the distribution of power. Organski commented that the “*present instability*” (referring to the period right after the end of the Second World War and the Cold War and the set

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<sup>36</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf, p. 274.

<sup>37</sup> Walt, S. M., (1987). *The Origins of Alliances*. New York, Cornell University Press.

<sup>38</sup> Morgenthau, H. J., (1960). *The Purpose of American Politics*. New York, Knopf.

<sup>39</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf, p. 340.

up shaped by the Cold War) of the international order was based on a concrete matter, which is pictured by population increase and decrease, different settings of political organization, as well as industrial and production power. The interaction of all these factors conveys each nation's amount of power, extending or lowering down the ability of a nation to influence the behavior of other nations, its capacity "*to persuade, to reward, to punish, or to apply force to other nations*"<sup>40</sup>. Particularly, when a nation undergoes a process of industrialisation, it passes by a transition of power that goes through three stages:

- A stage of potential power before the process of industrialization, in which generally nations possess a rural economy and a low productivity
- A stage of transitional growth in power, in which nations properly undergo the process of industrialisation as well as improve their governmental and political capabilities, increasing their capacity to influence other nations
- A stage of power maturity, where a nation is economically developed, experiments a growth rate and a rise of the living standards

Organski finely warned about the last step, reckoning that "*power is relative, not absolute. It's not a characteristic of the nation itself, but a characteristic of its relationship with the other nations*"<sup>41</sup>. That is to say that, while industrialisation process can persevere for nations in the last stage, other nation entering the process will be automatically dropped in a confrontation with the ones that reached power maturity. He writes, "*it is like a race in which one runner after another goes into a brief sprint*"<sup>42</sup>.

The theoretical assumptions, outlined by Organski right after the world was projecting itself towards the Cold War era, result noteworthy to sketch out the present scenario. The world is now living upon the second stage of power transition, in which some nations proceed in the process of industrialization, albeit with a slow pace, while others are emerging with obstinacy, hard-pressing in different ways whom thought to possess a power advantage.

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<sup>40</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf, p. 125.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 343.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

### 1.1.3. National goals, international goals and power

“A goal is a future state of affairs that someone considers desirable and worth spending some effort to achieve”<sup>43</sup>. Undoubtedly, a goal does not exist in the abstract, but it needs someone's mind or someone's thought. Yet, as individuals in an organized and well-established society may share common goals, and because they have national governments that act for them, it is possible to categorise goals as notional goals. According to Organski, a nation may have a variety of goals, that can differ according to their scope and their kind of application. It would be oversimplified, then, that only the pursuit of national power can be classified as a national goal. In a broader sense, power may constitute the target of another specific national goal, for it is through them that nations, in the long time of world history, gained importance and even predominance.

Apart from power and wealth, a nation may also crave cultural goals. The preservation of the national culture is a quite inherent goal of every nation. Indeed, the safeguarding of culture is often used by national governments to encourage a nationalistic sentiment, or as a means to unify the nation and increase the power and effectiveness of the government in its dealings and relations with other nations. Most nations today are not simply political units, they are also cultural units. Within this groundwork of action, according to Organski even peace, “*which nearly all nations consider desirable, other things being equal*”<sup>44</sup>, is one of the most accredited national goals, notwithstanding its action of limiting the pursuit of other goals. The assessment of the national goals pursued by a nation determines how power is exerted, to what extent, highlighting at the same time the importance of a precise perspective in the inherent race for power that Organski poses at the foundation of his theory. The more intense the willingness to share and to affirm national goals, hence national values, the more a nation's power can affect other countries in the international arena. Especially in the case of a presumed transition of power to occur, it will be possible to assess to what extent a country is powerful and can challenge the existing order. About national goals and international values, H. Taylor said that:

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<sup>43</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf, p. 62.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 72.

“All national goals are legitimate, no matter which nation has them or what they are. Once the principle of self-determination is invoked [...]. The state has a perfect right to establish its own national goals and to set up an institutional apparatus to further them.”<sup>45</sup>

Discussing about the role of United States using its national power to create a viable and just international order, Taylor stated that, as long as a country is acting generously and in the interest of world society, it is actually shaping an international order, as well as internationalizing its goals.

#### 1.1.4. The structure of international system

*Power Transition Theory* is generally encapsulated in the realist vision of international relations. As the main assumptions of the realist school provide, states exist within an international system based on anarchy, in which they are ultimately dependent on their own power and capabilities, to further their national interests. The survival of the state, including its people, its political system and territorial integrity is configured as the main goal within an everlasting struggle for power. Although being power the currency through which states do their business, *Power Transition Theory* yet detaches itself from the mainstream realist school of thought due to its dynamic description of the international system.<sup>46</sup> Unlike realism’s emphasis on anarchy, the power transition perspective envisions politics as a hierarchy of nations with varying degrees of cooperation and competition. Power transition can be defined as dynamic because, given a static structure of international system, it is basically complemented by dynamic factors that are able demonstrate how and why change occurs. Those changes focus on differential growth rates of states, and how their growth alters power relations between nations, resulting, thus, in new relationships within states and in the formation of new political

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<sup>45</sup> Taylor, H. (1965). “National Goals and International Values”. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 47(4), 175–179. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20371523>

<sup>46</sup> Bell, D. (2021). "Realism". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 22, 2021. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/realism-political-and-social-science>. Last accessed 4 April 2022; Little, R. (2007). *Kenneth N. Waltz's Theory of International Politics. In The Balance of Power in International Relations: Metaphors, Myths and Models*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 167-212.

and economic entities as well as new “competing groups.”<sup>47</sup> International relations are, hence, always flowing, affecting with this dynamism the great power status because of changes in another “national power”<sup>48</sup>. Since the period of the industrialization, rising nations typically make efforts to alter the international order to

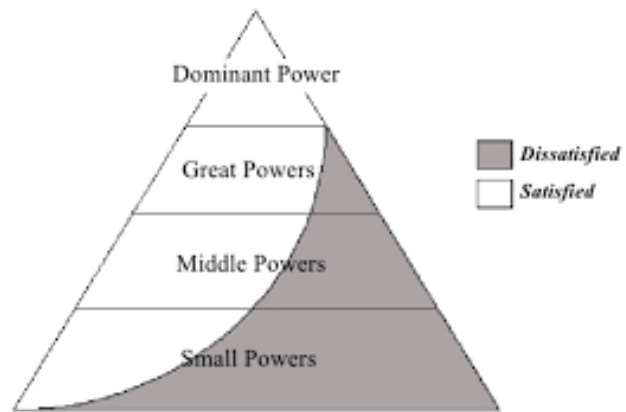


Figure 1. The structure of international system (Organski, 1961).

better serve their interests. As Robert Gilpin also states in his work *War and Change in World Politics*, expanding nations’ efforts necessarily bring them to be confronted to the dominant nation about the rules governing the existing international system. In this clash of diverging national goals, war will inevitably rise between the dominant power and the challenger, if they are not capable of settling the dispute in peaceful ways.<sup>49</sup> The “hegemonic war” stands out as the tool that great powers first use to resolve the differences in their relations or to create a new international order.

#### 1.1.5. The hegemonic stability theory (HST) and the theory of hegemonic war

“Every international system that the world has known has been a consequence of the territorial, economic, and diplomatic realignments that have followed such hegemonic struggles”<sup>50</sup>. According to the *Hegemonic Stability Theory*, the international system is more likely to remain stable when there is a single state as dominant world power, i.e., the hegemon. Starting from this assumption, the end of a hegemony is generally going to diminish the stability of the entire international system, consequently compromising the balance of power.

<sup>47</sup> DiCicco, J. M., (2017). “Power Transition Theory and the essence of revisionism”. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, September 2017. Available at: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~fczagare/PSC%20504/DiCicco%20PT%20and%20Revisionism>

<sup>48</sup> Lai, D. (2011). *The United States and China in Power Transition* (pp. 5–28). Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, p.6.

<sup>49</sup> Gilpin, R. (1981). *War and Change in World Politics*, London, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

Throughout the history of mankind there have been numerous powers confronted against each other, just to claim the ownership of a small piece of land, to dominate a geographical area of interest, even to conquer entire continents, and finally, in recent centuries, to race for global hegemony. Kingdoms, empires, nations themselves, have necessarily undergone an ascent, a decline, and then an overtaking in their succession. The protagonists of history have thus experienced cycles of hegemony, alternating with periods of transition which, in turn, have shaped geopolitical dynamics. The Greek word “ἡγεμονία” (hēgemonía), meaning "authority, rule, political supremacy"<sup>51</sup>, accurately outlines the sense of leadership and dominance by one state or social group over others. Greek history, moreover, brought about one of the most accurate examples that started off the analytical foundation of International Relations theory for many generations of scholars. Thucydides<sup>52</sup> recounted about Athens being the hegemon during the early time in human history, but its hegemonic position was overthrown by Sparta after fighting for almost twenty-seven years.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the rise of Athens literally instilled in Sparta a sentiment of fear, not only due to its economic prosperity but also because of its military power. In the realist anarchic structure of international system, security-seeking states are generally ending up in conflict, for “*a balance ceases to be true as soon as its adjustment is entrusted to anyone. It must either be maintained by its own equilibrium, or it becomes a pretence, sustained only by the application of arbitrary force*”<sup>54</sup>. Thucydides declared that he was writing, many and many years ago, something peculiar, for “*who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future [...], a possession for all time*”<sup>55</sup>. Assuming that the empirical phenomena he observed would have repeated

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<sup>51</sup> Hegemony. (2021). In *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* (2021st ed.). Oxford University Press.

<sup>52</sup> *Thucydides* was an Athenian historian. In his work *History of the Peloponnesian War* recounts the war between Sparta and Athens happened in the fifth-century BC. He is dubbed as the father of "scientific history" as well as the father of the school of *political realism*, intending the political behaviour of individuals and the subsequent outcomes of relations between states as ultimately mediated by, and constructed upon, fear and self-interest (see Korab-Karpowicz, W. J. (2010) “Political Realism in International Relations” in Zalta, E. N. (2013) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/realism-intl-relations/>; Strauss, L. (1964) *The City and Men*. Chicago, Randy McNally, p. 139.

<sup>53</sup> Hang, N. T. T. (2017). “The Rise of China: Challenges, Implications, and Options for the United States”. *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 30(1/2), 47–64. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26465816>

<sup>54</sup> Pollard, A. F. (1923). “The Balance of Power”. *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs*, 2(2), p. 59. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3014464>

<sup>55</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* London, Scribe, p. 28.



throughout human history, he basically revealed for the first time the “*underlying and unalterable nature of what is today called international relations*”<sup>56</sup>. He was the first to set forth the idea that the dynamic of international relations is provided by the differential growth of power among states, a driving force of international relations that generates, therefore, the rise and the fall of a nation’s position in the world stage.

Sober up, in the current configuration of international relations, understood as interactions within a system, it would be possible, according to G. Arrighi and B. J. Silver, to establish that there is no uniformity of agreement on the direction and meaning of the current transformations of the global scenario, precisely because we are in a *systemic transformation*, a process of radical re-organization of the modern world system.<sup>57</sup> This “hegemonic transition”, as also argued by Organski, proposes again a cyclical pattern experienced before on two historical occasions, sharing important similarities with the two previous periods of world hegemonic transition, from Dutch to British in the eighteenth century, and from British to US in the twentieth century.<sup>58</sup>

The decline of the dominant power on a world scale, in this case the United States, is again accompanied by the emergence of a new dispute between the two possible contenders who now want to occupy the place of that declining power. The hegemonic collapse is the decisive turning point in hegemonic transitions, it is the moment when the systemic organization that had been established and settled by the hegemonic power, now in prerequisite decline, disintegrates, and systemic chaos ensues. Yet, this is also the moment in which new hegemonies may be shaped.

With what Arrighi and Silver describe as “Sisyphean fatigue”<sup>59</sup>, declining hegemonic states must try to contain the forces pushing towards them. soon. late, even a small disturbance can tip the scales in favour of the forces that, consciously or unconsciously, are eroding the already precarious stability of existing structures, and thus erode the

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<sup>56</sup> Gilpin, R. (1988). “The Theory of Hegemonic War”. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 18(4), 591–613. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/204816>

<sup>57</sup> Arrighi, G., Silver, B. J. (2003). *Caos e Governo del Mondo. Come cambiano le egemonie e gli equilibri planetari*. Milan, Mondadori.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*. Sisyphus is one of the protagonists of the Greek mythology, punished by Zeus for cheating death twice by being forced to roll a massive rock up a hill that was expected to roll down every time it neared the top, repeating this action for eternity. Through the classical influence on modern culture, tasks that are both laborious and futile are therefore described as Sisyphean (see Sisyphean. In *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* (2021st ed.). Oxford University Press)

systemic organisation, causing it to collapse. The difficulty is that each State takes the same view of the excellence of a balance of power. The less equality the better, provided that the balance is on the right, i.e., its side. Each aim at the balance with the idea of improving it, and the balance of power is otherwise known as the race for armaments.

## 1.2. A Chinese-labeled theory of International Relations

According to World Bank analysis, Asia has become the economic powerhouse of the world today, although some of its most important features are still unknown. The twenty-first century would be "The Asian Century", a definition that has not only left journalists fond of it, but which, in the knowledge of its non-exhaustiveness and non-absoluteness, generates new doubts and perspectives for the future of international relations. Asian prominence contributes to world disorder, fuelling the systemic chaos that would reconfigure a new world order. To find out more, the World Bank's data concluded, in 2011, that 3 billion Asians will be able to enjoy Europe's typical living standards, and the region will account for over half of global output by the middle of this century. Asia is, indeed, in the middle of a historic transformation. If it continues to follow its recent trajectory, by 2050 its per capita income could rise six times in purchasing power parity terms to reach Europe's levels today.<sup>60</sup> So far, World Bank's report accounted for China and India having two largest populations in the world, and are expected to grow rapidly economically even more, challenging with different patterns of growth the existing global economies.

China, India and other Asian countries, with cultures and practices clearly different from the West, are now the new protagonists on the world scenario, as well as important actors in global affairs whose ideas and visions inevitably got an important role in the configuration of a new world order.<sup>61</sup> People's Republic of China, in particular, re-

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<sup>60</sup> Kohli, H. S., Sharma, A., & Sood, A. (Eds.) (2011). *Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century*. SAGE Publications India. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446270349>; <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/28608/asia2050-executive-summary.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). "Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales / Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making". *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 100, p. 68.

outlined the global economic and geopolitical pattern. In 1988, during a meeting with Indian Prime Minister R. Gandhi, the then Chinese leader Deng Xiao Ping declared that “in recent years people have been saying that the next century will be the century of Asia and the Pacific”<sup>62</sup>, but disagreeing with that trend. Yet, after four decades, the global landscape appeared to be necessarily characterized and depicted by a Chinese way of acting, economically and politically. Organski’s *power transition theory* provided some central elements for a transition to be feasible and realized - national power, stages of power transition and shifts in the distribution of power - as well as the need of a “contender” nation with well-defined geographic and demographic measures in the second stage of his pyramid.<sup>63</sup> Given those basic requirements, the “*second-ranked nation*”<sup>64</sup> has the will and capability to change the existing international order and its way of acting will bring it to confront the dominant power. Accepting the post-Cold War international system to be defined like the pyramid model proposed by Organski (see figure 1.1, p. 31) with the United States at the top, China is the contender nation able to challenge the existing order, and brought about, again in history, a systemic chaos. What is the world order that China is disrupting though? And, above all, is China really doing so? Judging by the words of Zheng Bi Jian, an important Chinese thinker and advisor whose theories precisely focused about the concepts of *globalism*<sup>65</sup> and *soft power*<sup>66</sup>, China is, if anything, experiencing a “*peaceful rise*”<sup>67</sup> on the global stage. Having thus noted its rise to great power status, it is appropriate to analyse the international system from the perspective of the emerging power, and to consider its culture and tradition, as was done during the “American century”.

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<sup>62</sup> Deng, X.P. (1993). *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, vol. 3*. Beijing, People’s Publishing House, pp. 218. Available at: <https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/selected-works-vol-3-1982-1992/>

<sup>63</sup> Lai, D. (2011). “The United States and China in Power Transition”. *Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College*, 5-28, p. 18.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>65</sup> *Globalism* can be defined as the dominant ideology and subjectivity associated with different historically-dominant formations of global extension, as well as the operation or planning of economic and foreign policy on a global basis (see James, P. (2006). *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism: Bringing Theory Back In*. London, SAGE publications)

<sup>66</sup> *Soft Power*’s definition was coined by the US Political Scientist Joseph Nye to describe a country’s ability to influence other countries without using force or coercion, typical elements of the component called “hard power” (see Nye, J. (2005) “The Rise of China’s Soft Power”. *Wall Street Journal*)

<sup>67</sup> Bijian, Z. (2005). “China’s “Peaceful Rise” to Great-Power Status”. *Foreign Affairs*, 84(5), p.20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/20031702>

### 1.2.1. Theoretical frameworks

“For more than 1,000 years of history, East Asia had an international state system centred on China, namely the “Hua-Yi Order” (华夷秩序 *Huá Yí zhī biàn*), which refers to China (*huá*) and others or, less charitably, “barbarians” (*yí*). This policy [...] helped maintain the stability of the East Asian region, and thereby the Hua-Yi Order itself.”<sup>68</sup>

The Chinese order configures itself as a peculiar order, not a power-based one that delineated for ages Western world, but a sort of bilaterally oriented new international order founded on Chinese tradition and reformed, rejuvenated<sup>69</sup> through modernity, compatible with the current international system. Behind a definition that would seem banal and sterile, however, lie long centuries of philosophical thought, of cultural development, of different schools interpreting the world. Even though history and culture play an extremely important role in innovation and social theoretical evolution, as well as, according to Organski, in the definition of national goals, many scholars of international politics affirm that it is not possible to establish the existence of a properly Chinese theoretical *corpus*, which could explain a new way of interpreting international relations under a Chinese spotlight. Suitable with Qin Ya Qing’s way of thinking, in fact, there is no Chinese international relations theory mainly because of “*the absence of a consistent theoretical core in the Chinese IR research*”<sup>70</sup>, and for the dominance of the Western narrative even in the Chinese academic community. Nevertheless, he tries to give order to the principal currents of thought that characterise today’s Chinese academia dealing with international relations, an academic world concerned with understanding whether it is reasonable to apply exclusively Western theories to interpret world affairs, and particularly non-Western affairs.<sup>71</sup> Specifically, Qin identifies three possible interpretations to analyse world reality: a *front interpretation*, a *reverse interpretation* and an *interactive interpretation*.

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<sup>68</sup> Xue, L., Cheng, Z. X. (2018). “What Might a Chinese World Order Look Like?”. *The Diplomat*, April 13, 2018. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/what-might-a-chinese-world-order-look-like/>

<sup>69</sup> See chapter 4 § 4.2.2. p. 139.

<sup>70</sup> Qin, Y.Q. (2007). Why is there no Chinese international relations theory? *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7(3), p. 314.

<sup>71</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales / Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 100, p. 68.

- The *front interpretation* considers a focus on reality by means of a traditional and cultural Chinese scheme that draws his tools from ancient and ethnical characteristics
- The *reverse interpretation* utilises a focus coming from foreign conceptual patterns to explain phenomena, specifically the Western theoretical basis about international relations
- The *interactive interpretation* combines the previous focuses to create an "intercultural dialogue"<sup>72</sup> and a more critical and less unipolar reflection about international relations. Indeed, Chinese dialectics sees conflict, in the sense of the encounter between two different entities usually embodied in *yin* (阴) and *yáng* (阳)<sup>73</sup> as a ring, a conjunction towards harmony and order. The use of Chinese dialectics can provide, thus, an alternative explanation of the relationships between actors from different cultural backgrounds within global society.<sup>74</sup>

China's International Relations community appears nowadays to be very prominent, proactively being the second largest in the world only to that of the United States. The discipline basically began to be consistent in the United States in coincidence with the rise of US as world power and has sprung up in the same way in China, a country that is a now a conscious "responsible great power"<sup>75</sup> that is embarking – or has already embarked – on its rise to world power status.

### 1.2.2. The concept of order in Chinese philosophy and the virtue 礼 *lǐ*

Zhang Yong Jin, professor of international politics and author of *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations*, argues about the Spring and Autumn period and the

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<sup>72</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). "Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales / Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making". *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 100, p. 80.

<sup>73</sup> See Bertuccioli, G. (2013). *La Letteratura Cinese*. Rome, L'Asino d'oro.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>75</sup> Kim, H. J. (2016). Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics be a Powerful Alternative? *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 9(1), p. 60. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48615772>

Warring States period of Chinese history to start a reflection about how to conceive a Chinese-oriented view of international relations. During what he defines the “*Axial Age of China*”, two paradoxical phenomena clashed. The most violent, divided and chaotic period of ancient Chinese history was paradoxically the most creative and philosophically innovative period in the world of thought in ancient China.<sup>76</sup> In this society of states, interacting in a system that was actually anarchic and based on power politics, happened, thus, a sharing of common culture dominated by the Chinese civilization that maintained functioning institutions, a balance of power, a diplomatic net to serve their common interests. The breakdown of the moral and political order claimed the authority of Heaven (天 *Tiān*), allowed Chinese thinkers to ask themselves how to prosecute a new moral and normative order aiming at re-establishing “*Heaven’s will*”<sup>77</sup>, the forging of a common philosophical and political discourse for all contending schools of thought.

Confucius (孔子 *Kǒngzǐ*), considered as the first thinker in ancient China and foundation of most of the Chinese thought, expressed his profound trust in Heaven, believing that that 天 *Tiān* ruled over human efforts<sup>78</sup> and incarnating the example of a close relationship between knowledge and power in China. As that of many others “*wandering intellectuals*”<sup>79</sup>, Confucius attitude was retained to be that of advising the princes about how to establish order within their own states as well as within the entire civilized world.<sup>80</sup> To shape an order as a social ideal was the most important principle in society for the Confucian philosophy<sup>81</sup>, usually embodied by the concept of 礼 *lǐ*, a multifaceted concept often associated with “ritual” or “rites” but intending in its broader sense a manner of behaviour, a code of conduct to be followed, one of the *Five Constant Virtues* (五常 *wu*

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<sup>76</sup> Zhang, Y. J. (2014). “The idea of order in ancient Chinese political thought: a Wightian exploration”. *International Affairs* 90(1), p.172. Available at: [https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/riia/v90i1/f\\_0029985\\_24267.pdf](https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/riia/v90i1/f_0029985_24267.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>78</sup> Waley, A. (1945). *The Analects of Confucius*. London, Allen&Unwin, p.108.

<sup>79</sup> Zhang, Y. J. (2014). “The idea of order in ancient Chinese political thought: a Wightian exploration”. *International Affairs* 90(1), p.174. Available at: [https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/riia/v90i1/f\\_0029985\\_24267.pdf](https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/riia/v90i1/f_0029985_24267.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>81</sup> He, Z. (1991). *An Intellectual History of China*. Beijing, Foreign Language Press.

chang)<sup>82</sup>. Whether in personal affairs or interstate relations, the principle 礼 *lǐ* should always be the foundation, for its lack could only lead to disaster and disorder.

### 1.2.3. The 天下 *Tiān xià* system

What is literally “under the Heaven” stands out as very fascinating as well as very peculiar to try to outline a Chinese-labeled way of thinking the international system. A key tool for governance for more than two millennia of Chinese empire, many scholars in the Chinese academic environment, as well as in Western think-tanks, have been promoting the concept of 天下 *Tiān xià* to help to shape a Chinese vision of world order.<sup>83</sup> In April 2005, Zhao Ting Yang, Chinese contemporary philosopher, published his essay *The Tianxia System: A Philosophy for the World Institution*. Zhao defended the idea that *Tiān xià* is a legitimate and responsible system for defining the world and for nation-states. Referring to the Zhou dynasty, specifically, Zhao argues that the *Tiān xià* system created and practised during that time (1046-256 BC) would be the ideal world system.

*“The establishment of a worldview that puts the world as a whole before the local, and global or common elements before local interests, is a good historical [...]. It works on the principle of family, creating a world based on the universal family bond, where hostility gives way to hostility, where harmony prevails, and where no one makes enemies.”<sup>84</sup>*

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<sup>82</sup> The *Five Constant Virtues* (五常 *wu chang*) are the five ethical principles regulated society in ancient China according to the Confucius school of thought. The five constant virtues (仁 *ren*, benevolence; 义 *yi*, righteousness; 礼 *li*, propriety; 智 *zhi*, wisdom; and 信 *xin*, fidelity) were important in determining who was a “true gentleman” in ancient Chinese society. Regardless of a person’s class or social status, he was expected to exhibit the five virtues and use proper conduct toward others. This also applied to the way in which rulers were expected to govern. A leader, from local bureaucrat to emperor, was supposed to govern with benevolent concern for the well-being of his subjects (see Chang, W., Madson, N. H (2013). *Inside China’s Legal System*. Hull, Chandos Publishing, pp.27-44).

<sup>83</sup> Callahan, W. A. (2008). “Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?”. *International Studies Review*, 10(4), 749–761. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25482021>

<sup>84</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales” / “Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 100, p.74.

Zhao proposes a Chinese model of world order that is supposed to be universally valid, a system that “*would solve the world’s problems through a world institution that embraces difference according to a magnanimous social grammar*”<sup>85</sup>. 天下 *Tiānxià* is first a geographical term, so correctly attributable to the world intended as a geographical space. Everything that lies beneath the sky is “the world”, “the earth”. As world’s problems are massive to be fronted by just one nation, this “*all-inclusive way*” draws back to ancient Chinese philosopher Laozi (老子 *Lǎozǐ*)’s *Dào Dé Jīng* (道德经)<sup>86</sup> that reports “*use the world to examine the world*”<sup>87</sup>, starkly in contrast with the chaos that Zhao denounces as a consequent shortcoming of the conventional Westphalian system imposed by the West. Through the *Tiān xià*, Zhao justifies the need for a transformation that would translate the chaos of the “many” into the order and harmony of “the one”.<sup>88</sup> Western institutions appear as super-entities, though they are still limited by a way of visualising the world as based on nation-states. The West, according to Zhao’s point of view, always tended to rationalise the world, to categorise it by racial distinctions. Chinese thought, on the contrary, “*unites [...] according to an ethical logic that is cultural*”<sup>89</sup>. It results quite clear that Zhao feels Western concepts, especially that of the Westphalian system, as the cause of the world’s drift towards a state of disorder. The established international system, which indeed originated from the Peace of Westphalia, is described as a jungle dominated by coercive power and the struggle for self-interest, as is also argued by the realist school of international relations theory. In Western way of thinking, then, pursuing its own interests is always justified, and therefore, for Zhao, it does not consider what he calls the

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>86</sup> Generally referred to in translation as “*The Book of the Way and the Virtue*”, is it considered as one of the classics of Chinese literature attributable to Laozi. Tradition has it that Lao Zi decided to leave the Zhou court because he was tired of fighting and disorder and wanted peace and quiet. The book deals with themes such as nature and non-action (无为 *wúwéi*), which inspired the philosophical-religious current of Taoism about the various disciplines for achieving perfection through self-cultivation.

<sup>87</sup> Laozi, (2004). *Dao De Jing: The Book of The Way*, trans. Roberts, M. Berkeley, University of California press, ch. 54.

<sup>88</sup> Zhao, T. Y. (2005). *Tianxia Tixi: Shijie Zhidu Zhexue Daolun [The Tianxia system: A Philosophy for the World Institution]*. Nanjing, Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chubanshe.

<sup>89</sup> Callahan, W. A. (2008). “Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?”. *International Studies Review*, 10(4), p.752.



“world-ness of the world”<sup>90</sup>, i.e., a more all-encompassing vision of the world that embraced all its components.

#### 1.2.4. The hierarchical structure of the 天下 *Tiān xià* system

It is noteworthy to highlight that even *Tiān xià* system presupposes a hierarchical structure.

In this sense, thus, this model shares with Organski’s model (fig. 1.1) its most peculiar characteristic. Yet, graphically speaking, once again this structure can be traced back to ancient Chinese culture, that shows how a hierarchical structure is represented not by a pyramid but by concentric circles. The circle, as an all-encompassing, plain figure, serves as the image of a universal system able to integrate all nations in a world



Figure 2. Cover to the book “All Under Heaven” by Zhao Ting Yang. (University of California Press, 2016).

basically built by and for all the people, a concentric zone structure that expanded from the Emperor’s palace outward. The relationships among the members within the system were both hierarchical and distinguished by their closeness to the center. The Tributary system enacted during the Zhou dynasty, according to Zhao, was the way by which legitimacy, order and peace succeeded in being preserved. This concrete application of the *Tiān xià* system was considered to be based upon inequality, in which unequal social relationships were the engine of the order itself. It is unequal in origin, as he who has had the mandate of Heaven inevitably occupies a superior, central position in this case. Inequality between individuals is, therefore, normal, but what really matters is not how to achieve equality, rather how to connect individuals so as to facilitate an orderly society. No hostility, though, is contemplated is such a kind of relationship but benignity. In

<sup>90</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales” / “Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 100, p.74.

Confucian thought that sees family as the basic and most important unity of society, the *Tiān xià* natural system intertwines with the Tributary social system to create an environment absolutely harmonious, where self-interest is at the minimum and cooperation and development are favoured<sup>91</sup>, an approach does not assume an “*Hobbesian jungle*”<sup>92</sup> but hangs its members together in what Confucius denominated 王道 (*wángdào*), the “*king’s path*”. This concept connotes an ideology considering that an organization could continuously create social values and take other people's interests into consideration, balancing the interests of all sides to make the civilization develop and continue, sharply in contrast with the idea of hegemony proposed by Western thought. Apart from the necessary references to the history and philosophical culture of ancient China, Zhao Ting Yang focuses his analysis of the *Tiān xià* system looking at international relations. Defining today’s world is as a “*non-world*”, due to the lack of a universal political identity and a global political philosophy, he underlines the absence of a genuine concept of globality. The world is anarchic, made of constantly conflicting set of nation-states, each with its own interests. For Zhao, a system based on these principles of Confucian family ties could offer an idea of the world that suits the XXI century, far from the hegemonic system generally based on coercion.<sup>93</sup> Starting from a belief in the existence of an innate relationship between the natural order and the social order, and so a hierarchical system, whatever social order is in existence is no more than part of a greater natural world. For the Confucians, therefore, the family is a microcosm, the state a macrocosm. In the same way, the human world is a microcosm and the natural world a macrocosm.<sup>94</sup>

Western theories consider a global system practically reduced to the politics of and between states, a state-centered perspective.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, *Tiān xià* clearly seeks to

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<sup>91</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales” / “Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 100, p.72.

<sup>92</sup> Qin, Y.Q. (2007). Why is there no Chinese international relations theory? *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7(3), p. 331.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>94</sup> Zhang, Y. J. (2014). “The idea of order in ancient Chinese political thought: a Wightian exploration”. *International Affairs* 90(1), 167–183.

<sup>95</sup> Montobbio, M. (2017). *El ascenso global de China y la reconfiguración de la teoría de las relaciones internacionales*. Madrid, Real Instituto Elcano Royal Institute. Available at: [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_es/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/asia-pacifico/montobbio-ascenso-global-china-reconfiguracion-teoria-relaciones-internacionales](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/asia-pacifico/montobbio-ascenso-global-china-reconfiguracion-teoria-relaciones-internacionales)

differentiate itself from this structure of relations, turning the “*non-world*” into a real one through the realisation of a universal family bond. For Qin Ya Qing, Western international theories are based on rationality, while Chinese thought is based on the idea of *relationality*, the fundamental conceptualisation of governance. Traditionally, Chinese people needed knowledge not to learn about an outside world, but to cultivate themselves so that they could live harmoniously in society. This relational governance seeks to build non-conflictive relationships, which should evolve into a harmonious synthesis, tending to channel relationships through cooperation.<sup>96</sup> *Tiān xià*, thought of as an international system, is first and foremost an attempt at political regulation of humanity as a whole. It requires a hierarchy and moral authority for the construction of a harmonious world.

### 1.3. “*Extending the bounds of Power Transition Theory*”

*“Should China surpass the United States as the world’s most powerful state while having no substantial demands for change to the international system’s organizing principles, power transition theory postulates that catastrophic war likely will be averted. In this case, China will emerge as a “satisfied” preeminent power [...]. In contrast, should China challenge the United States in the mid twenty-first century, holding deep-seated grievances against the West, its culture, and its imposed international rules and norms, then the probability of war rises dramatically.”<sup>97</sup>*

Starting from the theoretical assertions of power transition theory assumed by Organski, and assuming the United States as the dominant hegemonic power and People’s Republic of China as the emerging challenger, it is nowadays evident how much the distance between the two powers in terms of capabilities, has progressively narrowed. This happens from an economic point of view, passing by a political strategy that reassemble, in a sense, a post-Cold War world that appears uncertain. This assumed almost-reached

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<sup>96</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales” / “Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 100.

<sup>97</sup> Lemke, D., Tammen; R.L. (2003). “Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China”. *International Interactions*, 29(4), 269-271. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/714950651>

parity in terms of quantity of power toughly reduces the inequality, and, according to the analysed Western perspective of international relations, poses high risk of conflict. Nevertheless, as emerges from a Chinese-labeled way of seeing international system, China proposes a new way of cooperation, that albeit hardly suitable with a Western ideals and US strategic centrality in the world system, opens feasible paths to change the world order. Dissatisfaction of an emerging power, according to Organski, can be seen in its willingness to establish a new place for itself in the international society in an inherent belief that they can rival or surpass in power the dominant nation, and incapable to accept a subordinate position in international affairs. Yet, as Organski also punctuates, the dissatisfaction of an emerging power can be reduced by virtue of a high economic interdependence, that concretely exists in the relations between China and the United States.<sup>98</sup> In the economic realm, indeed, trade and investment ties between the two countries remain significant: US - China trade and investment are such robust that, in 2020, China was accounted as America's largest goods trading partner, third largest export market, and its largest source of imports, with most of U.S. companies operating in China report being committed to the China market for the long term.<sup>99</sup> The continuous competition as well as confrontation on the main geopolitical issues seems to feed the western narrative on the hypothesis of a possible new cold war between the two powers, thus confirming once again the mainstream theory of international relations and an existing anarchy of the world system where the interests of states end up being the cause of war. on the other hand, however, the economic competition, which translates into an effective collaboration as well as interdependence between the two countries, seems to confirm the Chinese perspective of international relations and its *Tiān xià* system in which there would be room for everyone.

According to Michelle Benson, three are the conditions necessary to wage a great power war, i.e., existing power transition, relative power parity between the two considered

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<sup>98</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf, p. 366.

<sup>99</sup> Hass, R. (2021). "The new normal in US-China Relations: Hardening Competition and Deepening Interdependence". *Brookings*, August 12, 2021. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/08/12/the-new-normal-in-us-china-relations-hardening-competition-and-deep-interdependence/>

countries, and dissimilarity of preferences about the *status quo*.<sup>100</sup> While the first two constitute nowadays a matter of fact for United States as well as China, the last condition seems to be interpreted in different manners by the two great powers. US attitude and willingness to preserve its hegemony translates itself in a sort of new containment policy which is, however, disproved by a necessary economic interdependence. China's attitude, on the other hand, appears justified by its ancient cultural values and by a superior mandate that, even in its Chinese name, appears to be on his shoulders. The bounds of Power Transition Theory should be, then, extended, to legitimately encompass Chinese moral power and its "*mutually-inclusive way*" (中庸 *zhong yong*)<sup>101</sup>. Ancient Chinese thought, as a matter of fact, constitutes a rich source of data to prop up an analytical insight for international relations, and the works of Chinese thinkers is to be considered equal in value to that of Thucydides in the Western canon.<sup>102</sup> According Jeremy Paltiel, who studied politics, government and foreign policies of Asia, it important to consider the ancient wisdom and acknowledge how and to what extent it can expand the frame of the scientific discourse for international relations.

Sober up, the People's Republic of China seems to have all the cards on the table, and in order, to present the world with a new model of international relations, and it even seems to have the power to impose it. The current president Xi Jin Ping, not from the towers of the Great Wall but from the Forbidden City, symbol of the *Celestial Empire* (天朝 *Tiān cháo*)<sup>103</sup>, observes every day what is happening, the new wars, the power struggles, and studies his strategy. From that China, which to the world seems to be protected by walls

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<sup>100</sup> Benson, M. (2007) "Extending the Bounds of Power Transition Theory". *International Interactions*, 33(3), 211-215. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620701449009>

<sup>101</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). "Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales" / "Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making". *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 100, p. 83.

<sup>102</sup> Paltiel, J. (2010). "Mencius and World Order Theories". *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3(1), 17-54.

<sup>103</sup> *Celestial empire* is one of the usual names used to dub the ancient Chinese empire. As argued in the second part of the chapter (see § 1.2.4.), the Heaven (天朝 *Tiān*) is the most important unity in a Chinese ideological hierarchy, anche the emperor is the the only one on Earth to exert its will, as its highest representative and its son (天子 *Tiānzi*).

even higher than the Great Wall, President Xi's political - and practical - programme seems to miss no opportunity to show itself to the whole world as a plausible alternative to a Western order that appears increasingly unstable, incapable even of standing on its own feet and of seeking solutions to the new and peculiar challenges of the century. Jo Biden's United States, however, in what seems to be a confrontation destined to flare up in the future, is not avoiding backlash in order to reaffirm its hard-won hegemony and is not denying that it wants to jealously guard and preserve it. Will the “*China challenge*” really result in a clash, or is it just a moment of transition that will actually lead to a change in the system of international relations? Xi Jin Ping said he wanted to “*make the water in the teapot hot*”<sup>104</sup>. Nonetheless, only history and circumstances, as well as the Chinese political pragmatism combined with its ancient morality, will be able to give effective answers, able to move, perhaps, the needle of the balance of power.

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<sup>104</sup> Osnos, E. (2015). “Born Red”. *The New Yorker*, March 30, 2015. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/06/born-red>



## CHAPTER 2

### 白发苍苍 (bái fà cāng cāng)

#### **“Old and grey-haired”. The US, the “China Challenge” and the transfer of power**

*“Trying to put it in a box or relate it to the past historic relations misses the richness and the complexity of the US-China relationship we have today. Acknowledging differences and recognizing these are issues that have to be grappled with is better for the relationship for the long term than simply focusing on the positive side. There is strong recognition that it's in the US interest for China to be successful, be peaceful and be prosperous.”<sup>105</sup>*

As *The Wall Street Journal* polls show, more than half of US citizens are reportedly doubtful about Biden's re-election to the presidency in 2024. His advancing years and underperformance because of not-quite-high energy level seem to worry the United States, especially in the face of new challenges the country has been facing for years, such as the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, the need for rapid responses to imminent global problems like the economic crisis, unemployment and climate change, but especially in the face of the greatest of challenges, the one that the US department of State called the “*China Challenge*”<sup>106</sup>. This wording, which soon became a journalistic reference encompassing several elements, be they historical, political, ideological or purely cultural, is concretely the sense of what has matured into a priority for the United States in terms of international politics since the first Barack Obama presidency (2008-2012), and which inevitably, in an increasingly globalised and economically interdependent world, affects its domestic aspects. China is and will remain for some time, certainly indefinitely given the ongoing evolution of global dynamics, the most important great-power rival for the United States. US foreign policy projects, from Obama's openness, through the stricter one of the Trump presidency, to the still-developing one of President Joe Biden, have measured themselves against a “*whole-of-government*

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<sup>105</sup> C-Span (2010). James Steinberg on U.S.-China Relations. Uploaded by *Center for American Progress*, December 7, 2010. Available at: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?296944-1/james-steinberg-us-china-relations>

<sup>106</sup> United States. Policy Planning Staff, Office of the Secretary of State (2020). “*The Elements of China Challenge*”. US Department of State, November 20, 2020.



*approach*<sup>107</sup> to cope with the China issue. Surely, hence, the relationship between United States and People's Republic of China will define the contours of the world and geopolitics in the 21st century. These two proven great powers, bound together by economic, security, and social ties, appears to set their confrontation in terms of the appearance and special characteristics of each of the two presidents: on the one hand, a “old and grey-haired” (白发苍苍 *bái fà cāng cāng*) man, President Joe Biden, on which the Republicans have made his age an issue to test his performance<sup>108</sup>; on the other hand President Xi Jinping, a man “*sixty-six years old, with a full, reddish face, neatly combed hair, and an expression of patient immovability*”<sup>109</sup> which has made of the “*great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*” (中华名族伟大复兴 *Zhōnghuámínzú Wěidà Fùxīng*)<sup>110</sup> one of the fundamental concepts of its political strategy. A complex, consequential, and tortuous relationship, a great game where it may be hard to find a winner,<sup>111</sup> but which is played out on the old and the new, on a well-founded, almost wise American exceptionalism, represented by Biden's white hair, and, on the Chinese side, on something new that shakes and frightens, on the concept of rejuvenation embodied in the shiny black hair of Xi.

In any case, whatever the facies of the two presidents or whoever takes their place, what really counts in the definition of a supposed new shape of the world order is the *modus operandi* of the two great powers, the way they interact with each other, and how each perceives the other. The psychological factor is supposed to very decisive in foreign policy. Decision-makers' belief systems can heavily impact how they perceive the world, also affect the decisions they make. Cognitive process approaches in the field of foreign

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<sup>107</sup> Hu, W. (2020). “The United States, China, and the Indo-Pacific Strategy: The Rise and Return of Strategic Competition”. *China Review*, 20(3), p. 127. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26928114?seq=1>

<sup>108</sup> Thomas, K.; Lucey, C. (2022). “Half of Americans Doubt Biden will run in 2024, WSJ Poll Shows”. *The Wall Street Journal*, March 15, 2022.

<sup>109</sup> Osnos, E. (2020). “The Future of America's Contest in China”. *The New Yorker*, October 1, 2020. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/01/13/the-future-of-americas-contest-with-china>

<sup>110</sup> The concept of *rejuvenation of the nation* is one of the key concepts of Xi Jin Ping's political project, whereby he generally urges the young population, so the future Chinese people, to dream big and to make the Chinese nation a great, renewed nation (see chapter 4 § 4.2.2. p. 139; see also Xinhua News Agency (2013). “Youth urged to contribute to realization of Chinese Dream”. *Xinhua*, May 5, 2013. Available at: [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2013-05/05/content\\_28731285.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2013-05/05/content_28731285.htm)).

<sup>111</sup> C-Span (2010). James Steinberg on U.S.-China Relations. Uploaded by *Center for American Progress*, December 7, 2010. Available at: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?296944-1/james-steinberg-us-china-relations>

policy, indeed, have attempted to map out the belief structures of decision makers and explore what concretely are the implications of these structures for the way international events are acknowledged and policy alternatives are considered.<sup>112</sup> The *Pew Research Center*, an independent American think tank that provides information about social, political and economic issues as well as public opinion, stated that US citizens generally possess a negative view about China, rarely mentioning Chinese millenary culture or history and lingering on political, economic and governmental issues. Some people, moreover, specifically mentioned US-China relations in their answer, “*many simply said things like they want world domination*”.<sup>113</sup> In the United States, as democratic and liberal country, public opinion may affect government decision, not only shaping public policy but also international policy-making, even if not in all the cases.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, even in Pre-Qin thought the fundamental causes of shifts in international power can be imputed to political leaders and their way of thinking more than in the state’s material force.<sup>115</sup> Whatever the psychological surroundings within which the two states act, if, as Hobsbawm states, a change in the geography of world power is taking place<sup>116</sup>, the United States are going, in a sense, to adapt to a “*less prominent position*”<sup>117</sup> in the international landscape. The liberal order appears jeopardised by the rising power of China. The centre of normative and military power may remain the United States, but what is changing are the means by which the taken-for-granted liberal hegemony will be exercised, and whether hegemonic power can transit in the hands of China dislodging the US<sup>118</sup>. China's

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<sup>112</sup> Shapiro, M. J., & Bonham, G. M. (1973). “Cognitive Process and Foreign Policy Decision-Making”. *International Studies Quarterly*, 17(2), 147–174. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600226>

<sup>113</sup> Schumacher, S.; Silver, L. (2021). In Their Own Worlds: What Americans think about China”. *Pew Research Center*, March 4, 2021. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/04/in-their-own-words-what-americans-think-about-china/>

<sup>114</sup> Burstein, P. (2003). “The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda”. *Political Research Quarterly*, 56(1), 29–40. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3219881>

<sup>115</sup> Yan, X. T. (2013). *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 66.

<sup>116</sup> Arrighi, G., Silver, B. J. (2003). *Caos e Governo del Mondo. Come cambiano le egemonie e gli equilibri planetari*. Milan, Mondadori.

<sup>117</sup> Jacques, M. (2009). When China Rules the World: the Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World. *The Times*, June 21, 2009. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/when-china-rules-the-world-the-rise-of-the-middle-kingdom-and-the-end-of-the-western-world-by-martin-jacques-hzvvgf8sn5q> ; <http://www.martinjacques.com/category/when-china-rules-the-world/interviews/page/2/>

<sup>118</sup> Goh, E. (2015). *The Struggle for Order. Hegemony, Hierarchy & Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 2.

ascendance as superpower may alter the cultural, political, social, and ethnic balance of global power, literally unseating the West and in the process of creating a “*whole new world*”.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, following a more realistic approach, it is possible to assess how changing in balance of power does not necessarily ends up in radical system changes.<sup>120</sup>

## **2.1. United States and the former balance of power: is US “exceptionalism” going to be outdated?**

It might be appropriate to use history as a means of comparison to analyse current world dynamics. Since the beginning of the modern State system set forth by the Treaty of Westphalia, the balance of power among the various nations had been preserved by means of alliances. Nevertheless, by the end of World War II in 1945 the balance of power underwent several changes, operating in a more unconventional way. According to international politics scholars, the balance of power after World War II became “unflexible”, in the sense that only two nations competed to concretely establish an order.<sup>121</sup> A. K. Organski, in his *World Politics*, analysed the reduction in the number of nations that were able to play the role of world powers in international politics, assessing that this kind of structure can have a deteriorating effect upon how the balance of power operates.<sup>122</sup> Concretely, the beginning of the so-called Cold War marks the moment when the world order is suspended on two different paths, that of the United States and that of the Soviet Union as great powers. However, starting in the late 1980s and with the fall of the Soviet project, the United States asserted itself on the world stage as a hegemonic power, ushering in a great change in world power relationships and opening a new, unipolar moment of unprecedented U.S. power. As analysed in chapter 1, realist school of international relations classifies unipolarity as the least stable of all power structure, being a great concentration of power a threat to other states that can cause them to move

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<sup>119</sup> Jacques, M. (2009). When China Rules the World: the Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World. *The Times*, June 21, 2009.

<sup>120</sup> Goh, E. (2015). *The Struggle for Order. Hegemony, Hierarchy & Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

<sup>121</sup> Monticone, R. C. (2008). “The Changing Balance of Power”. *Rivista Di Studi Politici Internazionali*, 75(4 (300)), 498–514. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42740755>

<sup>122</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf.

action to restore a balance.<sup>123</sup> Already in 1992, the United States Department of Defense drafted a strategy that was materially designed to preserve the state of unipolarity and to prevent the emergence of a global rival.<sup>124</sup> Yet, as time went by and because of the changing dynamics of a fast-evolving world, a more conscious response arrived, assessing that the current international structure is on the verge of shifting away from unipolarity.<sup>125</sup> Each US administration, since the early 1990s, has approached the Chinese question with a different attitude, in an attempt to cope with the almost unstoppable evolutionary dynamism of the People's Republic of China. Narrowing the material power gap with the United States inevitably suggests a shift in the international configuration.<sup>126</sup>

### 2.1.1. *The Obama administration and the pivot to Asia*

When dealing with the issue of the “Asian century”, it is meant the real importance, both regional and international, that many of the countries of the Asian continent have achieved since the end of the last century, when a series of investments, political reforms and geopolitical strategies combined to make economic development one of the main sources of redemption for what was once the most populous but poorest continent in the world. After the so-called “*Asian miracle*”<sup>127</sup> that highlighted the noteworthy results of

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<sup>123</sup> Waltz, K. N. (1997). “Evaluating theories”. *American Political Science Review*, 91(4), pp. 915-916. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2952173?seq=1>

<sup>124</sup> The countermeasures implemented by the 1992 US Defence Planning Guidance were enclosed in what was dubbed as *Wolfowitz Doctrine*, recalling the name of the Secretary of Defence. The measures were criticised as imperialist and unfair, trying to maintain a unilateralism protected by pre-emptive military measures to suppress potential threats from other countries (see Wang, Y. (1993). The Politics of U.S.-China Economic Relations: MFN, Constructive Engagement, and the Trade Issue Proper. *Asian Survey*, 33(5), 441–462. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645312> ; Tyler, P. (1992). “U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop”. *The New York Times*, March 8, 1992. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/us-strategy-plan-calls-for-insuring-no-rivals-develop.html> )

<sup>125</sup> Wohlforth, W. C. (1999). The Stability of a Unipolar World. *International Security*, 24(1), 5–41. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539346>

<sup>126</sup> Yan, X. T. (2013). *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

<sup>127</sup> Stiglitz, J. E. (1996). “Some lessons from the East Asian Miracle”. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 11(2), 151-177. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/786661468245419348/pdf/765590JRN0WBRO00Box374378B00PUBLIC0.pdf>

the rapid industrialization process of some Eastern countries, the roar of another tiger<sup>128</sup> echoed in Asia. China is nowadays the bulwark of Asian economic development and social redemption<sup>129</sup>, just as certain is the weight that the United States has exerted through economic aid in the sphere of development cooperation, a strategy that is not only humanitarian and social justice-oriented, but obviously carries its own geopolitical nuances. With the the Indo-Pacific area becoming the new arena of political and economic competition. The Obama administration, in 2011, adopted what Kurt Campbell defined as the “pivot”<sup>130</sup>, namely a turning towards the Asian continent and the East in general. The “pivot to Asia” policy pursued by President Obama was also intended as a "pivot to democracy". Obama proclaimed a "rebalance", a special shift in foreign policy. He presented himself as "*President of the US and the Pacific*"<sup>131</sup>, in this elaboration of a comprehensive strategy, an ambitious, difficult to realise and elaborate project, which nevertheless made use of his charisma. When speaking at the Australian Parliament in 2011, he defined that "*America's Pacific century*"<sup>132</sup>, as a resource to appreciate, because "*everyone deserves a fair chance*"<sup>133</sup>. In the twenty-first century, US national security interest has roughly remained the same since the end of the 1970s, i.e., to ensure a balance of power to prevent other countries' expansion towards the West.<sup>134</sup> Since 2011, thus, the current balance-of-power challenge for the United States is in East Asia. Basically, if

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<sup>128</sup> *Four Asian Tigers* or *Four Asian Dragons* are expression mostly used to designate the exceptional development underwent in East Asia by South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong between the 1960s and the 1990s (see also Gulati, U. C. (1992). “The Foundations of Rapid Economic Growth: The Case of the Four Tigers”. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 51(2), 161–172. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3487387> )

<sup>129</sup> Beeson, M. (2009). “Developmental States in East Asia: a Comparison of the Japanese and Chinese Experiences”. *Asian Perspective*, 33(2), p. 6. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42704671>

<sup>130</sup> Kurt Campbell served, under Secretary of State H. Clinton in the Obama Administration, as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. He published *The pivot: the Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (see Campbell, K. M. (2016). *The Pivot: the Future of American Statecraft in Asia*. New York, Twelve).

<sup>131</sup> The Obama White House (2016). President Obama Delivers Remarks at the 2016 Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders. *YouTube*, uploaded by The Obama White House, August 31, 2016. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYlu3w2qgqA>

<sup>132</sup> Clinton, H. (2011). Interview. Conducted by D. R. Morrison. November 10, 2011. Available at: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/11/176999.htm>

<sup>133</sup> The Obama White House (2011). President Obama Speaks to the Australian Parliament. *YouTube*, uploaded by The Obama White House, November 21, 2011. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdqI14rBswE>

<sup>134</sup> Ross, R. S. (2013). “US Grand Strategy, the Rise of China, and US National Security Strategy for East Asia”. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 7(2), 20–40. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26270764>

United States did not balance China's military and economic rise, China could acquire regional hegemony. Statistically, none of Asian-Pacific countries, possessed and still possess enough resources to balance Chinese power in the area. Except for India, arising in the last years as a possible counter-balance protagonist, United States' role in the Indo-Pacific region was considered by the first Obama administration to be essential as well as strategic to maintain and guarantee stability, a project of cooperation with a wide range of East Asian countries strengthening traditional allies, such as the mutual relationship with Japan, as well as new geopolitically strategic partners. China's growing advantage was not only economic, but military above all. In a 2020 report to Congress covering the two decades from 2000 to 2020, the People's Republic of China's force are defined as "sizeable"<sup>135</sup> and issue of consideration. Regardless of Chinese intentions and policies to be adopted, as the historical and theoretical pattern of great-power politics demonstrates, China would have sought its strategical position in the region, shifting local power's attention towards its sphere of influence. Obama's political, economic and military shift towards the Indo-Pacific, then, acted as a deterrent for China using force to achieve regional hegemony.<sup>136</sup> In spite of the measures put in place by the policy package that bore Obama's signature, the US has nevertheless seen, during his presidency, a China increasing its spending and investment on the military sector, as well as a GDP, that of China, evolving towards historic highs.<sup>137</sup> Certainly, the Obama administration has been characterised by a specific trade policy embodied in the *Trans-Pacific Partnership* (TPP). In 2016, the President outlined a strategic economic project aimed at creating a trading network cutting taxes and rising living standards not only in the United States but also in the involved countries. As he stated, "with the TPP, we can rewrite the rules of trade to benefit America's middle class. Because if we don't, competitors who don't share our values, like China, will step in to fill that void"<sup>138</sup>. The balance of power between the US

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<sup>135</sup> United States. Office of the Secretary of Defense (2020). "Military and Security Developments involving the People's Republic of China". US Department of Defense. Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>

<sup>136</sup> Ross, R. S. (2013). "US Grand Strategy, the Rise of China, and US National Security Strategy for East Asia". *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 7(2), 20–40. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26270764>

<sup>137</sup> Michael, M.; Blanchard, B. (2017). "China Confirms 7 percent Increase in 2017 Defense Budget". *Reuters*, March 6, 2017. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-parliament-defence-idUSKBN16D0FF>

<sup>138</sup> The White House (2016). *The Trans-Pacific Partnership. What You Need to Know about President Obama's Trade Agreement*. Web archive. Available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/economy/trade>

and China in the days of Obama, therefore, travelled not only on the thread of military security, but also and above all on the economic one. The US national goal of welfare became, to use Organski's classification, an “international goal”, a goal that sought to keep US hegemony vivid, while China was finalizing the last details of its “dream”.

### *2.1.1. Trump administration's attitude towards China's emerging power*

President Donald Trump's political rhetoric literally marked a watershed in United States' domestic policy, as well as in foreign policy. Entrepreneur, skillful calculator and man of bursting charisma, the decision-making process of the most famous US tycoon was characterised by shrewd, direct, by some even reckless choices, conditioned above all by the Chinese rise. In his inaugural address, the president promised with his motto “*America First!*” to “*protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs*”,<sup>139</sup> claiming that “*protection will lead to great prosperity and strength*”<sup>140</sup>. While trade between the United States and China reached historic peaks<sup>141</sup>, in terms of volume and debt held, as early as his inauguration, president Trump was worried about cutting the agreement of *Trans-Pacific Partnership* (TPP) to zero. Consistent was the opposition to multilateral free trade, supporting the introduction of tariffs on foreign products and services to try to limit the rise of a China that was, by his own words, “*raping our country*”<sup>142</sup>, beginning of a new era of protectionism. Contrary to Obama's principal political rationales, D. Trump demonstrated during his administration (2017-2021) his almost total rejection of multilateral summits and his lack of interest in the Indo-Pacific, but only in matters pertaining to China and North Korea. Trump maintained the alliance with Japan and South Korea, not so much because of peculiar interests but because he hoped to achieve

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<sup>139</sup> Trump, D.J. (2017). *The Inaugural Address* (speech, Washington DC, January 20, 2017. Available at: <http://whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address>

<sup>140</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>141</sup> In 2015, China exports to United States worth US\$ 409,979 million, with a partner share of 18.03 percent (see <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/CHN/Year/2015/Summarytext>)

<sup>142</sup> Diamond, J. (2016). “Trump: We Can't Continue to allow China to Rape our country”. *CNN Politics*, May 2, 2016. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/05/01/politics/donald-trump-china-rape/index.html>

a reduction in the bilateral trade deficit US was facing, and a greater financial contribution as well. A businessman, constantly obsessed by state accounts, Trump seemed to believe that a trade deficit means that other countries are taking more from the United States than what the United States is getting from them.<sup>143</sup> China was clearly and constantly the hardcore of Trump's Asian and foreign political strategy, and the only instrument he could use to confront such an emerging power was a battle, a war, concretely a trade war. Indeed, it is important to emphasise how the main objective of Trump's policy differed from the more geopolitical strategy of his predecessors. Rather than worrying about the historic US engagement on the Asian continent, as a good tycoon President Trump's goal was to heal the trade balance between the United States and China, which had been in the balance for years precisely because of China itself which, “unfairly”, had caused the US economy to wear out: while US was increasingly buying Chinese goods, so China was buying US debt, effectively provoking economic imbalances.<sup>144</sup> Trump proposed to replace the pivot strategy of the Obama administration with the policy of a “*free and open Indo-Pacific*”: it was a matter of giving more weight to India, which he declared as a preferential partner, and the Indian Ocean as a strategic geopolitical and economic counterweight to China<sup>145</sup>. Moreover, in his crafting of a specific security document, the president expressed his crystal-clear shift from Obama's welcome of a rising Asia to be integrated to defining China as a “*revisionist power*”<sup>146</sup>, which seeks to displace the US from the Indo-Pacific region and is trying to shape a world contrary to American values and interests. People's Republic of China was engaging in a coercive behaviour in its expansion's targets and geopolitical projects. In the 2018 speech, Vice-President Mike Pence starkly declared “*we have to fight China*”<sup>147</sup>, likening this speech to President Truman's speech in 1947, when

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<sup>143</sup> Blackwill, R. D. (2019). “TRADE” in *Trump's Foreign Policies Are Better Than They Seem*, pp. 59–64. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21419.18>

<sup>144</sup> Garrett, G. (2010). G2 and G20: China, the United States and the World after the Global Financial Crisis. *Global Policy*, 1(1), 29-39. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1758-5899.2009.00014.x>

<sup>145</sup> Harding, B. (2019). “The Trump Administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Approach”. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 61–68. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26939687>

<sup>146</sup> Trump, D. J. (2017). *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, President of the U.S. Available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

<sup>147</sup> The White House (2018). *Remarks by Vice-President Pence on the Administration's Policy towards China*. The Hudson Institute, Washington DC, October 4, 2018. Web archive. Available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>



the Cold War began with the *containment policy* towards the Soviet Union. Generally, the American sanctions against China as well as a policy aimed at isolating it did not work according to some scholars, they only affected the US with an increase in the unemployment rate, as well as increased results China's importance globally.<sup>148</sup> Responding to Trump's national security strategy document, Chinese officials expressed their dissent at this extreme characterization of China. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying, urged the U.S. to "*abandon its Cold war mentality and zero-sum game concept*"<sup>149</sup>. Some U.S. media organization anticipated, in a sense, the benefits that Trump literally gifted to Beijing. For *The Washington Post*, as an example, Trump was able to give "*China its first big win*"<sup>150</sup>. In fact, China was not standing still while "bombed" by President Trump's limitations, trying to reiterate its political strategy towards other countries that were seeking a convenient alternative to the TPP.<sup>151</sup> Recalling Organski's theoretical assumption about which characteristics defines the power of state, it is possible to visualise in the uneven pattern of China's growth not only to the emergence of another dominant power in the international arena, but also coming challenges to the dominant state's global leadership, in this case that of the U.S.<sup>152</sup> Undoubtedly, Trump was able to create a huge consensus in his public opinion, an obsession about China, a populist rhetoric supported by most of the Americans. Nevertheless, this plot against China has only strengthened and reinvigorated the Chinese path. Many, in fact, have been Chinese investments within the overall framework of the *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)* involving many countries of the world, replacing, in some countries, the supremacy that once belonged to the United States. That exceptionalism that had conquered the world in the post-Cold war era, now seems to have expired,

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<sup>148</sup> Blackwill, R. D. (2019). "TRADE" in *Trump's Foreign Policies Are Better Than They Seem*, pp. 59–64. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21419.18>

<sup>149</sup> Griffiths, J.; Wang, S. (2017). "China says Trump's new security Policy Shows Cold War Mentality". *CNN Politics*, December 19, 2017. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/19/politics/china-trump-national-security-strategy-intl/index.html>

<sup>150</sup> Tharoor, I. (2017). "Trump kills TPP, Giving China its First Big Win". *The Washington Post*, January 24, 2017. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/01/24/trump-kills-tpp-giving-china-its-first-big-win/>

<sup>151</sup> Tzogopoulos, G. N. (2017). *Trump, Globalization, and China*. Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, p. 8-9. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep04644>

<sup>152</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf, p.192.

replaced by the ambitions of a China that proposes, with its investments and its peculiar way of doing diplomacy, a new path. China's approach appears unique, for it places partnership networks at the center of its foreign policy strategy, thus rebalancing power in the global arena.<sup>153</sup> Beijing's gaze is wide enough to contain the whole world, leaving no one behind under the all-inclusive nature of *Tiānxià*. While Trump's America tried to counteract People's Republic of China's power, by claiming the eagle's swift and alert gaze from the sky keeping everything checked and under control, China, in 2019, was ranked a one of the world's fast-growing economies for the annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and recorded by the World Bank as "*the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history*"<sup>154</sup>. The U.S. industrializing boost was vanishing, as dominant state, appearing outdated. Other contending states, China in this case, industrialize, grow rapidly, and catch up, making the new distribution of power no longer compatible with the existing international order.<sup>155</sup>

### 2.1.3. The China Challenge

On July 9, 2014, during the opening ceremony of the sixth China-U.S. Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) and the fifth China-U.S. High-Level Consultation on People-to-People Exchange (CPE), president Xi Jinping said "*Sino-U.S. cooperation will achieve things that are beneficial to both countries and the world, while confrontation will be disastrous*". Yet, The U.S. State Department's Policy Planning Staff wrote, in 2020 that "*The CCP [Chinese Communist Party] aims [...] to fundamentally revise world order, placing the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the center and serving Beijing's authoritarian goals and hegemonic ambitions*"<sup>156</sup>. *The Elements of China Challenge*

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<sup>153</sup> Quan, L.; Min, Y. (2019). "China's Emerging Partnership Network: What, Who, Where, When and Why". *International Trade, Politics and Development* 3(2), 66-81. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ITPD-05-2019-0004/full/html>

<sup>154</sup> The World Bank (2019). *Overview of China*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview#1>

<sup>155</sup> DiCicco, J. M., (2017). "Power Transition Theory and the essence of revisionism". *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, September 2017. Available at: <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~fczagare/PSC%20504/DiCicco%20PT%20and%20Revisionism.pdf>

<sup>156</sup> U.S. Policy Planning Staff (2020). *The Elements of China Challenge*. U.S. Office of the Secretary of State, November 2020. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>

constitutes the backbone of the Trump administration's approach to China, as well as a primary source that well exemplifies the US foreign policy decision-making process, as mentioned above, predominantly consisting of this chess game where every move seems to be fatal. The Trump administration's approach, therefore, seems to be, almost at the end of its term, a more technical one, where China really poses a challenge, due to its conduct that is not considered correct. “*If we don’t act now*”, declared U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, “*ultimately the CCP will erode our freedoms and subvert the rules-based order that our societies have worked so hard to build*”<sup>157</sup>. What seems to worry the US, and which consequently justifies the conflictual approach with the emerging power, is the fear of being replaced as the hegemonic power in the global landscape. In fact, as argued by the main theories of international relations analysed, in particular by Organski, the dissatisfaction of the emerging power with the current order has emerged in history as a possible cause of conflict.<sup>158</sup> The document also contains a powerful critique against the alleged excessive authoritarianism of the People's Republic of China and emphasises its Marxist-Leninist cultural roots. China seems to suffer from vulnerabilities that are “*endemic to autocracy*”<sup>159</sup>, among which an indifference to other nations’ well-being. United States must endure in securing a “*free, open and rule-based international order*”<sup>160</sup>, addressing this threat to freedom posed by China’s attitudes. The fact that China’s conduct founds its ideas on communism neglects what, according to 2the US, all governments want, that is the freedom for their people, and for which the United States was conceived and to which it remains dedicated. To the U.S. Office of Secretary of State, China is pursuing an “*unrealistic internationalism*” that downplays power in politics and makes up un “*unrealistic geopolitical realism that discounts the political significance of opinion, culture, and tradition*”. Searching global preeminence, China is making the United States to consider a more reasonable approach, not only limited to analyse in what China does not mirror US-led world order image but unraveling the most peculiar characteristics of the Chinese Communist Party’s priorities. President Xi Jinping, is, in fact, intentioned to put the power of the State behind the one and only legitimate

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibidem*, p.1.

<sup>158</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf, p.192.

<sup>159</sup> U.S. Policy Planning Staff (2020). *The Elements of China Challenge*. U.S. Office of the Secretary of State, November 2020, p. 2. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>

<sup>160</sup> *Ibidem*, p.2.

understanding of economics, politics, and international relations. The document also underlines the Manichean approach of Chinese politics. Visualising the world as an eternal struggle between an oppressor class and an oppressed class, this dualistic view interprets the world as ruled by capitalism, exploiting the individual, and communism on the other hand, pursuing human emancipation. The construction of a new model of socialism by the People's Republic of China would offer an alternative to an old-fashioned capitalistic system.<sup>161</sup>

On the other hand, commenting the China challenge, Professor Yan Xuetong highlights how and to what extent ancient Chinese thought contributed to shape China's today ambitions. It should be simplistic think back to China as only the product of its early republican era, and therefore only consider its Marxist-Leninist roots. Ancient thinkers' philosophy on which today's Chinese political system is entrenched must be used to understand China's plans. At the same time, Yan criticises China, saying that it should not behave like the United States, i.e., claiming that all states are equal, but still trying to maintain a dominant international position<sup>162</sup>, abiding by the *Tiānxià* concept that takes care of the whole world. He is clearly assuming that being international politics as a succession of hegemonies, People's Republic of China will be the next one in covering this rule.<sup>163</sup> Chinese "moral realism" deriving from ancient philosophy worries the United States, conscious about the fact that a Chinese hegemony will look inevitably different to the previous one. Moreover, Professor Qin Yaqing unravels the relationship between the two primordial elements of *yin* (阴) and *yáng* (阳), transposing that relationship to the one between China and the United States. Yin and Yang are not two conflicting elements, but two entities that evolve together to achieve harmony. In fact, China is not far from assuming the non-existence of a conflict. Should there be one, however, it would only be the motor for achieving an order. The Chinese dialectic, for Qin Yaqing, would provide an alternative explanation for the functioning of relations between actors belonging to different cultural and civil environments in the global society.<sup>164</sup> The Trump

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<sup>161</sup> U.S. Policy Planning Staff (2020). *The Elements of China Challenge*. U.S. Office of the Secretary of State, November 2020, p. 31.

<sup>162</sup> Yan, X. T. (2013). *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 16.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibidem*, p.128.

<sup>164</sup> Qin, Y. Q. (2012). "Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales" / "Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making". *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 100, p. 83.

administration, in any case, achieved a fundamental break in the conventional wisdom about China, a strategic approach that does not include ancient Chinese philosophy and morality, but that, generally and precisely at the same time, aimed at distorting Chinese predatory and repressive practices. In the larger framework of this work, which aims to analyse a transition of power present in the world today, Trump's policy has been seen by many as the moment of the abdication of the United States from its role of world leadership in the system. the American withdrawal from its commitments as a hegemonic power would be seen as dangerous, because it would open up a period of competition and instability.<sup>165</sup>

#### *2.1.4. New approaches: Joe Biden's China challenge*

After the 2020 vote, the transition of American domestic power has polarised public opinion even more. US people found themselves at the crossroads of two different approaches that would shape the future of the United States and its role as a hegemonic power on the global stage. On the one hand, reconfirming Trump's republican presidency and continuing the gauntlet thrown down in 2017. On the other hand, to grant an opportunity to Democrat Joe Biden, a veteran politician and former vice-president of the Obama administration, the man who would have calmed the wind of populism that Trump had made to blow across the country.<sup>166</sup> President Biden's victory may have seemed a beacon of hope for most of the American people, a fact not so much borne out by the exit polls of the elections, which on the contrary still showed great appreciation for Trump's

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<sup>165</sup> Brands, H. (2018). "US Grand Strategy in an Age of Nationalism: Fortress America and its Alternatives". *The Washington Quarterly*, 40(1), 73-94.

<sup>166</sup> In line with the political trends that emerged after the financial crisis of 2008, former US president Donald Trump is often referred to as a "right-wing populist", in the narrowest interpretation of his term of gaining the consent of the population. however, assuming a contrast exists between society and the establishment, D. Trump would not be defined by all as a 'populist', being himself part of the American business elite, but only for his demagogic abilities ( see Kazin, M. (2016). "Trump and American Populism: Old Whine, New Bottles". *Foreign Affairs*, 95(6), 17–24. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43948377?seq=1> ; Morelock, J., & Narita, F. Z. (2018). "Public Sphere and World-System: Theorizing Populism at the Margins". In J. Morelock (Ed.), *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism* (Vol. 9, pp. 135–154). University of Westminster Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9hvtcf.11> )

tougher policies, as at the international level, to cool relations between what are considered to be the two great powers of today's world scene.<sup>167</sup>

The Capitol Hill assault on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, though, showed up an unprecedented crisis within the United States. The onslaught to what is generally contemplated as a temple of democracy<sup>168</sup> emphasised a profound crisis not only of democratic values, but also of the stability of a hegemonic power, which appeared shaky, uncertain and without a future at the time. Desecrated was the heart of that power that guaranteed stability and prosperity to the whole world since the post-Cold war. Democracy exposed its most profound “*faults and fissures*”, and the Biden administration had to front whatever it takes to repair those faults and to restore the disfigured image of democratic governance and trustworthiness of the United States.<sup>169</sup> In this attack that epitomises the political polarisation that seems to be mounting in the United States, the image of a divided country is mirrored, a country that no longer seems to possess the power to lead and set the agenda for the rest of the globe. Pessimism about the American future is common among many policymakers, all sharing the view of the country entering a post-hegemonic era.<sup>170</sup> Already former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in the 1980s, had the idea that the United States would have remained the predominant power but will soon have no longer the material capabilities, and even the political will, necessary to run the world in the way it had been able to do.<sup>171</sup> Former US President Jimmy Carter, moreover, once referred to the fact that “*to maintain order in the global system, the U.S. would have its grand strategy and devise more subtle means of guaranteeing its in a more interdependent world*”<sup>172</sup>. Joe Biden’s presidency, from 2021, picks up the fate of a highly polarised country, as former President

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<sup>167</sup> The New York Times (2020). “Presidential Elections Results: Biden Wins. *The New York Times*, November 3, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/03/us/elections/results-president.html>

<sup>168</sup> US Government Information (2021). *History of the United States Capitol*. US Government Information. Web Archive. Available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CDOC-106sdoc29/pdf/GPO-CDOC-106sdoc29-6-1.pdf>

<sup>169</sup> De Groot, K. (2021). “Capitol Attack: Where Does American Democracy go from here?”. *Penn Today*, January 7, 2021. Available at: <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/capitol-attack-where-does-american-democracy-go-here>

<sup>170</sup> Cox, M. (2002). “September 11th and U.S. Hegemony—Or Will the 21st Century Be American Too?”. *International Studies Perspectives*, 3(1), 53–70. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44218823>

<sup>171</sup> Kissinger, H.A.K. (1981). *For the Record: Selected Statements, 1977-1980*. London, Weidenfeld and Nikolson.

<sup>172</sup> Cox, M. (2002). “September 11th and U.S. Hegemony—Or Will the 21st Century Be American Too?”. *International Studies Perspectives*, 3(1), 53–70. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44218823>

Trump's foreign policy challenge to China. The trade war conducted by President Trump has, as previously analysed, put the US in crisis, which instead of becoming economically autonomous has ended up becoming even more dependent. As vice-president under the Obama administration, Biden was politically active throughout US history. His tone, however, remains harsh towards China, there is talk of extreme competition, of abuse in the economic framework, and Beijing therefore remains at the centre of US foreign policy. The interest in China is "*a fundamental debate about the future of the world, between those who see authoritarianism as the best model and those who understand that democracy is essential*"<sup>173</sup>, in Biden's words. China is essentially the only competitor that is able to combine its economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to pose a sustained challenge to a free and open international system. Biden's one is a strategy that does not stand out much from that of President Trump, an idea that presupposes China being a challenge to the United States and to the world. Nevertheless, Biden's priority was to restore multilateralism to strengthen old and new alliances, among which the QUAD dialogue<sup>174</sup>. Biden's policy is, hence, played out differently from Trump's one. His motto "*America is back*", albeit not that different, collides with "*America First*", in an attempt to take the United States back to its prosperity, "*repairing [our] alliances and engaging with the world again*"<sup>175</sup>. On November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the first virtual meeting between Biden and Xi Jinping took place. Two "*old friends*", as President Xi said, that appeared aware of being the world's two great powers and conscious about the fact that it's "*[their] responsibility as leaders of China and the United States to ensure that the competition between our countries does not veer into conflict, whether intended or*

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<sup>173</sup> The White House (2021). *Remark by President Biden at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference*, February 19, 2021. Web Archive. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/19/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-2021-virtual-munich-security-conference/>

<sup>174</sup> The QUAD (*Quadrilateral Security Dialogue*) is one of the cornerstones of US Indo-Pacific policy, not just a military strategy but an economic and cooperative one that from 2007 binds the United States with India, Japan and Australia, a response to a supposed increase in Chinese economic and military power. (see Power, J. (2021). "What is the QUAD and How will it Impact US-China Relations under the Biden's Administration?". *South China Morning Post*, February 24, 2021. Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/explained/article/3122933/what-quad-and-how-will-it-impact-us-china-relations-under-biden>

<sup>175</sup> The White House (2021). *Remarks by President Biden on America's Place in the World*, February 4, 2021. Web Archive. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>

*unintended just simple, straightforward competition*"<sup>176</sup>. Noteworthy is the responsibility held by the two leaders that the competition between the two countries does not escalate into a war. A dialectic, that of Biden, which departs from the challenge launched by Trump, and which instead relies on a regulation of the fact that the two countries will inevitably compete in many fields of policy-making. The rules of the game must be established, to guarantee a fair balance of power. Another *détente*<sup>177</sup> that cools down old tensions seems to be set out between China and United States, which certainly should not be underestimated, in the light of the bold contrast between two different ideologies. Indeed, the approaches of the two presidents are also dictated by two completely different future goals. President Xi Jinping needs to assure, in a sense, a political environment as stable as possible, for he will soon confirm his third term in office and must be aware of avoiding any surprises, domestically and internationally. President Biden, likewise, heads a country that is highly polarised, and the next presidential elections in 2024 will need a stable environment, especially about the Chinese issue. What emerges from Biden's approach? Balancing China is different from containing China. The US should not establish as the basis of its policy a counterweight to China, because that would be basically impossible for the inevitability of growing Chinese power. In face of an emerging new international arena shaped by this change of presidency in the White House, the economic damage caused by the coronavirus pandemic, to rely on its partners and allies is a strategic tool for the United States, aimed at creating a structure that provides balance and stability in the Asian region and globally.<sup>178</sup> This is a common point that the United States shares with China, namely putting at the center of its foreign policy strategy the search for partnership networks, as a focus on socio-economic issues.<sup>179</sup> Biden's approach and the resulting Chinese strategy seem to confirm the theories on the balance

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<sup>176</sup> Joshi, M. (2021). "The Xi-Biden Virtual Summit: a Gamechanger?" *Observer Research Foundation*, November 16, 2021. Available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-xi-biden-virtual-summit-a-gamechanger/>

<sup>177</sup> *Détente* is the term used during the Cold War to describe a relaxation of the tensions between United States and USSR in the 1970s. The term has been academically and journalistically transposed to the new confrontation between the United States and China and the subsequent alleged relaxation of tensions between the two countries with the administration (see also Da, W. (2021). "China-US Détente: Avoiding Overestimation and Underappreciation". *China-US Focus*, November 4, 2021. Available at: <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/china-us-detente-avoiding-overestimation-and-underappreciation>

<sup>178</sup> Eran, O., & Efron, S. (2020). "The Biden Administration's Expected China Policy: A Change in Style or Substance?". *Institute for National Security Studies*. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27776>

<sup>179</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.



of power, two great powers facing each other, trying to survive by ensuring that the other does not gain too much power. Certainly, in an increasingly economically interdependent world, trade acts as a buffer for a hypothetical military confrontation to come. However, to recall history as a resource to draw on to interpret the future, nothing occurred when the United States surpassed Great Britain as great power in the late nineteenth century.<sup>180</sup> The game between China and the US is played, however, on a clash between two different ideologies, which clearly do not share the same values. Certainly, the period of unipolar stability sanctioned by the *Pax Americana* is over, as is the distribution of power that is not weighed just using military power, but it is especially accounted by relative growth rates and shares of world GDP.<sup>181</sup>

China's peaceful rise, together with its military and political ambitions and impressive modernisation, make the US model appear relatively outdated. According to some scholars, conditions are ripe for China to be able to dissent and to criticise the existing international order, and to proactively urge for an alternative vision.<sup>182</sup>

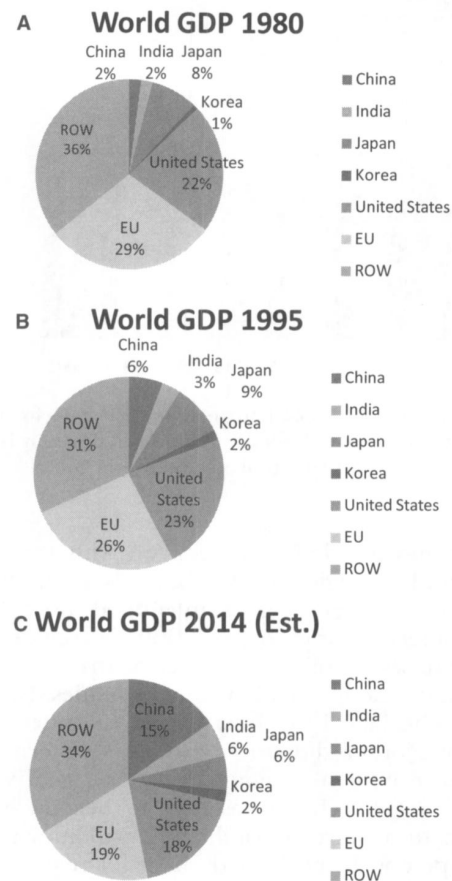


Figure 3. Shares of World GDP, 1989-2014. From IMF Data, World GDP as Percentage of Total (ROW: Rest of the World).

<sup>180</sup> Helle, H. J. (2017). "China and the us: A Balance of Power?" In *China: Promise or Threat?: A Comparison of Cultures* (pp. 24–39). Leiden, Brill, p.34. Available at:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h29s.8> ; Arrighi, G., Silver, B. J. (2003). *Caos e Governo del Mondo. Come cambiano le egemonie e gli equilibri planetari*. Milan, Mondadori.

<sup>181</sup> Layne, C. (2012). "This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the "Pax Americana." *International Studies Quarterly*, 56(1), 203–213. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41409832>

<sup>182</sup> Rolland, N. (2020). *China's Vision for a New World Order*. Seattle, National Bureau of Asian Research. Available at: [https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/sr83\\_chinasvision\\_jan2020.pdf](https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/sr83_chinasvision_jan2020.pdf)

## 2.2. The *American Dream*: slipping away

In one of the most famous novels of US literature, Francis Scott Fitzgerald wrote “*the American Dream is the continuous desire for better*”<sup>183</sup>. Almost a century later, that dream seems for many to have been fully realised, while for others it seems to be fading away. What is known as the *American Dream* is but a model or set of ideals characteristic of the United States of America, in which the concept of freedom is understood as the pursuit of prosperity, progress and social mobilisation. More than any other nation, United States has celebrated itself as the land of opportunity.<sup>184</sup> If it is considered that a nation could be a great one as long as it has a great dream, the best example for this is the United States. Its exceptionalism resides in its realization of the dream to be a superpower. American Studies experts call it as a “hegemonic culture” in which US norms, values and also cultural practices are considered qualitatively superior.<sup>185</sup> The hegemonic role, as well as the hard power actions, have driven the United States to be a country serving as an imperial power at global level. As world superpower in the post-Cold war environment, US possessed the ability to establish preferences and to entice and attract other countries, thanks to its freedom ideology that always includes the values of democracy, personal freedom, and an abundant grade of openness. US patterns spread around the world also by the momentum of globalization, creating an effective engine to expand the American dream. The United States has become not merely a nation, but an idea that lives in the mind of the people of the world.<sup>186</sup> Soft power tools helped the United States to maintain its strategic power throughout the world, yet after 2008 financial crisis the dream seemed to be dead. What appears to be the end of the American dream reflects the dramatic increase in inequality, the collapse of social solidarity, of a model that although it still makes the world a protagonist no longer seems to be able to adapt and meet the challenges of today's world. Many social studies and research have suggested an unraveling of the American dream, domestically visible in growing wealth gap, an ongoing race and gender

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<sup>183</sup> Fitzgerald, F. S. (1925). *The Great Gatsby*. London, Penguin, p. 36.

<sup>184</sup> Vanneman, R., & Cannon, L. W. (1987). “The American Dream” in *The American Perception of Class* (pp. 257–282). Temple University Press. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv941wv0.17>

<sup>185</sup> Kasiyarno, K. (2014). “American Dream. American Hegemonic Culture and its Implications to the World”. *Humaniora*, 26(1), 13-21. Available at: <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/jurnal-humaniora/article/view/4652/4112>

<sup>186</sup> *Ibidem*, p.15.

inequality, as well as internationally underlined but a more distributed power.<sup>187</sup> Nowadays, US hegemony appears to not call the shots. Despite continuing to exert an important weight in shaping the strategic and security arrangements of the Asian continent, new countries are sneaking into the threads once sewed by the United States. China's new global position as leading economic power is proposing to the world a new model, a new dream that would have made its country prosperous for the benefit of the whole planet. The Chinese one is a project that is being consolidated by a new, determined and ambitious leader, President Xi Jinping<sup>188</sup>, that succeeded in changing the political atmosphere of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, altering the way in which many states, even loyal US partners, have started perceiving Washington. From the very beginning of diplomatic relations between the two countries, China seemed to step on the toes of the United States, as it literally imported, for the opening-up process initiated under the presidency of Deng Xiaoping<sup>189</sup>, the US know-how and theories to build its own dream. Yet, the country underwent a process of "indigenization", enriching Western narrative with Chinese concepts and thought in the framework of an *interactive interpretation*<sup>190</sup>.<sup>191</sup> As Jin Kai, Associate Professor at Guangdong Academy of Social Science, argues, a China-labeled dream is not intended to challenge the US global leadership, for "*it is not meant as a universal dream but as one alternative among many*"<sup>192</sup>. Chinese civilization and culture that draw back to Confucius thought helped to shape a unique way of Chinese contemporary policy-making that considers the importance of order, the respect for the authority, as well as the importance of collectivism, performing in contrast with the mainstream Western model that shaped the world for centuries.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Hanson, S. L., Zogby, J. (2010). "Trends—Attitudes about the American Dream". *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 74(3), 570–584. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40927731>

<sup>188</sup> Gallelli, B. (2021). *La Cina di Oggi in Otto Parole*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 31.

<sup>189</sup> The *reform and opening up* (改革开放 *Gǎigé kāifàng*) is the process that People's Republic of China underwent under the presidency of Deng Xiaoping in 1978-1979 to reform a stagnating economy after the Cultural Revolution and to open up to the world limiting state's regulation. Foreign policy also became an issue of important relevance (see Yifu, J., & Shen, Z. (2018). "Reform and development strategy" In R. Garnaut, L. Song, & C. Fang (Eds.), *China's 40 Years of Reform and Development: 1978–2018* (pp. 117–134). ANU Press. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv5cgbnk.15> )

<sup>190</sup> See Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2.1.

<sup>191</sup> Zhang, F. (2012). "The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations". *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 5(1), p.76. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48615864>

<sup>192</sup> Jin, K. (2014). "The China Dream Vs. the American Dream". *The Diplomat*, September 20, 2014. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2014/09/the-china-dream-vs-the-american-dream/>

<sup>193</sup> *Ibidem*.

### 2.2.1. The “Chinese issue” and the “American issue”: complex since 1949

With the same method that has been used so far in analysing the main issues raised by this work, it is important to start from the meaning of words in order to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts underlying the main dynamics in the relations between United States and China. Language is in fact the mirror of culture, and in this work language and culture are, from the theoretical framework, an essential tool of analysis.<sup>194</sup> Whether in official documents such as state documents, newspaper articles, or speeches by leading state figures, the relationship of the United States with China and that of China with the United States are defined by the words *issue* in English and 问题 (*wèntí*) in Chinese. In English, issue comes from the action of putting something out, be a topic, a discussion, or a problem<sup>195</sup>. In Chinese language, 问题 (*wèntí*) is the fusion between two characters: 问 (*wèn*) meaning “to ask, to question something, and 题 (*tí*) meaning “topic, subject, problem”.<sup>196</sup> In both cases, the two terms indicate a matter of relevance, something to take an interest in. As a matter of fact, it has been documented in the first part of the second chapter how both governments, even during different administration, expressed concern about the other countries. The relation between United States and China started in 1949. Since then,<sup>197</sup> “*U.S.-China relations have evolved from tense standoffs to a complex mix of intensifying diplomacy, growing international rivalry, and increasingly intertwined economies*”. In 1949, President Mao Zedong proclaimed the People’s Republic of China in Beijing and Chiang Kai-Shek was exiled in the territory of the Republic of China (ROC), i.e., the territory geographically known as Taiwan. United States commitment against the spread of Communist ideology was evident in its support to the then Nationalists’ government in Taipei, maintaining limited relations with Communist mainland China. As a matter of fact, US have exercised in Asia (and still continues, albeit with greater difficulty, to exercise) what is known as *powerplay*, a

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<sup>194</sup> Yan, X. T. (2013). *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

<sup>195</sup> Issue. (2021). In *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* (2021st ed.). Oxford University Press. Available at:

[https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/issue\\_1?q=issue](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/issue_1?q=issue)

<sup>196</sup> Lu, S. (2004). “问题 [wèntí]” in *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* [Contemporary Chinese Dictionary]. Shanghai, Commercial Press.

<sup>197</sup> Council of Foreign Relations (2022). “U.S. Relations with China 1949-2022” in *Timeline*. Council of Foreign Relations. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>

construction of an asymmetric network of alliances with the aim of exerting as much control as possible in the region and over the allies themselves.<sup>198</sup> Relations got sour during the Korean War (1950-1953) for the different support in the conflict and culminated in almost twenty years of neither diplomatic nor economic relations between the two countries. A key point that cracked the ice that was freezing US-China relationship emerged in the framework of what was called as *ping-pong diplomacy* (乒乓外交 *Pīngpāng wàijiāo*). To People's Republic of China, sport widely served higher political purposes, like that of enhancing friendship among peoples of different nations. Sport embodied, hence, a political tool that revealed to be essential in foreign affairs management to sustain China's authority over both its own people and foreigners, and to pursue the moral idea of "*friendship first, competition second*". The Mao Zedong era was characterized by a period of isolationism. Yet, athletes were the few who were allowed to leave the country and to travel overseas, expanding relations even with ideologically rival countries.<sup>199</sup> Chinese peculiar way of making diplomacy paved the way to US President Richard Nixon's (1969-1974) first visit to mainland China in 1972. Preceded by secret visits held by Secretary of State H. Kissinger, the United States foreign policy of the first years of the 1970s was characterized by a rapprochement with China, with Nixon's personal idea that it would have been worthless to leave China



Figure 4. First meeting between PRC's President Mao Zedong and US President Richard Nixon. February 7, 1972. Getty Images.

"angry and isolated". The strategy was obviously geopolitical: a diplomatic relationship with China would have helped the United States to put pressure on the Soviet Union in the Asian continent, taking advantage of the fraying relationships between the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China and allowing, in a sense, a major distribution of global power against the Soviets.

<sup>198</sup> Cha, V. D. (2009). "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia". *International Security*, 34(3), 158–196. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40389236>

<sup>199</sup> Guanhua, W. (2003). "Friendship First: China's Sports Diplomacy during the Cold War". *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 12(3/4), 133–153. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23613227>

<sup>200</sup> The most tangled knot in the first sign of US-China diplomatic relations, however, is exemplified by the *Shanghai Communiqué*, a document that albeit affirming a normalisation of the relations between the two countries, underlines a controversial issue that nowadays still conserves its “matter of relevance” status. The “Taiwan question” and the *One China Policy* (一个中国 *yīgè Zhōngguó*)<sup>201</sup> issue found the two countries found not to be on the same page. On the one hand, the United States was committed to ensuring a peaceful resolution of relations between the two territories; on the other, China that firmly and assertively told the world not to interfere in what it called an internal affair. Since 1979, indeed, United States has maintained with Taiwan “officially substantial but non-diplomatic relations” <sup>202</sup> , that allowed itself to guarantee the foreign policy defined as *strategic ambiguity*. Being ambiguous, and thus supporting Taiwan's democracy but at the same time recognising the People's Republic of China as the only Chinese



Figure 5. Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping visiting Texas in 1979, one of the most famous images as symbol of well-established relationship between the US and China. AP Photos.

state and maintaining diplomatic, political and economic relations with it, is part of the US policy to preserve and ensure peace and stability not only between China and Taiwan, but also to maintain control in one of the most convulsive parts of the Asian region.<sup>203</sup> In the same years, US President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) guaranteed People’s Republic of China an even more official diplomatic recognition, culminating in the trip to United States by Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping and the stipulation of many agreements to form a scientific, technological, and cultural interchange, as well as trade relations. With Deng

<sup>200</sup> The Richard Nixon Foundation (2014). *The Opening of China*. Available at: <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/exhibit/the-opening-of-china/>

<sup>201</sup> The *One China Policy* (一个中国 *yīgè Zhōngguó*) represents one of the most complex and tangled issue of China’s domestic and foreign policy. Mainland China (People’s Republic of China) affirms itself as the only legitimate government and Taiwan (Republic of China) as part of mainland China’s territory and governance (see Document 12: PRC White Paper, “The One China Principle and the Taiwan Issue, February 21, 2000”. (2000). In *Asian Affairs*, 27(1), 38–54. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30172991> )

<sup>202</sup> *Taiwan Relations Act*, Public Law 96-8, 22 U.S.C. 3301 et seq. (1979). Available at: <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/taiwan-relations-act/>

<sup>203</sup> Clark, C. (2010). “The Taiwan Relations Act and the U.S. Balancing Role in Cross-Strait Relations”. *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 17(1), 3–18. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44288005>

Xiao Ping self-appointment as “Chinese Premier”, US dialogue with the PRC started to cover a wide range of issues, encompassing global and regional strategic problems, political-military questions, as well as Chinese access to multilateral organizations. China's openness to the world has not only made it possible to invest in research and development, but to open up the country to new techniques and new technologies, allowed many to travel and learn, to take inspiration to reproduce in China what was happening in other countries. Decollectivisation of agriculture, privatisation of certain sectors as opposed to state-ownership, and the inauguration of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to experiment with free trade, were just some of the essential and strategic reforms that still form the cornerstone of the great growth that China has experienced.<sup>204</sup>

Relations remained tight for the next ten years, until 1989, when the Tiananmen Square protests<sup>205</sup> took place in Beijing. United States loosened its commitment, for what for China was just an “accident” (六四事件 *liùsì shìjiàn*), for the United States represented a serious crisis of democratic values and the protection of human rights and freedom of expression. The international community itself approved of sanctions determined to strike a serious blow against Beijing's own international values enshrined in the UN Charter.<sup>206</sup> Like the Taiwan issue, the topic of human rights, which is so important to the Western world, has always been a peculiar feature of the relationship between the United States and China, which underlines its complexity even more. In the face of what are agreements that enshrine a firm relationship, the clash between two different ideologies peeps out, and exacerbates the tone. It will have to wait until the beginning of the new century, precisely year 2001, for relations between China and the US to return to calmer waters. The so-called *issues* or 问题 (*wèntí*), however, do not remain closed in the drawer, but simply appear more veiled, under the news of China's entry into the *World Trade*

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<sup>204</sup> Huang, J., et al. (2008), "Agriculture in China's Development: Past Disappointments, Recent Successes, and Future Challenges", in Brandt, Loren; Rawski, G. Thomas (eds.), *China's Great Transformation*, Cambridge, Cambridge university press.

<sup>205</sup> The Tiananmen Square protests were a serious of riots and upheavals that took place in Beijing's homonymous square in 1989. People demanded more guarantees for the future of China that was undergoing a rapid economic industrialization and modernisation, but government's restrictions, corruption and censorship constituted, especially for young students, a relevant problem for political participation. The Chinese government toughly repressed the protests provoking the death of thousands of people (see Nathan, A. J. (2001). “The Tiananmen Papers”. *Foreign Affairs*, 80(1), 2–48. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/20050041>)

<sup>206</sup> US State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research (1989). *China: Aftermath of the Crisis*. US State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, July 27, 1989. Web Archive. Available at: <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB16/documents/36-04.htm>

*Organisation* (WTO). From 2001 to the present, the “Chinese issue” and the “American issue” are the main focuses of US and Chinese foreign policy, a relationship that is mainly based on economic exchanges and know-how accounted for billions of dollars, but which conceals, as analysed, geopolitical, ideological and cultural issues of relevance. Nevertheless, in the wider framework of international relations, the establishment of economic and social relations of a transnational type, characteristic of today's US-China pattern, would nevertheless seem to guarantee a stabilising effect on relations between states. The liberalist approach, from this point of view, provides a theoretical alternative to the mainstream realist interpretation of US-China relations.

### 2.2.2. *Is United States responsible of China's development?*

In contrast to the previously considered realist approach to international relations, which envisages an anarchic global scenario formed by states only pursuing their own interests, liberalism as international relations' theoretical framework argues that states as entities interacting in the global system will promote economic interest and will focus on absolute advantages in favour of cooperation.<sup>207</sup> Although China's rise is therefore not without potential conflict and competition factors, by virtue of its economic growth it ends up having incentives to stabilise the international order, promoting forms of trade cooperation as well as having a “*responsible behaviour*” towards the international order itself. The US foreign policy that over the years has ensured China's access to the global sphere would therefore be responsible, in a way, for China's rise, as well as, at the same time, for ensuring a global order. According to the historian Niall Ferguson, trade and financial foreign investments and cooperation would have had an “*appeasement effect*”, seeing in the relation between United States and People's Republic of China a symbiotic fusion. To paraphrase his own words, the relationship would be a “Chimera” formed by China producing low-price commodities hence saving and buying US debt, and United States dragging the global economy and feeding China's rise with high levels of

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<sup>207</sup> Jahn, B. (2018). “Liberal Internationalism: Historical Trajectory and Current Prospects”. *International Affairs*, 94(1), 43-61. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322268485\\_Liberal\\_internationalism\\_Historical\\_trajectory\\_and\\_current\\_prospects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322268485_Liberal_internationalism_Historical_trajectory_and_current_prospects)



consumption.<sup>208</sup> Certainly, it is possible to assess that the extraordinary evolution of Chinese economy and its role in the global system has produced an impact on Western societies as well as has produced concern on United States' dream spread. Generally, US narrative appears worried about an historical cyclical process that would see the two countries waging a war, and interpreting China's use of US capital as a tool to build China's own strength to threaten the United States. Nevertheless, a rising power is not necessarily a "revisionist power" that will certainly destabilise international order.<sup>209</sup> On the contrary, it is legitimate for it to propose different strategic models that can be an alternative to the founding pillars of the international order, in this case those built by the United States. China's rise, whether economic, political or military is actually within a Western-oriented system shaped and molded by the leadership of the United States, a system that results "valuable" in China's view. From the beginning of the reforms that led the country to a more opened and market-oriented system, China has concretely accounted many benefits for its own economy. The international polling firm *GlobeScan*, moreover, has accounted for a very high interest in free enterprise system in China, with almost 74% of participants declaring the appropriateness of the market economic system.<sup>210</sup>

### 2.2.3. *Empire of production and empire of consumption: balancing power*

An article by the *Financial Times* of December 2021 reported "*If only China had not been waved into the World Trade Organization [...]. If only successive White Houses had not been so credulous in their dealings with Beijing*"<sup>211</sup>. To coexist with China is certainly an issue that makes the American dream slipping away, or at least a question that overlaps

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<sup>208</sup> Ferguson, N.; Schularick, M. (2007). "Chimerica and the Global Asset Market Boom. *International Finance*, 10(3), 215-239. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1468-2362.2007.00210.x>

<sup>209</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 30.

<sup>199</sup> Zhong Zhou, J. (2008). "Does China's Rise Threaten the United States?". *Asian Perspective*, 32(3), 171–182. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42704645>

<sup>211</sup> Ganesh, J. (2021). "The US is not responsible for China's Rise". *Financial Times*, December 14, 2021. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/917596e5-66e1-4bd4-88da-42d4d3bf5b3a>

with what President Xi Jinping has named “*Chinese Dream* (中国梦 *Zhōngguó méng*)”<sup>212</sup>. For the two countries, sharing many opportunities is source of mutual benefit. Chinese economy heavily relies on Western expertise and know-how, and since the times of Deng Xiaoping reforms Chinese workers were sent to the United States to learn the scientific knowledge. Moreover, nowadays’ Chinese foreign trade largely depends on investments, and its exports are produced by foreign-funded enterprises. China is, hence, sensitive to the ups and downs of the international economy, and that of the U.S. economy above all. Should US economy have complications, these complications can hurt China's economic growth. It can be argued that the economic relations linking the United States and China are now becoming a new way or channel on which to interpret power relations between the great powers. In a report by the *Pew Research Center*, the balance of power between the two countries is analysed and surveyed through the lenses of economic power, arguing about a general positive attitude about the economic ties, and some concerns over Beijing’s influence at the same time. Many countries believe about Chinese investments to influence too much, especially in the United States’ eyes that see a predominant Chinese positive influence in countries where United States invested in the past.<sup>213</sup> The American dream model that the United States exported in the world collides with Chinese projects and perspective, even if in developed countries, according to the research, views of China’s power influence are generally more negative, being these countries more liked to issues like human rights and corruption. Nevertheless, Chinese footprint onto the world is becoming even more evident in the last years, undoubtedly changing the distribution of power and its balance with United States previous preponderance. Always in the economic field, the two countries seem to share a common destiny, i.e., the shift from “empire of production” to become an “empire of consumption”. United States and China can be seen as two imperial powers. In the recent past, United States ascended to become a hegemon, adopting an imperialistic approach that that ended up in economically dominating the world and in sharing its dream. First, the US system was based upon an organization of the economic activity based on production which diffused a “mass industrial capitalism”. By the 1960s, however, American foreign aid to other countries

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<sup>212</sup> See chapter 4.2.

<sup>213</sup> Silver, L.; Devlin, K.; Huang, C. (2019). “China’s Economic Growth Mostly Welcomed in Emerging Markets, but Neighbors Wary of its Influence”. *Pew Research Center*, December 5, 2019. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/12/05/chinas-economic-growth-mostly-welcomed-in-emerging-markets-but-neighbors-wary-of-its-influence/>

tended to diminish its own advantages, shifting its system towards being an “empire of consumption” based on supply side economics and deficits financed by foreigners.<sup>214</sup> In the same way but years apart, the Chinese dream contains the idea of a hope for restoring glorious Chinese imperial past, betting on economic development to give Chinese people, and the world, a “*personal happiness*”<sup>215</sup>. Moreover, with its strategic plan named *Made in China 2025* (中国制造 2025 *Zhōngguózhìzào èrlíng'èrwǔ*), People’s Republic of China proposed an industrial policy that is already giving its results, transforming the country, often dubbed as “world’s factory” because of its labour-intensive system, to a technology-intensive country where consumption covers a pivotal role.<sup>216</sup> With the economic reforms ensued over the past fifty years, China’s middle class expanded, as expanded was consumption possibilities, the key factor for growth. Expenditure that has been a traditional element of Western countries is now very common in Chinese households, focusing on services over goods.<sup>217</sup> The Chinese dream, hence, boosted the same process enhanced in the United States. As already analysed, it appears to overlap with the American dream, and for some it seems to tread on it. Both ways of dreaming hope for success through hard work, the American one pointing on the spirit of freedom and social mobility, the Chinese one stressing unity and stability. The future of the balance of power between the two countries is played out above all in how the different dreams, with their models, are presented, how they are sold. The first, the American one, more classic and already tried and tested. The second, the Chinese one, new and alternative that makes the American Dream slipping away and that haunts the United States’ decision-making. Just as the US leadership was designed to give the world an opportunity for progress, freedom and development, the modernity and prosperity they

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<sup>214</sup> Maier, C. S. (2006). *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

<sup>215</sup> Liu, S. (2013). “The Chinese Dream” *Caixin*, January 31, 2013. Available at: <http://english.caixin.com/2013-01-31/100488402>

<sup>216</sup> Li, K. (2015). “Hulianwang, shuangchuang, Zhongguozhizao erlingerwu cuisheng yi chang xingongyegeming [The Internet, Double Innovation, and Made in China 2025 Will Give birth to a New Industrial Revolution]”. *Xinhua*, October 15, 2015. Available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-10/15/c\\_1116825589.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-10/15/c_1116825589.htm)

<sup>217</sup> Ip, C. (2021). “China Consumption: How Important is it to the world’s n.2 economy? *South China Morning Post*, October 30, 2021. Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3154119/china-consumption-how-important-it-worlds-no-2-economy>

implement in the night of the Chinese dream are the path to a new era of great harmony (大同 *dàtóng*), national, regional and global.

#### 2.2.4. China containment policy

As a matter of fact, emerged from the previous analysis, China is increasing its global influence at a brisk pace through a process of rapid modernisation. Therefore, its rising power points out many questions. Nowadays, the paramount one is how China will be able to manage its relationship with the world's greatest power, the United States. As hot as fire is the debate over policy choices between both countries towards each other, and from United States' point of view. It becomes an issue of paramount relevance, Is China really a revisionist state able to change the *status quo*? To hold its position firmly, the United States should contain China to suppress its power,



Figure 6. An exemplifying illustration by Edel Rodriguez in which Chinese President Xi Jin Ping is “contained” by the dome of the Washington’s Capitol, symbol of US power. (The Wall Street Journal, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/containment-can-work-against-china-too-11638547169>)

even if many scholars believes that, through engagement, United States can influence China to operate within the well-established rules of world community.<sup>218</sup> From the other side of the map, Chinese policy-makers are at the same time dealing with likewise feasible assumptions, to comprehend and implement China’s national goals and interest in a world essentially dominated by American hegemony.<sup>219</sup> United States’ foreign policy toward China is not brand-new. It is rooted in the Cold War, the period in which the U.S. adopted a containment policy against communist states. To be specific, containment as a geopolitical strategic policy was first adopted by US President Harry Truman (1945-1953) in the immediate post-World War II with the target to contain the spread of Communism

<sup>218</sup> Carpenter, T. G. (2000). “Confusions and Stereotypes: U.S. Policy Towards China at the Dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” in Carpenter, T. G., Doran, J. A., (2000). *China’s Future: Constructing Power or Emerging Threat?* Washington, D.C, Cato Institute.

<sup>219</sup> Zhang, B. (2004). “American Hegemony and China’s U.S. Policy”. *Asian Perspective*, 28(3), 87–113. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42704468>

that was chasing for Soviet geopolitical expansion.<sup>220</sup> Yet, pundits of politicians and scholars are nowadays recalling and exhuming Cold War rhetoric to fit it to the new world scenario profoundly featured by United States and China. Basically, vast are the differences in the nature of the threat that China is posing to the United States compared to that of Soviet Union.<sup>221</sup> Unlike the Soviet Union, China is complexly and deeply integrated into a world system, it appears “*more economically dynamic and technologically sophisticated*”, that’s why its ambitions can threaten much more than the Soviet’s ones.<sup>222</sup> According to the realist interpretation, United States’ policy towards China and China’s policy towards the United States must consider the power factor. Inevitably, then, United States is to adopt a containment policy to face China’s rising power. Already in the US 2006 *National Security Strategy* Document, United States accepted China’s rise, but affirming that it was not feasible, for China, to stay on his own “*peaceful path*” while using “*old ways of thinking and acting*”<sup>223</sup>, referring to a policy-making that appeared not that transparent. China’s containment would help, then, the United States to maintain its great power status. Nevertheless, the Cold War rhetoric seems to be superficial in facing nowadays world with its tangled dynamics. As argued in the first part of this chapter, the last two US Presidents, namely Donald Trump and Joe Biden, used different charismas to declare that the United States are actually embarked a competition with China, but neither Trump nor Biden explained in a technical sense what is the target to be achieved. They barely outlined a strategy for success. While China is gradually entering the global arena even more. Many Chinese analysts have affirmed that the United States do not possess the power to act unilaterally, it is materially rounded by other strategic major powers. Acting unilaterally, then, may constitute a successful strategy to enjoy the advantage of its power, but it will not be a way to impose a hegemony.

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<sup>220</sup> See Beschloss, M. (2003). *Our Documents. 100 Milestone Documents from the National Archives*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 194-199. Available at: [https://books.google.es/books?id=qqDA6OGvhmUC&pg=PA194&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.es/books?id=qqDA6OGvhmUC&pg=PA194&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>221</sup> Larson, D. W. (2021). “The Return of Containment. What the Cold War policy means for our current moment”. *Foreign Policy*, January 15, 2021. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/15/containment-russia-china-kennan-today/>

<sup>222</sup> Brands, H. (2021). “Containment Can Work Against China, Too”. *The Wall Street Journal*, December 3, 2021. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/containment-can-work-against-china-too-11638547169>

<sup>223</sup> The White House (2006). *National Security Strategy*, March 2006. Web Archive. Available at: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>

<sup>224</sup> As President Joe Biden remarked, People's Republic of China is the “*most serious competitor*” that poses a concrete challenge to the “*prosperity, security and democratic values*”<sup>225</sup>, even from a military point of view. To contain China is not just to wage a trade war, as Trump acted during his administration, but is also to surround China's territory in the remote but realist event of a conflict. US military strategy to build an ideological and military *cordon sanitaire*<sup>226</sup> to contain China is part of President Biden's turnover towards the Indo-Pacific area, crafting and restoring alliances to encircle China's territory. As a matter of Fact, from the Obama administration deep was the focus on soft power diplomacy within the Indo-Pacific region to build a network of alliances and limit the geographical expansion of Chinese soft power, a strategy very similar to that implemented during the Cold War to contrast the Soviets. This strategy of deterrence may work to maintain not only a strategic position even in the most dynamic and wiggling area of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but also to preserve US power and to balance Chinese rising power. China's long-term military strategy, as a response, essentially aims at challenging US military and at its access-denial capabilities. <sup>227</sup> The expanding presence of the United States in East Asia, however, is fronted with constrained financial resources that challenges United States economic power to sustain the level of spending, destabilising, in a sense, US-China cooperation. Containment policy implemented by the United States is seen by China as the most concrete threat to its own national security, and Chinese response is not by implementing military spending. Whatever military strategy the United States pursues, it should take into account any little change that can re-shuffle the security environment in Asia. China's strong economy and sustained investment in military modernization surely constitute a powerful tool, not only for the security environment,

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<sup>224</sup> Wang, J. (1999). *Lengzhan hou Meiguo di quanqiu zhanlue he shijie diwei* [Post- Cold War American Global Strategy and Its Position in the World]. Beijing, Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, p.406.

<sup>225</sup> The White House (2021). *Remarks by President Biden on America's Place in the World*, February 4, 2021. Web Archive. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>

<sup>226</sup> *Cordon sanitaire* (“sanitary cordon”) is a metaphorical term that came to denote the ideological barrier created by France after World War I to isolate the Soviet Union and Germany. Similarly, the term came to denote the same type of American approach to isolate the Soviet union after World War II and prevent the spread of communist ideology. Again by translation, the term has been used several times in foreign policy to describe some of the strategies used by the United States against the Chinese power. (see Norman, S. E. (2014). *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Policy*. Lanham, Roman&Littlefield, p.90)

<sup>227</sup> Ross, R. S. (2013). “US Grand Strategy, the Rise of China, and US National Security Strategy for East Asia”. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 7(2), 20–40. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26270764?seq=1>

but also for the shift the balance of power to the Chinese side, or to make the realist interpretation of the advent of a new US-China conflict a reality. China is not seeking conflict with the United States, as its pursuing of national interests like the survival of the Communist regime, the maintenance of social order and the economic growth are best implemented by a peaceful and relatively stable international environment. Furthermore, Chinese power importance and influence is also assessed by its own behaviour within the international community, it must demonstrate to the world to be a constructive member proposing an alternative model that can improve or implement the international rules. What emerges in a broader analysis is that the tension between Chinese and U.S. interests is more pronounced and electrical from a regional point of view. The United States' containment policy, in fact, is focused on its ability to maintain its strategic position in the Indo-Pacific area to reduce China's military capabilities and, consequently, an essential part of its power.<sup>228</sup> To seek a global convergence while being willing to preserve a regional divergence is the most interlaced issue of weaving a stable relationship between China and the United States. More than containment, a strategy that balances global shared interests with regional tensions should be the path towards establishing a new global order.

As a new containment policy can appear outdated because of its likely unsuccessful result in a new and very different global set than that of the Cold War era, even US power appears to be outdated, in the broad sense of no longer being the driving force for the whole world. Surely, the perception of the American Dream fading away can be revisualised in the light of the fact that the American global position today is still dominant than any other hegemonic power in history, especially because of its soft power. Albeit US gross predominance in economic, military, and scientific fields, China is effectively narrowing the power gap with the United States. Its increasing power, however, will not necessarily improve its balance of power against the United States. As Bao Huizhang, Professor at the Department of Political Science at Lingnan University of Hong Kong, states, power should be considered in its two components of absolute power and relative power. In this perspective, China has seen a major increase in while China has seen a major increase in its absolute power, but its relative power compared to that of

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<sup>228</sup> Terrence, K.; Dobbins, J. et al. (2014). *Developing a U.S. Strategy for Dealing with China – Now and into the Future*. Santa Monica, Rand Corporation. Available at: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9802.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9802.html)

the United States has not undergone increases yet.<sup>229</sup> China's power has been growing, but so too has US power done, especially in key areas that are considered vital to affirm national power in the future, like technology, and military power. United States is leader of technological revolution, and its exceptionalism can still be evident in its concrete and wide application of computer and information technologies in every field of knowledge. Yet, China is gradually catching up with the United States, recognizing the importance of technology in the future as the core for highlighting national power. *"Today's world has entered an era of competition of integrated national power that is defined by high technologies. Whoever controls the high-tech area will be able to rapidly develop its economy, enhance its integrated power, and protect its national security"*.<sup>230</sup> Joe Biden and Xi Jinping, irrespective of their age and the colour of their hair, will confront each other on the new challenges that the world is calling them to face. China, of course, will not be slow to make itself ready, new and unpredictable with its model. Not necessarily, therefore, an armed conflict is the fate of the two powers: to recall Xi Jinping's thought, history is linear, progressive, projected towards the ultimate destiny of achieving order.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Zhang, B. (2004). "American Hegemony and China's U.S. Policy". *Asian Perspective*, 28(3), p.96. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42704468>

<sup>230</sup> *Ibidem*, p.98.

<sup>231</sup> Carrai, M. (2021). "Chinese Political Nostalgia and Xi Jinping's Dream of Great Rejuvenation". *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 18(1), 7-25. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-asian-studies/article/chinese-political-nostalgia-and-xi-jinpings-dream-of-great-rejuvenation/3B68F260CFC535B9CF22990C3D4F4055>





## CHAPTER 3

### 重温旧梦 (chóng wēn jiù mèng)

#### **“To relive past experiences”. A new “Cold War”: China reshaping world order and the “political meritocracy”**

*“When a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power, alarm bells should sound: danger ahead. China and the United States are currently on a collision course for war – unless both parties take difficult and painful actions to avert it. As a rapidly ascending China challenges America’s accustomed predominance, these two nations risk falling into a deadly trap [...].”<sup>232</sup>*

In the preface of *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* it is powerfully summarized the mainstream and most widespread interpretation of the evolution of the dynamics between the two great powers on the global stage today: the United States of America and People’s Republic of China. As US political scientist and analyst Graham T. Allison<sup>233</sup> made clear in his most famous essay, this work used history and culture to analyse the most important issues of relevance that outline the relationship between what are nowadays considered the two actors of a great power competition. From a realist point of view, United States and China are acting on the global stage and contending for the hegemonic power. On the one hand, the United States struggling to maintain the *status quo*. On the other hand, China emerging as “*the biggest player in the history of the world*”<sup>234</sup> that shakes and menaces US hegemony in a fatalistic perspective. Starting from the J. W. Bush presidency (2001-2009), sign of a surging friction between Washington and Beijing were evident, especially from US perspective. The relationship was not believed to be as harmonious as it was supposed to be, interests and cultural values were not as compatible. The pressing Chinese attitude in the Indo-

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<sup>232</sup>Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* London, Scribe, vii.

<sup>233</sup> *Graham T. Allison* is one of the most important personalities in US academic panorama. Specifically, he contributed to the analysis of decision-making process in politics especially during times of crisis and became a leading analyst of national security policy. His essay *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* constitutes nowadays one of the most accredited research projects in the analysis of international relations between US and China.

<sup>234</sup> Allison, G., Blackwill, R., Wyne, A. (2013). *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master’s Insights on China, the United States and the World*. Cambridge, MIT Press, p.42.

Pacific area was likely to wane US established hegemony, and the country's impending relationship with other strategic countries was thought to corrode US vital connections, and values. A "combustible mix"<sup>235</sup>, to which a Chinese double-digit rising economy contributed to fuel the fire. This conscious rivalry with China raised in the United States fundamental questions about the future direction of US-China relations and about its characterisation. Will this relation be marked by convergence through the establishment of a good cooperation, or by an increasing deterioration and open competition, and perhaps even war? As a matter of fact, the tensions in the Indo-Pacific area, as explained in *chapter 2*, could have contributed to divide the Asian continent in a new Cold war asset, in the prospect of a direct confrontation. From the economic perspective, though, the United States and China appears every day more interdependent: the world's largest economy in the West and worldwide<sup>236</sup>, on the one hand, and China that almost forgets to eat and sleep to achieve his goals and accomplish its dream, on the other hand. Despite the fact that the story serves, as stated by Allison himself, as a unit of measurement and tool of comparison for the analysis of international relations and international politics, many years ago few people were able to foresee that the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union was about to undergo a radical transformation, and few people thought that the latter would have ceased to exist, as scholars and analysts lacks powerful predictive tools to foresee the future of international relations.<sup>237</sup> The historical metaphor set forth by G. Allison provides a powerful lens for "*illuminating relations between China and the US today*"<sup>238</sup>, analysing and internalising the impact of a rising China on US power in the same way as it occurred between Sparta and Athens in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Liberal capitalism and state capitalism, the flagship democratic values of the United States and the one-party authoritarianism of the Chinese government, the well-established Western values that have dominated world ideology for centuries and the Confucianism that has guided the celestial empire since antiquity. All are pieces of a large

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<sup>235</sup> Friedberg, A. L. (2005). "The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?". *International Security*, 30(2), p.8. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137594>

<sup>236</sup> By 2020, United States of America was ranked as the world's largest economy by GDP (see Research FDI (2021). *The top 20 Largest Economies in the World by GDP*. Research FDI, February 28, 2021. Available at: <https://researchfdi.com/world-gdp-largest-economy/> )

<sup>237</sup> Friedberg, A. L. (2005). "The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?". *International Security*, 30(2), p.10. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137594>

<sup>238</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides's Trap?* London, Scribe, viii.

jigsaw puzzle, which are struggling to correspond together, a puzzle where not all the pieces line up together and which, for the US, China assertively wants to readjust. The idea the United States and China can potentially head a war against each other has nowadays become a commonplace, especially in the United States, among knowledgeable observers. Falling in what Allison has called *Thucydides's trap*<sup>239</sup> poses one of the most accredited interpretations to unravel current and future relations between the United States and China, in which one power is allegedly trying to unseat and displace the other. Indeed, China's economic and military capabilities are concretely improving. It is logic and theoretically feasible, thus, that this concept has become the lens through which this great power competition is analysed. According to academic records, by 2019 the number of works containing the phrases "China" and "Thucydides's trap" have grown impressively.<sup>240</sup> In the classic realist interpretation, bad states, usually nondemocracies, and leaders' propensity towards aggression can motivate war.<sup>241</sup> In the case of China, United States' attitude presented, especially in the last year, the image of an assertive Chinese President, Xi Jinping, carrying with him a revisionist project of consolidation of power.<sup>242</sup> Clearly with Trumpian rhetoric, a particular attachment to the sovereignty exercised by the United States and a reluctance towards those who place limits on it, in antithesis with the liberal international order, has emerged from the American political debate. It is a shift that, albeit in different tones, was and is still supported by a large part of what is known as the foreign policy community.<sup>243</sup> Nevertheless, Allison's thought and its consequent applicability to the US-Chinese relations presents no shortage of criticism from the US academic world itself. Being the purpose of this thesis to present a different perspective of how the global order is interpreted in the light of a rising China as a new world power, it is noteworthy to brightly highlight that the Chinese perspective of the

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<sup>239</sup> Allison, G. (2012). "Thucydides's Trap Has Been Sprung in the Pacific". *Financial Times*, August 21, 2012. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/5d695b5a-ead3-11e1-984b-00144feab49a>

<sup>240</sup> Hanania, R. (2021). "Graham Allison and the Thucydides Trap Myth". *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 15(4), 13–24. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48638049>

<sup>241</sup> Waltz, K. (2001). *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. New York, Columbia University Press.

<sup>242</sup> Rudd, K. (2018). *Xi Jinping, China and the Global Order: The Significance of China's 2018 Central Foreign Policy Work Conference*. Addressing Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, June 26, 2018. Available at: <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/kevin-rudd-xi-jinping-china-and-global-order>

<sup>243</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina Gli Stati Uniti, e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p.98.

international order does not consider a direct confrontation with the United States, denying the old “Cold war mentality”. In an article published in 2019 by the *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, it comes to light the idea that certainly a supposed power transition must be a matter of concern. The “China model” is a new and functional model, which necessarily challenges the Western one, raising doubts above all about the validity of the democratic system. Yet, even if the tool used by Allison is considered by many scholars a powerful instrument of analysis for studying United States and China relations, according to other studies that encapsulate the Chinese point of view the two countries are not destined for war. Their journey is more towards an “*uncertain future*”, in the searching for new criterion to escape the Thucydides’s trap.<sup>244</sup>

### 3.1. Great Power Competition and the “new Cold War”

The relationship between the United States and China, be it a simple relationship, cooperation, or confrontation, is an inextricable mix of multiple agents. Based on data and empirical analyses of facts, the realist interpretation of international relations predicts that between the two powers, one already established and hegemonic and the other on the rise, there will inevitably come a time of collision. When national interests diverge, when industrial development makes the rising power increasingly influential, and when the latter becomes dissatisfied with the *status quo*, the two powers are destined to compete, in a zero-sum game where there is only one winner. The revisionist power will not be satisfied with its gaining importance within the global sphere but will inevitably seek to subvert the previous order. The cornerstone assumptions of the realist school are shared by most US perspectives on the future of US-China relations.<sup>245</sup> Using historical memory, the United States and China would be destined for a *new Cold war*, and for some, it would have already begun. Today, the two countries are actually competing to shape security architectures, as well as norms and practices worldwide, including trade and investment regimes and the development and regulation of new technological infrastructures. The frictions will certainly play out over decades, not just within the countries but also in any

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<sup>244</sup> Zhang, C., Pu, X. (2019). “Can America and China Escape the Thucydides Trap?” *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 24(1), 1-9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-019-09609-y>

<sup>245</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina Gli Stati Uniti, e il Futuro dell’Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

other place of the globe, including space and cyberspace.<sup>246</sup> In international politics and within the analysis of the international relations, the past can be a bright light that glows, and through the past it is possible to discern some option among the many possibilities offered by an analysis. Evaluating and investigating great power competition occurring today between United States and China means to examine the impact of many dynamics that interact together and that can define the rise, or the fall of a great power, as well as the character of their relations.<sup>247</sup>

### 3.1.1. A renewed bipolarity?

It's a matter of fact that, regardless of any theoretical framework, United States established itself as the sole superpower in the world. Unipolarity turns out to be a historically constructed fact, after the end of the Cold War and the US "victory", also given its military supremacy. US hegemonical power, exercised in various ways, generated what would be defined as "unipolarity", i.e., the situation in which the power is distributed unequivocally on the side of one great power. Yet, as also argued in *chapter 2 § 2.1.4*, the US academic debate was interrogating itself about the future of this structure of polarisation, and about the longevity of unipolarity. According to some interpretations, sooner or later other major powers would have emerged and would have, in a manner, competed with the hegemon.<sup>248</sup> Others, on the contrary, contended that US global hegemony was destined to stay because of a huge power gap existing between the United States and other countries. Nevertheless, this last approach appears quite outdated, because of the presence, on the global stage, of the People's Republic of China, supposedly acting as revisionist power and intentioned to change the current setup. The liberal school, as an approach opened to progress possibility in international politics,

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<sup>246</sup> Woodrow Wilson Center (2018). *Wilson Quarterly Spring 2022 - Portraits of Challenging U.S. Partnerships: Focus on China*. *YouTube*, uploaded by Woodrow Wilson Center, May 25, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ld8d5jQSIng>

<sup>247</sup> Vuving, A. L. (Ed.). (2020). "Great Power Competition: Lessons from the Past, Implications for the Future". In *HINDSIGHT, INSIGHT, FORESIGHT: Thinking About Security in the Indo-Pacific* (pp. 13–36). Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26667.7>

<sup>248</sup> Layne, C. (1993). "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise". *International Security*, 17(4), 5–51. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539020>

theorises that the establishment of economic and transnational relations between two powers would be an advantage for them, and a factor that would ensure stability: China, as a rising state, would have incentives to maintain order and promote forms of integration, while the United States would continue to drive the global economy.<sup>249</sup> Liberalist theory, however, would not hold, considering all the fields in which China has become a competing, and menacing, power for the United States. In the face of China's improving capabilities, the world is supposed to experiment a renewed bipolarity, that distributes the power towards the West pole and the East pole of the map, a power that appears locked again, as it was in the post-World War II period, in a struggle for primacy.<sup>250</sup> China worries the United States and distresses the world and its order. With its economic leverage, its rising military spending and its almost non-stop growth, the Dragon is the official candidate to rival the "global policeman"<sup>251</sup>. With its almost automatic recognition, and conscious about its own capabilities, China is effectively the "second" great power in a new bipolar international regime. Scholars debate the likelihood of future war with a rising China, each side arguing whether direct conflict is quite inevitable. Yet, this mainstream debate does not consider the most probable future of US-China relations. As offered by many theories and as reminded by history, a direct conflict between the two superpowers can be a possibility, but considering Chinese point of view it remains remote.<sup>252</sup> China's economic and military capabilities are undoubtedly rising if not surpassing, relative to those of the United States, and it appears, for many scholars, quite clear that this concept has become the lens through which many see an imminent and future great power competition. However, the Chinese government has repeatedly emphasised that it does not seek a direct confrontation with the United States, nor is it its intention to assert a struggle to annihilate Western ideology. In the recent virtual World

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<sup>249</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina Gli Stati Uniti, e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

<sup>250</sup> Layne, C. (1993). "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise". *International Security*, 17(4), 5–51. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539020>

<sup>251</sup> *Global policeman* is an informal term very used to describe US role in the world. As hegemonic power and security supplier for many years, US route towards a supposed "global peace" has sought to intervene in sovereign states revindicating its role as carrier of democratic and liberal values (see Wertheim, S. (2020). "Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy". *Boston Review*, October 19, 2020. Available at: <https://bostonreview.net/articles/sam-lebovic-stephen-wertheim-tomorrow-the-world/>)

<sup>252</sup> Yeisley, M. O. (2011). "Bipolarity, Proxy Wars, and the Rise of China". *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 5(4), 75–91. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26270538>

Economic Forum on January 17, 2022, President Xi Jinping affirmed the need to “*discard Cold War mentality and seek peaceful coexistence and win-win outcomes*”, underlying that protectionism and unilateralism are not made to protect anything and anybody.<sup>253</sup> President Xi, with the destiny of Chinese nation on his shoulders, doesn’t talk about division, confrontation, or bipolarity. Using the Confucian thought, on the contrary, he remarks China’s commitment to contributing to shape a new world order that is no longer supposed to carry the US-label.

### *3.1.2. Power Politics and the “bamboo curtain”: the China threat*

In the first chapter of this work, it was presented a theoretical framework to provide the pattern to develop the issues surrounding the future of US-China relations in an argumentative manner. *Power Transition theory* (see *chapter 1, § 1.1.2*), in particular, can serve as main theoretical basis to support the theory of a new Cold War occurring between the current two great powers, United States and China. According to the classical realist school of international relations, international politics is the result of forces that are intrinsic in human nature, such as the pursue for power.<sup>254</sup> Power Politics, concretely, explain that the distribution of power and national interests of each nation are fundamental causes of war that can create a instability in the global system.<sup>255</sup> Nowadays, the world is effectively living a situation in which an established power, the United States of America, is feeling menaced by the rise of another power, China. Two countries that, in order to prioritise their national interests, are threatening each other by a range of political, military and economic instruments. When the US Vice-President Mike Pence pronounced his confident speech at the Hudson Institute of Washington D.C., on October 4, 2018, the preconditions for the advent, or beginning, of a clash were made clear. The then Vice President of the United States of America had the role of denouncing an incorrect,

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<sup>253</sup> World Economic Forum (2022). President Xi Jinping’s Message to the Davos Agenda in full. *World Economic Forum*, January 17, 2022. Web Archive. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/address-chinese-president-xi-jinping-2022-world-economic-forum-virtual-session/>

<sup>254</sup> Morgenthau, H. J. (1967). *Politics among Nations*, New York, Knopf.

<sup>255</sup> Lemke, D. (2008). “Power Politics and Wars without States”. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(4), 774–786. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25193849>



assertive, revisionist, dangerous, threatening Chinese attitude, an attitude that was undermining US policies and politics and advancing its “*authoritarian expansionism*” to unseat the United States from its commitment and underlying with tough tone that America “*will not stand down*”.<sup>256</sup> The following day, *The New York Times* published on its front page that analysts had interpreted M. Pence’s remarks as something that left few doubts about Washington “*embarking on a Cold War, that would force the country to dig in for a prolonged multifront battle*”.<sup>257</sup> Confirming how this speech was a watershed in the history of US-China relations, the newspaper reported the interview to professor Zhang Bao Hui, affirming that Vice-President Pence’s declarations looked like a declaration of a new Cold War. Moreover, the speech was defined as “*earth-shattering*”, re-evoking another updated edition of the “*iron curtain speech*”.<sup>258</sup> Historical comparisons appeared inevitable in public opinion in both countries, as well as in the expectations of their two leaders. In 1945, the then British Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared for the first time that an “*iron curtain*”<sup>259</sup> was being erected, in a telegram sent to then US President Harry Truman, to describe his concern regarding the attitudes of the Soviet Union, informally beginning the historical period known as the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the same way, after decades marked by the *pax americana*, Mike Pence's speech becomes the informal symbol of the new Cold war preparing to begin between the United States and China, a war that is not only being fought to the tune of imposing tariffs and economic obstacles, but that is being waged over the strategic security of the Indo-Pacific area and the ideological difference between liberal-democratic America and the “*Beijing’s authoritarian goals and*

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<sup>256</sup> Hudson Institute (2018). *Remarks delivered by President Mike Pence on the administration’s policy towards China*. Hudson Institute, October 4, 2018. Web Archive. Available at: <https://www.hudson.org/events/1610-vice-president-mike-pence-s-remarks-on-the-administration-s-policy-towards-china102018>

<sup>257</sup> Perlez, J. (2018). “Pence’s China Speech Seen as Portent of ‘New Cold War’”. *The New York Times*, October 5, 2018. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/05/world/asia/pence-china-speech-cold-war.html>

<sup>258</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>259</sup> Warner, G. (1970). “The United States and the Origins of the Cold War” [Review of *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers. The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference) 1945.; Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers, 1945. Vol. I. International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 46(3), 529–544. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2613228>

*hegemonic ambitions*”<sup>260</sup>. This time the curtain is not an iron curtain, but to borrow a definition already used years earlier, that between the US and China would be a *bamboo curtain*<sup>261</sup>. It is a border that falls down into the map again, retracing the timeline of history and demarking the lines of a relationship between two countries that seems to be in free fall with no way back, laying the foundation for a confrontation that seems to have many of the characteristics of the Cold War. Who would have been the one calling the shots? Already in March 2011, US Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, informed with his speech to the US Senate about China representing the most imminent “*mortal threat*” to the United States, underlining that, even if Chinese intentions are not malicious, it had the capacity to present such a danger.<sup>262</sup> What is labeled as *China Threat Theory*, in fact, relies on J. Clapper’s assumptions about Chinese capabilities and the possibilities to elevate to such an extremely category of threat, and represents the corpus which now attracts considerable Western attention, especially within the United States. John Mearsheimer, professor of political science at Chicago University, paved the way for the realist analysis that argues that China's growth will almost inevitably cause tensions with States, considerable potential for war with what he named “*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*”<sup>263</sup>. President Trump’s hostile rhetoric gave the impression that he might upset the U.S.-China relationship in a more concrete and material way, but certain literature is not as alarming as the realist approach about China’s rise. Some scholars, as an example, are positive about Chinese power, and stand in favour of an engagement policy to cope

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<sup>260</sup> U.S. Policy Planning Staff (2020). *The Elements of China Challenge*. U.S. Office of the Secretary of State, November 2020, p. 1. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>

<sup>261</sup> The term *bamboo curtain* was used as early as the beginning of the “first cold war” to designate the political and ideological barrier that impeded relations between Communist Asia, especially China, and the West from 1949 to 1972, associated with the already widespread image of the *Iron Curtain* dividing the Western world and the USSR. The term is often used journalistically in an ironic manner (see Bamboo Curtain (2021). In *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* (2021st ed.). Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/bamboo-curtain> )

<sup>262</sup> Turner, O. (2013). “Threatening” China and US security: the international politics of identity”. *Review of International Studies*, 39(4), 903–924. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24564438>

<sup>263</sup> Mearsheimer, J. J. (2006). “China’s Unpeaceful Rise”. *Current History*, 105(690), 160–162. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45318719>

with the Chinese issue rather than a containment to be applied by the United States.<sup>264</sup> As also demonstrated by Organski's model, material realities about what Chinese power is made of are a matter of concern. At the same time, however, the nature and extent of their importance must be considered, as well as the ideas underlying below the power. International affairs are nowadays guided by more than the distribution of state capabilities.<sup>265</sup> Evelyn Goh, professor of strategic Policy Studies at the Australian National University, emphasises the centrality of ideas to be pointed out within the wide framework of Sino-US relations.<sup>266</sup> Ideational forces are likely to shape and produce a "fantasised China threat"<sup>267</sup>, and contribute, of course, to enable US policies in response that configured as harsher. Policies themselves reinforce the understandings which make them possible. Today's taken-for-granted "China threat" to US security and, for extension, to the whole world, emerges in part from representations and interpretations that only consider merely material elements and capabilities. When feasible dangers from China have emerged across the whole history of Sino-US relations, they have always been perceived through the lens of American identity. Consequently, thus, dangers have always existed as a threat to that identity. More than the American dream that is seen as slipping away, United States are thought to experience a crisis of identity, as the existing global order is considered in danger of rupture. The core assumptions carried by United States are perceived nowadays as attacked, reinforcing, in a broad sense, the construction of idea of the threat: political rhetoric intensified over the way in which it was possible to restore order. The doctrine of containment of 1947 and the idea of the "iron curtain", essentially, paved the way for the understanding of American identity as menaced.<sup>268</sup> A doctrine that, nowadays, is again to frame the boundaries of US approach towards China.

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<sup>264</sup> Miller, S. E. (2001). "International Security at Twenty-Five: From One World to Another". *International Security*, 26(1), 5–39. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3092077>

<sup>265</sup> Turner, O. (2013). "Threatening" China and US security: the international politics of identity". *Review of International Studies*, 39(4), 903–924. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24564438>

<sup>266</sup> Goh, E. (2015). *The Struggle for Order. Hegemony, Hierarchy & Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

<sup>267</sup> Turner, O. (2013). "Threatening" China and US security: the international politics of identity". *Review of International Studies*, 39(4), p. 905.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibidem*.

### 3.1.3. Graham Allison's Thucydides's trap

The United States and China have yet entered into a dire confrontation under the Trump presidency. Trump's administration and rhetoric stretched out the image of an assertive China that was unseating United States sovereignty. Apart from the tough tones it adopted, the China policy elaborated by President Trump's administration was commented by many as uncertain and even sporadic, principally made of economic practical stratagems to try to subvert a China that was about to ride the wave of global economy, and hegemony.<sup>269</sup> The U.S.-China relationship is, indeed, "the most consequential bilateral relationship in the world"<sup>270</sup>, bound, as explained by the realist theory, to have hegemonic power rivalry, and may to fall into what Graham Allison called the "Thucydides's trap". Thucydides, born in the 4th century BC, is an Athenian historian of ancient Greece, who was able to capture, in a scientific manner, history in his pages as it presented to his eyes. As Allison remarks, indeed, Thucydides had the clever capability to identify the root cause that were lying under complex historical events. In his masterpiece *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides accounted the conflict that outbreaked between Sparta and Athens, the most important cities of the ancient Greece, in his humble effort of giving to future statesmen, citizens or combatants the key to understand the war as phenomenon and avoid future mistakes that can make people fall into the same circumstances.<sup>271</sup> In his essay *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides's Trap?*, political analyst Graham Allison took Thucydides's words literally. If history can be useful for "those who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to understanding the future"<sup>272</sup>, tracing the timeline of relations between Sparta and Athens can be a valuable light for analysing today's relations between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, and unraveling their destiny. Drawing back from the historical argumentation that Thucydides weaved in his account, Allison forged one of the terms,

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<sup>269</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2022). *Reality Check: Falsehoods in US Perception of China*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, June 19, 2022. Available at:

[https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjbxw/202206/t20220619\\_10706059.html](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjbxw/202206/t20220619_10706059.html)

<sup>270</sup> Hu, W. (2018). "Trump's China Policy and Its Implications for the "Cold Peace" across the Taiwan Strait". *China Review*, 18(3), 61–88. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26484533>

<sup>271</sup> Thucydides (1996). *The Peloponnesian War*. Ed. Robert. B. Strassler, trans. Richard Crawley. New York, Free Press.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibidem*, v. 1.23.6.

maybe the most symbolic, that would have traced a new history, that between United States and China. “Thucydides’s trap” asserts the “*severe structural stress caused when a rising power threatens to upend a ruling one*”<sup>273</sup>, a stress that contracts the hegemonic power, while the rising power expands. Not falling into the trap is muscular gymnastics, almost a training for a challenge that awaits the old hegemonic power and the new power on the global stage, where both are pulling the strings. In the light of a vision that tends to see the fate of the United States and China as an incumbent new war, the concept of “Thucydides’s trap” effectively describes the inclination to war of great power competition. In the Greece of 490 BC, Sparta was a dominant regional power, which even today remains the most acclaimed symbol of military power and culture, strength, vitality, rewarded military valour, courage, discipline. Athens, on the other hand, was a port city made of merchants, an open society that experimented with a peculiar form of government: democracy. The threat of the Persian invasion united the two cities for the first time, emphasising Athens' prowess, and how the skills of its sailors were far more important than the quantity of its fleet. Athens built, brick by brick, its maritime empire in the Aegean Sea, expanding its trade, but without using violence. Sparta, on the contrary, suffered the Athenian advance, not so much for its territorial conquest as for its different political and ideological approach. That between Sparta and Athens soon became a clash, but between cultures. The ability to resolve disputes through primordial forms of diplomacy came forward, but Sparta's stress on Athens' seemingly limitless ambitions did not take long to “*set the pyre alight*”<sup>274</sup>. The Peloponnesian war that set off between Sparta and Athens that Thucydides narrates was devastating, a war from which Sparta emerged victorious, but exhausted, worn down, just as worn down were her alliances and riches. The hegemonic contest of our time is centrally between the United States and China, as it was in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC between Athens and Sparta. In the same way as millennia ago, history presents the same scenario again, but on a global level. A global hegemonic power, the United States, with its culture, its type of discipline, like Sparta. Allison underlines in his essay how US President Theodore Roosevelt (1933-1945) muscularly shaped America’s sense of its role in the world, stressing national greatness, military superiority to be achieved and the will to fight. On the other hand, an ascending power, China, a rural and poor country, which like Athens has taken off and is literally experimenting its own

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<sup>273</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* London, Scribe, p. 29.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34.

new-brand model of government and life, and which presents itself on the world stage as the challenger to the hegemonic power. Washington and Beijing are at odds over a range of not only regional issues, like Athens and Sparta, but over international issues such as trade and investment, regional security, global governance, as well as a different vision of world order. Sooner or later, as Allison points out, this clash of culture will inevitably shape the destiny of the two superpowers and the “*course of war*”<sup>275</sup>. In particular, the collision between Sparta and Athens is advanced by Thucydides on three different levels, which are necessary to analyse today's US-China relations. The dynamic that led to war was instilled by interest, by fear and by honour. As also argued when Organski's theory was presented (see *chapter 1*), national interest and goals build the backbone of a country or nation, effectively characterizing it and giving it the chance, and the lawful right, to make decisions in its territory. United States and China today are both identified with their different, peculiar and ambitious national goals, that clashes and bump between them. Fear is a sentiment, and it is presented by Thucydides as a fuel for misperceptions. Allison interpreted fear as the fuel of unrealistic expectations each country may have of the other, and it is known how misperceptions about United States and China dramatically deteriorated from both perspectives, contributing to harsh the tension between the two countries.<sup>276</sup> Moreover, as presented in § 3.1.2, the conflict is supposed to be inevitable because of fear, and because of other state's intentions are supposed to be unknowable.<sup>277</sup> Last, honour is the ingredient that most seasoned the attitude of a country, and can make dynamics more savoury, or bitter. Thucydides defines honour as the “*State's sense of itself*”<sup>278</sup>, a sort of self-assessment or recognition of what something or someone is and the respect that is due. In nowadays recipe, the United States as “*missionary nation*”<sup>279</sup> is

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<sup>275</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 147.

<sup>276</sup> *Political psychology of International Relations* provides a wide understanding about how countries fail to perceive each other's intentions, not considering different view of the world and allowing false expectations to fester (see Gries, P. H. (2009). “Problems of Misperceptions in US-China Relations”. *Orbis*, 53(2), 220-232. Available at: <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/gries.US-Chinarelations1.pdf>)

<sup>277</sup> Mearsheimer, J. J. (2006). “China's Unpeaceful Rise”. *Current History*, 105(690), 160–162. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45318719>

<sup>278</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides's Trap?* London, Scribe, p. 39.

<sup>279</sup> According to US vision, human rights and democracy are of universal aspirations, and non-Western countries should commit themselves to these values. That is why American Political scientist and adviser Samuel Huntington dubbed the United States as a *missionary nation* (see Huntington, S.P. (2011). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, Simon&Schuster, p. 184).

a preparation filled with honour due its commitment to spread liberal values across the world, mixed with its claimed respect for the set of a hegemonic order that guaranteed stability for many years. From the other part of the world map, yet, the recipe appeared revisited, elaborated, Chinese. China's honour comes from a distant, shining, and prosperous past, which is now flourishing again, and which deserves to be respected also because of the humiliations suffered in the past. Are United States and China supposed to re-live the past crossing through the same disastrous conflict that involved Athens and Sparta? Graham Allison affirms that “*unwise or undesirable, however, does not mean impossible*”<sup>280</sup>. Should the tensions between the great powers continue to rise, the world could become again divided into two blocks of a new Cold War, and the prospects for confrontation and direct conflicts would seem certain to rise.

### 3.2. 惹事生非 (rě shì shēng fēi) “*To stir up a trouble*”

In Chinese language, the *chengyu* 惹事生非 (*rěshì shēngfēi*) covers a range of meanings with the purpose of indicating wrong or mistaken actions that may lead to a lack of understanding, a problem, or even a dispute. It means “to stir up a trouble”, something, an event or a situation that figuratively stimulates, excites, provokes.<sup>281</sup> Stirring up is what People's republic of China is doing according to the United States, it is preparing a new recipe for the world that since years provoked a tectonic shift with its disruptive and unprecedented rise. With the risk to generalize about a very complex topic, the literature and discourse about the relationship between United States and China are dominated by the realist and the liberal vision, supposing, in the first, a fear that an illiberal China will displace the US as the preponderant player in Asia, and an offer, in second, of accommodation to China for its status in the Asian regional position but accepting US strategic interests.<sup>282</sup> In line with many of the Trump administration's statements, starting with the strategic document of the US Policy Planning Staff *The*

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<sup>280</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides's Trap?* London, Scribe, p. 153.

<sup>281</sup> 惹事生非 (*reshi shengfei*) (2013). 成语大词典 [Chengyu Da Cidian]. Shanghai, Commercial Press.

<sup>282</sup> Goh, E. (2015). *The Struggle for Order. Hegemony, Hierarchy & Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 224.

*China Challenge*, Chinese revisionism would consist precisely in wanting to revise the rules of the game, to radically change the *status quo*. The competitive turn in Sino-US relations proposed by President Trump has been, if in lighter tones, picked up by today's President Joe Biden. According to most of the US think tank, it would be difficult to include Beijing in the liberal order, and as an engagement policy is not that adequate to front the Leninist-Marxist character of the Chinese regime, a confrontation almost seems to be a one-size-fits-all solution. The change in approach towards China, which changes the Western world's perception of this increasingly emerging power, aims to portray the regime of president Xi Jinping as a project of hegemony that wants to overpower the American one, without considering the legitimacy that China, as a sovereign state, possesses for its interests to be considered.<sup>283</sup> From what perspectives is People's Republic of China's rising menacing the US well-established world order? Two tigers cannot share the same mountain.<sup>284</sup> Ancient Chinese thought, however, helps shed light and clarity on Beijing's plans, and the legitimacy it has to reach the mountain.

### 3.2.1. *The concept of war in Chinese thought*

As widely presented in this work, differing identities and ideologies lie at the heart of the disordered and disordering relationship between United States and China. Many of the misperceptions, like the assumed increasing mutual mistrust and rising threat, concretely have been translated into tougher foreign policies that can become “*self-fulfilling prophecies*”<sup>285</sup>, ending in the now widespread fatalistic sense of an imminent

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<sup>283</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

<sup>284</sup> There is an ancient Chinese proverb that states 一山不容二虎 (*yī shān bùróng èr hǔ*), meaning “One mountain cannot contain two tigers”. I report this proverb because I collected it during my experience in China. Particularly, when we were in class, this proverb was often used by my teachers to urge us to be more competitive and become the best students in the class. By virtue of the linguistic, and historical, analysis that this work uses to confute arguments, I thought it was appropriate to transpose the image of the two tigers contending the global stage (the mountain) to the relationship between the United States and China, and to the fact that, in accordance with the realist view, one of the two powers is supposed to take, sooner or later, the hegemonic position.

<sup>285</sup> Gries, P. H. (2009). “Problems of Misperceptions in US-China Relations”. *Orbis*, 53(2), p. 221.



confrontation between the two countries that inevitably spirals bilateral relations towards conflict. The comparative approach used in this work leads once again to the need to legitimately analyse the Chinese view of an impending conflict, and what “war” means in Chinese culture. When, in 2017, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chun Ying, urged the U.S. to “*abandon its Cold war mentality and zero-sum game concept*”<sup>286</sup>, he was expressing one of the philosophical maxims of Confucian teachings, i.e., the disregard of physical coercion. Indeed, China thinks the military functioning like a last resort, as the same principles of social and political order used domestically must be effective even at global level.<sup>287</sup> This kind of obligation to maintain this effectiveness is moral rather than practical: the historical centripetal orientation of China as country “in the middle” (中国 *Zhōngguó*) has always embraced not the strategy aimed at expanding its borders and conquering new territories, yet maintaining a hierarchy that would have maintained the stability and the order of the 天下 *Tiān xià*. As G. Allison also confutes in his essay, for Chinese strategists the war is primarily psychological and political in its nature, not merely concrete. The aim of eroding the enemy’s material capabilities would be better than necessarily resort to the battlefield.<sup>288</sup> Allison uses the Greek historian Thucydides for his essay, providing a commonly Western version of how the conflict between Sparta and Athens can prove possible historical evidence to describe, or rather predict, the future of US-China relations, as well as the future of the global stage. In the same way, it could be used the thoughts of a “*correspondent in the east*”, who, like Thucydides, was able to capture the way of warfare of ancient China, to provide an alternative perspective, and to refute it. Sunzi (孙子 *Sūnzǐ*) was a general and, above all, a military strategist that lived during the period of Spring and Autumn and that of the Warring States (770-256 BC).<sup>289</sup> In the same time frame in which Thucydides narrated the Peloponnesian War, Sunzi composed his *The Art of War* (孙子兵法 *Sūnzǐ bīngfǎ*, lit. “*Sunzi’s military method*”) a very influential work of military strategy that was considered to affect both Western and East Asian way of thinking about warfare. In fact, his work

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<sup>286</sup> Griffiths, J.; Wang, S. (2017). “China says Trump’s new security Policy Shows Cold War Mentality”. *CNN Politics*, December 19, 2017. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/19/politics/china-trump-national-security-strategy-intl/index.html>

<sup>287</sup> Anderson, E. (2010). *China Restored: The Middle Kingdom Looks to 2020 and Beyond*. Santa Barbara, Praeger, xiv.

<sup>288</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* London, Scribe, p. 149.

<sup>289</sup> See also chapter 1, § 1.2.3, p.39.

focuses much more on alternative ways to resort to the battlefield, like pursuing stratagem, using people external to the army itself, collecting a range of powerful tricks not only to be used to understand the enemy, but more to avoid the concrete war. According to Sunzi, in fact, “*the highest victory is to defeat the enemy without ever fighting*”<sup>290</sup>. What is noteworthy to analyse in Sunzi masterpiece is the concept of 勢 (*shì*), as complex as important to unravel in its essence. In an article published by *The Diplomat* in 2017, it was written that “*China has shi on its side*”<sup>291</sup>. Commonly translated as “energy, power, force”, cultural and linguistic differences mislead the intrinsic meaning of 勢 (*shì*), which for Sunzi includes a momentum but featured by circumstances or environments that substantially can support one party in a conflict. It is an intangible power, also embracing a psychological condition, that aims at distorting the enemy, threatening, deterring and manipulating it rather than using weaponry to neutralise it.<sup>292</sup> In presenting Sunzi’s philosophical understanding of warfare, Allison indeed compares, in his essay, the Western conception of war and the Eastern one exemplified by Sunzi’s thought through the words of Henry Kissinger. Western culture is usually apt to emphasise heroism, force, an almost-inevitable clash with the enemy, but in Chinese traditional thought emphasis is placed on the “*patient accumulation of relative advantage*”<sup>293</sup>. Today, taking a snapshot of the Indo-Pacific region, it would be possible to see that in fact the Chinese strategy speaks volumes. Reinforced by President Xi Jinping’s numerous speeches in which avoiding a new Cold War and thus falling into the Thucydides’s trap would be contemplated as a priority for the People’s Republic of China, Chinese action would not seem to be that of attacking, but that of a deterrence, be it nuclear or simply military. In its 2017 white paper<sup>294</sup>, China concretely presented its military strategy inevitably linked to a foreign policy strategy.<sup>295</sup> Changed appeared the environment in the Indo-Pacific

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<sup>290</sup> Sun Tzu (1971). *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith. London, Oxford University Press, 14-16.

<sup>291</sup> Jin, K. (2017). “How Sun Tzu Would Understand the China-India Doklam Standoff”. *The Diplomat*, August 07, 2017. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/how-sun-tzu-would-understand-the-china-india-doklam-standoff/>

<sup>292</sup> Mott, W.H., Kim, J.C. (2006). “The Idea of Shih”. In *The Philosophy of Chinese Military Culture*. New York, Palgrave MacMillan. Available at: [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781403983138\\_2](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781403983138_2)

<sup>293</sup> Kissinger, H. (2011). *On China*. London, Penguin Press, p. 23.

<sup>294</sup> A *white paper* is generally a report or review that informs about complex issues in a resumed way, usually implemented in policy-making process.

<sup>295</sup> This statement bears in mind the Chinese cultural discourse on war, in light of the type of analysis conducted in this paper and to confute G. Allison’s thesis that, as argued, may appear

region, it had become an arena of competition between the great powers, so between China itself and the United States. The latter's supposed military prevalence in the area is supposed to be the main cause of international disruption. When the Obama administration adopted the *pivot policy*, the rebalance towards Asia strengthened US military presence. According to President Xi, the predominance of a "Cold War mentality" was supposed to (and effectively) hit the equilibrium in Asia.<sup>296</sup> As a matter of fact, the military dimension is central to the competition between the United States and China for a presumed renegotiation of a world order, or for defining a new one. The strategy China is implementing is aimed at protecting its security, as well as to promote a regional order at the head of whose hierarchy would be China itself. On the contrary, the US strategy to maintain the *status quo*, and thus an open global liberal order, once again dictates American leadership in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>297</sup> China would therefore not be applying an offensive strategy, which would aim to replicate the cold war conflict, but would be implementing a deterrence strategy aimed at no longer bear the "*intense humiliation*"<sup>298</sup> suffered by the Chinese people during the colonial era, and to restore "*the glorious traditions of the army*"<sup>299</sup>. Whatever is necessary is to be done to avoid indignity again. Avoiding direct confrontation with the United States is, hence, a national interest, as well

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simplistic. It is important to emphasise, therefore, that China has resorted to military support and intervention on a number of occasions, including participation in the Korean War in the 1950s, long-distance support for communist movements throughout Asia, and exercises in the Taiwan Strait that continue to this day (see Fravel, M. T. (2007). "Power Shifts and Escalation: Explaining China's Use of Force in Territorial Disputes". *International Security*, 32(3), 44–83. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30130518> )

<sup>296</sup> The State Council of the People's Republic of China (2017). *China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation*. China's State Council Information Office, Jan 11, 2007. Web archive. Available at:

[http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2017/01/11/content\\_281475539078636.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2017/01/11/content_281475539078636.htm)

<sup>297</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p.103.

<sup>298</sup> Xi, J. (2019). *Speech by Xi Jinping at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China*. The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, July 1st, 2021. Web Archive. Available at:

<http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/c23934/202107/ce62fd23a2f24be7bb96c30b56c0c111.shtml>  
(for the concept of *humiliation* see chapter 4, § 4.1.1. p. 123)

<sup>299</sup> Xi, J. (2017). *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*. Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China October 18, 2017. Available at:

<https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceil/eng/zt/19thCPCNationalCongress/W020171120127269060039.pdf>

as a priority for China. Previous Chinese governments maintained a moderate foreign policy stance that did not improve external circumstances, but President Xi is inclined to a proactive reconfiguration applying Sunzi's classical thought. China's 2017 white paper clearly underwrites that it "*will not attack unless we are attacked, but we will surely counterattack if attacked*"<sup>300</sup>. In its analysis, Graham Allison raised the specter of an impending war between the two hegemonic contenders in the nowadays global scene. Yet, considering the philosophical thinking and values analysed that guide China's governance and justify its policy, his thesis can be considered as misplaced.<sup>301</sup> Allison uses the historical analogy in his analysis to conclude with a fatalist approach, certainly based on historical evidence, but which would not fully consider the Chinese perspective. Allison assumes that all cases of great power competition share a similar structure, and the inevitability of war is confuted by the most emblematic case of the Peloponnesian war accounted by Thucydides. In the East, however, taking into consideration not only the cultural legacies and history but also the political programme of the current president Xi Jin Ping, China presents itself not as a revisionist power, but rather as appreciative of the role that the United States has played in the security and stability of the region, while at the same time claiming its role, rightly and legitimately. American policies in the Indo-Pacific region would therefore be the product of a hegemonic and imperialist tendency, interfering with China's national interests and its right to sovereignty.<sup>302</sup>

### 3.2.2. A game of strategy

By claiming its legitimate right to participate in the international community, China would, in the eyes of the United States, be a problem aimed at destabilising the liberal world order. As a matter of fact, China's military and economic strength are greater today,

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<sup>300</sup> The State Council of the People's Republic of China (2017). *China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation*. China's State Council Information Office, Jan 11, 2007. Web archive. Available at: [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2017/01/11/content\\_281475539078636.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2017/01/11/content_281475539078636.htm)

<sup>301</sup> Vuving, A. L. (Ed.). (2020). "Great Power Competition: Lessons from the Past, Implications for the Future". In *HINDSIGHT, INSIGHT, FORESIGHT: Thinking About Security in the Indo-Pacific* (pp. 13–36). Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26667.7>

<sup>302</sup> Rolland, N. (2020). *China's Vision for New World Order*. Washington, The National Bureau of Asian Research.

and well certified and proved by piles of analyses that every day are produced by US think tanks. Yet, the real threat that the People's Republic of China presents to the United States security, can be interpreted as a social construction, considering the increasingly widespread conviction that a rising power like China is necessary destined to constitute a real danger. China means war, and its inevitability is the most common assumption served by the academic literature dealing with Sino-US relations<sup>303</sup>. According to data, China possesses nowadays the world's largest population, the fastest growing economy of the world, as well as the largest army and the largest middle class.<sup>304</sup> From the beginning of its reforms, China began to occupy important places into the global institutions: not only its entrance in the *World Trade Organisation* but especially its permanent seat on the *United Nations Security Council* are matter of concern.<sup>305</sup> China possesses the ability to change, or at least redefine, the rules of the game, and its capabilities, as also Organski assessed, are what define concretely the amount of its power. For years, the United States has been a security provider, not only in Asia, but throughout the world. and now that China is about to present a robust and numerous army, an arsenal incorporating the best technologies, and a military expenditure under the government of Xi Jin Ping that is higher than in the past, creating the image of a war not far off is as inevitable as its possibility. Nevertheless, David Lai, Research Professor of Asian Security



Studies at the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) of the U.S. Army War College (USAWC), proposed an alternative image, an instructive analogy that sheds light and more clarity on the future landscape of a Sino-US conflict. If the United States moves, and has moved, pawns in the game of chess, China moves pawns on the chessboard of its traditional game,

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<sup>303</sup> Babbin, J.; Timperlake, E. (2006). *Showdown: Why China Wants War with the United States*. Washington, D.C., Regnery Publishing, pp. 23-24.

<sup>304</sup> Callahan, W. A. (2008). Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony? *International Studies Review*, 10(4), 749–761.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25482021>

<sup>305</sup> Sitting at the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member means not only to ensure international peace and security, but also to authorize military actions and have the right of veto for any decision that is made (see United Nations (1945). *Charter of the United Nations*, 1 UNTS XVI, art. 4, art. 24. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text> )

the 围棋 (*wéiqí*). In the game of chess, the player must dominate the centre of the chessboard, and conquer his enemy. In *wéiqí*, by contrast, the player's scope is to surround the enemy. The philosophy behind the *wéiqí* game is to compete for relative gains instead of trying to annihilate the opposing force.<sup>306</sup> American way of moving war of course can have its strengths, but knowledge and experience of Chinese warfare can be a valuable addition to the United States foreign policy, warfare and diplomacy. The image of the *wéiqí* game reflects, in a material way, Chinese strategy and its role in international relations. China asserts its position, its right, as the great power it has become, to contribute to the international community with its pattern, its game plan, its strategy, its own way to establish order. In the world that has been marked by American hegemony since post-Cold War, People's Republic of China wants to restore fairness, an order to which everyone contributes equally rather than a gaining of advantages over others. Especially on the Asian continent, however, given its size and ascendancy, China is regionally aware of the need for a hierarchy that establishes order, along the lines of the one that well worked in the pre-Qin period, the most flourishing of Chinese history.<sup>307</sup> China presents a strategy that could be construed as misleading, duplicitous, and aimed only at pursuing national interests. In the document *The China Challenge* drafted by the United States, in fact, harsh accusations are made against Chinese policy, which is allegedly earning its place in the world and revising world order “*placing the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the center and serving Beijing's authoritarian goals and hegemonic ambitions*”<sup>308</sup>. For former US Secretary of State M. Pompeo, for example, China is a country that needs “*to be induced to change*”<sup>309</sup> because it “*threatens American*

*Figure 7. The weiqi game and its board that is not as systematic as the chess board, allowing the gamer to create its strategic thinking and interaction.*  
[https://books.google.es/books?id=ejbaMEkhUxkC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.es/books?id=ejbaMEkhUxkC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>306</sup> Lai, D. (2004). “Learning from the Stones: A Go Approach to Mastering China's Strategic Concept, Shi”. *US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute*, 5(28). Available at: [https://books.google.es/books?id=ejbaMEkhUxkC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.es/books?id=ejbaMEkhUxkC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>307</sup> Yan, X. (2001) “The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes”. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 10(26), 33-39. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Rise-of-China-in-Chinese-Eyes-Xuetong/e1b0987d82b7be92984c237403d27d9721b7f260>

<sup>308</sup> U.S. Policy Planning Staff (2020). *The Elements of China Challenge*. U.S. Office of the Secretary of State, November 2020, p. 1.

<sup>309</sup> Pompeo, M. R. (2020). *Communist China and the Free World's Future*. Speech of the Secretary of State, Yorba Linda, California, The Richard Nixon Presidential Library Museum, June 23, 2020. Available at: <https://sv.usembassy.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-remarks-at->

*prosperity and freedoms*". The Chinese model, however, as often stated, does not intend to disrupt the system, but to proactively contribute to reshaping it so that its interests are also covered. And does so with its capabilities, presenting the world with economic alternatives, models that are almost obsolete for a West, and a world for years cradled in the arms of Uncle Sam<sup>310</sup>. Even Allison in his analysis, despite the supposed inevitability of the conflict between the United States and China, offers the US leaders the advice to look deeper and fully recognise China's perspective, in order to avoid the clash.

### 3.2.3. Hegemony VS Hierarchy

When discussing about an alternative theory of international relations that would be Chinese-labeled, under the concept of 天下 *Tiān xià*, philosopher Zhao Ting Yang highlights that from the affirmation of the Westphalian system there were sufficient incapacity and inability to solve global problems. In the jungle of the global system inaugurated with Westphalia, all nations are practically living in a world in which coercive power dominates and everyone is fighting for their own interests.<sup>311</sup> Even in the current era generally characterised by globalisation, the struggle for hegemony forms the centre of thoughts in international politics, thus transforming the rise of a new nation globally as an inevitable possibility of conflict for supremacy. There is no view, according to Professor Zhao, "*that takes the whole world into consideration and that refuses to think locally or regionally at the cost of the rest of the globe*"<sup>312</sup>. The Chinese-style solution to world problems sees conflict as a link towards the achievement of an order, a supreme

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[the-richard-nixon-presidential-library-and-museum-communist-china-and-the-free-worlds-future/](#)

<sup>310</sup> *Uncle Sam*, with the same initials of United States, is a common way to refer to United States, a personification of the country and a popular symbol that is based on a poster maybe honouring Samuel Wilson, a man that supplied American soldiers during the war of 1812 (see Schaffler, R. H. (1912). *Flag Day, Its History*, New York, Moffar Yard and co, Press. Web Archive. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/flagdayitshistor00scha> )

<sup>311</sup> Zhao, T. Y. (2005). *Tianxia Tixi: Shijie Zhidu Zhexue Daolun [The Tianxia system: A Philosophy for the World Institution]*. Nanjing, Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chubanshe.

<sup>312</sup> Qin, Y. (2012). "Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales" / "Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making". *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 100, 67–90. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41803504?seq=1>

harmony, in complete contrast to the Western idea that emphasises the conflictual nature of world politics.<sup>313</sup> The clash between the United States and China turns out to be more of a clash between two different models of understanding the world order than an armed conflict: *hegemony* and *hierarchy*. Graham Allison, in his analogy between the Peloponnesian war and the alleged conflict between the United States and China, repeatedly emphasises how the clash between Sparta and Athens was primarily a struggle for hegemony. In fact, from a linguistic point of view, the term *hegemony* derives from the ancient Greek language word ἡγεμονία (*hēgemonía*) and expresses precisely the “ability to command”<sup>314</sup>, the ability to lead and to take the first place. Consistent with the theory of hegemonic stability, the erosion of US primacy by China not only regionally in the Indo-Pacific, but also globally, is perceived as a threat of paramount importance. China, however, is not pursuing a hegemonic project on a global scale<sup>315</sup>. On the contrary, the Chinese model based on the dictates of Confucian thought, emphasises the importance of the three fundamental values of *harmony*, *hierarchy* and *respect for authority*. Confucianism regards the family and the relationships within it as the basis, the archetype of society. Within the family unit, all individuals fall within a rigid hierarchy, and this fosters order, cooperation, responsibility of the different members. Those with more subordinate positions within the hierarchy of family hold a general duty of obedience and respect to the superior members of the family. In the ideal Confucian society, morality, rather than the wishes of the single individuals, serves as the foundation for harmony (和 *hé*), a society based on a hierarchical system in which each individual’s role is determined by his or her position in society, as well as by familiar and personal relationships.<sup>316</sup> Since the state is a larger society, or a larger family<sup>317</sup>, where each member interacts for the common good, the Confucian concepts of family ties are transposed to the way of government, the primary representation of the state and of a society. The primary idea behind Confucianism is, indeed, to exert governance by education, persuasion and moral example. The application of hierarchical status on a national scale would guarantee order

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<sup>313</sup> *Ibidem*, p.83.

<sup>314</sup> Hegemony (2021). In *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* (2021st ed.). Oxford University Press.

<sup>315</sup> U.S. Policy Planning Staff (2020). *The Elements of China Challenge*. U.S. Office of the Secretary of State, November 2020. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>

<sup>316</sup> Zhao, T. Y. (2005). *Tianxia Tixi: Shijie Zhidu Zhexue Daolun [The Tianxia system: A Philosophy for the World Institution]*. Nanjing, Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chubanshe.

<sup>317</sup> This concept is reflected in the Chinese word 国家 (*guójiā*), meaning “nation, state”. Concretely, the first character means “nation” and the second means “family” (*Ibidem*).



and stability, in a nation in which loyalty and obedience to rulers were paramount virtues within society.<sup>318</sup> The fundamental concept of harmony in Chinese thought already echoed in the dialectic of former President Hu Jin Tao (2003-2013), projected into the idea of an “*harmonious society*” (和谐社会 *héxié shèhuì*), that becomes an “*harmonious world*” (和谐世界 *héxié shìjiè*) in foreign policy.<sup>319</sup> This assumption concretely marked a shift in the leadership’s understanding of China’s position in the world, a China that, conscious about its role and its capabilities, needed to adjust its attitude. The even more proactive role under the presidency of Xi Jin Ping is necessary to shape the country’s destiny. This natural need for harmony enshrines the sense of the necessity and legitimacy of finding agreement between different values and interests on a global level, but without necessarily resorting to conflict or violence.<sup>320</sup> A heterogeneity between differences, the awareness of being culturally and ideologically different that goes hand in hand with the need to broaden the representativeness of the international multilateral system, “*improve its fairness, enhance its effectiveness*”<sup>321</sup>. The *Tianxia system*, then, is not a hegemonic system pretending to completely overhaul the global order, but to make it to integrate all the nations in a world suitable for all the people.<sup>322</sup> The Chinese model inevitably clashes with hegemonic ideology and Western values, but when speaking of clash or confrontation, one should not necessarily think of an armed struggle, of a conflict that inevitably leads to the battlefield. After all, one of the founding values of Western democracies is the coexistence of different opinions and thoughts, which at the same time,

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<sup>318</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>319</sup> Qin, Y. (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales” / “Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 100, 67–90. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41803504?seq=1> ; Hu, J. (2007). *Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive for New Victories in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects*. Delivered at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China October 15, 2007. Available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/celr/eng/majorevents/t375202.htm>

<sup>320</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell’Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p.59.

<sup>321</sup> Foot, R. (2020). “China’s rise and US hegemony: Renegotiating hegemonic order in East Asia?”. *International Politics*, 57(3), p.16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-019-00189-5>

<sup>322</sup> Qin, Y. (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales” / “Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 100, 67–90. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41803504?seq=1>

by confronting each other, come to a synthesis.<sup>323</sup> In asserting its model, and its way of conceiving the world order, is China automatically calling the US into direct conflict? Probably, as G. Allison himself admits, it must be recognised that the balance of power is nowadays no longer impaired largely by military power, but has become a combination that embraces economic power, an intertwining force that largely outweighs the military one. The dramatic shifts that characterised the global economy since 2008 financial crisis should lead Washington to a “*serious pause for reflection*”<sup>324</sup>, to understand from a broader and “*mutually inclusive*”<sup>325</sup> perspective Beijing’s plans. Certainly, applying history to fully understand today’s dynamics presents itself as a special opportunity, and as a powerful method of analysis. Reinterpreting it, however, in the light of a changing world in which various actors are involved, could perhaps allow two tigers to remain on the same mountain. It is important to emphasise, furthermore, that in the Chinese political programme, the hierarchical model does not concern the international framework, but rather is limited to a regional level. In 2014, President Xi Jin Ping had in fact emphasised that “*Asia to Asians*”<sup>326</sup>, relying on a model of Chinese centrality on the Asian continent as a modern reinterpretation of the *Tianxia* system of imperial times (see *chapter 1*), an order in which China occupied a central position during its glorious past.

### 3.3. 废寝忘食 (fèi qǐn wàng shí) “*To forget to eat and sleep*”

A famous quote often attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte states “*Let China sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world*”. Already two centuries ago, one of the most famous and prominent leaders in history was effectively warning about the potential

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<sup>323</sup> Shin, D. C. (1994). “On the Third Wave of Democratization: A Synthesis and Evaluation of Recent Theory and Research”. *World Politics*, 47(1), 135–170. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2950681>

<sup>324</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* London, Scribe, p.214.

<sup>325</sup> The *Zhongyong dialectic* (中庸之道 *zhōngyōng zhīdào*), or *complementary dialectic*, is a core component of Chinese knowledge and culture, and the essence of several thousand years of practice in Chinese society. In contrast to the conflictual dialectics Western thought which assumes conflict as the essence of interacting poles, the *Zhongyong dialectic* argues that interacting poles are complementary in nature, and inclusive of each other (see Yaqing, Q. (2014). Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China’s International Strategy. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 7(3), 285–314. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48615912> )

<sup>326</sup> Xi, J. (2014). *The Governance of China, vol. 1*. Shanghai, Shanghai press, p. 356.

capabilities of the then Chinese empire, predicting, in a fatalistic sense, what is happening in the world today. The global stage appears shaken by the rise of the Celestial Empire that has in the end woken up in the guise of the People's Republic of China. In the preface of *Destined for War*, G. Allison opens his discussion with Napoleon's quotation, to affirm that China really woke up, and even seems to have no intention of going to sleep. To use an effective *chengyu*, China 废寝忘食 (*fèiqǐn wàngshí*), i.e., it doesn't eat and it forgets to sleep so to pursue its dream, to lead and drive its society towards its target of the "*great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*" (中华民族伟大复兴 *Zhōnghuámínzú Wěidà Fùxīng*).<sup>327</sup> The realisation of the functionality and legitimacy of its model, as well as the awareness of its own capabilities and its exceptionalism, led China to consider itself as a "powerful country" (强国 *qiángguó*)<sup>328</sup> on par with the United States, now not as solid and statuesque as it once was. 强国 *qiángguó* at the best expresses the amount of Chinese power, and what China wants to do with it. A power that is used to proactively regain its rightful place and protect its crucial interests.<sup>329</sup> Chinese power and capabilities have displaced the world balance, and it is almost necessary for the world to find a new one. Allison put pressure on the fact that for the United States is unthinkable to be unseated by another country: Americans and Western world are attached to the position of the United States atop the world, and it would be morally stressful to start considering being "no.2".<sup>330</sup> As history reminds, the countries with larger GDPs can acquire greater influence overtime in the shaping of the international affairs, and China economy has flared up as its expenses for "*guns and tanks*". Nevertheless, though Trump's administration had increasingly extended its war footing towards a revisionist China, the Biden administration approached to the China issue as a "*stiff competition*"<sup>331</sup>. Concretely,

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<sup>327</sup> Gallelli, B. (2021). *La Cina di Oggi in Otto Parole*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 13.

<sup>328</sup> He, Y. (2020). "Xi Jinping xin shidai Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi sixiang shi 21 shiji makesizhuyi [Xi Jinping's thought about socialism with Chinese characteristics is Marxism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century]". In *Zhonggong Zhongyang dang xiao*, June 14, 2020. Available at: [http://www.ccps.gov.cn/dxsy/202006/t20200615\\_141601.shtml](http://www.ccps.gov.cn/dxsy/202006/t20200615_141601.shtml)

<sup>329</sup> Gallelli, B. (2021). *La Cina di Oggi in Otto Parole*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 31.

<sup>330</sup> In the annual report on the global economy issued by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the press reported the headline "*America is now No.2*", in 2014. (see Giles, C. (2014). "The New World Economy in Four Charts". *Financial Times*, October 7, 2014. Available at: <http://ftalphaville.ft.com/2014/10/07/1998332/moneysupply-the-new-world-economy-in-four-charts/>)

<sup>331</sup> Salama, V.; Lubold, G. (2021). "Biden Says He Sees China as 'Stiff Competition'". *The Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 2021. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/biden-press-conference-live-updates-analysis/card/ifi5yjOOBkp0pm2Lzv>

it is widely understood that during years the United States squandered its competitive edge, putting economic, technological, and military advantages, that outlined the country for years, at risk. United States' politics and values, moreover, come out dysfunctional, and vulnerabilities are slowly popping up. American threat perceptions are magnified and fuelled by a tendency to blame People's Republic of China for problems that appears, on the contrary, domestic.<sup>332</sup> Misperceptions largely influenced Washington view of a world order that has to be preserved at any cost because of an evil China offering a different governing model, a viable alternative to the well-established idea of democracy that, right there in its beating heart seems to be in crisis. Does China really want a war? Is the fate dictated by history stronger than the commitment to try to establish a new balance of power, in the awareness of new dynamics coming into play on the world stage? As already pointed out, President Xi has repeatedly stressed the need to abandon the "Cold War mentality", probably because China lacks the "imperialism gene" that has characterised the US in exporting its model.<sup>333</sup> When in the conclusion of his essay Graham Allison asks "*where do we go from here?*", the desire to understand and unravel the knots of what has become for the US the "*China challenge*" is evident. Certainly, his historical analysis emphasises that throughout time almost all confrontations between an incumbent power and one on the rise have ended in war, and the hegemonic cycle ended with the assertion of one of the two. By the same token, nevertheless, the same historical analysis teaches us that in some cases this did not inevitably happen, and this certainly leads today, in the light of a changing world, to a questioning of how the relationship between the United States and China is viewed by the entire international community, and especially by the two countries themselves. With its projects and its bursting model, Xi Jin Ping's country will insist on being accepted as China, and not as a "*honorary member of the West*"<sup>334</sup>. New human dynamics are supposed to change the assumed perspective of a conflict between the two great powers. Actors, like China, that have previously occupied a

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<sup>332</sup> Gries, P. H. (2009). "Problems of Misperceptions in US-China Relations". *Orbis*, 53(2), 220-232. Available at: <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/gries.US-Chinarelations1.pdf>

<sup>333</sup> Xi, J. (2017). "Xi Jinping shouti 'liangge yingdao' you shenyi" [Xi Ji Ping's concept of "the two guidances" have profound meaning]. *Zhongguo Ganbu Xuexi Wang*, February 21, 2017. Available at: <http://www.ccln.gov.cn/hotnews/230779.shtml>

<sup>334</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides's Trap?* London, Scribe, p.220.

marginal position in the system can now bring a new energy due to the ideological fervour, technology, new governance organisations or economic resources available.<sup>335</sup>

### 3.3.1. Confucianism and politics

Confucianism is legitimately recognised as one of the oldest schools of thought hailing for the far East. It generally embraces many cultural values that build nowadays the basis of many of the Eastern societies. Confucianism became closely intertwined with people's daily lives, it became the state philosophy to lead a good and fair government, and since the official adoption by the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.- 9 A.D.) was transmitted for generation, forging a model in the Eastern society.<sup>336</sup> Similarly, when the concept of democracy first appeared in ancient Greece, it formed a cultural basis on which the society commonly referred to as 'Western' built values, which still today, albeit with some difficulties, are the cardinal point of the West. In the analysis of the US Policy Planning Staff document *The Elements of China Challenge*, the dispute put forth by Asian societies and in particular by China, to the United States and other Western democracies are widely underscored. Democratic model, proving “*rampant social problems*” and a general of disorder that destabilises the world, are not considered as a model that can suit Asian societies.<sup>337</sup> In the East world of today, some society like Japan, Taiwan, or South Korea are effectively democratic, but others, especially the rising People's Republic of China, are considered, in the most neutral way possible, as undemocratic, or antidemocratic.<sup>338</sup> Generally, Confucianism would constitute a much more valuable and coherent ideological basis for a well-ordered Asian society than Western notions of individual liberty embraced by democratic values. Looking at the trade-off that people may have to make when they have to choose between democracy and another valuable thing they

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<sup>335</sup> Vuving, A. L. (Ed.). (2020). “Great Power Competition: Lessons from the Past, Implications for the Future”. In *HINDSIGHT, INSIGHT, FORESIGHT: Thinking About Security in the Indo-Pacific* (pp. 13–36). Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26667.7>

<sup>336</sup> Routledge (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Politics in Asia*, Ed. Shi Ping Hua. London, Routledge, p. 538-547.

<sup>337</sup> Fukuyama, F. (1995). “Confucianism and Democracy”. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(2), 20-33, Available at: <http://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0029>

<sup>338</sup> Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press.

cherish, like economic development, is a noteworthy parameter to look at the relationship between the United States and China. The lack of democratic values in Chinese society, its authoritarianism, and its control of personal freedom would threaten not only the US, but the entire world. However, according to a survey conducted by *Asian Barometer*, in Asia all countries, except Japan, generally reports that economic development is more important than democracy.<sup>339</sup> This assumed incompatibility between Confucian and democratic ideals, which carry two respective models of governance, would be a motive for considering that between the United States and China there is not only a military and ideological clash but, in the words of Samuel Huntington, a “*clash of civilizations*”<sup>340</sup>. The 2017 US Policy Planning Staff document repeatedly moves, as already stated, against the fact that “*China under the CCP is marked by a variety of vulnerabilities*” because of its “*20<sup>th</sup> century Marxist-Leninist dictatorship*”<sup>341</sup>, underlining its authoritarianism and hegemonic goals. On the US side arises an extreme interpretation of Chinese nationalism and objectives, an assault on liberal democracy. The Chinese model, on the other side of the globe, inevitably represents not only China, but also the social model of other Asian countries, a model that, over time, has been challenged not so much for its diversity as for the elements inherent in it that have ensured prosperity and development for many societies. As analysed in § 3.2.3., Confucian social order involves a series of relationships in which there is always a superior and inferior order, hierarchically positioned. the superior must take care of and provide a moral example for the subordinate; the subordinate at the same time, must show respect and follow the example of the superior. an individual is expected to serve, first and foremost, the interest of his/her family, and by extension, of the society. The hierarchical scheme that outlines Confucianism clashes with democratic model based on individual freedom and political equality, yet it does show, at the same time, the same inclination to place the public welfare as a priority. In fact, in Chinese the word *democracy* is translated as 民主 (*mín zhǔ*) commonly meaning

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<sup>339</sup> Doh, C. S., June Kim, H. (2017). “How Global Citizens Think about Democracy: an Evaluation and Synthesis of Recent Public Opinion Research”. *Asian Barometer*, July 2017. Available at:

<http://www.asianbarometer.org/publications//598f00c184a3be1d4daeef771664d3ef.pdf>

<sup>340</sup> Huntington, S.P. (2011). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, Simon&Schuster.

<sup>341</sup> U.S. Policy Planning Staff (2020). *The Elements of China Challenge*. U.S. Office of the Secretary of State, November 2020, p. 1-2.

“people at heart”.<sup>342</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet, the United States pushed Asian countries and allies to undertake a process of democratisation to be bound to economic liberalisation in the belief that liberal and capitalist democracy seemed to be the unquestioned model. Yet, many Chinese scholars considered the moment labeled as “*the end of history*”<sup>343</sup> to be just an ideological claim used by the United States in an attempt to justify its proper model while discrediting any other visions of the world.<sup>344</sup> Confucianism and Western-style democracy are not completely incompatible. Certainly, they have many differences, but China's model of governance as a new superpower deserves to be considered, not only from a confrontational and challenging perspective, but comparatively. Zhao Ting Yang offers the idea that democracy would be illegitimate for representing the whole world interest, because of its intrinsic mere consideration of individual desires. Moreover, he affirms that although a democratic model could work in domestic politics and so within the borders of a single state, it does not offer a proper functioning from an international point of view.<sup>345</sup> Zhao's model not only offers a solution to the world order that reinterprets ancient Chinese thought in a modern key, but more importantly, rather than reaffirming a necessary clash between two different cultures, the West and the East, it emphasises the need for interrelation, for a new balance. Furthermore, and most importantly, it denies the belief that the Chinese model aims to be exported to other countries around the world. At the 2017 opening ceremony of the *Communist Party of China (CPC) in Dialogue with World Political Parties*, President Xi Jin Ping vigorously stated that the Chinese model is a tool for “*provide more opportunities for the world through our development*”<sup>346</sup>.

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<sup>342</sup> Routledge (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Politics in Asia*, Ed. Shi Ping Hua. London, Routledge, p. 542.

<sup>343</sup> Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York, Free Press.

<sup>344</sup> Routledge (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Politics in Asia*, Ed. Shi Ping Hua. London, Routledge, p. 590.

<sup>345</sup> Zhao, T. Y. (2006). “Tianxia Gainian yu Shijie Zhidu [The Tianxia Concept and the World System]” in *Zhongguo Xuezhì Kan Shijie: Guoji Zhixu Chuan [Chinese Scholars View the World: International Order]*, ed. Qin Y.Q., pp. 3-35. Beijing, New World Press.

<sup>346</sup> Xinhua (2017). “Highlights of Xi’s Speech at World Political Party Dialogue”. *China Daily*, December 1, 2017. Available at: [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-12/01/content\\_35161658.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-12/01/content_35161658.htm)

### 3.3.2. Authoritarianism and democracy

What determines the quality of life in any society is, in a considerable amount, the quality exerted of its leadership. The idea that a political system should select people by their quality and their superior ability is central to both Western and Chinese political theory and practice, but the crisis of Western model of governance actually undermined the faith enshrined in democracy, opening a “*normative space for political alternatives*”.<sup>347</sup> In the last decade, not only the experiment of the Chinese model but also a wave of studies that can be defined as “post-Western”, have proposed an understanding of international politics by highlighting the need to revisit the idea that non-Western states should stick to a process of democratisation and homologation in the international order created and dominated by Western powers.<sup>348</sup> The Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 had already constituted a turning point for the legitimacy of the US model, which embraced economic liberalism over democratisation. The process of economic globalisation promoted by the United States had generated risks and instability, which led many countries, especially those in the Asian continent, to a major recession and deep social laceration. The imposition of the US model that bore the name of *Washington consensus*<sup>349</sup> was perceived as the root cause of the crisis, as well as a form of coercion and ideological and cultural arrogance.<sup>350</sup> Parallel and within the complex framework of *modernisation theory*<sup>351</sup>,

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<sup>347</sup> Bell, D. A. (2015). *The China Model. Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 3.

<sup>348</sup> Seth, S. (2009). “Historical Sociology and Postcolonial Theory: Two Strategies for Challenging Eurocentrism”. *International Political Sociology*, 3(3), 334-338. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/3/3/334/1814341?login=true>

<sup>349</sup> The *Washington consensus* was a package of reforms proposed by the Washington based International Monetary Fund, World Bank and US Treasury to be adopted by developing countries wracked by the crisis during the 1980s that promoted, as key prescriptions, liberalization, deregulation and privatization. (see Williamson, J. (1990). “What Washington means by Policy Reforms”. *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, November 1, 2002. Available at: <https://www.piie.com/commentary/speeches-papers/what-washington-means-policy-reform> )

<sup>350</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell’Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p.174.

<sup>351</sup> The *modernization theory*, already traceable in the thinking of the German sociologist Max Weber, states that all societies progress over time from one stage to another through a precise paradigm. The ultimate goal of all societies will be to become a modern or post-modern society. The relationship between the modernization process and democracy is very studied in the field of comparative politics, claiming that development undergone by a society led to a transformation of its governance into democracy. In the post-Cold war period modernization was largely associated with the US liberal-capitalist model, claiming that continuing with policies and cultural norms of the past would have undermined many countries



which envisaged, for the economic and social development of underdeveloped countries, the application of the same model that had allowed Western countries to prosper, China was moving on a different track, proposing a more regional, economic order, sheltered from possible external shocks, that concretised after the 2008 financial crisis. The economic dependence of many Asian states on the United States had further highlighted how the American model was unstable, economically and politically. Multilateral agreements signed by China after its entry into the *World Trade Organisation* would pose a threat to US primacy. China is presenting itself as an alternative economic, and political, model, which imposes a new centrality of the state in the face of the liberalisation advocated by the United States, highlighting the need to consider different global proposals that are adapted to the individual domestic situations in which each country can harass. The threat that the United States perceives is that of a China attempting to override the model that had allowed the world a “*fair chance*”<sup>352</sup> for so many years. While the quality of the US economic and political model seems to expire and show the first signs of time, the “Chinese model”, although still considered experimental, looks optimistically at development, economically, socially, and politically. The Western one appears no longer to set a clear-cut model for other countries. The world is witnessing the Chinese experiment of *political meritocracy*, a model of governance that, while encompassing authoritarianism, is working, and has ensured development and prosperity in the short term.<sup>353</sup> In his essay *The China Model*, Professor Daniel A. Bell, Dean of the School of Political Science and Public Administration at Shandong University, proposes an analysis that challenges the conventional Western idea that considers “*good democracies*” in contrast with “*bad authoritarian regimes*”. Bell emphasises the validity of the Chinese model, a political prescription that would also legitimise the economic approach of People’s Republic of China and its rapid rise. The objective is that of considering and recognizing it, in a debate that aims to go beyond the idea of the democratic model as

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to develop, justifying, thus, the necessity to spread the US model (see Przeworski, A., & Limongi, F. (1997). *Modernization: Theories and Facts. World Politics*, 49(2), 155–183. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25053996> )

<sup>352</sup> The Obama White House (2011). President Obama Speaks to the Australian Parliament. *YouTube*, uploaded by The Obama White House, November 21, 2011. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdqI14rBswE>

<sup>353</sup> Bell, D. A. (2015). *The China Model. Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

“*the least bad*”<sup>354</sup>, but also includes different perspectives of order. Bell's analysis does not seek to justify or necessarily accept the Chinese model of governance, but rather to analyse it in its particulars so that it can be, in a sense, one of the elements for not falling into Thucydides's trap. The ideological difference and its application to the model of governance would therefore not be a pretext to reduce the confrontation between a hegemonic power and a rising power necessarily to a clash. rather, the China model is a model from which it is possible to capture the elements necessary to maintain the balance of power that would guarantee international stability. Within the Chinese academic debate, it flourished the concept of *neo-authoritarianism*”, often associated with a form of “tutelary democracy”<sup>355</sup>. In this perspective, Chinese authoritarianism would be seen as a variant of political democracy which recommends itself not to the vote of the single individual, but to the elites. The appeal of authoritarianism was in Chinese debate, and in the international debate about models of governance, a reaction to the overall political, economic, and social conditions of China during the 1980s, a country that was undertaking important and massive reforms to develop, expectant, hopeful, but also considered as uncertain and without a settled future. The authoritarian model of governance would have guaranteed, in China, political stability and order, it would have protected the country for any shock attempting its development. In its mixture of nationalism and economic development, political leaders expanded the control by political education, even suppressing political opposition, proposing traditional culture as the foundation of national spirit.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> *Ibidem*, p.18.

<sup>355</sup> The concept of *tutelary democracy* as applied to the East Asian nations strongly influenced the Chinese advocates of neo-authoritarianism and the model of its governance. Even Samuel Huntington recognises a direct relationship between authority and progress in the development process, looking at the history of continental Europe in which rationalized authority and centralized power were necessary not only for unity but also for progress (see Shils, E. (1962). *Political Development in the New States*. The Hague, Mouton, pp. 61-62; Huntington, S. P. (1968). *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, Yale University Press, pp. 125-26 )

<sup>356</sup> Petracca, M. P., & Xiong, M. (1990). “The Concept of Chinese Neo-Authoritarianism: An Exploration and Democratic Critique”. *Asian Survey*, 30(11), 1099–1117. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644692>

### 3.3.3. Political meritocracy

China's political system has now evolved into a very sophisticated system that selects and promotes political talent, and that, for Bell, “seems to have underpinned China's stunning economic success”<sup>357</sup>. Starkly in contrast with the US liberal democratic model, the “China model” proposes a proven *political meritocracy*, the idea that political power should be distributed not by the basis of “one person, one vote”, but in accordance with the abilities and the virtues. Where electoral democracy has produced failures for the development and progress of so many countries, China reaps the success of a model of governance in which trained and virtuous people are selected to lead a country to prosperity, a dense and articulated system that through examinations and tests elevates the qualities of those judged morally fit to lead a state. The public examination system widely used during the imperial China is the foundation of what today springs up as a new model of governance, which selects political leaders on the basis of their superior abilities to govern the community. It administered the selection of candidates for the state bureaucracy assessing their merits. Once again, China draws from its millennial history, and brings back an ancient system, be it the *Tianxia system* or the imperial examinations for the selection of leaders, which it has guaranteed even in the short term, an unprecedented rise in the global arena. The “biggest player in the history of the world” clashes, thus, with the Western model. Its skills, capabilities and its new “exceptionalism” that seems to replace the one that belonged to the United States for so long, however, does not necessarily jeopardise the stability of the international system, and perhaps it is far from being “destined for war”. As debated, many Western leaders, as well as Western academic debate, began to describe the relationship with China in starkly ideological terms, as a defence of democracy against the threat of authoritarianism. China would menace to replace, or revise, the democratically-based liberal international order with the principles and practices of the Chinese Communist Party, endangering, thus, democratic societies everywhere. As refuted, notwithstanding, the Cold-War trope misrepresent Chinese essence, and its legitimacy to actively participate to the world order, a rhetoric that inevitably places China on the side of the villain.

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<sup>357</sup> Bell, D. A. (2015). *The China Model. Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, p.4.

Reducing the fate of two superpowers necessarily to a clash over ideological difference worked during the period of the Cold War, and demonstrated, in a sense, the failure of the Soviet model and the justification the US model. Now that the Chinese model has proven its workings, however, it would be appropriate to analyse and unravel its traits. In the age of globalisation and interdependence, it would be opportune to revisit the way the global order is interpreted and the balance of power between the great powers. Professor Lawrence Freedman, emeritus professor of War Studies at King's College in London, affirmed that the notion of an inevitable conflict between Athens and Sparta, transposed to the contemporary confrontation between United States and China, does not consider in a proper manner the fact that the then Athenian leader Pericles "*made poor strategic calls*", and that any different decisions would have avoided a bloody war. Issues of interest and alliances are nowadays as important as power balances, and all the characterisations of power need to be watched carefully. Probably the idea of the *bamboo curtain* instead of the *iron curtain* that divided the world during the cold war is the most appropriate image to describe the photography of the world today. The world does appear divided. two different models, one tried and tested and quite valid, that of the United States; one in the process of experimenting, but which has already brought home far-sighted results, that of China. Two different ideologies, two ways of doing governance, two cultures that clash over their underlying values. A bamboo curtain, however, no matter how bushy it may be, is always traversable, and perhaps, in the dynamics of the future, it will be discovered which of the two superpowers will cut through the thick bamboo hedge or pass through it to look a little further. Apparently, China has already started to do so.



## CHAPTER 4

### 与众不同 (yǔ zhòng bù tóng)

#### “*Unconventional, out of the ordinary*”

“China reminds me most of America at its own moment of transformation, [...] ‘when every man has his dream, his pet scheme’. [...] When I stood in the light of a new Chinese skyline, I sometimes thought of Gatsby’s New York – ‘always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world’.”<sup>358</sup>

The Heavenly Empire has awakened, and the word “China” is on everyone's lips. It is training hard and preparing to be the world's leading economy.<sup>359</sup> It is the country that, even from far away, produces most of the products that the world consumes, it is the country whose majesty and authoritarianism frighten. An ancestral culture, one of the oldest in the world, an ancient wisdom, wise and prepared to debate and renegotiate the great questions of today’s world. A territory as vast as the inventions and discoveries that are commonly used today without too much hesitation. People’s Republic of China is a *Dragon*, an animal that might seem like a monster, disturbing the sleepless nights of many people. Yet, on those nights, this Dragon dreams big, shapes its ambitions, and wrestles to re-write the rules of the world. It is not a black and evil monster hiding in the wardrobe, but the cosmic rule, a wonderful and colourful creature.<sup>360</sup> Tian’an Men Square appears, at the first glance, to harbour great ambitions and talk about a glorious past. Evan Osnos captured the gazes of people who, on the opposite side of the globe, look curiously at the future, and prepare to live and enjoy it in the most prosperous way. Today's China, to use an adjective so popular in the United States, is *unprecedented*<sup>361</sup>, a country of modern complexity, a country with a fever. Evan Osnos, an American journalist and author, as well as China correspondent for politics and foreign affairs, has given a picture of a

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<sup>358</sup> Osnos, E. (2015). *Age of Ambition. Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 6.

<sup>359</sup> The World Bank (2019). *Overview of China*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview#1>

<sup>360</sup> Meccarelli, M. (2021). “Discovering the Long: Current Theories and Trends in Research on the Chinese Dragon”. *Frontiers of History in China*. 16 (1), 123–142.

<sup>361</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* London, Scribe.

convulsive, invigorating China, where it is “*difficult to predict when or where a fever would ignite, or what it would leave behind*”<sup>362</sup>. Humbly sharing with him an experience in China, albeit a much shorter and different one, I carried through in this work the academic studies on the future of international relations together with Osnos' analysis to argue and discuss the “Chinese characteristics” that can change the manner of intending the world order. The lucid and critical gaze of a US journalist has provided “*some of the figures at the cutting edge of a changing China*”<sup>363</sup> that firmly outline the complexity of a fast-evolving nation. In the great disorder shaking the world, after devastating economic crises and a pandemic, in contrast to an apparent paralysis of democratic values that have guided the international community for decades, People’s Republic of China is there staunch, in the Far East, firm and stable as well as dynamic and energetic at the same time. It remains standing, dodges wracking economic crises, increases the prosperity and the welfare of its population, proposes an order, a pattern as rigid and complex its governance. The *exceptionalism* that had labelled the United States as unique in human history in its inherent difference to other countries of the world is now a “*double-edged sword*”<sup>364</sup>, with its favourable and unfavourable consequences. American exceptionalism seems to slowly pass the baton to a *Chinese exceptionalism*, a label that, like the United States’ one last century, represents a model to which the world is not accustomed, which thinks outside the box, and appears 与众不同 *yǔ zhòng bù tóng* (“unconventional and out of the ordinary”)<sup>365</sup>.

Analysing the Chinese model is indispensable, today, to draw the profile of the new, changing global scene, a snapshot that sees two powers such as the United States and People’s Republic of China in the background. New perspectives are opening up on a global level, and Xi Jinping's political and strategic model certainly collides with the American-Western one. Developing this work, however, it has been confuted that assessing the relationship between the US and China as just a collision or a conflict is not a proper way of deeply understanding much more complex dynamics. The *Chinese dream*

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<sup>362</sup> Osnos, E. (2015). *Age of Ambition. Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 6.

<sup>363</sup> Yan P. Lin Center, McGill University (2022). Annual Lecture by Rana Mitter. *YouTube*, uploaded by Yan P. Lin Center, April 19, 2022. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0AAP-r95\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0AAP-r95_c)

<sup>364</sup> Lipset, S. M. (1996). *American Exceptionalism: a double-edged sword*. New York, Norton.

<sup>365</sup> 与众不同 [yǔ zhòng bù tóng] (2012). 成语大词典 [chengyu da cidian]. Shanghai, Commercial Press.

is a prosperity project that carries a millenary tradition on its shoulders. Despite the idea that the Confucian tradition, deliberately recovered by President Xi, would be just a propaganda tool to justify the authoritarian ideological aspirations of the Communist Party's "populist" dream<sup>366</sup>, an accurate analysis of the *Chinese model* is a means that allows to dissect and unravel, at least, the complexity of relations that exists between the United States and China, a comparison tool for assessing reality, with the aim to "point to better ways of doing things"<sup>367</sup>. Since the 1980s, Chinese administrations have pursued a model of reforms whose analysis results useful to assess not only the improvements that have taken place in the country, but also the adaptability of this model to future scenarios. As D. Bell states, it is worth asking, beyond the Chinese government's alleged unwillingness, whether this model can be exported elsewhere, as the United States has done for many years. Indeed, going beyond a mere ideological interpretation of China as an authoritarian and communist country, the Chinese model brings with itself far-reaching political, economic and social reforms, which have been fertile ground for its *rejuvenation*, its re-birth, and for coming to occupy the position that is playing today on the international stage.<sup>368</sup> China's role is one that is struggling to be recognised. It is appropriate, however, to realistically consider its successes as well as its shortcomings in the world arena. As E. Goh reiterates, in this struggle for power it is perhaps more appropriate to adopt a realistic perspective, in the sense of being based on hard facts, than to indulge in a mere estimation of the differences between the two powers and a fatalistic view.<sup>369</sup> The decisions taken in the late 1970s were a milestone for the development of the economy and the personal enrichment of the Chinese society. Today, the CCP is at the head of the world's second largest economy, poised to become the first, and already the world's chief economy according to different data and calculations.<sup>370</sup> This performance inevitably allowed it to gain legitimacy, becoming the basis of its right to be proactive part in the international arena. In the more complex framework of this work, China today represents a new paradigm, a new order which, to the eyes of many, seems to be able to fix up not only the

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<sup>366</sup> Perry, E. J. (2015). "The Populist Dream of Chinese Democracy". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 74(4), 903–915. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24738563>

<sup>367</sup> Bell, D. A. (2015). *The China Model. Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 188.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibidem*, p.195.

<sup>369</sup> Goh, E. (2015). *The Struggle for Order. Hegemony, Hierarchy & Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

<sup>370</sup> The World Bank (2019). *Overview of China*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview#1>



disorder dictated by the complexity of contemporary assumptions and challenges, but also that structural disorder created by the questioning of certain models that today no longer seem to fully represent the changing demands and needs of new global challenges. The United States continues and will continue, in a broad sense, to exert its hegemony on the global stage, at least in the short period.<sup>371</sup> Nevertheless, in an assessed general crisis of the US liberal model that managed the global order for years, the “Chinese road”, intended as a new and alternative pattern to global order, is one worth considering on the journey towards a new balance of power.<sup>372</sup> The *hegemonic model* is one of the most accredited and studied to describe the workings of the decline and rise of states, meaning them aimed at maximising their power.<sup>373</sup> However, new perspectives are emerging in the world of international relations. In fact, according to recent studies, rather than being destined for a direct confrontation with the United States and the conquest, for one of the powers, of the role of new hegemon, China could integrate itself perfectly into the new global environment, a complex, multiplex landscape that finds in some of its characteristics the coexistence and interdependence of different models. In the great disorder, China could be the exceptional element, with its model, to rebalance global power.<sup>374</sup>

#### 4.1. 修齊治平 (*xiu qi zhi ping*) “*Educate, regulate, put in order, pacify*”

The concept of order is inherent in Chinese culture. As already argued, Confucianism and the Chinese philosophical tradition comprehensively encompass relations of order and harmony that would lend themselves, as was the case in the era of Warring States and the period of Springs and Autumns, to guarantee peace, stability, and

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<sup>371</sup> Vuving, A. L. (Ed.). (2020). “Great Power Competition: Lessons from the Past, Implications for the Future”. In *HINDSIGHT, INSIGHT, FORESIGHT: Thinking About Security in the Indo-Pacific* (pp. 13–36). Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26667.7>

<sup>372</sup> Fernández, D. C. (2021). “The Hegemony Crisis, the Neoliberal Model, and the United States Power Structure”. *Critical Sociology*, 47(7–8), 1283–1293. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920521992443>

<sup>373</sup> Fiammenghi, D. (2011). “The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis”. *International Security*, 35(4), 126–154. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41289682>

<sup>374</sup> Nicolas, F. (2016). “China and the Global Economic Order”. *China Perspectives*, 2016 (2), 7-14. Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/6960#quotation>

prosperity.<sup>375</sup> Order and harmony are cornerstone values that guided China and Chinese society for millennia, values that have been projected into the way of life and governance of what today is People's Republic of China. For today's People's Republic of China, a country that is looking to the past and projecting into the future, "*the world has its foundation in the state, the state in the family and the family in the individual*"<sup>376</sup>. Contemporary China's identity has indeed the traits of the past, but constantly looks to the future and shapes, through Confucian thought, a new way of understanding the international landscape. What E. Osnos has called the "*age of ambitions*"<sup>377</sup> provides the idea of a country that does not tire, where a constant, feverish flow of energy and ambition shape every day the picture country that presents itself to the eyes of the world as embodied by a stable, authoritarian, firm and decisive leadership such as that of president Xi Jinping. Its political project truly demonstrates, through a dialectic reminiscent of the great thinkers of the past, a concrete and productive plan of action, which allows, and has already allowed China, to gain a remarkable importance on the international stage, a work that began under the leadership of Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin but now reinforced in its objectives. China is a dynamic, modern country, where not only the tea water that accompanies the days boils, but also the social fervour, that "cultural fever" (文化热 *wénhuà rè*), part of the Chinese dream.<sup>378</sup> Former Singapore premier Lee Kuan Yew has stated that the extent of the shift produced by the People's Republic of China in the world order is such that the world will inevitably have to find a new balance.<sup>379</sup> Rather than a direct confrontation with the United States, then, what seems inevitable is precisely the reconquest, by China, of its own legitimate space within the international scene. As Yan Xuetong argues, in fact, the Chinese decline that occurred after Western colonisation would only be a historical mistake, and which, if corrected, would simply return the world

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<sup>375</sup> Wei, X.; Li, Q. (2013). "The Confucian Value of Harmony and its Influence on Chinese Social Interaction". *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 9(1), 60-66. Available at: <http://cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/viewFile/j.ccc.1923670020130901.12018/3618>

<sup>376</sup> Scarpari, M. (2013). *Mencio e l'Arte di Governo*. Venice, Marsilio, p.51.

<sup>377</sup> Osnos, E. (2015). *Age of Ambition. Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

<sup>378</sup> Zhang, X. (1994). "On Some Motifs in the Chinese "Cultural Fever" of the Late 1980s: Social Change, Ideology, and Theory". *Social Text*, 39, 129–156. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/466367>

<sup>379</sup> Rose, C. (2010). "Interview with Lee Kuan Yew about the New Global Order". *Bloomberg*, May 14, 2010. Available at: <https://shabait.com/2010/05/14/part-ii/>

to a condition of normality and order rather than an upheaval.<sup>380</sup> In Xi Jinping's China, there seems to be no room for a “Cold War mentality”. Rather, a proactive attitude persists that emphasises the country's capabilities, right and duty to promote an international order that recognises its leadership role in Asia and its status as a great power, on a par with the United States of America.<sup>381</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Identity and ambitions of contemporary China

Already during President Hu Jintao's leadership (2002-2012), which not coincidentally followed China's more concrete opening to the world through its entry into the *World Trade Organisation*, the traditional ideas of Confucianism were seen as an intellectual resource, a means to legitimise a new role for China in the international arena.<sup>382</sup> Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening-up policies had allowed China to “take off”, as W. W. Rostow would argue in his *modernisation theory* (see §3.3.2.), providing the country with a solid economic base to legitimise, albeit relatively, its weight on the global stage. Hu Jintao's government presented China's growth as a “*peaceful rise*”, a term that, for the avoidance of any doubt, was replaced with the expression “*peaceful development*” (和平发展 *héping fāzhǎn*) in order to ward off what was perceived as a danger in the world.<sup>383</sup> The central idea behind this concept was that of a “*harmonious world*” (和谐世界 *héxié shìjiè*), the consequent extension, through Confucian principles, of the ancestral values of harmony and order to the world as a whole. Already in the Chinese government's 2015 State Council document, in fact, the idea of a more assertive, proactive China that is working towards the realisation of a new international political and economic order that

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<sup>380</sup> Yan, X. (2001). “The Rise of China in Chinese eyes”. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 84(3), 33-39.

<sup>381</sup> Liff, A. P. (2018). “China and the US Alliance System”. *The China Quarterly*, 233(2), 137-165. Available at: [https://scholar.google.com/citations?view\\_op=view\\_citation&hl=en&user=Sw5arW4AAAAJ&citation\\_for\\_view=Sw5arW4AAAAJ:mVmsd5A6BfQC](https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=Sw5arW4AAAAJ&citation_for_view=Sw5arW4AAAAJ:mVmsd5A6BfQC)

<sup>382</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

<sup>383</sup> Renmin Ribao (2010). “Cong Heping Jueqi dao Heping Fazhan” [From peaceful rise to peaceful development]. *Renmin Ribao*, January 29, 2010. Available at: <http://book.people.com.cn/GB/69399/107424/180913/10879494.html>

is both just and more rational appears clear.<sup>384</sup> The harmony to which China refers is not transcendental, but rich in political concreteness. It implies not the rejection but the acceptance of a coexistence of different forms of political organisation, as well as values, on a global level. What it rejects, on the contrary, is the idea that a global order must necessarily be founded on a common normative root and common values.<sup>385</sup> Thousands of years ago, Chinese carved the character for harmony and peace 和 *hé* on tortoise shells, and Confucius forged the philosophical concept of a harmony without uniformity.<sup>386</sup> As affirmed by former President Hu Jintao, the world is full of differences and contradictions, but the righteous man should balance them and achieve harmony.<sup>387</sup> A critique that is both concealed and open at the same time, an hidden attack against the hegemony of the United States that for years had moulded first the Asian continent, then the entire world. China was preparing its idea of order opposed to the world order pursued by the United States, a superpower considered incapable of ensuring fair justice and inclusiveness.<sup>388</sup> China is, now, preparing, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, its “*dream of rebirth*”<sup>389</sup>, that of a “prosperous and powerful” country. The concept of 富强 *fùqiáng* (“prosperous and powerful”), which best exemplifies the identity and ambitions of contemporary China, refers to a *chengyu* originating in the time of the Warring States, a period of Chinese history that has accompanied this analysis as a reference point for the argument, as well as a factor that highlights the present Chinese attitude of looking to the past to shape the future. The expression for a prosperous state with a powerful militia was claimed as early as the nineteenth century by Chinese intellectuals to express the desire and dream of reviving the splendour of the heavenly empire, the prosperity and power that belonged to China and that were already obscured when the British Empire imposed its rule by force of arms on the Asian country in 1839. The leadership of Xi Jinping uses 富强 *fùqiáng* as a “*warning to the world*”<sup>390</sup>, to remind that China is in no way willing to suffer another

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<sup>384</sup> State Council of the People’s Republic of China (2005). *China Peaceful Development Road*. Beijing, 2005. Available at: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cegv/eng/zywjyjh/t227733.htm>

<sup>385</sup> Callahan, W. A. (2008). “Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?”. *International Studies Review*, 10(4).

<sup>386</sup> Bertuccioli, G. (2013). *La Letteratura Cinese*. Rome, L’Asino d’oro.

<sup>387</sup> Hu, J. (2005). *Harmonious World: China's Ancient Philosophy for New International Order*. Speech at the UN's 60th anniversary summit, New York, October 24, 2005. Available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cena/eng/xwdt/t410254.htm>

<sup>388</sup> State Council of the People’s Republic of China (2005). *China Peaceful Development Road*. Beijing, 2005. Available at: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cegv/eng/zywjyjh/t227733.htm>

<sup>389</sup> Gallelli, B. (2021). *La Cina di Oggi in Otto Parole*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p.13.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibidem*, p.31.

terrible humiliation, nor to give in on issues that affect its crucial interests. As demonstrated by the President's own political report enunciated during the 19th Communist Party Congress, the Chinese model with its ambitions offers a “*completely new solution to all those countries and nations that wish, on the one hand, to accelerate their economic development and, on the other hand, to maintain their independence*”<sup>391</sup>. “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” would then offer the wisdom of the ancients available to create, and put into practice, a new model for solving humanity's problems.<sup>392</sup> In forging its identity and acting as a great power, China sees itself as committed to developing friendly cooperation with the whole world, while claiming to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. Within the framework of international relations defined by President Xi himself, and reiterated several times by Foreign Minister Wang Yi, as *win-win relations*, China claims its sovereignty while identifying its responsibility at international level and expects other countries to act in the same way. In Chinese harmony and order, there is no place for conflict or direct confrontation. Rather, diplomacy and mediation are posed as operational tools to cultivate win-win relations, a new kind of multilateralism that would allow not only China, but the world at large, to return to the splendour of the past and a situation of order.<sup>393</sup> It is important to emphasise that the Chinese model, with its ambitions and concreteness already demonstrated by impressive economic growth and social development, is very appealing in the eyes of many countries classifiable as non-Western. Many countries in Africa and Asia, indeed, lend themselves to the lower political cost of Chinese projects, compared to the often austere Western political and economic conditionalities. To add to this, the two major crises, the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 and the global financial crisis of 2008, have further highlighted how Western conditionalities have often amplified crises and further torn apart the social fabric of many developing countries.<sup>394</sup> The imposition of

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<sup>391</sup> Xi, J. (2017). “Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokangshehui duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi weida shengli – Zai Zhongguo gongchandang di shi jiu ci quanguo daibiao dahui shang de baogao” [Complete the construction of a society of moderate prosperity and achieve great success in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics - Political Report presented at the XIX National Congress of the Communist Party]. *Renmin Ribao*, October 27, 2017. Available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/19th/n1/2017/1027/c414395-29613458.html>

<sup>392</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>393</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2019). *China's National Defence in the New Era*. Beijing, July 24, 2019. Available at: [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content\\_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html)

<sup>394</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

*International Monetary Fund* measures, for example, have often been seen as economic and political coercion, and a form of “*ideological and cultural arrogance*”<sup>395</sup>. The US model later turned out to be unstable and prone to crisis. The search for new “Asian alternatives” at regional level to cope with the external shocks of the great crises of globalisation found their landing place in China, a confidence built on a functional model that actually managed to bypass the economic and social shocks. In the Chinese identity that has the traits of harmony and stability, there is social prosperity, there is what President Xi Jinping, during the parade to celebrate the centenary of the Communist Party in 2021, announced. The fact that China has achieved the first goal, that of building a “*moderately prosperous society in all respects*”<sup>396</sup>, stressing that nobody should be left behind on the path towards a harmonious society. As China steps up as a superpower on the international world stage, it is inevitable Chinese willingness to provide a new kind of international relations, as inevitable is that they will be different from that demonstrated by the United States.<sup>397</sup> The Chinese success, as has already been described, worries the United States. Not only the contrast between two different ideological and political models, but rather the Chinese, keen military strategy, is what shocks the world the most, especially the major security providers to date. China, however, through President Xi's own words, justifies its military expenditure with the inescapable necessity of having to defend oneself, of having to place a deterrent in front of anyone who tries to put obstacles in its way, while at the same time opposing aggression and the threat of weapons.<sup>398</sup> The Chinese one is the “*culture of insecurity*”<sup>399</sup>, the culture of a country that is rising in an exemplary manner from a trampled and humiliated past. Identity and ambitions of the new China are being shaped through culture. In the preface to his essay *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, professor Yan Xuetong reported that,

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<sup>395</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 174.

<sup>396</sup> Xinhua (2021). “Xi Declares a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects”. *Xinhua*, July 1, 2021. Available at: [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2021-07/01/content\\_77599320.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2021-07/01/content_77599320.htm)

<sup>397</sup> Yan, X. T. (2013). *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

<sup>398</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2019). *China's National Defence in the New Era*. Beijing, July 24, 2019. Available at: [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content\\_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html)

<sup>399</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p.64.

in a conversation, Henry Kissinger said that he firmly believed China to adopt ancient culture as the compass for its foreign policy, and actually he was right.<sup>400</sup>

#### 4.1.2. Xi Jinping and the “New Era”

At dawn on 15 March 2013, a man with many years of experience in public administration and a brilliant career rose to power in the People's Republic of China. The world's most populous country emerged from the previous year with an economic growth of 7.8 per cent, which was better than expected.<sup>401</sup> The 18th Communist Party Congress committed to the general tone of moving forward while maintaining stability, firmly deepened reform and opening up, and making more innovation. At the same time, the party chose Xi Jinping to lead the country towards new ambitions and a prosperous future, and “*to preside over the country's destiny*”<sup>402</sup>. Conservative, but a “flexible moderniser” at the same time, Xi Jinping carried out his local and provincial duties showing to be pragmatic and reformist. Defensor of a market economy and of a major international openness, but also cautious, and orthodox in his actions.<sup>403</sup> Xi Jinping was picking up the legacy of a country that was on its way to becoming a major economic, and then political, power, a country that even though it recorded double-digit economic growth nevertheless appeared internally fragmented, corrupt in some of its components<sup>404</sup>, an endemic problem that absolutely had to be solved, and that President Xi made his main objective to restore China to its traditional splendour and correct the “*historical error*”<sup>405</sup> that had

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<sup>400</sup> Yan, X. T. (2013). *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

<sup>401</sup> National Bureau of Statistic of China (2013). *China's Economy Showed Good Momentum of Steady Growth in the Year of 2013*. National Bureau of Statistic of China Available at: [http://www.stats.gov.cn/enGLISH/PressRelease/201401/t20140120\\_502079.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/enGLISH/PressRelease/201401/t20140120_502079.html)

<sup>402</sup> Zheng, Y.; Cheng, G. (2009). “Xi Jinping's rise and Political Implications”. *China: an International Journal*, 7(1), 291-294.

<sup>403</sup> Cabestan, J.-P., & Guill, E. (2012). “Is Xi Jinping the Reformist Leader China Needs?”. *China Perspectives*, 3 (91), 69–76. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24055485>

<sup>404</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>405</sup> President Xi is referring to the so-called “*tigers and flies*” campaign, in reference to the widespread corruption within the Chinese communist party after the reforms initiated in 1978. The injection of capital created opportunities for Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and state officials to exploit state resources for private gain. In 2012 Hu Jintao was warning the country that systemic corruption could lead to the downfall of the CCP and the country itself. Picking up where Hu left off, President Xi Jinping, highlighted graft and corruption as the most important

downgraded it. G. Allison emphasised how, although the economic factor is not the sole determinant of power, throughout history countries with a larger GDP have gained proportionately more influence in shaping international affairs. China's economic growth therefore worried the US, posing a fundamental problem for China's growing weight to be rebalanced.<sup>406</sup> Xi Jinping, even today, is at the helm of a country that, as recounted by E. Osnos, “*had virtually no access to fortune, truth or faith*”<sup>407</sup>, and that, “*within a generation [...] had gained access to all three – and they want more*”<sup>408</sup>. He carries on the aspiration and the “*indomitable determination to reclaim the past greatness*”<sup>409</sup>. Singapore's former Premier Lee Kuan Yew describes Xi Jinping as a man with iron in his soul, just as “*iron-willed*” is his vision for China that combines prosperity and power.<sup>410</sup> Xi had lived through the years of the cultural revolution, had experienced the arrest of his father, loyalist but captured by Mao Zedong, and a period of “re-education” that took him to the Chinese countryside. A dark period, but at the same time one of rebirth and fortification, which even today, when he delivers his sumptuous speeches, brings out an emotional composure and stability. E. Osnos says that Xi Jinping chose to survive to become “*redder than red*”<sup>411</sup>, struggling to go back to his place. A man of discipline, who demonstrated his abilities and the concreteness of his foresight, famous for his uprightness with which he managed to climb the insidious mountain of the Communist Party elite, until he became its secretary, due to his brilliant merit. That of Xi Jinping immediately emerged as “*China's new revolution*”<sup>412</sup>, a project already initiated by Hu Jintao's administration and reinvigorated by Xi's own political project. At the 17<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress, in 2017, China experienced with Xi Jinping a truly remarkable development, “*grow rich and become strong*”<sup>413</sup>, underlining how China was

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challenge confronting the party. (see Yan, X. (2001). “The Rise of China in Chinese eyes”. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 84(3), 33-39).

<sup>406</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides's Trap?* London, Scribe, p. 19.

<sup>407</sup> Osnos, E. (2015). *Age of Ambition. Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 7.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>409</sup> Osnos, E. (2015). *Age of Ambition. Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 107.

<sup>410</sup> Allison, G; Blackwill, R.; Wyne, A. (2012). *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master's Insights on China, the United States and the World*. Cambridge, MIT Press, p.17.

<sup>411</sup> Osnos, E. (2016). Born Red. *New Yorker*, April 6, 2015. Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/06/born-red>

<sup>412</sup> Economy, E. C. (2018). “China's New Revolution: The Reign of Xi Jinping”. *Foreign Affairs*, 97(3), 60–74. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44822145>

<sup>413</sup> *Ibidem*.



headed in the right direction and how could constitute a fair and legitimate model to “*solving the problems facing mankind*”.<sup>414</sup> Chinese political system was run by a collective leadership for many years, but Xi Jinping revolutionised China governance centralizing political authority in his own hands. Meaningful has been the amendment, in 2018, of the Chinese constitution, whereby the office of president is no longer limited to two terms but can continue. For Xi Jinping, centralising power is about taking concrete time, it is about efficiently managing a country with a “*reawakened sense of destiny*”<sup>415</sup>, it is about pursuing goals and projects that would be lost without order and stability, an illiberal state that is seeking leadership within a liberal world order.<sup>416</sup> In October 2016, *Renmin Ribao*, Chinese national newspaper, published an article in which it commented on the disorder of the US elections, which eventually saw the victory of President Donald Trump. In particular, the article did not dwell on the voting patterns or the convulsive campaigning of the two American presidential candidates. Rather, it stingily pointed out an obvious contrast between the concepts of stability and order, and that of disorder.<sup>417</sup> Once again, the Confucian virtue 和 *hé* emerges from the Chinese analysis. It is evoked to demonstrate, this time, the shortcomings of the US system, starkly in contrast to the Chinese meritocratic system. The great fear of the political and social instability caused by the years of the Cultural Revolution has marked Chinese politics, and to a greater extent President Xi Jinping, a disruption that would undermine years of efforts to pursue a project of modernisation and economic growth. Stability has obviously been the fundamental prerequisite of successive Chinese leaderships from Deng Xiaoping onwards, to the point of being a compass for Xi Jinping's governance, allowing China to navigate towards a prosperous future.<sup>418</sup> From this perspective, in fact, a more realistic vision of

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<sup>414</sup> Xi, J. (2017). “Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokangshehui duoqu xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi weida shengli – Zai Zhongguo gongchandang di shi jiu ci quanguo daibiao dahui shang de baogao” [Complete the construction of a society of moderate prosperity and achieve great success in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics - Political Report presented at the XIX National Congress of the Communist Party]. *Renmin Ribao*, October 27, 2017. Available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/19th/n1/2017/1027/c414395-29613458.html>

<sup>415</sup> Allison, G; Blackwill, R.; Wyne, A. (2012). *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master's Insights on China, the United States and the World*. Cambridge, MIT Press, p.2.

<sup>416</sup> Economy, E. C. (2018). “China's New Revolution: The Reign of Xi Jinping”. *Foreign Affairs*, 97(3), 60–74. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44822145>

<sup>417</sup> *Renmin Ribao* (2016). “Meiguo xuanju luanxiangtuxian zhidu biduan” [The chaos of US presidential elections shows shortcomings of its political system]. *Renmin Ribao*, October 8, 2016. Available at: <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2016/1008/c1003-28758481.htm>

<sup>418</sup> Gallelli, B. (2021). *La Cina di Oggi in Otto Parole*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

Chinese governance emerges, not seen as authoritarian and revisionist, but as aimed at preventing the disorder that the president himself experienced from being repeated. A clear message from a charismatic man: Xi Jinping really does know the people, and he gives himself the right to speak and decide for them. A centralised power, yet one that looks to the international scene, to meet the challenges of a crucial phase for the People's Republic of China Development.

#### 4.1.3. 应运而生 (yìng yùn ér shēng) “To emerge to meet a historic destiny”

At the opening ceremony of the 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress, October 2017, President Xi clearly advocated for 奋发有为 *fèn fā yǒu wéi*, i.e., a “*striving for achievement*”, calling for greater Chinese leadership in world affairs. Already in the first years of his presidency, new policies have been combined with new institutions to give shape to an important achievement craved by Xi Jinping: 人类命运共同 — *rénlèi mìngyùn gòngtóngyī*, a “*community of common destiny*”. The concept of destiny has become one of the most powerful tools in China's diplomacy during the recent years. Many Western scholars tried to give an interpretation of the sense of community, meaning an international community or a “society of states” bound by common interests. Nevertheless, noteworthy is the sense conveyed by China's own definition.<sup>419</sup> Apart from the mere construction of partnerships for cooperation, by which countries treat each other as equals and consider themselves involved into “*intern-civilisation exchanges*”<sup>420</sup>, the community desired by President Xi considers that emerging powers including China should be treated as equal to the developed countries in global governance, and China shows itself keen to increase its role in global affairs, in accordance with its growing strength. Xi Jinping's China is, according to his political programme, a country retracing its steps, not following a fatalistic fate, but a historical destiny. As professor Yan Xuetong affirmed, “*the Chinese see their rise as a reconquest of lost international status, rather*

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<sup>419</sup> Zhang., D. (2018). “The Concept of Community of Common Destiny in China's Diplomacy: Meaning, Motives and Implications. *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, 5(2), 196-207. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/app5.231>

<sup>420</sup> China Daily (2015). “Speech by Xi Jinping at the General Debate of the 70<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly”. *China Daily*, September 30, 2015.

than an attempt to achieve something new”<sup>421</sup>. The China of the first republic, that of Mao Zedong and revolutionary fervour, did not recognise the role of the other great powers, an isolation that identified the country as outside the world order. The China of Xi Jinping is aware of its growth, its development, and the need to return to its past splendour, that of a thousand-year-old empire, but with a different governance and political model. Certainly, as recognised by scholars, Chinese development has been made possible by the country's participation in the American-led international order and the application of some of the characteristics of the US liberal model. This does not exclude, however, that China as a rising power may present a different and legitimate strategy for the contemporary international order.<sup>422</sup> Xi Jinping’s emergence as General Secretary of the Communist Party in 2013 marked a signal moment in both redefined the place of the Party in the context of the narrative of Chinese history, as well as legitimated China’s strategic intentions to be recognized as a global power, fulfilling the mandate of that historical narrative. Xi’s international relations vision resonates with the traditional political order regulated by the “mandate of Heaven” (天下 *Tiānxià*). That dynastic doctrine typical of the imperial age, with the emperor ruling by rites and virtue, echoes not only in contemporary Chinese political doctrine, but also in its global approach.<sup>423</sup> E. Osnos talks about Chinese destiny as something external, which cannot be controlled but is itself the cosmic rule.<sup>424</sup> Xi Jinping’s China is pursuing its destiny, regaining its rightful and traditional role.<sup>425</sup> In the wider academic literature and even in Xi’s own speeches, this Chinese-labeled model is set up against an “old model” of international relations, which is associated with the United States and Western powers. Nevertheless, the assumptions underline a renewed Chinese centrality at world level that, free of any fatalism or moral concept, is realistically concrete.<sup>426</sup> It is a kind of centrality that China has gained through

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<sup>421</sup> Yan, X. (2001). “The Rise of China in Chinese eyes”. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 84(3), 33-39.

<sup>422</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell’Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p.8-9.

<sup>423</sup> Cranmer-Byng, J. (1973). “The Chinese View of Their Place in the World: An Historical Perspective”. *The China Quarterly*, 53, 67–79. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/652507>

<sup>424</sup> Osnos, E. (2015). *Age of Ambition. Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

<sup>425</sup> Burton, C. (2020). “China’s History as Destiny”. *The Dorchester Review*, 10(1), 3-10. Available at: <https://www.dorchesterreview.ca/blogs/news/chinas-history-as-destiny>

<sup>426</sup> Goh, E. (2015). *The Struggle for Order. Hegemony, Hierarchy & Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

what Steven Lukes called the “*third dimension of power*”, a capacity to shape others’ beliefs and desires<sup>427</sup>, an ideological structure built through classical thought and culture, the vehicle through which the ideals and values that underpin a healthy and harmonious society can assert themselves within as well as outside the country. Whereas the Chinese “*community of common destiny*” is premised and based on win-win relations, the “old model”, on the contrary, is governed by “zero-sum” thinking and by what Xi repeatedly called a “Cold War mentality.” In placing Chinese assertiveness within the game of international power balancing, the destiny that China prosecutes would not only refer to the “Asian century” narrative (see §1.2.) and its inevitable shift of global power towards the Asian continent, dictated by a Sino-centric order. Rather, China's destiny is about a newfound “*old order*” that preceded western civilisation and belonged to Asian civilisations when they were the most advanced in the world.<sup>428</sup> Pre-Qin thinkers described the causes of shift in international power lying in the thought of the leader, rather than merely in a material power. In September 2014, during the 2565th anniversary celebrations of Confucius' birth, Xi Jinping used one *chengyu* to say that when knowledge is at its peak, people are educated and have good intentions; being educated, relationships within families are regulated; being regulated, states are kept in order; and being kept in order, the whole world is pacified.<sup>429</sup> A man, so the leader, as the foundation of political and governmental action, the Confucian principle that underlies the art of good governance, that theorised for over two thousand years revives now in Xi Jinping’s domestic and international approach. a destiny that is fundamentally a re-appropriation of an ancient ethical system but considered functional to the construction of a new morality, "one that knows how to speak the language of man, solidarity and sharing, and not only that of economics and individualism"<sup>430</sup>. From here moves Xi’s political approach to defeat the corruption, together with the striving to put man at the centre of

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<sup>427</sup> Steven Lukes is a British political and social theorist who that analysed the ways in which power is exercised, pointing out the third dimension of an “ideological power” that allows to influence people's wishes and thoughts (see Lukes, S. (2005). *Power: a Radical View*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

<sup>428</sup> Goh, E. (2015). *The Struggle for Order. Hegemony, Hierarchy & Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

<sup>429</sup> Scarpari, M. (2015). “La Citazione Dotta nel Linguaggio Politico Cinese Contemporaneo. *Annali di Ca’ Foscari. Serie Orientale*, 51. Available at: <https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/media/pdf/article/annali-di-ca-foscari-serie-orientale/2015/51/art-10.14277-2385-3042-22p.pdf>

<sup>430</sup> *Ibidem*.

political and governmental activity and restoring a spiritual, moral dimension that has been denied for too long. Xi Jinping's current ideology campaign reflects China's preference to have Chinese standards adopted as legitimate alternatives to Western values and institutions. Moreover, the ideology campaign moved forward by the President should not be visualized as anti-West or anti-American, but as a strong commitment to maintain, preserve and cultivate Chinese culture, which for a matter of values is different from the Western one, and deserves to be cherished.<sup>431</sup> When Yan Xuetong delivers his message for China's strategy of ascent, he suggests that China should not behave like the United States, which advocates the idea of all states being equal and on an equal footing while in practice always seeking to maintain and preserve their dominant status.<sup>432</sup> The message appears clear. Domestically, China has entered with President Xi what is dubbed as a "New Era". Furthermore, Xi Jinping has also provided a path for China's international leadership, in a world entering a "global New Era".<sup>433</sup> When he said "Educate, regulate, put in order, pacify" (修齊治平 *xiuqi zhiping*), Confucius' words provided legitimacy for his project and for the final destination of the "community of common destiny" that Xi firmly has in mind. The Chinese one is a universalist mission, at times reminiscent of that of the United States, yet painstakingly clarified and outlined in the words of the president himself to define its limits. A new international order without hegemonies and characterised by sovereign equality, where everyone, on an equal footing, contributes legitimately to stability. The rise of China would ultimately be a benefit for the stability of the international order, as well as an opportunity for progress.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Zhang, Y.; Pho, S. (2015). "Do Western Values Threaten China? The Motives and Methods of Xi Jin Ping's Ideology Campaign". *Wilson Center & Kissinger Institute on China and the United States*, April 5, 2015. Available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/do-western-values-threaten-china-the-motives-and-methods-xi-jinpings-ideology-campaign>

<sup>432</sup> Yan, X. T. (2013). *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, p.16.

<sup>433</sup> Mardell, J. (2017). The Community of Common Destiny in Xi Jinping's New Era. *The Diplomat*, October 25, 2017. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/the-community-of-common-destiny-in-xi-jinpings-new-era/>

<sup>434</sup> Yan, X. T. (2013). *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

#### 4.2. 中国梦 (Zhōngguó mèng) “The Chinese Dream”

“While China’s past has already been written into the history books of humanity, China’s present is being created by hundreds of millions of people and it is inevitable that China’s future will be even more beautiful”<sup>435</sup>. In People’s Republic of China, government, and people as well, daydream looking towards a prosperous future. These are the words spoken by President Xi Jinping during the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China, significant words that encapsulate the essence of one of the most unprecedented projects in history.<sup>436</sup> For decades, the American dream has inspired the world, produced a possibility of redemption on a global scale, a chance for some states, but above all for individuals, to improve living conditions. Nevertheless, since Xi Jinping literally ushered in a “New Era” for his country but also for the global stage, China’s ambitions are emerging and impacting in a clear and purposeful manner, as well as to emerge is its way of dreaming, its own personal dream. The 中国梦 (Zhōngguó mèng) has been outlined very differently from the American one, especially underlining its different range. Rather than celebrating individual aspirations, the Chinese-labeled dream belongs to the community, and represents the collective, not individual, effort of all Chinese citizens. A “concrete dream”, which does not depend on fate but on the commitment of an entire society. E. Osnos tells of an interview with Professor Desmond Lam, a scholar of marketing from the University of Macao talking about Chinese attitudes towards risk. According to Lam, “Americans tend to see themselves in control of their fate, while Chinese see fate as something external”, conveying the Chinese commitment to do, to create, with the aim of acquiring more luck and prosperity.<sup>437</sup> In what appears to be a struggle between two civilisations and two ideologies, however, it is worth considering how two opposing ways of acting and thinking need not be opposed to each other.<sup>438</sup> In fact, as Xi Jinping pointed out, the Chinese dream is also about trying to find a common ground that can preserve

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<sup>435</sup> Xi, J. (2019). “A speech in Celebration of the Seventieth Anniversary of the People’s Republic of China”. *Xinhua news*, October 1, 2019. Available at: [www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-10/01/c\\_1125065799.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-10/01/c_1125065799.htm)

<sup>436</sup>Allison, G., Blackwill, R., Wyne, A. (2013). *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master’s Insights on China, the United States and the World*. Cambridge, MIT Press.

<sup>437</sup> Osnos, E. (2015). *Age of Ambition. Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p.81.

<sup>438</sup> Jin, K. (2014). “The China Dream Vs. The American Dream”. *The Diplomat*, September 20, 2014. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2014/09/the-china-dream-vs-the-american-dream/>

differences.<sup>439</sup> The Chinese dream, with its concrete initiatives that are also deployed in foreign policy, has also become the dream of many countries in the world, especially those that can be classified as underdeveloped, just as the American dream became so years ago. Within the grand project of a “new Silk Road”, various scholarly opinions arise in the cauldron of perspectives that strive to predict the future of US-China relations. Certainly, it results complicated to draw a crystal-clear picture of the Chinese dream and its goals, as the formulations that are made about it often appear cryptic, full of rhetoric that draws on Chinese cultural tradition, and which often conceals the concreteness of its objectives.<sup>440</sup> The analysis conducted by Nadège Rolland, Senior Fellow, Political and Security Affairs, at the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), warns against the more rarefied considerations of the Chinese dream, emphasising the Communist Party's media control and instrumentalisation of classical culture as a justification for achieving certain goals. The Chinese leadership especially under President Xi, by the way, never speaks explicitly about the consistency of the Chinese dream, partly out of a fear of generating international backlash and suspicion about its ambitions. Relying on the more valid words of its spokesman Xi Jinping, however, it is paradoxically crystal-clear that rather than constituting a global dream like the American one, the Chinese dream is presented as one that belongs only to China, which does not want interference in its internal affairs, but shows itself as a model to be emulated.<sup>441</sup> If, for some, China's ambitions to “redress”<sup>442</sup> the world order based on US hegemony would be an attempt to ensure the survival of the communist party itself and its authoritarian model, Xi Jinping's leadership plays the card of China's international responsibility as the great power it has become. Conscious of its material power and the gap between this power and the possibility of “controlling” international affairs, Xi Jinping's China reinterprets the international order by rejecting western values and seeking a non-Western paradigm based on wisdom and cultural excellence.<sup>443</sup> If that of the United States is a garment that no longer fits the new global

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<sup>439</sup> Xi, J. (2014). “Gongyan Zhonghua minzu weida fuxingde Zhongguo meng” [The Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation]. *Renmin Ribao*, February 19, 2014. Available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0219/c64094-24399558.html>

<sup>440</sup> Rolland, N. (2020). “China’s Vision for a New World Order”. *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, 83, January 27, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-vision-for-a-new-world-order/>

<sup>441</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibidem*, p.5.

<sup>443</sup> Rolland, N. (2020). “China’s Vision for a New World Order”. *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, 83, January 27, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-vision-for-a-new-world-order/>

challenges, as well as many cultures and societies around the world, China is trying, with its tailoring but with seams yet to be definitively drawn, to reshape the international system, not only by ensuring the survival of its model, but also by proposing it as functional.<sup>444</sup> With the Chinese dream opening up new perspectives for the world, inevitable is what in terms of international relations is a power shift, meaning a new emerging global landscape according to a new, balanced distribution of power.<sup>445</sup> Xi Jinping today advocates an ambitious and functional domestic political project, as well as a global project, certainly on a larger scale, that incorporates features such as free trade, or action against climate change. The Chinese model envisages the country's return to the pre-eminent position it occupied in the world before succumbing to the West, a diverse multiplex world as a feasible alternative to the US hegemony.<sup>446</sup>

#### 4.2.1. 乘风破浪 (chéng fēng pò làng) “To have high ambitions”

In Chinese language, the *chengyu* 乘风破浪 (chéngfēng pòlàng) describes taking advantage of the wind to break the waves and navigate the sea. It gives the idea of overcoming obstacles, of taking advantage of them in order to continue forward unabated.<sup>447</sup> Likewise, “*the Party and the country are advancing toward completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*”.<sup>448</sup> Xi Jinping's China looks to the past, and draws from history, a “*compulsory course*”<sup>449</sup>, the foundations for dreaming of a prosperous future. It was November 2012 when Xi Jinping referred for the very first time to a 中国梦 (Zhōngguó

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<sup>444</sup> Fu, Y. (2016). “The U.S. World Order Is a Suit that no Longer Fits”. *Financial Times*, January 6, 2016. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/c09cbbb6-b3cb-11e5-b147-e5e5bba42e51>

<sup>445</sup> Golden, S. (2020). “The US and China in the New Global Order”. *CIDOB Opinion*, 607, January 2020. Available at: [https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication\\_series/opinion/seguridad\\_y\\_politica\\_mundial/the\\_us\\_and\\_china\\_in\\_the\\_new\\_global\\_order](https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/opinion/seguridad_y_politica_mundial/the_us_and_china_in_the_new_global_order)

<sup>446</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>447</sup> 乘风破浪 [chéngfēng pòlàng] (2012). 成语大词典 [chengyu da cidian]. Shanghai, Commercial Press.

<sup>448</sup> Xinhua (2013). “Xi Stresses Adherence to Socialism, Serving the People”. *Xinhua, People's Daily online*, June 26, 2013. Available at: <http://en.people.cn/90785/8300828.html>

<sup>449</sup> *Ibidem*.



mèng). The occasion was unique and symbolic, as the National Historical Museum in Beijing was showcasing an itinerary narrating Chinese resistance against colonial powers during its period of humiliation. In the following year, 2013, Xi would take office as president of the People's Republic of China, but since then the idea of a dream for China has spread very quickly, with its various interpretations.<sup>450</sup> When the term 梦 mèng (“dream”) was used for the first time, it virtually surprised the world community, especially the West. Winberg Chai, Professor of political science at the University of Wyoming, emphasized how Western press, like the British and the American ones, seized on the idea of a dreaming China as an excuse to return to the central position the country once occupied, and, especially, as a propaganda term to reaffirm the power of the Communist Party.<sup>451</sup> Policy guidelines of republican China never contemplated to dream. Chinese people were told to study, to work, but never to dream. Yet, before taking power, President Xi already had a new possibility for China in mind. Not only a renewed interest in Confucian culture, but also dare to dream as a means to counter Western criticism and to make China even more proud of its country, culture and philosophy. Xi Jinping’s *Chinese Dream* is the mixture of authentic Confucian ideals and a profit-oriented capitalism, a political project that, for the first time encourage Chinese people to dream, instead of making endless sacrifices. Technically speaking, more than a concrete political programme the *Chinese Dream* can be considered as a slogan containing a political programme, a sort of catchphrase that embodies Xi Jinping’s political ideology.<sup>452</sup> On crucial issues such as fighting corruption, promoting democracy, carrying forward economic reforms in a desirable direction and on China’s global role, the Xi Jinping’s leadership did not provide adequate and proper clues to its line of action, but rather identified goals to be achieved, using a well-read and cultured language from Confucianism, but adapted to be understood by the people.<sup>453</sup> Apart from its powerful and eloquent articulation, indeed, there are those who have seen in the Chinese dream not a technical-political concreteness, but more a set of ideals, often contrasting it with the

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<sup>450</sup> Mohanty, M. (2013). “Xi Jinping and the “Chinese Dream”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(38), 34–40. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23528539>

<sup>451</sup> Chai, W., & Chai, M. (2013). “The Meaning of Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream”. *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 20(2), 95–97. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44289022>

<sup>452</sup> Tao, X. (2014). “Opinion: IS President Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream Fantasy or Reality?”. *CNN World*, March 14, 2014. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/14/world/asia/chinese-dream-anniversary-xi-jinping-president>

<sup>453</sup> Mohanty, M. (2013). “Xi Jinping and the “Chinese Dream”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(38), 34–40. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23528539>

American dream, which is then suitable for understanding by the Chinese people themselves.<sup>454</sup> On the contrary, however, Xi Jinping has taken care to leave aside domestic affairs, which remain a matter of state. rather, he has focused on building the image of a China that, through his figure, more explicitly asserts its role as a great power. The *Chinese dream* is the dream of a benevolent, non-assertive China, a country capable of exercising virtuous leadership especially at the regional level. The idea of a newfound superiority for the People's republic of China, rooted in its ability to produce order, respect, stability, without exercising any hegemony.<sup>455</sup> Domestically, President Xi has highlighted some of the characteristic of the Chinese Dream, especially stressing the anti-corruption aspect, a driving major policy initiative that would guarantee order, stability, and growth. Moreover, on the economic front, enormous pressure is made to assure standards of high standards of growth, urging for new growth model so that the widening income gap and regional disparity can be reversed, as well as promoting of domestic consumption and less dependence on imports. Internationally, the Chinese Dream represents the emerging global role of China, and hope for the whole world, especially for developing countries. “As the global economy is being reshaped”<sup>456</sup>, said President Xi, “we are committed to exploring new models and approaches towards more equitable development and inclusive global growth. [...] The Chinese dream will be realised and will benefit Asia and the whole world”<sup>457</sup>. What differentiates Xi Jinping's project-ideal from previous Chinese leaders is the fact that the Chinese dream does not embrace a purely political, or merely economic strategy. 中国梦 (*Zhōngguó mèng*) is well contemplated as a geopolitical, global vision, a collective dream that would benefit all the peoples of the world, by virtue of its inclusiveness. “China today is like a strong lion, but gentle and peaceful. No one has to worry. The Chinese dream is a dream of prosperity, it is not a threat”<sup>458</sup>. Backed by a stable political center like the Party, a problem-solving mentality, and responsiveness to popular needs, the Chinese dream in hence performing in a supposed new emerging

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<sup>454</sup> Tao, X. (2014). “Opinion: IS President Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream Fantasy or Reality?”. *CNN World*, March 14, 2014. Available at:

<https://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/14/world/asia/chinese-dream-anniversary-xi-jinping-president>

<sup>455</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell’Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 69.

<sup>456</sup> Xinhua (2013). “Xi Jinping’s address at Boao Forum for Asia on April 2013 did However Commit China to Narrowing the North-South Gap”. *Xinhua News*, April 2013. Available at: [http://www.china.org.cn/business/Boao\\_Forum\\_2013/2013-04/10/content\\_28501562.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/business/Boao_Forum_2013/2013-04/10/content_28501562.htm)

<sup>457</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>458</sup> Xi, J. (2014). *The Governance of China*. Beijing, Foreign Language Press.

world order in which liberal democracy is wavering among crisis and uncertainty. In contrast with an assessed US liberal model failure to guarantee equality, China's technocratic efficiency promotes social equity, multipolarity, and gains ground as a competitive, alternative, and valid paradigm that challenges the idea according to which liberal democracy is necessarily the final step in the evolution of the governance of complex societies on a global scale.<sup>459</sup> China holds the helm, it harnesses its wind to firmly navigate international waters, and its crew grows larger.

#### 4.2.2. 东山再起 (dōng shān zài qǐ) "To resume one's former position": China's rejuvenation and the "Silk Road"

The Chinese past has not been easy. Certainly, when talking about the Heavenly Empire, an historical image conveying glory and splendour is evoked, the image of one of the greatest empires of antiquity. Yet, that is a light that was softened and nearly extinguished during the years in which the country suffered the impact of Western colonialism.<sup>460</sup> President Xi Jinping has made the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation one of the fundamental pillars of the *Chinese Dream*. Achieving what is called 中华民族伟大复兴 *Zhōnghuámínzú Wěidà Fùxīng* ("great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation") represents, for China, becoming masters of its own destiny again, and leaving behind that China that "went through hardships as grueling as storming an iron-wall pass"<sup>461</sup>. Xi Jinping makes the renaissance of China a central and essential theme, a restoration of China's past greatness, of its being 中国 *Zhōngguó*, with the clear intention of not espousing "the American notion of universalism to spread its values around the world"<sup>462</sup>, but at the same time without forgetting the national humiliation. Xi Jinping's China wants, as it is legitimate, to restore its past position in the world, it wants to return to a shining past,

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<sup>459</sup> Golden, S. (2020). "The US and China in the New Global Order". *CIDOB Opinion*, 607, January 2020. Available at: [https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication\\_series/opinion/seguridad\\_y\\_politica\\_mundial/the\\_us\\_and\\_china\\_in\\_the\\_new\\_global\\_order](https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/opinion/seguridad_y_politica_mundial/the_us_and_china_in_the_new_global_order)

<sup>460</sup> Wahed, M. S. (). "The Impact of Colonialism on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century in China". *Cambridge Journal of China Studies* 11(2), 24-33. Available at: [https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1810/257410/2\\_24-33.pdf?sequence=1](https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1810/257410/2_24-33.pdf?sequence=1)

<sup>461</sup> Xi, J. (2014). *The Governance of China*. Beijing, Foreign Language Press.

<sup>462</sup> Kissinger, H. (2011). *On China*. London, Penguin Press, p.259.

when the country was a crossroads of culture, philosophy, order and stability, but looking to the future. Xi Jinping's renaissance project certainly passes through a domestic governance, which takes care of its people first and foremost. Simultaneously, though, the rejuvenation of China has globally aimed at restoring the *Silk Road*, that great network of trade, and cultural exchange, which already from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC played a central and fundamental role in development.<sup>463</sup> Just as the *Silk Road* played a significant role in opening up political and economic relations between the Asian continent, Europe and the Middle East, facilitating, in addition to goods, an unprecedented exchange of ideas, religions, philosophies and scientific discoveries that changed the course of history,<sup>464</sup> China's *great rejuvenation* involves putting this network back into use, and it has already come into full operation. In 2018, in fact, Xi Jinping described the *New Silk Road* as a "legacy of the normative ideals of peace, friendship, goodwill, coexistence and harmonious development"<sup>465</sup>. Decisive is, then, the function of the market with the ambitious aim to reform the internal balances within the international order, promoting new forms of cooperation.<sup>466</sup> A project of mammoth scope, covering many countries of the world, in a Chinese attempt to build an inclusive order, an alternative project to the American-led one that has characterised previous centuries that would leave more room for self-determination.<sup>467</sup> For H. Kissinger, China would be different from the US because it expands according to what H. Kissinger defined "*cultural osmosis*" and not by the "*missionary zeals*" of which the United States had made their main commitment.<sup>468</sup> A rhetoric, that of People's Republic of China, which necessarily changes the international balance of power, which reshapes the hegemonic model, and which, in an established

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<sup>463</sup> Elisseeff, V. (2001). *The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce*. UNESCO Publishing.

<sup>464</sup> Bentley, J. (1993). *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times*. New York, Oxford University Press, p.33.

<sup>465</sup> Chan, S.; Song, W. (2020). "Telling the China Story Well: A Discursive Approach to the Analysis of Chinese Foreign Policy in the "Belt and Road" Initiative. *Chinese Political Science Review*, 5(1), 4127-437. Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340594345\\_Telling\\_the\\_China\\_Story\\_Well\\_A\\_Discursive\\_Approach\\_to\\_the\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Chinese\\_Foreign\\_Policy\\_in\\_the\\_Belt\\_and\\_Road\\_Initiative](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340594345_Telling_the_China_Story_Well_A_Discursive_Approach_to_the_Analysis_of_Chinese_Foreign_Policy_in_the_Belt_and_Road_Initiative)

<sup>466</sup> Garrick, J.; Bennett, Y. C. (2018). "Xi Jinping Thought": Realisation of the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation?". *China Perspectives*, 1-2 (113), 99–106. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26531916>

<sup>467</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 210.

<sup>468</sup> Kissinger, H. (2011). *On China*. London, Penguin Press, p.259.

crisis of the US liberal model that no longer fits more specific needs for addressing global challenges, fits into the great puzzle of world disorder. China, therefore, would not pose a threat, but rather an opportunity that would benefit the stability of the international order.<sup>469</sup> In the great disorder, Xi Jinping's China appears to have found a new rule, a key to rearrange the pieces of global order.

#### 4.2.3. 一带一路 (yī dài yī lù): the “Belt and Road initiative”

In *The Governance of China*, the collection of writing and speeches that condenses Xi Jinping's (and Chinese Communist Party's), official line to promote China's development, it is said that “China will make greater contributions to the world as it pushes forward reform and opening up, accelerates the transformation of the growth model, implements the opening-up policy, and provides a better economic environment and favorable conditions”<sup>470</sup>. While the world economy is supposed to be still preserved in a phase of uncertainty and instability, the robustness of Asia's economic growth is presented starkly in contrast with the global economies' setbacks, with Chinese economic prospect as becoming of “universal interest”.<sup>471</sup> With Xi Jinping taking power as Chinese President and Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, considerable discussions and debates got foothold all over the world, as well as considerable became the concern about Chinese increased assertiveness for its global engagement. Nevertheless, albeit in a less overt and decisive form, China's global engagement had already begun with the opening-up reforms desired by Deng Xiaoping's administration and continued in the post-Cold War period under the slogan “China goes Global”<sup>472</sup>, a strategy that merged into China's entrance into the *World Trade Organisation*. Xi Jinping's political-strategic project, though, has given a different thrust and direction to the low-profile strategy that China had maintained in previous administrations, especially through the inauguration of an ambitious project through the construction of a global network that goes by the name of *Belt and Road*

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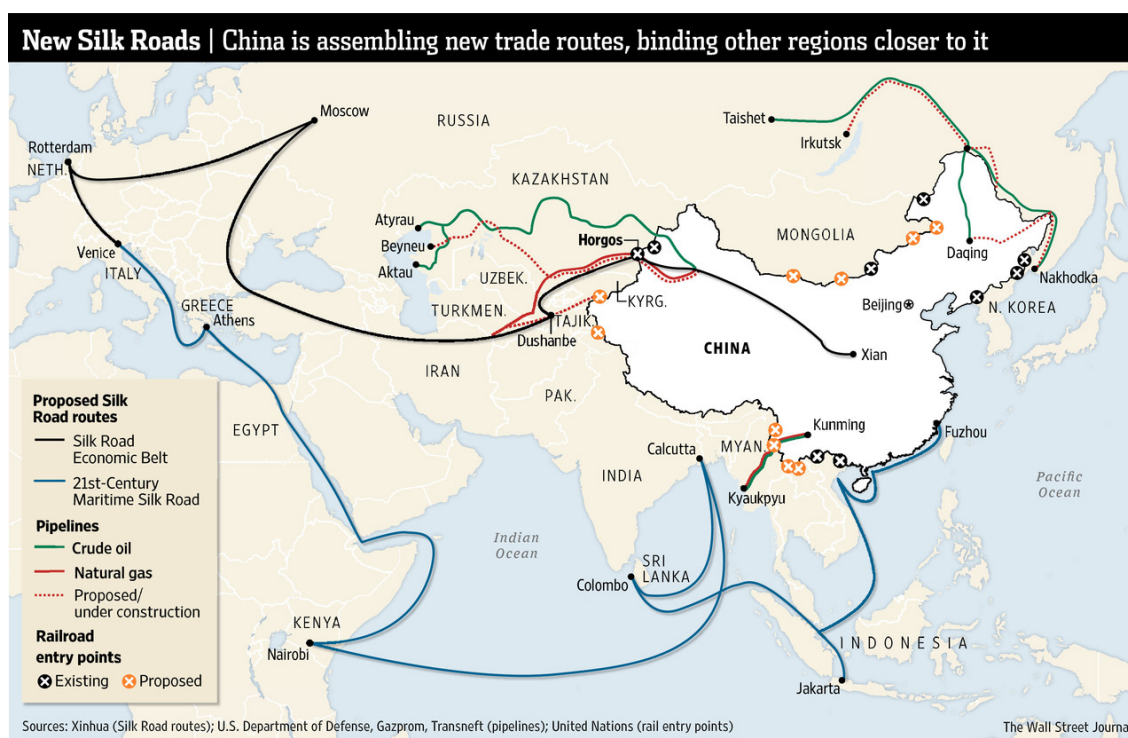
<sup>469</sup> Yan, X. T. (2013). *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, p.204.

<sup>470</sup> Xi, J. (2014). *The Governance of China*. Beijing, Foreign Language Press.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>472</sup> Hong, E.; Sun, L. (2006). “Dynamics of Internationalization and Outward Investment: Chinese Corporations' Strategies”. *The China Quarterly*, 187, 610-634. Available at: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/20192654#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/20192654#metadata_info_tab_contents)

Initiative (BRI), 一帶一路 *yī dài yī lù* in Chinese. Literally “one belt, one road”, alluding to its expansion both by land and sea, what is very often known as the *New Silk Road* represents the network through which Xi Jinping's China connects and interacts with the world. A true vehicle that would not only allow China to achieve some of its strategic goals, including economic growth and trade, as being already a major player in the world economy, but also to demonstrate its internationality and contribution, as well as “special role”, in the global order.<sup>473</sup> In October 2018, *China Today* published a report to reiterate the BRI as an essential party of China's commitment, and as the embodiment of China's international responsibilities.<sup>474</sup> In Xi Jinping's words, particularly, the BRI would be a feasible and prosperous alternative to the protectionism and isolationism that had damaged global economy following the important crises of the last decades, especially after Trump's administration, hitting the multilateral trading system, that still represents a massive resource for the whole world.<sup>475</sup> A “shared community and international



<sup>473</sup> Mobley, T. (2019). “The Belt and Road Initiative: Insights from China's Backyard”. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 13(3), 52–72. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26760128>

<sup>474</sup> Jin, X. (2018). “Why Does China Advocate the Belt and Road?” *China Daily*, October 10, 2018. Available at: <http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/>

<sup>475</sup> China Daily (2017). “President Xi Jinping, “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” (speech, 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Beijing, China, 18 October 2017)”. *China Daily*, October 18, 2017. Available at: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/>

*cooperation*” is the starting point, the instrument, and the end point of the *new Silk Road* desired by President Xi, an “*initiative*”, as expressed by the official name, that well appoints the openness, involvement and engagement of the project. The BRI evokes a project from the past but with a vision of the future. And it is perfectly in line with Xi Jinping's way of doing politics in China, a China that looks back to its great and flourishing past, to its culture, to philosophical thought, to build a world order where it once again occupies a legitimate place. Moreover, while infrastructure and economic investments are building the skeleton of the BRI, they preserve at the same time Chinese core interests, such as geopolitical security or access to natural resources, increasing, at the same time, cultural and social connectivity.<sup>476</sup> Also defined an understandable strategy<sup>477</sup>, China is using the ambitious project of the New Silk Road to improve its economic, political and security situation. Apart from being praised as a “*potential economic boon*”<sup>478</sup> for partner countries, indeed, the BRI has become part and main tool used to exercise the “China threat” narrative that would upset the planetary balance, and criticised as a strategic ploy to gain assets and build political and economic influence through means that are dubbed by the US as “*coercive*”<sup>479</sup>, the use of the so-called “debt trap” to reshape international relations in its favour.<sup>480</sup> Viewed objectively, in fact, the BRI deserves both praise and criticism, but it is bound to change the *status quo* of the international order, almost inevitably. The BRI's projects, and especially its huge economic investments that would provide jobs and thus social redemption, have proven attractive to many countries, especially on the Asian and African continents. In particular, China, unlike the civilising mission that Washington has always included in its development cooperation plans aimed at spreading liberal values and build democratic governances, respects the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, an attractive approach for countries that, given domestic conditions, value the absence of problems

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<sup>476</sup> Mobley, T. (2019). “The Belt and Road Initiative: Insights from China’s Backyard”. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 13(3), 52–72. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26760128>

<sup>477</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 53.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>479</sup> U.S. Policy Planning Staff (2020). *The Elements of China Challenge*. U.S. Office of the Secretary of State, November 2020, p. 3.

<sup>480</sup> Mobley, T. (2019). “The Belt and Road Initiative: Insights from China’s Backyard”. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 13(3), 52–72. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26760128>

related to the nature of individual political regimes.<sup>481</sup> In addition to the viability of the Chinese model, surely the BRI project represents Chinese dissatisfaction with the *status quo* of the world order and with the current state of affairs which is still dominated by US hegemony. Indeed, as has been seen since the *pivot* of the Obama administration, the US has reasserted its influence in the Indo-Pacific, economically, militarily, and politically. However, in the light of the rise of a China that is now to all intents and purposes a great power, and after the failure of the US model especially from an economic point of view, the BRI presents itself as the answer to that American political engagement with Beijing that had hitherto limited its political space. At a time when China is presenting itself as an alternative leader, both regionally in Asia and globally, the United States' model, starting from 2008 financial crisis and especially after the Trump administration's decisions to withdraw from many partnerships in which America still played a leading role on the Asian continent, is losing its credibility, a model for which the costs of the economic and geopolitical order that bears are greater than the benefits associated with it.<sup>482</sup> The new Biden administration has declared since its inauguration its intention to regain ground on the Asian continent, to counterbalance the great influence that China, especially thanks to BRI investments, is gaining.<sup>483</sup> However, it will have to weave a network that not only allows the US to regain credibility, but also to present itself in a different way with forms of economic integration and partnerships meant as non-invasive, and more compatible with the countries' interests.<sup>484</sup> Ultimately, since its launch in 2013, the BRI constitutes what is referred to as the backbone, the framework on which the new world order project pursued by Beijing stands and moves at the same time. Not only does the initiative present itself as an alternative, as a complementary product to the existing international system based on alliances and cooperation, but at the same time it is the path on which a gradual evolution of the world order itself is travelling, and which rebalances power.<sup>485</sup> In the first chapter, it was analysed how a power transition, and a consequent

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<sup>481</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 192.

<sup>482</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 209-210.

<sup>483</sup> Hass, R. (2020). "Biden set to restore US Credibility in Asia". *Brookings*, November 12, 2020. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/11/12/biden-set-to-restore-us-credibility-in-asia/>

<sup>484</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 212.

<sup>485</sup> Rolland, N. (2020). "China's Vision for a New World Order". *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, 83, January 27, 2020, p. 40.



hegemonic transition, would be possible when a rising power is dissatisfied with the previous hegemonic set-up that characterised the world order. Following this theoretical path, China, dissatisfied with the model dictated by US hegemony, would be the next superpower to dictate global rules.<sup>486</sup> Nevertheless, in light of the important initiatives of the BRI and the growing economic interdependence that unites almost all the countries of the world, together with China's intentions to contribute to a world order based on inclusiveness and stability, according to Chinese intellectuals and ruling CPP echelons, new geopolitical perspectives are opening up in international relations.

### **4.3. A new world order: multipolar balance of power**

*“China’s time has now come. It is China’s turn, as the ascending great power about to surpass all others in quantifiable measures of material power, to assert authority over the world using the same instruments that the West has used to establish and maintain its dominance.”*

With the *Belt and Road Initiative*, it comes the end of a journey that crossed this work to explore, through cultural and political characteristics, the projects of the *Chinese Dragon* as well as the meaning and intentions of its rise. At the same time, parallelly, the BRI opens up another path, that path that China would have begun in 2008, that journey towards the shift in the centre of gravity of world power. Chen Shuguang, professor with the Party School of the CPC Central Committee in Beijing, affirmed that one of the major advantages of the Chinese political system consists in its ability to formulate long-term development plans, as well as in its effective implementation.<sup>487</sup> In the name of this far-sightedness that would characterise the Chinese way of doing politics, Chen identified 2008 as a turning point in the global dynamics of power distribution. China and the United States, the two powers that would theoretically performing on the international stage to vie for the role of hegemonic power, would technically have entered a “switching cycle”,

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<sup>486</sup> See chapter 1, § 1.1.5, p. 31.

<sup>487</sup> Xinhua (2017). “Understanding China’s Path in the Next 5 Years”. *China Daily*, October 15, 2017. Available at: [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-10/15/content\\_33280380.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-10/15/content_33280380.htm)

a process that would usher in a “*Chinese revival*”<sup>488</sup> and through which “*U.S. hegemony will come to an end, and the era of multipolarity led by China will begin*”. Chen's thinking seems to be in line with the main neo-realist current in international relations, according to which, as long as a new power emerges in the international system and demonstrates dissatisfaction with the status quo, a hegemonic transition is possible.<sup>489</sup> Nevertheless, in the course of this work it has been shown and argued how the transition of power and the Chinese rise need to be re-framed within Chinese culture itself, just as they should be analysed and understood within a possible, different political landscape. Professor Chen, in fact, does not focus on the conflicting nature of the Chinese and US models, or the necessary overtaking of one over the other, but rather on the need, on the Chinese, side to create its own “*system of discourse*”<sup>490</sup>. In view of an obvious and legitimate Chinese dissatisfaction with the current global governance system, China's material strength means that there are ripe conditions not only to be a dissenter with the existing global framework, but “*to push more proactively for its own alternative vision*”<sup>491</sup>. It was analysed how a more proactive role for the People's Republic of China forms the backbone of President Xi Jinping's governance, a narrative that not only values Chinese culture and tradition but extends them globally in the project of renegotiating the world order. Xi Jinping stated that the global governance structure “*depends on the international balance of power and reforms hinge on a change in the balance*”<sup>492</sup>. China, in fact, demonstrates a desire not to upset, but to reorganise the architecture of the global governance system, in the direction of a structure that is fairer, more equitable and more just, in contrast to a world order that has already demonstrated its weaknesses, and which

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<sup>488</sup> Chen, S. (2018). “Zhongguo Shidai yu Zhongguo Huayu [Chinese era and Chinese discourse]”. *Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, February 24, 2018. Available at: [http://www.cssn.cn/zxx/201802/t20180224\\_3855531.shtml](http://www.cssn.cn/zxx/201802/t20180224_3855531.shtml)

<sup>489</sup> See chapter 1, § 1.1.5, p. 31.

<sup>490</sup> Professor Chen Shuguang pioneered the concept of *discourse power*, i.e. the ability to voice one's own ideas and concepts and have them respected by others in order to generate change in the way others think and behave. In the case of China, to develop discourse power would be to assert one's own ideas and values so that they are internationally accepted in order to move away from the rhetoric of a threatening and overly assertive China (see Chen, S. (2018). “Zhongguo Shidai yu Zhongguo Huayu [Chinese era and Chinese discourse]”. *Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, February 24, 2018. Available at: [http://www.cssn.cn/zxx/201802/t20180224\\_3855531.shtml](http://www.cssn.cn/zxx/201802/t20180224_3855531.shtml) )

<sup>491</sup> Rolland, N. (2020). “China's Vision for a New World Order”. *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, 83, January 27, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-vision-for-a-new-world-order/>

<sup>492</sup> Xinhua (2016). “Xi calls for reforms on Global Governance”. *Xinhua*, September 29, 2016. Available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-09/29/content\\_26931697.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-09/29/content_26931697.htm)

is “*unfair and unreasonable*” (不公正，不合理 *bù gōng zhèng, bù hé lǐ*)<sup>493</sup>. The Chinese rise is not just the correction of a historical mistake, as Yan Xuetong called it. Rather, President Xi sees the Chinese renaissance as a natural, inherent process, an evolution of China's power status that in no way aims at “*dismantling the existing system and creating a new one to replace it*”<sup>494</sup>. On behalf of the entire developing world on its shoulders, China is reclaiming its moral mission to legitimately help change the current world order, which is incapable of resolving major global issues like economic crises mostly attributed to globalisation and the connected problem of poverty, asserting a “*deep yearning for changes shared by the broader international community*”<sup>495</sup>. It is important to recognise that China is grateful for the role that the United States has played in the process of development and human growth that the world has gone through in the last century. However, it is a contribution that is now resting in the past, a dream that has already been realised, and that should make room for other dreams, such as the Chinese one. The US-led West has monopolised power, in the name of the international community, advocating a political, economic and social model widely accepted by the international community, but which has become a paradigm that no longer fits the needs of a new era and a changing world.<sup>496</sup> The United States, with the entire West, has wielded enormous power over the world, but this set-up should change, and reflect the shift of the balance of power that is occurring in favour of emerging countries, in order to improve its representativeness.<sup>497</sup> The insistence of Xi Jinping's narrative on Chinese exceptionalism, which passes through a thousand-year-old culture and a peculiar historical experience, in Xi's view, legitimises China's desire to reform the international order. Precisely because every country is

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<sup>493</sup> The expression 不公正，不合理 *bù gōng zhèng, bù hé lǐ*, meaning “unfair and unreasonable” is used not only in many of China's official government documents, but also in President Xi's public speeches, to highlight how China does not feel represented within a US-dominated world order (see Rolland, N. (2020). “China's Vision for a New World Order”. *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, 83, January 27, 2020, p. 14).

<sup>494</sup> Wall Street Journal (2015). “Full Transcript: Interview with Chinese President Xi Jinping”. *Wall Street Journal*, September 22, 2015. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/full-transcript-interview-with-chinese-president-xi-jinping-1442894700>

<sup>495</sup> Pang, Z. (2016). “What is China's Role in Global Governance?”. *China Daily*, December 21, 2016. Available at: [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2016-12/21/content\\_27728534.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2016-12/21/content_27728534.htm)

<sup>496</sup> Ding, Y. (2017). “Guojian Zhongguo huayuquan tixi you duo zhongyao? Meiguo ren zao jiu yong xingdong zhengming le” [How important is to Construct a Chinese Discourse System? Americans Have Long Proved it with Actions]. *Guancha*, December 27, 2017. Available at: [http://www.guancha.com/DingYiFan/2017\\_12\\_27\\_440745\\_6.shtml](http://www.guancha.com/DingYiFan/2017_12_27_440745_6.shtml)

<sup>497</sup> Rolland, N. (2020). “China's Vision for a New World Order”. *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, 83, January 27, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-vision-for-a-new-world-order/>

different due to its historical and cultural conditions, there cannot be a universal model that necessarily fits everybody.<sup>498</sup> For this, China advocates a multilateral, inclusive model that takes into account the individual needs of countries and their different political, economic and social situations, as well as the right to self-determination. Consequently, clearly in contrast to what has been classified in the academic literature as the “*China threat*”, China's mobility is increasingly discrediting the fact that its rise may actually pose a threat to world order.<sup>499</sup> Rather, the Chinese model is presented as a means of putting in order a world that, shrouded by American hegemony, is 乱七八糟 luàn qī bā zāo (“*in complete disorder*”). Xi Jinping governance’s assertiveness, exerted non only by a strong and performing economy but also diplomatically and military, has allowed China not only to emerge as a regional power within the Asian continent, but also to present itself as a functional development model, less constraining than that of the US. While the neo-realist turn of recent years, which has highlighted the problems of China's rise, has conditioned the approach of many countries, especially Western ones, in managing relations with the country of the Celestial Empire, China is responding vigorously, revaluing its culture and creating its own path through the labyrinth of global challenges, without too many pitfalls. It is clear, hence, that Chinese growing influence, especially at regional level, is inevitably a question that involves a review of the regional as well as the global balance of power.<sup>500</sup> The US-led unipolar model that had characterised history since the end of the Cold War now seems a “*passing moment*”<sup>501</sup>, a structural transformation of global landscape is going to emerge by which several great powers join the international system as poles of attraction. How power will be balanced or remain balanced will depend on the new powers themselves, and on how they act in the global arena.<sup>502</sup> To use David Lake’s classification, People's Republic of China seems to have

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<sup>498</sup> Kubat, A. (2018). “Morality as Legitimacy under Xi Jinping: The Political Functionality of Traditional Culture for the Chinese Communist Party”. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 47(3), 47–86. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261804700303>

<sup>499</sup> Rolland, N. (2020). “China’s Vision for a New World Order”. *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, 83, January 27, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-vision-for-a-new-world-order/>

<sup>500</sup> Jash, A. (2021). “China, United States and the Changing balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific”. *East Asia Research Programme*, October 16, 2021. Available at: <http://earp.in/en/china-united-states-and-the-changing-balance-of-power-in-the-asia-pacific/>

<sup>501</sup> Schweller, R. L., & Pu, X. (2011). “After Unipolarity: China’s Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline”. *International Security*, 36(1), 41–72. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41289688>

<sup>502</sup> *Ibidem*.

clear objectives for its part. It does not present itself as a spoiler who seeks to unravel the existing order and replace it with an entirely different model, though as a supporter that is conscious about their fair share of the responsibilities associated with co-managing an evolving the global system.<sup>503</sup> New geopolitical perspectives are opening up in international relations studies, which in a way respect China's way of thinking: a multilateral, cooperative and inclusive global order. Graham Allison recalled the dramatic structural changes that have shaken the world, and the danger of those situations in which states undergo rapid rises and aspires to hegemonic status, while another power seeking to preserve it. In the world order model that follows Chinese thinking, contrarywise, one always remains cautious and far from falling into the “*Thucydides's trap*”. The multilateralism pursued by Beijing, made up of partnerships rather than alliances, conforms to certain new models that are adapted to describe a changing world, which follows new balances, and in which the economic factor plays a role that is not only strategic but also of primary importance.

#### 4.3.1. *The geo-economic model*

Within the studies of international relations and international politics, new models for representing world dynamics and relations between the various powers are developing and taking hold. Rather than disproving or discrediting previous models, the new studies draw on new dynamics and new forces interacting in the international scene to better outline new perspectives and to better interpret the future of world order. When Singaporean former leader Lee Kuan Yew was interviewed by Graham Allison, in 2011, he firmly stated that the concept of *balance of power*, in its old version, meant largely the amount of military power, as the main conditioner of relations between nations; nevertheless, in today's world, the military one is gradually leaving space to the economic power, and this latter seems to outweigh the former peculiarly.<sup>504</sup> In the attempt to

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<sup>503</sup> Lake, D. (1984). "Beneath the Commerce of Nations: A Theory of International Economic Structures". *International Studies Quarterly*, 28(2), 143-170.

<sup>504</sup> Allison; G.; Blackwill, R. (2011). Interview: Lee Kuan Yew on the Future of U.S.-China Relations". *The Atlantic*, December 2, 2011. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/03/interview-lee-kuan-yew-on-the-future-of-us-china-relations/273657/>

circumscribe the relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China within a model or pattern, the geo-economic model seems to well suit some of the characteristics analysed and discussed throughout this work. The term *geoeconomics* has become quite popular, especially in academic writing and journalism, though it lacks an agreed definition.<sup>505</sup> It is intended as the mixture of geopolitics and economics, and the use of the economic tool to achieve geopolitical goals and to advance geopolitical objectives. Broadly speaking, the concept was advanced by Edward Luttwak, an US military strategist that thought about geoeconomics as the interplay of international economics, geopolitics and strategy: following the Cold War, indeed, the importance of military power was giving way to a *geo-economic power*.<sup>506</sup> Especially in the study of China as an emerging power on the international scene, therefore, the increasing use of economic tools to project power well frame and describe how world order is changing, and how China exerts its influence rebalancing the power retained by the United States. The use of trade policies, investment policies, economic and financial sanctions, financial and monetary policy, energy and commodities, financial aid, as well as cyber tools are the major instrument by which China has become nowadays “*the world’s most prominent practitioner of geoeconomics*”<sup>507</sup>, however hand in hand with the United States. The geo-economic model would put different weapons on the scales of power to wage war against each other, white, economic weapons through which, albeit without direct conflict, the countries involved can condition and influence the world order. The model, therefore, envisages a “*war by other means*”<sup>508</sup>, the action of building relationships as well as destroying them through economic instruments. At the time when Luttwak was prescribing a new model to understand the new post-Cold War reality, in the 1990s, he thought that the term geoeconomics was kind of a catchphrase the world will have heard will hear for a long time. Certainly, his hypothesis stands out as confirmed when it comes to US-China relations, in which the same logic that underlies military conflict years earlier now governs international commerce as well as international relations as a whole.<sup>509</sup> The methods of commerce are quite displacing military methods, and the logic

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<sup>505</sup> Luttwak, E. N. (1990). “From Politics to Geo-Economics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce”. *The National Interest*, 20, 17-23. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42894676>

<sup>506</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>507</sup> Blackwill, R.; Harris, J. (2016). *War by Other Means: Geoconomics and Statecraft*. Harvard, Belknap Press.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibidem*.

of commerce appears to govern global affairs: in some cases this logic can lead to competition, in other cases it can end up into alliances and partnerships that benefit and integrate. It is noteworthy to specify how Luttwak emphasises the global interdependence as a factor that can benefit all and displace the “zero-sum game logic”. Nevertheless, remains quite realistic when it assumes that, despite the interdependence created by trade, the international system still consists of states and blocs of states acting for their own interests. What changes, however, is how the action of states is transformed, how states follow “*the logic of war in the grammar of commerce*”<sup>510</sup>. The emergence of People’s Republic of China as a global economic power has attracted, as discussed, significant attention on trying to give perspective to the future of the world order. China’s international attitude, in fact, exploits the economic instruments at its disposal to implement its geopolitical objectives, within the larger framework of the renegotiation of the world order.<sup>511</sup> As a matter of fact, Beijing has become central to the world economy due to its unprecedented economic successes, as well as increasingly central has become its role in world politics. The ambitious policies enacted by President Xi Jinping aim at establishing China not only as a regional power in the Asian continent, but also a global power. In his October 2017 report to the Chinese Communist Party’s 19th Congress, President Xi Jinping stated that, by 2049, 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of People’s Republic of China, the country will “*become a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence*”<sup>512</sup>. Despite the growing debate about the country’s relationship with the United States, generally arguing for a stark confrontational tone, President Xi has always strove to underline China’s willingness to maintain a peaceful and cooperative coexistence. No matter how much the country may grow, China “*will never threaten any country or seek a sphere of influence*”.<sup>513</sup> China’s primary goal remains to renegotiate the

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<sup>510</sup> Luttwak, E. N. (1990). “From Politics to Geo-Economics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce”. *The National Interest*, 20, 17-23. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42894676>

<sup>511</sup> Kean, F. L. (2010). “On China’s Growing Geo-Economic Influence and the Evolution of Variegated Capitalism. *Geoforum*, 41(5), 677-688. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S001671851000045X>

<sup>512</sup> Xinhua (2017). “Xi Jinping’s Report at the 19<sup>th</sup> Chinese Communist Party National Congress, Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in all Respects and Strive for Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”. *Xinhua*, October 18, 2017. Available at: [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>513</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China (2019). *China’s National Defence in the New Era*. Beijing, July 24, 2019. Available at:

internal balance of the international order, legitimately taking its rightful place as a major power. It does so through the economic instruments at its disposal, through the creation of a new kind of multilateralism that, although different in its modalities from that exercised by the United States, functions in the same way. China's overseas investments have included numerous developing economies. As argued before, the *Belt and Road Initiative* spanned a massive Chinese presence in many countries of the world, providing infrastructures, in the framework of a manner to relaunching the world economy through its own, Chinese-labeled initiatives. China's economic instrument goes hand in hand with its political instrument. Beijing is exporting, together with its economic model, a political model, presenting itself as an alternative to the US, Western, democratic model. Here the Chinese strategy becomes geo-economic, an issue that was obviously seen as an opportunity but also as a threat, especially to the United States.<sup>514</sup> The economic fallout caused by the 2008 financial crisis turned the world towards People's Republic of China, and its remarkable growth has given rise to a precise geo-economic strategy which rebalances global power. As China rode out the weakness of Western countries, especially the US, in tackling with economic uncertainty and instability, its model has inevitably caught the attention of many countries around the world, which have chosen Chinese intervention to safeguard a particular kind of social fabric excessively worn down by wracking crises.<sup>515</sup> Tony Saich, stated that Chinese economic (and political) rise is already challenging traditional ways of making geopolitics.<sup>516</sup> Leveraging its own model to be recognised as global superpower, China increasingly challenged the market-oriented basis of the liberal economic order founded and spread all over the world by the United States. According to the geo-economic model, therefore, that between China and the US would remain a competition, but not a conflict, in which the main battlefield of international relations shifts from the classical realm of military-security to the fields of trade, investment, technology. To use Luttwak's concepts, the shift is from geopolitics to

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[https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content\\_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html)

<sup>514</sup> Breslin, S. & al. (2012). "China's Geoeconomic Strategy". Special Report. *London School of Economics*, June 2012. Available at:

<https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/reports/LSE-IDEAS-Chinas-Geoeconomic-Strategy.pdf>

<sup>515</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>516</sup> Saich, T. (2017). "What Does General Secretary Xi Jinping Dream About?" *Asch Center Occasional Paper Series, Harvard Kennedy School*, August 2017.



geoeconomics.<sup>517</sup> It is important to emphasise, however, that the military dimension is not completely abandoned, quite the contrary. Both the United States and China, apart from the huge sums of money invested in military expenditure, consider security an important pillar of their policy, domestic and foreign, not only for the protection of their strategic interests, but also as a means of power confrontation.<sup>518</sup> Security remains a key issue in relations between states, even when the economy seems to be the table on which strategic moves are played out. Just as the United States continues to be a global security provider, so too does China invest in military spending to defend what are considered its national interests. In President Xi's view, however, there seems to be no room for a military confrontation unless the United States precisely demonstrates the intention to undermine Chinese national interests. In the pursuit of building a community of common destiny, geo-economics seems well suited to describe a new way of managing global affairs. The China-US relationship is essentially more cooperative than competitive, and they are actually each other's most important trading partners. China reinforced its peaceful intentions rather than global hegemonic aspirations, underlining its objective to be internationally recognised and influential but to advance its domestic development.<sup>519</sup> The perspective, hence, envisages, a “*new US-China relationship based on mutual understanding and strategic trust, respect for core interests, mutually beneficial cooperation, and cooperation on global issues*”<sup>520</sup>. The period when President Donald Trump sat at the helm of the United States was often touched upon in this work, a rather troubled time for US-China relations, where the so-called “trade war” was the defining word for political and economic choices that conditioned China's global thinking. China was seen as “*a country that threatens prosperity and freedom, and must be induced to change*”<sup>521</sup>, a tone that soured relations between the two superpowers and provoked

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<sup>517</sup> Luttwak, E. N. (1990). “From Politics to Geo-Economics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce”. *The National Interest*, 20, 17-23. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42894676>

<sup>518</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

<sup>519</sup> Byun, S.-W. (2016). “China's Major-Powers Discourse in the Xi Jinping Era: Tragedy of Great Power Politics Revisited?”. *Asian Perspective*, 40(3), 493–522. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44074793>

<sup>520</sup> *Ibidem*, p.3.

<sup>521</sup> Pompeo, M. R. (2020). *Communist China and the Free World's Future*. Speech of the Secretary of State, Yorba Linda, California, The Richard Nixon Presidential Library Museum, June 23, 2020. Available at: <https://sv.usembassy.gov/secretary-michael-r-pompeo-remarks-at-the-richard-nixon-presidential-library-and-museum-communist-china-and-the-free-worlds-future/>

Beijing's economic responses. However, the change of administration seems to have re-established, or at least clarified, some points in relations. In a virtual meeting held in November 2021, President Joe Biden and President Xi Jinping jointly discussed the importance of the relationship between the two superpowers, sealing a mutual commitment to addressing global challenges in the name of an “*international system that is free, open and fair*”.<sup>522</sup> Economic interdependence is then assumed to promote peace and cooperation, as well reducing economic barriers, such as tariffs, and physical barriers. The “win-win strategy” often remarked by Beijing would increase, then, economic efficiency as well as social welfare. Characterising U.S.-China merely as a rivalry and so as a possibility for a new Cold War would be misleading. During the Cold War Period, indeed, the United States and the Soviet Union had little economic interactions between each other, while China and the United States are deeply economically integrated, as well as are many other states throughout the world.<sup>523</sup> Economic interdependence, has argued by Luttwak, has led the States to engage in geoeconomics strategies that necessarily envisage new ways of settling the disputes rising among them.<sup>524</sup> The geoeconomics model stresses the efforts made by the great powers to reshape and renegotiate the rules and the institutions that govern international commerce and economy in order to fit them to their security preference.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> The White House (2021). “Readout of President Bidens Virtual Meeting with President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China”. *The White House*, November 16, 2021. Web archive. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/11/16/readout-of-president-bidens-virtual-meeting-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>

<sup>523</sup> Ferguson, V.; Moraes, H.; Roberts, A. (2018). “The Geoeconomic World Order”. *Lawfare*, November 19, 2018. Available at: <https://www.lawfareblog.com/geoeconomic-world-order>

<sup>524</sup> Luttwak, E. N. (1990). “From Politics to Geo-Economics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce”. *The National Interest*, 20, 17-23. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42894676>

<sup>525</sup> Ferguson, V.; Moraes, H.; Roberts, A. (2018). “The Geoeconomic World Order”. *Lawfare*, November 19, 2018. Available at: <https://www.lawfareblog.com/geoeconomic-world-order>

#### 4.3.2. *The multiplex model*

Especially in recent decades, international relations and international political studies have contemplated the concept of decolonisation and have used this issue to apply to studies that until the early 2000s had the West as a “*privileged place in our thought*”<sup>526</sup>. It has been proposed a “decolonisation” of theoretical concepts analysing the non-Western world. A need, moreover, was highlighted to overcome or revisit ideas and concepts analysing international politics from the sole Western perspective, based on the Westphalian system.<sup>527</sup> Because new powers were and are emerging, since the immediate the post-Cold War, in the institutionalised order forged by the United States, power relations inevitably changed, and influenced global governance.<sup>528</sup> Integration and economic interdependence, to a greater extent, have meant that more and more countries are participating and helping to shape global affairs. The need for this strand of studies was to overcome an analysis of international politics and its dynamics that relied on dogmas and principles derived from Western studies to describe countries belonging to the non-Western world. the idea that non-western states should adopt a model created and dominated by the west is deemed incorrect. rather, the ability and legitimacy of other countries to actively contribute to the international order through their own concepts, projects and ideas is asserted.<sup>529</sup> The People's Republic of China, with its rise as a historical, cultural, and political phenomenon, fits within this framework. Indeed, as discussed above, China claims the legitimacy and the right to participate in the international order, as well as its own role as a power, oriented towards maintaining a stable and peaceful order.<sup>530</sup> Within the framework of this “decolonisation of studies”, providing alternative theoretical perspectives within international relations, the model proposed by Amitav Acharya can be ascribed. Amitav Acharya, Professor of International Relations at American University of Washington, presented the emergence of a *multiplex*

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<sup>526</sup>Seth, S. (2009). “Historical Sociology and Postcolonial Theory: Two Strategies for Challenging Eurocentrism”. *International Political Sociology*, 3(3), 334-338. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-5687.2009.00079.4.x>

<sup>527</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>528</sup> Stephen, M. D. (2017). “Emerging Powers and Emerging Trends in Global Governance”. *Global Governance*, 23(3), 483–502. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44861138>

<sup>529</sup> Chakrabarty, D. (2000). *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rsx9>

<sup>530</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell’Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino, p.67.

*world order* as a model to describe not only the structure of the international system, but also to define the consequent functioning of global affairs. He argues about an end of a US-dominated world order, as well as the absence of what is generally supposed a return to multipolarity. According to Acharya, in fact, the 21<sup>st</sup> century world is “*politically and culturally diverse but economically and institutionally interlinked*”<sup>531</sup>, as well as many are the major powers that stood out the international stage. The system of global governance appears nowadays fragmented, not in a negative way, but as a consequence of many forces interacting, as well as a consistent proliferation of regional and plurilateral arrangements, private initiatives, and many various forms of partnership involving governments, private parties, and civil society actors in many areas of global interests. A. Acharya underlines how many of those links are not the product of the US leadership and supposed hegemony, nor beholden to American purpose. This is not to imply a total absence and action of American-led liberal values, if not to mark as those values and principle have necessary to coexist and enmesh with the ideas and institutions propelled by other countries, especially from China.<sup>532</sup> The idea of a “multiplex world” carries with it a critical approach: instead of lamenting the fragility and crisis of liberal and democratic values promoted by the United States, the West should try and commit to accept a new, necessary reality, while pursuing new ways to ensure peace and stability in partnership with the rising powers. The concept of *multiplicity*, in fact, the use of which is emphasised by Acharya, particularly refers to the diversity of actors involved in today’s world that makes global order, not just States, but also new international institutions, multinational corporations, transnational movements, non-governmental organisations, and other non-state actors. The multiplex model would be able to cope with what is called the “complexity” of the contemporary world, i.e., the existence of problems and issues within global affairs that go beyond national borders, that variegate contemporary challenges, and make them multidimensional and even unpredictable, therefore impossible to be considered only at national level and with a single perspective of action. As in a multiplex theatre the audience has the option of choosing between many different genres of films, actors, directors or plots, far more choices are nowadays available to address in the making of world order. Using a simple yet effective metaphor, A. Acharya construes and

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<sup>531</sup> Acharya, A. (2017). “After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order”. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 31(3), 271-285. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ethics-and-international-affairs/article/after-liberal-hegemony-the-advent-of-a-multiplex-world-order/DBD581C139022B1745154175D2BEC639>

<sup>532</sup> *Ibidem*.

identifies “the transition from a hegemonic world to a much more pluralistic and decentred world”<sup>533</sup> in which order is produced not just by great powers but by a multitude of actors. In the future, therefore, while order and stability would continue to function, different forms of regional order could coexist together, but embedded within a peaceful and heterogeneous global order that includes norms and values that differ from historically recognised Western values. The multiplex model proposed by Acharya, together with his critique of a vision of the international order that is excessively centred on western ideas and the Westphalia system, has provided fertile ground for the development of new ideas and theories that look to new perspectives. The Chinese commitment and its desire to renegotiate the global order presents itself as one of the most attentive to the construction of new theories that are adapted to represent a culture different from that of the West. Indeed, as argued in *Chapter 1*, some Chinese scholars proposed new ideas for an international order that takes into account not only cultural differences, but also the social and political differences of countries.<sup>534</sup> Although assuming the non-existence of a Chinese-labelled international relations theory for the dominance of the Western narrative even in the Chinese academic community<sup>535</sup>, Professor Qin Yaqing first advocated an intercultural dialogue within global affairs and theoretical framework, a more critical and less unipolar approach and reflection about international relations.<sup>536</sup> Zhao Tingyang, Chinese contemporary philosopher, takes up the legacy of Qin Yaqing and reintroduces to the contemporary world the concept of *Tianxia* system<sup>537</sup>, practically outlining the idea of a world that embraces the differences under a “*magnanimous social grammar*”<sup>538</sup>. Ancient Chinese thought, revived and enhanced by Xi Jinping's administration, responds to the idea of a multiplex world, not only by revaluing, the order that had characterised pre-colonial Asia, but also by emphasising how the Chinese empire had historically been a centre of gravity for ensuring

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<sup>533</sup> Acharya, A. (2017). “After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order”. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 31(3), p.276.

<sup>534</sup> See Chapter 1, § 1.2.1., p. 36.

<sup>535</sup> Qin, Y.Q. (2007). Why is there no Chinese international relations theory? *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7(3), p. 314.

<sup>536</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales / Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 100, p. 80.

<sup>537</sup> See Chapter 1, § 1.2.3., p. 39.

<sup>538</sup> Qin, Y. Q., (2012). “Cultura y pensamiento global: una teoría china de las relaciones internacionales” / “Culture and global thought: Chinese international theory in the making”. *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 100, p.74.

a stable and harmonious order.<sup>539</sup> Ideological differences, as well as different political practices from Chinese culture, are valorised by President Xi Jinping himself as a legitimate alternative to western cultural hegemony. The rich Chinese cultural tradition can effectively contribute to the theory of international relations, as well as reshape the world order from the perspective of governance that considers and respects cultural and political heterogeneity.<sup>540</sup> A. Acharya outlines a new way of understanding international relations and the future world order that would refute G. Allison's realist theory that a direct confrontation between the two great powers and a consequent hegemonic transition would be almost inevitable, and allows the Chinese-labeled model to strengthen. The idea of global governance proposed by Chinese scholars and remarked by President Xi Ping's political project would preserve the balance of power, provide order and harmony, and provide a global order more suited to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>541</sup> A new vocabulary of international relations would be needed, one that does not reuse realist concepts from the past to adapt them to the present situation, but one that seeks "*fresh ideas to understand and explain change in world politics*"<sup>542</sup>. Indirect, though biting, is the criticism of Graham Allison's neo-realist perspective, considered as a "*misapplication of history*". The world of today is a far from being multipolar, and even farer from the limited geopolitical perspective that characterised the Greek city-states. The concept of *Thucydides's trap* is unfit to describe the emerging world order, as well as hegemonic power is not sufficient to manage the inextricable complexities global affairs.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Zhao, T. (2006). "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept "All-Under-Heaven". *Social Identities*, 12(1), 29-41. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/13504630600555559?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

<sup>540</sup> Dian, M. (2021). *La Cina, gli Stati Uniti e il Futuro dell'Ordine Internazionale*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

<sup>541</sup> Qin, Y. (2017). Why is there no Chinese international relations theory? *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7(3), p. 331.

<sup>542</sup> Acharya, A. (2017). "After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order". *Ethics & International Affairs*, 31(3), p.283.

<sup>543</sup> Keohane, R. (1984). *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

### 4.3.3. Where to next? Huaxiaism

At least almost all economic indicators shows that the rise of China is all but inevitable<sup>544</sup>, and no discussion of world economy seem to go ahead and be adequate without talking about China. Interest and concerns about the Dragon have become very popular topics even among in the United States, raising many questions about the future of the relationship between a rising power, already accredited as superpower for its economic preponderance and material power, and a well-established power as is the United States.<sup>545</sup> Will China replace the United States as the dominant power in the world? Will it happen soon? What kind of superpower can China be? Can China ever become a democratic country and integrate the liberal model? What is now a certainty is that China has shaken the whole world, surely beginning what Graham Allison has described as a dramatic and significant transformation for the global balance of power.<sup>546</sup> And while the US tried to tip the scales, China continued to grow. It is not just an economic issue, quite the contrary. China has strategically used its economic progress to raise hundreds of millions from a poverty status, producing a consistent middle class as well as millionaires and billionaires.<sup>547</sup> If it is true that GDP is not only a numerical value but also defines the “*substructure of national power*”, China has well awakened, and is back on the world stage shining as it did in its glorious past. From the world stage, China redefines the global economic and geopolitical order.<sup>548</sup> Perhaps China has never disembarked this stage, and those rules for the world order that were established without it now need to be

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<sup>544</sup> See The World Bank (2019). *Overview of China*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview#1>; The World Bank (2022). Lifting 800 Million People Out of Poverty – New Report Looks at Lessons from China’s Experience. *The World Bank*, April 1, 2022. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/04/01/lifting-800-million-people-out-of-poverty-new-report-looks-at-lessons-from-china-s-experience>

<sup>545</sup> Zhong, Y., & Shen, C. (2008). “Reading China: How Do America’s China Scholars View U.S.-China Relations and China’s Future?” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 41(2), 359–365. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20452186>

<sup>546</sup> Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* London, Scribe, p.6.

<sup>547</sup> The World Bank (2022). Lifting 800 Million People Out of Poverty – New Report Looks at Lessons from China’s Experience. *The World Bank*, April 1, 2022. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/04/01/lifting-800-million-people-out-of-poverty-new-report-looks-at-lessons-from-china-s-experience>

<sup>548</sup> Allison, G.; Fitzek, C.; Kiersznowski, N. (2022). “The Great Economic Rivalry: China vs the U.S.”. *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School*, March 23, 2022. Available at: <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/great-economic-rivalry-china-vs-us>

renegotiated.<sup>549</sup> Without contemplating any direct confrontation of a realist theoretical matrix, China tries to achieve strategic equality with the United States, inaugurating a new type of great power relations, a type of foreign policy that, as discussed, reflects the great influence of domestic factors. Not only a thriving economy for a prosperous future, but the cultural and philosophical matrix, an expression of nationalism but at the same time of “*mutual benefits and mutual interests*”.<sup>550</sup> Of considerable importance, in this regard, is the work of Ye Zicheng, professor of Political Science at the Beijing University. Professor Ye published, in 2013, *Huaxiaism*, a new way of looking at the world developed by some leading scholars in China’s academic environment. By illustrating ancient Chinese thought in relation to the contemporary world, the work is a bearer and supporter of the Western theory, popularized by Samuel Huntington, of the clash of civilisations, but providing a rather positive perspective. S. Huntington stated how post-Cold War world politics was changing its dynamics, and how within world affairs, the causes of conflict would no longer be ideological or economic, but cultural.<sup>551</sup> Ye Zicheng follows the same line, reiterating how cultural conflict and differences in moral principles would shape the main source of contradiction in international relations. Yet, a different perspective is provided through the enhancement of the Confucian concept of “variables”. As Professor Ye argues that everything that changes and varies is more important than the “constants”, which represent something that, by virtue of the word itself, remains unchanged. According to this logic, therefore, and by virtue of a difference in culture and civilisation, in political affairs one should be able to combine “*the actual situation and the fundamental character of that which is dividing, in order to determine the outcome*”<sup>552</sup>. Ye Zicheng describes this approach as a premise to be adopted in contemporary decision-making process. Using this model, therefore, political divisions are more predictable, possess more practicality, characteristics necessary as a guide towards good governance.<sup>553</sup> In contrast to the immobility of international politics advocated by realist and neo-realists theories, according to which the rise of other powers generates fear and

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<sup>549</sup> Dempsey, M. (2016). “Notes From the Chairman: A Conversation with Martin Dempsey”. *Foreign Affairs*, 95(5), 2–9. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43946950>

<sup>550</sup> Routledge (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Politics in Asia*, Ed. Shi Ping Hua. London, Routledge, p. 284.

<sup>551</sup> Huntington, S. P. (1993). “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, 72(3), 22–49. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/20045621>

<sup>552</sup> Ye, Z. (2013). *Huaxiaism*. Beijing, Renmin Press.

<sup>553</sup> Routledge (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Politics in Asia*, Ed. Shi Ping Hua. London, Routledge, p. 286.



the need to protect one's integrity also, and above all, through the threat of force, *Huaxiaism* sums up, in a sense, the essence of the Chinese model of international relations, a model that as argued within this work possesses both modernity and tradition.<sup>554</sup> It turns out to be very important to go deeper into the views of Chinese scholars to help understand what is going on between China and the United States, and, above all, to try to better understand the future of their relationship.<sup>555</sup> At the same time, the importance of Chinese scholars within US academia should be emphasised and enhanced, with the aim to get a deeper understanding of Chinese culture, history, and society. Because of their detailed knowledge and understanding of China, these scholars can really and valuably offer insightful assessment and judgment concerning the relations between China and the United States, even enlightening American policymakers. It has been shown and discussed, through exploring certain models proposed by new studies of international relations, how the world is moving toward a new multiplex order, as well as a multiplex balance of power. The military competition, of course, cannot be excluded from shaping the balance. States will inevitably continue to confront between themselves, as security remains a core concept of the international system. Potentially, great powers will remain relevant in the world system, also because of their material capabilities for projecting power beyond the borders of the states in themselves.<sup>556</sup> Economy, without a doubt, should be considered a dimension of power able to shape new orders. Scholars expects the rise of China to eventually cause the US a geopolitical or even military clash, very similar to the struggle of the Cold War. Concretely, as analysed, China combines many typical great-power attributes, like large size, rapid economic growth, and foreign policy ambitions. At the same time, however, it has been seen how the Chinese attitude does not involve a cold war mentality, and how it carries with it an exceptionalism that makes it different and precludes it from the dynamics that characterised the Cold War. It has a long history of being the dominant power in East Asia, possessing a huge historical and cultural baggage. It has been shown how Xi Jinping's presidency has revived a traditionalism, a reevaluation of traditional Chinese culture to propose new models of global order that are more inclusive, heterogeneous, and take into account the differences

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<sup>554</sup> Routledge (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Politics in Asia*, Ed. Shi Ping Hua. London, Routledge, p. 284.

<sup>555</sup> Zhong, Y., & Shen, C. (2008). "Reading China: How Do America's China Scholars View U.S.-China Relations and China's Future?" *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 41(2), 359–365. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20452186>

<sup>556</sup> Organski, A. F. K. (1958). *World politics*. New York, Knopf. (see Chapter 1, §1.1.2, p. 27)

that, as a result of belonging to different civilisations, countries possess. In the light of this characterisation that considers the Chinese point of view, the theory of the clash of civilisations reworked by Ye Zicheng would indeed respect a natural factor of the new global status, namely a complex system where different cultures and civilisations inevitably coexist. However, the idea does not present itself, as defined by some Chinese commentators, as an “*ideological claim by a hegemonic America used to discredit any alternative vision of the world*”<sup>557</sup>, but as a more inclusive and objective reinterpretation that takes into account the incompatibility of American ways with Asian, and Chinese, culture. The world appears 乱七八糟 *luàn qī bā zāo* (“in a great disorder”). It was wracked by financial crises, a pandemic, and it is entangled increasingly complex global challenges. As presented in the introduction to this work, almost never-ending wars, climate change, and poverty constitutes some of the global challenges that need to be tackled with, together with the changing of old geopolitical assets. Chinese rising within the global economic stage brings with it the “*completion of that rise*”<sup>558</sup>, not only in economic, but also in political and geopolitical terms. China is nowadays accounted as the the second-largest economy, as well as it is considered well on the way to becoming the largest economy in real terms in short terms. Chinese economy has certainly and positively contributed to world economic growth for decades, and its integration into the global economy has brought global market potential up to unprecedented levels. The world became enlarged, and the world market integrated thanks to China new opportunities not only to boost world production, trade and consumption, but also the possibility for increasing the welfare of all the countries involved, especially developing countries. Today’s People’s Republic of China steps up, proposes its own model, its own way of reviewing the world order, carves its own, legitimate path. It is no longer a question of taking sides or not, it is a question of integrating, in its good features, a model that could be an inspiration for dealing with the assumptions of the contemporary world, in the name of cooperation. China, therefore, would reject a realist view according to which relations with the United States are destined to deteriorate and culminate in a confrontation. Rather, it proposes strategic cooperation to tackle global challenges

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<sup>557</sup> Routledge (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Politics in Asia*, Ed. Shi Ping Hua. London, Routledge, p. 590.

<sup>558</sup> Golley, J., & Song, L. (2011). “China’s Rise in a Changing World. In J. Golley & L. Song (Eds.)”. *Rising China: Global Challenges and Opportunities* (Vol. 2011, pp. 1–8). Available at: ANU Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24hbk1.8>

together as a responsible superpower. To conclude, “*the underlying assumption that the Chinese leadership attempts to validate through its example is that, because countries differ in their historical conditions, cultural heritage, and national conditions, there cannot be universal model that fits all. Each country is therefore entitled to choose its unique path of development*”<sup>559</sup>.

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<sup>559</sup> Klimeš, O. (2018). “China’s Cultural Soft Power: The Central Concept in the Early Xi Jinping Era. *Auc Philologica*, 2017(4), 127-150. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323965522\\_China's\\_Cultural\\_Soft\\_Power\\_The\\_Central\\_Concept\\_in\\_the\\_Early\\_Xi\\_Jinping\\_Era\\_2012-2017/references](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323965522_China's_Cultural_Soft_Power_The_Central_Concept_in_the_Early_Xi_Jinping_Era_2012-2017/references)



## CONCLUSIONS

In the light of a course of studies carried out under the banner of a comparative and global approach to International Relations, international politics and global affairs, this final thesis presents itself not only as a concretisation of the new perspectives and skills acquired in recent years, but also as a humble demonstration that the critical observation of topics and issues from multiple points of view can help, if not to answer, to at least unravel the most intricate knots of a situation. International relations between China and the United States now occupy a large part of the studies and reflections on what the world will look like in the future, on a possible new world order, and on how global challenges will be addressed through the responsibility of the great powers. China, as demonstrated, is often put to the test by public opinion and major Western leaders to assess how it responds to certain challenges, how it reacts to the new dynamics that make our already complex planet every day. There is too often a risk of isolating China, of making it a country standing on its own, far removed from mainstream Western culture and, above all, the bearer of models that, being different in their nature, must necessarily be considered as dangerous or harmful. This work, in line with the new studies of international relations and the new, more inclusive perspectives that characterise international politics today, stands as an attempt to look at China with a different gaze, one that is not accusatory, not set in stone, not necessarily steeped in the main canons of Western theory, but one that is more reflective.

The aim of this work has been to open, as far as possible, a new view of the world, a new perspective that, as Matteo Dian, an important source for the development of this thesis, states, goes beyond the determinism that characterises the main and most widespread approaches to international relations. Thus, not only my personal experience in China, my degree programme, have enabled me to create a discourse that considers the complexity that not only characterises the contemporary world, but also China itself. This does not mean adopting a position that contradicts Western ideas or categorically denies the main interpretations of the dynamics of international politics, nor does it mean providing an argument that goes against the importance of the studies that are still flourishing and that are keenly expertly conducted in the United States in the field of policy-making and international relations. Indeed, the United States and the West still constitute a valuable source of material and studies for analysing the complex dynamics

and future role of the great powers, as well as one of the old sources to which to adhere. Rather, from a more holistic perspective, this work has aimed to restore a more than positive objective image of the People's Republic of China, one that does justice not only to its millenary culture, which often and in many traits intersects with and hides in certain features of that of the West, but also to legitimise its role as the great power it has become, as well as to reflect on its model that is in many respects functional. The whole world is going through an intricate, complex, messy historical period. Many of the progress and great goals achieved by the international community now seem to be distant, some of the models that were considered founding pillars are still struggling to be valid anchors to hold on to. Civil and ethnic wars, hunger, poverty and inequality still unsettle many of the countries that, after the decolonisation process, have not been completely able to cope with the great structural changes of a globalised world. Economic crises, and the pandemic, have further entwined the ball of the world, which every day seems more and more complex and difficult to cope with. nationalisms have revived in many countries, especially in the West, in which the fear of diversity fuels concerns and social instability. Looking at China with a perspective that reckons with the complexities of the contemporary world could be a starting point to untangle this ball of yarn, to make it at least a little less complex. China is often scary and worrying. The West is often convinced that its rise necessarily poses a threat to the entire planet. however, one should grasp the positive, and objective, aspects that China itself proposes. its model of development, as well as its model of renegotiating the world order, could provide a sound basis for addressing new global challenges. It can be misleading to consider everything that one considers to be outside one's sphere of influence as dangerous and harmful, because, if not analysed, it does not do justice to the cultural and historical complexity of a country that, like others, is the result of a millenary civilisation, of a glorious history, of inventions that have changed the course of history itself, and is the product of a cultural and commercial network that many centuries ago allowed the entire world to have access to essential consumer goods. The country of president Xi Jinping, as discussed during this work, does not seem to be backing down. rather, it proposes and talks about its model, implements it, and makes it functional, and inevitably re-establishes a balance in a world that until a few years ago was considered unipolar. A power shift towards the Asian continent, and above all towards China, has already taken place, and it inevitably conditions many of the dynamics, starting with the economic ones, which as demonstrated today provide the main channel not only for establishing relations between countries, but

above all for balancing power. In a world 乱七八糟 *luàn qī bā zāo* (“in a great disorder”), therefore, China is carving its own path, an alternative that stands up to the US model, which constitutes a novelty but does not necessarily constitute a threat to western values. Rather, as Daniel Bell states, the whole world should draw all those technical aspects from the Chinese model to critically, and constructively, evaluate every single aspect of a global situation that, despite crises, sees us increasingly interconnected.

In the first chapter, a theoretical framework was presented as a starting point to explain the dynamics of international relations and how power is distributed among the great powers. The mainstream realist model, based on that of A. F. K. Organski, provides a valid interpretation which, drawing on historical experience, has long guided international relations studies, and according to which when a rising power possesses material characteristics combined with dissatisfaction with the status quo, a hegemonic transition is possible. Presented in parallel, however, is a Chinese model of international relations, a relatively recent type of study in China but one that also makes use of history, and especially the Confucian cultural tradition, to propose a different model of relations between the great powers along with a different world order, reflecting the order and harmony that governed China especially in the pre-imperial period. In particular, the concept of 天下 *Tiānxià*, a different international system, an attempt at political regulation of humanity as a whole. Supported by the new Chinese theories of international relations, this concept in fact transposes the idea of a global order that is more inclusive and that considers differences, seeks to build non-conflictive relationships, which should evolve into a harmonious synthesis, tending to channel relationships through cooperation. Furthermore, it has been discussed how the validity of the Chinese model is to be considered on a par with any other model of international relations, not only because of the great power status that China is acquiring (or has allegedly already acquired), but because it is considered legitimate and capable of contributing to the international order.

In the second chapter, a historical perspective of the dynamics and relationships involving the United States and China was outlined. It was decided to focus on the most recent administrations, both American and Chinese, to provide a political perspective that analysed the various postures adopted by the two countries in their relations. The possibility of the so-called transfer of power from the United States to China was analysed, as was the fact that China constitutes a challenge to the United States in all respects.

Especially during the Trump administration, the political rhetoric concerning China has tightened its tone, and would have become a source of instability in the proper balance of power between the two countries. The Chinese perspective, however, turned out to be quite different, oriented towards cooperation rather than confrontation, but still maintaining its place and claiming to be recognised as a great power. It was also analysed how the psychological factor has been relevant in conditioning and influencing the fragility of relations between the US and China in recent years. However, a constructive comparison between the “old” American dream and the “new” Chinese dream has been used to valorise the perspective that China adopts, according to which its model is not intended to be exported to other countries as the United States has done for many years, but is seen as a new, legitimate and functional proposal for maintaining the global order.

The third chapter was used as an antithesis for the discussion. specifically, it proposed Thucydides' concept of the trap, a theory that uses the history of hegemonic transitions between the great powers to try to provide concrete perspectives on the future of international relations between the United States and China. The fact that the two countries are destined for direct conflict, as well as the theories that the United States and China have entered a new Cold War, constitute valid frameworks of analysis today, which interpret the nature of the two superpowers as necessarily conflictual, especially in light of the historical events that have characterised the rise of the world's great powers. however, the Chinese cultural tradition and its non-Western history have been used to look at the future of the two states in a different way. China, for its part, neither wants nor contemplates a direct confrontation with the United States. This has been valorised through the use of various primary sources of the Chinese government, especially through the speeches of President Xi Jinping, whose political project would not be hegemonic or revisionist, but only a valid and legitimate proposal to rebalance what for years has been a world in which US hegemony, although recognised as useful and essential to foster the development of many countries, including China, is now excessive, and not suited to the dynamics of a changing world and states that culturally do not recognise themselves in the liberal model. China contemplates war only as a last resort to defend its own interests, which in no way interfere with those of other states. In contrast to a Western vision of an assertive and revisionist China, China reacts with its own image as a model of prosperity, and with its proactive role in international dynamics.

The fourth chapter was used as a final reflection and appreciation of China's role in international relations and in contributing to a new world order. Starting from the



definition of its political project, in particular the one proposed by Xi Jinping, and passing through the definition of its own identity and precise ambitions, the model of the Chinese dream was illustrated, which not only contemplates a renaissance of the country at the domestic level, but also at the global level. China sees its proactive role within the international landscape as a benefit for all countries, not just for China itself. In a perspective where its decline with western colonisation would have been a historical mistake, Xi Jinping's China wants to restore its past glory, and the essential role it played not only on the Asian continent but also for the rest of the world. All organised and well framed within a perspective of order, harmony, and stability for the entire planet. The rise of China inevitably changes geopolitical perspectives and reshapes old dynamics. China is not asking and does not want to displace or unseat the United States, rather it is asking for recognition of what it historically and by nature of power, is entitled to. The new models, such as the geo-economic model or that of a multiplex world, argue well for a world order that differs from the past. The economic factor has become part of global dynamics, it shapes and forms international relations, and makes the world culturally and socially interconnected. China for its part, therefore, does not see its rise as revisionist, but rather as an opportunity for the world towards a prosperous future. In general, therefore, this work has set out to demonstrate through culture, politics, and linguistic elements how the Chinese rise does not necessarily have to be ascribed within a revisionist perspective. Rather, in a process of renegotiation of the international order and in the light of a new global balance of power, it is appropriate to consider the perspectives and wills of a country that has woken up, is making noise, and is travelling fast into the future. In thus considering the United States and China as the two new poles of world power, one should work on balanced power, as well as on the balanced assessment of the perspectives that both countries, not only the United States, possess. In final analysis, it is appropriate to state how the Chinese rise has brought about what has been defined as a change of historic scope and enormous proportions within the global order, given precisely the weight that China wields on the international scene. However, in the light of the broader reflection involving Chinese thought and culture, it is equally appropriate to classify how the one with the United States is not necessarily destined for a clash or a repetition of a new Cold war, but rather a new geopolitical order that, in its peculiarity, functions differently.

The research, studies, and materials used for the analysis to compose this work refer to a period up to Jul 2022. Therefore, it does consider new issues and dynamics in the evolving relationship between the United States and China. Namely, the official visit of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan dates to 3 August 2022, a visit that particularly shakes up and redraws the balance between the two powers. The subject of the island of Taiwan, which has not been discussed in this paper except for a few historical references, is probably one of the hottest topics that characterise and renegotiate the strategic cooperation between the US and China. The US House speaker's visit, an official visit not seen in twenty-five years, was interpreted by Beijing as a violation of Chinese sovereignty, as well as another, umpteenth attempt by the US to enter Chinese domestic affairs, in which China, as discussed, demands non-interference. Beijing reacted with military exercises around the island of Taiwan, a warning that had already been given. The Taiwanese Island issue, a state not internationally recognised by many countries hence with a *sui generis* situation, is part of the “strategic ambiguity” plan pursued by the US, a plan that is still piping hot. The democratic nature of Taiwan’s government, as well as its strategic maritime location and its comparative advantage in the production of chips that are now essential in the technology market, are issues that trace a troubled history involving the US support received during the Cold War, a story that China wants to rewrite. President Xi Jinping, above all, has often stated how sooner or later Taiwan, considered a rebellious territory, will return under the rule of mainland continental China, as it was before the birth of the Chinese republic. A very complex issue, inherently intricate, but one in which the two great powers are at odds and not in strategic cooperation. President Biden announced few days later to immediately suspend some cooperation affairs with China, like those on climate change, as an example. Only the commitment of the two to negotiate a peaceful solution could maintain the balance of power and world order that China wants, but certainly the road is long and winding. This work has in fact focused on the mere external assessment of a new world order after the Chinese rise, leaving out soe very complex dynamics that outline US-China relations. What is certain, however, is that no matter how entangled and difficult the nature of their relationship is, a comparative study that considers the ideas, projects and ambitions of both great powers could be the key to finding peaceful and non-invasive solutions in the perspective of that larger destination that is the *community of common destiny*. To succeed in it has been this work’s, and mine, modest intent.



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