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### **What is the role of China in the world?**

A comparative analysis between Deng Xiaoping's "keep a low profile" and Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream of "striving for achievement" exemplified through Sino-US relations

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## **1. Introduction- Cause and purposes**

It is currently undeniable that China is increasingly growing in importance and power in the international arena. China has been at the center of the international news during the past few months regarding what has been called the “US-China trade war”. As an example of China’s importance in today’s international system we can cite how this “trade war” has become one of the top readings of 2018 for the Financial Times (The Financial Times, 2018). Although China is usually regarded in terms of trade, its power is not only economic, it is also political, and, even military. Therefore, for someone studying or working in the field of international relations it is essential to know what the role of China in the world is.

The Chinese relations with the United States have been marked by constant changes and ups and downs. China began to gain a key role in the international system after Deng Xiaoping’s reform (Kissinger, 2011, pp. 440-446) that pushed the country into a great leap forward economically speaking and transformed it into the “Asian Giant” that is today. China is one of the biggest economies in the world and its importance makes the country one of the main poles and hegemonies in our multipolar world.

The rivalry that Trump, as representative of the United States, has with Xi Jinping, the leader of China, accurately demonstrates the importance that China is gaining in the world. The most visible face of this rivalry has been the already mentioned “trade war”, however, it is not the only side. Since Xi Jinping became the leader of the biggest country in the world China has become more active in the international arena. Chinese foreign policy approaches have demonstrated that China has no desire to stay passive, it responds to the provocations, it wants to be visible.

From its economic growth to its increasing military expending China wants to shift its foreign policy. The Chinese influence in today’s international system is growing. The consequences of China’s growth and influence in the international arena must be studied. It is important for the rest of the world not to underestimate China’s current power as it seems that it will keep growing in the future. The international community has to try to understand the journey China has taken since its first signs of opening to the international market system until its current position as a competing hegemony against the United States.

Taking into account the growing importance of the role China is playing in the international system this work pretends to make an analysis of the evolution of the Chinese foreign policy. It will be centered on comparing Deng Xiaoping's first steps and reforms towards a more open foreign trade an economic policy whilst defending a low profile with Xi Jinping's will to make of China a world power.

Moreover, this paper will be looking at the evolution of China's foreign policy towards the United States, as both countries are essential pieces to the multipolar system. The relations between China and the United States are of extreme relevance to the international arena and analyzing and understanding its consequences for the international system is absolutely vital.

I am intrigued, concerned and amazed by the power that China has reached and its growing importance in international relations. I am also specially interested in the turn that Xi Jinping has done towards a more active role of China in the international system in comparison with past Chinese foreign policy. These are the reasons behind the writing of this paper which will analyze and compare how China has changed the perception of its role in the world and the consequences that its involvement is having and will have in the international system.

## **2. State of the issue**

### **2.1. Deng Xiaoping: the leader behind the scenes**

China, as the present-day economic superpower, is the legacy of Deng Xiaoping. (Kissinger, 2011, p. 333). Deng Xiaoping was never the leader of the communist party of the People's Republic of China, nevertheless, not being the leader, he played a key role during two decades working behind the scenes. Deng was always a defendant of the communist one-party rule; however, he did believe in a need for economic reforms that diverge from the communist standards. Deng Xiaoping highlighted the importance of development.

For these views Deng was exiled for many years accused of being a "capitalist roader" being gradually reintegrated in the political sphere in 1973 (Jie, 2017, p. 3). Right after his reincorporation to the Central Committee, Deng Xiaoping became the person that linked China and the United States. In 1974 he was appointed as the main interlocutor with America (Kissinger, 2011, p. 322).

Deng made several diplomatic visits to the United States during the 70s, diplomatic visits that could very well be considered as "business trips". (Kissinger, 2011)

These visits were made under Mao's rule in 1974, right before the supreme leader died, and under Hua Guofeng that inherited Mao's position as Chairman and head of the Central Military Commission (Kissinger, 2011, p. 328). During these visits to the United States Deng Xiaoping made sure to stress out China's poverty and the Asian countries will to learn from foreigners. Deng Xiaoping defended that the key to achieving modernization was the development of science and technology. (Kissinger, 2011, p. 333)

The next decade, the 1980s, was marked by the economic changes in the People's Republic of China. The leadership of China changed from Hua's hands to Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping managed to keep his power behind scenes. China went through a "complicated and very long course of meshing capitalism with socialism" (Kissinger, 2011, p. 400). China welcomed foreign investment, started working in "long-term plans", opening up the Chinese economy and understanding the market economy as a means, not an end (Jie, 2017).

China arrived to the end of the 1980's with the Tiananmen protests that supposed a state-nation crisis that affected the country and its recent economic openness. After this crisis Zhao Ziyang was substituted. Jiang Zemin became the head of the Communist Party. Tiananmen meant that China was isolated and punished by the international community with trade sanctions (Kissinger, 2011, p. 440).

Deng Xiaoping returned in 1992 to keep the urge of continuing with the economic liberalization. Deng and Jiang saw in improving the standard of living and enhancing productivity as the best guarantee of social stability (Kissinger, 2011, p. 441). It was during these years when Deng designed a guideline for Chinese foreign policy under the premise: "keep a low profile, do something" (*tao guang yang hui, you suo zuo wei*) to create a favorable external environment towards the economic development of China as a whole (Zhimin, 2008). Deng Xiaoping died in 1997 (Kissinger, 2011).

Most scholars agree on attributing the rise of China as we know it today to Deng Xiaoping. From the consensus on this perspective Deng Xiaoping could be understood as one of the main political figures of the last decades of the twentieth century. The recognition of Deng's role, mostly played behind the scenes, is almost unanimous among experts. His ideas on opening China to the market economy and foreign trade while "keeping a low profile" in foreign affairs are recognized by national Chinese experts that have analyzed and studied his work in-depth. There is currently a new wave of interest towards the study of measures and ideas that Deng brought to Chinese foreign policy, especially to compare it to the new approach of active foreign policy that is being carried

out by Xi Jinping. In this comparative analysis is where we find defendants of Xi Jinping that criticize the measures that were taken by Deng. Probably, one of the people that best knew Deng Xiaoping is Kissinger, for he met and worked with Deng several times. Therefore, it can be assured that Deng Xiaoping was a relevant figure, the precursor of the rise of China as we know it today, the thinker that managed to balance the one-party Communist dictatorship in China with the opening of the country to trade, foreign investment and market economy.

## **2.2. Xi Jinping: the powerful leader**

During the first decade of the twenty-first century Hu Jintao ruled China managing to transform the country into one fully integrated in the international system. Xi Jinping was chosen as Jintao's successor in 2012 (Xuetong, 2014). Xi Jinping soon made clear his foreign policy ambitions. In a speech he delivered in October 2013 Xi presented his views and ideas for the future Chinese foreign policy (Xuetong, 2014). These ideas drastically departed from, the until then existing, "keeping a low profile" premise in foreign affairs.

Xi Jinping advocated for a new premise to rule Chinese foreign affairs strategy. Xi defends a foreign policy strategy based on "the strive for achievement" aiming to increase the international credibility of China as a key actor in world politics (Xuetong, 2014). This ambitious foreign policy has been ruling Chinese political decision-making since 2013. The striving for achievement strategy is also well-known under the name of "The Chinese Dream". Under one name or the other, what Xi Jinping is pursuing is a more aggressive Chinese foreign policy (Sørensen, 2015).

Xi Jinping seeks to leave a mark in China and in the world. This is one of the reasons behind his new strategy. Xi Jinping presents China as a great power (Sørensen, 2015). This presentation of China as a great power differs highly from the humble presentation that Deng Xiaoping did during his diplomatic visits. China is no longer presented as a poor country that needs to learn from others. Now, China is presented to the world as a great power with a great responsibility. Xi Jinping defends and emphasizes that the power that China is acquiring is a peaceful development strategy and, therefore, an increasing great power responsibility (Sørensen, 2015).

This new foreign policy strategy has been reflected in a more active role of China at an international level. The unstoppable growth of China as a world power has thrown the Asian country to the elite of the international system. Xi Jinping sees China as a strong

competitor for the United States in the fight of hegemonic rule. Maybe this is one of the explanations that can help to understand the ups and downs the relations between China and the United States have gone through.

Xi Jinping's active foreign policy strategy has concerned many foreign scholars, especially Americans, with both mistrust and fear (Xuetong, 2014). Inside and outside China there are defendants and detractors of the striving for achievement policy. There is an open debate that divides experts between those who defend the foreign policy under Deng Xiaoping's premise to "keep a low profile" and those who advocate for Xi Jinping's Chinese dream to strive for achievement. From Xuetong and his 2014 article comparing the foreign policies of these two actors to the critical perspective of Jin and Zheyuan. Nevertheless, although there are different opinions about which policy is better China has been striving for achievement under Xi Jinping's mandate since 2013. A foreign policy that has had a strong impact on China and on the international system as a whole.

### **3. Objective**

The aim of this paper is to make a comparative analysis of the different Chinese foreign policy approaches presented by Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping respectively. These two leaders have shaped and modified China's perception in the international system. Deng Xiaoping from behind the scenes and Xi Jinping as the visible face of the change and power of current China. The work will highlight the evolution of the two foreign policies. From Deng Xiaoping's defense to "keep a low profile" to Xi Jinping's Chinese dream in the search to strive for achievement at the international level.

The paper will also address the consequences the latest shift in the Chinese international policy has had in the international arena. This means to understand how these two leaders perceive the role of China in the world and compare their views to understand the differences between them.

The comparison of both of the policies and their consequences will be centered on the Chinese relations with the United States providing an in-depth perspective of the international comparative politics carried out by each strategy. These two countries have been chosen due to their relevance and power in the international arena and their strikingly different political systems. Moreover, the relations between these two countries is full of ups and downs and currently at the center of the international relations news. The relations between these two countries is key for the present and future of the international system.



In the attempt of understanding the foreign policy decision-making process that China carries out, this paper will be looking at one of the countries that is growing in relevance and importance in the international sphere going through the evolution of its foreign policy. Something that will serve to prove that China is currently contesting to position itself as the main hegemonic power in the world, something that it shows through its foreign policy.

#### **4. Theoretical Framework**

Now that the objectives of this paper have been established the next step is to look at the theoretical framework that will be used during the analysis. There are different international relations theories that will provide the theoretical framework for this paper.

##### **4.1. The traditional theories: realism and liberalism**

The two most traditional international relations theories of realism and liberalism are not going to be of much use for the purpose of this paper. Now the two most traditional international relations theories of realism and liberalism will be looked at to see to what extent will they be useful for the purpose of this paper.

Understood literally liberalism, in a strictly political sense, defends that only elected governments are legitimate and politically reliable believing in their cooperative potential (Snyder, 2004). Being China a communist dictatorship and knowing that both Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping are firm defendants of this undemocratic political system, political liberalism has no space in understanding China's foreign policy. Though, it is remarkable to see the economic liberalism in Chinese foreign trade and market economic policies as the will to cooperate with the rest of the world in economic and trading terms (Snyder, 2004). Economic liberalism is, therefore, the basis of both foreign policies. It is easier and reliable to explain both Deng Xiaoping's *keeping a low profile* and Xi Jinping's *striving for achievement* under economic liberalism. Economic liberalism will provide the theoretical framework and necessary scope to study the defense that these two figures made of the urgency to open China to foreign markets, foreign trade and foreign investment. They both defended the economic liberalization of China embracing market economy from a liberal economic perspective.

Realism is the international theory of power. For realists the struggle for power is the core of international affairs (Snyder, 2004). Therefore, realism as such is a materialistic approach and is not going to serve as an explanation to Deng nor Xi's foreign policy. Nevertheless, Xueting on his article *From keeping a low profile to striving for*

*achievement* defends that Xi Jinping's leadership could be a good illustration of moral realism. Xi Jinping's chase of the Chinese dream is not only a search for China's best interests but also a moral obligation. Therefore, the legitimization of Chinese foreign policy should be based on the principles of fairness, justice and civility (Xuetong, 2014). Moral realism as a theory of international relations was first presented by Hans J. Morgenthau who saw a relationship between realism and ethics. This theory defends realism is influenced by ethics as it is argued that statesmen cannot be guided and moved only by material power (Brian A, 2006). Morgenthau asserted that universal moral principles have a place on the actions taken by states. Therefore, moral realism understands that policy decision-making needs to take into account both dimensions of power and morality (KorabKarpowicz, 2017). So, this moral realism may be useful for the analysis of China's current foreign policy as it would be explained, Xi Jinping acts moved by Chinese interests while respecting universal moral principles as much as he can, at least in his foreign policy decision-making. Whereas realism as such, is not going to be useful to understand Deng and Xi Jinping's foreign policy decision-making process due to its purely materialistic approach.

Now that moral realism has been explained it can be seen that it will be useful to understand Xi Jinping's foreign policy. It is a branch of realism that takes into account ethics and values differing from pure realism and from neorealist theories like the defended by Waltz. These neorealist theories assume that the states only act in their benefit searching security and protection (Telhami, 2010). The realist and neorealist trends overlook ethics and values in foreign policy while moral realism shows that some realists are actually interested in ethics although the recent proponents of realism are less interested in morality and ethics. So, moral realism will serve as inspiration, but realism and neorealism will not.

#### **4.2. Social constructivism**

As most part of the analysis will be done by looking into discourses and words by Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping, the discourse analysis will lead to the acceptance of the influence of social constructivism in this paper. Social constructivism is an international relations theory that considers the social aspect of the political world as the most important aspect to understand international relations. For social constructivism the international system exists as a human invention, constructed by a set of ideas. A system of norms arranged by certain people at a particular time and place. If the thoughts and

ideas that shape the international system change, then, as a consequence, the system itself changes as well (Jackson, 2006, p. 162). Constructivism emphasizes the social construction of reality, and so, international relations are shaped by thoughts and ideas, by the social norms, rules and relations with others. (Jackson, 2006)

Social constructivism may be obviously useful to see how Deng Xiaoping's and Xi Jinping's foreign policy strategies have shaped and constructed the international system and how the international system has changed as a consequence of the change in the Chinese foreign policy strategy. During their specific time of controlling China's foreign policy decision-making process Deng and Xi constructed through his discourses the ends and the goals China wanted to achieve in the international system shaping the relation China has with the countries it interacts with.

### **4.3. Role theory and foreign policy analysis**

Another useful theoretical approach for this thesis will be the implications of role theory in foreign policy analysis. Role theory builds a bridge between agent and structure in international relations (Breuning, 2011, p. 16). Basically, what role theory explains in terms of foreign policy is that decision makers, how leaders will act, what kind of reaction they expect from others, and how they will act if they do not get it affects the country's foreign policy behavior (G Thies, 2009). To understand role theory in foreign policy analysis it could be seen as portraying the state as a corporate entity with an identity founded on the speeches of key policymaking individuals that create their national role conceptions (G Thies, 2009). Something that is directly related to the analysis of Chinese foreign policy assuming Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping as the key policy-making individuals. As part of role theory, it can be understood that foreign policy decision makers make an evaluation of the role their state plays in the international system (Breuning, 2011). One of the goals of the analysis of this paper is to understand the role Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping attribute to China in the international system.

As it can be deduced, the analysis of Chinese foreign policy by two different individuals, Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping, that have two different roles in the Chinese political system spectrum and make different foreign policy decision-making choices can be understood through role theory. Each of their proposals is influenced by their own different concepts of China's role in the world, and these different concepts, shape Chinese foreign policy. Role theory will be useful to explore and understand why Deng and Xi chose to take the foreign policy decisions they took.

## 5. Methodology

Addressing the methodology used in this paper the chosen strategy has been the qualitative social research method. Particularly, this qualitative research method understood through the lenses of “language-based approaches to the collection of qualitative data, such as discourse analysis and the collection and qualitative analysis of texts and documents.” (Bryman, 2012, p. 383) The academic researches and studies of Deng Xiaoping’s *keeping a low profile* and Xi Jinping’s *striving for achievement*, as secondary sources, have helped to better understand Deng and Xi’s providing critical perspectives to the analysis of their discourses. To proof the impact and better comprehend the evolution and differences between these two foreign policies the Sino-US relations have been presented. The evolution of Chinese foreign policy is best reflected in the way China’s foreign policy decision-making has changed towards the United States. These Sino-US relations have also been analyzed from a qualitative perspective using both primary and secondary sources. Moreover, as explained further below, during the analysis of the most recent relations between China and the United States newspapers, magazines and other mass media sources have served for the analysis due to the little academic research that has been made for reasons of contemporality. The qualitative social research method, as explained during the structure of the paper presented below, has been chosen because it has proved to be the best method to understand the evolution of Chinese foreign policy and the impact Deng Xiaoping’s and Xi Jinping’s theories have had on the international system. Now, for a more in-depth understanding of the methodology used during this paper, the structure of the paper will be presented explaining the methodology used in each of the parts.

The structure of the paper has been: first, descriptive, then analytical and then comparative with the purpose of taking the reader through a comprehensive journey of what is explained and analyzed throughout it. This body of work has been structured as follows:

First, the cause and purposes of the paper have been stated. Right after the cause and purposes the state of the issue has been presented with a brief historical overview of the related issue. The relevance of Deng Xiao Ping and Xi Jinping’s journey in the Chinese political system has served as historical background to frame the analysis of the Chinese foreign policy that takes place later on. Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping have been

chosen because the impact of their foreign policies has been huge for China and for the international system as a whole.

Once the objective of this essay has been presented, a theoretical framework of the main international relations and foreign policy theories that have been used throughout the paper has been explained and presented. The theories that have been used are explained in this part where the reasons behind choosing these theories instead of others are also defended. The chosen theories that will be used are: moral realism, social constructivism, discourse analysis and role theory in foreign policy analysis.

After the present section on “methodology” the main part of the thesis has been presented. In this part, the analysis, goes, first, through Deng Xiaoping’s “keep a low profile” foreign policy analysis, its basis and its support both internationally and domestically. This first part of the analysis will break down the main points of Deng Xiaoping’s proposal to understand the strategy as a whole. Secondly, the analysis will address the Sino-US relations during the time Deng Xiaoping’s “keep a low profile” was applied to Chinese foreign policy decision-making. Going, in the first place, through the first years of Sino-US relations with Deng Xiaoping in the spectrum, to focus on the time in which the low-profile policy was fully in practice. The main focus of this analysis has been put on the decisions Deng made during the time the United States imposed China sanctions over Tiananmen, back in 1989. In order to do so, Kissinger’s first-hand experience has been used together with some political discourses Deng Xiaoping did during the time.

Then, the analysis proceeded to go through Xi Jinping’s premise of “striving for achievement” for China’s foreign policy decision-making process. To understand “striving for achievement” as a foreign policy strategy it is essential to know where China is now. And, therefore, the analysis focused on Xi Jinping, China’s current leader. Xi Jinping’s latest foreign policy approach was expressed in his intervention during the 19<sup>th</sup> CPC congress in 2017. This intervention has provided the key to introduce what Xi calls “the Chinese dream” that has been understood through the constructivist theory as it is a discourse that is currently helping Xi Jinping to gain domestic support to his foreign policy.

During the analysis of the Chinese foreign policy proposals the steps of discourses analysis presented by Iver B. Neuman have been taken into account. These are the three steps proposed by Neuman in order to make a good discourse analysis:

1. Delimiting the texts: the chosen ones for this paper are Deng Xiaoping's foreign policy proposal of "keeping a low profile" and Xi Jinping's latest intervention during the 19th CPC Congress in 2017 on Chinese foreign policy where he defends his strategy of "striving for achievement". (Neumann, 2008, p. 65)

2. Mapping representations: search out to identify the various representations of reality in the chosen discourses. (Neumann, 2008, p. 70)

3. Layering discourses: being able to demonstrate the relevance of the chosen discourse. (Neumann, 2008, p. 73)

Discourse analysis has served to emphasize the way versions of the world are produced in discourse. How the discourses analyzed have shaped the way China has been influencing the international system through its foreign affairs policy. (Bryman, 2012) Analyzing their discourses has turned out to be the most useful way to understand their foreign policy strategies.

Afterwards, the analysis proceeded to go through the Sino-US relations with Xi Jinping comparing its "striving for achievement" and "Chinese Dream" to Trump's "America First" and "Make America Great Again". An analysis that has been very useful to continue with the comparison between Deng Xiaoping's and Xi Jinping's foreign policy system strategies. Taking the examples of Sino-US relations during both Deng's and Xi's eras, the differences between the two have been proved through the specific actions and decisions taken by each one of them. In this part a brief introduction has been made to see China's influence over Asia in the last years as its foreign policy in the region, which is useful to understand the tense relations and the ups and downs the Sino-US relations have gone through in the past few years. More specifically, the focus has been put on the trade war initiated in July 2018 until the truce established in December 2018. Choosing this 2018 trade war between China and the United States has been helpful to carry on with the comparative analysis between Deng and Xi's foreign policy strategy. Again, discourse analysis, academic publishes and newspaper articles, for the latest events, have been used to carry out the analysis

The conclusions of this paper have been drawn from the data and knowledge discussed during the analysis. The conclusions also address future fields that could expand the search around this topic of study.

## 6. Analysis

### 6.1. Deng Xiaoping's "keep a low profile" foreign policy strategy

As it has already been mentioned Deng Xiaoping was never the President of China, nevertheless, he was managing China's domestic and foreign policy behind the scenes for around two decades. This is the reason why Deng's foreign policy strategies appear, mostly, in studies and analysis of the Chinese foreign policy strategies over those years.

In this part of the paper Deng Xiao Ping's foreign policy strategy will be explained. More specifically, his foreign policy strategy well-known under the premise "keep a low profile". A strategy he formally proposed after the Tiananmen protests, in 1989, when China was put on the spotlight facing international sanctions (Kissinger, 2011, p. 440) to which Deng Xiaoping defended his foreign policy strategy under the 24 characters.

His defense on "keeping a low profile" was described with 24 Chinese characters which are the following: observe calmly (*lengjing guancha*), secure your position (*wenzhu zhenjiaok*), cope with affairs calmly (*chenzhuo yingdui*), keep a low profile (*taoguang yanghui*) hide our capacities (*shanyu shouzhuo*), bide our time (*yousuo zuowei*) and never take the lead (*juebu dangtou*) (Jin & Zheyuan, 2015).

In order to understand Deng Xiaoping's foreign policy strategy, it is essential to go through these seven points to explain them:

1. By "observing calmly" it is clear that Deng Xiaoping stresses out a passive attitude instead of a call for action. He asked for China to be an observer in the international sphere.
2. To "secure your position" was a way of saying not to move. Deng clearly wanted China to stay where it was, at least for what concerned its place in the international system.
3. When Deng proposed that China should "cope with affairs calmly" he most probably meant that, regarding international affairs or international conflicts, the smartest way to act would be to analyze them and act towards them calmly, pacifically, avoiding the use of violence.
4. Addressing the point that has passed as the main premise of Deng Xiaoping's foreign policy strategy "to keep a low profile" is a synonym of

staying under the radar. Which basically means to pass without being noticed.

5. China should also “hide its capacities”. Deng Xiaoping seemed to believe that being humble was the best way China could act in international affairs. China first needed to learn from others and grow, especially economically speaking, develop itself as a country. In order to do so it should hide its potential.
6. The point of “biding our time” is intrinsically connected with the fifth point. Deng believed that with this strategy China could grow and develop, it was only a matter of time. China needed time to grow, Deng Xiaoping’s plan was a long-term plan. Deng Xiaoping was certain that China would grow and develop its capacities and potential with time.
7. The last point “to never take the lead” sums up all of the above. For Deng, China was not prepared to have a leading role in the international system.

After addressing these seven points or “24 characters” of Chinese foreign policy it is time to analyze it as a whole. Firstly, it is important to put this foreign policy proposal in context. It is easy to understand that after the Tiananmen protests, or “the incident” as Chinese call it, Deng promoted the search of stability. Deng Xiaoping made stability a priority as he told the leading members of the CPC Central Committee in 1989:

“We will create a good image domestically and internationally, an image of stability and unity, and be a model of stability and unity.” (Xiaoping, 1989, p. 204)

Searching for stability and unity inside China and “keeping a low profile” when addressing foreign policy did not mean to close up the country from the rest of the world. In the same speech Deng Xiaoping remembered that: “China must have a leading collective with image of people who favor the policies of reform and opening to the outside world.” (Xiaoping, 1989, p. 206)

From these excerpts it can be said that Deng Xiaoping’s proposals were centered in avoiding unrest both internally and internationally, being this the key point of his policy proposals. As he assured: “(...) my views about the international situation can be summed up in three sentences. First, we should observe the situation calmly. Second, we should secure our position. Third, we should act calmly. Don’t be impatient.” (Xiaoping, 1989, p. 208)

Deng wanted for China to focus on development and economic growth. For this goal to be achieved his foreign policy approach was to keep a low profile. Meaning that



China should avoid conflicts and tensions as these could divert the country from the essential goal of domestic growth.

Nevertheless, all of these did not mean that Deng Xiaoping was unsure of China's potential, not at all. In fact, in his own words: "With stable policies of reform and opening to the outside world, China can have great hopes for the future." (Xiaoping, 1989, p. 209)

Therefore, Deng Xiaoping was convinced of China's potential. He believed that, by opening to the outside world, especially in economic and trade terms, China could grow and develop. This is why he defended a low-profile policy, especially after Tiananmen. It is not hard to imagine how the world reacted to China's response to the Tiananmen incident, the images of the protests and the military response were everywhere. China was punished with trade and economic sanctions.

In this context, Deng Xiaoping decided for China to play a role based on calmness. He saw China as a country that should avoid playing an active role in foreign affairs. And, so, China expressed its disagreement towards the sanctions, and defended its response towards the incident, but never dared to use countersanctions or take any similar measures against those countries that were imposing them.

During the period of time that Deng Xiaoping's "keep a low profile" approach to international affairs lasted the foreign policy decisions made by China were constructed and shaped through Deng Xiaoping's views and premises, even long after he died, the "keep a low profile" approach was the go-to motto for China, at least in everything related to international policy decision-making.

Besides, the economic and trade openness that China accompanied this low-profile foreign policy with was a sign of economic liberalization. Though this liberal approach was clearly only in economic terms, as Deng Xiaoping had no intention to change the communist dictatorship. Nevertheless, for China to open itself to the market economy seemed to be beneficial for all.

This could be one of the reasons why the approach to foreign policy was, in general, well received by the international community as Xuetong states phrases like "searching for no expansion" and "never take the lead" indicated that other countries had no reason to fear of a rapid growth of China's power. (Xuetong, 2014)

For the international community to see that China was going to act following the premise of keeping a low profile in foreign affairs was a relief. As this Chinese approach to foreign policy meant that China would not jeopardize the structure of the international system. In the eyes of the international system it was a positive sign the fact that China

decided not to change the dominant status quo at the time. Therefore, the “keeping a low profile” strategy helped China to, progressively, be reconsidered as an ally more than an enemy for the international community.

The support to Deng Xiaoping’s foreign policy proposal came also from Chinese academics. This is the case of Shen Dingli, while being Director of the Institution of International Studies at Fudan University insisted on the importance of the keeping a low profile strategy China’s rise would be something to occur in a long-time coming and the keeping a low profile proposal was a long-term strategy (Xuetong, 2014). Or Jin Canrong who, while working in the School of International Relations at Remin University, argued that, by keeping a low-profile, China would improve the external conditions while allowing itself to focus on its domestic problems (Xuetong, 2014). Others like Qu Xing, a Chinese foreign policy analyst, defended the keeping a low-profile strategy assuring that by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century China would be completely modernized. (Jin & Zheyuan, 2015)

For these Chinese academics and experts, the strategy of keeping a low profile in international affairs was an approach that allowed China to grow and develop. It was a strategy that permitted China to center on domestic affairs while opening to the international market. It put China inside the international system. China was no longer isolated. With this calm approach towards international affairs China guaranteed its position in the international system without rising any red flags.

Despite all of these support, Deng Xiaoping’s foreign policy proposal had also some detractors. Internationally speaking there existed questions around China’s real power. There were foreign scholars accusing the “keeping a low-profile strategy” to be designed by the Chinese government to hide China’s real capabilities and potential (Xuetong, 2014). Within the Chinese community there were also thinkers that believed that China was constraining its power. Arguing that the strategy of keeping a low profile was acting like a birdcage in which China was trapped inside, impeding China to spread its wings and fly freely (Jin & Zheyuan, 2015).

It is understandable that these arguments against Deng Xiaoping’s keeping a low-profile proposal rose during the time its foreign policy ideas influenced China’s foreign policy. Deng Xiaoping’s ideas shaped Chinese foreign policy since mid-seventies. From the 1990’s until, more or less, the first decade of the twenty-first century (as it will be explained further, during the analysis) his keeping a low-profile approach was the engine

moving China's foreign policy. It is now time to analyze how this approach influenced the Sino-US relations during more than a decade.

### **6.1.1. Sino-US relations under Deng Xiaoping's "keeping a low-profile" foreign policy strategy**

Now it is time to take a look at the way China related with the United States under Deng Xiaoping's "keeping a low-profile". This analysis will then serve as platform to understand the evolution of Chinese foreign policy with the United States in the following sections of this paper.

Deng Xiaoping was one of the Chinese figures with the closest relations with the United States. He became China's principal mediator with the United States in 1974 (Kissinger, 2011). In April of that year Deng was sent as part of the Chinese delegation to a UN General Assembly session dealing with economic development (Kissinger, 2011). During this session he coincided with Henry Kissinger in what will be the first of many encounters as Kissinger states in his book *On China* (2011).

In the late 1970's Deng Xiaoping pushed the Sino-US relations further. In 1978 normalization of Sino-US relations came about when Carter invited Deng Xiaoping to Washington D.C. for the first time (Kissinger, 2011). This visit achieved one of China's most important goals in its foreign policy agenda. "The American Embassy would move from Taipei to Beijing; a diplomat from Beijing would replace Taipei's representative in Washington" (Kissinger, 2011, p. 356). A decision that changed the United States foreign policy towards the Chinese-Taiwan conflict and that strengthened the Sino-US bond.

Deng Xiaoping's "keeping a low-profile" strategy was being forged during the 80s. A decade that marked Chinese foreign policy with the willingness to open to international trade. In order to do so, during his repeated visits to the United States, Deng Xiaoping invoked China's poverty emphasizing China's backwardness, its challenge to do better, and learn from foreigners (Kissinger, 2011).

In accordance with this humble view Deng Xiaoping projected of China in the 1980's, he did several diplomatic visits to the United States. His visits could be considered more as "business trips" as his main goal with them was to show interest on American technology and science. Deng's commitment was with China's development and he strongly believed that foreign investment, an open market, and science and technology were the key to achieve it (Kissinger, 2011).

Evidently, Deng Xiaoping was the main Chinese figure that fought to create and promote good and solid Sino-US relations. During the decades of the 1970s and the 1980s

he managed to portray an image of China based on showcasing its poverty and a humble willingness to grow and develop. Deng Xiaoping chose to focus on the United States knowing that to open the Chinese economy to the world and alliance with the United States was indispensable. Deng led the relations between China and the United States and achieved the favor of the American government, in one of the most important foreign policy issues for China, when the United States recognized China over Taiwan. Moreover, the first steps China did towards development were achieved thanks to the humble image of the country he defended. A humble image that set the basis of his future “keep a low-profile” perspective on China’s foreign policy decision-making.

After Tiananmen, in June 1989, China became an isolated country constrained by trade sanctions and international backlash (Kissinger, 2011). The relations between China and the rest of the world were full of tensions and were even broken completely in some cases. The Sino-US relations suffered the consequences of China’s national unrest. The United States heavily criticized China’s response to the revolts. In a speech in which he addressed the officers and troops that enforced the martial law in Beijing Deng Xiaoping stated: “The United States has blamed us for suppressing the students. But didn’t the US itself call out police and troops to deal with student strikes and disturbances, and didn’t that lead to arrests and bloodshed?” (Xiaoping, 1989, p.199)

With this statement Deng Xiaoping defended the response China gave to Tiananmen’s protests. Deng considered the Tiananmen protests had the goal to demolish the Chinese socialist system and overthrow the Communist Party to establish a bourgeois republic (Xiaoping, 1989). It is clear that Deng Xiaoping was a true defendant of the Chinese communist dictatorship. His declarations made clear he considered the United States to act in a double moral: criticizing the Chinese response to Tiananmen protests and punishing China with sanctions, while using force to combat student protests within its own borders.

Even though, Deng Xiaoping prized the Chinese response to Tiananmen while calling out the international community and the United States for criticizing this responding and imposing trade and economic sanctions. His proposal to help China to exit the isolated situation it was facing since Tiananmen was one of opening to the outside world.

After Tiananmen, Deng Xiaoping urged China to continue with the foreign policy based on opening the country to trade, investment and foreign markets. The main goal after Tiananmen’s “incident” was to “have a leading collective with the image of people

who favor the policies of reform and opening to the outside world.” (Xiaoping, 1989, p. 206). This meant to work towards stability inside and outside China to achieve the desired development in the future.

In these terms, Deng Xiaoping expressed his willingness of ending the tensions Tiananmen had spread in the Sino-US relations. Deng defended that China and the United States should put behind the tensions that rose between the two countries and open up a new era. As seen above Deng Xiaoping directly expressed his disagreement with the measures taken by the United States with regard to China’s response to Tiananmen. In fact, Deng reaffirmed this position when he said: “Don’t ever expect China to beg the United States to lift the sanctions.” (Xiaoping, 1989, p. 216) Nevertheless, committing to his “keep a low-profile” proposal on foreign policy, China never responded actively to these sanctions.

The situation of the Sino-US relations during this time sets the perfect example of what the proposal of “keeping a low-profile” in foreign policy decision-making process truly meant. It did not mean for China to not to express its disagreement if it had them in regard to any decision affecting them at an international level. After Tiananmen, Deng Xiaoping repeated several times he was not content with the behavior of the international system towards China. At the same time, though, Deng was aware of the importance that maintaining the open foreign policy had in China’s future. This is why he defended his proposal of keeping a low-profile and never took any active counter-measures against the sanctions imposed by the United States. For him the Sino-US relations had a good foundation that allowed both countries to help each other develop. (Xiaoping, 1989)

In December 1989 all these desires seemed to be fulfilled as a representative of George W. Bush’s government made an official visit to China. Deng Xiaoping highlighted the importance of improving China and the United States’ relations. He also expressed his willingness of maintaining the position of “keeping a low profile” by assuring that “China cannot be a threat to the United States, and the United States should not consider China as a threatening rival.” (Xiaoping, 1989, p. 227)

By not positioning China as a threatening rival it is clear that Deng Xiaoping wanted to fully implement his proposal of “keeping a low-profile”. This statement put in practice the points of “keeping a low profile” and “never taking the lead” as China presented itself as a non-threatening country.

Following his premises, Deng Xiaoping defended that, in order to settle the disputes, both China and the United States should re-establish their relations based on

respect. Therefore, both countries should not encourage the war of words and both sides should try and make concessions, so the settlement and future agreements benefit them equally. (Xiaoping, 1989)

Putting the light on respect and the end of conflict, searching a common ground, and setting dialogue as the way to achieve agreements; are also movements that Deng Xiaoping made to put in practice its proposal of keeping a low profile with China's foreign policy towards the United States. More specifically, it complies with the premises of observing and coping with affairs calmly.

As it can be assumed, the agreements Deng Xiaoping searched to re-establish China's relations with the United States were, mainly, economic, trade and investment agreements in accordance with his defense of helping China develop through the "keeping a low-profile" foreign policy strategy.

With the new decade, the fall of the USSR and the end of the Cold War; Deng Xiaoping became aware of the changes the international system was going through. Deng Xiaoping welcomed this new international economic and political order. And hoped that his "keeping a low-profile" foreign policy strategy would, in the long-term, transform China into a pole of the new so-called multi-polar world (Xiaoping, 1990).

As Deng Xiaoping hoped, and as it will be analyzed in the following sections of this paper, China has grown. A growth and a development that would have not been possible without Deng Xiaoping's foreign policy decision-making proposal to "keep a low-profile". Although his premise has been substituted by Xi Jinping's strategy for China to strive for achievement (which will be studied below) Deng Xiaoping and his "keep a low-profile" strategy was the trigger of China's current influence in the international system. The "keeping a low-profile strategy" shaped the image China gave of itself during decades and contributed to shape the way the international system is today.

## **6.2. Xi Jinping encourages China to "strive for achievement"**

Xi Jinping has been China's leader since 2012 (Bader, 2016) taking control of the country as the second largest economy in the world, the world's largest trading country, the biggest target of foreign investments and the largest scale manufacturing country in the world (Bader, 2016). China, therefore, is currently in a different international position than it was twenty years ago. And Xi Jinping is aware of these changes.

"Both China and the world are in the midst of profound and complex changes." (Jinping, 2017, p. 1) acknowledged Xi Jinping in his intervention during the 19<sup>th</sup> National

Congress of the Communist Party of China. And his foreign policy reflects these changes. In this section of the paper Xi Jinping's aspirations regarding foreign policy will be explained.

Xi Jinping sees the power of globalization and wants China to actively participate in it. That is why, like Deng did before him, Xi Jinping defends *openness brings progress* (Jinping, 2017). Along these lines he defends the importance of participating in the interconnection brought by globalization and taking advantage of global multipolarity. In these terms, Xi Jinping outlined China's new role in the international system highlighting that China has grown and is now stronger and, therefore, this will be a new era in which China will move to the center of the international stage and make greater contributions to humanity (Jinping, 2017).

These views put in evidence the confidence Xi Jinping has in China. A confidence that, just like mentioned above, in his own words, comes from the changes both the world, and specially China, have experimented in the last decade. China is not the country that needs to keep a low profile anymore. China has grown. Xi Jinping is completely conscious of China's growing influence and power and of the capacities his country now has to shape the international community. Therefore, Xi Jinping's "Chinese dream" is for China to "strive for achievement".

What can we understand by "striving for achievement"? What does this term mean in Chinese foreign policy? To answer these questions, it is essential to understand, first, what is the "Chinese dream", what does Xi Jinping mean when he makes use of these expressions?

Xi Jinping, since he became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 2012, has been promoting the "Chinese Dream". The Chinese Dream is a national revival that will only be achieved through unity and party leadership (Sørensen, 2015). It is a defense of Chinese communism, through a strong leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. It is a call for Chinese patriotism.

Xi Jinping believes that China's strength is based on the projection of unity and stability that the country gives to the world. This is Xi Jinping's main goal when he defends the "Chinese Dream". And so, the "Chinese Dream" is Xi Jinping's effort to ensure stability within Chinese borders (Sørensen, 2015).

In this sense, it can be said, that, under Xi Jinping, China is a country willing to project an image of stability. Patriotism is a force that unites Chinese people and encourages them to defend their political system and a strong leadership. Xi Jinping

believes in China's strength, in its capacities. There is no longer space for the humbleness Deng Xiaoping defended. China is superior, and this superiority entitles China with the right of great power status, dignity and respect (Sørensen, 2015).

The Chinese Dream is a discourse that shapes and encourages Chinese people to protect China's political system, believe in its strength, defend its leadership, and promote stability. Ultimately, Xi Jinping is reshaping China through the Chinese Dream. His new view of China creates a new way in which Chinese see themselves. The Chinese Dream implies a change of attitude impacting both in Chinese domestic and foreign policies.

As it has been said before, this patriotism implicit within the Chinese Dream proposal does not mean that China thinks itself to be so strong not to need the rest of the world. The Chinese Dream does not mean "China first". Xi Jinping is not willing to pursue this kind of isolated policies. He emphasizes that "no country alone can address the challenges of mankind." (Jinping, 2017) Therein lies the issue, the "Chinese Dream" promotes an image of a China that needs the rest of the world to continue to grow and develop just like the *keeping a low profile* strategy. But, at the same time, it defends a strong China that can reciprocate by contributing to the growth and development of the rest of the world. The "Chinese Dream" seeks to demonstrate that China is capable of actively acting, departing from these ideas of *keeping a low profile*. From Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" China portrays an image of a country that can show of its abilities, a country that has learnt from the development of other world powers to become the image and example of growth and development.

With the "Chinese Dream" Xi Jinping is making a huge impact at home and abroad. It has served him to accumulate authority and to enhance much more the power of the People's Republic (Jie, 2017) with the intention to influence the Chinese people and the international community all at once.

The foreign policy proposal of "striving for achievement" materializes Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream (Esteban, 2017). As it has been seen with the Chinese Dream Xi Jinping presents China as a great power, not a developing country. Therefore, the main idea of this new foreign policy strategy is for China to increase its power and its responsibility in the international system, something Xi Jinping emphasized all throughout his intervention at the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress. This means that: "China will become more active and constructive in participating and in dealing with international and regional issues, (...) and safeguarding world's peace and stability". (Wan, 2013)



Every time the “striving for achievement” foreign policy is mentioned it puts China as a power with responsibility, with a role in the world. It is, therefore, a very ambitious global foreign policy with which Xi Jinping aspires to shape the international system as a whole.

In this foreign policy proposal Xi Jinping does not only urge China to “strive for achievement” at an international level. It also encourages China to “be more active” in the international sphere and to “take greater initiative” when it comes to foreign policy decision-making (Sørensen, 2015).

All these points that characterize China’s current foreign policy can be summarized as the will to be more proactive. As Zhai Kun, who worked as professor in the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, argued: China’s current proactivity in foreign policy is demonstrated in three aspects:

1. The establishment of the new national security commission (Zhai, 2014).
2. The efforts to use different instruments in foreign policy: economic, political, military and non-governmental (Zhai, 2014).
3. The efforts to combine strength and gentleness in relation to international issues that affect China’s rights and interests (Zhai, 2014).

What is demonstrated through these key points that China follows now in its foreign policy decision-making is that Xi Jinping is moving away from Deng Xiaoping’s perspective. China will act in its own interest, therefore, treating friends and enemies differently than before, without fear. It will work to ensure and guarantee peaceful diplomatic agreements and, at the same time, use more instruments of diplomacy like isolation or sanctions to ensure Chinese interests (Sørensen, 2015). China is now powerful enough to freely chose when to use “sticks or carrots” in its international decision-making process. And, usually, China follows the path of using free trade to try to ensure and guarantee peaceful diplomatic agreements (Sørensen, 2015).

This is the reason why Xueting believes that China’s current foreign policy can be explained through the international theory of moral realism. Although it is generally assumed that realism does not concern about morality, in fact, the best way to understand China’s “striving for achievement” foreign policy strategy is through the lenses of moral realism.

Moral realism follows the premise that “international morality plays a role in the legitimization of policy and in the increase of national power” (Xueting, 2014, p. 11). The “striving for achievement” foreign policy approach acts according to this principle,

as Xi Jinping wants for Chinese foreign policy to be at the level of the power that China has now in the international system while, at the same time, it wants to show China as a promoter of peace and cooperation.

In this way, Xi Jinping uses moral realism as a foreign policy instrument because his “striving for achievement policy” is a strategy that “contends that moral foreign policy is favorable to the strategic interests of a rising power (...) a new world order cannot be established if foreign policy is contrary to international morality.” (Xuetong, 2014, p. 11)

Xi Jinping is willing for China to leave an impact and influence the international system and the world order, but it is conscious that, in order to do so, it must try not to break the international rules. Respecting the international system morality when carrying out its foreign policy strategy of “striving for achievement” seems to be something of great importance for Xi Jinping.

Another characteristic of moral realism that the “striving for achievement” foreign policy theory complies with is that “nationalist policy of a humane authority state can be humanitarian when its policy is guided by the concerns of global leadership.” (Xuetong, 2014, p. 11) Meaning that China, by following Xi Jinping’s nationalist policy of the *Chinese Dream*, aims, at the same time, to gain a position of leadership in the world without living its humane side, at least in what concerns foreign policy. To “strive for achievement”, under the light of moral realism, can be understood as a foreign policy that seeks for China to be a powerful leader without letting moral and ethics aside when the country acts in the international sphere.

As it has been already explained the “striving for achievement” foreign policy is a reflection of the “Chinese Dream” nationalist theory. And so, by complying with moral realism Xi Jinping’s foreign policy strategy is seeking world leadership through both strength and morality.

China’s foreign policy goals searched with the “striving for achievement” foreign policy strategy are quite clear. China wants to strengthen friendship and cooperation with its allied countries through peace, development and cooperation. It seeks to have a more active role in the international system responding to international issues with all the tools in its disposal whether these are sticks or carrots. China is confident of its power and it will act accordingly to the international issues that affect its rights and interests (Jinping, 2017).

It is too soon to know if the “striving for achievement” foreign policy decision-making proposal that Xi Jinping’s government is carrying out for China is actually

working or not. After all, Xi Jinping has only been in office since 2012. And, therefore, it has been less than a decade of him implementing the “Chinese Dream” rhetoric and the “striving for achievement” foreign policy strategy.

Nevertheless, there are Chinese scholars, like Xu Jin from the Institute of World Economics and Politics, that defend that “the foreign policy principle of *striving for achievement* has, since the summer of 2012, proved to be quite effective” (Xu, 2017).

Regarding the international community’s perspective, it is evident that the new Chinese foreign policy has created noise and opened debate. In Western media Xi Jinping’s new approach to foreign policy has attracted much attention. When addressing the “Chinese Dream” it is often considered a nationalistic doctrine focused on regaining China’s power and dignity status (Sørensen, 2015). Most of these views also throw a negative light to the “striving for achievement” proposal calling it out as being dangerous and a threat for international stability and security (Sørensen, 2015).

China’s relevance on the international sphere is undeniable. Whether the “striving for achievement” foreign policy strategy is working or not for Chinese interests will be proving when it is put in practice for a longer time. What it is sure, is that it has created debate, it has generated changes and different responses. One of these responses, the most sounded one, has been the one given by Trump’s administration. The Sino-US relations have been much of a roller coaster in the past couple of years. The United States seems to see China’s “striving for achievement” approach as a threat.

To show the relevance and importance of Xi Jinping’s “striving for achievement” foreign policy decision-making proposal on the Sino-US relations since President Trump arrived at power will be analyzed below. This analysis will help to understand how China’s foreign policy and way of acting has changed with the “striving for achievement approach”.

### **6.2.1. Sino-US relations: Xi Jinping vs Trump’s “open war”**

Since Donald Trump arrived at the White House and became President of the United States, the Sino-US relations have been going through constant ups and downs. Before getting into an analysis of this roller coaster it is useful to know China’s foreign policy in its region, especially in East Asia and the South China Sea, since Xi Jinping is being applying his “striving for achievement policy”.

Xi Jinping’ “striving for achievement” foreign policy strategy tries to shape the international system. Xi Jinping knows that, in order to shape the international system,

China must first become the strongest country in its region. This is the reason behind the foreign policy decision-making he has been taken in Asia.

Among these, we find his actions in 2013: to take control over the islands of Diaoyu/Senkaku long-disputed with Japan on the East Asia Sea or the controversial and sounded creation of artificial islands in the South China Sea (Sørensen, 2015). There is no need to go into further explanations on these acts, but it helps us to understand how these policies have been seen as aggressive by many Western observers (Sørensen, 2015).

Not to forget Xi's strong promotion of Asia as a region. China is actively committed to further develop the integration of Asia's sub-regions in economic, political and security terms. Carrying out initiatives like the new silk road with Central Asia, the maritime silk road with South East Asia, the economic corridor with South Asia or the security policies with East Asia; as well as creating the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Sørensen, 2015). These initiatives have increased China's presence and power over the Asian region. They represent an example of China following Xi Jinping's "striving for achievement policy" and being more active in its foreign policy.

Before Xi Jinping started to put in practice his "striving for achievement" foreign policy strategy in Asia, the United States was the country with the most influence in the region, especially in Asia-Pacific. The way that Xi Jinping is acting could be seen as "Chinese efforts to counter-balance the American "rebalance to Asia" strategy." (Sørensen, 2015, p. 12). It is an idea Xi Jinping has long defended and repeated in his foreign policy rhetoric that "Asia is better managed by Asians" (Jinping, 2017).

This leadership that China is gaining over the Asian region since Xi Jinping has been putting in practice with his "striving for achievement" foreign policy strategy, a leadership he has taken away from the United States, can be seen as one of the reasons behind Trump's administrations' ups and downs with the Asian giant. Trump's arrival has deteriorated the international image of the United States (Esteban, 2017) and Xi Jinping is taking this opportunity in the advantage of China through his "striving for achievement" foreign policy strategy.

Contrary to the Obama administration which practiced a "Pivot to Asia" policy, Trump's administration is stepping back imposing its "America First" strategy. (F. Li, 2017) These two different reactions to Xi Jinping's "striving for achievement strategy" are manifested on the "Trans-Pacific Partnership" (TPP) proposed by Obama's administration which deliberately excluded China's participation (F. Li, 2017). Obama was trying to enhance the United States' power in Asia, trying to contain China's power

and increasing influence on the region. On the other hand, Trump decided to retire from the TTP early on 2017 in the line the United States has taken since Trump entered office, reducing its international obligations. (F. Li, 2017) This retreat from the TPP may be leaving a space for China to replace the United States. With its current “striving for achievement” policy it seems logic to think China will try to enter the TPP and fill in the space the United States has left.

Xi Jinping’s “striving for achievement” foreign policy strategy has been put into practice in the latest Sino-US relations. Xi has called several times for world leaders to ‘keep the goal of building a community’ (M. Nordin & Mikael, 2018). A statement that makes clear that Xi Jinping wants to keep opening-up to the world and to the international system. In contrast to Trump’s latest moves in international affairs. A statement that has been accompanied by firm proposals of the Chinese leader positioning China as the leader of the system. Xi Jinping is taking advantage of Trump’s willingness for the United States to retire from the multilateral spectrum. A vacuum that Xi Jinping wants China to fill in.

Xi Jinping’s administration is unapologetically open about his and China’s *bid for regional and world leadership* (M. Nordin & Mikael, 2018). This leadership role that Xi Jinping wants for China clearly differs from the country’s previous foreign policy strategy. Xi Jinping has separated himself from Deng Xiaoping. After decades of *keeping a low profile, hiding its capacities, biding for its time and never taking the lead* (Jin & Zheyuan, 2015) now China is presenting itself as the candidate to lead the international system. As it can be seen, Xi Jinping believes that China is ready to take the lead in at both regional and world levels.

From a theoretical perspective these are the proof of a change in the way China perceives its role in the international system. Xi Jinping has transformed Deng Xiaoping’s discourse of *keeping a low profile* into one of leadership. This change has constructed a new reality for China. Now, China feels entitled to present itself as a candidate for international leadership. The discourse has shifted, shaping and creating a new role for China in the international system. China has gone from a humble country that flew under the radar when it followed Deng Xiaoping’s foreign policy, to a country that shows off its power and will for leadership under Xi Jinping. Furthermore, Xi Jinping’s statement and will to present China as a possible candidate to lead the international system could be seen as if Chinese foreign policy is falling under the scope of moral realism. Xi Jinping is proposing China as the guide that the international system could follow (Xuetong, 2014) in the pursue of *keeping the goal of building a community*, as a possible leader that

could continue promoting free trade, market economy and multilateralism (M. Nordin & Mikael, 2018).

Since Deng Xiaoping's times China has developed and grown to become one of the main countries and most important actors in the international system. Trump's administration is unpredictable and volatile. Currently, there is a "contrast between Xi's keen leadership of capitalist development and a United States perceived as pursuing a new in-ward looking and protectionist direction keener to demand than to lead (M. Nordin & Mikael, 2018, p. 243)." Xi Jinping, aware of the turn the United States' foreign policy strategy has taken with Trump's administration, is pursuing his own foreign policy strategy of "striving for achievement". Trump's administration and foreign policy strategy has left space for Xi Jinping to fully start to develop his own foreign policy strategy.

Xi Jinping's China and Trump's United States are currently following two different foreign policy system strategies. These differences have resulted in growing tensions that have been building up and developing during the past couple of years. A *mix of trust and mistrust* (F. Li, 2017) in the relations between both countries. A contrast between "America First" and "striving for achievement" between "make America great again" and "the Chinese Dream". These opposing views have triggered tensions in the form of a trade war that have served Xi Jinping to expose its foreign policy strategy and put it in practice showcasing a strong contrast with the actions China took under Deng.

During the month of June 2018 Trump announced the United States was going to impose tariffs over certain Chinese products (Wong & Chipman Koty, 2019). Tariffs that have mounted to a total of US\$250 billion from the time these tariffs officially entered into force on July 2018, to the time a temporary truce was announced on December 2, 2018 (Wong & Chipman Koty, 2019). These tariffs work along the lines of the protectionist foreign policy that has defended Trump since he is in office. The imposition of the tariffs has not been one-sided. Xi Jinping has distanced himself from the previous foreign policy strategies. China has made clear that they have a say in the trade war. China was not intimidated by the tariffs and has actively and equivalently responded (Steinberg, 2018). More specifically, China reached a total of US\$110 billion during the whole trade war period, from July to December 2018 (Wong & Chipman Koty, 2019). In this way Xi Jinping has proved and put in practice his active foreign policy strategy. Unlike Deng Xiaoping, who, after the tariffs the United States imposed over China due to Tiananmen, decided only to verbally oppose them while adhering to his keeping a low-profile

approach by never taking any active counter-measure against these sanctions (Xiaoping, 1989).

The high tensions between the United States and China seemed to be hardening as the G-20 meeting in Argentina was approaching. The last G-20 meeting, a summit that annually reunites the 20 most powerful countries in the world, took place in Argentina between the 30<sup>th</sup> of November and the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2018 (Mitchell & Fei Ju, 2018). It was expected for Xi Jinping and Trump to have a cold meeting, one in which the outcome would be of higher and broader tariffs and increased hostility. Far from these assumptions what finally took place was the accordance of a truce in the trade war (Mitchell & Hancock, 2018). In less than a year, the relations between these two countries have gone through a trade war to a truce. A situation that depicts the volatility and unpredictability to which the relations between these two countries have been subdued. An unpredictability that could continue as both countries, at the time of developing this part of the analysis for the paper (early February 2019), are undergoing and planning different meetings and negotiations to see where their foreign relations are heading to. The tariffs have been suspended, the pulse between the two countries has come to a recess, nevertheless, it is difficult to predict where are they going to go from now on. One thing is almost certain, if Trump's administration reimposes the tariffs to Chinese products Xi Jinping's hand will not shake meaning that China will answer with an active foreign policy response.

The contrast between Xi Jinping's *striving for achievement* and Deng Xiaoping's *keeping a low-profile* foreign policy strategy can be understood in the light of the Sino-US relations. As it has been seen, both have had different views of the role China should have in the international system. Their foreign policy strategy discourses oppose from one another, mainly in terms of the way China should act when it comes to international affairs. The way in which China responded to the sanctions imposed back in 1989, after Tiananmen, contrasts with the way Xi Jinping has responded to the United States' latest tariffs. Xi Jinping has definitely broken up with the to-do way Deng Xiaoping established for China during his *keeping a low-profile* foreign policy system. When tensions would build up during Deng Xiaoping's era, he responded with discourses that recriminated the sanctions or the tariffs but never with actions. On the other hand, Xi Jinping has considered that China has enough power to respond with an active role proving that the country is no longer hiding nor keeping a low profile and, so, his striving for achievement strategy will be applied through a responsive foreign policy and equivalent measures even

if it implies going into a trade war with a country as powerful in the international system as the United States.

## **7. Conclusions**

Since Deng Xiaoping proposed to open China to the world, the Asian giant has become one of the main players in the international arena. The growth of China would have not been possible without the implementation of Deng Xiaoping's "keeping a low profile" foreign policy strategy. And, precisely thanks to this growth China has experimented over the last decades, Xi Jinping can carry out now a foreign policy based on "striving for achievement".

By comparing these two foreign policy strategies, this paper aimed to demonstrate how the way China perceives itself and its role in the world has influenced and shaped the international system. The "keeping a low profile" strategy allowed China to present itself as an ally, as a country that wanted to grow economically but was not interested in having a strong, active role in the international system. Nevertheless, China's current dream of "striving for achievement" has developed a foreign policy strategy that is unapologetically intending to demonstrate that China wants to become an active and strong player of the international system.

The relevance of comparing the two Chinese foreign policy strategies and studying the evolution of China's role in the international system relies on the already visible changes and implications it is having in the world. The focus has been put into the evolution of the Sino-US relations because one of the clearest examples of China's dream of "striving for achievement" is the ongoing trade war that has been taking place since Trump became the President of the United States. The Chinese trade war exemplifies that Xi Jinping believes China is now strong enough to contest and confront one of the most powerful countries in the world in an economic war. This kind of situation would have been unimaginable during the "keeping a low-profile" era.

This paper has provided a scope of China's role in the world through the analysis of two different foreign policy discourses: "keeping a low-profile" and "striving for achievement". These foreign policy strategies were proposed by two very different figures: Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping. Both can be considered to be the most relevant Chinese political figures of the last decades. Understanding the evolution China has gone through, and the changes in its foreign policy strategy can help to understand better the world in which we are currently living in. China's relevance and importance in the



international system is undeniable. This paper has gone back to the roots of the first changes in China's foreign policy strategy in order to understand why China is currently such a relevant actor in the international system. This is the reason why, to understand how and why China is acting today at an international level, it is necessary to go back to when it first started to open-up.

During the analysis carried out in this paper it has been found that China's current position of power concerns the rest of the actors in the international system. The study of the evolution of the Sino-US relations has permitted to verify these changes and how they have affected China's actions in the international sphere. China's active role will keep on having consequences in the future. It is important not to lose sight of the moves China is making and will be making as its relevance in the international system will shape the world in the future.

The last events analyzed in this paper are the ones that took place the last G-20 meeting, a summit that annually reunites the 20 most powerful countries in the world, took place in Argentina between the 30th of November and the 1st of December 2018 (Mitchell & Fei Ju, 2018). The volatility of the Sino-US relations does not guarantee a stable end to the trade war. In the future, we can expect new changes in the Sino-US relations and in Chinese foreign policy actions. For instance, Xi Jinping has been going in a European tour. Xi Jinping is searching for new bilateral accords. In his visit to Italy he signed the Silk-Road accord with the Mediterranean country, and thus making Italy a piece of the Chinese Dream (BBC, 2019). The Chinese leader has also visited France to sign a trade accord valued in billions of dollars (Associated Press, 2019). It seems like China is trying to safeguard its power and economic position by making moves in the form of bilateral and multilateral accords. Xi Jinping, aware of the volatility of China's relations with the US, is planning its next moves and strengthening its partnership with the rest of the world.

On this regard, I believe that future research activity on this issue could be focus on the strategic moves that China will be making on its foreign policy to fulfill the Chinese Dream of striving for achievement. Moreover, as the Sino-US trade war may keep on going, the alternative partnerships and policies that Xi Jinping will implement in the near future could be worth investigating. China will continue to pursue an active role in the international system. Keeping an eye on the evolution of Chinese foreign policy will be essential for future international relations studies. Xi Jinping's determination of

fulfilling the Chinese Dream through his striving for achievement foreign policy strategy must not be underestimated.

To conclude this paper, I would like to remark, once again, the relevance of Chinese foreign policy which is currently shaping the international system. Plus, the importance of understanding the evolution that Chinese foreign policy has gone through to achieve its current position of power. Only time will reveal the consequence of the Sino-US trade war and the scope of the influence that Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream and striving for achievement will have in the international system.

## 8. References

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