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China's Rise and Expansionism through the Lenses of its Leaders

The case of Taiwan

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Abstract: Geopolitics, which revolves around geography and power politics, has regained its relevance in the field of International Relations, after a period characterized by the preeminence of liberal values and economic interdependence. China's rise and territorial expansionism epitomize this reality.

Today, China tops the world for the longest land border and is determined to maintain such status, confronting anyone who gets on its way. Behind this robust façade lay four prominent Chinese leaders who, since 1979, have managed to bring China from isolationist defensiveness to international openness, achieving its long-desired dream of great-power status. It has been thanks to their discursive strategies, both at the domestic and foreign level, that China has consolidated its role in the international system, causing ripples of unease not only in Asia, but also in the rest of world and especially the US.

Among the many issues that govern its foreign policy, the issue of the China-Taiwan divide has always been especially sensitive and important for the Chinese leadership. This case constitutes the perfect scenario to illustrate how the game of Chinese geopolitics unfolds.

Keywords: Geopolitics, China, Foreign Policy, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping, Taiwan

Resumen: La geopolítica, que gira en torno a la geografía y la política del poder, ha recuperado su relevancia en el campo de las relaciones internacionales, después de un período caracterizado por la prevalencia de los valores liberales e interdependencia económica. El ascenso de China y su expansionismo territorial reflejan esta realidad.

Hoy día, China cuenta con la frontera terrestre más larga y está decidida a mantener esa condición, enfrentándose a cualquiera que se ponga en su camino. Detrás de esta fachada robusta yacen cuatro destacados líderes que, desde 1979, han logrado llevar a China de una actitud de aislacionismo defensivo hacia una de apertura internacional, logrando su ansiado sueño de adquirir el estatus de gran potencia. Gracias a las estrategias discursivas de sus líderes, tanto en el ámbito nacional como en el extranjero, China ha consolidado su papel en el sistema internacional, causando inquietudes no solo en Asia, sino también en el resto de países y especialmente en los Estados Unidos.

Entre los muchos asuntos que gobiernan su política exterior, la cuestión de la división entre China y Taiwán siempre ha sido especialmente sensible e importante para el liderazgo chino. Este caso es el escenario perfecto para ilustrar cómo se desarrolla el juego de la geopolítica china.

Palabras clave: Geopolítica, China, Política Exterior, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping, Taiwán

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence
CPC	Communist Party of China
CSSTA	Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement
DDP	Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan
ECFA	Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement
KMT	Kuomintang of China
NUSCR	National Committee on US-China Relations
OBOR	One Belt One Road initiative
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
UN	United Nations
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization

LATIN ABBREVIATIONS

ibid *Ibidem* (“in the same place”)

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*“War is
A grave affair of the state;
It is a place
Of life and death,
A road
To survival and extinction,
A matter
To be pondered carefully”*

Sun Tzu
The Art of War

INTRODUCTION

In colonial times, world powers would craft aggressive foreign policies based on territorial expansionism as a sign of power and dominance. Today, it seems this form of policy making is regaining its importance and priority in international affairs – such is the case of China, Russia or the Arctic. In this context of renewed geopolitical importance, this project seeks to illustrate the evolution of modern Chinese Foreign Policy through the mindset of some of its leaders.

The main sources of inspiration of this project have been Henry Kissinger's works, as well as several personal experiences in China. Kissinger's work constitutes an extremely valuable tool to obtain a detailed, reliable and practical assessment of China's evolution, both from an internal and an external perspective. Similarly, my trips to China have allowed me to better understand the country's reality and have sparked my curiosity about its political processes and their outward projection.

For these reasons, this project attempts to provide an answer to one main research question: "how have the geopolitics of China evolved since the late 1970s and the presidency of Deng Xiaoping?". In answering this question, the project also examines the means and goals of Chinese Foreign Policy and digs into the evolution of the political mindset of Chinese leaders, analyzing the discursive strategies that they utilized to sustain an expansionist foreign policy throughout the years.

This project is divided into two major parts, which proceed as follows. Part I provides a series of theoretical and methodological considerations utilized for the elaboration of the project. It is thus the framework which needs to be taken into consideration to understand the following part. Part II deals with the empirical analysis, based on real facts and experiences. First, it contextualizes the object of the project into two major themes: the return of geopolitics and China's rise. It then carries out a historical survey from the year 1979 onwards, focusing on four prominent Chinese leaders. The analysis is divided according to the ruling political elite of the country during a certain period of time – notably, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and the actual Xi Jinping. In order to support the analysis, this project also looks into a relevant, ongoing territorial conflict: the China-Taiwan divide, which in 1945 divided the territory into the Popular Republic of China and the Republic of China.

PART I: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Justification of the project

This project will provide the reader with a critical insight into modern Chinese history of Foreign Policy Making, with a special focus on geopolitics. In doing so, it will illustrate how the ideas and beliefs held by Chinese civilization, and put across by its political leaders, are turned into policy decisions. This project will also help the reader understand why certain decisions were made in the past and might shed some light into how the state will deal with certain issues in the future.

The topic chosen is relevant for various reasons. From an academic perspective, the political science domain requires a theoretical and case-based analysis of the most recent developments in Chinese Foreign Policy, especially from a geopolitical point of view. From a practical perspective, such analysis will illustrate how China is on the brink becoming the new world hegemon and might shed light on how its future as a superpower will look like.

2. Research questions

Main research question: how have the geopolitics of China evolved since the 1970s and the presidency of Deng Xiaoping?

Sub-questions: what are the means and goals of Chinese Foreign Policy?; what has been the evolution of the political mindset of the Chinese leaders?; what discursive strategies were utilized in order to further consolidate such mindset?

3. Objectives

The main objective of this project is to portray the evolution of modern Chinese Foreign Policy in a context of renewed geopolitical importance and China's rise. A secondary objective will be to illustrate such evolution as applied to the case of Taiwan.

In order to further this goal, I will briefly explain which factors have contributed to China's rise in the 21st century. This will place us in an appropriate position to understand the beliefs and ideas fostered by several prominent Chinese leaders in the process of Foreign Policy Making, from Deng Xiaoping at the end of the 1970s, until Xi Jinping today. Lastly, I will analyze how their discourse was effectively put into practice in a case

which lies at the heart of recent Chinese Foreign Policy: the China-Taiwan divide. In this sense, this case study will serve as evidence of the initial theoretical assumptions.

The time scope of the project will be placed between the end of the 1970s up until the present day. Spatially, it will be mainly based on the country of China and the regions where it exerts or seeks to exert influence. More specifically, it will pay special attention to the region of Taiwan.

4. Current status

A number of authors have written books on the Chinese giant. Some of the most important and recent works on Chinese Foreign Policy to date, and which are related to the object of this project, are listed as follows.

The first one is entitled “The Columbia Guide to Modern Chinese History”, written by R. Keith Schoppa, (2000). Schoppa’s book provides a comprehensive overview of the main features of modern Chinese history, explaining how several crucial events shaped China as we know it today. The author focuses on five core aspects of Chinese history: domestic politics, society, the economy, the world of culture and thought, and relations with the outside world. It also devotes some of its articles to relevant key figures, events, and terms, making his work a valuable source for researchers concerned with almost any aspect of Chinese history over the last 220 years.

The formation of the Chinese civilization is conceived by the author as the result of the largest revolution in world history, derived from the efforts of the Chinese people to transform a traditional society into a modern nation-state. Seeing these significant changes, the United States and the rest of the world now ask themselves whether the new China will be “a friend or a foe, a challenger or a collaborator” (Schoppa, 2000). However, the effort to understand modern China can come with many difficulties as well. The country’s linguistic and cultural diversity leads the author to conclude that there exist many different Chinas, not only those coming from the geographical division between the North and South.

Another valuable source is “Out of Mao's Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China”, written by Philip P. Pan (2008). In this book, the author creatively assorts nine human stories with political meaning in order to give account for Chinese politics and society in the post-Deng era. One example is the story of an uncommon citizen who voluntarily undertakes the preservation of the last graveyard of the Cultural Revolution. Another is the story of a labor leader who encourages a whole city to rise against managers

who steal from state enterprises. Another story deals with a blind human rights lawyer under house arrest and his audacious escape to the U.S. embassy in Beijing, etc. (Ramsey 2008). However, not all characters are heroes. Pan also narrates the story of a “billionaire real estate developer” who succeeded in her business thanks to her political connections with the Chinese bureaucracy (Pei, 2012). Overall, the author’s firsthand interviews and reporting make the book a valuable source of experience for the reader.

Through these stories, Pan shows how wide and deep the divide between the CPC and the Chinese people is; he also illustrates how today’s China is radically different from Mao’s. Overall, political conditions have hugely improved since then; nevertheless, he notes the emergence of a new capitalism linked to “a one-party system ungoverned by laws that defend life, liberty and property” (Ramsey, 2008).

Also relevant to this topic is Richard McGregor’s “The Party” (2010). His work represents a revealing investigation into China’s Communist Party and highlights the vital role it played during the country’s political and economic growth in the past three decades. Despite its global impact, the party behaves as a deeply secretive political machine, disrespectful of the law and not liable to anyone besides its own tribunals.

McGregor’s book is innovative in that it delves into the internal mechanisms of the CPC and seeks to uncover how it has managed to leave its mark on both regional and global issues, without generating any organised opposition at home (Brown, 2010). He observes a series of practices that have perpetuated the CPC’s hold on power since 1949. These are, among others, its command on every aspect of the government and its control over the media, the courts and the military. Because of this, the party has become the only geopolitical rival of the United States and one of the main challengers of the West.

We can also refer to one of Yu Hua’s most important works, entitled “China in Ten Words” (2011). Throughout this book, the author takes on ten different words and concepts and crafts a portrait of the social complexities and contrasts of modern China under a populist tone (Mishan, 2011). Each chapter is devoted to one particular word, where its origins, devaluation or appreciation in meaning are discussed. The words chosen by Yu Hua are “People”, “Leader”, “Reading”, “Writing”, “Lu Xun”, “Revolution”, “Disparity”, “Grassroots”, “Coypicat” and “Bamboozle”.

The author is aware that the meaning of some words, such as “people” or “leader”, has varied dramatically over the years, especially in contrast to Maoist thought (Nalbach, 2011). Through the word “Disparity”, Yu Hua makes reference to the increasing gaps that set apart the citizens of the country. The times of “revolution” in the 1970s and the 2000s

gave way for men from the “grassroots” or disadvantaged classes, as he describes it, to rise and stand up against the system. The word “copycat” refers to the growing practices of piracy and imitation, which are perceived by the author as a new revolutionary “action by the weak against the strong” (*ibid*). And lastly, the practice of “bamboozle” represents the games of trickery and fraud played by capitalists, which has now become entrenched in the Chinese way of life.

On another note, the former United States Secretary of State and National Security Advisor during Nixon’s and Ford’s administrations, Henry Kissinger, has also produced an indispensable piece of work on Chinese Foreign Policy. In his book “On China” (2011), the author illustrates how the history of China, both ancient and more recent, “has shaped [the country’s] foreign policy and attitudes toward the West” (Kakutani, 2011). In doing so, he delves into the patterns and cycles that characterize Chinese history – from isolationist defensiveness to international openness – as well as the philosophical differences that distinguish it from the United States. Throughout his book, Kissinger stresses the idea that both China and the United States are bound by a sort of “manifest destiny”; however, whilst American exceptionalism is missionary, China’s is cultural (*ibid*). In other words, whilst Americans perceive a moral obligation to spread their values around the world, China does not feel a need to convince anyone else than itself about the relevance of its institutions. Instead, it tends to categorize all other states “as various levels of tributaries based on their approximation to Chinese cultural and political forms” (Kissinger, 2011; 213).

The book also places special emphasis on the central role that Kissinger played during Nixon’s opening to China. Indeed, because the author personally met several generations of Chinese leaders, he is able to paint an accurate portrait of China based on his real experiences – just as Pan (2008) does in his book.

Along the same lines, “The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy”, by Edward N. Luttwak (2012), has been classified by Foreign Affairs as one of the best books on the rise of China. According to Luttwak, the universal “logic of strategy” will allow a country to attain either military strength or economic prosperity. However, China is going after both goals simultaneously. This ambitious behaviour, furthered by an aggressive foreign policy, seems to be urging China’s neighbours into creating a “camp of strategic containment”, just as was the case for Germany during the years preceding World War I (Anderson, 2012).

In order to counter these threats, Luttwak advises, Chinese leaders should stop relying on the dictates of ancient strategic texts, such as Sun Tzu’s “Art of War”. The tactics they prescribe

might have been useful to handle diplomatic and military crises inside China itself, but applied outwards, they are only likely to turn the country's neighbours into rivals. That is why, to avoid creating even more enmities, Chinese leaders ought to foster sustainable economic growth while restraining their military and diplomatic ambitions.

Another original piece of work was written by Harvard University professor Ezra F. Vogel under the title of "Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of Modern China" (2013). According to Huchet (2014), there already are plenty of biographies on Deng written in English. He cites several authors such as Harrison E. Salisbury (1992), Ruan Ming (1992), Richard Evans (1994), Benjamin Yang (1998), and Michael Marti (2002). However, Huchet believes Vogel's biography is "to date, the most accomplished and comprehensive" (nearly 900 pages).

In his work, Vogel explores the controversies that arose in the life and legacy of China's boldest strategist, Deng Xiaoping. The book is indeed a biography, where the author narrates Deng's youth and his tumultuous rise to power, full of obstacles, ambiguous loyalties and exile. Deng is portrayed by the author as the leader "who most influenced China's modern trajectory". He was responsible for China's radical transformation since the late 1970s, which involved putting an end to Mao's personality cult and alleviating the economic and social policies that had prevented China from thriving. Notably, Deng also opened trade relations with the West, but his authoritarian roots remained in place, which was seen after the events at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Overall, Vogel seeks to show that, where the rest of generations of modernizing leaders struggled, Deng succeeded (Huchet, 2014).

Lastly, a recent book written by Elizabeth C. Economy named "The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State" (2018), synthesizes the most important aspects of the Xi era, focusing on China's domestic and international affairs. The book revolves around Xi Jinping's new political and economic reforms, which can be classified into internal and external policies. Inside its borders, Xi has sought to centralize power under his leadership, to expand the CPC's role in every aspect of Chinese society, and to more closely supervise the exchange of capital and ideas between China and other states. Beyond its borders, Beijing has redefined itself as a new superpower, fighting to recover its ancient glory and gearing the international system towards its own geostrategic objectives. In doing so, Xi Jinping is inverting the trend toward political and economic openness and the low-profile foreign policy set in motion by Deng Xiaoping's "Second Revolution", which had taken place thirty years before.

Aside from her all-encompassing exploration, the author also evaluates the implications of these new policies for the rest of the world and issues several recommendations for how the United States and others should cope with this vast nation in the upcoming years. For these reasons, Economy's work is essential to understand the most recent – and present – facet of China and may help develop new paths of cooperation between the country and the rest of the world.

The aforementioned works make up the underpinnings of modern China, and so the object of this project will have to be analyzed in light of these considerations. Most of them (Pan 2008, Kissinger 2012, Vogel 2013) focus on the events taking place in the modern era – from the 1970s onwards – which coincides exactly with the time frame of this project. They also provide an extremely valuable tool to contextualize China as we know it today and to understand its position toward the rest of the world. Some of them, notably Luttwak's (2012) and Economy's (2018) work, address the topic of China's rise as a superpower and its implications for a new world order. This fact is of crucial importance to grasp the whole meaning of the project.

Furthermore, all authors seem to agree on the idea that Chinese civilization has a unique character, which can only be understood by looking back at its historical roots and philosophical postulates. The role played by Chinese ancient beliefs in constructing China's identity is highlighted by authors such as Yu Hua (2011) and Kissinger (2012). Similarly, the personal experiences undergone by some individuals, as in Pan (2008), and the personal talks with some of the leaders themselves, as in Kissinger (2012), provide empirical evidence of the authors' arguments and give more credibility to their stories.

Although put together, these books may contain all the information necessary to grasp China's geopolitical aspirations, none of them seems to include the whole trajectory from the 1970s up until the present day (2019). They thoroughly describe the principles of Chinese Foreign Policy, but often applied to a specific topic or a specific leader. This project will do its best to compile all the relevant information and create a chronogram identifying all relevant leaders, from Deng Xiaoping until today's Xi Jinping. The case studies will serve to see the application of their policies on the ground.

5. Theoretical framework

This section will examine the four main approaches to the study of international relations and will select those which best serve to interpret the object of this project. These approaches are Structural Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, Constructivism and Critical Theory.

Structural Realism. The theory of Structural Realism was first outlined by Kenneth Waltz (1979) in his work entitled “Theory of International Politics”. In line with Realist Theory, Structural Realism holds that the nature of the international system is anarchic. It sees power as the most important aspect in international politics and places special emphasis on the balance of capabilities among different countries (Lobell, 2010). The balance of capabilities will therefore influence the structure of a system in which states “seek their own preservation” (Waltz, 1979).

There exist two competing schools of thought of structural realism: offensive and defensive realism. Each one relies on different assumptions and prescribes different policies. Lobell (2010) identifies three main differences between the two. The first one is their conception of the anarchic international system and whether it incites states to maximize either their power, for offensive realists, or their security, for defensive realists. The second one is whether conquest and expansion constitute the cause of pathological state behaviour – such as “overexpansion, self-encirclement, and overextension”. The last one is whether states adopt a revisionist approach in their intentions, as would an offensive realist, or whether they are motivated by a security-seeking behaviour, as would be a defensive realist.

Offensive realism represents the lens through which the Chinese State sees the world. It also serves to understand China’s rise in the 21st century, a phenomenon which assumes the world is anarchic, with states balancing one another. That is why at a first glance, it may seem China meets the theoretical postulates of offensive realism; however, this approach does not accurately match the main purpose of the project. Realist theories place States at the center stage and adopt a materialist approach – that is, they analyze the material resources of a State and how they can be used against other States. This project will not focus on the State of China as much as it will on the ideas, beliefs and perceptions that shaped its evolution and identity. Furthermore, while Realism would place its emphasis on the foreign policy of the Chinese state, our emphasis will rather be on the domestic sources which lie behind that foreign policy. That is why the present analysis will fall best within the scope of a different theory, as we will see below.

Institutional Liberalism. The institutional liberal approach was coined by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in their book “Power and Interdependence”. This theory represents a challenge to realist ideas. The authors conceive the world as an arena in which “actors other than States participate directly in world politics” (Betts, 2017). In this scenario, there is a multitude of formal and informal channels connecting societies, there

is no clear hierarchy of issues and military force is an ineffective instrument of policy. These conditions amount to a situation of “complex interdependence”, in which economic interdependence and cooperation are salient aspects not accounted for by realist theory. Institutional liberalism also seeks to shift international relations away from zero-sum issues towards win-win ones (Mead, 2014). Keohane (2012) asserts that institutions and rules can enable mutually beneficial cooperation within and among States. He also holds that the social purpose of Institutional Liberalism is to create a more “peaceful, prosperous and free world” by improving human security, human welfare and human liberty. This social purpose ultimately serves to justify the use of power in constructing institutions. Lastly, Keohane and Nye accept several realist assumptions, for instance, the view that institutions depend on structures of power and interests; however, they try to limit their scope.

Institutional liberalism is the typical approach adopted by the United States and Europe when acting within the international system. According to Mead (2014), both of them prefer to focus on “matters of world order and global governance” – such as trade liberalization, nuclear nonproliferation, human rights, the rule of law, climate change... - rather than on geopolitical questions of territory and military power. Nevertheless, applied to the object of this project, institutional liberalism does not provide an accurate frame of analysis. Although it will place special emphasis on individuals as non-State actors, it will not deal with issues concerning economic interdependence or international institutions. Besides, institutional liberal theory has not been able to challenge the main neorealist assumptions, as it is still mostly based on the idea on an anarchical structure in which states pursue similar interests in a rational way. These assumptions do not allow for a study of the domestic sources – such as ideas or moral principles – behind the foreign policy of a country. Neither do they allow for an analysis of the genesis and evolution of interests. Much on the contrary, this project will show that interests are not fixed forever, as a realist or liberalist would say, but that they can change and be redefined over time.

Constructivism. Although the theory of Constructivism was initially outlined by Nicholas Onuf, Alexander Wendt is the best-known advocate of social constructivism. In his article "Anarchy is What States Make of It: the Social Construction of Power Politics" (1992), Wendt criticizes neorealists' and neoliberal institutionalists' excessive commitment to materialism. Instead, he focuses much more on the social components of civilizations. In “Collective Identity Formation and the International State” (1994; 385), Wendt declares that

Constructivism is a structural theory of the international system that makes the following core claims: (1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the states system are intersubjective rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are in important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature [as neorealists maintain] or domestic politics [as neoliberals favour].

Constructivism sees the world as a project under construction, and thus considers that international relations are socially constructed through the interaction of different agents. Constructivists like Wendt also stress the importance of ideas, history and beliefs, as well as their role in constructing social life. In this sense, ideas are a basic tool to understand the way in which international relations evolve. Constructivism also stresses the importance of perceptions. It holds that a State's perceptions will condition its foreign policy decisions. In other words, States will behave in a different way when dealing with "allies" than when dealing with "enemies", because they perceive them in different terms. Conversely, the perception that others have about a certain State will determine their behaviour towards it. Lastly, constructivism also condemns the limits of rationalism. It asserts that not every behaviour in international relations can be accounted for by means of a rationalist perception (Behraves, 2011).

The constructivist approach in its interpretative variant is the most accurate framework to analyze the discursive strategies of Chinese political leaders. As we will see throughout this project, the diversity of ideas and perceptions cultivated by each individual leader, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping, have been translated into different strategies to approach social reality – although essentially, they have all followed a similar trend since Deng's policy of "Reform and Opening Up". In this sense, ideas are of crucial importance, as they constitute the link between the decision-makers – the leaders – and the policy decisions carried out on their behalf. Conversely, the impact of such policies will engender new ideas and perceptions coming from other decision-makers, who will also put them into practice, creating a feedback loop. Coincident views create friendships; dissident views foster enmities. This project will demonstrate how these dynamics have ultimately shaped China's relations with the outer world and have served to label others as friends or foes.

The constructivist approach takes into account the importance of history, ideas and beliefs of the Chinese civilization when designing a foreign policy that is adjusted to the country's needs and goals. The peculiar nature of Chinese values, remarkably different from those held by any other State, has given birth to a society with unique characteristics

and a unique conception of itself. For that matter, Constructivism will prove that China's perceptions – of both itself and the outer world – have derived into an aggressive foreign policy based on geographic expansion and power politics.

Critical Theory. Critical theory was first mentioned by Robert Cox in his influential article 'Social Forces, States and World Orders'. In it, Cox identified two kinds of theories with two different purposes. The first one, which he called 'problem-solving theory', uses a given particular perspective and analyzes problems arising within it. The second one, named 'critical theory', questions the theorizing process, making it possible to come up with a different perspective to explain the world. Critical theory thus 'stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came about' (Cox, 1981; 128-130). It questions the established social and power relations and it favours a different social and political order based on a normative conception. In other words, it seeks to transform the world on the premises of liberation and emancipation. Instead of using the term "International Relations", Cox focuses on that of "World Order", where the interaction between material conditions, ideas and institutions are essential to its development.

The postulates of Critical Theory do not provide an accurate lens to analyze the object of this project. While Critical theory focuses its efforts on identifying the structural inequalities of the international system and coming up with the mechanisms to transform it, it is evident that an analysis of the Chinese geopolitical mindset does not further these aims. This project does not seek to question the way China perceives the world nor find any alternative perspectives to it; instead, it will just provide an analysis of the existing perceptions and their implementation.

In sum, for the reasons stated above, the constructivist approach will best serve to interpret the object of this project.

6. Methodology

This section seeks to determine how to organize, classify and categorize all the information relevant for this project.

The methodology utilized for these purposes will be a qualitative one based on several case studies. As per Ander-Egg (2000; 156), qualitative data are those that derive from "the actors' own interpretations, their own definition of the circumstances, their reference frameworks...". These data focus on the whole picture, rather than on specific or reduced variables. Obtaining qualitative data thus consists in grasping social reality in its entirety,

in the way it is understood by the different social actors. Examples of qualitative data can be found in printed materials, such as “school textbooks, novels, comics, magazines of all kinds, newspapers, televised programs, speeches [...], etc.” (*ibid*; 157). Together with these, the observation of a great variety of human conducts, such as those reflected in neighbourhood or student associations, even public auctions, also serve as an important source of qualitative data.

By nature, a qualitative approach does not rely neither on extensive analyses nor on statistical samples. There are, however, reduced samples of individuals, facts or selected events, studied in depth, which seek to be representative of the whole (*ibid*).

Ander-Egg describes the different steps that are to be taken when dealing with qualitative data. First is the organization of the “file”. Such file contains all sorts of information derived from ideas, facts, registered data or events. The content of the file is then classified and categorized relying on coherent, consistent and logic criteria, all with a view to systematize the available information. This way, it becomes necessary to identify the main categories and subcategories related to the object of the project, establishing different headings and subheadings (*ibid*; 158-159).

The analysis of social research is conducted differently when dealing with quantitative or qualitative data. Qualitative research, in the present project, relies on non-standardized procedures and, unlike in quantitative research, fieldwork is not separated from analysis. This type of research, because of its holistic nature, aims to integrate the different parts into a whole and, by doing so, it starts giving shape to the answers of the main research questions. This is the main purpose of analysis.

In terms of techniques of analysis, this project will use document analysis. Through this form of qualitative research, documents will be interpreted to gain understanding on the main topic and develop empirical knowledge on it. The documents that will be used for this analysis will take a variety of forms, including government documents; speeches of political leaders; background papers; books and brochures; diaries and journals; letters and memoranda; newspapers; maps... These will be obtained from university libraries and other online resources, such as political science databases. The analytic procedure will seek to find, select and synthesize the relevant data contained in them (Bowen, 2009; 28).

The last part of this project will include a specific case study. Case study research, according to Zainal (2007; 1), “enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context”. It is often considered the most appropriate research method when carrying out holistic, in-depth investigations, as is the case for this project. This is because

case studies allow the researcher to go beyond the mere statistical or quantitative results and comprehend the motivations behind the actors' behaviour. A case study method usually identifies a specific geographical area or a limited number of individuals and uses them as the object of study.

As part of this approach, this project will study the case of the China-Taiwan divide. This case is mainly concerned with the island of Taiwan, also known as the Republic of China. After the victory of Mao's Communist Party in the Civil War of 1949, the defeated regime of the Republic of China fled the Mainland and established itself on the island. Since then, there have been two different regimes – the People's Republic of China on the one hand, and the Republic of China (ROC) on the other – both regimes claiming to be the legitimate government of the Chinese state. The island of Taiwan has always been claimed by the Popular Republic of China as part of the country, but lately there have been even more assertive declarations on the part of Xi Jinping calling for a need to “reunify the country” under a common rule. Throughout this case study, we will highlight a series of strategies developed by China to undermine Taiwan's independence at the international level. Similarly, we will evaluate whether China's claims are mere wishful thinking or whether there is an actual risk of attack for Taiwan (Gries & Wang, 2019).

This case was chosen for two reasons. First, because it concerns a geographical area which has long been under dispute and therefore, it is a perfect scenario to illustrate how the game of geopolitics unfolds. And second, because it has been present in China's foreign policy agenda long before the 1970s and therefore, it is covered by the time scope of the project. That is why the analysis will follow an evolutionary approach: it will assess the way each one of the Chinese leaders treated the issue and whether this treatment was coherent with their political discourse.

PART II: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

1. The Return of Geopolitics and China's Rise

1.1. The Return of Geopolitics: Meaning and Implications

The old power strategies are regaining their relevance in the field of International Relations of the 21st century, as can be seen from Russia's annexation of Crimea, the political alliances established by Iran in the Middle East, or China's new security policy, among others. What these powers have in common is "their agreement that the status quo must be revised", as expressed by Mead (2014). Indeed, we are witnessing the political renaissance of a perspective that arose at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, a historical moment dominated by colonialist, imperialist and racist conceptions (Borón, 2014).

This was a time when authors like Mackinder, Mahan or Spykman, also known as the "fathers of Geopolitics", became remarkably important. Especially influential among them was Mackinder who, in 1904, at the time of the British imperial expansion, published an article entitled "The Geographical Pivot of History". In it, he analyzed the geographic relationships of States in a global system and designed a "pivot area" with the potential to create an empire of global reach. Particularly influenced by Mackinder was Karl Ernst Haushofer, a German geographer and general, who interpreted the relation between space and politics from a strongly deterministic perspective, understanding that the international struggle between states to ensure their own "vital space" – *Lebensraum* – was inevitable.

That was how a long geopolitical tradition was forged out of the reflections of these authors, who endeavored to portray a historical moment where international relations were mainly characterized by power struggles.

Nevertheless, since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western states abandoned territorial and military geopolitical issues and focused on issues of global governance – such as trade liberalization, human rights or climate change –, in the belief that the world had reached the "end of history", as conceived by Fukuyama (1989). At that point in time, it seemed that international relations would shift away from zero-sum issues and progress toward win-win ones (Mead, 2014). In other words, it seemed the main issues of world politics would never concern borders, spheres of

influence or military bases anymore, and that new forms of international cooperation would take center stage.

However, Mead recognizes that Western states should never have assumed that the geopolitical game would disappear once and for all. And if they did so, it was because they misunderstood the true meaning of the fall of the Soviet Union. This might have meant the triumph of liberal and capitalist democracy over communism, but certainly not “the obsolescence of hard power”. The author goes on to point out that States such as China, Iran and Russia – which he terms as “revisionist States” –, who were never satisfied with the geopolitical settlement established after the Cold War, are now looking for ways to reverse it through strategies that upset Western countries. In fact, “their efforts have already shaken the balance of power and changed the dynamics of international politics” (*ibid*).

If today we say the importance of geography and geopolitics has reappeared, it is because these scientific fields account for the current complexities better than others, such as geoeconomics or liberalist theories. Both geography and geopolitics have been able to provide a critical insight into capitalism in its current stage, a stage characterized by the global reach of this mode of production and the "savage practices of territorial dispossession" suffered by the most vulnerable populations during the last decades. (Borón, 2014).

Hence, Western states will have to put an end to their aspirations towards a continental order governed by the rule of law. The world has proved to be much more complex and it ultimately revolves around power.

1.2. How and Why States Rise

Possibly due to the nature of the international system and the zero-sum dynamics of geopolitics, the rise of an emerging state necessarily implies the decline of an established great power. Such was the opinion held by Layne (1993; 8). Along the same lines, Allison (2017) wrote an influential book where he referred to this as the “Thucydides’s trap”. In it, he also refers to a Harvard study that showed that, in sixteen cases in history where a rising and an established power interacted, twelve ended up in war. In our case, we can argue that the rise of China to great power status has the potential to provoke the fall of the United States, shifting the structure of the international system. What we cannot ascertain yet is whether this transition will entail a war between the two or whether it will be a peaceful process.

Acknowledging the pattern of great power emergence throughout recent international history, Layne (1993; 9) attempted to provide an explanation of how and why states become great powers. In the author's words, "great power emergence is a structurally driven phenomenon". More specifically, he points to the interaction of two factors: differential growth rates and anarchy in the international system.

First, differential growth rates refer to the power of states in relative terms. In this sense, the economic, technological and military power of states grows at differential, and not parallel rates. This implies that, when a state gains power, other states will comparatively have less of it than the initial state – therefore, they "lose" power in relative terms. Differential growth rates thus translate into gains of relative power, resulting in a series of effects: when states see their power increased, they will attempt to advance their standing in the international system. This will impel them to increase their capabilities and control over their external environment, thus enhancing their own security. Consequently, they will also end up developing more international interests and becoming engaged in more international commitments (*ibid*; 10-11). Therefore, and as Robert Gilpin noted, differential growth rates will ultimately lead to a redistribution of power in the system.

Second, in an anarchic international system fraught with real or apparent threats, states are mainly concerned with their own survival. To counter these threats, they will strive to attain great power status and, in doing so, they will enter into competition with other states. Layne discusses that there are two important consequences of anarchy, which are balancing and sameness. Through balancing, states will attempt to "correct a skewed distribution of relative power in the international system" (*ibid*; 12); through sameness, states will try to imitate their rivals' successful characteristics in order to become successful too (Waltz, 1979). In this sense, states may develop different strategies and approaches, but ultimately these must allow them to attain the same level of survival and security as other states, as well as the same successful position in the realm of international politics (Layne, 1993; 16). Because of this, the same author points out that "great powers are similar because they are not, and cannot be, functionally differentiated".

The author applies his theory to the process followed by the US in its rise to great power status. To illustrate the US' differential growth rate, Layne explains that the country first started gaining relative power in the international economic domain, and then expanded its influence into the international political one. Then, as its economic and political interests deepened, so did its capabilities to defend them. This was in part

because the US managed to imitate Great Britain's naval, colonial and trade policies. This stands as proof of the sameness effect.

Some like Kennedy (1987) say there was a virtual inevitability to the whole process when he stated that "the attainment of world power status was the key to America's security". But what is crucial about Layne's (1993) analysis is that he portrayed US hegemony in a system of unipolarity – one which had been formerly ruled by the British, and by the Germans afterwards. In this system, some "emerging great powers" such as Ukraine, Korea or China were about to challenge the established hegemon. Taking Layne's arguments one step further, we are now in a position to suggest that China is actually fulfilling the steps to become the next world hegemon.

1.3. China's Rise as a New Superpower

According to Kissinger (2015; 213), China has taken one of the most complex evolutionary journeys, "from ancient civilization through classical empire, to Communist revolution, to modern great-power status".

China's rise in the 21st century must be understood in light of its historical evolution, which takes us back to the year 221 B.C., when its integral parts unified as a single political entity. From that time onwards, China started developing a sense of uniqueness, considering itself to be the "sole sovereign government of the world", and treating every other known society "as being in some kind of tributary relationship with it" (*ibid*; 213-214). These were the main assumptions of the system of "All Under Heaven", where China constituted the central, civilized part – hence its traditional denomination as "the Middle Kingdom". Under this system, China was supposed to be the inspiration of the rest of humanity. However, China did not expand "by conquest, but by osmosis" (*ibid*; 216). That is to say, it did not seek to export its political system through aggressive means; instead the others would willingly assimilate into the Chinese ways – for example, the Mongols, long-time enemies of China, embraced core elements of Chinese culture for administrative purposes.

For the reasons stated above, Kissinger acknowledges that the Chinese conception of world order and the mechanisms to exert control over it differed remarkably from the European experience, which was based on a multiplicity of equal states (*ibid*).

Having said that, the rise of China in the 21st century is not a new phenomenon, but a reproduction of historical patterns. The difference is that now, China has come back "as both the inheritor of an ancient civilization and as a contemporary great power of the

Westphalian model” (*ibid*; 220). Its return reinstates the postulates of the system of “All Under Heaven” with an important component of technocratic modernization. Thus, the national quest now revolves around how to create an effective synthesis between the two.

Even in the year 1993, a study by Nicholas D. Kristof already recognized that China was becoming more aggressive over time, and that it would continue to do so if nobody prevented it. In Paul Beaver’s words, “China [was] moving from a regional power to a regional superpower”. He also admitted that, although this trend did not have the strength to completely upturn the balance of power, it had already caused a lot of ripples in the region.

Indeed, back at the time when Kristof wrote, China had already envisaged the possibility of recovering its former spheres of influence. This was illustrated in a map drafted in 1954 (see Annex I). This map, which was then included in a book entitled “Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China” by John W. Garver, illustrated China’s main ambitions, including Nepal, half of Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Taiwan, among many others. Kristof (1993) understood that the map itself did not necessarily imply that China would actively try to “recapture” those territories, but that it harbored towards them a “sense of territorial loss”.

What is most striking about Kristof’s study is that he was able to foresee the emergence of a conflict in the South China Sea – concerning the Spratly Islands –, and another in the East China Sea – concerning the Diaoyu Islands¹ and Japan. He also made reference to the long-standing border disputes with some of its neighbouring countries; notably, India and the Soviet Union. As we will see throughout the following sections, these issues – except for the one involving the Soviet Union – still constitute some of China’s most important concerns in the field of foreign policy.

Applying Layne’s (1993) model, China’s rise to superpower status can be explained by the interaction between its differential growth rates on the one hand, and the anarchy of the international system on the other.

First, China’s differential growth rate could be initially assessed from the wealth of its economy, where its comparative advantage resided. Many of China’s neighbours were dependent on the goods it produced, which made the country very influential in economic terms (Kissinger, 2015; 220). In fact, there has not been a rise in economic terms as rapid as China’s – from 2,3% of the world GDP in the 1980s up to 18% in 2017 (Allison, 2017).

¹ These islands are known in Japan as the Senkakus.

But as China grew economically stronger, it aroused concern and distrust coming from other countries in the region, who conceived these developments as a possible threat to their independence (Kristof, 1993). In accordance with Layne's (1993) theory, the growth of the national economy allowed for an increase in military spending. China started making sweeping improvements in its armed forces – such as the acquisition of new military ships, fighter planes, radar systems, etc. –, once more, leaving many Asian countries feeling threatened and unnerved (Kristof, 1993). These developments remarkably increased the country's security, as well as its desire to exercise control over its external environment. In fact, as Kristof (1993) explained, China already had nuclear weapons pointed at some of its neighbours, placed under the pretext of consolidating its power and security beyond its shores. In sum, this proves how China's pursuit of a central role in regional and world affairs is a process which started by virtue of its financial and economic capabilities.

Second, the effects of the anarchic international system can be appreciated in China's relation with some of its counterparts, especially with the US. Due to the emergence of new security challenges in the system, China was impelled to engage in debates with other countries about how to define both its domestic purposes and the role it had to play in the world. According to Kissinger (2011; 487), this signified the symbolic beginning of a new relationship between China and the US. Such relationship was made possible because both sides perceived they were “too large to be dominated, too special to be transformed, and too necessary to each other to be able to afford isolation”. Applied to Layne's (1993) analysis, this process reflects the states' tendency to balance because, through their debates, they seek to correct any distribution of power that would place the other in a more advantageous position.

Lastly, China's tendency to imitate other countries' practices and strategies stands as proof of the sameness effect. Some of the most relevant examples are the establishment of the system of industries, which it adopted from the US, or the development of nuclear weapons, some of which it acquired from Russia and other countries (Kristof, 1993). The rapprochement of perspectives with the US on some issues, such as Taiwan in 2003, or the condemnation of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, is also part of this effect. However, one of its most important manifestations can be found in Chinese modern geopolitics. As a matter of fact, Chinese geographical expansionism today resembles the strategies employed by some of the great empires of the past. Just like the US used Great Britain's as its model to create naval, colonial and trade policies, China might be relying on

previous imperialist strategies in order to advance its quest for global hegemony. Some prominent examples which reflect this reality today are the power struggles over the South China Sea or the recent, \$1 trillion “One Belt, One Road” initiative (OBOR), a “state-backed campaign for global dominance” (Kuo & Kommenda, 2018) via a dense rail, sea, and road network.

Certainly, geopolitics constitutes one of the main strategies – at least, the most visible one – underpinning China’s rise to power. But this will obviously not come free of risks, as “China has affirmed explicitly [...] the option of military force in the pursuit of core national interests” (Kissinger, 2015; 178). This has led some authors like Allison (2017) to contemplate the possibility of war in East Asia, or even an open confrontation between Washington and Beijing – despite their apparent partnership. Such wars are not inevitable; however, avoiding them will demand a great effort and an extremely careful management of China’s relationship with its neighbours and with the US. Kissinger understands that the key question now is whether the new Chinese superpower will strive to integrate into the current order or, on the contrary, seek to change it in its own interest (2015; 226).

As a final note on this section, we should bear one aspect in mind. Unlike Western leaders, China’s leaders apply history. In a round table discussion held at Harvard Kennedy School in 2017, Niall Ferguson admitted that, to his knowledge, there was no more historically-minded leadership elite in the world than the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the CPC. And that may be why the US and China will not end up in the “Thucydides’ Trap” that Allison (2017) had suggested. China’s leaders know that they should positively avoid and do not need war – or cold war – in order to outpace the United States. They watched as the Obama Administration pretty much failed to execute a Pivot to Asia. Now, they watch its successor essentially vacating the role of global leadership, walking away from the international institutions that had helped the US so much since 1945. Ferguson was actually struck by the self-confidence of China’s leaders today, because they know history is going their way – as an example, he referred to financial technology and the way that China kept control over Silicon Valley; in other words, how all the major functions that are delivered to us in this domain are in reality performed by Chinese companies. Therefore, because Chinese elites have been able to learn from history, Ferguson believes, they will carefully formulate a strategy to avoid falling into any undesirable confrontation. But at least one thing is certain, and that is, that “handling the rise of China will be the single greatest challenge of the 21st century” (Allison, 2017).

2. Paramount Chinese leaders and their discourse

No Western statesman has thought more deeply about the US-China relationship than Henry Kissinger who was, in many ways, the man who opened the door that had been closed between both countries until he visited Beijing in 1971. What is most relevant about Kissinger's work is that he actually maintained conversations with several leaders, setting forth his findings in writing and thus providing a very valuable source of information to ascertain the personal motivations of each leader. That is why, in many instances, this section will make reference to his work and his opinions. Nonetheless, it is important to interpret them carefully, as they might be biased by the US perspective.

At present, China is governed by the fifth generation of leaders since the revolution. Each one of them "distilled his generation's particular vision of China's needs" (Kissinger, 2015; 227). This section is concerned with the last four of them, from Deng Xiaoping at the end of the 1970s, until Xi Jinping today.

2.1. Deng Xiaoping (1979 – 1989)

2.1.1. General considerations

As Kissinger (2011; 321) relates, before Deng Xiaoping came to power, Mao Zedong had destroyed and radicalized most of the country's institutions during his more than thirty years in office. Certainly, after Mao's death, nobody else could come close to bearing comparable authority. But despite the absence of an official heir or a program for a post-Mao China, he had made sure that Hua Gofeng would rise after him. Nevertheless, Hua notably lacked Mao's ability to mobilize an entire nation, and so he ended up disappearing into oblivion almost as soon as he had emerged (*ibid*; 327-329).

Deng, who was in competition with Hua, had started in a very disadvantageous bureaucratic position. However, he ended up prevailing because, over time, he had established a strong connection within the Party and the PLA, and proved to have much greater political skills than Hua (*ibid*; 329-331).

That is how in 1979, China shifted its course and, under Deng Xiaoping, started preaching "a non-ideological foreign policy and a policy of economic reforms that [...] had a transformative effect on China and the world" (*ibid*, 2015; 175). In other words, China, as the economic superpower that it is today, is mainly the legacy of Deng Xiaoping (*ibid*, 2011; 333).

Deng understood that China's historic role could never endure if it did not become internationally engaged. He believed that only by modernizing both its society and economy would China's influence increase (*ibid*, 2015; 227). This was a daring statement that none of China's former leaders had made before. Nevertheless, as Deng consolidated power, these premises became the "operational maxims" of China's rise to the superpower sphere.

Kissinger (2011; 223) admires the way in which many Chinese people have remained committed to their society despite all the agony and injustice it has inflicted on them. In fact, Deng had been purged from his offices twice. First, during Mao's Cultural Revolution, he was charged with being a "capitalist roader" and was kept under arrest for some time. And second, he was again stripped off his party and government position for eulogizing certain characteristics of Zhou Enlai that had been criticized at the Politburo. In spite of these instances, Kissinger states, Deng always maintained "his convictions and sense of proportion" (*ibid*; 324).

By analyzing a collection of comments and declarations from Deng Xiaoping, Kissinger distilled some of his most notable features. Among them, Deng shone for his pragmatism and straightforwardness. Unlike Mao, he professed no grand philosophy nor concerned himself with the Chinese people's singular destiny. Instead, his declarations had a more pedestrian nature and focused on practical details. Where Mao dealt with issues through the lens of ideology, Deng subordinated ideological pursuits and political correctness to professional competence – such was the conclusion from the talk "Priority Should be Given to Specific Research" (September 26, 1975). In another talk entitled "The Army Needs to Be Consolidated" (January 25, 1975), he also spoke of the need to put things in order. He challenged his people to overcome the backwardness that had placed China at the queue of advanced industrial countries:

The key to achieving modernization is the development of science and technology. And unless we pay special attention to education, it will be impossible to develop science and technology. Empty talk will get our modernization programme nowhere; we must have knowledge and trained personnel. . . Now it appears that China is fully 20 years behind the developed countries in science, technology and education" ("Respect Knowledge, Respect Trained Personnel. (May 24, 1977).

As Kissinger (2011; 333) suggests, progress in a society can only come at the hand of courageous leaders willing to undertake a course which they deem will bring the necessary benefits. In this sense, Deng was successful not because of the nature of the programs he designed, but because he satisfied the ultimate task of a leader. That is, he

brought his society from where it was to where it had never been. And to do so, he did not need to rule like an emperor; instead, he based his governance on the invisibility of the ruler, operating essentially “out of sight” (*ibid*; 334).

In December 1978, at the event of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC, the slogan “Reform and Opening Up” was promulgated. Such slogan was to characterize all of Deng’s subsequent policies. In a speech he delivered at the close of the Conference, he called for the need to “emancipate our minds”, “loosen our ideological constraints” and “think things out for ourselves” (“Emancipate the Mind, Seek Truth from Facts and Unite As One in Looking into The Future”. December 13, 1978). In his vision, this would generate “large numbers of pathbreakers who dare to think, explore new ways and generate new ideas”. His ideas were intelligent and bold; however, his mistake was that he never took into account any of the postulates of the pluralistic democracies in the West, and thus failed to foresee the emergence of threats to political stability: “What kind of democracy do the Chinese people need today? It can only be socialist democracy, people’s democracy, and not bourgeois democracy, individualist democracy” (Kissinger, 2011; 338).

For these reasons, the changes wrought by Deng derived in serious political and social tensions, which ultimately led to the Tiananmen Square crisis of 1989. Nevertheless, as opposed to China’s nineteenth-century leaders, he had managed to completely revamp Mao’s legacy, realizing the reforms that would bring China to the place where its history entitled it (*ibid*; 339).

2.1.2. *Foreign Policy*

When Deng rose to power, he completely reformed Mao’s domestic policy. However, he maintained most of Mao’s foreign policy, mainly because both leaders harbored strong national feelings and a common perception of the Chinese national interest (*ibid*; 348).

During Deng’s years in office, the most eminent threat came from the Soviet Union, who had long had its eye on China. Kissinger (2011; 349) believes that it was possibly because of this that Deng oriented his foreign policy towards a rapprochement to the US. Deng thus aligned his strategic interests with America’s Soviet policy and sought to achieve a parallel implementation. To accomplish this, though, he had to put an end to all the ambivalences concerning the American relationship. Similarly, Deng also argued that the inclusion of China and Japan into the global design was essential in resisting the threat that the Soviet Union posed to Europe.

Despite initial disagreements between China and the US regarding the issue of Taiwan – which will be studied later on –, US President Carter agreed to a de facto strategic alliance with China to deal with the Soviet Union. And thanks to Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, such alliance took the form of a coalition to oppose “Soviet advances in every corner of the globe” (*ibid*; 351). In this cooperative relationship, Deng did not just passively accept American prescriptions; instead, he acted as an “instructor on strategy”. He would reject the principles that underpinned the American discourse — international law, multilateralism, human rights — only to respect them in those situations where they could help China achieve a certain objective. That objective, was “coping with the polar bear and that’s that”, as Deng admitted in one of his conversations with Kissinger (*ibid*; 353).

In line with the above, China sided with the US during the Vietnam War. Indeed, to deal with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, Deng proposed the creation of a kind of cooperation similar to the Atlantic Alliance – although much more intimate and risk taking – that could act preemptively repel any imminent offensives. China’s insistence on joint action reflected its belief that cooperation with the US for security reasons was imperative.

Deng also travelled a fair amount during his years in office. Throughout his trips, he would draw attention to China’s relative backwardness and expressed a desire to acquire technology and expertise from developed nations. Despite this, he still believed that China’s underdevelopment would never change its commitment to combat Soviet and Vietnamese expansion, “if necessary by force and alone” (*ibid*; 357).

During an interview with Time magazine in February 1979, Deng took the opportunity to describe the Chinese strategy to a big audience:

If we really want to be able to place curbs on the polar bear, the only realistic thing for us is to unite. If we only depend on the strength of the U.S., it is not enough. If we only depend on the strength of Europe, it is not enough. We are an insignificant, poor country, but if we unite, well, it will then carry weight.

As mentioned above, Deng’s strategy required the engagement of Japan as an essential piece to help isolate the Soviet Union and Vietnam. With this objective in mind, he worked for the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China during his travels to Japan. The result was the signing of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship, in April 12th, 1978. Normalization then led to a real reconciliation between both parties, and so Deng managed to put an end to “half a century of suffering inflicted on China by Japan” (*ibid*; 358).

Deng also travelled all around Southeast Asia – notably, to Burma, Nepal, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand – in an effort to counter Soviet and Vietnamese influence in the region (Kamm, 1978). In his public statements, he would refer to Vietnam as the “Cuba of the East” and spoke to the new Soviet-Vietnam treaty as a threat to world peace (Kissinger, 2011; 358). Through these speeches, Deng partially achieved his objective, as the Southeast Asian nations started behaving much more cautiously when confronting both the Soviet Union and Vietnam. But most importantly, Deng made the world aware that China was ready to intervene at any cost to remedy the situation.

Lastly, Deng also visited the US in order to set forth the guidelines that would define his new alliance with President Carter. After all his travels, Deng had achieved his central plan of bringing China closer to the world and isolating Hanoi. Afterwards, Kissinger (2011; 367) states, he never left China again, and he adopted during his last years in office “the remoteness and inaccessibility of traditional Chinese rulers”.

On February 17th, 1979, China launched an invasion of northern Vietnam with the aim to “put a restraint on the wild ambitions of the Vietnamese and to give them an appropriate, limited lesson”, as Deng admitted to President Carter (Brzezinski, 1983). When China considered that its punitive mission had been achieved, the troops were then withdrawn from Vietnam. Most importantly, during the course of the invasion, the Soviet Union decided it would neither intervene nor run any risks of a wider war. Although conventional wisdom among historians has it that the war was a “costly Chinese failure” (Kissinger, 2011; 370), one might argue this is only based on a miscomprehension of the Chinese strategy. Indeed, despite China’s inability to deter Vietnam from Cambodia, it successfully demonstrated that the Soviet Union was unable to protect its Vietnamese ally (Elleman, 2005).

Short time after, when the Soviet Union’s gains were reversed – among others, the end of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, the collapse of the Communist-backed government in Ethiopia or the withdrawal of Soviet armies from Afghanistan –, a new equilibrium started to emerge in world politics. As a response to this new reality, Chinese leaders discarded their former strategy of military containment and “began to explore their scope for a new diplomacy with Moscow” (Kissinger, 2011; 389).

This strategic rethinking did not only take place in China’s relationship with the Soviet Union; in fact, the country began to consider new options for partnership at a global level. This way, China detached from both the US and the Soviet Union and chose to solidify its position in the Third World. Deng expressed this at his speech at the Twelfth National

Congress on September 1, 1982:

We have always firmly opposed the arms race between the superpowers, stood for the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons and for their complete destruction and demanded that the superpowers be the first to cut their nuclear and conventional arsenals drastically...

Socialist China belongs to the third world. China has experienced the same sufferings as most other third world countries, and she is faced with similar problems and tasks. China regards it as her sacred international duty to struggle resolutely against imperialism, hegemonism and colonialism together with the other third world countries.

Deng's words throughout this speech reflect China's self-confidence as well as its eagerness to be recognized as a new superpower in the international scene, at the same level as the US or the Soviet Union. China knew that if it took sides again it would lose the prominent status that it had taken so long to build.

Now that the Soviet threat had almost disappeared, China and the US – at the time governed by the Reagan Administration – no longer needed work on strategic programs of joint action. Instead, they became “partners of convenience” only on those issues where they shared a common interest (*ibid*; 394).

As the Reagan years came to a close, the situation in Asia became tranquil as ever. The region went through a new era of economic prosperity and reform, with the collective of Asian states behaving on Westphalian lines, keeping a balance between the various centers of power. These were, according to Kissinger, the seeds of twenty-first century Asia, known as “the world's most productive and prosperous continent” (*ibid*; 395).

Lastly, this is not the place to examine how the tragedy at Tiananmen Square came about; suffice it to mention that the crisis provoked a stark international reaction. The People's Republic of China was portrayed in the international media as an “arbitrary authoritarian state crushing popular aspirations to human rights” and Deng was criticized as a tyrant (*ibid*; 411) – though he had never expressed his will to turn his country into a Western-style democracy.

President Bush had assumed office less than five months earlier. Tiananmen had placed him in a very delicate position concerning China and the relationship between the two countries had come under attack. When Congress decided to impose punitive measures on Beijing, Bush tried to soften some of its aspects in an attempt to remain engaged with China. But American sanctions coincided with similar measures coming from the European Community, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, along with statements of regret and condemnations from other governments worldwide. While China would seek to maintain its relations under the premises of national interest and non-intervention

in other states' internal affairs, the US and its allies did not want to give up on defending their democratic values and principles. Ultimately, this led a tipping point in Sino-US relations and caused a rupture. China became isolated (*ibid*; 416-419).

At the end of the 1980s, Deng began to gradually retire from high office – some say the Tiananmen crisis accelerated this decision. As he receded from the scene, he provided his successor with a set of maxims to guide him and the next generation of leaders. These were known as the “24-character instruction”,

Observe carefully; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership.

And the “12-character explanation”

Enemy troops are outside the walls. They are stronger than we. We should be mainly on the defensive.

At this low point of isolation and unrest, Deng's words can be understood as a sign of his fear that China might consume itself amidst the crisis, and as a call for future leaders to make their best efforts to recognize the risks of excessive self-confidence (*ibid*; 439).

Deng died in 1997; by then, Jiang Zemin had already solidified his position.

2.2. Jiang Zemin (1989 – 2002)

2.2.1. General Considerations

Before he was elevated to Head of the Communist Party, Jiang Zemin used to be the Party Secretary of Shanghai. During his time in office, he had to deal with one of the most convoluted crises that had ever hit the People's Republic of China. The country was isolated, harsh sanctions were being imposed from abroad and, at the same time, nationwide unrest was shaking the country at home. Simultaneously, Communist regimes were on the brink of collapse in every other country in the world, save for a few exceptions such as Cuba, North Korea or Vietnam. The regions of Tibet and Xinjiang were agitated. Overall, the situation was becoming unsustainable (*ibid*; 440).

As a consequence, the most conservative members of the Politburo, notably those who were against liberalization, blamed Deng's opening-up policies and pressured Jiang to return to Maoist principles. Nevertheless, he and Deng held exactly the opposite view to the conservatives. They believed that the only way for China to escape isolation was to accelerate the implementation of the reform program it had designed after Tiananmen. In

their view, achieving social stability would involve improving the standards of living and enhancing productivity (*ibid*; 441).

In this context, the eighty-seven-year-old Deng, in early 1992, emerged from retirement to carry out what would be his last public gesture. He launched an “inspection tour” through Southern China to push for continued economic liberalization and rally public support for Jiang’s reforms. The campaign became known as “Deng’s Southern Tour”. In a way, he was acting like an “itinerant preacher”, as he did not hold an official title or formal function anymore. The tour signified the reemergence of the vision of a continuous revolution, as term coined by Mao. However, this time it was a different kind of revolution based on personal initiative rather than ideological exaltation; with connection with the outside world rather than autarky (*ibid*; 445).

This tour was important for the Jiang Zemin era because, ultimately, it became Jiang’s responsibility to implement the principles set forth by Deng. In this task and all that followed, the new leader was assisted by the extraordinary Vice Premier Zhou Rongji and foreign minister Qian Qichen. Indeed, Jiang managed to instigate these principles in such a skillful way that, when his office came to an end in 2002, “the debate was no longer over whether this was the proper course but rather over the impact of an emerging, dynamic China on world order and the global economy” (*ibid*; 446).

At that time, very few outside observers believed that Jiang would succeed the way he did, but Deng already knew that he was a “real intellectual”. Jiang came through the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crisis thanks to his personal diplomacy at the international level and his policy to broaden the base of the CPC at the domestic level. He steered the People’s Republic of China into the international stage and turned it into an attractive trading partner (*ibid*, 2015; 227). In short, thanks to Jiang’s determination, China rose again out of its own ashes into the staggering explosion of energy and creativity that characterized its ascent (*ibid*, 2013; 447).

After several conversations with Jiang and Deng, Kissinger (*ibid*; 448-450) noticed several differences in rhetoric and character. Whilst the author conceived of Deng as “the battle-hardened guardian of the national interest”, Jiang’s behaviour resembled that of an amicable family member. Not only was he warm and informal, but he liked to smile, laugh, tell anecdotes and touch his interlocutors in order to increase proximity. Likewise, it was easy to tell that he was highly educated and well read. He believed the views of his opposite number, as well as those of his colleagues, deserved the same importance and

attention as his own. Nevertheless, this did not prevent some outsiders to mistake his friendly style for a lack of seriousness.

Jiang's education had provided him with a wide, cosmopolitan perspective of the world, which allowed him to understand that China could not keep on clinging to Middle Kingdom remote standards. Much like Deng, Jiang recognized that his country would only thrive by taking part in the international system. But where Deng was only able to implement his vision fragmentally, as he was aborted by Tiananmen, Jiang was determined to implement it in its entirety. His main goal was to restore confidence at home, because that would help cure China's domestic wounds and soften its image towards the outer world.

With regards to his philosophy, Jiang expanded the notion of Communism from an exclusive class-based elite to a wider scope of society. His philosophy became known as the "Three Represents", because the CPC was meant to represent "the development needs of China's advanced productive forces"; "the onwards directions of China's advanced culture" and "the fundamental interests of the largest numbers of the Chinese people" (The Economist, 2000). The CPC opened its doors to business leaders and established democratic internal procedures.

And that was how the 1990s gave way to a period of outstanding economic growth in the country. A decade earlier, the idea of "Reform and Opening Up" was essentially a vision for the long-term; China was still struggling to find its place in the world trade system; and foreign companies were still questioning the viability of investments in the country. However, China surprised the world by realizing one of the most powerful per capita GDP growth rates in history (Naughton, 2007). In fact, by the end of the 1990s, average income had tripled the figures of 1978 – an increase which was even more radical in urban areas. This was paired with an increase of trade exchanges with neighbouring countries, where it took on a leading role, as well as the development of strong economic ties with the US. In 1997, Zhu Rongji noted: "Never before in history has China had such frequent exchanges and communications with the rest of the world" (Kissinger, 2011; 480). Three years later, China was admitted into the World Trade Organization (WTO).

It thus appeared clear that China had developed a new world role. It went from being "the recipient of foreign, often Western, economic policy prescriptions", to practically an "independent proponent of its own solutions". And it did it to such a degree that it also became an emergency source of assistance to other economies in crisis (*ibid*; 479).

2.2.2. *Foreign Policy*

Jiang Zemin “held up the flag of Deng Xiaoping in regards to foreign policy” and took advantage of his position as Deng's successor to exercise authority (Nakai, 2003; 30). Initially, the new leader committed to keep the “24-character instruction” and the “12-character explanation” intact and use them as a framework for his policies. He also created an organization and a network of qualified personnel to assist him in fulfilling Deng's directives. Among them, the Vice Premier Zhu Rongji was left in charge of handling the financial and administrative reforms, often more problematic for domestic society, whilst Jiang involved himself in top-level diplomacy and ideology campaigns. He also ruled through personal leadership, which allowed him to maintain “his position as the leading figure and the top policymaker of China” (*ibid*).

Although China was already a member of the Asia Pacific Corporation since 1991 and an observer of the ASEAN Regional Forum since 1994, it was not until 1997 that the country started committing itself to regional activities, and it did so in an aggressive way. China could have just “observed carefully”, “hide its capacity”, “maintain a low profile” or “never claim leadership”, as Deng’s instruction indicated; however, under Jiang’s vision, China was also meant to take part in the regional community, in spite of the tensions that this could entail. This represented a turning point where Jiang moved away from Deng’s postulates. Nakai (2003; 34) suggests three reasons for this aggressive behaviour: first, Deng’s death might have enabled Jiang to launch his own diplomatic initiatives; second, the Handover of Hong Kong in 1997 might have been interpreted as a gateway to the establishment of new multilateral relationships with Southeast Asia; and third, it might have been China’s intention to thwart Taiwan's influence and get rid of US interests in the region. This commitment to regionalism should have been welcomed by the US and Japan, which had long been pushing for Chinese participation in the international community. However, the problem was that China utilized such regionalism “as a means to expand its interests in the region and [...] improve its international status” (*ibid*; 35).

Jiang also managed to reconstitute China’s relations with the US and the rest of the world in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crisis. This rapprochement was mainly due to economic interdependence, which allowed not only for the strengthening of relations between China and some of its neighbouring countries such as Russia or others in South East Asia, but also other countries in Europe, Central Asia, Africa and South and Central

America, thus realizing the goal of an "omnidirectional diplomacy" proposed by Deng Xiaoping (Nakai, 2003; 30).

With regards to Sino-US relations especially, China took numerous steps aimed at improving relations with the US and working together on a new international order – one example was the lifting of martial law in Beijing and Tibet. But because both parties held different opinions about democratic values and human rights, their relationship came to a deadlock. Unlike the US, China did not believe that a country's values had to be projected across borders; instead, it considered that relations between states ought to be governed by principles of national interest. This way of thinking was reflected in an oral message sent to President Bush: "China cherishes Sino-US friendly relations and cooperation which did not come easily, but it cherishes its independence, sovereignty and dignity even more" (Kissinger, 2011; 459).

In this type of situations, Kissinger believes that sometimes, a choice must be made between claims of national security and a state's values and principles of governance; nevertheless, the US Administration was reluctant to make such a choice for fear of damaging its relationship with China.

Jiang and his associates were striving for a multipolar world that could tolerate China's notions of "hybrid socialism" and "people's democracy". In the words of the leader:

There is no fundamental conflict of interest between our two countries. There is no reason not to bring relations back to normal. If there can be mutual respect and if we refrain from interference in internal affairs, and if we can conduct our relations on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, then we can find a common interest.

In other words, China was asking the US to treat it on equal terms as a great power (*ibid*; 455).

Sino-US relations were also affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had given rise to a new geopolitical context. For Beijing, the end of the Cold War brought both relief and dread. On the one hand, the unraveling of the Soviet Union was received as good news for China; but on the other, Chinese leaders tended to make comparisons between the disintegration of the Soviet adversary and their own domestic instability. Just like the Soviet Union, they had also "inherited an ancient multiethnic empire and sought to administer it as a modern socialist state" (*ibid*; 458). For the US, the collapse of the Soviet Union signified the universal triumph of liberal and capitalist democracy over communism, an assumption that Chinese leaders utterly rejected.

With the Clinton Administration, Sino-US relations evolved into a roller coaster ride. Clinton was known to have a very aggressive human rights stance, which translated into

persistent pressures to introduce democracy in China by meddling into its domestic affairs. These pressures were bolstered by other Western democracies, whose goals were aligned with those of the US. China saw these tactics as attempts to weaken and overthrow its Communist regime in the way nineteenth-century colonialists would do it. In other words, China perceived they were conspiring to prevent it from attaining great power status.

As a reaction, China adopted a foreign policy which resembled Bismarck's rather than Mao's: "incremental, defensive and based on building dams against unfavorable historical tides" (*ibid*; 463). This posture was paired with a strong sense of independence and a commitment to resist outside pressures, as Jiang pronounced in 1991: "We never submit to pressure. This is very important. It is a philosophical principle". Along these lines, Qian Qichen warned that China was ready to defy American predominance in a unipolar world: "We believe it is impossible that such a unipolar world would come into existence. Some people seem to believe that after the end of the Gulf War, the US can do anything. I don't think that is correct [...]" (*ibid*; 464).

But sometime after, China realized that, in order to guarantee the success of its reform program and consolidate its membership of the WTO, it had to engage in renewed dialogue with the US. Clinton also came to acknowledge the Chinese leaders' convictions and their endurance against public challenges. Subsequently, both parties set up consultative institutions which allowed them to deal with a broad range of technical issues and, as a result, the previous atmosphere of confrontation came to an end.

In this context, Jiang believed that if the US and China were to cooperate once again, each side should understand the changes they were required to make in their traditional attitudes:

The world should be a rich, colorful, diversified place. For example, in China in 1978 we made a decision for reform and opening up... In 1992 in the Fourteenth National Congress I stated that China's development model should be in the direction of a socialist market economy. For those who are accustomed to the West, you think the market is nothing strange, but in 1992 to say "market" here was a big risk.

Similarly, he claimed that both sides should adjust their contrasting ideologies for the sake of interdependence: "Simply put, the West is best advised to set aside its past attitude toward communist countries, and we should stop taking communism in naive or simplistic ways [...]. East and West must improve mutual understanding.". Since then, both sides started to work together to surmount their internal contradictions and thus define the fundamental nature of their relationship (*ibid*; 485).

In general terms, Jiang governed during a tumultuous, challenging period. China had gone from being isolated internationally to restoring its political ties with America and introducing a broad range of reforms that helped the country thrive. Jiang had been able to overcome all the initial challenges, turning the country into a financial and economic global power². In Kissinger's (2011; 481) words, "a decade that began in turbulence and doubt had turned into a period of extraordinary achievement". By design or by default, it seemed a new international order was emerging. Whatever that new order would look like constituted the unsolved challenge for both superpowers in scene: China and the US. Whether they would stay partners or become adversaries, it remained to be seen.

In 2002-2003, Jiang bestowed his leadership roles on Hu Jintao, although he continued being involved in Chinese politics and as an influential figure almost a decade after he retired.

2.3. Hu Jintao (2002 – 2012)

2.3.1. General Considerations

The fourth generation of leaders, headed by President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, came to power at the turn of the century. A new millennium had begun.

Hu and Wen managed China's development from an unprecedented perspective. Unlike the rest of the leaders in the Communist period, they had no personal experience of the revolutions, they had taken office through constitutional means and they were the first ones to endorse responsibilities in a country that was clearly consolidating its role as a great power (*ibid*; 488).

During Mao's rule, both Hu and Wen were ousted from their universities in Beijing to some of the most rebellious regions in provincial China. From there, they slowly started to rise within the Communist Party hierarchy, but fundamentally, the time they spent away allowed them to get a glimpse of their country's own fragilities. In fact, they experienced firsthand China's 1989 unrest: Hu in Tibet, during the Tibetan uprisings; Wen in Beijing, during the Tiananmen crisis. All this allowed them to acquire a broad

² Some authors, like Nakai (2003; 33), disagree with this statement. In his view, China had surely become much richer and powerful during Jiang Zemin's presidency. However, he suggests that these good results were not achieved by Jiang Zemin himself, but by Zhu Rongji. "Since 2002, Jiang Zemin took charge of politics, while Zhu Rongji took charge of the economy".

understanding of China's domestic challenges by the time they assumed their position as top national leaders in 2002-2003.

Deng had brought to a halt the Maoist war on Chinese tradition; however, his leadership was an attempt to compensate for lost time and was tainted with a sort of embarrassment at China's missteps. Jiang ruled in an undoubtedly confident and affable way, but he took the helm of a China still undergoing a serious domestic crisis and struggling to recover its international reputation. Under Hu Jintao, it seemed that the efforts of the two previous periods were bearing fruit. The China he was entrusted had rid itself of Western technological and institutional constraints and was "confident enough to reject, and even on occasion subtly mock, American lectures on reform" (*ibid*; 490). In other words, China was ready to design a foreign policy that could reflect its actual potential.

Hu's personality differed in many ways from Jiang's. According to Brown (2012), his most noticeable features were his dullness and egolessness. This was somehow shocking, as the country he was in charge of "is one of the most dynamic, fractious, and energetic places on Earth" (*ibid*). Other sources (Stone Fish, 2012) consider he has a "robotic personality", both at the domestic and the international level. As a matter of fact, Hu acted in such a reserved and cautious way that one European head of state, after a conversation with him, said he was the most boring person they had ever met (*ibid*). Nonetheless, it can be argued that these traits stem from his immense and rigid self-control in the face of the highly strategic world of elite Chinese politics (Brown, 2012).

Hu and Wen sought to bring normalcy and stability back to China, and so they formulated their goals within a framework of a "harmonious society" and a "harmonious world". Their new domestic agenda would now focus on sustained economic growth and the conservation of social harmony among a vast population which was undergoing both unparalleled prosperity and unusually high levels of inequality (Kissinger, 2011; 490).

In order to face the challenges brought by the 21st century, Hu and Wen resorted to traditional wisdom. They aspired to build a "*xiaokang*"³ society, a term that was to replace the party's former slogan – the "Three Represents" campaign, coined by Jiang Zemin. The previous slogan had not been successful, as it had only left people with the impression that party leaders were disengaged from their everyday concerns; however, the new

³ As per The Economist (2003), the term "*xiaokang*" refers to "a middle-class level of prosperity at which basic needs are comfortably met".

slogan was more politically marketable (The Economist, 2003). *Xiaokang* was a term with distinctly Confucian connotations and, according to John Schrecker, it suggested “some sense of retreat from the utopian goals of Maoism” (*ibid*). Hu and Wen strived to revive the study of Confucius in Chinese schools and to promote his legacy in popular culture. Confucius thus became a source of Chinese soft power on the world stage, as reflected by the opening of the official “Confucius Institutes” or by a new statute raised in his honor in Tiananmen Square in 2011 (Kissinger, 2011; 491).

2.3.2. *Foreign Policy*

When Hu assumed China’s leadership, he pursued what Zhao (2012) terms the “*taoguangyanghui* policy”, which entailed a strict observation of the 24-character strategy set by Deng – consisting on keeping a low profile, biding its time... – to avoid an open conflict with the US or other Western powers. China’s foreign policy aims were to operate within a peaceful international environment and have access to raw materials, because that would allow it to achieve its domestic goal of sustained economic growth. Therefore, in general terms, Hu’s approach to foreign policy at the beginning of his mandate avoided dramatic moves and frequently ignored external requests for China to develop a more visible international leadership role (Kissinger, 2011; 490).

However, China’s foreign policy made a strident turn as its core national interests, conceived as the basis of national survival, “suddenly became a fashionable term”, frequently appearing in the Chinese leaders’ discourse as well as their official publications. As China’s power aspirations grew, so did the list of its core interests. Indeed, the list ended up encompassing so many interests in such an ambiguous way that China’s foreign policy aims became much more ubiquitous and assertive than before (Zhao, 2012).

This change of direction brought both an increased sense of confidence to the country, as well as one of frustration. On the one hand, China was confident because it could see its economic and diplomatic power rising; on the other, it was frustrated due to the persistent anti-China forces seeking to prevent it from rising to its rightful place (*ibid*).

This sense of frustration generated an atmosphere of nationalism. An important sector of society became increasingly suspicious of the US and other Western powers and demanded that the Chinese government recapture all its “lost territories”. As a consequence, the Chinese leadership adopted a confrontational attitude against the Western powers and developed harsher measures to lay claim to a myriad of maritime

territories which were disputed between China and its Asian neighbours – now to become its rivals. In line with this its new expansionist ambitions and assertive foreign policy stance, Beijing categorically affirmed the preeminence of its own “core interests” in territorial disputes. This was in contrast to the previous strategy, which sought to avoid the use of force and prevent a dangerous escalation of the conflict. In fact, before Hu was in power, China’s core interests concerning sovereignty and territorial integrity were limited to Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang; however, this catalogue of core interests had now expanded to include a set of territorial claims across the Indian border as well as maritime claims in the South and East China Sea (*ibid*).

To support its sovereignty claims, China deployed more personnel and installed new equipment to carry out regular sea patrols and law enforcement in a more frequent and forceful manner. This increase of military capabilities inevitably led to an increase of tensions, resulting in severe diplomatic crises with implications for regional and global security. According to Kim (2015; 107), these new geopolitical conflicts were set to “trigger major power realignments in East Asia and beyond, which would, in the end, challenge US predominance in the post–Cold War international system”. But it is important to note that China’s territorial and maritime disputes did not just represent isolated issues for Chinese leaders. Instead, they should be regarded as part of the wider process of China’s rise, as well as means to display “the nation’s capabilities to protect its interests, sovereignty, and image as a great power ” (*ibid*; 108).

With regards to the US, two different American Presidents held office consecutively during Hu Jintao’s leadership: these were George W. Bush and Barack Obama. In general terms, China aimed for good relations with the US, but Sino-US relations during this period presented several facets. On many issues, they progressed in a cooperative manner; but on some other issues rooted in history and geopolitical orientation, their goals were not compatible. Nevertheless, it can be said their relation had matured, as “neither side supposed the other would share all of its aims” (Kissinger, 2011; 492).

On the side of cooperation, both parties combined their efforts in the fight against terrorism. The attacks of September 11 reoriented America’s strategy “away from East Asia to the Middle East and Southwest Asia”, where it launched a new program to combat terrorist networks (*ibid*). As China was wary of terrorists within its own minority regions, especially in Xinjiang, it quickly condemned the 9/11 attacks and offered diplomatic and intelligence support to the US in its War on Terror. However, each side dealt with terrorism in a different way: whilst Washington sought to project its power and promote

democracy across the Muslim world, China behaved like an agnostic spectator. In Kissinger's words, it was willing to "adjust to changes in alignments of power and in the composition of foreign governments without passing moral judgement", as its main concerns revolved around having continued access to oil from the Middle East and protecting its investments in Afghanistan. As long as these interests were fulfilled, China was not to oppose American efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan (*ibid*; 493).

On the side of confrontation, there exist two issues over which the countries' interests notably conflicted. These were the economy and weapons of mass destruction. Firstly, China's economic rise and US-China economic interdependence led to a confrontation of both parties' respective currency policies. Americans perceived the low value of the yuan as a strategy of currency manipulation designed to benefit the Chinese companies and harm the American ones. However, China considered its policy was only meant to favor domestic manufacturers and promote political stability. Overall, it seems the underlying issue was political rather than economic. If China followed US instructions to consume more and export less, the former would become less dependent on exports and possibly encourage the creation of an Asian bloc, which would incentivize economic ties with its Asian neighbours rather than with the US, thus harming the latter even more (*ibid*; 495).

Secondly, the issue of nuclear weapons is closely linked to the commitment in North Korea to a military nuclear program. At first, China had left it in the hands of the US to deal with the issue and provide North Korea with a sense of security that would replace nuclear weapons; however, China perceived nuclear proliferation would sooner or later affect its security as well, because other countries such as South Korea, Japan or Vietnam might follow the North Korean example, thus leading to upheaval in the strategic landscape of Asia. Furthermore, China also feared an implosion of the North Korean regime, as that would also tremendously destabilize its borders (*ibid*; 496). For these reasons, the Six Party Talks were intermittently held from 2003 until 2009, when North Korea declared it would withdraw from the dialogue (Arms Control Association, 2018).

The leaders in Beijing, conscious of China's growing assertiveness and power during the initial years of the 21st century, engaged in a self-reflective discourse and skillfully assuaged foreign concerns by formulating the proposition of China's "peaceful rise" to great-power status. Zheng Bijian, a relevant policy figure at the time, published an article which was interpreted by many as an official policy statement. In it, he asserted that, to achieve the goal of a peaceful rise, China would strive to "improve [its] relations with all the nations of the world" (Bijian, 2005; 21); it would "transcend the traditional ways for

great powers to emerge” and it would not follow “the path of Germany leading up to World War I or those of Germany and Japan leading up to World War II” (*ibid*; 22).

Finally,

China does not seek hegemony or predominance in world affairs. It advocates a new international political and economic order, one that can be achieved through incremental reforms and the democratization of international relations. China's development depends on world peace—a peace that its development will in turn reinforce (*ibid*; 24).

In line with Zheng’s words, Hu delivered a speech at the United Nations General Assembly entitled “Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity”, where he emphasized the importance of the UN for China:

China will, as always, abide by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, actively participate in international affairs and fulfill its international obligations, and work with other countries in building towards a new international political and economic order that is fair and rational. The Chinese nation loves peace. China's development, instead of hurting or threatening anyone, can only serve peace, stability and common prosperity in the world (September 15, 2005).

At the end of the Hu leadership, the overall feeling was that China had accomplished the dream cherished by reformers and revolutionaries over the past centuries: that of a prosperous China that could wield modern military capabilities while protecting its distinctive values (Kissinger, 2011; 504). Nevertheless, in such a situation, Chinese leaders would still have to ask themselves whether the West would allow China to rise harmoniously.

2.4. Xi Jinping (2012 – today)

2.4.1. General Considerations

A new generation of younger Chinese and Party and PLA elites assumed power in 2012. Kissinger did not get to personally meet the new leader, but he had stated that this was to be the “first generation since the early nineteenth century to have grown up in a China that is at peace and politically unified, [...] and whose economic performance outstrips that of most of the rest of the world” (*ibid*; 512). Because Xi’s new era continues to unfold, no definitive conclusions can be drawn about his general political strategy or whether his leadership has benefitted or harmed China overall. Nevertheless, this section will concentrate on the most notable changes and decisions up until the present moment.

Since Xi is in office, he has profoundly changed the system of Chinese governance. Under the former model, previous generations of Chinese leaders starting from Deng

Xiaoping had operated within a “consensus-driven system”, created in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. In it, a collective system of checks and balances integrated by bureaucratic institutions and party elites would complement the tasks of leadership and decision-making (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016; 6). Today, these bureaucratic procedures are no longer in place. Xi has set up a new system where collective leadership has been replaced by the elevation of his personal power, emphasizing the central role of the Party in every aspect of life (Economy, 2018).

Temperamentally, Xi has been described as a self-confident person who likes to keep his own counsel. He is not afraid to take risks in matters concerning his domestic or foreign policy and, in contrast to other Chinese leaders, he “frequently deviates from his talking points in meetings with foreign officials” (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016; 9). It has even been suggested that, despite Xi’s strategic and cautious approach, he can at times be impatient and impetuous, and that he occasionally does not make very rational decisions. In sum, it seems China is ruled by a leader who is just as complex as he is ambitious.

Xi has undertaken a massive reform of the Deng scale (Kissinger, 2015, 227); he has turned upside-down the two key hallmarks set forth during the Deng era. Concerning domestic policy, Deng’s principle of pragmatism – based on experimentation and a policy of trial and error – no longer applies. Instead, Xi compels everyone to follow him, “the strongman”, as he is the one who will ultimately lead China to the place where it belongs. In doing so, he has adopted a very ideological and dogmatic approach – Economy (2018) speaks of the “Xi Jinping Thought” as the new ruling ideology, even if it still under construction. Externally, Xi has walked away from Deng’s instruction to “hide one’s capabilities and bide one’s time” and has adopted a new approach, one through which the rest of the world is meant to show due respect to China. Simply put, the liberal trends that characterized much of the past four decades have been replaced by many of the traditional and Maoist postulates. Under the new slogan of “The Four Comprehensives” – also known as the “Four-pronged Comprehensive Strategy” –, Xi put across his ideological directive for governance, which consists of “comprehensively building a well-off society, comprehensively deepening reform, comprehensively implementing the rule of law and comprehensively strengthening the Party’s discipline” (Wei, 2017).

Overall, it appears as though Xi were aiming to take China forward by, in some meaningful ways, taking it backward. In other words, although China under Xi Jinping has a strong commitment to reform, such reform would ultimately render the country

more isolated and restrictive to outsiders, as well as more repressive to its own citizens (Economy, 2018). This is bound to bring a myriad of challenges and threats to the US and many other Western powers, both at home and abroad.

2.4.2. *Foreign Policy*

Structurally speaking, Xi has undertaken a centralization process through which he has limited the role that the State Council, the Foreign Ministry and the military used to play in the process of decision-making. These modifications are meant to help Xi achieve greater freedom from governmental machinery and other opponents who could end up manipulating Chinese foreign policy (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016; 6).

With regards to the content, although there has been a noticeable break from the previous foreign policy under Hu Jintao, it is not as dramatic as some mistakenly assume. In fact, Xi's policies and objectives maintain certain continuity with those endorsed during the last years of the Hu leadership, characterized by a strong assertiveness on territorial and maritime matters. The difference, however, is that Xi is now willing to “use every instrument of statecraft, from military assets to geoeconomic intimidation, as well as explicit economic rewards”, to fulfill his geopolitical aims (*ibid*; 16). Up until now, Xi's policy has been characterized by intimidation of his adversaries in territorial disputes and the granting of selective economic benefits, without excluding the use of economic coercion if deemed necessary.

These tactics have been largely employed in China's territorial and border disputes. Beijing has notably toughened its position on when dealing with Southeast Asian states over the South China Sea; however, it has also granted them generous investment and trade packages, all of which are aimed at geopolitical ends. With regards to Japan, China has opted for a highly nationalistic policy, as was observed through its declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea, which has only led to a dramatic escalation of tensions between the two rivals. Lastly, China's relations with India have also been marked by a combination of hard and soft measures. China has adopted very uncompromising positions on the border, for example, by launching one of its largest incursions ever into disputed territory with India. Nevertheless, the generous offers of aid for Indian infrastructure as well as investment in Indian companies that accompanied these violent moves seem to have smoothed tensions.

Xi's overall foreign policy strategy has been described as “multifaceted” and “omnidirectional” (*ibid*; 19). That is to say, it is not only based on hard and soft tools of

statecraft, but also spread over a range of targets. In particular, Xi has sought to strengthen ties with EU members, Brazil, South Africa and Russia – especially after the imposition of Western sanctions against Russia subsequent to its invasion of Ukraine. Another important component of this multifaceted strategy has been to enthusiastically join and create new multilateral institutions. China has developed a notably dominant role in institutions such as the AIIB and the CICA, and it has created the New Development Bank – formerly the BRICS.

Xi has also taken steps intended to strengthen China’s global leadership, the most notable example being the OBOR initiative (see Part II, 1.3). Nonetheless, Xi’s efforts to isolate China from foreign interference and competition might have “undermined the country’s ability to lay claim to global leadership” (Economy, 2018).

Although Sino-US relations have always been a priority for Chinese leaders, they now seem to occupy a secondary position in Xi’s foreign policy agenda. Notably, the new leader has adopted a challenging attitude toward its American counterpart and has unscrupulously criticized its alliances, casted doubts on the role of non-Asian powers in Asian affairs, and built institutional structures which exclude the US, such as the aforementioned CICA (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016; 19). Beijing’s perceptions on matters ranging from human rights, to the territorial integrity of Japan or, most especially, to the future of Taiwan tends to create considerable tensions with US national interests and commitments. However, these authors point out that China’s geopolitical aspirations often find an obstacle posed by the “reality of its economic interdependence with the US and a variety of shared international interests between the two countries” (*ibid*; 28). This will not radically stop China from pursuing its ambitions, but their bilateral interdependence will, in some instances, help it reevaluate its strategy. In a public policy speech given by Xi during his visit to the US in 2015, he reinforced the need for cooperation and coordination between the two countries:

President Obama and I reached the important agreement to jointly build a new model of major country relationship between the two countries. This was a major strategic choice we made together on the basis of historical experience, our respective national conditions and the prevailing trend of world. Over past two years and more, the two sides have acted in accordance, with the agreement steadily moving forward by actual coordination and cooperation in various fields, and made important progress. We worked hand-in-hand to cope with aftermath of international financial crisis and promoted global economic recovery. We deepened pragmatic exchanges and cooperation in all fields, which brought about tangible benefits to the two people’s (NUSCR, 2015).

At the close of his speech, he underlined once more his commitment to work together with the US “to bring about an even better future for China-U.S. relations and make an

even greater contribution to the happiness of our two peoples and well-being of the world”.

In sum, Xi’s strong-minded policies, his unparalleled power and influence within the political system, and his great ambition to create a robust Chinese diplomacy have generated a foreign policy that is “assertive, coordinated, and diversified across the instruments and targets of statecraft” (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016; 20).

After evaluating the mindset of several generations of the Chinese leadership, Kissinger (2015; 228) concludes that its composition over the years has accurately reflected China’s evolution toward participating in – even shaping – global affairs. It is surprising how, back in 1982, no member of the Politburo was college-educated. However, at present, almost all of them have a college degree – and a significant number also have advanced degrees. A college degree in China is no longer based on the old mandarin system, but on a Western-style curriculum. Similarly, in older times, the Chinese were quite narrow-minded in their perception of the world. Contemporary Chinese leaders are still influenced by their knowledge of history, but they have learned from it and are not captured by it. This signifies a sharp break with China’s past (*ibid*).

3. Case Study: The China-Taiwan divide

The issue over what Taiwan is, or even what it should be called has led to disagreement and confusion since 1949, when Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China (ROC) government fled the Mainland (PRC) and settled on the island. Initially, the ROC claimed to represent the whole of China and intended to retake the country. Besides, it occupied China's seat on the UN Security Council and many Western nations recognized it as the only legitimate Chinese government. However, in 1971, the UN forced it out as it shifted diplomatic recognition to Beijing. Since that moment, the ROC government started losing international recognition from many countries – today, it only enjoys recognition from 20 countries (BBC, 2019).

In China’s view, Taiwan is a breakaway province and it is thus determined to retake it, by forceful means if necessary. Taiwan's leaders oppose this view, saying their territory is much more than a province. They conceive it as a sovereign state, with a constitution of its own, democratically-elected leaders and well-functioning armed forces (*ibid*). Facing such different positions, most countries seem to have accepted the current ambiguity, “whereby Taiwan has most of the characteristics of an independent state, even if its legal status remains unclear” (*ibid*).

But for PRC leaders, the issue of Taiwan's international status has great symbolic importance and it is a potentially explosive issue in their foreign policy agenda. Possibly because of this, they are especially sensitive to any attempts at challenging Beijing's claim to sovereignty over the island (Ji, 1996; 119-125).

The US is also involved in the matter and, since 1954, its approach to the Taiwan question has been regarded as an indicator of basic US attitudes toward Beijing. The truth is, Taiwan affairs remain among the biggest issues in Chinese-American relations and the level of understanding between both sides concerning this matter is likely to shape their overall relationship significantly. This was reflected in a memorandum issued by the CIA in 1981, which stated that "for the US to default in Beijing's eyes by failing both to take into account Chinese sensitivities and act according to strategic imperatives would raise basic questions about the utility of the Sino-US relationship as a whole" (CIA, 1981; 4). In other words, Chinese leaders are ready to take retaliatory measures that could pose a threat Sino-US relations if they believe it necessary to do so, without considering the larger strategic situation needs or the benefits of good relations between the parties (*ibid*; 5). In this sense, the threat of using armed force against the "rebel province" has always loomed behind the Chinese political discourse.

According to Ríos (2012; 7), there have always been three constant features characterizing China-Taiwan affairs. First, the undeniable necessity of reunification for the PRC. In this sense, the Mainland may adopt a more or less peaceful approach depending on the circumstances, but its strategic goal always endures. Second, Taiwan's gradual consolidation as a *de facto* state, which entails the creation of a new identity that is halfway between that of the ROC and the new vectors associated to the island. And third, the growing economic interdependence between both sides of the Strait, which could ultimately provide the basis for a future reunification.

We will now see how these three factors intertwined under each one of the leaders.

3.1. Under Deng Xiaoping

For the PRC leaders at the time of Deng Xiaoping, Kuomintang control implied that the long civil war was still not over and the Taiwan question remained a "blatant challenge to the legitimacy, credibility and strength of the Communist regime" (CIA, 1981; 4). Deng's vulnerability on this matter can be better understood from a broader perspective rather than as a specific foreign policy issue. For him, the Taiwan question was fundamental in that it could directly affect his country's sovereignty and legitimacy. In

this sense, any obstacle, such as strong nationalistic sentiments coming from Taiwan or the development of Taiwan-US relations, had the potential to gravely undermine his position (*ibid*; 1).

As explained above (see Part II, 2.1), the Deng era was characterized by process of rebuilding of relations between the US and China. But despite the close consultations between them, there was an anomaly in that America still formally recognized Taiwan as the legitimate government of China and Taipei as its capital. However, as Jimmy Carter took office, normalization of relations became a priority in the Sino-American agenda, an aim for which he proposed a specific formula that would allow both sides maintain their established principles (Kissinger, 2011; 349).

Normalization implied that the American Embassy would move from Taipei to Beijing and a new representative from Beijing would replace Taipei's diplomat in Washington. Deng personally oversaw the whole process and reiterated two conditions that had been set forth back in 1971: the withdrawal of all American forces from Taiwan and the end of their defense treaty⁴ (*ibid*; 355). In response, the US Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act in 1979, which guaranteed support for the island by declaring the US commitment to help Taiwan defend itself. This provided the legal basis for the US to sell arms to Taiwan and it is crucially the reason why Washington maintains today a "robust unofficial" relationship with Taiwan, including continued arms sales to the island (BBC, 2017).

After a series of altercations due to Deng's unwillingness to allow American unspecified arms sales, Carter committed to reaffirm the principles accepted by Nixon and Ford and stressed his country's efforts to achieve peaceful change. This persuaded Deng to agree to US arms sales⁵ and accept the US commitment for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Nevertheless, Beijing's position remained, as stressed by Deng, that "the liberation of Taiwan is an internal affair of China in which no foreign country has the right to interfere" (*ibid*; 356).

Both sides restated their basic principles in the Third Communiqué of August 17, 1982, which became part of the basic architecture regulating Sino-US relations. Deng also proposed the formula of "one country, two systems" as a way to resolve the issue over

⁴ The two former Presidents, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, had agreed to these conditions, but they had not been able to fulfill them due to the impact of Watergate (Kissinger, 2011).

⁵ This was also due to Carter's threat that, in the absence of American arms sales, Taiwan would be obliged to resort to nuclear weapons (*ibid*).

Taiwan. This began a period of accommodation and mutual concessions between the two parties, including Taiwanese economic support (*ibid*; 382-383).

3.2. Under Jiang Zemin

Jiang Zemin was appointed as the head of the Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs in January 1994. The group strongly recommended Taiwan affairs to become Jiang's first priority concerning foreign policy. Hence, he had the opportunity to put his strategy of personal leadership in practice, so much so that "it gave the impression at home and abroad that it was Jiang Zemin who took the responsibility for China's new policy towards Taiwan" (Nakai, 2003; 31).

Deng's principle of "one country, two systems" allowed for the approval of new peaceful measures and enabled leadership consensus (Ji, 1996; 19), culminating an important speech entitled "Continuing to Strive Toward the Reunification of China", whereby Jiang set forth eight propositions⁶ that were to mark the development of the relations between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits. These propositions represented the continuous stance of the CPC on the issue of Taiwan and sought to promote peaceful reunification of the motherland. They were much appreciated by the Chinese at home and abroad and they received worldwide attention. In the eyes of Jiang Zemin, the process of reunification was now an irreversible trend, and one which was in accordance with the will of the people. This feeling of reunification was further intensified when China resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong and Macau in 1997 and 1999, respectively (IBP, 2015; 105).

Jiang's initiative showed a high level of sophistication and flexibility toward Taiwan. Indeed, this leader understood that excessive military threats would only lead to a backlash, so he did his best to ensure that Taiwan still had room to engage in international affairs without feeling excessively pressured by China (Ji, 1996; 120).

Jiang would not insist on an immediate change of Taiwan's status, but he did point out that the American position still contained an anomaly, like Deng did. In Kissinger's (2011; 483) words, "the US did not support independence of Taiwan nor, on the other hand, did it promote reunification". However, in line with his foreign policy, Jiang called for a global perspective to deal with the matter, the perspective of a world whose future was dependent on Sino-American cooperation; he also called for compromise between

⁶ Full text can be found at: <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/twwt/t36736.htm>

both sides – a word almost never used by Chinese leaders when dealing with Taiwan (*ibid*; 484).

Not long after, Lee Teng-hui from the Kuomintang (KMT) consolidated power in Taiwan and proclaimed a Taiwanization approach at home, coupled with a “pragmatic policy” abroad. At this point, the Chinese strategy switched “from inducement to pressure” (Ji, 1996; 120). Furthermore, Lee Teng-hui’s visit to the US was interpreted by China as a sign of the beginning of a new Cold War. This brought the romance between China and the US to an end, as China could not rely on anybody else to help it control Taiwan’s independence. That is why, “amidst Chinese frustration over 15 years of wasted hard work, military preparations were readjusted for possible confrontation across the Strait” (*ibid*). China halted regular contacts with Taiwan and, in 1996, it started carrying out ballistic missile tests in the area surrounding the island, to which the US responded by sending an aircraft carrier to the Strait. In 1999, Lee Teng-hui referred to the ties between Taiwan and China as “international”, leading to protests and fueling the tensions even more.

In 2000, pro-independence Chen Shui-bian from the Democratic Progressive Party (DDP) was elected president of Taiwan. He enunciated his “Four Noes and One Without” policy which, among other aspects, declared that Taiwan would not formally declare independence. In the following year, transportation between China and Taiwan began to recover. Beijing offered reconciliation with a new version of its principle of “One China”, which no longer treated Taiwan as a Province. According to this policy, there was only one China in the world, to which both the mainland and Taiwan belonged. However, as expected, the Taiwanese president responded that there was a country on each side of the Strait, which once more hindered progress of their relations.

3.3. Under Hu Jintao

In 2003, Taiwan’s president expressed his intention to call a referendum on applying for UN representation under the name “Taiwan”. As a response, Wen Jiabao reminded him of the desirability of peaceful reunification:

Our fundamental policy on the settlement of the question of Taiwan is peaceful reunification, and one country-two systems. We would do our utmost with utmost sincerity to bring about national unity and peaceful reunification through peaceful means.

When Chen Shui-bian (DDP) was reelected president in 2004, Beijing reacted by passing an “Anti-Secession Law”⁷ on the year that followed. This law must be understood as a reaction to Taiwan’s increased rhetoric on sovereignty, as well as an attempt to preserve Chinese territorial integrity and sovereignty and to neutralize the fear of increasing radicalism during Chen Shui-bian’s second term (2004-2008). In general, the law normalized many of the principles that had guided Chinese conduct in the field until then; as an example, it made forceful occupation compulsory in case of the announcement of a *de jure* independence in Taiwan. T (Ríos, 2012; 50).

Ma Ying-jeou’s (KMT) victory in the 2008 election accelerated a series of measures in many fields that completely transformed the previous situation. These measures ultimately led to the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement⁸ (ECFA) in June 2010, a preferential trade agreement between the governments of the PRC and Taiwan aimed at reducing tariffs and commercial barriers between the two. The ECFA illustrated a totally different dynamic to that expressed in the Anti-Secession Law. The agreement, which was seen as the most significant one since the two sides split in 1949, reflected China and Taiwan’s economic convergence, characterized by “an active flux of economic and trading relations led by thousands of Taiwanese in possession of business in the Mainland” (*ibid*; 52). It also recognized the key role played by Taiwan in bolstering Deng’s opening-up policy in China, as it was the largest provider of foreign investment during many years.

Ma also proclaimed the policy of the “Three Noes”: “no independence, no unification and no use of force” to delineate his approach on cross-strait relations (Yang, 2018). This was then followed by a period of rapprochement and cooperation between the adversaries. Direct transportation between China and Taiwan, interrupted since 1949, was reinstated and China began to implement its principle “peaceful development” or “peaceful rise” (see Part II, 2.3.3), whereby it would work to improve its relations with all the nations of the world, including Taiwan.

It seems somehow surprising that, during Hu Jintao’s term of office, both sides of the Strait managed to put aside their differences in record time, giving rise to an era of reconciliation and negotiation. As per Ríos (2012; 75), Hu Jintao was responsible for bringing about “the greatest shift of bilateral relations in history”.

⁷ Full text can be found at: <http://www.chinaembassy.org/eng/zt/999999999/t187406.htm>

⁸ Full text can be found at: <http://www.ecfa.org.tw/RelatedDoc.aspx>

3.4. Under Xi Jinping

Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012 signified a fundamental change of course in almost all matters concerning both Chinese domestic and foreign policy (see Part II, 2.4). With Xi at the forefront, China's sense of urgency to achieve reunification increased.

During March and April of 2014, the Sunflower Student Movement provoked unrest in Taiwan. This was a protest movement promoted by students over the passage of the Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement with China (CSSTA) by the ruling party Kuomintang. During the protests, Taiwanese university students occupied the Parliament and the Taiwanese Executive claiming that the trade pact with the PRC would seriously damage Taiwan's economy and render it vulnerable to political pressure from Beijing. Since then, the Kuomintang started to lose power of Taiwan's legislature (BBC, 2014).

In November 2015, a presidential summit between the leaders of the two sides, Xi Jinping and Ma Ying-jeou, took place in Singapore. This was the first meeting to take place since 1949; however, it only had symbolic importance, which was diluted even more by the political collapse of the Kuomintang in the 2016 presidential election.

The outcome of the 2016 election gave the victory to the pro-independent candidate Tsai Ing-wen (DDP). While Tsai opted for a policy of maintaining the "status quo" in the Straits, Xi suspended all negotiations and adopted a tougher stance towards the island, in line with his foreign policy aims. This situation was exacerbated when, in December of that same year, Tsai telephoned US President Donald Trump to congratulate him on his presidency. The call clearly unleashed the anger of China and intensified tensions against both Taiwan and the US. Nevertheless, Taiwan and Washington became closer allies, with the latter adopting a growing number measures and laws favorable to Taiwan.

In January 2019, Xi announced that he would continue to adhere to the policy of "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan, but he also warned, "We do not forsake the use of force." And the truth is, the election of Tsai Ing-wen has rendered peaceful reunification somewhat elusive, and many Mainland Chinese have already lost patience with the idea. With Tsai in power, it looks as though China has only a small opportunity to seize Taiwan, which has encouraged the creation a new counter-strategy under the name of "forceful reunification". In the meantime, China has already started to isolate Taiwan by forcing it out of international bodies such as the WTO, requiring airlines to substitute "Taiwan" for "Taiwan, Province of China" and even prompting other countries to sever their ties with Taiwan (Gries & Wang, 2019).

In sum, Xi's assertive posture on sovereignty and territorial integrity, added to the domestic and international political costs that would materialize if Taiwan made a move toward independence, is likely to provoke a strong and decisive reaction from China against any new Taiwanese policy under the DPP that aims to increase separation between Beijing and Taipei. Such a reaction could, without a doubt, entail the use of force (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016; 25).

CONCLUSIONS

Walter Russel Mead (2014) was not mistaken when he said that the old power strategies were regaining their importance in the field of International Relations. Western states misunderstood the real meaning of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union by interpreting them as the triumph of liberal values and the end of the geopolitical game. But the truth is that the importance of geography and geopolitics has reappeared. China, as we have seen throughout this project, epitomizes this reality.

States rise thanks to the interaction between their differential growth rates and the anarchic nature of the international system where they operate. In such a system, China is already paving its way towards world hegemony because it fulfills all the characteristics necessary to do so.

Nevertheless, China's rise has not come free of obstacles; rather, it has been a convoluted process which has altered not only the regional landscape of Asia, but also the established position of the US as the world's leading superpower. The key question now is whether China and the US will end up falling in the Thucydides Trap, where a war would be inevitable; or, on the contrary, whether China's rise will be a peaceful process. Handling this phenomenon is indeed one of the greatest challenges of the century.

China's rise would never have occurred if it had not been for the role of its leaders, who are the state's ultimate source of domestic and foreign policy. Each one of the leaders analyzed in this project, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping, is singular in that they had to deal with a different set of issues and, although they all had clearly different personality traits, they were similar in their conception of China's role in the world.

Since the advent of Deng Xiaoping in 1979, China detached from its old Maoist traditions and opened up to the world; however, his mission was aborted by the Tiananmen crisis. Jiang Zemin maintained most of the measures put in place by Deng and took them a step further, bolstering China's role in the international system; however, his leadership was still somewhat affected by the previous domestic crisis. Under Hu Jintao, China consolidated its role as a great power and got rid of Western influences and challenges to its regime. Now, with Xi Jinping in office, China has proved to be clearly able to design a foreign policy that reflects its real potential and ambitions.

In short, the China we know today owes its tremendous economic potential and its international engagement to Deng Xiaoping; its strong sense of resilience and capacity to overcome difficulties are the legacy of Jiang Zemin; Hu Jintao placed renewed emphasis

on the country's core national interests and engineered a way for it to rise peacefully; lastly, thanks to Xi Jinping, China has become stronger. Nevertheless, several features of Xi Jinping's leadership, such as his assertiveness and restrictive policies, tilt the balance towards an open confrontation with the West and make us wonder whether China's rise will be a peaceful process after all.

The case of the China-Taiwan divide has served to illustrate from a practical perspective how each one of the leaders perceived China's role in the world. Overall, the policy of "one country, two systems" established by Deng in 1979 has been fairly consistent ever since. It is a policy of reunification which relies on two contradictory tools: peaceful efforts and military means. In general terms, each leader's approach was coherent with his political discourse; however, because Taiwan constitutes such a sensitive issue for the Chinese leadership, as it can directly affect the country's sovereignty and legitimacy, it is normal to see that none of them were willing to take major risks that could undermine their position. Once more, Xi Jinping's assertive foreign policy and risk-taking attitude may reverse the trend towards non-confrontation and peaceful reunification and turn it into one of forceful reunification. Whether that will be the case, it remains to be seen.

This project has portrayed how societies can flourish if they count on leaders who are willing to take risks and question the established traditions of their country. Looked at together, China's leaders, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping, have managed to bring Chinese society from where it was to where it had never been; they have overcome domestic and international crises; they have created both enmities and alliances; they have sometimes opted for peace, other times for war... but essentially, whichever strategy they chose to employ, they always did so with the aim of bringing China to what they deemed was its righteous place in the international system.

The spatial limitations of this project do not allow for a more detailed analysis of the possible implications of China's foreign policy in the years to come. For this reason, further investigation will be needed to address such matters. Since Xi Jinping's leadership has not yet come to an end, we may ask ourselves three questions. First, will Xi remain president for life or is he likely to be replaced?; second, how will the Trump administration and other administrations deal with China's expansionist programs?; and third, how will Sino-US relations affect the issue of Taiwan?.

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ANNEXES

Annex I



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