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Community of shared future

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Abstract:

The arrival of Xi Jinping to the posts of Secretary General of the PCC and Chairman of the Central Military Commission in 2012 and a year later to the presidency of the People's Republic of China has accelerated the evolution of China's foreign policy and the proliferation of concepts such as "community of shared future", the "Belt and Road Initiative" or the "Chinese dream of national rejuvenation" among others. The already perceptible change in Chinese foreign policy brings us to one of the great questions to be analysed today. Where is China going? What international system does China intend to build? Does China intend to reform the system or create a new one by abandoning the current one?

Keywords:

China, Foreign Policy, geostrategy, community of shared future, China Model.

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La política exterior de China y la comunidad de futuro compartido

Resumen:

La llegada de Xi Jinping a los puestos de secretario general del PCCh y de presidente de la Comisión Militar Central, en 2012, y un año más tarde a la presidencia de la República Popular de China ha acelerado la evolución de la política exterior china y la proliferación de conceptos como «comunidad de futuro compartido», la Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta o el «sueño chino de rejuvenecimiento nacional», entre otros. El ya perceptible cambio en la política exterior china nos lleva a una de las grandes cuestiones que hay que analizar en la actualidad. ¿Hacia dónde va China? ¿Qué sistema internacional pretende poner en pie? ¿Pretende reformar el sistema o crear uno nuevo abandonando el actual?

Palabras clave:

China, política exterior, geoestrategia, comunidad de futuro compartido, el modelo chino.

Introduction

In 2016, Wang Yi, China's Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated in a speech that "the Chinese diplomacy will continue to uphold the themes of peaceful development and win-win cooperation, foster a more favorable international environment for the realization of the two centenary goals and the Chinese dream of great national renewal, and make new and even greater contribution to peace, development and progress of mankind"¹. After years of being used to have a reduced role on the international stage, trying not to draw attention to its development, Deng Xiaoping's doctrine that advised prudence, discretion and moderation has been abandoned in favor of concepts that are more aligned with the new status of China, reflecting the extraordinary change that has taken place in the Asian giant since 1978.

Faced with this new position on the international scene, the Chinese leadership has been, since 2013, devising a series of strategies, plans, concepts and ideas that, although diffuse, malleable, nebulous and constantly in change, give a vague idea of the type of international system to which China aspires and in which its interests will be protected. The arrival of Xi Jinping to the posts of Secretary General of the CPC and Chairman of the Central Military Commission in 2012 and a year later to the presidency of the People's Republic of China has accelerated the evolution of China's foreign policy and the proliferation of concepts such as "Community of shared future", the "Belt and Road Initiative" or the "Chinese dream of national rejuvenation" among others.

Its spectacular growth in all aspects of state power and the growth and maturity of its economy together with the opacity of the Chinese government and the multiplicity of abstract concepts in its foreign policy have once again dusted off the China threat theory. In the US, China has been labelled as a revisionist power and a strategic rival after Donald Trump's victory in 2016. One of the new concepts launched by the Chinese leadership is that of the Community of Shared Future. This will be a key tool to provide the necessary stability to achieve the "Chinese dream of national rejuvenation" and it is the vehicle through which China will begin to shape the regional system, exporting its governance and economic model. Although it is still in its initial stages, this initiative has

¹ WANG, Yi. FMPRC. Work Together to Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind. Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1369269.shtml

the capacity to politically and economically transform and reconfigure regions such as Southeast Asia or Central Asia, increasingly integrating them into a regional system with China at its core.

The evolution of China's Foreign Policy

China's foreign policy has been influenced by several critical elements in the modern history of the country: the so-called "century of humiliation", the creation in 1921 of the Communist Party of China, the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 and the set of reforms that allowed the Chinese economy to take off after the death of Mao Tse-Tung. During the mandate of Hu Jintao and his Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, the policy called "heping fazhan" or peaceful development was inaugurated, and it began to absorb the change that was taking place inside China. China was already leaving the state of underdevelopment behind and was aware that it was no longer just another country on the periphery, it was a rising power, and this was in contradiction with Deng Xiaoping's thesis. Indeed, China's economic growth during Hu Jintao's tenure was already very difficult to hide. The growth during the 2008 crisis showed the growing importance of China in the international economy (overtaking Japan to become the second economic power) and the Olympic Games of the same year launched a renewed image of China becoming the perfect showcase to relaunch its soft power.

The policy of peaceful development was intended to prevent China's development from being a threat by its neighbours and, above all, by the United States. However, China's actions in the South China Sea and around the Senkaku Islands began to show an increasingly assertive face of Chinese diplomacy that no longer avoided the escalation of hostilities and did not hesitate to show its growing military power to its Asian neighbours. Hu Jintao's new agenda, while expanding the focus of Chinese foreign policy by seeking a growing Chinese presence in Asia, still lacked the global and more ambitious focus that has characterized Xi Jinping's tenure.

With Xi Jinping, Chinese foreign policy has undergone a notable change as a result not only of the greater political, military or economic capabilities that China has but also because of the accumulation of power in the hands of the Chinese president². Since 2012, Xi Jinping began a path to centralize power in his hands and to remove the brakes established in the Chinese political and legal system to avoid the repetition of the cult of personality that characterized the Maoist period. The traditional collective leadership has given way to a growing presence of the figure of Xi Jinping reinforced after his campaign against corruption that ousted several political rivals (Bo Xilai, among others) and allowed him to put loyal supporters in key positions. In March 2018, Xi Jinping took another step to strengthen his grip thanks to the Chinese parliament decision to abolish presidential limits, allowing Xi to get rid of the time limits of the presidency. This has given him the possibility to give an important turn to the foundations of China's foreign strategy, abandoning the policy of "Tao Guang Yan Hui" for that of "Fen Fa You Wei" (striving for success) without fearing for his position. According to Xuetong Yan, this policy commitment by Fen Fa You Wei means that "Chinese foreign policy is no longer focused on keeping a low profile but is based on beginning to show (and use) its capabilities by aspiring to leadership, especially in the region"³.

In his first years Xi Jinping began to elaborate his political strategy at home and abroad. One of its first elements was the so-called "strategy of the four comprehensives". These are aimed at:

1. Comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society.
2. Comprehensively deepen reform.
3. Comprehensively govern the nation according to law.
4. Comprehensively strictly govern the Party.

The first of these movements gave way to what we know today as "the Chinese dream", which has an internal and external dimension that we will analyse in the next section.

² DOÑATE, Mavi. ¿Se cree China la reina de un nuevo tablero mundial?. IEEE. DIEEEO 131/2020. Available at:

http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2020/DIEEEO131_2020MAVDON_geopoliticaChina.pdf

³ XUETONG, Yan. From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volumen 7. 2014. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/cjip/article/7/2/153/438673>

The internal and external dimension of the Chinese Dream

Since Xi Jinping assumed the post of General Secretary of the CPC, one of the most repeated slogans has been that of the "Chinese dream." The first time this concept was used was in November 2012 during Xi Jinping's visit to the National Historical Museum where he declared that "to bring about the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the greatest of Chinese dreams"⁴. This concept has grown in importance becoming the main goal of Xi Jinping's mandate, reinforced in 2014 with his speech at the Central Conference on Foreign Affairs. As with many other concepts, interpretations have immediately proliferated regarding what the Chinese dream means, ranging from the most pessimistic that understand this dream as a threat to the liberal order and as China's will to achieve a hegemonic position in the international system to the most benevolent who understand the Chinese dream as an opportunity to expand cooperation between countries, foster the growth of all economies and avoid struggles between powers due to the pacifism inherent in the concept. Regardless of the intentions that one and the other intend to see behind the Chinese dream, it can be divided into internal and external objectives. The internal objectives of the Chinese dream are twofold:

First of all, the year 2021 will be the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping set out to "build a moderately prosperous society in all its aspects" for which it is necessary to double the 2010's GDP and per capita income of the rural and urban population in 2020. This goal, based on official Chinese sources, would have already been achieved⁵. Secondly, in 29 years, Xi Jinping intends to build "a prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious modern socialist country" coinciding with another centenary, this time that of the founding of the People's Republic.

The basic goal of internal economic development (the foundation of the CPC's legitimacy) has not changed since Deng Xiaoping. What has changed is China's attitude towards its external environment. Deng understood that if China wanted to start its economic take-off, it needed a stable international situation, good relations with the

⁴ MANORANJAN, Mohanty. Xi Jinping and the 'Chinese Dream'. Economic and Political Weekly Vol. 48, No. 38 (SEPTEMBER 21, 2013), pp. 34-40. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23528539>

⁵ CGTN. Data reveals how far China's from a moderately prosperous society in all respects. Available at: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-06-28/How-far-is-China-from-a-moderately-prosperous-society-in-all-respects--RH5YiYHiNO/index.html>

main powers and with its neighbours. Thus, China intended to take advantage of the structure of the international economic system to develop internally without considering the possibility of modifying a system in whose construction it had not participated and whose foundations were contrary to the Chinese political system. With Xi Jinping, the approach, although similar, is different since, although it is true that China has posited itself in recent years as a defender of free trade and economic openness in the face of protectionism, it is no less true that the Chinese intentions to modify several important pillars of the global and regional institutional structure are increasingly evident, putting aside the passive attitude to show an increasing willingness to position China as a creator of institutions and as a rule-maker.

During his November 2014 speech, Xi Jinping presented his international project and his vision of China's position in the world, stating that “we can see that China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for its development endeavor in which much can be accomplished. Our biggest opportunity lies in China's steady development and the growth in its strength. On the other hand, we should be mindful of various risks and challenges and skillfully defuse potential crises and turn them into opportunities for China's development”, Xi continued saying that “We should seek other countries' understanding of and support for the Chinese dream, which is about peace, development, cooperation and win-win outcomes. What we pursue is the wellbeing of both the Chinese people and the people of all other countries”. In this way the Chinese dream changes depending on the audience that China is addressing. For the domestic audience it is about pure development of China's economic capabilities for the benefit of Chinese citizens. For the foreign audience, the Chinese dream has the mission of creating an image of China as a responsible actor within the international community that because of its economic (and military) power is able to present itself as a leader who is able to maintain the stability without losing its benign character and without falling into the pitfalls of the great powers.

In order to sustain this image, Xi Jinping pointed out that “we should promote neighbourhood diplomacy, turn China's neighbourhood areas into a community of common destiny, continue to follow the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness in conducting neighbourhood diplomacy, promote friendship and partnership with our neighbours, foster an amicable, secure and prosperous

neighbourhood environment, and boost win-win cooperation and connectivity with our neighbours". The Chinese strategy, however, is not directed only at its neighbours. With Xi Jinping the foundations of the relationship between the great powers have been laid in a different way based on a "new model of relations between great countries" that is directed to "correctly manage relations with other large countries, building a solid and stable structure among large countries"⁶.

According to Chen Xiangyang, this speech has become a manifesto to secure the Chinese dream, adding that this concept is Xi's way of saying "that China, a developing socialist country, has already become a great country ready to take its place in the world"⁷. The Chinese dream appears as the culmination of China's international aspirations and as a strategy aimed at erasing the experience of the century of humiliation, returning to China the position of political hegemony in Asia and its economic importance at the global level that it had before the meddling of the West in Asia. According to Xi Jinping, the future "will be an era that will see China move closer to the centre stage, making ever greater contributions to Humanity"⁸.

Within China's narrative the concepts of "new type of international relations (xinxing guoji guanxi - 新型 国际 关系) and of a "new model of relations between large countries "(xinxing daguo guanxi - 新型 大国关系) stand out with their own light⁹. The first is aimed at the international community and aims to give a positive image of China's growth and it conveys the idea that it is not only compatible with economic growth in its neighbourhood but is necessary for its neighbours, creating a win-win relationship in which both China and its neighbours would profit. Behind this principle of new international relations lies China's intention to avoid being considered a revisionist power and to prevent its actions to be threatening to its neighbours. By showing the benevolence and harmony of successive Chinese dynasties over the centuries, Chinese

⁶ XINHUA. Xi eyes more enabling int'l environment for China's peaceful development. Available at: <http://en.people.cn/n/2014/1130/c90883-8815967-3.html>

⁷ CHEN, Xiangyang. A Diplomatic Manifesto to Secure the Chinese Dream. China-U.S. Focus. 2014. Available at: <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/a-diplomatic-manifesto-to-secure-the-chinese-dream>

⁸ XINHUA. Socialism with Chinese characteristics enters new era: Xi. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/18/c_136688475.htm

⁹ BLANCO TORRES, Carlos. LAS RELACIONES DE CHINA EN ASIA ORIENTAL Y SU DEFINICIÓN EN EL CONTEXTO INTERNACIONAL, MOTORES DE CAMBIOS GLOBALES. IEEE. DIEEEO 104/2014. Available at: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2014/DIEEEO104-2014_China_en_asia_Oriental_CarlosBlanco.pdf

leaders seek to underscore the benefits that a 'pax sinica' can bring to Asia and the rest of the world. In this way, the Chinese dream would not be solely of China but would be a dream shared by the rest of the international community. In Xi's words "the dream of the Chinese people is strongly connected with the dreams of other nations; the Chinese dream can only be realized in a peaceful international environment and under a stable international order"¹⁰.

The second principle of the "new model of relations between large countries" is essentially focused on the United States. In 2010, when Barack Obama began his "pivot to Asia" policy, it became clear to Chinese leaders that the policy of keeping a low profile was no longer adequate to manage relations with the United States. The rise of China, evident to everyone, was beginning to create frictions, and China's effort to cover it up only fuelled the 'China threat' theory. Without any apparent advantage, it was necessary to change position to counter the growing suspicions towards China. The new model of relations between big countries aims to put aside all the theories and debates that have abounded in recent years about the so-called 'Thucydides trap' proposed by Graham Allison, as he pointed out that in 12 of the 16 times when there was an emerging power that challenged a hegemonic power the end result was war¹¹. To dispel the possibility of a war between great countries (note that Chinese diplomacy avoids using the word power) China has used its history to demonstrate that its rise is benign, using philosophical principles of the Chinese classics that consider that "harmony is most valuable", "peace and harmony must prevail" and that "all men under heaven are brothers". According to China countries can learn from the past and the Chinese leadership points out that we must move away from historical determinism, in other words, the ascent China does not have to lead to a war with the United States and is compatible with the existence of two or more powers in the international system or with the existence of two separate international systems.

¹⁰ XI, Jinping. Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf

¹¹ ALLISON, Graham. The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War? Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/usa-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>

Through the policy of striving for success (Fen Fa You Wei) Xi Jinping aims to place China at the forefront of the international system. As we have seen, the principles that govern the external aspect of the Chinese dream are not only aimed at regulating relations with the US. With the new model of international relations Beijing acknowledges that the continuity of China's growth requires a greater effort to create and model an institutional structure capable of giving greater strength and credibility to this Chinese dream. This greater solidity must also be accompanied by a search for allied countries that sustain and support Beijing's hegemonic project and that enable an environment conducive to their interests. Hence Xi Jinping's interest in creating partnerships with multiple countries whose objective, according to the Chinese Foreign Minister, is "to commit to mutually consult and understand each other; create a security architecture based on equality, justice, joint contribution and shared benefits; promote open, innovative and inclusive development that benefits all; increase exchanges between civilizations to increase harmony, inclusiveness and respect for differences and build an ecosystem that puts mother nature and green development first". These would be the pillars of a community of shared future that we will analyse below.

The Community of Shared Future

The centre of gravity's shift from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific and the Indian Ocean and the withdrawal of the United States from its traditional role as leader of the international community since 2017 have opened a window of opportunity for Xi Jinping to begin to sketch the kind of international system in which China would have a predominant position, in which its vital interests would be guaranteed and in which the continuity of the Communist Party of China would be undisputed. In his speech at the 19th National Congress, Xi Jinping acknowledged the existence of a series of dynamics such as "changes in the global governance system and in the international order" and advocated for the "construction of a community of shared future"¹². This community of shared future (ren lei ming yun gong tong ti - 人类命运共同体) is the latest modification made to the concept previously called "community of common destiny". The community

¹² XI, Jinping. Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf

of shared future, as an external dimension of the Chinese dream, is one of the most important concepts in Chinese diplomacy, so important it is that in 2018 it was inscribed in the constitution. As indicated by Cui Tiankai, China's Ambassador in Washington, "China has made an unwavering choice: we are working to build a community with a shared future for mankind. This is at the core of China's foreign policy and has been incorporated in the Constitutions of the Communist Party of China and of the People's Republic of China."¹³. This community would be a basic element to promote the evolution of the global governance system thanks to "the rise of China's international influence, its ability to inspire and power to shape"¹⁴.

We could consider the community of shared future as the grand strategy that China has chosen to progressively shape the global and regional system. This great strategy has two main pillars: the first one is political and the other one has an economic nature. With the first one, China is going to export its governance model by promoting authoritarianism abroad. With the second one, China is going to export its economic development model. Both have the goal of creating a global scenario whose features are closer to those of China, creating an environment more favourable to its national interests and the continuity of the CPC. The latter is a vital interest for the Chinese leadership, as noted at the last National Congress where it was declared that "the Party remains always the backbone of the nation; and that as history progresses and we continue to uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics, the Party remains always a powerful leadership core"¹⁵.

As will be seen in this section, the target audience of this community of shared future are the developing countries. China, which still considers itself a developing country, would be at the head of this grouping and would promote the development of these countries through the Belt and Road Initiative reducing the gap between countries of the north and the south through "assistance to developing countries, especially less developed countries"¹⁶. Being at the forefront of developing countries allows China to promote a series of gradual changes in the international system, claiming, like many

¹³ Remarks by Ambassador Cui Tiankai At the Forum on US-China Relations. Available at: <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgxss/t1738974.htm>

¹⁴ XI, Jinping. Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Asian, African and Latin American countries, that the current system is not inclusive because it is created and sustained by the West and that it discriminates against developing countries whose presence and interests are not protected. As Jiang Zemin pointed out, "the old international political and economic order, which is unfair and irrational, has yet to fundamentally change"¹⁷. China understood that if it wants to modify the international system "in a fundamental way" it must do so accompanied by those countries that consider themselves relegated to the periphery of the system by the western core and want to put an end to that hegemony. A certain resemblance is seen here with Mao's foreign policy and its vision of China as an anti-imperialist leader and guide to the least developed countries.

This community of shared future is still in an initial phase of development, which prevents a clear vision of its contours. Until now it has been characterized, in the absence of a greater specificity, by a series of features aimed at favouring its gradual acceptance by the rest of the actors.

First of all, the community of shared future is a flexible term that has changed over the years. At first this project, as we have already said, was called a community of common destiny and was focused exclusively on the bilateral relationship between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan). Over time, the project has evolved as both China's capabilities and ambitions have evolved. Geographically, the community of shared future is directed, above all, to the areas near China that have traditionally been its sphere of influence and expansion: Southeast Asia and Central Asia. According to Pang Zhongyin, the surrounding areas have become a critical priority for Beijing's foreign policy¹⁸. Although these areas are the preferred areas in the project, other regions such as Africa or Latin America are also important, but because they are more remote areas with greater cultural differences, they are not as important as the Asian ones. Third, on paper, the Chinese project is egalitarian, underlining the principles of "mutual respect, balance, justice", its preference for a system in which the 5 principles of peaceful coexistence prevail and an environment that "make[s] economic

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Jiang Zemin Delivers Report to the 16th CPC National Congress". 2002. Available at:

http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/3698_665962/t18869.shtml

¹⁸ PANG, Zhongying. ISEAS. FROM TAO GUANG YANG HUI TO XIN XING China's Complex Foreign Policy Transformation and Southeast Asia. Available at: https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TRS7_20.pdf

globalization more open, inclusive and balanced so that the benefits are shared by all”¹⁹. In practice, the system is totally unbalanced given the evident difference in China's political, military, and economic weight compared to its neighbours.

One of the great advantages of the project is its inclusiveness. For years China has denounced the efforts of the United States to export its internal model and its use of international institutions to achieve changes in the political and economic systems of other countries. Interventions in the Middle East and Libya or the aid conditionality from the IMF or the World Bank would be examples of this eagerness to meddle in the internal affairs of other countries. The community of shared future has been tailored, precisely, to accommodate a series of countries that, due to their undemocratic systems, are not accepted in the liberal order or because of their economic system cannot access the aid mechanisms of the international financial institutions. China thus intends to postulate itself as the defender of a diverse order that respects the differences between various alternative models to the liberal and democratic order that exists today. Fifth, the promotion of the community of shared future is carried out through a plurality of means and channels. There are institutional channels (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), multilateral forums (Lancang-Mekong Cooperation), bilateral projects (trade agreements) and training and education of civil servants or the exchange of students. Finally, considering that the community is still in an embryonic phase, it lacks a centralized structure that gives visibility and coherence to all projects.

All these characteristics of the community of shared future aim to facilitate the incorporation of developing countries into China's initiatives. The more states get on the train, the easier it will be for China to model the international system and promote its policies. As Pang Zhongying points out “this shared future implies the export of the 'Chinese model'. For this reason, the export of this 'Chinese model' is an indispensable element of the community of shared future”²⁰.

¹⁹ XI, Jinping. Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf

²⁰ PANG, Zhongying. ISEAS. FROM TAO GUANG YANG HUI TO XIN XING China's Complex Foreign Policy Transformation and Southeast Asia. Available at: https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TRS7_20.pdf

What does he mean by Chinese model? In the words of Xi Jinping, "the Chinese model for a better system of social governance offers a new option for other countries and nations that want to accelerate their development while preserving their independence. And it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems that humanity faces". This system of government based on authoritarianism and the primacy of the state in the economy is combined with a dose of Chinese values inherited from its Confucian and Legalist tradition.

A detailed report on Beijing's activities by Elizabeth C. Economy points to China's efforts to promote its political model in Asia, Africa and Latin America by "offering defence training for the Army, economic training for ministers and justice training for the police, there are also very specific lessons on what tools to use to suppress dissidents and how to promote foreign investment while accessing and retaining foreign technology". She goes on to highlight Chinese activities in Africa, focusing on Ethiopia where the CPC has been training the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front "in developing its structure, strengthening its ideological work and its propaganda system". It has also exported its model cybersecurity law to Tanzania and Zimbabwe and trained the leaders of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement on "transport, health and cultural industries, their poverty reduction efforts and on how to manage public opinion and build a party"²¹.

China's development model is another product that China is exporting in order to shape the regional system. Since the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's reforms, successive Chinese leaders have been building an economic model classified as socialism with Chinese characteristics that is, according to Xi Jinping, "the guarantee of the progress and development of modern China"²². This socialism with Chinese characteristics began to take shape during the 70s when a market economy intervened strongly by the state gradually emerged and when enrichment became acceptable under the slogan "being rich is glorious". Thus, the market began to play an increasingly important role within the Chinese economy, combining the free market, the liberalization of the

²¹ECONOMY, Elizabeth C. Exporting the China Model. Available at: [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/testimonies/USCCTestimony3-13-20%20\(Elizabeth%20Economy\)_justified.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/testimonies/USCCTestimony3-13-20%20(Elizabeth%20Economy)_justified.pdf)

²² XI, Jinping. Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf

economy and the privatization of economic sectors but giving the state an essential role in the process and ensuring that it maintained political and economic control through a series of state-owned enterprises²³.

The 2008 crisis was a severe blow to Western economies whose economic model, aligned with the so-called "Washington consensus", was accompanied by economic crises in America and Europe, the most important of them being the 2008 financial crisis. The idea of an alternative model based on the successes achieved by Asian countries soon emerged among academics. Some began to speak of a "Beijing consensus", a term coined by Joshua Cooper Ramo. In this context, Xi Jinping unveiled in Astana and in Jakarta one of the most ambitious projects of Chinese diplomacy: the Belt and Road Initiative (better known as the 'New Silk Road' or BRI in English).

The BRI comprises five links to achieve greater integration between the economies of the participating countries:

1. Policy coordination.
2. Infrastructure connectivity.
3. Cooperation in supply chains and investment facilities.
4. Financial integration.
5. Cooperation and cultural exchange.

These links will be developed along 5 strategic corridors. The New Eurasian Land Bridge linking western China with Europe by land via Kazakhstan and Russia and linking by sea the Chinese ports of Rizhao and Lianyungang with the European ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp; the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor; the China-Central and Western Asia Economic Corridor linking China with the Mediterranean and the Arabian peninsula; the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor linking China with Singapore. In turn, the sea route aims to connect China with Asian ports in the Indian Ocean, with East Africa and with the Mediterranean. To carry out all these projects, China has promoted the creation of a series of financial institutions such as the New Development Bank (linked to the

²³ FRÍAS SÁNCHEZ, Carlos Javier. China, ¿un gigante con los pies de barro? Documento de Opinión IEEE 108/2019. Available at: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2019/DIEEEO108_2019CARFRI_China.pdf

BRICS), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank or the Silk Road Fund which will facilitate China's efforts to gradually shape regional economic integration in Asia²⁴.

The initiative has, in addition to an economic component, an important geopolitical weight since the end point of the project is the complete integration of Asia into the Chinese economy attracting also the European and African economies. As the BRI Action Plan points out, among the purposes of the initiative are to "integrate the development strategies of the countries along the Belt and Road" and "to work together and advance towards the goals of mutual benefit and common security" both being essential objectives for the community of shared future. The Chinese economy is also going to benefit from a greater internationalization of its state-owned companies and its currency. Chinese SOEs play a key role, either by building infrastructures as sole bidders or through joint ventures with local partners. One of the points of the Action Plan declares the intention to "promote the participation of Chinese companies in the construction of infrastructures throughout the BRI and the realization of investments". The Plan also envisages a greater role for the renminbi in the Asian financial system by promoting "financial cooperation and striving to build a stable currency, investment, financing and credit reporting system in Asia and supporting the efforts of governments, their companies and financial institutions with good credit rating to issue bonds in renminbi"²⁵. Another element that will strengthen Beijing's strategy is the entry into force on November 15th of the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). This agreement, which has created the largest trading bloc, brings together 15 Asian nations and is an indispensable factor in bringing the economies of East Asia closer. The agreement, although fostered by ASEAN, will promote both the economic integration of its members with the Chinese economy and the leadership of Beijing in Asia, especially after India's exit from trade negotiations. All of this will bring many Asian economies closer to Beijing, gradually forming an economic bloc with China as the centre²⁶.

Ultimately, the Community of shared future will be a vehicle for the export of China's political and economic model, expanding China's influence in Eurasia and Africa, and at

²⁴ LLANDRES CUESTA, Borja. China's foreign policy in Southeast Asia. Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. DIEEEO 08/20. Available at:

http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2020/DIEEEO08_2020BORLLA_surAsia_ENG.pdf

²⁵ State Council of the RPC. Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative. Available at: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm

²⁶ JIN, Kai. Can China Build a Community of Common Destiny? Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2013/11/can-china-build-a-community-of-common-destiny/>

the same time a means to "mitigate the concerns of other countries, especially developed ones, regarding the rise of China maintaining a favourable international environment for China's effort for the rejuvenation of the nation"²⁷. Should Beijing's efforts to reconfigure the political and economic map of Asia yield positive results, there would be a notable modification of the international system, since China would cease to be a country on the periphery of the Western system. This new Asian system would be made up of a periphery of countries economically and politically dependent on Beijing, where the true centre of power would be found, rebuilding the historical configuration of the Asian order before the arrival of the Europeans.

Chinese exceptionalism

When presenting the Community of shared future to foreign audiences, Chinese leaders always resort to Chinese exceptionalism, pointing out the virtues that have characterized the Chinese government throughout history, the fruit of a millenary culture that has sought harmony, cooperation and has shown benevolence towards its citizens and its neighbours²⁸. Foreign Minister Wang Yi noted that "The vision of a community of shared future for mankind is rooted in the time-honoured Chinese civilization and the great conduct of China's diplomacy"²⁹. The community of shared future is imbued by a series of principles derived from Confucianism such as "harmony has unparalleled value", "achieving universal prosperity throughout the world" or "the unity of man and nature"³⁰. During the government of Hu Jintao, China launched the concept of "harmonious world" and with the arrival of Xi Jinping the new concepts launched by China's diplomacy are increasingly using terms and concepts that evoke the classics of Chinese thought. For years, Chinese theorists have been merging the various classical and modern ideas. The philosopher Gan Yang gave a presentation at Tsinghua University in which he advocated a unification of the three traditions in the new era. These three traditions would be the classical Confucian tradition, the communist

²⁷ DENGHUA, Zhang. The Concept of 'Community of Common Destiny' in China's Diplomacy: Meaning, Motives and Implications. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/app5.231>

²⁸ PARDO DE SANTAYANA, José. Confucianismo-leninismo en China. IEEE. DIEEEA01_2019. Available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2019/DIEEEA01_2019PARDO-China.pdf

²⁹ WANG, Yi. Work Together to Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind. Available at: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceus/eng/zgyw/t1369269.htm>

³⁰ Ibid

tradition of Mao Tse-Tung and the reformist ideas of Deng Xiaoping³¹. Far from the attacks that the figure of Confucius suffered in the past, Chinese leaders have been extracting from classical thinkers the principles needed to justify the continuity of the CPC at the forefront of power in China and also to present a benevolent image of Chinese power avoiding the usage of Western principles to build their regional system.

One of the most relevant ideas of classical Chinese thought applied to international relations is the concept of Tianxia (everything under the sky). As we have already noted, for centuries China was the hegemonic power in Asia and the main engine of the global economy. In the interior of the country, the Chinese Emperors were called the Son of Heaven and the legitimacy of their rule stemmed from their benevolence towards their citizens, a flourishing economy, and the protection of the nation. Abroad, the Emperors were at the top of a hierarchically organized system in which China was the centre and whose "belief system was ethically correct and should be followed by all peoples". To enter this Sinocentric system, neighbouring countries had to periodically send embassies with local merchandise and pay homage to the Emperor. In exchange, the countries accessed the Chinese market, and the government was legitimately recognized by China. This system supposedly ensured stability by avoiding struggles between states and guaranteed prosperity through trade, thus achieving the Tianxia Datong (the great harmony under heaven)³².

As can be seen, the dynamics of Chinese foreign policy and the concept of a community of shared future bear a relative resemblance to the system we have described. China's growing weight in the world economy and increasing economic dependence on its neighbours, its military power and political influence, together with a greater confidence of the Chinese leadership in its ability to put the country at the forefront of the system seem to lead the region to a modern version of Tianxia. This would imply the practical fragmentation of the world into two normative systems: the liberal order that we know today cantered on the West with the United States at the head and an authoritarian order with China as the political, security and economic centre.

³¹ GAN, Yang. "Unifying the Three Traditions" in the New Era: The Merging of Three Chinese Traditions". Available at: <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/gan-yang-tongsantong-chapter-1.html>

³² CRANMER-BYNG, John. The Chinese View of Their Place in the World: An Historical Perspective. 1972. p 68

Conclusion

As has been seen throughout the article, China's foreign policy has varied depending on the country's internal and external dynamics and each leader has adjusted the country's position in the international community based on China's political and economic capacities at that moment. Xi Jinping's vision corresponds to an international situation in which China is already the second world power at a political and economic level, exerting a notable influence over its entire neighbourhood and being an unavoidable actor for the resolution of numerous global issues such as climate change, the regulation of cyberspace or the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

The community of shared future, one of the flagship initiatives of Xi Jinping's thought is already a central element of China's foreign policy and of the CPC's long-term strategy. The success of the strategy will depend on Beijing's ability to attract Asian, African and Latin American countries under the umbrella of the community and on the ability to export its economic and governance model. It will also depend on the strength and coherence of the strategies to counter China's movements coming from the countries most interested in maintaining the current liberal international order at the global and regional level with the United States at the head, without forgetting the importance of Japan.

If the construction of this community of shared future comes to fruition, it wouldn't mean the recreation of the tributary system of two or more centuries ago or a global hegemony. Rather it would mean the establishment of a hierarchical system whose nucleus would be Beijing, an Asian region strongly integrated into the Chinese economy and various peripheral areas more or less close to China depending on their degree of adaptation to the Chinese model and their respect for the vital interests of Beijing. Most likely, this hierarchical system will coexist with the current liberal order dividing the world into two systems with various political principles, economic systems, security systems and even two Internet networks.

It is clear by now that China is not going to settle for a secondary position in the international system. It is also clear that China is not going to become a liberal democracy with a market economy. After a 'century of humiliation' and 100 years after the proclamation of the People's Republic of China, with the community of shared future Xi Jinping intends to place the country in a pre-eminent international position and to close the cycle of American hegemony.

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