

# **‘Domestic Politics and International Order: A Constructivist Analysis of Chinese Discourses on Territorial Sovereignty’**

*A thesis submitted in January 2022 to the University of Hyderabad  
in partial fulfilment of the award of the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
in  
POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**by  
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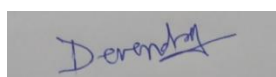
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## DECLARATION

I, **Devendra Kumar**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled '**Domestic Politics and International Order: A Constructivist Analysis of Chinese Discourses on Territorial Sovereignty**' submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Dr. Aparna Devare**, is a bona-fide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this university or any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/ INFLIBNET.

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**A)** The research scholar has published articles in the following publications:

- 1) “Multilateral Initiatives and Security Dilemma: Explaining India’s Choice to Join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).” *Strategic Analysis* 45, no. 3 (2021): 222-236, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2021.1920496>
- 2) “Traditional Cultural Ideas and Symbols, and Possibilities of Discursive Legitimacy in Contemporary China,” *ICS OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. 54*, August, 2020. [URL:https://www.icsin.org/uploads/2020/08/24/36ebf106b2b6a3ce8b21f7222a7e889a.pdf](https://www.icsin.org/uploads/2020/08/24/36ebf106b2b6a3ce8b21f7222a7e889a.pdf).

**B)** The research scholar has made presentations in the following international conferences:

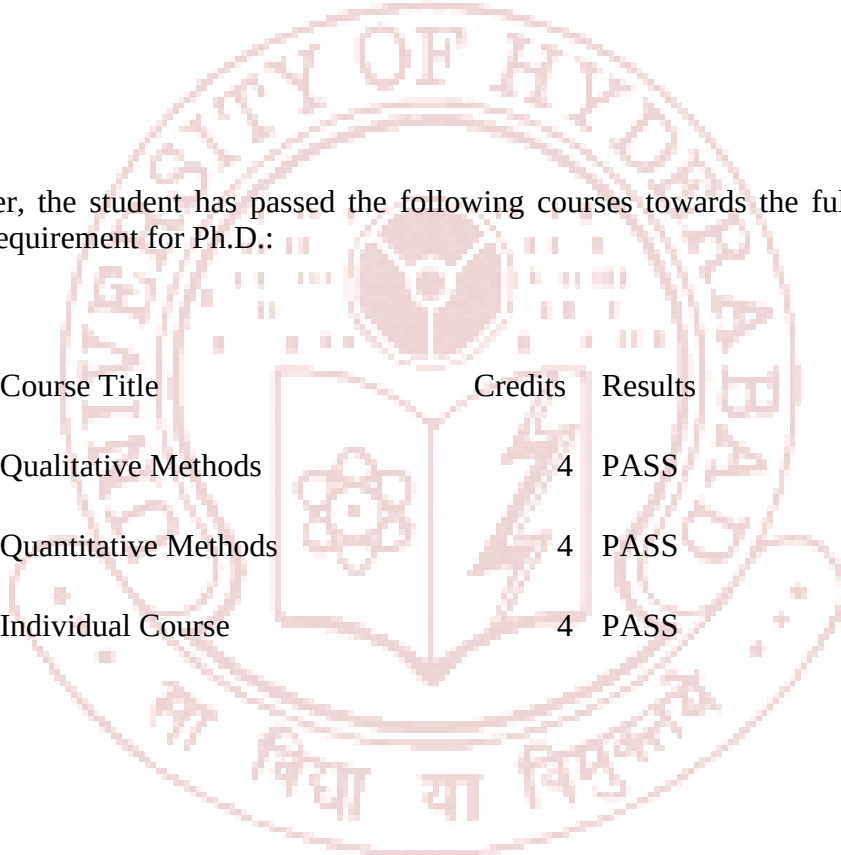
- 1) “Traditional Symbols, Leadership Styles and the Possibility of Discursive Legitimacy in Contemporary China” in the All India China Studies Conference organized by O P Jindal Global University and the Institute of China Studies, New Delhi during 7-9 November 2019.
- 2) “Multilateral Initiatives, Regional Connectivity and Development: A Case of China Sponsored Projects in South Asia” in the Second South Asian Border Studies Conference

beyond Boundaries and Borders: South Asian Quest for Peace, Development and Regional Connectivity held at the Department of Civics and Politics, Mumbai University, Mumbai, Maharashtra during 1-2 March 2019.

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| Course Code | Course Title         | Credits | Results |
|-------------|----------------------|---------|---------|
| PS 801      | Qualitative Methods  | 4       | PASS    |
| PS 802      | Quantitative Methods | 4       | PASS    |
| PS 803      | Individual Course    | 4       | PASS    |

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**Dean**  
**School of Social Sciences**

**Dedicated to**

My Guru

Guru Jambheswar who taught me to respect and empathize with all living  
beings

&

My parents who gave me life, support, and freedom to pursue what I choose to.

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Devendra Kumar

University of Hyderabad

## ABBREVIATIONS

|       |                                                                |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| AIIB  | Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank                           |
| APEC  | Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation                              |
| ARF   | ASEAN Regional Forum                                           |
| ASEAN | Association of South East Nations                              |
| BoP   | Balance of Power                                               |
| BoR   | Balance of Relationships                                       |
| BRI   | Belt and Road Initiative                                       |
| CCP   | Communist Party of China                                       |
|       | Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in  |
| CICA  | Asia                                                           |
| CNP   | Comprehensive National Power                                   |
| CPSU  | Communist Party of Soviet Union                                |
| CSF   | Community of Shared Futures                                    |
| EAF   | East Asia Forum                                                |
| GMD   | guomindang or kuo min tang                                     |
| ICISS | International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty |
| LoR   | Liberal International Order                                    |
| NAM   | Non-aligned Movement                                           |
| NGOs  | Non-Governmental Organizations                                 |
| PRC   | People's Republic of China                                     |
| R2P   | Responsibility to Protect                                      |
| RoC   | Republic of China                                              |
| SCO   | Shanghai Cooperation Organization                              |
| UNGA  | United Nations General Assembly                                |
| UNHCR | United Nations Human Rights Council                            |
| UNSC  | United Nations Security Council                                |

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### I

#### Background

Since the late 1970s, China has undergone profound changes in economic, cultural, military, politico-ideological, and foreign policy spheres. It has emerged as the second-largest economy after the United States with a GDP of more than US\$ 14 trillion. Additionally, it has transitioned to a market economy. Its military strength has grown to the second largest in terms of percent of GDP and absolute amount spent (US\$ 220 billion) with huge technological advancement.<sup>1</sup> It is a member of most international institutions, pacts, and agreements covering all issue areas in International Relations (IR) from the economy, trade to climate change and human rights. It has also been part of multilateral initiatives at regional and sub-regional levels.

In the politico-ideological and cultural sphere, three broad trends have characterized domestic politics namely the emergence of modernization paradigm, the decreasing role of Maoist-Socialism, and the revival of a set of ideas derived from tradition and history. The modernization paradigm has manifested in the belief in technological and economic efficiency, social and economic progress, and views about history. Economic reforms and the changes in the worldviews of the leadership of the party reflect these changes.<sup>2</sup> Despite setbacks and deficiencies in the efficacy of Maoist-Socialism, it has remained a potent force in the political legitimacy of the Communist Party of China (CCP). Yet its influence and ideological rigidity have given way to flexibility manifested in the interpretations of history, worldviews of the leadership about China and its place in the world, and the nature of international order. Finally, there has been a revival of tradition in Chinese intellectual debates and political discourse. Tradition has come in a big way in domestic politics and International Relations theories and foreign policy discourses. There is an increasing number of scholars and policymakers who push forward the idea that Chinese traditions and history provide a better source of organizing politics within and among states. In a way, tradition has become central to domestic politics and foreign policy discourses in China today.

These changes in domestic politics and foreign policy are situated in its integration or negotiation with the international order since the 1970s. These changes in the reform era have

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<sup>1</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), “World military spending rises to almost \$2 trillion in 2020,” accessed on September 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2021/world-military-spending-rises-almost-2-trillion-2020>.

<sup>2</sup> Huaiyin Li, *The Making of Modern Chinese State: 1600-1950* (London: Routledge, 2020), IX-X.

given rise to a range of questions and consequently debates over the nature of China's interaction with the world and its impact on the existing international order (an assemblage of rules, norms, and institutions). Answers to questions of what China will look like and how China's 'rise' will shape the world depend upon the theoretical approach one takes and where one stands.

In addition to the Cold War security dynamics with the Soviet Union and later economic engagement, the western engagement with China since the 1970s has been premised on the belief that China would accept existing international order as well as a western model of the political system. For China, the implications of this are clear that it would have to give way to a multiparty competitive political system from one-party rule. But this belief has not materialized and the recent policy changes towards China by the United States and western countries reflect the disappointment and the realization of the failure of this premise.<sup>3</sup> China has remained a one-party ruled state and it has not accepted existing norms and worldview either.

In this context, answers to the above-mentioned questions are not just about whether China would seek to change the existing international order in its favour. But more importantly, it is about whether and how China's one-party political system and a different set of ideas, worldview, and norms will influence its behaviour and the vision of international order. Additionally, what the dynamics of different ideas, and worldviews, and policy courses in domestic politics tell us about China's vision of international order. Any change in domestic dynamics of which ideas become important can entail different policy actions. But before accounting for the ideas and worldviews of Chinese leadership and changes therein, the question whether ideas and norms or material power and interests alone (economic and military) matter is the basic question.

## II

### **The Study and its Scope**

This thesis investigates the revival of traditional ideas, practices and historical experiences in China's foreign policy and International Relations (IR) scholarship. It is presented as a contribution to the debates on China and International Relations Theories (IRTs), and China's approach to international order.

In particular, it focuses on how China's rise as an economic and military power impinges upon the existing international order defined as an ensemble of ideas, norms, rules,

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<sup>3</sup> Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-13/china-reckoning>.

international law and institutions.<sup>4</sup> It does so through the conceptual and empirical investigation of the idea of territorial sovereignty in China's foreign policy and intellectual debates. Conceptually, sovereignty and territory are separate yet are overlapping categories. The term *territorial sovereignty* here denotes the territorially embedded nature of sovereignty in modern western understanding. As a result, sovereignty is defined in relation to territory. Philosophically, it performs the functions of the fundamental principle that define other principles of existing international order namely order, identity, difference between international and domestic realms, and use of force/violence. The thesis understands territorial sovereignty is a meta-norm that also defines other norms namely, human rights, and humanitarian interventions.

China's rise as an economic and military power and its consequent impact on international order provides the context for the study. Chinese leaders and scholars have engaged with tradition as well as articulated ideas that go beyond nation-state since the early twentieth century. From Kang Youwei's *datong* (Great Unity), Mao's world revolution to Hu Jintao's harmonious world and Xi Jinping's the Community of Shared Future have been prominent ideas. Additionally, a strong current of scholarship not only from International Relations scholars but also scholars from other disciplines have engaged with tradition, history and their relevance for the contemporary period.

In this context, the question of whether China exhibits characteristics of modern-European nation-state or it has characteristics that do not fit into the international order based on territorial nation-state is significant. Lucian Pye argues, that "China is not just another state in the family of nation-states. China is a civilization pretending to be a nation-state."<sup>5</sup> The consequences are that China does not fit into modern international order based on nation-states and hence it frustrates western countries about why it does not follow them to liberalize and modernize.<sup>6</sup>

Prasenjit Duara argues, China's concept of geopolitics cannot be understood purely in western territorial and geopolitical concepts neither we can understand its contemporary practices purely in terms of cultural ideas.<sup>7</sup> Historian Yuri Pines has explored the difference between Chinese traditional concepts and western concepts. He argues, while western

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<sup>4</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, "China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Compliance and Challenge in Beijing's International Relations," *International Security* 44, no. 2 (2019): 13, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00360](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00360).

<sup>5</sup> Lucian Pye, "China: Erratic State, Frustrated Society," *Foreign Affairs*, 69, no. 4 (1990), 58, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1990-09-01/china-erratic-state-frustrated-society>.

<sup>6</sup> Pye, "Frustrated Society," 56.

<sup>7</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 26.

thinking has emphasized “sovereignty, territoriality, international anarchy, war, and international society”, Chinese thinking has focused on “unity, hierarchy, Tianxia (all under heaven) and tribute system.”<sup>8</sup> Hence, the Chinese understandings of “war, diplomacy, and trade all embodied quite different practices and understandings from those in the West.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the question of what role ideas play in China’s approach to international order is consequential as much as its economic and military power. Whether it accepts or rejects international order depends on how it conceives power.

For analytical purposes, norms in International Relations can be divided into two types i.e. regulatory and constitutive norms.<sup>10</sup> Examples of regulatory norms include immigration rules, trade agreements, etc. These are norms that govern inter-state interactions on an everyday basis. Constitutive norms include territorial sovereignty, equality, human rights, and humanitarian intervention, etc. that provide the philosophical and moral foundation to regulatory norms and the international order.

Existing literature has proposed various arguments in support or against the proposition that China's participation in regulatory norms provides an example of its acceptance of existing international order, i.e. western worldview of politics and international order.<sup>11</sup> This study analyses constitutive norms of territorial sovereignty, and related norms namely human rights and humanitarian interventions.

The thesis proposes that while China has participated in regulatory norms and institutions in the international order, it does not mean it has accepted the constitutive norms and their cultural and philosophical assumptions rooted in Euro-American history and thought. To examine this proposition, it examines Chinese IR scholarship particularly those who focus on Chinese tradition and history as a source of thinking about politics and international order in the contemporary period. In addition to that, it examines the revival of Chinese traditional ideas in domestic politics and China's foreign policy focusing on territorial sovereignty. In these writings and policies, the critique of cultural and philosophical assumptions of the existing international order is one important trend, and that Chinese tradition and history provide more inclusive source of thinking about international

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<sup>8</sup>Yuri Pines cited in Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 3.

<sup>9</sup>Acharya and Barry Buzan, “Making of Global International Relations,” 3.

<sup>10</sup> On the distinction between two types of norms see, Ronald L. Jepperson, Peter Katzenstein and Alexander Wendt, “Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security,” in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> Johnston, “China in a World of Orders,” 9–60; G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (2008): 23-37, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2008-01-01/rise-china-and-future-west>.

order and solving global problems. Obviously, the context is the rise of China as an economic and military power and consequently its substantial influence in international relations and institutions.

The concern here is not whether Chinese tradition and history are a better source. Rather, it focuses on why China resists constitutive norms and articulates an alternative cultural and philosophical worldview. The study proposes two arguments. One, dominant ideas in a state's foreign policy are shaped by power dynamics within domestic politics. By power dynamics here, I mean contending ideas about interests and how to achieve them, state identity (i.e. how geopolitical identity is defined) vis-à-vis international order, and contestations over state power i.e. organizing politics. In the Post-Mao period, the Communist Party of China has struggled to find the long-term ideological and moral basis for its legitimacy because Maoist-socialism is no longer adequate although it is still relevant for the party. Nevertheless, the revival of traditional ideas is part of the party's search for alternative sources of its legitimacy. In this pursuit, it must show to its own people that their tradition, cultural and political system is better than other alternatives. Hence, even though its policies are no different from capitalism and all its problems, and an authoritarian system, it asserts traditional ideas as alternative norms in foreign policy.

But norms and ideas have other purposes too. Norms provide moral legitimacy to existing power relations and international institutions. They are also used to resist the same. To demonstrate how ideas and norms influence China's approach to international order, the study develops a conceptual framework to define power and norms as constitutive or norms as an element of power rather than just an instrument. The dominant understanding of power is the realist idea of power as military and economic capabilities. A state's influence in institutions is usually included in the matrix of Comprehensive National Power (CNP) but it is derivative of economic and military capabilities.<sup>12</sup> The problem is that this view of power does not tell us why China or any state would justify one set of power relations with reference to some norms and ideas. For example, it does not tell us why western countries promote democracy, human rights and a particular set of ideas about the international order. Constructivist writings in International Relations have contested the materialist view of power and proposed that power is socially constructed and ideas and norms are consequential

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<sup>12</sup> Comprehensive National Power (CNP) is a terminology used frequently by China scholars to measure China's relative power, see Qi Haixia, "From Comprehensive National Power to Soft Power: A Study of the Chinese Scholars' Perception of Power," The Griffith-Tsinghua Project "How China Sees the World" Working Paper Series No. 7 (2017): 1-26, [https://www.griffith.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0022/206644/Griffith-Tsinghua-WP-7-final-web.pdf](https://www.griffith.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/206644/Griffith-Tsinghua-WP-7-final-web.pdf).

for understanding power. It argues that having others accept China's worldview itself is part of how China conceives power apart from material power superiority.

Additionally, it approaches the nature of international order as essentially contested and dynamic unlike stable and ahistorical idea of international order presented in liberal and realist literature. Since 1980s, a range of International Relations theories namely feminism, post-colonialism, post-modernism, English School and constructivism have provided a critique of an ahistorical, stable and constant idea of these principles and idea of international order in rationalist theories of both Realist and Liberal kind. These approaches have postulated that the idea of international order and associated principle like sovereignty, etc. are dynamic in nature and have emerged out of a particular geopolitical and cultural background. The view of existing international order, rules, principles and norms as historically contingent implies that it is subject to change.

Yet, a sustained critique of all these approaches has been put forward by many that these do not go beyond western European and American thought, history and experiences. As a result, non-European ideas, experiences and practices have not been addressed in the way they bear influence on international order and consequent changes therein. The experiences of non-European societies and their contact and interactions with Western European international order and ideas through colonialism and imperialism have been consequential. A dynamic view of international order and its fundamental principle like territorial sovereignty means that the nature of international order is essentially contested. In the process, both material (military and economic) and ideational (ideas, norms) bear upon how international order changes.

### III

#### **China's Foreign Policy and International Order: Limitations of Existing Literature on China**

There are four major trends of literature to explain and understand the impact of China's rise in the international order. They place different emphasis on ideas and material power, i.e. economic and military capacity. These are Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, Constructivism and set of writings subscribing to different theoretical assumptions but focusing on Chinese ideas and practices. Realism remains one of the predominant theoretical approaches among non-Chinese scholars and even among Chinese scholars. Chinese scholars also define national interests and comprehensive national power in realist terms.<sup>13</sup> As various

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<sup>13</sup>In his various writings since the 1990s, Yan Xuetong has provided various matrixes of CNP. Of late, he has

surveys of Chinese IR scholarship from 1980s suggest many scholars especially in the 1980s and 1990s subscribed to Realism as a major theoretical approach.<sup>14</sup>

Realist understanding of International Relations relies on the distribution of material capabilities among states. For them, the idea of international order is a fantasy.<sup>15</sup> International relations are characterised by anarchy, i.e. devoid of any rules and norms that check state behaviour. Therefore, the distribution of material capabilities is fundamental to a Realist understanding of international relations. In addition to that, anarchy leads states to focus on their survival and security. Neo-realism, a variant of Realism, places international structure, i.e. the distribution of material capabilities and power relations based on that as the fundamental driver of how states behave.<sup>16</sup> Although Realists disagree whether states would seek offensive capabilities or defensive capabilities, the primary factor remains the nature of international structure. The changes in international structure would lead to changes in state behaviour.

Realist writings on China have primarily followed these assumptions. Goldstein explains the rising strategic competition and rivalry between the USA and China in the context of the changing nature of the international system in terms of the rise of China's economic and military power. The cooperation between China and USA since 1970s is understood to be the result of shared economic and security interests. But as the Soviet Union collapsed and China's economic and military power rise, the focus of rivalry shifts between China and USA.<sup>17</sup> Following "offensive realist" assumptions that states seek more power than just survival, John Mearsheimer's writings have proposed that a strategic competition

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come up with leadership and morality as two more 'variables' in his view of CNP apart from other material aspects of it; For a detailed review of how Chinese scholars measure CNP, see, Wuttikorn Chuwattananurak, "China's Comprehensive National Power and Its Implications for the Rise of China: Reassessment and Challenges," Paper presented at the CEEISA-ISA 2016 Joint International Conference during 23-25 June 2016, <http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/CEEISA-ISA-LBJ2016/Archive/01043de7-0872-4ec4-ba80-7727c2758e53.pdf>; Qi Haixia, "Comprehensive National Power,"; Yong Deng, "The Chinese Conception of National Interests in International Relations," *The China Quarterly*, no. 154 (1998): 308-29, Doi:10.1017/S0305741000002058.

<sup>14</sup> Gerald Chan, "International Studies in China: Origins and Development," *Issues & Studies* 33, no. 2 (1997): 40-64; David Shambaugh and Wang Jisi, "Research and Training in International Studies in the People's Republic of China," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 17, no. 4 (1984): 6-14, Doi:10.1017/S1049096500025002; Qin Yaqing, "Development of International Relations Theory in China," *International Studies* 46, no. 1-2 (2009): 188-191, Doi:10.1177/002088171004600212.

<sup>15</sup> For Realist critique of the idea of international order, see John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order," *International Security* 43, no. 4 (2019): 7-50, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00342](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342).

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of international politics* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publications, 1979), 95-97.

<sup>17</sup> Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 8.

between China and existing hegemon the United States will follow.<sup>18</sup> As China gets more material power, it becomes more ambitious, and as result, the condition of security dilemma between states becomes intensified.

The distribution of power in international relations as the main axis finds a range of writings that attempt to explain power transitions between rising economic and military powers and existing power. They propose various scenarios but the point is that the changes in distribution of material capabilities remain the main factor. Changes in material capabilities are primarily measured through economic growth rates and Gross Domestic Product.<sup>19</sup> Apart from claiming to explain the past, it also predicts future relations in that international transitions are likely to be conflictual when a rising power and existing power compete for superiority.<sup>20</sup> This argument has dominated a range of writings on China's rise and its likely impact on the international system. Graham Allison's work is representative of this argument. He argues, that following the patterns of changes in history, the rise of China is likely to lead to conflict between the United States and China.<sup>21</sup> Hence, China does not have a choice but to engage in conflict and rivalry with the United States and others as its power rises.

There are other Realist writings that consider the distribution of material capabilities, i.e. international structure as the main factor driving state behaviour. Nevertheless, they argue for agency of states to manoeuvre.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, they bring in domestic politics as a factor that shapes state behaviour rather than dictated entirely by international balance of power. For these scholars, Neoclassical Realists, Regime vulnerability, social cohesion, elite consensus within domestic politics become major factors that shape policy behaviour namely, balancing.<sup>23</sup> Hence, they argue that there is a causal relationship between domestic factors

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<sup>18</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3(2010): 381–396, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poq016>; John J. Mearsheimer, "Can China rise peacefully?" *The National Interest*, October 2014, URL: <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/can-china-rise-peacefully-10204>.

<sup>19</sup> Power transition theorist Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war takes economic growth as primary measure of changes in the distribution of power, Robert Gilpin cited in Schweller, Randall L., and Xiaoyu Pu, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline," *International Security* 36, no. 1 (2011): 43, [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00044](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00044).

<sup>20</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, "Hegemony with Chinese Characteristics," *The National Interest* no. 114 (2011): 18, <https://nationalinterest.org/article/hegemony-chinese-characteristics-5439>.

<sup>21</sup> For example, the case studies of power transitions that Allison and other Realist works take are mostly from Euro-American world and it points towards the bias in theory developing as well as contentions from Chinese scholars including Realists that China's rise may not follow same logic and pattern.

<sup>22</sup> W. Woforth, "Realism and Foreign Policy," in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Cases, Actors* eds. S. Smith, A. Hadfield, & T. Dunne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35–36.

<sup>23</sup> Randall L Schweller, "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing," *International Security* 29, no. 2 (2004): 176–184, <https://doi.org/10.1162/0162288042879913>.

and international system that produce a different kind of result. Every state, based on their relative capabilities and differences in domestic politics, are affected by the international system in a different way.<sup>24</sup> China's domestic economic interests and changing nature of international system requires that it accommodates the United States and its predominance. But such a strategy is pragmatic and a radical change in distribution of power in favour of China will lead it to challenge the existing system. But Neoclassical Realism proposes a gradual change because China cannot pursue its interests if it resorts to conflictual behaviour at this stage.<sup>25</sup>

To the Neoclassical Realists, China's domestic factors namely the regime vulnerability and nationalism are two important factors to explain China's foreign policy behaviour. They believe that since the Communist Party of China's legitimacy relies on its performance in providing economic growth and better life for its people, any obstacle to economic growth may deter China from engaging in conflict and rivalry.<sup>26</sup> Hence, state legitimacy in terms of state leadership's ability to convince society about their rational policies is important. Another domestic factor is nationalism that is "double edge" sword because on the one hand it allows state leadership to rally support for its policies. On the other hand, it may prove difficult to handle because they might have to take certain policy decisions that ultimately harms its interests. China's policy towards Taiwan is cited as one example of how rising nationalism becomes difficult to handle because the party may be resistant to engage in war as it will impact its economic interests and legitimacy. As a result, Neo-classical scholars do not believe China's rising economic and military capabilities are necessarily negative for the international system.<sup>27</sup>

Although many Chinese scholars subscribe to Realist assumptions, they disagree with their western counterparts. These disagreements can be explained in terms of an eclectic approach Chinese scholars take and their focus on policies. Their disagreements stem from primarily two sources. These differences are methodological rather than ontological or epistemological. One, historical practices and patterns of relations in Chinese history provide a corrective to existing Realist theories as well as a source of theory building. In this respect, they disagree with conclusions arrived at by western counterparts because although material

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<sup>24</sup> Camilla T. N Sørensen, "Is China Becoming More Aggressive? A Neoclassical Realist Analysis," *Asian Perspective* 37, no. 3 (2013): 365, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42704834>.

<sup>25</sup> Schweller and Xiaoyu, "After Unipolarity," 53-57.

<sup>26</sup> Sørensen, "Is China Becoming More Aggressive," 372.

<sup>27</sup> Sørensen, "Is China Becoming More Aggressive," 369; Charles Glaser, "Will China's rise lead to war? Why realism does not mean pessimism," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (2011): 80-91, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2011-03-01/will-chinas-rise-lead-war>.

capabilities remain paramount, inter-state relations especially power transition may not follow conflict or war. Two, they add morality and leadership as two more variables of power. As a result, Chinese realist scholars despite their shared theoretical assumptions, disagree with the idea that the rise of China will lead to conflict.

Foremost among these scholars is Yan Xuetong who subscribes to scientific methodology and is a self-claimed realist. He along with his associates at Tsinghua University has led a project to develop theoretical insights using the Warring-States Period (476-221 BC) philosophies and inter-state practices.<sup>28</sup> In his various writings, Yan Xuetong has developed the idea of moral leadership wherein morality especially moral qualities of leadership are a major factor apart from material capabilities. The implications of it, according to him, is that China does not seek just hegemony (*ba*) defined in terms of economic and material superiority. Rather it seeks humane authority defined as moral leadership (*wang dao*). In his previous writing, therefore, he applauded Chinese leadership for adopting traditional ideas namely harmonious world in foreign policy discourses.<sup>29</sup>

There are advantages and disadvantages of Realist approaches. Their focus on explaining the centrality of material power in China's behaviour is useful to understand China's foreign policies towards the international order. Without material capabilities, it is not possible that China can wield influence in international institutions, and deter other countries from interfering in its affairs. Therefore, the relative decline in US material capabilities and China's rise will lead to a challenge to the former's power because institutions reflect material power relations.<sup>30</sup> Its rising economic capabilities have provided it with considerable influence in developing countries that it uses to advance its interests in international institutions and economic interests.

But their understanding of China's behaviour suffers from problems. The main problem is that they do not explain how China is wielding its power in its engagement with the international order. For example, Realists do not explain why China participates in existing international institutions and promotes new institutions. Besides, they cannot account for why China resorts to alternative norms to reject norms, international laws and institutions that do not serve its interests. But at the same time, China participates in international

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<sup>28</sup> A detailed review of Yan Xuetong and his team's research can be found in Feng Zhang, "The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 5, no. 1 (2012): 73–102, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/por015>.

<sup>29</sup> Yan Xuetong, Daniel A. Bell and Sun Zhe, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, trans. Edmund Ryden, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 252.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Layne, "The US–Chinese power shift and the end of the Pax Americana," *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018): 99–103, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix249>.

institutions resorting to shared norms of equality and sovereignty. The primary reason is that Realists consider power only in terms of material capabilities. Besides, although Neoclassical Realists admit domestic politics as a causal factor, their understanding of domestic politics is shallow. Nationalism, for example, can be used to go to war against Taiwan. But it can also be used to legitimize suffering because of a war. Hence, the understanding of legitimacy in terms of whether it can provide economic goods is narrow and does not capture the complex ideas and norms that can be used to legitimize policies and the regime. As a result, their account of how domestic factors influence foreign policy remains incomplete.

Liberal institutionalism is another dominant theory that has been used to understand China's rise in the international order. Liberal institutionalists unlike Realists believe that power can be checked by institutions, rule and norms. Hence, even though international relations are anarchic, it is possible to avoid conflict. Therefore, China's integration into the world economy, its accommodation in the existing order since 1970s and its participation in the existing multilateral institutions help China integrate into a liberal order.<sup>31</sup> It is also believed that deeper interconnectedness and China's growing integration with world economy will allow strengthening of existing international institutions. Hence, China's rise might be easily accommodated within a liberal international order even after US hegemony declines and China becomes the most powerful country.<sup>32</sup> However, the integration of China with the global economic order does not guarantee that China will follow liberal values and norms.<sup>33</sup>

For liberals, norms and values are liberal values. Hence, they tend to define international order as "liberal international order" and any ideas and norms that do not emerge from liberalism are denounced as a destabilising force. The liberal order is defined in terms of "a capitalist global economy and a variety of liberal democracies, as well as the guiding principle of the rule of law, and crucially centred around American power and a set of liberal institutions established by the US as well as its preponderant military."<sup>34</sup>

Liberal institutionalists emphasise China's domestic political system as a major factor in how China approaches the LOR. China's authoritarian political system poses

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<sup>31</sup> Ikenberry, "The Rise of China," 31-32.

<sup>32</sup> David Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal world: the resilient order," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2018), 20-22, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-06-14/liberal-world>.

<sup>33</sup> Xinyuan Dai and Duu Renn, "China and International Order: The Limits of Integration," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 21, no. 2 (2016): 2-3, [10.1007/s11366-016-9403-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-016-9403-5).

<sup>34</sup> Nana de Graaff, Tobias ten Brink and Inderjeet Parmar, "China's Rise in a Liberal World Order in Transition-introduction to the FORUM," *Review of International Political Economy* 27, 2 (2020): 192, [10.1080/09692290.2019.1709880](https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2019.1709880).

challenges for liberal values and norms.<sup>35</sup> As a result, emerging international order is either liberal or non-liberal. The latter is not a desirable option though. By doing so, while they bring in how domestic politics influences international behaviour, they tend to ignore whether alternative norms articulated in China's foreign policy can be used to legitimize supposedly non-liberal values and norms. Besides, a stable notion of international order also excludes how liberal norms are used for legitimizing existing power relations. The idea that liberal values and norms are universal is a problem because it ignores a dynamic nature of international order and the contestations.

China's integration with the global economy and economic institutions namely, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, among others reflects, according to liberal institutionalism, an adaption to LOR. Besides, the processes of integration with the global economy has entailed that China has developed a high-degree of interconnectedness with the outside world, and thereby it has developed a stake in preserving the order. Again, the question of whether China's engagement with "regulatory" aspects of liberal order means acceptance and adaption to "constitutive norms" remain unanswered in liberal writings. Besides, how China might use its economic and military capabilities and institutional influence to contest existing norms and push for alternative norms is unclear. The exclusive notion of international order as LOR does not allow liberal institutionalists to consider the nature of international order as dynamic and evolving. While China is integrating into the global economy and adapting to "regulatory norms" in various ways namely, adopting global practices of trade, finance, and property rights, it does not mean Chinese "integration" on liberal terms. One may ask whether there ever existed a liberal international order. Therefore, it may continue to be an authoritarian country yet powerful in shaping global norms and institutions. As a result of the contestations, a hybrid, dynamic and contested nature of international order evolves. While open character of existing order allows China to participate in it and provides an opportunity to mould it in its favour,<sup>36</sup> the exclusive character of LOR also generates discontent because it does not allow diversity in political systems, values, norms and practices.

The exclusive focus of liberal institutionalism and Realism has been critiqued in recent years. These scholars rely on Chinese historical experiences, institutions, ideas and patterns of inter-state relations as consequential in theorizing China's contemporary

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<sup>35</sup> Jessica Chen Weiss and Jeremy L Wallace, "Domestic Politics, China's Rise and the Future of Liberal International Order," *International Organization* 75 (2021): 639-640, doi: 10.1017/S002081832000048X.

<sup>36</sup> Ikenberry, "The Rise of China," 28.

international relations especially in the East Asian region. The study of China's historical international relations has been a preserve of historians and Sinologists.<sup>37</sup> But mainstream International Relations Theories (IRTs) including English School that focus on understanding the emergence of international society and its expansion has also paid little attention to Chinese experiences, ideas, practices, and institutions of inter-state relations.<sup>38</sup> It is only in recent years that English School theorists have begun to explore these dimensions of Chinese history and its possible impact on China's approach to the international order in the contemporary period.<sup>39</sup>

Scholars have recognized that history provides a rich array of resources to develop International Relations Theories (IRT) and understand contemporary international relations.<sup>40</sup> Some scholars have argued that it is difficult to leave history outside while thinking about IR.<sup>41</sup> Yet, using history in constructing IRT comes with problems of *presentism*, i.e. looking at the past from present perspectives. Such a problem can be recognized in the way the Chinese state selectively uses history as well as scholars who try to read historical practices and ideas from current disciplinary categories and perspectives. Yet, history is everywhere in IRT. Realist theorists have long depended upon historical case studies from Ancient Greece, Rome and other periods of European history and thought to develop practical and theoretical insights for the contemporary period.

Many Chinese scholars have also combined different theoretical perspectives of existing theories with innovations from Chinese history, experiences, practices and ideas. Scholars have argued that there is a long genealogy of thinking about international order from ideas and concepts rooted in Chinese culture and worldview from Kang Youwei onwards in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>42</sup> Pre-1949 thinking about international order is replete with insights

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<sup>37</sup> John King Fairbank and Ta-tuan Ch'en, *The Chinese world order; traditional China's foreign relations* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968); Richard Louis Walker, *The Multi-State System of Ancient China* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971).

<sup>38</sup> See Yongjin Zhang, "System, Empire and State in Chinese International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 5 (2001): 43–63, doi: 10.1017/S0260210501008026.

<sup>39</sup> Xiao Ren, 'Toward a Chinese School of International Relations', in *China and the New International Order* eds. Wang Gungwu and Zheng Yongnian (London: Routledge, 2008), 293-309; Peter Katzenstein, ed., *Sinicization and the Rise of China: Civilizational Processes Beyond East and West* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Martin Wight, "Why Is There No International Relations Theory?" *International Relations* 2, no. 1 (1960): 48, doi/10.1177/004711786000200104; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (eds.), *Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Perspectives on and Beyond Asia* (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.

<sup>41</sup> John M. Hobson and George Lawson, "What is History in International Relations?" *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (2008): 415–35, 10.1177/0305829808097648; Jack S. Levy, "Too Important to Leave to the Other: History and Political Science in the Study of International Relations," *International Security* 22, no. 1 (1997): 22–33, [https://muse.jhu.edu/article/446815/summary#info\\_wrap](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/446815/summary#info_wrap).

<sup>42</sup> Nele Noesselt, "Revisiting the Debate on Constructing a Theory of International Relations with Chinese Characteristics," *China Quarterly* no. 222 (2015): 136-137, doi: 10.1017/S0305741015000387.

from Chinese history and cultural worldview.<sup>43</sup> In line with these arguments, David Kang is one of the most vocal critics of the exclusive nature of Realist scholarship, and argues that China's historical patterns of relations, institutions namely the tributary system, and ideas (*tianxia*) emphasize stability and a peaceful rise of China rather than a conflict-prone approach towards its rise.<sup>44</sup>

In recent years, a group of scholars based in Shanghai and Taiwan, sometimes referred to as *gongsheng* (symbiosis) school, have proposed a new intellectual project to rethink international relations using traditional Chinese principles of *guanxi* (relationship) in Confucianism and *yin/yang* in Daoism. They advocate plurality, peaceful coexistence, relationships rather than structures, and diversity and difference, and hybridities.<sup>45</sup> These themes have been explored and debated widely in postcolonial, constructivist, feminist and other Reflectivist approaches.<sup>46</sup> Their engagement with Chinese cultural and philosophical ideas and understanding brings out traditional ideas and their relevance to contemporary international relations in going beyond western thinking and experiences. It is based on the belief that there is a need to recover diversity and plurality since “Westphalia system perpetrates violence...theories of International Relations treat world as if multiple worlds neither existed nor mattered.”<sup>47</sup>

These efforts are not just to account for how “marginalized actors” (societies, states, and individuals) influence world politics; rather the idea is to question a monistic epistemology and ontology of existing International Theories namely, Realism and Liberalism.<sup>48</sup> By doing so, these writings point towards epistemological, ontological and normative biases that underline western cultural and philosophical thinking.

Chih-yu Shih et al's attempt to redefine existing theories of balance of power as Balance of Relationship (BoR) using Confucian and Buddhist philosophical ideas is, in this context, an important contribution. Their focus is on bilateral relationships rather than international structure and anarchy, balance of power, etc. since states act through relations. Hence, it is the most important analytical category. For them, relationship is “a process of

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<sup>43</sup> Lu Peng, “Pre-1949 Chinese IR: An Occluded History,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 2 (2014): 133–55, 10.1080/10357718.2013.861385.

<sup>44</sup> David C. Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 66, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228803321951090>.

<sup>45</sup> Ren Xiao, “Grown from within: Building a Chinese School of International Relations,” *The Pacific Review* 33, no. 3-4 (2020): 405–407, 10.1080/09512748.2020.1728573.

<sup>46</sup> For a review of works from Post-Colonialism, Feminism and Constructivism from perspectives of diversity, plurality and problems of existing theories, see, L H M Ling, *The Dao of world politics: Towards a post-Westphalian, worldlist international relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 28–35.

<sup>47</sup> Ling, “The Dao,” 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ling, “The Dao,” 24–40.

mutual constitution that reproduces imagined resemblances.”<sup>49</sup> Imagined resembles are defined in terms of “kinship, geo-cultures, languages, values, norms, customs, institutions, networks, threats, commitments, and most pragmatically interests.”<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, interests and identities are socially constructed through relationship between states rather than given unlike a Realist understanding. Hence, states most often engage in the Balance of Relationship (BoR) rather than balancing power. Similarly, Qin Yaqing has argued how relationality is a useful concept unlike rationality to understand how states act in the real world.<sup>51</sup> These writings have turned the focus on domestic origins of state behaviour, and have proposed a rather fluid and unstable notion of international order unlike Realist and Liberal Institutional scholarship. Additionally, they also provide a complex account of how norms and ideas matter in relationships and how domestic politics shape state interests. Yet, the problem of why states articulate alternative norms and ideas, and how power and norms are related to each other remain unclear.

Finally, Constructivism has emerged as an important theoretical lens to understand China’s approach to international order. For Constructivist scholars, the idea of international order is dynamic and hence, they reject a stable and ahistorical understanding of international order in Realism and Liberal Institutionalism.<sup>52</sup> This dynamic notion of international order is rooted in the Constructivist idea that international relations are socially and politically constructed, and hence, it is in the relationship between states that fundamental ideas of international order emerge namely, territorial sovereignty, order, etc.<sup>53</sup> As a result, Constructivist scholarship has been able to provide a less pessimistic view of China’s rise and its impact on the existing international order. It is argued that China’s participation in international institutions and rules namely, arms treaties, trade and finance, etc. shows that its rising power may not be a threat.<sup>54</sup>

Ideas, beliefs and norms shape state identity defined in terms of how states see themselves vis-à-vis international order.<sup>55</sup> Since state identity formation takes place in context

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<sup>49</sup> Chih-yu Shih et. al, *China and International Theory: The balance of Relationships* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Shih et. al, “China and International Theory,” 1.

<sup>51</sup> Shih et. al, “China and International Theory,” 1.

<sup>52</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, “China in a World of Orders,” 12-14.

<sup>53</sup> Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391-395, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027764>; Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 172-176, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.23.1.171>.

<sup>54</sup> Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Johnston, “China in a World of Orders,” 9-60.

<sup>55</sup> Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It,” 392.

of relationship with other states, it is essentially unstable and dynamic. Hence, China's participation in dominant international order and norms may slowly allow it to adapt to international norms. It is in this context that this thesis revisits the questions of when, why and how China has contested and put forward alternative understanding of norms.

## **V**

### **The Objectives of the Study**

The study has the following objectives:

1. To analyze the debates on the idea of territorial sovereignty in Chinese foreign policy in the Post-Mao period;
2. To examine the domestic origins of China's approach to the international order via the concept of territorial sovereignty;
3. To examine the claims and limitations of IR theorization by Chinese scholars;
4. To analyse the dynamics of norms and power for articulations of alternative ideas in international relations;
5. To analyse the relevance of Chinese ideas and practices in international relations;
6. To analyse China's approach to the concept of territorial sovereignty.

## **VI**

### **Research Problem(s)**

To achieve the objectives of the study, it asked the following research questions:

1. How does China approach the idea of territorial sovereignty in the Post-Mao Period?
2. Why and how do traditional ideas and practices inform its conception of territorial sovereignty?
3. Why are new ideas and norms articulated by China and implications for the international order?

## **VI**

### **Methodology**

The study used content and discourse analysis methods. The study began with

extensive readings, literature review and discussion on traditional ideas and their articulations in domestic politics and foreign policy in the Post-Mao period. To validate initial thoughts, the study conducted a content analysis of three newspapers namely People's Daily (Chinese edition: *renmin ribao*), Guangming Daily (*guangming ribao*) and Beijing Review (weekly). All three newspapers were accessed through the online database at Tsinghua University, Beijing. The content analysis was done using online databases and articles selected using key words. The objective at this stage was to understand contexts, frequency and issues where territorial sovereignty has been significant in China's foreign policy and domestic politics.

As a result it was found that territorial sovereignty remains one of the most important conceptual category in Chinese debates and practices of foreign policy. It is related to following issues areas: territorial sovereignty/security in Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan 2. Sovereignty and globalization; 3. Sovereignty and human rights; 4. Sovereignty and political stability/intrusion of foreign ideas/nationalism and the party 5. Chinese experience, sovereignty and western imperialism and new international relations. 6. Sovereignty and cybersecurity.

Additionally, since this study intended to understand the salience of traditional ideas and culture, it conducted a trend analysis of the same newspapers using frequently used terms namely excellent traditional culture (*youxiu chuantong*), harmonious society (*hexie shehui*), etc. It found that traditional culture and ideas figure prominently in the following themes namely cultural imperialism, identity and political system; compatibility between tradition, socialist ideas and reform era thinking; tradition and culture as a source of identity and norms. Along with review of existing literature, the study formulated the objectives and asked preliminary questions.

Apart from newspapers and Chinese scholarship on international relations, the study also engages with official debates, policies and practices both in domestic politics and foreign policy. To do that, it analyzed official statements, reports, policies in domestic politics as well as foreign policy. The study, therefore, analyses China's official views and policies with regard to bilateral relations, regional and international institutions and major issues namely territorial sovereignty and related norms and issues namely humanitarian intervention, human rights, etc.

The central concern of the thesis is to understand why there is a shift towards traditional ideas and culture in both intellectual circles and official debates, and what implications it can have about understanding China's domestic politics (political legitimacy) and its foreign policy in terms of its approach to the international order. Positivist

epistemology and ontology do not recognize the role of ideas as consequential because it is grounded in the rationalist idea that reality is out there to study. As a result, ideas do not have an agency in effecting changes. However, positivist approaches, Realism and Liberalism, cannot explain why China resists the constitutive norms of the international order. To account for the agency of ideas in understanding China's approach to the constitutive norms, this study argues for the usefulness of examining the role of ideas in China's foreign policy.

The study is guided by Constructivist epistemological and theoretical assumptions. Constructivism take discourses conducted through language and ideas as consequential for how a state constructs its interests and pursues them. For constructivist scholars, international relations are socially constructed practices.<sup>56</sup> Power, anarchy, institutions, and norms make sense to and are produced by states through certain ideas about who they are and what their interests are.<sup>57</sup> Constructivist scholarship has also postulated that the idea of international order is unstable and dynamic as state interests are.<sup>58</sup> Realist scholars have criticized discourse analysis and Constructivist epistemological assumptions for negating the role of material capabilities and lacking a coherent research agenda.<sup>59</sup> However, this criticism does not stand valid as Constructivist scholars have shown since the late 1980s. Instead of negating the role of material aspects of international relations i.e. economic and military capabilities, Constructivism emphasizes how, when and why material reality makes sense to policymakers and states in the way they make policies.

It contests the idea that there is an objective world out there which can be accessed without human biases. Rather, Constructivist scholarship has shown that this idea of objective reality is flawed and has provided alternative understandings in which meanings of material reality is constructed through inter-subjective interactions and discourses.<sup>60</sup> As a result, ideas and discourses become central to how states conceive their interests along with material capabilities and interests.

Another criticism of Constructivist scholarship in international relations has been that it is irrelevant to policymaking.<sup>61</sup> However, one cannot depend upon only material aspects of a state's foreign policy. Through an examination of Chinese discourses on the constitutive

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<sup>56</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy," 391-395.

<sup>57</sup> Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 172-176.

<sup>58</sup> Johnston, "China in a World of Orders," 11-14.

<sup>59</sup> Dale C. Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay," *International Security* 25, no. 2 (2000): 187-212, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/447728>.

<sup>60</sup> Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 174.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1989): 379-96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600589>.

norm of territorial sovereignty, the thesis contends that China's criticism of the constitutive norms is fundamental to the way China envisions the international order. Hence a mere focus on the rise of its material capabilities does not provide a complete picture of its approaches to the international order. Therefore, discourse analysis is a useful method to understand how and why different ideas and norms are articulated and compete with each other both in domestic politics and international relations to produce a dynamic state identity and the idea of international order.

This thesis is an attempt to understand why new ideas i.e. traditional ideas, experiences, and worldviews emerge in China's domestic politics in the Post-Mao Period. Then it examines how these ideas bear upon the way China approaches the constitutive norms and ideas of the international order. In this complex dynamic, domestic politics and foreign policy are interconnected realms. The Constructivist assumptions of an unstable and dynamic international order capture the dynamics of how states adapt to and resist certain regulatory and constitutive norms. Constructivism focuses on how states construct their interests and identities in their interactions with other actors in the international order. The thesis begins with an assumption that power relations in domestic politics and international relations are legitimized with reference to certain ideas and norms. For instance, the "liberal international order" is legitimized through the ideas of democracy, and human rights, among others. Any challenge to the international order involves challenging these very fundamental norms and ideas. In addition, the dominant ideas and norms in the international order emerge from and make moral and political claims on domestic politics. Hence, domestic politics becomes the fulcrum understanding a state's approach to the international order.

Hence, positivist understandings of China's approach to the international order focusing on material capabilities provide an understanding of only a part of the story. To understand how China adapts to and participates in the international order while it contests the cultural and philosophical understandings of the constitutive norms, it becomes imperative to understand why new ideas and understandings of these norms are articulated. In other words, it involves the contestation of the existing power relations by questioning their normative foundations.

Constructivist epistemologies also contend that nothing happens outside a discourse.<sup>62</sup> In attempting to understand why China contests the constitutive norms of the international order, it also becomes clear that the existing discourses also cannot be understood until and

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<sup>62</sup> David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 4.

unless their impact on legitimizing power relations are appreciated. Therefore, Realist approaches to the international order that render China's rise as part of the existing patterns of rise and fall of powers, or liberal institutional approaches that delegitimize any alternative idea as a threat to the international order provide a normative legitimation to the existing power relations in the international order. The thesis takes discourses on the constitutive norms seriously to understand the dynamics of adaptation and contestation in China's approach to the international order precisely to highlight how China contests the constitutive norms through discursive practices and alternative ideas.

## **VII**

### **Chapterization Plan**

The thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research problem by identifying limitations of the existing literature to account for the role of ideas in China's foreign policy. Chapter 2 titled "Domestic Politics and International Order: the Dynamics of Contestation and Adaptation" develops the theoretical framework of the study to conceptualize the role of ideas and norms in China's conceptions and practices of territorial sovereignty as the foundational norm of international order. It establishes that territorial sovereignty as it is theorized in Realist theories and international law is rooted in Euro-American socio-political thought and history. After doing so, it analyses how contestations has been a characteristic feature of expansion and universalization of the western European system. The European ideas and practices of territorial sovereignty have been normatively privileged through exclusion of non-European ideas and practices of organizing politics and society. The final section develops the theoretical framework to conceptualize how norms and power interact in China's foreign policy.

Chapter 3 titled "Revival of Tradition and Political Legitimacy: Prospects and limitations" investigates how the challenges to the CCP's political legitimacy in the reform period have necessitated a shift towards tradition and history. First, it establishes that it might be possible that traditional ideas play a critical role in its political legitimacy. After doing so, it analyses the revival of traditional ideas in domestic discourses and intellectual writings. Therefore, this chapter provides the first part of the conceptual framework that the articulation of alternative ideas is located in domestic political dynamics of China.

Chapter 4 titled "China and International Relations Theories" analyses the claims of Chinese IR theorists and intellectuals that Chinese ideas and practices from the past provide valuable

resources to solve the problems of the existing international order. It discusses the ideas both as a counter-hegemonic attempt to reimagine the normative foundations of political order and the articulation of China's vision and objectives in the international order as a great power.

Then the next chapters analyse China's practices of territorial sovereignty in domestic and foreign policies. Chapter 5 titled "Territorial Sovereignty and China's Domestic Policies in Periphery" analyses China's policies in domestic politics to overcome the challenges and problems of territorial sovereignty in minority regions namely, Xinjiang and Tibet. It develops an argument how dominant understanding of territorial nation-state shapes both challenges to its sovereignty in these regions and as result, China's response. The chapter analyses China's policies to overcome sovereignty challenges through three strategies namely, economic developmentalism, redefining Han-Minority relations, and rewriting history.

Then Chapter 6 titled "Foreign Policy Discourses on Territorial Sovereignty (1978-Present)" analyses changes and continuities in ideas and practices of territorial sovereignty in foreign policy in the Post-Mao period. It takes up major issues and case studies to examine China's approach to territorial sovereignty in foreign policy discourses, diplomacy at bilateral, regional and multilateral institutions. The major issues include interference in domestic affairs, humanitarian intervention, human rights, and the one country-two systems with reference to Hong Kong and Taiwan. It also takes up new ideas namely, the Community of Shared Futures (CSF) to evaluate China's push for new ideas in its foreign policy. Chapter 7 concludes with findings and summary of arguments of the thesis.

## CHAPTER 2

### Domestic Politics and International Order: the Dynamics of Contestation and Adaptation

#### Introduction

This chapter has two objectives. First, it attempts to provide an overview of how territory and sovereignty are related. It examines how specific cultural and philosophical understanding of the relationship between the two and its manifestations in organizing politics within and between political communities have emerged from early modern western Europe. Secondly, it looks at how its specific cultural and philosophical origins and their manifestations expanded to other parts of the world. It attempts to locate how multiple cultural and philosophical understandings of the relationship between sovereignty and territory can be used to think about alternative ideas and their politics.

In this chapter, the local origin of ‘global’ norms and principles is a major problem dealt with. The fundamental ideas like territorial sovereignty emerged from particular geopolitical and cultural contexts of western Europe that over a period of time expanded to the whole world. The idea of sovereignty as a principle of inter-state relations in international relations is almost taken for granted and is practiced on an everyday basis by states. However, how did a local principle become global? Based on a critical review of existing literature, this chapter discusses how the articulation of alternative ideas from Chinese, Indian, and other contexts can be understood.

The particular cultural and philosophical understanding between territory and sovereignty from the European context has been contested by non-European leaders and scholars using alternative concepts and philosophical ideas. Some of the examples of such concepts include *dao*, *yin-yang*, and *tianxia* from China, *ubuntu* from Africa, *Adavaita* and *Sufism* from South Asia, and the Japanese concept of *one and many*.<sup>1</sup> All these concepts contest the inside-outside and monistic epistemologies to bring in a recognition that diversity and plurality are characteristic features of understanding international relations. These alternative ideas must not be considered just normative but intellectual proposals to redefine the cultural and philosophical understanding of international relations.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Deepshikha Shahi, *Advaita as a Global International Relations Theory* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2018); L. H. M. Ling, *The Dao of World Politics: Towards a Post-Westphalian, Worldist International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Anke Graness, "Ubuntu and the concept of cosmopolitanism," *Human Affairs* 28, no. 4, (2018): 395-405, 10.1080/05568641.2017.1295616; Deepshikha Shahi, "Introducing Sufism to International Relations Theory: A Preliminary Inquiry into Epistemological, Ontological, and Methodological Pathways," *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 1, (2019): 250–275, doi/10.1177/1354066117751592.

Another important question is the origin of ideas within national contexts. All ideas are located within particular locations and reflect certain power relations both within these societies and among societies. To be sure, all ideas have local origins and hence the fact that they emerge from local context should not hinder their capacity to understand and shape the world. Also, the acceptance of ‘global’ norms does not mean the actors copy them passively. The decolonization movements across the world and later alternative ideas articulated by leaders and scholars from non-western societies attest to the fact that ideas of the nation-state, democracy, sovereignty among others have not been copied passively. Rather contestations and adaption go together.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the ideas articulated by Chinese leaders and scholars should not be criticized just because they emerge from a particular context. Imposing language and concepts on Chinese understanding of the world does not help. Rather, recognition that these ideas are consequential leads us to recognize pluralistic ontology and epistemology at the core of our inquiry. Yet, the question of power cannot be disentangled from theorizing, and hence, a critical evaluation of ideas and their contexts must be explored to judge their efficacy for ‘global’ expansion.

The chapter is organized into four sections. The first section discusses the problems of defining sovereignty, its origins in early modern Europe, and the relationship between territory and sovereignty that emerge from this context. The second section takes up the broader theme of expansion of western European international system/society and norms to other parts of the world. In this section, I discuss emerging literature on non-western societies and how to understand non-western ideas in the context of the expansion of principles like sovereignty, territory, order, identity, and violence. Third section then takes up the issue of the relationship between nation-state and territoriality by contextualizing nation-state territoriality as a specific form of territoriality. The fourth section develops the conceptual framework of the thesis. It discusses the reasons why we should take the concept of territorial sovereignty seriously in the context of China. Besides, its fear of territorial break-up and challenges by ethnic groups in its peripheries, and the expansion of western norms of domestic politics and order make the concept significant to the understanding of China’s foreign policy and domestic politics. Finally, it introduces the conceptualization of the relationship between norms and power using constructivist ideas.

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 153-220.

## **Sovereignty: Origins and its Relationship with Territory**

Sovereignty is among the fundamental concepts that define both conceptual understanding and practices in international relations. It is more so with territorial sovereignty. The most referenced definition of state is that a sovereign state has a well-defined territory, population, and institutions to carry out its will through the legitimate use of force.<sup>3</sup> In popular parlance in international relations, the concept of sovereignty as we know it emerged at the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and represents the moment for the advent of modern politics and international relations. Additionally, the popularity of the concept in the non-western world is generally understood as a natural extension of the universalization of the concept. But the centrality of the concept was questioned in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The increased use of humanitarian intervention, globalization, and the rise of non-state actors in international relations led scholars to write off sovereignty as an outdated concept.<sup>4</sup>

The arguments proposed a post-Westphalia world in which the state began to lose its tight control over cross-border flows of people, ideas, and trade. The rise of supranational institutions like the European Union was considered models for the post-Westphalian order. Additionally, sovereignty was no longer considered a sacred norm of the international order reflected in new norms of humanitarian interventions, the promotion of democracy and human rights. It was reflected in a series of interventions by the United States and other powers in Kosovo, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia among others. The promotion of democracy and human rights also became salient features of European and US foreign policies. Yet, sovereignty defined in terms of non-interference into another state's territory and affairs, equality among states in the international system have been the salient principles even during the post-cold war period. Besides, the cultural and philosophical understanding of the relationship between territory and sovereignty has not shifted. Hence, while the functional role of territory changes in terms of regulating transborder flows of people, goods and ideas, the impact of territorial understanding of social-political order and identity remains intact.

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<sup>3</sup> H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 77.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief review of the arguments on this see, Allen Carlson, *Unifying China, integrating with the World: Securing Chinese Sovereignty in the Reform Era*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 06-10; John H. Jackson, "Sovereignty-Modern: A New Approach to an Outdated Concept," *American Journal of International Law* 97, no. 4 (2003): 782-802, doi: 10.2307/3133680.

The continued relevance of the concept is not only manifested in the use of the concept by weaker states against interventions, territorial disputes, state control over the flow of people, goods, and ideas but it has also been used by nations and groups without states throughout the world to demand sovereign statehood. The literature in the 1990s on the demise of the Westphalian order and state assumed the demise of nationalism as a force in the wake of globalization. But as scholars like Michael Maan have argued, that nation-state and nationalism is still an unfinished agenda and it is still expanding and taking root in the non-European societies.<sup>5</sup> Even the demand for smaller communities in western Europe like Catalanian in Spain, Flemings in Belgium, and Quebec in Canada show that the idea of a sovereign nation-state with a definite territory goes against the dominant ideas of globalization and trends towards post-Westphalian order. Rather as scholars like Habermas argue, these trends show counter-trends to globalization and sovereign territorial nation-state is likely to the basic idea of political community underpinning international order.<sup>6</sup>

Territorial sovereignty is a salient factor in inter-state relations in much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in terms of territorial disputes, movements for statehood by smaller communities within larger nations, and the central role of the state in inter-state relations despite the emergence of regional organizations. The fact that every piece of land is parcelled among sovereign nation-states and their central role in conducting inter-state affairs attests to the fact that sovereignty embedded into territory remains the fundamental principle of international order. But the way territorial sovereignty is practiced and imagined in the wake of local ideas of socio-political order, community, and identity is understudied in international relations theories. The emergences of borderland studies and critical geopolitics to understand the centrality of borders, territory, and making of territorial borders have attended to the issues of how local ideas and practices conflict with the dominant idea of the sovereign territorial nation-state.<sup>7</sup>

### **Sovereignty and Territory**

Territory has been important part of state making in all parts of world even before modern European international system became globalized. Also, sovereign powers have also been defined in relation to control over territory while other forms of sovereignty also existed

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Mann, "Nation-States in Europe and Other Continents: Diversifying, Developing, Not Dying," in *Mapping the Nation* eds. Gopal Balakrishnan and Benedict R. Anderson (London: Verso Books, 1996), 281-294.

<sup>6</sup> Jurgen Habermas, "European Nation-state, its Achievements and Limitations: on the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship," in *Mapping the Nation* eds. Gopal Balakrishnan and Benedict R. Anderson (London: Verso Books, 1996), 284-294.

<sup>7</sup> Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands," *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (1997): 211-242, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/179234>.

that were loosely connected with territory. But what makes territorial sovereignty that emerged from modern Europe special is a particular cultural and philosophical understanding of territory and its role in defining socio-political order wherein sovereignty lies and outside that domain sovereignty has other functions.<sup>8</sup>

Constructivist scholars have shown that territory is not natural phenomenon. Rather it is constructed socially and politically.<sup>9</sup> It is in this context that modern European understanding of territory and its relationship with sovereignty and how these practices became ‘global’ gains significance in understanding contestations and new ideas about international order from China. The concept of territoriality defined as a set of practices and ideas that shape how territory is organized can be a useful tool to highlight the plurality of practices and ideas that can shape relationship between territory sovereignty.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, modern European understanding is one among many forms of relationships between the two categories. The normative superiority of nation-state as a form of political community with associated notions of order, identity and violence emerge from privileging a particular form of territoriality. This, however, does not mean that other forms of territorialities do not have problems of power relations and are not hegemonic. Rather it means that normative superiority of modern European territoriality has been founded based on its material superiority, and normatively discrediting other forms of territorialities. It is possible that other ideas and practices emerging from China and other societies redefine and reimagine the relationship between territory and sovereignty although the conditions and constraints for such possibilities need to be explored.

International Relations Theories especially Realism have not taken the idea of a dynamic nature of territory seriously. Its emphasis on notions of power defined in economic and military terms in analysing territory and its relevance does not recognize this dimension. Besides, although realist literature does not recognize territory as a category to be taken seriously, nevertheless it is the fundamental idea that forms Realist thought especially how sovereignty and state, order, identity and use of force is defined and legitimized as desirable. In Post-Second World War Realist theories, the idea that the modern state is defined by its territoriality has dominated debates. Classical Realists believed that state is a territorial entity. John Hertz stated that:

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<sup>8</sup> Gearóid O'Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1-17.

<sup>9</sup> Tuomas Forsberg, “The Ground without Foundation: Territory as a Social Construct,” *Geopolitics* 8, no.2 (2003): 7-24, 10.1080/714001038.

<sup>10</sup> John Gerard Ruggie, “Territoriality and beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations,” *International Organization* 47, no. 1 (1993): 139-145, doi: 10.1017/S0020818300004732.

“in that substratum of statehood where the state unit confronts us, as it were, in its physical, corporeal capacity: as an expanse of territory encircled for its identification and its defense by a “hard shell” of fortifications. In this lies what will be here referred to as the “impermeability,” or “impenetrability,” or simply the territoriality of the modern state.”<sup>11</sup>

Like Classical Realism, subsequent branches of Realism also subscribe to the idea that state is defined by bounded territoriality. Besides, bounded territoriality is a feature of modern state that differentiates it from ‘pre-modern’ states. Gilpin argues that the modern state is defined by “a strong central authority that is differentiated from other social organizations, and ... exercises control over a well-defined and contiguous territory.”<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the boundary between international and domestic, for Realist scholars, is defined by a “hard shell” of territoriality. English School theorists who contested Realist claims also believe that a state’s recognition within the community of states is determined by the control of territory. Hedley Bull defined international order as constituted of sovereign states that control territory. He states that:

“The starting point of international relations is the existence of states, or independent political communities each of which possesses a government and asserts sovereignty in relation to a particular portion of the earth's surface and a particular segment of the human population...An independent political community which merely claims a right to sovereignty (or is judged by others to have such a right), but cannot assert this right in practice, is not a state properly so-called.”<sup>13</sup>

In International law, a state’s sovereignty is defined by its control over territory. It reflects the Realist idea of territorial international relations. A state is sovereign and independent because state territory is:

“that space within which, in principle, one state, the state to which the territory belongs, is entitled to carry out coercive acts, a space from which all the other states are excluded. It is the space for which, according to general international law, only one definite national legal order is authorized to prescribe coercive acts, the space within which only the coercive acts stipulated by this order may be executed. It is the space within the so-called boundaries of the state”<sup>14</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Max Weber developed an elaborate theory of modern state. His aspiration to find an ideal political order had a pervasive impact on subsequent IR

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Howard L. Williams, Moorhead Wright and Tony Evans, *A Reader in International Relations and Political Theory* (London: UBS Press, 1993), 204.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 121.

<sup>13</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 8

<sup>14</sup> Hans Kelsen, *General Theory of Law and State* (London: Routledge, 2005), 210.

theorization.<sup>15</sup> He defined the state as:

“a human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. Note that ‘territory’ is one of the characteristics of the state... The state is considered the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence.”<sup>16</sup>

For Realist scholars, the sovereignty of state forms the basic principle of international order divided into territorial units. Sovereignty and territoriality of state defines the Realist ideas of domestic and international geopolitics, violence, and sovereign identity.<sup>17</sup>

The centrality of territory in Realist literature has been questioned and critiqued from various theoretical perspectives namely post-colonialism, Constructivism, post-modernism, and critical geopolitics since the 1980s.<sup>18</sup> The next two sections discuss some of the key works from these perspectives. In short, these theories consider territory not as a natural phenomenon but as a socially, culturally and politically constructed idea. However, that does not mean natural aspects of territory are insignificant. The processes, practices and ideas to *produce* territory can be defined as territoriality and it exists at different levels in human society from individual to collective levels and performs multiple functions. However, territorial sovereignty or state sovereignty only focuses on how territory plays in organizing power in a society.<sup>19</sup>

The centrality of territoriality beyond state sovereignty reflects the importance of territory in human life that cannot be wished away due to interconnectedness and globalization or changes in state functions. Rather, it tells us that one or the other form of territoriality exists and in close connection with state sovereignty. Here, the multiple forms of territorialities are an important dimension. Modern western nation-state territoriality represents only one form of relationship between territory and sovereignty. The next section discusses how European ideas and practices in the early modern period onwards shape the way ideas of political and social order, identity and violence is theorized and legitimized in international relations. The issues of exclusion of other forms of territorialities than western European idea of nation-state and their normative privileging are central to the discussion

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<sup>15</sup> Apart from mainstream IR theories, the impact of Weber’s ideas has been most significant on historical sociologists.

<sup>16</sup> Gerth and Mills, “Vocation,” 77-78.

<sup>17</sup> Jeremy Larkins, *From Hierarchy to Anarchy: Territory and Politics before Westphalia* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 17-35.

<sup>18</sup> Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at Its Centenary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1-30.

<sup>19</sup> Forsberg, “Beyond Sovereignty,” 359-362; For centrality of territory in human life in various forms, see Robert Sack, “Human Territoriality: A Theory,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 73, no. 1 (1983): 55-74, 10.1111/j.1467-8306.

here.

### **Sovereignty as a Western European Concept**

The concept of sovereignty, as it is defined in international relations, and practiced in diplomacy and international law, has emerged from the early modern period during the transition from ‘empire’ to modern nation-state in Western Europe. The idea that it emerged in the treaties of Westphalia dominate histories of modern international system and the concept of sovereignty.<sup>20</sup> However, scholars have traced the origins of the idea of sovereignty and its relationship with territory to pre-Westphalia period. These studies have examined the socio-political and economic conditions that shaped the emergence of ideas and state practices leading to Westphalia and other treaties in the subsequent period.<sup>21</sup>

These writings postulate that the origins of the idea of sovereignty is located in the ideas of socio-political order, and broader socio-cultural and political changes taking place since late medieval period in Europe.<sup>22</sup> The medieval socio-political orders, at least in western Europe, were based on hierarchical and overlapping spheres of authority between the church and monarchs. It was not so in other societies such as China wherein state played the central role while Confucianism and other religious-philosophical ideas did not give rise to a separate sphere of authority overriding or overlapping with that of emperors and state. Scholars of state-religion relations in Chinese history agree that emperor’s authority was supreme and at no time in history, religion claimed authority beyond state despite its role in legitimization of political authority.<sup>23</sup>

This is an important distinction that I attend to in the later sections of the chapter because seamless authority within the direct control of the dynasties was unquestioned and the emperor had full authority over territories in Chinese history. Hence, the question of sovereignty in China traditionally did not transition from overlapping spheres to nation-state. The idea of political community, *huaxia*, and its relationship with territory within Chinese land has been close although, there are debates whether cultural boundaries of civilization

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen D Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Jeremy Larkins, “Hierarchy to Anarchy,” 1-35.

<sup>21</sup> Jeremy Larkins, “Hierarchy to Anarchy,” 1-35.

<sup>22</sup> Larkins, “Hierarchy to Anarchy,” 1-35; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, “Popes, Kings, and Endogenous Institutions: The Concordat of Worms and the Origins of Sovereignty,” *International Studies Review* 2, no. 2, (2000): 93-118, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1521-9488.00206>; Benno Teschke, “Geopolitical Relations in the European Middle Ages: History and Theory,” *International Organization* 52, no. 2 (1998): 325- 358, doi: 10.1162/002081898753162848.

<sup>23</sup> For review of arguments on state-religion relations in Chinese history, see PC Lai, “Subordination, Separation, and Autonomy: Chinese Protestant Approaches to the relationship between Religion and State,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 35, no. 1, (2020): 151-153, doi:10.1017/jlr.2020.3.

were territorial and coincided with each other.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the processes whereby territory in imagining political community in the post-1911 period China have emerged differently than Western Europe or probably other parts of the world.

The idea of a universal empire, e.g., Christendom was based on loyalty and faith rather than territory. Slow but steady transition from this to modern nation-state involved the centrality of territory to politics and social life.<sup>25</sup> Thus, loyalty to state within a particular territory took precedence over loyalty based on faith. The Treaty of Westphalia is widely believed to give a form and concrete shape to these changes and thus it became the founding moment for modern politics as it is narrated in Realist literature.<sup>26</sup> Although scholars have traced the origins of modern politics and territorial state much earlier to 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, it remains the reference point to understand the idea of modern international politics, law and fundamental principles of sovereignty, equality, justice and violence.

Regardless of the controversies and arguments regarding the origins of the concept of sovereignty and modern politics, the idea that political loyalty is tied to territory and to a sovereign within that territory is an idea that even supposedly non-territorial loyalties, e.g., religious loyalties based on faith (the Concept of Ummah in Islam, Christendom, the idea of Communist revolution based on proletarian solidarity etc.) have not been able to displace. Even the idea of *tianxia* as articulated in Chinese debates, this thesis argues, is reimagined with a territorial state at the core unit despite its supposed non-territorial vision.

The local origins of sovereignty in western Europe have been explained by taking into account various perspectives. The dynamics of contestation between monarchs and the church for authority is one of the characteristics of medieval European politics and society that gave rise to sovereign territoriality. Tracing the origins of territorial sovereignty to the Concordat of Worms between the Holy Roman Empire and the Church, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita has written a revisionist history of the idea by locating the origin of it in a much earlier period than 1648 AD.<sup>27</sup> He argues that the right to earn revenue for kings given in the Concordat of Worms in 1122 AD was one of the first instances that set in motion the rise of a territorially sovereign state system. As per the provisions of the Concordat, kings were

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<sup>24</sup> Zhaoguang Ge, *What Is China? Territory, Ethnicity, Culture, and History* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2018), 1-28.

<sup>25</sup> John Ruggie, "Territoriality and beyond: Problematizing modernity in international relations," *International Organization* 47, no. 1, (1993): 139-174, doi: 10.1017/S0020818300004732; O'Tuathail, "Critical Geopolitics," 1-17.

<sup>26</sup> Krasner, "Sovereignty,"; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub, 1979) and Larkins, "Hierarchy to Anarchy,"

<sup>27</sup> Mesquita, "The Concordat of Worms," 93-118.

given a right to earn an income from the territories assigned to Bishops. Placing these dimensions into context of church-monarch competition, he traces the origins into the religious-political and economic context of medieval Europe. As a result, the Treaty of Westphalia becomes only a turning point rather than the originator of the practice of sovereign territoriality.

Similarly, Benno Teschke has traced origins of territorial sovereignty in the nature of changing social property relations in the late medieval period.<sup>28</sup> He rightly argues, that the nature of constitutive units impacts the nature of international relations not only in modern period but also pre-modern international societies and systems in different regions including Europe, China, India, etc. Rather than taking an ahistorical view of historical origins of the idea, his approach emphasises historical contingencies and contexts which is a useful way to understand the origins of modern concept of sovereign territoriality. It is also a useful way, unlike an ahistorical view of modern international system in Realism, to understand how sovereign territoriality especially of a particular kind became dominant by replacing other kinds of territorialities.

The separation of the authority of the church and monarch/state is a well-known historical development that shaped the overall context of the rise of principles of sovereign territoriality. Also, the Treaty of Westphalia for the first time defined sovereignty in terms of horizontal organization of authority among states. In that sense, these treaties gave concrete shape to the long-term trends taking place in western Europe prior to 1648 AD. While pre-1648 AD developments were consequential in shaping the ideas that went onto influence the 1648 AD treaties at Westphalia, later developments in European and later in international relations have consolidated the idea of territoriality provisioned in 1648 AD.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the idea that a state has authority to use force within its territory has emerged as the fundamental principle of international relations.

At the same time, the development of territorial sovereign state was not predestined. As Hendrik Spruyt has shown that there have been rival forms of political communities during the early modern period.<sup>30</sup> But once the idea of territorial sovereign state became dominant in its competition with other forms of political communities, the idea that state has monopoly over use of force within its territory is a fundamental idea that underpins how modern state is defined, instituted within international law and its socio-cultural and

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<sup>28</sup> Teschke, "Geopolitical Relations," 325-358.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Philpott, "Revolutions in Sovereignty," 28-72.

<sup>30</sup> Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

institutional features are understood. Weber's conceptualization of state has been the dominant framework of understanding state and territorially embedded nature of institutions and organization of politics in general.

Similarly, Weberian account of the role of economic and religious conditions is part of a larger debate on China and its future including the role of traditional ideas.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the incremental development of sovereign territoriality in its institutional forms from empires and other forms of communities to nation-state is an important dimension to understand the practices and alternative ideas of political communities when they interact with the idea of sovereign territoriality. The relationship between sovereign territoriality and the nature of institutional forms of state is taken for granted in much of the Realist literature.

However, the assumed linear trajectory of historical development of sovereign territorial state is misleading because it has not developed in a linear fashion within western Europe, where the idea originated. For example, empires collapsed as late as 1960s and 1970s after more than four centuries following the Treaties of Westphalia.<sup>32</sup> This aspect of the history of sovereign territorial state is necessary to highlight because it tells us that there exist various forms of institutional features of state simultaneously while adhering to the dominant idea and practices of territorial sovereignty in their relations with other units of the international system. Besides, it also indicates that the privileging of one form of territorial sovereignty making it normatively superior lies at the heart of the politics of alternative ideas whether it is in China or Middle East where most of the efforts in the Post-Cold War period have been invested in the hope of democratization.

The two crucial questions, one, how one form of territoriality, i.e. western European territoriality, came to be privileged and what are its source, become significant to help reflect upon Euro-centric understanding of the relationship between territory and sovereignty, and two, how alternative ideas interact with this form of territoriality in non-western societies are posed here. Few scholars of sovereignty have recognized that non-western societies did not accept these ideas and practices passively. Rather contestations over the adaptation and rejection of western European ideas and practices are intricately related to the processes through which these ideas became global and the dominant framework of the territorial

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<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that Weber's treatment of non-European traditions remains questionable and Chinese scholars have highlighted the problems rather confidently in the wake of economic rise of countries in East and South Asia namely South Korea, China, Taiwan, Singapore, see, Tongdong Bai, *China: The Political Philosophy of the Middle Kingdom* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 8-10.

<sup>32</sup> Philpott, "Revolutions in Sovereignty," 168-220.

nation-state.<sup>33</sup>

The rest of this section traces back modern western nation-state territoriality to cultural and philosophical ideas from early modern Europe. Besides, the interaction with early modern European forms of territoriality and its cultural and political manifestations with non-European forms of territorialities and ideas is an important dimension that is taken up in the next section on the expansion of the international system.

As it is referred above, there are different forms of territoriality. The modern nation-state or Westphalian territoriality is the dominant form of political territoriality that is discussed here. It is based on a conception of “linear and fixed boundaries separating continuous and exclusive spaces.”<sup>34</sup> Political order, in terms of organizing authority and power, is compartmentalized between states with no overlap of authority. Such a compartmentalized territorial order was canonized by the Westphalia Treaties that were, as mentioned above, one of the turning points in stabilizing and codifying emerging norms of territorial sovereignty and territorial state. It also put an end to the overlapping spheres of authority between the church and monarchs.<sup>35</sup> The source of such a concept of territorial order or organization of political order lies in early modern European ideas of space, science, socio-political conditions that led to separation between the church and state, and later on the emergence of the idea of nation-state.<sup>36</sup>

Jeremy Larkins contests the dominant idea in Realism that the idea of territorial sovereignty/state emerged in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century and that 1648 AD ushered in the new and modern international politics and political order. While not contesting the importance of the Treaties in 1648, his discussion on how ideas of space were influenced by emerging ideas of science from Renaissance Italy in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, two or more centuries earlier than 1648 especially in Machiavelli’s thought. These ideas of space gave rise to the conception of political space that was horizontally compartmentalized and precisely excludes what is inside

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<sup>33</sup> Maria Adele Carrai, *Sovereignty in China: A Genealogy of a Concept Since 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Chi-yu Shih, *Navigating Sovereignty: World Politics Lost in China* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Carlson, “Carlson, “Unifying China,” and Allen Carlson, “Moving beyond Sovereignty? A brief consideration of recent changes in China’s approach to international order and the emergence of the tianxia concept,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 68 (2011): 89-102, 10.1080/10670564.2011.520848; Lydia He Liu’s work remains one of the most significant works on the role of power asymmetry in translation and resistance to western ideas of sovereignty, nation-state among others in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century China, see Lydia He Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> Forsberg, “Beyond Sovereignty,” 363.

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy Larkins, “Hierarchy to Anarchy,” 17-35.

<sup>36</sup> O’Tuathail, “Critical Geopolitics,” 1-17.

and what is outside that space.<sup>37</sup> The discourses assumed such a conception of space became the dominant form of imagining space and organizing society and politics at a time when the medieval order was collapsing with monarchs getting the upper hand. The competition between the church and state during the period before and after 1648 and the ideas of space were used by monarchs to consolidate their authority and eliminate overlapping with the church. Thus, mapping became one of the tools for monarchs to establish control over their domains, resources, and demarcate their territorial limits.<sup>38</sup>

As discussed above, Realism has naturalized such a conception of space and territorial political order. Besides, the normative privileging of such a territorial political order through social and political thought and political practices can be understood both as a part of the process of emergence of the modern state in Europe and later on through the interactions with non-European societies through colonialism and imperialism. I try to discuss these two dimensions through the literature that has critiqued this idea rather than going into debates on how the modern state came to be. But, as emphasized in later sections, other forms of organizing power like clan organization or early tribal organization of state and other ideas of community like *tianxia* in China and *ummah* in Islam cannot be disentangled from their territorial dimensions.

However, there are alternatives to the territorial nation state because the importance of territory in these conceptions of community is radically different from the nation-state. The boundaries of communities are generally defined by loyalty to faith rather than territory, because nation-state does not allow alternative sources of authority in a particular territory. That is where the idea of sovereignty in Westphalian political order is different from other forms of sovereignty. In this conception of sovereignty, “sovereignty and space are conceptualized in logical interdependence- either one takes the compartmentalization of space into territorial portions to be necessary features of sovereignty or conversely modern state is a centralized unit whose sovereignty, independence and power all resulted from its territoriality.”<sup>39</sup>

In constructivist literature, territory as a natural phenomenon does not have much significance. What matters is that human beings make sense of territory as a natural phenomenon through mental maps, discourses and metaphors. Hence, national boundaries and territory are political constructs. Scholars like Tuomas Forsberg suggest, it is not just

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<sup>37</sup> Larkins, “Hierarchy to Anarchy,” 145-195.

<sup>38</sup> O’Tuathail, “Critical Geopolitics,” 1-17.

<sup>39</sup> Jens Bartelson cited in Forsberg, “Beyond Sovereignty,” 364

enough to consider territory as a social construct. Rather, we should understand how social construction takes place. This view brings focus on the dynamics of power and norms within a society in the way territory is socially constructed. As he states, “one has to show how territory and borders are socially constructed and how certain social constructions make a difference in some more specified regard.”<sup>40</sup>

This view brings in the dynamics of why it matters whether social construction happens in one way or the other. A mere focus on what borders represent like difference and exclusion through creating territorial limits does not help explain other aspects of territoriality. In a way, it focuses more on what is kept out rather than explaining how the inside is ordered spatially. It is more so when we think about sovereignty, because it is not merely about creating boundaries between inside and outside. Rather, geopolitical aspects of territoriality like security and control over territory matter as much as its mental, social and political construct. Additionally, the influence of western territoriality on organizing politics within states has been a complex process and involves interactions with alternative ideas of territory, space and sovereignty.<sup>41</sup>

The idea of territory as socially and politically constructed brought out the ideas and practices in all realms of society together to bear upon understanding the relationship between territory and politics. Additionally, this also leads to treating the rise of territorial sovereignty in gradual and wider contexts in a complex way rather than taking things happening in social, cultural, religious and political realms as separate.

John Ruggie was among the first scholars who critiqued Realist literature on modern territoriality from a Constructivist perspective. He located the rise of peculiar territoriality of the modern nation-state within a European context and its ‘material environments, strategic behaviour and social epistemology.’<sup>42</sup> He recognized that modern territoriality is the basis on which the modern international system is based which Realist literature takes for granted in theorizing IR. This approach opened up new questions that related to the sources that led to the rise of modern territoriality. The emergence of new “social epistemology”, a set of ideas and practices about individual, community and self-other relations, emerged over a long period of time before 1648 AD. In different realms of society like culture, religion,

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<sup>40</sup> Forsberg, “Beyond Sovereignty,” 365.

<sup>41</sup> Thongchai Winichakul’s work on modern Thailand shows how Buddhist ideas of space have been influential in creating boundaries and defining Thailand’s modern identity as a nation-state. His work among others refers to a complex process of interactions with an agency of local ideas to shape state practices and ideas of sovereignty and territoriality of nation-state, Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam mapped: A history of the geo-body of a nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> Ruggie, “Territoriality and beyond,” 152.

architecture and politics, these new ideas gradually displaced medieval social epistemes through which human beings as individuals and collectivities made sense of the world around them. Scholars from reflectivist theories have since the 1990s explored these changes from the medieval to the modern period examining how new norms led to reorganization of social and political order in western Europe.<sup>43</sup>

Recent exploration of border making and remaking from critical geopolitical perspectives suggest, that the relationship between territory and sovereignty may also be influenced by cultural ideas. Hence, a modern western understanding of territorial sovereignty is culturally specific in its fundamental understanding. It specifically manifests in the role of boundaries in social and political life of a state.<sup>44</sup> The significance of boundaries across political systems like empires, tribal organizations, nomadic groups have differed throughout history. Nation-state territoriality has displaced other forms of territorialities and brought territory at the center of defining identity and affiliations of individuals and groups. It also shapes the regulation of relations among states as well as within states in terms of relationship between center and periphery.<sup>45</sup> Shifting significance of territory in cultural, social and political life of groups does not mean a reduced strategic and economic significance. Rather, it means how a political community is organized and how it interacts with other such political communities.

The idea of territorial sovereignty displaced the diversity of forms of political community through its normative coding of equality of similar units while delegitimizing other forms of political systems. The normative privileging of territorial nation-states neither came at one go nor it was predestined.<sup>46</sup> Rather it is still a work in progress.<sup>47</sup> What ensured its relative success over other forms of political orders is that it was backed by a certain type of socio-economic and political context. Besides, political identities and their ethical foundation are informed by spatial and ethical life theorized in early modern period and it remains at the foundation of how people imagine their identities and life.<sup>48</sup>

Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that the fundamental aspects of

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<sup>43</sup> For example, Friedrich Kratochwil, "Of Systems, Boundaries, and Territoriality: An Inquiry into the Formation of the State System," *World Politics* 39, no. 1 (1986): 33-40, doi: 10.2307/2010297; R B J Walker, "State Sovereignty and the Articulation of Political Space/Time," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 20, (1991): 445, 10.1177/03058298910200030201.

<sup>44</sup>David Newman, "Boundaries, Border, and Barriers: Changing Geographic Perspectives on Territorial Lines," in *Identities, Borders, Orders. Rethinking International Relations Theory* eds, M. Albert, D. Jacobson and Y. Lapid (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 145-147.

<sup>45</sup> Friedrich Kratochwil, "Of Systems," 35-36.

<sup>46</sup>Spruyt, "The Sovereign State," 151-179.

<sup>47</sup>Mann, "Nation-States," 281.

<sup>48</sup> Walker, "State Sovereignty," 445.

territorial order like territorial sovereignty, therefore, are located within a particular context of western Europe. The treaties of Westphalia, Utrecht and others since then have codified these emerging socio-cultural conceptions of what an ideal community means within a given political context.

Boundaries as a separation line between states are not just a physical line but it functions as a separating line between cultures, people and societies. Apart from regulating economic, political and military contacts, boundaries have other significances that are not captured by Realist epistemology and ontology. Boundaries gradually replaced frontiers in the modern period. Unlike frontiers, boundaries are inward looking and hence, it is more about separating inside from outside than performing the function of a contact zone.<sup>49</sup> Its implications are wider than acknowledged by Realist theories. Boundaries do not merely function as physical separations between different communities. Rather, they define, culturally and politically, who belongs to a political community.<sup>50</sup>

The social-cultural embeddedness of territory and boundaries means that merely increasing trans-boundary interactions in trade and migration cannot displace fundamental ideas that gave rise to nation-state territoriality. In the 1990s, scholars argued that the nation-state is declining due to increased interdependence, rise of non-state actors like multi-national corporations (MNCs), advancements in technology, globalism/cosmopolitanism and functional delegation of authority to supranational organizations. Yet, the decline of territorial sovereignty does not make sense beyond a point because the significance of territory and the cultural and philosophical ideas that gave rise to it are still dominant even though cross boundary interactions have increased. Hence, it is argued here that until these cultural and philosophical ideas are challenged and contested by alternative ideas, territorial sovereignty will be the dominant concept governing political life within and among states. Given that territorial sovereignty is the dominant concept, alternative ideas for alternative territorialities cannot displace it completely and hence, the relationship between power and norms become significant in understanding articulation of alternative ideas like that of Chinese or others.

Nevertheless, territorial sovereignty is embedded in a Eurocentric cultural and philosophical understanding, since it creates sharp inside-outside boundaries. Firstly, the idea of nation-state as a homogeneous community gave rise to sharp distinctions between two

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<sup>49</sup> L.K.D. Kristof, "The Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 49, (1959): 269-282, 10.4324/9781315135267-14.

<sup>50</sup> Kristof, "The Nature of Frontiers," 270-273.

groups although there has not been any group that can be purely seen as homogeneous. Secondly, the interactions between European countries and non-European societies are an important historical process that consolidated the inside-outside boundaries. As Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney argue, ‘IR misses the way international society—as both a system of states and a world political economy—forms a competition of cultures in which the principles of sovereignty and self-help work to sanctify inequality and subjugate those outside of the centres of “the West.”’<sup>51</sup> This helped privilege European conception of politics and political order over non-European ideas and practices normatively.

The implications of such privileging of western ideas and concepts which have been expanded as part of imperialism and colonialism is deeper than it is acknowledged and understood in Realist IR literature. These dimensions of IR as in how diversity is treated while understanding the idea of territorial sovereignty are discussed in the next section. Here, it suffices to note that normative privileging of European ideas of politics took place in the context of asymmetric power relations in the form of colonialism and imperialism. Besides, it helped European states to delegitimize other ideas, and consequently, alternative ideas of politics and international order were undervalued. This particularly can be seen on the debates on “liberal international order” and supposed threats to it from China and other states that articulate alternative visions of international order.<sup>52</sup> The articulation of alternative ideas that provide a universalistic vision is considered as a threat. This comes from tension about the normative superiority of the idea of nation-state and liberal universalism.

This tension emerges from the very constitution of territorial sovereignty in early modern period wherein *difference/diversity* was coded into norms of territorial sovereignty, political order, identity and violence in international relations. The “problems of difference” as Inayatullah and Blaney put it, shapes much of the thinking about international relations.<sup>53</sup> Creating a homogeneous political order within a state is presupposed in this scheme that of course creates tensions and problems as every society is diverse and there are no given cultural/social boundaries of a political community. The understanding of security, international order and peace emerges out of threats and dangers that differences pose. Much critiqued and obsolete theories of “democratic peace” are an example wherein peace is

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<sup>51</sup> Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004): 2.

<sup>52</sup> Nana de Graaff et al., China’s rise in a liberal world order in transition – introduction to the FORUM,” *Review of International Political Economy* 27, no. 2 (2020): 191-207, 10.1080/09692290.2019.1709880. The point here is not whether China attempts to change the existing order. Rather it is to emphasize the privileging of liberal international order as the only and stable order.

<sup>53</sup> Inayatullah and Blaney, “Difference,” 1-5.

predicated upon sameness manifested through liberal and ‘democratic’ political systems and values. The assumption that democratization is necessary for world peace and prosperity is another example that treats differences in cultural, social and political imaginations of different political orders within states as dangers to the existing international order. The same goes for debates on the rise of China and its impact on international order. The debate on nature of transition that is likely to be brought about by China is not value neutral. It is more about a different political system rising as a major power. This dimension comes out clearly in the way Western countries expect that China will become “liberal.”<sup>54</sup> The dominant idea in these narratives is that a liberal China would not be a threat like ‘autocratic’ China would be to the international order.<sup>55</sup>

## II

### **How a European Concept Became Global: Politics of Norms and Power**

After I established in the previous section that territorial sovereignty as a fundamental concept of international order emerged from the socio-cultural, philosophical and political contexts of Europe, this section develops it further by exploring ideas and arguments in literature on how the concept became global. The expansion of territorial sovereignty in non-European societies poses two particular problems. First, to account for relations between power and universalization of norms. Second, to understand the resistance to universalizing principles and norms. While there is no reason to discard rules and norms that help every state, the basic power structure and inequality that helps the European international society to expand needs to be explored so as to recognize alternative ideas of order and justice and contestations. Otherwise, it becomes a hegemonic narrative that glosses over racial, economic and other inequalities that still are fundamental to the character of the international order.

The expansion of European ideas, practices and institutions took place in two contexts. One, the European countries enjoyed military and economic superiority. Secondly, this was morally legitimized by the binary of civilized vs. uncivilized. In a way, normative privileging of European ideas over other ideas took place within the binary of civilized vs. uncivilized or cultural differences.<sup>56</sup> The ideas of territorial sovereignty as discussed in the previous section emerged from the particular context of Europe. The emergence of equal territorial sovereign states within Europe became the norm after 1648 AD. But the same

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<sup>54</sup>Graaff et al., “China’s rise,” 191-194.

<sup>55</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, “Hegemony with Chinese Characteristics,” *The National Interest*, no. 114 (2011): 27, <https://nationalinterest.org/article/hegemony-chinese-characteristics-5439>.

<sup>56</sup>Inayatullah and Blaney, “Difference,” 20-39.

equality and sovereignty was not accorded to non-European societies which were understood to be lacking sovereignty or did not have cultural and political competence to be sovereign.<sup>57</sup> To be sovereign, as the history of the expansion of European international order shows, non-European societies needed to change their culture, and politics and conform to modern European ideas of society and politics. The fundamental idea behind delegitimization of non-European ideas was the deliberate distinction made between European universalism vs. non-European particularism.

Why non-western practices and norms that were already there did not qualify as universal laws and norms is a major question that has been discussed in various ways. One of the many ways in which norms help hegemony is by exclusion and delegitimization. As Anthony Anghie argues, the inclusion of non-European societies by ‘granting’ them sovereignty has not been empowering and liberating for these societies.<sup>58</sup> The delegitimization happens at many levels but most importantly it works at normatively delegitimizing other ways of organizing power and political orders. As a result, inclusion in European system took place by delegitimizing other ways of organizing societies and political orders. But the predominance of European power economically and militarily has ensured that non-European states do not have an option not to join it either.

Without going into detailed discussions of these debates, this section discusses some of the discussions to develop the argument that interactions between norms and power have been crucial. Besides, these norms emerged from a particular geopolitical and cultural context, and that these ideas have not expanded uniformly due to resistance to the imposition. Rather, the contestations over norms and ideas that shape the ideas like territorial sovereignty are part of the process of its expansion. The next section then will develop this argument further by explicating the conceptual framework of why and how norms and ideas matter both in expansion of European international order as well as resistance and propagation of alternative ideas.

As mentioned above, the forceful expansion and universalization of European system and resistance to it by non-European societies is still an understudied area. Postcolonial IR writings and now global IR framework provide centrality to these two aspects and attempt to rethink fundamental concepts like territorial sovereignty.<sup>59</sup> In one of the celebrated works in

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<sup>57</sup> Anthony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>58</sup> Anghie, “Imperialism,” 7.

<sup>59</sup> Global IR focuses on bringing non-western experiences, ideas and practices to understand international relations. As such, diverse approaches including Post-colonialism, feminism, etc. are argued to be part of the

IR, Hedley Bull and Adam Watson sketches the expansion of international society. They argue how international society expanded through “a group of states (or, more generally, a group of independent political communities) which...have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognise their common interest in maintaining these arrangements.”<sup>60</sup> They argue, that states do seek common rules and norms to engage in cooperative behaviour and therefore they construct a society of states. Yet, their contention of its expansion through consent and dialogue is a problematic proposition that hides or invisibilizes contestations over the current international order from alternative visions of international order emerging out of non-western societies.

A number of scholars subscribing to different schools that range from Post-colonialism, to Third World Approaches to International Law, and even critical theorists have extensively unravelled the way culture in terms of civilizing mission, race and economic-political exploitation have shaped the nature of expansion of the European system. Building on these arguments, I try to frame these encounters in terms of the relationship between power and norms and the way the dynamics between the two shapes the nature of interactions between European and non-European societies. In a way, I make a general point with regard to previous periods in history to develop an argument that emphasises the expansion and resistance to the European system in terms of how power is legitimized through creating certain norms.

Exclusion of non-European norms is one way to delegitimize their capacity for universal application. From early modern period onwards, this exclusion of non-Europeans ideas and norms took place because they were considered backward, local and lacking capacity for universalization.<sup>61</sup> In International relations theories, the exclusion of non-European norms took place in two ways. One, the normative constitution of the concepts like territorial sovereignty has been taken for granted. By doing so, the history of expansion of international system is narrated as a value neutral and even liberating and empowering process thereby making marginalization and damage to non-European societies invisible or something good. Secondly, non-European concepts, practices and experiences have not been used to theorize the practices of these concepts thereby invisibilizing the resistance and dynamic nature of adaptation and practices of the same concepts like territorial sovereignty in

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framework. For more details on this, see, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, “Why is there no Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten years on,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 17, 3 (2017): 341–370, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcx006>.

<sup>60</sup> Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, *The Expansion of International Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>61</sup> Anghie, “Imperialism,” 5-12.

non-European societies.

Apart from inter-state levels, the delegitimization of non-European ideas and norms has much to do with delegitimization of organizing social and political orders. Although equality and non-interference are considered sacred principles of territorial sovereignty, they are usually qualified with the type of domestic order especially with respect to non-European societies. The idea behind democratization is one such example. It seeks to change how domestic politics is organized and in turn to change society and culture on the model of Western values and institutions. Thus, changes in sovereignty cannot merely be explained and understood by explicating how flows of people and goods between states have become easier. Rather, changes must be looked at how normative bases of territorial sovereignty changes. As Ruggie rightly points out, the idea of sovereignty has been used in modern times to legitimize the post-medieval order; any changes in underlying reality will then be logically legitimized by alternative norms.<sup>62</sup> Bartleson's idea that the idea of sovereignty must be grasped with regard to its relationship with knowledge is instructive here to understand the relationship between knowledge produced about sovereignty and its normative value, and geopolitical interests of European powers.<sup>63</sup> The specific claims about universality of territorial sovereignty and necessity of state are based on specific claims about knowledge about politics and reality. These claims are reified and reinforced by political practice and knowledge production.<sup>64</sup>

Even the seemingly inclusive idea of Westphalian order based on the principles of equality and sovereignty have had exceptions that pertained to the practices of international law as applied to non-European societies. Edward Keene's work on Grotius and his impact on the practices of international law before the Second World War show that the exceptions were 'normal' for European states to make to legitimize practices like protectorates and control of colonies.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the idea that the Westphalian system can be applied universally is wrong. Rather, for the major part of its history, the non-European societies were treated differently. The justification for such practices is well-known arguments like lack of capacity to be sovereign and backwardness.<sup>66</sup> The processes of decolonization and the rise of independent sovereign states in non-European societies after the Second World War made

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<sup>62</sup> Ruggie, "Territoriality," 140-142.

<sup>63</sup> Jen Bartleson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>64</sup> Walker, "State Sovereignty," 446.

<sup>65</sup> Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> Anghie, "Imperialism," 7-8.

sure that these practices could not be justified normatively.<sup>67</sup> This has come about through contestation by non-European societies.

However, at the same time, the constraint on the sovereignty of weaker states is a well-known story that need not be retold. The point here is that unequal practices emerged out of political-economic and military dominance of European powers and these were justified through cultural and normative superiority of European ideas and practices. Besides, the claims to sovereign statehood by non-European societies had to match with expectations of normative-political order established by European societies. The global governance mechanisms, economic and financial mechanisms through the World Bank, the IMF and other institutions, humanitarian interventions, sanctions and regime changes are generally used to bring 'deviant states' into the fold of what is the normatively legitimized order.

Another area of practice of international law and sovereignty that has been explored extensively regarding the bias towards weaker states is the ideas of humanitarian intervention. The point I want to make here is that the delegitimization of non-European ideas of socio-political orders remain at the heart of how European powers and the USA have justified these exceptions to sovereignty. No one can disagree with the fact that some of these states where humanitarian interventions have taken place were ruled by cruel regimes and leaders. Yet, the idea that some states have responsibility to redefine domestic orders and hence they should violate sovereignty of weaker states reflects the normative superiority of European ideas of space, order, and politics.

Ideas like democracy, equality, etc. that emerged within European countries were used effectively by colonial societies to claim sovereignty.<sup>68</sup> These changing norms in turn were used by colonial resistance movements across the world to resist colonialism. But the question is whether European norms were the only norms that they used. In this respect, the existing literature in IR is largely silent.<sup>69</sup>

The emerging field of border studies and critical geopolitics have explored some of the themes of how cultural norms and understanding of space inform adaptation of European ideas of state and border and territorial sovereignty.<sup>70</sup> But these discourses have not been

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<sup>67</sup> Daniel Philpott, "Revolutions in Sovereignty," 153-220.

<sup>68</sup> Hendrik Spruyt, "The End of Empire and the Extension of the Westphalian System: The Normative Basis of the Modern State Order," *International Studies Review* 2, no. 2 (2000): 65-92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1521-9488.00205>.

<sup>69</sup> Amitav Acharya has recently delved into the issue of agency and making of global order in his work. See, Amitav Acharya, *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Amitav Acharya, "Ideas, norms, and regional orders," in *International Relations Theory and Regional Transformation* ed. T. Paul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 183-209.

<sup>70</sup> Winichakul Thongchai, *Siam mapped: A history of the geo-body of a nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii

brought into conversations with the idea of territorial sovereignty and especially how non-European ideas modify the ideas like territorial sovereignty in practice. Despite acceptance of legal and normative dimensions of concepts like territorial sovereignty, states in non-European societies imagine their spatial identity and articulate their relations with outside world in a different normative framework. Chinese practices and articulation of the idea of territorial sovereignty, which I explain in next sections, falls within these alternative discourses.

The idea that the norms and practices developed by European states were used by colonial resistance movements make invisible the resistance and contestation of international order by these societies both politically and intellectually. It may suggest that European power ‘granted’ colonial societies equality and sovereignty.<sup>71</sup> For example, one of the standard arguments has been that:

It was the turning of the weapons-the ideas, the instruments, the institutions-of the West against itself which swung the balance against imperialism. The Indian National Congress, the Convention People's Party of the Gold Coast, and similar nationalist movements of a modern type were the ones which won independence.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, it is important to bring in alternative norms that contest existing international order to understand why and how resistance to and changes occur in the international order. In fact, the changes since the Second World War are not unilateral. Rather, states in non-European societies have contested and helped bring about normative changes not just by adopting European norms but non-European ideas and norms of international order in various ways. It is here that I argue why alternative ideas coming from China are useful to discuss not just as a destabilizing force but as a source to critique the existing order. Whether they provide an alternative or not, is another issue that needs to be explored in state practices in domestic politics and foreign policy.

### III

#### Nation-state and Sovereign territoriality

Territorial sovereignty and its relationship with nation-state is another dimension that helps us understand how one form of territoriality emerged, and the influence of alternative ideas must be evaluated whether they help change this particular relationship in practice. As such, the relationship is related to two major questions. Firstly, who wields sovereignty? In

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Press, 1994).

<sup>71</sup> For example, see, David Strange, “The Inner Incompatibility of Empire and Nation: Popular Sovereignty and Decolonization,” *Sociological Perspectives* 35, no. 2, (1992): 367-384, doi/abs/10.2307/1389384.

<sup>72</sup> Emerson cited in Strange, “Inner Incompatibility,” 369.

the dominant history of the concept narrated in Realism, sovereignty transitioned from popes/kings to kings and to people. Secondly, where does sovereignty lie? The modern concept of sovereignty, as it is argued in previous sections, is defined by its specific relationship with territory. Therefore, a simple answer to this question can be sovereignty lies in territory. For example, a state's sovereignty lies in the territory it controls. In this sense, the history of the concept of territorial sovereignty can be delineated by looking at the history of the nation-state. The complicated history of hyphenated concept of nation-state tells us how territory came to be the link between two different concepts.<sup>73</sup> But it goes beyond that simple answer because the idea of nation-state as a political community is defined by its control over territory in a cultural sense too. In this section, I briefly discuss why territoriality of nation-state is distinct and hence, looking at its relationship we can infer the ways in which non-European societies have come to imagine their sovereignty and whether and how alternative ideas resist and redefine the relationship.

While territory has been significant for state building throughout history, it has never been about the question of existence of sovereignty and identity as such. For example, a loss of territory or swapping territories has been a normal practice historically. But it never became an existential threat as such. On the other hand, the territoriality of nation-state demands that even a small piece of land and its loss may be considered an attack or existential threat to the 'geo-body' of a nation.<sup>74</sup> In the Chinese case, China has undergone many territorial changes and even rule of 'barbarian' dynasties like the Yuan (Mongols) and the Manchus being the longest ruling dynasties in its history. But the idea that sovereignty lies in the king and China was the centre of the world could never be destabilized.<sup>75</sup> The challenge lies in explaining how these changes came about since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historians have attempted to map out these changes and how new ideas and concepts destabilized traditional order.<sup>76</sup> But whether the revival of traditional ideas in the Post-Mao period suggests reversal of the changes in the twentieth century is an issue that forms one of the central concerns of this study.

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<sup>73</sup>Jan Penrose, "Nations, States and Homelands: Territory and Territoriality in Nationalist Thought," *Nations and Nationalism* 8, no. 3, (2002): 283-293, 10.1111/1469-8219.00051.

<sup>74</sup>Penrose, "Nations," 283-288; Sankaran Krishna, "Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 19, 4 (1994): 507-521, 10.1177/030437549401900404.

<sup>75</sup>Ge Zhaoguang, "What Is China? Territory, Ethnicity, Culture, and History. Harvard University Press, 2019), 64-94.

<sup>76</sup>Zhaoguang, "What Is China?" 64-94; Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995); Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Nation-state and its relationship with territoriality can be understood in three important ways. All these three kinds of relationships defined the uniqueness of nation-state territoriality that characterises the concept of territorial sovereignty. Firstly, territory is an existential fact because each community or people need physical territory to reside in. This aspect of territory is basic to all groups, communities and political communities. In this sense, territory fulfils functions of resources. Territory is used for accessing resources, military and other purposes. Secondly, territory is considered variously as homelands, motherland etc,<sup>77</sup> although, some of these ideas that a society or group has emotional connection with particular territory has been there. For example, the Chinese have always considered themselves people of central plains or *huaxia*.<sup>78</sup>

Likewise, there has been specific attachment to territory. But such a relationship with territory was different because people's identity was not defined in terms of territory. Modern nation-state defines its identity in terms of territory.<sup>79</sup> Territory is an essential part of claiming sovereignty by a group. Historically, there have been sovereign people without clearly defined territory namely, nomadic empires although they too relied on territory for their sustenance. To understand the alternative ideas, we must understand the linkages between territorial sovereignty and nation-state. This would give an idea about how non-western ideas (Chinese ideas) influence the translation of modern western ideas of nation-state, sovereignty and territory. Thirdly, the territoriality is reflected in the way power, administrative or political, is organized within society. Every state has territorial organization of power although in different ways.<sup>80</sup>

At the risk of oversimplification, we may think of territory and its relevance for politics in broadly two ways. Firstly, that territory provides resources and hence, it is a basic necessity for existence of society and state. In that sense, control over territory is a source of power. Such a role of territory is universal for all states and all periods of history.<sup>81</sup> Now, my intention here is not to explore or critique existing literature on nationalism and territoriality. Rather, the thesis discusses the practices and ideas of territoriality sovereignty mainly to explore contradictions and possibilities that Chinese IR theorists have proposed based on traditional Chinese ideas. Chinese scholars like Zhao Tingyang and Qin Yaqing argue, that

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<sup>77</sup>Penrose, "Nations," 278-281.

<sup>78</sup> The term *huaxia* refers to the nine provinces mentioned in the Book of Shang (*shangshu*). For detailed discussion on significance of territory in Chinese history and identity, see Ge Zhaoguang, "What Is China? 1-64.

<sup>79</sup> S. Grosby, "Territoriality: The Transcendental, Primordial Feature of Modern Societies," *Nations and Nationalism* 1, no. 2 (1995):143-62, [10.1111/J.1354-5078.1995.00143.X](https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1354-5078.1995.00143.X).

<sup>80</sup>Penrose, "Nations," 280.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Sack, "Human Territoriality," 55-74.

Chinese traditional ideas like relationality (*guanxi*) and *tianxia* provide better understanding of world politics because these ideas accommodate diversity and avoid sharp distinctions between inside and outside that usually lead to conflicts in current international politics.<sup>82</sup>

The issue is how we reconcile practices of territorialities of nation-state in China's periphery and traditional ideas of relationality and unbounded *tianxia*-based order. Jen Penrose has differentiated between two types of territorialities. Firstly, identity is defined mainly with reference to 'culture.' In this type of territoriality, control over territory is more of a strategic and existential question that its role in defining identity of a society. Secondly, territory plays a different role when identity is defined with reference to territory. Here, control over territory is not just strategic. Rather the symbolic existence of a society depends upon controlling territory.<sup>83</sup> In the second type of territoriality, the latent power of territory, i.e. space and its relation with emotions and symbolic resources of a society are mobilized to construct meaning of a territory. This distinction between two types of territoriality is useful to understand how territory plays different roles in power and identity. If identity is defined territorially, how the underlying cultural and philosophical assumptions can be avoided become a crucial question.

While these arguments points towards claims of sovereignty over territory by a specific group, they do not answer the question of how changes in norms and values may alter the way a group conceive relations with territory and consequently territorial sovereignty. Emotional and cultural articulations of territorial sovereignty have limitations, although their significance is that they provide sources for norms that shape cultural articulations and conceptions of territorial sovereignty like self-other binaries, territory as a homogenous political order, etc. But it only tells us how a group of people give importance to particular territory. As it is discussed above, Realist ideas of territorial sovereignty coded into legal norms in international law and control over territory does not help us understand why the modern concept of territorial sovereignty is specific and why ideas of sovereignty change. This is because Realism ignores the question of normative legitimation of sovereignty.<sup>84</sup> As a result, sovereignty defined as an authority over a particular territory is presented as an unchanging concept. In turn, its expansion as part of the international system does not

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<sup>82</sup> Qin Yaqing, "A Multiverse of Knowledge: Cultures and IR Theories," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 11, no. 4 (2018): 415–434, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poy015>; Zhao Tingyang, *Redefining A Philosophy for World Governance* (London: Palgrave, 2019).

<sup>83</sup> Jan Penrose, "Nations," 7–11.

<sup>84</sup>For Realist literature on legitimation and sovereignty see, J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin, "The State and the Nation: Changing Norms and the Rules of Sovereignty in International Relations," *International Organization* 48, no. 1 (1994):108–110, doi: 10.1017/S0020818300000837.

recognise how alternative norms modifies and contest the underlying norms that sustain territorial sovereignty, and the political order, both at a domestic and international level, produced by such a concept.

The Realist idea of territorial sovereignty as an unchanging concept is not helpful to understand actual practices of territorial sovereignty and ignores how norms changes. The examples cited above tell us even if legal and institutional aspects of territorial sovereignty have been adopted by almost all countries, it is not just voluntary but a result of predominance of European norms and power. Besides, the normative bases of concept of territorial sovereignty as well as practices have differed across the world. It is as a result of efforts of non-European states through contestation normatively and institutionally as part of international order as well as organizing their political and social orders in different ways. Therefore, to recognise the usefulness of ideas from non-European societies like China is to recognize the dynamic nature of territorial sovereignty. It is also to recognize that alternative norms do define and redefine existing norms in a different way despite their limited capacity to effect real changes.

#### IV

##### **Chinese Ideas and IR Theories: Norms, Power and Territorial Sovereignty**

Theoretical debates on the rise of China and its impact on the existing international order date back to the 1990s. Since then, the literature produced can be categorized into four trends. Realist writings on the issues have largely confined themselves to whether, when, and how China will acquire enough material (i.e. economic and military) capabilities to change the status quo. As a result, its likely impact has been rendered through as part of the larger trends of change in international politics rather than recognizing specific circumstances like the globalized and interconnected world, the existence of nuclear weapons, etc. that may constrain or prevent the trajectory of falling in the pattern of what European states have gone through in the past.<sup>85</sup>

Crucially, for the purpose of this thesis, it should be emphasized that the role of Chinese ideas and norms or even western norms are, for realist scholars, irrelevant to analyse China's rise. There are two problems with Realist writings on China's rise. Firstly, the case studies these works take to explain the rise of new power and its impact on existing

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<sup>85</sup> For prominent Realist writings on China's rise, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* New York: WW Norton, 1997); Graham Allison *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

international order all are from Anglo-American history.<sup>86</sup> Hence, the question of whether contexts matter is not dealt with seriously. Secondly, ignoring norms and ideas leaves out a crucial part of how China behaves and articulates its foreign policy.

Realist scholarship on China does not recognize the role of changing ideas in the Post-Mao period on its foreign policy. As a result, they tend to misinterpret not only Chinese behaviour in general but also misunderstand the Chinese approach to international order. One such misunderstanding is that the rise in China's economic and military capabilities is likely to lead to conflict following the patterns seen in history. There is more than one problem with such arguments in Realist literature although one cannot deny that the rise in power will certainly change the nature of power relations at different levels in favour of China. As a result, Realist writings do not explain why new ideas have emerged and what impact they will have on China's politics and foreign policy.

Liberal writings on China have emphasized the role of interconnectedness, institutions, and even gradual socialization of China into a "liberal international order."<sup>87</sup> But their concern has overwhelmingly been whether China will challenge the liberal values, norms, and institutions.<sup>88</sup> In this pursuit, their assessment of China's behaviour ignores whether Chinese ideas and norms can improve or provide an alternative.

To counter the Eurocentric nature of Realist and liberal writings, scholars have raised the issue of whether Anglo-American experience can be the basis of understanding Chinese behaviour. These writings while not necessarily raising questions about Realist ontological and epistemological assumptions and the role of power politics bring in the role of different patterns of inter-state behaviour to argue that China's rise is not destined to follow the

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<sup>86</sup> For example, three most celebrated works in Realism by Paul Kennedy, John Mearsheimer and Graham Allison take case studies from Euro-American history. Mearsheimer, although, devotes a full chapter to the case of the rise of China but to test rather than develop arguments, see Mearsheimer, "Tragedy," 360-402; Similarly, Graham Allison takes all case studies from Euro-American history and applies it to China-US competition, see Allison, "Destined for War,,"; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987). In recent times, few scholars have revisited the idea of revisionism in international politics and argue, that revisionism is also a characteristic of existing hegemon like the USA. Hence, China's challenge to the international order is complex, see, Kai He, Huiyun Feng, Steve Chan, and Weixing Hu, "Rethinking Revisionism in World Politics," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 14, 2 (2021): 159–186, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poab004>.

<sup>87</sup> G John Ikenberry, "Introduction: The United States, China and Global Order" in *America, China, and the Struggle for World Order: Ideas, Traditions, Historical Legacies, and Global Visions* eds., G John Ikenberry, Zhu Feng and Wang Jisi (London: Springer, 2015), 1-20; G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China: Power, Institutions, and the Western Order" in *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* eds, Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 89-114.

<sup>88</sup> Graaff et al., "China's Rise," 191-207; G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?" *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1, (2008): 23–37, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2008-01-01/rise-china-and-future-west>.

European path of conflict.<sup>89</sup> It is argued that East Asian International Relations cannot be explained by using concepts and theoretical frameworks developed in the West.<sup>90</sup> The objectives of finding Chinese worldview and perspectives to theorize and analyse China's international relations has emerged from these writings. They argue, Chinese practices, ideas and experiences from history provide a better understanding.<sup>91</sup>

Another set of writings approach the question of Chinese ideas and their impact on international order from the perspective of the international society/English School approach.<sup>92</sup> Even some Chinese scholars have also been receptive to the ideas of the international society/English School approach for building the Chinese School of IR.<sup>93</sup> While these writings help analyse Chinese behaviour in many ways, they suffer from the same problem, i.e., they do not explain why China contests existing norms while it participates in the international order. Besides, their emphasis on integration of China in international order leads them to side-line how norms shape the way China articulates its power while not necessarily providing an alternative in terms of alternative practices and institutional forms. Despite its utility, international society approach, as it is pointed out below in respect to other approaches, understands state as a passive receptor of international society norms and rules.<sup>94</sup> Finally, English school from the beginning has ignored non-European historical international societies.<sup>95</sup> It is historians of China and sinologists who explored inter-state

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<sup>89</sup> David Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 57-85, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/43687>; Amitav Acharya, "Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?" *International Security* 28, no. 3 (2003): 149-64, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/52922>.

<sup>90</sup> Qin Yaqing and Wei Ling, "Jiegou, Jincheng yu Quanli de Shehuihua: Zhongguo yu Dongya Diqu Hezuo," (Structures, Processes and the Socialization of Power: China and the Regional Cooperation in East Asia), *World Economics and Politics*, no. 3, (2006): 7-15.

<sup>91</sup> Kang, "East Asia," 161-171.

<sup>92</sup> Barry Buzan and George Lawson, "China through the Lens of Modernity," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 13, no. 2 (2020): 187-217, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poaa005>; Barry Buzan, "China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?" *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 1 (2010): 5-36, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pop014>.

<sup>93</sup> Jiangli Wang and Barry Buzan, "The English and Chinese Schools of International Relations: Comparisons and Lessons," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 1 (2014): 1-46, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pot017>; Zhang Xiaoming, "China in the Conception of International Society: The English School's Engagements with China," *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 763-86, 10.1017/S0260210510000422; Qin Yaqing, "Development of International Relations Theory in China," *International Studies* 46, no. 1-2 (January 2009): 185-201, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcr003>.

<sup>94</sup> Bull and Watson, "The Expansion," 1-10.

<sup>95</sup> For example, all major works by English School theorists namely, Hedley Bull, Adam Watson have not devoted detailed discussion of Chinese historical inter-state relations. A detailed review of English School theorists and China, see Yongjin Zhang, "System, Empire and State in Chinese International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 5 (2001): 43-63, 10.1017/S0260210501008026. Ada Bozeman's work is one exception wherein she devotes a chapter to discussion of inter-state relations in Ancient China; see Adda B. Bozeman, *Politics and Culture in International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 133-156.

relations, patterns, institutions and norms in history.<sup>96</sup> Recently Barry Buzan and Zhang Yongjin's collaborative work, however, signal English school approach's seriousness towards how history can be used to rethink international relations in the Chinese context.<sup>97</sup>

Finally, constructivist scholars have approached the question of the impact of China's rise in a different way in terms of international order being fluid rather than given.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, their focus on ideas and norms apart from material power has led them to explore China's participation in the international system. There is a positive attitude in Constructivist writings about the rise of China and its impact on the existing international order. In that sense, these writings go beyond Eurocentric arguments that China's rise can neither be explained in terms of the "teleological narrative" of rise and fall of powers present in Realism nor it can be explained by Chinese ideas of *tianxia*.<sup>99</sup> By doing so, it emphasizes how international order is not static and is always a work in progress and hence we cannot rely solely on past patterns to explain future behaviour.<sup>100</sup> Besides, it argues, that the nature of China's interactions with the west-dominated international order is a key to understand the rise of China. Alastair Ian Johnston has argued, that China's engagement with the existing international order, for example, reflects a more nuanced view of rising China wherein it does not challenge it fully. Rather it accepts and has adopted many of the norms and institutions of the existing system while challenging others.<sup>101</sup>

Constructivists' emphasis on the role of ideas and norms explains why just increasing material capabilities cannot be predicted to lead to conflict. Therefore, power, norms, and ideas cannot be examined separately in the way China engages with the existing international order. In particular, constructivist scholars have engaged with how Chinese practices, ideas, and experiences may impact its behaviour. Ian Johnston explored how *real politik* was articulated through the Chinese cultural worldview.<sup>102</sup>

The Constructivist scholars have highlighted how ideas, beliefs, and norms shape

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<sup>96</sup> However, historians of China have extensively written on China's inter-state relations in history, see John King Fairbank and Ta-tuan Ch'en, *The Chinese world order; traditional China's foreign relations* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968); Richard Louis Walker, *The Multi-State System of Ancient China* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971).

<sup>97</sup> Yongjin Zhang and Barry Buzan, "The Tributary System as International Society in Theory and Practice," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 1, (2012): 3–36, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pos001>.

<sup>98</sup> For constructivist critiques of the idea of international order, see Alastair Ian Johnston, "China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Compliance and Challenge in Beijing's International Relations," *International Security* 44, no. 2 (2019): 11–14, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00360](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00360).

<sup>99</sup> John Agnew, "Emerging China and Critical Geopolitics: Between World Politics and Chinese Particularity," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 51, no. 5 (2010): 569–582, 10.2747/1539-7216.51.5.569.

<sup>100</sup> Johnston, "China in a World," 11–12.

<sup>101</sup> Johnston, "China in a World," 14.

<sup>102</sup> Alastair Ian Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

state interests and identity how that in turn affect how states envision their interests and frame policies.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, ideas matter as much as material interests in terms of how material interests are interpreted and understood by states. They have also highlighted that interests and state identity are constructed in the process of interactions among states and hence relationships are central to state behaviour and how a state makes sense of its security, interests, and identity.<sup>104</sup>

The idea that interactions between states through institutions change the identities of states is a widely agreed thesis now.<sup>105</sup> Also, changes in state identity take place through practices through which states interact and, in the process, states (actors) try to make their interests and beliefs understandable to others in the community or reproduce both actor identity and structure but they do not necessarily remain the same.<sup>106</sup> Ian Johnston's work on China's participation in security institutions cooperation in the post-Mao period shows that China's engagement in terms of conceptual language and articulations of its interests are done in terms of the dominant language. Johnston's emphasis on mimicking, persuasion, and practices that bring about changes in state identity in this respect is an important contribution in understanding changing ideas and approaches to international order.<sup>107</sup> The changes in terms of language and concepts used in articulating its foreign policy have changed drastically from the Mao period to the present and it is attributable to its participation in the international order. But the question is whether accepting regulatory norms leads to acceptance of constitutive norms. A related question that is important to ask is whether the challenge to constitutive norms leads to similar challenges to regulatory norms.

Similarly, constructivist scholars have emphasized that dominant norms and rules constrain states not to deviate much from widely accepted practices. Even those states which challenge dominant norms usually justify their actions either by citing problems with specific actions of other states or the content of norms themselves. Here, I emphasize that empirical investigation from the Constructivist perspective needs more evidence to understand how norms are challenged and when and how a state can justify its actions against dominant norms. The distinction made by Ronald Jepperson and others between regulatory norms i.e.

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<sup>103</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391-395, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027764>.

<sup>104</sup>Wendt, "Anarchy," 392-393.

<sup>105</sup> AI Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press; 2008).

<sup>106</sup> Wendt, "Anarchy," 394; Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 172-176, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.23.1.171>.

<sup>107</sup> Johnston, "Social States," 1-45.

norms that govern everyday interactions between states namely, trade, immigration, etc. and constitutive norms namely sovereignty, equality, etc. is useful here,<sup>108</sup> because challenges to regulatory norms are common practice in international relations. For example, disputes over trade rules or any other such regulatory norms do not evoke fears about changing underlying constitutive norms about equality, sovereignty, etc. But challenges to constitutive norms are not so regular and hence, it is necessary to understand when and how a state challenges the dominant constitutive norm.

In the last few decades, a relatively large body of constructivist literature has been produced on China.<sup>109</sup> Along these lines, this thesis examines the (re)emergence of traditional ideas and beliefs and their impact on its foreign policy through the conceptual and empirical lens of territorial sovereignty. Here, the thesis attempts to show, through the investigation of the idea of territorial sovereignty, that Chinese participation in international order exhibits contradictory approaches of rejection of constitutive norms and at the same time practices of territorial sovereignty in domestic politics or diplomacy show that it practices constitutive norms for a large part. What explains these contradictions in its practices and ideas/norms when it comes to constitutive norms is the puzzle this thesis intends to solve. The contradictions also raise questions about how far interactions can change state identities and highlight the normative dimensions of power as salient. Here, normative power means norms as elements of power as discussed below. In other words, the idea that socialization through interactions leads to changes in state identities presupposes that dominant ideas within domestic politics and policy circles will change. Besides, it also underestimates the power dimensions in these interactions.

Here, I take up two understudied issues in Constructivism of how power is linked to norms. One is that interactions do change state identities in terms of the need to justify their policies with reference to norms. It implies that when a state participates in a collective system, it does attempt to conform to dominant ideas. But whether it leads to changes in

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<sup>108</sup> Ronald L. Jepperson, Peter Katzenstein and Alexander Wendt, "Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security," in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* ed, Peter Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 12-20.

<sup>109</sup> Andreas Bøje Formby, "The Logic of Social Identity in IR: China's Identity and Grand Strategy in the 21st Century," Ph.D. Thesis (University of Copenhagen, 2015); Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010): 63-95, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2010.34.4.63>; Peter Hays Gries, "Social Psychology and the Identity-Conflict Debate: Is a 'China Threat' Inevitable?" *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 2 (2005): 235-65, 10.1177/1354066105052966; R. E. Kelly, "A 'Confucian Long Peace' in pre-Western East Asia?," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 3 (2012): 407-430, 10.1177/1354066111409771; Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: the Realignment of International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Huiyun Feng, *Chinese Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy Decision-making: Confucianism, Leadership and War* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

constitutive norms of the system is a question. For that, we must examine why states articulate alternative ideas and norms. Secondly, this puzzle cannot be solved without taking into account the norms as constitutive elements of power.

To understand this co-constitutive equation of norms and power, the thesis attempts to situate the puzzle in the dynamics of how ideas change in domestic politics. In other words, why dominant international norms are resisted by policymakers is situated in the power dynamics of domestic political legitimacy. Additionally, power usually defined in terms of economic, military, and consequently institutional control cannot be defined without reference to norms in foreign policy. That is because, it will argue, normative elements of power help sustain the normative superiority of material dimensions of power relations. As it is discussed above, normative privileging of a certain understanding of territorial sovereignty was established and sustained by material power of economic and military terms. Therefore, it can logically be expected that changes in material power dynamics are likely to change in normative dimensions of power in terms of constitutive norms because alternative norms can be backed up by material power. But both material and normative elements of power cannot do without each other. The constructivist understanding of power recognizes these dynamics and emphasizes the role normative privileging plays to “reproduce, discipline and police” existing understandings of international order.<sup>110</sup> In that sense, Constructivism unlike other approaches recognizes that there are more than one set of norms and that they are constantly contested by different actors with different identities.<sup>111</sup>

For a long time, constructivist research agenda about new norms and their diffusion has followed the three-stage development of new norms viz emergence, diffusion and internalization put forward by Martha Finnemore and others.<sup>112</sup> Although the studies based on this formulation have helped understand various dimensions of norms and their diffusion, what they ignore or do not emphasize is the relationship between norm diffusion and “remoulding”<sup>113</sup> or what this thesis calls *contestations over norms*. Besides, constructivist scholars have explored how international norms impact domestic politics. Here, in line with dominant trends in norms research, the focus on how domestic politics may lead to

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<sup>110</sup> Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 180, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.23.1.171>.

<sup>111</sup> Walker, R. B. J. “Realism, Change, and International Political Theory,” *International Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1987): 65-86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600660>; Ian Johnston, “China in World Orders,” 12.

<sup>112</sup> Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887-917, 10.1162/002081898550789.

<sup>113</sup> Yuan Zhengqing, Li Zhiyong & Zhufu Xiaofei, “China and the Remolding of International Human Rights Norms,” *Social Sciences in China* 38, no. 3 (2017): 26, 10.1080/02529203.2017.1339437.

contestation and remaking of international norms has been less than how international norms change domestic state and identity.<sup>114</sup> Constructivists emphasise that international norms impact domestic politics in terms of changing state identity and interests in terms of shaping these two in constitutive ways. Therefore, the impact of norms is that states start to see these norms as shared understanding.<sup>115</sup>

In the same vein, constructivist works like that of Johnston's on the impact of international norms on China follow the line of argument that China's participation in international institutions and systems makes China confirm to dominant international norms.<sup>116</sup> While the argument certainly holds as it is argued below in that China must show to the world and its own people that it upholds values, what it does not tell us is the dynamics of power and norms at the domestic level that gives rise to challenge these norms. Here the question is not just about whether certain practices and policies uphold or go against established norms; rather the question is about the constitutive content and understanding of norms themselves as it is pointed above.

The understanding of content of norms and their relationship with power also raises questions about whether different type of norms can lead to different set of institutions.<sup>117</sup> Here, Christian Reus-Smit's emphasis on why different types of sovereign states create different type of institutions and society is instructive. It points towards how different understanding and constitutive elements of norms can lead to different set of institutions. Thus, his work corrects the mistake that other constructivist scholars have committed in not emphasizing variations in understandings of sovereignty. As he argues, "sovereignty has never been an independent, self-referential value. It has always been encased within larger complexes of meta-values, encoded within broader constitutive values."<sup>118</sup> Therefore, it is necessary for scholars to take into account how different ideas and norms shape how a state constructs its vision of international order. When a state has different ideas about sovereignty

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<sup>114</sup> For this line of argument on the relationship between domestic politics and international norms see, J.T. Checkel, "International Norms and Domestic Politics: Bridging the Rationalist-Constructivist Divide," *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 4 (1997): 473–495, 10.1177/1354066197003004003. Liberal scholars also see the relationship between international norms and domestic politics as one of constraining or incentivising domestic actors despite their differences in epistemology and ontology, see, Andrew Moravcsik, "Explaining International Human Rights Regimes: Liberal Theory and Western Europe," *European Journal of International Relations* 1, no. 2 (1995): 157–89, 10.1177/1354066195001002002.

<sup>115</sup> Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics," 892.

<sup>116</sup> Johnston, "Social States," 197.

<sup>117</sup> Zhang Yongjin asks similar question why and how different societies developed different norms and institutions with reference to comparative perspective on different types of institutions and norms developed in different parts of world, Yongjin, "Systems," 42–44.

<sup>118</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, *Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6.

and consequentially international order, then there is bound to be contestations over the foundational values of international order. In Reus-Smit's words, the differences in hegemonic belief about moral purpose of the state differs and hence their approach to organizing principles of international order.<sup>119</sup> As a result, power becomes an important category to investigate in relation with norms and ideas. Reus-Smit, however, does not provide any discussion about why even the moral purpose of state itself may change.

Some scholars researching norms in international relations have focused on when and how domestic conditions lead to conformity with international norms.<sup>120</sup> But the problem is that it leaves open how power and contestation over a norm plays out before it becomes a common or shared norm. In other words, there has been less focus on how and why domestic ideas and norms change examining power dynamics within domestic politics between different constituencies, and the way a state challenges or confirms to international norms. Besides, the processes of contestations lead to change in content of norms and their practices; because internalization does not take place in a passive manner. States with different political systems and ideas do not challenge or confirm to international norms just in terms of international norms.<sup>121</sup> Rather, the content of norms is sought to change with a different normative and ideational understanding of norms themselves. It is here that, as it would be argued below, power and norms become elements of each other rather than separate conceptual and normative categories.

While relationality as Qin Yaqing has put forward,<sup>122</sup> rather than rationality in Realist writings, provides better understanding of how shared norms develop, the emphasis on dialogue, consensus and wearing out differences and bringing about coexistence leave out a crucial part of how norms develop. Norms, as it is emphasised here, are used to legitimize or contest certain power relations and processes normatively and morally better than other options. Like the English school, it might be too naïve to argue that dialogue and consensus brought about expansion of territorial international society<sup>123</sup> or norms especially between

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<sup>119</sup> Reus-Smit, "Moral Purpose," 29-30.

<sup>120</sup> Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe," *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1999): 83-114, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0020-8833.00112>.

<sup>121</sup> In the Localization thesis put forward by Amitav Acharya in the context of collective security and humanitarian intervention norms in South East Asia, he conceives that the localization is a process of reconstructing international norms in interaction with existing cultural beliefs and norms in domestic politics of states. The question remains unanswered is what if local beliefs do not match or are put against international norms? See, Amitav Acharya, "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism," *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 239-75, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818304582024>.

<sup>122</sup> Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>123</sup> Bull and Watson, "The Expansion of International Society," 8-10.

states coming from two different cultural and historical backgrounds can develop shared norms.<sup>124</sup> The fact that even the use of crude material power to make other states conform is normatively legitimized makes norms a constitutive element of power. Besides, the disparity among states in material power always makes norms a contested issue in international relations.

The contestations over the fundamental principles of existing international order namely territorial sovereignty, order, use of violence, etc. cannot be ignored. Realist and liberal understandings of these principles as constant and stable, is a reflection of normative privileging of one kind of understanding. By questioning the taken for granted nature of these concepts and that they change, Constructivism provides a crucial lens to analyse the changing dynamics of these principles.

### **Territorial Sovereignty as a Conceptual and Empirical Site of Inquiry**

This thesis focuses on the concept of territorial sovereignty as a conceptual and empirical site of inquiry to understand the revival of traditional ideas and norms in Chinese politics and their impact on its foreign policy. Research on sovereignty and China's foreign policy is scarce but is flourishing in recent decades. Allen Carlson's work is one of the most comprehensive studies on the way China uses sovereignty in its interactions with the world in the reform era since the 1970s.<sup>125</sup> His analysis of Chinese foreign policy through the concept of sovereignty is located in the way Chinese diplomats, policy-makers, and leaders use the concept to demarcate boundaries between 'what is inside China' and international society. The empirical issues he takes up namely human rights, Tibet, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and economic sovereignty have been major sites where Chinese foreign policymakers have advanced their interests and objectives.

Maria Adele Carrai's work delves into the conceptual history of the concept since 1840 by locating her research within international law and its practices and discourses in China.<sup>126</sup> Her emphasis on China's agency to modify and interpret the concept in its way thereby questioning Euro-centrism in the history of international law and history is a useful contribution. China's usage of the concept in its foreign policy and diplomacy is not an extension of the understanding of sovereignty through European experience since the Westphalian treaty of 1648. Rather, Chinese discursive usage of the concept is as legal as it is

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<sup>124</sup> Also see, Zhengqing, Zhiyong and Xiaofei, "China and the Remolding of International Human Rights," After making the case for centrality of power in norms development, the authors suggest, that remolding international norms can happen through dialogue and consensus.

<sup>125</sup> Allen Carlson, "Moving Beyond Sovereignty?" 89-102; Allen Carlson, "Unifying China," 6-10.

<sup>126</sup> Maria Adele Carrai, *Sovereignty in China: A Genealogy of a Concept since 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

political.

Chih-yu Shih's exploration of the dilemmas that Chinese leaders, policy-makers, and intellectuals face in defining China's identity as a territorial or non-territorial state in the globalized era is another crucial contribution to the debates on the idea of sovereignty and China.<sup>127</sup> He asks a provocative question of whether China can become a 'normal territorial state' and his answer lies in the undecidability of Chinese leaders on the question of China as a territorial or cultural state. Such undecidability lies at the heart of "postcolonial hybridity and the Chinese state's adaptation to Western modernity" in the modern period.<sup>128</sup> He approaches the dilemmas for exploring "the psychological space created when Western modernity and Confucian tradition meet" through the lens of cultural studies and postcolonial theory.<sup>129</sup>

The existing literature, specifically the works of Chi-yu Shih, Allen Carlson, Maria Adele Carrai are closer to the approach this thesis takes in that all these works question the Euro-centric narratives and understanding of the concept of sovereignty in China and emphasizes the way Chinese practices and agency makes a difference to the understanding of the use of the concept at a global level beyond European experience and history. But this thesis' scope conceptually and empirically differs from the existing literature in the following ways. While the existing studies locate their empirical investigations at the sites of interactions between China and the international system, my focus is on how the dynamics of domestic political legitimacy and challenges to its territorial sovereignty in peripheral regions namely, Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Taiwan and Hong Kong give rise to changes to the dominant ideas and their consequent impact on its articulations of new ideas and norms in foreign policy.

The existing literature has not dealt with the traditional ideas in Chinese debates and their impact on how China thinks about constitutive norms of existing international order in the Post-Mao period.<sup>130</sup> There are a variety of ideas of China that affect how China approaches the question of territorial sovereignty. China as a civilization, a nation-state, globalized and unbounded China and even a seized mentality characterized in the century of humiliation discourse are some of the dominant ideas in Chinese discourses. In the earlier period, China as a communist state to bring revolution and resist imperialism dominated. All these ideas in varying degrees are present in Chinese discourses and affect how China

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<sup>127</sup> Chih-yu Shih, *Navigating Sovereignty: World Politics Lost in China* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

<sup>128</sup> Shih, "Navigating Sovereignty," 2.

<sup>129</sup> Shih, "Navigating Sovereignty," 1.

<sup>130</sup> One exception is Allen Carlson, "Moving beyond Sovereignty?" 89-102.

articulates its vision of international order and place in the world via territorial sovereignty.

Territorial sovereignty is central to these ideas in Chinese debates, and Constructivism is better suited to explain these multiple and often contradictory ideas articulated in China's foreign policy. As John Agnew notes, that China's geopolitical behavior can neither be explained by modern geopolitical concepts nor through the lens of traditional Chinese ideas of *tianxia*.<sup>131</sup> This study highlights these contradictory and conflicting ideas in its practices and articulation of foreign policy. Besides, constructivist claims about the fluidity and dynamic nature of concepts rather than their constant nature highlight the contestations.<sup>132</sup>

As it is argued in the previous sections, territorial sovereignty in Realist literature is taken as a constant and therefore, the contestations over cultural and philosophical assumptions behind the idea are ignored or considered irrelevant. Also, it happens because territorial sovereignty with its particular cultural and philosophical assumptions is normatively privileged and taken for granted. This does not mean that Realist literature is devoid of any normative assumptions. Rather certain norms are taken for granted. As a result, existing literature, especially within Realism, characterizes China variously as revisionist, expansionist, or as an empire.<sup>133</sup> Additionally, the negative impact of China's rise on the international order is taken as a given. While this thesis does not contest the realist arguments in terms of their possible outcomes although it is not given and predestined to behave in the same ways, it provides a different account of the how and why part of the question by conceptualizing norms and power as co-constitutive.

Ideological rhetoric and assertions have been part of Chinese articulations of foreign policy. Constructivist writings in this regard provide a conceptual lens to understand such articulations because actors do make their grievances and resistance through conceptual and linguistic acts.<sup>134</sup> It implies then that material interests are not enough to make sense of foreign policy and non-material or ideational aspects are important sites to understand. It also implies that territorial sovereignty has multiple dimensions and focus on only material dimensions does not capture the complexity of the concept in practice. An example of why ideational aspects matter can be as follows (discussed in various respects in later chapters). China has been extremely sensitive to alternative ideas and narratives of history, tradition, and identity of minority communities in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. Going by

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<sup>131</sup> John Agnew, "Emerging China," 569-582.

<sup>132</sup> Johnston, "China in a World," 11-12.

<sup>133</sup> For an overview of the literature on this see, Feng Huiyun, "Is China a Revisionist Power?" *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2, (2009): 313-334, 10.1093/cjip/pop003; John Agnew, "Emerging China," 569-582.

<sup>134</sup> Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21-43.

constructivist logic, it implies that normative and ideational aspects matter even though minority communities cannot realize their political claims. Therefore, the role of norms and ideas articulated in Chinese foreign policy cannot be ignored in understanding its approach to territorial sovereignty and international order.

### **Domestic Origins of Norms and Changing Dynamics of Ideas in Chinese Foreign Policy**

Now, the question is how do new norms and ideas emerge in domestic politics in the first place? It is emphasized here that the rise of certain ideas and norms in domestic politics is the core of understanding the problem of how, why, and what norms state articulate in international relations. In this respect, I take two dimensions of the problem of why certain ideas arise in domestic politics. First dimension concerns the political legitimacy of the political system or regime. It should be noted that the fundamental values, beliefs, and ideas that are dominant in domestic politics influence the kind of ideas a state articulates in its foreign policy. As Jeffery Legro's work has shown the type of political system, whether democratic or authoritarian, here does not matter much. Rather these changes lie in interests, socio-political and economic conditions as much as certain ideas giving rise to new ideas and norms in foreign policy.<sup>135</sup> Focus on changing dynamics within domestic politics provides a crucial lens to understand changing ideas and norms in Chinese foreign policy. I map out the dynamics of changing ideas in relation to domestic politics through the investigation of questions of political legitimacy (Chapter 3).

Political legitimacy, as one of the crucial questions in Chinese domestic politics, allows us to see why the imperatives of the ruling party shift from earlier ideology to traditional ideas. In this context, the first major shift in dominant ideas in Chinese politics took place from the early 1970s to the 1990s. Mao-Era politics was characterized by the ideological worldview in which the world was defined by conflict and chaos and hence, China needed to oppose imperialism and hegemonism through world revolution. This worldview opposed any participation in Western-led international order because it opposed both regulatory and constitutive norms as unjust and hence it was a normative political critique. But as it would be noted that a combined effect of cultural revolutions, economic policies, and adversarial approaches in foreign policy led to the isolation of China and hence it started changes. It should be noted that although some of the ideas changed as the leadership changed initially it was Mao himself who approved these changes. Therefore, the changing economic, political context within domestic politics was a major factor that led to

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<sup>135</sup> Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 24-48.

changes.

The second major shift occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s in terms of dominant ideas and these ideas have shifted from marginal academic debates and moralist rhetoric to central features of Chinese politics gradually. The rise of debates on traditional ideas was primarily aimed at the domestic audience when the CCP's political legitimacy could not be legitimized in terms of Maoist socialism anymore. But it could not shift towards a democratic political system as it would lead to its collapse. Hence, it would be argued that the party allowed and later adopted many of these ideas to boost its legitimacy. Although one cannot say which ideas are going to be dominant in the near future, the fact that traditional ideas are promoted by the party makes them a salient force in how China conceives its role and place in the international order.

Contrary to the image of strict authoritarian rule, there exist a range of intellectual and political opinions within the domestic politics of China, although the CCP's dominance both in politics and the intellectual sphere is paramount. The early years of reform period saw increasing political activism for political liberalization leading to Tiananmen Square students' Protests in 1989 and consistent movement within and outside China by dissident activists challenging the dominant ideas of the party since then. A host of "rights groups" like human rights, women rights and other Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) advocate norms and values that conform to the dominant international norms of human rights, democracy, etc. As scholars have pointed out, non-state actors like NGOs can also be major influence on domestic politics to conform to international norms.<sup>136</sup> Despite strict control over political activism and intellectual sphere, it is not difficult to argue that the party faces dormant if not active challenge to its legitimacy from these constituencies which the party attempts to address by ideological innovation in terms of new ideas and authoritarian control. It is these challenges to its dominance that has brought about changes in ideology and ideas since 1978.

The second dimension of the problem of why certain ideas emerge is that of convincing the state's own people that their political system is better than others and hence, it is the compulsion of regime legitimacy that gives rise to new ideas and makes them dominant. It is argued, that China articulates a different vision than liberal international order to legitimize its rule in the eyes of its people. Some studies from other parts of the world point towards the links between domestic political legitimacy of a different political system

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<sup>136</sup> Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink, "The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices," in *The Power of Human Rights, International Norms and Domestic Change* eds. Thomas Risse, Stephen C Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-38.

and a challenge to the international norms.<sup>137</sup> Building on these arguments, the study proposes that the reorientation towards Chinese tradition and ideas is a part of the party's efforts to legitimize its own rule. If a state cannot convince its own people of the universality of its rule and that its political model is better than other alternatives then it loses its political legitimacy. In a way, the focus on this dimension partly explains why there is a gap and contradiction between ideas and practices in Chinese foreign policy.

### **Conceptualizing the dynamics of participation in regulatory norms and the contestation of constitutive norms**

To understand why China contests the constitutive norms of the international order, it is useful to recap key points discussed in the previous sections. 1. Resistance to the dominant visions and norms of the international order has been part of its evolution within modern European context as well as its expansion to other parts of the world. 2. Resistance and adaptation to the international order go together. States in non-European societies have gradually become a part of the dominant international order. At the same time, they also resist and criticize the economic and military dominance of Euro-American states, practices of norms and international institutions. These states criticize the functioning of the order by referring to the same constitutive norms or criticize the constitutive ideas and norms because they are exclusive and biased in cultural terms. Here, the role of norms in legitimizing or resisting power relations is the most significant dimension in the way ideas and norms play role in the international relations. 3. The dominant international order also demands reorganizing domestic political order, institutions and values. As a result, it triggers opposition by domestic elites and regimes in power. 4. Finally, resistance to the dominant norms also emerges from alternative ideas emerging from either modern ideology namely Marxism or cultural-philosophical resources from non-European societies that become salient in the response by intellectuals and political elites in non-European societies.

In China's case, an important dimension of its approach to international order is that of a contradiction between its practices of territorial sovereignty, and its opposition to its cultural and philosophical assumptions rooted in European socio-political thought and history. In other words, the contradiction is between the regulatory and constitutive aspects of territorial sovereignty as a norm. To understand the contradictions, we must look at two

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<sup>137</sup> Klotz, Audie. "Transforming a Pariah State: International Dimensions of the South African Transition," *Africa Today* 42, no. 1/2 (1995): 75-87, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4187032>; Laurence Whitehead, *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

important issues. 1. China is a part of the international order dominated by western ideas and institutions. China has also borrowed western ideas in domestic politics over a period of time in twentieth century. 2. The dominant international norms and ideas make certain moral and political claims on domestic politics. Thus, the first part of the problem is to understand why and how domestic politics drives China's critique of the international order. To do that, the thesis examines the questions of political legitimacy to situate China's resistance to the constitutive norms of the international order.

At one level, there is nothing distinctive about China's resistance to the constitutive norms as all states either legitimize or criticize the existing power relations with reference to certain norms and ideas. Therefore, Chinese debates in IRTs and the articulations of alternative ideas in foreign policy can be seen as counter-hegemonic attempt to criticise the existing power relations and legitimize the disruptions in the existing power relations as its economic and military capabilities, and influence in international institutions rise.

At another level, Chinese debates on the relevance of traditional ideas and practices like harmony, relationships, and role of morality among others in rethinking IRTs point towards an important role of ideas and norms as an element of power. As a result, redefining the cultural and philosophical understanding of the dominant norms becomes central to its approach to the international order. Thus, Chinese discourses place emphasis on the role of Chinese ideas and remoulding the constitutive norms in addition to enhancing material capabilities and its influence in the international institutions.

To understand the dynamics of resistance to the constitutive norms and adaptation to the regulatory norms of the international order, the thesis looks at how resistance and adaptation go together in the process of an idea becoming common norm. Building on Constructivist literature in IR theories and research on norms, the thesis looks at how China attempts to resist and adapt to territorial sovereignty as a constitutive norm. China's adaptation and resistance to the international order is shaped by its military, economic and institutional capacities. At the same time, discursive power through the propagation of alternative ideas and norms become part of its approach to the international order. Unlike existing literature that focuses on the regulatory norms and socialization where dominant international norms shape state identities, this thesis looks at how and why China resists and can remould the constitutive norms.

The debate on strategic culture in China has propounded that Confucianism was a cover for realist power politics in China's history. However, Ian Johnston also emphasizes an interrelationship between moralist grand strategy and realist grand strategies. Hence, the

normative dimensions of power are significant.<sup>138</sup> While not pronouncing any judgment on these arguments, I put forward an argument about the dynamics of norms and power in defining the concept of power itself to raise questions about whether norms/ideas can themselves be defined as part of power rather than just as instruments.

Constructivism, by emphasizing the role of ideas and norms, has brought close links between knowledge and power. This link is important because constructivist scholars have rightly pointed out that power is socially constructed.<sup>139</sup> However, there exists an ambiguity over the precise relationship of norms with power. Constructivist scholars have relied on Steven Lukes' three dimensions of power to build a constructivist view of power.<sup>140</sup> First of all, Lukes' conceptualization of three dimensions, I emphasize, construct norms as instrument rather than constitutive element of power.<sup>141</sup> In the second and third dimensions of power, he alludes to the role played by norms as ideology in delegitimizing other agendas and changing views of people. However, it does not recognize norms as elements of power the implications of which are that norms are regarded as mere instrumental value. In other words, Lukes does not define power; rather, he outlines ways to express or exercise power. While I do not claim to define power in the entirety of ways it can be defined and exercised, defining norms (and ideas) as elements of power helps us understand why an actor (state in international relations) would want to define norms and institutions in its own normative and conceptual language.<sup>142</sup>

Therefore, I propose a complementary rather than supplementary approach to existing constructivist writings on power, from these debates that rather than thinking about norms or ideas as separate from power, they should be defined as elements or one of the dimensions of power like material dimensions. Conceptualized this way, the role of norms becomes central to defining and conceptualizing power and hence, we can better appreciate why states articulate alternative norms or contest existing knowledge and assumptions about international politics. Additionally, it also helps us go beyond the problem of whether

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<sup>138</sup> Johnston, "Cultural Realism," 249-250.

<sup>139</sup> For Constructivist accounts of power, see Stefano Guzzini, "The Concept of Power: A Constructivist Analysis," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2005): 495-521, 10.1177/03058298050330031301; Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 171-200; Wendt, "Anarchy," 391-425; Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, "Power in International Politics," *International Organization* 59, no. 1 (2005): 39-75, 10.1017/S0020818305050010.

<sup>140</sup> See, Stefano Guzzini, "Structural Power: The Limits of Neorealist Power Analysis," *International Organization* 47, no. 3 (1993): 443-78, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300028022>; Barnett and Duvall, "Power in International," 39-75.

<sup>141</sup> Steven Lukes, *Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1-19.

<sup>142</sup> One of the earliest critiques of Lukes' concept of power referred to this problem while highlighting the problem of defining 'interest' see, Alan Bradshaw, "A Critique of Steven Lukes' 'power A Radical View'," *Sociology* 10, no. 1 (1976): 121-27, 10.1177/003803857601000109. Interest may, I emphasize here, also include making others accept one's positions and why they should prefer it normatively.

discussing culture, ideas, and norms in international politics leads one away from the centrality of politics and power in international relations theories.<sup>143</sup>

For China, traditional ideas not only legitimize its power in domestic and international relations, although it depends upon political-economic and other contexts how much it can affect changes but allows it to insert its ideas as part of a desirable world order articulated in its concepts. Conceptualized this way, it also explains why democracy, freedom, and individualistic values for the western countries are a means to delegitimize other forms of normative ideas and cloak their material interests. When all others accept these values, western countries establish normative superiority of existing power relations. To be sure, this form of understanding power is not unique to Asia or China as it is mentioned in the example of the use of democracy as a means and end. It is, I argue, so because every power relationship is legitimized normatively and morally.

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<sup>143</sup> This problem has been prominently brought out by Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 171-200; and Friedrich Viktor Kratochwil, "Is the Ship of Culture at Sea or Returning?" in *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* eds, Friedrich Viktor Kratochwil and Yosef Lapid (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 201-222.

## CHAPTER 3<sup>1</sup>

### **Political Legitimacy and the Revival of Traditional Ideas in Post-Mao Period**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter locates the revival of traditional ideas and narratives of history in China's domestic politics and foreign policy in the dynamics of domestic politics of China in the Post-Mao period. Despite differences among scholars about the nature of legitimacy crises and why the CCP still enjoys relatively stable power, there is a consensus that the CCP faces serious challenges to its legitimacy. The political legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP or the party) is at the core of the politics of alternative ideas in China's domestic politics and foreign policy. Partly, it is because Maoist-socialism is inadequate to legitimize its market-oriented economic policies and consequent socio-economic realities.

The party faces normative and ideological challenges both at domestic and international levels. At the domestic level, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), dissident intellectuals, rights activists, and the increasingly globalized middle classes exposed to the ideas of democracy, individual rights and freedom among others contest the party's ideology and its legitimacy. At the international level, the dominant discourses of modernization and the need for an open and democratic political system, and the desirability of democracy are reinforced through foreign policies and intellectual debates. These challenge to the party's claim to rule based on a top-down Leninist party organization and authoritarian system are central concerns of CCP's ideological concerns and search for alternative ideas and narratives.

The CCP resorts to repression, technological surveillance, strict ideological, political and security control, relative institutionalization, continuity of Leninist party organization, and economic performance to maintain its political control and legitimacy. However, these measures have limitations and hence, the party has gradually shifted to tradition, culture, and history (hereafter TCR traditional cultural resources) to reinforce the moral and ideological foundations of its legitimacy.<sup>2</sup> The turn towards tradition sits uneasy with the party's

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<sup>1</sup>The main argument of the chapter was published as Devendra Kumar, "Traditional Cultural Ideas and Symbols, and Possibilities of Discursive Legitimacy in Contemporary China," *ICS OCCASIONAL PAPER* no. 54, (2020), <https://www.icsin.org/uploads/2020/08/24/36ebf106b2b6a3ce8b21f7222a7e889a.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> This chapter uses terms tradition and culture with reference to practices, ideas, philosophies and narratives used in the party discourses. Hence, TCR include Confucianism, Daoism, and other philosophical traditions, a host of traditional beliefs about family, authority, state, morality, etc. derived from traditional texts and practices.

ideological positions and policies towards traditions in the Mao period when it repressed tradition to bring in socialist modernization. Confucianism's tenets contradicted Maoist social and political ideas.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the shift towards embracing traditions has serious implications for China's political system, party ideology, and its approach to the international order.

The chapter argues that the CCP's embrace of tradition emerges from the need to de-link economic modernization from political modernization which is at the core of western modernity and modernization narratives and ideas.<sup>4</sup> In short, the idea that economic modernization leads to political modernization i.e. democratization is at the core of party's ideological challenges. Although the party reinforces the idea of "socialist modernization" against capitalist modernization to legitimize one party rule<sup>5</sup> - that idea is inadequate to legitimize market-oriented economic reforms in the last four decades. Hence, it is argued here that the party shifts towards a set of traditional ideas, narratives of history and culture to foreground economic modernization with reference to Chinese traditions and history. The chapter analyses the party's shifting narratives and discourses on tradition and history to understand this dynamics.

In addition, the party also cannot allow an unhindered and uncontrolled spread of ideas and narratives outside its top-down party organization and ideology. Hence, when elements of traditions began to resurface at the grass-root levels and among intellectuals in the 1980s, the chapter argues that the party had to control these narratives and meanings of what traditions and history mean to the people. However, the party has also proactively appropriated, after the 1990s, traditions and narratives of history at different levels to fill the ideological gaps. The chapter locates revival of traditional cultural resources (hereafter TCR), and the need for the party's urge to control and promote traditions and revised narratives of history in the context of changing socio-economic realities after economic reforms in the Post-Mao period, changing state-society relations, and challenges to the CCP's political

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<sup>3</sup>Shaohua Hu, "Confucianism and Contemporary Chinese Politics" *Politics & Policy* 35, no. 1 (2007): 142, 10.1111/j.1747-1346.2007.00051.x; for more details on anti-Confucianism campaign during the Mao-period see, A. James Gregor, and Maria Hsia Chang, "Anti-Confucianism: Mao's Last Campaign," *Asian Survey* 19, no. 11 (1979): 1073–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2643955>.

<sup>4</sup> Classic argument on the links between economic modernization and cultural-political modernization comes from Max Weber whose ideas of a rational state have dominated theories of state and political legitimacy.

<sup>5</sup>Xinhua News, "Full Text: Resolution of the CPC Central Committee on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century," November 16, 2021, [http://www.news.cn/english/2021-11/16/c\\_1310314611.htm](http://www.news.cn/english/2021-11/16/c_1310314611.htm); Ying Miao, "Romanticising the Past: Core Socialist Values and the China Dream as Legitimation Strategy," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 49, no. 2 (August 2020): 162–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868102620981963>; Niv Horesh, "'One Country, Two Histories': How PRC and Western Narratives of Chinese Modernity Diverge," *Journal of Global Faultlines* 7, no. 1 (2020): 114–25, <https://doi.org/10.13169/jglobfaul.7.1.0114>.

legitimacy. The chapter also emphasises the complex challenges the party faces in appropriating traditions to its ideological narratives and policies.

The remainder of this chapter is organized into six sections. The first section identifies the limitations of the Weberian approach to understanding the questions and problems of political legitimacy in China. It critically analyses the existing literature to highlight theoretical gaps. The second lays out a theoretical framework to conceptualize the utility of normative-ideological changes through the use of TCR. Subsequently, the third section lays out the rationale behind why the shift towards TCR is consequential in contemporary Chinese politics. It lays out reasons why despite Leninist-Maoist state and party structures, the shift towards TCR helps party fill the ideological gap as the traditional Marxist-Leninist ideologies are not adequate to justify its policies and rule. The fourth section substantiates the claims made in the previous section by relying on intellectual debates and official discourses. The fifth section contextualizes the arguments made in the previous sections within the overall argument of the thesis. It argues that reconstructing normative foundations of socio-political order or at the least the seriousness of the attempts by the CCP represents a crucial shift in Chinese politics. The final sections summarize the chapter.

## I

### **Political Legitimacy: Theory, Practice, and Problems**

The role of traditional culture in contemporary Chinese politics concerning domestic political legitimacy has caught the attention of scholars in recent times.<sup>6</sup> The literature available has explored various aspects of the use of philosophical ideas in the CCP propaganda, speeches of leaders, and the articulation of policies,<sup>7</sup> the frequent use of traditional symbols in policy debates and narratives.<sup>8</sup>

The existing literature on political legitimacy in China has framed the questions about the use of traditional cultural resources in terms of Weberian notions of legitimacy, power,

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<sup>6</sup> Jinghan Zeng, "The Debate on Party Legitimacy in China: Bridging the Wide Gulf between Western and Chinese Scholarship," *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, 88, (2014): 612–635, 10.1080/10670564.2013.861141. Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Intellectuals' Quest for National Greatness and Nationalistic Writing in 1990s," *The China Quarterly* no. 152, (1997):725-745, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000047536>. Baogang He, *the Democratization of China* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> William A. Callahan, "History, Tradition and the China Dream: Socialist Modernization in the World of Great Harmony," *Journal of Contemporary China* no. 96, (2015): 983-1001, 10.1080/10670564.2015.1030915.

<sup>8</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, "State Confucianism, Chineseness, and Tradition in CCP Propaganda," in *China's Thought Management*, ed. Anne-Marie Brady (London: Routledge, 2012), 57–76; Elizabeth J. Perry, "Cultural Governance in Contemporary China: 'Re-Orienting' Party Propaganda," in *To Govern China: Evolving Practices of Power*, edited by Vivienne Shue and Patricia M. Thornton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 29–55.

authority, and institutionalization. The studies grounded in the Weberian approach to political legitimacy take for granted that the party faces a legitimacy crisis.<sup>9</sup> It evaluates the nature of political legitimacy in China against the model of the electoral democratic political system. The fundamental ideas of Weberian legitimacy viz rationalization of bureaucracy and institutions, the impersonal nature of law and authority are grounded in political culture and institutional framework of an electoral democratic political system.<sup>10</sup>

While this chapter does not contest the claims of the legitimacy crisis advanced in this trend of literature, it does argue that the Weberian approach limits or ignores a possibility for strong political legitimacy based on processes, ideas, and beliefs that do not represent the ideal type of political system, that is, the electoral democracy. The absence of elections negates the possibility of dynamic interactions between the people and the state in a discursive space. Weber's typology of political legitimacy distinguishes between rules and laws in modern and traditional political systems. It postulates that political legitimacy in the modern state is derived from rational and objective adherence to the rules and laws, contrary to the traditional notion of authority based on charisma and respect for traditions.<sup>11</sup> The Weberian approach discredits the use of traditional cultural resources normatively in favour of rationalization, and electoral democratic processes by distinguishing between traditional and modern laws.

This problem is significant in the context of China because, despite the legitimacy crisis identified by the Weberian approaches, the party has enjoyed relatively stable legitimacy. The literature has emphasized strict political control over the economy, the suppression of alternative organized social and political life outside the party structures, technological surveillance, and use of extensive security apparatus to explain the various aspects of its rule.<sup>12</sup> Andrew Nathan explains the "authoritarian resilience" in terms of institutionalization. According to him, the growing professionalism, functional specialization, a relative degree of openness in providing information on policy issues, and the routinization of party structures and processes help the party cope up with a legitimacy crisis.<sup>13</sup> Joseph

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Bruce Gilley, *China's Democratic Future: How it Will Happen and Where It Will Lead* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Max Weber, *Politics as a vocation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, ed. and trans., *Weber: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 75-79.

<sup>12</sup> Diana Fu and Greg Distelhorst, "Grassroots Participation and Repression under Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping," *The China Journal* 79 (2018): 100-122, 10.1086/694299.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew J. Nathan, "China's Changing of the Guard: Authoritarian Resilience," *Journal of Democracy* no. 1, (2003): 6-17; Andrew Nathan and Bruce Gilley, *China's New Rulers: The Secret Files* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2003).

Fewsmith explains the resilience of the party legitimacy in terms of the reassertion of centralized party structures and norms rather than the institutionalization of formal state structures. In his recent work, he elaborates on his idea that it is the Leninist system that explains China's political system. He argues that the institutionalization of the state structures is incompatible with the norms and processes of the centralized party structure and hence, there is an inherent tension between reforms and a centralized Leninist party organization.<sup>14</sup> While Nathan and Fewsmith disagree about what institutionalization means, they share common theoretical assumptions that institutionalization in the Weberian sense is a necessary condition for building political legitimacy.<sup>15</sup>

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, scholars extensively explored the links between economic reforms and political liberalization.<sup>16</sup> The democratization paradigm assumed the inevitability of liberalization in China. Such assumptions were rooted in Weberian understanding of rationalization as a result of economic changes.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the Weberian assumptions about relationship between economic and political changes dominate literature in other areas on China, namely economics. Chinese scholars have extensively dealt with Weber's writings on the relationship between culture and capitalism to argue that Confucianism does not hamper with commerce and capitalism.<sup>18</sup> But again, these studies have failed to adequately explain the relative stability of the party rule, and the failure of the economic reforms to usher in political reforms.

The existing literature fails to adequately explain the relatively stable political legitimacy of the party. The failure stems from two reasons. One, electoral democratic political system idealized by Weber is not to be taken as inevitable. In other words, an ideal type of political system theorized by Weber does not exist in its perfect form, and it is not a universal model of organizing power in society. The studies informed by Weberian theories, as discussed above, take for granted the normative superiority of democracy as a political system in comparison to other types of political systems.

There are various models of the social and political order of which a democratic

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<sup>14</sup>Joseph Fewsmith, *Rethinking Chinese Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 15.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Fewsmith and Andrew J. Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience Revisited: Joseph Fewsmith with Response from Andrew J. Nathan," *Journal of Contemporary China* no. 28, (2019): 167-179, 10.1080/10670564.2018.1511390.

<sup>16</sup>Perry, "Cultural Governance," Bruce Gilley, *China's Democratic Future: How it Will Happen and Where It Will Lead*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Baogang He, "The Democratization of China."

<sup>17</sup> Minxin Pei, "China: Totalitarianism's Long Shadow," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 2, (2021): 5-7.

<sup>18</sup> Tongdong Bai, *China: The Political Philosophy of the Middle Kingdom* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

political system is one. The moral foundations of political legitimacy are rooted in cultural resources and people's beliefs.<sup>19</sup> Cultural resources differ from one society to another. Hence, there exists a variety of ways of organizing power. The studies on comparative democratization suggest that despite institutional similarities, electoral democratic political systems differ because the local cultural resources interact and shape the notions of power and authority in different ways with democratic political system and institutions.<sup>20</sup>

Some scholars have gone beyond the Weberian paradigm to understand why the political legitimacy of the party is relatively stable. Schubert has put forward a multi-dimensional idea of legitimacy formulated as the "zones of legitimacy" emphasizing that there is a multiplicity of sources of legitimacy.<sup>21</sup> This new formulation goes beyond the teleology of the democratic paradigm and the fetishism for rationalization and institutionalization to understand political legitimacy. It recognizes the efficacy of moral and ideological changes brought in by the party to adapt to new socio-economic realities. But he does not provide a conceptual scheme as to how different "zones of legitimacy" are interconnected with each other. An article by Elizabeth Perry engages with the significance of the use of cultural resources for political legitimacy. She formulates the role of traditional cultural resources as cultural governance. She defines cultural governance as "the deployment of symbolic resources as an instrument of political authority."<sup>22</sup>

However, Perry's argument has limitations. She develops the argument for the utility of TCR for legitimacy based on assumptions of the electoral democratic political system as a model wherein the interactions between the rulers and the ruled take place through electoral and other institutional processes. As it is argued in this chapter, the Weberian framework is conceptually weak to understand political legitimacy as a social scientific concept in a comparative perspective. She formulates the idea of cultural governance in terms of identity politics rather than recognizing the possibility for an alternative moral and institutional framework of discursive legitimacy that provides a relatively stable political regime. The chapter takes these arguments as a departure point to develop the conceptual framework but

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<sup>19</sup> People's beliefs have been an important factor in theories of political legitimacy from Max Weber to constructivist like David Beetham. For a detailed discussion on people's beliefs and theories of political legitimacy from different perspectives, see, Kwanhu Lee, "Political Legitimacy, Representation and Confucian Virtue," PhD Thesis (University College London, 2014), 15-26.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Lamb, *Rethinking legitimacy and illegitimacy*, (Washington, DC: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Gunter Schubert, "One-Party Rule and the Question of Legitimacy in Contemporary China: preliminary thoughts on setting up a new research agenda," *Journal of Contemporary China* no. 17:54, (2008): 191-204, 10.1080/10670560701693153.

<sup>22</sup> Perry, "Cultural Governance," 29.

instead uses constructivist perspectives.

Constructivist understanding of political legitimacy suggests that norms, values, and institutions are mutually constructed through the dynamic interactions between the people and the rulers. These interactions do not “necessarily come from people’s ‘belief in legitimacy’ but are expressed through their actions in public that legitimize rulers’ authority.”<sup>23</sup> Even when such actions of people are not in agreement with rules and norms, their silence can also attest normative authority to legitimacy.

Therefore, legitimacy, at a basic level, is a social construction brought about by various types of social and political processes.<sup>24</sup> It implies that there can be diverse forms of legitimate political systems because social construction depends upon underlying socio-cultural and political contexts which differ from one society to another. For instance, the experiences of democratization in non-western societies show that multiple types of political systems exist simultaneously in the world today. The Weberian approaches to understanding political legitimacy are prescriptive because they tend to assume an ideal political system, i.e. the western electoral democratic system, as a model.

## II

### **(Re)Constructing Normative Foundations of Power and Authority**

Culture is a discursive category the meanings of which are constructed through social interactions.<sup>25</sup> Hence, it is a fluid and dynamic concept. It helps shape the moral and normative foundations of social order. The theories of culture from different disciplinary perspectives reveal the dominant actors in a society attempt to control and shape normative and moral ideas to shape social relations and institutions that favour their material interests.<sup>26</sup> Hence, there is a close relationship with power and culture.

Here, I bring in arguments on why democratization usually fails in non-western societies in order to develop the idea that existing values and institutions in these societies organize power in a certain way. Democracy as a system of values and institutions clashes

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<sup>23</sup> David Beetham, *Legitimation of Power* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 90-97.

<sup>24</sup> Beetham, “Legitimation,” 11 and 31.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond Williams, “Developments in the Sociology of Culture,” *Sociology* 10, no. 3 (September 1976): 497-499, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003803857601000306>.

<sup>26</sup> There is a rich and vast literature on the relationship between power and culture. By taking cues from literature, it suffices here to say that power and culture are intertwined and cannot be separated. In the unequal relationship between people and the ruling elite, the latter is at a dominant position to shape what culture means and is constituted of. But the discursive space in which these social processes take place does allow agency of the ruled however limited and constricted it might be. See, David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

with these dynamics of power and hence, it is the domestic dynamics among different elites that determine how and why certain ideas become dominant pro or against democracy. Noah Feldman argues that the problem of democracy in Islamic societies lies in the fact that democracy and Islam as a religious-cultural system represent two different types of cultural systems. The legitimacy of two different ways of organizing power relies upon different sets of cultural resources both normatively and institutionally.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, democracy and Islamic societies (religion) represent two different values systems that organize power in society in two different ways by organizing social relations based on two different sets of moral values, ideals, and institutions. His arguments explain why democracy as a political system finds it difficult to take hold in these societies. This is an instructive proposition. It entails that TCR determine the legitimacy of a political system because they provide moral foundations of social and political order or what I term "the organization of power" materially as well as normatively. The chapter argues that TCR shape the moral and normative foundations of institutional order and notions of authority and power. Besides they also shape political aspirations and ideals.

Democracy is a cultural system emerging from a particular historical and social context of Western Europe and hence, it has cultural specificity,<sup>28</sup> since in its ideal form as a model, it prescribes values of individualism that emerged from European contexts. This way of thinking about democracy is relevant to understand why there might be some alternative political systems with a dynamic mix of ideas from different models including democracy. This also helps us to understand why democracy does not succeed in other societies with a certain degree of social coherence and a rigid social system.

Democratization primarily deals with how the interactions between two types of political systems with their respective norms, ideas, beliefs, and institutional arrangements take place. Or why one kind of political system, i.e. democracy, takes different forms in different social and cultural contexts. This problem reveals a crucial point that culture defined as norms, beliefs, and ideas that underpin power relations not only shape the nature of the organization of power but also that it can be used to alter the status quo.

The cultural specificity of democracy lies in the moral values (equality, freedom), ideas (individualism), practices (the universal franchise, institutional accountability and checks, and balances), and institutional mechanisms (parliament) it prescribes. These ideas,

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<sup>27</sup> Noah Feldman, *After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straux and Giroux, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, "The Cultural Particularity of Liberal Democracy," *Political Studies* 40, no. 1 (August 1992): 160–62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1992.tb01819.x>.

practices, and institutional mechanisms inform the notion of power and authority that is particular to the democratic political system. In an electoral democratic political system, the moral authority of political power and authority depends on the ideas of social contract and expression of general will through electoral and other institutional processes. These institutional mechanisms and processes obtain legitimacy based on values and ideals of individual liberty, freedom, and progress, etc. On the other hand, Islam vests the sources of political power and authority in the holy book, the Quran, and the historical practices namely the Caliphate. Hence, it envisions the relationship between state, society, and individual as different from democracy. In this sense, the category, culture, includes communism, caste, religion, and democracy. It can be argued however that some Islamic societies like Indonesia are experimenting with democracy and have found compatibility between democracy and religion.

The social construction perspective on political legitimacy would postulate the idea that democracy takes different forms depending upon the cultural context and how democracy as a cultural system interacts with alternative ways of organizing power in a society. The cases of failed democratization in the non-European context emphasizes that the discursive interactions between the rulers and the ruled are crucial to understanding the actual historical processes and the nature of political legitimacy.<sup>29</sup> These interactions are a two-way process and take place within the shared moral and normative space that determines the legitimacy of power relations. In the shared normative space, the ruled exercise the agency in constantly shifting normative context by accepting or rejecting norms and ideas based upon their existing beliefs. Hence, a “power relationship is not legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy, but because it can be justified in terms of their beliefs.”<sup>30</sup> The discursive interactions take place even in authoritarian contexts. Therefore, the idea that discursive interactions between the ruled and the ruling elites determine political legitimacy irrespective of the type of political system allows a comparative analysis of the use of traditional cultural resources in Post-Mao China.

Looking from this framework, an investigation of the logic and objectives of the use of traditional cultural resources in political practices provides an alternative way of understanding political legitimacy in China. A Weberian approach to understanding political legitimacy normatively prioritizes western electoral democracy as a universal idea and a yardstick to assess the nature of social and political order. As a result, it limits the possibility

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<sup>29</sup>Lamb, “Rethinking legitimacy,” 1-44.

<sup>30</sup> Beetham, “Legitimation,” 11.

of alternative ways of organizing power normatively. The conceptual framework developed in this chapter does not make any claim about the normative superiority of any model of the political system.

However, the questions of political legitimacy in China cannot be understood without taking into account the dominant norms and ideas in the international order. The questions of normative superiority of democracy are at the centre of the normative and ideological challenges to the CCP's legitimacy both within domestic politics and international system. Developing on the theoretical framework developed in chapter 2, the questions of the political legitimacy of the CCP and political system, therefore, are analyzed as a core problem of China's adaptation and resistance to the constitutive norms and ideas of the international order.

The political legitimacy of regimes is, therefore, an important issue in understanding resistance to the dominant norms and the articulation of alternative ideas and norms. Audie Klotz's work on why Apartheid South African regime articulated alternative norms on racial equality against dominant norms in international relations to legitimize its cruel regime is an instructive argument.<sup>31</sup> While she explains why and how international organizations, non-state actors and states mobilized the dominant norm of racial equality to oppose the apartheid regime, it is instructive to see how the apartheid regime could sustain within domestic politics by legitimizing racial discrimination through racial ideas and institutions. This argument can be extended to other authoritarian regime that claim legitimacy based on alternative ideas about progress, modernization and political order by resorting to history and cultural traditions. At the heart of these articulations lies the question of political legitimacy of a different political system. However, this does not mean that democratic political system in other parts of the world do not resort to cultural traditions. Yet, authoritarian regimes resort to cultural tradition and alternative narratives of modernization more almost as a rule.

All political systems resort to tradition and historical experiences of their own societies. The United States and its approach to the international order have been shaped by its ideas of progress, freedom and democracy. Jeffrey Legro has explained how the US engagement with and approach to international order in the twentieth century has been shaped by its domestic political order and values.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, domestic political system shapes how a state views the international order. But when a state is not the predominant

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<sup>31</sup> Klotz, Audie. "Transforming a Pariah State: International Dimensions of the South African Transition," *Africa Today* 42, no. 1/2 (1995): 75-87.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 24-48.

shaper of norms and dominant values in the international order, it resists dominant values and norms to legitimize its political order and system.

This argument can be extended to explain why democratization has often failed due to resistance from existing elites in non-western societies who lose power as part of the transition towards democracy. The elites mobilize traditions and culture as a counter strategy by resorting to identity- whether religious, national or cultural. Hence, they attempt to justify their political legitimacy with reference to values and ideas that go against democracy as a cultural system and the ideas and narratives of western modernization. Thus, the CCP's embrace of traditional cultural resources can be based on the imperatives of an alternative source and ideas of modernization when Maoist-socialism cannot do the same as it did in the Mao-period.

As a result, China's foreign policy and domestic politics cannot be disentangled from its approach to the international order. For, it faces ideological challenges from dominant values and ideas of democracy, progress, modernization and political system within the international system. Hence, the ideological competition between China and other countries necessitates that it assures its citizens about the desirability of its one-party rule. It does so through mobilization cultural identity, pride and fears.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, the return of tradition in the society is part of the increasing distance between party state and society in the changing dynamics of state-society relations in the post-reforms period.<sup>34</sup> The role of party in promoting tradition cannot be discounted too. However, there are two broader problems for the party as society drifts away from party-state ideological mould. First, it must control the meaning and role of traditions and history in how people understand it. In this respect, the party's appropriation of tradition is important for its legitimacy because people at large turn towards diverse views which it must control within its ideological fold. Here, the idea that power needs constant moral legitimation is important.<sup>35</sup> Second, the control over what tradition means is also important for the party to mobilize people around "Chinese identity" derived from cultural identity.

### III

#### **Ideology and Institutions: Changes and Continuities**

Deng Xiaoping's rise as the paramount leader of the CCP and its denunciation of

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<sup>33</sup> Odd Arne Westad, "Identity Politics with Chinese Characteristics: How the CCP's Quest to Define "China" Shapes Beijing's Agenda," *Foreign Affairs* June 1 2021.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/identity-politics-chinese-characteristics>

<sup>34</sup> Fewsmith, "Rethinking *Chinese Politics*," 13-16.

<sup>35</sup> David Beetham, *Legitimation of Power* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1991), 12 & 97.

Mao-era policies in its “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” in 1980 set in a process of change in Chinese politics that still resonates.<sup>36</sup> This process brought the meaning of politics and modernization out of Mao-era ideological formulations of class struggle and socialism. As GP Deshpande succinctly remarked in 1990 -

“Deng Xiaoping has taken the political question clearly out of the Leninist-Stalinist discourse. A whole set of institutions implementing the new approach to modernisation has sprung up over the last decade. The modernisation drive under Deng Xiaoping has made the political debate widely and fundamentally different from the debate as it was known before 1978.”<sup>37</sup>

At the same time, Chinese politics did not take the turn towards liberal democracy and that made the task of the CCP to legitimize its rule difficult because it did not have ideological and moral wherewithal to justify its continued rule. The party faced serious moments of crisis in 1980s and 1990s. For example, the students’ protests in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989 for democratization were met with force but the party could not come up with a convincing narrative.

Emerging out of debates in 1990s and in response to problems created by economic modernization after 1980, the party leadership came up with new ideas in the early 2000s that relied on TCR to reconstruct the normative foundations of its legitimacy. The CCP allowed ‘advanced productive forces’ (*xianjin shehui shengchanli*), a euphemism for allowing business people to become members through a new ideological innovation in the form of Three Represents (*sange daibiao*) in the Sixteenth Party Congress.<sup>38</sup> But these alternative moral and ideological concepts have not easily become the normative foundations of political order and this constitutes the main challenge before the party since then.

The party’s challenge of political legitimacy arises from its inability to justify its policies in terms of traditional ideology while it cannot resort to liberal representative democracy as adopting democracy would mean the end of its one-party rule. Therefore, the logic of using traditional ideas emerges from this dilemma to re-anchor moral and normative foundations of political order for one-party rule. Since the early 1980s, China has adopted, gradually, an open market and capitalist model of development dubbed variously as

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<sup>36</sup> “Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People’s Republic of China,” Marxist.org, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm>

<sup>37</sup> GP Deshpande, “Modernization and Political Process in China,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 1, (1990): 29, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4395771>.

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, “Full Text of Jiang Zemin's Report at 16th Party Congress,” November 18, 2002, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/3698\\_665962/t18872.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/3698_665962/t18872.shtml).

“socialism with Chinese characteristics” or China model. In other words, the party’s efforts are aimed at foregrounding the sources of modernization within Chinese culture and history.

The challenges to the party’s narrative emerge both from competing political ideologies of democracy and modernization at international level, and various sections of society within China. NGOs, rights groups, activists, academicians, and influence of media, and an increasingly global middle class contest the party’s narratives and support for electoral democracy, and dominant idea of modernization. In this context, the party strives hard to put forward the narrative that China’s economic modernization may not require western ideas and institutions. Rather Chinese history, culture and experiences have enough evidence to bring in modernization. This is where the party mobilizes culture as a source among various sections of society to provide an alternative basis for modernization rooted in Chinese history and culture. Since Maoist-socialism no longer can do that, the party finds tradition, culture and history as valuable resources for its legitimacy.

The party has tacitly promoted the revival of traditional culture at the grassroots level since the early 1980s.<sup>39</sup> These developments have much to do with the party’s ambiguous yet deliberate policy of letting loose the flourishing of traditional culture while its emphasis has been on remaking traditional culture as national culture. The proliferation of National Learning (*guoxue*) studies across universities and independent research institutions is an example of this whereby the party has attempted to remould the traditional culture as selectively defined by it as the national culture. Thirdly, the rise of China as a major economic and military power in the world provides an important context that shapes the ideological contours of these efforts to rethink political order from a traditional cultural perspective. Fourthly, although the party has resorted to rhetoric of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’, socialist economy, etc. its policies and policy outcomes are at variance with its ideological rhetoric. Rising social and economic inequalities due to economic reform policies can no longer be justified with traditional Marxist-Maoist approaches and a new language of socialism with Chinese characteristics was needed.

The new social and economic realities in contemporary China challenge its political legitimacy. As a result, the party leadership felt the need to re-anchor norms and moral foundations of its rule. But given that it cannot resort to democratic representative political

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel Mattingly’s recent study on revival of associational groups especially in regions namely, South and Central China shows that the party has allowed clan, temple and other traditional groups at village level to flourish. As he aptly argues that these groups are helped by the party so that the legitimacy deficit can be made up with the use of local elites. Although it presents a challenge of the capture of power and institutions at the local level, these groups are means of controlling dissent and disenchantment at the local level. See Daniel C. Mattingly, *The Art of Political Control in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 11-16.

system and processes to legitimize its rule, it has no option but to turn towards traditional culture and philosophies as intellectual sources to reconstruct the normative foundations of political order. However, this transition is not given and is fraught with alternative ideas from within and outside China as well as the gap between socio-economic reality and the normative-ideological resources it uses to justify them.

From the early 1980s to the early 2000s, the party lacked the ideological certainty that it had enjoyed during the Mao-period. But since early 2000s, it has found resources in traditional Chinese culture that it feels can help it reconstruct the normative foundations of political order in total. The early 2000s saw the introduction of new ideas like harmonious society that it used to justify socio-economic realities of socio-economic inequalities and social dislocation caused by economic development and consequent moral crisis in society. But afterwards, a consistent focus on traditional culture and philosophies hints that the party attempts to redefine the fundamental ideas of progress, development, justice, fairness, etc. in terms of traditional concepts of morality and norms. In other words, as the new socio-economic realities emerged with economic development, socio-economic objectives of China as a society was being redefined in terms of a traditional normative framework rather than western liberal ideas or Marxism-Maoism of the previous period.

In the subsequent section, the chapter discusses how the party and various state organs and officials attempt to redefine the normative and moral aspects of politics. This section tries to show the ways in which the elites in China that include the party, state organs and people therein and intellectuals redefine the moral foundations of political order. There have been several studies and commentaries on the socio-economic and ideological changes in different fields of study. However, there has not been a systematic effort to examine how traditional cultural ideas and philosophies are being used to redefine the normative content of the concepts like progress, justice, development within the context of rising China and nationalism in the Post-Mao period.

Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, the CCP has adopted two contradictory approaches. Firstly, in policy implementation and ideological work, it has adopted the time-tested methods of mass line, purges and nationalist-mobilization led policy implementation.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, it has increasingly shifted towards ‘excellent traditional culture’ and tradition for moral and normative ideas. Here, the use of Maoist legacy is more instrumental to justify policy objectives and rhetoric. One of the evidences for this is that the language, rhetoric and

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<sup>40</sup>Ling Li, “Politics of Anticorruption in China: Paradigm Change of the Party’s Disciplinary Regime 2012–2017,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 155 (2018): 47-63, 10.1080/10670564.2018.1497911.

symbols in party propaganda have been significantly drawn from Maoist-era legacies as much as it does from 'tradition' as it defines and selects what is 'excellent' in traditional culture. The possible reason for this is that Maoist-era legacy and symbols evoke resentment among the population, especially among the rich who fear the repression and chaos of the period. Yet the party cannot dispense altogether with the socialist and Maoist legacy because it provides reason of the state for it to rule. Although it makes efforts to reconstruct the ideological and normative foundations of political order, this does not guarantee it an immediate success and hence a gradualist approach is optimal for now.

In contrast to earlier transitions in 1911, 1949 and 1978 which were radical shifts in the sense that the main ideological-normative and political objectives with some major changes in institutions took place, the increasing reliance on traditional ideas and culture is taking place gradually with minimal institutional changes in the Post-1978 period. Yet these changes are profound in many ways. First, there is continuity in institutional structures and processes that characterize Chinese politics especially in terms of policy-making, implementation and governance as a whole. Chinese politics has been characterized by mass revolutionary campaigns as a way of mobilizing people for the support of the party and particular policies from Mao period onwards. Many scholars started to argue that the Post-Mao period Chinese leadership discarded mass revolutionary campaigns as a strategy of governance because they relied more on technocratic governance under strict authoritarian control.<sup>41</sup> But as Elizabeth Perry has emphatically argued, "post-Mao engineers have both retained and reconfigured the revolutionary tradition... by means of what I call managed campaigns, adopt and adapt revolutionary campaign methods to current reformist agendas."<sup>42</sup> The decreased frequency, intensity and changed objectives of mass campaigns as a way of governance do not mean they do not matter.

While arguments highlighting the party's reliance on technocratic governance in the post-Mao period do point out a qualitative difference with the previous period, the number of mass campaigns under Xi Jinping and their centrality in consolidation of leadership and adherence to 'party line' indicate that this mode of governance and connecting with people at large is one of the characteristics features of governance. For Xi Jinping, 'the "mass line"

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<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth J. Perry, "From Mass Campaigns to Managed Campaigns: 'Constructing a New Socialist Countryside'" in *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China* eds. Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 3-5.

<sup>42</sup> Perry, "From Mass Campaigns," 36.

(*qunzhong luxian*) campaigns are like a “hereditary treasure” that can keep its vitality.”<sup>43</sup> Such a conclusion about the role of ‘mass campaigns’ in governance and politics is supported by arguments by Ling Li in her study of disciplinary and mass line campaigns during the first five years of Xi Jinping’s rule. She argues that these campaigns have proved consequential for leadership consolidation and general party discipline.<sup>44</sup> In sum, the party’s governance strategy has changed but still relies on similar kind of strategies in governance and political mobilization.

With regard to the institutions and their relevance to governance and legitimacy of the party, despite reforms and institutionalization of political processes and decision-making as outlined by many scholars like Fewsmith and Andrew Nathan, institutions largely remain subservient to the party and play only a supplementary role rather than a central role in organizing politics. As Guoguang Wu notes:

“Conceptually, it suggests a theory of authoritarian legitimization that focuses on power domination, institutional manipulation, and symbolic performance in a political and institutional context that differs greatly from a democratic one but “steals the beauty,” so to speak, from democracy in order to legitimize contemporary authoritarianism.”<sup>45</sup>

The governance and political mobilization styles and strategies, and the role of institutions in governance and political process in general, beg a crucial question of how a Leninist party and state structures sit comfortably with increased use of traditional cultural norms and philosophies. This is an important dimension to locate the use of traditional culture in the existing literature. Research studies on propaganda system reveal that ideas other than what the party authorizes cannot be part of mainstream discussion. The complex yet robust system of ideological and thought control places severe control over scholarship and any other form of expression.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the very fact that debates and discussions have taken place widely on traditional culture, history and philosophies and their relevance for contemporary politics is enough to take these debates seriously irrespective of whether they have concrete influence over policy-making and institutional reorganization at large.

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<sup>43</sup> Xinhua, “Xi urges further “mass line” efforts,” *Xinhua News*, January 21, 2014, <http://english.sdchina.com/show/2885197.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Ling Li, “Politics of Anticorruption in China,” 47-63.

<sup>45</sup> Wu Guoguang, *China's Party Congress: Power, Legitimacy, and Institutional Manipulation*, (British Columbia: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4.

<sup>46</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, ““We Are All Part of the Same Family”: China's Ethnic Propaganda,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 41, no. 4 (2012): 159-181, 10.1177/186810261204100406; Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008); Anne-Marie Brady, “State Confucianism, Chineseness, and Tradition in CCP Propaganda,” in *China's Thought Management*, ed., Anne-Marie Brady (London: Routledge, 2012): 57–76.

Maoist legacies also remain significant for the party legitimacy because its original mission lies in the ‘rejuvenation’ of China. Hence, even though Maoist-socialism is not adequate to legitimize economic policies i.e. capitalism, the party is sensitive towards history and a correct view of it. If it cannot defend or denounce Maoist-revolutionary legacies completely, it loses its original mandate. In this respect, Chinese scholars and leaders frequently cite the reasons why the Soviet Union collapsed because the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) forgot its own history when it denounced Stalin-era policies in 1956 and later in the Gorbachev period.<sup>47</sup> As Xi Jinping often cites the importance of history, it is important for the party to stick to an ideological line and its view of history although Mao-period disastrous policies namely, cultural revolution (*da wen geming*) and the Great Leap Forward (*da yuejin*) have been criticised by the party as well as been allowed by intellectuals and people to comment and remember it. Yet, it can be done within limits set by the party. Therefore, the party reiterates, reinforce and impose its version of history through censorship, control and its own efforts of official history writing, school textbooks, and preserving red history through red tourism and memorials. But Maoist-socialism is not the only dominant legacy the party relies on and neither is it the dominant conceptual worldview. Tradition and history include five-thousand years of Chinese history and culture. It is this shift in attitudes and worldview towards pre-1949 history, tradition and ideas that is significant.

The complexity of changes makes it difficult to conceptualize the ideological and institutional transitions the Chinese state is undergoing. How we can understand Chinese state’s shift towards traditional culture after 1980s is a question that has to be understood in the longer-term rather than shorter-term. This applies to understanding both past patterns of changes and the future trajectories the changes might take. David Shambaugh’s conceptualization of changes in the nature of Chinese state since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in this context, provides an instructive lens to understand the use of traditional ideas and philosophies. He terms the nature of the Chinese state as a result of a series of changes taking place namely, the decline of the Qing Dynasty and the Republican government in 1911, the establishment of the PRC in 1949 and Reform and Opening after 1978 as “eclectic”. To quote Shambaugh in detail, he states:

“As one evolved to the next, some elements of the past survived each transition and were woven into new institutional frameworks. Each new departure was never total, although all were sharp and each sought to “overthrow” and replace the former. In reality, though, each

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<sup>47</sup>John W Garver, “The Chinese Communist Party and the Collapse of Soviet Communism,” *The China Quarterly* no. 133 (1993): 16-19, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000018178>.

new Chinese state maintained certain features of the old. Moreover, in each phase, different foreign elements were imported and grafted on to the evolving indigenous root, creating an ever-more complex hybrid.”<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, the changes are gradual in the sense that earlier institutional and ideological forms do not just wither away. Rather, new ideological goals and ideas are introduced in a way that does not change the nature of state radically. But at the same time, its ideological objectives of social transformation do not change. Shambaugh argues that:

“While radically different in its basic ethos and organizational structure in each phase (monarchical-republican-Leninist liberal), the Chinese state on the mainland has had three enduring missions: modernization of the economy, transformation of society, and defence of the nation against foreign aggression. The intended goals of social transformation varied (from neo-Confucianist to neofascist to radical Maoism to pragmatic Dengism), but for more than a century these have been the central and consistent missions of the Chinese state regardless of their fundamentally different cast.”<sup>49</sup>

Despite institutional and ideological continuities in the form of policy-implementation, the shift towards traditional culture is consequential for long-term changes. The process is intended to change the normative objectives of state in the form of maintaining status-quo and redefining the normative foundations of socio-economic order developed on capitalist-market oriented policies. In other words, the normative shift is brought about by the same institutional structure and processes that were built in earlier periods. But the objectives of social transformation are being redefined in terms of traditional notions of just socio-political order.

Deng Xiaoping’s policies after 1978 marked a radical shift in both normative objectives and means towards achieving prosperity regardless of means of doing so from Mao-era emphasis on class-struggle and egalitarianism with the same institutional structures and processes with some changes. Similarly, the current phase of shift towards traditional culture also indicates continuity with change. Of course, there are qualitative differences between the two phases but their aim is creating social and political stability with material prosperity. The main difference at the ideological level lies in the fact that Deng Period’s policies were anchored in pragmatism in a time of great shifts while the current policy is aimed at providing normative resources for legitimizing the political order in the long-term.

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<sup>48</sup>David Shambaugh, “Introduction,” in *Modern Chinese State*, ed., David Shambaugh (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 1-2.

<sup>49</sup>Shambaugh, “Introduction,” 1.

The shift towards traditional culture is not identity politics in the sense that it is not just a tool to rally people around behind the party in the short-run in times of crisis legitimacy. Yet, it marks a long-term objective to reconstruct normative aspects of politics in general that should be understood. However, the identity aspect of the shift cannot be ruled out. In the short-run, traditional culture justifies the imagination of a national system that engulfs every one. While post-totalitarian socialism carries the institutional legacies, including sectoral, local, and factional, in addition to bureaucratic, multiplicity as well as their complex intersections, a culturally sensitive call for unity can integrate them at the time of crisis immediately. Those who fail to answer the call and show their self-disciplinary learning might risk losing their legitimacy of belonging to the national system. Such a call thus enhances the legitimacy of the party leaders to achieve the task at hand. However, a period of decentralization necessarily follows to enable all actors to breathe normally and get ready for the next call for unity. Yet, it is in the long run that the national identity aspects of traditional culture make it more useful to understand the long-term changes the party intends to bring in.

Traditional philosophies of governance prominently Confucianism and Legalism influenced institutional structures and governance philosophy of China until the fall of the last imperial dynasty, the Qing, in 1911. Although many remnants survived as emphasized by Shambaugh and others, it gave way to new forms of institutions that are radically different from traditional institutions. The lack of concrete ideas of institutions based on traditional philosophies is a major deficiency, so to say, that hamper traditional philosophies as a holistic proposal for China's future political order. The next section examines intellectual proposals that emphasise the relevance of traditional philosophies for institutional innovations and reorganizing politics in general. Yet, here it suffices to say that these proposals are just intellectual debates and their actual implementation is unlikely, given the sensitivity of the party towards any change that threatens its institutional and ideological control over power.

#### IV

#### **Traditional Cultural Resources and Reorienting Ideology**

The existing literature on political legitimacy in China has focused broadly on two aspects viz institutions and ideology as propaganda. While these are broadly analysed within the framework of “authoritarianism” or “new-authoritarianism,” the role of culture and especially traditional culture in political legitimacy in recent decades is almost ignored except

in few studies.<sup>50</sup> In this respect, the aim to convert the moral world view of people through which they evaluate the socio-political order and the rule of the party is important at least in the long-term. Although it is a transition period and the party has not been able to find a conclusive solution of the ideological and normative gap, its intention to remould ideological-normative framework to traditional culture cannot be ignored as inconsequential for two reasons. Firstly, the party has been trying to selectively open-up for traditional culture since the early 1980s itself which shows that it does not see a threat from such debates.

Besides, the very fact that the party allows and promote discussions on traditional culture, it should be taken seriously for its impact on normative basis of political legitimacy. The goal is “to identify China’s distinct ‘cultural genes’ and to re-establish China not just as a strong nation, but also as a civilization with its own core values on par with the West.”<sup>51</sup>

Secondly, the strict control over ideas and thoughts with anti-west rhetoric taps into the long-tradition of anti-western thought in twentieth century China. As Guo Yingjie in his study of Chinese nationalism argues, cultural nationalism has a long legacy from the late nineteenth century and has become more pronounced in last few decades.<sup>52</sup> Even, Mao’s anti-tradition political ideology informed by socialist modernization had an ambiguous attitude towards Chinese history and traditions.<sup>53</sup> The widely debated idea of “signification of Marxism not only was rationalized in terms of different nature of capitalist development in China and the nature of class structure in China, but it also reflected desire to reconcile foreign ideology to Chinese cultural context.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, Marxism in China has been combined with nationalism and pride in Chinese identity. Mao’s exhortation on the eve of proclamation of the People’s Republic of China that China has finally “stood up” in the international order reflects how the CCP has combined Marxism with Chinese nationalism.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Heike Holbig, “Ideology after the end of ideology: China and the quest for autocratic legitimation,” *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (2013): 61-81, 10.1080/13510347.2013.738862; Aleksandra Kubat, “Morality as Legitimacy under Xi Jinping: The Political Functionality of Traditional Culture for the Chinese Communist Party,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47, no. 3, (2018): 47–86, 10.1177/186810261804700303.

<sup>51</sup> Jeremy Page, “Why China Is Turning Back to Confucius,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-china-is-turning-back-to-confucius-1442754000>.

<sup>52</sup> Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> C. P. Fitzgerald, “Mao and the Chinese Cultural Tradition,” *Il Politico* 42, no. 3 (1977): 487, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43209976>.

<sup>54</sup> Raymond F. Wylie, “Mao Tse-tung, Ch’en Po-Ta and the ‘Sinification of Marxism,’ 1936-38,” *The China Quarterly* no. 79 (1979): 487, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000038273>. For more on Chinese Marxism, see, Chenshan Tian, “Mao Zedong, Sinicization of Marxism, and Traditional Chinese Thought Culture,” *Asian Studies* VII (XXIII), 1 (2019): 13–36, <https://doi.org/10.4312/as.2019.7.1.13-37>.

<sup>55</sup> Scholars have also pointed out how the traditional ideology of middle kingdom which also contradicted with Communist world revolution at least theoretically. See, Mark Mancall, “The Persistence of Tradition in Chinese Foreign Policy,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 349, no. 1 (September

Since its formation in 1921 and its existence as a ruling party since 1949, the CPC's political legitimacy rested upon the class-based understanding of society rooted in Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. In this ideological scheme, the mandate of the party was to bring in changes to root out class differences and theoretically, even the state itself, to establish an egalitarian and classless society or socialist modernization in opposition to capitalist modernization. The use of traditional cultural resources goes against the class-based understanding of society. The traditional ideas have gained traction in academic and official discourses in the mainland in the early years of the 21st century paralleling the changes in ideological and moral ideas by the party to articulate policies during the first term of Hu Jintao onwards.<sup>56</sup>

The changes in ideological bases of legitimacy have taken place gradually since the early 1980s as the underlying social, economic, and political dynamics changed. The changes in policies necessitated the need for changes in the ideological and moral foundations of legitimacy in two ways. One, the Marxist and Maoist-Leninist ideological justifications of political legitimacy could not be justified any longer. In response to the demands for democratization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the CCP under Jiang Zemin brought about new changes in education policy in 1992 in its efforts to instil patriotic values and it was the first institutional effort to bring in ideological and moral change for reorienting the moral foundations of political legitimacy of the party.

However, these efforts to infuse traditional ideas into party discourses preceded the debates on the role of culture and political legitimacy in the 1980s. As the party adopted economic reforms in the early 1980s, it led to debates on culture and modernization. One of the strong currents of thought was so-called "enlightenment movement." To state it in brief, the debates emphasised "modernization of Chinese culture" implicitly meaning western modernization.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, traditional beliefs, cultural practices and philosophical ideas in intellectual debates flourished. However, the events leading to the Tiananmen

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1963): 14–26, 10.1177/000271626334900103; Samuel S. Kim, *China, the United Nations and World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

<sup>56</sup>The ideas of harmony and great unity have been overarching normative concepts from tradition that have become prominent. For an overview of debates on great harmony in the early years of the 21st century in China, see William A. Callahan, "Remembering the Future — Utopia, Empire, and Harmony in 21st-Century International Theory," *European Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 4, (2004): 569-601, 10.1177/1354066104047849. The common theme among these discourses is that the idea of great harmony is a state-centric model of domestic and world political order. Secondly, the idea of great harmony is represented as a blend of socialist and great harmony discourse. Hence, the discourse on harmonious society promoted during the Hu Jintao period in articulating official narratives and policies is termed as a "harmonious socialist society."

<sup>57</sup> Xu Jilin, "The fate of an enlightenment: twenty years in the Chinese intellectual sphere (1978–98)," in *Chinese Intellectuals between State and Market*, eds. Edward Gu and Merle Goldman (London: Routledge, 2004), 188-189.

protests indicate that western modernization was gaining support among intellectuals and activists which also resulted in widespread demand for political liberalization.<sup>58</sup> Although the party suppressed the intellectuals and activists who argued for political liberalization after 1989, it realized that an alternative source for its legitimacy is required to sustain it. This urgency led many “establishment intellectuals” to develop the idea of “neo-authoritarianism.” It referred to the idea that a strong state was necessary for economic development.<sup>59</sup>

However, one of the first indications to reorient the party’s political legitimacy to traditional culture came from Wang Huning. Wang Huning is credited with innovations in ideological campaigns and theories since Jiang Zemin period.<sup>60</sup> Among many writings of Wang Huning before he was brought to serve in the central government by Jiang Zemin, he wrote an often ignored essay in which he emphasised culture as the “software” of the political system.<sup>61</sup> To state his complex ideas in brief, he argued for bringing in traditional culture to develop new political culture. In addition, his ideas portrayed western modernization and democracy as antithesis to Chinese conditions.<sup>62</sup> These ideas have gained prominence in the party discourses gradually.

After more than two decades of economic reforms, the CPC introduced a fundamental change in its ideological basis when it introduced the concept of Three Represents (*sange daibiao*) in 2002. This marked a major change formally brought into the ideology. As such, the changes represent a gradual shift necessitated by the decaying relevance of Marxism and Maoist-Leninist ideology. The party no longer represented its original mandate of representing the interests of peasants and the working class through the means of class struggle. The conflict-based class understanding of society became a thing of the past in the ideological, moral, and political positions of the party. The party now also claimed to represent “China’s advanced culture” in addition to a revolutionary socialist culture that

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<sup>58</sup>Xu Jilin, “The fate of an enlightenment,” 195.

<sup>59</sup> On “neo-authoritarianism in the late 1980s and 1990s see, Li He, *Political Thought and China’s Transformation. Politics and Development of Contemporary China* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 31-45; Stephan Ortmann and Mark R. Thompson, “Introduction: The ‘Singapore Model’ and China’s Neo-Authoritarian Dream,” *The China Quarterly* 236 (2018): 930–45, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741018000474>.

<sup>60</sup>In recent years, Wang Huning has got serious attention in media and debates on China under Xi Jinping. For the role of Wang Huning in ideological innovation see, Michael A. Peters, “The Chinese Dream: Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49, no. 14 (2017): 1299-1304, 10.1080/00131857.2017.1407578.

<sup>61</sup>Wang Huning, “The Structure of China’s Changing Political Culture,” *Reading China Dream*, accessed September 2021, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/wang-huning-ldquothe-structure-of-chinas-quo-changing-political-culture.html>.

<sup>62</sup>On this aspect, Wang Huning’s book laid out basic premises and attitudes on western style democracy which reflect in the party discourses in many ways. See, Wang Huning, *America against America* (Shanghai: Shanghai Arts Press, 1991).

became secondary gradually.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the formal changes brought in 2002 represent a radical break with the past. Hereafter, gradual but steady efforts have been made to bring in the party-led revival of traditional values, ideas, and practices to bring about a complete overhaul of the ideological and moral basis of political legitimacy.

### **Chinese Tradition as Comprehensive and Universal Set of Values**

The revival of traditional culture coincides with emerging nationalism as the economic and military capabilities of China rises. The confidence in the rise of China as a great power has infused the sense among leadership that “throughout the history of the world, the rise or revival of a nation is often closely related to the rise of its national spirit and the revival of national culture.”<sup>64</sup> Such a quest for an independent identity emanates from the need to justify the one-party rule. The accumulative result is a “Post-Marxist” and “Post-Maoist” politics in which moral and ideological foundations of social and political order are rooted in traditional Chinese cultural ideas and norms with the institutional structure of Maoist-Leninist state.<sup>65</sup>

Chinese scholars in recent decades have advanced arguments that traditional cultural and political ideas are universal and provide alternative normative ideas for organizing social and political order. The apparent success of economic reforms in China seems to have led scholars to rethink the relationship between culture and capitalism via Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Rise of Capitalism*. Chinese intellectuals have taken it as a departure point to argue that Chinese traditional ideas are relevant to the contemporary world to organize social and political order and offer experiences for other countries to follow. Philosopher Tongdong Bai has argued that Chinese traditional thought provides holistic and universal normative relevance to organize social and political order in contemporary times.<sup>66</sup> He builds his argument by critiquing the assumption in modernization theories that culture shapes economic success. There is an emerging consensus on this critique in academia within and outside China.

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<sup>63</sup>“Full Text of Jiang Zemin's Report at 16th Party Congress,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs People's Republic of China, Accessed 10 July, 2020, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/3698\\_665962/t18872.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/3698_665962/t18872.shtml).

<sup>64</sup> Xinhua, “shi ba da yilai, xi jinping zheyang wei chuantong wenhua “daixin,” (Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping has ‘spoken for traditional culture), *Xinhua News*, May 29, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-05/29/c\\_1121054808.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-05/29/c_1121054808.htm).

<sup>65</sup> For more details about the departure from Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology during the 1980s and 1990s see, Kalpana Misra, *From Post-Maoism to Post-Marxism: The Erosion of Official Ideology in Deng's China* (London: Routledge, 1998); Guoxin Xing, “Hu Jintao’s Political Thinking and Legitimacy Building: A Post-Marxist Perspective,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 36, no. 4 (2009): 213-26, 10.1080/00927670903355196.

<sup>66</sup> Bai Tongdong, *China: The Political Philosophy of the Middle Kingdom* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 7-9.

Since the 1990s, Chinese intellectual writings have increasingly derived ideas from traditional Chinese thought to develop a conceptual, intellectual and moral defence of the existing social and political order. Tongdong Bai explores the classics to argue that ancient Chinese thinkers namely Confucius, Mencius, Xun Zi, etc. advocated equality on par with the idea of equality in democracy; he thinks that inequality in some form is inevitable. He advocates for the Confucian notion of social and moral order as it benefits the least advantaged.<sup>67</sup> His appreciation for some form of hierarchy goes against ideas of equality in democratic theories and ideological tradition of Marxist-Leninism-Maoism. The fact that intellectuals have begun to promote such ideas on normative grounds indicates that Chinese society and politics are undergoing a normative change in which the ideas of equality and social order prevalent during the Mao period are no longer the dominant ideas. The overarching objectives of these intellectual trends and writings are to defend existing order normatively while change and revolution of the previous era take a backseat.<sup>68</sup>

Western ideas and models of political and social order have occupied Chinese intellectuals for more than a century and continue to be one of the dominant intellectual focuses in contrast to which intellectuals attempt to formulate their questions and defence of Chinese culture and political system.<sup>69</sup> Besides, references to ‘tradition’ are common to all intellectual currents across the spectrum. But as William Callahan states, what constructs said ‘tradition’ is problematic and may differ from time to time. For Chinese intellectuals, tradition also includes a one-party rule and the revolutionary tradition of the 20th century.<sup>70</sup> The efforts of intellectuals and the party focus on blending pre-1911 traditions represented by Confucianism and socialist-revolutionary traditions in order to bring about the moral and ideological foundation that can also legitimize the current political system of one-party rule. Philosopher Gan Yang’s works represent this effort among scholars in recent years.<sup>71</sup> He

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<sup>67</sup> Bai Tongdong, *Against Political Equality: the Confucian Case*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 32-50.

<sup>68</sup> For a detailed account of views and ideas of Chinese scholars who take state and political stability as the central objective since the 1990s, see, Sebastian Veg, “The Rise of China’s Statist Intellectuals: Law, Sovereignty, and “Repoliticization”,” *The China Journal* 82, (2019): 23-45, 10.1086/702687. For a review of ‘establishment intellectuals in pre-1990 period, see Timothy Cheek and Carol Lee Hamrin, *China’s Establishment Intellectuals* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1986).

<sup>69</sup> For a review of the reform era intellectual currents see, Merle Goldman and Oufan Li, *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Timothy Cheek, A. Joshua and David Ownby, *Voices from the Chinese Century: Public Intellectual Debate from Contemporary China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

<sup>70</sup> William A. Callahan, “History, Tradition and the China Dream: Socialist Modernization in the World of Great Harmony,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96, (2015): 983-1001, 10.1080/10670564.2015.1030915.

<sup>71</sup> It is interesting to note that Gan Yang was among the scholars in the 1980s and 1990s who advocated for western modernization. In recent years, he has shifted his ideological positions on traditions and has advocated blending all three traditions.

argues the three traditions viz. Confucianism, Maoist revolutionary tradition of the 20th century, and market reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping should be integrated.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, scholars like Hu Angang and Zhao Tingyang also think the blending of the three traditions is a ‘correct’ path to follow.<sup>73</sup> Political Scientist Pan Wei considers adopting the western democratic model of the political system as “enslavement and decline” and hence “China’s rejuvenation” is the only way forward.<sup>74</sup> These traditions are contradictory to each other in terms of the values, social, and political system they envision. As a result, as William rightly states that the efforts to harmonize the three diverse and contradictory traditions to produce a new vision for 21st century China are full of tensions.<sup>75</sup>

Scholarly writings on the positive role of traditional cultural resources have flourished in recent years. There are few distinctive and common features of these writings and publications. First, most of them recognize the inability of Marxism-Maoism as a normative anchor to reconstruct political order. Although given the political-ideological rhetoric of ‘socialism’ of the party, most of them are couched in the language that does not differ much from official positions of the party. Second, these new ideas and debates centering on traditional ideas and philosophies try to portray Chinese culture and philosophy in opposition to western ideas and political philosophies. In this regard, the party’s tacit approval for proliferation of traditional culture has contributed to these ideas to a great extent.

Yet, whether TCR can provide intellectual resources and practical guidance for institutions is a major question that faces both intellectuals and the party. This question is not new in Chinese politics. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, whether Chinese traditions serve as a holistic philosophy for modern politics has been debated for a long time. Twentieth century Confucian intellectuals especially based in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the United States namely, Mou Zongsan, Tu Weiming, and Tang Junyi among others attempted to reconcile Chinese tradition, i.e. Confucianism, with western political institutions and values of

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<sup>72</sup> Jiang Shigong, a Constitutional Scholar, makes similar arguments, see Jiang Shigong, David Ownby and Timothy Cheek, trans., “Philosophy and History: Interpreting the ‘Xi Jinping Era’ through Xi’s Report to the Nineteenth National Congress of the CCP,” Reading China Dream, accessed 30 June 2020, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/jiang-shigong-philosophy-and-history.html>; Gan Yang, and David Ownby, trans., “Unifying the Three Traditions” in the New Era: The Merging of Three Chinese Traditions,” Reading China Dream, accessed 30 June 2020, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/gan-yang-tongsantong-chapter-1.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia tixi: Shijie zhidu zhexue daolun* (The Under-Heaven System: The Philosophy for the World Institution), (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin Chubanshe, 2011); Hu Angang, “Shijie datong de ‘Zhongguo meng,’” (The China dream” of the World of Great Harmony) *zhongguo wang*, December, 11 2011. <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/1211/c359405-23812773.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Pan Wei, *zhongguo Mo Shi: Jie Du Ren Min Gong He Guo De 60 Nian* (China Model), (Beijing: Zhong Yang Bian Yi Chu Ban She, 2009), 3-4.

<sup>75</sup> Callahan, “Great Harmony,” 985.

democracy, human rights, individualism.<sup>76</sup> However, mainland “neo-Confucians” differ from these readings of Chinese traditions as compatible with western modernization.<sup>77</sup>

To counter the idea that Chinese traditions lack institutional basis for modern politics, Jiang Qiang proposed a new intellectual project to argue that Confucianism does provide an intellectual blueprint for institutions in the mid-1990’s. Jiang Qiang had been the dominant figure in these debates for some time until other intellectuals joined the debate in the early 2000s. Hence, despite his wider influence on the debate, his position is one of the many on how traditions, especially Confucianism, can be a guiding philosophy for modern politics. Nevertheless, his intellectual blueprint for reorganization of Chinese politics remains radical and controversial, yet represents the sincerity with which contemporary Chinese intellectuals approach tradition.

Jiang’s approach to Confucianism differs from that of “moral Confucianism” of Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi and others. He starts with the criticism that scholars like Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan have relied on Mencius, and Song and Ming dynasty intellectuals who paid less or no attention to institutions and politics. Rather his argument is that “*gongyang* learning” of Han Dynasty has enough resources for Confucian revival in politics. Based on his reading of Confucian tradition, he proposes a “tri-cameral” parliament or assembly at the top of the political system each representing common masses, sacred truths of Confucianism, and the descendants of Confucius.<sup>78</sup> Whether his proposal is workable and possible is one important question that can be debated. But here I make two major points about what his approach to tradition can entail for revival of traditions. One, that Jiang’s advocacy of Confucianism as a civil national religion is crucial as it completely replaces, in theory, Maoist-socialism. Two, that his approach is oppositional to western ideas unlike Mou Zongsan and others whom he criticises for trying to impose western ideas on Chinese tradition. Therefore, for him and many others, Confucianism and Chinese traditions are universal.

Another important issue is that of ruptures created by modernization from the later nineteenth century onwards in cultural, political and civilizational continuity. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 and attendant socio-cultural and intellectual attack on tradition, the

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<sup>76</sup> A brief review of different positions on democracy and Confucianism can be found in Baogang He, “Whither Confucian Democracy Studies,” *Political Theory* 49, no. 2 (2021): 339–47, 10.1177/0090591720966252.

<sup>77</sup> On the differences between “mainland Confucians” and other based in Taiwan, Hong Kong and USA, see, Stephen C. Angle, “The Adolescence of Mainland New Confucianism,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 49, No. 2 (2018): 83-99, 10.1080/10971467.2018.1549352.

<sup>78</sup> Jiang Qing, “From Mind Confucianism to Political Confucianism,” in *The Renaissance of Confucianism in Contemporary China*, ed., Ruiping Fan (Leiden: Springer, 2011), 17–32.

establishment of the People's Republic of China and destruction of tradition, and finally capitalist mode of economic development in Post-Mao period have brought drastic socio-cultural changes. A number of Confucian scholars have asserted civilizational continuity from tradition to contemporary times. In these writings, modernization is played down in constructing a narrative of continuity.<sup>79</sup>

In this context, tradition includes pre-1911 traditions, Maoist-socialist revolutionary legacy and Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic economic reform.<sup>80</sup> By defining tradition so, scholars have provided intellectual resources for the party. For the party, defining tradition in continuity and preserving its revolutionary legacies ideologically is crucial in its effort to reorient sources of political legitimacy. Therefore, the intellectual efforts to claim universality of Confucianism and Chinese tradition are an important shift in the intellectual landscape which also parallels the discourses in public life.<sup>81</sup> The proposals that Confucianism should play the role of civil religion as Protestant Christianity does in western countries attempt to find Chinese roots of economic modernization that the party has been pursuing in the reform period.<sup>82</sup>

It is instructive to see that intellectuals from other trends of thought namely, the New Left also fall back upon tradition and Chinese history to push forward the idea of alternative modernity.<sup>83</sup> Besides, tradition plays a central role in reflections upon contemporary political problems and the questions of what path should China take. The reliance on Chinese tradition by non-Confucian scholars places any intellectual project within the problems of political legitimacy the party faces. For example, Xu Jilin, a 'liberal' scholar, in his various writings

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<sup>79</sup> Chen Yun, "The Mainland Confucian Revival and Its Problems as Seen from the Perspective of "Civilizational Theory," *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 49, 2 (2018): 14-146, 10.1080/10971467.2018.1496655; Chen Ming and David Ownby (trans), "The Road to Confucian Civil Religion," *Reading China Dream*, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/chen-ming-confucian-civil-religion.html>.

<sup>80</sup> Chen Ming and David Ownby (trans), "Transcend Left and Right, Unite the Three Traditions, Renew the Party-State: A Confucian Interpretation of the China Dream," *Reading China Dream*, accessed June 10 2020, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/chen-ming-transcend-left-and-right.html>

<sup>81</sup> Chen Lai, *Tradition and Modernity: A Humanist View*, trans. and Edmund Reyden (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 118-119.

<sup>82</sup> Ming and Ownby (trans), "The Road,"

<sup>83</sup> The term New Left in Chinese context is conceptually porous and contentious. Yet, some common features are attributed to New Left intellectuals. These include: resistance to global capitalism, the idea that western style democracy does not work in other contexts, and search for alternative sources of modernity. Among many influential scholars, Wang Hui's writings manifest these tendencies. See, Wang Hui and Rebecca E. Karl, "Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity," *Social Text* no. 55 (1998): 11, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/466684>. However, their complicated relationship with Maoist socialism and Chinese traditions put their ideas into larger fold of the critique of western modernization and finding alternative Chinese roots of modernity in the party discourses. A detailed account of New Left intellectuals, see, He Li, *Political Thought and China's Transformation. Politics and Development of Contemporary China* (Palgrave Macmillan, London), 46-59.

has provided a different reading of tradition and critiqued statist, ultra-nationalist and nativist tendencies in New Left, Cultural Conservatives from Neo-Confucianism and others.<sup>84</sup> However, if we read his various writings together, it becomes apparent that he is unable to overcome the problem of how to reconcile Chinese tradition with liberalism.

Since liberalism is not indigenous to China, the style of the liberals is quite traditional as almost all May Fourth activists were. In any case, the post-socialist system relies on liberals only instrumentally to open-up the planning system. The Western forces seek alliance with the liberals to change China. The result is the peculiar realignment of Confucianism and Socialism since the 1990s, which ultimately brings disillusionment to the Western forces. China's threat becomes existential at this point. In this process, liberals reproduce traditional culture to the extent that they all believe in the view of the national system and the responsibility of the leaders to rule with benevolence. Discursively, they inadvertently reinforce the leaders' capability to enlist traditional culture as foundation of their legitimacy.

Chinese scholars have, for long, resorted to German theorist Carl Schmitt's ideas to legitimize an authoritarian political system.<sup>85</sup> But statism and exceptional tendencies are not just reflected in ultranationalist and establishment intellectuals. New Left intellectuals namely, Wang Hui, Wang Zhaoguang and Gan Yang have supported one-party rule and statism.<sup>86</sup> This shift is crucial and can be debated in length but it is suffice to say here that political control over thought, cultural identity and pride in Chinese history and culture, and ideological affiliations shape how intellectuals shape the questions of modernity.

In this context, Zhaoguang Ge, a Chinese historian, provides a lens to put these questions in perspective. He states that there are three reasons why Chinese intellectuals and the state desire to go back to traditional ideas and cultural resources. First, there is a strong desire to search for an escape out of the "grip of western culture" and its impact on China's institutions, ideas, and culture in the last couple of centuries. This desire emanates, with political implications, from a desire to seek a Chinese and native foundation of the values with an alternative starting point that China should adhere to in the contemporary period. Second, there is a strong desire to search for Chinese identity rooted in Chinese people's understanding of their history, culture, and traditions. Finally, intellectuals make efforts to

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<sup>84</sup> A collection of his important writings is translated by David Ownby, see Xu Jilin, *Rethinking China's Rise: A Liberal Critique*, translated by David Ownby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>85</sup> For a detailed review of the debates on Carl Schmitt in Chinese scholarship, see, Ryan Martinez Mitchell, "Chinese Receptions of Carl Schmitt since 1929," *Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs* 8, (2020): 181-263.

<sup>86</sup> A brief overview of writings of these scholars and Xu Jilin's take on these arguments can be found in Xu Jilin, "Rethinking China's Rise," XXII-XXVIII.

“extract China from a century of western influence” aimed at searching for a new direction for a future rooted in China’s own experience and culture.<sup>87</sup>

### **Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao Period and Ushering of New Normative Concepts**

Hu Jintao, the general secretary of the CPC and President of China during 2002-2012, spearheaded institutional and ideological changes during his period. As he recognized that China’s “social structure and ideological set-up was in a major shake-up” due to changes brought in by economic reforms and market-oriented policy, the party was prompted to focus on bringing in traditional ideas to “strengthen ideological and ethical build-up.”<sup>88</sup> An analysis of Hu Jintao’s speeches in different contexts suggests that the resources for ideological and ethical changes were supposed to be derived from traditional cultural ideas and practices. There have been extensive writings on the reasons why Hu Jintao fell back upon traditional normative ideas to stave off domestic issues namely increasing inequality, environmental degradation, etc. that challenged the legitimacy of the party.<sup>89</sup>

There are two trends during the Hu Jintao period in intellectual and official discourses. One, a state-centric political order that emphasized political and social stability was the main objective. Secondly, the Chinese traditional cultural resources and political ideas are useful to organize modern social and political order as an alternative to western democracy. These two trends have strengthened during Xi Jinping’s period while the ideological and political environment has become rigid. Soon after the 18th Party Congress, Document 9 issued by the General Office of the CPC after the Third Plenum of the CPC enumerated the following western ideas that posed a threat to the party rule. They are as follows: constitutionalism, questioning the idea of socialism with Chinese characteristics, promotion of historical nihilism by questioning the history of the party, promoting neo-liberalism, western ideas of independent journalism, universal values that threaten the theoretical foundations of the party rule, and independent civil society.<sup>90</sup>

The current vocabulary in political discourse of “well off society” (*xiaokang shehui*), “rejuvenating great Chinese nation” (*zhongguo weida fuxing*), “excellent Chinese culture”

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<sup>87</sup> Zhaoguang Ge and Michael Hill, *What Is China? Territory, Ethnicity, Culture, and History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>88</sup> China Daily, “Hu: Harmonious Society Crucial for Progress,” *China Daily*, June 28, 2005, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-06/28/content\\_455332.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-06/28/content_455332.htm).

<sup>89</sup> For a summary of core issues, themes, and arguments in this regard see, Manoranjan Mohanty, “Harmonious Society: Hu Jintao's Vision and the Chinese Party Congress,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 50, (2012): 12-16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41720457>.

<sup>90</sup> China File, “Document 9: A China File Translation: How Much Is a Hardline Party Directive Shaping China’s Current Political Climate?” *China File* accessed 20 July, 2020, <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>.

(*youxiu chuantong*) etc. has evolved from late 1990s onwards. If we ignore language and normative interpretations of the objectives presented in political discourses, the objectives of achieving prosperity is nothing new. Leadership in previous periods from the early twentieth century onwards have spoken of achieving great prosperity (*fuqiang*) in a phased-manner.

But language and normative concepts are an important part of the legitimization process and changing normative resources the party uses. It is widely believed that Xi Jinping brought about the sudden and decisive changes in narratives and ideological changes. While such beliefs remain true for some of the changes namely an assertive foreign policy and mass-mobilization campaigns with emphasis on Maoist legacies and heritage, the foundation for the normative and ideological changes under Xi's rule were laid gradually since late 1990s. From the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress onwards, the new vocabulary infused with often vague but intended overarching concepts have become increasingly the mainstay of ideological-normative repertoire of the party and official discourses.<sup>91</sup>

The new vocabulary and normative concepts are used to fill the gap between policies, socio-economic realities and the ruling ideology. The idea of 'Harmonious socialist society' (*hexie shehui*) that was brought by Hu Jintao during the early 2000s was aimed at giving new meanings to a new reality and a normative goal to achieve amidst rising social conflicts as a result of economic development. The economic reforms after 1978 led to creating two distinct group of winners and losers with the latter consisting of working classes, rural peasants and others that had given rise to a high level of "mass incidents", a term for protests by these classes and social groups. By the official statistics, there were 87000 mass incidents in the year 2005 alone.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the socio-economic realities produced by economic

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<sup>91</sup>The 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report emphasised that the current period was "a stage in which we will gradually narrow the gap between our level and the advanced world standard and bring about a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on the basis of socialism." It further stated that "We should foster socialist ideology and ethics by basing ourselves on China's reality, carrying on the fine cultural traditions handed down from history and assimilating the advances of foreign cultures." "Jiang Zemin's Report at the 15th National Congress of the Communist Party," accessed on July 15, 2019, <http://academics.wellesley.edu/Polisci/wj/308S/Readings/jzm15CCP.htm>. The 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report declared that "our Party must stand firm in the forefront of the times and unite with and lead the Chinese people of all ethnic groups in accomplishing the three major historical tasks: to propel the modernization drive, to achieve national reunification and to safeguard world peace and promote common development, and in bringing about the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on its road to socialism with Chinese characteristics." It further stated that "Socialist spiritual civilization is an important attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Basing ourselves on China's realities, we must carry forward the fine tradition of our national culture and absorb the achievements of foreign cultures in building socialist spiritual civilization." "Full text of Jiang Zemin's Report at 16th Party Congress", *China.org*, accessed June, 2019, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/Nov/49107.htm>.

<sup>92</sup>Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Hu Jintao Era*, (London: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), 253-255. There are various estimates about the number of protests in China depending upon how one defines a protest gathering to count. However, different studies have shown a consistent high number of protests since the 1990s onwards, see,

reforms could not be justified by the existing ideologies and hence, a new language infused with new norms and morality forced the party to rely on traditional ideas like harmony which could be imposed through a vast propaganda network and control over ‘thought.’ As David Beetham argues, the normative justification of power is a necessary condition for its legitimacy<sup>93</sup>; the party had to come up with a new normative and conceptual language.

### **The Xi Jinping Period and Culture as a Technique to Mould Moral Worldview of People**

Document 9 was the initial indication of the hardening ideological positions of the party in the subsequent period. Scholars have pointed out that the nature of the leadership of Xi Jinping has marked a break from the idea of ‘collective leadership’ and the processes of institutionalization in the Post-Mao period.<sup>94</sup> Xi’s leadership is also marked by Mao-style leadership and political mobilization through campaigns, big-banner posters, and personality cult with the centralization of power.<sup>95</sup> Maoism in its various forms still counts as a major force in Chinese politics and ultra-Maoist sympathizers are vocal.<sup>96</sup> In addition, many ideas and political rhetoric namely “common prosperity”, mass campaigns, and shift from “collective leadership” to personality cult during Xi Jinping’s period are generally portrayed as a return to Mao-style leadership and politics.

While all these arguments hold true in various measures, Xi Jinping’s leadership is different from Mao’s concerning the ideological and normative resources used to articulate aspirations, objectives, and tools of policies although the state structures are similar to Leninist-Party state and scholars have also noted the similarities between Mao-style policy implementation that provides flexibility in changes in policies.<sup>97</sup> Yet, the party has changed, gradually, the normative framework within which it articulates policy objectives and values that inform its propaganda. Xi Jinping’s articulations of the grand narrative of “China Dream” reflect similarities with the type of leadership the party had under Mao. Mao’s use of

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Chia-Yu Tsai, “Protest and Power Structure in China,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 130 (2021): 558-561, 10.1080/10670564.2020.1852742; Christian Gobel and Lynette H Ong, “Social Unrest in China,” Europe China Research Network and Advice, 2012, [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Asia/1012ecran\\_gobelong.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Asia/1012ecran_gobelong.pdf).

<sup>93</sup> Beetham, “Legitimation of Power,” 31.

<sup>94</sup> S. L Shirk, “China in Xi’s “New Era”: The Return to Personalistic Rule,” *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 29, no. 2, (2018): 22-36.

<sup>95</sup> Meng Na, “Mass Line Campaign Key to Consolidate CPC’s Ruling Status,” *People’s Daily*, 19 June, 2013, [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2013-06/19/content\\_29160503.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2013-06/19/content_29160503.htm); Javier C. Hernández, “The Propaganda I See on My Morning Commute,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/28/world/asia/beijing-propaganda-xi-jinping.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Jude Blanchette, *Chinas New Red Guards: The Return of Radicalism and the Rebirth of Mao Zedong*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>97</sup> Heilmann and Perry, eds. “Invisible Hand,” 5.

catchy phrases and slogans to articulate grand objectives find place in Xi Jinping's style of functioning. The narrative of 'China Dream' (*zhongguo meng*) is grounded in the idea of reviving and rejuvenating Chinese traditional culture and its glory specifically.<sup>98</sup> It is aimed at building Chinese society in the image of traditional society.

Xi Jinping at his address at the 80th anniversary celebration of the founding of the Central Party School and the opening ceremony of the 2013 said, "Chinese traditional culture is extensive and profound, and learning and mastering the essence of various ideas is very beneficial to establishing a correct world outlook, outlook on life, and values."<sup>99</sup> The efforts are aimed at changing the normative and ideological outlook of the people in the long-run to normatively justify its right to rule and construct political legitimacy in a discursive space.<sup>100</sup>

A normative, rather than just emotional and nationalist shift in outlook is the key goal. The literature has well documented the propaganda efforts since 1980s to bring in changes with nationalist and patriotic campaigns drawing on resources from both pre-revolutionary and revolutionary traditions.<sup>101</sup> The main objective is to build a moral and normative space that provide a compass to judge policy outcomes and the political legitimacy of the party itself in the absence of any overarching normative framework unlike other political systems wherein either religion or the constitution provides a normative framework and discursive space within which political legitimacy is constructed. As some commentators have argued, the party strives to build such a normative framework and social capital grounded in traditional Chinese culture.<sup>102</sup>

On one hand, the language, conceptual and ideological vocabulary is infused with Marxist-Maoist symbols along with new concepts from traditional culture. On the other, the party has attempted to not just use these new ideas to remould normative-ideological basis for its policies and legitimacy, but these are also intended to change people's moral thinking into a traditional moral framework. While socialist legacies do not provide any substantial resources for moral legitimacy, it is still necessary to identify with the party's original mission. As Heike Holbig states, "the widespread use of "socialist/socialism" as an empty

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<sup>98</sup> Philosopher Chen Ming has been one of the many Chinese scholars who have attempted to make case for Confucian reading of China Dream, Chen Ming and David Ownby trans., "Transcend Left and Right, Unite the Three Traditions, Renew the Party-State: A Confucian Interpretation of the China Dream," *Reading China Dream*, accessed on July 03, 2020, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/chen-ming-transcend-left-and-right.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Global Times, "Xi advocates study, practice among CPC members," *The Global Times*, March 1, 2013.

<sup>100</sup> On this point also see, Perry, "Cultural Governance," 29-55

<sup>101</sup> Brady, "Party Propaganda," Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 1-10.

<sup>102</sup> Kerry Brown, "China's New Moral Education Campaign," *The Diplomat*, September, 21, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/09/chinas-new-moral-education-campaign/>.

signifier guarantees not only the rhetorical coherence of official language, but also the CCP's monopoly over the reproduction of ideology.”<sup>103</sup>

Yet the emphasis on traditional ideas and philosophies are not just linguistic and empty normative concepts. During Xi Jinping's period it is intended that traditional cultural ideas and norms would help the party to remould the moral worldview of people. The moral emptiness of 'socialism with Chinese Characteristics' and a constant "threat" cited by the party against western ideas have become two important factors that lead the party to emphasise a moral worldview of the people embedded in traditional culture. The "threat of western ideas" did not start with Xi Jinping. Hu Jintao had constantly cited the threat that western ideas posed to China and its political system that almost amounted to saying that it is an issue of national security.<sup>104</sup> The party equates itself with Chinese people/nation and hence, any threat to its legitimacy is cited as national threat or a threat to China itself.

The efforts to inject traditional cultural resources into party structures, leadership styles and normative thinking about authority among the people through education, moral campaigns and propaganda are targeted at the autonomy of normative social capital sourced from traditional cultural resources that helps CCP to stave off ideas of democracy.<sup>105</sup> Thus, it has two consequences: one, it allows CCP to have control over society in a way that makes it relatively stronger in state-society dynamics; secondly, it helps the party to stave off ideological criticism from the west. As a result, it equips the party with the moral authority to rule.

### **Appropriation of Traditional Culture within the fold of Leninist Party Organization and Official Ideology of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics"**

The party's efforts to reorient its political legitimacy through traditional culture resources and narratives of civilizational history aim at appropriation of tradition. Apart from changing moral worldview of people as discussed in the previous section, the party also attempts to control people's beliefs and cultural practices by appropriating traditional culture within the fold of official ideology and organizational politics. The need to control people's beliefs emerges from the tensions between an increasingly open society as China opened up

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<sup>103</sup> Holbig, "Ideology," 71.

<sup>104</sup> For example, "Chinese President Hu Jintao warns of cultural warfare from West," *The Telegraph*, January 2, 2012, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8988195/Chinese-President-Hu-Jintao-warns-of-cultural-warfare-from-West.html>.

<sup>105</sup> For moral education campaigns, and propaganda emphasizing on traditional Chinese culture during Xi Jinping's period see, Kubat, "Morality as Legitimacy," 47–86; Zi Yang, "Xi Jinping and China's Traditionalist Restoration," *China Brief: Jamestown Foundation* 17, no. 9 (2018), <https://jamestown.org/program/xi-jinping-chinas-traditionalist-restoration/>.

and the top-down Leninist style party organization.<sup>106</sup> Hence, as traditional culture began to flourish, the party began to promote traditional culture and control to define what tradition means. This section highlights these efforts for the appropriation of people's beliefs aimed at controlling the meaning and significance of traditional culture and history.

The disastrous impact of the Cultural Revolution on traditional cultural resources has been attempted to be undone. Xi Jinping is credited with renovating traditional temples destroyed during cultural revolutions in Zhengding County in Hebei province during the early 1980s.<sup>107</sup> Since 1980s, the party has promoted traditional culture and a revised view of history through educational curriculum, history writings, party discourses, vast propaganda network, city-planning and preservation of heritage and leadership styles.

Recent studies have shown that the local level party-state has promoted traditional social organizations namely temple organizations, clan, and other cultural organizations. The number of such organizations with vertical bonds of fellowship has increased in thousands. On the other hand, the state has tightened control over right-based organizations namely Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). These efforts are part of making up the legitimacy crisis at the local level by utilizing the social capital of local elites through these organizations.<sup>108</sup>

The party has also promoted traditional culture, values and attitudes towards civilizational and continuous history through education. In 1992, a revised view about history was introduced, especially focusing on the period after Opium War in 1840 as a “century of humiliation.” It was the first time the party introduced a revised view of history emphasising continuity from pre-1911 history and de-emphasizing Maoist-era Marxist history that denounced pre-1911 as feudal. Since then, traditional culture, worldviews about society, politics and history have been introduced in school curriculum.<sup>109</sup> In addition, the party also promoted traditional cultural values through “Reading Classics Movement among children” since the early 1990s.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Fewsmith, “Rethinking Chinese Politics,” 15.

<sup>107</sup> For a detailed analysis of his work as a party official in the county especially the renovation of traditional temples and its context of the changing ideological contours of the party ideology at grassroots see, Ian Johnson, *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion after Mao* (London: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2017), 276-281.

<sup>108</sup> Daniel C Mattingly, *The Art of Political Control in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 120-138.

<sup>109</sup> Apart from changing narratives of Chinese history, school education curriculum has introduced traditional cultural elements about morality, family, and other social norms especially in the elementary school textbooks. The researcher has examined primary school textbooks for the purpose.

<sup>110</sup> Janette Ai, *Politics and Traditional Culture: The Political Use of Traditions in Contemporary China* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2015), 46-59.

Besides, the appropriation of traditions and people's beliefs about the same involve more mundane activities and techniques. In this context, architecture, city planning and preservation of heritage and traditional culture, and museums have become channels through which the party has promoted and appropriated traditional cultural resources. In this context, two projects are worth mentioning. Confucius city in his birthplace, Qufu, in Shandong<sup>111</sup> and rebuilding of Xian in the image of its ancient cultural significance highlight the extent to which the party appropriates and promotes tradition through various means. Collectively, it helps the party to dictate what traditional culture and history means to people by making them part of ideological and organizational politics.

The leadership style reflects a mix of traditional symbols, paternalistic policies, and populism.<sup>112</sup> Populism is not new to Chinese politics. But the renewed vigour with which leadership uses the traditional resources along with a populist, coercive, and economic-growth centric policies is a new dimension of leadership style emerging in contemporary times.<sup>113</sup> Anti-corruption campaigns and tours in poverty-stricken areas in the country-side and urban localities by top leadership are two examples in the recent decade. A critical analysis of official narratives, in this regard, indicates that the normative foundations of authority are being redefined through traditional ideas, values and norms. Xi Jinping has frequently visited poverty-stricken areas with carefully choreographed tours that are targeted at the larger audience, especially the poorer sections to show that the party cares for them to tame the problems that four decades of economic reforms have resulted in, like rising economic inequality and environmental degradation.<sup>114</sup>

In this context, the traditional ideas namely, *limin* (Caring for poor people) and *minben* (people as root or people first) reflect in the widely-used terms such as “people-centred governance” and moral character of party cadres and leadership in Xi Jinping's speeches and party propaganda. These ideas and rhetoric of people at the centre of governance is a symbol of traditional authority and role of the state in people's lives.<sup>115</sup> The same rhetoric is used in the party discourses to criticize western style democracy as messy

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<sup>111</sup> Ai, “Politics and Traditional Culture,”

<sup>112</sup> Bin Xu, “Moral Performance and Cultural Governance in China: The Compassionate Politics of Disasters,” *The China Quarterly* 226, (2016): 407-430, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741016000370>.

<sup>113</sup> Joseph Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 129.

<sup>114</sup> The analysis of the tours of Xi Jinping is based on the data maintained at China Vitae: Travel and Appearances for Xi Jinping <http://www.chinavitae.com/vip/index.php?mode=events&type=cv&id=303>. The speeches given at different such tours are largely taken from media reports where speeches are quoted extensively to allow for thematic content and discourse analysis.

<sup>115</sup> For the use of traditional ideas and symbols to articulate narratives and policy objectives see, Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014).

and elitist. The authority of traditional cultural resources comes from their reference to Classics in Xi Jinping's speeches.<sup>116</sup> For Xi Jinping, traditional culture is the "soul" and "foundation" of Chinese society.<sup>117</sup> The fact that the use of traditional culture to bring in ideological and normative changes was introduced in party schools and other agencies speaks to the scope of the efforts.<sup>118</sup> It thus became the linchpin of moral and ideological campaigns in anti-corruption drive under Xi Jinping and school education and curricula reforms since 2013.

There is a pattern in Xi Jinping's speeches as well as the party's use of traditional symbols, ideas, and practices that points towards the possibility of traditional culture being selectively used to reorganize moral power in the society. This trend is of making no reference to ideas, symbols, or practices from Christianity or Islam. It implies that the party is relying on a certain type of moral framework that is conducive to a certain type of social organization. Christianity represents a different set of moral values like individualism, human rights, and social organization than Confucianism. This is not to say that the party is adopting these traditional thoughts in their totality. These trends of thought contain complex and sometimes contradictory ideas. Rather the party chooses certain ideas and values that suit its own political and mobilizational agenda.

## V

### **Defining Tradition and Political Legitimacy in Minority Regions**

This section briefly discusses why the use of traditional culture resources is not without problems for the party. It is particularly relevant with regard to China's policies in the minority regions of Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang wherein communities not only have long and distinctive traditions and histories that conflicted with the Chinese one but also that these cultural traditions and a sense of distinctive identity based on alternative history challenge China's state legitimacy or territorial sovereignty. As it has been discussed above the definition of tradition in the party discourses and intellectual debates is problematic from the point of view of cultural diversity, minority rights, and the usefulness of Chinese ideas for rethinking International Relations Theories. Tradition, culture and history are what the party wants traditions and culture to be with some exceptions for example scholarly critiques.

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<sup>116</sup> The People's Daily Review Department, xi jinning yongdian (Xi Jinping Quotes), *The People's Daily*, September 30, 2015.

<sup>117</sup> Zhao Yinping, "wenhua zixin: xi jinning tichu de shidai keti" (Cultural Self-Confidence: Xi Jinping Raises Present Era Topic), *Xinhua News*, August 05, 2016.

<sup>118</sup> For detailed discussion on the idea of traditional culture and its use in different agencies and party schools, see, Kubat, "Morality as Legitimacy," 47–86.

To understand the role of TCR in political legitimacy and how it impacts its foreign policy, this chapter makes an important distinction between “regime legitimacy” and “state legitimacy.” The questions of regime legitimacy involve questions about the type of political system, rather than the lack of faith in the idea of China itself. On the other hand, state legitimacy involves the lack of faith in the identity of the political community itself. In China’s case, the question of legitimacy of regime rather than state legitimacy is the main problem in China, including Hong Kong except minority regions namely, Tibet, Inner-Mongolia and Xinjiang. On the other, there is a lack of both regime and state legitimacy in these regions. While the return to tradition, history and culture is an important dimension of Chinese politics, it also impinges on its articulations of ideas and visions of international order through its foreign policy.

The Mao-era narratives of ethnic unity (*minzu tuanjie*) among 56 ethnic communities, and hence China’s sovereignty over these regions after the fall of the Qing Dynasty was ideologically articulated through the idea of class struggle and the party’s mission against imperialism. The idea was that the poor masses in these regions were required to be liberated by the party under Mao to get rid of class exploitation and oust imperialist forces.<sup>119</sup> This ideological framework could also be used to justify autonomous regions established on the lines of the Soviet Model. At the same time, it was also used to justify its political legitimacy and territorial sovereignty in these regions. But the decline of communism as the ruling ideology and shift towards traditional cultural resources as a normative-ideological framework to reconstruct political order poses a serious problem. The problem mainly arises from the Han-centric definition of cultural traditions that cannot be reconciled with existence of long and distinct cultural traditions and histories in minority regions.

This chapter has outlined the reasons why the shift towards tradition is consequential to understand China’s domestic and foreign policies. The use of traditional cultural resources is aimed at developing a distinctive ‘national culture’ and genealogy that is being used to put forward narratives of a China-centric (Han-centric) political order to delegitimize alternative articulations of political order, history and tradition.

## VI

### Conclusion

The usefulness of traditional cultural resources is still hotly debated within China yet

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<sup>119</sup> On class struggle and territorial integration of minority regions during Mao period, see Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1-23.

less so recognized outside China especially with regard to thinking about political legitimacy. In assessing political logic of bringing tradition by the party and political debates within China, this chapter has located the revival of traditional ideas within the context of need for reorienting political legitimacy. However, it does not pronounce any definitive role played by these cultural resources; it does emphasise however, on the direction of where the party wants to go from an ideological confusion manifested in the party discourses in the 1980s and 1990s.

This chapter has outlined the major aspects, areas and purposes of using traditional cultural resources within the context of socio-economic changes since 1978. While the mobilization of traditional culture for the purpose of nationalist and identity construction, and the coercive nature of the party rule are characteristics that define the Maoist-Leninist party state, the traditional cultural resources are used to reorganize moral and normative foundations of authority and social-political order. The increasing use of traditional norms, symbols and ideas to articulate policy objectives namely moderately prosperous society (*xiaokang shehui*), rejuvenation of nation (*guojia fuxing*), great harmony (*datong*) and China Dream (*zhongguo meng*), etc. help reshape normative foundations of social and political order along these lines and away from revolutionary period ideas of equality, classless and egalitarian society. As discussed above, the party has made ideological adjustments, most notably in the form of the Theory of Three Represents (*sange daibiao*) that signalled its embrace of new ideas and practices. It is argued here that the reshaping of normative foundations of social order does provide a possibility that political legitimacy constructed via traditional resources might be stickier than Weberian approaches suggest.

The party's embrace of traditions has led to the flourishing of traditional culture. The number of traditional organizations, institutions namely temples and pilgrim destinations have flourished. Besides, the study of traditional culture in universities, research institutes, and party schools have become the core of moral and ideological discourse. These trends also indicate that people's beliefs are embedded in traditional ideas that the party is trying to tap into. Therefore, the efficacy of the efforts to reorganize moral and normative foundations of social and political order depends on the discursive interaction with people. While the party sits at an advantageous position vis a vis people in defining traditional culture, people's role in legitimizing it is crucial. Therefore, if the party can overcome challenges namely income inequality and other governance issues relatively well, the traditional cultural resources can provide a stable normative social-political order.

Certainly, there are various intellectual positions in China in comparison to the

previous period when Maoist-Socialism was the sole ideology. Yet different positions namely new left, liberal (Chinese liberals), and Neo-Confucianism place central role of tradition or some form of it in defining Chinese identity and organizing politics. The strict political control over intellectual and political environment certainly functions as a check on any digression from officially accepted terms of discourse.

## Chapter 4

### Chinese Ideas and International Relations Theories

“What is going to end is the modern era, not history”– Zhao Tingyang<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

In recent decades, Chinese scholars have come to contest the existing theories of International Relations – particularly, Realist theories. The contestations of existing theories are based on two claims. Ontologically, the cultural and philosophical assumptions underlying International Relations Theories (IRTs) are particular to the Euro-American world and hence, their universal application is questioned. In this respect, Chinese ideas and historical practices provide, as claims go, a better understanding of international relations. These ideas include harmony, co-existence, morality, relationship, relationality, li (ritual, etiquettes or manners), yin-yang and dao (non-binary thinking about self-other, and world as a family).

Besides, it is claimed that Chinese ideas are better poised to restructure the existing international order. Most Chinese scholars who subscribe to the idea that Chinese ideas, history, practices and experiences provide better understanding tend to underline the hegemonic aspects of western ideas and power in recent centuries in IRTs and international order. At the practical level, Chinese ideas and practices are supposed to provide alternative practices of inter-state relations to solve global problems.

There are varieties of theoretical approaches that Chinese scholars subscribe to from scholars who work with existing theories of IR namely, Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism among others to those who work with traditional Chinese concepts of politics and inter-state relations.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have engaged with Chinese tradition and history as a source of thinking about international relations and produced a number of influential publications and have brought Chinese ideas, history and

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<sup>1</sup> Zhao Tingyang, *Redefining Philosophy for World Governance*, trans. Liqing Tao (London: Springer, 2019), 54.

<sup>2</sup> There exist multiple surveys of theoretical approaches Chinese IR scholars adopt. See, Qin Yaqing, “Development of International Relations Theory in China,” *International Studies* 46, 1&2 (2009): 185–201, Doi: 10.1177/002088171004600212; Qin Yaqing, “Why Is There No Chinese International Relations Theory?” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7, no. 3 (2007): 313–40, Doi: [10.1093/irap/lcm013](https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcm013); Gerald Chan, “International Studies in China: Origins and Development,” *Issues & Studies* 33, no. 2 (1997): 40–64; David Shambaugh and Jisi Wang, “Research and Training in International Studies in the People’s Republic of China,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 17, no. 4 (1984): 6–14, Doi: 10.1017/S1049096500025002; Huiyun Feng, Kai He and Yan Xuetong, *Chinese Scholars and Foreign Policy: Debating International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2019); David Shambaugh, “International relations studies in China: history, trends, and prospects,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11, no. 3, (2011): 339–372, Doi: [10.1093/irap/lcr013](https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcr013).

experiences at the core of international relations theory debates.<sup>3</sup> This chapter critically evaluates writings of key Chinese IR scholars with respect to how they approach the fundamental principles of international order namely order, territorial sovereignty, equality and power.

The chapter is particularly interested in discussing the contestations at the intersection between norms and power in international relations and what this means for a rising China and whether they legitimize, intentionally or unintentionally, China's material interests and provide normative legitimation to new power relations with China as an emerging power centre. In this respect, norms and power are mutually constitutive and hence, one supplements the other. It provides a better vantage point from which we can approach the dynamics of Chinese IR theories in the way they question power relations in the normative foundations of international order.

Theory building or knowledge production in general, cannot be disentangled from political practice and the dynamics of power. As Robert Cox famously summed up that “theory is always for someone and something”, the exercise of theory building is deeply entrenched within the contestation and legitimation of power structures in domestic and international politics.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, key writings of scholars are conceptualized as an attempt to restructure normative foundations of international order and establish new hegemony that rests upon China-centric normative and material aspects of power in international order.

Chinese claims to an alternative world view represent an ontological argument. Despite material power and the importance of institutions being emphasized, it is essentially based on the claim that the Chinese world view provides a different understanding of politics, power, and norms governing inter-state relations. For instance, self-other and inside-outside binaries that define the western understanding of international relations and fundamental concepts like territoriality, sovereignty, international and domestic order are supposedly opposite to Chinese understanding of such binaries based on Confucian principles. At the same time, it is also a normative argument because Chinese worldview and ideas are supposedly better equipped to structure domestic and international order.

Chinese scholars and politicians fall back upon a complex and long history to tease

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<sup>3</sup> Hun Joon Kim, “Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics be a Powerful Alternative?” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 9, no. 1, (2016): 59–79, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pov014>.

<sup>4</sup> Robert W. Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” *Millennium* 10, no. 2 (1981): 126–55, Doi: 10.1177/03058298810100020501.

out certain ideas to put forward an alternative set of ideas. History is a difficult and complex terrain and hence, domestic power dynamics become an important site to investigate why some ideas and a certain type of interpretation become dominant within Chinese debates. Besides, whether and how Chinese geopolitical interests can be disentangled from IR scholarship are important dimensions. Nevertheless, the utility of Chinese ideas should not be underestimated just because they emerge from China. Rather they should be evaluated for their arguments and applicability.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section evaluates the ideas, problems, and concepts that Chinese IR theorists as well as non-IR scholars have brought up in the debates of IRTs. The suffix ‘Chinese’ here means that they emerge from China and are informed by Chinese ideas and historical practices. The second section critically analyses the dynamics of power and norms in Chinese scholarly attempts to advance new theories or modify existing theories to understand international relations from a Chinese point of view. In this section, I frame the question of Chinese ideas and historical practices as a push to contest the norms as a larger attempt to contest western dominance in normative and material aspects of international order. In this respect, the domestic politics of norms and power is as important as international dimensions of contesting Western norms. The third section briefly raises some questions about the implications of these ideas and debates for domestic politics. The final section summarises the main arguments and highlights the main points dealt with in the subsequent following two chapters.

## I

### **Traditional Ideas, Historical Experiences, and International Theories**

Chinese visions of world order emerge from a vision of domestic social and political order. This is also true of western thinking because all ideas emerge from a certain context in domestic politics. One particular difficulty in studying traditional Chinese ideas and their implications for IR theories is that the Chinese perception of world order in history was confined to geographical boundaries of Chinese empire. Although inter-state relations during the Warring States’ period are usually taken as an example of Chinese world order, these states of the period shared a common cultural worldview.<sup>6</sup> Existing writings on Chinese

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<sup>5</sup> The question of whether Chinese ideas are an alternative is important but complex one to answer. This thesis investigates Chinese tradition as one possible source of thinking about IRT. For similar approach to how Chinese ideas and history are useful for IRT, see Amitav Acharya, “From Heaven to Earth: ‘Cultural Idealism’ and ‘Moral Realism’ as Chinese Contributions to Global International Relations,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 12, no. 4 (2019): 467–494, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poz014>; Kim, “IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics,” 59–79.

<sup>6</sup> Yongjin Zhang, “System, Empire and State in Chinese International Relations,” *Review of International*

world order have rarely dealt with the questions of how states in the Chinese world order dealt with questions of cultural diversity between states. Throughout history, Chinese world order included countries namely, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, etc. that shared cultural a worldview rooted in Confucianism and other philosophies.<sup>7</sup> However, at least at the perception and philosophical levels, the idea of universal kingship and *tianxia* was real for the Chinese.<sup>8</sup>

Another dimension of traditional Chinese ideas of world order and politics is that of reconciling the essentially hierarchical nature of world order with a world order based on equality of states and societies. This chapter problematizes Chinese scholars' attempts to build international relations theories based on such a hierarchical vision of political order and situates these attempts within the dynamics of norms, power, and knowledge production in international relations. At the political and diplomatic practice levels, the traditional ideas of a harmonious world and the community of shared interests have been articulated by using the language of western IR. But to build a theory is to take into account the fact that contemporary international politics does not accept hierarchical assumptions of world order at least at the theoretical and discursive levels. The majority of outside scholarship has highlighted the problem, and it has made any attempt to build theories based on Chinese ideas an overtly political attempt.

China's domestic power dynamics is a major 'ecological factor' within which efforts to theorize IR take place. This is true of certain readings of traditional ideas intentionally or unintentionally in most of the writings by Chinese scholars. This makes it possible for them to select certain writings and readings of them to make theoretical claims. One way to understand this dynamic is to assess Chinese foreign policy and domestic legitimacy issues and IR theorization. For example, by making claims of a domestic political order with a true sage king as the ruler to provide moral leadership, Yan Xuetong's theory of moral leadership inadvertently helps refute the claims of the end of history discourse and seems to legitimize one-party rule of the Communist Party of China (CCP).

Besides, making claims of cultural identity in other writings, such claims oppose unintentionally the view that China should democratize thereby linking these theories to domestic political legitimacy. In other words, constructing a different domestic political order

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*Studies* 27, no. 5 (2001): 43–63, Doi: 10.1017/S0260210501008026.

<sup>7</sup> John King Fairbank and Ta-tuan Ch'en (eds), *The Chinese world order; traditional China's foreign relations* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968).

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin I. Schwartz, "Chinese Perception of World Order, Past and Present," in John King Fairbank and Ta-tuan Ch'en (eds), *The Chinese world order; traditional China's foreign relations* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968), 276-277.

refutes claims of liberal universalism found in much of IR theorizing. Therefore, I highlight the counter-hegemonic aspects of IR theorizing intentionally or unintentionally that help the CCP while a new hegemonic regime of norms and rules are sought to be constructed. Besides, the selection of Han Chinese text as “Chinese”, Chinese IR theorists, and scholars in other fields obliterate and neglect the existence of other traditions that are not so ‘Chinese’ namely Uighur, Mongol and Tibetan. Whether and how tradition and history is defined is consequential in ignoring questions of territorial sovereignty and cultural diversity within domestic politics.

Apart from mainstream IR scholars in China, scholars from other disciplines like history and philosophy, and political leaders create ideas that impinge upon Chinese perception of the world as well as IR theorizing in a general sense. In this section, I briefly discuss a trend of thought that approach the questions of the relevance of tradition and history for modern politics in a different way than key scholars discussed in this chapter. These scholars have attempted to ‘reconcile’ hierarchical moral and political order in traditional Chinese visions with territorial nation-state based international order. Besides, their reading of tradition and history is not confrontational and oppositional to western ideas. This would also help us understand the political logic behind using traditional ideas at the domestic level in mainland China in the reform period. These Chinese thinkers and politicians have generally accepted equally based nation-state order but they still emphasize the utility of traditional ideas in shaping the moral foundations of world order. Such an outlook points towards a hybrid nature of world order vision based on territorial international order and Chinese ideas.

Such a hybridity can be seen in Chinese IR theorists who argue for the relevance of Chinese traditional ideas for contemporary international order not as a replacement or alternative but as a supplement to augment the problems.<sup>9</sup> In this reading, Chinese ideas support the institutional architecture of the current world order, and basic norms like sovereignty, equality among nations, and independence - along with a different moral and normative interpretation of international order. The existing literature on Chinese IR has generally neglected the usefulness of non-IR scholars in understanding the discourses of traditional ideas. Only a few scholars like Zhao Tingyang are being discussed. Here I go

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<sup>9</sup>A somewhat similar approach to traditional ideas can be seen in the works of “*gongsheng* school”, a group of scholars from Taiwan and Shanghai. These scholars seek plurality, hybridities and dialogue between different traditions including western traditions to rethink international relations. See, Xiao Ren, “Grown from within: Building a Chinese School of International Relations,” *The Pacific Review* 33, no. 3-4 (2020): 405-407, Doi: 10.1080/09512748.2020.1728573; L H M Ling, *The Dao of world politics: Towards a post-Westphalian, worldlist international relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

beyond Chinese IR discipline and discuss scholars who have systematically explored the questions of traditional ideas and their significance in thinking about international order. One must note that much before Chinese IR scholars, it was the scholars in other disciplines namely, philosophy and history who began to discuss traditional ideas and their relevance in society and politics in contemporary times.

Before I go into a detailed discussion, it is useful to note that I frame the discussion on Chinese ideas and writings, and IRT by focusing on the concept of territorial sovereignty. There are two specific reasons for this. One, it is the foundational principle that defines the western conception of international order and associated ideas like order, politics, the legitimate use of violence and identity. Two, the main objective of the thesis is to examine the role of traditional ideas and their implications for China's practice of territorial sovereignty, because claims of scholars discussed in this chapter question the cultural and philosophical assumptions underlying territorial sovereign international order. Besides, a specific focus on a single idea allows us to meaningfully incorporate main ideas and concepts in debates on Chinese traditional ideas within Chinese IR discourses.

The traditional Chinese perception of political order has been characterized as a form of culturalism that differentiated boundaries of inside and outside based on cultural and moral differences rather than based on territorial boundaries. Ban Wang states that “sustained by affective ties rather than coercion, *tianxia* distinguishes the inside from the outside less by geography and ethnicity than by cultural competence.”<sup>10</sup> The territory had been an important element but it had different political and social functions in the imagination of political order. Wang further states that “as a universal mandate, *tianxia* aspires for normative principles, and its validity rests not on the power to impose on others but its potential as a critique of parochial interests and structures of domination.”<sup>11</sup>

Joseph Chan has convincingly explored the non-territorial nature of traditional Chinese ideas of political order. As he states that:

“Confucian conception of the elastic and potentially unbounded nature of human relationships and moral order fits naturally with the traditional Chinese conception of the ideal political order. The highest political order for the Chinese is the order of *tianxia* (the world under

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<sup>10</sup> Ban Wang, *Chinese Visions of World Order: Tianxia, Culture and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ban Wang, “Chinese Visions,” 2.

Heaven), which has no territorial limit; and it provides the broadest site one could imagine for the practice of ren and the actualization of one's self."<sup>12</sup>

The idea of world order was territorially unbounded and included the whole world, at least normatively, and Confucian morality and Chinese cultural values were markers of inside-outside boundaries. In such discourses that provided self-identity to Chinese emperors as well as political legitimacy, *tianxia* represented “a concept referring to a universal political order over and above the order of individual “states” (*guo*)” and was backed by “the dominant political ideology of Unificationism—the hope of merging all states into one giant empire with unlimited territorial boundary.”<sup>13</sup> But in this respect, two questions should be kept in mind while examining the debates on *tianxia*. Firstly, that the traditional Chinese conception of world order never considered different cultures as equal.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, that such a universal empire was never actualized beyond Chinese lands but was used in philosophical and state discourses.<sup>15</sup>

But the traditional perception of world order could not sustain and Chinese intellectuals and politicians had to rethink it against the universalizing territorial international order based on nation-states. The studies on nationalism mapped out how the idea of territorial nation-state and international order became the dominant worldview during the course of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup>

The idea of territoriality of the political identity of China became a necessity emerging out of its need for defending the Qing Empire territories beyond China proper in its peripheries as well as due to its compulsion to reorganize political order against the universalizing European territorial nation-state-based order.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, many Chinese scholars, activists, and politicians thought it was necessary to remould China into a

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Chan, “Territorial Boundaries and Confucianism,” in *Confucian Political Ethics*, ed. Daniel Bell (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 66.

<sup>13</sup> Chan, “Territorial Boundaries,” 68.

<sup>14</sup> Many Chinese scholars point out that although Confucianism advocated the idea that “king does not rule over barbarians”, this did not include racial binaries. See, Xu Jilin, “The New Tianxia: Rebuilding China’s Internal and External Order,” translated by Mark McConaghy, Tang Xiaobing, and David Ownby. <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/xu-jilin-the-new-tianxia.html>; Jiang Shigong, *China’s Hong Kong: A Political and Cultural Perspective* (Hong Kong: Springer, 2017), 127-128. However, any binary has ethical dimensions that lead to superiority-inferiority in the way powerful states treat others. Therefore, the binaries of civilized vs. barbarian (*hua-yi*) were different from racial binaries, their ethical implications remained more or less same in terms of hierarchical thinking.

<sup>15</sup> Hu Jian, “Tianxia zhixu: yizhong wenhua yixiang (The Tianxia Order: A Cultural Image) *Xue Hai*, 4, (2017): 195–203.

<sup>16</sup> Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1-54.

nation-state for progress.<sup>18</sup> Yet, there have been several scholars and politicians who attempted to recast the traditional vision of world order and reinterpreted it as being compatible with the territorial nation-state. For example, Liang Qichao accepted the Western multi-state system and came to the judgment that traditional Chinese “cosmopolitanism” led to the failure to develop a strong nation-state. At the same time, he also reinterpreted the *tianxia* world order vision in terms of a type of cosmopolitanism. He stated that:

“Since civilization began, the Chinese people have never considered the national government as the highest form of social organization. Their political thinking has always been in terms of all mankind, with world peace as the final goal, and family and nation as transitional stages in the perfecting of the World Order (Tianxia). China has contended, moreover, that government authority should never be the prerogative of any one group or section of mankind.”<sup>19</sup>

In his thinking, it was possible to attain the objectives of universal ideals that underlie traditional concepts within the territorial nation-state order too. In other words, it could be reinterpreted in modern terms.

From the late 19th century onwards, while the traditional world order with unbounded territoriality collapsed, there have been two trends with regard to the intersections of the traditional vision of political order and the territorial nation-state. On the one hand, there is clear thinking emerging from Liang Qichao, Sun-Yat Sen, and others during the early twentieth century onwards to create a homogeneous and territorially bounded ‘geo-body’ of China with an objective premised on the assumption of security and geopolitical imperatives of a strong state.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, scholars who think of the traditional world order and its vision, and relevance within the territorially bounded nation-state framework attempt to rework the traditional ideas to fit into the latter.

For us in this chapter, the objective is to analyse how traditional world order vision or any fragment of it impinges upon Chinese political leadership’s thinking and IR theorizing efforts of Chinese scholars in the reform period since 1978. In the following paragraphs, I tease out the arguments in scholarly writings about how the traditional idea of the world order based on the unequal relationship between Chinese and other cultural and moral order has been attempted to fit into the territorial international order. This would provide a background to the debates on traditional ideas and practices being discussed in contemporary IR theories in mainland China.

The process of rethinking traditional world order based on culturalism as a marker of

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<sup>18</sup>Duara, “Rescuing History,” 33-35.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Joseph Chan, “Territorial Boundaries,” 67.

<sup>20</sup>Duara, “Rescuing History,” 33-35.

distinction between Chinese culture and ‘barbarian’ cultures started with creating and legitimizing the territorial empire inherited from the Qing dynasty. Liang Qichao, Sun-Yan Sen, and later the communists under Mao redefined the territorial identity of China by redefining the fundamental ideas of the traditional order, that is, culturalism, by drawing on ideas from Europe. In a way, the sheer necessity of legitimizing the territorial boundaries of China led Chinese leaders and scholars to redefine boundaries between different ethnicities and geopolitical boundaries of China. This led to the collapse of a traditional world order based on the superiority of Chinese culture and territorial unbounded cultural and moral foundations of world order.

However, the Han superiority remained in the new conception of political order; instead of, it took a shift towards defining Chinese geopolitical identity based on territorial international order and its associated concepts like equality, sovereignty, and independence. But the tensions between Han superiority/centrality have resurfaced in the Post-Mao period discourses on Chinese identity and emphasis on traditional ideas. As James Leibold argues, that early-twentieth-century discourses in Liang Qichao and Sun-Yan Sen’s reformulation of Chinese identity by drawing on spatial discourses from Europe and redefining traditional distinctions of cultural boundaries led to a new spatial imagination of China’s geopolitical identity as a nation-state but old distinctions remained. He states that:

“The formulation’s unique authority lies in its apparent scientific empiricism and its ability to, first, reinforce and authenticate the old ethnocentric distinction between a civilized Sinic Self and a barbarian Other to, second, reimagine the Chinese world order as a natural and evolutionary process whereby the Self and the Other are organically fused into a new spatially delineated form of Chinese universalism.”<sup>21</sup>

China’s new geopolitical identity and consequent spatial imagination of political and world order while accepting the principles of sovereign equality between states, still left out the old tensions between the Han majority conception of the cultural and geopolitical identity of China, and minority regions with different cultures and histories. Leibold further argues that “for Chinese nationalists, geographical boundaries rather than cultural or racial traits became the defining marker of their imagined community.”<sup>22</sup> Without going into the details of the history of the collapse of the traditional Chinese vision of world order and the consequent acceptance of the nation-state as a form of political community, it suffices to say that modern western understanding of territorial nation-state and international order is deeper

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<sup>21</sup> Leibold, “Reconfiguring,” 36.

<sup>22</sup> Leibold, “Reconfiguring,” 42.

in Chinese thinking today.

The question is what traditional Chinese ideas can offer in terms of theorizing China's contemporary International relations as claimed by Chinese scholars. Almost all scholars recognize the necessity of territorial sovereign nation-state as the foundation of international order although nation-state, for some, is not the main axis of international political order. Nevertheless, China's position within a territorial international order dominated by western ideas and practices of political order makes it difficult for Chinese scholars to think in a radically different way ignoring nation-state as the fundamental unit of international relations.

The international dynamics of power relations and conceptual and institutional hegemony of western ideas make Chinese scholars and China negotiate with the existing system while putting forward their own visions of international order. Therefore, one must be careful to analyse the policy impact of these debates and ideas in IR scholarship for their implications for China's foreign policy. In a way, it is better to look for a hybrid nature of conceptual and institutional innovation at the practice level in Chinese foreign policy rather than taking these ideas as a destabilizing force or ideal types that influence policy directly.<sup>23</sup> China's acceptance of territorial sovereign nation-state as a site of politics and foundation for international order, although with moral and normative ideas and concepts as different from western ideas is an example.

Before the Post-Mao revival of traditional culture in mainland China, several notable Confucian scholars had debated and written on the relevance of traditional ideas and philosophy for the contemporary period. In this regard, a particular trend of thought has debated why and how traditional ideas like those of Confucianism are not oppositional to western ideas of democracy; rather they are compatible with them. I here briefly discuss the main arguments in the debates which are still popular outside mainland China and form one of the alternative readings of Chinese tradition and history.

There are two objectives to discuss these ideas and scholars. Firstly, it is to highlight that before Chinese IR scholars debated the relevance of traditional ideas, there have been discussions on these questions. But these scholars thought and wrote in a different period and from a different vantage point because most of them were either located in the western world or Taiwan and Hong Kong. These ideas, therefore, provide alternative readings of the

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<sup>23</sup> Western reactions to the rise of China in general and traditional Chinese ideas in particular have been that of surprise and shock because China is perceived to destabilise the world order built by the western countries and values. For detailed views of some of the writings on this see, Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, "The Tributary System as International Society in Theory and Practice," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 1, (2012), 5-6, Doi: [10.1093/cjip/pos001](https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pos001).

relevance of traditional ideas in opposition to puritanical and state-centric, and politically contingent considerations behind the debates. I show that contemporary scholars across the field within mainland China project debate on tradition within the political questions posed by contemporary developments within China and its relationship with the outside world.

Secondly, these scholars thought about the fundamental conceptual gap between Chinese ideas and western ideas like that of democracy, nation-state, and territorial international order in a way that promoted dialogue rather than opposition. This way of thinking probably has more relevance for thinking about inclusive IR theories. Finally, this also provides a lens to understand the different ways in which mainland scholars, in contrast to scholars based outside, approach the questions of modernity and modernization. While the latter seeks compatibility of Chinese ideas and worldview with western modernity, the former seek to foreground Chinese modernization into Chinese traditions including twentieth century revolutionary legacies and history.

This chapter takes Mou Zongsan (牟宗三) as a representative example.<sup>24</sup> Mou Zongsan was among the earliest Chinese scholars who attempted to read traditional Chinese philosophies especially Confucianism with respect to ideas of sovereignty, nation-state, and democracy, etc.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, he makes an instructive case study of reading Confucianism and its encounters with western political ideas. The idea that Chinese and western ideas can be compatible has been popular outside mainland China for quite some time.

Mou Zongsan attempted to redefine the hierarchical nature of Confucian social worldview by arguing that different cultures evolve in their ways and every culture has its own worldview that is equally valid. The unity of human cultures is manifested in the way they express the human psyche and temperaments. But cultures evolve with social and political institutions like nation-state that give expression to national culture. As Joseph Chan notes, Mou tried to create room for a pluralistic view of cultures and hence a practical reason for the nation-state within Confucianism.”<sup>26</sup> But rejecting the hierarchical social worldview in Confucianism does not lead Mou to abandon the traditional idea of political order; *tianxia*. Rather, he interprets the idea of *tianxia* as compatible with contemporary ideas of liberal

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<sup>24</sup> Mou was born in Shandong province in Eastern China and studied at Peking University. He moved to Taiwan after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and remained in Hong Kong and Taiwan after that. He is best known for his synthesis of Kantian and Hegelian philosophy with Traditional Chinese philosophies of Confucianism. Particularly, his reading of traditional philosophies is different from both Communist period scholars and state ideology, and contemporary Confucians in mainland China.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Chan, "Territorial Boundaries," 79.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Chan, "Territorial Boundaries," 79-81.

institutionalism because in his thinking *tianxia* does not replace nation-state-community-individual order. Rather it works as an organizing idea that gives shape to the world as a whole as an entity with different nation-states having their own independence and sovereignty.<sup>27</sup>

Mou's redefinition of Confucianism as compatible with modern western ideas has inspired a generation of scholars who argue for the idea of Confucian democracy and Confucian modernity.<sup>28</sup> The issues that these debates cover are complex but relevant to the concerns here because they look for a pluralistic understanding of politics and ideas of democracy, rights, and values that should form the normative basis of political order. Instead of taking oppositional views of Asia vs. Western values and some contemporary readings of Chinese tradition especially by Jiang Qing's political Confucianism and Zhao Tingyang's idea of *tianxia* show, Mou's reworking of Confucianism also reworks the moral and normative values of modern western ideas of political order. Yet, he places his readings of traditional Chinese ideas within the framework of nation-state based political order that fundamentally differs from the traditional conception of world order (*tianxia*) and contemporary Chinese IR scholars' selective reading of traditional ideas to re-imagine international relations.

While other scholars in the previous period thought about Chinese ideas and tradition being compatible with western ideas and concepts, contemporary scholars speak about "alternative" to western thinking.<sup>29</sup> However, this does not mean that scholars do not seek compatibility in the sense of thinking about IR as a global discipline. Qin Yaqing's idea of relationality is one such example that seeks dialogue with western ideas.<sup>30</sup> The alternative conception of international order and politics itself rests upon the dual exercise of critique of western IR thinking as well as providing an alternative. This critique at cultural and philosophical levels impinges upon how Chinese scholars conceptualize the ideas and concepts of international order.

Zhao Tingyang's idea of *tianxia* is the ideal case for this kind of critique of IR

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<sup>27</sup>Joseph Chan, "Territorial Boundaries," 83.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Fröhlich, "'Confucian Democracy' and Its Confucian Critics: Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi on the Limits of Confucianism," *Oriens Extremus* 49 (2010): 167-200, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24047741>; A review of different arguments on Confucian Democracy debate can be found in Sungmoon Kim, *Confucian Democracy in East Asia: Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-27.

<sup>29</sup> In this respect, a group of scholars frequently referred to as "mainland Confucians" read Chinese tradition in opposition to western ideas of politics. For a detailed review of these writings see, Stephen C. Angle, "The Adolescence of Mainland New Confucianism," *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 49, no. 2, (2018): 83-99, Doi: 10.1080/10971467.2018.1549352.

<sup>30</sup>Also See, Ren, "Grown from within," Ling, "The Dao of world politics," Chih-yu Shih et. al, *China and International Theory: The balance of Relationships* (London and New York: Routledge).

thinking based on western cultural and philosophical assumptions. Zhao's starting point of critique of western IR thinking is that the latter thinks in terms of state and not at the level of the world. That is why he thinks that "our world is still a non-world."<sup>31</sup> Approaching the questions of international politics from the perspective of the state is problematic because such thinking can never accommodate the world as an ontological starting point. At a philosophical level, it provides a critique of western IR thinking based on the distinction between inside and outside.

Western IR thinking emerged out of modernity, and how society and politics are organized in space. In this scheme, the spatial organization of social relations and political authority in space that distinguishes between outside and inside sharply gives rise to a perspective that looks at the world as divided into compartmentalized space.<sup>32</sup> In this context, Zhao's focus on the world as a starting point for thinking about IR and world politics joins a tradition of critique of western IR thinking from within and outside namely, Post-colonialism, Post-modernism and other approaches since the 1980s. He argues that western IR thinking unduly emphasizes the state because it conceptualizes the world at the level of state and then top-down order. This order consists of state-community-individual in a hierarchical order. On the other hand, the Chinese conception of world order starts at the level of *tianxia* and goes down to the level of family and not individual. This order consists of the following hierarchy: world/*tianxia*-state-family.<sup>33</sup> In other words, Chinese thinking based on *tianxia*, he asserts, includes the world as a category of thought. And this is because western IR thinking lacks an idea of global political philosophy and hence, all attempts to bring about a stable world order are useless until and unless a new perspective with a focus on the world as a whole is put forward. He claims that the Chinese idea of *tianxia* provides such an alternative global philosophical concept.<sup>34</sup>

His idea of *tianxia* has three main axes or meanings. It is a geographical concept because it includes the whole world. It is also a normative concept and it is also a world institution. Let us discuss these three meanings of the concept in relation to how he critiques and incorporates existing concepts like territorial sovereignty.

While his critique of western IR thinking for lacking an ontological basis of thinking

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<sup>31</sup> Zhao Tingyang, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All Under-Heaven'," *Social Identities* 12, no. 1, (2006), 30, Doi: 10.1080/13504630600555559.

<sup>32</sup> R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1-25.

<sup>33</sup> Zhao Tingyang, "A Political World Philosophy in terms of All-under-heaven (Tianxia)," *Diogenes* 56, no. 1 (2009): 11, Doi: 10.1177/0392192109102149.

<sup>34</sup> Zhao Tingyang, "Political World Philosophy," 9.

about the world as such is fair as many other scholars and thinkers in the west itself have pointed out, he fails to reconcile his critique with his proposal for thinking about the world as a whole. He argues that the “modern world-system is far from just an institutional system of the world. A world system is always imperialistic dominance... imperialism has proven not to be a solution to the problems of world politics, since it is imposed on the world, rather than being of and for the world, or by the world.”<sup>35</sup> He makes this distinction by arguing that this modern world-system (he implies the modern nation-state system) emerged out of “the concept of the empire ruled by power” and it is not “an institutional system of the world” based on “of and for the world, or by the world.”<sup>36</sup>

But he is not able to provide an answer to how his idea of *tianxia* as a world institution can be brought about without dominance and hegemony. His answer that, “What the world needs is an institutionalized system to promote universal wellbeing, and not just the interests of some dominating nations” falls back into the same trap. Who will institutionalize and by what means? His implicit answer may be that China with its benevolence and moral leadership will restructure the world based on the idea of *tianxia*. But it still does not provide an alternative that is practical to implement and that which does not involve hegemony.

There are two aspects of *tianxia* that he thinks will make it better than the idea of nation-state-based order. Firstly, it includes the whole earth as a geographical unit while thinking about world politics. But as discussed above, it is a deliberate extension of the traditional idea of *tianxia* that was boundless in terms of its spatial boundaries but at the same time, such an idea was only limited to the land of China proper.<sup>37</sup> The question that he is not able to answer is that if the European idea of the nation-state and territoriality sovereignty-based international order emerged from a particular geopolitical and cultural context and hence it cannot be a universal political order, how a provincial idea emerging from China can be universally applicable.

Besides, Zhao’s idea of *tianxia* as a world political philosophy is problematic and ambiguous with regard to the role and idea of the state. Let me quote him in detail to

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<sup>35</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Political World Philosophy,” 6.

<sup>36</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Political World Philosophy,” 6

<sup>37</sup> Some Chinese scholars have raised crucial questions and doubts about Zhao’s ideas in this regard. Prof Wang Qingxin from Tsinghua University has argued that it is not possible to replace existing order with *tianxia*. It is also not necessarily a better option than existing one, Qingxin Wang, “Rujia wangdao lixiang, Tianxia zhuyi yu xiandai guoji zhixu de weilai,” (Confucian Benevolent Ideal/Kingly, Tianxiaism and the future of the modern international order) *Waijiao Pinglun* (Foreign Affairs Review) 33, no. 3 (2016): 373–99. Prof Hu Jian has argued that Tianxia was indeed a political unit within Chinese empire and a tool for nationalism and great unity but within empire. Hence the utility of *tianxia* as a universal political unit is useless discussion Hu Jian, “Tianxia zhixu: yizhong wenhua yixiang (The Tianxia Order: A Cultural Image) *Xue Hai*, 4, (2017): 195–203.

contextualize how he conceptualizes the idea of the state within this scheme and how differences, according to him, can be handled. He states that:

“The conceptually defined Empire of All-Under-Heaven does not mean a country at all but an institutional world instead. And it expects a world/society instead of a nation/state. All-under-Heaven is a deep concept of the world, defined by the trinity of the geographical, psychological, and political worlds. From the viewpoint of this political ontology, our supposed world is now still a non-world, for the world has not yet been completed in its full sense. World institutions and full popular support are still missing. We are talking nonsense about the world, for the world has not yet been fulfilled with its world-ness.”<sup>38</sup>

In this respect, the state is only one unit in the continuum of family-state-*tianxia*. But his criticism of emphasis on western thinking about the world from the perspective of the nation-state takes the idea of *tianxia* out of historical context and evidence. Although *tianxia* as a concept was thought to be an idea of world order that world order did not imagine its boundaries beyond the traditional boundaries of China.<sup>39</sup> Hence, the boundaries between the state and *tianxia* were coterminous. Zhao claims that thinking in terms of *tianxia* as a unit is “essentially different from the western understanding of world order. In western political theory, the biggest political unit is found to be a country or nation/state, while in Chinese theory it is the framework of ‘world/society.’”<sup>40</sup> But he does not provide a reason as to how and why world/state and world/society in western and Chinese thinking are different from each other. It is particularly relevant to ask this question because the traditional Chinese concept of *tianxia* was Chinese society.

This brings us to another crucial aspect of the western international order that Zhao criticizes; that is, the idea of difference. Zhao claims that western thought emphasizes erasing difference through conquest and by force but Chinese thinking based on *tianxia* and ethical code does that through dialogue and conversion through a cultivation of cultural and ethical modes of life. To sum up his view of how two bodies of thoughts deal with the question of difference, he states, “the difference between the western and Chinese ethics: western philosophy sees humanity through the eyes of subjectivity, while the Chinese see it through the eyes of other-ness. And this is a clue in distinguishing cultural empire from cultural imperialism.”<sup>41</sup> His distinction between western and Chinese ways of dealing with differences is not fundamentally different because even though he argues Chinese thinking

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<sup>38</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Rethinking Empire,” 30.

<sup>39</sup> For example, see Zhaoguang Ge, *What Is China? Territory, Ethnicity, Culture, and History* (New York: Belknap Press, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Rethinking Empire,” 31.

<sup>41</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Rethinking Empire,” 36.

emphasizes passive learning and voluntariness in a reciprocal relationship between different cultures, his idea of *tianxia* as an all-inclusive world institution presupposes oneness, with those with different cultures excluded from the system.

Zhao states that there is a need for world political sovereignty.<sup>42</sup> This is because people still lack the sense of world-ness which the idea of *tianxia* can fulfil. The territorially sovereign and independent nation-state system with individual rationality is the core of Zhao's critique of nation-state order. He argues that relational rationality is a better way to ensure coexistence or what he calls a politics based on the ontology of coexistence, because relational rationality promotes cooperation and understanding with the coexistence of different ideas and cultures unlike individual rationality in western thinking which promotes cultural imperialism and conflict. That is why although he is positive about the United Nations as a form of institutionalized cooperation, according to him, it still lacks the viability of emerging as an effective form because it is based on the idea of territorially independent nation-states with individual rationality. He argues:

“We cannot expect to develop world politics out of international politics, because international politics is derived from national politics and is consequently subject to the logic of the latter. National politics is an internal politics with the distribution of power and interests, rights, and obligations as its core issue. International politics, on the other hand, is a nation's external politics, namely its rivalry with other nations for power and interests, including through competition, struggles, or even war.”<sup>43</sup>

Hence, *tianxia* with its focus on the psychological sense of the world as an inclusive space and institution provides a better option. But in Zhao's conceptualization of world order based on *tianxia* in opposition to nation-state order, he replaces equality between states and sovereignty with an order that is hierarchical. He models his scheme of world order on the Zhou system. In such a hierarchical world order (not international order), the centre, supposedly a territorial state holds control over territory and there are two other kinds of states outside the suzerainty of the central suzerain in concentric yet hierarchical order.<sup>44</sup> Although as per his scheme, any state can become suzerain that will manage the world order and there is the diversity of cultures and political system, all other states and their domestic orders will replicate the world order. This is a contradictory proposal even taken on its own terms, because in all his writings Zhao goes on to explain that his idea of the world order based on *tianxia* provides a different vision of a world based on ideas of relationality, the

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<sup>42</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Redefining Philosophy,” 43.

<sup>43</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Redefining Philosophy,” 45.

<sup>44</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Redefining Philosophy,” 14

political ontology of co-existence, and promotes compatible universalism. The idea of hierarchical world order along with the idea that “the all-inclusive concept of the *tianxia* system determines that its politics aim to turn enemies into friends, not to distinguish enemies from friends” is not different from unilateral universalism of the west that he attempts to critique.<sup>45</sup>

While Zhao tries to envision a world order that goes beyond territorial international order based on sovereign nation-states, he himself falls into the same trap, because his idea of the central state is essentially a territorial state yet the world order is hierarchical with all other states situated in a concentric circle follow the world order modelled on the central state. He does not seek to discard the necessity of nation-states. Rather, he critiques the cultural and ethical foundations of the idea of territorial nation-state based international order. However, what remains unanswered or a problem is whether and how binary of *hua-yi* (civilized-barbarians) can be dispensed with. In addition, his approach to Chinese traditions puts it in oppositional and binary terms with ‘west.’ Hence, he does not provide an answer to the question of hegemony, power and universalization of ideas in international relations. The central state he has in mind is China, and therefore his attempts to develop global political philosophy faces the most basic obstacle of making his proposals clear of geopolitical interests of the Chinese state.

Whereas Zhao Tingyang attempts to provide a completely different alternative to western IR theories, scholars like Yan Xuetong approach the understanding of international relations from the vantage point of realism. He is a self-proclaimed realist and subscribes to scientific methods in IR. He accepts basic assumptions of realism but adds other dimensions to the existing realist approaches viz morality and leadership. I briefly explain the basic ideas and approaches of the scholarship of Yan Xuetong and other scholars who subscribe to the broad approach that his “Tsinghua School” takes both methodologically and ontologically using traditional Chinese ideas and historical practices. There are three broad concerns here. Firstly, to extract the ways in which Tsinghua school scholars methodologically deal with using Chinese ideas within Realism. Secondly, how does such an approach inform their ideas of international order and other associated ideas? Thirdly, how do they imagine China’s rise given this approach?

At the outset, he does not promote a Chinese School of IR because he believes that that is not a worthy effort to make as Chinese thought and ideas are diverse and hence a

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<sup>45</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Redefining Philosophy,” 15.

single school named as Chinese is not desirable. At the same time, it is clear from his writings that he does not want to name his approach as Chinese school; rather, he prefers to call his approach Chinese Realism. His writings suggest that the outcome is not different from those writings that aim to build a Chinese school of IRT. As he says, “every IR theory should be considered as a baby. Before we give birth, we cannot be sure of the name we should give the baby.”<sup>46</sup>

Taken as a whole, his writings attempt to build a realist theory with Chinese ideas of moral leadership and Chinese historical experiences.<sup>47</sup> All his writings and new concepts use Chinese ideas like moral leadership to explain even Anglo-American IR. Besides, his project aims to develop a blueprint of the theory for China’s rise. In sum, two things make up his approach within broader debates of Chinese IR discussions. Firstly, he believes that “the rise of China is granted by nature. They (the Chinese people) believe China’s decline is a historical mistake which they should correct.”<sup>48</sup> Secondly, that “China should behave differently from the US, by providing a different type of international leadership for the world.”<sup>49</sup>

The use of Chinese ideas and experiences acts as a correction to western IRT because the latter have solely depended upon Anglo-American experiences and western social and political thought. In this respect, he brings out the ideas and practices from Chinese history that can be useful to think about international relations irrespective of the purpose his ideas serve the Chinese state. As I discuss in the next section, his use of Chinese ideas and practices do contest the basic assumptions of IRTs and the power relations in the international system. Now, the question is how different is an international order in his approach than in the existing IRT. At the basic level, he believes that states are territorially organized and are independent and sovereign. But Yan’s realism provides a vision of international order that is hierarchical. He has been explicit about this aspect of his theory in that he believes some states are more powerful than others and China must strive to climb up the ladder of the power hierarchy in international relations.

Yan has been particularly interested in assessing China’s relative material power and

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<sup>46</sup> Yan Xuetong, Daniel A. Bell and Sun Zhe, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, trans. Edmund Ryden, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 256.

<sup>47</sup> Also see Zhang Feng, “The Tsinghua Approach and the Inception of Chinese Theories of International Relations” *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 5, no. 1, (2012): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/por015>.

<sup>48</sup> Yan Xuetong, “The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 10, No. 26, (2001): 33, Doi: 10.1080/10670560123407.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in B. Creutzfeldt, “Theory Talk #51: Yan Xuetong on Chinese Realism, the Tsinghua School of International Relations, and the Impossibility of Harmony,” *Theory Talks*, (2012): 2, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155591/Theory%20Talk51\\_Xuetong.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155591/Theory%20Talk51_Xuetong.pdf).

it is an important dimension of his theory. In brief, he believes that China has sufficient material capability to influence international order and exert its interests and ideas. In this regard, he has been particularly supportive of a shift in foreign policy under Xi Jinping from ‘keeping low profile’ strategy after Deng Xiaoping to ‘striving for achievement strategy.’<sup>50</sup> Relative material capabilities also bring more responsibility to those states that hold more power. Therefore, he has been an advocate of China taking more responsibility in the world.<sup>51</sup> Besides, he believes that asymmetry in material capabilities can be overcome by two factors and in this respect; he is particularly fixated on China’s competition with the United States.

The two factors are moral and efficient leadership, and building alliances. Here, it suffices to focus on two aspects of his argument. Firstly, he is positive about the hierarchical nature of international order backed by the claims that hierarchy provides stability which he tries to back by evidence from Chinese history, and that hierarchy is an actual reality that cannot be ignored because states have asymmetric material power. Secondly, he reinterprets hierarchy as a tool to bring in peace and harmony through moral leadership conceptualized as humane authority (*wang dao*).

A comprehensive and updated exposition of the theory of Moral Realism is developed in his book, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* published in 2019. In this work, he synthesizes Chinese ideas and experiences with a realist focus on the material dimension of power to develop “a potential mechanism through which a rising state can replace the dominant state in a given interstate system.”<sup>52</sup> The central argument is that, “when the rising state’s leadership is more capable and efficient than that of the dominant state and that of other contemporary major states, international influence is redistributed in a way that allows the rising state to eclipse the dominant state.”<sup>53</sup>

Here, I do not go into details of how Yan attempts to synthesize moral leadership and material capabilities methodologically. Rather, I would focus on the way he conceptualizes the idea of the international order that he claims will be ‘different’ from existing international relations through such a synthesis. In other words, I focus here on the end result of authority by which he attempts to define the nature of international order through the influence of

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<sup>50</sup> See, Xuetong Yan, “From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 2 (2014):153–184, Doi: [10.1093/cjip/pou027](https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pou027).

<sup>51</sup> See, Xiaoyu Pu, “Leadership and the rise of great powers,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, No.6, (2019): 804-808, Doi: 10.1177/0974928419860945.

<sup>52</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Moral leadership and Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Yan Xuetong, “Moral leadership,” 3. For methodological critique of his focus on moral leadership from the vantage point of Realism, see Rajesh Rajagopalan, “Book review: Yan Xuetong, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*,” *India Quarterly* 75, No.3, (2019): 405–409, Doi: 10.1177/0009445519895609.

morality on power and capability. Yan's Moral Realism besides the methodological issues pointed out by Realist scholars suffers from two problems. Firstly, that morality is invested in the individual leader and not in the state as an ensemble of institutions and laws. This point is particularly important because as constructivist scholars have pointed out, that morality matters in the sense that it influences the way the state defines its identity and interests, and consequently foreign policy actions. However, foreign policy making and processes are not leader-centric even within China. Therefore, to invest in leadership an extraordinary capacity to determine foreign policy decision-making does not tally well with how foreign policies are made in actuality. Additionally, morality cannot be a preserve of individual leaders alone. It can also be articulated and exercised through institutions. These questions remain unanswered in Yan's theory of moral leadership.

Nevertheless, Yan's departure from Realist theories especially neo-realism is purposeful because his clear focus is on providing a blueprint for China's "inevitable yet peaceful rise" in his own words. Yan does not have qualms about stating clearly that international relations are the realm of hierarchy and anarchy. But he proposes that Chinese ideas and practices from the pre-Qin period can help build a new kind of global power and a new kind of hegemony viz humane authority which he differentiates from hegemony by the United States. Yan's focus on pre-Qin thought and practices seems deliberate in this regard that his theories provide material for China's narrative of peaceful rise.

His idea of humane authority as a new form of hegemony can be rephrased in the following way. That China's leadership although backed by material power capabilities will be based on the universal morality of ancient Chinese thinkers and it will not engage in double standards like the USA in the Post-Second World War international relations. For this China must provide moral leadership to lead the world rather than by force and power. Keeping in line with his ideas on the role of morality and humane authority, Yan Xuetong has consistently, in his writings, emphasised the central role of moral leadership as a strategy to avoid conflictual path that Realist literature emphasises.

## II

### **Power/Knowledge and Resisting Hegemony through Alternative Vision of World Order**

There are a multiplicity of approaches, views, and questions studied by Chinese IR scholars. But a common theme that most scholars share is questioning the material and normative foundations of the international system and IRT. However, most theories emerging from the global south or non-west share this characteristic with Chinese scholars, and therefore Chinese IR thinking is not an outlier in that sense. At the same time, the rise of

China's material capacities unparalleled with any case after the Second World War makes the questioning of existing IR theories and international order by Chinese scholars a distinctive process in its own right.

The emergence of the view that Chinese IR scholars must take into account China's culture, history, and philosophy while thinking about IR had been present from the beginning in the late 1990s when calls for Chinese IR theories began to gain traction. Besides, the hegemonic aspects of international order and western thinking about IR have also been the focus of Chinese IR scholars. The first-ever call for building IR theories from a Chinese perspective came from Huan Xiang, an influential party leader, deputy foreign minister, and then Director-General and Secretary of the Leading Party Group of the Centre for International Studies of the State Council in 1987. He made the point that Chinese scholars should build 'IR theories with Chinese characteristics.'<sup>54</sup>

Although one may not take that vocabulary seriously as it is part of a larger propaganda but at the same time, the distinctive call coming from an influential party functionary placed the efforts to develop IR theories from the Chinese perspective within the context of rising China and questioning the international order from the beginning. In fact, the study of international relations as a field and IR theorization was promoted by the Chinese state as its interactions with the outside world grew.<sup>55</sup> In this pursuit, the call for building IR theories with Chinese characteristics was quite explicit in a series of conferences sponsored and held during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In other words, the flourishing of Chinese IR research paralleled China's rise with the focus on IR theorization with the Chinese perspective being at the heart of these efforts. This clearly places the development of Chinese IR thinking and the development of the discipline within the historical patterns of IR thinking in the Anglo-American world. In these patterns, IR thinking has always been linked to foreign policy practices of states.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Yan Xuetong, "Ancient Chinese Thought," 252.

<sup>55</sup> In 1990s, there were a number of publications reflecting upon building IR theory with Chinese characteristics. For a review of some of these publications see, Yongjin Zhang, "International Relations Theory in China Today: The State of the Field," *The China Journal* 47 (2002): 101-108, Doi: 10.2307/3182075; Song Xinning, "Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics," *Journal of Contemporary China* 10, 26 (2001): 61-74, Doi: 10.1080/10670560125339. Again, these publications were backed by scholars who were part of government, see Kim, "IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics," 65-66. Hence, it can be surmised that the initial push for IR theory building in China were closely related to official narratives. All these efforts in 1990s emphasized using Mao, Deng Xiaoping, and Marxist-Leninist thought as guiding principles to develop IRT. It would be noted in this chapter that later publications do not take these ideas as the most important guiding principles, a marked change in the dominant ideas in domestic politics. Yet the seriousness of the questions raised in these publications cannot be ignored while evaluating IRT debates in China.

<sup>56</sup> See, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at Its Centenary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1-17.

Developing IR theories, while focusing on the national interests of China, has been the mainstay in Chinese IR debates. As Liang Shoude, one of the earliest proponents of ‘IR theory with Chinese characteristics’ following the official calls states that the goal of developing IR theories with Chinese characteristics is a foregone conclusion. Liang Shoude talked about developing theory with Chinese characteristics did not, however, resort to traditional Chinese ideas and practices. Rather he left the term Chinese characteristics undefined and his writings as of others during the 1980s and 1990s framed their questions in terms of China as a Westphalian nation-state. While talking about Chinese characteristics, for example, he talks about national sovereignty, international law, national interests, and China’s unique political and economic conditions in the present. Nevertheless, his writings provided initial food for thought in the direction of developing IRT in China. Besides, these early calls did not provide an alternative view in terms of defining what ‘Chinese characteristics’ mean but they questioned the universality of theories from the Anglo-American world.

The early calls can largely be construed as ideology-driven and even used the official vocabulary of Chinese characteristics. However, the early scholars who started delineating the blueprint of CIRT also focused on the critical role of theory as a means to dismantle the hegemony of western or American IR by developing theories from Chinese perspectives. For example, Mei Ran from Peking University made a plea for making IR multi-centred as an objective of CIRT. For him, asking new questions from the perspective of China was a way forward and that would also question American hegemony. In other words, one can see clear links between the aspiration to build CIRT that reflects Chinese interests and perspectives by way of critiquing existing IRT. Mei Ran states that “To display a China brand is to expose the unreasonable circumstances of the current global IR community and to stress the significance of transforming this situation, as well as to demonstrate the courage of the Chinese scholars to participate in this change.”<sup>57</sup>

Another Scholar Ren Xiao from Fudan University made a similar argument that “we Chinese, instead of just absorbing and transplanting, should have a spirit of thinking independently and should not always follow others. In a word, the Chinese should forge their theoretical contributions.”<sup>58</sup> These early arguments about developing CIRT placed its

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<sup>57</sup> Mei Ran, “*gai bu gai you guoji zhengzhi lilun de zhongguo xuepai—jian ping meiguo de guoji zhengzhi lilun*,” (Should there be a Chinese School of Theory of International Politics?) *guoji zhengzhi yanjiu* (Studies of International Politics), No. 1, (2000): 63–67.

<sup>58</sup> Ren Xiao, “*lilun yu guoji guanxi lilun: yixie sikao*,” (Some Thoughts on Theory and International Relations Theory) *Ou Zhou* (Europe), No. 4, (2000):19–25.

objective within the context of changing material dynamics of world order with a rising China and a quest for independent thinking that asked questions and sought answers from Chinese perspectives. These efforts to question western hegemony in the knowledge of IR were an aspect that has become more aligned with China's rise in later years.

Scholarship emerging out of the non-west has questioned power and knowledge hierarchies in international relations for quite long. But Chinese scholars have also strived to think about China's national interests while they strive to indigenise IRT. For example, Li Bin from Nanjing University argued that:

“The key to the indigenization of Chinese international relations theory is to put forward a systemic explanation of international relations that is in China's core national interest...An indigenized Chinese IR theory, in a sense, is to link the revival of the Chinese nation via the country's economic development with cooperation and conflict in the world... A Chinese theory should neither be some footnotes of what the leaders say, nor a ‘cartoon-style’ illustration of Chinese foreign policy. Instead, it has to be a product that is deduced from scientific paradigms or enlightenment that is naturally and deliberately obtained through a process of telling ‘historical stories.’ To me, this is the most crucial objective and format requirement for China's IR theoretical innovations.”<sup>59</sup>

The question of whether Chinese scholars should develop universal theories or national theories has plagued efforts to develop CIRT since the beginning. But early efforts in the 1990s and early 2000s could not go beyond national level thinking while they questioned the utility of western IR thinking.

But the discourse about universal versus particular theories changed with new ideas and concepts getting traction in Chinese foreign policy discourses in the early years of the 2000s. The concept of a harmonious society and harmonious world was put forward in official discourses. With that, a shift towards using traditional Chinese ideas and practices happened and scholars started using these ideas from history to question the universality of western ideas of politics, society, and world order. In this respect, coherent and comprehensive analysis and proposal for ‘rethinking’ IRT in China came from Philosopher Zhao Tingyang in 2005 in his book *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of a World Institution*.

In the previous section, I have discussed his work in relation to spatial aspects of political order and the role of Chinese ideas in redefining fundamental concepts of international order in existing IRT. Here, I want to extract ‘anti-hegemonic’ aspects of his

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<sup>59</sup> Li Bin cited in Xiao Ren, “Grown from within,” 389.

thinking by locating his arguments within larger efforts to develop CIRT as a means to critique western hegemony in the context of China's rise and a proposal for China's global role. In other words, the development of theory is squarely placed within China's attempts to restructure international order. William Callahan critiqued these efforts as a way of establishing new hegemony.<sup>60</sup> While critiques like that of Callahan are valid at a certain level, it is also important to see that one should not be surprised to find proposals for foreign policy practices as China rises because in a way all theories emerge within certain power relations. Here, it is important to see why and how theory development exercises become entangled with changing power dynamics in international relations and the way norms and material power interact with each other.

Zhao's work was an attempt to "rethink China" in the sense that it was focused on recovering China's agency in producing knowledge about China and the world. Rethinking was proposed in contradiction to 'discussing China' because the outside theories only discussed China, in his view, from the standpoint of their perspectives. What Zhao proposed was to think of China on its own terms and conceptual categories like *tianxia*. As he states that:

"The historical significance of 'rethinking China' lies in striving to restore China's own ability to think, so that China once again begins thinking, re-establishes its frameworks of thought and fundamental concepts, once again creates its worldview, values, and methodology, and ... reflects on China's future ... and on China's role and responsibilities in the world."<sup>61</sup>

For Zhao, Chinese philosophy specifically Confucianism and the concept of *tianxia* provided the resources to recover the lost agency of China in thinking about the world. While there have been numerous thinkers from the Chinese speaking world who have deliberated the use of Chinese philosophy and its relevance for the contemporary world, what distinguishes Zhao from other attempts is that he placed his argument directly within the context of rising China in international relations. Zhao's idea among many others can be understood as a way of developing a vision of China-centric world order, but their utility to critique existing IRT and their hegemonic aspects and faulty understanding of the universality of the theories developed from particular geopolitical and cultural context cannot be underestimated.

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<sup>60</sup> William A. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-hegemonic or a New Hegemony?" *International Studies Review*, Volume 10, Issue 4, (2008): 749–761, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2008.00830>.

<sup>61</sup> Zhao Tingyang, *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of a World Institution*. (Tianxia Tixi: Shijie zhidu zhexue daolun) (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2005), 7

The existing IR theories and power relations in the international system cannot be looked at separately. At the same time, new alternative ideas like that from Chinese scholars like Zhao and others should not be looked at destabilizing the existing system. For example, a frequent question is asked whether these theories are status quoist or provides ‘alternative’, that is, a destabilizing factor.<sup>62</sup> By questioning the universality of western theories, Zhao and others’ efforts can be useful to understand the diversity of ideas and practices in world politics as well as understanding practices of concepts like territorial sovereignty in more plural terms than what existing theories like realism allow for. While the challenges of their relation with official discourses, cultural exceptionalism, and relativism remain acute, their utility in critiquing existing IRT and the power dynamics that underlie them are useful in understanding the diversity of ideas in developing a more inclusive and pluralistic concept of IR.<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, the questioning of existing IRT is the dominant lens through which we can understand the way Chinese scholars ask questions and locate their inquiry of traditional Chinese ideas. Crucially, Zhao’s whole project<sup>64</sup> of rethinking China and a world order based on *tianxia* makes two assumptions. Firstly, the existing international order based on nation-state and western thought is inadequate because it does not attend to the real problem of “non-western world”; rather it focuses on “failed states.” Hence, for Zhao, the problem can be solved by thinking about the world as a whole while excluding “no one.” Secondly, he implicitly assumes that China is rising in its influence and power and hence, Chinese philosophy and ideas should contribute towards rethinking China and the world as material power relations change as a result of its rise. That is why he constantly refers to the idea of hegemony in the international order that he contends can be overcome by cooperation and harmony in Chinese traditional thinking.

There are two points here to make with regard to questioning the hegemony of western knowledge that goes in tandem with China’s foreign policy discourses that question certain aspects of existing international order. Firstly, he frames questions within the larger

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<sup>62</sup> John G Ikenberry , "The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?" *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (2008): 23-37, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2008-01-01/rise-china-and-future-west>.

<sup>63</sup> Acharya, "From Heaven to Earth," 468-470.

<sup>64</sup> Zhao Tingyang, "Tianxia System," Zhao Tingyang, *Investigations of the Bad World: Political Philosophy as the First Philosophy* (huai Shijie Yanjiu: zuowei diyi zhexuede zhengzhi zhexue). (Beijing: Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 2009). His updated theory was published in 2019 in which responds to his critics as well, see Zhao Tingyang, "Redefining a Philosophy."

context of rising China and its impact on changing power relations in the international order that places his arguments and the whole exercise of bringing Chinese cultural resources as a counter-hegemonic attempt. Secondly, by questioning the international order based on territorial nation-states through Chinese cultural resources, he explicitly questions the utility of western ideas for the contemporary world and hence, attempts to provide China an agency that it lost during the 19th century. Thirdly, he argues that western Christianity and monotheism provides cultural and philosophical resources that emphasize us vs. them, outside vs. inside, and friend vs. enemy binaries.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, he recommends ‘compatible universalism’ which he defines as “any value that can be defined by symmetrical relations is a universal value” against ‘unilateral universalism’ that breeds conflict and wars.<sup>66</sup>

Questioning the universality of western theories is a starting point of almost all scholars and approaches by scholars in China. Apart from Zhao, and other contemporary scholars, scholars in the 1990s focused particularly on questioning the universality of western ideas while they did not have a coherent idea about an alternative set of ideas.<sup>67</sup> While it works better at the level of critiquing hegemonic and particularistic aspects of western IR theories, and their faulty universality by extending parochial ideas from Europe, it also makes their task difficult to imagine Chinese ideas and their application beyond China or East Asia. I attend to the issue of cultural relativism and exceptionalism in the next section. Here, it suffices to say that CIRT ideas and proposals are effective in questioning power/knowledge hierarchy in the existing international order while they still lack theoretical know-how to go beyond that. This impedes their role in theorizing the hybrid nature of ideas like sovereignty, political order, and inside-outside binaries as a result of interaction between western and Chinese ideas or in general other non-western ideas.

Qin Yaqing approaches the questions of using traditional Chinese ideas and practices by placing the theory-building exercise in the cultural context of a particular theorist and country. His approach is otherwise accommodative in the sense that he recommends a dialogue with different theories and perspectives emerging from the different contexts which is a more practical approach because it is unlikely that ideas and practices from one cultural and geopolitical context can be universally applied. But at the same time, by placing the

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<sup>65</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Redefining A Philosophy,” 60.

<sup>66</sup> Zhao Tingyang, “Redefining A Philosophy,” 60.

<sup>67</sup> See for example, writings in 1990s like He Fang, “jianli zhongguo de guoji guanxi lilun (Establishing the International Relation Theory with Chinese Characteristic),” *shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (World Economy and Politics), No. 1 (1992):36–9; Liang Shoude, “zhongguo guoji zhengzhixue lilun jianshe de tansuo,” (Theory Building in Chinese Study on International Relations) *shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (World Economy and Politics), No. 2 (2005):16–21.

theory-building within a cultural context, he finds it difficult to develop ideas and insights that can be applied in general to other contexts.

For Qin, to develop Chinese IR theory, scholars must find a “hardcore” that defines the unique contribution of CIRT. He believes that American IR or English school have their hardcore which is defined by maintaining American hegemony and the dominance of western culture and civilization respectively. Similarly, CIRT’s hardcore should be China’s rise and its place in the world.<sup>68</sup> It places his ideas and approach to IR theory within the debates on the rise of China and even how China can become a great power.

The intimate relationship between rising China and interests and scholar-intellectuals’ role in it raises a question of whether we can differentiate Chinese IR scholars from earlier Confucian scholars in the twentieth century who tried to defend and make it compatible with modern western ideas of nation-state, democracy, human rights, etc. or the traditional role of intellectuals in China’s imperial history. To put it another way, the debate on Chinese ideas and their relevance is closely related to China’s rise and its interests and hence, one cannot differentiate between material power interests of the Chinese state and normative and theoretical knowledge production.

The prominent intellectuals’ framing of questions is in terms of how China can find its ‘rightful’ place in the world and use its culture, philosophy, and history to restructure the international order. Qin and other scholars like Yan Xuetong believe that China’s hard-core question is part of *bainiankunhuo* (hundred year’s puzzle) wherein China has attempted to find its place in the world. By framing their questions and approaches within the material and political pursuit of China in the world, these scholars place the theory-building exercises within the dynamics of power and norms in international relations. Their task is to question the limitations if not outright problems of the universality of western ideas and theories while exploring how to make Chinese ideas and experiences relevant in China’s pursuit to reorder the world order.

The scholarly debates on Chinese ideas and their relevance echo with the official discourse of finding “Chinese solutions to the world problems.” The view that China can provide new and unique solutions to world problems has emerged over the last two decades wherein the nationalist identity discourses, political legitimacy, and the evolving confidence

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<sup>68</sup> See, Qin Yaqing, “Development of International Relations Theory in China: Progress and Problems,” in *Transformation of Foreign Affairs and International Relations in China, 1978-2008*, ed. Wang Yizhou (Boston: Brill, 2011), 474; Qin Yaqing, *Relations and Process: The Cultural Construction of Chinese International Relations Theory* (Guanxi yu guocheng: Zhongguo guojiguanxi lilun de wenhua jiangou). (Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 2012), 3.

among the Chinese security community at large with the rise of China's material capabilities and global reach should and can provide new ways to deal with problems that the world faces. The vocabulary of 'new international relations', the harmonious world, and the community of shared interests among others are intricately linked with domestic discourses on traditional ideas, culture, and political legitimacy and the confidence of China's leadership about China's role as well as the need for reforming and changing the international order.

These leading theorists of Chinese IR have also written and talked about why Chinese traditional ideas and culture can provide solutions to the problems and the patterns of international relations at the least in East Asia that existing western theories of IR do not explain and help us understand. For example, Qin Yaqing writes that cooperation and the patterns of relationship between East Asia relations cannot be explained adequately using western IR theories because they exhibit more than what IRTs consider valuable factors for explaining and understanding inter-state relations.<sup>69</sup> In this context, David Kang, a proponent of the uniqueness of traditional Chinese world order in East Asia complementarily argues that the failure of IRTs to explain and understand inter-state relations in East Asia is because these relationships are embedded in Chinese cultural worldview.<sup>70</sup>

Yan Xuetong and his research team over time have developed a new brand of IRT that relies on historical experiences, ideas, and practices of the pre-Qin period to explain contemporary international relations. Although he is a self-proclaimed realist because he believes that Realism explains international relations fairly well, he goes beyond the existing theories and adds that morality and the moral quality of leadership of states matter in IR. His focus is particularly on explaining the rise of China and how it would be possible. Besides, he argues that China's rise would be peaceful because China's means to great power status is not through violent power struggle but through creating a moral leadership that will lead to the humane authority of Chinese world leadership, a form of hegemony that differs from hegemony based on material power only. Yan Xuetong critiqued China's foreign policy in the wake of its de-emphasis on the ideas of a harmonious world during the later period of the 2000s and states that China cannot rise if it abandons the moral ideas and new concepts like the Harmonious world.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Qin Yaqing and Wei Ling, "Jiegou, Jincheng yu Quanli de Shehuihua: Zhongguo yu Dongya Diqu Hezuo," (Structures, Processes and the Socialization of Power: China and the Regional Cooperation in East Asia) *aisixiang*, <https://m.aisixiang.com/data/14380.html>.

<sup>70</sup> See, David Kang, "Hierarchy, Balancing and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations," *International Security* 28, No. 3, (2004): 165- 181, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228803773100110>.

<sup>71</sup> Yan Xuetong, "Ancient Chinese Thought," 100.

Yan Xuetong is an influential academic and also plays an advisory role to the Chinese state. His ideas have reflected in official discourses and in his writings, he approves the new concepts like the Community of Shared Interests and harmonious world by arguing that these ideas that are derived from China's historical experiences provide new ways to deal with problems in the world. Hence, one can see the intersections between such academic writings and official discourses without going into the issue of who influences whom. In other words, what is clear is that IR scholars in China believe that western theories are not universal or only partially can explain international relations. Their approaches are subversive because they question the universality of these theories, and these are also part of the rise of China's story that hampers their efforts to generalize their ideas and theories.

Some scholars like Qin Yaqing highlight the subversive dimensions of the debates on traditional ideas because this way it helps them to get the attention of the outside world and Chinese concepts and ideas become part of the discourse. In this regard, he relates the power and discourses or intellectual debates about IR and China. Qin Yaqing states that:

“If you want to do something like that, change the intellectual status quo, you have to sometimes go to some extreme, so as to at least open up a way for it. Otherwise nobody will pay any attention to Chinese ideas. If you wouldn't use the label, other people wouldn't even see them. So, you need to use the label. That's the only reason I use the name 'Chinese school.’”<sup>72</sup>

As mentioned above, prominent scholars like Yan Xuetong see their role of theorizing as an attempt to help China attain great power status in the mirror of traditional scholars. Noesselt also suggests, that “the search for a “Chinese” paradigm of IR theory thus finally reveals itself as part of China's global positioning ambitions.”<sup>73</sup> Wang Zhengyi uses the analogy of world-systems theory to argue that international relations knowledge production has ‘core’ and periphery. But he believes that the dynamics of knowledge and power in international relations can be changed.<sup>74</sup> This belief comes from China's rise as an economic and military power since 1978.

As a matter of fact, all knowledge production exercises happen within a certain context of power and knowledge. The existing IRTs and Anglo-American dominance in

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<sup>72</sup> Qin Yaqing in B. Creutzfeldt, “Theory Talk #45: Qin Yaqing on Rules vs. Relations, Drinking Coffee and Tea, and a Chinese Approach to Global Governance,” *Theory Talks*, (2011): 9, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155106/Theory%20Talk45\\_Yaqing.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155106/Theory%20Talk45_Yaqing.pdf).

<sup>73</sup> N. Noesselt, “Revisiting the Debate on Constructing a Theory of International Relations with Chinese Characteristics,” *The China Quarterly* 222, (2015): 444-445, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015000387>.

<sup>74</sup> Zeng Wang, “chengwei zhishi de shengchanzhe,” (Becoming a producer of knowledge) *shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (World Economics and Politics), (2006): 3.

international politics shape such a context for Chinese IR scholars at the international level and consequently they frame their questions and theoretical approaches within the context of existing IRTs. Yet, the point this section makes is that Chinese scholars while framing their questions and choosing theoretical approaches and concepts are conscious about the dynamics of knowledge and power, and hence, they attempt to change the situation. As a result, their project of rethinking IR from Chinese perspectives, material or normative, is tied to Chinese state's push for alternative normative foundations of international order.

### III

#### **Domestic Politics and Theorising IR in China**

While the international context shapes the views and approaches of Chinese IR scholars, domestic politics is another site where power and norms interact with consequences for theorising IR that existing studies largely ignore.<sup>75</sup> Scholars outside the IR discipline in China also provide a useful insight into the context of debates on traditional ideas as well as Chinese state's efforts to remould the domestic political order that shapes its foreign policy. The research is on how traditional Chinese ideas, history and philosophy will impact international relations with increasing influence of China. But there have been few research studies that problematize the ideas of tradition, historical experiences and philosophical ideas and how they are interpreted and recast to suit contemporary political objectives and to interpret and rethink contemporary politics. As a result, examining domestic dynamics of politics is an important window into Chinese worldviews and debates that ultimately shape international relations theory debates and foreign policy.

IR theorizing based on Chinese ideas runs into problems at many levels due to the exclusion of non-Han traditions namely, Uighur, Mongol, Tibetan, new binary of west vs. East/China and domestic political legitimacy. Firstly, if Chinese tradition consists of Confucianism and other philosophies the challenge is in overcoming the diversity within China. It is in this regard that using traditional ideas intentionally or unintentionally serves the purpose of the current political regime and the idea of China as a unified territorial nation-state by excluding ideas and practices of ethnic minorities. It is this aspect of Chinese IR

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<sup>75</sup> William Callahan has raised the question with regard to territorial sovereignty questions in China, Callahan, "Chinese Visions," 755-756. Xu Jilin might be the only mainstream Chinese intellectuals living within China who has criticised statist and nationalist tendencies in the discourses on civilization and *tianxia*, Xu Jilin *Rethinking China's Rise: A Liberal Critique*, trans. David Ownby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 139-145. However, Xu Jilin's writings on New Tianxianism (*xin tianxia shuyi*) remain silent about the questions of minority question in the periphery in the contemporary period. Hun Joon Kim, in this context, argues that the moral and cultural claims made in the theories of *tianxia* remain entangled with questions of structural power in the periphery. See, Kim, "Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics," 75-76.

theories that link them with ‘national interests’ of Chinese state in its periphery. First and foremost, these theories legitimize China’s interests in its periphery by ignoring and not attending to the question of diversity within. The Robert Cox’s dictum that “theory is always for someone and something” can partially explain the location of the arguments put forward by scholars within the power relations among different ethnic groups.

As chapter 3 shows the ideas of tradition and culture are narrowly defined and consists of only Han culture and hence, while questioning the universality of western thought is legitimate at one level, these efforts also universalize or let us say nationalize Han cultural ideas to all of China’s territories that are also populated by minority populations some of which, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, have equally long historical and cultural traditions. By reimagining a cultural and normative order imposed on national territory, Chinese scholars provide a legitimate blueprint for territorial sovereign nation-state based political order. This order is squarely based on the ‘core’ of China’s vision of power and normative order.

The claim for universality of Chinese values and culture is not new. Yet, the silence of Chinese IR scholars to deal with the question of ethnic diversity, and how China deals with them is problematic for their claims of Chinese ideas to develop IRT. Firstly, any idea must be applicable to both domestic and international affairs to qualify for its value to redefine fundamental principles and concepts of IRT. Secondly, if Chinese ideas like relationality and *tianxia* in Qin Yaqing and Zhao Tingyang’s works do not address the problem of diversity and ethnic question in China, then it begs a question how they can redefine the question of diversity in international relations? These questions and problems remain unaddressed within Chinese debates on alternative ideas from Chinese tradition and history to redefine IRT and practices of international relations.

The problem is not that Chinese ideas like relationality are themselves wrong as such. The problem instead is that they do not evaluate China’s policies in domestic politics. This squarely puts them into the dynamics of power and norms within China’s domestic politics. As discussed in the previous chapter and next chapter, China’s policies domestically remain questionable, to say the least, vis a vis its claims of ethnic unity and diversity. Nevertheless, the silence of Chinese IR scholars on the questions of diversity within China and how these problems arising out of its policies are handled can be contextualized within the politics of “sovereignty of Chinese ideas and culture” vis a vis the ideas of individualism and democracy. And, it reflects the constricted nature of discourses within China and the anxiety of maintaining one-party rule. Therefore, even multiple interpretations of ideas and history is

not possible.

Finally, a recurring problem in Chinese debates discussed in this chapter is that while attempting to critique western culture and philosophy for creating boundaries and binaries, these writings themselves give rise to new binaries. For example, East-West binary is a recurring problem in these writings. Apart from that, China's policies in ethnic minority areas of Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia cannot discard older binaries of civilized vs. barbarian, a problem that cannot be ignored before one discusses how Chinese ideas can contribute towards developing inclusive and non-oppositional IRT.

Although, the claim that traditional Chinese idea of political order was “non-territorial” (in terms of nation-state territoriality) and hence, it could avoid binaries of inside-outside/self-other that creates problems in existing IRT and international relations, the Chinese scholars do not address the question of older binaries of civilized vs. barbarian, new binaries of West vs. China, and Chinese vs. non-Chinese minority traditions. Therefore, the question that needs to be answered here is how these binaries can be avoided.

#### IV

#### Conclusion

The chapter examined the claims of Chinese scholars that Chinese ideas like relationality (*guanxi*), *tianxia*, harmony (*hexie*) etc, provide a better understanding as well as intellectual and normative resources to redefine existing international relations. The discussion is framed on the way these ideas redefine fundamental concepts of international relations like territorial sovereignty and their underlying cultural and philosophical ideas. There are two major approaches to traditional Chinese ideas. The scholars like Mou Zongsan and others from earlier twentieth century onwards wrestled with the question of how and why Chinese tradition can be useful to thinking about socio-political order. In this respect, their approach has been that of dialogue and has advocated compatibility between western and Chinese ideas. The chapter argues that despite these readings of Chinese tradition emerging from a concern of preserving cultural ideas, these readings provide a better source to approaching questions of how Chinese tradition and history can be brought into the debates of redefining IRT.

On the other hand, scholars and the Chinese state in mainland China have approached tradition and history in oppositional and confrontational ways in the reform period. As this chapter shows, while these ideas are useful in questioning hegemony of western ideas and knowledge production in IRT, their usefulness in redefining international relations and developing inclusive and universal IRTs remain entangled with same questions that existing

IRTs are accused of. These questions pertain to how these ideas and proposals disentangle themselves from geopolitical interests of China and most importantly, how they deal with questions of diversity within China's domestic social and political order with respect to the ethnic question.

Chinese scholars do not discard the inevitability of territorial state as the basic unit of the international order. However, they critique the cultural and philosophical foundations of it. These contradictory ideas reflect the multiple and often contradictory identities that China articulate in the international order namely, civilizational state, great power, unbounded and globalizing China, China fearful of disintegration, among others. In addition, there is a consistent pattern that focuses on foregrounding economic modernization with reference to Chinese history and tradition. While there are precedents for such thinking in Chinese thinking about the international order and China's place in it from the late nineteenth century onwards, the Post-Mao debates reflect the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to reorient its political legitimacy, and renewed confidence and abilities to shape the international order.

## CHAPTER 5

### Territorial Sovereignty and China's Domestic Policies in the Periphery

#### Introduction

The changing contours of the idea of sovereignty in the Post-Cold War period reveal that dominant norms namely human rights, Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and humanitarian interventions make moral and political claims on states with reference to their claim to sovereignty within their domestic politics. These moral and political claims are however not new.<sup>1</sup> But they are part of contestations over the nature of international order and norms. States generally assert their sovereignty in contesting and adapting to the international order. Their contestations emerge from legitimizing moral claims of sovereignty over territories and groups who contest their claims, and their domestic political order vis-à-vis the dominant norms of the international order.

China has emerged as a strong supporter of the concept of territorial sovereignty. China faces challenges to its territorial sovereignty by ethnically compact groups in Tibet and Xinjiang and criticism of its sovereignty claims and policies with reference to the dominant norms of human rights, democracy, among others. The chapter argues that China's critiques of the cultural and philosophical understandings of the concept of territorial sovereignty are aimed to stave off moral and political claims made by the dominant norms in the international order. The competing assertions of sovereignty by ethnic groups and Chinese state concern the claims over territories that have majority ethnic populations.<sup>2</sup>

The chapter examines China's strategies to deal with territorial sovereignty challenges in minority regions of Tibet and Xinjiang through three strategies-economic development, redefining minority-majority relations, and re-writing history. Each strategy consists of a set of overlapping and interrelated policies and narratives aimed at dealing with alternative

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<sup>1</sup> The protection of minority rights has become an important issue in the debates on sovereignty, humanitarian interventions, and human rights in the Post-Cold War period. However, they have precedents in history. For example, western European powers imposed conditions of minority rights protection on the right to sovereignty on Eastern European countries in the nineteenth century. See, Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 38. One can also interpret these exceptions to territorial sovereignty with reference to conditions for political changes and democratization on various governments. Moral and political claims were also imposed on the colonial societies for their capacity to govern themselves. See, Anthony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Census of 2010, Tibet (Xizang) Autonomous Region (Tibetans: 90%, Han: 8%), Xinjiang (Uighur: 46.42%, Han: 38.99%, Kazakh: 7.02%), Inner Mongolia (Mongolian: 17%, Han: 79%, Manchu: 2.0%). Besides, Tibetan population lives in Yunnan and Qinghai provinces that are not part of Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) but is usually claimed by the Tibetans as part of 'Greater Tibet.' See, National Bureau of Statistics, "6<sup>th</sup> Census, 2010," accessed October 10, 2020, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/Statisticaldata/CensusData/>

political articulations of territorial sovereignty based on distinctive history, culture, and tradition by these ethnic groups. The term strategy here denotes a deliberate attempt by the Chinese state to achieve broadly defined goals of creating a multi-ethnic unified state.

The evaluation of China's policies through these three strategies is used to locate China's critique of dominant constitutive norms as well as to provide an internal critique of the claims by Chinese scholars about the usefulness of Chinese ideas, experiences and practices for the international order. The challenges to China's sovereignty in Tibet and Xinjiang, and the critiques of China's policies on human rights and democracy with reference to the dominant constitutive norms of the international order force China to legitimize its territorial sovereignty. As a result, China's policies to deal with sovereignty challenges in Tibet and Xinjiang get entangled with its approach to the international order. As chapter 4 discusses, the Chinese critiques of the international order pertain to the questions of cultural diversity and power in international relations. In this context, this chapter raises questions about whether and how China attempts to deal with the criticisms of its policies, and bring in the question of diversity within domestic politics in its policies towards minorities.

The questions of territorial sovereignty have become increasingly central to the debate on the ethnic question in the Post-Mao period in the ethnic minority regions. This is reflected in the number of protests and incidents of violence in the reform period in Tibet and Xinjiang.<sup>3</sup> In the same period, diaspora activism for sovereignty from these ethnic communities has also become significant and visible. While the regional autonomy mechanism could not solve the problems, the reform era policies have increased the sense of alienation and resentment against China leading to widening gap and conflict in Han majority- ethnic minority relations, increasing regional economic inequalities, and finally, the politicization of culture, tradition, and history.

China's opening up to the outside world has made it easier for external influence to mobilize disenchanted minorities to assert sovereignty, especially because these ethnic communities have transnational connections in neighbouring countries.<sup>4</sup> The collapse of the

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<sup>3</sup> Debashish Chaudhuri, *Xinjiang and Chinese State: Violence in the Reform Era* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2018), 162-206; Tsering Woeser, *Tibet on Fire: Self-Immolations against Chinese Rule* (London: Verso Books, 2016); Gardner Bovington, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 174-190.

<sup>4</sup> Chinese claims on the external threats and support to Uighur nationalism and resistance to Chinese rule in Xinjiang remain contested. The Chinese state has emphasised external support to suppress legitimate demands and legitimize its policies. See, Justin V. Hastings, "Charting the Course of Uyghur Unrest," *The China Quarterly* 208 (2011): 893-912. Doi: 10.1017/S0305741011001056. For the purpose of this chapter, it is emphasized here that it is not just material and ideological support to Uighurs that matter. Rather, it is the imagination of spatial political identity and order away from Beijing that is important for China to change.

Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia led to assertions and creation of nation-states by minorities in eastern Europe and former Soviet Union. It also caused worries among Chinese leadership about similar demands and mobilizations by ethnic groups.<sup>5</sup> The Post-Cold War period has seen an increased number of humanitarian interventions in the name of human rights and democracy by western powers going beyond Westphalian sovereignty in Middle East and Africa.<sup>6</sup> All these factors, both domestic and international, make territorial sovereignty issues central to Chinese policies which it has attempted to address through domestic and foreign policies.

The remainder of the chapter is divided into three sections. The first section lays out conceptual and empirical issues that make territorial sovereignty and China's contestations of its cultural and philosophical understandings significant. Building on conceptual debates in chapter 2, the chapter argues that territorial sovereignty becomes salient because the dominant norms of the international order claim the reorganization of the domestic political order in terms of democracy, human rights, and minority rights. Chinese articulations are also necessitated by the problems of political legitimacy of one-party rule that needs alternative cultural embeddedness of its identity and moral-social order. Hence, China contests the cultural underpinnings of territorial sovereignty and associated norms namely human rights.

However, the challenges to China's territorial sovereignty emerge from the presence of alternative imaginations of political identities based on distinct history, culture, and identity in minority regions of Xinjiang and Tibet. Thus, China must overcome these challenges. The second section examines three strategies- economic development, redefining spatial, cultural, and political relations between ethnic groups, and use of history- to understand practices, policies, and objectives of the Chinese state in these regions. In this context, the chapter focuses on how Chinese policies treat cultural differences to problematize claims of Chinese scholars and the state to critique cultural underpinnings of dominant norms of the international order. It argues that while one should not reject Chinese ideas and practices to rethink the international order, they cannot be accepted uncritically. The final section summarizes the chapter.

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<sup>5</sup> Francois Bougan, *Inside the Mind of Xi Jinping* (London: Hurst and Company, 2018), 33-42; John W Garver, "The Chinese Communist Party and the Collapse of Soviet Communism," *The China Quarterly*, no. 133 (1993): 16-19, Doi: 10.1017/S0305741000018178.

<sup>6</sup> Allen Carlson, *Unifying China, Integrating with the World: Securing Chinese Sovereignty in the Reform Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 6-10.

## **Territorial Sovereignty in Peripheral Regions: Dynamics of Domestic Politics and International Order**

This section provides a conceptual understanding of the nature of challenges to China's territorial sovereignty in peripheral regions. It builds interconnections between domestic politics, dominant norms of the international order, and China's security and strategic calculations.

The imagery of these regions- Xinjiang and Tibet- as remote, inner Asia, or Chinese peripheries among others is part of contesting spatial political narratives. As a result, territorial sovereignty becomes the main axis in China's policies in these regions. Ethnic groups in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia have contested the geopolitical and territorial identity of China inherited from the Qing Empire since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the articulations of alternative political identities and aspirations for sovereignty by Uighurs, Tibetans, Inner Mongolians, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are embedded in the conceptual worldview of territorial sovereignty and territorialized international system. China has attempted to address these problems through a variety of means and mechanisms which, this chapter, analyses through three strategies mentioned above.

There are two major differences with other minority groups in China and these regions. One, these minority groups, Tibetans and Uighurs, are concentrated in these regions and consist of the majority of the population. Two, these three regions have had long and distinct history and tradition that often conflicted with Chinese empires. Therefore, the first and foremost task of the domestic policies of Beijing is to overcome this spatial disjunction due to alternative imaginations of order, identity, and its articulations. In addition, Beijing needs to cut off their social, cultural, and historical links with neighbouring countries.

The chapter develops on the interrelationships between space, territoriality, and identity discussed in chapter 2. Jane Penrose, while writing on the relationship between territory and nationalism, differentiates between two types of territorialities.<sup>8</sup> One, identity is defined in terms of culture. In this sense, a group identifies with a territory because people belonging to the same culture live there within its boundaries. Hence, cultural distribution, i.e.

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<sup>7</sup> Apart from Xinjiang and Tibet, Muslim rebellions in Gansu, Ningxia, and Yunnan during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century involve more highlighted cases that contested sovereignty, see, Jonathan Spence, *Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 189-200; Raphael Israeli, "The Muslim Minority in the People's Republic of China," *Asian Survey* 21, no. 8 (1981): 904-905, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2643890>.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Penrose, "Nations, states and homelands: territory and territoriality in nationalist thought," *Nations and Nationalism* 8 no. 3 (2002): 7, doi: 10.1111/1469-8219.00051.

extent of the cultural region provides the symbolic meaning of territory in terms of a social group's attachment to it. This is the most important element, and that in turn, shapes the strategies and techniques employed to control territory. Understood in this way, the material significance of territory in terms of natural resources is still important but not the primary factor in determining a group's relationship with it.

Secondly, the other type of territoriality emerges when a group defines identity in terms of territory. Here, territory:

“Is the geographical distribution of a political unit that is used to delineate a territory. As this suggests, it is the material resources of a territory, including the symbolic significance of controlling it, that has primary influence in its formation and in strategies to preserve it. The emotive powers of territory continue to be drawn upon, but their primary function is to reinforce what are fundamentally material or functional claims to space.”<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the territoriality of the modern nation-state is distinct from pre-modern states or any other form of a political community like an empire. As Penrose notes in his work, “it is through the combination of a cultural identity with a territorial identity, and the privileging of this composite identity over all others, that nationalism derives much of its appeal and resilience.”<sup>10</sup> In this sense, both modern western territorialities that emerge from Weberian notion of state and much of Realist theories in IR - in terms of territorial identity and definition of the political unit by geographical limits, and in terms of cultural distribution over a geographical unit are blended together.<sup>11</sup> China's policies, it is argued in the chapter, aim at expanding cultural distribution of identity within current geo-political boundaries leading to redefine history of minority regions and populations as part of longer Chinese history and identity. The political legitimacy of the CCP also dictates its policies towards minority cultures because it cannot allow any organized form of culture and ideology beyond its Leninist top-down organization.

The provision of regional autonomy for ethnic minorities emerged out of the problems of forging a stable state.<sup>12</sup> The communist takeover in 1949 partly resolved this dilemma when the CCP emphasized class struggle and anti-imperialism of outside powers to ‘liberate’ these regions. It also resulted in recognition of the autonomy of ethnic minority regions to accommodate their aspirations of self-rule. But this has proved to be ineffective in solving the

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<sup>9</sup> Penrose, “Nations, states and homelands,” 8.

<sup>10</sup> Penrose, “Nations, states and homelands,” 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> On the second type of territoriality in terms of the instinctive nature of human beings to demarcate space, see, Robert Sack, “Human Territoriality: A Theory,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 73, no. 1 (1983):55-74, Doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8306.1983.tb01396.x.

<sup>12</sup> Debashish Chaudhuri, “Xinjiang and Chinese State,” 108-109.

question of self-determination and sovereignty in these regions. The number of protests, inequality, and alienation among Tibetans and Uighurs in the Post-Mao period attests to their ineffectiveness. The relevance of class struggle in ruling ideology has also decreased as a normative and ideological resource to legitimize its rule.

Distinct culture, history, and identity of Uighurs and Tibetans pertain to historical relations between Chinese state (dynastic regimes) and polities in these regions have shifted and cannot be captured through the modern idea of sovereignty. Hence, the politics of territorial sovereignty in these regions has involved, since 1978, a process wherein the idea of homogenous national community (*zhonghuaminzu*)<sup>13</sup> plays an important role in shaping China's overall objectives and strategies in claiming sovereignty and delegitimizing alternative claims. The use of tradition, history, and culture in this process is central to defining what it means to be Chinese as well as the history of these regions, and the historical relations between minority ethnic communities.

*Zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nation) has become an increasingly central concept in Chinese discourses to resolve the problems of inter-ethnic relations, and politicization of ethnic identity and history. It was introduced in 2018 in the party constitution with reference to “great rejuvenation of Chinese nation” (*zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*).<sup>14</sup> However, the idea that a unified Chinese identity should be developed to overcome the ethnic problem and to overcome challenges to sovereignty has developed over a period of time. It was, in fact, used for the first time by Sun Yat-Sen as a Han-centric concept.<sup>15</sup> Three strategies discussed in this chapter are aimed at creating unified *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nation). The discourses on *zhonghua minzu* have shifted from the official idea of creating multiethnic state in the previous periods since 1949. As a result, ethnic diversity has become increasingly a threat and highly securitized. Yan Sun, a US-based scholar on minority policies, has differentiated scholars within China between “integrationists” and “socialist autonomists.”<sup>16</sup> However, most of “socialist autonomists” are scholars of minority origin and have been

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<sup>13</sup>The term *zhonghua minzu* is not used in the official name of China. Instead, its name is 中华人民共和国 (*Zhong huaren minzu heguo*). *Huaren* refers to people who originated from *huaxia*, the ancient nine provinces of China proper mentioned in the Book of Shang (*shangshu*). *Huaren* is also used for foreign citizens of Chinese origin. *zhonghua minzu* is also used in the discourse on *guojia rentong* (national identity) with respect to China as a multi-ethnic nation-state. See, Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (2005): 147, <https://doi.org/10.1162/001152605774431545>.

<sup>14</sup>Uradyn E. Bulag, “Minority Nationalities as Frankenstein’s Monsters? Reshaping “the Chinese Nation” and China’s Quest to become a “Normal Country,” *The China Journal* 86 (2021): 46-47. Doi: 10.1086/714737.

<sup>15</sup>Xiaowei Zang, *Ethnicity in China: A Critical Introduction* (London: Polity Press, 2015), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Yan Sun, *From Empire to Nation: Ethnic Politics in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 305-310.

marginalized in recent years.<sup>17</sup> Thus, this chapter, by highlighting integrationist tendencies through the discussion on three strategies, brings in the question of diversity in the context of the debates on traditions and International Relations Theories discussed in chapter 4.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, China has interacted with the outside world dominated by western ideas and institutions built by western powers. Sovereignty is such a fundamental organizing principle of the international system that has shaped inter-state relations as well as political imaginations of the nation in non-European societies.<sup>18</sup> Hence, China has had to articulate its interests and interact with the outside world through the very same institutions and ideas. This constrains its choice to use its ideas and concepts in diplomacy, international law, and other sites of interactions with the outside world. It is more so in the Post-Mao period when China has shown willingness to interact with the international order.

However, dominant ideas of territorial sovereignty also command moral and political claims of organizing domestic politics and system in their image. This chapter argues that China's critique of cultural and philosophical understandings of territorial sovereignty emerges from the need to resist these moral and political claims to reorganize domestic political order. In addition, the dominant ideas also insist on the salience of diversity within China that gives political voice to the movement for nation-statehood in China's periphery.

Thus, the translation of dominant ideas in China like territorial sovereignty has involved resistance to moral and political claims to reorganize domestic political order, and adaptation to them. The politics of Chinese ideas and values is situated within this process that began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Lydia Liu has insightfully argued, the translation of ideas from the western world has never been total.<sup>19</sup>

In this process, China's vision of political community, at the domestic level, has involved aspects of territoriality of nation-state to include or exclude different ethnic communities within the 'Chinese nation.'<sup>20</sup> While western nation-state was considered a pre-requisite by Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century for reclaiming sovereignty lost after the Opium war in 1840,<sup>21</sup> there has been an inherently uncomfortable feeling to

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<sup>17</sup> For a useful discussion on these scholars, see, Bulag, "Minority Nationalities as Frankenstein's Monsters?" 47-48, and Zhao Taotao and Sow Keat Tok, "From Academic Discourse to Political Decisions? The Case of the Xinjiang Ethnic Unity Education Textbook Reform," *The China Quarterly* 245 (2021): 165-85, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741020000119>.

<sup>18</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from Nation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 9.

<sup>19</sup> Lydia He Liu, *The clash of empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004), 22-30.

<sup>20</sup> James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 1-17.

<sup>21</sup> Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China," 148.

follow this mould.<sup>22</sup> Time and again, Chinese intellectuals and leaders have rejected nation-state formation and the centrality of territory.<sup>23</sup> This is particularly relevant to understand China's approaches to territorial disputes. It adopted nation-state territoriality in terms of demarcation of borders and defining boundaries of China in terms of territory but rejects colonial cartography -borders imposed during colonial times.<sup>24</sup>

Chinese elites from the late nineteenth century subscribed to a linear conception of history and it has been one of the dominant ways to look at the past and their worldview.<sup>25</sup> But they did not have clear ideas and strategies to lay claim to territories beyond Han-dominated areas. Neither the *guomintang* (nationalist party) government nor the communist government under Mao Zedong had a clear idea of the territoriality of the political community that they imagined. Rather, their claims were the result of ideological grandstanding of anti-imperialism and securing political power.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the ambiguity about the spatial boundaries of political community with ethnically diverse communities has allowed for other spatial ideas to emerge from time to time. The idea of *datong* (great unity) among ethnic communities during the nationalist government, the communist world revolution during the Mao period, and a set of traditional ideas in the reform period after 1978 have interacted with territorial nation-state order borrowed from the west. These ideas have criticized the normative and political claims on how to define and organize domestic political order.

In the context of the idea of *zhonghua minzu*, and the questions of cultural diversity in IRTs, the term *ronghe* (integration or blending together) becomes significant. The idea of *minzu tuanjie ronghe* (ethnic unity and integration) has become one of the main goals of ethnic policies in recent years.<sup>27</sup> Like *zhonghua minzu*, *ronghe* was first used by Sun Yat-sen. Although *ronghe*, unlike *tonghua*, also used by Sun Yat-sen, reflects relatively equal

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<sup>22</sup> Zhaoguang Ge, *What Is China? Territory, Ethnicity, Culture, and History* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2018), 120-121.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Gue Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885-1924* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2012), 122.

<sup>24</sup> Zhihua Shen and Julia Lovell, "Undesired Outcomes: China's Approach to Border Disputes during the Early Cold War," *Cold War History* 15, 1 (2015): 97, Doi: 10.1080/14682745.2014.932350; Dai Chaowu, "The Question of Maps: China-India Negotiation and its Significance, 1950—1962," *CPC History Studies* no. 5 (2017):74-92.

<sup>25</sup> Duara, "Rescuing History," 35-48.

<sup>26</sup> See, Hsiao-ting Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics, 1928-49* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> For example, Qiushi, "xi jinping zongshuji liangxia tuanzu qiangdiao minzu tuanjie," (General Secretary Xi Jinping's two delegations emphasize ethnic unity) 10 March 2021, [http://www.qstheory.cn/zhuanqu/2021-03/10/c\\_1127195333.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/zhuanqu/2021-03/10/c_1127195333.htm).

relationship between different groups, they both emphasise assimilation.<sup>28</sup> Since the early twentieth century, the ideology of *ronghe* has been an important streak of minority ethnic policies aimed at creating *zhonghua minzu*.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, *datong* (great unification) is another Confucian idea in Chinese discourses on national unity. *Datong* is a Confucian principle meaning a greater good in opposition to *xiaokang* (moderately prosperous). It is ideally achieved, as per Confucius, when a hierarchical and harmonious society becomes reality.<sup>30</sup> However, after Kang Youwei's reformulation, *datong* has been used to emphasise unity of *zhonghua minzu*. Thus, it figured in Sun Yan-Sen's three principles, Mao's idea of "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship" and recently in the discourses on *minzu tuanjie* (ethnic unity) and *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nation). In these contexts, it refers to unity among ethnic groups with reflections of Han-centrism. Both ideas have significance for understanding how Confucianism understood relations between the Hans and "barbarians." In other words, the ways in which they deal with cultural diversity.

Scholars have argued, that Confucianism promotes cultural assimilation of non-Han people and emphasises on cultural rather than ethnic or racial markers of identity to become Han.<sup>31</sup> The cultural assimilation, historically, has involved non-violent assimilation of "barbarians" when they followed Han ways of life.<sup>32</sup> The ideas of *datong* and *ronghe* or *tonghua* emphasise on cultural aspects of identity and inter-ethnic relations rather than racial or ethnic aspects of identity.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, *tianxia* is presented as a 'non-territorial' concept going beyond the cultural and philosophical understandings of territorial sovereignty and territorial nation-state, and attendant binaries of self-other.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, these ideas are supposed to de-binarize and de-territorialize the binaries of self-other in international relations characterised by territorial sovereignty based international

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<sup>28</sup>James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 113-120.

<sup>29</sup>Xiaowei Zang, *Ethnicity in China: A Critical Introduction* (London: Polity Press, 2015), 22-24.

<sup>30</sup>Chen, Albert H. Y., The Concept of 'Datong' in Chinese Philosophy as an Expression of the Idea of the Common Good, University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law Research Paper No. 2011/020,14, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1957955> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1957955>

<sup>31</sup> He Baogang, "Confucianism versus Liberalism Over Minority Rights: A Critical Responses to Will Kymlicka," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 31, no. 1 (2004): 114-116, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2030098>; June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People's Republic of China* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1976), 1-3.

<sup>32</sup> David W.S. Wong, "Ethnic Integration and Spatial Segregation of the Chinese Population," *Asian Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2000): 53-54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/146313600115072>.

<sup>33</sup>Joseph Chan, "Territorial Boundaries and Confucianism," in *Confucian Political Ethics*, ed. Daniel Bell (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 66.

<sup>34</sup> Zhao Tingyang, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-Heaven' (Tian-Xia)," *Social Identities* 12, no. 1 (2006): 36-37, Doi: 10.1080/13504630600555559.

order rooted in Euro-American history and thought. However, it remains to be seen whether the end result of assimilation and binaries of civilized vs. backward or civilized vs. barbarian can be avoided. For this, we must look at actual policies of the Chinese state in the domestic politics. These questions get a greater significance in the context of the critique of the western cultural and philosophical understandings of territorial sovereignty. Several Chinese scholars have argued that Chinese ideas like *tianxia* and Confucianism are better suited to handle cultural diversity that characterizes international relations.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the rise of China in the international order makes these questions relevant.

The dominant framework of territorial nation-state has impacted narratives and articulations of political order and community in terms of writing history, making of borders, every day practices of territoriality, and the centrality of territory in defining cultural and political identities across the world. It is true for China as well as minority nationalisms that challenge China's territorial sovereignty.

The questions of autonomy and territorial sovereignty of ethnic minorities essentially involve the questions of distinct history, tradition, and political mobilization. It also involves the questions of inequality and marginalization that evoke political mobilization and make history and tradition politically salient. Therefore, the assertion of distinct history and tradition becomes a serious political issue. Chinese policies to deal with ethnic minority cultures can be said to have emerged out of culturalism,<sup>36</sup> or they can be interpreted as racial relations.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, there are various models around the world wherein territorial nation-states have accommodated aspirations for autonomy of territorially compact ethnic communities. These include multi-culturalism, associational democracy, and federalism.

While these arguments are certainly relevant to the study of China's minority policies, this chapter focuses on a different logic that provides valuable insights into the domestic-external connections in Chinese politics. This focus is related to the central concern of the thesis about the claims of Chinese IR scholars that traditional ideas such as relationality provide a better lens to organize world politics than western concepts of individuality and sharp distinctions between us vs. them. In addition, the resistance to the constitutive norms

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<sup>35</sup> Guo Yi, "Tianxia zhuyi: shijie zhixu chongjian de rujia fang'an [Tianxia-ism: A Confucian Solution for Re-establishing World Order]," *People's Tribune*, No. 6 (2013):28–35, <https://www.wenmi.com/article/pxhwlc0202so.html>; Lu Mingjun, 20 "The Bene-Ideal: China's Cosmopolitan Vision of World Order," *Chinese Political Science Review* 1, no. 2 (2016):336–52, 10.1007/s41111-016-0016-0; Zhao, Tingyang, "Rethinking Empire," 29–41; Zhao Tingyang, "A Political World Philosophy," 5–18.

<sup>36</sup> Xiaowei Zang, *Ethnicity in China: A Critical Introduction* (London: Polity Press, 2015), 18–26.

<sup>37</sup> Frank Dikötter, "Race in China" in *China Inside Out: Contemporary Chinese Nationalism and Transnationalism* edited by Pál Nyíri and Joana Breidenbach (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), 177–204.

emerges from the need to legitimize a different political system because the dominant norms make moral and political claims on domestic political order.

It concerns the claims of diverse ways of organizing domestic political order and contesting binaries of self-other and hegemonic aspects of dominant understandings of these concepts. Thus, these new ‘de-territorialized’ or ‘non-territorial’ concepts derived from traditional culture namely *ronghe*, *datong*, *tianxia*, etc. are supposed to de-binarize international relations and politics.

Thus, a major question here is whether and how Chinese policies in Xinjiang and Tibet overcome these binaries or introduce new binaries. This question is important to ask because rethinking international relations theories cannot be accepted uncritically. As Dibyesh Anand rightly points out, rising powers cannot deny and escape from the scrutiny of their policies while they critique imperialism and hegemony of western powers.<sup>38</sup> Thus, while the critiques of hegemonic ideas and norms are legitimate since they are in fact biased, however, the scrutiny of these alternative ideas cannot be ignored. As Sankaran Krishna has argued, calls for geo-culturally pluralistic IR may reify culturalist and nativist tendencies, and hence there is need for politicized efforts to think about the plurality of ideas.<sup>39</sup> This again points towards the importance of examining Chinese debates with reference to domestic policies even if one argues that Chinese scholars do not have the freedom to express their ideas.

The claims made by the Chinese state and scholars cannot avoid the hegemonic aspects of international relations that ‘western international relations’ theories are accused of. The exclusion of voices from within China and especially from its minority regions takes place at various levels, from defining what is ‘Chinese’ to the displacement of the spatial-political and identity narratives emerging out from these regions. As a result, the use of culture and tradition in Chinese discourses becomes closely related to power and the politics of Chinese identity and agency in international relations, rather than addressing the questions of difference and dialogue. A very few scholars in IR theories debates have raised the hegemonic aspects of Chinese ideas and the questions of diversity within domestic politics.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Dibyesh Anand, “China and India: Postcolonial Informal Empires in the Emerging Global Order,” *Rethinking Marxism* 24, no. 1 (2012): 74, [10.1080/08935696.2012.635039](https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2012.635039).

<sup>39</sup> Sankaran Krishna, “On the Pitfalls of Geo-cultural Pluralism in IR,” *International Politics Reviews* 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41312-021-00113-1>.

<sup>40</sup> William A. Callahan, “Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-hegemonic or a New Hegemony?” *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (2008): 749–761, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2008.00830.>; Xu Jilin, *Rethinking China’s Rise: A Liberal Critique*, trans. David Ownby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 139-145.

Therefore, the questions of democratizing and rethinking IR theories from Chinese ideas involve two important dimensions. First, it is not just the west/China binary that should be explored in terms of the former's exclusion of practices and traditions from China in conceptualizing IR. But it is also about how ideas and thoughts from China tackle the same problems of exclusion in domestic politics. Second, before an idea qualifies as an international norm, it should also be applicable to the domestic political order.

### III

#### **Sovereignty, Political Order and Political Legitimacy: Strategies of Reorganizing Power**

This section discusses three strategies- economic developmentalism, redefining ethnic relations, and rewriting history- through which the Chinese state attempts to reconstruct the moral foundations of political order to deal with the challenges to its territorial sovereignty and political legitimacy in Tibet and Xinjiang. In attempting to understand how China deals with the questions of cultural diversity within domestic politics, these strategies traces how new binaries of backward/civilized and modern/primitive among others are created.

##### **Strategy One: Economic Developmentalism and Questions of Territorial Sovereignty**

In the Post-1978 period, economic development has been used as a major strategy to address the challenges of territorial sovereignty and ethnic minority resentment. In the shift from class-based ideological strategy, economic developmentalism has been adopted with an assumption that it would bring about ethnic integration and ethnic minority into the mainstream framework of building unified *zhonghuaminzu*.<sup>41</sup> It is aimed at reducing inequality between minority regions and other parts of China. Besides, it has also figured prominently in its ideological narratives at the domestic level and in foreign policy to respond to the criticism of China's policies in these regions on human rights, the alienation of minorities, and the suppression of cultural and economic rights.

While economic development does bring about positive changes for ethnic minorities in terms of livelihood opportunities, it also helps the Chinese state to strengthen its control over these regions by dislocating traditions, cultures, and histories of these regions, and closer integration of these regions to the political economy of inland provinces. This section builds

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<sup>41</sup>Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, "zhongguo de minzu zhengce yu ge minzu gongtong canrong fazhan," (China's ethnic policy and the common prosperity and development of all ethnic groups), September 2009, [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2009-09/27/content\\_2615773.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2009-09/27/content_2615773.htm); Chen Jianyue, "minzu tuanjie: xi jinping faguo lizheng sixiang de hexin linian," (National Unity: The Core Idea of Xi Jinping's Thoughts on State Administration and Administration) *China's Borderland History and Geography Studies* no. 3 (2016): 11-16.

upon existing studies, scholarly writings by Chinese scholars, and official discourse to understand how economic developmentalism helps the Chinese state strengthen territorial sovereignty through the dislocation of markers of ethnic identities.

There is nothing unique in the claim that economic development helps the Chinese state exercise greater control over ethnic minority regions in its political economy. It is a phenomenon that has characterized most of the countries across the world.<sup>42</sup> Some of the effects of the same can also be considered unintentional. But there is sufficient evidence that China's economic development strategy in minority regions is not just a reflection of its economic and security interests. The official and intellectual discourses, and its policies are aimed at what Hu Angang and Hu Lianhe call *guozu rentong* (unified national identity).<sup>43</sup> This aligns with larger debates and emphasis on nationalism in the reform period wherein national identity has become one of the sources of legitimacy. National identity discourses in the minority regions emphasize *minzu tuanjie* (ethnic unity) and define minority cultures and history as part of Chinese culture and history.

In Maoist China, the two major programs in the 1960s and 1970s viz 'support the borderlands' (*zhibian*) and 'third front strategy' (*sanxian*) were laid out whereby millions of Han migrants and workers were sent down to the western regions to build road networks, civilian and military infrastructure that was aimed at consolidating the CCP's control over these regions, and countering resurrection of "capitalist bourgeoisies and spiliticism."<sup>44</sup> The party discourses on women who were in many occasions forced to migrate and marry laid-off soldiers from the KMT and the Xinjiang Construction Corps have been considered essential to building the nation in the borderlands.<sup>45</sup> The belief in Han workers and soldiers by the CCP reveals the cultural and ideological dynamics of economic development in Xinjiang and Tibet. These narratives are part of popular culture. For example, the Hunan TV channel conducted a program to honour the women who migrated to marry the laid off soldiers.<sup>46</sup> TV channels frequently portray Han party cadres and workers in Xinjiang and Tibet as protectors

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<sup>42</sup> Doreen Massey's studies have explored these dynamics in that discourses on development of peripheries involving the denial of history and agency to communities living at the periphery, see, Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 64-69.

<sup>43</sup> Hu Angang and Lianhe Hu, "Dierdai Minzu Zhengce: Cuijin Minzu Jiaorong Yiti He Fanrong (Second Generation Minzu Policies: Promoting Organic Ethnic Blending and Prosperity)," *Xinjiang Shifan Daxue Xuebao (Zhaxue Shehui Kexue Bao)* 32, no. 5 (2011): 3.

<sup>44</sup> See, Covell F. Meyskens, *Mao's Third Front: The Militarization of Cold War China* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Tom Cliff, "Refugees, Conscripts, and Constructors: Developmental Narratives and Subaltern Han in Xinjiang, China," *Modern China* 47, no. 5 (2021): 547, 10.1177/0097700420904020.

<sup>46</sup> Hunan Television "hunan weshi 2009 xiang xi de hunan nushi," (湖南卫视 (2009) 向西的湖南女士 Hunan women who went west), Hunan Television Heroes Awards 2009.

of sovereignty and building the nation.

During the reform period, China has developed transport networks (road, railways, and air), cross-border connectivity projects and infrastructure connecting these regions with neighbouring countries, and inner provinces economically and security-wise. The studies show that infrastructure projects across these regions have led to immense spatial changes dislocating the local cultures, social relations, and the sense of community.<sup>47</sup> These spatial changes as a result of ‘westward expansion’ become significant when read in the context of the idea of ‘Great Northwest’ (*weida xibei*) that has shaped China’s imagination of the peripheral regions since the early twentieth century.<sup>48</sup> The binaries of backward vs. modern reflect in Chinese official discourses on economic development in minority regions. An extreme example of such binaries is naming of the relocated villages in Tibet and other minority regions as “new socialist villages” in contrast to the “backward and unscientific villages and practices” among minorities.<sup>49</sup> While imageries of minority regions as exotic geographical landscape capture the imagination of common Chinese people fuelled by propaganda and party discourses, these regions as backward and feudal are frequently used as justification for changing ethnic identities and social practices.<sup>50</sup>

After the initial focus on coastal areas in its economic model for two decades, China unveiled a major plan, the western development plan (*xibu da kaifa*) in 1999. The plan included total of 11 provinces (Sichuan, Yunnan, Qinghai, Gansu, Guizhou, and Shaanxi, and 5 Autonomous regions viz Tibet, Xinjiang, Ningxia, Guansi, and Inner Mongolia). As part of the plan, the main idea was to fill up the regional inequality gap fuelled by the strategy of allowing some regions (coastal regions) to get rich first, and tap natural resources from these regions to continue to fuel growth in central and coastal areas.

Crucially, the ethnic minority unrest and challenges were one of the main rationales behind that plan as growing inequality between western and eastern regions (mainly Han

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<sup>47</sup> Rahilä Dawut, “Shrine Pilgrimage among the Uighurs,” *The Silk Road* 6, no. 2 (2009): 56–67; Emily Ting Yeh, *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 163-1167 and 195-200; A Joniak-Lüthi, & Uradyn Bulag, “Introduction: Spatial Transformation in China’s Northwestern Borderlands,” *Inner Asia*, 18 no. 1 (2016): 3-5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44645082>.

<sup>48</sup> Jiang Jingguo (Jiang Kai Shek), *Weida de xibei* (Great North Western) (Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 2001). Also available at [http://www.phoer.net/people/j/jiangjingguo\\_01.htm](http://www.phoer.net/people/j/jiangjingguo_01.htm); Hsiao-ting Lin, “Nationalists, Muslim Warlords, and the “Great Northwestern Development” in Pre-Communist China,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (2007): 129-131; Dawut, “Shrine Pilgrimage,” 57-58.

<sup>49</sup> Françoise Robin, “The “Socialist New Villages” in the Tibetan Autonomous Region: Reshaping the rural landscape and controlling its inhabitants,” *China Perspectives* 28 October 2019, 10.4000/chinaperspectives.4845.

<sup>50</sup> Wang Xin and Zhou Wei, “On the Northwest Ethnic Problems in the Development of Western Regions of China,” *Journal of Northwest University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* no. 4 (2001):10-17.

populated regions) fuelled ethnic minority hopes in the immediate aftermath of the reforms.<sup>51</sup> Chinese debates on social transformation due to economic development recognize that there is resentment among minority communities.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the economic linkages between these peripheral regions and other parts of China have evolved closer although these regions still lag in industrialization mainly supplying raw materials like oil, gas, cotton and other agricultural products.

Apart from the displacement and dislocation of local spatial and social relationships as a result of infrastructure projects, the commercialization of ethnic minority religious places like shrines, monasteries, and mosques have become another site of displacement of ethnic history, tradition, and culture. The renovation of shrines in Xinjiang, Mosques in other parts of China, and temples in Tibet have become sites where the Chinese state pushes its narratives of history and tradition of these ethnic communities as part of the larger history of China.<sup>53</sup>

In the name of development and creating tourism opportunities, local religious places become mere tourist destinations and function as exotic places for Han tourists.<sup>54</sup> Housing projects in urban areas in Xinjiang and Tibet have erased the spatial markers that allow ethnic communities to feel they belonged to the places.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, economic development while bringing positive changes has a negative impact on culture and history of ethnic communities and their sense of belonging. It is achieved through the displacement of local markers of identity and tradition and the inscription of Chinese history and culture in these places. These policies are part of larger narratives of constructing *zhonghuaminzu* or *guojiarentong* (Chinese nation or national identity).

The shift from class-based ideological to changing dynamics of political legitimacy of the CCP has also shifted the framing of minority regions with reference to a revised view of history and culture. This reflects in efforts to erase the distinctive characteristics of Tibetan Buddhism and Islam. In contrary to the CCP's official ideology and the Constitution which guarantee religious freedom to the minorities, the party has never tolerated any organized

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<sup>51</sup> Debashish Chaudhuri, "Xinjiang and Chinese State," 137-161; S. Frederick Starr et al. (eds.), *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (London: Routledge, 2002), 4.

<sup>52</sup> Gao Yun Jiu, "lun minzu xinli rentong dui wending de zuoyong," (Thoughts on the Social Stability of China's Minority Areas) *Journal of Lanzhou University* no. 03 (2003): 45-50.

<sup>53</sup> Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi, "Xinjiang's geographies in motion," *Asian Ethnicity* 16, no. 4, (2015): 428-445, Doi: 10.1080/14631369.2014.1001162; Anthony Ross, "Development in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region: Spatial Transformations and the Construction of Difference in Western China," *Discussion paper, Stellenbosch University, Centre for Chinese Studies*, 2012, <https://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/70439>.

<sup>54</sup> Joniak-Lüthi, "Xinjiang's geographies in motion," 435.

<sup>55</sup> See, Darren Byler, "Spirit Breaking: Uyghur Dispossession, Culture Work and Terror Capitalism in a Chinese Global City," Ph.D. Thesis (University of Washington, 2018).

ideology and religion. Tibetan Buddhism provides Tibetan population a different vision of identity and resources for mobilization against China's sovereignty. Hence, the party attempts to "sinicize" it and render it as part of Chinese culture and history. Similarly, Islam's origins in Middle East provide a different spatial imagination of political community among Uighurs, and source of identity that conflict with the party narratives and ideology of embedding Han Chinese identity into Chinese culture and history.

### **Strategy Two: Redefining Cultural, Political, and Territorial Dimensions of Minority-Majority Relations**

Han-minority relations are another source of challenge to China's sovereignty and sources of unrest in Tibetan and Xinjiang. The concept of autonomy is a spatial-political category which signifies spatial adjustment of political aspirations of minorities as well as a worldview about national-political community of Chinese elites, ever since it emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. It is related to the questions of territorial sovereignty and how China organizes its political order.

The questions of autonomy have become crucial after the reform period not only because there has been unrest and assertions of independence and more substantial autonomy based on claims of distinct history culture and tradition and power sharing within Chinese political system - but also because of the collapse of the Soviet Union and creation of states in central Asia, the fall of Yugoslavia and ethnic mobilization across the world for nation-statehood. Besides, the decline of Maoist ideology as a ruling ideology has also raised the questions of how and in what framework the claims of territorial sovereignty and political legitimacy be articulated. The Post-Cold war period has also seen attempts by the US and other European powers for democracy promotion and other values that have also put pressure on China and the issues of territorial sovereignty especially the way international opinion is mobilized in support of diaspora rights and political groups from these regions.

In this process, the question of distinct historical relations between China and these ethnic territories has come into sharp focus. Chinese scholars and state have responded to these challenges by reinterpreting history of these regions, and Han-ethnic community relations by questioning cultural, spatial, social and territorial boundaries that defined traditional relations. It is here that multiple ways of thinking about spatial organization of power and how Chinese traditional ideas and practice like *datong* (Great Unity), *hexie* (harmony), and *ronghe* (assimilation or integration) come to play a role in Chinese thinking about creating spatial political order that is Beijing-centric. Methodologically, it means that multiple ways of representing and articulating spatial aspects of politics through culture,

cartography and narratives of past and history are important sources to understand overall thinking of Chinese policy makers. That is where multiple strategies in different areas of policy namely cultural, history rewriting, education, cartography and narratives are adopted with, of course, the use of force to delegitimize alternative imaginations and articulation of spatial-political order by minority communities.

The minority question in the Post-Imperial China has been entangled with the question of sovereignty. The pairing of two questions, that of minorities and sovereignty, has been one of the most important questions in creating a ‘unified nation-state’ consisting of 56 officially recognized minority groups and hundreds of others that could not find the place in minority classification.<sup>56</sup> Yet few minority groups have posed greater problem in solving the ethnic question than others. These groups, the Uighurs in Xinjiang, Tibetans, Mongolians in Inner Mongolia, have posed a unique problem because of their concentration in a particular territory, distinct history and cultural traditions with significant connections with regions beyond borders of the People’s Republic of China. These regions have also been impacted by the larger geopolitical developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the former empires collapsed at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Post-1949 ethnic policies have undergone multiple changes. The provision of ‘autonomous regions’ was adopted to resolve the questions of autonomy for ethnic minorities.<sup>57</sup> Sulemaan Wasif Khan has shown, the centrality of territory was and has been central to the survival of Chinese state from Mao onwards - the rejection of the right to self-determination after 1949 by the CCP promised in the 1930s and 1940s to co-opt minority groups against the KMT and Japanese aggression seems logical.<sup>58</sup> The idea of regional autonomy was borrowed from the Soviet model of nationalities to deal with the minority question after 1949.

But there is an important difference that Chinese system of regional autonomy has as opposed to the Soviet Model. In Chinese institutional mechanism of ‘regional autonomy, a region is granted autonomy but the autonomy for individual ethnic minorities is layered in the sense that they have their own autonomous prefectures, counties or villages within an autonomous region or even outside.<sup>59</sup> This distinction is crucial to understand Chinese

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<sup>56</sup>Chaudhuri “Xinjiang and the Chinese State,” 67-68.

<sup>57</sup> Chaudhuri “Xinjiang and the Chinese State,” 68.

<sup>58</sup>Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China’s Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2018), 5.

<sup>59</sup> For example, China counters Uighur claims to Xinjiang based on the presence of other minority groups as well as increasing Han population. Han population in Xinjiang has increased manifold since 1949 with Uighurs consisting of majority only in Southern Xinjiang now. Recent studies of Chinese strategies on migration point

strategy, especially in the Post-1978 period, whereby it has used the layered ethnic autonomy mechanism along with Han migration to reject the claims of ethnic minorities for territorial sovereignty. The questioning of traditional boundaries and their reification through regional autonomy mechanism and the politicization of traditional cultural and spatial boundaries are situated within this context.

In the immediate aftermath of transition of leadership in 1978, China reinstated the Regional Autonomy that was removed in the Constitution of 1975 when it promulgated new Constitution in 1982, passed a new law in 1984 that recognized ethnic minority rights (theoretically at least) to preserve their culture among others. This was in parallel with a relatively open environment that led to the revival of expression of minority identities and revival of ethnic culture and life in general. All this was happening when debates on Chinese identity and culture shifted from Maoist-socialism to new ideas that included redefining culture and tradition.

These debates challenged the idea of culture that the CCP had monopolized and looked at tradition and culture from different standpoints.<sup>60</sup> This challenge, coupled with student protests across China in the late 1980s that culminated in 1989 Tiananmen protests, and riots in Tibet and other parts of ethnic minority areas, led the party to focus on national identity as a source of its legitimacy. Besides, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 primarily because of minority ethnic national mobilizations convinced the CCP that the existing ethnic minority policies including regional autonomy mechanism is not sustainable.<sup>61</sup> There was a widespread panic and recognition both among intellectuals and leadership that the party faced a real danger of collapse.<sup>62</sup> Hence, a shift towards integrating ethnic minorities within the fold of *zhonghuaminzu* identity began.

This nationalist turn reflected in patriotic education campaign (*aiguojiaoyu*),

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towards strategy to make Southern Xinjiang “embedded” with Han population to reduce the percentage of Uyghur population. See, Adrian Zenz, “End the dominance of the Uyghur ethnic group’: an analysis of Beijing’s population optimization strategy in southern Xinjiang,” *Central Asian Survey* 40, no. 3 (2021): 298, doi: 10.1080/02634937.2021.1946483.

<sup>60</sup> Lee Ou fan Lee, in Tu Weiming (ed), *The Living Tree: Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (Stanford University Press, 1994), 274.

<sup>61</sup> On the centrality of ethnic nationalism in the collapse of the Soviet Union, see, Mohd. Moazzam Ali, *The Collapse of the Soviet Union: The Nationality Causes* (New Delhi: Lancer’s Books, 2004); Jin Bingao, Jue Qing and Mou Zhang, “Lun Zhongguo gongchangdang disandai lindao jiti de minzu lilun,” (On Ethnic Theory of Third Generation CCP Leaders) *Minzu Yanjiu*, no. 5 (2001): 9-18

<sup>62</sup> Tieying Li, “Yanjiu sulian xingshuai de lishi jingyan, wei jianshe zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi shiye fuwu,” (Exploring the Historical Experiences of Rise and Decline of the Soviet Union in order to Contribute in the Construction of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics) *Russian, Central Asia and East European Studies*, no. 2 (2003): 2.

nationalist writings by scholars and party propagandists.<sup>63</sup> While this changed the tone and language of minority ethnic policies, there was a renewed emphasis on integration. It should be noted here that the focus on integration has always existed but underwent ups and down as the nature of domestic politics and resentment among ethnic communities changed.<sup>64</sup> But from the early 1980s onwards, there have been continuous efforts to redefine cultural, social, spatial and historical boundaries by redefining the historical relations between ethnic communities and majority Han.

Territory became the main axis of defining Chinese identity in minority areas in the Post-Mao period. To be sure, influential Chinese scholars like Historians Zhaoguang Ge and Ge Jianxiong have questioned these narratives of continuous Chinese history and identity involving current territorial boundaries.<sup>65</sup> Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, with funding from Chinese government and the Ministry of Culture has, over a period of time, launched a series of projects to rewrite history of borderland regions.<sup>66</sup> There are numerous publications as part of these projects.

The following points summarize the objectives and contents of the projects. First, ethnic communities are ‘Chinese’ and hence all the historical dynasties and polities in the regions have been Chinese by this logic. Second, the distortion of ‘Chinese history’ of these regions must be corrected. Third, the current territorial boundaries of China are historical boundaries; fourth, any attempt by separatists must be countered with a correct version of history.<sup>67</sup> Such a version of history is biased and there is no doubt about it. But these views that have prevailed in Chinese intellectual and official discourses reflect the tendency of China to territorialize its identity in peripheral regions in terms of modern western territorialities that characterize the nation-state. This is not only reflected in the centrality of territory but also in defining relationship with territory coterminous with distribution of culture. Hence, the eraser of distinctive markers of cultural and religious identities goes together with rewriting history of these regions with an objective of expansion of “Chinese cultural areas” as coterminous with the current geopolitical boundaries.

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<sup>63</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “Chinese Intellectuals’ Quest for National Greatness and Nationalistic Writings in the 1990s,” *The China Quarterly* no. 152 (1996): 726, Doi: 10.1017/S0305741000047536.

<sup>64</sup> Zang, Ethnicity in China,” 18-26.

<sup>65</sup> Ge Jianxiong, “gudai zhongguo: jiuqing you duode,” (How Big Was China), 2007, <https://view.news.qq.com/a/20120727/000031.htm>; Zhaoguang Ge, “What Is China?”

<sup>66</sup> The CASS launched three projects viz The Northeast Project (Manchuria region covering Heilongjiang, Liaoning and Jilin provinces), the Northwest Project (Xinjiang) and the Southwest Project (Tibet) in 1990s and 2000s. See, the website of CASS, *zhongguo bianjiang shi di Yanjiu* (China’s Borderland History and Geography Studies) at <http://www.zgbjssdyj.com/html/qkjs.html>

<sup>67</sup> Yoon Hwytak, “China’s Northeast Project: Defensive or Offensive Strategy?” *East Asian Review* 16, no. 4 (2004): 102.

The idea that ethnic minorities living within current borders of China are Chinese, have been debated within anthropological and ethnic studies in China. One of the most celebrated sociologists of China; Fei Xiaotong's works have dealt with the question of ethnic problems. His works have developed an idea of 'unity with diversity' (*he er butong*) that rests upon the idea of 'other' in western anthropology and the Confucian idea of Great Unity (*datong*).<sup>68</sup> In this theory, Han majority and its history is placed at the centre of the evolution of *zhonghua minzu*. In Fei's view, Han history has absorbed ethnic communities at its periphery like "a snowball gathering more and more snow as it rolls."<sup>69</sup>

The current idea of *zhonghua minzu* has developed from the ancient *huaxia* (people of Xia dynasty living in nine provinces in eastern and central plains) through this process and hence, the idea of *zhonghua minzu* is essentially unified yet plural.<sup>70</sup> The assumption is that these ethnic groups will ultimately merge with majority Han to form a unified *zhonghuaminzu*. These ideas have been closely aligned with the political project of creating a Chinese nation.<sup>71</sup> These ideas are at the centre of Chinese narratives of history of ethnic communities and identity to territorialize and nationalize the peripheral territories.

Border and spatial markers have become central to visual propaganda, thereby bringing the territorial aspects of politics at the heart of the question and the way Chinese state articulates these issues to its own people. Visuals of minority groups especially smaller groups other than the Uighurs saluting border pillars with "China" written on them as protectors of borders is a major phenomenon in propaganda films and media reports.<sup>72</sup> In these narratives and propaganda, the idea of creating a "new great wall" has gained wind very quickly. The Great Wall is usually cited as the traditional cultural boundaries between Han and non-Han people historically.<sup>73</sup> Such a re-conceptualization is in consonance with

<sup>68</sup>Jian Jiao, "shi shuo Fei Xiaotong de lishi gongneng lun," (Testing Fei Xiaotong's theory of Historical Functionalism). *zhongyang minzu Daxue Xuebao* (Journal of the Central University for Nationalities), 34, no. 1 (2001): 5-11.

<sup>69</sup> Fei Xiaotong, "Plurality and Unity in the Configuration of Chinese People," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Delivered at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 15 and 17 November, 1988, 168, <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/resources/documents/a-to-z/f/fei90.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> Ma Rong, *minzu yu Shehui fazhan* (Nationalities and Social Development) (Beijing: Beijing: minzu Chubanshe, 2011): 75-81.

<sup>71</sup> Wang Mingming, "The Third Eye: Towards a Critique of 'Nativist Anthropology,'" *Critique of Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (2002): 150-151, Doi: 10.1177/03075X02022002850.

<sup>72</sup> Films have long been sites of promotion of ideology and the idea of *minzu tuanjie*. For example, *Two Generations* (1960), *Analkhan* (1962), *Shewket's Summer* (2012), *The Wings of Songs* and *Kunlun Brothers*. These are some of the example among many. Apart from *minzu tuanjie*, these films also portray these regions as barren, exotic, wild and remote reflecting the idea of *weida de xibei* (Great Northwest). For propaganda and ethnic minorities, see, Anne Marrie Brady, "We Are All Part of the Same Family": China's Ethnic Propaganda," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 41, no. 4 (2012):159-181, doi: 10.1177/186810261204100406.

<sup>73</sup>Ning Sao, *Minzu yu guojia: Minzu guanxi yu minzu zhengce de guoji bijiao* (Minzu and State: An International

narratives of history of minority and border regions as well as the idea of *minzu tuanjie*.

Chinese scholars of ethnicities have similarly questioned the regional autonomy mechanism as a barrier to constructing *zhonghuaminzu*. In Ma Rong's, one of the most celebrated sociologists of ethnic communities, regional autonomy reifies ethnic sense of identity and distinctiveness and hence should be done away with gradually.<sup>74</sup> The idea of creating a homogenous domestic political order without layered political authority in the form of regional autonomy builds upon the idea of nation-state borrowed from the west. As Professor Ning Sao says, there can be no other *minzu* (ethnicity) other than *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese ethnicity).<sup>75</sup> In this context, the metaphor of 'Great Wall' as a traditional boundary between Han Chinese and ethnic groups with different and often conflicting relations has come to be questioned. Historian Lin Gan argues that these boundaries have been constructed by imperial powers like Russia, Japan and others during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, Chinese scholars and the CCP have attempted to portray Uighur history as part of broader Chinese history. In this respect, the idea of Uighurs as an identity with their history distinct from Chinese history or as part of Pan-Turkic/Islamic history is rejected.<sup>77</sup> This is the basic premise of Chinese historiography mobilized to nation-state making projects to create a modern nation-state out of former empire. It is part of a larger trend in writing history and nationalism in modern period, and Chinese writing of history and the past through the prism of contemporary political needs is not unique.<sup>78</sup> The current discourses question internal administrative, cultural and spatial boundaries to make current territorial boundaries coterminous with Chinese culture and history by construction. Whatever the historical truth is, these narratives and ideas are at the centre of Chinese narratives of national identity and territorial sovereignty. Anything contrary to this is presented as an imperial design to cut off the 'geo-body' of China and must be defended.

### **Strategy Three: History as a Site of Contestation and Legitimation of Political Order and Sovereignty**

History is central to Chinese thinking - both in terms of their articulations of long-term objectives and interests, and locating their contemporary developments and policies, as

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Comparison of Minzu Relations and Minzu Policies) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1995), 12-14.

<sup>74</sup>Ma, "Reflections," 240-241.

<sup>75</sup> Ning Sao, "Minzu yu guojia," 12-14.

<sup>76</sup> Lin Gan, *A General History of the Xiongnu* (New York: American Academic Press, 2020), 1-10.

<sup>77</sup> Tursun Nabijan, "The Formation of Modern Uighur Historiography and competing perspectives towards Uighur History," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6 no. 3 (2008): 91.

<sup>78</sup>Duara, "Rescuing History from Nation," 17-50.

well as learning lessons from history. History writing as a tool of political legitimacy has a long tradition in China. Such an instrumental use of history has been inherited from imperial dynasties which commissioned history writing, often leading to reinterpretations of previous accounts as well as the suppression of alternative histories.

In his report to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2017, Xi Jinping had stated in a rather crisp and short phrase that “the Chinese Dream is a dream about history, the present, and the future.”<sup>79</sup> Xi Jinping’s emphasis on the importance of history is significant. While Maoist China reviled past and tradition, the party and intellectuals have relooked at the past and tradition in light of changing domestic ideology. Yuri Pines, while writing on debates on the first Chinese imperial dynasty, argued that:

“The ongoing debate over the Qin Empire concerns not just the past, but, primarily, the present: it is the debate about how China is to be governed, how much autonomy is to be accorded to each of its parts, what role intellectuals should have in society, and what means are legitimate in restoring China’s glorious position as a powerful and awe-inspiring nation.”<sup>80</sup>

History is also at the centre of contestations over territorial sovereignty in Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.<sup>81</sup> This section, therefore, looks at the use of history to make certain claims on territorial sovereignty in these regions. However, the focus here is on conceptualizing the use of history rather than a detailed discussion on specific cases. To be sure, it happens from the Chinese state as well as the groups contesting Chinese sovereignty. As a result, history becomes a site of contestation. In the process, there is an element of construction because the past is looked at from the perspective of the present. I have dealt with the two issues; the invented nature of past, tradition and culture, and the problem of presentism.

In this chapter, rewriting history for making claims or counter-claims is looked at from two vantage points. First, history is used to make claims over territory. In these claims which are constructed, the past is interpreted as to make claims that China has ruled over these territories and hence, they are part of China. Second, the past is rewritten from the perspective of the territorial nation-state, a geo-body that reveals close connections with culture, history, and the ownership of territory. Looking at the interpretations and discourse on history, it amounts to rejecting and even erasing alternative claims about the history of these regions.

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<sup>79</sup> Xinhua, “Full text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress,” *Xinhua News* March 11, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c\\_136725942.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm).

<sup>80</sup> Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>81</sup> Nabijan, “Uighur Historiography,” 87-100; Shautman, “Resolving the Tibet question,” 77-107.

While the use of history in the imperial period was more about the legitimacy of the dynasty - modern China after the fall of the Qing Dynasty had another use of it in its efforts to claim imperial territories in Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Manchuria. This dimension, I emphasize in this section, locates the use of history within the context of claiming sovereignty over non-Han territories. The existence of different cultures and societies and their complex relationship with Chinese imperial dynasties posed a different challenge that dictated the dilemmas and choices of Chinese leaders and politics since 1911.

For example, the necessity of making claims to the former imperial territories as part of the new republic, early twentieth century Chinese nationalists had to change their positions on the idea of China they had articulated in the late nineteenth and early years of twentieth century. Han-centric racial articulations of nationalism by leaders like Sun Yat-Sen and their change of positions dictated by articulating a plural idea of the nation in terms of the multi-ethnic nation consisting of five nationalities-Han, Tibetans, Hui, Manchu, and Mongols- is an illustrious example.<sup>82</sup> But the dilemma of creating a modern and uniform nation-state has not been resolved until now. It is rather becoming more prominent as time passes.

There is extensive literature on Chinese nationalism about the problems of creating a nation-state out of a former imperial polity that had diverse populations. Here, I take two dimensions as a starting point to contextualize the debates on and the use of history. First, there has been a strong urge to transform 'barbarians' into Chinese relying on the notion of *ronghe* (blending or integration) derived from traditional Confucian cultural and moral distinctions between inside and outside/self-other. This implies that the Chinese state and society has inherited this urge to expand by assimilating minorities by sinicising through *ronghe* and this dimension has been there in its approach to minority populations.<sup>83</sup> Second, partly as a result of the policies of the Chinese state, global expansion of the idea of the nation-state, and partly because the assertive minority groups have their distinctive history, tradition, and identity that clash with Chinese vision, there have been alternative articulations of political identity that contest the very idea of China as a multi-ethnic nation-state.

Hence, Chinese claims must counter these claims. In the process, history becomes a technique to claim that these territories and groups have been part of Chinese society, a homeland. Therefore, culture and tradition are sought to be redefined by their relation to a particular territory or its ownership thereby placing Chinese developments within the

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<sup>82</sup> David Brophy et al, "Introduction: The Xinhai Revolution and Inner Asia," *Inner Asia* 14, no. 2 (2012): 319–322, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24572067.pdf>.

<sup>83</sup> Zang, "Ethnicity in China," 18-26.

framework of territorial nation-state and its ills that Chinese leadership and intellectual claim to cure by Chinese ideas. It is in this context that culture and philosophical underpinning imagining space and politics gains significance to understand the Chinese approach to territorial sovereignty. Thus, various articulations of space and politics- cultural, cartographic, and religious- become so significant that a narrow focus on power and security does not help develop a complete understanding.

### **History and China's Territorial Sovereignty Claims**

China's claim to sovereignty in Tibet and Xinjiang also involves claims about external boundaries. The external boundaries of territories like Tibet, Xinjiang and Mongolia were never fixed and hence, have been one of the problems in China's articulations of sovereignty claims. The issue of historical relationship between Tibet and China is a case in point to understand the way modern concepts of territorial sovereignty and territorialized nation-state have been significant in shaping the 'Tibet question.' The issue is salient because Tibetan émigré argue that Tibet was not part of China. It is this assertion that lies at the heart of Tibet question in contemporary times between Tibetans and Chinese.<sup>84</sup> While existing literature provide conflicting views about the exact nature of historical relations between China and Tibet, there is overwhelming consensus in the literature that Tibet and China, conducted their relations in a conceptual worldview that was completely distinct from western world view of territorialized international order.<sup>85</sup> The interpretation of historical Sino-Tibetan relations through the lens of European concepts and ideas enshrined in the international law has caused much confusion. Yet the rise of the view among the Tibetan nationalists that Tibet and China were distinct entities historically defined in these European terms is at the core of contention between Tibetans and the Chinese government.<sup>86</sup>

Similarly, the articulations and claims of nationalists in Xinjiang and Uighur émigré relies on 'constructing' a history that largely fits well within the modern western narratives of nationalism. At the same time, the idea that a unified Xinjiang existed as historically distinct from traditional Chinese empire is an invention of 20<sup>th</sup> century nationalists in Xinjiang as part of larger trends in international system wherein nation-state became a dominant framework to

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<sup>84</sup> Shautman, "Resolving the Tibet Question," 78.

<sup>85</sup> Dibyesh Anand, *Geopolitical Exotica: Tibet in Western Imagination* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 76-80; Dawa Norbu, "The Europeanization of Sino - Tibetan Relations, 1775-1907: The Genesis of Chinese 'Suzerainty' and Tibetan 'Autonomy,'" *Tibet Journal* 15, no. 4: (1990): 28-74, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43300374>. For Chinese views of Historical Tibet-China relations see, Tieh - tseng Li, *Tibet: Today and Yesterday* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1954).

<sup>86</sup> G. Schmitz, "Tibet's Position in International Law," in *Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora*, eds. D. Bernstorff and H. Von Welck (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004); Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947* (London: Pimlico, 1999).

articulate political identity and sovereignty. In the process, the spatial imagination of Xinjiang as a distinct territory from China has become the centre of articulation by those who root for independence.

Xinjiang, as it is known today, never existed in history before 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>87</sup> It was divided into various kingdoms and a major divide was between north (Tzungar) and South (Tarim) based oasis communities. Rather, its present identity came into being as part of power struggle and control over territory.<sup>88</sup> However, it suffices to state that Xinjiang's identity as a Uighur land is a twentieth century construction. Therefore, contemporary political identity of Uighurs is as much a construction as it is a Chinese conception of Xinjiang being part of China.

Uighur articulations of political identity and resistance language and conceptual worldview have been changed by the influence of the dominant form of political community namely the nation-state. Yet it does not obliterate the real resistance and opposition to China's rule that the Uighurs have posed not just in contemporary times but for a much longer period. It is more so for the Uighurs that they use the language and conceptual worldview of nation-state and territoriality to assert their political aspirations because they do not have real power to exert any influence. In this respect, the Uighur or Tibetan assertion for separate statehood can be compared with numerous political movements around the world that use dominant nation-state framework and construct their own identity in the light of it to claims of nation-statehood.

David Brophy explains the origin of Uighur identity in the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of political changes after imperial polities broke up both in China and Russia.<sup>89</sup> In such an articulation, Tibetan and Uighur nationalists articulate their political demands, especially those who demand for independence from China in terms of their distinct identity and territory. The construction of Uighur identity is, since early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, basically embedded in the idea that they have not been part of Chinese history or have been forcefully integrated. They articulate spatial-political order that either gives centrality to Xinjiang or part of neighbouring societies and civilizational orders rather than being part of Sino-centric history and identity narratives.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Rian Thum, *Sacred Routes of Uighur History* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014), 6

<sup>88</sup> Thum, "Sacred Routes," 4-5.

<sup>89</sup> David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2016), 173-204.

<sup>90</sup> An example of how Uighur intellectuals like Turghum Almas resist Sino-centric narrative is to reimagine Xinjiang as part of central Asian and Islamic civilizations. By doing so, they imagine Xinjiang as peripheral to China spatial in opposition to Sino-centric narratives in Chinese discourses. See, Bovingdon, "The Uighurs,"

These articulations also cannot be considered correct descriptions of history given the sharp distinctions between Tibet, Inner Mongolia/Mongolia, and Xinjiang and China/Sino-centric political order historically. It is this dimension of the contestations over territorial sovereignty in these regions that puts them into the dynamics of power and norms wherein the normative ideas become central to political understanding of history. Yet, the influence of territorialized international order is such that ‘sovereignty’ can only be demanded in absolute sense with a distinct territory, history and culture (common language, religion etc.) being markers of territorial identity.

For Chinese leadership, the dilemma of claiming territories out of porous and dynamic boundaries has been dictated by contingent security and strategic calculations. At the same time, history and historical claims to the territories is one of the major sources of claims. History becomes significant more so due to the contestations over identity and history of these regions by Tibetans and Xinjiang. It involves contestations over the historical relationships between these groups and Chinese dynasties. Thus, for China, claiming historical boundaries coterminous with Tibetan history becomes a necessity. Historical claims over the Qing imperial territories and the claims of Chinese since early twentieth century was at the heart of Chinese nationalism and the politics of defining China. While there were disagreements, both Communists and the Nationalists agreed that all former Qing territories are part of a Chinese nation. Other factors like creating a secure and strong state that could project its power and glory was of course the original mission of the Chinese nationalists who inherited the sense of identity and glory from previous periods.

The CCP after 1949 has articulated its positions on territorial sovereignty and territorial disputes within this broad consensus that was built during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, Zhou Enlai in his address to the Bandung Conference in 1955 laid out the broad vision that China like other countries that had been subjugated by colonial powers had the right to territorial sovereignty and integrity within the framework of Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence.<sup>91</sup> Crucially, what remained to be done was the demarcation of boundaries and border within this framework. But the question over territorial sovereignty in all former Qing territories did not arise for him.<sup>92</sup>

Such an approach was also outlined in the CCP official documents.<sup>93</sup> Two important

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<sup>91</sup>“Main Speech by Premier Zhou Enlai,” 9-20.

<sup>92</sup> “Main Speech by Premier Zhou Enlai,” 9-20.

<sup>93</sup>Liao Xinwen, “Ershi Shiji Wuliushi Niandai Zhonggong Zhongyang Jiejue Bianjie Wenti de Yuanze he Fangfa: Lao Yibei Gemingjia yu Bianjie Wenti Yanjiu Zhiyi,” [Principles and Methods of the CPC Central

considerations can be drawn from these earlier positions. Firstly, Chinese leadership was extremely sensitive about security and brittleness of territorial sovereignty at the time and even now. For that, the principle of territorial sovereignty and integrity as part of the five principles of peaceful co-existence was articulated primarily because China wanted its neighbours to honour its territorial integrity and sovereignty, especially when its border provinces like Tibet were still not under full control. Secondly, Chinese claims to these territories did not involve a clear idea of where boundaries are located. Hence, Shen Zhihua and Julia Lovell's argument that Chinese leadership did not have an idea about boundaries gains significance.<sup>94</sup>

Yet, the claim that China ceded large amount of territory in settlement of boundary with most of its neighbour in the 1950s and 1960s does not tally well with the fact that China claimed the Qing territories that did not have clear demarcation of border and hence, they were vague. Therefore, it is difficult to make a point that China made concessions. Here, the role of contingent security and strategic factors become salient in boundary settlements.

China's approach to boundary demarcation lied within the contingent security and strategic considerations. This can be seen from China's negotiations with Russia (former Soviet Union) during the 1960s where it proposed not to lay claim to territories that were occupied under the 'unequal treaties' during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in lieu of security guarantee and respect for its sovereignty in those areas.<sup>95</sup> Again, a similar approach can be seen in its approach to solution of border disputes with central Asian countries and Russia during the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>96</sup>

At the same time, the national identity built largely in opposition to outside interference and to safeguard 'Chinese' territories inherited from former Qing Empire has brought the concern of territorial sovereignty at the core of China's approach and foreign policy. In this respect, there has been an emerging shift from 'cultural and civilizational' definitions of inside and outside to geopolitical and territorialized understanding of China and the very definition of China as a nation-state. Civilizational or cultural boundaries no longer

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Committee in Resolution of Boundary Problems: A Study of Revolutionists of the Older Generation and Boundary Problems] *Documents of the CPC*, 4 (2013): 76–79.

<sup>94</sup> Zhihua Shen & Julia Lovell, "Undesired Outcomes," 12.

<sup>95</sup> The term 'unequal treaties' refers to those treaties signed after 1942 between Qing empire and outside powers that ceded extraterritorial concessions. These powers included Russia, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, and the United States. For details, see, Dong Wang, *China's Unequal Treaties: Narrating National History* (London: Lexington Books, 2005).

<sup>96</sup> See, M. Taylor Fravel, "Power Shifts and Escalation: Explaining China's Use of Force in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007): 44–83, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2008.32.3.44>; N. Godehardt, *The Chinese Constitution of Central Asia: Regions and Intertwined Actors in International Relations* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 1-25.

define the geopolitical identity of China. Rather it is territorial identity and sovereignty issues that inform its practices and ideas.

The centrality of territorial sovereignty issues during this period is a reflection of this shift. However, this is built upon the already existing idea of China in terms of language, race (as a common ancestry from Yellow Emperor), ethical system derived from Confucian canons, and territorial expansion of Chinese culture with a core located in the central plains.<sup>97</sup> Although, the distinction between civilized Han people and Barbarians was primarily ethical and cultural, the spatial and territorial core of Han race was also clear in Chinese minds that came to the fore in the articulation of a racialized idea of China in early nationalist thinkers like Sun Yat-Sen.<sup>98</sup> This latent sense of space and emotional ties to that territory of Chinese culture is mobilized by Chinese state in contemporary times to claim territories that have been integrated as part of geopolitical and state making processes in the modern times.

For example, the ‘unequal treaties’ have been central aspects being debated within China especially after 1949 with respect to the peripheral territories that were integrated - often loosely - in terms of political and administrative control and even symbolically, in terms of establishing ‘tributary’ relationship with local political entities.<sup>99</sup> The traditional concept of *tianxia* defined by the spatial expansion of Chinese culture and civilization wherein lied the sovereignty of the heavenly kingdom can also be interpreted as a claim to sovereignty over territories where Chinese culture and its boundaries lie. However, the traditional idea of *tianxia* was geographically confined to ‘China proper’ and did not include ethnic territories that are now part of China.<sup>100</sup> But the expansion of Chinese culture, unintentionally, in ethnic territories provides a basis for territorial sovereignty claims by China and mobilization of latent power of territory.

Going back to the earlier period, the May 4 movement was triggered by the provision of Versailles Treaty that gave former German territories in Shandong (Eastern China) to Japan.<sup>101</sup> In the reform era, the CCP has focused on building a narrative of wounded national identity of China during the period after the Opium War 1842 focusing on unequal treaties

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<sup>97</sup> Tu Weiming (ed), *The Living Tree: Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>98</sup> Dikötter, “Race in China,” 177-181.

<sup>99</sup> Wang Dong, “The Discourse of Unequal Treaties in Modern China,” *Pacific Affairs* 76, no. 3 (2003): 399–425, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40023820>.

<sup>100</sup> Dong, “The Discourse,” 400-401.

<sup>101</sup> Dong, “The Discourse,” 403-404.

and Japanese aggression of China during the 1930s and the Second World War.<sup>102</sup> The term ‘a century of humiliation’ (*bainianchiku*) has emerged as a part of larger discourses and narratives of ‘humiliation’ and national identity.<sup>103</sup> To be sure, the national identity discourses have been related to the mission of the CCP to secure and safeguard Chinese territorial sovereignty and rejuvenate the nation so that China never has to face the same experience again.

To instil a patriotic sense among the people, it started ‘patriotic education campaign’ (*aiguojiaoyuyundong*) during the early 1990s.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, national identity and its approach to sovereignty have come to be defined by the intersection between identity, sovereignty and territory that is characteristic of territoriality of nation-state.

China rejects borders drawn during the colonial period. Its roots lie in its anti-imperialism nationalism and an inheritor of former imperial territory that lies at the heart of the legitimacy narratives of the ruling party. As Tu Weiming notes, nationalism in China emerged as a revolutionary ideology in the early twentieth century as a response to “unprecedented exogenous forces threatening to reduce China to a mere geographical expression.”<sup>105</sup> However, its pattern of settlement of boundaries with Russia, Central Asian states, and Myanmar shows that its historical claims over territories coterminous with ethnic cultural areas of Tibetans, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia pertains to claiming these groups and their history as part of China. In addition, the contingent security and strategic factors play a role in the way it deals with boundary disputes.

In Chinese view, the process of nation-state formation that was imposed by western powers in China has not yet come to completion. As a result, China’s urge for civilizational identity pushes against territorial boundaries imposed by the nation-state framework which has characterized Chinese approach to territorial problems and even the origin of territorial disputes. In other words, the territorial disputes of China emerge from the fact that it has not been able to integrate with the western territorial nation-state system and its urge to think through civilizational identity and values goes against this system. This probably explains China’s reliance on power (military and economic) and diplomacy rather than international

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<sup>102</sup>Wang Dong, “The Discourse,” 400-410; Rana Mitter, *China’s Good War: How World War II Is Shaping a New Nationalism* (London: Harvard University Press, 2020).

<sup>103</sup> Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>104</sup> Jin Bingao, Jue Qing and Mou Zhang, “Lun Zhongguo gongchangdang disandai lindao jiti de minzu lilun,” (On Ethnic Theory of Third Generation CCP Leaders) *Minzu Yanjiu*, no. 5, (2001): 9-18

<sup>105</sup> Weiming, “The Living Tree,” 6.

law as a starting point in dealing with territorial disputes and making territorial claims.<sup>106</sup>

China's emphasis on 'traditional customary line' (*chuantong xiguan xian*) in its border negotiations is such an example that rejects colonial cartography.<sup>107</sup> While it has settled borders many times within what it claims to be customary line (example: Russia, Vietnam and Central Asian States where it swapped territories to settle borders), the frequent reference to historical claims in cartography and foreign policy narratives remain entangled with its national identity as an inheritor of traditional empire. At the same time, the settlement of boundary has involved the recognition of Chinese sovereignty.

As a result, the challenges to its territorial sovereignty in peripheral regions- Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Hong Kong and Taiwan- necessitate the use of history in a different manner than just claiming territory and asserting sovereignty. In this context, the relationship between space, territory and power is a vantage point through which the use of history to make claims and counter alternative claims should be understood. In short, the use of history or rewriting history of border regions, where its sovereignty is challenged, is aimed at making these regions Chinese by rewriting past to counter other claims. Combined with other practices like development and redefining internal boundaries- cultural, territorial and historical- between minority ethnic groups and the majority Han, the use of history is a potential source that China uses to erase alternative sources of political identity.

## V

### Conclusion

As a result of dealing with territorial sovereignty challenges, Chinese policies in Tibet

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<sup>106</sup> In terms of methods of solving territorial disputes China uses in boundary negotiations, China has used all methods as categorized by Huth in his seminal study on methods of resolving territorial disputes namely delaying, escalation, cooperation, control of contested territory. See, PK Huth, "Enduring Rivalries and Territorial Disputes, 1950-1990," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 15, no. 1 (1996):7-41, Doi: 10.1177/073889429601500102. Some scholars namely Australian journalist Neville Maxwell whose writings on India-China war have been popular believes that except the case with India where China went to war, China has pursued 'cooperation strategy, throughout. In this case too, it is India which pursued escalation strategy that led to war, See, Neville Maxwell, "Settlements and Disputes: China's Approach to Territorial Issues," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 36 (2006): 3873-3881, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4418678>. This seems too simplified a picture of China's approach to territorial disputes as other scholars have shown, see, Eric Hyer, "China's Policy of Conciliation and Reduction (Sanhe Yishao) and its Impact on Boundary Negotiations and Settlements in the Early 1960s," Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson Centre Working Paper No. 85, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/chinas-policy-conciliation-and-reduction-and-its-impact-boundary-negotiations-and>; Steven A. Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis* (California: University of California Press, 1990). The work by Steven Hoffman provides a nuanced understanding of 'revisionist thesis' put forward by Maxwell and Chinese official positions. China's policy and strategies towards the South China Sea issue is another recent example of using a variety of methods including force, etc.

<sup>107</sup> Dai Chaowu, "The Question of Maps," 74-92; Mu Ani and Wang Qunyan, "zhongni jiebian tanbian jincheng de lishi kaocanji qishi," (China-Nepal Border Negotiation Process: A Historical Study and Enlightenment) *South Asian Studies* no. 1 (2016): 106-122.

and Xinjiang erase rather than recognize cultural diversity. Territory becomes so central to Chinese approaches to identity, security, strategy and sovereignty that they reproduce similar binaries. Chinese IR scholars, discussed in the previous chapter, critique the western cultural and philosophical understandings of the constitutive norm of territorial sovereignty. But mainstream IR scholars in China have largely ignored how China has come to deal with territorial sovereignty questions since 1949, although their writings deal with these issues conceptually in relation to traditional ideas. The silence of mainstream IR theorists about these questions of cultural diversity and power at the domestic level to understand or explain beyond just claiming that western ideas have been imposed is significant. If Chinese scholars do not explain the relevance of these ideas in organizing domestic political order and assessing domestic politics in the same manner as they do at the international level, the politics of alternative ideas would remain aligned to geopolitical interests of China rather than theorizing IR.

Domestic contestations mainly between neo-traditionalist, modernists and socialists/Maoists<sup>108</sup> leave out the voices of the significant constituents of China, the minority groups. The distinction between state sovereignty and political legitimacy, made in chapter 3, is critical here. What unites Chinese scholars of all theoretical persuasions is their national identity. That is why the questions of territorial sovereignty in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet are addressed as part of problems that China faces, rather than a challenge to China's sovereignty.<sup>109</sup> However, for traditional Chinese ideas like harmony and unity in diversity (*he er bu tong*) among others to become relevant for rethinking and theorizing inclusive, culturally sensitive and global International Relations, then they cannot ignore the problems of power relations and intolerance towards cultural diversity revealed in Chinese policies.

Chinese scholars, especially those discussed in chapter 4, are silent about the questions of ethnic diversity and how Chinese policies deal with them while putting forward the ideas that Chinese experiences, traditions and ideas provide useful resources to rethink cultural and philosophical understandings of the international order. Yan Xuetong, while developing the theory of moral leadership and his various writings, is silent about ethnic question, the allegations of suppression of minority rights, and forceful erasure of cultural

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<sup>108</sup> The distinct ideological and political lines are categorized variously. The main currents are liberals, neo-traditionalist/Confucians, socialists/communists, new left. However, each of these categories should be treated flexibly as each individual scholar has layered political positions that make it difficult to categorize Chinese scholars. For the purpose, I treat these categories as distinct as far as the basic ideological and theoretical positions are different from each other.

<sup>109</sup> Hui and Hutters (ed.), "The Politics of Imagining Asia," 195-196.

diversity in minority areas. For Yan, morality of leadership of state in the international order comes from leaders, not from type of domestic political system and values. Similarly, Zhao Tingyang and Qin Yaqing do not even mention minority issues, the critiques of human rights, and the issues of cultural diversity within China. However, one cannot doubt their knowledge about these issues, and China's policies. They are all well-read scholars and well-versed in both western writings on China and Chinese policies. Thus, the framing of the questions of cultural diversity in terms of west vs. China in the debates on rethinking International Relations Theories raises the question of how Chinese ideas in their contemporary context of rising China can deal with cultural diversity at the international level.

Some scholars have already raised these questions in the context of the debates on Chinese experiences, traditions, and the debates on IRTs. William Callahan argues, an exclusive focus in Zhao Tingyang's writings on west vs. China leads to treating "differences as otherness" because it excludes western worldviews.<sup>110</sup> It should be added that it also excludes worldviews of China's minorities.

Similarly, Zhang Shuguang argues, that *tianxia* as a cultural and moral concept to rethink IRT is presented as a new utopia. These debates on *tianxia* disregard critical aspects of Chinese thought both historically and do not evaluate classical ideas with reference to actual practices unlike critique of western ideas of democracy and human rights.<sup>111</sup> Anthropologist Wang Mingming has raised the question of the lack of attention to assimilation and the question of "other" within Chinese debates on ethnic question and cultural diversity. His argument has larger significance to evaluate how internal diversity is ignored between Han and non-Han peoples while framing discourses on civilization and cosmopolitanism in the name of *tianxia*.<sup>112</sup> It entails that the emphasis on binaries between west/China, the internal diversity is played down and even erased which supports the state agenda of creating unified *zhonghua minzu*. The analysis of China's policies through three strategies in this chapter supports these conclusions in the long-term.

In attempting to conceptualize China's policies to deal with territorial sovereignty challenges, this chapter has outlined the problem of dealing with alternative culture, history and identity as the basic questions. A conceptual analysis of these strategies reveals that

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<sup>110</sup> William A. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?" *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (2008):754, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2008.00830>.

<sup>111</sup> Zhang Shuguang, "tianxia lilun he shijie zhidu: yi jiu tianxia tixi wen xueyu zhao tingyang," (Theory of tianxia and world institution: learning from Mr. Zhao Tingyang by asking questions on Tianxia System) *aisixiang*, 10 October 2006, <https://m.aisixiang.com/data/11361-3.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Wang Mingming, All under heaven (tianxia) Cosmological perspectives and political ontologies in pre-modern China," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 1 (2012): 348, doi: 10.14318/hau2.1.015.

China attempts to erase rather than recognize them and resolve problems through institutional mechanisms and political process. Thus, this analysis helps us provide a critique of claims of Chinese scholars discussed in chapter 4 that Chinese ideas and practices can help rethink territorialized international order by rethinking its cultural and philosophical understandings rooted in European history, social and political thought.

## CHAPTER 6

### Foreign Policy Discourses on Territorial Sovereignty (1978-Present)

#### Introduction

China's approach to International Relations has shifted from a 'revolutionary challenger' during the Mao Period to 'practical order participant' in the Post-Mao period.<sup>1</sup> It is argued that during Xi Jinping's period its approach has become that of a 'reformist order shaper'.<sup>2</sup> The objective of world revolution during the Mao Period, and Deng Xiaoping's dictum of "hiding your capacity and bide your time" (*taoguang yanghui*)<sup>3</sup> reflected a 'revolutionary' and 'practical order shaper' approach to the international order respectively.<sup>4</sup> In recent decades, Jiang Zemin's idea of 'gear with the world' (*yu shijie jiegui*), and Xi Jinping's idea of the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (*Renlei mingyun gòngtóngtǐ*) underline China's urge to bring about a 'new international order.' For example, Xi Jinping claimed that China's rise has provided it with "power to shape" global governance system and international relations.<sup>5</sup>

Such ideas of world revolution and Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSF), also underline a problem with the existing international order organized into sovereign territorial nation-states. While Mao's idea of world revolution was premised on anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism that rejected nation-state formation, the idea of CSF brings in thinking about sovereign territoriality through the prism of 'world as community/family' derived implicitly or explicitly from Chinese ideas. This is particularly relevant to understand China's attitudes towards the international order and territorial sovereignty. It is argued in this chapter that the assertions and articulations of cultural diversity in the international order in Chinese official discourses reflect China's opposition to the idea that western political institutions and political ideas of democracy, human rights and consequently interventions into internal affairs are normatively justified.

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<sup>1</sup> Qin Yaqing cited in Zhimin Chen & Xueying Zhang, Chinese conception of the world order in a turbulent Trump era, *The Pacific Review*, 33, no. 3-4, (2020): 439, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2020.1728574>.

<sup>2</sup> Zhimin Chen & Xueying Zhang, "Chinese conception," 439-440.

<sup>3</sup> The term frequently used is part of the 24-character quotation which is usually translated as "Observe calmly; 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."

<sup>4</sup> International order can be defined as a set of ideas, practices, and institutional structures that provide order to political-economic relations between countries and global governance. See Robert W Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method," *Millennium* 12, no. 2 (1983): 162-75, doi/10.1177/03058298830120020701.

<sup>5</sup> 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, Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China," *Xinhua*, November 3, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi\\_Jinping's\\_report\\_at\\_19th\\_CPC\\_National\\_Congress.pdf](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf).

This chapter answers the question of how China's practices of territorial sovereignty inform its approaches to international order. In particular, it attempts to assess the impact of new ideas in (re)imagining the fundamental ideas of order, community, identity, security, and sovereignty embedded in the territorial sovereign nation-state. The idea of CSF, for example, has been used to articulate its approach to global governance, regional and international order, and a new way of imagining the world as a community that not only is informed by Chinese ideas but also claim to redefine territorial sovereignty based international order.<sup>6</sup>

There is extensive literature on the changes in the worldview of Chinese people and its leadership during China's encounters with western powers and in its attempt to regain its capacity to determine its independence and sovereignty. Chinese world-views changed from the traditional idea of the world as a *tianxia* to a world of equal, multiple, and sovereign nation-states.<sup>7</sup> That changed the idea of China as a world in itself to a part of the wider world and thereafter began the efforts to turn China into a nation-state.<sup>8</sup> But this was disrupted with a complex and tumultuous period after 1949 when China under Mao Zedong imagined China as a harbinger of world revolution and going beyond the nation-state. In the Post-Mao period too, traditional ideas of community, order, identity, and politics have resurfaced on the debates of the rise of China and its impact on the existing international order. What these ideas and articulation mean for China's approach to the international order and how do these ideas manifest in its approach to regionalism, security, economic policies, and international order?

The chapter is organized into four sections. The first section briefly outlines the main themes, ideas, and theories of territorial sovereignty during the Mao Period. It analyses these ideas to contextualize the changes in ideas and articulations of political order at domestic and international levels in the subsequent period. The second section covering Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin's era analyses China's approach to territorial sovereignty in its responses to major issues and cases in international relations. It was the period when the traditional Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology became less important in articulating China's long-term objectives and interests in its foreign policy about international order. Hence, it was a period

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<sup>6</sup> Guo Shuyong & Yu Yang, "Quanqiu zhixu guan de lixing Zhuang yu xin lixing- renlei mingyun gongtongti de lixing jichu" (The rational turn and "new rationality" of the global order concept-the rational foundation of the community of shared future for mankind), *shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (World Economic and Politics), 4 (2020): 1-13; Fu Ying, "China's Vision for the World: A Community of Shared Future," *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2017 , <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/chinas-vision-for-the-world-a-community-of-shared-future/>.

<sup>7</sup> Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996);

<sup>8</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

of ideological-normative confusion and pragmatic engagement with the international system. The 21st century witnessed changes in domestic ideology when the CCP officially changed its position through the new concept of the Three Represents (*sange daibiao*). Therefore, section three discusses the drivers of the ideological normative changes, and changing dynamics of norms and power at the international level due to its rising economic and military power. It covers the Hu-Xi era up to 2019. Section four discusses the idea of the Community of Shared Future as a new normative conception of international order through the institutional, diplomatic and discursive practices in its foreign policy during the Xi Jinping period.

I

### **Territorial Sovereignty and Maoist China: Strategic and Foreign Policies until 1976**

China's foreign and strategic visions and policies were articulated in Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideological parameters during the period from 1949 and guided by its objective of securing its territorial sovereignty. China under Mao inherited a huge task to territorially integrate vast regions and ethnic populations. At the time of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the CCP had to not only establish its political legitimacy in core areas but also ensure territorial sovereignty in peripheral regions. The efforts by China under Mao to unify vast swaths of territory as part of the PRC have been discussed and written about by historians and China scholars. But one thing that has remained the same is that Chinese leaders from Mao onwards have "seen China as a brittle entity, in a world that was fundamentally dangerous, and their main task was to protect it."<sup>9</sup> Concepts and language of articulation have shifted from Mao-era up to the present. The changes have taken place in the ideology and underlying visions to articulate its place and identity in the world. Besides, the strategies to unify China including Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, North-East provinces and other territories in both its land and maritime peripheries have also changed partly. While military force remains the dominant strategy throughout - the ideological, economic, and cultural approaches to unify the minority regions have dominated during the later periods as the dominant ideas change.

While articulated in ideological terms, its foreign policy was grounded in the belief that territorial unification and sovereignty were the basic minimum for survival. The First Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference laid down the basic idea

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<sup>9</sup> Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2018), 3. Wang Jisi, "China's Search for Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* March/April, 2011, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2011-02-20/chinas-search-grand-strategy>.

that “the principle of the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China is the protection of the independence, freedom, integrity of territory and sovereignty of the country.”<sup>10</sup> The twin goals of securing security and successful revolution depended upon maintaining territorial sovereignty. Therefore, the Communist Party of China began to secure territories under the former Qing Dynasty while it started diplomatic efforts to secure a suitable environment. The idea of “Five Principles of Co-existence” and its diplomacy especially in the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) emphasized the centrality of territorial sovereignty.

Without going into details of the practices and articulations of territorial sovereignty, I make three general points to initiate the discussion. Firstly, territorial control was the key objective both as an inheritor of former Qing Dynasty territories as well as consolidating security and sovereignty. This was inbuilt into Chinese nationalism since the early 20th century. Additionally, it was presented as an anti-imperial and anti-colonial struggle. Secondly, the control over territories did not mean that the CCP under Mao had subscribed to the idea of territoriality of the nation-state. Mao’s idea of world revolution went beyond nation-state territoriality.<sup>11</sup>

Thirdly, the ambiguity over the conceptual idea of territorial sovereignty of nation-state emerged, as a recent study claims, from ideas of “the imperial ideal of China comprising ‘all under heaven’ and, on the other, the imported Marxist theory of ‘world revolution.’”<sup>12</sup> The idea that Chinese leadership under Mao was ambiguous about ideas of nation-state and sovereign territoriality by Shen Zhihua and Julia Lovell is convincing for some reasons.<sup>13</sup> For example, their comparison with the Soviet Union’s ‘acceptance’ of nation-state territoriality manifested in its demarcation and resolution of borders just after 1917 reveals that either CCP

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<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, “Formulation of Foreign Policy of New China on the Eve of its Birth, 1949,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC*,

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/ziliao\\_665539/3602\\_665543/3604\\_665547/t18057.shtml#:~:text=In%20September%201949%2C%20the%20National,People's%20Republic%20of%20China%20is](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18057.shtml#:~:text=In%20September%201949%2C%20the%20National,People's%20Republic%20of%20China%20is)

<sup>11</sup>For example, the PRC government after 1949 defined citizenship based on ethnicity and birth or *jus sanguinis* doctrine that included grant of citizenship, enumerating Chinese diaspora as Chinese population census and political representation in the first National Congress. However, the policy gradually changed due to opposition from Southeast Asian states over a period of time. See, Enze Han, “Bifurcated homeland and diaspora politics in China and Taiwan towards the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, No. 4 (2019): 583-584, doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1409172. In addition, the idea of proletariat world revolution at least theoretically and ideologically transcended territorial sovereignty based international order and defined international order in terms of class and economic relations.

<sup>12</sup>Zhihua Shen & Julia Lovell, “Undesired Outcomes: China's Approach to Border Disputes during the Early Cold War,” *Cold War History*, 15, no. 1, 2015: 109-110, Doi: 10.1080/14682745.2014.932350..

<sup>13</sup> A number of scholars have also pointed out how traditional idea of empire and the middle kingdom mentality informed Mao’s foreign policy, see Mark Mancall, “The Persistence of Tradition in Chinese Foreign Policy,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 349, no. 1 (September 1963): 14–26, doi: 10.1177/000271626334900103; Samuel S. Kim, *China, the United Nations and World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

took the ideas of world revolution and traditional imperialism seriously or the rejection was more of an ideological standing than a serious attempt.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, the control over territory in China's peripheries was the fundamental objective, and the idea of territorial sovereignty articulated during the period was that of "the notion of absolute sovereignty, with its core elements being independence, the inviolability of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs."<sup>15</sup> The idea of territorial sovereignty that emerged from Mao's theoretical formulations and the practice of foreign policy was that of a fixed notion of sovereignty. Mao's understanding of sovereignty was grounded in the class struggle, and anti-imperialism. Mao understood sovereignty as the right of people to exercise their affairs. Such a fixed notion of sovereignty emerged from perceived threats to its territorial sovereignty and security in peripheral regions.<sup>16</sup>

Since 1949, China used the ideas of anti-imperialism and class struggle to legitimize its integration of peripheral areas namely Xinjiang, and Tibet among others.<sup>17</sup> Whether it was just an ideological justification of the control over these territories or Chinese leadership actually believed in these ideas may be debated. But shifting minority policies and its ideological justifications in anti-imperialism and class struggle to creating *zhonghuaminzu* (Chinese nation) derived from supposed long history tell us that the control over these territories has been the fundamental objective of China. China adopted the minority policy influenced by the Soviet model but Mao's ideas, especially his theory of democracy, attended to the question of sovereignty in minority areas. Post-imperial Chinese regimes, in both Republican and Maoist China, have claimed the inheritance of territories of the Qing empire. In the Republican period, Sun Yat-Sen's theory of Five Nationalities constituting China was

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<sup>14</sup> Shen and Lovell, "Undesired Outcomes," 112-114. Sulmaan Wasif Khan calls China's views of external boundaries of China in Tibet as "empire-lite" meaning that although China was forced to demarcate external boundaries and define who boundaries of Chinese citizenship, its control of Tibet reflected the imperial vision. He states that "Empire-lite" describes an empire that rules by allowing local autonomy and mores to flourish, even while asserting control over functions such as foreign policy and defence." See, Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Muslim, Trader, Nomad, Spy: China's Cold War and the People of the Tibetan Borderlands* (Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 3. Another instance of ideological ambiguity about territoriality of nation-state, and rejection of colonial cartography was that China started mapping and studying borderlands after 1957 and has asserted its claims to traditional territories controlled by peoples in borderlands which are part of People's Republic of China after 1949. This aspect of China's attitudes towards territorial sovereignty is best captured in vast amount of research on border disputes and China's framing of these disputes as sovereignty issues.

<sup>15</sup> Zhu Liqun, *China's foreign policy debates* (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, 2010), 44.

<sup>16</sup> D. Howland, "The Dialectics of Chauvinism: Minority Nationalities and Territorial Sovereignty in Mao Zedong's New Democracy," *Modern China*, 37, no. 2 (2011): 171, doi: 10.1177/0097700410382082.

<sup>17</sup> Gardner Bovington, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1-25.

used to justify control over peripheries.<sup>18</sup> Mao's justification relied on his theory of new democracy and anti-imperialism that determined the position of minority groups in China. On the one hand, minority groups like Tibetans, Mongolians, and Uighurs were, in Mao's view, victims of imperialist forces, at the same time they were comrades. On the other, they were also victimized by landlords and bourgeoisie classes; hence they were anti-feudal.<sup>19</sup>

China's understanding of the international order during the late 1960s and 1970s was defined by three concepts namely, hegemonism, anti-imperialism, and national sovereignty. Mao's Three Worlds Theory (*sange shijie*) was grounded in these three concepts through which it articulated its understanding of international order.<sup>20</sup> The Soviet Union was characterized as a 'socialist-hegemon.' In this imagery, international order was a chaotic world dominated by superpowers and the weapon for weak states in the Third World was revolution and resistance to uphold their national sovereignty in all respects.

Sovereignty defined as non-interference in internal affairs of states was used to resist imperialism and hegemonism. As Deng Xiaoping summed up in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1974 that:

“The essence of the problems of raw materials and development is the struggle of the developing countries to defend their state sovereignty, develop their national economy and combat imperialist, and particularly superpower, plunder, and control. This is a very important aspect of the current struggle of the Third World countries and people against colonialism, imperialism, and hegemonism.”<sup>21</sup>

But sovereignty was not an idea that matched with the western realist notion of territorial sovereignty. It was a vision of the configuration of power at the international level that could be resisted through maintaining state sovereignty. The economic structure underlying such an order was the main axis through which Chinese policymakers understood the nature of international order. While articulating the idea of alternative international economic order, the idea proposed by many developing countries in 1974, he further states:

“that in both political and economic relations, countries should base themselves on the Five Principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful

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<sup>18</sup>James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 30-54.

<sup>19</sup>Howland, “The Dialectics of Chauvinism,” 174.

<sup>20</sup>Mao Zedong, “On the Question of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds,” February 22, 1974, <https://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/rdv10n1/mao.htm>

<sup>21</sup>Deng Xiaoping, “Speech By Chairman of the Delegation of the People's Republic of China, Deng Xiaoping, At the Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly,” April, 10, 1974, *Marxism.org*, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1974/04/10.htm>.

coexistence.”<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, the precise understanding of Mao-era Chinese conceptual understanding of territorial sovereignty is still lacking. Yet, two major points can be made before the discussion moves on to the next section. One, that the ideas of world revolution did go beyond nation-state territoriality and hence, at the level of ideology it contested the international order based on the territorial nation-state. Two, that the idea of territorial sovereignty understood as equality among states and non-interference was used as it was done in most of the developing world in forums like the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). But as the party drew legitimacy from anti-imperial nationalism through revolution, the nation-state territorial sovereignty was already taking root in terms of defining Chinese national identity in terms of territory.

## II

### **Post-Mao Era: From Normative-Ideological Confusions to the Politics of Alternative Ideas**

Mao-era thinking began to change during the early 1970s as China began negotiations with the United States. In this changed thinking, the world was not entirely defined by conflict and instead, cooperation was possible. The changes reflected in its membership in the United Nations and reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang*) policies because it reflected its willingness to participate in international order and institutions.

But China’s willingness to participate in existing international institutions did not mean its acceptance of normative foundations of western-led international order. The Chinese view of the United Nations, for example, was that it was a “paper tiger” in the hands of the United States that was used to spread its cultural and political hegemony.<sup>23</sup> The shifts in policies towards the United Nations and international order began after the 9<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1969 in the backdrop of Sino-Russian tension on northern border, chaos in economic and political realms of domestic politics causing huge economic hardships. In new shifts in its approach to foreign policy, it started establishing contacts with the international community at different level in its efforts to achieve a seat in the UN. It established diplomatic contacts with 39 countries from late 1969 to 1973. Its anti-UN rhetoric too vanished relatively and the objective became to achieve recognition for its sovereignty in international order.<sup>24</sup>

Its quest for a UN seat and changing ideological and foreign policy thinking reflected,

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<sup>22</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “Speech,”

<sup>23</sup> E. Luard, “China and the United Nations,” *International Affairs*, Volume 47, no. 4 (1971): 729-730, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2625680>.

<sup>24</sup> Luard, “China and the United Nations,” 734-735.

for the first time, its willingness to accept the idea of international order based on normative foundations of western nation-state system. Its engagement with the outside world and membership in the United Nation meant two things. One, its ideological and normative positions shifted from creating an alternative world order through proletarian revolution to one that endorsed the international system pragmatically. Secondly, it also meant that China's thinking of territorial sovereignty based international order began consolidating hereafter. In fact, its membership in the United Nations was a perfect statement of its accepting territorial sovereignty as a basic principle of international order. It achieved normative recognition of its territorial sovereignty over its territory including Taiwan.<sup>25</sup>

While power struggle and hegemony have remained major conceptual lenses to describe international order, China started to use existing norms of territorial sovereignty as a means to further its domestic and foreign policy interests. Its foreign and domestic policies were hereafter grounded in territorial order in which states are the only legitimate political actors and the source of this legitimacy is the mutual recognition of each other's right to independence and autonomy in domestic affairs. In nation-state system based on territoriality, political authority and politics is spatially defined with clear cut boundaries of where a state's domestic and foreign policy realms began. Its Marxist-Leninist-Maoist understanding of politics, although grounded in modern ideas of politics and society, were spatially different. It defined politics based on ideology rather than just territorial control and monopoly of power and violence. The idea of world proletarian revolution to bring about socialist order was based on such an alternative spatial politics in which international order, means of violence and authority was not bounded in territory but it spanned across boundaries. Yet, its actual practices of securing territorial control over peripheral regions and integration of minorities contradicted with ideological positions.

Mao-era ideological position of world as the chaotic and conflictual gave way to one that recognized that peace and cooperation is possible and the world is not entirely founded on war and revolution. It was a profound change that pervaded all policy areas in its interactions with the international system. On the contrary, Mao's thinking was grounded in conflictual thinking following Marxism-Leninism. In such a world, China had no option but to strive for world revolution and change it with a new international order. But with Deng

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<sup>25</sup> The three communiqués signed between the United States and China in 1972, 1979 and 1982 as part of the normalization of diplomatic relations recognized 'one China policy' by the US. It meant the transfer of diplomatic recognition from the Republic of China (ROC) government based in Taipei to the People's Republic of China (PRC), see, Embassy of People's Republic of China in the United States, "US-China Communiqués," accessed July 2019, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgx/doc/ctc/>

Xiao-ping at the helm, Chinese thinking during two decades of reform era changed. As Zhu Liqun notes:

“The Chinese mindset was nurtured by the painful historical experience of foreign aggression and the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s to believe that the international system was an imperialist one, based on exploitation and dominated by the law of the jungle. Although Deng Xiaoping replaced this historically shaped worldview with the idea that the world now was comparatively peaceful and stable, there still existed widespread mistrust and suspicion towards the international system.”<sup>26</sup>

The foreign policy debates in China during the first two decades of the reform period are characterized by the ideas and trends of thinking from the previous period, and these new changes in thinking about the international system and China’s role in it. But one thing that should be noted is that Chinese thinking became profusely grounded in its own cultural and philosophical worldview changing from Marxist-Leninist worldview of the Mao-Period. Such a change has underpinned thinking about national sovereignty too. From early 1980s’ emphasis on hegemony and class interpretations of world politics, Chinese policy makers and thinkers had come to interpret world in a different conceptual scheme. To highlight the nature of the change in China’s view of the world, it is instructive to look at Hu Jintao’s brief comment about how China looks at the world. Hu Jintao in an official commentary in 2009 wrote that China’s relationship with the world was characterized by the following:

1. Profound transformation, 2. A harmonious world; 3. Common development; 4. Shared responsibility and 5. Active engagement.<sup>27</sup>

Chinese scholarship on international relations has similarly moved from a worldview grounded in Mao era ideological and theoretical fixity to a diverse terrain of ideas, including Chinese traditional thinking and modern western political thought to analyse and propose ideas for domestic and international politics. The rest of the section discusses two case studies viz the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 and the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China to make sense of changing ideas and articulations of territorial sovereignty as the dynamics of domestic and international politics changed.

### **Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan and Chinese Discourses**

The Soviet Union’s intervention in Afghanistan elicited fierce debates among scholars and response from Chinese government, primarily because it had repercussions for its territorial sovereignty in Xinjiang at a time of a tense relationship with the Soviet Union.

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<sup>26</sup> Zhu Liqun, “Chaillot Papers,” 22.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Hu Jintao, “shidaiguan de wuda zhongguo zhuzhang’, liaowang xinwen zhoukan,” (China’ Five Positions on Contemporary Times) 24 November 2009; Zhongguo Gongchandang Xinwen Wang (Chinese Communist Party News Web). <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64093/64387/10439546.html>.

Xinjiang was as it is today, a territory restive due to sovereignty claims by the Uighurs, its fears of exploiting the problems in Xinjiang by outside powers as the Soviets had done for long during the Cold-War, radicalization in neighboring regions that could easily spill over to Xinjiang, and poor control over Xinjiang in terms of infrastructure connectivity, and security apparatus. These concerns remain in the present due to the challenges posed to its territorial sovereignty in the region by the Uighur nationalist movement and hence, the experience of its response to the Afghanistan occupation reveals the dynamics of territorial sovereignty and foreign policy in the subsequent period.<sup>28</sup>

Chinese response to the Soviet actions in Afghanistan were characterized by language and a conceptual vision of the transition period wherein both Maoist-Socialist vision and articulations of world politics did not die but with new changes that were characterized by its emphasis on national territorial sovereignty and language that became more familiar with international law. This transition period was characterized by China reform and opening up policies after 1978 which required closer relationship with the west, the membership of the UN system, and deeper economic engagement with the outside world.

The Maoist-era foreign policy was characterized by language of anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism and anti-hegemonism by big powers. With the Sino-Soviet schism becoming a reality, Chinese leaders perceived the Soviet actions in Afghanistan as an instance of hegemonism. Deng Xiaoping stated in the CCP Central Committee meeting responding to the security threat to China as a result that “opposing hegemonism will be on our daily agenda”, and ‘the struggle against hegemonism is a grave task constantly confronting our country.’<sup>29</sup> Hegemonism in Deng’s own terms was defined “as denoting the situation when a country ‘becomes arrogant’ and ‘acts like an overlord and gives orders to the world.’”<sup>30</sup>

In fact, the use of the term ‘hegemony’ in Chinese foreign policy lexicon and its semantic meaning has shifted from Mao-era to Post-Mao period as the underlying vision of world and ideology changed. From 1950s onwards, the term was used to describe the antagonism between two systems-capitalist west and socialist developing world including the Soviet Union. Such a conceptualization of the term reflected underlying Maoist-Communist vision of world order. However, its connotations changed gradually and in an evolutionary

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<sup>28</sup> Bonnie Girard, “How 1980 Laid the Groundwork for China’s Major Foreign Policy Challenges,” *The Diplomat*, September 12, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/how-the-1980-laid-the-groundwork-for-chinas-major-foreign-policy-challenges/>.

<sup>29</sup> Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, edited and translated by the Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, vol 2 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press. 1995), 241

<sup>30</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “Selected Works,” 123.

manner in the Post-Mao period. Since then, its meaning largely revolves around what Deng Xiaoping defined as mentioned above. A Chinese intellectual elaborated the concept that confirm to foreign policy practices to the present. In the Post-Mao period, the term:

“means big countries that try to control or interfere in smaller countries. Many scholars mix up imperialism and hegemony. We do not know if it is a system or a policy. Before the 1980s we thought it was a system, like Soviet social-imperialism. We now define hegemony as a policy. For example, in the past when we called the United States imperialist, we meant the system; today we use hegemony to describe its foreign policy.”<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, both Soviet and other capitalist countries were hegemonic because they meddled in domestic affairs of other countries. The only difference was that “imperialism refers to capitalist countries while hegemonism refers to countries regardless of system.”<sup>32</sup> But for practices and ideas of territorial sovereignty, it referred to the conceptual ambiguity with no clear commitment to international order.

By defining hegemonism as a policy of powerful states to interfere in less powerful countries and terming the Soviet action in Afghanistan as hegemonic, Chinese policy-makers and researchers all were on the same page that it threatened Chinese territorial sovereignty in the western part of the country. Such fears emanated from the past experiences of the Soviet incursions into Xinjiang after 1950s, and going back into history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Scholarly discussions after the Soviet actions in Afghanistan reveal these anxieties of security and threats to territorial sovereignty. Scholars highlighted the unequal treaties with the Tsarist Russia and the contemporary research on the boundary questions and negotiations with the Soviets during the 1980s; securing territorial sovereignty was a major concern.<sup>33</sup>

Further shifts towards using the principles and norms of existing international order in China’s foreign policy in the aftermath of the Afghan occupation were to emphasize on equality among countries. It was a major shift that began to take place in how China defined and articulated its foreign policy and the vision of international order away from Maoist-socialism. Its support towards Yugoslavia vis a vis the Soviet Union is reflected in the words of Hu Yaobang, the Party General Secretary, who praised Josip Tito’s principles of independence and equality among all communist parties, and of opposing imperialism,

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<sup>31</sup> David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 79.

<sup>32</sup> Shambaugh, “Beautiful Imperialist,” 79.

<sup>33</sup> Li Yuanming, “Sulian baquan zhuyide lishi yuanyuan” (The Historical Origin of Soviet Hegemonism), *Hongqi* (Red Flag), 17: (1981): 21–25.

colonialism, and hegemonism.<sup>34</sup> It also reflected the crumbling of the three-world vision and the ideals of world revolution, and early advance towards accepting the language and vision of multi-polar world in commensuration with the underlying principles of the existing international order. Therefore, the distinctions between capitalist-communist and other binaries of Mao era began to crumble in the way Chinese scholars and leaders articulated their positions towards the Soviet actions in Afghanistan.

The Soviet occupation in Afghanistan took place when China began to open up and reform its economy. These policies were dictated by domestic economic problems as much as by China's foreign policy problems, since Maoist era foreign and strategic vision of exporting revolutions in other parts of the world, particularly the Third World countries had isolated it in the international system. Deng Xiaoping understood this problem and sought to overcome these problems by bringing China within the ambit of what he called "modern international politics."<sup>35</sup> In concrete terms, it meant that Chinese foreign and strategic visions would be articulated in the language and normative framework of Westphalian nation-state system. Therefore, it began to define its reform and opening policies in national terms denouncing any particular model, the early emergence of the terminology of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics.' China sought to denounce the burden of Maoist and Soviet legacy in its foreign and domestic policies and defined itself as an "anti-colonial Asian power and true friend of the third world."<sup>36</sup>

### **Taiwan and Hong Kong: One Country, Two Systems and Territorial Sovereignty**

Territorial unification has been one of the central objectives of China after 1949. After establishing control over core areas of China, the CCP controlled Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Northeast. But Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan remained as an 'unfinished agenda.' The idea of the political order and the underlying ideological visions of state have changed from Maoist-Socialism and class-based society to territorial nation-state grounded in its own culture and authoritarian regime drawing legitimacy from a mix of Maoist-socialism and traditional ideas. It has remained committed to integrating these territories.

The invention of 'One Country Two Systems' idea was a pragmatic move to claim sovereignty over Hong Kong in an environment that was getting easier for China as it started to open up to the outside world, and its relationship with western countries began to improve after the normalization of diplomatic relations with US, UN membership and economic

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<sup>34</sup> Liu Xing, "Huyaobang zainan juxing jizhe zhaodaihui" (Hu Yaobang Holds Press Conference in Yugoslavia), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), May 13, 1983, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "Selected Works," 248–249.

<sup>36</sup> Ning Wang, "China's Role in a Multipolar World," *Beijing Review*, January 7, 1985, 42.

reforms in the later 1970s. But it was never at ease with the fact that Hong Kong had a different political system and society that challenges China's CCP-led one party political system ideologically. There are two factors that shaped its approach to sovereignty question in Hong Kong over a period of time or for that matter, Taiwan too. In the initial period, the primary objective was to claim sovereignty over Hong Kong without triggering tensions with western powers. Therefore, its approach has been pragmatic. But its domestic political legitimacy and need to justify one party rule has made it necessary to erase any imagination of alternative political order and hence, its approach has been to erase that in Hong Kong or any other peripheral regions. Secondly, with the rise of China's material capabilities, Chinese policymakers and intellectuals have shifted their focus to create a strong and unified state as a precondition for its rise as a great power.

Territorial sovereignty as a principle has been used in this context from the beginning. From its claims to formal sovereignty of the island to national security law, the idea of territorial sovereignty has been used to justify its policies. The idea of 'one country two systems' has been interpreted differently in different periods. There are two main interpretations within Chinese discourses. One, it is a new theoretical contribution by China in which two systems can be together under a single sovereign state. This interpretation mainly has dominated in debates on ideology and theory of CCP. It shows a certain level of flexibility in thinking about sovereignty in Chinese debates from the previous period. But it is a temporary strategy rather than a conceptual shift in its approach to territorial sovereignty. For example, one can see its recent National Security Law in 2020 and intellectual ideas of strong state and absolute sovereignty influencing ideas of Carl Schmitt and nationalist feelings. Secondly, 'one country two systems' is just an administrative issue beyond which it has no value. In this understanding, it means that the CCP can decide all matters pertaining to the island. This interpretation has been put forward by intellectuals who argue for a strong state and many policymakers to justify the CCP's interference in the Hong Kong affairs beyond the basic law mandate.<sup>37</sup>

The idea of 'one-country-two systems' originated initially as a vague formula for China's proposal for integration of Taiwan during 11<sup>th</sup> party congress in 1978. For example, Ye Jianying, then Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress,

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<sup>37</sup> My objective here is to map out major ideas and practices in these debates to understand its approach to Hong Kong with reference to the idea of territorial sovereignty in its foreign and domestic policies in the long-run. I do not focus on specific policies as such.

propounded nine principles to unify Taiwan and called it 'one-country-two systems.'<sup>38</sup> The commentaries in newspapers show that ideologues interpreted it as a loosely defined formula to integrate Taiwan. But its application to Hong Kong and as a new idea to claim sovereignty while keeping political systems intact was proposed in an article by Deng Xiaoping in 1984 that:

"We are pursuing a policy of "one country, two systems." More specifically, this means that within the People's Republic of China, the mainland with its one billion people will maintain the socialist system, while Hong Kong and Taiwan continue under the capitalist system. In recent years, China has worked hard to overcome "Left" mistakes and has formulated its policies concerning all fields of endeavor in line with the principle of proceeding from reality and seeking truth from facts. After five and a half years things are beginning to pick up. It is against this background that we have proposed to solve the Hong Kong and Taiwan problems by allowing two systems to coexist in one country."<sup>39</sup>

The adjustment in allowing these regions theoretically to maintain different social and political systems did not mean normative and conceptual shift about its understanding of the importance of the idea of territorial sovereignty. Rather, it was a change in strategy and means that became more flexible ideologically from the previous period. It was also aimed at assuaging the popular opinion in Taiwan and Hong Kong because the dynamics of emerging identity in Hong Kong and particularly in Taiwan have been embedded in the idea of a political order that is different from that of China's. As a result, overcoming the antagonistic identities taking shape in these regions has been a particular problem that China has attempted to manage. Its narratives of Chinese identity and nationalism have been particularly aimed at territorial unification and unity of all peoples including in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

One of the major factors that have shaped its policies towards Taiwan and Hong Kong is that of conflicting identity taking shape.<sup>40</sup> These identities are political in nature and provide an idea of political order and spatial-political order that goes against Chinese attempts to create China centric spatial-political and economic order in East Asia. Its economic, cultural and security policies have been aimed at achieving this particular goal. Along with identity and alternative spatial-political articulations of political order, a territorial

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<sup>38</sup> People.cn, "Notes," accessed July 2019, <http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol3/note/C0190.html>

<sup>39</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "One Country, Two Systems," June 22-23, 1984. <http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/c1210.html>.

<sup>40</sup> As per political attitude surveys conducted by National Chengchi University, the number of people who identify as only Taiwanese has gone up to 67% as of 2020 from merely 20% in 1992. Along with these trends, the existing literature maps out the nature of Taiwanese identity as a political and national identity shaped against Chinese identity. See, "Source: Distribution Trends of Important Political Attitudes of the National Chengchi University Election Research Center," <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7804&id=6960>

unified order with a strong state is considered a necessary condition for the rise of China.

To understand the objectives of China's policies towards Hong Kong and other regions, it is important to understand the long-term objectives being discussed in intellectual debates. Chinese leadership has focused on achieving territorial unification of Hong Kong and Taiwan in the long-term perspective. Deng Xiaoping announced that "reunification of the motherland is the aspiration of the whole nation. If it cannot be accomplished in 100 years, it will be in 1,000 years."<sup>41</sup> While such phrases may serve the ideological side of its politics and also assuage popular opinion in domestic politics in order to justify its inability to achieve reunification in their lifetime, they also reflect Chinese leadership's thinking grounded in long-term. As a matter of fact, all Chinese leaders since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century have spoken of a time frame that goes beyond their lifetime. These articulations reflect China's urge to become a great power it is always perceived to be in history.<sup>42</sup>

The CCP's political legitimacy remains tied with its normative and ideological justification of the political order- one party rule. In this respect, the coupling of territorial sovereignty concerns and reunification with security threat to Chinese nation as such make territorial sovereignty an effective tool to mobilize public opinion and stave off outside interference and domestic conflicting identities in Hong Kong and Taiwan. It is the dynamics of political legitimacy and territorial sovereignty along with long-term objectives in Chinese thinking that make the idea of territorial sovereignty central to its articulations of a spatial-political order.

China did not concern itself with Hong Kong after Deng Xiaoping took reigns of the party. It was focused on the question of Taiwan and its reunification with the mainland. China's approach to Hong Kong in 1980s to the present can be defined by three factors: sovereignty, expanding its social and political order to Hong Kong, and creating strong state by controlling the fortunes of the city. It was triggered by British efforts to lease new territories beyond 1997 deadline that made the Hong Kong issue urgent. The leasing beyond 1997 would have complicated the legal questions over sovereignty and hence, it began to pursue Hong Kong and Macau issues on an urgent basis. While it used legal and historical claims to take over sovereignty from the British, for Chinese leadership the issue of sovereignty did not end with just economic benefits due to Hong Kong's open society and flourishing economic hub. For them, the issue of sovereignty reflected China's resistance to

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<sup>41</sup> China Daily, "Deng Xiaoping on "one country, two systems,"" *China Daily*, February 19, 2002. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-02/19/content\\_307590.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-02/19/content_307590.htm)

<sup>42</sup>For example, Liu Mingfu, *The China Dream: Great Power Thinking and Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era* (Shanghai: CN Time Books Inc, 2015), 5-10.

colonialism by ending national humiliation, revitalizing Chinese civilization and way of life opposed to ‘open and democratic system’ under colonial rule in Hong Kong and ensuring the way for a strong state.<sup>43</sup>

The three elements have determined the overall approach to Hong Kong in various measures in different stages. In the beginning, sovereignty was not just a legal but also a political question for Chinese leadership. As Deng Xiaoping stated in his interactions with Thatcher that:

“We have a clear-cut position regarding the question of Hong Kong, which involves three things. First, it involves the issue of sovereignty. The second question is about what method China will adopt to govern Hong Kong to maintain its prosperity after 1997. The third question is that both the Chinese and British governments should carefully discuss how to ensure that no major fluctuation will occur in Hong Kong from now to 1997.”<sup>44</sup>

The approach was more political than legal to the questions of sovereignty. It was also in continuation with Mao-era approach in that the definition of sovereignty was not Westphalian sovereignty at least in the way Chinese leadership and intellectuals interpreted it although, Chinese used international law to advance its claim. It was more about reclaiming Chinese sovereignty and agency with reference to wrongs done to Chinese civilization and people. In addition, the idea of sovereignty was still grounded in control of territory to create a strong and secure state rather than defining Chinese claims in terms of Westphalian terms. As the Mao-era approach to territorial questions, the Chinese approach did not use a precise definition of sovereignty as per western international law but it used it as a political tool for its claims. However, in recent years, Chinese discourses among people at large reinforce the relationship between territory and sovereignty. Chinese identity is being defined in relation to territory that reflects the idea of territorial nation-state in practice in Westphalian terms.

The British claims to a democratic and open society in Hong Kong have been construed by Chinese leaders and intellectuals as a pretense to hold on to colonial possession of Chinese territory. Thus, China’s resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong not only resists imperialism and colonialism but also advances and fights against colonialism through revitalizing Chinese tradition and civilization. While the meanings of civilization have differed in different periods after 1980s, the emphasis on Chinese way of life and its connection with sovereignty is an important dimension to understand the links between Chinese domestic political order and its political legitimacy, and foreign policy approaches with regard to questions of territorial sovereignty.

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<sup>43</sup>Deng Xiaoping, *One Country, Two Systems* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 2004), 1-10.

<sup>44</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “One Country,” 1.

The main challenges that China faces is that the regions like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia have deep rooted social order and traditions which give expression to distinct articulation of political identity and imagination. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, the issue of territorial sovereignty is directly linked to legitimacy of political order and system. The antagonistic identities taking shape in these two societies have much to do with the type of political order despite similarities in socio-cultural traditions and norms with mainland China. Political identities in these two regions have taken shape in direct response to China's political system and order under the CCP. These antagonistic political identities that challenge the territorial sovereignty of mainland China primarily are based on political legitimacy. As a result, the issues of security, territorial sovereignty and socio-political order become linked to the CCP's political legitimacy in the way China responds to these challenges. Although, China under any regime would have laid claims to territorial sovereignty of these regions as a state does by its nature to control territory, its approach, tools, and narratives are aimed at erasing these alternative political identities.

In contrast to the notion of absolute sovereignty and centralized control over territory to defend territorial integrity and interference in its internal affairs, the reform era-scholars also reinterpreted the notion with flexibility. It was not a rigid idea anymore. Rather, it was interpreted as an evolving concept as historical developments took shape.<sup>45</sup> China's approach to Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and humanitarian interventions show that its idea of sovereignty while linked to control over territory is basically a political approach in which its justification of alternative values and political order is based on alternative ideas of international order and politics. Hence, the concept of sovereignty may also be useful to other political forms and order. It evolved in the context of the emergence of nation-state but as the latter changes the idea of sovereignty also changes.<sup>46</sup>

### **One-Country-Two Systems and Territorial Sovereignty during Hu-Xi Period**

Deng-Jiang period of cautious and flexible approach to the question of territorial sovereignty in Hong Kong and Taiwan began to shift from Hu Jintao period onwards. During this period, territorial sovereignty became part of "core interests" which included Taiwan and other issues. China's intellectual landscape is diverse with a range of theoretical and ideological positions represented, Here, I discuss intellectual ideas of those who are

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<sup>45</sup> Ren Weidong, "quanqiuhua Jincheng zhong de Guojia Zhuquan: Yuanze, Tiaozhan ji Xuanze," (sovereignty in the era of Globalization: principles and challenges to choices) *Guoji Guanxi Xueyuan Xuebao*, (International Relations Institute Journal) no. 6 (2005): 4

<sup>46</sup> Yu Feng, "Zhuquan de Qiyuan: Lishi Lixing, Hefaxing yu Rentong Jichu," (Origins of Sovereignty: historical rationale, legitimacy and identity) *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi*, (World Economics and Politics) no. 4 (2008): 34.

characterized as ‘statist’ due to their emphasis on “the powers of the state (guarding against external and internal threats) as the highest political principle, overriding if necessary, the powers of the constitution.”<sup>47</sup> The focus on state and its security as the locus of sovereignty provides intellectual wherewithal to legitimize one-party rule as well as creating normative and intellectual background for strong and unified state as a pre-condition for rising as a great power.

In this regard, Chinese policymakers as well as a strand of intellectuals draw on both Chinese sources as well as western thinking that emphasize strong and centralized state.<sup>48</sup> As Peter Zarrow has argued, “the view that the state—the institutions of governance—is the ultimate locus of sovereignty, self-legitimizing, and the highest source of good” has a long tradition in Chinese political thought.<sup>49</sup> Here, the debates on Carl Schmitt’s idea of state and sovereignty in Chinese debates in the last few decades are instructive. Carl Schmitt’s critique of liberalism and advocacy for strong state and sovereignty has influenced Chinese intellectuals especially in the recent decades.<sup>50</sup>

Besides, an emerging brand of Chinese strategists, primarily coming from the People’s Liberation Army and other organs of state, has shifted towards an idea that a string state with a unified and centralized political order is necessary for China to exercise its power efficiently.<sup>51</sup> They derive these conclusions from both Chinese history and modern western history. For these nationalist and strategists, territorial sovereignty is absolute and a fragmented authority within domestic political order is undesirable.

Jiang Shigong is an influential intellectual whose works provides insight into long-term thinking about China’s policies towards Hong Kong. Deriving inspiration from thinkers like Carl Schmitt who have theorized and legitimized centralized state, he argues that “the result of social contract is that the people master the highest political power of the state and their “general will” constitutes “people’s sovereignty.”<sup>52</sup> He further notes that “In accordance with the construction of the modern state, national sovereignty must be rooted in individual

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<sup>47</sup> Sebastian Veg, “The Rise of China’s Statist Intellectuals: Law, Sovereignty, and “Repolicization,” *The China Journal*, no. 82 (2019): 1324-9347, doi: 10.1086/702687.

<sup>48</sup> Carl Schmitt’s ideas have been popular among scholars and strategists, for a review of debates on Carl Schmitt in China, see, Ryan Martinez Mitchell, “Chinese Receptions of Carl Schmitt Since 1929,” *Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs*, 8, (2020): 181-263.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885–1924* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>50</sup> Mitchell, “Chinese Receptions of Carl Schmitt,” 181-263.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Liu Mingfu, “China Dream,”; Zhang Weiwei, *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State*. (Shanghai: WPCPC, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Jiang Shigong, *China’s Hong Kong: A Political and Cultural Perspective* (Beijing: China Academic Library, 2017), 106.

citizens who are equal to each other, which necessarily requires each citizen to place national sovereignty above his/her family, tribe, religion and ethnicity.”<sup>53</sup> As a result, he argues that the coexistence of two incompatible systems, capitalism and socialism, do not have political logic to stay. Besides, his affinity with ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ leads him to argue that socialism and capitalism are two ways to attain modernity and socialism is a superior system. Therefore, he surmises that the CCP’s efforts to unify Hong Kong through national security laws and other policies is justified and do not violate its commitments made through the Basic Law of Hong Kong. It represents, according to him, the forward march towards modernity through socialism with Chinese characteristics to bring the capitalist Hong Kong or backward social systems in other regions into the narrative of progress.

In other words, the “one-country-two systems” was not supposed to be a permanent mechanism. Rather, it was a transition period mechanism before China could bring them back into its fold as Mao brought Tibet into the Chinese fold by land reforms and establishing communes. His recent writings in the context of the national security law in Hong Kong reflect his long-term thinking about a strong state.<sup>54</sup> For him, bringing capitalist order in Hong Kong under mainland control is about overcoming internal contradictions of modernity in socialism vs. capitalism dynamics.

The sovereignty of a state is derived from people, according to Jiang. But he defines people in two ways: class and ethnicity. In the class perspective, the focus is on political leadership and dominance while in ethnic perspective; the focus of sovereignty is on territory and history. By combining both perspectives, he argues that “Class equality” and “ethnic equality” were “prior restraints” on the construction of “sovereignty of the people” and the “prior restraints” became the cornerstones of New China’s constitution.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, “the idea of “one country, two systems” is particularly imaginative, embodying as it does a set of “theories of state against modern states” and resolving the modern dilemma (specifically, the Cold War predicament) in an anti-modern way. More precisely, it is a classic Chinese way of governance that wears a cloak of modernity.”<sup>56</sup> Since the existence of two systems within a single political order cannot be defined in terms of a modern state, the ‘one-country-two systems’ must be done away with to correct a false contradiction between country (nation *guo*) and state (*jia*).

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<sup>53</sup> Jiang Shigong, “China’s Hong Kong,” 107

<sup>54</sup> For example, Jiang Shigong, “Philosophy and History,” *Reading China Dream*, translated by David Ownby. <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/jiang-shigong-philosophy-and-history.html>

<sup>55</sup> Jiang Shigong, “China’s Hong Kong,” 109.

<sup>56</sup> Jiang Shigong, “China’s Hong Kong,” 110.

While Jiang Shigong critiques one-country-two systems and urges for a strong centralized political authority drawing on modern western thinking like Carl Schmitt, his other writings provide a re-reading of modern Chinese history in the context of “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for new era” that also draws on Chinese traditional ideas. In this respect, his reading of western modernity, Chinese history and current trajectories of political developments in the wake of the rise of China provide centrality to Chinese agency in rethinking political order at domestic and international levels. It is to be noted that his framing of questions against western modernity reflect wider trends in intellectual thinking in China.<sup>57</sup> The rethinking of Chinese history is a wider trend to craft a new path for a rising China.

Gan Yang’s essay based on his lecture at Tsinghua University provides a background of discussions on western modernity and hegemony, and the need to bring in Chinese traditions to rethink the idea of international order that starts in domestic politics. Gan Yang argued that China’s contemporary thinking must be guided by a mix of traditional Chinese cultural resources, its socialist legacy of equality, and capitalist trends for efficiency and innovation in economic production.<sup>58</sup> The centrality of Chinese agency in Jiang Shigong’s rethinking of history of modern China is reflected prominently. He argues, that “‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’ has entered a new age, meaning that the Chinese people, who have long suffered in the modern age, have now made a great leap, from standing up (*zhanqilai*), to becoming rich (*fu qilai*), to becoming strong (*qiang qi lai*).”<sup>59</sup> In this process, the role of the CCP in furthering China’s agency is central.

While drawing a distinction between western and Chinese thinking, in this context, Jiang Shigong provides a different idea of spatial-political order and philosophical assumptions underlying it. While western thinking is based on binaries of heaven and earth, Chinese culture and philosophy does not make such distinctions. The re-interpretation of history to justify the Chinese state in his ideas provides an alternative spatial political order that is universal. He states that “the construction of legitimacy in the Chinese political order must first be a historical construction.”<sup>60</sup> This line of thinking is getting traction in international relations theories in China as well as other realms of thought. It should be

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<sup>57</sup> For example, Timothy Cheek, David Ownby, and Joshua A. Fogel, *Voices from the Chinese Century: Public Intellectual Debate from Contemporary China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

<sup>58</sup> Gan Yang, “Unifying the Three Traditions” in the New Era: The Merging of Three Chinese Traditions,” *Reading China Dream*, translated by David Ownby. <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/gan-yang-tongsantong-chapter-1.html>

<sup>59</sup> Jiang Shigong, “Philosophy and History,”

<sup>60</sup> Jiang Shigong, “Philosophy and History,”

reemphasized that claims of Chinese culture and tradition for universal values is pitted against western modernity and its universal claims.

The existence of an alternative political order within the sovereign realms of China, therefore, is something that posits challenge to the legitimacy of CCP-led one party rule. The debates on one-country-two-systems in Hong Kong since 1997 is more about when would China unify Hong Kong into its fold after it assumed formal sovereignty. These new brand of intellectuals and strategists think that the existence of capitalist order in Hong Kong is an anathema to the rise of China which must be erased.<sup>61</sup> Territorial sovereignty in Westphalian sense is merely a legal and political tool rather than reflecting its ideal. Power configuration is more important. These intellectuals and strategists understand that it is material capacity that provides security to its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Besides, a state with more material power can protect its sovereignty better. I discuss the relevance of new ideas from traditional culture to understand the dynamics of spatial-political order and territorial sovereignty in the latter section.

### III

#### **Human Rights and Territorial Sovereignty**

Human rights are another major issue that finds place in Chinese discussions of territorial sovereignty. There have been changes in emphasis and frequency of the discussions on human rights and their links with territorial sovereignty. The changing domestic ideological dynamics is one factor that contributes to the changing definitions of human rights. Besides, international dynamics plays a major role in linking human rights with territorial sovereignty. The Tiananmen incident put the human rights issues at the center of China's foreign policy as western countries especially the United States made it a factor in its foreign policy towards China since then.

The debate on 'new sovereignty' during 1990s in the wake of humanitarian interventions in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union triggered major debates in Chinese academia and among policymakers. The debate considered changing dynamics and role of sovereignty in international politics with respect to globalization, unipolar world order after the collapse of the Soviet Union and changing nature of state itself.<sup>62</sup> While many Chinese scholars and policymakers propounded that the nature of sovereignty is dynamic and changes with historical developments, the overall approach

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<sup>61</sup> Chris Buckley, "Clean Up This Mess': The Chinese Thinkers Behind Xi's Hard Line," *The New York Times*, Aug. 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/02/world/asia/china-hong-kong-national-security-law.html>.

<sup>62</sup> For overview of 'new sovereignty' debate during 1990s, see, Allen Carlson, *Unifying China, integrating with the world: Securing Chinese Sovereignty in the Reform Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005): 6-10.

reflected the concerns with the security and legitimacy of political order under the CCP and its territorial sovereignty issues in peripheral regions. The collapse of the Soviet Union and debates in China loomed large that led to an ideological and political approach to human rights issues and its links with sovereignty. The debates on minority rights and autonomy reflected Chinese policymakers and scholars concerns that an independent identity of minority may lead to collapse and China should not repeat the Soviet mistake in granting excessive autonomy.<sup>63</sup>

### **Human Rights and China's Approach during Mao Period**

After 1949, Chinese foreign policy used human rights as a major tool to denounce imperialism, colonialism and racism in Third World countries. It advocated its support to human rights in its foreign policy and frequently highlighted the problems of human rights, women and racial minorities in western countries, and colonialism in developing countries. However, in practice it had a different conception of what human rights consist of in its foreign policy rhetoric and it was emphasized as a major tool and rhetoric.<sup>64</sup> Besides, western colonialism and rights of people, it defined human rights of third world countries for national independence and sovereignty. In fact, the major part of its foreign policy rhetoric and criticism of western countries and the Soviet Union were aimed at colonialism and the rights of Third World countries to attain national sovereignty. The linking of national sovereignty with human rights has been a constant theme for Chinese official positions to stave off western criticism in its practices and rally popular opinion against such criticism.

China's membership in the United Nations and gradual integration with the world have converged with official language and rhetoric with international legal norms on human rights over a period of time. In fact, China has joined all international conventions on human rights and is part of different bodies of the United Nations on human rights since the 1970s.<sup>65</sup> But China has maintained a thin line between sovereignty and human rights in the hope that "the development of international law of human rights helps the Third World countries make use of the issue of human rights to oppose hegemonism and colonialism, to preserve sovereignty and independence and to promote the development and prosperity of national

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<sup>63</sup> For example, Ma Rong, "Reconstructing "nation" (minzu) discourses in China," *International Journal of anthropology and ethnology* 1, no. 8 (2017): 1-15, Doi: 10.1186/s41257-017-0003-x.

<sup>64</sup> For main currents and themes of human rights and China's foreign policy until 1989, see, Andrew Nathan "Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Policy," *The China Quarterly* 139, (1994): 622-643, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/655133>.

<sup>65</sup> For the list of treaties, conventions and pacts signed by China on Human rights see, State Council Information Center, "White Paper on China's Efforts and Achievements in Promoting the Rule of Law," *State Council Information Center* February, 2008. [www.gov.cn/english/2008-02/28/content\\_904901\\_8.htm](http://www.gov.cn/english/2008-02/28/content_904901_8.htm).

economy.”<sup>66</sup>

### **Human Rights and Territorial Sovereignty**

The violent suppression of students at the Tiananmen Square in 1989 put human rights issues at the center of China’s engagement with western countries. The United States and host of other western countries imposed economic sanctions on China. At the same time, the incident also brought debates on human rights within domestic politics at the center because of increased interactions with the outside world.

The UN Human Rights Charter is not a binding document on member states and has a broad definition of human rights that could accommodate China’s official positions. But due to the changing geopolitical dynamics at international level, an increasing trend emerged in international politics in which powerful states adopted a range of other measures like economic sanctions, military interventions, etc. that put pressure on domestic policies. It is the changing dynamics of international politics and increased interventions of powerful countries like the US into other countries in the name of human rights that triggered debates on human rights and sovereignty in Chinese discourses after the Cold War ended.

The Chinese debates on human rights and its approach are grounded in critique of western domination over rest of the world. Therefore, a sustained critique of western discourses and practices of human rights in Chinese discourses have been that it is used as a tool to sustain hegemony. There have also been shifts in Chinese debates. During the Mao-era, human rights discourses were grounded in economic inequalities and power relations through colonialism that formed the basis of its critique of western countries. In fact, economic developmentalist view still is one of the dominant strands in human rights debates in China. At the same time, Chinese debates have also touched upon the issues of cultural domination, ideas, practices and their material basis that define current world order. Therefore, China’s approach to human rights is dynamic rather than dogmatic as it is portrayed generally as it includes aims to redefine their cultural underpinnings. An example of the same can be given in that China’s approach to human rights changed after the Iraq war (2003) when it started using human rights as enshrined in international law to criticize the United States’ foreign policy. Therefore, China’s approach to international order, sovereignty and domestic human rights issues is a complex one. China “primarily contests the implications of human rights for its domestic politics and policies rather than the norms themselves.”<sup>67</sup> It aims to redefine their

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<sup>66</sup> Gu Yan, "On human rights in international relationships," *International Strategic Studies* (China Institute for International Strategic Studies), no. 3 (1991): 10.

<sup>67</sup> Katrin Kinzelbach, "An Analysis of China’s Statements on Human Rights at the United Nations (2000–2010),"

moral and political meaning and implications for domestic politics.

The Post-Cold War theories of sovereignty in western world postulated that national sovereignty is not absolute and hence, states could intervene in other countries to safeguard human rights of people in those states.<sup>68</sup> These arguments about moral responsibility gave legitimation to powerful states to intervene for humanitarian reasons. Chinese scholars have reacted to these arguments and humanitarian interventions with a position that national sovereignty is absolute and a weapon for weaker states to safeguard their independence from powerful states. Besides, it is a ploy of western countries to subjugate weaker states in international relations.

Chinese scholars generally believe that the relationship between human rights and national sovereignty is complementary to each other. This view argues, that “the international protection of human rights is the result of a sovereign state’s commitment to treaty obligations in accordance with generally recognized principles of international law or international treaties.”<sup>69</sup> In this sense, it is state that protects human rights and interventions destabilize a state’s sovereignty to implement human rights.<sup>70</sup>

Chinese scholars have interpreted state, not individual as subject of international law.<sup>71</sup> But in this respect, Chinese scholars have articulated a variety of ways to allow international legal norms to protect violation of human rights in domestic affairs of a state. The predominant view, according to them, is that territorial sovereignty is a sacrosanct principle that prohibits any interference in domestic affairs. In these debates, the question of when other states can intervene to ensure protection of human rights has a range of conditions. One, human rights are applicable when states ratify particular treaties for particular rights. Secondly, the violation of human rights must have a certain definition. For example, only heinous crimes against their own populations allow international community to intervene. Thirdly, when human rights violations by state create regional security problems like terrorism, refugee crisis, genocide, etc. international community should be allowed to intervene. Fourthly, if there are a range of other issues like colonialism, hegemonism, and mass-scale violations of human rights then the international community should interfere.<sup>72</sup>

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*Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 30, no. 3 (2012): 299, doi: 10.1177/016934411203000304.

<sup>68</sup> See, Allen Carlson, “Unifying China,” 6-10.

<sup>69</sup> Li Lin, “Guoji renquan yu guojia zhuquan,” (International Human Rights and State Sovereignty), *Chinese Studies of Law*, no. 1 (1993): 37-44.

<sup>70</sup> Liu Ming, *guoji ganyu yu guojia zhuquan* (International Intervention and National Sovereignty) (Chengdu Sichuan People's Publishing House, 2000), 398.

<sup>71</sup> Li Lin, “Guoji renquan,” 38.

<sup>72</sup> Li Lin, “Guoji renquan,” 42.

These views are with regard to when the international community is justified to intervene and it is in compliance with treaties China has signed.

Human rights have also been defined as part of China's 'core interests.'<sup>73</sup> Hu Jintao was the first higher official to club human rights as part of core interests. In his visits to Laos and Pakistan in 2006, he appreciated two countries' support to China's positions on "Taiwan, Tibet, human rights and other major questions involving China's state sovereignty and core interests."<sup>74</sup> Similar statements clubbing human rights loosely as part of core interests have been made by its embassies in various countries too since then. What it means is that China expects other states to recognize its policies in Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Hong Kong and Taiwan as internal affairs.

### **State as a Container of Territorial Sovereignty**

China's diplomacy at international institutions like the United Nations and its agencies has reflected the following trends. Firstly, China has supported the idea of human rights as such. But it disagrees and contests a particular idea of human rights. It has frequently characterised human rights as "common treasure"<sup>75</sup> and 'the promotion of human dignity and human rights had been the constant quest of mankind'<sup>76</sup> Secondly, sovereignty is a guarantee of human rights in domestic affairs. If a state does not have sovereignty to conduct its internal affairs, it cannot protect human rights of its population too. Therefore, state is the main actor to protect and implement human rights.<sup>77</sup> The priority of sovereignty over human rights was a main theme of Deng Xiaoping's thinking.<sup>78</sup> Chinese official

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<sup>73</sup>Core Interests is a term frequently used since the early 2000s to refer to China's interests that cannot be compromised. The 2011 White Paper 'China's Peaceful Development listed the following as part of China's Core Interests. 1. State sovereignty; 2. National security; 3. Territorial integrity; 4. National reunification; 5. China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability; 6. Basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development. See, The State Council of People's Republic of China, "China's Peaceful Development," *The State Council of People's Republic of China* September 09, 2014. [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2014/09/09/content\\_281474986284646.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284646.htm)

<sup>74</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Lithuania, "Hu Jintao Holds Talks with General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) and Lao President Choummaly," *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Lithuania*, November 19, 2006, <http://lt.chinaembassy.org/eng/xwdt/t281353.htm>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, "China-U.S. Joint Statement," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC* January 19, 2011. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/hjtzxdmgfw\\_665768/t788173.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/hjtzxdmgfw_665768/t788173.shtml); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, "Carry on Traditional Friendship and Deepen All-round Cooperation—Address by Hu Jintao, President of the People's Republic of China, At Islamabad Convention Center, SRC-406," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC* November 24, 2006, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/yzs/gjlb/2757/2758/t285917.htm>.

<sup>75</sup> Cited in Katrin Kinzelbach, "Analysis of China," 306.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Katrin Kinzelbach, "Analysis of China," 306.

<sup>77</sup> Liu Ming, "guoji ganyu yu guojia zhuquan," 398.

<sup>78</sup> Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Vol. 3 (1982-1992)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994) 125. Deng's position was articulated in the context of western criticism of human rights in the wake of the Tiananmen incident.

discourses reflect these trends in different contexts.

The Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Tang Jiaxuan in his address at the UN in 2000 stated that “sovereign equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of States were the two core principles guiding international relations”<sup>79</sup> He further opined that the United Nations should be ‘aimed at better safeguarding the fundamental rights and interests of all Member States.’<sup>80</sup> By classifying sovereignty as a fundamental right of states, he provided an idea of absolute sovereignty.<sup>81</sup> In his speech at the United Nations Millennium Summit on September 7, 2000, Chinese President Jiang Zemin strongly criticized the notion that “human rights rank higher than sovereignty.”<sup>82</sup> He further stated in continuation with official positions that “Dialogue and cooperation in the field of human rights must be conducted on the basis of respect for state sovereignty.”<sup>83</sup> This is the fundamental and most effective way to protect and promote human rights. So long as there are boundaries between states, and people live in their respective countries, to maintain national independence and safeguard sovereignty will be the supreme interests of each government and people. Without sovereignty, there will be no human rights to speak of.”<sup>84</sup>

As a result, China has adopted a strategy to oppose country-specific evaluation by the UN Human Rights Council. Rather than evaluating each country’s human rights record, China has repeatedly suggested that the UNHRC should “become a forum for mutual learning from experience.”<sup>85</sup> The logic behind such arguments is that sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of states is enshrined in the UN Charter and hence country-specific evaluations “contravened the spirit of the Charter.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, it has argued for country-specific evaluations only in the condition of serious violations of human rights while

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<sup>79</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, “Statement by Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan at the 54th Session of the UN General Assembly,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC*, November 15, 2000, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/gjs\\_665170/gjzzyhy\\_665174/2594\\_665176/2602\\_665192/t15218.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/gjs_665170/gjzzyhy_665174/2594_665176/2602_665192/t15218.shtml)

<sup>80</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, “Statement by Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan,”

<sup>81</sup> Chinese scholars usually make difference between international human rights and domestic rights by citing the difference of content of the rights. At international level, human rights also include right to sovereignty and self-determination.

<sup>82</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs People’s Republic of China, “Statement by President Jiang Zemin of the People’s Republic of China at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs People’s Republic of China* September 6 2000. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t24962.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t24962.shtml)

<sup>83</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs People’s Republic of China, “Statement by President Jiang Zemin,”

<sup>84</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs People’s Republic of China, “Statement by President Jiang Zemin,”

<sup>85</sup> Permanent Mission of People’s Republic of China to United Nations Office in Geneva, “Statement by H.E. Ambassador Sha Zukang, on behalf of the Like-Minded Group, at the Informal Meeting on Reform of the UN Human Rights Machinery,” 2005. <http://www.china-un.ch/eng/rqrd/thsm/t191364.htm>

<sup>86</sup> Permanent Mission of People’s Republic of China to United Nations Office in Geneva, “Statement by H.E. Ambassador Sha Zukang,”

arguing for abolition of country-specific evaluations altogether.<sup>87</sup>

Chinese official positions on human rights also, in continuation with previous era, emphasize on western dominance and ‘double standards’ in applying to developing countries. In this regard, the binaries of developed vs. developing, global south vs. north and west vs. the rest has been prominent in its articulations of positions on human rights, and territorial sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. For example, the opposition to country-specific evaluation is supported by its claims that western powerful countries impose their own definition of human rights on Third World countries and hence, it is a hegemonic tool to maintain power inequality between the developed western world and poor developing and third world countries. China’s permanent representative Sha Zukang at the UNHCR meeting in 2005 argued, that since the Cold War ended, the UNHCR had adopted over 100 country-specific resolutions but all of these resolutions had been aimed at developing and third world countries.<sup>88</sup>

China questioned the practice of country-specific resolutions only against the developing world because human rights is not, as it argued, a problem of just the developing world. Developed countries too have human rights issues. It questioned its hegemonic nature and dominance of developed countries in determining what constitutes human rights. Hence country-specific evaluations are used to infringe upon sovereignty of developing countries by powerful countries.<sup>89</sup> Chinese diplomats have construed the violation of sovereignty itself as a human rights issue. For example, China’s permanent representative on UN Human Rights stated that:

The right of self-determination was a basic right provided for in both International Human Rights Covenants and constituted a prerequisite for the enjoyment of other rights and fundamental freedoms. Bullying the weak and small, attempting to subject them to political pressure or economic sanctions, and interfering in the affairs of others by force deserved the

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<sup>87</sup> Permanent Mission of People’s Republic of China to United Nations Office in Geneva, “Statement by H.E. Ambassador Sha Zukang,”

<sup>88</sup> Permanent Mission of People’s Republic of China to United Nations Office in Geneva, “Statement by H.E. Ambassador Sha Zukang,”

<sup>89</sup> Qian Hu, “Chinese Practice in Public International Law: 2005(I),” *Chinese Journal of International Law*, 5, no. 2, (2006): 466, <https://doi.org/10.1093/chinesejil/jml028>. For Chinese view on unequal power between states and national sovereignty, see, Xiao Jialing, “Theory of National Sovereignty”, *Current Affairs Press*, (2003): 2; Yin Jiwu, “Constructing the Principle of State Sovereignty: An Analysis of a Cultural Approach,” *Twenty-first Century Online Edition*, 23, February 28, 2004, <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c>. This view has reflected in scholarly writings and official statements from Mao-period to the present. Sovereignty is a legal and political weapon for weaker states including China to resist interventions in their internal affairs by powerful countries meaning European powers and the USA. I have noted in the next section that China’s positions on various humanitarian intervention cases have reflected the unequal power and ‘double standards’ by western powers to dominate weak states.

strongest condemnation by the international community.<sup>90</sup>

Chinese official positions consider self-determination as part of human rights. At the same time, it rejects the angle of self-determination in its minority and autonomous regions of Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan by emphasising that they are inalienable part of China and hence, the right to self-determination does not apply. Besides, the right to self-determination also implies that each country has right to safeguard their sovereignty against outside interference in domestic affairs. For example, Chinese advisor to its delegation to the UNGA Third Committee on the right of self-determination in 2006 stated that, “The right to national self-determination is an important inalienable human right. It is a solemn political right that all peoples are entitled to in their struggle against foreign aggression and interference, and in their efforts to safeguard national sovereignty, independence and human dignity.”<sup>91</sup> In this regard, it has consistently supported the issue of Palestine and other cases from time to time.<sup>92</sup>

In sum, China’s official positions at international institutions have emphasised sovereignty before human rights. While China does not have a well-defined alternative set of values to western values of human rights, its strategy to resist compliance and international institutions’ jurisdiction to sanction compliance with human rights is defined by its own concerns in Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Taiwan. This strategy is both a counter for criticism of its practices as well as born out of its historical experience of interference and imperialism in its territorial sovereignty.<sup>93</sup>

### **Human Rights, Ideological Changes and Territorial Sovereignty**

Sovereignty is the central idea in Chinese debates on human rights and the most recurring theme in the Chinese human rights discourse is the primacy of state sovereignty—no state sovereignty no human rights.”<sup>94</sup> Wang Tieya, a renowned scholar and practitioners of international law in China, argues that:

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<sup>90</sup> Qian Hu, “Chinese Practice,” 467.

<sup>91</sup> Zhu Lijiang, “Chinese Practices in International Law: (2006) 1,” *Chinese Journal of International Law* (2007), 6, 2 (2007): 480.

<sup>92</sup> See Chinese Representative’s statement at the Third Committee of the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNGA on Agenda Items 67 (a)–(b) and 68 on Palestine, Zhu Lijiang & MA Chengyuan, “Chinese Practices in International Law: 2012,” *Chinese Journal of International Law* (2013): 368. The right to self-determination and the case of Montenegro in 2006 see, Ministry of Foreign Affairs People’s Republic of China, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Jianchao’s Press Conference,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs People’s Republic of China* 30 May 2006, [www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/2511/t255751.html](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/2511/t255751.html).

<sup>93</sup> Y. Zhu, “China and International ‘Human Rights Diplomacy,’” *China: An International Journal*, 9, no. 2, (2011): 217–245.

<sup>94</sup> Li Zhaojie, “Legacy of Modern Chinese History: Its Relevance to the Chinese Perspective of the Contemporary International Legal Order,” 5 *Singapore Journal International & Comparative Law* 314, (2001): 324.

“The PRC sticks to the doctrine of sovereignty not only because China has bitter experiences of its sovereignty being ruthlessly encroached upon by foreign powers in the past, but that it also has the conviction that the principle of sovereignty is the only main foundation upon which international relations and international law can be established and developed.”<sup>95</sup>

While these ideas and view reflect its official positions in international diplomacy and foreign policy, intellectual debates in recent decades provide a wider critique of human rights from the perspective of culture, Euro-centrism and the need for changing normative foundations of international order. Zhao Jianwen, a researcher at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, argues, that Chinese traditional culture has a long-tradition of ‘people-centered thinking, a term frequently encountered in Xi Jinping’s speeches on governance, which has profound impact on thinking about human rights.’<sup>96</sup> Xue Hanqin, Chinese Jurist and Member of International Court of Justice (ICJ), writes that international law reflects Christian values and is a product of unequal power relations between West and East. Power disparity between the western countries and non-western countries ensured that western-oriented international law spread across the world. But to bring non-western values, “is not a matter of perspective, but more importantly, a search for a new world order.”<sup>97</sup> She cites the example of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence as an example of how non-western countries can contribute towards developing truly ‘international’ law that reflects values and voices of all countries.

As a result, it is conflict between values that lead to controversies over sovereignty, human rights, non-interference and other issues in international relations.<sup>98</sup> The calls to include non-western values into international law are not new in Chinese debates. Even Wang Tieya, whose writings and views have been moderate and accommodative, urged during the early period of reform era that the objective of international law is:

“to establish an effective universal international law. The process might be hard and long. For the present, the task of international lawyers is to take account of different histories and cultures of various countries and to find out principles of law and justice which are common to all.”<sup>99</sup>

These views clearly reflect the trend from previous periods in that domestic and

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<sup>95</sup> Wang Tieya, *International Law in China: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1990): 290.

<sup>96</sup> Zhao Jianwen, “Human Rights Connotations and Contemporary Values of Traditional Chinese People-Based Thinking,” *China Human Rights*, 2018. [http://www.chinahumanrights.org/html/2018/MAGAZINES\\_0427/11052.html](http://www.chinahumanrights.org/html/2018/MAGAZINES_0427/11052.html)

<sup>97</sup> Xue Han, “Meaningful Dialogue Through a Common Discourse: Law and Values in a Multi-Polar World,” *Asian Journal of International Law*, 1, no. 01 (2010): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2044251310000068>.

<sup>98</sup> Xue Han, “Meaningful Dialogue,” 14.

<sup>99</sup> Ronald St. John MacDonald, *Essays in Honour of Wang Tieya* (London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1994), 1

international laws are different in nature. Pan Junwu brings out the traditional Chinese distinction between *Li* (moral laws) and *Fa* (criminal law) to argue that China's search is for an international *Li*.<sup>100</sup> In Confucian philosophy, *Li* refers to moral codes of conduct which are informal but everyone adheres to them by cultivation. On the other hand, *Fa* in legalist philosophy refers to criminal law and was used against those who violated *Li*. Such a distinction denotes, as per Chinese philosophical view, that China's emphasis is on dialogue in the realm of international law rather than achieving goals through the use of force. Chinese scholars and politicians have increasingly come to push forward a benign view of China against the western expansionist view. The narratives of Zheng He's expeditions and traditional Chinese world order based on Confucian universal state have been argued to be non-expansionist and devoid of urge to interfere in internal affairs of others.<sup>101</sup>

There are two major problems with these arguments. One, these ideas do not go far in terms of concrete policies. Two, they also contradict with the state's existing policies. For example, despite China's stated official policy of non-interference in internal affairs since the 1980s, the covert use of economic tools, for example, has emerged as a major pattern in its behavior in recent years.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, they do not appear to go beyond moralist foreign policy expressions.

### **Humanitarian Interventions, R2P and Territorial Sovereignty**

This section discusses China's approach to humanitarian intervention. Humanitarian intervention has emerged as a new norm that constrains state sovereignty.<sup>103</sup> In consonance with the official positions and scholarly debates, Chinese positions on humanitarian interventions cases have been characterized by two factors. Firstly, state sovereignty is sacrosanct and cannot be infringed upon, except in cases of serious violations of human rights. Secondly, China has consistently highlighted the centrality of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in humanitarian interventions cases.<sup>104</sup> One of the major arguments against

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<sup>100</sup> Junwu Pan, "Chinese Philosophy and International Law," *Asian Journal of International Law* 1, no. 214 (2011): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2044251310000354>.

<sup>101</sup> Li Zhaojie & Li James, "Traditional Chinese World Order," *Chinese Journal of International Law* 1, no. 1, (2002): 54.

<sup>102</sup> See, William J. Norris, *Chinese Economic Statecraft: Commercial Actors, Grand Strategy, and State Control* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2016).

<sup>103</sup> Tiewa Liu & Haibin Zhang, "Debates in China about the responsibility to protect as a developing international norm: a general assessment," *Conflict, Security & Development*, 14, no 4 (2014): 404-406, doi: 10.1080/14678802.2014.930590.

<sup>104</sup> Chinese statements at international forums emphasize the centrality of UN in international relations in general and human rights, sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. For some examples see, Zhu Lijiang, "Chinese Practice in Public International Law: 2013," *Chinese Journal of International Law* (2014): 1. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's statement in 72<sup>nd</sup> UGGA, see Xiaohui Wu, "Chronology of Practice: Chinese Practice in Public International Law in 2017," *Chinese Journal of International Law* (2018): 1036. Chinese

humanitarian intervention and R2P has been that western powerful countries willfully intervene in weaker developing countries for their own material interests. By extension, China's responses to western criticism of human rights in China go along the same line. In practice, China usually considers three aspects when adopting intervention policy namely, national strategic interest, and the potential risk of the intervention. The third is ideological concern over state sovereignty.<sup>105</sup>

In debates on humanitarian intervention and the protection of human rights, the concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is fundamental in defining the morality of interference in internal affairs of states. The debates in R2P follow the arguments in the debates on territorial sovereignty in 1990s in China that sovereignty is not a sacrosanct principle. But its insertion in international law reflects the centrality of the concept of territorial sovereignty. For example, in 2001, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) stated that "state sovereignty implies responsibility, and the primary responsibility for the protection of its people lies with the state itself."<sup>106</sup> The report further states that the principle of non-interference is basic to the Charter of United Nations and that "obligations inherent in the concept of sovereignty."<sup>107</sup>

Generally speaking, the Chinese Government supports the concept of R2P as agreed at the World Summit in 2005. Liu Zhenmin, Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, stated that the 2005 World Summit Outcome 'has made a prudent definition on "Responsibility to Protect."' He also emphasized that the primary responsibility to protect the population rests with the government of the state concerned: "the international community can offer certain help, but the responsibility to protect its citizens should finally reside on the state government." He continued, "this is in accordance with the principle of national sovereignty", because 'the determination to follow the principle of sovereignty and non-interference should never be shaken.'<sup>108</sup>

Official positions on humanitarian interventions and R2P are reflected in scholarly

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Ambassador Liu Zhenmin's statement on the debate on "Maintenance of international peace and security: respect for international humanitarian law" in the United Nations Security Council, Zhu Lijiang, "Chinese Practice in Public International Law: 2009," *Chinese Journal of International Law* (2010): 637. These are only some of the examples.

<sup>105</sup>Liu and Zhang, "Debates in China," 404-410.

<sup>106</sup>International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (IDRC, 2001), XI. China's strong push to include state sovereignty as the corner stone of the R2P was consequential in this regard.

<sup>107</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, "The Responsibility," XI.

<sup>108</sup> Xinhua, "Window of China, 'Chinese Diplomat: Implementing "Responsibility to Protect" Must not Contravene State Sovereignty," *Xinhua* July 25 2009.

debates as well as debates on sovereignty.<sup>109</sup> There is a general consensus that the R2P is essentially an instrument of Western countries to pursue self-interests. Hence, R2P cannot and should not become an international norm because the idea of R2P was developed from ‘humanitarian intervention’, which inevitably reflected Western power politics. Thus, although the concept has been accepted by the international community, “it has not yet become an international norm.”<sup>110</sup> In general, Chinese scholars and policymakers accept the utility of the concept of R2P but only within the boundaries of their concerns of same provisions being used against China and general human rights positions in Chinese official and scholarly debates. Although, there are some scholars who believe that R2P is part of international law and hence, it is a useful norm to adopt.<sup>111</sup> Official debates also point towards similar ideas. For example, during the debate at the 54th Session of the UN General Assembly in the fall of 1999, at the first such meeting following Kosovo, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan criticized the "new interventionism" and the placing of "human rights over sovereignty" as hegemonic in nature.<sup>112</sup>

China’s position on Iraq reflected its basic positions on humanitarian interventions and national sovereignty. One, it supported “political solution of the Iraq issue within the framework of the United Nations”; Second, requiring Iraq to fully and strictly comply with relevant UN resolutions and truly honor its words of not possessing any weapons of mass destruction, emphasizing that the sovereignty, independence and integrity of territories of Iraq should be respected.”<sup>113</sup> Chinese diplomats and leaders consistently have maintained that territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iraq is fundamental and should not be violated, while Iraq could still be held responsible for weapons of mass destruction under relevant resolutions namely, Resolution no. 1441.<sup>114</sup> Its positions on the US intervention in Iraq in 2003 also reflected that China started using international law and human rights to criticize other powers like the USA.<sup>115</sup> China, since the early 2000s, has not only emphasized

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<sup>109</sup>For an overview of Chinese debates on R2P, see, Tiewa Liu & Haibin Zhang, “Debates in China,” 403-427

<sup>110</sup> Qiu Meirong and Qing Zhou, “Responsibility to Protect: A Theoretical Study of the Western Humanitarian Intervention after the Cold War,” *Chinese Journal of European Studies* 2, (2012): 122–138.

<sup>111</sup> Song Jie, “The Responsibility to Protect: Studies on the Judicial Practice of the International Court of Justice,” *Science of Law* (Journal of Northwest University of Political Science and Law) 5, (2009): 55 –64.

<sup>112</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, “Statement by Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan,”

<sup>113</sup> Permanent Mission of People’s Republic of China to United Nations Office in Geneva, “China’s Stance and Diplomatic Effort to Solve Iraq Issue,” *Permanent Mission of People’s Republic of China to United Nations Office in Geneva* April 19, 2004. <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cegv/eng/ljzg/zgwjzc/t85882.htm>

<sup>114</sup> Permanent Mission of People’s Republic of China to United Nations, “China’s Position on the US War in Iraq,” *Permanent Mission of People’s Republic of China to United Nations* March 26, 2003, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceun/eng/chinaandun/securitycouncil/regionalhotspots/mideast/ylk/t537117.htm>

<sup>115</sup> Dongsheng Zang, “China’s “Attitude” toward Human Rights: Reading Hungdah Chiu in the Era of the Iraq War,” *Maryland Journal International Law* 27 no. 263 (2012).

territorial sovereignty in international law and domestic discourse but it has also actively used existing norms to criticize the United States and push for its own agenda in international institutions. Such an attitude is reflected consistently in its response to criticism and legal measures promulgated by the USA and other western powers since 2016.

China's positions on Darfur (South Sudan) interventions highlight another issue that is important in Chinese debates. Chinese statements have emphasized that the problem in Darfur is that of poverty, rather than genocide. Chinese positions on human rights emphasize that intervention can only be justified, that too under the aegis of the UNSC, when there is large scale violation of human rights. As the then Vice-President Xi Jinping stated, "China has always supported the resolution of the Darfur issue via the three-party mechanism of the Sudanese government, the African Union and the United Nations, and the double-track strategy of peacekeeping action and the political process moving forward together."<sup>116</sup> Its positions on other cases viz Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and others have been consistent with these policy stances. In Libya, in fact, initially China voted in favour of the UNSC resolution to intervene. But later it retracted from this position in favour of intervention and criticized the western alliance because the intervention was not according to the UNSC mandate, a key argument against interventions.

What do these positions tell us about China's vision of international order? Few trends can be extracted. Firstly, that China still contests the normative foundations of the existing international order. In a sense, China's foreign policy in the reform period is a continuation of the Mao period because it does emphasize underlying power politics and the role of new norms from non-European societies. Secondly, its practices of territorial sovereignty are more about politics of norms rather than thinking about a non-territorial approach to international order. China's use of economic statecraft to influence other countries is one example. Thirdly, that its security and territorial sovereignty concerns dominate its thinking about territorial sovereignty and international order.

#### IV

#### Conclusions

#### **New Ideas in China's Foreign Policy: Going Beyond National Territorial Sovereignty?**

The previous sections established that territorial sovereignty is central to China's

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<http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/mjil/vol27/iss1/16>

<sup>116</sup> China Daily, "China Reiterates Position on Darfur Issue," *The China Daily*, 11 June 2008, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-06/11/content\\_6751118.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-06/11/content_6751118.htm). Also see Ambassador Liu Zhenmin made the following statement on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in 2006 on the relationship between international law and humanitarianism, Zhu Lijiang, "Chinese Practices," 506.

engagements with the international system. Also, the previous chapter developed a point that Chinese national identity is increasingly being defined territorially, meaning that there is a conceptual shift from a class-based understanding of political order to one defined by nation-state territoriality. Such a shift implies that China is inching closer to western nation-state territoriality that defines existing international order and its defining principles like sovereignty, order, identity, and others. In this section, I take up recent discussions on the ideas like the Community of Shared Future and harmonious world that supposedly go beyond the territorial community of nation-state. There are two key questions that I ask. One, whether and how these new ideas manifest in China's economic and security policies at the regional level in East Asia. Two, if so, do they imagine a community beyond the territorial nation-state? The objective here is to understand the rationale behind these ideas and how new ideas can reconfigure Chinese thinking about international relations in general.

Before going into the details of these concepts and how they manifest in specific policies and initiatives, it is necessary to point out the context in which they have emerged that makes these ideas significant in terms of Chinese thinking about international order and politics behind it. With the rise of China's economic and military power, the question of whether China can rise peacefully became a central question from the 1990s onwards in the debates on the 'rise' of China.<sup>117</sup> In response to the "China threat" narratives, Chinese official discourses began a narrative of peaceful development. The basic idea is that China can defy Realist claims of "Thucydides Trap" for two reasons. One, Chinese ideas provide a better source of understanding and conduct of international relations.<sup>118</sup> Two, historical patterns of relationships in East Asia have been different and hence, it need not follow the European path.<sup>119</sup> Third, Chinese scholars and state push forward claims that Chinese ideas like harmony (*hexie*), relationality (*guanxi*), *tianxia*, and the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (*Renlei mingyun gongtongti*) provide a better understanding and guide to international relations. It is in these contexts that new ideas like a harmonious world and the CSF emerged in the last two decades.

The ideas of a harmonious world and the CSF began to take root as China's economic integration deepened and it amassed the capacity to stoke security fears as well as shape security and economic relationships, especially in the immediate neighborhood. Therefore,

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<sup>117</sup> Yan Xuetong, "The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 10, no. 26 (2001): 33-39, Doi: 10.1080/10670560123407.

<sup>118</sup> See, discussion in chapter 4.

<sup>119</sup> On this see, David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 57-85, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137604>.

talking about the immediate neighborhood as a community of shared interests not only allows China to allay security fears but also integrate these states into its economy and hence, its sphere of influence. How do Chinese elites (military strategists, scholars, leaders, and opinion makers) see China's place in the region or region as a whole?

William Callahan in an influential study has shown that Chinese maps and cartographic practices in the Post-Mao era reflect contradictory images of the spatial-political imagination of China and its place in the world. On the one hand, the narrative is that of an unbound China reflecting its great power aspiration to shape the world. On the other hand, the maps show its fears of territorial disintegration in what he calls "national humiliation cartography."<sup>120</sup> In a highly popular book *China's Road under the Shadow of Globalization* by Wang, Fang, and Song pushed the narrative of western states' intention to divide up China into independent states in Taiwan, Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, East Turkestan, and Tibet.<sup>121</sup> The spatial-political narrative presented here reflected Chinese leadership's long-term skepticism about the brittleness of China's territorial sovereignty.<sup>122</sup> Chinese commentators and intellectuals have throughout raised concerns about the negative impact of globalization, interdependence, and China's integration with the global economy on its sovereignty.

These security fears emerged from, the challenges to its sovereignty in peripheral regions. China's increased interactions with the outside world brought its peripheral regions in close contact with the neighbourhood. Korean population in North-eastern province of Jilin, Mongolian population in Inner Mongolia, Kazakh, Uighur, and other groups in Xinjiang share cultural-historical and political links with neighbouring countries of South and North Korea, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and other central Asian countries respectively. As China opened up its economy to the outside world, its populations in these regions were exposed to political, cultural, and historical linkages in neighbouring countries. This posed serious security and territorial sovereignty challenges for China. For example, ethnic mobilizations in the Post-Soviet republics have been one of the security concerns among Chinese leadership for similar ethnic mobilizations in its periphery.

The rest of the section evaluates the concept of Community of Shared Future for Mankind as a new normative idea in Chinese foreign policy, particularly in its neighbourhood. The concept has been used to articulate China's foreign policy aimed at constructing a

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<sup>120</sup> William A. Callahan, "The Cartography of National Humiliation and the Emergence of China's Geo-body," *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (2009): 141-173, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2008-024>.

<sup>121</sup> Wang Xiaodong, Fang Ning, and Song Qiang, *Quanqiuhua yinxiang xiade Zhongguo zhi lu* (China's Road under the Shadow of Globalization) (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1999).

<sup>122</sup> Khan, "Haunted by Chaos," 1-15.

community and is of recent origin.<sup>123</sup> It was enshrined in the constitution as part of the Xi Jinping Thought and its definition captures its essential elements that have been used in different contexts in official discourses. According to the text:

“In international affairs, it shall uphold justice while pursuing shared interests, safeguard China’s independence and sovereignty, oppose hegemonism and power politics, defend world peace, promote human progress, work to build a community with a shared future for mankind, and advance the building of a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity.”<sup>124</sup>

Despite its ambiguous definition and catch-all meanings attached to it, the concept of CSF has emerged as a central normative concept in Chinese discourses. Among its many meanings, one that stands out is that it stands for the community whether at the neighbourhood, regional or global level. As a community, it advocates openness, inclusiveness and sharedness, and is non conflictual in nature. It is also compatible with national territorial sovereignty and can overcome power politics. But whether it provides an alternative conception of regional or international order is a crucial question.

Chinese scholars have started to conceptualize the idea in different contexts.<sup>125</sup> Partly, the idea of rising China as a great power status plays into domestic politics and hence, new ideas are part of the nationalistic turn in Chinese foreign policy. But Ian Johnston has pointed out that while China adheres to norms and rule of the existing order, it does contest and push forward new norms, rules and ideas.<sup>126</sup> The question of whether the CSF provides an alternative must be evaluated in terms of whether or not it can inspire new norms.

There are existing conceptions of community in international relations that do attempt to go beyond territorial sovereignty-based order to imagine a community in certain senses. For example, the idea of international society emerging out of the English School of IRT conceptualized the notion of community at the international level in terms of shared norms,

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<sup>123</sup> It was first used in Hu Jintao’s Report to the Party Congress and later in a white paper, its contents and significance were laid out, see, Information Office of the State Council (2011), “White Paper: China’s Peaceful Development,” Information Office of the State Council, (Online: Web), Accessed Sep 6 2011, URL: [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2014/09/09/content\\_281474986284646.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284646.htm); China Daily (2007), “Full text of Hu Jintao's report at 17th Party Congress,” China Daily, 24 October, 2007, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-10/24/content\\_6204564.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-10/24/content_6204564.htm).

<sup>124</sup> Xinhua, “Full text of Constitution of Communist Party of China,” *Xinhua News* November 3, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Constitution\\_of\\_the\\_Communist\\_Party\\_of\\_China.pdf](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Constitution_of_the_Communist_Party_of_China.pdf).

<sup>125</sup> In this case, scholars have taken up the idea promoted by the official discourse. In previous period too, the ideas of ‘peaceful rise’ and ‘harmonious world’ were first proposed in official discourses. This relationship between scholars and Chinese state has been defined as one of the four types by Huiyun Feng and Kai He in their work on Chinese IR scholars and foreign policy. See, Huiyun Feng, Kai He and Yan Xuotong, *Chinese Scholars and Foreign Policy: Debating International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2019). However, some of the ideas emerged as part of larger discourses on Confucianism and the relevance of traditional ideas for the contemporary world.

<sup>126</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, “China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Compliance and Challenge in Beijing’s International Relations,” *International Security*, 44 No. 2 (2019): 9-60, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00360](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00360).

rules, and institutions to govern inter-state relations. Similarly, Liberal Institutionalism also provides an idea of a liberal community knit together by liberal norms, open trade, and institutions that shape inter-state relations. There are not necessarily ideals but they do go beyond territorialized nation-state international order defined by power politics. Can the CSF be compared with these ideas of the community?

Despite their problems, international society and liberal institutionalism provide some distinguishable and workable ideas in the way cooperation, inclusiveness and most importantly institutions work. As a result, they not only partially explain international relations but also inspire future actions like regionalism, developing rules and institutions, etc. The idea of CSF does not provide an idea of how the ideas of harmony, inclusiveness and relationality can be materialized in actuality.

China has been an active participant in creating regional multilateral initiatives. The Tumen Initiative in North-East Asia involving North Korea, Mongolia, Russia and China was established in the early 1990s for developing economic and cross-border cooperation on a range of issues such as transborder trade. In the late 1990s, the creation of Shanghai 5 and later the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) involved newly created Central Asian Republics, Russia and China. Although initially aimed at security cooperation, the SCO has also emerged as a major economic cooperation mechanism. China has hailed it as a successful multilateral initiative and more recently, it has injected the idea of creating CSF as its goal.

But it is primarily a security-driven initiative aimed at staving off cross-border mobilization and movement of radical elements in Xinjiang, integrating its Xinjiang frontier economically with its core areas in inland as well as making neighbouring countries as stakeholders in stability, and keeping outside powers like the USA out of Central Asia and thus away from its frontiers.<sup>127</sup> In the process, China used its economic capacity to incentivise Central Asian countries with investment and other infrastructure projects. Additionally, it has settled its boundary disputes with all countries in the region.<sup>128</sup> As a result, the number of organizations based in Central Asian countries has declined from 1990s onwards thereby making support for Xinjiang dissidents difficult.<sup>129</sup> The challenges to its sovereignty in Xinjiang and possible outside support remains one of highest security goals and creating

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<sup>127</sup> David Kerr & Swinton Laura C., "China, Xinjiang and Transnational Security of Central Asia," *Critical Asian Studies* 40, 1 (2008): 115-116, doi: 10.1080/14672710801959174.

<sup>128</sup> Michael Clarke, "China's Integration of Xinjiang with Central Asia: Securing a "Silk Road" to Great Power Status?" *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (2008): 95-99, <http://hdl.handle.net/10072/22347>.

<sup>129</sup> Russel Ong, "China's Security Interests in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey* 24, 4 (2005): 429-431, doi: 10.1080/02634930500453566.

cooperation mechanism with the neighbouring countries, therefore, helps it to cope up with these challenges.

Similarly, China has participated as an initiator in multilateral organization in its maritime neighbourhood like the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum (APEC), ASEAN +3, ASEAN Regional Forum, and a host of trade pacts functions as forums. Some realist Chinese scholars like Sun Xuefeng have questioned whether these multilateral forums serve Chinese interests.<sup>130</sup> But apart from economic benefits, China's participation allows it to prevent something from happening at the least as Mark Beeson has recently put it.<sup>131</sup> For example, it has used individual ASEAN members to vote against any proposal that goes against its interests especially related to alliance with outside powers like the USA or ASEAN collective action on the South China Sea issue. Chinese scholars with realist inclinations do see these initiatives basically aimed at security concerns rather than as creating economic interests or CSF.<sup>132</sup> Their analyses are not only informed by realist assumptions but they are unanimous in agreeing on the problems that China faces in its neighbourhood. Its own actions also stoke fears and hence, China has attempted to allay security fears of these countries.<sup>133</sup>

In this context, the idea of CSF has been used to articulate its policies in normative framework that may help it allay security fears or give a normative counter narrative to its aggressive actions. For example, two influential scholars associated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) have put forward the view that the CSF represents a comprehensive view of international order as community deriving from ideas of relationality among others.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, many scholars have interpreted the New Security Concept (*xin anquan gainian*) announced in 2014 as part of the CSF. In this idea, the idea of region includes whole of Asia captured in the phrase in Xi Jinping's speeches "Asia for Asians."<sup>135</sup> Not only the geographical scope of region covers whole of Asia but also the NSC is presented as an open, inclusive and win-win idea for the region.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, other scholars have also included inclusiveness, openness and elasticity of the NSC and connected with the idea of

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<sup>130</sup> Sun Xuefeng, "The efficiency of China's multilateral policies in East Asia (1997–2007)," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 10, no. (2010): 515–541, Doi: [10.1093/irap/lcq011](https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcq011).

<sup>131</sup> Mark Beeson, "Can ASEAN cope with China?" *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35, no. 1 (2015) 5–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341603500101>.

<sup>132</sup> Yan Xuetong, "In China's diplomacy, the 'periphery' is more important than the United States," *Huanqiu Shibao – Global Times*, 13 January 2015.

<sup>133</sup> Feng Liu, "The recalibration of Chinese assertiveness: China's responses to the Indo-Pacific challenge," *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 9–27, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz226>.

<sup>134</sup> Guo Shuyong & Yu Yang, "Quanzhi zhixu,"

<sup>135</sup> Dong Wang & Weizhan Meng, 2020: 6–7.

<sup>136</sup> Jiang, Z., "Yazhou xin anquan guan jiqi zhixu yihan" (The new Asian Security concept and its implications for order), *Heping yu Fazhan* (Peace and Development), 5 (2014): 1–11.

CSF.<sup>137</sup> Shen Dingli, for example, refers to multilateral initiatives and confidence building measures like the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) among others as Chinese actions to promote region as a community.<sup>138</sup>

Therefore, there are both types of ideas that take territorial sovereignty and security at the core of China's approach to economic, security and multilateral policies in its neighbourhood. At the same time, the new ideas like CSF have been used to give a normative basis to already existing policies. I conclude with two points as to whether or not new ideas conceptualize community beyond territorial sovereignty-based order. The first is that challenges to China's sovereignty in its periphery, and security concerns in neighbourhood especially intervention of outside powers make its economic policies and multilateral initiatives primarily security and power-centric. Xi Jinping's speech at the Third Plenum of 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2013 probably captures this point well. He stated that:

“Hostile forces are doing their utmost to propagate so-called ‘universal values’ ... their objective is ... to overthrow the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and China's Socialist system. If we allow [this] ... those false efforts will ... endanger the Party's leadership and the security of the Socialist national regime... Western anti-China forces continue to vainly attempt to use the Internet to ‘topple China’ ... On this battlefield of the Internet, whether we can stand up, and gain victory, directly relates to our country's ideological security and regime security.”<sup>139</sup>

The second is that ideas like the CSF provide meaning to already existing policies and initiatives, rather than providing an alternative in terms of institutionalization. Hence, they remain significant at the discursive level in terms of moralist foreign policy rather than providing alternative views in terms of going beyond sovereign territoriality.

In this respect, China's participation in existing international institutions and approach to insert its own ideas namely, the CSF is pragmatic rather than rejecting institutions. For deputy Foreign Minister Fu Ying, for example, argues, that China rejects “US-led liberal order” rather than the United Nations (UN)-led order.<sup>140</sup> It has time and again articulated support for fundamental principles of international order namely territorial sovereignty, the

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<sup>137</sup> Han, A., “Dongya anquan kunjing yu Yazhou xin anquan guan de qidi,” (East Asia's security dilemma and the inspiration of the New Asian Security Concept), *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* (International Studies), 5 (2015): 51–64.

<sup>138</sup> Shen, D., “Suzao Yazhou gongtong yishi yu Yazhou jiti anquan” (Shaping Asia's common consciousness and Asia's collective security), *Zaobao*, May 23 2014, 1.

<sup>139</sup> “Communique of the Third Plenum of the 18th CCP Central Committee (Full Text),” *China.org.cn* [January 15, 2014](http://www.c3sindia.org/society-politics/reference-material-communique-of-the-third-plenum-of-the-18th-ccp-central-committee-full-text/).[https://www.c3sindia.org/society-politics/reference-material-communique-of-the-third-plenum-of-the-18th-ccp-central-committee-full-text/](http://www.c3sindia.org/society-politics/reference-material-communique-of-the-third-plenum-of-the-18th-ccp-central-committee-full-text/)

<sup>140</sup> Fu Ying, “China's Vision for the World: A Community of Shared Future” *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/chinas-vision-for-the-world-a-community-of-shared-future/>.

UN Human Rights Charter and has participated in all major international institutions and agencies. Therefore, it is prudent for Chinese leadership to seek gradual shift in norms and values through participation in international institutions and order. As its economic power increases and consequently its influence especially over developing countries and in international institutions, the rejection of constitutive norms and values go together with acceptance of regulatory norms. By doing so, it projects itself as a responsible power without jeopardizing its economic interests.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

In the Post-Cold War period, the concept of sovereignty has been redefined with reference to economic globalization, the emergence of ideas of ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P) and humanitarian interventions although territorial state remains the cornerstone of the international order. However, China has emerged as a strong supporter of territorial sovereignty defined in terms of strict non-interference in internal affairs. At the same time, Chinese scholars and the official discourses have advanced criticisms of cultural and philosophical understandings of the concept of territorial sovereignty. By making a distinction between regulatory norms, and constitutive norms of the international order, the thesis shows why China asserts territorial sovereignty as the basic principle of the international order while it contests the cultural and philosophical understandings of territorial sovereignty as a constitutive norm. The analytical distinction made in the thesis between regulatory and constitutive norms help bring out these dynamics of China’s approach to the international order.

Looking at the dominant ideas and drivers of China’s foreign policy, and its approach to constitutive norms of the international order in the Post-Mao period, one factor that seems most important is the question of political legitimacy of the Communist Party of China (CCP). The fact that the CCP must legitimize its one-party rule in terms of ideas and institutions that cannot be derived from democracy and liberal values drives its search for new ideas and norms in foreign policy. This becomes more significant when Maoist socialism becomes increasingly inadequate to justify economic policies in the last four decades of reforms.

An analysis of how dominant ideas in its domestic politics changed over time, suggests that the dominant ideas in its approach to and articulation of the international order reflect contestations over how domestic political order should be organized. The domestic chaos, both economic and political, and isolation in the international system led Mao and his associates namely Zhou Enlai to open diplomatic relations with the US in the 1970s. China’s membership in the United Nations in 1971 as a result of diplomatic recognition from the Republic of Taiwan to the People’s Republic of China represents a shift in China’s approach to the international order. The shift was effected by the interplay between the changes in domestic politics, the need to end economic chaos, and its interests to end isolation amidst rising tensions with the Soviet Union from the early 1960s.

In the immediate aftermath of the reforms and opening-up policies in the 1980s, political control over ideologies was relaxed. As a result, various strands of thought not only among political and cultural elites but also among the masses emerged. Among these strands of thought and ideas, re-evaluating tradition and culture, and support for democracy was prominent. Coupled with these developments, a relatively open environment allowed people at large to vent their frustrations at rampant corruption which paved the way for Tiananmen student protests.

These protests coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the delegitimation of Marxism as a political and economic ideology, the creation of republics in China's Central Asia neighbourhood, and most importantly a renewed ideological push and pressure on the Communist Party of China within US-led international order for political reform. As a result, the party and intellectuals close to the establishment had to explain and justify the one-party rule with reference to alternative ideas and norms. The idea of neo-authoritarianism rose in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a result of the need to find moral and ideological sources of changing economic policies and ideological challenges in the international system for political reform. The neo-authoritarian intellectuals pushed forward the idea that a strong state was necessary for economic development reflecting larger debates and arguments on the success of the state-led developmental model in East and Southeast Asia. However, these arguments had limits because they lacked strong ideological legitimacy to justify the shift from Maoist socialism to the capitalist developmental model.

The CCP's shift towards tradition, culture, and historical experiences, therefore, was rooted in the need to find an alternative ideological source for economic modernization. Looking at the debates on tradition, it becomes clear that the party has attempted to articulate China's economic modernization with reference to the sources in Chinese tradition and history. The main thesis of western modernization theories or the idea of modernity is that political transformation will follow as a necessary step towards economic modernization. For the political legitimacy of the CCP, the main ideological challenge has been to convince its people and international audience that it is not necessarily so. Hence, the party took a lead in promoting traditional culture in a big way to cope up with serious ideological and political legitimacy crises in the aftermath of the Tiananmen protests and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Since then, the party has promoted traditional culture and a changed attitude towards pre-1911 history. In the education reforms of 1992 and ensuing ideological campaigns in the 1990s, China's glorious tradition, history, and "century of humiliation" became the main

themes. The CCP promoted traditional culture in propaganda, education, and academic realms through changes in curricula, establishing *guoxue* (national learning) institutes in universities, promoting conservation of traditional culture and heritage among others. In intellectual debates, an increasing number of intellectuals have pushed forward the idea that Chinese tradition provides an alternative and desirable source for modernization with the party at the helm.

These intellectual efforts converged with the party's ideological agenda in two respects. First, that Chinese history and culture provide alternative sources for modernization. Second, the expansion of global capitalism and the path towards western modernization is not desirable. The latter argument was prominent in New Left literature and debates. A critical examination of these ideas and debates, and the party's push for traditional culture, therefore, reveal that the need to justify economic modernization through sources and narratives against western modernity is the crucial reason why the party has shifted towards tradition.

Additionally, the reform and opening-up policies have led to tensions between the Leninist party organization, and its absolute control, and socio-economic tendencies for openness. Hence, the party's strategy is to strengthen its institutional and ideological control over society and associational form of life. This tendency to control society also leads it to define the meaning and relevance of traditional culture to people although it is not certain whether and how much it can succeed in doing so. Nevertheless, the party controls the narratives and meanings of tradition, culture, and history through a vast propaganda system, media, education, and by appropriating everyday practices of traditional culture to align it with the party's tight ideological narratives and control.

However, China's critique of cultural and philosophical understandings of the constitutive norms of the international order is not unique. Rather, resistance to dominant norms and ideas of the international order has always been present. The literature on the evolution of the international order, and its fundamental principles namely territorial sovereignty, order, equality, international law, and institutions reveal that their cultural and philosophical assumptions have emerged from Euro-American thought and historical experiences. The idea of territorial sovereignty underlines these cultural and philosophical assumptions, historical experiences, and power relations with non-European societies in the process of expansion of the international order.

At the heart of the processes of adaptation and resistance of the international has remained the critique of cultural and philosophical understandings of the international norms, and participation in the regulatory norms. The dynamics of adaptation to regulatory norms

and resistance to the constitutive norms explains how dominant norms and ideas evoke resistance when they make moral and political claims to reorganize the domestic political system. It becomes more so when a state has economic, military and institutional power to resist and reshape dominant norms.

Therefore, Chinese interactions with and responses to the international order since the late nineteenth century can be contextualized within the framework of an unstable, evolving and dynamic international order rather than stable and fixed ideas of the international order reflected in Realist and Liberal literature in International Relations. What makes a difference in cultural and philosophical assumptions significant in the competing visions and ideas of the international order is a sense of pride in cultural identity and history. Therefore, the CCP or any regime with a different political system for that matter mobilizes the sense of cultural identity to resist and push forward a certain vision of the international order. Looking at the dynamics of why states promote and pursue certain ideas of the international order, it is possible to extend this argument to even the Euro-American world. As Jeffery Legro shows, that the US policies from the twentieth century onwards are shaped by the values of democracy, human rights, and a sense of commitment to shaping the world in a liberal image. Hence, China's resistance to the constitutive norms of the international order is shaped by the interplay between the necessity to legitimize one-party rule, and resist moral and political claims made by the dominant norms.

However, one cannot ascribe all kinds of alternative ideas through the lens of the cultural identity of scholars and states. Alternative visions of domestic politics and international order have always been present. Additionally, there have also been different competing visions of politics and the international order although they are often part of ideological competition. For example, Marxism has presented an alternative vision of international order in the twentieth century. Despite Marxism's shared assumptions about modernization with a liberal understanding of progress and modernization, it has presented a different vision of international order.

An examination of Chinese scholarly debates in international theories in the Post-Mao period reveals that new ideas have emerged within the context of dynamics of political legitimacy of the party, and China's rising economic and military power. Chinese scholarship especially those who focus on traditional ideas and history align their ideas both to contest hegemony and power of the dominant liberal ideas and Euro-American states and to provide a justification for one-party rule. However, they do question the cultural biases and hegemonic aspects of IRT, and their efforts can be understood as part of larger scholarly

critiques of IRT from various perspectives such as post-colonialism, feminism, third world international law, etc.

However, the question is whether Chinese tradition and ideas can provide a non-binary critique of international relations theories and offer an alternative. An analysis of Chinese ideas in IR scholarship and state practices show, the problem of binaries namely such China vs. West remain a problem even though they critique binaries of us/them in western understandings of territorial sovereignty. For example, the whole idea of pitting Chinese ideas and worldview against western worldview of the world in Zhao Tingyang and even realist scholars like Yan Xuetong cannot come out of the binary of west/China. Going beyond IR scholarship, the debates on traditions and their relevance in contemporary times among neo-Confucians put Chinese traditions in opposition to western traditions unlike scholars based outside mainland China. But there are more moderate and accommodative ideas about how traditional ideas can be useful to rethink IRT. For example, the writings of Qin Yaqing's relationality theory and "*gongsheng* school" (symbiosis school) scholars put forward proposals to rethink IRT without falling into new binaries of China vs. West. They do so by promoting a dialogical approach to contest and critique cultural biases and hegemonic aspects of IRT. However, these writings are at the margins of official discourses, and they also do not deal with Chinese policies in minority regions to evaluate official discourses and policies.

The problem with Chinese scholarly proposals and critique of cultural and philosophical assumptions of the international order is their complete silence to evaluate the questions of cultural diversity and how the Chinese state deals with ethnic minority questions. While it is given that Chinese scholars are situated within an authoritarian political system that does not allow freedom of speech, one must evaluate their proposals whether Chinese ideas provide an alternative lens to understand questions of cultural diversity with reference to the policies of the Chinese state. An analysis of China's policies in minority regions of Xinjiang and Tibet through three strategies namely economic developmentalism, redefining Han-minority relations, and history rewriting reveal that the way the Chinese state deals with questions of diversity in minority regions remains questionable in terms of its claims about the multi-ethnic state with equal rights.

While the Chinese state's policies can be looked at from many lenses, this thesis argues that until Chinese scholarly claims about the efficacy of Chinese ideas and historical experiences to redefine international relations are evaluated against actual policies, their claims for redefining cultural and philosophical assumptions of IRT will remain limited and

questionable. In this context, this thesis raises critical questions about these claims that any alternative ideas whether Chinese or non-Chinese should provide a perspective about organizing domestic political order for their efficacy to redefine IRT.

In this context, while the thesis does not discount the efficacy of Chinese ideas and historical experiences for thinking about IRTS, it argues that these efforts are deeply political in nature. Hence, any non-western ideas must be evaluated with reference to the domestic political order and actual policies of the Chinese state. Looking at the Chinese IR debates, one gets a sense that these efforts are being portrayed as the west vs. east or China which obliterate problems within non-western societies and China.

Looking at how China has articulated the ideas and visions of the international order in its foreign policy, there have been changes both in terms of language, conceptual vocabulary, and its willingness to participate in international institutions and international law. However, the Sino-centric vision of the international order and domestic politics with the one-party rule has shaped its approach to constitutive norms of the international order. Sino-centrism has been present in China's international vision since the early twentieth century. As several scholars namely Samuel Kim and Marc Mancall showed, China's self-perception as a great power derived from tradition has reflected in different ways during the Mao period.

For China to rise as a great power, it must participate in the international order. Thus, it participates in the international order by adhering to the regulatory norms. However, this does not mean China accepts the constitutive norms. China's emphasis on territorial sovereignty does not tell us anything about its approach to the international order other than the fact that China like any other state wants to preserve sovereignty in all matters. Rather it tells us that China has no option but to participate in or adapt to the regulatory norms. Thus, China's willingness to participate in the international order after 1971 showed its adaptation under no other option if it wanted to benefit economically and survive. Here, it is imperative to point out that there is close relationships between the regulatory and constitutive norms of the international order since the latter normatively legitimizes the former. However, adherence to or contestations over the regulatory norms do not evoke threats to the international order. For example, even those states like the US which support the constitutive norms of the international order violate and resist the regulatory norms.

China's adaptation to the international order has also brought about changes in domestic political order. This shift has taken place from the early twentieth century to the Mao period and the Post-Mao period. The early twentieth-century revolutionaries used the territorial nation-state as a goal to build a modern Chinese nation. The shift to define Chinese

identity in territorial terms has taken place through the interplay between dominant geopolitical practices and ideas of territorial sovereignty. For example, Mao's idea of territorial state lacked nation-state sovereignty and reflected "empire-lit" characteristics as Sulemman Wasif has called it.

A decisive shift took place towards defining Chinese identity with reference to territoriality in the Post-Mao period when the political legitimacy crisis due to the ideological crisis of Maoist socialism took place. To bridge that gap, the party resorted to the idea of "a century of humiliation" through education, media, propaganda, and history writing that brought the territorial sovereignty of the nation-state to the centre of defining Chinese identity. This notion of territorial sovereignty can be seen in the shift in conceptual vocabulary, and centrality of national identity in domestic politics of foreign policy.

However, the revival of traditional ideas and historical experiences have become central to articulating a different set of ideas against the dominant liberal international order and values, and their underlying cultural and philosophical understanding are the same. As noted above, alternative ideas and norms emerge from domestic political legitimacy and have been used by states in the modern period to contest the hegemony and power of Euro-American powers. Therefore, the thesis argues, that three factors namely, the political legitimacy of the party, using alternative ideas to contest dominant understanding of constitutive norms and to legitimize its material interests explain why China participates in regulatory norms and institutions but contest constitutive norms and ideas. These three factors can be seen in how China participates in international institutions on different issues areas namely human rights, R2P.

However, the contention by constructivist scholars namely Ian Johnston and others that China's participation in international institutions, treaties, and international law, etc. reflects its acceptance of the international order are questionable. As the political logic of alternative ideas in domestic politics, the significance of identity, and consequently articulations of alternative ideas in its foreign policy show that China's participation in international institutions and law does not mean it accepts its constitutive norms. Thus, the seeming contradictions between China's practices of territorial sovereignty, and its resistance to the constitutive norms and ideas of the international order, from the Chinese perspective, can be resolved when China attains its agency.

Looking at the contradictions from this perspective, resistance and participation in the international order go together. China attempts to mould constitutive norms that can legitimize its domestic policies and political system through greater material capabilities and

power to shape agendas in international institutions. It also explains contrasting narratives of China namely, a globalizing and unbound China, antagonistic narratives of China fearful of break up in the pressure of western geopolitical designs, China with cultural sovereignty of ideas and visions, and narratives of Chinese exceptionalism. A complex interplay between needs for legitimizing a different political system, a sense of cultural pride and identity and increasing material and institutional capabilities to shape the international order, therefore, makes any exclusive focus on material capabilities inadequate to understand how China approaches the international order.

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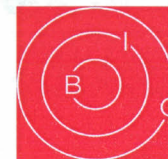
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# Domestic Politics and International Order: A Constructivist Analysis of Chinese Discourses on Territorial Sovereignty'

*by Devendra Kumar*

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