

# From Rising to Superpower: Pragmatism and the Community of a Shared Future for Mankind in Chinese Foreign Policy

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## Abstract

For almost two decades, China has presented itself as a leading power on the international arena, moving very quickly from an emerging power to a real superpower, ambitioning for the first place by 2049. Perfectly reconciling a pragmatic policy, embodied by the win-win concept, in its relations as well as an idealism carried hand-in-hand by the Community with a shared future for Mankind, China is growing in power without causing collateral damage to the development of other countries. This paper explains this paradox, which is proving to be a success story in its relations, in particular, with developing countries. Early results demonstrate that China uses a different modus operandi and narrative in its overseas intercourses with other states to gain and maintain its global strategic credibility. In no way did conditioning its assistance by any economic or financial reform of the beneficiary states. The use of a correct, respectful, and practical diplomatic grammar, allowed the middle kingdom to attract the sympathy and almost unconditional support of a large part of the International community. The paper also demonstrates that the current Chinese foreign policy is built on the Community with a future shared for Mankind, a philosophy of universal harmony, and a shared future that emphasizes humanity or the promotion of human development, a pacifist and integrative philosophy that contrasts with the Western philosophies of domination, hegemonism, and to some extent predatory.

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## Keywords

Pragmatism, Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, Superpower, Win-Win Cooperation

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## 1. Introduction

One of the subjects, in International Relations, which unleash passions and curiosities, in recent years, inevitably remains the rise of China. Sometimes considered as adversary or peer competitor of the United States in particular, or Western states, in general (Mushinda, 2021; Mahbubani, 2020; Olemanu, Lestari, Shongo, Mushinda & Diur, 2022a)—Now and then as an unavoidable alternative to the Western model of cooperation and partnership for Southern States, China crystallizes the attention of all specialists in international politics (Wintgens, 2016).

Indeed, the spectacular development of the country in just a few decades seriously questions its possibility of revisiting the global status quo imposed by the Westerners since the fifteenth century. Going from a backward country to the second economic power in the world, or even first in Purchasing Power Parity, the Middle Kingdom is on the agenda of the international debate.

Since the policy of reforms and openness, launched in 1978, its entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001, passing through the subprime crisis in 2008 and most recently with the emblematic management of the COVID-19 pandemic—which are undeniable successes of the political and economic orientation, China has transformed in less than half a century into a real world superpower, to the point that, the only question that we ask ourselves is: at what point will it become the first world superpower? (Boniface, 2020)

There is no doubt, with its technology at the forefront of innovation, its economy running out of steam at more than 9% average annual growth since 1980, its increasingly modern military-industrial complex, its growing influence in the countries of the South, China is perceived as the main threat to American supremacy.

According to conventional wisdom, the power of a state inevitably comes to the detriment of others. A state first seeks its own interest and is hardly interested in the interests of its peers (Morgenthau, 1948). And even closer to us, the proponents of offensive realism are also convinced of this. The state must maximize its power to tame the potential revisionist powers. Because international anarchy leads states to maximize their power, none can determine when a real revisionist power will emerge (Mearsheimer, 2001). This is the famous zero-sum game all about.

However, China is on the way to becoming the first world superpower, understood here as the undivided domination of all areas of the greatness of a state: Economic, military, scientific, technological, cultural, etc.—without obstructing

the development or potential development of other states. For instance, China has never conducted military expeditions against a state since the border dispute with the Soviet Union on the Amur and Ussuri Islands in 1969—or interfere in the internal affairs of its partners. An astonishing attitude all the more so since the classic use of power, on the international scene, is accompanied by the practices of colonization, neo-colonization, political interference, tacit or not exploitation of mineral resources, the fomenting of coups d'état, military invasion, financing of rebellions, imperialism, etc. (Encel, 2022).

Conversely, the quality of China's diplomatic and political relations is praised by almost all states. With more than 290 diplomatic missions, the Middle Kingdom has become the first country with the largest diplomatic network in the world (Lowi Institute, 2021).

Among the approaches used by Beijing, on the one hand, there is what is called the use of a "pragmatic" policy which consists of relying only on what is practical to advance cooperation with its partners, implemented by the "win-win" concept. For example, not to condition its assistance on the basis of respect or not for Democracy or Human rights. On the other hand, what should be called "idealism" in the Chinese way of international relations, embodied by the "*Community with a Future Shared for Mankind*"—a philo-political thought of universal harmony and a Shared future, advocated by President Xi Jinping, inviting all partners or friends to work together, regardless of the divergence of interests (Xi, 2019).

Part of a classical realism of the Edward Carr type, combining realism and idealism, power and moral principles in the understanding of International Relations (Carr, 1946), this paper proposes to understand how China becomes a superpower, without resorting to the supremacist and hegemonic practices of Western powers.

## 2. Substance of Chinese Power

Asking about Chinese power is to request about China's status in the hierarchy of powers in International politics. Over the past two decades, the question of the status of the People's Republic of China has been raised vehemently (Oneal, 2007). For some, it is a Middle power (Flores, 2021), for others, it is a Great power in its own right (Chen, 2019).

However, the broad consensus that has prevailed is that of considering China as an "*Emerging Power*" (De La Maisonneuve, 2011). Due to its strong sustained economic growth, 9.1% on average since 1979, its skilled but cheap workforce, its size, its mass as well as its growing influence in developing countries, have been the most invoked arguments to justify this status.

During the same period, other voices have bet on China as the future world superpower. At the moment, their bet is being realized. Murray (1998) or Fang (2007) have seen it right since China's international status as a confirmed superpower is no longer in the shadow of any doubt (Delfeld, 2022). Indeed, the

United States officially and solemnly declares China and Russia as “*Revisionist Powers*” that must be fought, because according to the same document, they are states “*wanting to change the international order with their authoritarian model and obtain a right of veto over the decisions of other countries in economic, diplomatic and security matters*” (The Pentagone, 2018). Thus, the United States elevates the two countries to the status of enemy number one of American interests, thus breaking nearly two decades policy of combating terrorism, carried out since the attacks of September 11, 2001; crowned successively by the deaths of two Leaders of Al Qaida, Osama Bin Laden in 2011 and Ayman Al-Zawahiri in 2022.

This status is acquired, first of all, by the fact that the current world super-power designates it as its main rival. Because until the end of Barack Obama’s term, which reoriented the priority of American foreign policy as an Asian pivot, China was no more than an emerging country in the same way as South Africa or Brazil, without as much importance. The trade and technological wars which are characterized by sanctions and counter-sanctions between the two states—the tensions in the China Sea and much more the very aggressive anti-Chinese speech of the United States are the most vivid manifestations of this rivalry and the new status of the Middle Kingdom.

Then, what’s a “*superpower*”?

Power is a central concept in the analysis of international issues. According to the size of the power, states are usually divided into Hyperpower, Superpower, Large Power, Middle Power, Emerging Power, Small Power and Sub-Power (ultra-small countries). What determines the level of power of a country is the combination of power factors, not just one or a few indicators. Of course, the importance of the factors conditioning the power of the state is different. Some factors represent a relatively large proportion, in particular, some basic elements, such as population and territory factors. Although a large population or territory is not synonymous with a real power, such a state is certainly a potential power. On the contrary, a small country with a quantitatively limited population and a small territory, regardless of the power factors at its disposal, specialists will not consider it a powerful state. What is important to remember is that the power remains much more an impression fact.

According to Kenneth Waltz (1979), the father of neorealism, power offers four advantages: 1) Maintaining autonomy; 2) increasing freedom of movement; 3) obtaining a greater margin of maneuver in complete safety; 4) gaining greater influence in the international community. When talking about power, people think of such opposite relationships, namely large and small, strong and weak, high and low. These relationships are inextricably linked with power, because from the point of view of realism theory, the main source of power is the ability in and/or from reality. Large to small is a capacity, strong to weak is a capacity, and from top to bottom is also a capacity. With an ability to control the opposite side, the conditions for influencing the opposite side are met accordingly. In this

sense, power is the freedom that an actor enjoys when he realizes his own interests in the international system. Actors with small power have very few choices when they realize their own interests, while actors with great power have many choices when they realize their own interests.

In 2001, to justify the new neologism that he had just invented, [Hubert Vedrine \(2000\)](#), former French minister of foreign affairs, writes that a “*Hyperpower is a Superpower that has lost its rival*”. Thus, referring to the dislocation of the Soviet bloc as well as the state of almost absolute domination of the United States at the beginning of the XXI century. However, the concept of “*Superpower*” was invented and first used by Professor [William Fox \(1944\)](#) in a futuristic analysis on the powers (The United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union) that should organize the international order after the Second World War—then popularized by the former US Secretary of State [Zbigniew Brzezinski \(1997\)](#) who described it as “*the State possessing the monopoly of 4 major areas of power: the Economic, the Military, the Cultural and the Technological*”. Sticking to this last definition, on the one hand, it is obvious that China, in addition to the monstrous capabilities that it has acquired in all these four fields, has considerably reduced the gap with the United States to the point that, in certain fields such as economic and technological, the *mano-à-mano* turns more and more to its advantage than in the country of Uncle Sam. On the other hand, by combining with other factors such as the cognitive psychology of its own power, China has become a real superpower.

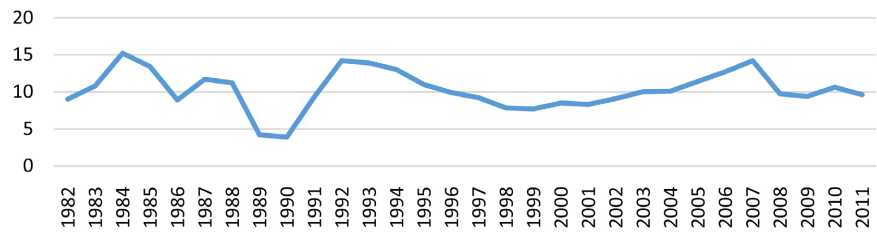
## 2.1. Quantitative Data of Chinese Power

### 2.1.1. Socio-Economic Data

If there is one data to which the leaders of the Chinese Party Communist (CPC) point out, it is undoubtedly the economic performance. This is the greatest achievement of Chinese officials, presented both inside the country and at the international level. The People’s Republic of China has managed to maintain unabated economic growth for almost half a century with a substantial impact on improving the social conditions of the Chinese peoples.

Going from a GDP per capita of 75.8 USD dollars in 1961 to 12556.3 USD dollars in 2021, that is to say in sixty years, the individual wealth of the Chinese has multiplied by a little more than 168 times, that is 142 times more than the average of the global increase during the same period. The culmination of this socio-economic improvement is the eradication of extreme poverty in China since 2021 where more than 800 million individuals have emerged from extreme poverty ([Figure 1](#)).

The country has posted an annual average growth of 9.1% since 1979, the year of the launch of the reform and opening policy. Between the decade 1980 and 2010, the country experienced an average double-digit growth rate of 10.2%. The only false notes in this growth, the years 1989, 1990 and 2020 where the Middle Kingdom achieved a growth of 4.2%, 3.9% and 2.2% respectively. For the first two years, this is due to the large upheaval that oppressed the international scene,



**Figure 1.** Chinese double-digit average economic growth between 1982-2011 (10.2%). Source: <https://www.data.worldbank.org>.

in particular the fall of the Berlin Wall, the democratization of the world as well as the imminent breakup of the Soviet bloc. For the third year, it is mainly for reasons of pandemic linked to the Coronavirus, part of Wuhan in China and which has engulfed the entire planet are the main causes of the slowdown in Chinese growth. Despite these Chinese-style counter-performances, Chinese growth has always been positive, never negative, regardless of the turbulence of the period.

This is a great economic feat, especially since, even during the period of the thirty glorious years, the 12 major European economies that would later form the European Economic Community (EEC) never did better than 4.6% annual average growth between 1945 and 1973 (Fourastié, 1979).

Since the policy of openness, China has become a quasi-capitalist economy. The market share in the Chinese economy has increased and this evolution was confirmed in 1993 with the adoption of the concept of “*socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics*”. Manifestation of the empiricism of the Chinese leaders, this one recognizes the coexistence of a growing sector of the economy governed by the laws of the market, private or with mixed capital, and an openness to foreign investments with a state sector whose weight remains extremely important (Niquet, 2017)—which allows China to become an essential economic power of our time since in 2019, according to the International Monetary Fund [IMF], China had a nominal GDP of 14,140 billion US dollars; second in the world behind the United States. The growth rate of 6.3% against 2.3% of the United States. If the two states maintain the same growth rate, China could overtake the United States in thirteen years, that is, in 2032. However, as we can observe with the cyclical events such as COVID-19 or structural trials such as the trade war and tensions in the South China Sea with the United States, which China has experienced or could experience, a slowdown in this ascent. The consecration can come a little later. But, if there is any certainty, China is already on the verge of surpassing the United States economically. Because it has already surpassed the United States in Parity of the Purchasing Power with \$27,309 billion against \$21,439 billion.

This Chinese economic growth makes it possible to pull up global growth. China alone contributes to more than 30% of global economic growth (China National Bureau of Statistics-CNBS, 2022). The world is hanging on to China’s good economic health, which is a formidable weapon, especially since we are in the era of economic domination in all aspects of the term.

Since 2014, China has been the leading economic and commercial partner of more than 120 countries and regions of the world (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development-UNCTAD, 2020). The first economic and commercial partner of the United States, Japan, India and since 2020 of the European Union. Some countries, such as the southern countries of South America or Africa, have an economy based on Chinese growth because of their dependence on raw material exports. For Eritrea, this dependence can go up to 57.7% of exports and 24.3% for Chile. It is even more striking the dependence of certain economies such as those of Mongolia or North Korea between 80% and 90% of trade with China. This makes China, the country that contributes the most to global economic growth, or 30% on average from 2012 to 2021.

China is currently the country that produces the most manufactured goods in the world or 28.4% of goods used in the world are produced by China against 16% of the United States. Which is a high percentage considering the number of states in the world. China has huge rare earth deposits contributing to the creation of 85% of electronic, medical, military, metallurgical, transport, petrochemical and other equipment and components used in the world. China is also one of the world leaders in the field of electronic components, a sector with quantum computing, artificial Intelligence and Biotechnology constitutes the permanent field of the Sino-American competition.

Out of the 5 largest container ports in the world, there are four Chinese ports: Shanghai, (Singapore), Shenzhen, Ningbo-Zhoushan and Guangzhou. The Chinese shipbuilding industry is also ranked first in terms of gross tonnage. Which means China is a privileged destination for global maritime trade. A serious advantage when we know the maritime stakes in the geopolitical rivalry. Among the 500 largest companies in the world, 133 are Chinese compared to 121 American, according to the Fortune Global 500 (2020). A force of attractiveness and competitiveness of Chinese companies that are no longer content to play the role of subcontractor of American companies.

### **2.1.2. Military Data**

In terms of military power, China is ranked as the third largest army in the world. In addition to its richly supplied nuclear arsenal, it has the army with the largest number of 2,183,000 troops, 3800 Tanks, 3600 Field Artillery, 2650 rocket launchers. China has invested a lot in the warship, one of its greatest weaknesses during the Opium Wars. They came to the conclusion that the decline of the Empire was due to the lack of modernization and investment in key sectors of the power of a state such as industry and transport. More specifically, the naval force of the army. They concluded that all the great powers of recent centuries are, above all, maritime powers: the United Kingdom then the United States. China has learned from its mistakes and is investing a lot in its naval strength there like no other state since the end of World War II. To date, it has the largest military naval fleet in the world in number, i.e. 778 active ships against 490 from the United States: 3 Aircraft Carriers, a helicopter carrier, 52 Frigates, 41 de-

stroyers, 70 corvettes, 79 submarines, 152 patrol boats, 36 minesweepers. The Chinese military budget has also been constantly increasing for several years and ranks in second place with 237 billion dollars.

### 2.1.3. Technological Data

Artificial intelligence is a scientific field that seeks to solve logical or algorithmic problems, and more generally it constitutes devices imitating or replacing the human being. AI is quite discreetly in our daily lives, such as when we do a translation on the internet or when Facebook or Weibo shows us advertisements. AI is also present in video games or demotics with Alexa, the personalized Virtual Assistant to do everything, created and sold by Amazon.

On September 1, 2017, during a conference of the “*open national lesson*” with the Students of the city of Yaroslavl in the North-East of Moscow, Vladimir Putin declared: “*Artificial Intelligence represents the future not only of Russia, but of all Humanity. It brings colossal opportunities and unpredictable threats today... whoever becomes the leader in this field will be the master of the world*” And to add: “*it is highly undesirable that someone gets a monopoly in this field*” (CNN, 2017).

In the field of technology, in addition to the digital giants who are now popular and known around the world: Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent and Xiaomi in the acronym BATX equivalent American GAFAM, China has become to date, one of the world leaders in the field of artificial intelligence. Indeed, in the opinion of many specialists such as the former CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt who emphasizes that the American advance in artificial intelligence is no longer 5 or 10 years, but only one or two (Klein, 2021). Indeed, the goal of the Middle Kingdom is to become the world leader in the field of artificial intelligence by 2030. The progress made to date bodes well for this future. In 2021, under the leadership of the Academy of Artificial Intelligence in Beijing, China launched “*Hua*”, a virtual student with artificial intelligence with the ability to learn, absorb texts, images and videos, draw and write poems. Tsinghua University predicts that “*Hua ZhiBing*” by his full name, within a year, will be able to think like a 12-year-old child and design websites in the future. In addition to the aforementioned characteristics, Hua has advanced linguistic and image processing capabilities, thanks to the work of more than 100 Researchers. The tool has 10 times more parameters to a measure of the degree of intelligence of an Artificial Intelligence model than the GPT-3 which debuted in the United States in 2020 and attracted attention for having written a flawless essay (Xinhua, 2021).

At the beginning of the year 2022, the country carried out the experiment of an artificial uterus whose tests on mice were a real success (Europe1, 2022). It is a small plastic pouch connected to a series of tubes through which the nutrient fluids circulate. The AI adjusts the carbon dioxide fluids and the elements necessary for the development of the embryo without ever having to take them out as if it were in its mother’s womb. With this exception, the computer can detect abnormalities and classify the embryos according to their development potential



to make them almost perfect babies. The artificial uterus had already been used on sheep in the United States, this is the first time that AI has been at the controls. The experiment was successfully carried out on mice by a team of researchers from Suzhou University. This advantage may prove crucial in the context of creating a robotic army in which soldiers would be endowed with super-human genetic combat abilities. We are approaching a reality that was once a fiction of Hollywood cinema.

The country is far from being the backyard of the United States and asserts itself well as the locomotive in this field, moreover in 2020, it surpassed the United States for the first time in terms of Academic Citations related to Artificial Intelligence, representing 20.7% of the total against 19.8% for the United States, according to a report by Stanford University (*AI Index, 2021*). Since 2012, China has published 240,000 academic articles on AI, far surpassing the United States which has published only 150,000, according to the British research specialist Clarivate. Which means more and more, in terms of Artificial Intelligence, China is becoming the global reference to the detriment of the United States.

This is also supported by Kai-Fu Lee (2018), former Manager at Apple and Microsoft who said: “*If data is a new oil, then China is the new Saudi Arabia*”. He believes that China has four big advantages in this area: 1) the formation of deep learning models requires more a raw method than innovation, although adapted to the supposedly higher quantity but lower quality of the software engineer in China than in the United States; 2) China has fewer data protection regulations (for example, general data protection regulation in Europe) than other countries, so Chinese software collects more data about users; 3) the culture of Chinese tech startups is more aggressive than that of other countries with fewer restrictions on intellectual property and fewer obstacles to vertical integration; 4) the participation of the Chinese central government in financing and raising the status of the Artificial intelligence industry.

In addition to the field of Artificial Intelligence, other technological sectors such as semiconductors, where China is also one of the world leaders in electronic components, the biotechnology sectors as well as Quantum Computing are also interesting. In the latter sector, China is undoubtedly ahead of the other countries. Since 2016, the Middle Kingdom has been the only country so far to launch a Quantum Communication satellite—in addition to the successful computing experiments of its supercomputers.

## **2.2. Cognitive and Psychology of Chinese Power**

Power is above all a psychological issue. The idea of dominating or placing oneself in a position of domination is above all a question of will inspired either by one's history, culture, thoughts, philosophy or politics. The history of the slave trade, colonization or even the fall of all the great historical empires such as Mongol, Egyptian, Kongo or Amerindian finds its explanation in this fact intrinsically inherent in human nature. Closer to us historically, the invasion of Iraq

by the United States or Vladimir Putin's Military Operation in Ukraine are inextricably linked to the feeling of domination towards other states. Even in the wildest delusions, Vladimir Putin's Russia would never invade Ukraine if it knows in the depths of its cognition to be inferior to the state led by Volodimir Zelensky.

China, in its current power cognition, has a firm desire to become the first world superpower, in all areas by 2049. 2049 is the year of the rebirth or total restoration of the Chinese nation and greatness after a hundred years of humiliation, of Western imperialism imposed following the Opium wars—which corresponds to the hundred years of proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 by Mao.

Indeed, before the Opium Wars, China has always considered itself a great power both by its millennial civilization that has passed through time and by its economy or its politics. It was at the origin of inventions such as gunpowder, the compass, paper, the printing system or the sterilization technique. According to the works of Professor Agnus Maddison, the great specialist in the History of Economics, the economic prowess of China today cannot really be a surprise because he believes that "*China has been the largest economy in the world for almost two thousand years, but in the 1890s, its position was replaced by the United States. He estimates, for example, that the exact moment when China's GDP was exceeded by the United States was in 1895, when China and Japan signed the Maguan Treaty*" (Maddison, 2007).

For the Chinese, contact with the West in the nineteenth century was a profound trauma. Indeed, in 1842 the first of the unequal treaties was signed between the United Kingdom and the Chinese Empire in the first Opium War. At issue is the British desire to rebalance or even reverse the Kingdom's deficit trade balance. Indeed, the United Kingdom is during the nineteenth century, in full swing of industrial revolution. It produces a lot of manufactured goods that it must export and exchange with the other nations, especially with China, which is already the largest market in the world. The United Kingdom imports tea, silk and porcelain from China. The latter only requires payment in "*silver*" (metal) which should come from the Spanish colonies and does not import much from the United Kingdom. As a logical consequence, the UK's trade balance is becoming a deficit. To compensate for this deficit, the Kingdom finds a product very popular with the Chinese but officially banned from use and consumption in the Middle Kingdom for its harmful effects on health: Opium which is grown in neighboring India. By English smuggler merchants like William Jardine or James Matheson manage to export to China via India, where poppy cultivation was done—an illegal opium traffic to the point that the Chinese authorities decide to tackle this public health problem. However, in this Opium traffic, the United Kingdom has commercial interests linked to this smuggling market to the point of triggering the first Opium War in 1839.

On June 3, 1839, China destroyed by Inspector Lin Zexu the opium stock lo-

cated in the port of Canton. A first battle is triggered in September of the same year at the port of Canton where the English are forbidden to access it forever. In the weeks that followed, the British prime minister Lord Palmeston, with the agreement of the English parliament, sent a squadron: 16 Ships of the line, 4 Gunboats, 28 transport ships, 540 guns and 4000 men. With clear objectives: reimbursement of the destroyed stock; opening of several ports, franking of the Co-Hong system; possibility of judging English nationals according to English law (Lovell, 2017; Paulès, 2011).

The Chinese are beaten and in the Treaty of Nanjing, have been forced to cede the Hong Kong Island; accept international trade and free trade, as well as the reimbursement of damages caused to Opium traffickers. Thus was signed on August 29, 1842, the Treaty of Nakin after three years of wars and Chinese defeats. In addition to these advantages, the United Kingdom has also obtained the right to always have the last word, to buy land in China as well as a presence off Canton. This episode of the Chinese wars also gave rise to the expression “*gunboat diplomacy*”. For purely mercantile reasons, free trade and illegal opium trade, the United Kingdom imposes the unequal Treaty of Nanjing. After the Treaty of Nanjing, the unequal treaties signed with France and the United States to trade with China are followed.

In 1858, the Treaties of Tianjin were signed, this time with the official legalization of the opium trade. In October 1858, a British boat was captured by China for trafficking Opium off the coast of Hong Kong, it was the first diplomatic incident since the Treaties of Nanjing. The United Kingdom, supported by France, attacks China off the port of Canton. China is beaten again. China needs to open new ports to international trade. The city of Beijing, previously blocked, must be opened to Western embassies. Thus, Opium is officially legalized in China. Russia takes advantage of this situation to modify its borders with China by the Treaty of Aigun which creates the city of Vladivostok.

In 1860, the British and the French attacked the Forts of Tianjin at the mouth of Taku. Beijing is then attacked, taken and the Beijing Summer Palace burned down. Thus the Beijing Convention is signed which sees the participation, in addition to the United Kingdom, France, Russia and the United States. Hong Kong is enlarged for the benefit of the United Kingdom. Russia recovers other territories, in particular in Manchuria. In addition to these treaties, other treaties will be signed with other countries. During the years that followed and rightly described as the century of humiliation, China will lose other territories such as Mongolia which proclaimed its independence in 1911 or even Tanu Tuva, territory which became attached to Russia in 1914 as well as the glaring political instability that characterized this period with the Warlords who occupied the country in each of its portions.

Many specialists only mention China in the present tense without referring to the Chinese historical feeling of its contact with the West. It is a great humiliation of this great civilization which has been besieged on all sides. Today's Chinese will for power draws its inner strength from this humiliation. The objective

is to wash away the affront suffered for a century, thus regaining the place that has always been theirs in the concert of nations, that of a major power. At the current stage, with regard to the means it is giving itself, the country is on the right track to achieve this goal of “rebirth of the Chinese nation”.

### 3. China’s Pragmatism and Win-Win Cooperation

It is unquestionably accepted that the People’s Republic of China uses a pragmatism that is highly appreciated in current international cooperation. Indeed, China is considered a perfect model of cooperation especially by the countries of the South. The enchantment around cooperation with China finds its direct explanation in the opposition to the traditional model of international cooperation, used by Western countries, commonly known as the “*Washington Consensus*”. This traditional model which consists in conditioning international cooperation by respecting a certain number of universal values among which: Democracy, respect for human rights, good governance, the privatization of public companies, market liberalization and external opening, the rule of law, the adjustment and readjustment of the economic and financial systems of the beneficiary states. The most emblematic case remains the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the 1980s-1990s which proved to be a glaring failure with inflation reaching its peak and budget cuts in the fields of health or education (Diata, 1989; Stiglitz, 2008). Dani Rodrick writes about this:

*“The first mistake of the orthodox proponents of the ‘Washington Consensus’ was to think that the objectives of liberalization, privatization, external openness as well as good governance, conceived as necessary conditions for development and growth, lead to unambiguous institutional economic recommendations that are applicable to any country... the second error stems from the fact that the economic policy recommendations aimed at promoting liberalization and external openness are based on the premise that markets are efficient and that frictions and distortions must be reduced in order to increase trade and its allocative efficiency, and thus, ultimately, encourage economic growth. However, such policies would be perfectly justified if our world were globally characterized by perfect markets, in which case it would be effective, very effective and legitimate to reduce or eliminate distortions at the margins. But the real world is, on the contrary, an imperfect world, a world of second rank, that is to say in which frictions and distortions constitute the norm much more than the exception” (Rodrick, 2008).*

The other criticism of the Washington Consensus is that of Joseph Stiglitz, former Nobel Prize Winner in Economics, Chief Economic Director and Vice-President of the World Bank who, after his resignation from the World Bank, revealed the harmful role played by the Breton Woods institutions in their desire to take into account only the interests of the large American shareholder in the formulation of policies applied to developing countries (Stiglitz, 2002).

On strictly bilateral cooperation, the North-South partnership has often

turned into policies of interference in the internal affairs of the Southern states which, for some, ended in condescending, contemptuous and not very rewarding remarks. “*the African man has not entered history enough*” (Rampazzo, 2012). In the worst case, coups d’état and assassinations fomented from Western capitals to satisfy the interests of the countries of the North when the leaders of the South oppose a cooperation considered disadvantageous. The independent French investigative media Médiapart revealed for example since the period of African independence, 22 Heads of State and African leaders have been assassinated by France (Mediapart, 2019).

While China proposes another totally different approach, whether in form or in the modus operandi that has been agreed to be called the “*Beijing Consensus*”. It consists in conducting bilateral cooperation without exerting any constraint, of a political, diplomatic or economic nature with a particular emphasis mainly on socio-economic development or infrastructure. In short, the model proposed by Beijing is characterized by a form of efficiency in cooperation, the simplification of procedures and the speed of execution of projects. He is pragmatic and is content to be as efficient and as useful as possible. William James, the father of pragmatism, declared: “*The important thing is not to know if it is true or false. The important thing is to know if it is useful or not*” (James, 2013).

In its form, the Chinese model proposes a different narrative, based on respect, dignity, win-win cooperation and the notion of just defense of legitimate interests. This speech, which may seem idealistic, remains very consistent in the actions and gestures of the Chinese leaders who, as we can see, all over the world, are very well received.

Cooperation with China, however, is based on an existential dependent variable, which is historically, objectively, politically and culturally important in Chinese foreign policy: the recognition of the principle of one China. In short, there is one China in the world, Taiwan is an inalienable part of China’s territory, and the Government of the People’s Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China. All the diplomatic relationship is based on this principle. This principle is very important in order to benefit from cooperation with China, which has become its promoter today. The other dependent variable which is a set of classic principles of its foreign policy, stated since the 1960s by Zhou Enlai, former Minister of Foreign Affairs: respect for sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of the other state or the non-use of blackmail or military force to resolve a dispute.

### 3.1. Infrastructure versus Raw Materials

One of the characteristic features of the pragmatism of Chinese cooperation is the ingenious mechanism for exchanging infrastructure for raw materials. The developing countries, which are full of many raw materials, unfortunately do not have the financial means to finance major development infrastructure projects such as Roads, Railways, Bridges, Airports, Universities, Schools, Hospitals, etc., exchange their mining resources in return with China, which finances and builds

the infrastructure they need. This is a perfect illustration of Chinese pragmatism because, for most of the countries that carry out this deal, China is the last partner to have been contacted: DRC, Zambia, Venezuela, Kenya, etc. The Western partners, the first to have been contacted, kindly rejected the offer either for lack of capital or by rejecting the content that seemed at first glance, not interesting. Most often, these beneficiary states of Chinese cooperation have experienced long periods of civil wars or are financially in a precarious state and the pressing need for socio-economic infrastructure or liquidity means that it is necessary to start the momentum of hope and development by launching major projects. The financial incapacity is then compensated by the natural resources for the repayment of the resulting debt.

An illustrative case is that of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Indeed, in 2008, after several years of wars with deficient infrastructure, the Congolese government of Joseph Kabila concluded on September 17, 2007 and April 22, 2008, respectively, a memorandum of understanding and a collaboration agreement with a group of Chinese companies in order to carry out mining and infrastructure projects. These two legal acts provide for the construction and modernization of hospitals, universities, social housing, roads, railways in exchange for the exploitation of mineral resources through the creation of a joint venture named “*Sicomines*”. This cooperation very quickly allowed the country to acquire a number of basic modern infrastructures. Thus, as an extension of said cooperation, a large hydroelectric power station has been built in Katanga: the Busanga hydroelectric power station, with a capacity of 240 MW, completed in 2022. From an initial amount of 9 billion US dollars, the Sino-Congolese cooperation deal was reduced to 6 billion US dollars after strong criticism from the Breton Woods institutions and the Western states (Olemanu, Mushinda, Kianga & Nonga, 2022b).

The other striking case is the construction of the Mombasa-Nairobi railway. With a length of 472 km, it is the first railway built by the country since 1896, the colonial era. Financed 90% by the EXIM Bank of China, it would have cost about 3.5 billion dollars. One of the loans was a loan (1.63 billion dollars) of foreign aid granted on a concessional basis (very low interest rate) while the other was a preferential export buyer credit below the market rate (Business Daily Africa, 2014). The deal to the advantage of the Kenyan government was also, 40% of the total cost of the project was spent on local supplies, including Sand, Cement, Power cables, Iron, Galvanized steel (Business Daily Africa, 2014). In addition, the project, which should initially last 5 years, took only 3 years to build.

Alongside these emblematic cases, there are notable achievements such as the construction of the Tazaria railway connecting Tanzania and Zambia, also called the “*friendship Road*” built after a categorical refusal by Great Britain to finance the project in 1970. This construction is one of the oldest Chinese infrastructure construction projects in Africa and even in the world, at a time when

the country was not yet as thick as it is today. These illustrative cases, which are not exclusive to the African continent, of the Chinese practice of infrastructure mechanism against raw materials demonstrate this pragmatic side, which several are trying to criticize wrongly and through under the prism of an essentially neocolonialist vision.

China's popularity in developing countries is largely due to this pragmatism. According to the Pew Researcher Center study on China's influence in the world, most European countries surprisingly consider China to be number one not the United States (Pew Researcher Center, 2019). Most countries in Africa and Latin America think that China is good for their economies. The rate varies for 83% in Nigeria and 54% in Argentina.

### 3.2. A Correct Narrative

Chinese diplomatic grammar is imbued with a revealing but rather significant concept: "*win-win cooperation*". Simply put, China presents itself to developing as well as developed states as a "*partner and friend*" in order to do business that works for it and for the other. She does not present herself as a teacher or as a paternalistic figure. This rhetoric largely contrasts with the concepts of "*Assisted*", "*donor*" or "*Helped*" that Westerners regularly use in their relations with developing countries. A non-paternalistic posture, therefore, of relationships with others. The Chinese leaders promote a win-win cooperation discourse, based on respect, sincerity and equality with their partners. This is all the truer since Chinese cooperation is truly win-win and mutually beneficial and not an aid or assistance.

China gains not only by expanding the share of its international market, essential to maintain its economic growth, by exporting its construction companies that build infrastructure in the beneficiary countries but also by influencing its influence on the international level. The beneficiary countries gain socio-economic infrastructure, the fundamental basis of the development process which, then, allow them to boost economic growth through intranational, regional and international trade as well as through the export of raw materials. In most joint ventures created by China and the countries benefiting from its cooperation, there is a clause to give preference (most favored nation clause) to Chinese buyers who must pay, first, at the market price for the raw material produced. This is a definite advantage for states whose economic structure is fundamentally based on the export of raw materials because there are safe and permanent buyers. On the Chinese side, a guaranteed supply for its constantly growing industries. In the white paper on Sino-African cooperation in the new era, published in 2021, China considers despite its important status that it has taken on the international scene, to always keep the same friendship, respect and consideration towards its African friends (White Paper, 2021).

Instead of placing itself in a position of dominant power over the friendly states with which it has always been close for a long time, it remains the same state and contributes so little to their development without harming their digni-

ty. This posture of humble, respectful and frank state is therefore quite surprising for a major power in international relations which is also reflected in the consistency of its actions.

### 3.3. The Status of the “Largest Developing Country” and Representative of the Countries of the South

Despite its status as a declared and claimed superpower, China considers itself a developing country, better a country of the South. It presents itself as the representative of all the developing countries of which it is the largest (developing) country. This presentation allows him to speak on behalf of the victims, the oppressed and the marginalized of the international system. Thus having their memberships directly or indirectly. An attachment that is based not only on economic and commercial cooperation or coordination in international affairs which are only the consequences but also and above all on a common history of the invaded peoples, colonized by the Western imperialists. So, China has become the voiceless voice of the Southern states.

This translates into an almost unwavering support for China in international initiatives. At the end of 2018, more than 150 cooperation agreements with 106 countries, 29 International Organizations from Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and the South Pacific were signed to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (China, 2019); a rather rich presence of personalities from the countries of the South during the South-South Forum on Human Rights; an increasingly large stake in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

### 3.4. Criticisms of Chinese Pragmatism

Despite the mutually advantageous partnership, several are critical of China's veiled ambitions, the most virulent of which would be to plunge the beneficiary countries of Chinese cooperation into a new form of colonialism and dependence linked to the debt trap (Aksante, 2018). That is to say, China lends colossal sums to states that do not have the prospect to repay them—thus plunges these states into a continuous debt trap and takes advantage to exploit them. What some people describe as a “*chequier diplomacy*” (Emine, 2017).

The case highlighted would thus be the transfer of the port “*Hambantota*” from Sri Lanka to China. Indeed in 2005, after several years of wars, Sri Lanka wants to make the port Hambantota, a hub of international trade. The country is appealing to India, Japan, international financial institutions as well as Western states to finance the project, but these states have not done so. The country is turning to China, which is financing and building it. Facing competition from more attractive ports such as those of Indians, Malaysians, Thais, Singaporeans, Burmese or Icelanders on the Indian Ocean, the country does not benefit from the commercial and economic benefits hoped for in this investment. After seven years of individual operation, the country decides to create a Sino-Sri Lankan joint venture for the joint operation of the port. What remains a normal economic and commercial operation.



In reality, it is simply a campaign to demonize China against the background of the global geopolitical competition that opposes it to the United States (Mushinda, 2021). Because China is in the process of surpassing the United States as a world Superpower, thus, according to Graham Allison, the two states could lead the world into a likely “*Thucydides trap*” (Allison, 2017). A confirmed power that does not want to be overtaken by the rising power and seeks to wage war against it.

The other reality is what China is today capable of doing beyond what the traditional Western model has always proposed.

The pressing need for socio-economic development infrastructure in developing countries is such that China, by financing them, presents itself as a lifeline for the reconstruction and modernization of these beneficiary countries. It is not necessarily the taste of the Western world to see that this role that it should play by law and in fact, in view of the historical past and the sociological links with the developing countries, is played by another state, which is moreover a non-Western state, which does not share their culture, their political system and their moral and religious values.

## 4. Idealism in the Community of a Shared Future for Mankind

### 4.1. Content

When we talk about Chinese foreign policy, the first idea that crosses our mind is the invocation of five principles known as the “*five principles of peaceful coexistence*”, namely: 1) support the peoples in their struggle against imperialism and (neo)colonialism in order to obtain and preserve their independence; 2) encourage governments to pursue policies of peace, neutrality and non-alignment; 3) support the aspirations of the peoples for unity and solidarity; 4) promote the peaceful settlement of disputes; 5) respect national sovereignty and reject any external interference.

The five principles of “peaceful coexistence” which still constitute the normative foundations of China’s relations with developing countries today (Wintgens, 2016) are a reflection of the Chinese worldview.

However, the concept of “*Community with a Future Shared for Mankind*” is very little popularized in the world compared to legendary philosophies such as Confucianism, Buddhism or Taoism. The concept of “Community with a Future Shared for Mankind” is a fundamental variable in the construction of President Xi Jinping’s foreign policy. Initially misunderstood or interpreted through and wrongly, the concept contains cultural, economic, social, political, security and defense dimensions of international relations (Marcelli, 2019). It indicates in a pithy way, that the human or international community has one and only Destiny: “*Humanity*”. By Humanity, we should understand, what is common to the human race and/or to the States. The common good (Wu & Yan, 2019). As Xi Jinping himself: “*Human beings live in the same planetary village,*

*live in the same time and in the same space where history and reality meet, and become more and more a community of destiny with me in you and you in me*". (Xi, 2019) It is therefore the common denominator of the international community.

It is therefore a particular emphasis on human development and the shared future of humanity. In recent years, the entire Chinese foreign policy has been to put a particular emphasis on this aspect: win-win cooperation, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or the creation since 2014 of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) are all illustrations of the Chinese vision focused mainly on promoting the development of human well-being.

These Chinese mechanisms, which have undoubtedly allowed the beneficiary countries of Chinese cooperation to win, especially in terms of socio-economic development infrastructures, remain, however, a Chinese way of expanding its geopolitical influence and competing with Western states, in particular the United States on the world stage.

On the socio-cultural level, it refers to the aspiration for development, civilizational exchanges, knowledge sharing, social and economic development, mutual learning. The Confucius Institutes scattered all over the world enter into this framework of exchanges and mutual learning.

On the political and economic level, it amounts to the democratization of international relations. In other words, a global governance of extensive consultation in which all States, large or small, rich or poor, strong or weak are equal and promote win-win cooperation with mutually benefits—recourse to multilateralism and the United Nations-support for the expansion of developing countries in international affairs as the Largest developing Country (China) in the world. China is promoting a vision of a multipolar world where the Southern states will have a prominent place in international affairs. A multipolar world in which powers such as China must exercise what Yan Xuetong (2019) calls a "*humanist leadership*" with a certain "*realistic morality*".

In the absence of a multipolar world, China is in favor of global governance of the G2 type. A construction of the world made around China and the United States. The idea raised by the geopolitologist Fred Bergsten (2009) since 2005, however, has found few favorable echoes in the United States who do not wish to share this scene with the Chinese upstart.

Even if, officially, the Chinese leaders have always refused this idea. It remains one of China's wishes, to be associated with the United States as a key power in major international issues such as climate change or international disarmament. As on the Subprime crisis of 2009 or the Paris climate Agreement of 2015 where China played an important role.

*"China does not support the proposal of a Group of Both (G2). World affairs should be decided by all the countries of the world, rather than by one or two countries. Nevertheless, we are convinced that Sino-American cooperation can play a unique role in advancing the establishment of a new international political and economic order, as well as in promoting world peace, stability and prosper-*

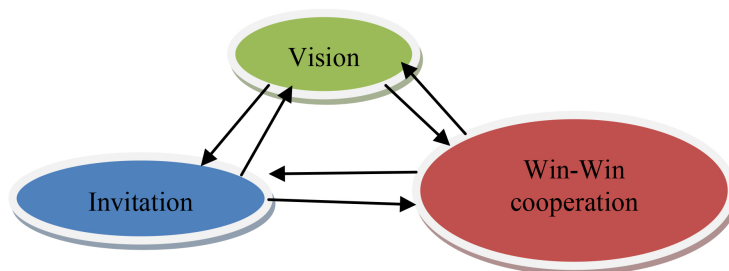
ity”. (Wen, 2009)

A fundamentally philosophical concept, the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind is a human-faced vision of international relations. What should be in international reports. A normative humanization of the cosmopolitan ideal of President Xi Jinping (Yab, 2019). In his speech at the United Nations General Assembly on January 18, 2017:

*“What is there in the world, what are we doing? This is a question that the whole world is thinking about and that I have been thinking about. It is the expectation of the peoples of all countries and the responsibility that falls on our generation of statesmen to transmit the fire of peace from one generation to another, to maintain the momentum of development and to make civilization shine. China’s plan is to build a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind and achieve win-win sharing”* (Xi, 2021).

It must be constantly remembered that the concept of Community with a Shared Future for Mankind is inseparably linked to the concept of “win-win cooperation with mutually beneficial benefits” or “win-win cooperation with mutually and previously shared benefits”. Which translates into cooperation that gives satisfaction to all. A cooperation that makes it possible to meet the expectations of each other. That is, in the cooperation “I win, you win”. The concept is not a zero-sum game where the gain of one party is the loss of the other. It is implemented in the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind for the tireless search for the content “I win, you win”, “I am satisfied, you are satisfied” or vice versa. No cooperation is possible if the parties do not find satisfaction for the needs of their cooperation in the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind.

The very simplified understanding of this pragmatic approach makes it possible to understand all the coherence behind each action taken by President Xi in his relations with other states. With the exception of the Western states, for obvious reasons, which constantly accuse China of conducting disadvantageous cooperation with respect to third parties, however, there are no other states that accuse the Middle Kingdom. Which translates into the fact that in two decades, China has behaved in a rather correct way towards the world, in particular the world of the South (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Conceptualization of the community with a shared future for mankind. Source: Our own elaboration.

The Community with a Shared Future for Mankind is also an invitation to the international community to join the ideal of building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind through the One Belt, One Road project. “*To live in propriety, to advance towards the great path of justice*”. We encourage everyone to join the circle of friends of the “*Belt and the Road*”. We are not trying to fill “*gaps*” but to build a network of partners, mutually beneficial and cooperative (Xi, 2019).

The Community with a Shared Future for Mankind is therefore both a constructive vision of what the world should be like, according to President Xi Jinping, and an invitation to join it in a common project put forward today through the Belt and Road. The content of this multifaceted concept is very particularly interesting in understanding the international relations of China today. A China, once indigenous, now open to the world and carrying an integrative and peaceful vision under the leadership of President Xi Jinping (Liu & Zhou, 2013).

#### 4.2. Philosophical Foundation

Concept used for the first time by President Hu Jintao as part of the internal policy on the common destiny of the Chinese mainland and the island of Taiwan, it is today extended and defended by President Xi Jinping on the international level (Khan, Wang, & Ali, 2021). It is intelligibly difficult to grasp the thought of President Xi Jinping, contained in the Community of Destiny for Humanity, if we are not located in the holistic vision of the multiple philosophies that found his moral foundation. Indeed, the underpinning of President Xi Jinping’s thought, contained in the concept of a Community of Destiny for Humanity, is as rich as it is varied in sources. The latter is found at the intersection of several philosophical thoughts of Chinese antiquity such as those of Confucius, Mencius, TianXia, YinYang, Datong, Taoism—passing through Marxism—up to that of the founding fathers of the People’s Republic of China—Maoism, Dengism, the important thought of three representativities, scientific development and the thought of Xi Jinping in the era of the new renaissance of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

In many speeches, President Xi refers to philosophical thoughts that happen to be complementary to each other. When he quotes Mencius in “*Living in propriety, advancing towards the great path of justice*”. And to continue “We encourage everyone to join the circle of friends of the “Belt and Road”. We are not trying to fill “gaps” but to build a network of partners, mutually beneficial and cooperative. Not only does he evoke the “*theory of integrity*” and the “*concept of a Great Man*”, recognized in Mencius. Here, the Great Man, an imaginary figure replaced by the Great Countries (or the Largest Developing Country) such as China must move towards the great path of justice and equity, understood as equality between states—there is, therefore, the idea of social justice and distributive, contained in Marxism that must lead to the goal of having a company of

average fluency (Xiaokang shehui 小康社会) by 2049, a form of socialism transposed to the international (Qiao, 2019).

Here, by inviting the International Community to join the circle of friends of the Belt and Road, without seeking to fill their “gaps” but to weave a network of mutually beneficial partners, Xi Jinping is based, among other things, on the thoughts of: TianXian defined, according to Zhao TingYang as a dependence on each other, a perfect integration in diversity (Zhao, 2018). Better a system of attraction, integration and harmonization of everything that is under the sky: peoples and cultures—YinYang, Taoist philosophy of the tireless search for the balance between the positive and the negative, the hot and the cold, while remaining in a form of unity, complementarity and permanent transformation—Datong, conception of the world where everything and everyone is at peace.

The Community of Shared Future for Mankind is radically opposed to Western philosophical thoughts and theories, the most widespread on the dominant, predatory and hegemonic vision of the world by a privileged state or group of States: Machiavellianism, Offensive Realism, Schmidt, manifest Destiny, etc (Figure 3).

In several speeches by President Xi, it is necessary to make an effort to deepen philosophical thoughts in order to establish the possible ramifications and interconnections. All these philosophical thoughts intersect in an extraordinarily perfect balance to form a coherent, harmonious and complementary whole. It is therefore important to place oneself in a holistic vision of many ancient or modern philosophies to grasp the depth of Xi Jinping’s thought. Especially since in a reductionist reflection, understanding can be seriously shaded.

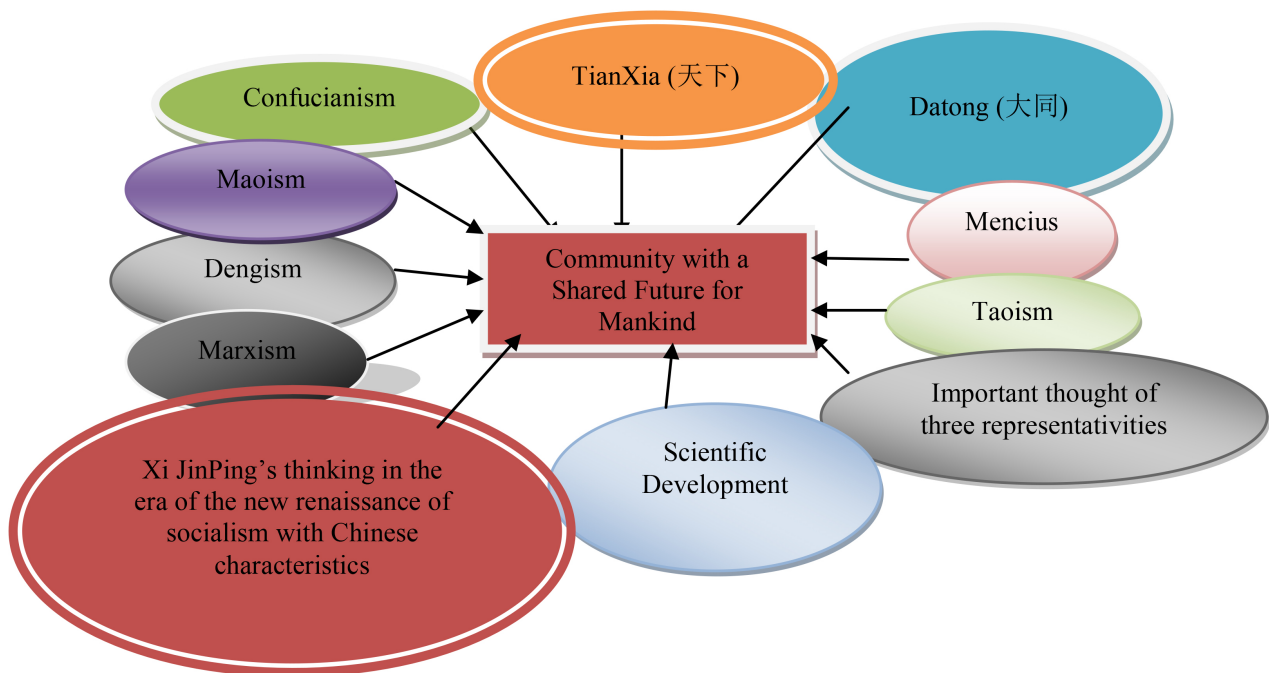


Figure 3. Diagram of the holistic understanding of the community of shared future for mankind. Source: Our own elaboration.

## 5. Conclusion

China has become an undisputed superpower to this day on the international stage, though an atypical superpower, because it does not use the same practices and the same narrative as the traditional powers. China's difference from the others lies in its ability to treat bilateral relations pragmatically, without derogating from the principles of respect, dignity and consideration that are dear to it and its partners, which greatly contributes to returning the image of a morally correct power. This pragmatism is attached to his philosophy of Community of a Shared Future for Mankind. This philosophy of universal harmony which considers only one thing in relations with others: Humanity or the promotion of human development—has become the normative foundation of Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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