The Relevance of Deep Pluralism for China's Foreign Policy

Abstract

Deep pluralism describes a global society in which power, wealth and cultural and political authority are distributed diffusely within a system that has high interaction capacity and is strongly interdependent. This concept has empirical and normative value for understanding China's foreign policy. Empirically, it enables us to see that China has been a key driver of deep pluralism in its modern history. Normatively, it points to the importance of the contestation between consensual and contested forms of deep pluralism and the critical role China can play in this contestation. China is now facing choices between those motivated by *raison d'etat* (narrow self-interest) and *raison de système* (system-wide responsibility incorporating enlightened self-interest). For its professed goals of international peace and development, it is imperative that China promote a consensual form of deep pluralism in the spirit of *raison de système.* In the Asian region, where its regional policy is entangled with its US policy, this would require it to ameliorate contested deep pluralism in its policies toward the US while adopting a consistent strategy of reassurance toward its neighbors.

Keywords

Deep pluralism, consensual vs contested pluralism, China's foreign policy, Sino-US relations, China's Asia policy

Introduction

Deep pluralism is a way of capturing the emerging structure of global society in the coming decades. It addresses the nature and characteristics of a global society in which power, wealth and cultural and political authority are distributed diffusely within a system that has high interaction capacity and is strongly interdependent economically, culturally, and environmentally.[1] How can this concept help us understand China's foreign policy in general and its policies toward the US and the Asian region in particular?

We argue that deep pluralism has both empirical and normative relevance. Empirically, it enables us to see that China has been a key driver of deep pluralism in its modern history. This is one of China's major contributions to modern international relations, but is usually ignored by scholars of Chinese foreign policy. Normatively, deep pluralism points to the importance of the contestation between *consensual* and *contested* forms of deep pluralism and the critical role China can play in this contestation. China now faces choices between those motivated by *raison d'etat* (narrow self-interest) and *raison de système* (system-wide responsibility incorporating enlightened self-interest). For its professed goals of international peace and development, and especially for its aspiration of building "a community with a shared future for humankind," it is imperative that China promote a consensual form of deep pluralism in the spirit of *raison de système.*[2]

To develop this argument, the next section looks in more detail at deep pluralism as the emerging structure of global society, and the consensual or contested ways in which it might unfold. Section 2 shows how China has been a key driver towards deep pluralism since 1949. China has shaped deep pluralism by its conscious policy choices, not only its self-definition as an international actor, but also in its anti-hegemonism, solidarity with the Third World, and Asian regionalism. Section 3 explores how China now faces the question of how it might continue to shape deep pluralism in ways that are

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[1] For a more detailed look at *deep pluralism,* see Barry Buzan, 'A World Order Without Superpowers: Decentred Globalism,' *International Relations*, Vol. 25, No.1 (2011,) pp.1–23; Barry Buzan and George Lawson, 'Capitalism and the Emergent World Order,' *International Affairs*, Vol. 90, No.1 (2014), pp.273–304; Barry Buzan and Laust Schouenborg, *Global International Society: A New Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.192-193; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.261-284.

[2] For China's official statements of its foreign policy goals, including peace, development, and a community with a shared future for humankind, see Institute of Party History and Literature of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, *Xi Jinping guanyu zhognguo tese daguo waijiao lunshu zhaibian* (An Edited Selection of Xi Jinping's Remarks on Great Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2020).

conducive to its own interest as well as to the common interest of regional and international society. Using the entanglement of China's policies toward the US and the Asian region as a case study, we argue that where possible, China should make clear choices to steer deep pluralism in a consensual rather than contested direction.

1. The General Character of Deep Pluralism

In one sense deep pluralism is a theoretical concept about the structure of global society, and in another it is an empirical reflection and projection of global trends. By *global society*, we mean a set of primary institutions in the English School sense,[3] that operate not just in the interstate domain, but span across that and the transnational and interhuman domains.[4] In a structural theoretical sense, deep pluralism can be compared and contrasted to both the premodern structure, which also had diffuse wealth, power and cultural and political authority, but within a system that had relatively low interaction capacity and weak interdependence; and the opening phase of modernity, where wealth, power and cultural and political authority were concentrated in a small group of mainly Western states plus Japan and Russia, but within a system that had high interaction capacity and was strongly interdependent. In this sense, deep pluralism is a distinctive global system/society unlike any we have experienced before. Both 'deep' and 'pluralism' carry specific meanings. Pluralism privileges the units of the interstate system/society over global society, valuing sovereign states as a way of preserving the cultural diversity that is the legacy of human history. China expresses this through its often-emphasised idea of 'Chinese characteristics' in its policies. Pluralism favours *raison d'etat* (or *raison d'empire*) over *raison de système,*[5] and operates by a logic of coexistence within a fairly thin international society. In this context, 'deep' means not just a diffuse distribution of wealth and power, but also of cultural and political authority. These criteria contrast sharply with the preceding decades of Western domination and globalisation in which wealth and power, and cultural and political authority, were relatively concentrated.

In the last few decades, quite a lot of thought has gone into how to conceptualise what was agreed to be an important shift in the nature and structure of global society. Various labels have been put forward to capture the

[3] For example, sovereignty, territoriality, nationalism, human equality, diplomacy, international law, war, great power management, the market, science, sport, and environmental stewardship.
[4] Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 90-138.
[5] Coined by Watson and defined as 'the belief that it pays to make the system work'. See Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge,1992), p.14.

novelty and complexity of this emergent construction: *plurilateralism*,[6] *postmodern international system*,[7] *heteropolarity*,[8] *no one's world*,[9] *multinodal*,[10] *multiplex*,[11] *decentred globalism*,[12] *polymorphic globalism*,[13] and *multi-order world*.[14] This array of concepts offered different emphases in their interpretations of the shift that was underway. Some assumed globalisation to be the main trend, and so emphasised the relative disempowerment of states and the rise of non-state actors of various kinds. Others emphasised the diffusion of wealth and power and the relative decline of the West. Most saw a more complex, multifaceted type of world order, rather than a simple realist 'polarity' vision of a system of states jockying for wealth and power. A reversion to the old realist ideas of multipolarity or bipolarity could not capture the main architecture of what was happening in this layered and complex diffusion of power.

Acharya and Buzan offered the concept of *deep pluralism*, in an attempt to aggregate the vocabulary.[15] They noted that deep pluralism could unfold in two ways. *Contested pluralism* means that there is substantial resistance to the material and ideational reality of deep pluralism. This might take various forms: former superpowers (most obviously the US) refusing to give up their special rights and privileges; great powers refusing to recognise each other's standing, seeing diversity as a problem, and playing against each other as rivals or enemies. *Consensual pluralism* means that the main players in global society not only tolerate the material, cultural, ideological, and actor-type differences of deep pluralism, but also respect and even value them as expressions of diversity. That respect should rest in part on the understanding that cultural

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[6] Phil Cerny, 'Plurilateralism: Structural Differentiation and Functional Conflict in the Post-Cold War World Order,' *Millennium*, Vol. 22, No.1 (1993), pp. 27–51.
[7] Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.363-367.
[8] James Der Derian, 'The Question of Information Technology,' *Millennium,* Vol. 32, No.3 (2003), pp.441–456.
[9] Charles A. Kupchan, *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[10] Brantly Womack, 'China's Future in a Multinodal World Order,' *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 87, No.2 (2014), pp.265–284.
[11] Amitav Acharya,*The End of American World Order* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014).
[12] Barry Buzan, 'A World Order Without Superpowers: Decentred Globalism,' *International Relations,* Vol. 25, No. 1 (2011), pp.1–23.
[13] Peter J. Katzenstein, 'Many Wests and Polymorphic Globalism," in Peter J. Katzenstein ed., *Anglo-America and Its Discontents: Civilizational Identities beyond West and East* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp.207–247.
[14] Trine Flockhart, 'The Coming Multi-Order World', *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2016), pp. 3–30.

[15] Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), ch. 9.

diversity is the natural legacy of human history, which like biodiversity is to be valued in itself, and as the foundation for coexistence.[16] The re-emergence of this understanding is itself a natural consequence of the winding down of two centuries of Western cultural and political hegemony, and the ongoing diffusion of modernity into other cultures. Consensual pluralism might also be supported by a degree of intersubjective realisation of common interest in dealing with the array of shared fate issues that increasingly confront humankind as a whole, some of which are existential questions for the human species. These issues range from pandemics and climate change; through nuclear proliferation, mass migrations, and terrorism; to the implications of biotechnology and machine intelligence. The difference between consensual and contested deep pluralism is the degree to which humankind's responses to these shared threats will be coordinated and collaborative, or fragmented and conflictual.

We are already within the structure of deep pluralism, and so are beginning to experience the dawn of modernity in a more truly global form, not just the Western-dominated transition of the first century-and-a-half of modernity. Unfortunately, deep pluralism is unfolding against the specific historical circumstances of reaction against the collapse of the short-lived heyday of neoliberalism, economic globalisation and supposed US unipolarity, during which the liberal order over-extended itself. Under the imperative of neoliberalism, which emphasized free market competition, it pushed for a global economy that incorporated too many illiberal regimes, and whose governance mechanisms were inadequate. The idea that liberalism and democracy would be transplanted everywhere by the spread of capitalism proved totally wrong. Now populists both inside and outside the West want to pull down economic globalisation, and reinstate the domestic/international divide in a more robust form. Reinforced by the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, economic nationalism is now back in fashion.

The much-used term 'emerging economies' captures the wider array of states and societies now finding success in increasing the wealth, power and authority they can extract from modernity. As they do so, pluralism gets both wider as more countries shift from periphery to core; and deeper, as more varieties of capitalism and modernity unfold.[17] This is where the full picture of contemporary modernity begins to crystallise, because it has now spread well beyond the founding elite, and established itself effectively in a range of societies outside the West. Multiple modernities and varieties of capitalism come into clearer meaning, as do the sustainable forms of global political

[16] Acharya and Buzan labelled this 'embedded' pluralism, but 'consensual' seems simpler and clearer. See ibid.
[17] Barry Buzan and George Lawson, 'Capitalism and the Emergent World Order,' *International Affairs*, Vol. 90. No.1 (2014), pp. 71–91.

economy. Now that we are actually beginning to experience deep pluralism, one can see at least some of its specific features more clearly. These are generally driven by a mix of structural logic (i.e. they could be expected in any instance of deep pluralism), and historical circumstances (i.e. arising from the particularities of the recent history that led here). There are four significant features of deep pluralism that bear on Chinese foreign policy. These are the fading out of superpowers and a strengthening of anti-hegemonism, the introverted turn of great powers, the continuing historical legacy of post-colonial resentment, and the rise of regionalism.

No Superpowers and Strong Anti-hegemonism

In much day-to-day public discourse about world politics, and even in some academic literature on current affairs, the term superpower is used in a very loose and poorly-defined way. There is a lot of talk of China as a rising superpower, carrying the implication that we are moving once again into a world of two superpowers (*bipolarity*). To support a dramatic claim, going against this conventional wisdom – that we are moving into a system with no superpowers – requires clear definitions. For this purpose, we draw on the ones given by Buzan and Wæver:[18]

> *Superpowers* require broad spectrum capabilities exercised across the whole of the international system/society. They must possess first class military-political capabilities (as measured by the standards of the day), and the economies to support such capabilities. They must be capable of, and also exercise, global military and political reach. They need to see themselves, and be accepted by others in rhetoric and behaviour, as having this rank. Superpowers must be active players in processes of securitisation and desecuritisation in all, or nearly all, of the regions in the system, whether as threats, guarantors, allies or interveners. Generally, superpowers will also be fountainheads of 'universal' values of the type necessary to underpin global society. The US is just about still the sole superpower, though its leadership legitimacy and ideological credibility are fraying fast. China is not yet in a position to treat the world as its region or to be accepted as a superpower.
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> *Great Powers* need not necessarily have big capabilities in all sectors. Neither do they need to be actively present in the securitisation processes of all areas of the international system, though they do need to be a significant factor beyond their own region. Great power status rests mainly on a single key: that they are responded to by others on the basis of system-level calculations about the present and near future distribution

[18] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 34-37.

of power. This single key is observable in the foreign policy processes and discourses of other powers.

Regional Powers - Regional powers define the polarity of any given regional security complex: unipolar, as in Southern Africa, bipolar in South Asia, multipolar as in the Middle East, South America and Southeast Asia. Their capabilities loom large in their regions, but do not register much in a broad-spectrum way at the global level.

In a general sense, the very definition of deep pluralism, with its emphasis on the diffusion of wealth, power and political and cultural authority, leans against the idea of there being one or more states being able to acquire disproportionate weight within the system. Such diffusion is already fuelling a strong anti-hegemonism, stemming partly from reaction against the harsh two-century hegemony of the early modernisers, and partly from the fact that rising powers generally cultivate anti-hegemonic attitudes. Since many are rising as the spread of modernity widens and deepens, and since the early modernisers are not going away (they are mainly in relative, not absolute, decline), it will necessarily be difficult, if not quite impossible, either for the US to retain superpower status, or for China to reach it. Indeed, the US seems to be losing the political will, and the support of its electorate, to play the superpower role, and a reasonable case can be made that China does not want the role. Unlike the US, which projects 'universal' values, and thinks everyone should become like America, China's exceptionalism is much more inward looking, stressing its uniqueness by the frequent use of the term 'Chinese characteristics.'[19] The prospect is of a world of several great powers and many regional ones. The US and China might well be *primus inter pares*, but they will not be superpowers.

In a technical sense, this system might look multipolar, and that will be the context in which any cooperation on great power management of global society has to be approached. But because of strong anti-hegemonic sentiments it is unlikely to feature the realist type struggle to dominate the whole system normally associated with the idea of multipolarity. What is emerging will be novel in a number of respects. Increasingly, power, wealth and cultural and ideological authority will be wielded by non-Western as well as Western actors.[20] Although they are all embedded in a highly interdependent global

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[19] Cui Shunji and Barry Buzan, 'Great Power Management in International Society,' *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2016), pp.192–194; Feng Zhang, "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2013), pp. 305-328.

[20] Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), ch. 9; Acharya and Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations*, ch. 9.

economy, and a single planetary environment, none wants to, or can, lead or dominate global society. It seems likely that while the US and China will be *primus inter pares*, they will not be in an entirely different class from India, the EU, and possibly Russia, Brazil and Japan. They will be great powers in the sense that their influence extends beyond their own regions, and that they have to be taken into account at the global level, but the world will not be their region in the sense of the definition given above, and therefore neither will be a superpower. Their contest seems to be more about adjusting spheres of influence in Asia, and about bringing the US down a peg or two in its pretensions to global primacy and leadership. It does not, at least in the short and medium term, or possibly the long term, look like a contest for global primacy.

Indeed, under emerging deep pluralism, the very idea of global hegemonic leadership, which has been closely associated with Western hegemony for more than two centuries, seems likely to be delegitimised. Such a world will feature different economic and political ideologies and systems, including the remnants of the liberal order. This will be a novel system/society, and not only because we have got used to living in a global international society with a high concentration of power dominated by superpowers. Deep pluralism thus poses a challenge to all those powers, including China, that have advocated 'multipolarity'. It is no longer enough just to use the word to challenge American primacy. Those who want multipolarity are now obliged to spell out more precisely what they mean by it.

Introverted Great Powers

The argument that deep pluralism will look like a multipolar system, but not behave as one, is reinforced by the fact that the particular historical conditions of this transition point in modernity, suggest that all of the likely great powers will be introverted in their outlook and behaviour. In other words, there will be an excess of *raison d'etat*, and a shortage of *raison de système.* Nothing in the theory says that deep pluralist systems are necessarily populated by introverted great powers, though the diffusion of wealth, power and authority perhaps make that more likely than not. There is a growing interest in the new great powers and their roles and (ir)responsibilities in international society.[21] It seems clear that introversion will be strong in the current and near future set of great powers for two reasons. First, the early modernising great powers (the US, the EU, Japan) are not going to go away, but they are exhausted, weakened both materially and in terms of legitimacy, and are increasingly

[21] Jamie Gaskarth, ed., *China, India and the Future of International Society* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015); Robert Falkner and Barry Buzan, eds., *Great Power Responsibility and Global Environmental Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

unable or unwilling to take the lead. No clearer illustration of this could be desired than the surprising 2016 successes in attracting voter support of both the Brexit campaign in the UK, and Trump's 'America first' campaign in the US.[22] The EU has weak foreign and security policy institutions anyway, and is too mired in its own local problems of the Euro, Brexit, migration, Turkey, Poland, and Russia to have much diplomatic energy or legitimacy left for *raison de système.* It is barely maintaining *raison de région*. Japan is preoccupied with recovering its status as a 'normal country' and trying to deal with the rapid rise of China. The rising great powers, particularly China and India, are successfully claiming great power status, and might provide new blood to the great power camp. But they are equally keen not to let go of their status as developing countries. They want to assert their own cultures against the long dominance of the West, and are cultivating a nationalism based on historical grievance. But while they know what they are against, the rising powers have as yet shown little clear idea about what kind of alternative global society they want. That combination leads them to give priority to their own development. They argue, not unreasonably, that their own development is a big and difficult job for them, and that developing their own big populations is a sufficient contribution to global society in itself. On that basis, they resist being given wider global, or even regional, managerial responsibilities. Russia is not a rising power, and is too weak, too unpopular, too self-centred, and too stuck in an imperial mind-set, to take a consensual global leadership role. Its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is almost certain to hasten its relative decline and damage its leadership pretensions for a long time to come.

Great powers are in part defined by their wider responsibilities to *raison de système*. If, as seems likely, it become accepted that developing countries can also rank as great powers, then the general consequence will be a granting of great power rights to more states, alongside a reduction in great power responsibilities. To the extent that states, and especially great powers, have introverted foreign policies, they not only fail to uphold *raison de système,* but also lose touch with their social environment, and are blind to how their policies and behaviours affect the way that others see and react to them. Introverted great powers are chronically poor at seeing themselves as others see them, and this provides thin foundations for diplomacy among them. In such conditions, a cycle of prickly action-overreaction is likely to prevail, and building trust becomes difficult or impossible. Everyone sees only their own interests, concerns and 'rightness', and is blind to the interests, concerns and 'rightness' of others. The absence of responsible great powers in conditions of deep pluralism points to a contested deep pluralist global society as the mostly likely outcome. Russia is the most extreme exemplar of a great power putting *raison*

[22] Barry Buzan and Michael Cox, 'The End of Anglo-America?' in Cornelia Navari and Tonny Brems Knudsen, eds., *Power Shifts in English School Perspective*, Palgrave, forthcoming.

d'etat first, and caring little about *raison de système.* Introverted great powers means that the exercise of great power management responsibility under deep pluralism will be more diffuse and more complicated than under the relatively concentrated domination of the US over the last few decades, or the relative simplicity of the bipolar Cold War.

Post-Colonial Resentment

The third predictable quality of emerging deep pluralism is that it will sit on top of a very tricky and corrosive history problem composed, on the one hand, of a large reservoir of post-colonial resentment in those seeing themselves as victims of colonialism, and on the other, of a mixture of forgetting, ignorance, and denial among the former metropoles.[23] The uneven but combined development that took over with such force during the first round of modernity came in a colonial, core-periphery, form in which one civilisation, itself fragmented into competing states, subjugated all the others, and, with much ruthlessness and coercion, imposed many of its social and material forms on them. Colonialism came along with political subjugation, economic exploitation, cultural disrespect, scientific superiority, and racial inequality and discrimination. It also came along with elements of development, but these were generally pitched towards the needs and concerns of the individual metropolitan powers.

The experience of colonialism unsurprisingly left a deep and powerful resentment within almost all countries that experienced it, and that resentment is now a major part of what the Global South brings to the table as inputs from the non-West into thinking about, and practicing, international relations.[24] Hodgson nicely captures the humiliation in the 'sense of radical spiritual defeat' that the encounter with the power and ideas of the modernising West inflicted on the Islamic world and China.[25] It was a blow to their inner prestige to have their sense of being the dominant world civilisation so rudely and abruptly displaced. Post-colonial resentment against the racism, coercion, and cultural contempt of the colonial West and Japan is not going to disappear any time soon. Indeed, as modernity spreads, the new wealth and power, and recovered

[23] On history problems as a concept, see Barry Buzan and Evelyn Goh, *Rethinking Sino-Japanese Alienation: History Problems and Historical Opportunities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 1-14.
[24] Ayse Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Acharya and Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations*; Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya, *Re-Imagining International Relations: World Orders in the Thought and Practice of Indian, Chinese, and Islamic Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
[25] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1993), p. 224.

cultural and political authority, of the Global South are increasingly linked to this still strongly felt post-colonial resentment. To get a measure of this one has only to look at the importance China still attaches not only to reproducing the memory of its 'century of humiliation', but also to making it an active factor in its day-to-day foreign and domestic policy. It comes up everywhere in the post-colonial Global South, from demands for aid as a form of reparations; through insistence on unequal responsibilities for the legacy polluters of early industrialisation in taking on the burdens of controlling climate change; to claims for the return of cultural objects looted or appropriated by the former colonial powers. Such claims certainly need to be addressed, even though inept leaders in the Global South still can, and do, also make good political use of blaming colonisation for their own shortcomings in achieving development.

When Hedley Bull worried about the Third Worlds' 'revolt against the West' nearly forty years ago, that revolt could still be, and largely was, ignored by the West, because the newly decolonised states and peoples behind it were mostly poor, weak, and culturally emasculated.[26] The West largely satisfied itself with some commitment to give foreign aid to the Third World in the hope that development along liberal lines would somehow be easy and automatic. Modernisation theory assumed that modernisation effectively meant Westernisation.[27] Now, substantial parts of the former periphery are growing strong, and knocking on the door of the core. They are finding, or in some cases such as China, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, have already found, their own paths to modernity, and they are not clones of the West, but distinctive syntheses between their traditional cultures and modernity. There remains a huge and politically volatile gap between former colonised and colonisers about how to understand their shared history. Under deep pluralism, the historical grievances of the Global South against the West and Japan can no longer be side-lined if consensual deep pluralism is to have any chance.

Regionalisation

As Buzan and Wæver argue, regionalisation is a relatively recent development in international relations.[28] The regional level did not really come into its own worldwide until decolonisation created autonomous subsystems of states, first in the Americas, and after the Second World War in South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Even then, regionalism was constrained by

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[26] Hedley Bull, 'The Revolt against the West,' in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 217–28.
[27] Hendrick Spruyt, *The World Imagined: Collective Beliefs and Political Order in the Sinocentric, Islamic and Southeast Asian International Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 344-346.
[28] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

superpower overlay during the Cold War, and up to a point thereafter by US primacy and globalisation. The relative decline of the US and Western dominance during the first two decades of the 21st century, and the move into deep pluralism, would seem to offer good prospects for a more regionalised global society.

The definition of deep pluralism suggests favourable conditions for what might be thought of as a subsystem-dominant form of global society. The diffusion of wealth, power, and cultural and political authority on the one hand, and the absence of superpowers treating the world as their region, on the other, both open up space for regional dynamics to gain more autonomy and prominence. But is that the way things will unfold? In relation to this question, a lot hangs on how the relationship between China and the US works out. If mainstream opinion is right, and deep pluralism becomes dominated by a globe-spanning superpower rivalry between the US and China, then, as during the First Cold War, the autonomy of regional dynamics will be compromised by degrees of overlay, in which the global-level rivalry of two superpowers penetrates and dominates more local dynamics. The main question marks hanging over this scenario arise from the domestic politics in the US and China. In the US, the rise of Trumpism left the legitimacy of US claims to global leadership deeply in doubt, and damaged many of the secondary institutions that supported it. If, as seems likely at the time of writing, Trumpism remains a powerful force in US domestic politics, the stability of the US's will and capability to play a superpower role are in serious question. In the case of China, one has to reflect on the longstanding self-centredness of Chinese politics, in which concerns about its domestic order far outweigh concerns about foreign relations.[29]

If we are right, and the US and China are not superpowers treating the world as their region, but merely two big great powers among several, then there is considerable scope for a more regionalised global society. In that case, the US-China rivalry would be mainly about spheres of influence in Asia, and not, as the US-Soviet rivalry was, a contest to dominate the planet. In a no-superpower scenario of deep pluralism, many of the emerging powers would have as much or more focus on their own regions, and their position within them, as they would on the global level. When superpowers dominated the system, global level concerns generally trumped regional level ones. But in a world of several great and many regional powers, the regional level could well become more autonomous. China has some global aspirations, but its main immediate concern is to gain primacy in Asia. Russia, India and Brazil want recognition as great powers, but are mainly interested in their own regions and those

[29] Peng Lu, 'Chinese IR Sino-centrism tradition and its influence on the Chinese School Movement,' *Pacific Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2019), pp. 150-167.

immediately adjacent. If regional dynamics become stronger relative to global ones, then many different models will come into play. As Buzan and Wæver observe, regions vary hugely in how they relate to great powers. Some are heavily dominated by a single great power within them (North America, South Asia, the former Soviet Union, possibly South America).[30] Some have created substantial institutional frameworks to mediate their affairs (Europe). Some have more than one great power within them (East Asia). And some have no great powers within them (Africa, the Middle East). Great powers can and do intervene in adjacent regions (China in South and Southeast Asia; Europe and Russia in the Middle East; Europe in Africa). For the most part, great powers can no longer simply exploit their local preponderance to maintain regional order. They need to negotiate with their neighbours and regional powers. As the transition towards a post-Western deep pluralism progresses, the waning of superpowers should raise the relative autonomy of the regional level, and the regional dynamics with internal and adjacent great powers.

On this basis, we might anticipate that under deep pluralism, great powers will operate on two levels, global and regional. On the global level, the extent and character of cooperation/conflict will depend on whether deep pluralism is more contested or more consensual. That, in turn, depends on how a complex conjuncture of factors plays out. How will the great powers respond to the various shared-fate threats, such as climate change and pandemics, that affect them all? How deeply will post-colonial resentment poison relations between first and second round modernisers? Will great power rivalries over spheres of influence disrupt their ability to cooperate? The key danger here is that the global level will remain undermanaged because a more regionalised global society will draw interest and attention away from the global level.

In our reading, on present trends, the odds favour a drift towards contested deep pluralism with a strong regional level. Great power management at the global level will consequently be weakened. Part of that will be a long contestation over the reshaping of intergovernmental organisations and institutions to accommodate the new realities of wealth, power and cultural and political authority in a global society with no superpowers and no hegemonic ideology. The key question is whether the pressure of shared-fate threats will be enough to sustain specific forms of global great power management adequate to deal with them.[31] If they are, that would ameliorate, possibly significantly, the default drift towards a harder form of contested deep pluralism.

[30] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers.*
[31] Acharya and Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations*, pp. 283-284.

2. China: A Key Driver of Deep Pluralism

We conceive deep pluralism as a structural concept depicting general trends in global politics. It is important not to misconstrue it as a kind of threatening structural juggernaut to which countries need to react in a *raison d'etat* way. As noted above, it is something that states and peoples themselves promote by valuing their own cultural distinctiveness. It becomes consensual when this right is extended to other states and peoples on an equal basis of mutual recognition and acceptance. This point is especially salient with respect to China. China's realists and ultranationalists may be predisposed to see deep pluralism as a hostile international environment against which China needs to protect itself by maximizing its power. Perceptions like this generate the self-fulfilling prophecy intrinsic to realist thinking, in which implementing them would push pluralism into contested rather than consensual form. It is more conceptually useful and empirically robust to understand deep pluralism as an emerging social construction that China has already shaped significantly and needs to continue to shape in a more conscious way.

Does this conception of deep pluralism help us understand China's foreign policy? We argue that deep pluralism has both empirical and normative relevance. Empirically, it enables us to see that China has been a key driver of deep pluralism in its modern history. This is one of China's major contributions to modern international relations, but is usually ignored by scholars of Chinese foreign policy. Normatively, deep pluralism points to the importance of the contestation between consensual and contested forms of deep pluralism and the critical role China can play in this contestation. Seeing deep pluralism as an emerging social construction means that it is a work in progress, and is able to be steered in either a contested or a consensual direction. Although it embodies powerful structural forces, deep pluralism still leaves much room for agency. The policy choices of states, especially great powers like China, will affect how it unfolds between the contested and consensual forms. For its professed goals of international peace and development, and especially for its aspiration of building "a community with a shared future for humankind," it is imperative that China promote a consensual form of deep pluralism in the spirit of *raison de système.*

It can easily be argued that at least since its first contacts with Europeans half a millennium ago, and possibly earlier, China's foreign policy has reflected a strong preference for something like deep pluralism. In order to maintain the peace, good order, and cultural stability of the Middle Kingdom, dynastic regimes in China, like those in Japan and Korea, were generally keen to keep

contact with foreigners to a necessary, and often tightly controlled, minimum.[32] After the fall of the Qing, this disposition carried over to the modernising regimes, both nationalist and communist, that have governed China since 1911. From that point on, it took the specifically Westphalian, and anti-colonial, form of strong claims to sovereignty and nonintervention. A related strand of Chinese thinking about deep pluralism is captured in the now widely used phrase 'Chinese characteristics'. This term emerged during the 1980s from Deng Xiaoping's advocacy of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' as a way of defining his program of reform and opening up.[33] From there, the idea of 'Chinese characteristics' filtered into both academic debates about international relations, and debates about foreign policy, and has remained prominent ever since.[34] As Cui and Buzan argue, 'China's longstanding mantra of 'Chinese characteristics' suggests a desire to preserve a distinctive culture and politics from the intrusions of offensive liberal universalism'.[35] It is a close fit with China's (and others', such as France, Iran, India) longstanding post-decolonisation rhetoric in favour of 'multipolarity', which has likewise been deployed in opposition to the dominance of international society by the US and its liberal teleology.

These general characteristics reflect a dispostion towards deep pluralism that is an enduring feature of China's relations with the rest of the world. When China has been weak, as was the case for most of the 19th and 20th centuries, its deep pluralism has been defensive, aimed at protecting China's cultural and political independence. When it has been strong, as before the 19th century, and increasingly now, the picture is less clear. Under its major dynasties (Qing, Ming, Yuan, T'ang, Han) China was an expansive empire. A strong China has combined elements of deep pluralism (tolerance and recognition of other cultures with different political forms), with elements of hierarchy (the Tribute System), and of China being a model for others to emulate (the Middle Kingdom, authoritarian development). The Mao period is an aberation, combining a weak China with attempts to export Chinese-style revolutionism to other countries. But even when strong, China did not lose sight of deep pluralism. As Zhang and Spruyt both observe, the Tribute System in practice was flexible, and accommodating to the realities of power and the diversities of

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[32] Feng Zhang, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015; David Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
[33] Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan, disanjuan* (The Collected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Vol 3) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), pp. 62-66.
[34] Barry Buzan and Wang Jiangli, 'The English and Chinese Schools of International Relations: Comparisons and Lessons,' *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2014), pp. 6-8.
[35] Cui Shunji and Barry Buzan, 'Great Power Management in International Society,' *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2016), p. 193.

culture.[36] It was not a rigid, suzerainty-like structure, but rather a flexible and pragmatic set of mutual relationships perhaps best viewed as a hegemonic form of international society which, more so for its outer than its inner circles, had other institutions such as adversarial balancing and war.[37]

Against this backdrop, one can identity three more specific contemporary strands in China's long-standing promotion of deep pluralism: anti-hegemonism, solidarity with the Third World, and promotion of Asian regionalism.

Anti-hegemonism

Anti-hegemonism is a strong feature of deep pluralism. China has contributed to this structural trend in three ways. First, it has consistently held an anti-hegemonic position since 1949. Second, in the post-Cold War era, it has supported multipolarity and economic globalization, in the hope of constraining American power. Third, since the Trump administration adopted a competitive strategy toward China, Beijing has responded with a new critical discourse against what it perceives as American bullying.

Anti-hegemonism may be ranked alongside the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as one of the most enduring principles of modern Chinese foreign policy. It contains two dimensions: opposing the hegemony of other powers, especially the established Western countries, and renouncing any intention to claim hegemony for China itself. Both are reactions to China's sufferings at the hands of colonial powers in the so-called "century of humiliation" from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

Mao Zedong did not appear to have used the term "opposing hegemony", as all later Chinese leaders have. His anti-hegemonism, which was stronger than that of his successors, was embedded in his opposition to Western imperialism/colonialism and his support for decolonization and national independence movements in the Third World.[38] The Third World, Mao believed,

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[36] Zhang Yongjin, 'System, empire and state in Chinese international relations, in Michael Cox, Tim Dunne, and Ken Booth, eds., *Empires, Systems and States: Great Transformations in International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 51-55; Spruyt; *The World Imagined,* pp. 93, 101-110.

[37] Feng Zhang, 'Rethinking the 'Tribute System': Broadening the Conceptual Horizon of Historical East Asian Politics', *Chinese Journal of International Politics,* Vol. 2, No. 4 (2009), pp. 545-74; Zhang, *Chinese Hegemony*; Zhang Yonjin and Barry Buzan, 'The Tributary System as International Society in Theory and Practice', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2012), pp. 3-36.

[38] See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and Party Documents Research Office of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, eds., *Mao Zedong*

was a major force against Western hegemony and power politics. In 1974, he advanced his “three worlds” theory, placing Asia (except Japan), Africa, and Latin America all within the Third World. China’s international strategy, he said, must align itself closely with the aspirations of the Third World in opposition to the First World dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union.[39]

Premier Zhou Enlai, Mao’s suave chief diplomat, presciently anticipated the problem of rising Chinese power which would generate unease abroad half a century later. In an October 1956 conversation with the Pakistani prime minister Hussain Shaheed Suharwardi, who raised the possibility of Chinese expansion, Zhou acknowledged such fear of China from its neighbors and even noted the expansionist history of the premodern Chinese empire. But, he emphasized, it was impossible for China to repeat the “old road of colonial aggression” since China had itself been a victim of colonialism. He announced that the present generation of Chinese leaders would not allow their successors to follow the path of colonialism; even after China became strong it should commit itself to peaceful coexistence and mutual support with other countries. “If future generations commit mistakes of this sort,” he said, “foreign friends can accuse them of doing things that their forebears would not be willing to do.”[40] In November 1971, he declared that China would never become a superpower of the US or Soviet kind, now or into the future.[41] These remarks, which represented early formulations of China’s vision of deep pluralism, would later solidify into a broad anti-hegemonic discourse, including forswearing any hegemonic intention from China itself.

The most famous renunciation of China’s hegemonic intention came from Deng Xiaoping’s April 1974 speech to the United Nations. Endowing China with the triple identities of being a socialist, developing, and Third World country, Deng averred that it was China’s internationalist obligation to oppose colonialism, imperialism, and hegemonism. China was not, and would not become, a superpower, which he defined as an imperialist country seeking world hegemony. Most interestingly, he avowed that if one day China became such a superpower, bullying, invading, and exploiting other countries, then people the

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waijiao wenxuan (Select Remarks of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1994).

[39] Ibid., pp. 600-601.

[40] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China and Party Documents Research Office of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, eds., *Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan* (Select Remarks of Zhou Enlai on Diplomacy) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1990), pp. 176-180.

[41] Ibid., p. 491.

world over should expose and oppose its socialist imperialism and together with the Chinese people, smash it.[42]

During the Cold War the targets of China's anti-hegemonism shifted from the US and Western powers in the 1950s and 1960s to the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s. The immediate trigger of this shift was the worsening relationship with the Soviet Union after the late 1950s and the increasing security threat from Moscow which culminated in border skirmishes in the late 1960s. The 1972 Sino-US Shanghai Communique contained an anti-hegemony clause aimed at the Soviet Union, as did the Sino-Japan friendship treaty of 1978.[43] In his report to the Twelfth Party Congress in 1982, General Secretary Hu Yaobang identified opposing Soviet hegemonism and safeguarding world peace as the world's most important tasks.[44] After the mid-1980s, however, as Soviet power waned, China toned down its anti-Soviet rhetoric and tried to achieve some balance in its relations with Washington and Moscow.

After the Cold War China retrained its anti-hegemonism on the US, for the obvious reason that the US was now the world's sole remaining superpower. In every party congress report since 1992, the continued existence of hegemonism and power politics has been pinpointed as a major obstacle to world peace and development. At the same time, in each and every one of these reports there is an emphatic announcement that China will never seek hegemony and expansion.[45]

Alongside this anti-hegemonism, there is another noteworthy discourse around the notions of multipolarization and economic globalization. The 1992 party congress report noted, for the first time, that "the world is developing in the direction of multipolarization," and this message has remained unchanged. Since the 2002 report, "economic globalization" was posited alongside multipolarity as a new trend. Both are seen to offer new opportunities for world peace and development,[46] though like other proponents of multipolarity China has so far conspicuously failed to provide any vision as to how a post-

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[42] Deng Xiaoping, 'Address of Zhonghua renmin gongheguo daibiaotuan tuanzhang Deng Xiaoping zai lianda tebie huiyi shang de fayan' (Head of the People's Republic of China Delegation Deng Xiaoping at the United Nations' Special Meeting), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), 11 April 1974.
[43] Henry Kissinger, *On China* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 270.
[44] Hu Yaobang, 'Quanmian kaichuang shehui zhuyi xiandaihua jianshe de xinjumian—zai zhongguo gongchandang dishierci quanguo daibiaodahui shang de baogao' (Comprehensively Opening a New Landscape for Socialist Modernization—Report at the Twelfth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party), 1 September 1982, http://fuwu.12371.cn/2012/09/27/ARTI1348712095996447_all.shtml.
[45] See the full text of these reports at http://www.12371.cn/special/lcddh/.
[46] See the relevant reports at http://www.12371.cn/special/lcddh/.

hegemonic global order would be managed. That task cannot be evaded any longer if the path towards contested deep pluralism is to be avoided.

Until the 2008 global financial crisis triggered by the crash of the American financial system, the Chinese discourse of anti-hegemonism, multipolarization, and economic globalization did not entail an active strategy of challenging American primacy or the US-led liberal international order. Instead, for two decades after the end of the Cold War, China generally accepted the US-led order and resolved to pursue a strategy of peaceful rise within this order. Multipolarization was seen as a long-term trend, and thus not something requiring China's active promotion by balancing US power. Economic globalization was useful above all to advance China's economic interests, but it may also constrain the US through a thickening web of economic interdependence. Globalization and multipolarization were thus seen as reinforcing each other in creating a favorable condition for China's development, restraining US power, and promoting the positive effects of China's rise. They supported a non-confrontational and integrationist approach toward the outside world.[47]

With the global financial crisis China's admiration for the US financial and economic system plummeted. Its successful coping of that crisis and its continued economic growth fostered a new confidence in its own policy competence and governance system. President Xi Jinping emphasizes "four areas of confidence" – confidence in the road, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics – to signal China's conviction in its own development model.[48] Nevertheless, this still did not amount either to challenging the US head on, or to spelling out how a multipolar order would work. During the Obama years, China's US policy was focused on building "a new model of major-country relationship" characterized by no conflict and no confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation.[49] Remarkably, even after the Trump administration sharpened America's China's strategy from engagement to competition, China still remains committed to building a relationship with the US based on the spirit of "a new model of major-country relationship" that it sought to achieve with Obama.[50]

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[47] Feng Zhang, 'Rethinking China's Grand Strategy: Beijing's Evolving National Interests and Strategic Ideas in the Reform Era,' *International Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (2012), pp. 318-45.
[48] Xi Jinpig, *Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng, dierjuan* (Xi Jinping on the Governance of China, Vol 2) (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 2017), p. 36.
[49] Xi Jinpig, *Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng* (Xi Jinping on the Governance of China) (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 2014), p. 279.
[50] Xinhua News Agency, 'Wang Yi jiu dangqian zhongmei guanxi jieshou xinhuashe zhuanfang' (Wang Yi Interviewed by the Xinhua News Agency on the Present Sino-American Relations), 6 August 2020, http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2020-08/06/content_5532729.htm.

President Xi Jinping has been rallying the nation around a new spirit of "struggle" to navigating an increasingly challenging international environment, which he refers to as "a great transformation not seen in one hundred years."[51] A critical indication of China's new approach is the concept of "viewing the world on an equal footing" (*pingshi*), which Xi first uttered in March 2021.[52] Of course, China has been calling for equality with the US ever since 1949. But this appeal to equality has been significantly accentuated since the Trump years, and the new concept of *pingshi* may well signal the beginning of a serious new policy to challenge American hegemony. How China does this will go a long way toward determining whether deep pluralism unfolds down the contested or consensual track.

Discourse and policy aside, the most tangible contribution China has made to the anti-hegemonic aspect of deep pluralism is its phenomenal economic growth in the reform era. In 1978 when reform began China's GDP was a mere 6 percent of the US GDP and 2 percent of world GDP. In 2020, it had increased to a remarkable 70 percent of the US GDP and its overall share of world GDP stood at 17 percent.[53] With some lag, China's military power is moving in the same pattern. No other country in the postwar era has contributed more to the diffusion of wealth and power in the global society than China.

Solidarity with the Third World

We noted earlier that post-colonial resentment against the racism, coercion, and cultural contempt of the colonial West and Japan is a central feature of deep pluralism in the twentieth century. This resentment has a strong Chinese dimension, most obviously in the narrative of its "century of humiliation." Its policy consequence is a persistent call from the victims of colonialism for a more just international order centered on national emancipation, independence, non-intervention, and equality. The appeal to international justice makes solidarity with the Third World during the Cold War and with developing countries after the Cold War a natural foreign policy choice. It embodies an instinctive suspicion of Western powers which generates a strong synergy with anti-hegemonism.

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[51] Xi Jinping, 'Bawo xinfazhan jieduan, Guanche xinfazhan linian, goujian xinfazhan geju' (Grasp the New Development Stage, Implement the New Development Ideas, Construct the New Development Structure), *Qiushi* (Seeking Truth), no. 9 (2021), pp. 4-18.

[52] Xi Jinping, '"Dasizhengke" women yao shanyongzhi' (We Need to Use the 'Great Thought and Politics Class' Well), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), A1, 7 March 2021.

[53] World Bank data at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CN-US-1W.

Mao's approach to the colonial world's revolt against their Western masters was heavily affected by his understanding of China's revolutionary experiences. The Chinese Communist revolution, and the Chinese nationalist movement in general, came about under the dual assault of revolutionary wars and opposition to foreign aggression. There could be no question, to Mao and his comrades, about the justice of achieving national independence and dignity by way of revolutionary struggles against domestic and foreign foes. This conviction spurred Mao not only to support national independence movements all over the world, but to provide special backing for revolutionary nationalism in these movements.[54]

Mao also put great emphasis on equality in relations with Third World countries, no doubt reflecting his revulsion against Western powers' domineering attitude toward China during the "century of humiliation" and a similar Soviet attitude which saw China as a junior partner in their alliance in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1964 when the Sino-Soviet relationship had deteriorated precipitately, he remarked that China's relationship with anti-imperialist countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America should be one of brotherly relations, not one of "father-son" relations.[55]

Mao's solidarity with the Third World was embodied in the evolution of his thinking from the "intermediate zone" to the "three worlds." He first mooted the idea of "the intermediate zone" in August 1946, referring to it "the wide swathe between the United States and the Soviet Union, composed of many capitalist and colonized and semi-colonized countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa."[56] In August 1954, he accused the US of seeking to dominate the intermediate zone from Japan to Britain.[57] In 1963-64 he put forward the idea of "two intermediate zones," composed respectively of the economically backward countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the rich countries in Europe, their commonality being opposition to US control.[58] This idea was meant to grasp the emerging trend of the spread of national independence movements in the developing world and provide a guiding principle for orienting the focus of Chinese foreign policy from the Soviet camp to the newly independent nations. It offered a

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[54] Niu Jun, *Lenzhan shidai de zhongguo zhanlüe juece* (China's Strategic Policymaking during the Cold War) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2019), p. 29.
[55] Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Party Documents Research Office, *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan*, p. 538. Mao's use of a Confucian metaphor to express this is striking, and anticipates the reinstatement of Confucian ideas after his death.
[56] Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji, disijuan* (The Collected Works of Mao Zedong, Vol. 4) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), p. 1193.
[57] Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Party Documents Research Office, *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan*, p. 159.
[58] Ibid., p. 506-509.

theoretical basis for an international united front against the US.[59] Mao's revolutionist approach to deep pluralism was rooted in Marxist ideas about inevitable global class conflict, and was thus necessarily conflictual.

The "three worlds" theory of 1974 was an extension and modification of the "intermediate zone" idea. By placing China firmly within the Third World, Mao hoped to shape the latter into a collective force in world politics. Even in the 1980s after China had embarked on economic reform by linking itself to the advanced capitalist economy, Chinese leaders kept using the concept of the Third World because it provided a way of identification for China's international role that could distinguish it from other great powers.[60]

China's first major foray into the developing world was the Bandung conference of April 1955, which created an opening for its relations with Asian-African countries. In the following decade China established 26 official diplomatic relations with Asian and African countries. By 1964, among the 49 countries with which China had official relations, 34 were in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, including 30 newly independent countries.[61] Meanwhile, starting from the mid-1950s, despite its own poverty, China started to provide foreign economic assistance.[62]

In the 1980s China continued to emphasize anti-hegemonism in its policies toward Third World countries, but there were some notable changes in principles and goals. In contrast to the ideologically driven policies of previous three decades, Beijing now eschewed ideology as a basis of policymaking; henceforth its goals toward developing countries would be peace and development on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, rather than support for revolution and war.[63] Despite the rapid growth of its economy, China refused to take a leadership role in the developing world. In December 1990, Deng Xiaoping declared that "China will forever stand on the side of the Third World, will never seek hegemony, and will never take leadership." But China needed to make some international contribution, and this was to "actively promote the creation of a new international political and economic order."[64]

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[59] Niu Jun, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo duiwai guanxishi gailun, 1049-2000* (An Introduction to the History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China, 1949-2000) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010), p. 177.
[60] Niu Jun, *Lenzhan shidai de zhongguo zhanlüe juece*, p. 31.
[61] Niu, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo duiwai guanxishi gailun*, p. 178.
[62] Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Party Documents Research Office, *Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan*, pp. 388-389.
[63] Niu, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo duiwai guanxishi gailun*, p. 281.
[64] Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan, disanjuan* , p. 363.

After the Cold War, China's relationship with the developing world became deeper and wider, mainly in economic and political fields. Opposing hegemony and power politics continued to provide the political basis for the relationship, but the more practical spur was rapidly growing economic interests. Emphasizing the goal of development to be achieved by mutually beneficial economic cooperation, China enhanced bilateral relations with developing countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It also built or shaped multilateral institutions for economic and security cooperation, most notably the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the BRICS Forum, the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, the China-Arab Cooperation Forum, and various dialogue mechanisms with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

There are important continuities as well as changes in China's approaches to the developing world over the past 70 years. During the Cold War the guiding objective was opposing imperialism and colonialism, first against the US and then against the Soviet Union. To this end China at times went to extraordinary lengths to support revolutionary movements in the Third World. In return Beijing received critical political and diplomatic support from developing countries, notably in its entry to the United Nations in 1971. Mao's China necessarily promoted contested pluralism in pursuit of its ideological goals. After the Cold War anti-hegemonism retained its relevance, but the guiding theme became economic cooperation. The common theme running through these two periods, however, was South-South cooperation for the creation of a more just international order. In his 1974 UN speech, Deng railed against the unequal relationship between the developed and developing worlds.[65] In a 1988 conversation with the visiting Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, Deng mentioned establishing a new international political and economic order as a pressing task facing the world.[66] Since then, creating a more just and reasonable international order which will better reflect the interests and aspirations of developing countries has been an overriding theme in China's relations with the developing world. The shift from Mao to Deng did not change China's commitment to deep pluralism, but it did move it from the conflictual end of the spectrum towards the middle. China's entry into the capitalist world economy, and its call for a new political and economic order, suggested openness to a more consensual approach to deep pluralism, though without abandoning suspicion and mistrust of the West.

Regionalism in Asia

[65] Deng Xiaoping, 'Address of Zhonghua renmin gongheguo daibiaotuan tuanzhang Deng Xiaoping zai lianda tebie huiyi shang de fayan.'
[66] Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan, disanjuan*, pp. 282-283.

A vague idea of Asian regionalism, also carrying strong synergies with anti-hegemonism, has accompanied PRC foreign policy almost since its founding. In June 1950, Mao declared that "Asian affairs should be managed by the Asian peoples themselves, not by the United States."[67] 64 years later, in May 2014, President Xi Jinping remarked: "Asian affairs must ultimately be dealt with by Asians. Asian problems must ultimately be addressed by Asians. Asian security must ultimately be maintained by Asians. Asians have the capacity and wisdom to realize Asian peace and stability through enhanced cooperation."[68] The continuity in regionalist thinking from Mao to Xi is remarkable. However, although Chinese foreign policy has always possessed a regionalist aspiration, the policy manifestations of this aspiration as well as the conditions for its actuation have fluctuated widely over the past 70 years. As a result, China's contribution to Asian regionalization has also varied considerably.

During the Mao years, a severe constraint on China's Asia policy was the contradiction between its identity as a member of the Soviet camp pitted against the US-led capitalist world and its desire to establish reasonably good relations with its neighbors.[69] Its socialist identity made ideology central to policy making, but its wish for good relations with its neighbors necessitated a realistic approach to find common grounds and common interests with these countries. The alliance with the Soviet Union and the consequent strategic and ideological commitment dramatically enhanced relations with the socialist camp, facilitating policies toward China's vast northern periphery. But the same commitment reduced China's strategic autonomy and flexibility, leading to policy difficulties with countries in East and South Asia.

Throughout the Mao years China struggled with this dilemma. A central pillar of Zhou Enlai's deft diplomacy was the advancement of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which eschewed ideology as a foreign policy consideration. During the 1955 Bandung conference where Zhou's diplomatic skills were on full display, he made an eloquent appeal to the spirit of "seeking common ground while reserving differences," clearly recognizing the need for flexibility in China's regional policy.[70] Nevertheless, a favorable condition for the realization of such flexibility would not emerge until the mid-1980s when China

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[67] Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Party Documents Research Office, *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan*, p. 137.

[68] Xi Jinping, 'Jiji shuli yazhou anquanguan, gongchuang anquan hezuo xinjumian' (Actively Establish the Asian Security Concept, Collectively Create a New Situation of Security Cooperation), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), A2, 22 May 2014.

[69] Yang Jiemian, *Duiwai guanxi yu guojiwenti yanjiu* (Foreign Relations and International Studies) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2009), p. 101.

[70] Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Party Documents Research Office, *Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan*, p. 121.

had established its independence from the Cold War confrontation between the two superpowers.

There were three major challenges of China's Asia policies in the Mao years. First, its February 1950 decision to form an alliance with the Soviet Union meant that the main challenge would come from the US presence in Asia and the postures of regional countries allied with or friendly to the US. In the 1950s and 1960s China confronted a number of military conflicts in its periphery, including most importantly the Korean War of 1950-53 and the Vietnam War of 1955-75, both of which involved the US as a major belligerent. The Korean War, in particular, significantly heightened Cold War tensions in Asia and Europe and, as a result of the US blockade of the Taiwan Strait, forced China to halt its plan of reunification with Taiwan.

The second major challenge of China's regional policy was its intricate territorial disputes with its neighbors, the most important of which were the disputes with India. It was above all with India that China advanced the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as the guiding principle of its regional policy.[71] But territorial disputes proved intractable, leading to two border clashes in 1959 and a border war in 1962. Rivalry with India had a significant impact on Cold War dynamics both in the South Asian subregion and the broader Asian region. After India established a quasi-alliance with the Soviet Union in 1971, a bipolarised confrontation emerged between China, the US, and Pakistan on one side, and India and the Soviet Union on the other side.[72] India aside, however, China was successful in resolving territorial disputes with a range of other countries, including Burma, Nepal, Pakistan, Mongolia, Afghanistan, and North Korea.

The third challenge of China's Asia policy was the power asymmetry between China and its neighbors. Most of these countries were small or medium-sized, and could not hope to match Chinese power by their individual efforts. This asymmetry naturally bred unease, suspicion, and fear of China in these countries, constraining the degree of trust that might be developed between them. Chinese leaders, notably Zhou, were acutely aware of this problem. That was why he emphasized so much the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the spirit of "seeking common ground while reserving differences" as the guiding principles of China's neighborhood policy. In one of his speeches to the Bandung conference, he made a point of mentioning a possible tendency of

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[71] Ibid., p. 63.

[72] Zhang Feng, 'India in China's Strategic Thought,' in Kanti Bajpai, Manjari Chatterjee, and Miller Selina Ho, eds., *Routledge Handbook of China-India Relations* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 139-50, at p. 141.

China as a big country to neglect and disrespect small countries, saying that China often engaged in self-criticism to wean it off big power chauvinism.[73]

In the post-1978 reform period, ideology was removed as a factor in China's Asia policy; national interest rose to the fore.[74] Although it was not until 1989 that the Cold War formally came to an end, a more pragmatic regional policy began to be fashioned in tandem with the reform decision. In October and November 1978, Deng Xiaoping visited Japan and Southeast Asia, declaring publicly his intention to develop trade and technology relations with these countries.[75] In regard to sovereignty and maritime disputes, especially those in the South China Sea, Deng suggested shelving sovereignty disputes to pursue joint development as an interim approach to peacefully resolving these disputes in the long run. All these new economic and security policies toward China's Asian neighbors were meant to create a peaceful and stable regional environment for China's new national strategy of reform and opening-up.

Such an overriding concern was to govern China's Asia policy for the next three decades. During the first decade, China took a bilateral approach to managing relations with its neighbors, with little conception or appreciation of the efficacy of regionalism and multilateralism. This stance changed in the 1990s. In the early 1990s China's foreign policy acquired a regional quality when Beijing tried to reach out to as many neighboring countries as possible to overcome Western-imposed diplomatic isolation. After the mid-1990s, this regional policy acquired a further multilateral aspect. Most importantly, China sought to improve relations with ASEAN in various ASEAN-related multilateral initiatives and with Central Asia in the development of the Shanghai Five mechanism. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis provided an important impetus for regional multilateralism by spurring China to initiate the "ASEAN+3" mechanism with Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN states. It also stimulated a new wave of "responsible great power" discourse inside China.[76] Beijing was rightly proud of the praise it received from the region for not devaluing its currency during the crisis.

Official discourse indicates an increasing prominence of regionalism in China's Asia policy. At the dawn of the 21st century, a diplomatic landscape which took the neighborhood or periphery region (*zhoubian*) as the foreign policy priority began to crystallize. Jiang Zemin's report to the sixteenth party congress in

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[73] Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Party Documents Research Office, *Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan*, pp. 131-132.
[74] Feng Zhang, 'Rethinking China's Grand Strategy,' pp. 321-322.
[75] Deng Xiaoping, 'Zhongguo yuanyi jiaqiang yu dongmeng guojia de youhao guanxi' (China Is Willing to Strengthen Friendly Relations with ASEAN Countries), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), A1, 9 November 1978.
[76] Feng Zhang, 'Rethinking China's Grand Strategy,' pp. 325-326.

November 2002 mentioned, for the first time, the intention to "enhance regional cooperation" with neighboring countries.[77] It was around this time (June 2001) that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was founded with Russia and four central Asia states on the basis of the Shanghai Five mechanism. In Southeast Asia, it was also at this time (November 2002) that China and the ten ASEAN member states signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DOC) in the South China Sea, which succeeded in keeping regional tension under control for a decade. Indeed, the year 2002 was pivotal as China launched the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement in the economic realm while also signing the DOC in the security domain. In 2003, it became the first non-ASEAN country to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with ASEAN. Even toward Japan, Chinese policymakers relied more on reassurance than punishment, even though their displeasure, especially over Japanese leaders' visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, was all too apparent. In the economic domain, apart from the "ASEAN+1" and "ASEAN+3" mechanisms, China supported ASEAN's efforts to create a new trade pact "the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership" (RCEP), which was concluded by 15 countries in November 2020. China is also a keen supporter of the East Asian Summit (EAS), an ASEAN-led, leadership-level regional institution comprising the ten ASEAN member states plus Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia, and the US.

A distinctive feature of East Asian regionalism is that it has been led not by great powers but by a regional organization consisting of small and regional powers in a subregion where the interests of the great powers intersect, namely ASEAN. This is above all because in a strategically important region where a plethora of regional and extra-regional countries interact in complex ways, ASEAN is the only entity acceptable to all for organizing regional cooperation.[78] The ASEAN-centered multilateral institutional framework has been credited by many scholars and officials as a major contributor to regional stability and development in the post-Cold War era.[79] China, aware of the need to ease regional suspicion of its power and intention, was happy to support and facilitate ASEAN's leadership in regional cooperation.[80] There was little

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[77] Jiang Zemin, 'Quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui, kaichuang zhongguo tese shehui zhuyishiye xinjumian—zai zhongguo gongchandang dishiliuci quanguo daibiao dahui shang de baogao' (Comprehensively Build a Well-off Society, Opening a New Situation of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics—Report at the Sixteenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party), 8 November 2002, https://fuwu.12371.cn/2012/09/27/ARTI1348734708607117_all.shtml.

[78] Kishore Mahbubani and Jeffrey Sng, *The ASEAN Miracle: A Catalyst for Peace*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2017.

[79] Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge, 2009.

[80] Yang, *Duiwai guanxi yu guojiwenti yanjiu*, p. 113.

indication, from roughly 1980 to 2010, that China wanted to dominate East Asian regionalism. Thereafter, however, and especially since 2014, the latest fluctuation in China's policy towards Southeast Asia involves a more robust assertion of its own territorial claims in the South China Sea.

For both outsiders and locals, China's regionalist policy is difficult to read. It is particularly difficult to disentangle China's engagement in the region as purely regional relations, from its engagement there as part of its anti-hegemonist stance against the US. The fault line in Asian regionalism in relation to the US-China rivalry consists in this tension: while China prefers a regionalism dominated by Asian countries, the US opts for a wider regionalism encompassing Pacific-rim countries including itself and its allies such as Australia and Canada. Since around 2017 the US and its allies have expanded the postwar toponym of "Asia-Pacific" to "Indo-Pacific". China has offered sustained support to the "ASEAN+3" mechanism composed of countries in Northeast and Southeast Asia. The US endorses trans-regional Indo-Pacific constructs such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the EAS, and most recently, the Quadrilateral Security dialogue (Quad) comprising the US, Japan, Australia, and India.[81]

China's stance can be interpreted in two ways. It might be about eroding US hegemony in the region, but its effect is to enhance China's influence as the biggest power in the region. If China was seeking its own primacy in East Asia, that would, at least locally, go against the basic idea of deep pluralism, but would be compatible with contested deep pluralism in the form of a world of rival great powers each dominating its region. If it is seeking merely to weaken or exclude US influence from the region, while preserving the autonomy and independence of the local states, that would point towards deep pluralism, but leave open the question of whether it is contested or consensual or has elements of both. Mutually antagonistic great power rivalry between China and the US threatens to sabotage the Asian regionalism that should be one of the pillars of a consensual deep pluralist world.

To sum up this section on China's historical contribution to deep pluralism, China has a longstanding disposition towards deep pluralism as its preferred form of international society. In that sense, if we are right that deep pluralism will be the dominant structure in the coming decades, then in two important respects, the world is moving in China's direction. First, Western hegemony, and the legitimacy of hegemony generally, are waning. Second, significant parts of the Global South are becoming empowered, and taking their own stance on development and world affairs. Only on the issue of regionalisation is

[81] Hoang Thi Ha, 'Evolving Regionalisms in Asia-Pacific,' *ASEAN Focus*, No. 3 (2018), pp. 2-3.

the picture more muddled, mainly because of the complexities for the countries of South and Southeast Asia in trying to position themselves between US and Chinese power.

In this connection we should note that China has not always fully devoted itself to the promotion of deep pluralism. Our argument on China's contribution to deep pluralism is based on our examination of Chinese policies in the three areas of anti-hegemonism, solidarity with the Third World, and Asian regionalism. In some other areas China has shown less inclination to promote deep pluralism. For example, China's contribution to globalization is limited to the economic sphere, as it keeps a beady eye over political and cultural globalization emanating from the West. There is a further, internally generated limit of China's promotion of deep pluralism. Inside China pluralism is not the governing political philosophy. As Pines shows in great depth and detail, China's history led to the opposite political conclusion from the West's. China came to fear political pluralism as a recipe for conflict, both domestically and internationally.[82] This uncomfortable disjointedness raises the question of how China might advance deep pluralism abroad without practicing it at home. So far, up to a point, China has been successful in cordoning off the domestic realm from the international. But if it wants to lead deep pluralism on the international stage, the contradiction between its domestic and international principles is bound to become more glaring.

For our purpose, the most important unresolved question is whether China's preference is for deep pluralism in its contested or consensual forms. Sometimes it goes clearly in one direction (e.g. contested under Mao; more consensual under Deng), and sometimes, most notably on the regional level, it seems to take both directions at once. In the period since 1949, even China's policies towards other great powers – the US, Russia, India, and Japan – have fluctuated between consensual and contested pluralism. China has been much clearer about what it opposes – hegemonism, whether American or Soviet – than about setting out a vision of how a post-hegemonic, deep pluralist, global order could and should be managed. This was perhaps an adequate position during the era of Western dominance, but as deep pluralism opens up, China and others face pressing questions about how they want this new global order to work. Failure to answer these questions will lead to contested pluralism by default.

3. Consensual Pluralism and China's Policies toward the US and Asia

[82] Pines, Yuri (2012) *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and its Imperial Legacy*, Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.

It is clear from this historical record that post-revolution China has long preferred some form of deep pluralism at the international level, and that preference has shaped both China and the emerging global society in significant ways. China now confronts the question of how it might continue to shape deep pluralism in ways that are conducive to its own interest as well as to the common interest of regional and global society. Given where we are now, with a mainstream drift towards contested deep pluralism, the best alternative is to pursue a mix of contested and consensual pluralism. China needs to follow two broad principles. First, where contestation cannot be avoided, the aim is to contain and ameliorate it to the extent possible. Where opportunities for cooperation transcend the issues under contestation, these should be pursued as vigorously as possible. A hybrid form of contested/consensual deep pluralism will necessitate diplomatic pragmatism and realistic goals. Second, China needs to develop a strong sense of *raison de système*, 'making the system work', so as to build a sense of consensus and community around shared-fate issues that transcend the issues that feed rivalry and contestation.

These principles hold clear policy implications for the future of China's anti-hegemonism, solidarity with the Third World, and Asian regionalism that have contributed so much to deep pluralism over the past 70 years. In the years ahead, China needs to keep resisting any form of hegemonism, both American, and, as Zhou Enlai repeatedly pointed out, its own. That should be relatively easy given that deep pluralism itself makes hegemonism illegitimate. China has to continue to support the development of the Global South in a sustainable way so that those countries and peoples can play their full roles in the diffusion of wealth, power, and cultural and political authority away from the West. And within that, China has to make its own regional policy more consistent and more consensual. In what follows we elaborate our normative positions by discussing the entanglement of China's policies toward the US and the Asian region.

Ameliorating Contested Deep Pluralism in US Policy

It is not difficult to make the case that the current default trajectory of global society is towards contested deep pluralism. The leading indicator of this is the growing polarisation and alienation of China and Russia on the one hand, and the US and its allies on the other.[83] This strongly emergent rivalry is multifaceted not only in taking on a broad-spectrum military character, but also in increasing economic disconnection. It also has many points of confrontation:

[83] One could add other developments to this picture, most obviously the tensions between China and India, and in the Islamic world between Sunni and Shi'a states and non-state actors.

in the East and South China Seas, in the border zone between the EU and Russia, in South Asia, the Middle East, and in space. There is not much room for compromise between, on the one hand, China's goal of national rejuvination and a maximal form of reunification, and its desire to develop a full spectrum of leading-edge great power military capabilitites; and on the other hand, the US's desire to maintain military and technological superiority, and to continue playing the ring-holder in Asian security. The experiment of linking their economies begun during the 1980s has now run its course, with both sides increasingly unwilling to accept the domestic consequences of that interdependence. Although they no longer clash over being capitalist or not, their divergent styles of capitalism have proved incompatible, and clashes over democracy and human rights versus authoritarian government are escalating. What many in the West are increasingly understanding as an emerging new cold war is sufficiently wide and deep, and sufficiently embedded in the domestic politics of both sides, that it seems unlikely to be stopped. The task, therefore, is to contain and ameliorate the rivalry to the extent possible.[84] There are useful precedents for such an approach in the history of Sino-American relations: the rapprochement in the early 1970s engineered by Nixon and Kissinger on the American side and by Mao and Zhou on the Chinese side is a celebrated example of successful diplomacy; and a more recent example is the Sino-American strategic dialogue pioneered by the Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo and the US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick in the 2000s.

At least in principle, there seems a willingness on both sides to entertain such limitation and amelioration. Since the Trump administration the US has determined that a degree of competition and confrontation with China is not only unavoidable but desirable. The Biden administration's formula for the relationship was that it would be "competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be."[85] China wants to "build a more rational, stable, manageable and constructive China-US relations."[86] Xi Jinping told Biden that "getting the relationship right is not optional, but something we must do and must do well."[87] He contended that the two

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[84] For a fuller discussion of how this might be done through a combination of deterrence, reassurance and diplomacy, see Feng Zhang and Richard Ned Lebow, *Taming Sino-American Rivalry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[85] Antony J. Blinken, 'A Foreign Policy for the American People,' Washington, D.C., March 3, 2021, https://www.state.gov/a-foreign-policy-for-the-american-people/.

[86] Qin Gang, 'Keynote Speech by Ambassador Qin Gang at the Welcome Event by the National Committee on US-China Relations Board of Directors,' 31 August 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/202109/t20210901_9169883.html.

[87] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Xi Jinping tong meiguo zongtong biden tong dianhua' (Xi Jinping in Telephone Call with US President Biden), 10 September 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1906016.shtml.

countries “need to promote competition based on fairness and justice…not a life-and-death struggle of the gladiatorial type.”[88]

The US and Chinese positions do not look incompatible. Since there is no possibility of avoiding a substantial degree of US-China rivalry, it is essential to the pursuit of consensual deep pluralism that the pathways to ‘cooperation where possible’ be kept open. That requires that China adjust its general relational approach to diplomacy and moderate its position that an improvement in the overall environment of Sino-US relations is a prerequisite to cooperation on specific issues. It is necessary to delink issue areas marked by cooperation from those by competition, especially when those areas of cooperation (e.g. climate change) have the potential of significantly affecting the trajectory of the bilateral relationship or the common interest of global society. China’s general preference for relationalism will not work in the face of a US that has become so hostile. Dealing with issues individually on their own merits will have a better chance of achieving cooperative deep pluralism.

The first cold war offers some obvious lessons in the necessity to balance reassurance and deterrence, and to single out issues on which policy might be coordinated even within a relationship of enmity. Despite their existential opposition, the US and the Soviet Union were able to recognise a mutual interest in survival, and to negotiate a range of arms control agreements to avoid some of the most dangerous forms of military instability. The US and China may well have to do the same. Like the US and the Soviet Union, they are pursuing military rivalry across the spectrum from space and nuclear weapons through to air and sea power. They will not have to contend, as the parties to the first cold war did, with conducting their rivalry while the technologies of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems were themselves evolving rapidly. But they will have other new technology races to deal with. While the US will try to slow China’s military ascent, it will eventually have to accept it, as it did with the Soviet one. Both sides should then focus on avoiding accidental wars, pursuing reassurance where possible, and negotiating a stable parity. Climate change also fits within a logic of shared survival.

The first cold war offers few lessons for the second about economic relations. At no point were there significant economic relations between the US and Soviet Union, whereas China and the US start from a position of having very substantially entangled their economies since the 1980s. This linkage produced huge benefits for both, but both now see those benefits as challenged by costs.

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[88] Xi Jinping, ‘Rang duobian zhuyi de huoju zhaoliang renlei qianxing zhilu’ (Let the Torch of multilateralism Shine the Way Forward for Humankind), 25 January 2021, http://jhsjk.people.cn/article/32011673.

The US has shifted to economic nationalism, and is attempting to re-shore manufacturing industry, and reduce dependence on global supply chains whose fragility has been exposed by Covid-19. China strongly professes its openness to trade, but for strategic reasons wants to make itself more self-reliant in crucial areas of technology and manufacture. Their economies are disengaging. The big question is how far they will go with this. So far, both the US and China have chosen to weaponise economic relations in pursuit of other political goals. Following security logic and economic nationalism to anything approaching full disengagement would strongly reinforce contested deep pluralism, not least by dissolving any shared interest in managing the global economy. There is a real danger that the global economy will fall victim to Sino-American rivalry. The two sides need to acknowledge that their systems of capitalism are radically different, while finding as much scope as possible for economic engagement that does not raise security issues. The economic sector is a possible area for building consensual deep pluralism, but there is no certainty about it. Unless China and the US both remain committed to managing the global economy, and supporting the institutions such as the WTO that are necessary for that management, China's vaunted "community with a shared future for humankind" will be a very thin and barren affair.

Developing *Raison de Système* in Asia

Raison de système means defining a country's interests in terms not just of its own narrow self-interest but also of the common interest of the international system as a whole. It is the ultimate test of being a responsible great power. China has ample intellectual and historical resources for developing itself into a responsible great power of this caliber. Classical Chinese thinking about interest is best exemplified by the remarks of Kongzi (551-479 BCE) on the problem of personal gain or benefit [*li* 利]. He says that "exemplary persons understand what is appropriate [*yi* 義]; petty persons understand what is of personal gain [*li* 利]."[89] By pitting *yi*, which may be translated as appropriateness or justice, against personal gain, he is admonishing that the quest for the latter must be based on the former; put differently, self-seeking behavior must be constrained by the standards of justice.

It is notable that the conception of the relationship between justice and interest has now become a central element in China's diplomatic thinking. President Xi Jinping has reiterated the importance of holding "a correct conception of justice and interest" (*zhengque liyiguan*). He remarked that a correct conception requires prioritizing justice while trying to achieve interest. It means rejecting a

[89] Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., trans., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 1998), p. 92.

short-term utilitarian approach to the quick acquisition of interest.[90] Related to *yi* is the concept of responsibility (*zeren*), which has steadily risen in prominence in Chinese thinking since the late 1990s. Compared to *yi* as justice, responsibility conveys a stronger sense of positive action. In an April 2021 speech, Xi urged that "we bear in mind the shared interests of humankind and make responsible and wise choices." "Great powers," he averred, "should behave in a manner befitting their status and with a greater sense of responsibility."[91]

As noted, China's regional policy is deeply entangled with its rivalry with the US, and this is a good part of the explanation for its fluctuating, inconsistent character. This entanglement seems highly unlikely to disappear in the coming decades, so the question is how to manage it. The regional question for China straddles across the divide between the unavoidable parts of contested deep pluralism, and those areas in which there is scope to pursue more consensual policies. We argue that in order to better manage this divide, China needs to pursue more reassurance and less coercion in its regional policy.

Reassurance, aimed at building a benign external environment for economic development, was China's main strategy toward its neighbors in the 1990s and 2000s. As described earlier, during these two decades, China restrained itself in territorial disputes, actively participated in regional institutions, and projected a responsible image through close economic engagement. Since around 2010, however, China has withheld comprehensive reassurance in favor of an approach combining conditional reassurance with selective coercion toward specific target states. The new reliance on a mixed strategy of reassurance and coercion is a significant departure from its past efforts to maintain a benign regional environment largely through engagement and accommodation.[92] This is most evident in the South China Sea, where island building has enhanced China's strategic position and where China's policies toward Southeast Asian countries have been conditional upon their attitudes toward Chinese positions in the South China Sea. It is also apparent in its punitive policies toward Japan, South Korea, Australia, and others.

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[90] Xi Jinping, 'Jiejian lishi jingyan chuangxin hezuo linian, rang 'yidai yilu' jianshe tuidong geguo gongtong fazhan' (Learn from Historical Experiences to Innovate Ideas of Cooperation, Let the Belt and Road Initiative Promote the Common Development of All Countries), *Renmin ribao*, A1, 1 May 2016.

[91] Xi Jinping, 'Pulling Together Through Adversity and
Toward a Shared Future for All—Keynote Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping
President of the People's Republic of China
At the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2021,' 20 April 2021,
https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgmb/eng/zgyw/t1870296.htm.

[92] Liu Feng, 'China's Security Strategy towards East Asia,' *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2016), pp. 151-179.

The rising prominence of coercion in Chinese policy reflects not so much a fundamental change in Chinese goals as a reordering of its policy priorities and a reassessment of its policy means. Throughout the post-Cold War period, China has pursued an ensemble of objectives including sustaining economic growth, defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity, maintaining internal stability and political rule, and securing China's status as a great power. After 2012, however, as China's economic and military power grew rapidly, it began to place more emphasis on securing hard material interests such as territorial sovereignty and maritime interests as well as the symbolic interests of status and influence. As its priorities and capabilties shifted, it became more willing to use coercion to achieve its goals.

Yet reassurance has not lost its value in this era of greater Chinese power. Indeed, it is crucial to the emerging balance between a contested and consensual deep pluralist world. The goal of easing conflict and inducing cooperation will remain important regardless of China's power position. Of course, China needs to develop military power appropriate to its defensive needs and status, and be able to deter other countries from damaging its legitimate interests. But deterrence needs to be practiced with restraint. Excess is likely to be counterproductive as it will increase other countries' perceptions of Chinese threat and compel them to enhance their deterrence posture, thus negating the effects of Chinese deterrence. A process of escalating mutual deterrence between adversaries generates arms racing and insecurity, and is a sure path towards contested deep pluralism.

The criteria by which China should judge the right mix of reassurance and deterrence in its regional policies is whether such policies can serve its fundamental goals as reflected in the slogans of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and the construction of "a community of shared future for humankind." China still needs a reasonably stable external environment to achieve these objectives, and so reassurance will remain indispensable in its strategic reservoir. A community of shared future for humankind, whether in Asia or globally, has to be built on consensus, not coercion. The future challenge for China's regional strategy is to determine the fine balance between reassurance and deterrence by a correct reading of the regional and international trends. Guidance on this can be found in the Chinese concept of *wangdao*, which confers the right to lead, but only if the powerful leads by providing benefit to the community as a whole. In modern language *wangdao* is leadership based on humane authority, one that satisfies the material needs and ethical aspirations of the members of community.[93] It is not a binary

[93] Yan Xuetong, Daniel A. Bell and Sun Zhe eds., Edmund Ryden trans., *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Yan

strategy dividing Asia between Chinese-led and US-led spheres of influence or opposing blocks. Instead, it is one that gives rise to an intermeshing community of regional countries friendly to both powers – or, in the words of President Xi, "a circle of friends common to both countries."[94]

In pursuing the strategy of *wangdao* as legitimate and benign leadership it is important that China resist the temptation of hierarchical arrogance. It needs to go back to the wise counsel of Zhou Enlai, noted earlier, that China must eschew the practice of categorizing countries into big and small and expecting the latter to show deference to the former. Most of China's neighbors have accepted China's rise and its centrality in regional affairs as a geopolitical fact, but they will not stomach Chinese hierarchy as a normative principle. These countries feel no less strongly than China about their post-colonial right to sovereignty and nonintervention. How to exercise benign authority without demanding hierarchical obedience, which is the essence of responsible leadership, is one key challenge for China's Asia policy in the years ahead. Another is how to make its regional policy more consistent. For China's neighbours, nothing undermines trust more thoroughly than not knowing whether China will be domineering or reassuring.

Tensions in the South China Sea offer a good case for illustrating our plea for a consensual policy based on reassurance and informed by the larger goal of developing *raison de système* in Asia. The disputes between China and other claimant states have significant implications for the distribution of maritime rights, including resource extraction and military activities. China's industrial-scale island building on seven Spratly reefs since 2013 has raised the strategic stakes considerably.[95] The US is embroiled in these disputes because it fears the prospect of Chinese domination of the South China Sea and the consequent erosion of its strategic primacy. Since 2015 the US Navy has been conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations to challenge China's island building. The Trump and Biden administrations intensified the scale and pace of these operations, all the while buttressing traditional deterrence with large military presence and exercises involving aircraft carriers and allied forces.[96]

Xuetong, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[94] Xi Jinping, 'Wei goujian zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi er buxie nuli' (Working Tirelessly to Construct a New Model of Major Country Relations between China and the United States), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), A2, 7 June 2016.

[95] Feng Zhang, "China's Long March at Sea: Explaining Beijing's South China Sea Strategy, 2009-2016," *Pacific Review*, Vol. 33, No. 5 (2020), pp. 757-87, at p. 774.

[96] Ronald O'Rourke, "U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), p. 34.

A satisfactory way to manage and resolve South China Sea disputes is for states involved to clarify their claims, bring them into line with prevailing international law and norms, and work toward a negotiated settlement based on fair and reciprocal compromise. China has partially clarified its legal claims in the South China Sea but has deliberately maintained some ambiguity in order to preserve diplomatic flexibility and bargaining leverage in future negotiations.[97] It is both unwilling and unable to be completely clear about its claims, as a national consensus on its claims is still being debated inside the country.[98] Nevertheless, Beijing should reassure regional countries and the US by rejecting the contentious U-shaped line as a national boundary. That line would make the 85 percent of the South China Sea enclosed by it China's internal waters under its exclusive sovereign control and jurisdiction.[99]

Such reassurance would be groundbreaking for China, but would likely fall short in fully allaying regional concerns. China's vast claims to maritime rights based on sovereignty over all of the islands would still make its neighbors nervous. They would fear that a powerful but impatient China might resort to force to realize these interests. China would need to enhance reassurance by imparting credibility to any promises of restraint in the South China Sea. This could be accomplished through an irrevocable commitment to peaceful management and settlement of disputes. It could take the form of a binding code of conduct to be negotiated between China and the ten ASEAN member states. A consultation process along this line had in fact begun in 2017, but was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and worsening regional tension. Reassurance also needs to come from the US. Having long sought such a commitment from China, the US should pledge full support for diplomatic efforts between China and its neighbors, whether bilateral or multilateral, to achieve a peaceful settlement. It should refrain from taking advantage of the disputes to oppose China for its own strategic purposes such as preserving maritime dominance, as Chinese elites suspect.[100]

China's sustained commitment to peace will lessen regional countries' fear of its coercion and domination and reduce the need for the US to aggressively

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[97] Feng Zhang, "Assessing China's Response to the South China Sea Arbitration Ruling," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (2017), pp. 440-59, at p. 450.
[98] Feng Zhang, "Chinese Thinking on the South China Sea and the Future of Regional Security," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 132, No. 3 (2017), pp. 435-66.
[99] On the U-shaped line, see Zhiguo Gao and Bing Bing Jia, "The Nine-Dash Line in the South China Sea: History, Status, and Implications," *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 107, No. 1 (2013), pp. 98-123; Chris P. C. Chung, "Drawing the U-Shaped Line: China's Claim in the South China Sea, 1946-1974," *Modern China*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2016), pp. 38-72.
[100] Wu Xinbo and Michael Green, "Regional Security Roles and Challenges," in Nina Hachigian, ed., *Debating China: the US-China Relationship in Ten Conversations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 198-220, at p. 204.

bolster military deterrence. The result would be lowered tension, enhanced trust, and greater stability in the region. The disputes themselves will take a long time to resolve, necessitating careful management in the interim. But a region-wide reassurance through a commitment to peace and restraint between China and its neighbors and a US commitment to diplomacy will stabilize the interim situation, creating a favorable environment for the eventual settlement of disputes. In this manner China and the US will join hands in developing *raison de système* for Asia, all the while easing their bilateral tensions. Together these developments will make a significant contribution to steering deep pluralism toward a consensual direction.

Conclusion

Deep pluralism describes the emerging structural trends of a global society in which power, wealth and cultural and political authority are distributed diffusely within a system that has high interaction capacity and is strongly interdependent. We have shown in this paper that China has significantly shaped the evolution of deep pluralism since the founding of the PRC in 1949. It has consistently held an anti-hegemonic position since the Cold War years and has more recently supported multipolarity and economic globalization, thus contributing to diminishing the dominance of superpowers in world politics. It has advocated solidarity with the Third World during the Cold War and pursued economic cooperation with developing countries after the Cold War, thus raising the political and economic status of the Global South. It has endorsed Asian regionalism since the 1950s and taken concrete steps to support ASEAN-led regional cooperation since the 1990s, thus promoting regionalism as a general feature of deep pluralism.

There is, however, an important unresolved question in China's promotion of deep pluralism. Does it prefer the consensual or contested form? Consensual pluralism means that the main players in global society not only tolerate the material, cultural, ideological, and actor-type differences of deep pluralism, but also respect and even value them as expressions of diversity. Contested pluralism, by contrast, implies substantial resistance to the material and ideational reality of deep pluralism. The history of Chinese foreign policy shows that sometimes China went clearly in one direction (e.g. contested under Mao; more consensual under Deng), and sometimes, most notably on the regional level, it went both directions at once.

This contradiction informs our normative discussion about the future of Chinese foreign policy. China should do more to further shape consensual pluralism in ways that will serve both its own interest and the common interest of regional and international society. The choices for China are between those motivated by *raison d'etat* (narrow self-interest) and *raison de système* (system-wide

responsibility incorporating enlightened self-interest). For its professed goals of international peace and development, and especially for its aspiration of building “a community with a shared future for humankind,” it is imperative that China promote a consensual form of deep pluralism in the spirit of *raison de système.* In the Asian region, where its regional policy is entangled with its US policy, this would require it to ameliorate contested deep pluralism in its policies toward the US while adopting a consistent strategy of reassurance toward its neighbors.