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**CHINA AND THE CONTESTATION OF LIBERAL WORLD ORDER**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper analyzes the People's Republic of China from a Constructivist viewpoint. Traditional international relation's theories, such as Realism, tend to treat states as imageary billiard balls, believing that their actions can be predicted. This paper argues that a different approach should be taken, focusing on Chinese self-perception, how they see themselves now and how the perception has changed from the establishment of PRC in 1949. In order to understand China, a range of highly important politico-philosophical concepts such as *Tianxia* and Traditionalism will be touched upon. The significance of historical Chinese-centered East-Asian order and the Chinese challenging entry into the Westphalian state-system in the XIX century will be tackled. The ultimate aim is to find out whether China is content on its status in Liberal-values based international system. The conclusion is that eventhough its values significantly differs from Liberalism, the system's structure has helped it to rise hence it is not realistic to expect that it would reform it substantially.

**Keywords:** China, International system, Tianxia, Constructivism, Liberalism

## INTRODUCTION

Fukuyama's (1989) famous essay captured the atmosphere during the falling of the Soviet bloc and seemingly triumphal Western Liberal values in 1989. Thirty years after the 'triumph' of Western Liberal values, they are evidently challenged by the People's Republic of China (further – China). For the XXI century, China is arguably the most significant topic in the field of international relations. Considering the context, the dominant theories existing in the field (Realism and Liberalism) have plenty of analytical shortcomings on how China sees itself and what the country's values are. Once these factors are taken into consideration, it is possible to have a more accurate understanding of China's role in the international system, now and forecasting it for the future. This paper argues that the English School and Constructivism can provide for a more nuanced theoretical framework to comprehend China. There is a distinct difference between the international system and international society, and this premise could be considered a prerequisite for this research work, thus Barry Buzan's take on the issue is to be presented at first. Constructivism focuses on ideas thus by looking at China from its ideal level it is possible to analyze its international behaviour. The paper presents three aspects of how to approach it: Traditionalism, Realism, and Liberalism. Firmly attached to Traditionalism is the concept of *Tianxia*, which is presented before the ideas mentioned above.

China is an integral part of the international system but is it content on its status on it? To find an answer for this, it is necessary to look at Chinese international relations scholars, who tend to refer to Chinese philosophy and ancient state-system of China. A diverse set of *intra*-Chinese values are for a large degree contradictory to Liberal Western values, and since the majority of current international institutions are based on Liberal values, the research question of thesis is visible; until what degree China is willing to integrate into the international system which is based on Liberal values, or does it have a will to reform the system to reflect its own values? The discourse analysis offers the most suitable methodology to approach the research question with its focus on gaining deeper knowledge of the topic (China in this case) through analysing multiple Chinese self-analysis. The analysis will be based on a comprehensive review of academic material,

covering both Western and Chinese sides. Western scholars will be used to mainly analyse Chinese integration into international systems (historical and current), and Chinese scholars to reveal underlying Chinese values and their difference to Liberal values.

The first chapter is divided into three parts: Western theoretical approaches, China in international systems and China in the United Nations (UN). Western theoretical approaches mixes English School and Constructivism by first presenting how state identity is constructed, and how the identity affects on states' integration into institutions. International system has a strong influence on state identity, thus it is presented together with a largely utopian international society concept. The reason why international society is an utopian concept is logical, it has never existed. However, regarding the research question it is important topic since international society is mostly understood as a value-based entity, and the willingness of China to fit into this kind of structure is unclear. The second part of the first chapter gives attention to the Chinese understanding of their role in the historical and current international system. The last part combines the previous two sections and puts China into the UN-bound framework, how its self-perception has evolved and how it has affected its role in the UN. The second chapter focuses on Chinese values and starts with the *Tianxia* concept which is followed by Traditionalism and Realism with Chinese characteristics. This chapter is highly important since it reveals opposing values of Chinese compared to assumed Liberal values, and most of the sources used are China-originated. The last chapter is the discussion part on China and Liberalism. The crisis of Liberal Democracies has connection to the rise of China, but China lacks soft power, which is a crucial power aspect. These two are presented together to get comparative analysis of Liberal Democracies vs China. The final part of the paper presents China on Liberal international structures, and the main idea is to see the depthness of Chinese integration into international system. Ikenberry (2008) underlines that China has been able to benefit from existing structures, and hence would not have the will to reform them.

# 1. CHINA IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

## 1.1. State identity and the European international system

Constructivism as a social theory offers tools to analyze state identity. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (2001, 392) define Constructivism research interests to be as follows: “Constructivists focus on the role of ideas, norms, knowledge, culture, and argument in politics, stressing, in particular, the role of collectively held or ‘intersubjective’ ideas and understandings on social life”. The interaction between humans is more shaped by ideas than materials and the most important ideas are shared by many, and these great ideas construct an actor’s identity. Constructivism has a research focus on ‘social facts’, like sovereignty and rights, which exist since people believe that they exist. Finnemore and Sikkink lists Constructivism’s primary theoretical opponents materialistic and individual theories, namely Neorealism and Neoliberalism. A shared concept for these theories is the rational choice which means that actors act rationally to maximize utilities. In Neorealism and Neoliberalism, actors are states who aim for material security and wealth and take identities for a large degree for granted, whereas in Constructivism the ideas are the focus point (Ibid., 393).

Perhaps the most well-known Constructivist scholar is Alexander Wendt (1989). His publication discusses the importance of ideas. He writes that humans and states have relational identities. For example, a person can be a brother, son, and citizen simultaneously, and state can be sovereign, ‘leader of the free world’ and imperial power (Ibid., 398). Wendt defines an institution as a structure consisting of identities and interests. Institutions have norms and rules, but their effectiveness depends on participants socialization level, and their functioning is based on actors’ ideas. The collective knowledge of participants allows institutions to be above individual-level thus diminish the possibility of an embodiment of institution (Ibid., 399). Wendt concludes his institutionalization analysis with the following statement:

On this view, institutionalization is a process of internalizing new identities and interests, not something occurring outside them and affecting the only behavior; socialization is a cognitive process, not just a behavioral one. Conceived in this way, institutions may be cooperative or conflictual, a point sometimes lost in scholarship on international regimes, which tends to equate institutions with cooperation. There are essential differences between conflictual and cooperative

institutions to be sure, but all relatively stable self-other relations-even those of 'enemies'- are defined intersubjectively.

Buzan defines the phenomenon of the international system as a system which consists of units (states) and interaction between them (1993, 331). This interaction occurs according to an agreed code of conduct, and by interaction, it is meant war, diplomacy, trade, migration, and movement of ideas. Buzan states that the current international system existed after European powers spread their influence globally which led to different regions having contacts between each other. He points out that the intensity of contacts has varied from low intensive ancient civilizations to the high intense international system at the end of the XX century.

One of the founding theoretical approaches of the English School came with Hedley Bull (1977, 13) when he gave his classical definition of international society: “[a] society of states (International society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a universal set of rules in their relations to one another, and share in the working of common institutions”. In his turn, Buzan states that the international system is before international society, society cannot exist without a system (Buzan., 331). He further distinct international society into two variants, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The *Gemeinschaft* (civilizational) concept is more based on shared values and identity, and evolves as a historical process, whereas *Gesellschaft* (functional) is constructed society where common norms, institutions, and rules are built into the system, and the members do not necessarily share the same values. Buzan continues that *Gesellschafts* based international society has never existed, but it could be the logical establishment in an intensively interconnected world where it is in the interests of leaders to have common rules to avoid conflicts and maximize benefits from interactions (Ibid., 333).

## **1.2. China and international systems**

### **1.2.1 Sino- centric international system**

Erik Ringmar (2012) compares three separate international systems: the Sino-centric system in China, Tokugawa in Japan and the Westphalian system. He justifies his research with the fact that for understanding the modern-day international system's interactions and problems, it is needed to

understand historical experiences with non-Eurocentric bias. Ringmar uses the Qing dynasty era as an example of the Sino-centric system. He defines the system as:

The Sino-centric international system, in other words, was both hierarchical and centripetal with China and its emperor located at a center that the constituent units of various kinds and sizes encircled in increasing distant orbits. Yet the ritual submission to the emperor did emphatically not imply political suzerainty. The emperor did not claim sovereignty over the system as a whole and the constituent units were free to carry on their affairs much as they pleased.

He states that Chinese had for centuries regulated relations with foreigners according to the tributary-system rules- “a set of rules, established and enforced by the imperial court, which obliged foreign nations to send delegations to the Chinese capital at fixed intervals” (Ibid., 4). Ringmar writes that the tributary-system was win-win cooperation since China got international recognition for its status and cultural supremacy. Conversely, the new rulers of tributary-states got from the emperor the recognition for their ruling (Ibid).

Ringmar compares the understanding of space on Westphalian and Sino-centric tributary system. He writes that on Westphalian system space is territorial and atomistic, and borders are given importance. This leads to an emphasis on sovereignty where the state can only be fully sovereign over particular territory or not sovereign at all. The sovereignty of states leads to constant negotiations between the countries. On Sino-centric-tributary system space is relational and the primary importance is given to a state’s relation to the central system. Sovereignty over particular territory is not absolute- it can be either shared with others or non-existent (Ibid., 13). Getting the membership of a system differentiated between the systems since on the Westphalian system, only with the recognition of others state can become a state, and the problem of getting the recognition often led to military conflicts (Ibid., 14). The tributary system was different since all the envoys who had acceptance from their ruler were included, and the Chinese believed that bigger the number of participants, more successful the audience (Ibid., 15).

### **1.2.2 Abandoning of Sino-centrism and joining the European international system**

As Ringmar noted, traditional Chinese understanding of sovereign differs from the Westphalian notion. Chen Yudan (2015) analyses how China was forced to transform from tributary-system into a member of the Westphalian state system. In the tributary system the concept of sovereignty

was unpresent since there was only one central authority, the Chinese emperor, to whom others regarded as the sole sovereign of the region (Ibid., 40). To underline this, he presents part of a correspondence between English King George III and the Chinese emperor, where the King suggests the notion of sovereignty, but the Emperor refuses. This refusal was due to the Chinese understanding that only the emperor can be the sovereign. Yudan referred to XIX century Western invasions and followed ‘semi-colonialization’ of China as the historical timeframe, where Chinese refer when they want to highlight the importance of sovereignty (Ibid., 41). He divides China into two, old and new China. Old China appeared from the opium wars until the establishment of PRC in 1949, and modern China afterward. He states that much of the legitimacy of the ruling party, the Communist Party, comes from highlighting their role on gaining back the national sovereignty from Japan and Western powers (Ibid., 42). The economic reform at the end of the 1970s transformed China from the ideological revisionist state towards *status quo* country, and the importance of sovereignty was highlighted. Yudan gives an example of this new policy line from China and Great Britains’ negotiations of Hong Kong’s status in 1984. Deng Xiaoping stated during the negotiations: “Sovereignty is not negotiable if Hong Kong was not returned, Chinese government today would be no more than the government of late Qing dynasty” (Ibid., 47). This statement emphasizes the difference between the ‘old’, and the ‘new’ China.

After China was forced to join the Western-oriented international system, the emergent question was whether China would also adapt to Western values. David Armstrong (2015) looks to Sino-Japanese war in 1894 as the starting point for the Chinese debate about Western values and ideas. China was defeated by Japan, followed by a discussion of whether China should adopt Western Democratic values and scientific knowledge to catch up with the development. The second time debate became relevant when Deng Xiaoping started economic reform at the end of the 1970s, and gradually integrated the Chinese economy into the World economy. There was uncertainty whether transform to the capitalistic economy would lead to acceptance of other Western values such as individualism and Democracy. Events such as Tiananmen square incident and repression of human right activist Liu Xiaobo suggest that China has not accepted all the Western values (Ibid., 76). Armstrong uses Chinese survival from global financial crises in 2008 as the defining moment for their policies. He ponders whether their better resistance of crisis proved that their ‘state capitalism’ was inferior to the Western market economy. This Chinese handling of the financial crisis will be later analyzed from soft power perspective (Ibid., 77).

## **1.2.2 Critique for Eurocentrism**

Eurocentrism is without a doubt one of the core topics among Chinese scholars. Interestingly many of them write about international society, although Buzan stated (check previous subchapter) that international society has never existed. The leading Chinese scholar Qin Yaqing (2010) criticizes the English School approaches due to their biased Eurocentric approach. He criticizes that European society has been taken as a model for the international society without considerations of other societies such as Indian, Chinese or Islamic. He argues that due to Eurocentric biases many features of international society are seen as universal when in reality they are unique European features (Yaqing., 134). Xiaoming Zhang (2011) goes furthermore with Chinese relation to international society in his English School engagement. He has a similar approach with Yaqing by criticizing the Eurocentrism of international society. Zhang states that European countries decided the standard of ‘civilized’, thus made their definition of civilization as a *de jure* universal. According to him, European superior military power left no chances to other civilizations than accommodating to it (Ibid., 771). Zhang reminds about the fact that before the Western invasion in the XIX century, China was the center of East Asia for over 2000 years and considered itself as the only civilized state and others as barbaric.

## **1.3 China in the United Nations**

### **1.3.1 From membership to anti-imperialism**

Once the Chinese historical process of becoming a member of the current international system is known, the text moves to analyze Chinese participation in the United Nations. The UN part is based on Wei Liu’s (2014) book, and essential aspects to focus on are Chinese changed self-perception and how it has affected their actions. To avoid confusion, the full name People’s Republic of China (PRC) is used until its acceptance of the UN membership in 1971. Chinese interest in establishing the UN was high, it took part in the conference where the Charter was prepared and signed it among the first ones. PRC was established in 1949 which forced the Republic of China (ROC) government to flee to Taiwan. This made China’s UN membership complicated issue since the membership was initially given to the ROC government. The PRC was *de jure* excluded from the UN membership (Ibid., 26). According to Liu, one of the key reasons why the exclusion caused insecurity among PRC leadership was the fact, that the UN membership was legal recognition of sovereignty on international system, which PRC now lacked. ROC

represented China on the UN until 1971, when the General Assembly voted in favor of PRC and replacement of the ROC. The result came as a surprise for the PRC and the international community. The reason behind the result was the newly independent states which increased the number of PRC supportive votes drastically on the General Assembly (Ibid., 28).

The first phase of Chinese participation in the UN concentrates on the period between the launch of PRC's membership until 1982. Liu defines that during this time Chinese self-image was anti-imperialist, Third World and a socialist state (Ibid., 111). The anti-imperialist image was to be against the superpowers, The US and the Soviet Union. The second image as the Third World country refers to Mao's 'three world theory', which he developed in 1974 and where there was three-dimension classification for the countries. The first one is the first World, which consists of the US and the Soviet Union. The second World consists for instance Europe and Japan and what differs them from the first World is the lack of resources and atomic bombs. However, according to theory, the second World countries were allies of the superpowers. The Third World then consists rest of the countries which are much poorer and non-aligned (Ibid., 113). The last self-image of Liu's three dimensions was a socialist state. Liu states that it was a natural stance due to an ideological competition of the Cold War and Chinese domestic Cultural Revolution, which was an extreme leftist approach and had an impact on China's UN participation (Ibid., 114). Considering PRC' participation in the UN during this period, Liu writes that the main priority for it was to be the only recognized government of China (Ibid., 123). Its participation was passive, and the main aim was to stand against the superpowers whom it believed sometimes manipulating the UN for own interests. That is why PRC for example, did not send troops or supported the UN-mandated peacekeeping operations (Ibid., 124). PRC's decision not to become representative of the Third World allowed it the possibility to stay between the superpowers and Third World. Liu concludes China's UN participation being "symbolic active and substantive inactive" (Ibid., 125).

### **1.3.2 Period of reforms**

China had a new paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, and its self-perception changed. The new self-images were developing country, peace lover and cooperator. The developing country is almost a synonym for above mentioned Third World country, and during this timeframe its appearance increased on official documents. The difference of these terms was that with a developing country it was meant economic development, in contrast to the Third World image which referred to non-

alignment. Due to the central planning of the Chinese economy and the failure of plans such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese economy was underdeveloped. Under the leadership of Deng, the focus was changed from class struggle to economic development (Ibid., 128). The term ‘peace lover’ definition was situational. Liu states that when it appeared alongside anti-imperialist statements, its meaning was conflictual suggesting a revisionist approach. When it appeared together with a developing country, it suggested being a *status quo* country (Ibid., 130). The third term cooperator meant that China was willing to integrate into international affairs and the World economy (Ibid., 131).

Chinese participation in the UN changed to more active. The first sign of it was its ‘yes’ votes for resolutions concerning peacekeeping missions and joining of arms controls regimes (Ibid., 142). Regarding the support of peacekeeping resolutions, Liu reminds that China held a firm stance on sovereignty and continued being against the superpowers and for the Third World (Ibid., 143). Chinese new self-image being a developing country and cooperator was further emphasized with its participation on all the UN organs.

### **1.3.3 Collapse of the Soviet Union and deepening integration**

The main difference between the two Deng’s leadership is the collapse of the Soviet Union. The democratization movement which started from Europe ended up to China, to Tiananmen Square demonstrations in Beijing. Tiananmen Square demonstrations were famously violently suppressed by the army (Ibid., 145). Liu points out that during this period Deng Xiaoping was *de facto* leader although Jiang Zemin was *de jure*. This was because of Deng’s high influence on behind the scenes (Ibid., 146). The Tiananmen incident and democratization movement were perceived as a threat for regime thus use of anti-imperialism image reappeared, and the use of cooperator decreased between 1990-1991. Kerry Brown (2016) also considers the Chinese understanding of the Soviet collapse and its consequences. He writes that whereas in West the collapse was seen as victory and liberation, on Chinese viewpoint it can be seen as an existential disaster which led to the decline of Russia and revealed that the West is not friend with anyone else except himself (Brown, 132). For Chinese officials, the post-1992 Russia remains as the bad example (Ibid). Liu concludes from these changing patterns of behavior, that when China feels its sovereignty being threatened, it turns to anti-imperialism. Cooperation occurs when it does not feel threatened (Liu., 147). The interesting image which started to appear was the Great Power status, and Liu argues that it was

due to the collapse of the bipolar system. China was willing to build a new multipolar system it being one of its pillars (Ibid., 148).

Liu argues that China on this stage abandoned its Third World status and became more active on the UN (Ibid., 163). This is visible from their support to various peacekeeping missions like Cambodian and Bosnian cases. To Cambodia they sent 800 military engineers to support reconstructions. Regarding Bosnia, they accepted the resolution where peacekeepers were allowed the use of force in specific conditions like when they were protecting civilians and for self-defense purposes. China also became more active in joining the arms control regimes and it joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention (Ibid., 164). Liu points out the influence of systemic change after the collapse of the Soviet. The US remained as the sole hegemon for to whom China wanted to avoid confrontation and have low profile behavior. More importantly, China was now a significant power which influenced the UN (Ibid., 165).

#### **1.3.4 Great Power**

This stage saw the rise of the new leader, Jiang Zemin. Liu states that opposite to Deng and Mao, Jiang cannot be described as the paramount leader due to his lack of revolutionary experience and personal authority (Ibid., 167). Chinese self-perception increasingly moved towards *status quo* characteristics and perceptions such as developing country, peace lover and cooperator gained attention. Revisionist images such as anti-imperialism decreased (Ibid., 168). The Great Power status was the perception the most increased during this timeframe. Liu uses as an example of the ASEAN regional forum conference in 1996, where the Chinese Foreign Minister Qian spoke about China being a Great power. Another example of this was the Chinese attendance of Group Eight (G8) meeting in 2003. Previously China saw it as 'rich men's club', but now wanted to take part in global governance as a Great Power (Ibid., 169).

The Great Power status made Chinese participation in the UN more active, especially regarding peacekeeping and arms controls. China accepted the authorization of Chapter VII in Croatia. The Chapter meant that the Security Council could take coercive measures against member states (Ibid., 193). After the Croatian mission, China started to show unconditional support for peacekeeping missions, a paradigmatic change from its past behavior. To underline the change, China even sent armed police officers to support the peacekeeping mission in East Timor (Ibid.,

194). Regarding arms controls, China continued the signing and ratifying of disarmament and non-proliferation treaties. It was a strong supporter of the Security Council Resolution 1540 which was against trafficking and acquisition of Weapons of Mass Destruction (Ibid., 195). Increased international responsibility can also be seen from Chinese coordinating role on the North Korean nuclear issue (Ibid., 196)

Buzan (2010) complements Liu's analysis. Buzan states that after the 1949 revolution China abandoned integration into international society and opposed West on the Cold war. Chinese alienation from West ended to the restoration of UN membership in 1971. During the 1970's China increasingly changed focus from class-based competition to state-based, which also meant an abandonment of economic self-reliance and introduction of the 'four modernizations' policy. The 'reform and opening up' policy started at the end of the 1970s, leading to Chinese reintegration to international system. Buzan sees that during this time the reintegration was mainly due to domestic reforms, when in the pre-1949 period the cause was external pressure. He writes that on Mao's period China was seeking a revolutionary rise in the Western-dominated *status quo* but changed into a peaceful rise within the *status quo* during Deng's period (Ibid., 12). The risk of opening up policy was that on the global level postmodern developments like human rights issues gained attention, and like on pre-1949 period, China again was not willing to fully Westernize itself and was on a threat of being isolated from international society. However, Its participation in international organizations and acceptance of the majority of rules and norms were the proof that it was increasingly *status quo* power (Ibid., 13).

It is time for asking the last question, what is Chinese status currently and what are the prospects. In Buzan's vision, China is not a *status quo* country but instead a reformist revisionist (Ibid., 18). His definition of reformist revisionist is the following: "A reformist revisionist accepts some of the institutions of international society for a mixture of calculated and instrumental reasons. But it resists and wants to reform, others, and possibly also wants to change its status" (Ibid). Yaqing (2010) refers to Buzan's definition of China as reformist revisionist by stating that this view is too narrow, it sees Chinese participation to international society only as a fully integrated partner or as a possible contender and overthrower of the primary institutions, without any middle solution.

## 2. CHINESE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES

To understand China it is necessary to cover its ideational basis, and this paper will do it by presenting two theories which give different prospects of it. Traditionalism has an emphasis on Ancient Chinese philosophy, and its values are often contradicting to Liberal. By using Realism with Chinese characteristics, it is possible to understand China in the contemporary international system. Before any theories can be used, the concept of *Tianxia* needs to be explained since it addresses the foundational Chinese values.

### 2.1. Heavenly mandate for universal rule

The concept of *Tianxia* plays a dominant role in Chinese international relations theories, and Tingyang Zhang (2006) made it internationally famous. The direct translation for *Tianxia* would be ‘all- under- heaven’, but it does not tell much about its content, thus he defines it more precisely as ‘an institutional world’, meaning World society which it differs from the current international system’s centrality of a nation-state concept (Ibid., 30). He further analyses that the idea of World society makes up the major contradicting issue between Chinese and Western political philosophy. Chinese see the World as the primary governmental unit where West see the nation-state (Ibid., 31). Firmly attached to *Tianxia* is the concept of ‘son of heaven’. It can be understood as a synonym for the emperor. Under the all- under- heaven the emperor rules territories below heaven which could be seen as a mandate for the universal rule. Zhang refers to Confucian master Mencius who stated that the justification for the emperor’s rule comes from the support of the people, and two variables are defining it: justification and legitimization. By justification he means the emperor’s ability to maintain the order which gives him popularity. Legitimization he explains vaguely meaning the legitimacy of establishing an empire which is supported by the people. Zhang writes that the *Tianxia* has absolute legitimacy in Chinese philosophy whereas the emperor gets legitimacy from the people . In theory, there are no limitations for who can be the emperor except that he needs to follow *Tao* (way), which brings happiness to the people. Zhang underlines the fact that any nation can lead the *Tianxia* and brings examples of Mongolians and Manchurians, who governed China for 400 years with *Tianxia* system (Ibid., 32)

The next important concept is the family and how it is related to *Tianxia*. In Chinese philosophy family has been the place where harmony, cooperation, common interest, and happiness exists.

The connection between *Tianxia* and family is visible when Zhang refers to *Tianxia* as the ‘world-family’, where all states belong, although precondition for a harmonious family is the homological compound of it. He explicitly states as a possible threat for harmony the Western ideas such as Democracy, equality, and liberty. The contradiction between individualism and family becomes inevitable when he states that in Western understanding the individual is the starting point in politics, whereas in China it is the group. Individual happiness can only be reached as a side effect from the group happiness (Ibid., 33). Finally, Zhang concludes that *Tianxia* has never existed and could be seen as a utopian ideal, something that should be aimed for but which in reality is non-existent. Chinese dynasties have tried and failed to establish it. An essential distinction between superpower and *Tianxia* is that *Tianxia* does not necessarily mean being a superpower, but instead the leader of the ‘family’ of countries. From this perspective, it suggests that China is not looking for global hegemony similar to the US (Ibid., 34).

The concept of *Tianxia* has theoretical self-contradictions what William A. Callahan (2008) points out. In the beginning, Callahan criticizes the omnipotent of *Tianxia* concept and parallelize it with theoretical physics which seeks ‘theory of everything’, as Callahan puts it. Callahan makes an important note from Chen’s original translation of Chinese classic, where the text is contradictory to Zhang’s interpretation. Zhang wrote that in *Tianxia* the most significant emphasis is on the World, not in individual-self. Callahan found out that it was not emphasized in the original text which instead suggested that the starting point is the individual (Ibid., 753). He also refers to concepts of ‘self’ and ‘others’, which have importance in *Tianxia*. Theory indicates that *Tianxia* is an all-inclusive system contradictory to the Western system which is exclusive for others. Callahan points out that *Tianxia* does indeed exclude others as the West does which is controversial since Zhang precisely criticizes West about contradicting self and others (Ibid., 754).

Callahan’s final critique refers again to the concept of all-inclusiveness but with a different approach. He ponders the question of what happens when someone does not want to be included in *Tianxia*, and uses examples of treatment of Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan. These areas are either part of China or what China *de facto* considers part of it. The areas have shown the somewhat indifferent attitude towards Chinese central governance, and Callahan uses harsh language to describe how China treats them due to the resistance- they are treated as a separatist regions (Ibid). It is relevant to ask how China would act in case of conflict if *Tianxia* is one day going to be

established? Would it use similar measures as with those mentioned regions or could the all-inclusiveness be achieved?

## **2.2. Chinese values**

### **2.2.1 Traditionalism as an opponent to Liberal values**

Yan Xuetong (2018) defines the following three main ideologies of China being Marxism, economic pragmatism and Traditionalism. This part will focus on Traditionalism due to its long-lasting influence on Chinese society and its relativeness to *Tianxia*. Traditionalism is a combination of values from the Ancient Chinese school of thoughts, not solely from Confucianism. The characteristic feature is the emphasis on leadership, ‘humane authority’, as Xuetong puts it, and the values referred to it such as Benevolence and Justice. Benevolence, Righteousness, and the Rites he gives special attention and compares them to equivalent Western ideas: equality, Democracy, and freedom. He explicitly mentions that Traditionalism is not an official ideology of PRC, but has been *de facto* chosen as the guiding principle on foreign affairs (Ibid., 9).

Xuetong parallel Benevolence to the Western concept of equality. He questions the idea that people should have equal rights since there are inherent disparities between them. Further, he analyses that balance as an underlying assumption on Liberalism leads to conflict between people, but he does not explain it more thoroughly. Change from equality to Benevolence is his suggestion to avoid conflicts. In Benevolence the emphasis is on the leader and his ability to control disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged actors (Ibid., 11). Merging of equality into Benevolence could be the solution according to Xuetong, and he changes the concept from equality and Benevolence to absolute equality and fairness. For absolute equality he uses an example of ‘first comes first serves’ principle, and for fairness or differentiated treatment, he takes a case from international climate change negotiations, where the burdening shares have been differentiated according to capabilities. He ends by suggesting that fairness could replace equality as the guiding international relations’ principle (Ibid., 12).

In Traditionalism the equivalent value for Democracy is Righteousness. Xuetong admits that Democracy gives legitimatization for authorities, but points out that it does not guarantee that authorities conduct just policies. As an example of it, he provides the US’ Congress authorization

of Iraqi war. A decision which was later revealed to have been based on invalid evidence of weapons of mass destruction. Another example of unjust policies on international organizations occurred when the Arab League decided to expel Syrian government and support the anti-governmental troops, a decision which escalated into civil war and can be seen as an unjust decision in humanitarian terms by democratic Arab League (Ibid., 13). Difference between Righteousness and Democracy is that Righteousness focuses on the result of the policy, whereas Democracy emphasizes the legitimation of it (Ibid., 14). Xueting then goes to great lengths presenting Democracy and Righteousness in the UN. He writes that the UN is working with Democratic principles, but the Security Council and its five permanent members can use vetoes which might lead to unjust consequences. By merging Democracy and Righteousness justice can be achieved. Xueting uses the UN resolution concerning South African apartheid regime as an example of a just policy; sanctions were simultaneously legitimized by the resolution and Righteous, hence the outcome has not been considered as an intervention to domestic affairs (Ibid). The last paralleling values what Xueting presents are freedom and Rites. He contradicts individual freedom and social order with the fact that individual freedom can exist in domestic circumstances due to the states' monopoly of violence, but in the international system the freedom of individual states can end up to systemic disorder (Ibid., 15). To avoid the disorder caused by this contradiction, he introduces the Rites.

Again, Xueting takes contradiction further and compares the laws and the Rites. The main difference is that the Rites have a pre-emptive effect, whereas the laws focus on punishing after the illegal activity has occurred. The Rites have a more comprehensive impact due to their coverage of areas where the laws do not operate. He criticizes the freedom of speech by using two examples where it caused violence: the release of the American movie *Innocence of Muslims* in 2012 and *Charlie Hebdo's* satirical cartoon about the Prophet Muhammad (Ibid). Xueting then compares the US and China since they are examples of Ritualistic and individualistic country, and also the two most powerful states in the international system (Ibid., 16). Understanding the importance of combining Ritualism and individualism could prevent future civilizational conflict between rising China and the US. He defines the combination of two as 'civic', which should be the guiding principle for the international norms and could exceed the Liberalism, and establish the 'human civilization' (Ibid., 17).

### **2.2.2 Realism with Chinese characteristics**

To continue with Chinese self-perception, it is important to consider Chinese national interest, and for this purpose Yong Deng's (1998) Neorealist analysis fits well. He starts by defining the three underlying assumptions of Realism. The primary importance is on state-centrism, a state is the main actor in international relations. The second one is that the international system is an anarchic system and the third refers to second by assuming international politics being about power politics (Ibid., 310). In the second part he focuses on Realism with 'Chinese characteristics'. He refers to the century of humiliation by Japan and the Western powers as the focal point for Chinese Realists. He underlines that Chinese scholars recognize the importance of multilateralism and interdependence on international relations, but mainly because they would like to see China taking maximum advantage of these structures (Ibid., 311).

Chinese foreign policy guideline 'the five principles of peaceful coexistence' was introduced in the 1950s. It has similarities with the UN Charter since both highlights the importance of sovereignty and non-interference on domestic issues. In 1988, Chinese leaders stated that these guidelines should become the leading principles of 'new international political order' (Ibid). Deng then writes about the globalization and the much speculated 'clash of civilizations', the term made famous by Samuel Huntington (1993). He states that in China scholars see it more as the nation-states' struggle for power than as the civilizational clash (Deng, 1998). On the following paragraphs he makes a distinction between national and ruling class (elite) interest. He states about the difference:

During the Maoist era, the Chinese theory on national interests was based on the Marxist class analysis which posits that, since the state is the tool of the ruling class, national interests are naturally the interests of the ruling class. In the post-Mao era, the invoking of national (instead of class) interest is a result against the reaction against the revolutionary diplomacy, viz., what the Chinese authors call the "ideologization" besetting Chinese foreign policy, especially in the 1960s.

Chinese realists differ from their Western counterparts with their stress on the low politics, meaning economics and technological development, contrary to Western Realists who emphasize high politics such as security. This is evident in Chinese Realists writings after the Cold War when the ideological and bloc thinking vane, and economic interest became the major issue (Ibid., 315). Contradictory to Traditionalist thinking with its value-based orientation, Deng concludes the Chinese Realist part with the following statement:

Compared with Westerners, Chinese are more accustomed to analyzing international relations from the perspective of practical interests. They are less likely to believe that some spiritual beliefs [values, religions, and ideologies] can also be a driving force behind diplomacy ... The Chinese see international exchanges more in terms of the motives of interest and the gains-losses thereof.

Liu Mingfu wrote Neorealist book of Chinese national interests and William Callahan (2012) analyses the book in his article. Mingfu as a senior colonel of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has written a book that reflects contradicting values than publicly praised 'peaceful rise' and 'harmonious world'. His vision is that China should militarize itself to guard its economic interests. He is giving particular attention to the US' with the ultimate aim of militarization being challenging the US. The only way to become strong is by having the combination of economic and military strength, as Mingfu puts it: "turn some 'money bags' into 'ammunition belts'". Mingfu uses the concept of 'peace through strength' to justify his arguments. Peace will be achieved by strengthening the Chinese military capabilities which would then prevent the US' attack on China (Ibid., 634).

Ultimate aim on his vision is to become the number one military power, which can be achieved peacefully if the US accommodates to rise of China instead of challenging it (Ibid). Callahan finds the second main argument of the book being the conflict between the Chinese single-party system and American democracy. Mingfu argues that the Chinese regime is a better model for the World since competition between the Great Powers is normal, but the rivalry between political parties is harmful. The contest with the US he sees as a zero-sum game where there can be only winner and loser. He sees that if China cannot achieve the number one status, it will end up to sidetrack. To conclude, the interesting notion what Callahan brings out is the online poll made among the newspaper Huanqiu Shibao readers- over 80% voted that China should exercise military supremacy, a result which is contradicting to official statements (Ibid., 637).

To conclude Realism with Chinese characteristics, it needs to be pointed out that there seems to be the consensus among Chinese to strengthen their international status. This could mean the potential for conflict, but Chinese scholars share the idea that it is a risk worthy of taking. What

are the odds that these aspirations could be actualized in the current international system? To find an answer, discussion on China and Liberalism is needed.

### **3. DISCUSSIONS: CHINA AND LIBERALISM**

This chapter moves from Chinese self-perception towards finding the answer to the research question. Liberal topics such as Democracy were touched on the previous chapter from the ideal level, and Chinese opposite stance was clear. On the final chapter, the aim is to find whether opposing happens only on an ideal level, or if it can be found on the structures as well. Approach is divided into three parts: the crisis of Liberal Democracy, Chinese soft power deficit, and Liberal internationalism.

#### **3.1 The crisis of Liberal Democracy and the Chinese soft power deficit**

Yascha Mounk and Stefano Foa (2018) have devoted academic interest in Liberalism and Democracy. They start by referring to the end of the XX century when the US had turned out to be victorious against the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and the political system it represented, the Liberal Democracy, dominated the century. They then argue that the success of Liberal Democracy might be due to its civic values, but more likely due to the economic success of Western Europe and the collapse of rival autocratic ideologies at the end of the Cold War (Ibid., 29). The recent appearance of populist movements and the fallen belief on Democracy they explain with materialistic reasons since the West has not been able to maintain high economic growth. They refer to studies where the result has been that the importance of Democracy has decreased among Westerners. The autocratic countries' share of the global GDP is above half and continues to increase, according to IMF prediction (Ibid., 30). This paradigm shifts from Liberal Democracies economic dominance to a situation where autocracies make over half of global GDP, can be seen as the real challenge for Liberal Democracy. Mounk makes two future scenarios, either some of the rising autocracies changes to Liberal Democracy or there will be a shift back to competition between political systems, similar to the Cold War (Ibid., 31)

Mounk and Foa explain the success and the attractiveness of Liberal Democracies being due to a combination of economic and soft power, the term made famous by Joseph S Nye (1990) and meaning on his own words:

Soft co-optive power is just as important as hard command power. If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow. If it can establish international norms consistent with its society, it is less likely to have to change.

If a large part of Liberal Democracy's success is based on its attractiveness in terms of soft power, the same cannot be said about China's current soft power account. Nye (2012) analyzed Chinese soft power. He states that Chinese soft power status has increased recently with the spreading of Confucius institutions, increased tourism and the rising numbers of international students, and in political terms by joining various international regimes and organizations. Nye then turns to criticism by stating that the great impact of the Beijing Olympics was lost afterward due to the crackdown of domestic human rights activists. He concludes by saying that China loses much of its soft power potential because of its tight control of civil society, it is precisely the civil society which produces most of its soft power (Ibid., 154).

David Shambaugh (2013) offers a pervasive analysis of Chinese soft power. What makes it different from most of the accounts, is the fact that his contribution is made by using mostly Chinese references. His overall message is that soft power is increasingly important for China and has raised attention among officials and the public. He agrees with Nye that civil society is the primary source of soft power and the effectiveness of public diplomacy is dependent on that (Ibid., 209). Shambaugh then divides Chinese soft power approaches into two: 'the values as culture' and 'the soft power-as-culture' camps. For the first camp, he uses as an example professor Men, the famous Chinese soft power analyst. Men have advocated the following four Chinese values as universal values: harmony, morality, etiquette, and benevolence. During the interview with Shambaugh he, however, states the following: "We have lost our values-we do not have any common values at all. There is a vacuum of values in China. Nor do we have an ideology" (Ibid., 212). For the second camp, he takes Yu Xintian as the representer. Her approach is contradicting to Men's by focusing more on contemporary ideologies such as 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. In her concept ideas, systems, culture, values and the quality of people are together the soft power (Ibid., 213).

Besides culture and ideas, the second significant aspect is political. Yan Xuetong has contributed to soft power research, and Shambaugh uses his comparative study on mild power difference

between China and the US. Xueting found out that Chinese soft power is one-third of the US', and he offers an explanation for this deficit:

China's soft power is weaker than the US mainly in the aspect of its political system. China's development has only provided economic success but not political and social success. Culture is a resource like the military or economy, but political power is the capability to make use of those resources- without political power, we cannot utilize our soft power.

The last soft power aspect is the Chinese economic growth model. For it, Mounk, Nye, and Shambaugh have all devoted efforts. China with its impressive economic growth has been able in a few decades to raise hundreds of millions of people into 'Authoritarian modernity', as Mounk puts it (Mounk, 2018). Shambaugh introduces many names for this development but points out that it has never been the Chinese government's official strategy to promote this idea (Shambaugh, 2013). Nye underlines the fact that the Chinese economic growth model might look attractive in authoritarian countries, but it is not enough since the Democratic countries do not find it attractive (Nye, 2012). Mounk connects the Chinese Authoritarian modernity and the soft power of Liberal Democracy with the following statement: "in the eyes of their less affluent imitators around the world, their remarkable prosperity serves as a testament to the fact that the road to prosperity no longer needs to run through Liberal Democracy" (Mounk, 2018).

### **3.2 Successful integration into Liberal structures**

China's lack of soft power and the simultaneous crisis of Liberal Democracy as the leading form of governance leads to incoherencies. How is China's position on international structures, is it *status quo* or revisionist power? The two John Ikenberry's articles discourse Liberal Institutionalism but with different angles. The first article (2009) presents Ikenberry's concepts of Liberal Institutionalism versions 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0. The main focus will be given to 3.0 since it is mostly attached to China. The second article is a continuation of the first by pondering Chinese stance on Liberal Institutionalism. This part is essential regarding the research question since it tries to find an answer for Chinese commitment to mainly Liberal-value based institutions.

The first Ikenberry's article (2009) contemplates the evolution of Liberal internationalism from XX century to XXI century. He defines three distinct phases: 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0. The excellent starting point is by defining Liberal Internationalism with Ikenberry's own words:

Liberal Internationalism offers a vision of an open, rule-based system in which states trade and cooperate to achieve mutual gains. Liberals assume that peoples and governments have deep common interests in the establishment of a cooperative world order organized around principles of restraint, reciprocity, and sovereign equality.

He continues that Liberals assume that Democracies are more willing than authoritarian states to cooperate in the international system. He finds five variables which have changed on this definition on the XX century: participatory scope, sovereign independence, sovereign equality, the rule of law, and policy breadth and depth. With scope he means the nature of Liberal Order, does it have universal accessibility or is it exclusive, for example, limited only for Democracies (Ibid., 72). Sovereign independence means the degree of sovereignty what participating countries have. It can be based on the Westphalian notion of sovereignty which means that the state has full sovereignty. Another option is that the state's sovereignty is partly ceded for supranational institutions or equivalent (Ibid., 73). The sovereign equality inside the Liberal Order can be hierarchical when countries have differentiated statuses and duties or then based on strict sovereign equality. The role of the rule of law can be highlighted with the formation of institutions and regimes or then minimized with a minimal set of rules and norms. The last variable, the policy depth denotes the International Order's deepness. Does it consider only high politics like security or also low politics like social and economic issues (Ibid)?

Perhaps the primary importance in Ikenberry's 3.0 version shall be given to polarity change from the assumed US' unipolarity to multipolarity with several essential stakeholders. It would mean reforming international organizations to reflect changed power distribution, for example G-20 should gain more importance than G-7 or the Bretton Woods institutions. IMF and World Bank should reform their voting shares to reflect the new power balance, meaning more power for China (Ibid., 81). Interestingly in 3.0, the emphasis would be given to human rights issues and the use of responsibility to protect (R2P) protocol. It is interesting since the Chinese scholars underlined the

notion of national sovereignty and traditional values which are contradictory to the Western understanding of human rights. Ikenberry notices this contradiction, and he predicts that the international community will face challenges when trying to make decisions when and how to use R2P (Ibid., 82). On the conclusion part of 3.0, he discusses the possible breakdown of Liberal International Order when multilateral rule-based order would diminish and be replaced with mercantilism, regionalism, and bilateralism. It would not necessarily mean the complete collapse of the Liberal Order, but instead collapse of multilateralism and the introduction of centers of power, China being one of them (Ibid., 83). On the final paragraph, Ikenberry concludes that it is not sure whether China has the will to support any of the ‘versions’, and to find an answer for this, we need to look on Ikenberry’s second article (2008).

Ikenberry (2008) sees the accommodation of China into the Liberal International Order in a relatively positive light. He starts by stating that rising China faces an enormous challenge since it is not enough for it to challenge only the US but instead the whole Western-centred Order. To make it more difficult, the introduction of nuclear weapons has deteriorated the possibility to use military means for systemic changes. Ikenberry then uses much effort for describing how 2.0 Liberal order is the US’ led, but states that because of its universalistic inclusiveness China can integrate into it, and the Order can maintain its Western orientation (Ibid). To support his argument he quotes scholar Marc Lanteigne who stated:

What separates China from other states, and indeed previous global powers, is that not only is it ‘growing up’ within a milieu of international institutions far more developed than ever before, but more importantly, it is doing so while making active use of these institutions to promote the country’s development of global power status.

Chinese participation on the UN Security Council as the permanent member and adaption to the global capitalist economic system Ikenberry sees as the proof of Chinese willingness to cooperate under the Western Order. However, he notices that Chinese status on multilateral institutions such as IMF and World Bank will have a paradigm shift from ‘client’ to important stakeholder (Ibid).

## CONCLUSION

The research aim was to reveal that until what degree China is willing to integrate into current international system that has mostly Liberal values. One of the relevant findings were that China itself was leading own East-Asian international system for more than millenia, this fact should be taken into account for further research since it has vast impact on Chinese self-perception. Also the fact that with semi-colonialization and followed century of humiliation China was forced to join the European led international system and abandon its regional superior status cannot be dismissed. The importance of century of humiliation for Chinese self-perception is underlined on their Realism literature and it is simultaneously question of legitimation, since large part of the ruling Communist Party power is attached from ending the foreign oppressions and gaining territorial integrity. After presenting Chinese scholar's ideas, it could be clear to conclude that China is not satisfied with its status on the current international system. Ikenberry's analysis of Chinese accomodation into Liberal international organisations and Chinese active supportance the United Nations reveals that this is not necessarily the case. According to these analyses, China is currently an active participant in the existing international system and has the will to maintain it. The crisis of Liberal Democracy, in general, can be genuine with low economic growth rates, but the Chinese soft power part pointed out that the attractiveness of Liberal model has still advantage over Chinese model and its importance should not be undermined. What Chinese inevitably lack is a consensus about its values, which is visible throughout the research and might have an influence on its foreign policy choices.

China has different understanding of important Liberal notions such as human rights and Democracy, the facts that could raise tensions between China and its peers. Taking these into account it could be realistic to assume that the *Gemeinschaft*-type of international society is not possible, but the *Gesellschaft* is a different question. Barry Buzan thought that constructed international society has never existed, but in fact it might appear soon. Current international system is gradually transforming towards being the *Gesellschaft* international society due to increasing Chinese influence and different values. What facts would support the possibility of *Gesellschaft* international society? China is the World's greatest exporter, it is beneficial for it to have institutions supporting its economic interests, especially if the trade war with the US escalates. China has developed gradually from Mao's time revolutionary state into Buzan's definition of China being a reformist revisionist state, which could be the most accurate definition

of its current status on international system. Defining China as *status quo* country would be a misinterpretation, it has ambitious plans such as Belt and Road initiative and it has been establishing new country groupings like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Power of these is to be seen, but it is evident that China has will to gain more power inside the international system.

To make it clear, according to this research, China will not have the will to reform the international system to reflect its values. It seems content and benefits from the general structure of it , just it has intentions to raise its status on it. The lack of Chinese own discursive analysis and the existing literature's contradictions leave space for uncertainty. To tackle this uncertainty, the academic discipline of international relations need to renounce Eurocentrism and make more research on the identities of non-Western actors. To underline the importance of knowing Chinese values and identity, the aforementioned Belt and Road is a useful example. Once the grand-initiative's aims are analyzed through discursive perspect, it could be seen whether the initiative is indeed modern day version of *Tianxia*, where China is the universal ruler and other countries can join it due to all-inclusiveness of it. Recently escalated trade war with the US could also been analysed thoroughly if Chinese identity is known in more details.

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