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The Chinese concept of time: implications for the foreign policy-making

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前言

每个社会都有一套以文化为名的态度，价值观和信仰；文化使他们以某种方式思考、行事和沟通。文化不仅对人们日常生活的影响是巨大的，而且它在决策中的作用是非常重要的。影响一个国家领导人做决策的因素有很多，而其中之一是时间概念，也就是说人们如何看待时间，人们和它如何联系。

这篇论文的目的首先是分析时间文化的概念，然后了解它如何影响中国从二十世纪到现在的国内与外交决策。这篇论文分为三个章节：第一章介绍文化在国家和人口生活各个方面的重要性；第二章和第三章详细地解释中国的时间文化概念对国内与外交决策的影响。

第一章首先介绍不同国籍的学者多年来提出的不同文化定义。综合来讲是：文化体现的是当下社会典型的思维和行为方式的价值观、信仰、知识和习俗；文化对国家的各个生活方面都很重要。它不但在人类生活中的作用是无可取代的，而且对国内与外交决策的影响非常重要。对中国国内与外交决策发展过程产生巨大影响的文化因素很多，其中之一就是中国的时间文化概念。

我的出发点是用来翻译英文单词 *time* 的汉字：通常中国人用“时”这个汉字。从中国古代文学来看，这个词具有及时性、适时做事的含义。在这个章节中提到了很多来自不同历史时期的引文；它们证明了这个特殊时间文化概念的重要性。其次，在这些情况下，“时”这个汉字意味着一切都应该在适当的时候完成。

从中国文化的角度来看，任何事都不存在一个完全正确的时间点；然而，存在的是做某事的适当时机。而什么决定了一个时刻的正确性，就是周围的整体情况。这意味着我们必须非常关注事务的全局。

在这方面，国际关系专家秦亚青教授认为，中国文化的特点是四个重要的元素；它们被定义为中文的四个“性”或者英语的四个 C。这个四个“性”引导着中国人分析周围的现实的方法。

第一个是环境性以及从它得出的“势”假定；在中国文化的四个重要元素之中，这篇论文主要集中在环境性和从它引申出的“势”来探讨，论证中国人在他们所做的一

切事情中始终采用整体方法。整体观念的意思是中国人习惯先分析背景，围绕每个行动或决定评估整体形势，然后再考虑具体情况。做决策的过程，西方人习惯首先考虑个人，他们往往只考虑具体情况，而中国人习惯优先考虑整体环境。中国人展现的是一种整体的思维方式。因此，只有在分析并正确了解区分背景的特征之后，他们才能采取最恰当的决策并以最恰当的方式行事。从中国人的整体角度来看，始终保持连贯性并符合周围环境的大趋势极为重要。

当然，这种方法也适用于中国政策确定。因此，当决策者必须确定政策时，首先，中国人评估国际体系的总体情况、性质和趋势，然后才进行国内与外交事务的决策。

第一章的最后一部分还解释了中国文化的其他三个关键元素。虽然它们没有直接提及时间文化概念，但它们对于更好地理解中国人对每种情况的大局以及引导它的大趋势的分析也很重要。

在中国文化的四个重要元素之中，第二个是互系性以及从它得出的“关系”假定，以此说明中国人认为现实是由动态的关系组成；也就是说人与人之间的关系、人与环境的关系、所有事物之间的联系都是现实的组成部分。

然后，第三个中国文化重要元素是互补性与它的“和”假定。它假设世界上的一切都是由两种以和谐关系为特征的相反力量组成的。从中国文化角度来看，宇宙的本质是和谐。

最后，第四个中国文化重要元素是可变性以及从它得出的“变”假定。根据此理论，世界上的一切都处在持续不断、永无休止的变化中，而这些变化的最终目标是达成一切事务最真实、自然的状态：和谐。

这篇文论的第二章阐述了中国的时间文化概念与中国的“势”假定如何应用于中国的国内与外交决策。中国政治家在制定国内与外交政策和战略之前，往往会对所处时间点的特征进行事先分析，以了解它的大趋势。正如历史所教导的那样，正确时间判断或者错误时间判断都可能导致国家的成功或衰败。因此，认识时间和区别时间特征非常重要。一个正确的时间判断不但是制定战略方针，而且是明智外交决策的出发点。

绝大多数国际关系专家和不同国籍的学者以及中国的学者都把二十世纪前半叫做战争和革命时代。这个定义的原因非常明显：在如此短的时间内，世界已经发生了两次世界大战（第一次世界大战和第二次世界大战）；那种是在人类历史上没有先例的战争。并且，这两场灾难性的战争导致了无数革命的爆发，从无产阶级革命到民族民主革命。在这个年代中，中国一直遵循世界的趋势，保持连贯性并符合周围环境的大趋势。与所有其它国家一样，它不仅标志着战争，而且标志着革命，例如所谓的五四运动。

然而，二十世纪被分为两个时代：头五十年可称为战争和革命时代，而后五十年可称为和平与发展时代。关于和平与发展时代开始的日期出现了一些讨论，但最终大多数学者认为它已经在二十世纪五十年代末到二十世纪六十年代初期开始。其实从二十世纪五十年代以来，不再发生世界大战，相反，人们开始寻求和平、合作和共同发展。

但是，当世界经济、政治、社会和文化达到前所未有的发展时，中国领导人拒绝承认时代的变化，继续执行战争与革命时期同样的政策和战略。这种状况持续了大约三十年，导致中国失去了很多机会，落后于所有发达国家，并使经济走向了崩溃的边缘。

最后，这篇文论的第三章介绍从上世纪八十年代末到上世纪九十年代初，经过三十年的混乱之后，中国人对时代的判断开始发生变化。多亏邓小平的贡献，中国政府意识到其政策和战略不再符合时代和国际形势。北京评估了国际形势的总体情况、性质和趋势以后，明白世界已进入和平与发展时代。有了这种认识，中国也开始参与到这个新的时代。所以，中国不仅开始越来越注重经济建设，而且积极参与国际事务。没过多久结果就呈现到了世界面前：中国的经济增长非常可观，甚至比预期更快。

第三章的最后一部分还说明了中国在过去几年中如何充分参与和平与发展时代，并在国际社会发挥决定性的积极作用。事实上，从 2013 年以来，在习近平的领导下，中国也继续努力维护和平的国际环境，以通过与各国的合作共赢实现共同发展。

这篇文论以对国际社会及中华人民共和国未来的一些假设与考虑结束。在一个不断变化的世界中，不同国家之间和平合作的新协议不断出现，但与此同时，国际安全中新的非传统威胁日益发生，人们想知道未来几年引导国际社会与中国的趋势将会是什么？

Introduction

Every community and group of people share a set of attitudes, values and beliefs that takes the name of *culture* and that makes them think, behave and communicate in a certain way. Culture certainly has an enormous impact on people's everyday life, but it plays an important role also in policy-making. One of the numerous cultural aspects that can influence one country leaders' policy-making is the concept of time, so how people perceive time and how they relate with it. The aim of the present work is, first of all, to analyse the Chinese concept of time and, then, to understand how it has influenced China's domestic and, especially, foreign policy-making during the twentieth century and up to nowadays. In order to do this, this thesis has been organized in three main chapters, the first of which analyses more in general the relevance of the culture for all the aspects of the country's and the population's life, while the second and the third ones explain in more detail the repercussions and the implications that the Chinese concept of time have on China's domestic and foreign policy.

The first chapter begins with an excursus about different definitions of *culture* proposed over the years by numerous scholars of different nationalities; the conclusion reached after it is that *culture*, intended as the set of values, beliefs, knowledge and customs that shape communities' way of thinking and behaving, matters for all the aspect of countries' life. It plays, indeed, an important role not only on people's everyday life, but also on countries' approach to domestic and foreign policy-making. One of the cultural aspects that can have a relevant impact on China's domestic and foreign policy's development process is the concept of time. My starting point is the Chinese term used to translate the English word *time*, that, most of the times, is *shi* 时. Since the ancient Chinese literature, this term has always had the specific meaning of *timeliness*, of doing things at the appropriate time. A lot of citations from different historical period's references mentioned in this chapter demonstrate how important is this particular concept of time behind the character *shi* 时, according to which everything should be done at the appropriate time. From the Chinese culture point of view, indeed, an unconditional and always right time for doing things does not exist; however, what exists is an appropriate time for doing something, rather than for doing something else. What determines the correctness or not of the moment, is the overall surrounding situation, to which people must pay a lot of attention.

In this respect, the International Relations (IR) expert and professor Qin Yaqing sustains that the Chinese culture is characterized by four main elements, defined as the *Four Cs*, that guide Chinese people in the analysis of the reality around them. The first of them and the one in which this work focuses the most is the Contextuality with its *shi* 勢 assumption. This element assumes that Chinese people have always adopted a holistic approach in everything they do, so they first analyse the context, the big picture around each action or decision that should be taken and, only then, they can take into account the specific situation. Contrary to Western people which are described as more objective-oriented, Chinese people are considered as context-oriented. So, only after have analysed and understood the characteristics distinguishing the context, they can take the most appropriate decisions and act in the most appropriate way, always being coherent and in accordance with the mega-trend of the context around them. This approach is valid, of course, also for what concerns the Chinese policy-making, because when policy-makers have to develop their strategies, they assess, first of all, the overall situation, the nature and the tendency of the international system and, only then, they feel able to develop their policies.

The last part of this chapter, explains also the other three key elements of the Chinese culture. Even if they do not refer directly to the concept of time, they are still important for better understanding the Chinese analysis of the big picture around each situation and of the mega-trend that guides it. So, the second of the *Four Cs* is the Correlativity and its *guanxi* 关系 assumption, according to which the reality around us is composed by a complex process of ongoing relations among individuals and between individuals and things. The third *C*, then, is the Complementarity and its *he* 和 assumption, that supposes that everything in the world is seen and perceived as two opposing forces characterized by a harmonious relation. Finally, the fourth and last key element of the Chinese culture is the Changeability with its *bian* 变 assumption, according to which everything in the world is subject to continuous and never-ending changes, with the aim of reaching its real and natural state of harmony.

The second chapter of this work focuses on how the Chinese concept of time and the Chinese *shi* 勢 assumption have been applied in China's domestic and foreign policy. Chinese politicians, before developing their policies and strategies, tend always to conduct a prior analysis of the characteristics of their times, so about the *shi* 勢 of their era. As history teaches, correct or incorrect judgment of the times can lead countries to success or to failure. Therefore,

the estimation and the distinction of the basic characteristics of different eras are considered the starting point for a wise foreign policy-making. The overwhelming majority of IR experts and scholars of different nationalities, including Chinese ones, sustains that the first half of the twentieth century can be defined as the Era of War and Revolution. The motivations behind this definition are quite clear: in such a short period the world has experienced the First and the Second World Wars, wars of unprecedented magnitude in human history. Moreover, these two catastrophic wars have led to the outbreak of numerous revolutions, from proletarian revolutions to national democratic ones. During this Era, China has observed what the *shi* 勢 assumption dictates and has followed the tendency of the world. Like all the other countries, it has been marked not only by wars, but also by revolutions, such as the so-called May Fourth Movement.

However, the twentieth century has been characterized by the alternation of two different eras: the second half of the century, indeed, has attended the beginning of the so-defined Era of Peace and Development. Since the 1950s no world wars have been fought anymore, but, on the contrary, people have begun to seek peace, cooperation and common development. But while the world economy, politics, society and culture were reaching unprecedented development, Chinese leaders did not recognise the change of the times and continued to carry out the same policies and the same strategies of the Era of War and Revolution. This situation lasted about 3 decades and led China to lose a lot of opportunities, reaching the point where it fell behind all the developed countries and pushed its economy to the brink of collapse.

Finally, the third and last chapter of this thesis focuses on how, since the end of the '80s and the beginning of the '90s of the last century, after three decades of disorders and chaos, the Chinese understanding of the times began to change. Thanks especially to Deng Xiaoping, indeed, the Chinese government has realized that its policies and strategies were no longer in line with the times and with the international situation. Applying the *shi* 勢 assumption and making an analysis of the mega-trend of the times, it understood that the world had entered the Era of Peace and Development and that China could not but take part in it. With this awareness, China began to be more and more focused on its economic construction and involved in the international system. The results did not take long to arrive and China's economic growth has been very impressive and even more rapid than the expected.

The last part of the chapter, then, illustrates how China has demonstrated, during the last years, to be totally involved in the Era of Peace and Development and to play a decisive and relevant role within the international community. Moreover, since 2013 under the new leadership of Xi Jinping, China continued to sustain its strong effort in the maintenance of a peaceful international environment, in order to pursue a common development through win-win cooperation among countries.

This work ends with some hypothesis and some considerations about the future of the international community and of the People's Republic of China within it. In a world that is constantly changing, in which new projects of peaceful collaboration between different countries continue to emerge, but at the same time new non-traditional threats to international security are a daily occurrence, one wonders which will be the tendency that will guide the international community, and China as well, in the years to come.

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CHAPTER 1

The Chinese concept of time

1.1 Culture matters

Someone argues that states and corporations only act in their own interests and believes that egoism is the key to understanding human nature and the states behaviours. In their vision, if a state has a specific goal to reach, a specific objective to achieve, its way of acting in pursuing the goal will be totally predictable, regardless of which is the state at issue.

But is it true? Is states' behaviour really guided only by their own interests or is there something that leads them to behave in a certain way? Actually, there are a lot of cases in which, when pursuing similar goals or comparable interests, states make different decisions and take different actions. This is true in domestic policy-making, as well as in foreign policy-making. So if, for example, a state has to take a decision for an international commitment, or has the opportunity to establish new commercial relationships with other countries, or if it has to decide whether to take part or not in an international dispute and so on, different states often behave in totally different ways.

So, what accounts for this difference? Why they behave in a different way when the goal is the same? This is the clear evidence that every community, every group of people shares a set of attitudes, values and beliefs that make them think, behave and communicate in a certain way. It is like an invisible force that drives them to do a specific thing instead of another one, to approach a specific situation in a certain way instead of another one. This cannot but be culture.

It is quite impossible to find a universal definition of culture that makes everyone agree. In 1871 the pioneer anthropologist Edward B. Tylor, in his book *Primitive Culture*, defined culture as «that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.»¹. In his study, he argued that the lifestyle of collectivities is the outward expression of a unifying and consistent vision about core issues, and not the result of a random and arbitrary accident. Since then, so many scholars

¹ Tylor, E. B. (1871). *Primitive culture: researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art, and custom*. (Vol. 2). London: J. Murray.

have tried to find the right definition and a lot of different opinions have been offered. Geert Hofstede, for example, as an expert on cross-cultural differences and management, defined culture as «the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another. (...) Culture, in this sense, includes systems of values; and values are among the building blocks of culture.»². With this definition, he underlined that the different systems of values that compose different cultures are the peculiar factor that distinguishes one community from the others; as a consequence, it inevitably makes them think and behave in totally different ways. Here we can find, again, the answer to our initial question: why they behave in a different way when the goal is the same? The answer is that their way to approach problems and to find solutions is unconsciously guided by a specific set of values that each member of a community has in his mind.

After Geert Hofstede, another interesting opinion was offered by James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks; they sustain that «The essence of a culture is not its artefacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies.»³. They affirm that culture is not represented by people's behaviour itself, but by the moral principles or values that guide people and shape their behaviour. Culture can be thought to as a “software”, as programming of the human system that translates symbols, ideas, beliefs and values into ways of thinking, feeling and reactions, which go beyond ideological divisions and calculation of interests. So, culture is not something tangible, it is not something possessed uniformly by every member of a community, but it is a shared common sense, that shapes the communities' view of the world, allowing them to live together and to face certain situations.⁴; this common sense permits members of a group to perceive, interpret, evaluate and act in both external and internal reality.

Different communities have faced different experiences and have dealt with different circumstances; this is the reason why every culture has its specific principles that can be totally different from other cultures'. In a specific situation, a person can be guided by a moral value,

² Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values* (Vol. 5). London: Abridged Edition, Sage Publications.

³ Banks, J. A. and Banks, C. A. M. (Eds.) (2010). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. 7th ed. Seattle: John Wiley & Sons.

⁴ Verweij, M., Oros, A. and Jacquin-Berdal, D. (1998). *Culture in world politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-10.

taking for granted that everyone agrees with him; but at the same time, there will always be someone who comes from another culture that thinks that his idea is totally unsustainable.

These reported above are only a few of the extremely numerous amount of different definitions of culture that have been offered over the years by different scholars of various nationalities. But despite a large amount of different definitions, there are three key elements that have gained general approval. The first one is that culture is not a quality of single individuals, but it is a quality of societies composed by individuals; for this reason, it cannot be confused with individuals' personality. The second element is that culture is something acquired by individuals from their societies; the acquisition process can be made through formal and conscious methods, such as religious and secular education, creation of role models, system of reward and punishment, but also through informal modes, such as the influence of family, workplaces and people we are in contact with. The third and last key element is that culture is a unique complex of attributes subsuming every aspect of social life; it includes material aspects, like for example the places that are lived and worked in, as well as intangible aspects, such as personal etiquette or the manner in which relationships are conducted.

So, after all these different definitions and assumptions, we can conclude that when we have to take a decision or when we have to solve a problem, culture, the set of moral values that shape societies' mentality and behaviour, matters.

1.2 Culture's impact on policy-making

Culture certainly has an enormous impact on people's everyday activities, but recently a lot of scholars have suggested that culture plays an important role also in policy-making. Originally, diplomatic scholars sustained that all countries' way to approach and negotiate with the others was the same, maintaining that there were universal principles for it. So, for many years, the culture's impact on public diplomacy has been quite unexplored. But over the past decades, there has been a surge of interest about this matter and the international relations (IR) studies about it have begun to spread. In the 1990s, IR scholars have begun to conduct researches and to develop theories about culture's role in conflict resolution, security studies and traditional diplomacy. Raymond Cohen found that, for what concern policy-making, culture matters; he has demonstrated that European, U.S. and Chinese diplomats do not negotiate in the same way,

and this is because of their distinctive styles derived from their differing cultural and intellectual heritage.

So in this sense, culture can be considered as «an underlying force that shapes the public communication between nations and publics in the global arena»⁵, because it has an impact on every aspect of public diplomacy, from policy, to practice and scholarship.

Diplomats, those who deal with foreign policy and international relations, are certainly influenced by their cultural background. Glen Fisher suggests that this occurs for three main reasons: the first is that they cannot completely escape by their mind-set coming from their societies, because it is so deep-rooted in their way of thinking, that no professional training could ever deviate it. The second reason is that diplomats are not a free agent, they act on behalf of governments, so they have to behave in accordance with them. The last reason is that diplomacy is a collective activity, not an individual one, so it has to respect group norms.

So, it is clear from what we said that awareness of culture is very important to improve and intensify relations and communications between nations. Only if there is a basis of knowledge about cultures, misunderstandings among delegates from different nations can be avoided. A lot of times public diplomacy initiatives fail because of the lack of knowledge about a hidden side of culture. So the awareness of culture is a very useful instrument in public diplomacy, because «viewing international relations through the lens of culture adds an important dimension to understanding the actions of nations.»⁶. Of course, it is necessary a two-sided awareness, referred to our culture and to others' culture; without a self-awareness, it is quite impossible to distinguish and understand the characteristics of other cultures. Once that a diplomat reaches a sufficient awareness of its and other's culture, he will be better able to approach and negotiate across different context.

1.3 The Chinese concept of time

As we said, culture has an impact on the way of seeing and perceiving the reality; one of the numerous aspects that can be influenced by different culture is the concept of time, so how to

⁵ Zaharna, R. S. (2012). The cultural awakening in public diplomacy. *CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy Paper, 4*. Los Angeles: Figueroa.

⁶ Zaharna, R. S. (2012). The cultural awakening in public diplomacy. *CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy Paper, 4*. Los Angeles: Figueroa.

perceive time, how to relate with time. In this thesis, I'm going to analyse the Chinese concept of time and its implication on Chinese foreign policy-making and on the Chinese economy.

In the way of perceiving and approaching the reality around us, indeed, the culturally influenced concept of time has certainly an important role and represents a fundamental basis; for this reason, the Chinese way of viewing time, of defining the current era, of deciding which is the proper time for doing something, can have an enormous impact on national policy-making and on the way of interacting with other nations and corporations.

My starting point is precisely the term used by Chinese people to translate the English word *time*. In the Chinese vocabulary, there is not a classical Chinese word exactly equivalent in meaning to the English word *time*, there is not a specific term for “what passes”. Nevertheless, a Chinese word often translated as *time* is *shi* 时.

One of the best references in which we can search all the different meanings and implications of the term *shi* 时 is the *Hanyu Da Zidian* 漢語大字典, literally translated as *Great Compendium of Chinese Characters*, that is a reference work composed by a group of more than 400 editors and lexicographers; they began its compilation in 1979 and the work was published in eight volumes from 1986 to 1989. Nowadays, it has become the international standard reference for Chinese characters.

Another important reference in which we can find all the definitions of 时 is the *Hanyu Da Cidian* 漢語大詞典, literally: *Comprehensive Chinese Word Dictionary*. It represents a diachronic coverage of the Chinese language, tracing the usages of Chinese words over three millennia, from Chinese classic texts to modern slang. It was composed by a team of over 300 scholars and lexicographers, that started the compilation of its thirteen volumes in 1979. The publication of this enormous work began in 1986 with the first volume and ended in 1994 with the appendix and index volume. Today it is considered the most inclusive available Chinese dictionary.

From an accurate consultation of these references, we find out that the word *shi* 时 presents over than twenty-five different definitions and implications, with a lot of examples and citations from the Chinese literature. The original meaning of *shi* 时 was *season*, as we can note in many Chinese classical texts. By extension, it also means *seasonality*, *timeliness*, referring to doing the right thing at the appropriate time. In this thesis, I'm going to focus precisely on this specific

shade of meaning, since it has a lot of important references in the history of Chinese literature, that have influenced the current way to perceive time and relate with it, in the field of everyday life's activities, as well as of politicians' domestic and foreign policy-making. So, in this sense *shi* 时 refers to *shishi* 适时, *he yu shiyi* 合于时宜, that means *at the right moment, in good time, timely, appropriate to the occasion*. In the *Hanyu Da Zidian* 漢語大字典 and in the *Hanyu Da Cidian* 漢語大詞典 are reported a lot of examples and citations from the Chinese literature about it. The first, and one of the most important, is extrapolated by the Book of Changes, that is the oldest of the Chinese Classics and, probably, the one that more represents the doctrinal bases of the Chinese traditional thought. This fundamental Chinese Classic is composed of sixty-four figures or hexagrams, each made up of six stacked horizontal lines, that can be broken, representing the *yin* principle, or unbroken, representing the *yang* principle. For each of these hexagrams, it is reported an interpretation of it. In the hexagram number fifty-two, that is the hexagram *gen* 艮, there is not only an example of the character *shi* 时 used in the sense of timeliness, but it is also explained this concept of doing everything at the appropriate time:

艮，止也。时止则止，时行则行，动静不失其时，其道光明。

Gen denotes stopping or resting. Resting when it is the time to rest, and acting when it is the time to act. When one's movements and restings all take place at the proper time for them, his way (of proceeding) is brilliant and intelligent.⁷

So the message transmitted by this hexagram is that there is no an unconditional right time for doing things; the right time depends on different situations, different circumstances, it is not the same for everyone and for everything. So, it is possible that in front of the same situation, two different persons react in two different ways; this is not only possible, but also right, because each person, rather than each society, has its own timing. What may seem to be the right thing to do at this moment for a person, can be not the right thing to do for another one. Every one of us must understand which is the right moment for doing specific things; but the right moment is up to us, to the circumstances and to the overall situation around us, it is not the same for everyone.

⁷ De, L. 德龍. (2006). *Yijing* 易经 (*Book of Changes*). [online] Zhongguo zhexue shu dianzi hua jihua 中國哲學書電子化計劃 (Chinese Text Project). Available at: <https://ctext.org/book-of-changes/gen/ens>.

One of the main reasons why this Chinese concept of doing everything at the appropriate time is a so deep-rooted concept for Chinese people, is that it is one of the statements of the Book of Changes, that, as well as all the Chinese Classics, is a fundamental resource of ethical principles and teachings that can be applied on every aspect of the everyday life.

Another fundamental citation reported in the *Hanyu Da Zidian* 漢語大字典 and in the *Hanyu Da Cidian* 漢語大詞典 as an example of *shi* 時 interpreted as timeliness, is from the Mencius. First, for better understanding the importance of this citation, it is necessary a brief excursus of who was Mencius and what relevance has had the text entitled with his name in the Chinese culture. *Mengzi* 孟子, translated as Mencius, was an itinerant Chinese philosopher and sage born in the fourth century BC. Fascinated by the doctrines of one of the greater masters of the ancient times, Confucius, he formulated a series of ethical and political precepts that the sovereigns of his time should have applied to the practice of government. These precepts were collected by his disciples in a work that would become one of the most important texts of early Confucianism, the *Mengzi* 孟子. The theories about the art of government contained in this work became the paradigm of the art of government in the imperial age; but their importance is so prominent, that even now they are held in high esteem by the Chinese leadership, thanks to their ethical dimension and functionality for the art of government.

So, the citation from the Mencius that we find in the two dictionaries about the character *shi* 時 is:

孔子，聖之時者也。

Confucius was a sage of timeliness.⁸

Also here, an explanation is necessary for understanding the meaning of this assertion.

Confucius firmly maintained, as the Book of Changes recites, that the *wanshi wanwu* 萬事萬物, so everything, all things in nature, from things to animal, to people without any distinctions, is subject to changes and mutations. There is nothing that remains constant and unvaried over time, without making any changes. For this reason, he sustained that the best response to this condition is to go “hand in hand” with changes, so behave in accordance with them. From here

⁸ Yao, X. (Ed.). (2017). *Reconceptualizing Confucian Philosophy in the 21st Century*. Beijing: Springer.

derives his statement *wu ke wu buke* 无可无不可, that means that everything has not an absolute, definitive and unchanged condition, but is constantly subject to changes; nothing remains unchanged over time, everything is constantly changing. Consequently, also humans must take a realistic view of the situation, size up it and act as the occasion demands, as the circumstances dictate.⁹ In the Analects, a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to the Chinese philosopher Confucius, it is reported:

子曰：“君子之于天下也，无适也，无莫也，义之与比。”

The Master said, "The superior man, in the world, does not set his mind either for anything, or against anything; what is right he will follow."

With these words, Confucius sustained that there is not something that humans have or have not to do unconditionally, the great human must size up the reality and act in accordance with the situation, choosing the right course and following it. This is what distinguishes the great man from the others: the great man attaches importance to the timing, to doing everything at the appropriate time.

From all these assumptions derives the citation from the Mencius mentioned before:

孔子，圣之时者也。

Confucius was a sage of timeliness.

In the Mencius, the philosopher said that Confucius not only predicated the precept according to which an exemplary person should choose in a timely way when deciding the right thing to do, but he was himself the most time-conscious sage among all the sages of the past. He was not restricted by any permanent metaphysical rules or dogma in his behaviour, he made different choices according to different situations. From Mencius' point of view, this specific characteristic was one of the most important ones, was the one that made the difference between Confucius and the other sages of the past. Beyond this approach in doing things, there must be a lot of intelligence, because you have to analyse each situation, understand which is the proper behaviour, the behaviour that more confirms the specific circumstances and then act in accordance with it; so, only a person with great intelligence can have this kind of approach. It

⁹ Yu, Y. 于永昌 and Yang, W. 楊槐. (2015). *Kongzi bolatu jiaoyu sixiang hebi* 孔子柏拉圖教育思想合璧 (*Confucius' and Plato's educational thoughts*). Shenyang: Liaoning People's Publishing House.

would be much easier to only apply a permanent and universal rule of conduct valid for every situation; contrarily, it is much more difficult to interpret the distinct situations and act in accordance with them. Confucius was the best one in doing it.

The concept of timeliness preached by Confucius is also known as *shizhong* 时中, in which *zhong* 中 stands for the best behaviour and conduct possible, in the sense of correctness and appropriateness; but this *zhong* 中 can only be decided in accordance with the *shi* 时, so in accordance with the specific situation. This means that a precise *zhong* 中 can only occur in a specific time and in a specific place, but it is not guaranteed that it is the *zhong* 中 of other times and other places. A particular choice or conduct can be the best possible one in a specific moment and in a specific place, but this does not mean that it will be the same in another time and another place. So, the concept of *shizhong* 时中 means «maintaining *zhong* within the flow of time or behaving differently at different times yet always being correct and appropriate.»¹⁰.

And this is the meaning also of another important citation from the Classic of Rites, one of the other Chinese Classics, in which it is contained the Chinese character *shi* 时 and, more precisely, the word and concept of *shizhong* 时中:

君子之中庸也君子而时中。

The *zhongyong* of the exemplary person is that he maintains *zhong* in a timely manner and thus is an exemplary person.

Here, again, it is explained the concept according to which the *zhongyong* 中庸 of a great man, that is the best possible behaviour for the current situation, is to behave in a timely way, so take decisions only sizing up the overall situation and acting in accordance with it. If you do it, you can be considered a great man.

These citations mentioned before, are only a few of the numerous references from the Chinese literature in which we found the character *shi* 时 with the meaning of *timeliness*. This cannot but be a clear demonstration of how much importance Chinese people have always attached to doing everything at the appropriate time. From the Chinese culture's point of view, an unconditional and always right time for doing things does not exist; however, what exists is an appropriate time for doing something, rather than for doing something else. What determines

¹⁰ Yao, X. (Ed.). (2017). *Reconceptualizing Confucian Philosophy in the 21st Century*. Beijing: Springer.

the correctness or not of the moment, is the overall surrounding situation, to which we must pay a lot of attention, in order to get the best from it.

There is a time for everything and we should have the capacity and the intelligence to understand which is the appropriate time for doing things and, then, act at in accordance with it.

This particular concept of time has always characterized the Chinese culture, from the ancient times, as we have seen from the numerous citations from the Chinese literature, up to nowadays.

1.4 The four Cs

Some scholars have conducted studies and researches about how Chinese cultural elements, such as the Chinese concept of time, influence China's policy-making, and in particular China's foreign policy-making. One of the most important personalities in this circle of experts is Qin Yaqing, president and professor of China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU) and chancellor of China Diplomatic Academy; he is also the executive vice-president of China National Association for International Studies (CNAIS) and editor-in-chief of Foreign Affairs Review, the academic journal of CFAU and CNAIS. He spent many years of his life conducting researches about International Relations theories and about the influence of the Chinese cultural and philosophical traditions on the development of the IR theories and on China's foreign policy. As a result, Qin's publications about this field are very numerous.

The leading scholar and professor sustain that Chinese culture is characterized by four distinctive key elements, four fundamental aspects that create important repercussions on the Chinese mentality and, as a consequence, in the Chinese people daily life, but also on their foreign policy-making. These four elements are known as the four Cs and from each of them derives a particular assumption, that really explains the consequences of them in Chinese people's mentality and behaviour. They are Contextuality and *shi* 势 assumption, Correlativity and *guanxi* 关系 assumption, Complementarity and *he* 和 assumption, Changeability and *bian* 变 assumption. As we are going to see, the first of these four Chinese culture's key elements especially, but also, in some way, the other three of them, are strictly related with the Chinese concept of time. As explained above, from the Chinese perspective, doing things at the

appropriate time is of extreme importance; this means that does not exist an unconditional and always right time for doing things, but exists an appropriate time for doing something, rather than for doing something else. What determines whether a moment is correct or not for taking a particular decision or a particular action is the overall surrounding situation. The first of the four Cs assumes exactly this concept, attaching extreme importance to the context around each particular situation and to behave in accordance with it.

1.5 Contextuality and *shi* 勢 assumption

The first distinctive aspect of the Chinese culture is the Contextuality, which means that Chinese people emphasize, and has always emphasized, the importance of the context, the importance of the environment where a person is and where a decision is made.

When they are asked to solve a problem, Westerns often try to find a solution looking only at the individual and final objective, without giving much importance to the situation around it; on the contrary, Chinese people are more inclined to take into account the context wherein the decision is made, they adopt a holistic approach when they are asked to make decisions. They are more context-oriented, they think that the best way to find a solution to a problem is to consider the overall situation, because the problem is within the context and not out of it, so it is inevitably conditioned by it and it can only be solved taking into consideration all the situations and the conditions around it. Only analysing and understanding the whole picture, they can find the best solution and take the most appropriate decision.

As simple examples of this extremely great importance attached to the context of each situation, we can look at traditional Chinese medicine and Chinese paintings. Even if they seem to have nothing to do with this argument, the principle is the same: considering and being part of the whole picture. In the traditional Chinese medicine, the treatments were made looking at the human body as a whole, as an entire organism and only if each part of it works good and in harmony with the other parts, it can be considered in healthy. So the approach of this kind of medicine was to treat the body as a whole, rather than to cure single parts one by one. Similarly, in the traditional Chinese paintings human beings are not considered as single individuals, but are part of the environment around them; they are part of the whole nature of the picture and, as such, they have to be in harmony with them, with the mountains beyond them, rather than

with the rivers in front of them and so on. These two simple examples from the Chinese cultural traditions suggest us how much importance Chinese people have always attached to the overall picture around each specific situation. This was true for traditional Chinese medicine and for traditional Chinese paintings in the past, as well as today it is true for domestic and, especially, for foreign policy-making. A right judgement of the whole world picture and of the current era, indeed, is fundamental for developing judicious and wise policies. So, first of all, it is necessary to analyse and understand the features of the times, in order to define the peculiarity and the nature of it. Only then, policy-makers can develop their policies, always respecting the characteristics of the times. As the researcher and expert of foreign affairs and international relations He Fang sustains, «arguing on the characteristics of our era is not meaningless and irrelevant, because the features of our times inevitably influence our leaders' strategic decisions.»¹¹.

From the first C, so from Contextuality, derives the so-called *shi* 势 assumption; *shi* 势, in this case, stands for mega-trend, so for the tempo-spatial context around the situation; it refers to «the overall configuration of power and the direction or tendency of the process of change in which an actor acts and interacts.»¹². Once again, it emphasizes the importance of the context, of the overall situation and circumstances, the importance of an actor's positioning in the context. This great relevance of identifying the *shi* 势, the big picture, derives mainly by the Chinese tradition of holistic thinking and philosophy of change, according to which the surrounding circumstances around specific situations and the potential inherent changes deserve great consideration. *Shi* 势 assumption suggests that, before taking a decision, it is necessary to analyse and understand the context and the *shi* 势 of the context. Only when we have really comprehended it, we can take action. But our actions must be in accordance with the *shi* 势, rather than in opposition with it. This is the sense of the prior analysis of the context: we can understand which is the behaviour that more suits the overall situation, so the behaviour that can be considered the most proper one. From this assumption, it follows that a misunderstanding of the tendency of the overall surrounding situation leads to misbehaviour, to a wrong and not appropriate behaviour. Obviously, this is valid also for policy-making,

¹¹ He, F. 何方. (2011) Shenme shi shidai he shidai tezheng - Heping yu fazhan shidai wenti shi jiang (zhi yi) 什么是时代和时代特征 — 和平与发展时代问题十讲（之一） (Which is our era and the characteristics of the times – First of the ten lectures on the era of peace and development). *Social Science Forum*.

¹² Zhu, L. (2010). *China's foreign policy debates*. Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies.

because when policy-makers have to make decisions, first of all, they must assess the overall situation, they must evaluate the nature of international system and the overriding features of today's world, they must look at the big picture and maintain a long-term view; only then, they can consider the specific situation and take action. So, before taking decisions, they always analyse the current *shi* 势 of the world, regarding the themes and the trend of the times. After that, they can propose and develop their policies, but their policy choices should always be based upon the understanding of the global mega-trend.

For better explaining it, Qin Yaqing in his article 中国文化及其对外交决策的影响 (*Chinese Culture and Its Implications for Foreign Policy-making*) proposes to us an interesting metaphor:

可以想象，一块岩石从山顶滚落，则拥有惊人的力量，而如果它想从山脚移到山顶，则无能为力。中国人认为，人或物只有顺应时势才能获得力量，逆势而行则会衰败。

Imagine a rock and a hill. The rock has stunning power if it rolls downwards from top of the hill, but it conversely has no power at all when it unsuccessfully tries to move itself upward on the hill. Chinese believe that people or objects gain power and prosper when they go along with the mega-trend, and that they decline when going otherwise.¹³

With this image, Qin explains to us how much important is for Chinese people to go with the mega-trend and not against it, because only going hand in hand with it, we can exploit it and achieve success. Contrarily, if we go against it, is like a rock that tries to move upward on a hill: it wastes all its strengths, but it has no power at all. Act against the mega-trend is like running against the wind, swimming against the current: you devote all your own energies in trying to achieve something, but everything around you is moving in the opposite direction. You waste all your strengths for nothing, because everything is against you.

Another point of view about the *shi* 势 assumption is also proposed by Zhu Liqun, a prominent personality, as she is the assistant president of China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU), where she is also professor of International Studies, and the secretary-general of the China National Association for International Studies; as deputy editor-in-chief of the Foreign Affairs Review, her researches focuses on China's foreign policy and its relations with the international society.

¹³ Qin, Y. 秦亚青. (2012). Zhongguo wenhua ji qi dui waijiao juece de yingxiang 中国文化及其对外交决策的影响 (*Chinese Culture and Its Implications for Foreign Policy-making*). [online] China Social Science Network. Available at: http://www.cssn.cn/zxz/xsdj_zxz/qyq/201604/t20160413_2964993.shtml.

In her monograph *China's Foreign Policy Debates*, she sustains that, for what concerns international affairs, *shi* 势, the overall world situation, involves two main aspects, two starting point for foreign policy debates conducted by Chinese scholars: the distinctive features of our times and the international power configuration.¹⁴ The first one is exactly what we have seen before, so it implies the analysis of the nature of the existing international system, of the international and global tendencies characterizing our contemporary era. Deeply understand the distinctive features of our times is fundamental, because it inevitably influences policy-makers' orientation and choices. The second aspect proposed by Zhu Liqun is the so-called *guoji geju* 国际格局, that is the international power configuration; she sustains that it is not sufficient to analyse and understand the general characteristics and tendencies of our times, but it is also necessary to understand how the power is distributed in the current world system, so whether the international environment is dominated and controlled by few hegemonic powers and which is the relations among them, or whether today, thanks to the emergence of some other major powers, we get a multipolarity world system. The international power configuration, indeed, together with the distinctive characteristics of our times, is the so-defined big picture, the context in which countries are—and in which they can create relations. Obviously, the way different countries employ in doing it, in relating with the others and with the overall international circumstances certainly depends on their objectives, but it depends also and above all on their cultural aptitude and inclination.

So, drawing conclusions, in a culture like the Chinese one, which attaches so much importance to the context, to the big picture around each situation, in the field of foreign policy-making it is fundamental to first analyse the *shi* 势 of our times, in order to take right decisions at the appropriate time, respecting in this way the timeliness assumption that has always characterized the Chinese culture.

¹⁴ Zhu, L. (2010). *China's foreign policy debates*. Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies.

1.6 The other three Cs: Correlativity and *guanxi* 关系 assumption

As we said before, also if the other three Cs do not directly refer to the concept of time, they can be relevant in studying and analysing the context around each situation and in understanding how Chinese people relate with it.

The second key element of the Chinese culture is the Correlativity, with its *guanxi* 关系 assumption. With the word Correlativity, Qin means that everything in the world is related to everything else, nothing is isolated. Chinese people consider the universe, not as an entity composed by a multitude of individuals, rather than a multitude of things, they consider the universe as a complex process of ongoing relations among individuals and between individuals and things. From the Chinese culture point of view, it is this process of ongoing relations that produces and builds all the different contexts, all the big pictures around each situation and, consequently, it creates opportunities and dynamics.

This particular vision of the world inevitably leads Chinese people to give extreme importance to social relations and to relational management, in every aspect of everyday life and, as always, in policy-making. One evident difference between China and Western countries, indeed, is that when they get in touch and negotiate with other countries, Chinese people tend always to establish a good atmosphere, to create personal relations with the counterpart; this is the so-called *guanxi* 关系 assumption. *Guanxi* 关系, literally meaning *relationship*, stands for any kind of relationship, for the network of relationships among different parties that come into contact for any reason. This kind of relation, however, is more than a simple interpersonal relationship, it includes reciprocal implicit obligations, as the Confucian heritage dictates, that cannot be broken and that continues over time, in a long-term perspective. The *guanxi* 关系 relation can be considered as «a kind of stock to be put away in times of abundance and plenty, but brought out in times of need.»¹⁵. As such, it has to be developed and reinforced continuously, through interactions and exchanges.

The great importance that Chinese people give to the principle of *guanxi* 关系 in their daily lives, as well as in policy making, is due to the fact that it is part of the Confucian legacy. Confucius sustained that an individual is fundamentally a social or relational being; for this

¹⁵ Luo, Y. (2007). *Guanxi and business* (Vol. 5). Singapore: World Scientific.

reason, the social order and stability depends on the relations among society's individuals. Because of the heavy influence of Confucianism, Chinese people consider themselves as interdependent with the surrounding social context. This can be considered one of the major differences between the East and the West: Western people tend to see human beings as independent, self-contained and autonomous entities, while Eastern people consider human beings as interdependent, as entities related one to the others.

Starting from this relational inclination, Chinese *guanxi* 关系 assumption makes people be more open and inclined to establish connections and relations with other people, relations that are deeply infused with «a higher sense of responsibility towards others»¹⁶, in order to build up a wide and varied relational web among different society's members. For all these reasons, this principle has been defined as «the lifeblood of all things Chinese – business, politics, and society»¹⁷.

Similar and related to the *guanxi* 关系 assumption is the *mianzi* 面子 (face) complex, that, as the *guanxi* 关系 principle, deeply influences the Chinese social life. In simple terms, *mianzi* 面子 complex stands for social recognition, both in terms of self-perceiving and other-perceiving, so both on how every one of us perceives itself in the society and on how the society perceives us. It is a «form of respect which interactants assume toward each other in the course of their interaction.»¹⁸. It implies that everyone does everything to build up the best possible social status, the best possible public self-image, because everyone wants to be given honour and prestige; after that, they do everything to protect it. Losing its face, indeed, means losing prestige, suffering an attack on our honour. *Mianzi* 面子 concept, however, is not only a Chinese or Asian concern, but it is quite universal. In every culture, people want to claim their face and protect it. Nevertheless, the face concept assumes different forms and different relevance according to the cultural environment, so it should be analysed within all the different systems of cultural meanings. In the Chinese culture, it not only assumes particular and peculiar meaning, but it permeates people social life to a larger degree than in other countries. In the

¹⁶ Shijun, T. (2006). Chinese thought and dialogical universalism. *Europe and Asia beyond east and west*, 305. London: Routledge.

¹⁷ Luo, Y. (1997). Guanxi: Principles, philosophies, and implications. *Human systems management*, 16, pp. 43-52.

¹⁸ Ting-Toomey, S. (Ed.). (1994). *The challenge of facework: Cross-cultural and interpersonal issues*. New York: SUNY Press.

Chinese relational society, *mianzi* 面子 assumes crucial importance; it represents not only the social status of each person in the society, but also its standing in the eyes of others, its reputation achieved through getting on in life, the possibility of being acknowledged. For this reason, losing face for a Chinese person is a very serious and real shame, is like «ceasing to exist in the eyes of others and in the society.»¹⁹.

In Chinese society, *mianzi* 面子 is a quality that everyone tries to achieve through social recognition, and, at the same time, it is a quality that can be used and exploit in interpersonal relations. In this sense, *mianzi* 面子 concept can be described as flexible, utilizable and dynamic: flexible because it is not fixed and permanent for the whole life of an individual, but it can be improved and reinforced or deteriorated and worsened; it is utilizable because, as for the *guanxi* 关系 concept, it can be put away and brought out in times of need; and it is dynamic because it is not only a social status, but it can be used in social relational obligations.²⁰ So we can say that, in a society like the Chinese one, where personal relationships deserve a so important relevance, the concept of face is exploited for facilitating interpersonal activities and even for solving interpersonal problems.

Anyway, focusing back on the *guanxi* 关系 assumption, it surely has a lot of repercussions on the Chinese foreign policy, especially from the second half of the twentieth century; the great emphasis given to the “relationality” implicates a peculiar way of being present in the world: Chinese people are characterized by a bigger willingness to expose themselves in personal contacts with others, seeking a dynamic relational life. Their main purpose is to create a harmonious relational web, shaped by ethical obligations and commitment. In this relational web, *guanxi* 关系 ties are not imposed as rules or impositions, they are intentional and volitional, they emerge during the process of interactions as willingness and intention of doing things together; for this reason «*guanxi* relations are characterized by dedicated cultivation»²¹. For doing it, people have to demonstrate their trustworthiness, so their capacity to meet the obligations and the expectations of the others. Relationships of this type require reciprocity,

¹⁹ Monfret, A. L. (2011). *Saving Face in China: A First-Hand Guide for Any Traveller to China*. United States of America: Xlibris Corporation.

²⁰ Ting-Toomey, S. (Ed.). (1994). *The challenge of facework: Cross-cultural and interpersonal issues*. New York: SUNY Press.

²¹ Barbalet, J. (2015). Guanxi, tie strength, and network attributes. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59(8), pp. 1038-1050.

because only through it the parts involved can pursue and get mutual benefits. For all these reasons, foreign policy-making becomes inevitably an outcome of these relational exchanges and interactions among China and others.

Summarizing, even if the second of the four Cs of the Chinese culture, the Correlativity, and the *guanxi* 关系 assumption, do not refer directly to the concept of time, they explain how Chinese people relate with the context and the situation around them, in order to then understand how the analysis of the big picture around each situation is conducted; only in this way they can know how to behave timely and accordingly to it.

1.7 Complementarity and *he* 和 assumption

The third C that characterized the Chinese culture is the Complementarity and its *he* 和 assumption; *he* 和 means harmony, the state of nature that, from the Chinese perspective, should be part of everything, of every relation and every situation. In the analysis of the context, of the big picture surrounding each situation, complementarity stands for the traditional dialectical vision that has always characterized Chinese culture, according to which everything in the world is seen and perceived as two opposing forces.

The peculiar aspect that distinguishes the Chinese dialectical thinking from the Western one, is that the Chinese dialectic stresses the complementarity of the two opposites, while the Western one stresses the conflict. In the Western dialectic, there are the thesis and the antithesis, which are two opposite forces constantly in conflict with each other; this type of dialectic can be considered as aggressive, in the sense that the ultimate goal of the conflict is to solve the contradiction between the two opposites, and the only way to solve this contradiction is through a complete transformation into a new synthesis. It means that thesis and anti-thesis work as two opposing and antagonistic forces, whose only resolution is a new synthesis of them.

On the contrary, the Chinese dialectic does not stress the contradiction of the two opposites, but it «uses contradiction to understand relations among objects or events, to transcend or integrate apparent oppositions.»²². In this sense, Chinese dialectic is not conflictual, but it is

²² Nisbett, R. (2004). *The geography of thought: How Asians and Westerners think differently... and why*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

complementary, it underlines the harmonious unity of the opposites, because the two opposing poles complement and complete one another. This is exactly what the yin-yang symbol illustrates: the yin and the yang are two halves that complement each other and that, only together, compose a harmonious and holistic circle.



Figure 1 Yin and Yang

There is not a thesis and an antithesis, because the two halves have the same relevance, they should coexist and work together in order to create the circle; without the contribution of either the halves, the circle cannot exist. For better explaining it, professor Qin Yaqing coined the term *co-thesis*, that explain in the most efficacy way the non-conflictual nature of the two poles. Thesis and co-thesis are not in conflict one with each other, but they coexist, they work in harmony; the two poles continually change toward each other, in order to reach a synthesis that is not a completely new transformed synthesis, as for the Western one, but it is the combination and the convergence of the them.

So, from this particular perspective, derives the so-called *he* 和 assumption, according to which harmony is the essence of the universe. This does not mean that conflicts, struggles or contradictions do not exist at all, because the world is full of them, but it means that these conflicts can be managed by human efforts, in order to reach the real state of nature, the harmony. To deeply understand and appreciate one state of affairs, the existence of its opposite is necessary and indispensable, because, as we have seen, everything is made of two opposing but interpenetrating forces that complete one another; without one of them, also the other one cannot exist.

This brings us back to the yin and yang principle, which is an essential part of the Chinese character and a way of living and perceiving everything. According to it, every single thing in

the world includes the yin and the yang, everything involves a yin aspect (so a feminine, passive, dark and soft side) and a yang aspect (so a masculine, active, bright and hard side). These two aspects are two opposite but interdependent forces that work together in order to produce all things in the world. In this sense, every event that happens in our life cannot be considered as a fortunate or as an unfortunate event at all, but, like everything, it always includes a positive and a negative aspect. This is exactly the message contained in a famous and well-known ancient Chinese story, from which derives a common Chinese idiomatic expression: *Saiweng shi ma* 塞翁失马, that literally means *the old man from the frontier lost his horse*. This story tells about an old man who lived at the border of the state. One day, a servant reported to the old man that one of his horses was missing. After hearing of this misfortune, all his neighbours felt very sorry for him and came to comfort him, but the old man was not troubled at all, claiming that nobody could know if that was a good or a bad thing for him. A few months later, the missing horse not only returned home safely, but it also brought back with it another beautiful horse. The old man's neighbours, heard the good news, congratulated on him for his good fortune, but, as the time before, he said: "How could we know if it is good or bad for me?!" One day, the old man's son was riding the new horse and fell off it, breaking his leg and becoming crippled. Once again his neighbours came to comfort him, but he was not disturbed by the accident, sustaining that nobody could know if that was a good or a bad thing for him. One year later, the Emperor's army arrived at his village to recruit all the young and strong men for fighting in a war against the neighbouring province; the old man's son, however, was not drafted because he was crippled and he was spared from certain death. So, this ancient Chinese story teaches us that every event that occurs in our life must never be considered totally positive or totally negative, because everything involves a yin and a yang aspect. The yin and the yang coexist inside everything and work together in order to find the harmony; since the difference in power between these two opposites is constantly changing, each of them is not a permanent and unchangeable condition, but they are part of an eternal process in which they are continually altering one into the other, each of them constantly changes into its opposite. When a thing has reached its full development, it begins to decline and to transform into its opposite, as it is exposed in the fifty-fifth hexagram of the Chinese ancient Classic *Book of Changes*:

日中则昃，月盈则食。²³

When the sun has reached the meridian height, it begins to decline. When the moon has become full, it begins to wane.

So, what the yin-yang principle, and the *he* 和 assumption as well, suggests, is not that conflicts and contradictions do not exist in the universe at all, because everything in the world is made up of two opposing forces; the yin-yang principle and the *he* 和 assumption suggest, however, that these two opposing forces are not in conflict one with the other, but they coexist and work together altering one into the other, in order to reach the essence of the universe, that is the harmony.

Obviously, the *he* 和 assumption deeply influences Chinese daily life, as well as Chinese foreign policy-making. Chinese people are first and foremost convinced to be part of a collective, rather than individual and «encapsulated units who maintained a unique identity across social settings.»²⁴. For this reason, they attach great and extreme importance to minimize frictions with the other society's members and to establish a harmonious social network within the community, which makes them feel part of a large, complex and benign social organism. This continuous search for harmonic relations within the society can also be observed in the ancient Chinese scrolls and porcelains, that has always depicted scenes of family activities and rural pleasures. Another example of it can be found in the *Zuo Chuan* 左傳, commonly translated as *The Commentary of Zuo*, that is an ancient narrative history regarded as a commentary of the Chinese chronical Annals of the so-called Period of Spring and Autumn; here, the concept of the search for harmony is explained through an interesting metaphor:

和如羹焉，水、火、醯、醢、鹽、梅，以烹鱼肉，燂之以薪，宰夫和之，齊之以味，濟其不及，以洩其過。²⁵

Harmony is like a stew. Water, fire, jerky, mincemeat, salt, and plum vinegar are used to cook fish and meat. These are cooked over firewood. The master chef harmonizes them,

²³ De, L. 德龍. (2006). *Yijing* 易经 (*Book of Changes*). [online] Zhongguo zhexue shu dianzi hua jihua 中國哲學書電子化計劃 (Chinese Text Project). Available at: <https://ctext.org/book-of-changes/gen/ens>.

²⁴ Nisbett, R. (2004). *The geography of thought: How Asians and Westerners think differently... and why*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

²⁵ Durrant S., Li W. Y. and Schaberg D. (2016). *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"*). Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

evening them out with seasoning, compensating for what is lacking, and diminishing what is too strong.

As a savoury taste is reached through the blended but distinctive contribution of each ingredient's flavour, in the same way, a society's harmony can be reached only through the contribution of each component of it, through the contribution of the ruler as well as the contribution of the subjects. In this way, each of them can compensate for the possible lacks of the others, working together in order to reach a good equilibrium.

The impact that the *he* 和 assumption has on the Chinese foreign policy-making is that, especially in the last few decades, China has preferred non-violent foreign policy, choosing diplomatic approaches and manoeuvring and adopting non-coercive means. From the Chinese perspective, in the international field, the main object is to create a peaceful relational web among different communities, in order to reach a harmonious environment that is favourable for China first, but also for the others. A clear example of it is the East Asian regionalism, in which, thanks to the Confucian culture, the *he* 和 assumption is considered as an essential and fundamental principle, and so, as a result, the cooperation among different states and communities has great relevance. Thanks to this regional cooperation process, in the last thirty decades East Asia has been able to develop and maintain stability and prosperity never seen before.

Drawing conclusions, the third C of the Chinese culture, the Complementarity, and its *he* 和 assumption do not refer directly to the concept of time, but in the wider perspective of the Chinese timeliness, they are necessary to deeply understand how Chinese people relate with the context around them; only in this way we can know how to understand which is the proper time for doing a thing or for taking a decision.

1.8 Changeability and *bian* 变 assumption

The fourth and last C that characterizes the Chinese culture is the Changeability, with its *bian* 变 assumption. This aspect has a lot in common with the Contextuality and the *shi* 势 assumption and, especially, with the Complementarity and the *he* assumption.

Changeability comes from the Chinese Classic *Book of Changes*, in which it represents the central theme. From the Chinese perspective, change, which is the only thing that never changes, the only constant phenomenon in the world, is the fundamental principle of the universe. The first hexagram of the Book of Changes, the *qian* hexagram, recites:

乾道变化，各正性命，保合大和。²⁶

The method of Qian is to change and transform, so that everything obtains its correct nature as appointed (by the mind of Heaven); and (thereafter the conditions of) great harmony are preserved in union.

Everything in the world is subject to continuous and never-ending changes, nothing is permanent and unchangeable; only through changes, everything can reach its real nature and its natural state of harmony.

Chinese philosophers have developed three ontological assumptions that describe the universal process of change: the first is that everything in the universe is represented by a transformation process, nothing is fixed substance; the second assumption is that the universe's transitional process does not proceed onward, but it is a cyclic process; the third and last assumption affirms that this transformation process has not an end, it is eternal. This endless, cyclic and transforming process of every single thing in the universe continues to influence the Chinese philosophy and way of thinking and deeply affects Chinese people behaviour.

This constant process of changes is valid, of course, also for human beings; one of the main features of human identities, indeed, is that they are in continuous transformation. While Westerners sustain that an actor can be either A or B, and not A and B at the same time, Chinese believe that A does not exclude B, and an actor can have both A and B properties. This is because identities, like everything else, is in continuous transformation, they are not always the same; «identity is and can only be identity in transformation»²⁷. These constant and endless transformations belong to the relational patterns changes. When the relation among two people varies for any reason, surely also the two people's identities and personalities are affected and,

²⁶ De, L. 德龍. (2006). *Yijing* 易经 (*Book of Changes*). [online] Zhongguo zhexue shu dianzi hua jihua 中國哲學書電子化計劃 (Chinese Text Project). Available at: <https://ctext.org/book-of-changes/gen/ens>.

²⁷ Qin, Y. 秦亚青. (2012). Zhongguo wenhua ji qi dui waijiao juece de yingxiang 中国文化及其对外交决策的影响 (*Chinese Culture and Its Implications for Foreign Policy-making*). [online] China Social Science Network. Available at: http://www.cssn.cn/zxz/xsdj_zxz/qyq/201604/t20160413_2964993.shtml.

as a consequence, change; in this sense A identity will be no more only A, it will be A with some characteristics of B. In this continuous process of transformations, human agency is essential, because, as Confucianism stresses, people cannot wait that changes happen, doing is the key for making them occur.

According to the Chinese Classic, changes depending on the dialectical interaction of yin and yang, the two opposing but interdependent forces that compose everything. Having the same power, the two poles are part of a constant and eternal process of change, in which they are continually altering one into the other. This particular opposition but also complementarity of the two forces, makes the universe «forever changing – alteration, movement without rest, and flowing, rising, and sinking without fixed law»²⁸, forming a complete and holistic system of change. However, people cannot simply and passively wait that changes happen; two correlated conditions, indeed, are required for making changes occur. The first one is human agency and human efforts; the human agency has always had a fundamental importance in the Chinese culture, since Confucianism stressed a lot its relevance. Its contribution in promoting the right change is essential. For doing it, people have to analyse the *shi* 勢 of their times, so the mega-trend of their times, and exploit it in the most proper way; this is the second condition required. Only in this way the change can occur and occur properly. Whether the change occurs in the right direction or not, depends on this, on how human agency exploits the *shi* 勢. The *bian* 变 assumption consists exactly in this: make human agency not only work, but work in accordance with the mega-trend and not against it, in order to produce the right change and, consequently, the right action at the proper time.

This awareness of the importance of changing with the mega-trend has deeply influenced the last few decades' Chinese foreign policy-making. China has begun to wonder which is the current mega-trend of the world, understanding that, in a so-globalized world, being part of the international society and actively work and cooperate with it is not only essential, but also imperative, it is the only way to succeed.

²⁸ Milhouse, V. H. and Asante, M. K. (2001). *Transcultural realities*. London: Sage.

1.9 Chinese analysis of the reality

Chinese culture has always had a holistic approach, stressing the importance of the big picture around each event. Before taking decisions and actions, it is important and necessary to analyse the context, the overall situation, in order to take the right decisions at the appropriate time. This is, indeed, the Chinese way to approach and relate with time: doing everything at the appropriate time; and the appropriate time for doing something is up to us and, especially, to the overall situation around us. This is valid, of course, for the daily-life decisions, as well as for the foreign policy ones. During the analysis of the overall picture, some Chinese traditional principles must be taken into account: first of all, the *guanxi* 关系 assumption, according to which social relations and relational management have extreme importance for any field we are talking about, from the small realities' management to the international one. From the Chinese perspective, this relational web must be characterized by a state of harmony, which is the intrinsic and natural state of everything in the universe, as the *he* 和 assumption teaches us. According to the *bian* 变 assumption, this state of harmony is reached through the continuous change toward each of the two poles that compose everything. These two opposing but complementary forces that are part of everything, work together in harmony, in order to reach a continuous new synthesis, combination and convergence of them.

Only through this kind of analysis of the reality around us, we can really understand how to know which is our right time for doing something. This, of course, has had a lot of repercussions not only in the Chinese way of thinking, but also in their way to relate with others and to conduct foreign policy, especially during the last fifty years. The specific and concrete consequences of this peculiar analysis for knowing how to move in the international arena are described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Twentieth century's two eras and the Chinese misjudgment of the times

2.1 The Chinese concept of time applied to the foreign policy-making

Chinese culture has always been characterized by a holistic way of perceiving the reality, according to which the best way for understanding the events that occur in our life is to focus on the whole situation and not on the single and individual parts, because the surrounding circumstances around single events make them be what they are. For this reason, the context of single happening deserves our first attention. Only after have analysed and understood the big picture, we can know how to react to that single event and how to behave in that specific situation. The *shi* 勢 assumption assumes exactly this concept: before taking actions, and even before making decisions, it is necessary to analyse the *shi* 勢 around them. *Shi* 勢, in this case, stands for the tendency, the mega-trend, the tempo-spatial context around the situation. This prior analysis is fundamental in order to understand which is the right moment for doing things, considering that Chinese people attach great importance to behaving in accordance with the *shi* 勢.

This particular way of relating to time has had a lot of repercussions on the Chinese leaders' way to conduct foreign policy and to formulate strategies. In order to develop right and judicious policies, indeed, they tend always to begin with the analysis of the *shi* 勢 of their times, of the *shi* 勢 of their era, so to analyse the international system's tendency, the mega-trend of the world. Therefore, the estimation and distinction of the basic characteristics of different eras are considered the starting point for a wise foreign policy-making. Defined the peculiarity and the nature of it, they can develop their own policies, that should always be coherent with it. So, for the Chinese Communist Party, judging the characteristics of the times is important for leading the country to success rather than to failure. But giving the right assessment to an era is not as simple as it looks; misjudgements about the times are not so rare and, as we are going to see, their consequences can be very dangerous. At the same time, knowing the characteristics that distinguish our epoch is also important for single individuals' chances and destiny; specific characteristics of the times, indeed, can lead people to make

certain choices instead of others when they are asked to take some life choices as the personal and vocational training.

In the past, it was believed that the question of the times' definition was important for the development of the foreign policy, but that, at the same time, it does not have much to do with the domestic policy-making. Nevertheless, domestic and foreign situations are objectively inseparable, they inevitably influence one another; as a consequence, also domestic and foreign policies are inseparable, you cannot manage one of them without taking into consideration also the other one. Therefore, from the Chinese perspective, the prior analysis and judgment of the *shi* 勢 of the international system represent not only the starting point for the development of the foreign policy, but also the basis for the definition of the domestic policy. Observing and analysing the international system, it is possible to fix the standpoint and the position of our country in the world; Chinese national development path and its interactions with the outside world is based on the judgment made about the times and about the international environment.

2.2 The origin of the importance of the era's definition

The importance of the classification and of the definition of the era in which we live originally was a fundamental aspect of the Leninism theories. No matter whether for a theoretical or political level, this concept has always been placed in the first place by the International Communist Movement and by the Communist Parties of many countries. In the 20s, Lenin defined its contemporary era as the Era of Imperialism and the Era of the Proletarian Revolution. He was convinced that the imperialist war was inevitable; it means that imperialism itself was a war and the war, inevitably, caused a revolution. However, history proved that this formulation was not completely accurate. After the First World War, there was not a world-wide proletarian revolution as Lenin sustained; of course, the war caused revolutions, but these revolutions were mainly national democratic ones in many European countries, or national independence movements in many Asian, African and Latin Americans countries. Lenin over-emphasized the role of the class division and of the class struggle for the definition of his times and, as the history has proved, he made some utopia mistakes in the estimation of the proletarian revolution. He Fang, an expert and researcher in the field of international relations and foreign affairs, explains that Lenin, defining his era as the Era of Imperialism and the Era of the Proletarian Revolution, made three main wrong assumptions. The first one is that Lenin

believed that Imperialism was the highest stage of the capitalist development and, as such, it was entering in the stage of death, the stage that represents the eve of the proletarian revolution. However, the history has proved that Lenin was wrong, because after the Second World War capitalism not only was not dead, but rather still ruled the world with a new guise. The second Lenin's wrong assumption is due to the fact that he believed that imperialism was ruled by the imbalance absolute law and, for this reason, the colonies and the sphere of influence were already decided. He sustained that the only way for redistributing the world, was an imperialist war, that cannot but be another world war. Nevertheless, after the Second World War, traditional capitalism was transformed into the new modernized one; a new world war among capitalist powers was considered impossible by the major expertizes. And not only that, according to the increasingly globalized world of the following decades, the majority sustained that probably another world war will not be played any more. The third and last Lenin's wrong assumption is that, in the beginning, Lenin believed that in order to achieve the final victory and to overthrow the capitalism, proletarian forces from all over the world must work together. For this reason, the Third International, founded by him, stipulated the obligations of internationalism that the proletarian of all countries should follow. During the first three decades the Soviet Union, China and all the other member countries fulfilled their internationalist obligations. However, didn't take long before they understood how difficult it was to really fulfil these obligations. Therefore, the Soviet Union quickly began to put its national interests in the first place and, after that, also Eastern Europe and almost all countries change dramatically, giving up the slogan of internationalism. From the Thirteenth National Congress, the internationalism was no longer mentioned.

For all these reasons, Lenin's classification of its era as the Era of Imperialism and the Era of the Proletarian Revolution is considered not very exact and correct; the most accurate definition for the first half of the twentieth century is the Era of War and Revolution, *zhanzheng yu geming shidai* 战争与革命时代 in Chinese.

2.3 The Era of War and Revolution

As we said, the most correct and precise definition for the first half of the twentieth century is the Era of War and Revolution, definition motivated by some specific events that have deeply marked the world during these decades.

First of all, this era is defined as the Era of War, and the reason behind this definition is quite clear. In such a short period, the world has attended to two wars that, for their entity and for their duration, have no priors in the course of the human history. They have no precedents for their entity because, for the first time, they were not fights including two or three countries, but they involved the majority of the world's countries, irremediably upsetting the international system. They have no precedents for their duration, because the duration of this kind of wars should be combined with their pre-war arms race and post-war repair for damages, which are not irrelevant at all; taking this into account, the two wars filled the half-century. Wanting to provide some data, the First World War involved thirty-three countries and 1.3 billion people, causing 20 million death and injuries. While the Second World War affected more than sixty countries and 2 billion of people, accounting for the 80% of the world population at that times; the battlefield covered an area of 22 million square kilometres and, during the war, more than 55 million soldiers and civilians were killed. After the end of the First World War, the participating countries have not even had the time to recover and to start the after-war economic development's attempt, that they had the whiff of another imminent world war. The pre-war arms race has begun very soon and countries of all over the world started to prepare for the war. In 1939 the German invasion of Poland marked the beginning of the Second World War, the deadliest conflict of the human history that had irreparably upset the social and political structure of the globe. The war lasted six years and the consequences were devastating. After the end of the war, however, the majority of the participating countries have made every effort to repair and recover from the war trauma, beginning to develop their economic systems as soon as possible; this was true for everyone, except for the socialist countries, so for the Soviet Union and China, that continued to vigorously develop their armaments, preparing for another war that they believed would have broken out in a short time. Doing so, they did not realize that, in the middle of the twentieth century, the times were changing and the Era of War and Revolution was coming to its end. As we are going to see in the next paragraph, this mistake in the judgment of the times has led to some serious consequences.

But secondly, this era is also defined as the Era of Revolution. Wars, indeed, always cause revolutions, so in a period characterized by two world wars, revolutions were inevitable; the First World War, indeed, has led to proletarian revolutions, while the Second World War has led to national democratic ones. First of all, a clarification about which situation can be considered as revolutionary is needed. Lenin sustained that revolution is characterized by three

main conditions: the first is that the revolution's fervour is set off by the masses, as it requires a notable degree of mass mobilization; second, after the efforts made during the revolution, the masses cannot leave as before, because revolutions always involve changes and transformations that do not allow them to leave as before; third, the rulers of the pre-revolution period cannot continue to rule after the revolution, for the same reason of the second condition. These represent the indispensable and inseparable common traits without which a revolution cannot be considered a revolution. After Lenin, a lot of scholars and experts have then conducted researches, trying to understand which are the main criteria that really categorize an event as a revolution. In the 1950s and 1960s, scholars attempted to apply social psychology models to better understand how and why revolutions occur; from this kind of analysis, emerged that revolutions can be defined as «a rapid, fundamental and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, government activity, and policies.»²⁹. A lot of other definitions has been drawn during the years, with some different details and different nuances. One of them, however, could be taken as a synthesis, and it is the one suggested by the American sociologist and historian Jack Goldstone: revolution is «an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in a society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and noninstitutionalized actions that undermine existing authorities.»³⁰.

After these clarifications, we can better understand why the first half of the twentieth century is defined as the era of revolutions. Before the First World War, there were four great empires in the world: the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Tsarist Russian Empire and the German Empire. The war, however, caused the fall of all of them, redrawing the map of the world. These enormous changes brought frequent and relevant turmoil, and the flames of revolution begun to spread everywhere, from Europe to Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Russia, for example, took place the so-called October Revolution in 1917, led by the Bolsheviks and their leader Vladimir Lenin, who leads his people to take power as a regime committed to creating a communist dictatorship. The Russian revolutionary events deeply influenced the Austro-Hungarian public opinion; the feeling of rebellion was reflected in many factories' workers' strikes since 1917. Moreover, during the last years of the First World War, also sailors

²⁹ Huntington, S. P. (1968). *Political order in changing societies*. New Haven, pp 264.

³⁰ Goldstone, J. A. (2001). Toward a fourth generation of revolutionary theory. *Annual review of political science*, 4(1), p. 142.

have represented an active and crucial revolutionary force in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as in Russia and Germany, triggering a lot of naval revolts. Since January 1918, the situation got worse: hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike in Vienna, followed by many sailors, who actively supported a workers' strike at the Pola arsenal. The January strikes have represented the first step on the road of revolution: since them, Slovene, Serbian, Czech and Hungarian armed forces' troops began to mutiny. All these revolutionary events caused the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire between the 28th and 31st October 1918, which was followed by the birth of new national independent governments that had taken the regional power.

In China, the revolution that marked a real turning point in the Chinese History has been the so-called May Fourth Movement. The stressor of this revolutionary movement has been a Chinese diplomatic failure at the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919: China participated in the meeting that followed the end of the First World War as a victorious power; nevertheless, its request of having back the territory of Shandong, which had been part of the German sphere of influence first and then taken by Japan during the World War I, has been ignored. The Versailles Conference was dominated by the Western Allies and their first interest and purpose were to punish Germany; for this reason, they did not care a lot about the Chinese demands and awarded Shandong territory and rights to Japan. The Chinese people's awareness that, despite the Chinese delegation was overwhelmed by many appeals and petitions, it had already given up hopes on the Shandong problem, has been the trigger point for the Chinese reaction. On the morning of the 4th May 1919, over than 3000 representatives of Beijing universities and high schools marched from many different points of the city towards Tiananmen, demonstrating against the Chinese inability to defend national interests. The next day, all the students of Beijing went on strike, followed by students, merchants and workers of many other cities across China; these demonstrations represented the starting point of a general nationwide wave of strikes, demonstrations and boycotts, that would then be gone down in history as the May Fourth Movement.

Muhlhahn Klaus, a German researcher and chair professor of Chinese History and Culture at the Freie Universität of Berlin, sustains that the May Fourth Movement represents an important turning point in the Chinese History for three main reasons: the first is that for the first time there was a public mobilization in which a real political alliance was formed. In 1911 only a few population's segments had taken part of the Republican Revolution, while this time, in

1919, students, workers, artisans, merchants, businessmen, all the masses joined their forces, marking «the beginning of an era of public mobilization as a modern form of politics.»³¹. The second reason is that during the May Fourth Movement, Chinese nationalism was transformed from a mental attitude into a real and tangible political force. The third and last motivation is that, since this revolution, the Chinese policy perspective on the international world system has changed, starting to distinguish three main blocs: the European-Japanese imperialism, the socialist Soviet Union (with which the Chinese revolutionary forces formed an alliance) and the disadvantaged, underdeveloped former and remaining colonies. So, all things considered, thanks to the May Fourth Movement, which had proved the Chinese social classes' ability to successfully collaborate, China entered a new revolutionary path.

Nevertheless, the revolutions that have marked the first half of the twentieth century are not only these characterized by violence, as it was believed in the past. The Chinese scholar and researcher He Fang sustains that also the numerous improvements reached during these decades should be classified as revolutionary events. Furthermore, he affirms that

改良推动社会进步的幅度和程度，有时还要超过暴力革命。³²

The extent of improvements in promoting social progress, sometimes, exceeds the violent revolutions.

Revolutions such as the Russian and the Chinese ones, indeed, had caused long periods of social instability, that could have hindered concrete immediate progress. Contrarily, especially after the Second World War, a lot of countries have made important social progress without passing through violence, but through continuous and gradual improvements. He Fang sustains that, because of their relevance, these social improvements are exactly equivalent to revolutions. As an example, originally the political democracy of a lot of capitalistic countries was very limited, people's right to vote was limited by factors as race, gender and property. Through gradual and continuous improvements, many Western countries' democracy has made great progress, to the point that, for example, in the United States also black people and women can be elected as president. Thanks to this continuous progress, also the Western capitalism itself, as the main

³¹ Muhlhahn, K. (2016). *China* [online] International Encyclopedia of the First World War. Available at: <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/china>.

³² He, F. 何方. (2011) Shenme shi shidai he shidai tezheng - Heping yu fazhan shidai wenti shi jiang (zhi yi) 什么是时代和时代特征 — 和平与发展时代问题十讲（之一） (Which is our era and the characteristics of the times – First of the ten lectures on the era of peace and development). *Social Science Forum*.

body of the world's capitalist system and dominant force, has undergone a lot of changes, turning from traditional capitalism to modern capitalism.

So, after all these considerations, we can conclude that the first half of the twentieth century has been properly defined as *zhanzheng yu geming shidai* 战争与革命时代, the Era of War and Revolution, since it has been characterized by two devastating world wars that have irremediably marked the human history, followed by many violent and non-violent revolutions, that have brought a lot of social changes and improvements all over the world. With the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, however, the economies of various countries destroyed by wars have recovered, the colonial system has basically collapsed and a general social order was reached; a new era was starting to show, the *heping yu fazhan shidai* 和平与发展时代, the Era of Peace and Development.

2.4 Twentieth century: alternation of two eras

The twentieth century has been characterized by the alternation of two main opposite eras: the Era of War and Revolution, first, and then the Era of Peace and Development. Scholars have long discussed which is the rightest date representing the transition from one era to the other. The majority of experts has agreed that the years between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the '50s represents the transition period from the Era of War and Revolution to the Era of Peace and Development. For explaining their statement, they provided 3 main reasons: the first is that at the beginning of the 1950s the World War II was finished already for five or six years, so countries' damages and devastations caused by the war were basically restored. Obviously, this was not valid for everyone: the Soviet Union and China represent the exceptions since they recovered a little bit later. However, the majority of the states which had participated in the Second World War have recovered their economy up to the pre-war level or even more, starting officially the Era of Peace and Development. The second reason is that in this period the colonial system was already basically collapsed; furthermore, the general tendency towards national revolutions seeking for independence, that had characterized the second part of the 1940s, almost came to the end. Despite there were some exceptions of states that were not independent yet, at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century most of the countries have reached their independence, independence reached

through the forced concession or voluntary renunciation of the sovereign state. The third and last reason why the beginning of the '50s represents the transition period from one era to the other is that, in these years, the Western capitalist countries' democratic reforms were over. This kind of reforms took place during the second half of the '40s, reaching a general success and bringing important developments. After the Second World War, the three Axis powers, so Germany, Italy and Japan, were forced to change into democratic systems; while in Germany and in Italy people accepted the democratic reforms quite smoothly, in Japan the democratic system met some oppositions that forced the American general MacArthur to impose democratic changes, reducing a lot the emperor's power and constituting a multi-party system. In America, England and France the democratic changes were even begun during the anti-fascist war, for example with Roosevelt's Four Big Freedoms of 1941: Freedom of speech, Freedom of worship, Freedom from want and Freedom from fear, principles that perfectly summarized the values of democracy.

So, in conclusion, the general recovery from the Second World War, the collapse of the colonial system and the end of the democratic revolutions make the world enter in a new era at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, the Era of Peace and Development.

2.5 The Era of Peace and Development

The reasons why the first half of the twentieth century has been defined the Era of War and Revolution are, now, very clear. But which are the main and specific motivations that led scholars sustaining that the decades from the 1950s up to nowadays represent the Era of Peace and Development? Which are the most important happenings that led them to choose for this definition? The most evident and obvious reason is that, while during the first half of the century there were been two world wars, in the second half no world wars have been fought. This does not absolutely mean that no wars have been fought during these years; surely there have been some conflicts between some states, but the important thing is that these conflicts did not result in wars that involved so many states to become world wars. The most relevant of these conflicts was the Cold War, a rivalry between the two superpowers emerged by the Second World War with their allies: the Soviet Union on one hand, determined to maintain the control reached on eastern Europe, with the intent of spreading communism worldwide, and the United States, on the other hand, that, since it had economic and political believes deeply different, was feared

about a permanent Soviet domination of eastern Europe. The two superpowers represented the heads of the two factions that were created during the Cold War years, relatively the Eastern and the Western one. However, the reason why the second half of the twentieth century has been defined as the Era of Peace in spite of the Cold War is that this conflict was conducted on political, economic and propaganda fronts, limited only to the weapons' recourse, but without direct military confrontations between the two sides. Despite the two superpowers were both heavily armed with nuclear weapons, they never engaged directly in a full-scale armed conflict, because they both recognised that nuclear attacks would have led to total destruction of the world.

So, during the second part of the twentieth century, there have been some factors that led people to seek peace, cooperation and common development. One of them is that people have learned an important lesson from the past and, since the memories about the consequences of world war were still fresh in their minds, they did not want to repeat the same mistakes. This awareness led rulers to deeply consider and assume their historical responsibilities, making sure that they did not act rashly without thinking. Another important factor that has deeply characterized this period was the fundamental change of the world's dominant capitalist system, from traditional capitalism to a new and modernized one. This transformation consisted mainly in some qualitative changes, that made it change from a totally free economy system to a market economy system coupled with some government regulations. So, modern capitalism provides for a market economy system that is not completely free to self-regulate, but that, at the same time, allows the government to only make limited adjustments. This sort of compromise has found to be the most efficient and successful one, also for the promotion of peaceful international coexistence. The third factor important for the definition of this period as a peaceful one, is, ironically, the rapid progress of destructive weapons. As mentioned before, nuclear armaments represent a powerful constraint for the outbreak of war between big powers. This kind of weapons' development had been so rapid, that big powers' rulers and leaders of the time realized that if only they had used those weapons in a fight, the consequences would have been disastrous for everyone and losses would have been so vast that no one could have afforded them. The two biggest superpowers of the times, the Soviet Union and the United States, claimed to have thousands and thousands of nuclear warheads, but fortunately they never got to the point of using them, because they realized that the other part would have replied with the same arm, causing the devastation of both of them. So, these are the three main factors that

have promoted peaceful coexistence among the international system during the second half of the twentieth century and up to nowadays; of course, a lot of other new factors are continually added to them, such as general balance strategies or the rapid development of the globalization that has marked the latest decades. All of them are essential in making the war impossible, or at least improbable, to return.

However, this half of century is defined as the Era of Peace and Development, so, as well as the peace's, also the development's factor deserves a thorough analysis. After the end of the Second World War, indeed, also thanks to the long-term peace conditions that have been created, the world economy, politics, society and culture have reached unprecedented development, making human civilization enter in a new historical stage.

First of all, the development has substantially affected the global productive forces. During the second half of the twentieth century, global productivity and accumulated intellectual wealth exceeded the sum of all previous achievements of all time. According to the finance professor Chen Zhiwu, from the Anno Domini to 1880 the world's per capita GDP only doubled, while from 1880 to 2000 it increased nearly four-fold. Only during the first thirty years after World War II, the cumulative value of the world's industrial output was twice the total industrial output of human history. After the war, the capitalist labours' productivity increased by 890% for what concerns the technological progress. During the post-war period, indeed, the field of economy and technology are, probably, the ones that more improved.

Besides the productivity's development, other two fundamental improvements that deeply marked the second part of the twentieth century are the development of the marketization and the trend of political democratization. With the term *marketization*, we mean «the process of transforming an entire economy away from a planned economic system and toward greater market-based organization.»³³, so a process that might include the liberalization of the economic activities, the reduction and the restructuring of the public governance regulations and the system's opening for a market-based structure. In this period, and in particular from the 1980s, marketization has represented an important driving force for a lot of different countries' economy. The Chinese scholar He Fang affirms that:

³³ Gingrich, J. (2015). *Marketization*. [online] Encyclopædia Britannica. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/marketization>.

凡是“化”的国家，经济发展一定快，反之，就会停滞甚至倒退。³⁴

In the countries where the marketization has been put into practice, the economic development will be certainly fast, in the others it will stagnate or even regress.

For what concern China, as the other socialist countries, after the Second World War did not implement the marketization; however, since its opening to the outside world in the 1980s and, especially, since the 1990s, the marketization began to be applied, starting right away to bear fruit. Since the Second World War, together with the marketization, also the trend of democratization has arisen almost all over the world. Before the war, there were only a few democratic countries in the modern sense and, in any case, their democracy's connotations were still incomplete. Probably due to the anti-fascist nature of the world, since the second part of the twentieth century and, especially, since the 1970s the democratization trend has started to rapidly expand. In 1975 only 30 countries had a democratically elected government; in 2005 they were increased up to 119. In 1989 in Africa only 3 of the 53 countries had a multiparty system; in 1994 they increased up to 48. Year by year, decade by decade, the democratization has been expanded all over the world, making big steps forward in the process for tackling discriminations and limitations on people's right to vote. In this period, other important steps in the global development process have been made, such as the rise and implementation of the social welfare; wages, employment system, health insurances, etc. were deeply improved, reaching much higher levels than before the war. Also, culture and civilization have taken several steps forward; do not matter whether they are material or not, changes and improvements during the second half of the twentieth century have been enormous. Scientific development, knowledge explosion, customs' evolution, productivity' progress, economy and politics improvements have made the world enter into a new era: the Era of Peace and Development.

2.6 Prospects of the Era of Peace and Development

As we have seen previously, the world entered the Era of Peace and Development around the 1950s; since the beginning of this era, more than six decades have already passed and, among scholars, some questions begin to be asked: will this era continue? And if so, how long it will last? Or, maybe, the world will return in the Era of War and Revolution? Or it will be replaced

³⁴ He, F. 何方. (2011) Shenme shi shidai he shidai tezheng - Heping yu fazhan shidai wenti shi jiang (zhi yi) 什么是时代和时代特征 — 和平与发展时代问题十讲 (之一) (Which is our era and the characteristics of the times – First of the ten lectures on the era of peace and development). *Social Science Forum*.

by another type of era? The majority of experts, accordingly to the Chinese researcher He Fang, sustains that, at least for the foreseeable future, the Era of Peace and Development will continue for a long time, without being replaced by other world wars and revolutions periods and neither by other sorts of eras. Obviously, there are many reasoning and motivations that have led experts to reach this conclusion; one of them is represented by mankind's progress. After the two world wars of the twentieth century's first half, indeed, the world has changed and, with it, also humankind. People, and rulers as well, have learned that the only thing that involves a world war is devastation and destruction. Even if you get out as a winner country, the price to pay for world war is too high. For this reason, researchers think that in the foreseeable future the majority of the countries will do everything in their power to avoid other world wars.

A second factor that has led experts to believe that the Era of Peace and Development will continue for a long time is the internationalization, first, and the globalization, then. The tendency of internationalization appeared worldwide after the Second World War and has taken the name of globalization since the 1980s. These tendencies have unified nations, making them form a global community in which the interests of all countries are more similar and overlapping. The Houston Institute for Culture defines globalization as «the worldwide spread of influence of culture, language, religion, transportation, communication, media, technology, trade, business practices, and interrelated government and corporate finance, as well as environmental and health concerns.»³⁵; it means that globalization is a concept that covers a lot of different dimensions, it is not only referred to the political or economic aspect. Through the globalization process, trade and foreign investments barriers have been progressively reduced, leading to an unprecedented integration among economies and cultures as well. The technological communication's development has enabled an increased flow of information and ideas across the borders of the countries; markets, organizations, corporations are becoming more and more international. During the decades after the Second World War, important and politically influent international organizations have been created, such as the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, also known as NATO; transnational economic associations have been established, like the European Union, the North American Association and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. All these organizations and institutions have been crucial in the management of the globalization process that has marked the last decades.

³⁵ Globalization. *Houston Institute for Culture* [online] Available at: <http://www.houstonculture.org/global/index.html>.

For what concern the case of the People's Republic of China, however, as we are going to see, it delays for the first thirty years its participation in the internationalization. But as the 1980s can be regarded as a turning point for the internationalization trend that became globalization, these years were also a dividing line for China, since it caught up with the globalization trend, aligning itself with the majority of the other countries and even becoming one of the protagonists of this process. Nowadays, for example, cultural exchanges between China and the West are very frequent and normal, they are not seen as cultural aggression as in the past anymore; in China, we can see a lot of American schools and universities, as we can see hundreds of Confucius Institutes in a lot of foreign countries. These cultural exchanges have played a peaceful evolution role in promoting social progress in China, on one hand, and in promoting the ancient traditions of Chinese civilization abroad on the other hand.

Finally, a third factor that has led experts to sustain that the Era of Peace and Development will last for a long time is the invention and the development of nuclear weapons. As mentioned before, since the use of nuclear weapons poses a danger of human total destruction, people and leaders of big countries are cautious to take this enormous risk. Even if, during the last few years, nuclear proliferation and threats spread in some small and medium-sized countries, if common sense prevails, it will not come to that point of no return; or, at least, this is my personal opinion.

In conclusion, looking forward, the Era of Peace and Development is not on the verge of ending, but rather it is expected to continue for a long time; the simplest and summary reason is the humankind development itself. The more human society develops, the more it is conscious and aware of how important is to avoid the outbreak of another world war and, with it, the employ of nuclear weapons. This does not mean that local wars will not break out anymore; local and regional wars, including international and civil ones, indeed, have never been interrupted since the end of the Second World War and, in all likelihood, also in the future, they will never stop. However, this kind of conflicts does not change or affect the characteristics of the Era of Peace and Development. The other aspect that will never stop and that makes this era never stop, at least for the foreseeable future, is the globalization. This unstoppable historical trend is going to assume more and more some specific connotations; the first is the comprehensiveness, that means that it is going to cover all societies' aspects, such as economy, politics, culture, languages, technology, communication and so on. The second characteristic is the profoundness, that means that the globalization is going to be deeper and deeper, making countries' restrictions,

such as the sovereignty or the territory, being increasingly weakened. The third is the balance, so, thanks to the globalization, the disparity between nations and regions will be gradually reduced. The fourth and last characteristic of the globalization is the convergence, that means that all countries, regions and ethnic groups are learning from each other, moving toward common civilization and global harmony. As the Chinese scholar He Fang sustains:

全球化是人类文明进化发展的必由之路。³⁶

The globalization is the only way for the evolution of human civilization.

All these assumptions represent the reasons why scholars have no doubt that the Era of Peace and Development will last for a long time.

2.7 The importance of the correctness of times' judgment

The assessment of the times has extreme importance for a country's destiny, because whether the judgment is correct or not determine the success or the failure, the rise or the fall and even the survival of the country. History has provided us with some clear examples of it: above all, the one of China and of the Soviet Union. In the beginning and during the Era of War and Revolution, they have been able to correctly analyse the characteristics of the times and, for this reason, they reached the success; the problems, however, came when this era has begun to reach its natural end and these two countries' leaders did not realize it.

Communist Party of China grasped the characteristics of the times of war and revolution thanks to its leader Mao Zedong, whose inclinations and propositions coincided perfectly with them of that historical period. The Chinese leader, indeed, was deeply convinced that problems can only be solved by fighting and the political power can only be the gun.

On the other hand, also the Soviet Union was well prepared for the world war during the Era of War and Revolution and, actually, it achieved victory after it. During the years before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Soviet Union concentrated its efforts to develop heavy industry and laid a strong basis for the military industry. For example, it built a lot of tractor factories, so that, once the war had broken out, it could turn them into tanks factories. In this way, the material basis for the war was very strong and powerful. Therefore, Stalin was not

³⁶ He, F. 何方. (2011) Shenme shi shidai he shidai tezheng - Heping yu fazhan shidai wenti shi jiang (zhi san) 什么是时代和时代特征 — 和平与发展时代问题十讲 (之三) (Which is our era and the characteristics of the times – Third of the ten lectures on the era of peace and development). *Social Science Forum*.

wrong about the judgment of the era, because the war and revolution era's definition was right; the problem was that he made a serious mistake about who was going to fight with who. Since he believed that the war would take place among imperialistic countries, he estimated the danger of war between countries like Germany and Italy, on one side, and France and Britain, on the other, more prominent than German aggression to his country. Under such numbness, Stalin continued to make a large cleaning in the Red Army, killing a large number of Soviet officers. However, he did not realize that, in this way, he self-weakened its own military power, enabling the German fascists to drive straight into the Soviet Union in the early days of the war. This, indeed, was one of the first reasons beyond the Soviet Union ruin.

But the real and biggest mistake of the two socialist countries was made later, when the Second World War and, with it, the Era of War and Revolution were coming to their end. They did not realize that the times were changing and that the world was entering into a new era, the Era of Peace and Development. After the period of the Second World War, almost all countries' economies begun slowly to grow and develop. The Soviet Union, during the war, had developed its military strength to an incredible level, so much that, in the middle of the twentieth century, the 80% of its industries were related to the development of the military power. Moreover, during the years of the Cold War, it was engaged in an arms race with the United States of America. By doing so, the Soviet Union further developed its military power, exceeding even the US's quantity of nuclear weapons, but without taking care of the development of its country and, consequently, without realizing the poverty level of its country and of its population. According to some international reports, during the '80s of the twentieth century, the per capita output value of the Soviet Union barely exceeds that of Costa Rica. While in 1917 the per capita consumption level of the Soviet Union occupied the seventh place in the world, in 1990 it retired to the seventy-seventh place. So, we can conclude that one of the reasons behind the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 was the URSS leaders' decisions to not take care of the economic growth, but to fight with the US for the hegemony, relying only on the military power; these policy decisions were due, definitely, by the fact that the Soviet Union assessment of the times was not correct, since it had not realized that the Era of War and Revolution had come to the end.

A similar situation was experienced by the People's Republic of China, that in the first thirty years after its foundation, so in the first thirty years of the twentieth century's second half, continued to maintains its preparation for the war and its support for the world revolution,

without realizing that the world was turning into the new Peace and Development Era. The country conditions were gradually getting worse, until, by the end of the cultural revolution at the end of the 70s, the Chinese economy has reached the brink of collapse. In that situation, if it were not for Deng Xiaoping that came out to reverse the situation, maybe the People's Republic of China would have made the same end of the Soviet Union.

China's specific experience, however, deserves a more detailed explanation, covered in the next paragraphs.

2.8 Chinese misjudgment of the times

The 1950s has marked the beginning of the new Era of Peace and Development for the whole world. But, while during the first decades the majority of the countries was committed to maintaining peace, China was still committed to preparing for fighting; while the others were seeking for development, China was still persisting on continuing the revolution. By doing so, China did not realize that it was falling behind all the others, losing thirty years of opportunities. However, this kind of mistake in the assessment of the times was not made only by the People's Republic of China, but also by the Soviet Union and the two things are, obviously, linked. Although the Communist International was dissolved in 1943, indeed, the Soviet Union's leadership of the international communist movement remained unchanged. Moreover, the Communist Party of China was established with the help of the Communist International. Mao Zedong Thought was not based directly on Marxism, but on Stalin's doctrines. Lenin and Stalin's theories and human beings fit perfectly the ideals and personality of Mao Zedong, being all inclined to solve everything through fights and violence, rarely considering peaceful confrontations; for this reason, Mao considered himself as the Stalin of China. As a consequence, Mao firmly believed in Lenin's judgment of the times, that was, as we said previously, the Era of Imperialism and Proletarian Revolution, definition not exactly correct for the Era of War and Revolution. At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union with Stalin and the newly established People's Republic of China with Mao, did not recognize the change of the times and, believing that the world was still in the Era of War and Revolution, continued to pursue war's and revolution's policies. This mistake in the judgment of the times has represented an important reason for the failure of the socialist countries and the entire international communist movement.

At the beginning of the twentieth century's second half, instead of concentrating on economic construction and on opening up relations with other countries following what the trend of the times dictated, China persisted in supporting and carrying out world revolution, strengthening the internal and external class struggle. For doing it and for consolidating its power, in the late 1950s, Mao Zedong took the country into a modernization campaign, known as the Great Leap Forward. This campaign represented an effort to exploit the enormous potential of the hundreds of millions of people living in the countryside; Mao, indeed, believed that turning all those villagers and farmers into a giant army of foot soldiers deployed in a constant and continuous revolution, it would be easier for him to transform the Chinese economy, leading its country to surpass capitalist countries and reach a time of plenty and wealth. He did not transform them literally into soldiers, but he herded them into giant collectives, called people's communes, in which every type of private property was totally abolished. In its stead, the absolute law that he imposes was radical and overall collectivization, through which everything belongs to the state; lands, tools, utensils, all of them became collective property. Actually, since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party had already started collectivizing most of the countryside's private property. However, 1958 represents the transition to absolute and radical collectivization, through the abolishment of any type of private property. Of course, the Great Leap Forward campaign backfired very badly and the effect was a famine on a devastating scale. Since farmers had been deprived of any incentive to work, losing any type of private property as well as decision-making power, obviously it became difficult to have them work with good results. For this reason, violence began to replace incentives; local party members began to use violent means in order to compel farmers to carry out works for which they were barely paid. The catastrophe was inevitable and from 1958 to 1961 tens and tens of millions of people were not only beaten and tortured, but also left to starve to death.

During the first years of the 1960s, since the Chinese domestic and international situation was rapidly tumbling down, the Chinese Communist Party's summit developed a rectification policy, defined as the policy of readjustment and consolidation, through which a policy's change of direction has been made; in the meanwhile, Mao Zedong stepped temporarily aside. Under Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese Communist Party developed a series of documents trying to bring the country out of the rapidly growing crisis. This policy's change of direction represented a retreat from the Great Leap Forward's radicalism. Some major changes

have been made, such as the reduction of the communes, in order to make workers' and farmers' efforts linked to their remunerations. In general, during the first five years of the 1960s, China was making a remarkable job for reviving its economy, having recognized that mobilization approach and mass political campaigns were no longer appropriate instruments for the Chinese economic development. The majority of CCP's leaders agreed with this consideration and, effectively, some first positive effects started to show in these years. However, Mao and a few of his supporters maintained a different opinion, viewing class struggle and mass mobilization as core factors for keeping the revolutionary process alive; moreover, they saw in the new trend a danger of capitalism's restoration. They were convinced that their country was headed down the road toward revisionism. In September 1962, at the Central Committee plenum, Mao launched the appeal to remember that the class struggle was not over, but rather it was still high on the Chinese agenda. In that occasion, he also recalled that in the socialist society, the struggle between the two roads, the road of socialism and the road of capitalism, still existed and the danger for capitalism's restoration was always present. Since this plenum, a political clash between Mao's position and CCP leadership's has begun to emerge, leading to a lot of conflicts and disputes that tore China apart. The 1962 meeting can be taken as a clear harbinger of what would become known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Being convinced that the Era of War and Revolution had not yet ended, indeed, the revolutionary spirit of Mao had never subsided. For this reason, he began to take some initiatives in order to reinvigorate the masses' revolutionary spirit and to rectify the party's leadership; the first of them was the campaign of socialist education, which was intended to strengthen the party's apparatus in the countryside. However, Mao became rapidly aware of the isolation in which he had now come to be within the party, understanding that these initiatives were not effective enough. In August 1966, he called the eleventh plenum of the Central Committee, in which he proclaimed the official beginning of the so-called Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, whose objective was the overthrow of those in the party who had taken the path of capitalism. He was determined to create groups, committees and congresses to support the Cultural Revolution, in which the Mao Zedong-thought was the absolute guideline. Mao did not just impose his line of thought on the Central Committee, but also on the masses: he addressed directly to them, through a manifesto in which he lashed out at all those who had adopted the reactionary point of view of the bourgeoisie. Over this summer, groups of students began to wear uniforms and to use a red armband, signifying that they were Mao's soldiers; they took the name of Red Guards. They

identified themselves as the defenders of Mao Zedong, the ones who will fight for him in order to ensure that the Cultural Revolution was carried out in the best way. Mao's initiative was soon followed by many party leaders and local officials, who, in order to maintain and protect their place, also started to organize groups and Red Guards. Soon, in the general confusion, violent clashes of factions began and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution became a decade-long period of political and social chaos. Devastation and violence of this period would leave an indelible mark on the Chinese's memory. All those who were considered Mao's or Cultural Revolution's enemies, regardless of whether they were part of the party or not, suffered ruthless persecution that in many cases culminated in moral and physical annihilation. During this decade, China has counted about 1.5 to 2 million people who were hounded to their deaths. However, as the Dutch historian and chair of humanities at the University of Hong Kong Frank Dikotter sustains, «the point is that it is not so much death which characterized the Cultural Revolution, it was trauma.»³⁷. One by one, cities were being thrown into total chaos, shops were vandalized, churches were vandalized, temples were torn down, tombstones were overturned, books were burnt through massive bonfires. But it was the persecutions, however, that reached the most unimaginable levels; the Red Guards began raiding the homes of those people suspected of still having ties or sympathies for the old regime. They turned people against each other, forcing them to denounce friends, colleagues and family members. This was the mark left behind by the Cultural Revolution: 10 years of turmoil, disorder, damages, bloodshed, hunger and stagnation, or even retrogression. It has been described as the most severe setback suffered by China since the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949.

2.9 The bad price of Chinese wrong times judgment

As we have seen previously, the judgment of the times has extreme importance for every country, because whether the assessment is correct or not can contribute a lot for their destinies, for their success or their failure. At the beginning of the 1950s the world has entered in a new era, the Era of Peace and Development; however, the People's Republic of China with its leader Mao Zedong did not recognize it and has continued to behave as if it were still in the Era of War and Revolution. It has continued to strengthen internal and external class struggle, to

³⁷ Dikotter, F. (2016) *Newly Released Documents Detail Traumas of China's Cultural Revolution*. (Interviewed by Davies D.). Fresh Air [Radio programme] NPR.

prepare for war and to support the world revolution. In the meanwhile, the other developed countries were committed to maintaining a peaceful environment, to restoring and developing their own economies as well as the world's one, to politically promoting the democratic transformation of the defeated countries. Deng Xiaoping, in a speech on the 3rd of June 1988, said that:

我们从1957年以后，耽误了二十年，而这二十年又是世界蓬勃发展的时期。³⁸

We have been delayed for twenty years since 1957, and these two decades are the period of world boom.

The consequences of the Chinese wrong judgment of the times, indeed, has been to fall behind all the others, losing thirty years of opportunities, and to push its economy to the brink of collapse; moreover, this happened exactly at the moment in which the other developed countries were entering in a long period of gold development.

For what concern the economy, specifically, during the first three decades after the founding of the People's Republic of China, not only it has not developed, but it has even regressed. This thirty-year period has been the golden age of world economic development, the best period with the best opportunities, but because China has taken the wrong way, it has lost these opportunities. During these years, while the other countries focused on the development of productive forces, China focused on class struggle; while the others opened up to the outside world, China did everything to be more and more internationally isolated; while the others attached importance to education's, technology's and science's progress, China despised and destroyed education and civil principles; while the others were engaged in democratic improvements, China strengthened its dictatorship. Obviously, all these choices have meant that, while the other countries have developed rapidly, China has regressed in many aspects. As an example, in 1948 China's per capita GDP was ranked as the fortieth in the world; in 1978, it fell to the second lowest place, with a per capita GDP of only two-thirds of India's one. Moreover, most of the indicators of China's development and living conditions ranked below the 170th place in the world rankings.

For better understanding the seriousness of the Chinese situation, we can take Japan as a comparison. During the final stage of the Second World War, Japan was devastated by two

³⁸ Liu, S. 刘胜兰 (1984). *Dangdai sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo de lilun zhinan — xuexi “dengxiaoping” di san juan de tihui* 当代思想政治工作的理论指南——学习《邓小平》第三卷的体会 (*A Theoretical Guide to Contemporary Ideological and Political Work: Learning from the Third Volume of Deng Xiaoping*). Theoretical study and exploration.

nuclear bombings detonated by the United States. In the following years, Japan has no choice but to engage in a slow and gradual recovery. According to the World Bank statistics, in 1955 China's total economic output accounted for 4.7%, while Japan's for 2.4%. Nevertheless, around 1960, Japan has already reached China: the two countries were about in the same condition, accounting for 4.6%. But, in 1980 China's total economic output fell to 2.5%, while Japan's one rose to 9.5%. And this comparison was not valid only with developed countries like Japan, but the gap between China and some developing countries was also getting bigger and bigger. This represents clear evidence of how wrong decisions dictated by the wrong judgment of the times have led China to the brink of collapse. Decisions such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the numerous ups and downs of political movements with their waves of ruthless persecutions cannot lead to social and economic development.

Furthermore, in an already serious situation, China has done everything to isolate itself internationally; Mao argued, indeed, that the masses have to rely only on their own strength, refusing any external and foreign help. In this way, until the beginning of the 1980s, China has lost the big opportunity to take advantages of the new trends of this period, the internationalization and the globalization. These tendencies' advantages, such as economic, political and technological development, environmental and health improvements, a flow of information and ideas across the borders of countries, can only be exploited by countries and communities that have accepted the arrival of the new Era of Peace and Development and that work in accordance with it. But China, at least until the 1980s, did not do it, continuing to carry out the same approach and the same strategy of the Era of War and Revolution. So, during its first thirty years, due to the mistake made in the judgment of the times, People's Republic of China having been closed against any international relation or contact, has lost a golden period of development and opportunities and has fallen behind compared to other countries.

Another society's aspect that has suffered a strong impact in this period is the cultural one. During these decades, and in particular during the Cultural Revolution, the Mao Zedong Thought has been imposed as the central operative guideline for every aspect of Chinese society. The Red Guards were authorized to impose themselves on the local police authorities, on the army and even, more in general, on the law. In this sort of circumstances, a lot of traditional aspects of the Chinese culture has been attacked and even forbidden. Traditional art, music and literature were all radically criticized, censored and banned. The CCP's leader was determined to destroy the so-called *si jiu* 四旧, that were the Four Olds, so the old customs, the old culture,

the old habits and the old ideas; these were the elements that proponents of the Cultural Revolution wanted to abolish in order to pursue their vision of China's progress. In their place, they imposed the *si xin* 四新, the Four news; this meant changing names of streets, shops or even people with revolutionary slogans, breaking into the homes of the bourgeois and destroying paintings, books, furniture and all the items viewed as part of the Four Olds, desecrating old temples and so on. In this way, the status of traditional Chinese culture and institutions were deeply and irremediably damaged. And beyond the Four Olds, the Cultural Revolution also aimed to eliminate the *niugui-sheshen* 牛鬼蛇神, the so-called Cow Demons and Snake Spirits; this term was coined by Du Mu of the Tang dynasty during the ninth century AD, in the preface of a poetry collected by Li He. With this term, the poet referred to the fantastical elements of Li He's poetry. During the Cultural Revolution, however, this term became one of the most popular expressions used to denounce and dehumanize any enemy, no matter whether they were real opponents or only perceived. Everyone who seemed to promote bourgeois ideas within the party, the government or among intellectual circles were considered enemies to be defeated. A new expression was also coined, in order to categorize all the Cultural Revolution's enemies: *hei wu lei* 黑五类, the Five Black Categories, represented by the groups of the *dizhu* 地主, the landlords, of the *funong* 富农, the rich farmers and peasants, of the *fan-gemin* 反革命, the counter-revolutionaries, of the *hau-i-fenzi* 坏分子, the bad-influencers, and of the *youpai* 右派, the rightists. A lot of people were denounced, humiliated and beaten even for the slightest suspicion. One of the worst traumas entailed by the Cultural Revolution has been having turned people one against the other, to such an extent that students denounced their teachers and children denounced their parents.

In this period, also the world of art and literature were deeply attacked; for what concerns the theatre, all the traditional operas were banned, since they were considered feudalistic and bourgeois. They were replaced by revolutionary operas, based on Peking opera, but with content and form modified. During the Cultural Revolution's years were produced eight model dramas, six of which were operas and two were ballads; they would have been the only approved opera forms for the years ahead. For this reason, these eight models became omnipresent as a form of popular entertainment: as well as theatrical performances, they were also transformed into films, broadcasted on the radio and taught to students in schools. In the meanwhile, artists, writers and intellectuals who appeared to be in the *Black Line*, the list of those who perceived to be bourgeois, anti-socialist or anti-Mao, were denounced, persecuted or imprisoned. Very few

were the writers who, in these years, had the permission from the new system for publishing their works; however, the permissible subject matter was strictly defined and, for this reason, the majority of writers repeatedly saw their work rejected, remaining without publishing for a long time. A very similar situation affected also the film industry: a book entitled *Four Hundred Films to be Criticized* were published and distributed; all the film directors and actors who had taken part in the films contained in this list were strongly criticized and even tortured and imprisoned. For more than five years, no new films were produced in China, except for the model dramas' films. For what concern the world of music, the Chinese Communist Party condemned much of the Shanghai popular music *Huangse yinyue* 黄色音乐, Yellow Music and banned it. They used this label because in China the colour yellow is associated with eroticism and sex, since the Chinese character *huang* 黄 also means *erotic*; CCP considered this genre of music immoral and indecent and replaced it with revolution-themed songs. Like most of the other artists, also musicians were ruthlessly persecuted.

During the years of the Cultural Revolution, also the Chinese education system was deeply compromised. In the initial stage of the revolution, all the schools and university were closed; during the following years, primary and middle schools gradually reopened, but colleges and universities did not reopen before 1972. Even if since 1972 China's universities gradually reopened, the university entrance exams remained deleted and were replaced with a system in which only factories and military units could recommend students. Only in 1977, thanks to Deng Xiaoping, the entrance exams were finally restored. During these years, about 142 thousand teachers, academics, professors and educators were persecuted and a lot of them were even sent to rural labour camps. In 1968 the CCP instituted the so-called Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement, according to which the urban privileged youths were sent to the mountains villages or to the rural areas, in order to be re-educated and to learn by the peasantry and the local workers. Only in this way, sustained Mao, they could really understand the fundamental role of the manual agrarian labour for China's society; but actually, in doing so, he only deprived them of the opportunity to access to a higher degree of education. Initially, a lot of youths left voluntarily the urban areas, but later was the government that forced them to move to the countryside. It has been estimated that from 1968 to 1979, about 17 millions of Chinese youths moved, voluntarily or forcibly, to rural areas.

All these happenings represent the clear demonstration that, during the first thirty years after the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party have made a

serious mistake on the judgment of the times. Being convinced that the Era of War and Revolution was not over and listening to their revolutionary spirits, they did not recognize that, since the 1950s, the world was entering into a new era, the Era of Peace and Development; with this conviction, they have continued to carry out the same approach and the same strategy of the first half of the twentieth century, so a revolutionary one.

By doing so, they gradually fell behind all the other developed countries, losing the opportunity to take advantages from an extraordinary golden period. China has been an example of how important is to correctly analyse and assess the characteristics of the times.

Fortunately, just when it touched the brink of collapse, the People's Republic of China has been able to summarize its experience, learn the lesson and change its strategy.

CHAPTER 3

China's change in the judgment of the times

3.1 The 1970s: political and social instability

The first decades of the People's Republic of China were not been very favourable and successful. The Chinese Communist Party's leader Mao Zedong, listening to his inclinations, made an irreparable mistake on the judgment of the times: he did not recognize that, at the beginning of the 1950s, the world was entering into the new Era of Peace and Development. For this reason, he stubbornly continued to carry out the same strategies and the same policy's approach peculiar to the Era of War and Revolution. By so doing, for pursuing his aim of the world's revolution, he took some actions, like the Great Leap Forward and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which brought China into an economic, political and social situation of total chaos. We have seen that, from its foundation in 1949 to the 1970s, China has gradually fallen behind all the other developed countries and, after almost three decades, its survival was seriously at risk.

Around the mid-'70s, however, something seemed to start changing. In a very unsteady situation, two opposing political tendencies were being created: on the one hand there were those who highlighted the economic needs of the country and underlined the necessity to pursue a policy of détente with foreign countries and, in particular, with the West; on the other hand, there were those who still supported the revolutionary themes, denying any contact with foreign countries. This opposition between the two tendencies was very evident during the tenth congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1973, during which two reports were presented, respectively, by Zhou Enlai and Wang Hongwen. The tenth congress has also formalized the return of Deng Xiaoping in the political world; during the first years of the Cultural Revolution, indeed, since his ideas had begun to diverge from those of Mao, he was pushed away from the political arena. However, the Premier of the People's Republic of China Zhou Enlai considered Deng his first choice as successor and, for this reason, has been able to convince Mao to readmit him into the world of politics. Moreover, when he fell incurably ill in 1974, Zhou made Deng became First Vice Premier of the Communist Party of China. During the following years, Deng tried to underline the importance of the national economy's reconstruction, but always remaining

careful of avoiding to contradict Mao. The Cultural Revolution, indeed, did not end before 1976 and, year by year, a radical leftist political group was taken more and more power; this political faction was known as the *Siren Bang* 四人帮, the Gang of Four and it was composed by Jiang Qing (Mao Zedong's wife and leading figure of the gang), Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen and Yao Wenyuan. The Gang of Four, as well as Mao, was quite suspicious about Deng Xiaoping and about the power that he was getting. They feared that he could ruin the reputation of the Cultural Revolution, the policy initiative in which Mao believed the most and in which he put a lot of hopes. The antagonism between Deng and the Gang of Four began gradually to increase, until it became quite evident. Mao Zedong seemed to be on the side of the Gang of Four, but his position was frequently unclear, being less and less able to direct the political struggle; although most of the times he was on the side of those who criticized Deng's policies, he sometimes assumed a suspicious and irritated attitude towards the radical faction. So, during these years, the political situation was very unstable and unpredictable. In order to counteract the concrete program presented by Zhou and Deng, the most radical leaders of the CCP launched a new campaign on the dictatorship of the proletariat and on the limitation of bourgeois rights; with this campaign, they denounced, once again, the risk of the capitalism's restoration and exhorted the masses to protect and safeguard the socialism. However, the situation worsened considerably when Zhou Enlai died in the January of 1976; with Zhou's death, indeed, Deng Xiaoping lost his biggest supporter within the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. The clearest demonstration of it was the fact that, contrary to what was requested by Zhou Enlai, the new position of prime minister was not assigned to Deng, but to the little-known official Hua Guofeng. The new prime minister was a compromise figure, accepted, at least initially, by both sides, even though neither of them could identify with him. Soon after his ascent, however, Hua Guofeng sided with the radicals, starting a campaign against Deng Xiaoping. Moreover, in April of the same year, Hua, as well as being confirmed in his position as prime minister, was also appointed as vice president of the Party, while Deng was deprived of all his official functions, retaining only the one of Party's member. The 9th September 1976, died the man who had been universally recognized as the supreme leader of China, but who, in his latest years, had played only a rather passive symbolic function, sometimes even inhibitory against any political solution: Mao Zedong. It seemed that the different factions were waiting for this moment to settle their accounts definitively. The first to move was Hua Guofeng: in the past he has assumed quite an ambiguous position, even if in the

end he sustained the radical faction and the Gang of Four, supporting their policy of criticizing Deng. After Mao's death, however, he arranged a coup to finally eliminate the Band of the Four. The 6th October 1976 the four were arrested. The speed with which the radicals left the scene is an indicator of the isolation in which they had come to be in their recent years, despite the control they still exercised on the media and propaganda outlets. After the elimination from the political scene of the Gang of Four, Hua Guofeng tried in every way to consolidate his position. But a lot of people, and especially a significant part of the Army, put a lot of pressures on him demanding the return of Deng Xiaoping, whose policy offered the best guarantees for overcoming the difficulties that the Party and the country were facing. Despite many uncertainties and despite his mistrust, Hua was forced to readmit Deng in the official positions he had previously held. The return of Deng Xiaoping was made official during the Third Plenum of the X Congress of the Central Committee in July 1977.

3.2 The return of Deng Xiaoping: China's first steps forward

Between 1977 and 1982 in Beijing, was held the XI Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and, during it, was made a significant renewal of the Central Committee, which saw the re-entry of many victims of the Cultural Revolution and the exclusion of the representatives of those mass organizations that in the past were you are controlled by the radical group. But beside the reformers, headed by Deng, the presence of those leaders who were referring to the Maoist tradition was still strong, first of all the same Hua, who was reconfirmed as president of the Party. But it was only a matter of time: moving with extreme agility, Deng Xiaoping gradually managed to create the conditions to definitively re-launch its policy against conservative resistance. The history of the People's Republic of China would therefore have experienced a gradual revision process, which went hand in hand with the consolidation of Deng Xiaoping's power. During the 6th plenary session of the XI Congress in June 1981, was approved a document called *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party by the Foundation of the People's Republic of China*; among the many measures listed in this document, the one considered as the most relevant was that of the evaluation of the Mao Zedong's role, in which were condemned the mistakes made during his last period, still recognizing the crucial importance of Mao Zedong's thought. If in the period from 1949 to 1957 his work can be considered fundamentally correct, the errors began from 1957 to 1966,

then considerably worsening from 1966 to 1976. Despite the due recognition attributed to his thought that, although badly applied by his own author, will continue to lead the Party, this document condemned Mao's arrogance, his contempt for democratic rules and his arbitrary decisions. These condemnations were further accentuated by the fact that Mao's mistakes were committed precisely in the years when the world was entering a new Era of Peace and Development, an era characterized by a considerable increase in opportunities and development, thanks also to the collaboration between the different states that has been discovered to lead to common advantages. But since the Chinese leader misjudged the times and continued to carry out the same policies of the Era of War and Revolution, Chinese people could not take advantages from these new opportunities and fell behind all the other developed countries. However, after Mao's death and with the consolidation of Deng Xiaoping's power, People's Republic of China has experienced a gradual process of political, economic and social revival. Now, the times were changing also for China.

文化大革命”给中国人民带来的苦难和创伤，激发了中国人民为建设一个高度民主、高度文明的现代化社会主义强国的无比强大而持久的热情。³⁹

The suffering and trauma brought to the Chinese people by the "cultural revolution" has inspired the Chinese people's unparalleled and long-lasting enthusiasm for building a highly democratic and highly civilized modern socialist power.

After that in the 6th plenary session of the XI Congress of June 1981 Hua Guofeng was forced to leave the presidency of the Party, in the XII Congress in September 1982 he was definitively excluded from the political arena, retaining only the status of member of the Party. Deng Xiaoping, on the other hand, confined himself to keeping his place in the Permanent Committee of the political office, in addition to the presidency of the Commission of Military Affairs, that guaranteed him the control of the army. But in the meanwhile, thanks to the fact that his policies aimed at the economic recovery of the country began to bear fruits, the consensus and power of Deng grew more and more.

It is necessary, however, to take into account that the Chinese Communist Party's awareness about the necessity and the urgency of accepting the new Era of Peace and Development and of working in accordance with it for the good of the state did not come all of a sudden. Despite

³⁹ Gao, G. 高皋 and Yan, J. 严家其. (2012). *Wenhua Dageming Shinianshi* 文化大革命十年史 (*Ten years of the Cultural Revolution*). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

Deng's tendency toward economic development and international cooperation, for several years it was not very easy for him to convince the other Party's central leaders about such a great change in the judgment of the times; some of them have changed their view quite rapidly, but for others it took a few years. Anyways, during this process, Deng Xiaoping's deep understanding about the characteristic of the times has played a fundamental and decisive role for the whole Party, without which, probably, today China would not be what it is nowadays: a country that, on the one hand, presents deep-rooted ancient traditions that still exert an incredible influence on many aspects of people's lives, but, on the other hand, is in continuous and rapid transformation, modernisation and economic development. Since this period, indeed, China has developed (and it is still developing) from a poor and backward developing country which was not interested in participating in international affairs, to a rising emerging country that plays a leading role in the international arena. Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening up have profoundly changed the relationship between China and the outside world, making China become more comprehensive and deeply integrated into the international system.

3.3 Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening up to the outside world

Deng Xiaoping, between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, personally realized the backwardness and the poverty his people were in. Being the undisputed core leader of the Party, it was his job to make things change; basically, he was convinced that the first step for making things change radically, was to change the Chinese perspective on the times, so to change Chinese judgment of the times. After years of Maoist political campaigns and revolutions that led to nothing but chaos and backwardness, Deng had indeed realized that the strategy of *being always ready for war* was no longer in line with the times and with the international situation. It was the time for China to change its judgment of war and revolution into peace and development, following the international tendency. This new perspective involved being more open to the outside world, more inclined to establish partnership relations with foreign countries, because only in this way it would be possible to achieve common development.

During the Third Plenary Session of the XI Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in December 1978, the first course changes were already seen: it was established that China needed

了解放思想、实事求是的思想路线。⁴⁰

an ideological line of emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts.

It means that, after having analysed the *shi* 势 of the times, so the mega-trend of the times, after having summed up the experience and learnt the lesson from the past, China finally made the great decision not only to focus on its economic construction, but also to opening up to the outside world. Through this strategy, China's international positioning has made a relevant change, shifting from being a socialist country dominated by a high degree of ideology, to a socialist developing country centred on economic development and on implementing reform and opening up.

In the September 1982, the XII National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party established an important strategic decision: the central position of the economic construction, which must be pursued always in the national interests, but without excluding itself from the international system. Moreover, during this National Congress Deng Xiaoping personally reported that:

We will unswervingly follow a policy of opening to the outside world and actively increase exchange with foreign countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.⁴¹

With these words, he officially declared that Chinese foreign policy was moving toward the tendency of peace and development. He understood that a stable and peaceful environment would contribute to China's development and, in turn, China's development would create stability and new standards of life not only in China, but also in Asia Pacific regions and throughout the world. He realized that the cooperation among countries within a peaceful environment can lead to common advantages that could not be achieved otherwise; so, for this reason, he sustained that:

任何一个国家要发展，孤立起来，闭关自守是不可能的，不加强国际交往，不引进发达国家的先进经验、先进科学技术和资金是不可能的。⁴²

⁴⁰ Lu, J. 卢静. (2018). *Guoji dingwei yu gaige kaifang yilai de zhongguo wajiao* 国际定位与改革开放以来的中国外交 (*International Positioning and China's Diplomacy since Reform and Opening up*). [online] China Institute of International Studies. Available at: http://www.ciis.org.cn/gyzz/2018-10/08/content_40526022.htm.

⁴¹ Keith, R. C. (2018). *Deng Xiaoping and China's Foreign Policy*. New York: Routledge.

⁴² Xiaoping, D. 邓小平. (1993). «*Deng Xiaoping wenxuan*» di san juan 《邓小平文选》第3卷 (*Selected works of Deng Xiaoping, vol. 3*). Beijing: People's Publishing House. p. 117.

It is impossible for any country to develop isolating and shutting itself down; it is impossible to strengthen international exchanges and not to introduce advanced experience, advanced scientific and technological knowledge and capital from developed countries.

This means that Chinese interests, as well as any other country's interests, cannot be pursued separately from the overall interests of mankind. China has, indeed, realized the importance of the relations and the exchanges with the other countries. So, now, the main goal of China's diplomacy is shifted from advancing the world revolution to promoting peace, developing cooperation and creating a peaceful and stable international environment, in order to have the best possible circumstances for pursuing China's economic construction. Indeed, Deng affirmed that:

我们把争取和平作为对外政策的首要任务。争取和平是世界人民的要求，也是我们搞建设的需要。⁴³

We regard peace as the primary task of foreign policy. Striving for peace is the requirement of the people of the world and the need for us to build.

Deng Xiaoping, furthermore, when was called to make important decisions, was used to not only hear different points of view before coming to the conclusion, but also to hear different opinions from foreigners first. This was because different observers could have different opinions about China's situation and, moreover, external opinions could give more objective and interesting ideas and suggestions.

This is the reason why, in October 1984, during a meeting with the German chancellor Helmut Kohl, the China's leader said openly how much Chinese policy was beginning to change; Chinese people, indeed, have begun to realize that, although a minimum danger of war will always remain, in that period the factors that can prevent a new world war were higher. In such a situation, the best thing they could do, especially if they wanted to pursue the country's development, was to review China's foreign policy. For this reason, the new path to take was that of the safeguard of the international peaceful environment; only in this way, they could still have hopes for a radical economic and social recovery.

⁴³ Xiaoping, D. 邓小平. (1993). «*Deng Xiaoping wenxuan*» *di san juan* 《邓小平文选》第3卷 (*Selected works of Deng Xiaoping, vol. 3*). Beijing: People's Publishing House. p. 116.

Then, on March 1985 the CCP's leader met a delegation from the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry; among other businesses, they also discussed the general trend of the world and about the overall structure of the Chinese foreign policy. In this occasion, Deng officially declared that China's judgment of the times was definitely changed; he affirmed, indeed, that, especially from an economic point of view, he recognized that the modern world presented two main tendencies for what concerns the global strategic issues: the first was the peace and the second was the development. With these words, the Chinese leader has demonstrated that he had finally understood the characteristics of his times, the tendency of the world. Contrarily to Mao Zedong, who did not want to accept the truth of the matter, he has begun to observe the world objectively, with a new and strong sense of the time; so, through this new type of analysis, he has understood that the world has entered into the Era of Peace and Development.

After that, another important meeting with a foreign counterpart in which this argument has been discussed was the one with the Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers in May 1987. During this occasion, Deng emphasized again the China's need for international peace. He explained how important it was for China, in the delicate moment in which it was trying to resume the other countries' economic level, to be surrounded by a peaceful environment; without it, the economic construction and development of the country would be out of the question. And, moreover, the effort of maintaining and striving for lasting peace was

不仅是符合中国人民的利益，也是符合世界人民利益的一件大事。⁴⁴

not only in the interests of the Chinese people, but also an important factor in the interests of the world population.

In the same year, the thirteenth political report of the Chinese Communist Party officially put forward that peace and development were the «当代世界的主题»⁴⁵, that means the themes of the contemporary world.

⁴⁴ Zhao, L. 赵亮 and Li Y. 李璐颖. (2018) Deng Xiaoping: Yao jianshe, meiyou heping huanjing buxing 邓小平：要建设，没有和平环境不行 (Deng Xiaoping: it is impossible to build without a peaceful environment). [online] *Guang'An Daily News*. Available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0720/c69113-30159588.html>.

⁴⁵ He, F. 何方. (2011) Shenme shi shidai he shidai tezheng - Heping yu fazhan shidai wenti shi jiang (zhi san) 什么是时代和时代特征 — 和平与发展时代问题十讲（之三） (Which is our era and the characteristics of the times – Third of the ten lectures on the era of peace and development). *Social Science Forum*.

So, all these official declarations of Deng Xiaoping show that the Chinese leader, in deciding which line to take for China's domestic and foreign policy, has finally begun to follow the so-defined *shi* 势 assumption. In doing it, he has implemented the classical Chinese holistic way of perceiving the reality, that, apparently, had been set aside by his predecessor Mao Zedong. Deng Xiaoping, indeed, before taking decisions and actions, has focused his analysis on the whole picture, so on the mega-trend of the world, on the international system's tendency. After have analysed and estimated the distinctive characteristics of his times, he has considered them as the starting point for the development of his strategies and policies. The *shi* assumption, indeed, sustains that behaviour and actions should always be in accordance and coherent with the mega-trend of the whole picture. Observing the world around him with an objective perspective and a strong sense of the time, Deng has understood how the world has changed since the second half of the twentieth century. Thanks to his understanding, even if with over thirty years of delay and with all the bad consequences that come with it, China has finally begun to take part in the Era of Peace and Development.

3.4 The 1990s: Chinese foreign policy's further progress

During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, internationally, a lot of drastic changes occurred; the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the crisis of the world socialist movement have certainly led a radical revision of the international system's structure. From the bipolar international system of the Cold War period, the world has begun to present a polycentric international order since the beginning of the 1990s. In addition, in China well-known critical events occurred in 1989, remembered as the Tiananmen Square massacre, which caused some bad influences at home as well as abroad. In such a situation, China's reform and opening up has entered a crucial stage; in this critical and difficult moment, Deng Xiaoping has had the strength and the firmness to continue to pursue his policy. For doing it, he adopted some guiding principles for foreign relations that can be described as

冷静观察、稳住阵脚、沉着应付、韬光养晦、善于守拙、决不当头、有所作为。⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Lu, J. 卢静. (2018). *Guoji dingwei yu gaige kaifang yilai de zhongguo waijiao* 国际定位与改革开放以来的中国外交 (*International Positioning and China's Diplomacy since Reform and Opening up*). [online] China Institute of International Studies. Available at: http://www.ciis.org.cn/gvzz/2018-10/08/content_40526022.htm.

Calmly observe, stabilize our own position, calmly cope, keep a low profile, remain honest, never take the lead, make a difference.

Through this low-profile observation of the world, the Chinese government realized that the new multi-polar world system still presented peace and development as the two main themes. Therefore, the Chinese leader's purposes remained unvaried, so economic construction for what concerns domestic policy, and world peace maintenance and common development's promotion for what concerns the foreign policy.

At the beginning of the 1990s, also the Party's third generation central leadership with Jiang Zemin confirmed the awareness that the trend of the world that should be followed was the economic development, intending not only the development of the national economic system, but also of the international system, with the aim of guaranteeing a long-lasting stable environment. Furthermore, within the new multi-polar world, the opportunities for states' interactions were increased a lot; for this reason, Jiang emphasised the importance of taking advantage of these opportunities a lot of times during his official and non-official speeches. During the APEC's first informal leadership meeting in November 1993, for instance, addressing to the Asia-Pacific region's partners of China, he declared that only working together for surmounting difficulties and obstacles, they could aim for mankind's peace and prosperity. For pursuing this objective, he continued, they should follow the historical trend, that meant increase economic ties among countries and regions, promoting economic exchanges and cooperation. In fact, no state or region could achieve a good level of development in isolation from the rest of the world. In light of the above, the Chinese policy of reforms and opening up would be carried forward and, even, further deepened, practising an opening-up not only toward the Asia-Pacific area, but also toward the entire world. He concluded his speech affirming that

友谊与合作是通向持久和平与共同繁荣的桥梁。⁴⁷

Friendship and cooperation are the bridges leading to lasting peace and common prosperity.

⁴⁷ Jiang Z. 江泽民. (1993). *Jiang Zemin zhuxi zai APEC di yi ci lingdao ren fei zhengshi huiyi shang de jianghua* 江泽民主席在 APEC 第一次领导人非正式会议上的讲话 (*President Jiang Zemin's speech at APEC's first informal leadership meeting*). [online] Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Netherlands. Available at: <http://nl.china-embassy.org/chn/gzzg/zt/zgyapec/bjzl/t137068.htm>.

In following the trend of the world, however, China adopted a peculiar approach due, as for all the other countries, to its history, its legacy and its culture. For what concerns its self-perception, indeed, China shows a dual identity, composed by self-superiority on one hand and self-inferiority on the other hand, that have, inevitably, impacts on its foreign policy. The first aspect of its self-perception is explained by the fact that, until the middle of the nineteenth century, China was considered the centre of Asian continent, the power's centre to whom others paid tributes. Since the mid-nineteenth century, however, China lost his central position, becoming a semi-colonial country. Despite during the twentieth century the China's autonomy has been reached again, this sort of dual identity continued to be perceived. Moreover, during the end of the 1990s, and up to nowadays, China was simultaneously a developing country and a regional power, fact that has contributed to the Chinese multiple personality. Obviously, China's foreign policy is closely linked to its self-perception, that affects inevitably the way in which it builds relationships and partnerships with other countries. On the one side, being a developing country, China shares historical experiences and interests with the other less developed countries, perceiving to be in line with the concerns of the third world countries; in fact, they all strive for the safeguard their national independence and economic development. For this reason, the third world countries represent one of the main forces and of the main standpoints for China's foreign policy. On the other side, China, being also a global power, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and a member of the G20, is in direct contact with developed countries and with established powers; this led China to seek also for relations and alliances with the most developed countries.

3.5 The strategic partnership relationships new tendency

As argued above, within the new polycentric international order of the 1990s, an increase of the opportunities for interaction among countries occurred. These circumstances have favoured more flexibility for what concerns the choice of partners, both at regional and global levels, and the type of relationships and alliances to build; relationships have become more selective and situational, more issue-specific. In such a situation, a particular type of relationship emerged within the broader international relations system during this period, distinguishing itself for a higher level of flexibility: the strategic partnership relation. This type of relationship provides a flexible and pragmatic tool for «organising bilateral relations, pursuing shared economic and

diplomatic interests, and seeking international status»⁴⁸. The strategic partnership relation represents one of the many types of cooperative interstate agreement, by which two states build a stable relationship that allows them to hedge against all eventualities and, at the same time, to pursue shared and mutual interests. The particularity of this type of partnership is the fact that it is based on a goal-driven alignment and not on a threats-driven one such as the military alliances; this permits the two counterparts to build closer ties in a non-binding way, with the only aims of facing common challenges of different kinds, facilitating their cooperation and pursuing common interests together. In order to shed light on it, four main characteristics can be found in order to describe in the best way the strategic partnership relation. The first is that these relations' structural framework goes beyond the common diplomatic interactions' one, since it provides for regular exchanges between the partners. When China establishes this kind of partnership, for instance, it always involves the opening of additional channels for direct intergovernmental communications and the scheduling of official visits, summit meetings and gatherings between the two countries' leaders. The second characteristic of this type of relations is a high level of flexibility, due to the fact that it is not highly institutionalised. For this reason, the costs for entering or leaving these agreements are very low, almost symbolic. This constitutes a convenient advantage for the developing countries, which can, through this partnership, benefit from, for example, economic and security assistance, without the risk of losing their autonomy, as would happen with other interstate alliances. During the latest years, the Chinese government has emphasized a lot of times that this new interstate relation is a sort of non-alliance, a non-confrontation, since it is not against any third party. The third characteristic of the strategic partnership, then, is that, since it is a relationship based on goal-driven alignment rather than on threat-driven one, it can be considered as a way for the two participants to pursue shared interests and common goals together. In this kind of collaboration, conflicting issues are left aside or, better, are faced as points of disagreement to be transformed into common interests to work on together, in order to reach a shared goal. On the other hand, the issues and the areas that are regularly involved in such an agreement are business cooperation, health and welfare collaboration, cultural, economic and technological exchanges and, sometimes, security cooperation. Beijing sustains that this kind of partnership involves access to a lot of favourable opportunities, such as different markets, investment opportunities

⁴⁸ Strüver, G. (2016). *International alignment between interests and ideology: The case of China's partnership diplomacy*. GIGA Research Programme. Hamburg.

and natural resources. Finally, the fourth and last characteristic of the strategic partnership relation is that, in comparison with the alliance, it involves a stronger behavioural disposition to establish relations. This particular type of partnership can be seen as a process that reduces the uncertainty about how much cooperation we can expect from other international actors. Through repeated exchanges between partners, the interstate trust can be deepened and the future cooperation facilitated. This relational aspect is of particular relevance for Chinese; as argued above in the first chapter, indeed, one of the key elements of the Chinese culture is the Correlativity and its *guanxi* assumption, according to which the universe is perceived as a complex process of ongoing relations among individual. The society's relational web is based on the *guanxi*, that is more than a simple interpersonal relationship: according to the Confucian heritage, it involves reciprocal implicit obligations, that cannot be broken and that continue over time, in a long-term perspective. From this deep-rooted cultural belief, we can understand how much importance Chinese people have always attached to social relations. The same thing is also valid, obviously, for international relations, considered of primary importance for what concerns foreign policy. Thus, from the Chinese perspective, the establishment and the maintenance of ongoing relations are more important than the achievement of immediate and tangible results, which is the reason why in recent years China has established this type of partnership with more than sixty countries and with five regions or regional organisations.

After numerous studies and analysis, scholars have found that two main lines of arguments can be distinguished for what concerns the partner's choice and the partnership's formation. Since, as argued above, the strategic partnership relation is a goal-driven alignment, the first line of arguments for the partner's choice certainly is the complementarity of goals shared by the governments involved. The majority of times, the choice about the country with which establish a strategic partnership is based on the economic interests of the parts involved. The most desirable and worthwhile partner, hence, is the one with similar interests and complementary resources. According to this perspective, China's most desirable partners would be the ones compatible with its need for energy and commodity resources and its search for new opportunities for Chinese investments and new markets for Chinese exports; furthermore, a good Chinese partner should be willing to work with China to bring forward China's image as a responsible and peaceful power. On the other hand, the second line of arguments for the partner's choice is the ideological affinities, both at domestic and international level. For what concerns the domestic level, this implies that countries with similar regime models are more

likely to collaborate and align. Nevertheless, scholars sustain that democracies are generally the most attractive partners, thanks to their greater public accountability and transparency; this is valid also for China's partners' selection. While, at the international level, compatible partners are the ones that share a common vision on the international order, perceived on the basis of similar ideological legacies. In this perspective, the strategic partnership is perceived as an identity-driven relationship, an alignment of identities. Between these two lines of arguments for what concerns the partnership selection, however, so between the interests-driven alignment and the identity-driven alignment, scholars agree that the one that influence more the choice of the countries' strategic partners is the first one, so the one based on shared and compatible economic interests.

3.6 China's strategic partnership network

As in the rest of the world, also in China, since the early 1990s, has begun to spread this particular type of partnership relation, defined as *zhanlüe huoban guanxi* 战略伙伴关系, strategic partnership relation. This underlines how much China has really become part of the new Peace and Development international order, embracing the globalization trend and the multidimensional diplomacy tendency, with the aim of guaranteeing a favourable world order for its rise. In order to shed light on the Chinese specific interpretation of this kind of relationship, a clear and exhaustive explanation was provided by the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao during his speech at the China-EU Investment and Trade Forum in May 2004; his words were:

所谓“战略”，是指双方的合作具有全局性、长期性和稳定性，超越意识形态和社会制度的差异，不受一时一事的干扰。所谓“伙伴”，是指双方的合作是平等、互利、共赢的，在相互尊重、相互信任的基础上，求大同存小异，努力扩大双方的共同利益。中国同欧盟致力于发展这样一种新型关系，不仅符合中欧双方的利益，也

有利于地区和世界的和平、稳定与发展。⁴⁹

By "strategic", it means that the cooperation should be long-term and stable, bearing on the larger picture of China-EU relations. It transcends the differences in ideology and social system and is not subjected to the impacts of individual events that occur from time to time. By "partnership", it means that the cooperation should be equal-footed, mutually beneficial and win-win. The two sides should base themselves on mutual respect and mutual trust, endeavour to expand converging interests and seek common ground on the major issues while shelving differences on the minor ones.

With these words, the Chinese Premier explained in a very detailed way the Chinese idea of the strategic partnership, defining it as a cooperation destined to last over time between two nations or between a nation and a region or a regional organization which, while maintaining their differences, pursue common objectives together. This type of relationship can only be established in a climate of equality, mutual respect and mutual trust.

According to official statements, China is one of the countries with the biggest number of this kind of alignment. Its first strategic partnership was established in November 1993 with Brazil, when they signed the so-called *Long-term and stable strategic partnership based on mutual benefit*. Since then, China has constantly continued to establish this type of partnership. It has been estimated that, at the end of 2014, China already reached 67 strategic partnership relations with individual countries and 5 with regions or regional organizations; in the mid-2015 the number of them reached 75. After the one with Brazil, for instance, China built a *partnership of strategic coordination based on equality and benefit* with Russia in April 1996, then a *collaborative partnership for the 21st century* with South Korea in 1998 and so on. In the beginning, during the early 1990s, Chinese partnership diplomacy was focused only among major powers and regional neighbourhood; however, since the turn of the century, the partnership geographical focus broadened a lot, reaching all the world's regions. Furthermore, among the numerous strategic partnerships established during these years, also the upgrades of already-existing partnerships must be taken into account; for example, only in 2014, China's

⁴⁹ Wen J. 温家宝. (2004). *Zhongguo guowuyuan zongli wenjiabao zai zhong'ou touzi maoyi yantao hui shang de jianghua* 中国国务院总理温家宝在中欧投资贸易研讨会上的讲话 (*Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao speech at China-Europe Investment and Trade Seminar*). [online] People's Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at: http://atcmx1.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zt_674979/ywzt_675099/zt2004_675921/wjbzlfwoz_675937/t94909.shtml.

strategic partnerships with Argentina, Australia, Germany, Mongolia, and Venezuela have been elevated to *quanmian zhanlüe huoban guanxi* 全面战略伙伴关系, comprehensive strategic partnerships. The difference between *strategic partnerships* and *comprehensive strategic partnerships* labels, is, simply, that the second one involves broader and more detailed agendas for the cooperation of the two partners, as well as a more formalised mechanism of collaboration, composed, for example, by specific direct channels of communication that promote and speed up regular and recurring interstate exchanges. During his speech at the China-EU Investment and Trade Forum in May 2004, the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao defined also the *comprehensive* characterization of this sort of upgraded partnership; his words were:

所谓“全面”，是指双方的合作全方位、宽领域、多层次，既包括经济、科技，也包括政治、文化；既有双边，也有多边；既有官方，也有民间。⁵⁰

By "comprehensive", it means that the cooperation should be all-dimensional, wide-ranging and multi-layered. It covers economic, scientific, technological, political and cultural fields, contains both bilateral and multilateral levels, and is conducted by both governments and non-governmental groups.

Between the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first one, the countries with which China has established entirely new comprehensive strategic partnerships are Algeria, Belarus, Egypt, Laos, Malaysia and Thailand. The *Table 1* illustrates how China's partnership network was composed at the end of 2014.

⁵⁰ Wen J. 温家宝. (2004). *Zhongguo guowuyuan zongli wenjiabao zai zhong'ou touzi maoyi yantao hui shang de jianghua* 中国国务院总理温家宝在中欧投资贸易研讨会上的讲话 (*Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao speech at China-Europe Investment and Trade Seminar*). [online] People's Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at: http://atcmx1.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zt_674979/ywzt_675099/zt2004_675921/wjbzlfwoz_675937/t94909.shtml.

	Comprehensive strategic partners		Strategic partners		Partners		Total	
	No.	Col. %	No.	Col. %	No.	Col. %	No.	Col. %
Africa	2	6.9	2	10.5	4	21.1	8	11.9
Americas	5	17.2	2	10.5	2	10.5	9	13.4
Asia	9	31.0	9	47.4	5	26.3	23	34.3
Europe	10	34.5	4	15.8	7	36.8	21	31.3
Middle East	1	3.5	2	21.1	0	0	3	4.5
Oceania	2	6.9	0	10.5	1	5.3	3	4.5
Total	29	100.0	19	100.0	19	100.0	67	100.0

Table 1 China's partnership network at the end of 2014

Source: Strüver, G. (2016). *International alignment between interests and ideology: The case of China's partnership diplomacy*. GIGA Research Programme. Hamburg.

In this table, the different partnership relations are grouped into three separate categories. The first category, entitled *comprehensive strategic partners*, involves all the partnership alignments in which the terms *comprehensive strategic* appeared in the partnership's official name. The same reasoning is valid for to the second category, including only the term *strategic*. All the other types of partnership relations are grouped into the third category, entitled simply *partners*. From this table is evident that, even if the Chinese partners are spread all over the world, Asia and Europe are considered the regions with the largest number of partners, with relatively 23 and 21 partner countries, accounting for 34.3% and 31.3% of the total number of China's partners.

All these different strategic partnership relations on the theoretical side are all the same or, at least, very similar; when the Chinese government decide to build a strategic partnership, indeed, the aims that it declares are about always the same: the establishment of a long-lasting and stable bilateral relation, the pursuit of common interests, recurring interstate economic exchanges, cooperation in many fields, the foregoing of interference in domestic affairs, coordination of the foreign policies in international affairs and the promotion of China's image as a responsible, democratic and peaceful power within the international environment. So, in sum, all of them consider the trade, the investments, the policies' coordination and the economic cooperation as the core aspects of their alignment. However, on the practical side, the numerous partnership relations obviously present inevitable differences. One of the main differences

among them can be, for example, the degree of importance of each partnership for China. The partnership with Angola, for instance, as well as with a lot of other under-developed countries, has surely a low relevance for Chinese foreign policy than the one with the European Union or with Russia. Moreover, previous and old bonds of friendship can certainly make the difference and attach greater importance to a relationship rather than to another. This is the case, for example, of Pakistan, considered an old friend of China, but only became a Chinese strategic partner in 2005. The *partnership* definition then can take different interpretations according to which is the counterpart, as well as varying over time. So, even if from a theoretical point of view all the Chinese strategic partnership present, more or less, the same characteristics and the same goals, in practice this type of relations are institutionalised and developed in several different ways, since some of them are built from scratch, while others are developed from old partnership relationships, not to mention the fact that some countries with which these relationships are established are internationally more relevant and influential than others. Obviously, the more a partner is considered important and relevant, the more the institutional partnership's framework is equipped with high-level and extensive mechanisms. The partnership with Russia, for example, is one of the most comprehensive and effective ones, reflecting how much importance is attached to this specific relationship. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, China and Russia established a strategic partnership relation in 1996, but, since its foreign policy was more concentrate on the West, Russia was not so committed in this partnership. However, by the end of 2013, the two countries have begun to deeply strengthen their relation, building an extensive and comprehensive partnership framework that includes a hotline for direct bilateral communication between their leaders and a scheduled programme of annual meeting for their Presidents, Prime Ministers and heads of Parliament. Also the partnership framework with important regional institutions like the European Union and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are very high-developed and effective; in the late 1990s, even before the strategic partnership relationships were established, annual summits with both the EU and the ASEAN were organized. Since their upgrade to a *comprehensive strategic partnership* for the case of EU and to a *strategic partnership for peace and prosperity* for the ASEAN, the cooperation mechanisms have been further developed, covering now more than fifty areas. As mentioned above, also old bonds of friendship can make the difference for the level of the institutional framework established between the partners. This is the case, for example, of the partnership relations between China

and Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao People's Democratic Republic; their solid party-to-party communication channels have been certainly favoured by the ideological special connection that has always characterized the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and the ruling parties of these countries. On the other hand, a lot of other China's strategic partnership relations, for different reasons, are not equipped with such sophisticated and extensive mechanisms; this is the case, for instance, of the partnership between the People's Republic of China and South Korea, or the People's Republic of China and Saudi Arabia. In many of these cases, the partners probably have suggested and even begun to strengthen their cooperation framework, but build a solid and long-lasting strategic partnership can take a lot of time. A clear example of it, is the strategic partnership between China and Brazil: as argued above, their strategic partnership was the first to be established in 1993; however, it was not until a few years after the turn of the century that this relationship began to be really institutionalized with specific coordination committee and direct channel of strategic communication.

So, in sum, as in the rest of the world, also in China, since the early 1990s, has begun to spread the so-called strategic partnership relation, the *zhanlüe huoban guanxi* 战略伙伴关系, demonstration that China, in this period, has really begun to work in accordance with the *shi* 势 of its time, with the mega-trend of the world. In these years, indeed, the international system began to be marked by the globalization trend, a tendency that favoured more collaboration and more exchanges among countries. From a theoretical perspective, all the numerous strategic relationships established by China from 1993 up to nowadays were equal, since their aims were to build long-lasting and stable bilateral collaborations, based on mutual respect and mutual trust, for pursuing shared interests and common goals. However, on the practical side, each of these partnerships presents some details, some characteristics that differentiate it from the others, explained by the previous relationship with the country involved, by the international relevance of the partner or by the different interpretation that the counterpart attaches to the partnership.

3.7 China's choice of strategic partners

As argued above, when a country has to decide which country to choose as a strategic partner, it usually follows mainly two lines of arguments: the complementarity of economic interests

and the affinity of the ideological views. In facing this process, a series of variables for each of the two lines of arguments can be considered, in order to understand which are the factors that guide the Chinese government during the analysis of the potential partner states.

The first line of arguments is the complementary economic interests and it represents the core of the partnership diplomacy. For this reason, the variables related to a country's attractiveness as a potential commercial partner have an enormous impact on China's partnership decision, as well as on any other country's one. The variables that China takes into account during this process of analysis are mainly four: the first one is the *market potential*; it measures the national economic attractiveness of the potential partner in relation with its geographical distance from China. It is calculated, indeed, dividing the national GDP, expressed in US dollars, by the distance between its national capital and Beijing, expressed in miles. The second variable, then, is the potential partner's *oil and metal production*, in relation to the world's production. This data specifies the average of the country's production of petroleum and of six strategic minerals (bauxite, copper, iron ore, manganese, nickel and uranium) per year, measuring the country's importance as a global supplier of strategic metals. The third variable is represented by the country's material power *capabilities* in relation with the total capabilities of its region; the aim of this data is to understand the relevance and the influence of the country within its regional area. Finally, the fourth and last variable is represented by the potential partner country's *trade importance* for China and its *trade dependence* on China; this data, indeed, is considered one of the most important information for a deep analysis about the country's potential economic attractiveness. So, in sum, the four variables that China take into account for the analysis of the complementarity of a potential partner's economic interests are its market potential, its oil and metal production, its material capabilities and its trade importance and dependence on China.

On the other hand, there is another set of variables supposed to be followed by the Chinese government during its analysis of potential partners and is that related to the ideological affinities' line of arguments. In this case, the variables are grouped into two sub-categories, dividing the macro-category of ideological affinities into *domestic regimes and belief*, on one hand, and *normative values supported within the international society*, on the other hand. For what concerns the first sub-category, the first variable that measures the domestic regime is the *polity* level, rated by the CSP's (Center for Systemic Peace) Polity Project. This score measures the institutional and procedural aspects of different regimes, from democracies to autocracies. The main differences among different types of regimes are «how political power is exercised

and constrained, how social order is defined and maintained, and how much influence public interests and opinion have on the decision-making process»⁵¹. According to this CSP's yardstick, a fully institutionalized democracy, so a regime in which the political participation is totally open and institutionalized and in which political representatives' choice is made through open and competitive elections, deserves a +10 score. Immediately after, there are countries that have some limitations on the political participation or inadequate compliance with the rule of law; they have a *polity* score ranging from +6 to +10. Then, there are countries characterized by some democratic traits, but also some autocratic ones; this particular type of regime is defined anocracy and, rather than a distinct form of governance, it is considered more as a middling category. Since they present a mix of different characteristics that are not very coherent with each other, these countries are often vulnerable to political disorder and instability and sudden changes in leadership and political regime. This type of political system's polity score ranges from -5 to +5. After them, there are countries defined as almost total autocracies, since they allow only a minimal and strictly restricted political participation and impose many limits on the executive authority; their *polity* score is from -10 to -6. Finally, the last group is made of the fully institutionalized autocratic countries, so the countries in which the citizen's political participation is basically null, the executive elections follow established rules of succession within the political elite and the executive power is exercised without any control by the institutions. This kind of political regime deserves a *polity* score of -10. The *Figure 1* shows the distribution of the governance regimes within the global system developed by the Center for Systemic Peace in its Global Report of 2017; the countries have been coloured with different colours according to their political regimes, corresponding to a *polity* score ranging from -10 to +10.

⁵¹ Marshall M. G. and Elzinga-Marshall G. C. (2017). *Global Report 2017 - Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*. Vienna, VA USA: Center for Systemic Peace.

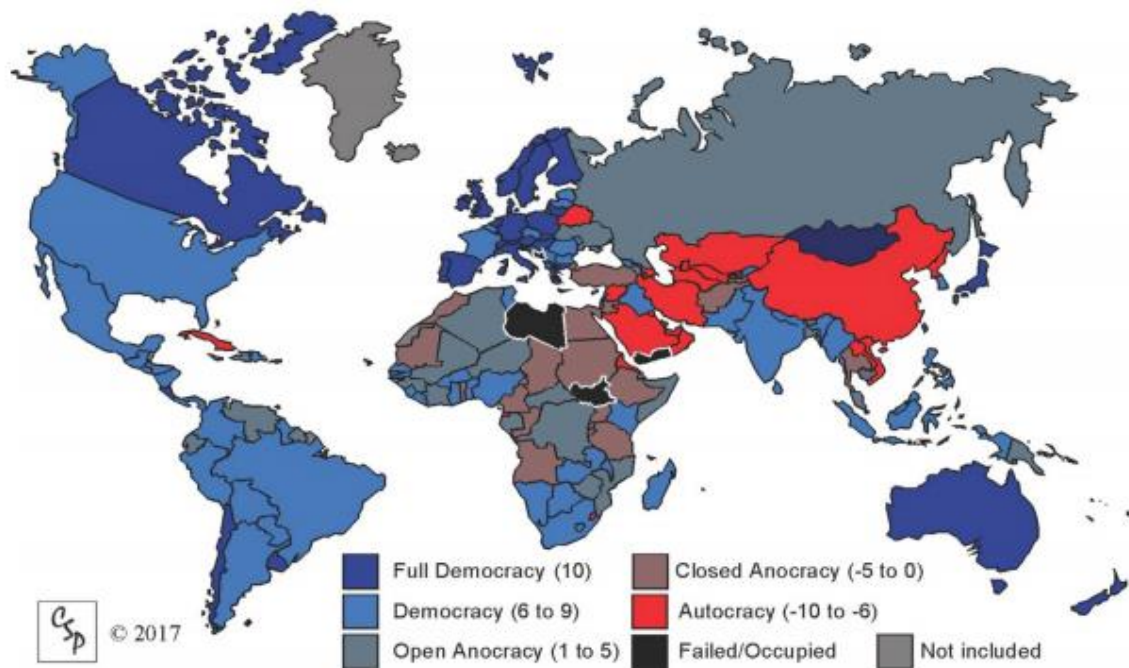


Figure 2 Distribution of governance regimes in the global system

Source: Marshall M. G. and Elzinga-Marshall G. C. (2017). *Global Report 2017 - Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*. Vienna, VA USA: Center for Systemic Peace.

So, in sum, during the Chinese government's process of analysis of the potential partners, the *polity* level rated by the CSP's Polity Project represents the first of the variables belonging to the *ideological affinities* macro-category and, more precisely, to them belonging to the *domestic regime and beliefs* sub-category. The other variable belonging to this sub-category, then, is the variable *socialist/communist laws*, according to which a score of 1 is associated to countries with a historical tradition based on socialist laws, while a score of 0 is associated to all the other countries with no socialist legacy. This variable is important for the Chinese government in order to find which countries have had socialist systems that have occupied a relevant place within the former socialist arena and that have influenced their today's form of governance.

Turning to the other sub-category belonging to the *ideological affinities* macro-category, so within the *normative values supported within the international society* sub-category, only one is the main variable that is supposed to be followed by the Chinese government during its selection of potential partners; this variable is defined as *similarity*, and it measures the level of similarity or dissimilarity between China and other countries for what concerns foreign policy preferences and choices within their international politics.

Georg Strüver, a research fellow of the German Institute of Global and Areas Studies (GIGA) and, more precisely, of the GIGA Institute of Asian Studies, has carried out a study about China's determinants of partnership onset and of partners' choice since the 1990s and up to nowadays. His paper, published in March 2016, is become part of the International Diffusion and Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes (IDCAR) research network. According to this study, China's choice of partners is more guided by interest-driven factors, rather than by ideological ones, even if neither of them should be overlooked. Generally speaking, the Chinese government has always looked for partnership relations with major powers of all the world regions, not only in some specific areas, with a particular focus on the major target markets, in order to pursue one of its main goals: international economic exchanges. Among China's core economic interests, indeed, one of the most relevant is securing access to natural resources, in order to pursue China's national economic development. One of the Strüver's study results, indeed, shows that during the China's analysis of potential partners and within the variables associated to the economic interests' line of argument, the one related to *oil and metal production* deserves a special position. The other most relevant variable within this line of arguments, then, is that of the *trade dependence* on China; it has been understood, indeed, that during the process for a partnership onset, Chinese government gives particular attention of how much the potential partner's trade is relevant for and dependent on China, in order to develop long-term commercial exchanges.

On the other hand, as mentioned above, also the ideological affinities' line of arguments represents a relevant guide during China's partnership selection and onset. For what concerns the choice of the partners based on the complementarity of the *polity* level, Strüver's study has found that the general assumption according to which shared domestic political regimes favour cooperative relations, is not valid for China's case. Even if China, as shown in the map of the CSP's global distribution of governance regimes, presents an almost total autocracy political regime, with a *polity* score that ranges between -10 and -6, Chinese government is more inclined to seek for democratic partners, rather than for partners that share non-democratic traits and socialist legacies. While, for what concerns the *normative values supported within the international society's* line of arguments, the study has demonstrated that China, in doing its selection of potential partners, tends to align more often with countries that show foreign policy preferences and international politic choices similar to the Chinese ones.

So, drawing the conclusions, within the new polycentric international order which has arisen since the 1990s, more opportunities for interaction and collaboration among countries occurred. Relationships have started to become more selective and flexible, and, for this reason, a new type of relationship has become to be established: the strategic partnership relation, an alignment characterized by its goal-driven traits and common interests' pursuit. Since China in that period was finally entering the Peace and Development Era, in accordance with the rest of the world, the strategic partnership relations began to be established also by the Chinese government, which called it *zhanlüe huoban guanxi* 战略伙伴关系. Even if the studies about this argument are not yet very numerous, scholars sustain that during China's analysis process of the strategic partners' selection, «the Chinese government fosters ties with regionally important countries, attractive markets, large producers of natural resources, and like-minded countries in international affairs»⁵².

3.8 China's foreign policy in the twenty-first century

As argued above, during the last decades of the twentieth century, China has finally changed its domestic and, especially, its foreign policy; following the so-defined *shi* 勢 assumption, it has made a previous analysis of the distinctive characteristics of the times and, only then, it has developed its own policy, that is coherent and in accordance with the tendency of the times. In this way, even if with over thirty years of delay, China has finally begun to take part in the *heping yu fazhan shidai* 和平与发展时代, the Era of Peace and Development, so it has started to look outwards, to establish cooperative relations and to pursue a peaceful and stable international environment. It has realized, indeed, that only through this approach it could pursue the national economic construction. For this reason, China's international engagement began to spread in all the spheres, from the economic to the socio-cultural one. Then, with the turn of the century and especially in the mid-2000s, China's international engagement strategy reached further higher levels; the resulting rapid economic growth has been very impressive, making China being recognized as «an engine of global economic growth»⁵³. This means that

⁵² Strüver, G. (2016). *International alignment between interests and ideology: The case of China's partnership diplomacy*. GIGA Research Programme. Hamburg.

⁵³ Bergsten, C. F., Freeman, C., Lardy, N. R. and Mitchell, D. J. (2008). *China's rise: Challenges and opportunities*. Peterson Institute.

the international perception of China has changed a lot during these years; since the world saw China as an underdeveloped country, with a lot of backwardness' problems, now it sees it as a developing country that, in a few years, has been able to reach economic levels that are very close to those of the major global powers. Actually, the People's Republic of China's role within the international arena has become anything but insignificant, leading some countries to wonder whether this incredibly rapid growth can constitute a threat to the international order. As a permanent and veto-wielding member of the United Nations Security Council, for instance, China deserves a unique authority to take decisions on critical international issues, exercising an important influential role. For its parts, the Chinese government has always wanted to pass the message that China's growth should not be regarded as a threat or an obstacle for other countries' growth, because, on the contrary, one of its the main goals is the pursuit of common development and the search for mutual benefits. Since China has begun to take part in the Era of Peace and Development, it has become aware of the importance of cooperation among countries. The globalization tendency has affected also the economy, making the economic systems of all the world's countries being more dependent on each other; for this reason, countries can really take full advantage of all the opportunities offered by the globalization and reach common development only working together. Furthermore, as the then China's minister of the foreign affairs Li Zhaoxing has declared during an official a speech in 2005, the common development is also important for maintaining common security.⁵⁴ During the last decades, indeed, security problems of various kind have been added to the traditional ones, becoming more transnational and unpredictable. For this reason, the security problems of a country became much more related with those of its region and of the world as a whole; thus, the best way for facing these international security problems is the cooperation among countries. The Cold War mentality leading to hostility between different blocs, indeed, is now outdated. In this respect, China has developed the so-defined *xin anquan guan* 新安全观, the New Security Concept (NSC), enunciated since the late 1990s, according to which China is the first to commit itself to develop relations of cooperation and collaboration with other countries. Announced for the first time during the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1997, the New Security Concept «seeks to replace Cold War antagonistic relations with a policy of security through diplomatic and

⁵⁴ Li, Z. 李肇星 (2005). *Heping, fazhan, hezuo - xin shiqi zhongguo waijiao de qizhi* 和平、发展、合作—新时期中国外交的旗帜 (*The banner of China's diplomacy in the new era of peace, development and cooperation*). [online] Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. Available at: http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2005-08/23/content_25497.htm.

economic interaction»⁵⁵. This demonstrates that China's government, as well as a lot of other countries' governments, is deeply convinced that only joining the forces, a higher level of international security can be reached. Then, between 2002 and 2003, under the leadership of Hu Jintao, another official policy with the same intent was developed: the *Zhongguo heping jueqi* 中国和平崛起, the China's Peaceful Rise. In a moment in which China was emerging as an economic power, Chinese Government wanted to reassure other countries that China is a benign country, reiterating and assuring the international community that China's rise should not be perceived as a threat for the world's peace and stability, since one of its main objectives is the promotion of a peaceful international environment from which everyone can benefit. However, among international authorities, doubt began to spread, because they focused their attention on the term *Rise* used to defined Chinese policy. Once again, they suspected that China's incredible surge could lead to negative consequences within the international order. So, in order to avoid any kind of doubt or misunderstanding, since 2004 Beijing decided to substitute the term *Rise* with the term *Development*, transforming its policy's definition into *Zhongguo heping fazhan* 中国和平发展, China's Peaceful Development.

Since the last decades of the twentieth century and up to nowadays, China has demonstrated its unswerving efforts in the pursuit of an independent foreign policy of peace, as well as in the search for friendly and cooperative relations with other countries. As declared a lot of times by many Chinese leaders and politicians, China considers the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as the fundamental basis for its foreign policy, in general, and for the development of relations with foreign countries, in particular. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, *Heping gongchu wu xiang yuanze* 和平共处五项原则 in Chinese, were established in 1954, during the decolonization process that took place after the end of the Second World War; in those years, newly independent countries, especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America, were looking for equality in international relations. Following this trend, China, India and Myanmar instituted the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, that would represent the basis for their relationship and for the relations with other countries. The five principles are mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence. Through this

⁵⁵ Larus, E. F. (2005). China's New Security Concept and Peaceful Rise: Trustful Cooperation or Deceptive Diplomacy?. *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 12(2).

initiative, they have made their contribution to the building of more equitable international relationships that began to spread all over the world. Between the second part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first one, indeed, new types of international relationships based on these principles have been established in Asia and in the whole world, thanks to their appropriateness for all countries' relations guiding principles. It is not a coincidence that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have been developed by Asian countries, because, as argued in the first chapter, the harmony value has always been part of the Chinese culture; the Chinese *he* assumption, indeed, sustains that the harmony is the true and right state of nature and, as such, it should be part of everything, of every relation and every situation. Applying this statement to China's foreign policy, Beijing aim is to pursuing an international environment characterized by peaceful and harmonious relations among countries. Furthermore, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence give also a concrete expression to the UN Charter's main purposes, facilitating its implementation.

In June 2014, in the occasion of the meeting marking the sixtieth anniversary of the initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping made a speech in which, among other things, he recalled the guidelines that compose and characterize the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. He defined them as the essence of today's international relations, since they have become the basic norms and basic principles that guide international relations and international law. Nowadays, they are incorporated in many international agreements and alignments, as happened, for example, for the declarations adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1970 and in 1974. For this reason, they are strongly supported by the majority of the world's countries. Moreover, since they predicate equality among all countries, regardless for their stage of development, size or social system, these principles have concretely supported the developing countries' rights and interests, upholding their sovereignty and independence. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, during these years, have made a great contribution in the establishment of a more equitable international political and economic order, rejecting the habit according to which the strongest get the best of the weakest and providing new methods for peacefully solving international issues. Nowadays, indeed, even if the global tendency is that of peace and development, a lot of injustice, inequality and disputes keep to emerge within the international system; the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, more than 60 years after their initiation, offer an important guideline for facing them. Xi Jinping, during his speech, affirmed that

新形势下，和平共处五项原则的精神不是过时了，而是历久弥新；和平共处五项原则的意义不是淡化了，而是历久弥深；和平共处五项原则的作用不是削弱了，而是历久弥坚。⁵⁶

In the new era today, the spirit of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, instead of being outdated, remains as relevant as ever; its significance, rather than diminishing, remains as important as ever; and its role, rather than being weakened, has continued to grow.

For this reason, today more than ever, it is important to pursue and promote a series of objectives within the international system. First of all, as argued above, it is of extreme importance to uphold the sovereign equality; all countries, regardless of their level of development, their size or their international relevance, must be considered as an equal member of the international community and no exception can be allowed. Secondly, all countries should indiscriminately participate in international security affairs, since international security is a right and a responsibility of all. In a world in which non-traditional security threats continue to emerge, it is essential to join forces and cooperate to address these obstacles. The right solution in these cases is always the dialogue among countries, in order to increase mutual trust and to cooperate in the best way. The third objective that should be pursued, then, is the common development. Development disparity should no longer be allowed to continue; each country's development process should be conducted in collaboration with other countries, not in isolation. Through an open global economy and through trade and investment liberalization, a stable and long-term global growth can be reached. In order to achieve this final goal, it is important to promote win-win cooperation among countries. As mentioned by Xi Jinping in his speech, indeed, «合则强，孤则弱。」⁵⁷, that means that cooperation generates strength while isolation only leads to weakness. Important international issues such as climate changes, resources and energy security

⁵⁶ Xi, J. 习近平. (2014). *Hongyang heping gongchu wu xiang yuanze jianshe hezuo gong ying meihao shijie* 弘扬和平共处五项原则建设合作共赢美好世界 (*Carry forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence to build a better world through win-win cooperation*). (President of the People's Republic of China' speech at meeting marking the 60th anniversary of the initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence). [online] People's Daily. Available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0629/c64094-25214109.html>.

⁵⁷ Xi, J. 习近平. (2014). *Hongyang heping gongchu wu xiang yuanze jianshe hezuo gong ying meihao shijie* 弘扬和平共处五项原则建设合作共赢美好世界 (*Carry forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence to build a better world through win-win cooperation*). (President of the People's Republic of China' speech at meeting marking the 60th anniversary of the initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence). [online] People's Daily. Available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0629/c64094-25214109.html>.

and terrorism's expansion, cannot be faced singularly by separate countries, but require international common efforts. During this cooperative process, mutual learning between different countries can and should take place. Diversity is an integral part of human society and, as such, should be respected and exploited, promoting international exchanges, dialogues and harmonious coexistence. Furthermore, countries with a different social system or with different ideologies can still establish partnership relations, seeking common interests and completing each other, because

志同道合是伙伴，求同存异也是伙伴。⁵⁸

Countries having the same ideals and common goals can be partners, but also countries seeking common ground while reserving differences can be partners.

Finally, more fairness, justice and democracy should be pursued in international relations by all countries. However, nowadays the world is still far away from realizing all these goals; but, at the same time, instruments such as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence offer good directions on the road to follow for achieving them.

3.9 China's foreign policy under the leadership of Xi Jinping

Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, China's foreign policy has not undergone extreme changes, except for the fact that China has become even more aware and involved in international affairs. It has begun to look at international issues from a more global perspective, instead of from a China-centric one. Moreover, being more aware of the importance of a peaceful international environment, it has begun to take new and more initiatives regarding issues of global relevance. So, we can say that, even if without substantial changes, Xi Jinping pursued and is pursuing a more active and innovative foreign policy in comparison with his predecessors. The main goals and the main principles guiding China's foreign policy, however, remained quite unchanged; under the leadership of Xi Jinping, indeed,

⁵⁸ Wang, Y. (2017). *Gong jian huoban guanxi, gong mou heping fazhan* 共建伙伴关系，共谋和平发展 (*Work Together to Build Partnerships and Pursue Peace and Development*). (Speech by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at Luncheon of the China Development Forum). [online] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Available at: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_chn//ziliao_611306/zyjh_611308/t1447084.shtml.

中国试图寻求实现现代化、建立和睦稳定的外部环境，以及逐渐发展国内经济。⁵⁹

China seeks to achieve modernization, create a benevolent and peaceful external environment, and take steps that allow it to develop its domestic economy.

With these aims, the maintenance of peaceful relations with other countries and the compliance with the guiding principles of justice and fairness remain China's foreign policy priorities. In this respect, Xi Jinping has affirmed that China is going to firmly pursue peaceful development, because it is good for China, for Asia and for the whole world. Following this strategic choice, China demonstrates, once again, to be perfectly in line with the trend of the times, the trend of the Era of Peace and Development. Secondly, China is undergone to pursue friendship relations and cooperation with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. During the last decades, indeed, Beijing has been actively committed to deepen and expand its partnership relations, looking for new partners among major countries, which play a decisive role in the cause of world peace and development, as well as among developing countries, with which it still has a lot in common. By the end of 2017, the partnerships set up by the Chinese government were ninety-seven, including those with single countries and those with international organizations. In addition, Xi Jinping declared that China is going to firmly pursue a win-win strategy of opening-up. The Chinese government, indeed, advocates a win-win approach for its foreign policy, and not an outdated zero-sum game approach in which stronger and richer countries bully the weaker and poorer ones. With the intent of win-win cooperation, a lot of important initiatives has been proposed in recent years, such as the so-called *Yidai yilu* 一带一路, the One Belt One Road, that is one of the initiatives put forward by the president of the People's Republic of China that deserves more attention. The One Belt One Road represents a fundamental effort made by the Chinese government to further build and expand partnerships; this initiative encourages the countries involved to combine their interests, to limit their development gaps and to increase and accelerate regional integration, in order to achieve common development and common prosperity. Even if this initiative has been developed by China, it has brought many benefits all over the world. Since its initiation at the end of 2013, indeed, the One Belt One Road has received the active support of more than a hundred countries and international organizations, leading to the conclusion of over forty cooperation agreements

⁵⁹ Zhao, K. 赵可金. (2013). *Zhongguo xin waijiao de zhidao yuanze* 中国新外交的指导原则 (*Guiding Principles of China's New Foreign Policy*). [online] Carnegie-Qinghua Center for Global Policy. Available at: <https://carnegietsinghua.org/2013/09/09/zh-pub-52904>.

between China and other countries or international organizations. It is creating an innovative pattern and a long-term win-win cooperation network that aim to create a unified big market, composed by the international and the domestic ones, that encourage trade and investment cooperation, enhance cross-border connectivity and promotes capital flows and cultural exchanges. It has been estimated that, although it is still at an early stage as a long-term project, the One Belt On Road is one of the largest and most ambitious infrastructures and investment projects in history.

Nevertheless, the One Belt On Road is not the only initiative proposed by Beijing during the last years; a lot of other important projects have been developed by the Chinese government in order to promote international peaceful cooperation, such as the Asian Infrastructure Bank (AIBB) or the New Development Bank (NDB). These and many other projects and initiatives show how much China is really striving to take an active part in the Era of Peace and Development which has characterized the world for the last few decades and which, hopefully, will characterize the international system still for a long time.

Conclusion

The first aim of this thesis has been that of demonstrating how much cultures can influence every aspect of the life of a country and of its population. Different values, beliefs, ways of thinking and behaving, indeed, can have an enormous impact not only on people's everyday life, but also on higher level aspects, such as the country's domestic and foreign policy. In particular, this thesis has been focused on how a particular aspect of the Chinese culture, like the concept of time, has influenced China's approach to the domestic and, especially, the foreign policy, during the twentieth century and up to nowadays. The way in which Chinese people perceive and analyse the times around them and the way through which they relate with it, indeed, has had particular consequences over the years.

In this respect, one of the four main elements that the IR expert and professor Qin Yaqing claims to characterize the Chinese culture is the so-called *Contextuality* with its *shi* 勢 assumption. With this statement, he explains that Chinese people have always emphasized the context around each action or decision that should be taken. Contrary to Western people which are more objective-oriented, Chinese people are definitely context-oriented; it means that they adopt a holistic approach in everything they do, they tend always to first analyse the big picture, the overall situation around the decision they are asked to take. Only after have analysed and understood the distinctive characteristics of the context, they can find the best solutions and take the most appropriate decisions, that have always to be coherent and in accordance with the mega-trend of the context around them. Obviously, this approach is valid also for what concerns the Chinese policy-making, because when policy-makers have to develop their strategies, first of all, they assess the overall situation, the nature and the tendency of the international system. Maintaining a long-term view and distinguishing the peculiar tendencies guiding the international system of their times, they can then consider the specific situations and develop their policies, always in accordance with overriding features of the times. This particular perspective has had a lot of repercussions on the Chinese leaders' way to conduct foreign policy over the years and, in particular, during the twentieth century.

The first half of the twentieth century has been defined by the overwhelming majority of IR experts and scholars as the Era of War and Revolution and the motivations are quite obvious; in such a short period, indeed, the world has attended two wars that have no priors in human history, the First and the Second World Wars. Furthermore, mainly as consequences of these

two catastrophic wars, the first half of the last century has been also characterized by numerous revolutions, from proletarian revolutions to national democratic ones. During this Era, China has followed the tendency of the world and, like all the other countries, has been marked not only by wars, but also by revolutions, such as the so-called May Fourth Movement. So, on this occasion, China has demonstrated to have observed and to have behaved in accordance with the mega-trend of the times, so, to have taken part in the *zhanzheng yu geming shidai* 战争与革命时代, the Era of War and Revolution, having opted for conflictual and revolutionary actions, instead of peaceful ones.

However, the twentieth century has been characterized by the alternation of two main opposite eras; the Era of War and Revolution, indeed, has been followed by the Era of Peace and Development. Despite a few contrasting opinions, the majority of scholars agree that the date representing the transition from one era to the other has been, approximately, the beginning of the 1950s, because it was in this period that most countries recovered by the Second World War, the colonial system was definitely collapsed and the democratic revolutions came to an end. The Era of Peace and Development has been so-defined for numerous reasons, the first of which is that no world wars have been fought. This does not mean that no wars at all have been fought, because, for example, the Cold War happened exactly in the second half of the century; it means that the conflicts erupted in this period did not involve so many countries to become world wars or that, as in the case of the Cold War, they were conducted only on political or economic fronts. So, during this period, there have been some factors that led people to seek peace, cooperation and common development; some of them are the fact that people have learned the lesson from the past and do not want to repeat the experience of a world war, as well as the fact that the rapid progress of destructive nuclear weapons has led political leaders to the awareness that the use of those weapons in a fight would have provoked disastrous consequences for everyone, including themselves. Besides that, this era has been defined as the Era of Peace and Development also because, thanks to the long-term peace conditions, the world economy, politics, society and culture have reached unprecedented development.

However, on this occasion, China made a dangerous mistake in the assessment of the times, that would have led it to serious and grave consequences. After the end of the Second World War, the newly established People's Republic of China with Mao Zedong have not recognised the change of the times and continued to carry out the same policies and the same strategies of

the Era of War and Revolution. Instead of focusing on the country's economic construction and on the establishment of cooperative relationships with other countries, as the trend of the times dictated, Mao persisted in supporting world revolution and in strengthening the internal and external class struggle. Because of this mistake in the judgment of the times, China paid a serious bad price, losing thirty years of opportunities, falling behind all the developed countries, becoming more and more internationally isolated and pushing its economy to the brink of collapse. This experience should be regarded as a demonstration of the fact that the judgment of the times has extreme importance for every country, since it contributes a lot for their destinies, for their success or their failure.

Fortunately, between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, China's fate changed. The new Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, indeed, realized that the strategies adopted by his predecessors were no longer in line with the times and with the international situation; he reached the conclusion that the first step to do was that of changing China's perspective and judgment of the times. With this awareness, China has gradually changed its domestic and, especially, its foreign policy, showing its application of Chinese *shi* assumption, according to which its behaviour should be in accordance with the tendency of the times. In this way, China has begun to take an active part in the *heping yu fazhan shidai* 和平与发展时代, so in the Era of Peace and Development. Since the 1990s and up to nowadays, China's international engagement spreads in all the spheres, from the economic to the socio-cultural one. The results did not take long to arrive and China's economic growth has been very impressive and even more rapid than the expected. With the new leadership of Xi Jinping since 2013, Chinese foreign policy has not changed, but, on the contrary, it has been strengthened, leading China being even more aware and involved in international affairs. The People's Republic of China's role within the international system is extremely relevant and, under this responsibility, it strives to demonstrate its strong effort in the maintenance of a peaceful international environment, in order to pursue together an increasing common development in all the spheres.

Today, since from the beginning of the Era of Peace and Development have already passed more than six decades, it is natural to wonder in which direction the world is going. The majority of scholars sustains that, at least for the foreseeable future, this era will continue for a long time for a lot of reasons. Thanks to the progress reached during the last decades, the world and the humankind itself is changed; the international community has become deeply aware of the

importance of a peaceful and cooperative international system. Moreover, tendencies like the globalization have created a global community in which the interests of all countries are strictly linked one to the other, ensuring that collaborating and establishing cooperative relations between countries represent an advantage for everyone.

Today, international security and harmony are subject every day to new non-traditional threats; most recently, we have witnessed dangerous attempts of protectionism and isolation by the world's major powers, that risk to undermine the peaceful coexistence within the international community. The hope of all countries, however, is that common sense will prevail, making the Era of Peace and Development continue for a long time. For reaching this aim, China's government, as well as a lot of other countries' ones, calls for dialogue, for confrontation and for collaboration, in order to always find, together, new paths of win-win cooperation.

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