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Liberal International Order Without Liberalism: Chinese Visions of World Order

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1. Introduction

The 'liberal international order' is encountering increasing challenges and its erosion is happening on many levels: the spread of democracy has halted and the growth of global trade is slowing down. Even the original main proponent of the liberal order, United States, seems to be pulling away from its commitments, putting its own interests above global cooperation. (Acharya 2017) Paradoxically at the same time the old institutional arrangements are not enough, as the mankind, in the words of Yuval Harari is facing "common problems that make a mockery of all national borders, and that can only be solved through global cooperation". (Harari 2018)

After the 'unipolar moment' of Western dominance has passed, a concert of new visions for the future international order has emerged. Some offer nostalgic schemes of returning back to certain foundational principles of the order, with sovereign nation states and strict national borders at its core. (Harari 2018). Others, such as the rising great powers like China and Russia are introducing bold visions of the order thoroughly reformed. The liberal international order proposed by the West is becoming only one vision among many, and its future seems increasingly uncertain.

According to Amitav Acharya, the power shift, in which the economic and political power is migrating from the West to the East, has been followed by an 'idea shift' in which the non-Western world is transforming from a passive receiver of ideas into their active maker. (Acharya 2016) With the idea shift, the West is losing also its long held power of defining the norms and ideals on what international politics should be.

Among the contending visionaries for a new world order, China is arguably the most important. During the early decades of its economic growth China engaged with the institutions and treaties of the liberal order in a fast pace, following a rather compliant 'low profile' foreign policy strategy. After 40 years of fast growth China has been more confident and ready for criticizing the dominance of the West within the international order – both economical as well as ideological.

At the level of official rhetoric the Chinese leadership has been offering its own concepts and ideas such as its grand vision of the international order reformed into a cosmopolitan 'Community of Common Future for Mankind', in which 'zero-sum power politics' would become a thing of the past. At the same time, Chinese scholars are criticizing the whole Western academic tradition of international politics, claiming that it only represents a particular European setting and is not applicable everywhere. With their arguments, the scholars are taking part in an overall discursive offensive, in which China attempts to debunk the legitimacy of Western dominance within the international order as well as the universality of Western ideas on world politics as a whole. (See Kallio 2016: 17–46)

This chapter focuses on the challenges China's rise is posing for the liberal international order especially in the realm of ideas. It will first shortly examine China's complicated historical

relationship with the international order during the modern era. The chapter will then move into more recent developments, during which the Chinese leadership has been increasingly bold in offering its alternative worldview and finally, the chapter will shortly analyze China's new framework for reforming the international order, the Community of common future for mankind.

2. From Polycentric World Order to Liberal International Order – and Back?

Ideas and their shifts matter. Through written history, societies have attempted to comprehend the political reality around them, making theoretical assumptions as well as normative guidelines for political action. Geographical surroundings and sociopolitical contexts have played key roles in these accounts: in different historical eras and in different regions, students and practitioners of international politics have arrived in completely different interpretations and institutional solutions.

Although it is easy to see the liberal international order based on democratic nation states and market economies as universally valid and perhaps even the best possible framework for organizing international politics, the order and the thought system around it are outcomes of long, complex and contingent historical processes, in which the ideas have emerged and developed in their historical contexts, always collaborating with actual day-to-day politics. This relationship has been famously articulated by Quentin Skinner so that "the political life itself sets the main problems for the political theorists, causing a certain range of issues to appear problematic and a corresponding range of questions to become the leading subjects of debate." (quoted in Tully 1988: 10–11) Bertrand Russell has an analogous depiction in relation to the evolution of human thought in general: "there is here a reciprocal causation: the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy, but, conversely, their philosophy does much to determine their circumstances." (Russell 1947: 11)

The liberal international order and its core institutions and values are based on particular European practices (sovereign nation states and their interactions according to certain diplomatic customs and understandings of international law) which expanded to become global during the 19th century. Similarly the currently dominating theoretical and normative visions of international politics were developed around European debates and contexts. They still hold a globally 'hegemonic' position on how international politics is being interpreted, and although different areas of the world might have differing models, the only theories and concepts that have become truly global and that are followed and internalized by (almost) everyone in the field of international politics, are the Western theories. (See Wæver 1999)

International thought holds an important connection with the order it is attempting to define, analyze and explain. Instead of being an objective observer, the thought *supports* the order by explicating according to which principles the world should be organized and what kind of foreign policies are to be followed. It tends to support certain kinds of thinking and marginalize and delegitimize the alternatives. (Ashworth 2014: 2–13) Robert Cox has stated the same in an overused, but still valid cliché, that international "theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose. Perspectives derive from a position in time and space, specially social and political time and space. [...] There is, accordingly, no such thing as theory in itself, divorced from standpoint in time and space. (Cox 1986: 207)

During the early modern era, before the globalization of the Western international order, Europe was merely a peripheral corner in a polycentric world system, in which various different international orders coexisted in a larger network. (See Pomeranz 2000, Little 2014: 159–180) The 'Westphalian' international order of nation states taking shape in Europe was simply one among others, all of which, in the words of Henry Kissinger, defined themselves as "the legitimate organizations of all humanity, imagining that in governing what lay before them, they were ordering the world". (Kissinger 2014: 4)

Within the polycentric world system, the Western power and the reach of Western ideas and institutions was restrained already in the Middle Eastern region by the international order built around the Ottoman empire. Further away, the Indian Mughal empire or China were both barely even conscious of the West. It is only following the revolutionary developments in economy and technology during the 19th century that the European international order could expand to become the universal world order of today, and to wipe out all the different forms of political organization i.e. tribes, city states or empires, with their interpretations and cosmologies for framing and understanding international politics and the world itself. (Buzan / Lawson 2013)

Along the spread of the Western order, the concept of international law and its standards were developed to define which political entity (or race) would be worthy of entering the order as its equal member. (Little 2014: 170–171) The West saw itself as the bearer of the standard of civilization, and the international thinkers of this era – even at the liberal end of the spectrum, such as John Stuart Mill or the vehemently anti-imperialist John A. Hobson – legitimized its mission of spreading influence, and bringing the backward peoples into modernity, more or less benignly. (Hobson 2012: 33–58)

Dealing with the catastrophic developments between the years 1914 and 1945 marked the birth of the 'liberal international order'. Its first version was established after the peace of Versailles in 1919 but the order was later updated to better reflect the dynamics of great power politics after the Second world war, and was in many senses designed to serve the foreign policy interests of the United States. (See Mäkinen 2018) The same era also saw the establishment of international relations as a specific field of study. Like the order, the theory of international relations, particularly after the Second world war, became almost identical with studying the foreign policy of the United States. (Wæver 1999) By defining the 'science' of international politics, the Western academic community could "determine what can be said, how it can be said and whether or not what is said constitutes a pertinent or important contribution to knowledge". (Behera 2010)

During the Cold war, the liberal international order existed mainly within the United States and Western Europe as many other parts of the world, including India and most of the third world remained effectively outside of it. The order was also challenged, in both theory and in practice, by communism in its many different variations. The communist states, despite their differences, held a vision of a world communist order, in which the states would eventually wither away and in which all humanity would work together in peace.

After the collapse of communism in the late 1980's it seemed that the liberal order with its definition of politics had defeated its last ideological and institutional challengers. The order, also known as Washington consensus, could now spread freely almost everywhere, and some liberal

thinkers, such as John Ikenberry even proposed that the United States might have finally found the correct recipe for a universally valid, sustainable and stable order. (See Ikenberry 2001)

The triumph of the West was declared too early however. Today, the West is increasingly unable to project its power beyond its core areas and is similarly facing challenges in disseminating the Western understanding of international politics and its central values. The rising powers are, on the contrary, *de-westernising* their conceptions of politics by re-discovering their deep cultural and intellectual roots from which they are drawing inspiration. (Käkönen 2017: 24–25)

It seems that the world is returning to a state not unlike the polycentric system of the early modern era, when various international orders coexisted and interacted at the same time yet upheld their particular (yet universal) visions and institutional frameworks. Amitav Acharya has described the emerging world order as a 'multiplex world', which is not dominated by any single hegemonic power or hegemonic thought system, but consists of various competing centers of power. It is not a 'multipolar' order either, as although the great powers remain influential, many new powerful actors, such as corporations and non-governmental organizations have emerged on the side of them, limiting their power. The multiplex world, like a multiplex cinema, does not have any dominating core, but offers a multitude of different views and regional arrangements; a broad variety from which to choose. (Acharya 2017)

Within this polycentric multiplex world, this chapter argues, a Skinnerian debate of global proportions is taking place, and the Western model of international politics is being challenged from all directions. One of the loudest and most significant challengers is China, whose critical narratives describe the Western international order as unjust and undemocratic, and the ever more unstable West itself as no more capable to lead it – at least not alone. The time has come to reform the order according to 'Chinese wisdom'.

3. China and the international order

China's relationship with the Western led international order has been complex throughout the encounters between the two civilizations. Before the Western great powers forced China to open up during the 19th century, the Chinese empire considered itself as *the* civilization, as the very center of 'all under heaven' (天下, *tianxia*) leading the whole world. Within this cosmology any other states or kingdoms – including the Western powers – were seen as mere barbarians which would need to submit and acknowledge their inferiority in front of the Chinese emperor. (Zheng 2011)

After China's humiliating defeat in the Opium war of 1839–1842, the Chinese international order together with its *tianxia*-cosmology was gradually dismantled. China was forced to integrate itself into the Western international order and to adapt its 'Westphalian' principles on state sovereignty and equality. At the same time, China absorbed the Western thought system and conception of international politics, with such classics as Wheaton's *Elements of International Law*, Marten's *Guide Diplomatique*, and Tyler's *Universal History* being translated into Chinese. (Ch'en 1979: 62)

After reluctant attempts in reform, the Chinese empire collapsed in 1911. The Republic of China, which was established in 1912 on the ruins of the empire, attempted to transform China into a modern nation state according to Western models, and to join the Western led international order as its equal member. The Republic, however, soon fell into domestic turbulence culminating in a brutal

civil war, and despite its tremendous sacrifices in both world wars, it was never granted an equal status in the view of the other great powers. (Zheng 2011)

Communist People's Republic of China (PRC), building on these bitter experiences, was hostile towards the liberal order since its very establishment in 1949. It first joined the Soviet-led world communist alliance, and later, after the Soviet Union and China broke their diplomatic relations in the early 1960's, continued as an independent pariah state, spreading its revolutionary Maoist doctrine and supporting anti-Western and anti-Soviet movements throughout the developing world. (See Hodzi 2019: 67–82; Zhao 2018: 645–646) During the tumultuous early decades of the PRC, China thus remained effectively isolated from the international order and its institutions.

A complete u-turn in this relationship happened after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, when Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping launched the groundbreaking policy of 'reform and opening up'. With the reforms, Maoist doctrine was played down in both domestic and foreign affairs, and market-oriented reforms were initiated. China's foreign policy took a similar turn as China focused on its economic development and instead of spreading its ideology, was now ready to cooperate with all interested parties, including, and perhaps especially, the developed capitalist countries.^I

This change in line was demonstrated already in 1978 in a speech given by Deng Xiaoping, in which he declared that

we [China] are still a relatively poor nation. It is impossible for us to undertake many international proletarian obligations, so our contributions remain small. However, once we have accomplished the four modernizations and the national economy has expanded, our contributions to mankind, and especially to the Third World, will be greater. (Deng 1978)

The launch of the reform initiated another cycle of engagement with the Western international order. China opened up for diplomatic ties with all foreign countries, regardless of their ideological stances and joined the institutions and treaties of the international order one by one, beginning with the World Bank and the IMF in 1980. (Zhao 2018: 645–646) China also signed the most important security treaties including the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1992, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996, and joined the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 2004. (Sutter 2012: 122–124) During this period of engagement, China grew to become an important member and even supporter of the liberal order.

Following engagement with the institutions and the norms of the liberal order, China's academic circles embraced also the Western discipline of international relations. With its diplomatic networks spreading out into the world in the 1980's, China faced a rapidly growing demand of knowledge and expertise on foreign relations and international politics in general. Instead of developing the field from the scratch, China basically adopted the whole American discipline of international relations, with its theoretical mainstreams (realism, liberalism and constructivism) and even its name (国际关系, *guoji guanxi*). First generations of Chinese international scholars studied mainly in the United States, and Western classics of international relations, which were translated into Chinese in masses during the 1990's, became the core readings of the discipline. (Qin 2010; Nielsen

I The only restraint was the question of Taiwan (Republic of China): the PRC requires that all parties cease all official relations with Taiwan.

/ Kristensen 2014) In all aspects, China seemed to swallow and embrace the Western vision of international politics as a whole, but this short honeymoon was about to pass soon.

4. A Revisionist Stakeholder

According to a recent research by Mazarr, Heath and Cevallos (2018: 8) the liberal order consists of various suborders. It has for example economic orders (trade, financial and monetary orders), security suborders (the UN Charter-based nonaggression order and the U.S.-led system of alliances) and a global liberal values order based on human rights conventions. Any member state of the order could thus emphasize some of these suborders, but resist others.

Throughout the process of its integration, China has supported the economic order and the security order based on the UN Charter, but it has strictly opposed the U.S.-led alliance system and the order based on liberal values – in other words, China has questioned the Western dominance within the international order. This partial support has been clearly noticeable in Chinese foreign policy statements, in which China is generally always claiming to unswervingly support the order, but at the same time, opposing any hegemonic acts or views imposed upon other states and promoting the democratization of the order. (Ibid.) Zhao Suisheng has aptly described China as a “revisionist stakeholder, dissatisfied not with the principles but its status in the hierarchy of the order.” (Zhao 2018: 644)

China’s confidence in offering its own concepts and ideas for reforming the order has increased steadily following China’s economic rise. During the administration of Jiang Zemin (1989–2002) for example, China launched the ‘new security concept’ (新安全观, *xin anquanguan*), according to which old-fashioned military alliances should be disbanded and the concept of security as a whole should be re-imagined following principles of ‘win-win cooperation’. Jiang administration also brought forth the concepts of ‘diversity of civilizations’ (各国文明的多样性, *geguo wenming de duoyangxing*) and ‘democratization of international relations’ (国际关系的民主化, *guoji guanxi de minzhuhua*) which both propose an international order wherein the Western dominance would be diminished and the developing countries would have more say. (See Keith 2012: 235–252)

The era of Hu Jintao (2002–2012) continued with these tendencies. Hu offered the first glimpses of a Chinese world order with his core concept of the ‘harmonious world’ (和谐世界, *hexie shijie*) which combined Jiang’s ideas with new, culturally oriented overtones: within the harmonious world different civilizations, political ideologies and economic systems would thrive and coexist peacefully, complementing and learning from each other. No single state, no matter how great, would dominate the harmonious world, and there would followingly be no hegemonic ideologies imposed on the weaker parties. (ibid.) Hu’s era saw also the introduction of ‘China’s peaceful development’ (中国的和平发展, *Zhongguo de heping fazhan*) – a rhetorical device which claimed that although China was indeed becoming a great power and although it had some reservations concerning the international order, its rise would be peaceful and China would never claim the status of a hegemon within the order. (See Glaser / Medeiros 2007)

With these officially sanctioned concepts China has attempted to transform the way international politics and its central values and objectives are being framed. According to Zhang Weiwei, a professor of international relations at the Fudan university, the West still maintains a ‘discursive

hegemony' (话语霸权, *huayu baquan*) on how world politics is being understood. Zhang has urged the Chinese leadership to reinforce its 'discursive power,' so that China would be able to define the dominating values, ideals, and master narratives of the world. (Zhang 2012: 125–129) Another scholar, Zeng Xianghong has claimed similarly that besides its supreme military and economic power, the West has also projected a 'hegemonic worldview' (霸权世界观, *baquan shijieguan*) over the world. (Zeng 2015: 1–15) These hegemonic frames need to be destroyed and replaced by a Chinese narrative in which a reformed international order is not only possible but part of an 'irreducible historical trend'.

Besides official rhetoric, Chinese scholars of international politics have emerged as a major force in developing and projecting China's discursive power. By searching indigenous 'Chinese' ideas and by applying traditional philosophical concepts, such as the 'kingly way' (王道, *wangdao*) or 'tianxia', the scholars are attempting to question the universal validity and superiority of the Western model of international politics. They are disseminating a grand narrative of China as a historically peaceful and harmonious great power, which can, by applying its age-old 'Chinese wisdom', reform the Western international order, troubled by wars, military alliances and hegemonic struggles. (See Kallio 2015; See also Rached in this volume)

China's top leadership welcomes the input of the academia, as the scholars are generating valuable intellectual ammunition with which the leadership can build its officially sanctioned vision. Chinese academics are allowed relative freedom for discussing their ideas: the government controls the general themes and the broad direction of the discussions with funding and (self)censorship, yet the dominating ideas flow back to influence the political leadership in a two-way relationship. China's intellectuals are therefore, as articulated by Zhang Feng, "more influential than their counterparts in many Western countries paradoxically because China's repressive political system makes intellectual debates a surrogate form of politics." (Zhang 2013: 46–47)

During the era of the current president Xi Jinping, the foreign policy rhetoric of China, while in essence continuing on the careful formulations of the previous administrations, has gained more confident and assertive overtones. Soon after taking power in 2012, Xi Jinping declared that China was now pursuing the 'Chinese dream' (中国梦, *Zhongguo meng*) of national rejuvenation. It was rising to regain the great power status which it held during the times of its greatest dynasties. Pompous as it sounds, the rejuvenation is presented in line with the peaceful development narrative not as a threat to other countries or the international order as a whole, but as a great opportunity since the rising China will "increase its contributions to world peace and development." (Xi 2015)

In a speech given at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2017, Xi again highlighted China's strong support for the international order. The speech was widely interpreted as China's response for president Donald Trump's unilateral 'America first' policy, implying that if the United States would abandon the order, China was ready to step in for more responsibility. (Xi 2017) Indeed, the Trump administration, with its nationalistic rhetoric and by withdrawing from international projects such as the Paris climate agreement, Trans-Pacific partnership, and UNESCO, has in effect, offered China excellent opportunities, one after one, for increasing its status within the order. (Zhao 2018)

At the Communist party conference of October 2017, Xi declared that China was, after 40 years of successful economic reforms and growth, entering a 'new era' (新时代, *xinshidai*). It meant that the

age of modest and careful low profile strategy was over and China was ready to move into the 'center of the world stage'. In his speech Xi further forecasted that in 2050 China would emerge as a 'leading global great power' with a 'world class military' supporting its endeavors. (Xi 2017)

These ambitious claims have been supported by assertive foreign policy on the ground.^{II} In regional conflicts, such as the South-China sea territorial dispute, China has rapidly militarized the region by building artificial islands with military facilities. In 2013, shortly after Xi took the lead, China launched the massively ambitious geo-economic project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is projecting China's economic power all around the globe. BRI is supported by the Asian infrastructure investment bank (AIIB), another new institution which is widely seen as an alternative development fund for the World Bank and the IMF. (Zhao 2018: 647–649)

With the 'new era' dawning, China has introduced its own blueprint for the reform of the liberal international, which it calls 'the Community of Common Future for Mankind'. (人类命运共同体, *renlei mingyun gongtongti*, now on CCFM)^{III} The concept (although appearing occasionally in the speeches and documents of the Hu-administration) was introduced by Xi Jinping in 2013 and has been used intensively ever since. It has become the core foreign policy concept of the Xi administration, and a central element for introducing China's worldview and China's stance on international politics.

CCFM combines the concepts of the earlier administrations, including the 'diversity of civilizations' and the 'harmonious world', but draws also heavily from the academic discussions of international politics, especially from the so called 'tianxia theory' (天下论, *tianxia lun*) which claims that China has always held a 'worldly' conception of international politics. (See Puranen 2019). CCFM criticizes Western hegemony in the international order, but also offers some suggestions for guiding the liberal international order in a more peaceful, just and stable direction.

CCFM is often claimed to be too vaguely described to serve as anything more than a rhetorical device. The concept is still described enough for providing, first of all, a Chinese outlook on the international order and the state of international politics in general, and secondly, several guiding principles according to which China will conduct its foreign policy in the future. (See for example Tobin 2018). Moreover, official concepts of the Chinese leadership are not to be taken as mere empty rhetoric. The Communist party, since the Hu administration, has intensified its efforts in developing a modernized socialist ideology, which has been stripped off its utopian elements, but which would effectively and practically guide the implementation of policies. Ideological concepts, such as CCFM are thus very carefully drafted and developed, and when presented and described by top-level leaders such as Xi Jinping, they represent the actual strategic planning of the party leadership. (Heath / Kavalski 2014: 59–74)

The CCFM provides interesting views into how the Chinese leadership understands its relationship with the liberal order and how it is aspiring to shape it. It is essential to study the concept in detail, especially as described by Xi Jinping in his most important speeches.

II Although many of the developments started already during the Hu era. (See Doshi 2019)

III The official English translation of the concept uses the word 'future' although the Chinese word *mingyun* means destiny or fate.

5. From the liberal order to a Community of Common Future?

At the surface, the Community of Common Future for Mankind paints a positive and cosmopolitan picture of international politics. It claims that during the era of globalization, the interests of all countries – big or small – are increasingly interconnected, and the 'Cold war mentality' of zero-sum geopolitics and military alliances is simply outdated. In order to answer the various challenges posed by globalization, the destinies of all states are coming together and form a 'common future'. The current state of the world is, according to Xi Jinping, also favorable for advancing CCFM:

The world is undergoing major developments, transformation, and adjustment, but peace and development remain the call of our day. The trends of global multi-polarity, economic globalization, IT application, and cultural diversity are surging forward; changes in the global governance system and the international order are speeding up; countries are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent; relative international forces are becoming more balanced; and peace and development remain irreversible trends. (Xi 2017c)

Against the Western pessimism, Xi frames the world as developing into a favorable direction since peace and development are 'irreversible trends'. An important part of these developments, although never pointed out clearly, is the weakening of the West, which is hinted by 'increasing multi-polarity', 'cultural diversity' and with the 'international forces becoming more balanced' in the world.

At the same time however, certain 'uncertainties and destabilizing factors' are arising. The main threats to the order are, according to Xi, that the

global growth is sluggish, the impact of the financial crisis lingers on and the development gap is widening. Armed conflicts occur from time to time, Cold War mentality and power politics still exist and non-conventional security threats, particularly terrorism, refugee crisis, major communicable diseases and climate change, are spreading. (Xi 2017b)

Chinese list of threats also differs from the Western concerns: China is not worrying the degeneration of democracy or the rise of authoritarian governments, nor does it see the order itself as being in danger. It but puts the emphasis on the imbalances, both within the economic and the political structures of the international order. It is these imbalances (such as the development gap) which feed other threats, including terrorism and refugee crisis.

From the point of view of the CCDM, the Western program of liberalism is, and has been unable (or unwilling) in fixing these imbalances. For balancing the international order, CCDM describes five core components which should guide the reforms: partnerships, new security order, balanced globalization, diversity of civilizations and an ecologically sustainable 'beautiful world'.

The core unit of state-to-state relationships in the CCFM is the **partnership**. According to Xi, military alliances and general principles of power politics, still enduring in the prevailing order, need to be replaced with a network of partnerships "based on dialogue, non-confrontation and non-alliance." The partnerships emphasize 'win-win -cooperation' and mutual respect in each others' internal affairs: no state shall interfere in the affairs of the other in any way. The partnerships will also be established on the principle of equality so that "big countries should treat smaller ones as equals instead of acting as a hegemon imposing their will on others". (Xi 2017b)

Official statements are rather silent on who will build these partnerships and how. As China is the only state so far to endorse such partnerships, the concept seems to mean bilateral relations between China and other countries. Xi himself has argued that with the partnerships China "will build a circle of friends across the world." (Xi 2017b)

Basing on the structure of partnerships, a "common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable **security order**" can be established. Echoing on the 'new security concept' proposed by Jiang Zemin, Xi has claimed that "the security of all countries is interlinked and has impact on one another." (Xi 2015) Security is thus something that states cannot possess alone, but which has to be constructed together. Within the new 'universal security framework' of the CCFM, the antiquated Cold war era alliances will be replaced with 'partnerships' and the alliance systems as a whole will be dissolved. (Xi 2017c)

This new security community would, according to Xi, attempt to prevent conflicts from emerging in the first place, but when they do rise, they will always be handled by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The CCFM prefers consultation between the parties of conflict supported by the international community, but if the consultations fail, the UNSC can take "mandatory actions, so as to turn hostility into amity." (Xi 2015) The mandatory actions are not explicated any further but they hint that the sovereignty principle has at least some limits.

Third component is the **balanced development**. According to Xi, globalization and economic liberalism are not at the root of the troubles of the international order. (Xi 2017) On the contrary, the world needs *more* globalization, but it has to be more inclusive and balanced so that "its benefits are shared by all." This balancing will include deepening "trade and investment liberalization" (Xi 2017c) and a throughout reform of the established financial institutions:

Only when it adapts to new dynamics in the international economic architecture can the global governance system sustain global growth. Countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are all equal members of the international community. As such, they are entitled to participate in decision-making, enjoy rights and fulfill obligations on an equal basis. We should adhere to multilateralism to uphold the authority and efficacy of multilateral institutions. (Xi 2017)

The CCFM proposes a democratized economic order, in which the developing countries would have a greater representation. In his speech at the United Nations in 2015 Xi declared in a straightforward way that "China firmly supports greater representation and say of developing countries, especially African countries, in the international governance system" and that "China's vote in the United Nations will always belong to the developing countries." (Xi 2015)

Fourth core component is the **diversity of civilizations**, which reflects China's unease with the Western dominance within the international order. According to Xi,

there is no such thing as a superior or inferior civilization, and civilizations are different only in identity and location. Diversity of civilizations should not be a source of global conflict; rather, it should be an engine driving the advance of human civilizations. (Xi 2017b)

Within the CCFM all the civilizations should respect and learn from each others' differences. The diversity also means that "no country should view its own development path as the only viable one,

still less should it impose its own development path on others.” (Xi 2017) Focus on civilizational diversity is indirectly criticizing the West, since as all civilizations are seen as equals, the Western great powers should not have any of their prevailing privileges in international institutions, nor should they hold the monopoly on defining the guiding values. Interestingly however, China has, during the Xi era been more willing in promoting its ‘Chinese model’ as an ”option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence.” (Xi 2017c)

The fifth and last component is the building of a **beautiful world** by pursuing ”green and low-carbon development.” (Xi 2017b) The concept is not described in detail, but by elevating ecologic aspects at the core of the CCFM, China articulates its environmental concerns, and portrays itself as a responsible power also on this crucial issue.

What would be China’s place within the community? Within the CCFM all the civilizations are equal and the partnerships between states are also established on equal basis, no matter the size of the states involved. According to these precepts, China should not have any special role within the community and Xi himself has claimed that ”whatever level of development China will attain, it will never establish a hegemony, nor expand its influence.”^{IV} (Xi 2017) The CCFM, in other words, would have no hegemonic center and it would ideally respond to common challenges through the United Nations.

To summarize, the Community of Common Future for Mankind is not aiming to overthrow the liberal international order, but to reform and diversify it: it is a liberal international order with less liberalism in it. The CCFM retains the deepening globalization and free trade as its major principles, but wants more control on how their benefits are shared. It preserves or even strengthens the security framework around the United Nations but, at the same time, reinforces the principles of sovereignty and equality of the states.

Putting heavy emphasis on diversity and non-interference, the CCFM would not have any unifying value systems, expect the overriding respect for differences. It would be a practical community, in which states are allowed to act as they want as long as they are not harming other states. As the threshold for intervening in the internal affairs of states is very high, the CCFM would not have any strong means for dealing with conflicts within its member states, nor even identifying what kind of conduct crosses the line and requires ‘mandatory action’. Although Xi did mention in his UN speech of 2015 that ”justice, democracy and freedom are common values of all mankind”, the phrase is more inclined to redefine the meanings of these concepts with terms favorable for the Chinese government: ‘justice and democracy’ means more say for developed countries in international forums, and ‘freedom’ merely the right to choose non-Western political and development models.

Without any clearly defined guiding values the CCFM can hardly be seen as a functional framework for an international order. The Western values cannot be tolerated, but there is nothing to replace them, and this lack of alternative ‘Chinese values’ is a well known problem in China as it attempts to project its ‘soft power’ around the globe. During the reign of Xi Jinping, China has began propagating a Chinese value system of ‘core socialist values’ (社会主义核心价值观, *shehuizhuyi*

hexin jiazhiguan) which, it is hoped, could serve as a foundation for a new value system to emerge. (See Gow 2016) Yan Xuetong, a well-known professor of international relations, has also proposed that in the international context, China could offer its traditional Confucian values of benevolence, righteousness and rites in place of the Western values. (Yan 2018) Neither initiative has, so far, received any notable international enthusiasm.

6. A Challenging Community

Although China's foreign policy concepts have had a rather lukewarm reception so far, their development needs to be followed closely. Among the new challenging visions within the 'multiplex world', China's is the most serious since China possesses the largest and rapidly growing capacities for pushing it forward. Its discursive power is, indeed, taking small but important steps: the CCFM has already been written in a United Nations resolution^V and within the international academic community, the idea of a unique 'tianxia' worldview has been noted even by the Western scholars of international politics.

Although the CCFM is vaguely described it offers certain guiding principles which give general directions for Chinese foreign policy. Besides introducing a 'Chinese' framework for reforming the international order, the community can also be studied as a strategic guide for constructing a stable environment in which China can develop its strength undisturbed. The more profound reform of the order could perhaps come later.

On the other hand, a China-centered international order could already be brewing under the shadow of the CCFM rhetoric. According to some analysts, the concept of the CCFM is aimed primarily at the developing countries. (See Zhang 2018) With its 'harmonious' and 'non-hegemonic' stance, China is building a stronger and more trustworthy relationships with the developing world, and with bilateral partnerships and deepening economic dependencies – especially pushed by the BRI – China is indeed expanding its "circle of friends across the world".

The design of the CCFM, as offered by Xi Jinping, describes a harmonious and peaceful world order in which great power competition would have become a thing of the past, and in which the mankind would strive against the global challenges together. "All under heaven shared by all" as Xi Jinping has himself outlined it. Beautiful as it sounds the CCFM is also in almost absolute contradiction with Chinese domestic policies.

When describing the concept of 'diversity of civilizations', for example, China remains silent on how it treats its own minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang, in which the cultural and religious rights of the minority populations are brutally repressed. Within Xinjiang, perhaps even million uyghurs are being detained in 're-education centers' in which core socialist values among other elements of China's official ideology are being taught forcibly. (Maizland 2019) China has claimed that the re-education centers are sanctioned by the United Nations as legitimate counter-terrorism activities – a statement which merely demonstrates how differently the international law can be interpreted. (State Council of The People's Republic of China White Paper 2019)

^V A General Assembly resolution aiming to prevent arms race in space promotes "the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes, with the objective of shaping **a community of shared future for mankind**" (See United Nations Disarmament Yearbook 2017: Part I 72/250: Further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space)

The positive attitude towards globalization and 'open world economy', praised in CCFM rhetoric, stands in stark contrast with China's domestic economy, which is one of the most protected and closed economies in the world. And lastly, China has itself become rather flexible with the non-interference principle it claims to value. It intervenes harshly against any country which deals with certain issues China considers its internal affairs – most notably the so called "three T's": Taiwan, Tibet and Tiananmen square protests. Meeting Tibetan or Taiwanese leaders or Chinese dissidents causes an immediate aggressive response from Chinese foreign ministry even if the government of the particular country is not involved. (See Siika 2015)

However, China has lately increased its attempts at controlling even the narratives on these affairs, and also within the West. This has been noted especially in the context of academic freedom, as academics studying 'hot topics' are finding their visas denied and their home institutions are facing problems signing cooperative relations with their Chinese counterparts. (See Parton 2019) So far China has justified its interference by claiming that the issues of its concern are China's 'internal affairs', but this could be changing and what is related to China's 'internal affairs' could be easily redefined.

As its rise continues, China will likely push forward its vision of the Community of Common Future for Mankind with an increasing vigor. And while the liberal core values of democracy and universal human rights are facing increasing setbacks, the liberal international order without liberalism which China is essentially offering will seem more and more appealing especially in the authoritarian world, even though (or perhaps because of) it remains ambiguous and vaguely described.

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