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## *The geopolitics of complementarity, towards a new way of addressing differences*



**Sources:** Rebellion

In the field of international relations, two lines of thought have dominated twentieth-century geopolitics, realism and idealism. Realism advocates the competition of States based on the "national interest" and an "anarchy" based on the relative power of nations as the main vector. That is, a geopolitical translation of naturalism and survival based on the "law of the fittest".

For its part, idealism, coined after the disaster of World War I – although with antecedents in Kant's text "On Perpetual Peace" – promotes a multilateral diplomacy, regulated by international law and international organizations, undermined today in practice behind the scenes by the influence of the financial and military power of the corporations and States at its service.

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Although there are minor currents, generally detached or renewed from these trends in geopolitical thought, China surprises the world today with the emergence of a type of relationship with other nations that we can call "geopolitics of complementation".

Even though it includes in its foreign policy concepts from traditional currents such as legitimate national interest – typical of realism – or attachment to multilateral institutions and their formal provisions – characteristic of idealism, Chinese diplomacy is reaping growing and innovative results – a pragmatic trait, essential in the Chinese mental universe. All this happens from the affirmation of relations of "mutual benefit" and the guiding idea of a "community with a shared future for humanity", propagated by the government of Xi Jinping as the basis of its foreign policy.

### **Peace and development**

In this context, the recent "carambola" is very significant.<sup>[1]</sup> of peace unleashed in the Middle East (or Western Asia), a region that, with the help of the repeated headlines of the monopolistic news agencies, is linked until now in the mental scenario of the population to violence, conflict and extremist terrorism as the only realities.

Resounding has been the recomposition of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, mediated by the Chinese effort, which feeds a way out of the humanitarian catastrophe experienced by the Yemeni people, hit by a war that has been going on for nine years and makes possible the resolution of different crises that behind the scenes have these contenders as main actors.

In the same way, the position taken by the Chinese government in Syria was very important, which together with Russia prevented from its permanent seat in the Security Council of the United Nations, the legitimization of interventionist projects or joint sanctions, such as those that caused the invasion of Iraq or the destruction in Libya in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

These days, the Saudi kingdom and Syria announced the resumption of commercial flights and consular services that had been interrupted in 2011, while two other Gulf countries, Bahrain and Qatar, have also just agreed to the restoration of diplomatic ties, cut by Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood, accused of influencing the Arab Spring uprisings. That rupture was followed by a blockade of the host country of the last soccer World Cup, which was promoted by Saudi Arabia in alliance with Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, among others.

Achieving peace in the Middle East and Central Asia is indispensable to implement gigantic infrastructure and trade development projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative,

which is a strategic objective of China, whose fruits are already beginning to be seen in the international arena.

However, this hopeful glimmer is still overshadowed by Israel's military action against the Palestinian people, the intricate political crossroads in Lebanon and the astronomical figures invested by the countries of the subregion in weapons, the largest in the world on average in relation to their Gross Domestic Product (4.3%, 2021), [according to](#) SIPRI.

### **Investment as a cover letter**

With the enormous resources achieved largely by its powerful surplus in the trade balance, which only between 2001 and 2021 went from 28 to 462 billion US dollars, China develops a global investment policy that brings it along with economic return, international influence and approval in the beneficiary countries.

The investment strategy, which was originally based on the complementarity of carrying out infrastructure projects and extending financing in exchange for the provision of food and other natural resources, has now diversified, aiming at the same time to enlarge local markets, in order to export more and better products. Strategy, which at least in theory, should benefit local populations, if there is no "really existing" capitalism that only favors minorities that concentrate the wealth produced.

Even so, this developmentalist horizon, unlike the flat dispossession of the European colonial powers, has provided some improvement to regions whose material deficiencies do not admit any relativization.

For example, in Africa, according to [data](#) from the China-Africa Research Initiative of Johns Hopkins University, the Asian country granted in the first two decades of the century 1143 loans worth 153 billion (in US\$). Except for Eswatini (formerly Swaziland, the only country on the continent to recognize Taiwan as an independent state), Libya and Somalia, all other African nations received funding.

According to the Chinese ambassador to Liberia, Ren Yisheng, "between 2000 and 2020, China helped African countries build more than 13,000 km of railways, almost 100,000 km of highways, about 1,000 bridges, almost 100 ports and more than 80 large power plants."

But China's cooperation diplomacy encompasses many other fields. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency, while several rich countries of the North hoarded batches of vaccines, even in excess for their own population, China was a leading voice in supporting the exemption of intellectual property rights (IPR) of vaccines and in

developing countries on their production. highlights the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Something similar happens with the flow of their investments in Latin America and the Caribbean. After the decade of neoliberal plundering of the 90's, China was consolidated as one of the main commercial and financial partners and source of direct investment in the region, which collaborated with the expansion of social rights and the sustainability of progressive governments.

But European companies also found in China a way out of their own crisis, opening their exports to the growing purchasing power of the middle layers of the eastern nation. As elsewhere, capital took advantage of this for its own benefit, with workers in Europe under pressure to see many of their jobs relocated to Asia.

And of course, the United States was also for several years the main destination of Chinese funds, today in decline to that country.

This diplomacy of money under the so-called concept of "win-win", makes an endless line of foreign dignitaries parade daily through the Chinese capital in search of "cooperation".

Over the years, China has managed to establish formal ties of exchange and agreement alternative to those managed by the alleged unipolar hegemon of the United States. Through permanent bilateral forums with each region such as China-CELAC or China-Africa and its participation in areas of economic and security partnership such as Shanghai Cooperation, BRICS, ASEAN, RCEP, just to name a few, the country has managed to insert itself as a global weight factor.

The tradition of mediation and the country's central location on the world stage can be directly traced back to the way the Chinese people call their territory, *Zhongguo*, which in literal translation means "country of the center of the Earth" or "Middle Kingdom."

Obviously, Western analysts (especially Americans), educated in the permanent competition for power, see in it a scenario of hegemonic replacement and warn of a new possible imperialism, this time with Eastern characteristics. What is the truth in that?

### **Towards a global civilization**

In October 2021, during the meeting commemorating the 50th anniversary of China's reincorporation into the UN, Xi Jinping said: "We must jointly push forward the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind, so as to jointly build a world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity. and that is open, inclusive, clean and beautiful. Human beings must unite to overcome difficult moments side by side, and live together harmoniously."<sup>[2]</sup>

In turn, in the framework of the High-Level Dialogues of the Chinese Communist Party with political leaders of other countries (March 2023), the president of China presented the Initiative for Global Civilization, a proposal to the world that complements the Global Development Initiative and the Initiative for Global Security released earlier.

With this, the eastern power seems to take the lead to redefine globalization from an inclusive perspective, respectful of sovereignty and diversity and, above all, focused, as the declaration, on "putting the people first and ensuring that modernization and development is people-centered."

Beyond the suspicions that the spokesmen of the Western "ancien régime" (particularly Anglo-Saxon) sow about the veracity of these intentions, the profound humanist character of the proposal cannot be overemphasized.

In recent decades, China has consistently opposed foreign intervention and unilateral sanctions, spoken out against the use or threat of use of force, opted for non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations – except on issues such as its own territorial indivisibility or political system – and promoted the peaceful resolution of disputes between conflicting nations. which exhibits a strong basis of credibility for their statements.

On the other hand, the increasing military spending and the possession of nuclear weapons, together with the reluctance to promote disarmament initiatives, even when they can be justified from defensive arguments, place a gray fog on such encouraging purposes.

### **A possible new way of addressing difference**

To understand more fully the world-system image that moves a China isolated for centuries from other nations and today fully interconnected, some elements of its philosophical universe must be considered.

There is no doubt that the "Xi Jinping era" has reinforced Confucian elements in domestic politics, such as rigidity in the face of dissent or lack of probity in the civil service and that in its foreign policy Taoist contents such as the complementation of opposites and the convergence of diversity into an encompassing whole appear.

In turn, a certain Buddhist component, the third source of main philosophical inspiration of the Chinese people, collaborates with the impulse towards a morality of peace and non-violence.

Corresponding to an integrative synthesis of such historical foundations, these currents seem to be amalgamated in the psychosocial background of the Chinese population in a

permanent search for balance and harmony as a congratulatory ideal of society, to which the government must respond, so as not to lose "the favor of heaven".<sup>[3]</sup>

Through the numerous schools of thought, these mythical reference sources have in turn generated an inclusive logic, different from the Western logic of the exclusion of opposites, based on Aristotelian axioms.

The bottom-up multilateralism that drives Chinese foreign policy can in turn be related to the need for proportion, which is that all peoples do better in a framework of shared well-being, in which preeminence is not sought but balanced distribution, recognizing the interdependence and structurality of the world.

Probably several of these underlying intentions favor the emergence of new ways of addressing differences, in a complementary and integrative sense, overcoming the stagnation of a perennial dialectic of opposing sides without effective synthesis.

They say in the West that the world has turned towards the East, but in reality the world has become more inclusive, having to seriously consider the contributions of a long denied and exploited East, which will be followed by the multiple contributions of all the cultures of the Earth, crushed in their identity by the primitive pretension of primacy and uniformity.

What seems inexorable is that globalization and historical acceleration lead to the formation of a planetary civilization united in diversity with equal rights and opportunities, a universal human nation, an inescapable condition for the preservation of the species and its projection towards new evolutionary challenges.

As the humanist thinker Silo announced in 2004: "We are at the end of a dark historical period and nothing will be the same as before. Little by little the dawn of a new day will begin to clear; cultures will begin to understand each other; Peoples will experience a growing yearning for progress for all, understanding that the progress of a few ends in progress for no one. Yes, there will be peace and by necessity, it will be understood that a universal human nation is beginning to take shape."<sup>[4]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup>While star fruit is a tropical fruit consumed in Southeast Asia, it is also the popular name for "French billiards", in which the player tries to hit, hitting with a cue on a ball, the other two that are on the mat.

<sup>[2]</sup><https://dangdai.com.ar/2022/10/05/apuntes-sobre-la-politica-exterior-china/>

[3] The mandate of heaven or celestial mandate (tiānmìng (天命) is a concept of traditional Chinese philosophy concerning the legitimacy of its rulers. Its origin dates back to the **Zhou dynasty**, although it would later be used by all other dynasties to justify their rule and by their opponents, to rebel against them.

[4] Words of Silo on the occasion of the First Annual Celebration of the Message of Silo, Punta de Vacas, Mendoza, Argentina, May 4, 2004. Complete speech in Silo in the open, p. 6 <http://www.archivosilo.org/archivopro/espanol/libros/cieloesp.pdf>

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