

CHINESE PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

in the Xi Jinping Era

By Ren Xiao and Liu Ming



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THE NATIONAL BUREAU *of* ASIAN RESEARCH
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in the Xi Jinping Era

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— FOREWORD —

The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) launched the project *China's Vision for a New World Order* in early 2019 with the intention to explore the vision of China's political and intellectual elites for a new regional and global order under Beijing's helm. Instead of inferring China's ambitions from observable external behavior, the project set about to examine the rich debate taking place within the country through careful analysis of Chinese-language sources and dialogues with the Chinese intellectuals and policy influencers who are helping shape the political leadership's vision. Although direct engagement has become more difficult over the course of the project, partly as a result of the heightened tensions in the U.S.-China bilateral relationship, NBR was able to co-host an international workshop in Singapore with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in September 2019. The two authors featured in this NBR Special Report participated in the workshop discussions. Their contributions offer precious insights into the intellectual framework that structures current internal discussions.

Ren Xiao from Fudan University explains the growing importance of area studies within the Chinese field of international studies and argues that this trend reflects China's increasing interests in the wider world. Tracing the modest beginnings of area studies in China back to Zhou Enlai's 1963–64 diplomatic tours of Asian and African countries and the sudden awareness of the dearth of Chinese regional expertise, Ren describes the successive waves that have led, under the central leadership's direction, to the development of regional studies centers throughout the country, now covering every region from the Caribbean to the Pacific Islands. He describes the growing integration of academic expertise and policymaking and devotes a section to China's research funding mechanisms. With a lucid eye, Ren also observes that the increasing number of research centers is leading to greater competition for resources and attention from the political leadership, which can sometimes generate poorly researched and hastily produced papers.

Liu Ming from the Institute of International Relations at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences examines the concept of a "community with a shared future for humankind." He describes this concept as an integral part of Xi Jinping's legacy and as commensurate with China's position as a rising power willing to take on more international responsibility. Although the concept first appeared in 2013, Liu believes that it came to full bloom in Xi's 2017 speech at the United Nations in Geneva. As he examines the various components of this community, Liu more or less explicitly articulates that this concept represents a rejection of an "unjust" and "anachronistic" order that supposedly nurtures confrontation instead of cooperation and peace. In essence, he contends that the community represents China's effort to improve the existing order. But Beijing is under no illusion that it will be able to persuade the existing hegemon to embrace this "grand proposal to reshape the world order." Therefore, this alternative path will develop only gradually over time.

NBR would like to thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York for its generous sponsorship of the project. We would also like to thank RSIS for its invaluable assistance in co-hosting the September 2019 workshop that led to this publication.

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The Development of Area Studies and the Implications for China's Future

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay surveys the growth of foreign area studies in China and assesses implications for future Chinese foreign policy.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Foreign area studies are rapidly growing in China today. This reflects increasing demand for sound knowledge about countries and regions across the world. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, there have been three waves of area studies. The first wave occurred before the Cultural Revolution in 1963–64, and the second wave surged in the 1980s and 1990s. Most representative of the second wave was what happened at the newly founded Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The third wave of area studies emerged around the turn of the century, chiefly driven by China's Ministry of Education. Many area studies centers are being established in various universities to provide full coverage of all the world's countries and regions. There are three major sources of demand for such expertise or knowledge: government and domestic companies, mass media, and international corporations. The extension of China's overseas interests increases the need to safeguard or protect those interests, and this in turn heightens the importance of foreign area studies. Given the explosive demand for expertise about once-neglected regions or smaller countries, the need for language training, especially in languages spoken in remote places and by fewer people, has increased significantly.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The growth of foreign area studies reflects China's concern with the whole world, and this in turn reflects China's expanding presence all over the globe.
- New waves of area studies in China are to a large extent policy-driven.
- The growth of area studies indicates that China will become more globally oriented and have a more international vision in the future.

In October 2019, China celebrated the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This became an occasion for the academic community to reflect on the state of humanities and social sciences in China, including international studies. Before the initiation of reform in the late 1970s, social sciences in China experienced radical fluctuations and setbacks. To provide just one example, political science and sociology were seen as “pseudoscience” and disbanded. By contrast, given the obvious need to know about the outside world, international studies had the rationale to survive and also some room to grow in a not very encouraging environment, which was characterized by one political movement after another.

Since reform, international studies has been a rapidly growing field in China. This is happening along with China's development and rise in the world. This essay surveys the growth of foreign area studies in China and assesses implications for future Chinese foreign policy.

A Modest Beginning

International studies in general and area studies in particular underwent ups and downs over the past 70 years. The earliest initiative to create a specialized research institute came from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1955. After being approved by the leadership, the Institute of International Relations was established in 1956. The same year, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies was founded at Xiamen University in Fujian Province, the first institute of its kind in the PRC. This was quite natural and understandable given Fujian's historical linkage with Southeast Asia (traditionally called Nanyang). A similar Institute of Southeast Asian Studies was created in 1960 at Jinan University in Guangzhou. The same year, an Institute of International Studies was established in Shanghai, only nominally within the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

One important development occurred in 1963 when the Central Foreign Affairs Leading Group submitted a report to the highest level of Chinese leadership on promoting the study of foreign countries. Before that call from within the government, Premier Zhou Enlai traveled to fourteen Asian and African countries. That was a major diplomatic drive and also the first visit of its kind to the African continent made by a Chinese leader. During the trip, Zhou felt that there was a serious lack of knowledge about foreign countries and that it was necessary to strengthen the discipline of international studies. Upon his return, he instructed the Central Foreign Affairs Leading Group to draft and submit the above-mentioned report. The report was quickly approved at the highest level and became a major driving force for the development of area studies in China.

As it turned out, 1964 became a watershed year in this regard. Departments of International Politics were established at three major Chinese universities: Peking and Renmin Universities in Beijing and Fudan University in Shanghai. The three departments later became both teaching and research centers for international affairs in the country. A division of labor was made for Peking to cover Asia and Africa (hence, the formation of the Institute of Asia-Afro Studies), Renmin to cover the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries (hence, the Institute for the Study of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe), and Fudan to cover the United States and Western Europe (hence, the Institute for the Economy of Capitalist Countries). Since then, the “big three” universities have played a leading role, and this configuration has left a profound imprint on China's international and area studies.

Besides in Beijing and Shanghai, other research units were founded in several border provinces. For example, in the Northeast there emerged the Japanese Studies Institute at Liaoning

University and both Japanese Studies and Korean Studies units at Jilin University, all in 1964. Other institutions included Indian Studies at Sichuan University (now the Institute of South Asian Studies) in the southwest, and the Institute of Islamic States at Northwest University in Xi'an (renamed the Institute of Middle East Studies in 1978). The top-down system was efficient and quick in taking action, with the provision of staff, funding, and other necessities from the government. During this first wave, various area studies institutes were created in different parts of the country, including African and Latin American studies institutes in Beijing.

Unfortunately, not long after, the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, which proved to be disastrous for the country. This was true for the humanities and social sciences in China. Area studies could not escape from this disaster either. To give just a couple of examples, Renmin University ceased to exist, and the Foreign Affairs College was disbanded. Both were resumed only after the end of the Cultural Revolution.

The Second and Third Waves

The initiation of the reform and opening in the late 1970s brought about a “spring for science” in China. With the deepening of the reform and opening process, area studies gained momentum and, with the passage of time, became more and more prosperous. During this era, two leaps forward occurred, and they became the second and third waves of area studies in China.

The Second Wave

The second wave occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. Most representative of this wave was what happened at the newly founded Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), which split from the long-standing Chinese Academy of Sciences. The new vice president of CASS, Huan Xiang, was China's foremost foreign affairs specialist and he was ambitious in establishing several research institutes within CASS in order to cover the whole world. Under his leadership, in 1980 the Institutes for the Study of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and West Asia and Africa, which had been under the International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), were transferred to CASS. This major reorganization, in conjunction with the founding of the Institutes for American Studies (1981), Japanese Studies (1981), Western European Studies (1981), and later Asia-Pacific Studies (1988, through a merger of a few research units), filled the void in area studies. By the end of the decade, CASS housed seven area studies institutes. With the Institute of World Economics and Politics, these institutes formed an area studies cluster of significant size. Soon they became the foremost research institutes in their respective fields, and their affiliated journals became leading area studies journals in China.

At the universities, area studies centers also mushroomed. For example, Fudan University established the Centers for American Studies (1985), Japanese Studies (1990), and Korean Studies (1992), as well as the Center for Nordic Studies (1995), which claimed to be the only one of its kind in Asia. At a time of limited research funds for area studies, the Ford Foundation in the United States, the Japan Foundation in Japan, and the Korea Foundation in South Korea played important roles in terms of funding and promoting American, Japanese, and Korean studies in China. The San Francisco-based Asia Foundation also supported conferences in China and donated books to Chinese institutions. Since 2002, for example, the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies has helped found Asia research centers at various universities throughout

Asia, including China. It supports one research center each in Cambodia (Royal Academy of Cambodia), Laos (National University of Laos), Mongolia (National University of Mongolia), Myanmar (Yangon University), Thailand (Chulalongkorn University), Vietnam (Vietnam National University), and Iran (University of Tehran). By contrast, as many as eleven centers of this kind were founded in China at Beijing Foreign Studies University; the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Fudan, Liaoning, Nankai, Peking, Renmin, Tsinghua, Yanbian, and Zhejiang Universities; and the Communication University of China.

At the provincial academies of social sciences, research on neighboring countries or regions also grew considerably during this period—Central Asian studies in Xinjiang (as well as at Lanzhou University in Gansu Province), Indian studies in Sichuan (at Sichuan University), Myanmar studies in Yunnan (at Yunnan University), Vietnam studies in Guangxi, Russian studies in Heilongjiang, Korean studies in Jilin and Liaoning, and South China Sea studies in Hainan. These provincial academies offered clear advantages of geographic proximity, language knowledge, personal connections, visit convenience, and so forth. However, that has not always been the case, and there are exceptions. For example, Henan Province's Zhengzhou University in China's north has become quite strong in the study of Vietnam, and the African Studies Institute at Zhejiang Normal University in Jinhua in Zhejiang Province has become a key research institution for the study of Africa.

The Third Wave

The third wave of area studies emerged around the turn of the century, chiefly driven by China's Ministry of Education. After two decades of reform and development, China had achieved rapid economic growth and possessed the capability to channel more financial resources into the humanities and social sciences. Starting in 1999, the Ministry of Education consecutively set up 151 key research bases in the humanities and social sciences at 66 Chinese universities. Those "bases" (*ji di*) are all research institutes or centers. The ministry constructed these bases to satisfy the criteria of being "first-class" and "unique."¹ The former requires a base that was set up at a specific university to be the top one in its field within the country, or at least among Chinese universities (outside of which are CASS and provincial or municipal academies of social sciences). A particular base was expected to reach the top level in its field after several years of construction. The criterion of uniqueness means that only one such base would be selected in a certain field. A particular base was expected to become a genuine research center in its field and spearhead the flourishing of the humanities and social sciences in China.

Nine such research bases in international studies were set up. The bases for research on Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia are at Xiamen University and Jilin University, respectively, which have a geographic advantage and traditional foundation in these areas. Three research bases are set up in Shanghai—the American studies base at Fudan University, the Russian research base at East China Normal University, and the Middle East research base at Shanghai International Studies University. Besides these, other research bases include European research at Renmin University (Beijing), South Asia research at Sichuan University (Chengdu), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) research at Nankai University (Tianjin), and overseas Chinese research at Jinan University (Guangzhou). These research centers gained momentum on the

¹ "Renwen shehuikexue zhongdian yanjiu jidi jianshe gaikuang" [Overview of the Development of Key Humanities and Social Science Resource Base], *Guayunfan*, February 21, 2020, <http://www.guayunfan.com/lilun/65671.html>.

basis of their newly obtained status and corresponding financial resources and could be staffed with more researchers.

Not long after, a new initiative followed suit to further boost social science research in China. It involved the construction of Project 985 national innovative bases in philosophy and the social sciences. What is Project 985? On May 4, 1998, President Jiang Zemin delivered a speech at the Peking University centenary commemoration and announced that, for the country's modernization, China needed to build a number of first-class universities with a global reputation.² In 1999 the State Council approved an education-promoting action plan submitted by the Ministry of Education that set goals for the 21st century. Project 985 was thus formally initiated.

Phase one was launched at Peking and Tsinghua Universities. In 2004 the Ministries of Education and Finance together released a document to continue Project 985 for further construction.³ Phase two aims to forge new forms of research organizations and innovative research teams. In practice, over half the key research bases set up by the Ministry of Education became the pillars of the state innovation platforms in philosophy and social sciences, including several area studies centers.

If the first stage of the third wave was characterized by selecting and supporting universities that had a reasonably good foundation on which to develop area studies, the feature of the second phase is “full coverage” in scope—namely, covering all regions and countries throughout the world. In 2011 the Ministry of Education started the “area studies incubation bases” project, setting up twelve area studies centers in various universities. Encouraged by the ministry's new initiative, other universities wanted to seize the opportunity by attaching more importance to area studies and taking corresponding measures. The selection and establishment of country or regional research centers would definitely mean more available resources, but more importantly it would elevate the status of those selected universities. In early 2017 the Ministry of Education issued another document stating that country and regional studies have important implications for serving China's foreign policy interests, including the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).⁴

By June 2018 the ministry had approved the construction of the first group of 37 area studies incubation bases, among which 23 are regional studies centers and 14 are country centers. The ultimate goal was to cover all countries and regions in the world. By November 2018 the ministry's list of candidates comprised nearly 400 research centers at more than 100 universities. These centers cover almost the whole world. According to the guidelines, they are supposed to serve public policymaking as their first priority. They also seek to conduct rigorous research, train younger-generation scholars, and form research teams with professional advantage and significant impact. The Ministry of Education opened a secretariat at the Beijing Language and Culture University to assist with the coordination of area studies, organize academic evaluations, and orchestrate documentation and information sharing. See **Table 1** for a partial list of such area studies centers.

² “Jiang Zemin zai beijingdaxue jianxiao yibai zhounian dahui shang de jianghua” [Jiang Zemin's Speech at Conference to Celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Beijing University], *People's Daily*, May 4, 1998, <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/jiaoyu/8216/2702275.html>.

³ “Jiaoyubu caizhengbu guanyu jinyibu shishi 985 gongcheng jianshe xiangmu de yijian” [Recommendations of the Ministries of Education and Finance on the Continued Implementation of Project 985], Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (PRC), June 2, 2004, http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A22/s7065/200406/t20040602_174769.html.

⁴ “Jiaoyubu bangongting guanyu zuohao 2017 guobie he quyuan yanjiu youguan gongzuo de tongzhi” [Ministry of Education, General Office Notice on Performing Strong Work on Area and Country Studies in 2017], Ministry of Education (PRC), February 23, 2017, http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A20/s7068/201703/t20170314_299521.html.

TABLE 1 University-based area studies centers designated by the Ministry of Education

Bases for regional studies
African Studies Center, Shanghai Normal University
Arab Studies Center, Beijing International Studies University
Arab Studies Center, Beijing Language and Culture University
Arab Studies Center, Ningxia University
ASEAN Studies Center, Guangxi University for Nationalities
ASEAN Studies Center, Guizhou University
Center for African Studies, Peking University
Center for Central and Eastern European Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU)
Center for EU Studies, Shanghai International Studies University (SISU)
Center for Latin American Studies, Southwest University of Science and Technology
Center for Shanghai Cooperation Organization Studies, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics
Center for South Asian Studies, Peking University
Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Xiamen University
EU Studies Center, Sichuan University
Institute for Central Asian Studies, Lanzhou University
Institute of African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University
Institute of International and Comparative Education, Beijing Normal University
Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University
Latin American Studies Center, Tianjin Foreign Studies University
Oceania Studies Center, Sun Yat-sen University
Russian Studies Center, Beijing Normal University
Bases for country studies
American Studies Center, Peking University
American Studies Center, Sichuan University
Canadian Studies Center, BFSU
Center for British Studies, SISU
Center for Canadian Studies, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies
Center for Russian Studies, SISU
French Studies Center, Beihang University
French Studies Center, Wuhan University
German Studies Center, Sichuan International Studies University
German Studies Center, Tongji University
Institute of Japan Studies, Nankai University
Japan Studies Center, BFSU
UK Studies Center, BFSU

Among the area studies centers, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies was selected in December 2011 to build the Center for Canadian Studies. The center was formally launched on June 18, 2012. In September 2012 a Pacific Islands studies center was launched at Liaocheng University in Shandong Province. It is the first specific center devoted to the study of Pacific Island countries in China. In Shanghai, East China Normal University houses an Australian studies center, while in southwest China the Research Institute for Indian Ocean Economies was created at Yunnan University of Finance and Economics in Kunming. In central China, Wuhan University partnered with the University of the West Indies and established the Center for Caribbean Studies. Not so long ago, it would be unimaginable for such centers to emerge.

Provincial-level governments have also taken steps to promote area studies. The Shanghai Academy of Global Governance and Area Studies was launched at Shanghai International Studies University on September 28, 2018. Built to inform policymakers, businesses, and the public, the academy serves multiple roles as a distinctive high-level think tank, a talent pool, and a platform and database of global opinions on China. It supports Shanghai's strategic plans of building an "excellent global city" with "five centers" (an international economic center, a financial center, a trade center, a shipping center, and a science and technology innovation center) and "four brands" (service, manufacturing, consumption, and culture) to satisfy the real needs of city development. The establishment of the academy was formally proposed in the "Action Plan of Shanghai for Playing a Bridgehead Role under 'Belt and Road'" in 2017. The municipal government can point to the academy as a further contribution to BRI.

Against this backdrop, area studies centers are proliferating in China, constantly joining the existing ones. At Peking University, the umbrella Institute of Area Studies was created in 2018 to activate and coordinate area studies at Peking. Earlier, a research organization at Beijing Language and Culture University was created bearing the same name.

In the meantime, China's development has continued. With Chinese overseas interests now extending to almost all corners of the world, the country's foreign trade and overseas investment have both been growing rapidly. Chinese businessmen, workers, students, and tourists are increasingly seen everywhere in the world. As a result of these developments, China must prepare for three kinds of circumstances: (1) new contingencies confronting Chinese engineers, workers, and tourists, (2) major natural disasters and domestic unrest in foreign countries that necessitate the urgent evacuation of Chinese nationals, and (3) major setbacks in overseas investments, given their inherent risks. All these circumstances require that Chinese decision-makers develop a better grasp of politics, economics, and other situations in foreign countries. This is exactly the goal of the third wave of investment in cultivating new centers for area studies.

Contextualizing Area Studies in China

The rapid growth of area studies in China is a microcosm of the explosion of international studies over the past two decades. Today, China's international relations community has become very large, perhaps second to only the United States. A large body of it consists of area studies. Traditionally, area studies in China has paid more attention to North America, Western Europe, and Japan, largely because of the following two reasons. One is the importance of those regions or countries for China's modernization drive. The other is that more resources were available in those fields. As discussed earlier, the Ford Foundation of the United States played a significant

role in promoting American studies in China, while the Japan Foundation and Korea Foundation played similar roles for the growth of Japanese studies and Korean studies. While those fields keep growing, greater demand for expertise on other parts of the world has been a powerful stimulus for area studies focused on other geographic regions.

A major source of demand is the government. Given the many challenges facing the country, Chinese policymakers have become aware of the need for more expertise and input from the research community. Along with the increase of contact between policy and research communities, policymakers are becoming more willing to listen to researchers and scholars. This change in attitude creates more room for interactions between the two communities. Within the Foreign Ministry, there are several regional departments. Each of them has interactions with the respective area specialists. This is a two-way street. The Foreign Ministry officials are invited to present keynote addresses at academic conferences and participate in discussions, while scholars are invited by government sponsors to offer analyses or views at advisory meetings. More regularly, the research community produces and provides policy briefs on issues deemed important. Diplomat-in-residence programs facilitate an innovative form of interaction. Often, senior Chinese diplomats at the counselor level are invited to leading universities, prominently Fudan and Tsinghua, for a research stay. They bring experience and information to the research community, while benefiting from interactions with academics. Sometimes the Foreign Ministry asks diplomats to talk to undergraduate and graduate students about the foreign service so as to help recruit outstanding students. In this way, the resident diplomats play multiple roles in facilitating two-way exchanges. A similar relationship has emerged between the research community and the CCP International Liaison Department and the Ministry of Commerce. In 2015 the Chinese government released a unique document to encourage the growth of think tanks, which was an unprecedented signal for the enhancement of policy-oriented work.⁵ Area studies products are further encouraged and now have more space and incentive to grow. As a result, area studies is mushrooming at more and more institutions in different parts of the country.

Another major source of demand comes from mass media. With China's reform and development also comes the enormous growth of mass media, especially newspapers, magazines, and television, as well as social media. Media outlets have a big appetite for coverage of international events. Area specialists are needed to provide critical observations and analyses of the countries and regions in which events happen. They are invited to contribute op-eds to newspapers and magazines and to appear on television as commentators. The latent risk here is that researchers, if they become overcommitted, may be distracted by their work with media. They also may undermine their credibility by making speculative predictions that turn out to be wrong. Overall, this is one of the major demands for area studies knowledge and analyses, and it helps stimulate research on a wider range of countries and regions. The initiation of One Belt, One Road (later renamed the Belt and Road Initiative in English) has stimulated many more demands for country or regional expertise.

A third source of demand for Chinese area studies expertise is international. With the broadening and deepening of reform and development, China is increasingly involved in international academic and exchange activities. Chinese scholars are invited to speak at

⁵ "Guanyu jiaqiang Zhongguo tese xinxing zhiku jianshe de yijian" [General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council Issue Recommendations for Strengthening Construction of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics], State Council of the PRC, January 20, 2015, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-01/20/content_2807126.htm.

international conferences and contribute articles in English. This is the case for international relations scholars as well as country and regional specialists. Today, Chinese scholars have more international exposure and more opportunities to interact with their foreign colleagues. Exchanging views in such venues is mutually beneficial for increasing understanding and promoting research. When Chinese institutions host international events, foreign specialists who study China are also invited to join and share their expertise. Since the once loudly propagated “North-South” cooperation has diminished considerably, “South-South” cooperation in social sciences under the framework of BRI has blossomed to some degree. For example, a network of heads of university international studies programs in BRI countries was formed in 2018 to boost dialogue and enhance exchange.⁶

Given the explosive demand for expertise about once neglected regions or smaller countries, the need for language training, especially in languages spoken in remote places and by fewer people, has increased significantly. Institutions like Beijing Foreign Studies University and Shanghai International Studies University are requested by the government to significantly boost training in those languages. A lack of understanding of such languages is one of the obstacles for area studies in China. For example, China is in dire need of Middle East specialists who speak fluent Arabic. Fluency in Hebrew for the study of Israel, and Persian for the study of Iran, is also lacking. Instead, Chinese researchers often rely on English-language sources to study those countries. This may work in some situations, but it is a constraint on researchers conducting field work.

Financial Resources

The good news for area studies in China is that more research funds are now available. There are at least three categories of funding in China: state, private, and international sources.

The most important source of funding is the state. The National Social Science Fund of China, which was founded in 1986, supports all humanities and social sciences. One category of funding is “international studies.” Initially, according to the National Social Science Fund, 5 million yuan was allocated annually to support various projects. This number steadily grew to 600 million in 2010. During the same period, the number of applications increased from less than 3,000 to 27,171, while the number of projects that were supported increased from less than 500 to 2,258. Like the National Social Science Fund, the Ministry of Education also administers a humanities and social sciences fund, for which university-based scholars are eligible to apply. Below the national level are provincial and municipal social science funds. For example, in Shanghai the Shanghai Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science administers applications for and management of many projects, including those in area studies. The same is true for various other provinces.

The second source of funding is private donations from Chinese companies or individuals. Over the years, the market economy has bred numerous successful companies and wealthy individuals. Some of them are willing to help finance international studies, including subsidizing the publication of research products. Leading universities also receive donations from wealthy companies or alumni. For example, Tsinghua University receives funds from Sino Biopharmaceutical Ltd., which sponsored the annual World Peace Forum in 2019.

⁶ “Zhengzhixue he guoji guanxi xueyuan lianmeng dierci huiyi juxing” [Second Union of Schools of Politics and International Relations Meeting Was Held], Fudan University School of International Relations and Public Affairs, October 25, 2019, <http://www.sirpa.fudan.edu.cn/?p=14536>.

A third source is international. While the Ford, Japan, and Korea Foundations continue to be important sources of funds for relevant area studies, foreign governments also provide minor funding for area studies in China. For example, in order to promote Pakistan studies and Pakistan-China relations, the Pakistani government in 2009 initiated support for new research centers at four major Chinese universities (Peking, Tsinghua, Fudan, and Sichuan). With a modest annual budget of \$50,000, the four centers organized exchange visits and events quite actively. This initiative prompted India, Pakistan's long-standing rival, to follow suit to compete for presence and influence in China. After some time of preparation, on May 16, 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Gandhian and Indian Studies Center at Fudan University. Unfortunately, Fudan did not find the right people to staff the center, and thus no momentum was gained. This situation disappointed the Indian side, which discontinued funding.

Conclusion: The Implications of the Growth of Area Studies in China

The explosive growth of area studies is a reflection of China's rising world status and its thirst for understanding of the known, less known, and unknown parts of the globe. This development may have significant implications for the future of Chinese foreign policy.

First, the growth of area studies reflects the growth of China's concern with the whole world, and this in turn is a reflection of the extension of China's presence all over the globe. This situation can be compared to that of the United States after the end of World War II, when it had a similar thirst for knowledge about the non-Western world. This is not to say, however, that China has already emerged as a new superpower. The extension of its overseas interests increases the need to safeguard or protect those interests, and this in turn heightens the importance of area studies, especially when more and more Chinese businessmen, tourists, and workers are traveling to lesser-known places. The reality of area studies in China is that research on many countries and regions remains preliminary and undeveloped and must be significantly strengthened. Talented scholars are desperately needed. Some of the newly created (or in some cases simply announced) area studies centers are poorly staffed and still exist in name only. This reality is quite clear if one considers the case of the over 50 claimed Latin America-related centers or programs throughout the country.

Second, new waves of area studies in China are to a large extent policy-driven. The Chinese government hopes that greater investment in the field will serve the needs of the country's major initiatives, most recently BRI. BRI is an overarching development program that requires enormous input, including scholarly research. Thus, state-funded institutions and government agencies such as the Ministry of Education have used the initiative as a justification for putting more resources into area studies. No Chinese university can neglect the signal sent by the ministry. Universities have been incentivized to demonstrate that they are relevant for BRI in order to compete for government recognition and the funds that accompany it. More generally, the quest for prestige and resources prompts area studies units to compete for status and government grants. To this end, every institution tries to produce policy briefs and hopes for a few words of praise from one or more leaders in the upper echelon. This competition for recognition and resources can be detrimental to area studies because it can breed quick products and studies not based on solid research.

Third, the growth of area studies indicates that China will become more globally oriented and have a more international vision in the future. There have been both open and closed periods of Chinese history. Whenever China was open, it was robust and prosperous. On the contrary, whenever the country was insular and close-minded, it became backward and lagged behind. As the world enters the third decade of the 21st century, a global China is emerging on the horizon. Shaped by an introspective culture, this is a China that, while pursuing its own success, sees that other countries are also successful and exhibits sympathy toward less fortunate peoples. This is not to say that China does not have its own interests. It certainly does. However, it hopes that countries that are different in terms of culture, history, religion, and size will prosper as well and endeavors to promote common development. Such a China should be welcomed and encouraged to continue becoming more open and willing to contribute to global public goods.

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Xi Jinping's Vision of a Community with a Shared Future for Humankind: A Revised International Order?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay examines the political and theoretical dynamic, content, and implications of Xi Jinping's vision of a community with a shared future for humankind, considers how the international community and academia should objectively and rationally interpret this idea, and assesses the difficulty in implementing it.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Building a community with a shared future for humankind will bring five major changes to international relations: developing a new model for major-power competition, shifting security concerns to nontraditional threats, promoting win-win economic cooperation instead of zero-sum trade and technological competition, integrating non-Western practices and governance with the Western system of universal values, and managing economic development in a way that ensures ecological balance. As disorder, conflict, and strategic competition spread throughout the world, this vision for a better world reflects Chinese philosophical underpinnings of justice, fairness, tolerance, mutual respect, equality, and dialectical balance. Beijing understands that the United States and other major powers will not abandon their vested interests in maintaining this established political and economic architecture and alliance network in order to accommodate a rising power. Thus, Xi stresses the common ground between China and the West, including widely shared norms and international institutions. Many developments have changed the political and economic architecture since the end of the Cold War, rendering many existing structures, institutions, and principles too obsolete or dysfunctional to address new trends and challenges. This offers a compelling rationale for improving and revising the world order to keep up with the times.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The idea of a community with a shared future for humankind needs to be turned into an understandable and operational policy with discourse that reflects common practice, willingness to change by most countries, and progress of global governance.
- China's main efforts to implement this vision should place more emphasis on win-win and reciprocal cooperation with developed and developing countries.
- The U.S. and other Western countries would do better to read and judge China's proposals, diplomacy, and actions from a more objective and rational perspective, avoiding a monistic or binary interpretation and conspiracy theories.

This essay examines the political and theoretical dynamic, contents, and implications of Xi Jinping's vision of a community with a shared future for humankind, considers how the international community and academia should objectively and rationally interpret this idea, and assesses the difficulty in its implementation. The first section analyzes the relationship between the *tianxia* system elaborated by Zhao Tingyang and Xi's community with a shared future for humankind, and the subsequent section works out the political and theoretical implications of these concepts. The third and fourth sections then discuss the rationales of China's vision for the world order amid intensified major-power competition and deglobalization and contrast the differing logic of the Chinese and Western frameworks.

The Tianxia System and Xi Jinping's Community with a Shared Future for Humankind

Zhao Tingyang first elaborated his idea of the *tianxia* (all under heaven) system in 2005 in his book *Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of a World System*, which established the basis for the *tianxia* system in political philosophy. In Zhao's work, *tianxia* comprises several meanings. First, it conveys the importance of observing and managing world affairs through the concept of a "world horizon" above the nations. Second, Zhao also proposes that this idea functions as the basic analytical unit of political and economic interests. Third, the *tianxia* system involves an openness of ideas, rules, or policies and is thus able to incorporate heterogeneous political powers into a common political framework.¹ Although this idea originated under the Zhou Dynasty in ancient China, its development has been ongoing throughout Chinese history until the current era. In the future, this system could be overseen by either a leading nation or a concert of powers comprising a large number of politically equal subordinate states.²

No one can say definitively the extent to which this idea has influenced Xi Jinping's vision of a community with a shared future for humankind. One thing, however, is clear: this vision has some common ground with the *tianxia* concept in that both stress the importance of tolerance, harmony, respect for other states, and political equality.³ To apply this concept to the contemporary world order, a hegemon must have a vision for the whole world's development and interests beyond its own geopolitical interests. Furthermore, a contemporary application of *tianxia* should incorporate a broad, open, and progressive culture and an ideology of inclusiveness. Of course, Zhao's starting point is more intellectual. As China becomes a world power economically, what it now possesses, in terms of development experience, capabilities, knowledge, and governance, should be recognized as a common civilized property of the world, and the country should proactively engage in the construction of a new universal intellectual system.⁴ To this end, some Chinese international relations scholars want to explore these ideas from a historic and philosophical perspective to refigure the future world order.⁵

¹ Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia tixi: Shijie zhidu zhexue daolun* [The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of a World Institution] (Nanjing: Jiangsu Education Press, 2005), 4.

² Cheng Yuan, "Tianxia de dangdaixing: Shijie zhixu de shijian hexiangxiang" [A Possible World of All-Under-the-Heaven System: The World Order in the Past and for the Future], *Dao* 17 (2018): 147–51.

³ See "Xi's World Vision: A Community of Common Destiny, a Shared Home for Humanity," *People's Daily*, January 15, 2017.

⁴ See Zhao, *Tianxia tixi: Shijie zhidu zhexue daolun*, 3. The author expands on Zhao's argument in this paragraph.

⁵ Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, "The Tributary System as International Society in Theory and Practice," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5 (2012): 3–36.

As Xi builds on the successes of his three predecessors—Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao—in reforming institutions and elevating living standards in China, he must adopt different practices to transcend the three former leaders’ achievements and bring the country onto a new world stage. Consequently, he has set the goal of realizing the “China dream” of the great rejuvenation of the nation by the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 2049. In addition to domestic measures focused on anticorruption, poverty alleviation in the countryside, the strengthening of party leadership, and structural reforms of the military, among other goals, Xi needs to put forward some new ideas about the world order commensurate with China’s status as a rising power and the growing expectation for the country to play a role as a responsible and benign leader of the international community. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and building a community with a shared future for humankind are Xi’s two most prominent proposals in this regard.

Besides these political and historical missions articulated by Xi, several other issues contribute to his thoughts about this community. These include discordant relations with neighboring countries, great-power competition with the United States, growing international discourse about the threat from China, increasing pressure on global governance and nontraditional security issues, the inadequacy of international institutions to meet new challenges, and the unbalanced benefits of globalization.⁶

Xi’s vision for a community with a shared future for humankind has gradually developed into a full-fledged concept since it was first officially proposed in a report made by him and approved by the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012. Three years later, this concept was presented to the international community when Xi made a speech at the UN Summit on September 27, 2015, titled “Build a New Type of International Relations Featuring Win-Win Cooperation, Create a Community of Common Destiny for Mankind.”⁷ However, the remarks outlined a general direction forward rather than a concrete way to build a new type of international relations.

Xi’s keynote speech at the UN Office in Geneva on January 18, 2017, presented a fuller picture of this idea for a global community by identifying five specific goals: lasting peace, common security, common prosperity, an open and inclusive world, and a clean and beautiful low-carbon world.⁸ The core motivations behind this final version of the community can be inferred as changing unjust practices, anachronistic concepts, and embedded rules that partially favor Western countries in the current international order, which Xi regards as root causes of strategic distrust, competition, conflict, unbalanced development, and other global challenges; changing the traditional ways of conceptualizing interstate relations and international security; and encouraging all countries to direct their priorities toward economic development.

⁶ See Xi’s speech at the National University of Singapore in late June of 2016, in which he particularly refuted the “China threat” theories and reiterated China’s commitment to maintaining peace and a willingness to cooperate with neighboring countries. In addition, Xi explicitly argued that the philosophy of peaceful development was in the genes of the Chinese culture and that China was the victim of foreign invasions. See “China Committed to Building Community of Common Destiny with ASEAN,” *Dubai News*, June 28, 2016.

⁷ “Build a New Type of International Relations Featuring Win-Win Cooperation, Create a Community of Common Destiny for Mankind,” *Xinhua*, September 30, 2015, http://www.china.org.cn/xivisit2015/2015-09/30/content_36720941.htm.

⁸ Xi Jinping, “Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” (speech, Geneva, January 18, 2017), <https://america.cgtn.com/2017/01/18/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-speech-at-the-united-nations-office-in-geneva>.

Political and Theoretical Implications

In terms of the content of the Geneva speech, the goal that Xi Jinping advanced is more integrated, developed, and consistent with international norms. First, he connects two large (or comprehensive) goals—the community with a shared future for humankind and global governance—demonstrating their compatibility and complementarity. Second, Xi affirms all the principles and norms established since the Peace of Westphalia, including the four purposes and seven principles enshrined in the UN Charter and the five principles of peaceful coexistence, as the main guideline in building this community. In short, the vision espoused by China does not deviate much from the legal and political foundations of the existing international order but rather provides a moderate blueprint for the betterment of the international order.

The five goals Xi mentioned at the UN Office in Geneva may imply some theoretical changes to five aspects of international relations practices, the first of which is to change the model for major-power competition. He understands the theory of power transition and the historical consequences of hegemonic war. He developed this new model in 2013 to reshape U.S.-China bilateral power relations to promote nonconfrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation. At their first summit in Sunnylands, California, on June 7–8, 2013, President Xi put forward this proposal and tried to persuade President Barack Obama to accept it.⁹ The Obama administration judged that such a framework would curtail and endanger U.S. interests in East Asia and demurred on Xi's proposal. After studying sixteen cases in history through 2015, Graham Allison cautioned the two leaders not to be drawn into the “Thucydides trap.”¹⁰ Xi believed that this observation was supported by both theory and reality and thus cautioned on several occasions that “as long as we maintain communication and treat each other with sincerity, the Thucydides trap can be avoided.”¹¹

Second, Xi's community with a shared future for humankind is an appeal to divert some countries' focus from traditional security concerns to nontraditional threats by pursuing common, comprehensive cooperation. Xi holds that one of the root causes for the intensification of conflicts and competition in the world is the excessive securitization of major powers' behavior, which magnifies the other side's strategic intentions. He argues that terrorism, refugee crises, and pandemics are common threats for humankind. Because they spread across borders and create social instability, they could give rise to a new mode of geopolitical conflict. The Covid-19 virus has startlingly spread worldwide, with 3,525,116 confirmed cases and 243,540 deaths by May 6, 2020, further ramping up the confrontation between China and the United States over whether China should be held accountable for the pandemic, or whether the Trump administration should blame itself for its delayed response and poor handling of the crisis. The tension between the two sides has been exacerbated by the groundless conspiracy theories that Covid-19 was developed in a Chinese lab. It is unfortunate that this global public health crisis has failed to mend the major powers' strategic fences through an effort to fight together against the pandemic. It is precisely to

⁹ During his first summit with Obama in June 2013, Xi outlined four points: elevating the level of trust through all kinds of dialogues and institutionalizing summits on the sideline of G-20, APEC, and other multilateral forums; relaxing the restrictions on U.S. high-technology exports to China so as to balance the asymmetric trade and investment relationship; building a new interactive model between the two countries that emphasizes coordinating on issues such as the situations in North Korea and Afghanistan, combating piracy and transnational crime, conducting peacekeeping and disaster relief, and addressing cybersecurity, climate change, and space security; and finally, exploring new ways to manage differences and disputes by constructing a new type of military-military relationship. “Xi Jinping Proposes Four Proposals,” *People's Daily*, June 10, 2013.

¹⁰ Graham Allison, “The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?” *Atlantic*, September, 23, 2015.

¹¹ Xi, “Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind.”

foster such cooperation that Xi encourages developed countries and major powers to divert their attention, albeit only partially, from traditional security concerns to enhance coordination and build various multilateral mechanisms to deal with nontraditional security threats.

Third, Xi's vision is to shift major economies from zero-sum competition and deglobalization policies into win-win economic cooperation. This demand directly points to President Donald Trump's tariff war as well as the decision by many Western countries to exclude the use of Huawei technology for 5G networks in their telecommunications systems. Though the uneven distribution of benefits from trade between the two mega-economies is unsustainable, it is irrational to unilaterally impose unfair measures on partners as global value chains bring different economies together for coproduction. Xi's prescription, by contrast, would keep doors open, reinforce macroeconomic policy coordination, negotiate settlements bilaterally and multilaterally, and jointly promote cooperation in a new era of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation.

Fourth, Xi's vision aims to change a long-held paradigm under which one universal value system and powerful civilization has dominated international society. The United States, Britain, and other countries, after they defeated Nazi Germany in 1945, established a world order undergirded by liberal values emphasizing democratic governance, free markets, private ownership, and freedom of speech and the press, among other principles. Non-Western countries, however, are wary of this liberal order, since most of these countries have extricated themselves from colonialism and imperialism through revolutionary wars. Their polities retain many norms, traits, and rules from their own cultures, religions, ethnic traditions, and political missions, while selectively and conditionally adopting classical Western values and contemporary laws and norms into their political systems and foreign policies.¹² They are reluctant to embrace coercive power and the use of military means against a country that violates international rules and provokes the ire of a big power; on the contrary, they usually opt for a more moderate approach.

In other words, the West should not take discriminatory stances or punitive actions toward nations with different value systems than its own. Just as China's dialectical philosophy indicates, only through the full play of subjective initiative can we manage or water down the conflict and confrontation.¹³ The fundamental core of Chinese dialectic is the unity of opposites, using contradiction to understand relations among objects or events, to transcend or integrate apparent oppositions, or even to embrace clashing but instructive viewpoints.¹⁴ In Sun Tzu's words and China's kingcraft (*wang-dao*), using military means requires legitimacy and community consensus and should only be a last resort.¹⁵ Civilizational dialogues, negotiations, third-party constructive mediation, and some pressure from the international community can narrow the differences between countries, build trust, and establish peace mechanisms, making conciliation possible. There are more than 200 countries and regions, over 2,500 ethnic groups, and multiple religions, and in Xi's view they should all be respected equally. No country, because of its self-deemed

¹² This kind of political distance exists mainly in the "nondemocracies and illiberal democracies." Among them, some are not listed in the U.S. strategic clients category, and they are often pushed and punished by the United States. See Yuen Foong Khongm, "The American Tributary System," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6 (2013): 8, 9–32; and Farah N. Jan and Justin Melnick, "China's Challenge to America's Political and Economic Liberal Order," *National Interest*, January 6, 2020.

¹³ Qin Yaqing, "Zhongguo wenhua jiqi dui wajiao juece de yingxiang" [Chinese Culture and Its Implications for Foreign Policymaking], *Journal of International Studies* 5 (2011).

¹⁴ Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Sun Tzu, *Art of War Illustrated* (London: Amber Books, 2019).

intrinsic superiority, has the power to judge and decide another country's policy; this attitude, as Xi implies, will lead to partition, distrust, confrontation, and conflict.¹⁶

Fifth, Xi argues for changing the model of excessive development with little respect for governance and ecological balance. This is the only one among the five goals that could be attributed to the common ground shared by the West and many developing countries and is already a goal for the international community. However, there are many existential problems in the development of global governance, such as too much focus on climate change as opposed to other equally important transnational challenges; lack of consensus and sufficient resource investment; reluctant political support from the developed countries; less focus on geographic, social, cultural, economic, or political transnational issues; and failure to cover “systems of rule at all levels of human activity.”¹⁷

Environmental pollution has been a thorny problem in China for many years. When Xi came to power, curbing pollution and proportionally reducing carbon dioxide emissions became one of the priorities on his agenda. A green, low-carbon, and sustainable way of life has been the consensus and mandated goal of the international community. Both Chinese leaders and liberal U.S. policymakers are aware of their countries' obligations, as the two biggest emitters of carbon dioxide, to reach a global agreement to curb greenhouse gas pollution. Thus, joint collaboration in global governance, including on climate change management, naturally occupies a central position in Xi's proposal for a community with a shared future.

New Configurations and Approaches in Managing the World Order

The community with a shared future for humankind has various significations in China's diplomacy and international relations at large. It is not just a representation of Xi's personal ideals and vision but also an expression of China's distinctive scheme for a better world order and its desire to play a role as an international problem-solver. As Joseph Nye explains, one of the three crucial skills in the exercise of soft power is presenting a vision of the future that attracts others.¹⁸ Current international relations are now caught in disorder caused by realpolitik, unilateralism, prejudice, nationalism, over-securitization of economic competition, unbalanced development, scarcity of resources, ethnic conflicts, and various historically unresolved disputes, among other maladies. Many countries discern the causes of these problems, but, for various reasons, they accept them as inevitable or beyond control. Now China is trying to address the facts and to identify a solution. No matter the goal or whether this solution can be realized, China's political attitude and actions are admirable.

Much importance, however, has been given to the exacerbation of Sino-U.S. competition on many issues and the spread of a deteriorating atmosphere throughout Chinese and American societies. If the two superpowers' relations are only driven by narrow strategic interests, competition for military superiority and technological capabilities, and fear of the other's ideology—rather than by complementary interests and the smart diplomacy that a big power must have to exercise

¹⁶ Xi, “Working Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind.”

¹⁷ James N. Rosenau, “Governance in the Twenty-First Century,” *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 1, no. 1 (1995): 13–43.

¹⁸ See Joseph Nye, “Joseph Nye on Smart Power,” interview by Doug Gavel, Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, July 3, 2008, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/joseph-nye-smart-power>.

global leadership—the world order cannot remain stable, and a new Cold War or a Thucydides trap will arise.¹⁹

Beijing understands that it will be unable to persuade the established power, the United States, to embrace a rising power's grand proposal to reshape the world order. With respect to this situation, Xi's approach stresses widely shared norms, lofty principles, and international institutions, rather than demanding the redistribution of power in institutions, new working mechanisms, the withdrawal of U.S. military forces deployed overseas, and changes to the structural arrangement inherited from the agreement of the big powers in the postwar era.²⁰ Though this vision reflects Chinese philosophical underpinnings—justice, fairness, tolerance, mutual respect, equality, dialectical balance, and a better life for all—some common ground between China and the United States can still be found.

First, all the major powers have a common interest and responsibility to preserve enduring world and regional peace, which requires that all stakeholders maintain consultation, cooperate bilaterally and multilaterally, exercise self-restraint in contentious areas, and coordinate positions on regional hotspots. Even though the major powers have different interests in and interpretations of their interrelated traditional security issues, such as the South China Sea, Taiwan, the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs, and the role of U.S. alliances, they ought to explore minimal compromise on maintaining the status quo in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean to prevent situations in regional hot spots from escalating.²¹

A second area of common ground is nontraditional security threats, including epidemic and pandemic viruses, terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, and human trafficking. Both China and the United States, as well as other major countries, have many mechanisms for cooperation.

Third, the majority of the members of the international community, including China and the United States, see eye to eye, at least in form, although not always in essence, on issues such as upholding sovereignty, developing sustainable and reciprocal globalization, maintaining open markets and free competition for common prosperity, using dialogue and negotiation as much as possible in the midst of a crisis, and maintaining the central role of the United Nations and other international organizations in managing world affairs. Despite this fact, China, the United States, and other countries have different understandings and interpretations of the underlying meanings of these principles and will set varying criteria for their implementation.

¹⁹ As Robert Zoellick, former president of the World Bank and U.S. deputy secretary of state, has pointed out, the constant confrontation with China rejects the idea that China can play a constructive role within the system that the United States constructed; that it can make contributions; and that China can, or even would, act in ways that complement U.S. interests. Robert B. Zoellick, "Can America and China Be Stakeholders?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 4, 2019.

²⁰ Xi pledged on July 1, 2016, at the Chinese Communist Party conference commemorating the 95th anniversary that China is a global development contributor and international order safeguard. See "Xi Jinping: China Has Always Been a Builder of World Peace, a Contributor to Global Development, and a Defender of International Order," CPC News, July 1, 2016. Former Chinese deputy foreign minister Zhang Yesui reiterated in a press conference for the new plenary session of the National People's Congress on March 4, 2018, that China will not overthrow the international order and try to rebuild it from scratch, but serve as a guardian and promoter of this order. See "Zhang Yesui: China Is Willing to Actively Participate in the Reform and Construction of the Global Governance System," Xinhua, April 3, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018lh/2018-03/04/c_137015040.htm.

²¹ Paul Haenle, the director's chair at the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, observes that there appear to be two approaches to China in Washington. The first argues that the United States should abandon cooperative efforts and take deliberate steps to contain, counter, and deter China. The second approach holds that it needs to frame what is inherently a competitive relationship as entirely zero-sum, bounding competition as a way of limiting the likelihood of conflict and making sure that both countries can still work together when their interests converge. See Paul Haenle, "The United States and China See Things Differently—Can They Reach an Understanding?" Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, December 19, 2019. This author tends to believe the second path will prevail sooner or later.

The Gap between Chinese and Western Frameworks for Global Governance

Despite all the positive factors supporting Xi Jinping's vision for a community with a shared future, the odds of the concept being put into practice globally remain slight because of the big difference between the stark realities of international relations and the idealization of the community idea. Furthermore, any plan for reforming the world order must have a clear blueprint for replacing the current, withered order. Demanding changes to the rules of international relations without preparing a new institutional arrangement will only amount to general talk.

There are diverse reasons leading to this difficulty in implementation. First and foremost, the international system is anarchic as well as hierarchic. Anarchy brings out the characteristics of a state distrusting the intentions of other states, feeling anxiety over their fast development, and believing in a counter-approach of arms consolidation and alliances to protect its own security. Hierarchy means inequality among all countries in terms of power and interests. The large countries will carry out a tacit policy of prioritizing their rights above those of small countries. The paramount country will have a decisive and final say, or veto power, on most important international issues. The biggest regional power will have similar superiority in its neighborhood, no matter how global power is diffused across regions. Over more than 2,500 years of international relations, there has been no period of real harmony among nations. As for China, the tianxia system in the Zhou Dynasty (the eleventh to third centuries BCE) was geographically limited to less than half of modern China, so the actual size of the ruled area and the functions of administration are not comparable to the breadth and depth of current world affairs. In the dynasty's 800 years of existence, only the first 300 could be characterized as stable, while the last 500 years were not orderly.²² Importantly, the Zhou system revolved around a single feudal principality that ruled a large number of vassal states. The principles of openness and all-inclusiveness enabled the system to incorporate heterogeneous political powers into a common framework. The contemporary world, by contrast, is a widely diverse and ethnically heterogeneous system with no open-minded and selfless leading country.

Second, to fully advance the community with a shared future for humankind requires establishing an experimental base in China's peripheral region—East Asia—which can be seen as a catalyst for the further proliferation of the system. By the same token, China has to prioritize reconciling its vested interests with the conflicting interests of the neighboring countries and the United States, which apparently will be a tough task. Every country has its historical destiny, depending on its geographic location, relations with its neighbors, power, and diplomacy, which will intersect with other states but cannot be fully shared by them. And underneath the destiny are territorial interests. Unlike the United States, which resolved all of its territorial disputes with its neighbors and the old colonial powers during its rise and has had a free hand to manage world affairs since, China has many unsettled territorial disputes with several East Asian countries. These disputes will certainly encumber its lofty goals in the region.²³

²² Cheng Yuan, "A Possible World of All-Under-the-Heaven System: The World Order in the Past and for the Future," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 17 (2018): 147–51.

²³ About former president Theodore Roosevelt's role in expanding U.S. territories from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, see Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 89–105.

From time to time, China will have strained, even confrontational, relations with neighboring countries because of historical, security, and maritime issues. Furthermore, its growing power and economic capabilities and the youth population's high-pitched harsh opinion of China's interests have heightened anxieties in the region. For this reason, Xi Jinping raised the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness a few years ago to soothe the regional discontent through a policy of good-neighbor diplomacy. However, this approach has not much relieved neighboring states' anxieties. According to an ASEAN-based ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute survey, over half of respondents would side with the United States if forced to choose between the two major powers. Moreover, perceptions of China's growing influence are not all positive, with 71.9% of respondents indicating certain worries about its growing influence.²⁴

Third, the United States, as the established hegemon, retains a series of vested rights and powers around the world. This fixes the status quo in its favor as the general manager of world affairs, liberal institutions, power structures, trade and investment frameworks, and financial markets and transactions. It is beyond China's ability to force the United States and other major powers to abandon all their vested interests in maintaining this established political and economic architecture and alliance network. They are used to all the privileges that this order enables, such as the discretionary dispensing of justice, management of geopolitical competition and balance of power, military preponderance, exclusive economic/security cooperation on the same identity or strategic consensus, humanitarian intervention with or without UN mandates, and the prerogative to unilaterally enforce military and economic power against rule violators and recalcitrant rivals.

In light of the United States' and Western countries' values and outlook, they will not accept and follow China's proposal for a community with a shared future for humankind. The political and philosophical divergence is too deep, as exemplified by two contentious issues. First, China prefers nonconditioned negotiation and dialogue for almost all the thorny security issues, without applying other enforcing leverage. By contrast, the United States will not accept indefinite negotiations without conditions and instead employs compulsory measures and military means. Second, during humanitarian crises involving the violation of international law by some political groups under irresponsible governments or civil wars, China will be against any kind of military intervention without UN authorization, worrying that such intervention will violate the principle of sovereignty and be abused for political purposes. However, the United States and Western countries often argue that such intervention is necessary and prioritize human rights over sovereignty.²⁵

A worthy development for China is the concept of “constructive engagement,” which emphasizes mediation among conflicting parties and is a creative refinement of the principle of nonintervention.²⁶ A recent case is China's attempt to persuade the Myanmar government to resolve the Rohingya crisis and help build temporary houses for settling some of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled Myanmar for Bangladesh in 2017.²⁷

These policy adjustments by China display a little foreign policy flexibility but will not narrow the great divide with the United States. It will still not be in Washington's interests to revise the

²⁴ Tang Siew Mun et al., “The State of Southeast Asia: 2020 Survey Report,” ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, January 2020, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TheStateofSEASurveyReport_2020.pdf.

²⁵ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–11.

²⁶ This concept was invented by Peking University professor Wang Yi-zhou. See Wang Yi-zhou, *Zhongguo waijiaoshinanti* [Ten Issues on China Foreign Affairs] (Nanjing: Jiangshu People's Press, 2014), 91–95.

²⁷ Poppy McPherson, Ruma Paul, and Shoon Naing, “China Struggles in New Diplomatic Role, Trying to Return Rohingya to Myanmar,” Reuters, January 20, 2020.

current world order by ceding its structural advantages and power to multiple players. Regarding the community with a shared future for humankind, from a positive point of view, the United States and some Western countries think that Xi's vision is too idealistic to be workable in this highly competitive and complicated world order. But from a negative point of view, they see it as a covert Chinese plan to build a global network of partnerships centered on China, replacing the U.S. system of treaty alliances and eroding the foundation of Pax Americana.²⁸

Conclusion

Generally speaking, the community with a shared future for humankind is a positive idea that arises out of Xi Jinping's good intentions to improve the flaws of the international order and ensure the common security and sustainable development of human society. Nearly 75 years have passed since the postwar order was established, and around 30 years have transpired since the Soviet Union bloc disintegrated. Many developments have incrementally changed the political and economic architecture. Some existing structures, institutions, and principles are too obsolete or dysfunctional to address new trends, phenomena, and challenges. This offers a compelling rationale for improving and revising the world order. The G-20 mechanism and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, for example, reflect the international community's desire to keep up with the times.

Undoubtedly, this idea of Chinese political-philosophical features involves some rules and demands that contradict elements of U.S. or Western interests and established power structures. But there are also a lot of overlapping interests. These are just concepts so far, and whether they can be promoted depends on an open discussion and negotiation among members of the international community. However, there is little possibility of a great change to the existing world order for the foreseeable future.

The West and the broader international community need not be alarmed by preconceived ideas that China's development model and vision for the world order will have a big impact on the current international system characterized by the primacy of Western values. The real challenge for the United States and other Western powers partly comes from the simmering unrest inside these countries among those who are discontent with their government's unjust policies and the growing gap between rich and poor.²⁹ A diverse new set of mechanisms for cooperation will develop gradually in the next decades, which will provide an alternative path for human society down the road.

²⁸ Liza Tobin, "Xi's Vision for Transforming Global Governance: A Strategic Challenge for Washington and Its Allies," *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 1 (2018): 155–66.

²⁹ Professor Zheng Yong-nian has an insightful view: the world is facing an unmanageable crisis, regardless of whether a traditional authoritarian regime or a democratic government rules, that is going to be out of the control of the ruling country's society because of the disappearance of the symbiotic relations between democracy and equality. See Zheng Yong-nian, "Dangdai de geming yu zhili weiji" [Contemporary Revolution and Governance Crisis], *Lianhe zaobao*, January 21, 2020, <https://www.uzbcn.com/mon/keji/20200121/66177.html>.



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