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The People's Republic of China between a Community of Shared Future for Mankind and the Near Seas Strategy: Reflection or Divergence?

MA International Relations – MA Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

In a semi-reference to Karl Marx's Manifesto (1848), this thesis begins with proposing that a shadow is hunting East Asia: the shadow of the Dragon. The aforementioned 'Dragon' symbolises of course China, whose rise to great power – or resurgence (Ma 2013, 156) – in the international political arena has sparked interest, debates and concerns. The People's Republic of China (PRC) is in fact regarded by a large number of experts as one of the threats to the United States-built and -led neo-liberal world order, established after the demise of the Soviet Union in the last decade of the past Century. As History had not come to its endpoint, thus proving Fukuyama's prediction incorrect (Fukuyama 1992), the abrupt rise in status and power of the PRC has been, and still is, seen as the fulcrum of international political events in the future ahead of us. Beijing's resurgence is a process that, through a 30-years-long span of time, has seen the PRC rise in relevance among fellow states, touching on numerous fields such as economic growth, diplomatic relations and activities, financial activism and technological advancements, to name a few. This topic is as interesting as it is broad; therefore, this thesis will focus on a smaller issue and will attempt to analyse it in depth: the relation between the Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM hereinafter) framework and Beijing's Near Seas Strategy (NSS), which fits in the broader topic of the relation between foreign policy and strategy. Precisely, the research question that will be answered in the work is the following:

To what extent does the PRC strategy for the Near Seas Region reflect the concept of Community of Shared Future for Mankind?

The core argument of this work is that the two dimensions are on the surface antithetical and driven by different logics, as, arguably, CSFM aims for peace and NSS leans towards conflict; however, through an interpretation based on the concept of Harmony – which will be the theoretical framework – a relation, coherent but bearing relevant implications, can be found. The elements that compose the research question are two: the 'Community of Shared Future for Mankind' and what I have named the 'Strategy for the Near Seas Region'. Both concepts will be explored thoroughly in the following chapters, both from a literature point of view – in Chapter 1 – and from a substantial angle – in Chapters 2, and in Chapter 3 according to the concept chosen as the theoretical framework for this work: Harmony. However, for the sake of this introduction and in order to introduce their meaning to the reader, they shall be defined already in this section, even if briefly.

CSFM is a recurrent concept amongst the Communist Party of China (CPC) élites' discourses and rhetoric, both domestically and internationally, such as in bilateral or multilateral summits, and even

in the United Nations (UN) framework (Zhou 2018). First introduced in 2013 to the international audience and proposed constantly by high ranking official from then on, it is a foreign policy goal targeting fellow states in the international system and hinting at the creation of a new international order, or anyway embedded in the post-liberal world order logic. Zhang defines it as “a group of people/nations bonded together by common interests and fate”, which “covers five perspectives including political partnership, security, economic development, cultural exchanges and environment” (Zhang 2017, 197-198).

On the other end, we find the Near Seas Strategy (NSS), as termed in this worked. This wide-encompassing term is used to indicate an ensemble of strategic-doctrinal theoretical and practical developments implemented by the People Liberation Army (PLA) and the political-military leadership, comprised in the Central Military Commission (CMC). Essentially, this concept describes the employment of military means pertaining to different realms of warfare, the innovations regarding the ways such means shall be used, and those significant technological developments in this realm – e.g. novelties in naval vessels, aircrafts, missiles, electronic warfare (EW), etc. In fact, it involves the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), the Air Force (PLAAF), the Rocket Force (PLARF) with the aim of organising a comprehensive strategy that can exert – or at least contend – control over the Near Seas Region, which can be considered as the area within the First Island Chain.

Having defined both CSFM and the NSS, it emerged preliminary that both concepts pertain to the broader area of Chinese international politics, but deal with different aspects of it. Given these partially different nature and characteristics between the two, this thesis aims to explore the mutual relation between them. It does so with an eye to the – potential – future. Although interesting, the choice for this topic is not due to a simple desire of exploring the link and relation between foreign policy and strategy. Instead, it is indeed determined by the matter of the rise of a new world order and the questions about its characteristics, given that current trends and future developments in the region might have repercussions on the entire international arena, on the global *status quo* and, ultimately, on the people affected by the potential evolutions in international politics.

The PRC has been chosen as the subject of this work, since it is widely recognised as – and accused to be by some – the main challenger to the current world order structure. Such idea is based on the path of resurgence to great power that the PRC has undertaken since the late ‘80s in the last Century, which has been mentioned in this paper already.

1. Please note that the notion of strategy included in this work is limited to the military realm; the reason for this choice will be explained in the following chapter.

As much as this critique may be malicious and ideologically driven, this paper reaffirms that Beijing's rising status – and its inherent risks – are worth of extensive analysis. The following examples aims to stress and justify the choice of PRC-related developments as the topic for this thesis.

For instance, based on previous historic records providing consistent trends of rising states and aspiring hegemonies clashing militarily, one potential scenario could be involving increasing hostilities between the PRC *vis-à-vis* the US and their allies. Many IR authors have already emphasised the risks that this kind of dynamics bears. Hegemonic rivalries between Athens and Sparta account for a classical example of this phenomenon, as described by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Gilpin 1988); more recently, Gilpin himself (1981) and Mearsheimer (2001) reflected on the matter of clashes between hegemonies and challengers as well; finally, Organski proposed that:

“an even distribution of political, economic, and military capabilities between contending groups of states is likely to increase the probability of war; peace is preserved best when there is an imbalance of national capabilities between disadvantaged and advantaged nations; the aggressor will come from a small group of dissatisfied strong countries; and it is the weaker, rather than the stronger power that is most likely to be the aggressor.” (Organski and Kugler 1980, 19)

This eventuality of a conflict shall not be intended as a scientific law in international relations however, as there are some – fewer – examples of pacific transition, e.g. between the United Kingdom and the USA as leading power during the last Century. Nonetheless, both historic records and academic interest justify the interest in Beijing's foreign policies and strategies, in order to grasp a more comprehensive understanding of their implications.

In this perspective, this paper targets the region that is potentially more relevant in such scenario. Although Beijing's political efforts are aimed at numerous areas of the globe with different approaches – e.g. the Belt & Road Initiative towards Central Asia – the maritime part of the East-Asian region, the so-called First Island Chain, can be regarded as particularly noteworthy. Geopolitical analyst Samuel Cohen coined the notion of ‘shatter belt’ (Cohen 2003, 43), which again draws attention to potential developments between the US and the PRC. This paper proposes that the First Island Chain region can be considered as such, meaning that is the area where Beijing's continental pressure meets Washington's maritime pressure. The first reason is that US presence is higher in this region more than in others, meaning that the US are present in the area with military bases since the Cold War era, and that Washington has established a network of alliances and state-to-state relations that is particularly strong. Not only this increases tensions between Washington and Beijing, as the latter interprets US initiatives as attempts to limit China's rightful resurgence, but it

also means that the terrain where contention takes place is closer to the PRC, which might encourage Beijing to resort to the use of force, as Chinese military power is stronger in that area than anywhere else. Furthermore, many countries in the region have inherited mutual distrust from the past events and are involved in a number of regional disputes, further complicating the picture in the area.

In conclusion, having examined the extreme relevance of the East-Asian region due to increasing tensions between the PRC and the US and deeply believing that academic research is a major step in deciphering the potentialities of future times, this thesis will try to shed light on Beijing's goals, foreign policy and strategy for this area, as well as on discrepancies between the two dimensions and their potential impact.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW, METHODOLOGY & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter aims to give insights on the crucial elements of this thesis – each of which will be discussed in a different section: the current state of the literature on both CSFM and NSS, thus highlighting the puzzle, the choice of Harmony as the theoretical framework for the analysis, the criteria for sources selection, and conceptualisation of the methodology behind such analysis.

1.1 Literature Review

CSFM Literature

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, foreign policy is defined as: general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states. Foreign policy is sometimes presented and discussed as a single unit, but this paper poses that a country can have different foreign policies contemporarily. To give an example, US foreign politics between the second half of XIX Century and the beginning of XX Century saw the existence of – apparently antithetical – policies, each addressing different regions: non-interventionism towards the European continent, *status quo* sponsorship and surveillance in the Americas according to the Monroe Doctrine, and a mix of colonialism and imperialism in Asia, with the annexation of Hawaii and the inclusion of the Philippines in Washington’s sphere of influence. In the same fashion, Beijing’s interests have global reach and, therefore, the CPC have designed a number of foreign policies – e.g. the Belt&Road Initiative or the so-called String of Pearls – to cope with them. Beijing’s approach towards different regions varies based on state-to-state relations, interests involved in specific areas, availability of resources, etc., and, indeed, the two above-mentioned examples have a limited geographical target. This paper conceptualises the CSFM as a foreign policy proposed by the CPC leadership, targeting fellow states on a global scale and taking into account concerns, national interests and goals of the PRC, mainly the creation of an alternative international order to the one existent to date.

Announced firstly to the international audience in 2013 by Chairman Xi and used since then with a varying alternative terminology – e.g. Community of Common Destiny, of Shared Destiny, etc. – CSFM was at the time a sub-part of the Chinese Dream framework; however, it has gained sufficient relevance to become a pivotal, stand-alone element.

Based on the definition given in the Introduction, the CSFM has global reach – thus including East Asia – and a clear political intent related to the subsequently-mentioned five constitutive principles. As such, CSFM deserves in-depth attention and, yet, in-depth analysis is missing, especially in

western-based literature; indeed, as Mokry argues, “[s]cholarly debates in China about the features of a future world order have yet to receive broad international attention” (2018, 5). In her recent MA Thesis, Cheung (2020) have acknowledged this failure and tried to tackle it, shedding light both on the current state of the literature and on the actual implications of CSFM. In general, international academics have preferred to focus on the so-called Chinese Dream and its features (Sørensen 2015), only hinting at CSFM indirectly, such as Callahan (2017, 262-3), or have dismissed it as “...simply an international expansion of domestic propaganda” (Mokry 2018, 4; in Cheung 2020, 7).

Western lack of attention to the CSFM is only made more significant by CSFM’s centrality in Chinese discourses and documents, as well as by the vagueness inscribed in CSFM-related jargon, including phrases such as ‘new type of international relations’ or ‘shared future’ and often “focus[ing] on what Beijing does not want” rather than the opposite (Mokry 2018, 4).

On the contrary, Chinese academia has engaged with the concept substantially, while upholding its peculiarity and great value. Cheung, whose work accounts for brilliant piece on the matter, highlights how, from a Chinese perspective, “CSFM is applauded by Chinese scholars as a major contribution of Chinese wisdom to the world (Zhao 2018, 25; Sun 2016, 114), a new framework that transcends traditional IR thought (*idem*), and as encapsulating the dreams of China and the world (Chen 2016, 32)” (Cheung 2020, 7; references in the original). Moreover, the concept has been embraced from different angles, such as from an ethnologic perspective (Liu & Zhang 2018) or in light of Marxist tradition (Wang 2018). Considering the ties between Chinese academia and the CPC government (Mokry 2018, 4) – e.g. main think-tanks being patronised by official institutions such as the CPC Central Committee or the CMC, personal and direct relations between prominent scholars and policy-makers (Abb 2015, 541-44), and PCP’s overall focus on ‘scientific development’ (*kexue fazhan*) since Hu’s administration (*ibid.*, 537) – the extensive engagement with CSFM reasonably reflects a high policy priority.

NSS Literature

Having mentioned the nature of the CSFM initiative, the next logical step is to address the literature on the NSS, as strategies – in a broader sense – are the way in which foreign policies would be implemented by the PRC.

A premise regarding the definition and boundaries of the term ‘strategy’ is, however, needed in order to clarify which scope they have, and how they are intended in this thesis. In general, states have a wide array of tools at their disposal to put foreign policies into practice, including diplomatic pressure or military actions, economic and financial means, cultural influence and the so-called soft power, to

name a few. These elements can moreover be utilised in different ways, meaning with assertive or aggressive approaches, such as in the case of economic and financial sanctions, or through the implementation of trade agreements, to limit the example to the economic and financial realm. The proper management of such diverse means of foreign policy is, understandably, a complex proposition and task. To make sense of such complexity, harmonise their actions, and make them more effective, states design strategies.

State-designed strategies are conventionally labelled in two categories: grand strategies and strategies. Grand strategy as a concept clearly implies the notion of something greater than strategy. Definitions of this concept are not homogenous, as two schools of thought debate what grand strategy is and what place should it occupy in relation to strategy and foreign policy. As a matter of fact, there is no consensus on this issue yet (Milevski 2019, 1). On the one side, we find authors who support the idea that grand strategy is above foreign policy and serves the purpose of creating a cohesive framework in which foreign policies are harmonised according to comprehensive national interests; they see it as “the overall mosaic into which the pieces of specific policy fit. It provides the key ingredients of clarity, coherence, consistency over time” (Foster 1985, 14; in Layton 2012, 59). On the other side, other authors believe that grand strategies encompass a wider range of tools but are limited in scope and goals by foreign policies, which establish what goals are supposed to be reached, before grand strategies set which tools are necessary to achieve such goals. In other words, this second group of authors consider grand strategy hierarchically lower than foreign policy, as they argue that “the role of ‘grand strategy’ is to co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation towards the attainment of the political object of the war: the goal defined by national policy” (Liddell Hart 1929, 150; in Layton 2012, 57). Notwithstanding the disagreement on the function of grand strategy, what is however relevant to this thesis, which emerges clearly from this debate, is that grand strategy involves foreign policy tools beyond the realm of military actions and has a “more extensive scope” (Layton 2012, 57).

Having explored the wider boundaries of grand strategies, it is logically implied that strategy limits its scope and logics to the military realm. Adding to Clausewitz’s classical definition of strategy, this paper proposes US Navy (USN) Admiral J.C. Wylie’s definition of strategy as “[a] plan of action designed in order to achieve some end; a purpose together with a system of measures for its accomplishment” (Wylie 1967). Furthermore, this thesis accepts Captain B.H. Liddell Hart’s definition as more complete, which states that strategy is “the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy” (Liddell Hart 1967, 321). It emerges from this definition

that strategies deals with military means and contemplate the use of violent coercive power according to foreign policy, in order to achieve national interests.

Keeping in mind that ‘strategy’ as a category pertains to the military realm, this papers defines the NSS as follows: the strategy designed by the political and military élites of the PRC targeting the Near Seas Region, meaning the maritime area within the so-called First Island Chain and delimited by it.

Figure 1. First and Second Island Chain from a PRC perspective



Source: McCabe 2018.

Focusing on what I have termed as NSS, the topic is central in both Chinese and Western – US prevalently – literature, and it is addressed in particular by authors with a military background, or anyway related to that world. Some of them focus on conceptual and doctrinal evolutions, that is to say the way in which the strategy itself is conceptualised; others analyse developments in material military means instead, meaning new systems of weapons, aircraft, naval vessels, etc. Erickson has explored both worlds in different works: on the one hand, he addressed the theoretical side of the matter by analysing the state and trends of Beijing strategy in the maritime realm (Erickson 2014); on the other side, he also focused on developments in military means, analysing in depth Chinese evolution in submarine forces (Erickson 2012), as well as in aerospace power (Erickson and Lyle 2011). On the contrary, *Asian Maritime Strategies* places Cole in the first category as, in the chapter on China, he debates both conceptual developments since the times of Liu Huaqing (Cole 2013, 97-98) and Hu Jintao (*ibid.* 95), and general trends in PLAN’s changing characteristics (*ibid.* 99-103). Yoshihara has also attempted a depiction of Beijing’s vision of its maritime surroundings, highlighting Chinese interpretations of the military-political situation in the East-Asian Region

(Yoshihara 2012, 294 and 297), as well as major geo-strategic concerns (*ibid.* 299 and 302-303). The same author, together with Holmes, had discussed the impact of Mahan's theoretical legacy on Chinese maritime strategies in a previous work (Holmes and Yoshihara 2005). Despite some disagreements amongst some of these authors – e.g. Cole vs Holmes and Yoshihara on the influence of Mahan on Chinese strategies (although this might be due to the evolving situation between 2005 and 2013) – this debate shows how relevant the matter of Chinese strategies in the Near Seas is, in particular amongst USN theorists and officials.

From a Chinese point of view, the question of Beijing's strategies is taken into account both by analysts and by the government, via official documents. These works, as per their western counterparts, focus on China's strategic concepts, technological developments and modernisation efforts within PLA forces. Notably, the 2015 and 2019 Chinese Defense White Papers express the CPC official position on national overall strategy in the current international environment, by touching on national strategic goals, forces modernisation and re-organisation, and security challenges, amongst which the threat of Taiwan 'independentism' and territorial maritime disputes are mentioned explicitly. Interestingly, these documents discuss both the strategic aspect – although not in-depth – and the importance of creating a CSFM as a goal, also indicating current progresses and future efforts in cooperation and partnership made so far in this regard. However, despite the stress put on the importance of CSFM, the document as a whole is perceived as partially contradictory, both in content and tone, when it comes to the Taiwan and Island disputes questions, compared to the general ideas contained in the document. The same problem emerges in numerous Xi Jinping's speeches targeting the armed forces, where the perceived assertiveness towards the aforementioned issues is in contrast with the general tone attached to the CSFM idea (Xi 2014).

In conclusion of this literature review, it is worth noting that most of the literature on both concepts is limited, in that, by focusing on the analysis of the concepts per se, authors are able to appreciate their complexity and characteristics, but fail to link and put the two worlds in relation to each other specifically, despite the fact that this relation exists per definition and is therefore very relevant.

Research Puzzle

Having seen how 'strategy' is defined in this paper and explored the state of literature on the topic of this work, we can at this point see the nexus between foreign policy and strategy, and the puzzle behind this thesis. Having in fact posed that the CSFM is a goal in Beijing foreign policy for the East-Asian region and that strategies are meant as a way to achieve foreign policy goals, it logically follows

that strategies for the same region should be designed accordingly, to achieve such goal. This work will first highlight a discrepancy between the CSFM initiative and the PLA- and CPC-designed NSS, and subsequently attempt to make sense of it through the Harmony theoretical framework, drawing a coherent picture with major implications.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Rather than opting for classical IR theories, this work approaches the research question from the perspective of Harmony. Deeply rooted in Chinese classical and contemporary culture, Harmony shall serve as the theoretical framework through which PRC policies can be understood properly and consequently interpreted.

The concept is a major pillar in Confucian tradition. Notwithstanding its ancient origins, and the fact that criticism towards Confucius' figure was acute during the Maoist era, peaking in the 'Criticize Biao, Criticize Confucius' Campaign according to Motoh (2009, 91; in Rošker 2013, 5), it still holds a central place in contemporary culture and thus politics, as past criticism was reversed in the following decades (Rošker 2013, 5). Contemporary relevance is shown in its diffuse presence among Chinese official speeches and documents since Hu Jintao's administration. Notably, Hu's speech at the UN 60th Anniversary summit was titled "Strive to Construct Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity". Harmony is also present in bilateral diplomatic relations, such as in a note of the PRC Embassy to Botswana². Although new concepts such as 'Chinese Dream' or CSFM have acquired a more focal role in Xi's era, Harmony still plays a role – e.g. in the 2018 Boao Forum for Asia (Xiang 2018) – as an ideology.

This paper poses that its role is not only domestic, but also international, in that the "extension of harmonious society in the international community" is a goal (Su 2009, 34). This claim is supported by its recurrence in official speeches and documents, such as the aforementioned ones. Moreover, the concept of CSFM itself, whose significance in Beijing's politics has been explained previously, clearly embodies the more immediate and superficial components of a Harmonious society – e.g. when referring to peace, common destiny, win-win cooperation, etc.

Being a foreign concept to the general Western audience, the meaning and implications of Harmony warrant for further explanation, in order to highlight how it will serve the purpose of this thesis. At a first glance, Harmony has positive implications and notably, as it is also suggested in the previous

2. Harmonious World: China's Ancient Philosophy for New International Order; accessed at: <http://bw.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/zgjk/t367341.htm>

Hu Jintao’s mention, entails peace within a social environment. However, it bears more profound meanings, mainly deriving from later – antithetical – understandings of Confucius’s theories by his disciples, Mengzi and Xunzi. Rošker argues that the latter’s interpretation and ideas are the one present in contemporary PRC culture and discourses (2013, 7).

Xunzi’s version of Harmony differentiates itself from Mengzi’s counterpart as it emphasises the legalistic and hierarchic dimension of Harmony. Specifically, Xunzi’s harmonious society is depicted as:

“a system of *distributive justice acceptable to everyone*. It should therefore have some dimension of *equality*. However, since a political body which would consist only of equals is not imaginable to Xunzi, it must also allow for *difference and hierarchy*. But difference and hierarchy, in turn, will only be acceptable if they are based on a principle that in itself embodies the demand of justice: the *principle of achievement and merit* as well as of sticking to the rules of this system” (Roetz 2010, 319; italics in the original).

The justification for such social conception stems from an anthropologic view echoing Hobbes’ own:

“Hostile natural conditions [...] would force men into a disastrous mutual struggle for scarce resources were it not for the artificial establishment of an organized society. Society however is only imaginable as based on a division of roles and a hierarchy. Difference and inequality then have to be accepted in order to put an end to ‘disaster’, the fight between men, and to allow everyone to survive. The inequality inherent in this order is indispensable precisely in order to relieve everyone equally from strife – it is ‘equally profitable to the whole world’ (jian li tianxia 兼利天下). The reverse of this idea is that inequality of status is only acceptable to subjects if in return care and public relief are provided by those in power. The just order is not meant to grant privileges to some at the expense of others” (*ibid.*, 320).

Not only does Xunzi advocate for a hierarchical “system [...] organized from the top but ‘supervised’ (lin 臨) from both ends” (*ibid.*, 322), he also distinguishes between three kinds of rule and explains which is preferable. Other than a utopic form of “kingship (wang 王), [he] discusses the second best form of political rule, hegemony (ba 霸)” (*ibid.* 323). Hegemons, who represent trust (xin 信), are imperfect, as “[t]heir virtue may be incomplete and their justice noncomprehensive, but the order of the world is in general established [?], their punishments and rewards are accepted and regarded as reliable by the world and their subordinates and subjects know clearly that they (the hegemons) can

be held accountable (yao 要)” (Xunzi 11, 132-33; in Roetz 2010, 323). To draw a comparison with Western terminology, Xunzi’s hegemony recalls Enlightened despotism/absolutism; it is worth highlighting that this political form is seen as the best realistic option.

This paper argues that Xunzi’s political architecture, originally referring to domestic realms, is valid for and can easily be employed in international politics too; this implies that an international harmonious society in Xunzi’s conception would manifest itself as a hierarchical one.

Providing evidence in support to Rošker’s claim about Xunzi’s legalistic conception of Harmony’s prominence nowadays within the CPC, Hagström and Nordin (2019, 11) warn that “[o]ne of the policies most strongly associated with Hu’s “harmonious society” has been increased censorship, especially of the Chinese internet, and this practice has become particularly repressive under Xi.” In practice, contemporary “harmony discourses have ended up legitimizing the elimination of voices other than that of the party-state. This use of harmony is also visible in government white papers”.

Therefore, Harmony has been chosen as the framework for two reasons. First, the effort of understanding Beijing’s CSFM and NSS through a distinctively Chinese theoretical lens is justifiable with the possibility of deeper and newer insights on the matter. More importantly, however, as shown in this section, Harmony is a concept that touches on both dimensions, allows to collocate them in a comprehensive relation and to read them in light of a single concept. In fact, there is a direct link between the peaceful connotation of Harmony and the idea of CSFM; equally, the hierarchical – and specifically hegemonical – aspect of Harmony as present in contemporary PRC engage with the matter of NSS.

1.3 Sources selection

Sources selection for primary sources in this work is based on four criteria, explained as follows.

The first criterion for selection is *officiality*, as foreign policy and strategies are matters of state and, as such, only official sources can be considered as valid for this analysis. In practice, this need for officiality and international outreach implies that only sources coming from official institutions within the PRC government can be taken into consideration; mainly, such institutions are: President Xi, Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the MoFA, the State Council, and the CMC and Ministry of Defense. For self-evident reasons, only open-source documents can be taken into account. The type of sources is variable, including speeches, White Papers, official notes, etc, as long as they fit into the second criterion, which is: *international audience*. Foreign policies and strategies are also naturally oriented towards the international environment, for the public that they address is beyond national

borders. For this reason, the sources selected are either directed towards an international audience (speeches) or implicitly meant to be conveyed to it (White Papers, notes). This requirement implies, moreover, that the language selected for the sources is English, as translation of official documents is made in order to make them accessible to a wider, international, public. Notably, English translations of these documents – where possible³ – assure that they meet the requirement of officiality, as their translation and publication of official documents is under direct control of the state-party apparatus, ensuring that they reflect official policies and intentions of the government.

A third criterion for selection is based on a *timeframe*. Precisely, only sources that are published between years 2015 and 2019 will be taken into account; possibly, this work targets two sources from each year within this timeframe, which account for a total of ten primary sources, five of which related to the CSFM and five to the NSS. First, this choice is due to the need for recent sources to analyse contemporary phenomena and, secondly, such distribution among the years aims to better represent evolutions and developments in either CSFM or NSS. Exceptions to year-based selection are possible according to availability and to the final criterion: *relevance*. In fact, if more than two documents of fundamental importance have been published in the same year, within the 2015-2019 period, they will be considered regardless.

The following table lists the primary sources for this work, together with the code that will be used from this point on for convenience.

Table 1. List of primary sources

Code	Title	Author/Document
CSFM Source 2015	“Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind”	Xi Jinping
CSFM Source 2016	“Working Together to create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind”	Wang Yi
CSFM Source 2017	“Working together to build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind”	Xi Jinping
CSFM Source 2018	“Working together to build a World of Lasting Peace and Universal Security and a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind”	Yang Jiechi
CSFM Source 2019	“Working for a Community of Shared Future for Mankind by Promoting International Cooperation and Multilateralism”	Yang Jiechi

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3. Not all sources are available in English from official sources, e.g. the 2019 Defence White Paper, which was accessible to the author only in Dr. Andrew S. Jackson translation; however, given their fundamental importance, they have been selected equally.

Code	Title	Author/Document
NSS Source 2015 – 1	“National Security Situation”	China’s Military Strategy” (Defense White Paper)
NSS Source 2015 – 2	“Missions and Strategic Tasks of China’s Armed Forces”	China’s Military Strategy” (Defense White Paper)
NSS Source 2017	Staying Committed to the Chinese path of building Strong Forces	19 th CPC Congress Report
NSS Source 2019 – 1	“International Security Situation”	“China’s National Defense in the New Era” (Defense White Paper)
NSS Source 2019 – 2	“China’s Defensive National Policy in the New Era”	“China’s National Defense in the New Era” (Defense White Paper)

1.4 Methodology

The main argument of this thesis is that, given the relevance attached to Beijing’s initiatives in world of politics and especially considering the PRC–US relationship, the CSFM foreign policy and the NS Strategy need to be analysed and their relations assessed, as well as interpreted. This paper supposes that, on the surface, the CSFM and the NSS differ in their core nature, as the first refers to peace and the latter to conflict. However, this work proposes additionally that this apparently antithetical relation can be explained and interpreted in light of the concept of Harmony, which would imply that the CSFM and NSS are respectively two sides of the same coin, meaning that they express two aspects of the same plan, that is the creation of a new world order.

In order to prove this argument, the methodology chosen for sources-analysis is *content analysis*, with the goal to isolate and stress the essential components of CSFM- and NSS-related speeches and documents.

The main reason behind this choice is related to the nature of the sources involved, and the kind of data relevant to answering the research question. Content analysis allows indeed to streamline contents by selecting categories of research, thus giving clear and immediate results, which is especially needed when dealing with sources that are complex texts and feature a peculiar jargon or register, possibly with many nuances. Moreover, by establishing fixed categories, this methodology makes comparison between core elements possible even when, as in this case, the sources are from different worlds and, seemingly, have different characteristics and tone.

Specifically, as far as primary sources are concerned, two categories have been established, which have been named: a) peace and b) conflict. Each of the pair includes words and phrases, as per the following table.

Table 2. Analytical categories for primary sources

a) Peace	b) Conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation • Peaceful development • Multilateralism • Win-win cooperation • Chinese contribution/wisdom • New type of International Relations • Humanitarian/Relief Intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security • Independentism⁴ • Colonialism/Imperialism • Western interferences/threats • Disputes (islands) • Hegemony • Zero-sum

The texts will be searched for in order to find and isolate the aforementioned words and phrases, either when mentioned in these exact terms or when they are included non-literally. For instance, phrases such as ‘win-win type of international relations’ will be counted in the first category because they combine other phrases that are already mentioned exactly in the table (in this case, ‘win-win cooperation’ and ‘new type of international relations’) and can, reasonably, be considered as pertaining to the category a). For each document, the total amount of these references will be calculated and then divided according to their pertinence to either category a) or category b).

Once all sources are analysed and the total number of references per category is obtained, the results from the five documents related to the CSFM will be compared to the ones related to the NSS, with the goal of highlighting if and to what extent the percentage with which peace-related references differ compared to conflict-related ones.

Table 3. Example of categorisation and text analysis⁵

	Security	Independentism	Western Threats	Colonialism/Imperialism	Disputes (islands)	Hegemony	Zero-sum	Total ‘conflict’ references
CSFM source n.1	4	7	2	6	3	2	3	27
NSS source n.1	3	2	1	5	6	4	4	32

4. The reason for including ‘independentism’ requires further explanation: under such phrasing, the CPC includes the question of Taiwan and its status, depicting the island as a rightful part of the PRC and framing the issue both as domestic and international, that is in terms of external security and/or threat to national unity; therefore, reference to disputes with Taiwan are to be found under this name.

Table 4. Example of distribution and comparison between categories per text⁵

	Total 'peace' references	Total 'conflict' references	Percentage of 'peace' references	Percentage of 'conflict' references
CSFM source n.1	48	24	66,66%	33,33%
NSS source n.1	2	28	6,67%	93,33%

If the comparison between the five CSFM-related sources and the five NSS-related one shows two trends that are clearly divergent, e.g. that CSFM sources contain consistently a majority of 'peace' references and the opposite for NSS-related sources, this thesis will propose that the NSS does not reflect the CSFM. In other words, the standard that determines whether the NSS *does reflect* or *does not reflect* the CSFM is, respectively, the absence or presence of divergent trends that this analysis aims to highlight. Shall each group of sources express a trend – thus excluding the cases in which they do not – there are four possible scenarios:

Table 5. Trend scenarios and potential results

	CSFM sources express a 'peace' trend	CSFM sources express a 'conflict' trend
CSFM sources express a 'peace' trend	Does reflect	Does not reflect
CSFM sources express a 'conflict' trend	Does not reflect	Does reflect

The goal of this kind of analysis is indeed to ensure a proper understanding of the overall meaning inscribed into the documents, which will be achieved by tracing their intrinsic components and the area to which they are related. As such, it allows to highlight where the discrepancies between CSFM and NSS, and the differences between foreign policy and strategy, lie.

Subsequently, secondary sources will be utilised to corroborate these findings and, thus, give a more complete and in-depth picture of the matter. In particular, this is needed in relation to the NSS-related sources, which, because of their nature and relatedness to the military world, are less likely to be explicit or to disclose crucial information in open-sources documents accessible to the general public. The opinions and understandings of authors who have specialised on either CSFM or NSS will be used to confirm the trends emerging from the previous analysis. They will serve as evidence to further support the claim that some discrepancies lie between the two. Specifically, this work will highlight if and to what extent experts on the matter, either implicitly or explicitly, collocate the CSFM or NSS in category a) or category b) based on their findings.

5. Please note that data in Table n.2 and n.3 are entirely fictional and only serve as examples.

In conclusion, through the theoretical lens of the concept of Harmony, this work will attempt to make sense and give an explanation for the supposed discrepancy between CSFM and NSS. In fact, this paper has posed previously that strategies are subordinated to foreign policies and ought to reflect them. Should the analysis of the sources suggest that, according to the argument of the work, this statement cannot be verified to be true in the case hereby considered, this work will attempt to explain such divergence through the theoretical lens of Harmony.

One potential explanation, and therefore hypothesis in this thesis, is that the CSFM and the NSS, despite not reflecting each other, find their coherence and place together in the world of Chinese foreign politics according to the concept of Harmony. As a matter of fact, the two core components of the concept itself and thus of an alleged Harmonious Society are its peaceful nature and hierarchical (hegemonical) architecture, as explained before. Building on the previous analysis of the CSFM and NSS contents and on the potential trends that will have been emphasised, the last chapter will compare the results with the notions of ‘peaceful society’ and ‘hierarchic social structure’ and assess if a relation between the CSFM, the NSS and these two categories can be found. Precisely, if any distinct trend has emerged from the data on CSFM and NSS sources, this work will study whether it matches one of the two core categories of the concept of Harmony through a qualitative interpretation of the two objects of comparison.

CHAPTER 2: ADDRESSING TRENDS AND POTENTIAL DIVERGENCES

This chapter contains the main findings of the analysis as explained in the previous paragraphs. It is divided between two sections, each of which addresses one of the two groups of sources, discussing numerical findings through the aid of tables and graphs, and strengthening them through a further look into the main themes and literature on the topics, in order to reach a multi-dimensional understanding of their significance in practice. It will be highlighted how the two recurring themes among CSFM sources are development and (win-win) cooperation, which express peaceful intents, whereas the NSS sources reflect major security and military-related concerns with national security and the territorial disputes in the Near Seas, notably Taiwan.

Before delving into explaining the reasons for such claims, the reader shall be advised that, unless the contrary is explicitly stated, the amount of references hereby calculated refers to positive cases, in that their meaning is in line and compatible with the category they are in.

2.1 Analysis of CSFM-related Sources

From a superficial and preliminary type of analysis, the main features that the CPC government attaches to the CSFM are already clearly in sight. The titles contain phrases that express a concern for peace, partnership and development, which can all be ascribed to a sentiment of friendship and openness to other countries. Moreover, the kind of environment – *fora*, UN meeting and sessions – in which these speeches were delivered was one that can be considered as amicable by definition and, adding to the sources here considered, the CSFM initiative has been brought up by PRC's officials in instances such as the Davos Forum in 2017 (Xi 2017), among others. For example, CSFM was the main theme and subject, as it is proven by the fact that the notion of CSFM itself was mentioned – either directly or in similar terms – forty-six times.

The general impression is then confirmed by the quantitative analysis of references and mentions on the basis of the two categories included in the 'methodology' section of the previous chapter. The two tables that follow show a considerable difference in numbers between the two themes of 'conflict' and 'peace' among the CSFM-related sources, with a marked preponderance for the latter of the couple. The mentions related to the category 'peace' are distributed as follows:

Table 6. Distribution of category ‘peace’ mentions among CSFM-related sources

	Cooperation	Peaceful Development	Multilateralism	Win-win cooperation	Chinese contribution/ wisdom	New Type of IR	Humanitarian relief	Total n. ‘peace’ references
CSFM Source 2015	5	10	5	5	2	2	2	31
CSFM Source 2016	1	12	0	8	1	1	1	24
CSFM Source 2017	7	12	5	6	3	0	3	36
CSFM Source 2018	14	20	16	8	3	1	3	47
CSFM Source 2019	24	15	16	8	3	1	3	70

On the contrary, less frequent ‘conflict’ mentions are divided as listed in table 6:

Table 7. Distribution of category ‘conflict’ mentions among CSFM-related sources

	Security	Independentism	Imperialism Colonialism	Western interference	Disputes (islands)	Hegemony	Zero- sum	Total n. ‘conflict’ references
CSFM Source 2015	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	5
CSFM Source 2016	6	0	0	0	1	0	1	8
CSFM Source 2017	3	0	1	1	1	1	0	7

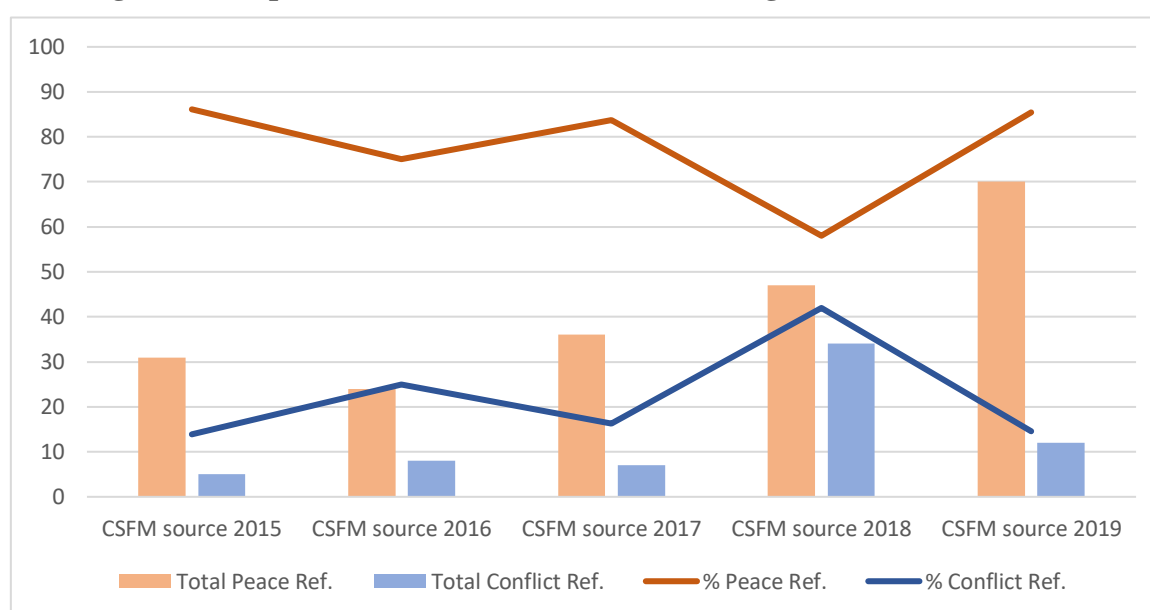
CSFM Source 2018	29	0	0	0	2	2	1	34
CSFM Source 2019	9	0	0	0	1	1	1	12

The following table – together with Figure 2 – shows a trend and its distribution through the years 2015-2019. It is worth highlighting the rather sharp rise of ‘multilateralism’ and ‘cooperation’ mentions in the year 2019 and in general a growing trend in ‘peace’ references among these sources.

Table 8. Distribution of mentions between ‘peace’ and ‘conflict’ in CSFM-related sources

	Total ‘peace’ references	Total ‘conflict’ references	Percentage of ‘peace’ references	Percentage of ‘conflict’ references
CSFM source 2015	31	5	86,111%	13,889%
CSFM source 2016	24	8	75%	25%
CSFM source 2017	36	7	83,72%	16,279%
CSFM source 2018	47	34	58,024%	41,975%
CSFM source 2019	70	12	85,365%	14,634%

Figure 2. Graphic distribution of references among CSFM-related sources



The impression of a strong correlation between CSFM and ‘peace’ is supported not only by the titles and environments, but also sustained by numerical analysis and findings reported in the tables. The trend is in fact clear, since, as the numbers show, the representation of the ‘peace’ category is consistently higher than its relative counterpart ‘conflict’, notably constituting the majority, and scoring at least 75% or higher in all but one source, which is considered to be a clear result. Moreover, the average percentage of ‘peace’ mentions (76,644%) is higher than its ‘conflict’ counterpart (22,355%).

It is worth noting that, as far as ‘conflict’ mentions are concerned, security is surely the most recurring theme. However, its attached meaning refers to rejection of its traditional understanding as national and hard-security and, in contrast, proposes a consistently peaceful connotation such as common and global security in a brotherly depiction, thus strengthening the idea that CSFM is and is perceived as a peaceful initiative.

Based on these findings, this paper argues that the CSFM initiative is peace-oriented and, within Beijing’s foreign politics and policies, it serves the purpose of portraying a friendly and non-hostile picture of the PRC abroad, to the international community and potential partners, whether they are bilateral or multilateral. This goal must be considered extremely meaningful in light of two factors regarding Beijing’s current international situation.

Historically, modern day China has inherited the reputation of a distrustful country, at least among Western countries. Since its proclamation in 1949 following the civil war against Kuomintang forces, the country was seen as hostile and a potential enemy, considering the Cold War context and mentality of the time and the fact that the ideology in the PRC was communist. Up until Kissinger’s visit to China in 1972, the country was seen as associated to the USSR under the banner of communist threats, even despite the rupture in Sino-Soviet relations from 1954 to 1966 following Khrushchev’s election as Soviet leader. With the end of the Cold War and, therefore, the triumph of liberal ideology in international politics, Beijing’s reputation abroad has not changed. In particular, Western countries continue advocating for liberal democracy in opposition to the CPC authoritarian regime, criticising the occupation of Tibet (Macfie 2009), the attempts to put an end to Hong Kong independence in the recent years – as well as in the exact days during which this thesis is being written (Regan 2020) – and the everlasting issues with Taiwan. Moreover, Sino-Japanese relations are jeopardised by past colonial invasions by the Empire of Japan, culminating in the Sino-Japanese War of 1937, as well as by territorial disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyu archipelago. Territorial disputes involve the PRC *vis-à-vis* other countries as well, such as the border disputes with India – which caused for the Sino-Indian War in 1962 already and are the epicentre of rising tensions during the current year (Goldman

2020) – or the Spratly archipelago with Vietnam, another country that had a conflict with Beijing, in 1979. To summarise, the PRC has a series of difficult relations based on distrust with a number of neighbouring or East-Asian countries, as well as with Western countries and notably the US.

Improving international relations through a process of image and reputation rebranding is a desirable move per se, but the necessity to do so in recent years is linked to the current so-called scenario of failing world order. This notion, taken from the Chinese narrative, conceptualise the ongoing trend of Chinese rise and – alleged – American decline, entailing the possibility of a transition from the US-led liberal world order to a new one. In practice, the PRC sees the existence of a ‘window of opportunity’ in which Beijing’s power will be peaking. In this view, if there was an occasion to create or restructure the architecture of the international arena, this would then be the most convenient time to act accordingly. Given this premise, it emerges how the need to rebuild a compromised image is dictated by contingent needs and goals, in addition to general ones. Furthermore, this active approach by Beijing fuels the worries of China’s neighbours and Western countries, as they perceive the PRC as an assertive rival due to its eagerness in constituting a new world order, thus worsening already bad relations and further increasing the regime’s need of a new image abroad.

Development

As far as the content of the CSFM initiative is concerned, a qualitative investigation and subsequent interpretation is also needed to add value to its role in contemporary Chinese politics. Based on academic literature – precisely secondary sources – this work targets two essential themes that express the two main features of a CSFM, in order to draw a more complete picture of the issue. First and foremost, the CSFM is thought of as a community of fellow states, whose relations are based on two pivots: cooperation and development. The relevance of this pair is also shown in Table 5, where the two sub-themes are the most recurrently traced in the texts. As previously mentioned in Section 1.1, official Chinese lexicon on the matter of CSFM is arguably vague and intricate (Mokry 2018, 4), therefore requiring a qualitative interpretation. The latter of the aforementioned pair, development, holds a central place in Beijing’s domestic and foreign politics in two ways. First of all, development – hereby intended as economic development mainly – is the channel through which the PRC has become the powerful country that it is nowadays and has reached its position, given that constantly-high rates of GDP – 115% between 2008 and 2018 (OEC 2018) – have created the image of a prosperous and efficient country, a portrait that certainly has repercussions in and on the international community. It has also increased actual Chinese presence on the international markets as a partner, as well as allowing Chinese capitals to be invested and Chinese companies to operate abroad. Economic development, and its corollary aspects that are international trade and finance, have been

the cornerstone of Chinese resurgence to the condition of great power, and it is not by accident that Chairman Xi spoke in favour of globalisation at Davos (Xi 2017). In sum, this work argues that domestic economic development has increased the PRC's power, and the subsequent prosperity, together with the exploitation of globalisation mechanics, has amplified the effects, thus creating a virtuous circle and further strengthening the image of a beneficial partner. In practice, however, Beijing's improved status is not the only outcome of this process: the resulting interdependence is arguably a downside. What is here defined as 'interdependence' must be intended in two ways: first, Beijing's interdependence with the image of a prosperous, efficient country and partner, which requires the CPC to continuously fuel China's growth; secondly, an interdependent relation with those countries upon which, and upon whose resources, Chinese development rests, which is relevant because of China's specific resource needs, such as oil and other energetic resources, raw materials, and technological or mechanical components (OEC 2018).

The fact that development holds such a central stage in the CSFM policy ought not to surprise the reader, since Beijing needs to uphold it for three reasons: the need for partners that are either rich in resources necessary to China's development or potential recipient of Chinese FDI, according to the "commerce-is-development view" (Ferchen 2020), potentially tying them to Beijing's sphere of influence and, in turn, promoting and allowing them to develop their economies; the need to continue along its growth path and to present itself to the international community as a strong, prosperous and growing country; and the need to enlarge its reach – diplomatic and economic – to include more and more Asian, African and Latin American less economically developed countries (LEDCs), thus becoming the landmark country in the world of tomorrow. According to the Chinese government and the CSFM policy, the Community would be designed upon the idea of common development and it would be *doubly beneficial*, aiming at benefitting China's partners through, reasonably, prioritisation in FDI, trade relations and opportunities to develop, as well as the PRC itself, which would build an economic structure able to answer to its developmental requirements.

Cooperation

The other macro-theme that is so often recurrent in the sources concerning the CSFM is cooperation. Cooperation is typically present in every policy aimed at the international public by every country, at least on the official level, and understandably so. Evidently, it would indeed be inconvenient to any country to present itself openly as one that rejects cooperation; the fact that the US and the USSR both advocated cooperation within their own spheres of influence during the Cold War, despite their deep differences, seems to confirm this claim. Yet, the kind of cooperation that is present in the CSFM framework is noteworthy in its own regard and deserves a deeper explanation.

First of all, cooperation is the cornerstone of a ‘shared future’ and ‘common destiny’, where wellbeing and benefits shared by and among nations are the result stemming from participating in this new system of international relations. Seeing how central development is in this framework, it is reasonable to expect that cooperation shall heavily take into consideration international trade, investments and have an economic background. The most noteworthy novelty that the Chinese proposal introduces is the ‘win-win’ nature of these future relations, which expresses the intention of building state-to-state relations that are beneficial to both the PRC and its partners. To the reader, this claim might be echoing the notion of interdependence that has been promoted by the US in the ongoing era of globalisation and also lies at the base of liberal IR theorisation (Keohane and Nye 1977). Even though the interdependence logic reflects in fact the one proposed by Beijing, it only does so partially, as one essential implication can be inferred within the lines of the CSFM discourse, which is the claim that international relations during the US hegemony were based on an unequal kind of cooperation, one in which Washington was the country that benefitted the most at the expense of its partners.

The argument that states that relations during the contemporary era are not mutually beneficial makes the emphasis on ‘win-win cooperation’ acquire a new significance, seeing that it is the distinctive trait of the new set of international rules proposed by China for the future.

Other two minor elements contribute to the coherence of this proposal: Beijing’s advocacy for a new type of IR, which enriches the aforementioned claim by indicating and reminding how the kind of relations that China proposes is new and different from past ones; moreover, the rebuttal of the Cold War or zero-sum logic works in the same direction, supporting the idea that Washington has betrayed the expectations regarding mutual benefit deriving from the globalisation process and, instead, continued to promote international relations based on hostile dynamics and adversarial mentality, where one’s gains equal its enemy’s losses.

In conclusion, the CSFM is portrayed as a community of fellow states, of equal importance, where a new kind of international relations – based on win-win logics and revolving around peaceful development and cooperation among nations – shall replace the one proposed by the West until today, which differentiates itself from Beijing’s one because it only proposed equality, peace, and mutual benefits and development only in theory, and not in practice. This conceptualisation of the CSFM could allow the PRC to continue along its development and growth path, while, at the same time, building a sphere of influence in countries tied to Beijing. However, it is worth wondering if and how the NSS strategy reflects a project of this kind and how they can cohabit in Chinese foreign politics, which is the topic of Section 2.2.

2.2 Analysis of NSS-relates sources

The selection of the NSS-related sources has not been as linear as for the previous group, mainly because of a matter of availability of open-source documents; however, they still apply to the 2015-2019 range. The reader might realise that the NSS sources are less eloquent than their counterparts, meaning that the number of mentions is distinctly lower overall, which might be due to the nature of the topic; regardless, the analysis is based on percentages, and the results are seen as nonetheless meaningful.

The following table shows the results of the analysis:

Table 9. Distribution of category ‘peace’ mentions among NSS-related sources

	Cooperation	Peaceful Development	Multilateralism	Win-win cooperation	Chinese contribution/ wisdom	New Type of IR	Humanitarian relief	Total n. ‘peace’ references
NSS Source 2015 – 1	1	4	0	1	0	0	0	6
NSS Source 2015 – 2	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	5
NSS Source 2017	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NSS Source 2019 – 1	2	3	0	1	0	0	0	6
NSS Source 2019 – 2	5	7	1	1	2	0	1	17

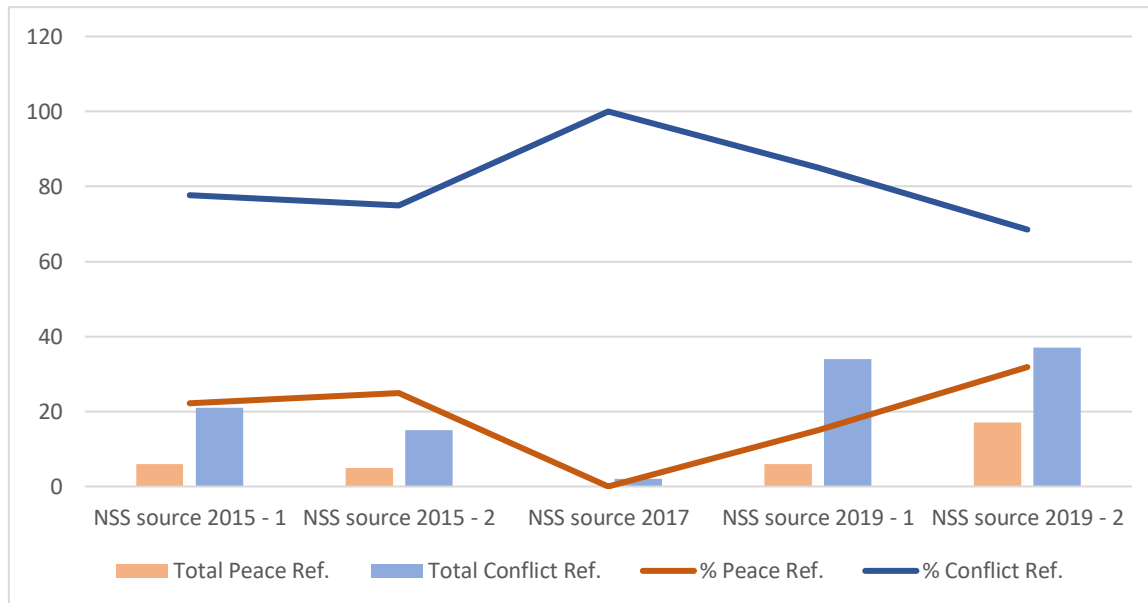
Table 10. Distribution of category ‘conflict’ mentions among NSS-related sources

	Security	Independentism	Imperialism Colonialism	Western interference	Disputes (islands)	Hegemony	Zero- sum	Total n. ‘conflict’ references
NSS Source 2015 – 1	9	8	0	1	2	1	0	21
NSS Source 2015 – 2	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	15
NSS Source 2017	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
NSS Source 2019 – 1	23	6	0	0	4	1	0	34
NSS Source 2019 – 2	19	7	2	3	4	2	0	37

As the data show, the references to ‘peace’ are overall low and the most recurrent categories remain ‘cooperation’ and ‘peaceful development’; references to the CSFM were marginally present (four times), while ‘war’ or ‘conflict’ were mentioned 16 times. In general, the majority of references concern the category ‘conflict’, as Table 10 and Figure 3 show:

Table 10. Distribution of mentions between ‘peace’ and ‘conflict’ in NSS-related sources

	Total ‘peace’ references	Total ‘conflict’ references	Percentage of ‘peace’ references	Percentage of ‘conflict’ references
NSS source 2015 – 1	6	21	22,2%	77,7%
NSS source 2015 – 2	5	15	25%	75%
NSS source 2017	0	2	0%	100%
NSS source 2019 – 1	6	34	15%	85%
NSS source 2019 – 2	17	37	31,841%	68,518%

Figure 3. Graphic distribution of references among NSS-related sources

Although the sources selected did not focus on the NSS specifically, they deal with the issue of security from Beijing’s perspective. The resulting picture is deeply connected with the matter of NSS anyway. Numerically, security is the most recurrent theme among the sources and, contrarily to the CSFM sources, is often paired up with the word ‘threats’, bearing a more traditional conception of security and showing that the CPC interprets the current situation as a threat for Chinese security. The other references give insights on what most worries the Chinese government: independentism, mainly referring to the issue of cross-Strait relations and the status of Taiwan, claimed by the PRC as integral part of the country; and disputes, referring to the numerous territorial disputes that China has in the Near Seas, such as the Senkaku/Diaoyu, the Spratly and Paracel islands, some of which have been militarised by the PRC (Council of Foreign Relations 2020). Moreover, mentions of ‘interferences’ can be found as well, and hint to the hostile role that, according to the PRC, Washington and its allies play in regional dynamics and territorial disputes.

Security concerns

All in all, this analysis shows that, amongst Beijing’s security concerns, the two that hold a central place are related to the Near Seas Region, which is in fact the pivotal area of Chinese security for different reasons. Firstly, Taipei’s status is a matter that touches on numerous aspects of Chinese politics, both domestic and international. Considering its relevance historically and in the CPC narrative, as well as China’s growing nationalism, it is deeply embedded in internal politics, as a scenario where Beijing is being forced to recognise Taiwan’s independence *de iure* and *de facto* would constitute a terrible blow to the PRC prestige and to the regime’s stability. Taiwan’s relevance in Beijing’s international politics (Yoshihara 2012, 302-3) is even greater and can be essentially

explained by the fact that – in the words of General MacArthur – it is “an unsinkable aircraft carrier” and, due to US-Taiwanese traditional relations, it is seen by Beijing as a forward base for China’s enemies, allowing them to threaten the coastal mainland (Pillsbury 2012) – where many major cities are located (Yoshihara 2012, 299) – due to its proximity, as well as gain or interdict China’s maritime and aerial control over the Near Seas. The matter of the island disputes is similar, as the PRC aims at preventing potential enemies to use the contested archipelagos to threaten its security.

However, because of its strategic value, the PRC’s interest is not only to prevent its potential enemies to gain control over the region, but also to be able to control it itself. Even though China has been a land-oriented nation since the Ming era – when China’s maritime tradition were ended, arguably hindering its development compared to Europe (Kissinger 2011) – the PRC has turned an eye to the sea during the last decade, approximatively, because of its economic condition.

As the CPC realised that consistent economic growth could only be achievable through its commerce flows with the rest of the world, the relevance of the area increased. As mentioned in Section 2.1, there is a direct link between China’s economic growth and its economic relations with other continents, both of which have increased steadily. Trade-wise particularly, the area is of paramount importance, as a quarter of global trade shipments flows through the Strait of Malacca (Calamur 2017). It is even more relevant to Beijing, whose main and most vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) pass through the area (EIA 2015; Maritime Executive 2020). From a geographic perspective, it is indeed the only option, as China is constrained by the so-called First Island Chain (Pillsbury 2012, 153), which limits the points of access and contact between the only Chinese littoral and the open seas. This semi-locked condition puts Beijing in a position that is doubly precarious, where the need to intensify trade relations grows and so does the risk of having vital SLOCs disrupted; the need to exert control over the area can only grow accordingly (Holmes 2009, 222).

As the analysis of the sources has shown, the main concern for the PRC is to minimise security threats, and being able to control the Near Seas Region is therefore a priority, which is meant to be achieved through the Near Seas Strategy.

A2/AD

When it comes to the actual strategy, the first question that has to be pondered is what kind of strategy is the NSS. In classic strategic studies, the three classic domains are land, sea, and air, to which the space, the nuclear and the newly-rising cyber realms can arguably be added. This thesis makes the choice of giving the NSS a conventional connotation, nominally, in order to categorise it in the first place and denote its main feature, before delving into its technicalities. This paper sees the NSS as a

maritime strategy for the most part. The name ‘maritime’ suggests a relation with the sea domain, but the concept is in truth not that basic. In fact, as opposed to naval power, maritime power does not investigate the sea for its own sake, but it also has influences on the land domain. As explained for the first time by Sir Julian Corbett, the foremost objective of maritime strategies is to keep lines of operations and lines of communications open (Gough 1988, 58-59). Drawing from this definition, the choice to consider the NSS a maritime strategy can be justified with the fact that it pertains a maritime region – the Near Seas and the South China Sea in particular – with the aim to protect China’s maritime lines within this theatre. As a matter of fact, the NSS relies almost entirely on the concept of Anti-access/Area-denial (A2/AD), a notion that has been made popular in the last years with reference to this exact case, whose core ideas are compatible with previous PRC naval/maritime strategic theorisation, as well as with the current situation and needs.

Traditionally, PLAN’s strategic concepts have been far from classic naval and maritime strategic thinking, which has in Mahan’s and Corbett’s thoughts its roots, and therefore foreign to concepts such as ‘fleet in being’. On the contrary, similarities can be seen with the French *Jeune École*, as well as with guerrilla tactics used during the civil war against national forces. Mao, whose rule was characterised by a firm focus on land, proposed the doctrine of ‘guerrilla warfare at sea’, which was coherent with the limited forces available at the time and with land-oriented preferences, implying the use of a brown/green water navy aimed at hindering, rather than stopping, the enemy (Murphy and Yoshihara 2015). Such idea stems from the need to understand the use of forces in a disadvantageous situation where the enemy has the upper hand in terms of strength, a situation that was true for Beijing in the 1950s, as well as today to a lesser extent. This work proposes that the A2/AD idea incorporates some of these elements, as its goal is to dissuade the enemy to operate, exert or try to gain control of a certain area by making it too costly in terms of losses, through an asymmetric response comprising of smaller vessels, submarines, aircrafts, missiles and rockets, and cyber and electronic warfare (EW) (Erickson 2014, 375). However, in its current state, the NSS is not limited to the aforementioned aspects and traditions.

Admiral Liu Huaqing, former head of the PLAN and CMC vice-chairman, was the most vocal proponent of a strategic shift within the PLAN, advocating for the need of a blue-water-oriented navy that included capital ships and was able to conduct specific and episodic operations further from the Chinese littoral (Cole 2013, 97). Liu’s ideas were only incorporated partially, but their presence can be seen in the efforts to acquire aircraft carriers, as well as in the acknowledgement that PLAN’s operational capabilities need to be extended to protect Chinese SLOCs in the Indian Ocean. The current state of Chinese maritime strategies is a union of the two natures, as the PLAN’s conception

of NSS strongly resembles the A2/AD deterrence method, but also incorporates two aircraft carriers; this work suggests that the PLAN merges A2/AD with a more classical notion of ‘command of the sea’, proposing what is here defined as *command-through-denial strategy*, where command means “control of maritime communications” (Corbett 1911; in Gough 1988, 59) and achieving command of the Near Seas is the result of successful area denial against chief enemy naval forces through dissuasion relying on asymmetric responses entailing naval and non-naval forces, with the intent to protect vital SLOCs and interests.

It is now necessary to explain what means shall be put in use to achieve denial and, eventually, command on the Near Seas. The most eye-catching novelty within PLAN forces is surely the adoption of two aircraft carriers – the Liaoning and the Shandong, respectively a reworked Kuznetsov-class STOVL and a STOVAR models – and the construction of a Type 003 carrier, which allows the incorporation of air into maritime power, extending the range and, thus, the capabilities of Chinese air forces in the region. The rest of the PLAN is composed of smaller-sized vessels – according to the A2/AD notions – such as frigates (Types 053, 054), corvettes (Type 056), destroyers (Types 051, 052, 055) and landing ships (Types 072, 073, 074) (Cole 2013, 100-101), and the submarine component (Erickson 2012), both of which have been involved in the Revolution of Military Affairs with Chinese Characteristics (Newmyer 2010; Gill and Ni 2019) and the modernisation efforts undergoing for the last decade. These processes have put an emphasis on submarines (Erickson 2012), as they are seen in theory as asymmetric tools increasing uncertainty due to their elusive nature, as well as being potentially able to reach beyond the first island chain undetected and strike.

Due to the nature of war, no kind of strategy can be reliable nowadays without encompassing air power, and this is no exception. Improvements and developments in air forces have also been prioritised in the last decade by the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and Naval Air Force (PLANAF), which has meant the adoption and design of new models, including fighters (Chengdu J-20 and prototypes of J-31) (Chan 2012), bombers (Xian H-20, in current development) (Chan 2020) and multi-role jets (Chengdu J-10), some of which have carrier-fitted variants (e.g. Shenyang J-11 and J-15). Missiles and rockets occupy a central role too (Erickson and Yang 2011; Erickson and Yuan 2011), as it is shown by the creation of the PLA Rocket Force (PLAARF) (Gill and Ni 2019) – previous II Artillery Force – as an independent component of the PLA, as well as by the development of new missiles, including anti-navy cruise and ballistic missiles (YJ-12, DF-17, DF-100 and DF-31) (Chan 2014; Makichuk 2020; Roblin 2020). PLA strategists also acknowledge the importance of corollary activities found under the category of Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) (Hekler 2011), as well as EW, anti-air warfare (AAW) and

unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) (Fisher Jr. 2011), and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) (Goldstein, Martinez and Murray 2011).

In conclusion, these findings allow to claim that the NSS is a conflict-oriented concept, dealing with the main concerns of the Chinese government, namely security across the Near Seas. Not only this is proven by numerical investigations and trends concerning primary sources, but it also confirmed by the emphasis that Beijing puts on its armed forces. These sources lack whatsoever reference to humanitarian or disaster relief missions; the authors analysed make clear that the purpose of this strategy pertains to the military realm, that the recent developments aim for increased capabilities in the Near Seas and, seeing how Chinese officials stated that “a military is built to fight” (Xi 2017), the author of this thesis can only agree on this point.

As the reader might have realised by this point, the answer to the research question is that the NSS *do not reflect* the CSFM. This is shown not only by the results regarding the trends in the sources selected, accordingly to the investigative framework outlined in Chapter 1, but also thanks to the additional qualitative analysis based both on numerical findings and secondary literature. This thesis has discussed the presumptive relation existing between foreign policies and strategies, and the reader might then wonder why there is no reflection between the subjects of this work. Therefore, one further step is necessary in order to address this discrepancy, which will be interpreted through the concept of Harmony in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: EXPLAINING THE DIVERGENCE

This final chapter serves two purposes, which corresponds to two section, as in Chapter 2: providing context to the divergence between CSFM and NSS through the perspective of Harmony and, eventually, drawing the final conclusion of this work, by summarising the most salient passages together and stating the argument again.

3.1 The perspective of Harmony

Section 1.3 has illustrated the meaning of Harmony and the main features of this traditional Chinese philosophical concept that finds a place in contemporary PRC's politics according to Xunzi's (re)interpretation and understanding of Confucius teachings (Rošker 2013). For the purpose of this thesis, it has been highlighted how the concept is present in foreign politics, and it has been argued that Harmony plays a role in shaping the characteristics and outlook that the international community or society shall have according to Beijing's vision.

The argument that this thesis proposes is that the divergence between CSFM and NSS can be explained by looking at the characteristics that an Harmonious society should have; in particular, if such Harmonious society expresses both a peaceful and a hierarchical nature at the same time (Roetz 2010, 322-23), they are understood to be reflected, respectively, by the CSFM initiative and by the NSS.

When taking the meaning of Harmony into consideration according to traditional Chinese cultural notions and history, Harmony means unity and peace, and it is opposed to chaos, which in turn means war and disaggregation (Kissinger 2011). During the imperial epoque, a unified and stable empire was seen as desirable, as it was better capable of protecting the population from external threats such as barbaric invasions, or of administering the land thanks to centralised authority. In short, 'Harmony' summarises a socio-political condition where the absence of conflict within a society determines prosperity for its members at every level.

On the other hand, times of conflict were seen as 'chaos'. Maybe due to the considerable extension of the country, Chinese history is full of conflicts spurring from internal struggles such as popular revolts, as in the cases of the Yellow Turbans Rebellion or the fall of the Yuan Dynasty. Typically, the demise of stable dynasties has meant times of political confusion, turmoil, and war within what today we call China; some of the clearer examples are the Three Kingdoms Era, the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period and, more recently, the Warlords Era following the Xinhai Revolution of 1911. As it is reasonable to expect, a country that has such a distinct history of internal struggles

values Harmony as a primary goal, aiming in practice for social cohesion, stability and unity within this framework. This passage also suggests the importance of a society that is hierarchically ordered, as only a strong and central authority was able to guarantee peace within the borders and a form of administration that, however unequal it might have been – especially if seen through the lenses of Western liberal values – it was certainly preferable to the uncertainties implied by prolonged periods of warring states. According to Xunzi, hierarchy held such a central place because of its ability to grant social cohesion and order among the population and feudal lords of Imperial China (Roetz 2010, 320).

As far as CSFM is concerned, the relation and similarities with the overall idea of Harmony appear to be clear. As the analysis in Section 2.1 has shown numerically and analytically, the main themes are peaceful development and cooperation. These two governing principles of the desired community of fellow states are indeed found in the concept of Harmony, in the importance attached to peace and prosperity. More specifically, the CSFM is depicted as a peaceful society, where cooperation is the standard for relations, where peace is the prerequisite for development and development itself is a goal, and where everyone benefits from said brotherly, both political and economic, relations.

However, the goal of a Harmonious society can only be reached when anarchy does not reign. On the contrary, the international arena (or society) is considered in this thesis as naturally anarchical, as the traditional IR schools of Realism has argued. If the PRC aims at the creation of a Harmonious society as the CSFM is, the matter of becoming the hegemonic ruler becomes central to the positive outcome of this goal: how can Beijing achieve such position?

The argument continues by proposing that the NSS is hugely relevant in the context of Chinese hegemonic aspirations, for two reasons. The first is related directly to crude power; having seen in fact in Section 2.2 the efforts directed towards the evolution of the Chinese armed forces, focusing in particular on the PLAN, PLAAF and PLARF, it is safe to argue that Beijing's military strength is increasing. Scepticism remains considerable, as it is worth wondering if Chinese forces pose a decisive threat to the superiority of US forces and their allies in the region, or to what extent the lack of training and combat experience can hinder actual Chinese capabilities in the case of a conflict. Nevertheless, the relevance of these efforts is not disputed, seeing how the CPC and PLA élites are determined to continue along this path, which is suggested by the construction of a third aircraft carrier above all, and how the translation of these efforts into actual military capabilities might in fact be a threat.

The second reason is related to the significance of development and economy for the PRC's position on the global stage. It has been previously explained what role economic growth has had in the

resurgence of China as a great power, as well as how development is currently a medium for relations between the PRC and numerous countries worldwide, according to the ‘commerce-is-development’ idea. This has highlighted how heavily Beijing relies on its commercial relations to boost its image abroad and to fuel its growth, and has given the reasons for the extreme relevance of the Malacca Strait and the Near Seas as the only channel for China’s trade flows and SLOCs. The main aim of the NSS has been defined as control-through-denial, meaning in practice that Beijing’s SLOCs could be secured or at least targeted less easily. Should Chinese armed forces manage to fulfil such goal, the PRC would be able to continue along its development- and trade-oriented policies undisturbed, further strengthening its position in other continents that are rich in resources, such as Africa, expanding its sphere of influence, and confirming its ability to sustain its growth with a plethora of positive effects, potentially allowing the PRC to become the hegemon in the region and, later, worldwide.

3.2 Conclusion

This section, the last of this work, contains the final conclusions, which will be stated after a brief summary of the main ideas and themes behind this thesis.

The goal of this paper was, in its conception, to bring a contribution to the broader issue of Chinese foreign politics and relations, the PRC being a protagonist country in many contexts within the international arena. The topic that was chosen is the relation that exists between foreign policy and strategies; specifically, the relation and supposed differences between CSFM and NSS, puzzled by the apparent discrepancies between these two elements of Beijing’s foreign politics.

The analysis of primary sources, organised according a numerical and qualitative method, has confirmed the hypothesis that these two dimension do not reflect each other and has highlighted what their different focuses are: win-win cooperation and peaceful development for the CSFM initiative and discourse, and security threats (SLOCs protection) and disputes related to the islands in the Near Seas, notably Taiwan, as far as the NSS is concerned.

Eventually, through the framework of Harmony, this work has argued that the fact of CSFM and NSS expressing two different natures can be explained through Xunzi’s understanding of the concept of Harmony. The goal of a Harmonious society, which is in fact peace amongst its member, can only be achieved through the establishment of a hegemonic hierarchy. In this regard, the NSS provides Beijing with tools to achieve such position, even at the cost of subordinating peace to the attainment of this goal and, potentially, accepting the eventuality of a conflict.

As much as this conclusion may be relatively limited in the vast world of China and its politics, by emphasising the relation between these two dimensions, it will hopefully bring a contribution to the subject by providing a different approach and perspective.

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