

CHAPTER III

THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS. A LATIN AMERICAN VISION

19

GLOBAL POWER, NOT A HEGEMON... YET: CHINA AND ASEAN BEFORE AND AFTER COVID-19

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I. LIMITS OF A GLOBAL POWER: A HYPOTHESIS

This chapter is devoted to depicting and analyzing the multilateral relations of the People's Republic of China (PRC, Beijing, Mainland) with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

As a starting point, my hypothesis is that China is a global power. However, it does not have international hegemony, nor regional one. It is capable and able of impose-negotiate its will on limited matters and on a few governments. It is part of many cooperative efforts, even has built or helped to construct some international institutions; however, Beijing has no power, ideas, and institutions yet to build an international order based on its hegemony. It means, China lacks force and organizational structure, as well as capability and ability to convince and enforce its will and be a hegemon. This assertion offers a framework to adequately understand what Chinese can perform and the extent of their policies designed to implement to ASEAN.

Having established the principal hypothesis, conducting thread of these pages, I present an underlying hypothesis that will order facts and arguments: this an analytical approach that offers a theoretical proposal to understand what the PRC is doing and can do, as well as its limits and the dynamics of its interactions with ASEAN. In another words: the best way to understand the behavior of the actors and establish the patterns of their behavior is through the combined use of various theoretical tools.

II. THEORY IS NOT A HOUSE OF CARDS

Theory gives foundations and pillars to comprehend a reality made of discourses, figures, masks, ambiguities, diplomacy, deceptions and perceptions. Without theoretical tools, construction of reality is just a house of cards.

In order to understand what is inside the framework of the exchanges ASEAN-the Mainland requires reviewing some theoretical approaches that will led us to apprehend Chinese proposals and actual international policies in South East Asia, followed by an explanation of some the domestic and international constraints faced by the dominant political elite. I am well aware that current bibliography exceeds the aims of this chapter. There are works that in a few chapters comprises the most important currents to approach the region (Pekkanen, Ravenhill, & Foot, 2014). My own approach is modest in scope, but focused on actors, agenda and space.

In the future, among other tools, academic community will build a hyperlinked set of theoretical approaches and concepts to study societal interactions.

Hegemony is a cardinal concept in international relations (IR) studies; therefore, it has components shared in most academic research and some issues are highly debated according to different schools' theoretical approaches. Historically, however its content was constructed for the political action, it has been recovered and popularized among IR scholars. Hegemony, according to this conceptual contribution (Gramsci, 1986), exists when the "line" of a hegemonic state-great power, no matter what, does not oscillate. Its actions are based in what is permanent, therefore powers impose their will on weak states. Gramsci's perspective is one of competition, force and imposition. Here I do not consider debates on the concept or its domestic application (Anderson, 2017).

Analyzing Gramsci's concept (Cox, 1983), it is possible to construct a set of variables to determine if a state has hegemony or not. To apply it, a researcher should consider when a hegemony begins and ends, that international institutions are means to develop institutions of ideology and its ideology, and the construction of historic blocs.

As I have explored somewhere else (Haro Navejas, *China's Relations with Central America and the Caribbean States: Reshaping the Region*, 2011), also from a Gramscian perspective, find patterns of international behavior there are two concepts, one is the war of position and the other one is war of manœuvre. The use of both will probe vital to achieve being a hegemon.

There is another approach (Keohane, 1984), that could be useful to be recovered nowadays. First of all, Keohane main concern is cooperation, not hegemony. Cooperation is fostered by hegemony. Secondly, it is not clear the difference, if necessary, between the noun, hegemony, and the adjective, he-

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gemonic. Third, even when hegemony could trigger cooperation by constructing international regimes, it is also a way to build means of cooperation. Keohane's proposal states that hegemony could diminish, but not cooperation.

Gramsci, Keohane and Cox, as many other, help us to construct a conceptual perspective to understand that, at this point, Beijing is at a crossroad. It has almost everything to be a hegemon, but not in the right place or moment, and not even in exact amounts. It has to surmount many obstacles, such as: systemic, China is an alien actor in the actual international system; perception, one of the weakest aspects, even worst in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is its negative image; spatial, its needs to find access to the Pacific Ocean and its effort to secure borders has helped Chinese making enemies; military, China has strengthening its muscle and getting involved in conflicts; cooperation, its power in this field it is not a global reality at this moment; culturally, one of its strongest assets, China raises suspicions about its interests behind its policy of cultural transmission/sharing.

The concept of hegemony/hegemonic/hegemon is a theoretical construct to understand limits and perspectives of China as a global power and a sometime-soon to be a hegemon. No matter how useful, it is insufficient to comprehend these pages topics. As long as Chinese actors and their interests grow spatially and in agenda, more and even new approaches will be needed.

III. TO WAR OR NOT TO WAR, IS THAT THE THEORETICAL APPROACH?

Under the current actions of the political and economic actors, every theory has been tested and there have been efforts not just to strength existing theoretical approaches, but even there are attempts to create new intellectual constructs. I myself consider that a single theoretical approach is not enough to understand China, not to mention to attempt foreseen its future behavior pattern. Theoretical proposals study specific actors and their interests, also particular environments are considered to analyze interactions across borders. Most of the time, it is better to use a couple of theoretical tools to have a better grasp of reality and actors that engage in it.

Contexts change, and actors evolve inside them. At the same time, they change contexts and contexts change them. In one of the classics of international relations academic discipline (Morgenthau, 1948), few months after the end of Second World War and few before the triumph of Mao Zedong, is pointed out the weight and line between the "two camps", United States and the Soviet Union, was so clear that China and India were not something to worry about in that present but in some uncertain future. As I stated, context has changed, as well as actors and the other way around. The time to worry is already here.

I do not intent to make a comprehensive discussion, not even a full depiction, of theoretical approaches devoted to China or even to ASEAN. My selection has been based in pragmatic or academic relevance of the approach, sometimes both are relevant.

From a historical perspective, there is a debate on the role of war as a main foundation of states. Following this assumption, China, not Europe, achieved “completeness of articulation” (Tilly, *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime*, 1985) from the upper side of the socio-political system and in this Asian territory there was not war between states but civil wars and rebellions (Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, 990-1990*, 1990). While there is a re-interpretation of the past, war had a relevance that Tilly did not perceive, new research fails to grasp the complex reality that surpasses subjugation of the “periphery” and the achievement or not of a binomial outcome of Chinese history: democracy-federalism (Hui, 2017).

For a relative long time, drums of war have been beaten in many arenas. Academic research has not been immune to this ideologically charged issue.

Leaning to the political position of Donald J. Trump, President of the United States, there is perception (Pillsbury, 2015) that states: China, without Americans knowing it, is making everything to supplant Washington as the “global hegemon”. In the process is constructing a new world order. This author tries to prove his position by proving that some assumption taken for granted are false, such as the idea that China will be a democracy. Rationalization in this side of the ideological spectrum is not clear enough about the final outcome of their ideas, but it seems that they could be willing to retort to war.

However, there are scholars (Mearsheimer, *Better be Godzilla than Bambi*, 2005), that wrote today’s argument since around 1994. History, mainly that of USA during the 19th century, shows that physical conflict is inevitable, mainly because China cannot rise peacefully. According to this school (Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2001), structural offensive realism, no power seeks status quo, all of them try to achieve the unachievable: global hegemony. Therefore, because of the structure of the international system the competition among powers is permanent and the only left option to survive is being a hegemon. Inside this box, destiny leaves no choice but confrontation with Washington as long as China grows.

There is another perception (Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?*, 2017), scholarly oriented, less ideological, that considers that a physical conflict China-USA is both unlikely and unwise. Here the emphasis is that humans, political actors, make decisions. There is no fatality in social processes. This hypothesis arose from a previous

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research on the Cuban missile crisis (Allison, *Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 1969) where we find three models that are used to explain international issues, that can be applied to explain and predict different situations: rational policy, organizational process, and bureaucratic politics. Allison's models could be strengthened with game theory (Kydd, 2015), mainly Chicken and pre-emptive war, applying them on highly competitive environments.

More in the idealist side of the theory, there are researchers about socialization (Kent, 202), who have proved how China's leaders learns inside international organizations and makes domestic changes as an outcome of what was learnt. It does not mean, in any sense, the Chinese governments behave always with same pattern or that they agree on every political matter. In fact, they are hard negotiators and do not accept everything on the grounds that they are protecting sovereignty and/or they have a market economy and yet China is a developing country.

Taking a closer look, the relation China-ASEAN give us a picture of mutual will to cooperate and change trough socialization: it is at least a multiple track relation where China pushes and ASEAN pulls (Sheng, 2008), it means that Beijing not only it not imposing its will, but the host organization has socialized the bigger partner, that willingly has learnt many lessons from ASEAN. Theory teach as that "actors who enter into a social interaction rarely emerge the same" (Johnston, 2001).

Giving relatives predominance of a theory over another one should be linked to changing political contexts. How actors have changed the contexts-institutions and how contexts-institutions have changed them.

China, in a first stage, was an eager learner of rules and procedures as a member of the General Assembly (GA) and of the Security Council (SC) of the United Nations Organization (UNO); then, with a wider experience as a socialized actor, it was a tough negotiator when negotiating its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO); in the Asia-Pacific Cooperation Forum (APEC) the Chinese government was militant because of Taiwan's presence and it was a ring to dispute Washington power; on the contrary, generally speaking, with ASEAN attitude has been positive, and yet with conflicts on specific issues, such as sea limits. China took a leap forward as the main driving force of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Haro Navejas & Hernández Mendoza, *La dimensión institucional en la relación ANSEA-OCS*, 2013), where its experience in ASEAN was fundamental to become not only organizer, but provider of ideas and material resources.

If the SCO was a successful attempt to build a regional organizations almost by its own, Xi Jinping has been in the road of openly claiming to be the main advocate of the free market, presenting himself as the leader capable

to displace any other peer, aiming a plan to alleviate structural-historical deficiencies of many countries related to infrastructure and productive investment and offering specific ideas to construct a new institutional order, among other propositions.

Xi Jinping is not looking to be a relevant actor in international affairs, institutional or not.

He pretends to be the playwright.

In order to deconstruct and reconstruct the play, multiple theoretical tools are needed. Multiple actors, interests, institutions, contexts, fast transforming environments, changing power balances, unknown variables (Covid-19) shape a system where uncertainty is the dominant feature.

Paraphrasing Gramsci's rationalization, it is possible to find an ideological continuum, a line, in politically irreconcilable Chinese elite groups that yearn for recuperate the place that supposedly China had in the international system. This line, in the mindset of the elite of the Communist Party of China (CPC), is the path to take China to the international hegemony.

The components that drive China in its seek of being a global-hegemon power are ideas, mainly an interpretation of history and specific policies to guide its international actions; ideas, that offer mind maps to act in global arenas; interests, that give a rational framework to implement its ideas that push Chinese actors to be successful securing raw materials and accessing foreign markets; institutions, that thanks to their rules Chinese could find certain degree of certainty to engage in trade exchanges, for example.

This trinity (ideas, interests, intuitions) needs the most important I. Identity is fundamental variable to understand Chinese actors' behavior. Identity explain how and why they act in particular way both domestically and internationally. Most important, identity is linked to ethnicity, history, culture, forefather, civilization and power. Identity is a way to build and exercise power.

If there is a Chinese issue closer to determinism that is identity. There is an ethnic identity with specific and particular components, such as biological, having one and single ancestor; culturalism, there is one and only cultivated civilization, with its distinctive language; history, where Chinese has been non-interrupted civilization for 6,000 years. Chinese identity flows and changes, even when some features remain or are shared by different social-political groups. Under de CPC, what is politically endemic in the mainland is a metaethnicity and or metaidentity: loyalty to CPC.

What drives Chinese actors and cements their society is the idea that China, the new China, exists because of the CPC. It does not matter to consider any other variable, even that they are important, loyalty to the Party is the variable of the elite in Zhongnanhai.

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IV. PURSUING GLOBAL LEADERSHIP: CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

PRC's dominant elites face many challenges and constraints that can be, for the purpose of analytical structure, domestic-intermestic and international.

Domestically, there is a historical long-term goal: maintain the CPC in power. Everything is subordinated to this premise that works as political principle and axiom. It does not mean, by any chance, that China and its institutions have not changed since 1949. Quite the opposite, state, government, and non-government institutions have been transformed but there are new organizational structures. However, because historical, spatial and demographic variables there is a permanent conflict and tendency to crash between centripetal and centrifuges forces. No matter if a political or economic actor try to control the center or separate from it, at some point every force is centrifuge as *sine qua non* condition to achieve enough political strength to reach whatever aim is seeking. Some possible outcomes are: relative profits, where a centrifuge position is a negotiation tool and a centripetal force maximizes its profits by being in the margins of central power; total failure when a centrifuge force adopts maximalists positions and/or the center crushes a social movement demanding political transformations or members of a non-Han, mainly from Tibet or Xinjiang, aspire to build an independent state; finally, different levels of victory, when a centrifuge actor becomes centripetal and fights those who undermine the central government, at least as it is perceived in Beijing.

From a Chinese official perspective, what Xi Jinping, President of the PRC and General Secretary of the CPC, has done and is doing is avoiding the victory of many centripetal forces: he defeated Bo Xi Lai and ascended, first, to the CPC's leadership and, second, to the presidency; he has devoted a lot of energy in hanizing Xinjiang with an impetus never seen before regarding one of the so-called national minorities; Xi tightened political control on Hong Kong, first, through Carrie Lam, Chief of the Executive, and with her failure, directly with the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SCNPC, 2020), enacted by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (SCNPC) of the PRC, June 30th, 2020 and promulgated the same date by the Chief of the Executive.

From both Chinese legal and political perspectives, all these developments concern to its sovereignty. However, because of broader implications and government actions have led to intermesticity of apparently mere domestic issues. The first, because of the murder of a British citizen, Neil Heywood, and Wang Lijun, the then local leader of the local police, fleeing to the American consulate in Chongqing made two governments had a non-desired participation. The intermestic features in Xinjiang and Hong Kong are

apparent. Xinjiang, a strategic part of Central Asia, contains natural resources and a population that flow beyond spatial, administrative and cultural borders that by itself is intermestic. By looking for international governments support, Beijing globalizes what considers a domestic issue. Because its spatial situation, as well, economic and financial weight and, most important, the political awareness of a vast amount of citizens, many interests concur and collude in the islands, what makes Beijing to send multiple messages to multiple actors and confront them, for example, with to articles in the above mentioned law: article 38 states that a person can commit a crime against Hong Kong abroad and could be punished.

The leadership of Xi Jinping has two main policies of international scope: the Chinese Dream-National Rejuvenation of the Nation and the Belt and Road Initiative. The first one was Xi's a political and ideological proposal to access to the party leadership as a final step to reach the presidency. The second one has been his guide to deepening Chinese presence in a growing number of economies. Chinese president has aspirations of planetary scale. The tandem Chinese Dream-Rejuvenation of the Nations is the ideological engine and the historic aim. It is both a circular and linear perspective. It is circular because it pretends to be again what they allegedly were before some time in past history. It is linear because elites, scholars and politicians alike, see a historical continuum that goes straight from a remote past, 6,000 thousand years ago, to the future, 2050.

Beijing has a strong short-term ally, Russian Federation. Their closeness will last as long as Moscow consider it is profiting from China's economic advantages and build its power by weakening the United States. In the long-run Moscow and Beijing have mutually exclusive global and regional goals. Even when Russians lack a general set of goals similar to those of Chinese. Both pretend to be global hegemony, now share certain control on Central Asia, each one of them has interests in the north, just to name a few issues.

As long as the present status quo between Pakistan and India does not substantially change, the only trustful friend that Beijing so far has is Islamabad. China is doing everything at its reach to become the power pouring money and infrastructure projects in many countries, such as Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Historical reasons, mainly with Viet Nam, and China's growing expansionism into the China Sea make impossible that literally almost any country belonging to ASEAN country willingly accepts China's leadership. If Beijing expects that to happen, it should displace and/or defeat Washington, convince its regional partners that does not pretend to be a colonial power or by using force them that Beijing is the hegemon in this area.

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V. CHINA-ASEAN, THE INSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL DIMENSION

Chinese elites, especially those that have arisen along the construction, evolution and triumph of the CCP, consider they have as their main historical tasks recover the *grandeur* of Chinese civilization, the cyclical perspective of history; becoming a global power leading the fights of the Chinese people since the Opium Wars as stated in the Constitution, the linear conception of history.

That is the easy part of a research focused on foreign policies. It is crystal clear what Beijing seeks. Problems appear when determining how-means-behavior. The first is a set multidimensional policies that swing from physical violence to cultural exchanges. Means are institutions, money and ideas. Behaviors cover, one extreme, seduction supported by an impressive cultural past, and also, on other side, different types of threats. There are other considerations: when, it is represented by political contexts; who, it is the actors and roles in the international arena and policies implementations; and why, it is the general, historical tasks, or specific goals related to trade or sea limits, that are (pre)texts to achieve the first ones.

Because of its own and inner transformation, ASEAN evolved from a loose anti-communist alliance at the end of 60s, when there was a regional induced terror in the context of the American army combating against the Viet Cong in Viet Nam, to an organizational structure devoted to pursue regional integration, while each member is protecting its sovereignty trying to profit from their comparative advantages, cheap-abundant labor-consumer people and raw materials, as well as from Chinese market looking for not engage in competition with no possible victory.

Economic gains have not been an obstacle to suspect about Chinese intentions or a double discourse. Mutual trust has been difficult to build.

Beijing understood that to be successful with its Southern neighbors, it needed to be committed with their organizational process. Main tool used by every actor was double-edge option: cooperation and institutionalization. Not even for a single day, Chinese have abandoned its aspiration get free access to the Pacific Ocean. However, they were building abilities and capacities to act in complex sets of multiple actors and interests interacting in different spaces of mixed cooperation and conflict.

Chinese politicians were not inclined to forget their historical aspirations, but they were with disposition to learn from the ASEAN. Being a leader, a hegemon, in the region requires to strengthen the existent institutions, deepening cooperation and even compete with traditional, Japan, and new cooperators, South Korea. Beijing, beyond trade and/or investment, was successful in becoming part of the ASEAN's structure. From a socialization conceptual approach, Beijing was successfully socialized. Its conduct, gener-

ally speaking, followed the institutional rules existing in the region. When problems arise, ASEAN offers a negotiation framework to solve disputes. At the same time, Beijing institutional activism can be considered part of its ear of position to increase its possibilities of being a hegemon.

China not only learned, followed and respected the organizational structure of ASEAN. Socialization worked, even it went as far as to help constructing the SCO considering the former as a model (Haro Navejas & Hernández Mendoza, *La dimensión institucional en la relación ANSEA-OCS*, 2013). What gave China more positions.

Chinese diplomacy acts in many multi-directional tracks and multi-ring stages. Beijing performs many plays with a growing number of actors. While flows and negotiates in the framework of ASEAN, constructs the SCO, builds its space at the doors of the Pacific Ocean, engages in particular bilateral interactions with every government of the region.

Beijing has its own idea of how to build institutions, it is an incremental way where and when it has control of the agenda. Before the One Belt, One Road Initiative, there was the strategic partnerships, initiative that is not extinct yet. According to Chinese academics (Feng & Huang, 2014), Beijing has been using it, they express, as a successful policy to engage in bilateral relation since 1993 when the first strategic partnership was reached with Brazil. It is an instrument that is combined with multilateralism. This kind of partnership differentiates levels of relations, which are not all the same, characteristic not always apparent. At some point, it was thought it could a step in the road to build what was called a New Type of Major-Power Relationship with Washington.

From my perspective (Haro Navejas & Hernández Mendoza, *Viaje al oeste. La Asociación Sino-Mexicana: una posibilidad funcionalista*, 2016), among other assets, the partnership's international policy strengthened Beijing's image of a global partner not of a threat. From a functionalist proposal, it does not pay attention to values but to shared interests.

Out of several objective variables and subjective considerations, ASEAN, its region, has been highly important to the PRC. They have a shared history of conflicts, border disputes, cultural and trade exchanges, among many other. Migration flows that can be politically relevant since the Chinese communities, old and new, have been more outspoken and active in domestic politics. Sometimes without a party, their social capital and support from Beijing make them strong stakeholders. Trade and investment count, but people are the subject that engages in both and many more activities.

It is clear that China needs ASEAN on its side, not only as a market, but as a mean to reach hegemony by a socialization process: multilateral institutional cooperation. The process has been long and complicated. It was only

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in July 1991, when Chinese government, represented by Qian Qichen, then the Minister of Foreign Affairs, began the ASEAN-China Dialogue; in 1996, Chinese were granted the full Dialogue Partner status. A highest peak was achieved in October 2003, when the parties signed the Joint Declaration of the Heads of State/Government of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the People's Republic of China on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (ASEAN, 2012).

This declaration, as it can be expected, review what was achieved by the parties since 1997 in politics, economics, security, international affairs, and so on. The declaration set the framework for the future based on United Nations Charter, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TACSA), which is mostly a non-Chinese framework, and the Five Principle of Peaceful Coexistence.

Parties agreed on many issues, such as: A) In political cooperation they decided integrate China to the TACSA, keep consultations regarding Chinese access to the Protocol to the Treaty on the Southeast Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone. B) In economic cooperation the plan was to foster and conclude negotiations on the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement, as well as having Chinese cooperation in several projects in almost every country of the region. C) In terms of social cooperation, it was agreed on a launching mechanisms in the public health sector and increase exchanges in science and technology. D) In the sector of security cooperation, they were ready to tackle non-traditional issues and, even more transcendent, employ the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. E) In terms of international cooperation, the important agreements were that China would support the ASEAN Regional Forum, make the ASEAN + 3 the main channel to accomplish regional integration, China supports Lao and Viet Nam membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and respect the different paths of development.

Beyond the specific issues negotiated with China, trade or security, from the theoretical perspective and taking in account the building of the institutional future, ASEAN have struggled to make Beijing accept and abide its conduct by the regional institutional rules and political behavior. What is asked from the Chinese is to accept ASEAN's institutional role, where the TACSA is crucial.

ASEAN has been transforming itself in many ways. The evident is its membership. The organization was founded in 1967 under the wings of Washington. Its purpose was to develop and integrate the region to promote peace and stability, i.e. avoid the victory of political forces considered communists. The first countries in the organization were Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. In 1984 Brunei entrance was granted.

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Viet Nam was accepted in 1995, Myanmar as well as Lao in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999.

Accepting new partners, even some of them outside the region, has meant, first that ASEAN transcendence has grown and is considered a key global institutional actor, not just regional; second, its principles and regulations needed to be changed. That is why the TACSA is important.

This treaty was signed in February 1976. Its main changes have been in 1987, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2009. Its first signatories were the five original ASEAN members: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei signed in 1984; Lao and Viet Nam in 1992; Cambodia and Myanmar in 1995; China and India in 2003; Japan, Pakistan, South Korea, Russia in 2004; New Zealand, Mongolia, and Australia in 2005; France in 2006; in 2007, signed Bangladesh and Sri Lanka; meanwhile, North Korea in 2008. United States in 2009. In 2010 Canada and Turkey. European Union, United Kingdom and Brazil in 2012; Norway in 2013. In 2016 signatories were Chile, Egypt and Morocco. Iran and Argentina indorsed the treaty in 2018. Finally, Peru was part of it since 2019.

Interacting with partners show diplomatic abilities, also it is the idea that is easier to deal with China in a multilateral environment. In its 1976 version (ASEAN 2016), there is a document of five chapters and 20 articles. This treaty stresses cooperation, avoiding any activity that threatens each other sovereignty, among other issues. The core of the text, essential aspect of any institutional socialization process, is chapter IV that contains what has been key in any international organization or agreement: pacific settlement of disputes. The parties agree in not using the force in any conflict and they would use good offices, mediation, inquiry and/or conciliation. All the parties must agree on applying the agreement, otherwise cannot be used. This content essentially remains in newest versions (ASEAN, 2012).

China arrived late to and already existent organizational structure. It does not matter how strong has growth its political and economic power, Beijing had to construct multidimensional politics and implement them in parallel times and situations. In the process of attaining a hegemony that Chinese think they deserve and are ready to perform, they play with ASEAN's rules and negotiate changes. Cooperation becomes essential in the way to hegemony; its exercise requires incremental cooperative games that could help to change rules and structures according to their image. At the same time, it does exist another set of variables, domestic military-oriented ideas and Washington policies, that pushes Beijing to be aggressive to recover, so they say, what belongs to their country in the South China Sea, but not just there. These variables belong to the field of war of manœuvre.

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In the political realm, Beijing is part of the efforts made by ASEAN to strength this organization by bringing it to the cooperative efforts and institutionally framing part of the competitiveness of China with south Korea and Japan.

Something similar is happening in the economic realm.

VI. CHINA-ASEAN, THE INSTITUTIONAL ECONOMICAL DIMENSION

From the socialization conceptual approach, on the long run, what matters is not trade exchanges by themselves; but socialized actors, who build-strength institutions and respect rules.

An aspiring hegemon, such as China, needs to construct its own and powerful international actors, not just those belonging to the state and not just domestic. Those actors arise in the development of strengthening the domestic economic and going abroad seeking for markets to get goods and consumers. At least it is the beginning of the process.

Bilaterally, China negotiates and, when necessary, flicks the wrist of its partners. Multilaterally, other behaviors are expected. Moreover, countries, like those belonging to ASEAN, find easier to negotiate with a power, even an hegemon in construction, in a multilateral context. In the process, it discovers more convenient and profitable bandwagoning and/or balancing for many reasons (Roy, 2005). It could be for security concerns.

In the relations China-ASEAN, there has a been a long process of socialization where the old and new members alike are compelled to be part of this process, not for the sake of trade, but for the demands of the socialization itself.

Hard negotiators as they are, Chinese have approached the trade relation with the ASEAN in an institutional framework. The first important deal was the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation, November 2002 to eliminate tariffs and the so called behind-the-border barriers, as well as to increase cooperation and investment. Main goal that parties set was achieved in January 2010 the establishment of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA). Its main issues were trade in goods and services, investment early harvest program, and the transcendental mechanism of dispute settlement.

Also, an Agreement on Trade in Goods was indorsed in November 2004. It has suffered several amendments with the aim of stablishing rules to eliminate tariffs, at least most of them.

Before going any further, in 2004, China and ASEAN signed an Agreement on Dispute Settlement Mechanism of the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Co-Operation. Beginning with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), every economic integration effort includes

this type of deal. Differences not only will not disappear, but because growing trade exchanges and deeper integration disputes will increase.

Two articles are the backbone of the agreement. Under article 5, every party, in a dispute, “at any time agree” to resort to conciliation or mediation, being sure that their confidentiality will be preserved. In the next article, 6, schedules are established and, even more important, it is explained how an arbitral tribunal could be appointed (Enterprise Singapore, NA).

The organizational structure, ambitious and complex, shows how difficult has been to build mutual trust. It seems that motto has been better complexity than ambiguity that could led to conflicts. The peak of the structure is the above mentioned ACFTA that summarizes dozen of prior negotiation and set the foundations for a deeper integration. It is the outcome of years of negotiation, China was the first non-ASEAN party to sign a free trade agreement.

It has been a permanent socialization and economic integration process, where rules change actors and, at the same time, actors change rule. Once actors are engaged in a dynamic of building and achieving mutual trust, rules are easier to negotiate and relations flow with one more process. In a spillover process, with no ultimate goal at sight, like the European Union, both bi and multilateral agenda, increases integration, actors and issues grow. Integration is accomplished, up to a point.

The highest degree of integration is the Protocol to Amend the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Co-operation and Certain Agreements thereunder between ASEAN and the People’s Republic of China (ASEAN, 2015). It is a document that covers almost every aspect of the trade multilateral relation. It has six chapters of different number of articles. Amendments to previous agreements in 22 pages on rules of origin and trade facilitation, trade in services, investment, economic and technical cooperation, and future work program. The heaviest and important part, a little more than 500 hundred pages, are the annexes that cover rules of origin, originating goods, goods wholly produced or obtained, goods not wholly produced or obtained, calculation of regional value content, accumulation, minimal operation and processes, direct consignment, de minimis, treatment of packing materials, packages and containers, accessories, spare parts and tools, neutral elements, identical and interchangeable materials, certificate of origin, consultations, review and modification. There is attachment A, with the procedures for the rules of origin, it has 26; then attachment B, it is about product specific rules. There is a section where every ASEAN member has a schedule of specific commitments by sector/subsector, limitation on market access, limitation on national treatment, and additional commitments. Finally, there is the reference paper and links with WTO agenda.

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It is the successful outcome of a double process of negotiation-socialization: same rules to every party. At the same time, it is an uneven process and every party has specific commitments. At this point it Chinese-ASEAN looking for deepest cooperation, no matter what happens in the South China Sea that is not everybody's problem, at least not in the same dimension.

Asymmetry between China and its Southeast Asia partners is colossal: population, spatial area, economy size, political system, army capabilities, anything. However, it possible to see huge asymmetry clearly by comparing their global ambitions and capabilities to fulfil them. Some of them, like Singapore or Thailand, could aspire to be regional powers and be the leader building consensus and alliances to facilitate bandwagoning in contexts of uncertainty and dispute between global powers. It is not idle to say that China is already a global power looking for hegemony to begin with in Southeast Asia.

Beijing has learnt how the international system and its institutions work, then became an active and purposeful actor. In the negotiations with the World Trade Organization (WTO), it was able to obtain most of its aspirations without jeopardizing its sovereignty, one of its best negotiations have been with ASEAN and it is the main partner. Even more, Beijing was and is the engine of the SCO.

Since Xi Jinping is president, and even months before, discourse and behavior patterns have changed fast. It is another era, where victimization is about to be fully left behind. There is a policy, One Belt-One road, that began spatially constrained. It has expanded, becoming global. It covers almost any portion of the planet and any issue.

Even more important that the policy, there is a political will to be a global superpower.

Trump is not giving up his country position as a leader. Quite the opposite.

He has a sort of a policy to develop a deinstitutionalization and demulti-lateralization process. His aim is reconstructing the international system, its institutions and agreements. He pretends to change the rules of the game, what means make less concessions to any government, convince his allies spend more money in security, change flows and directions of trade, bring back to American soil companies. In a few words, Trump pretends to build an American empire with China more as a colony, not a system with shared power and responsibilities. A new order under its aegis.

Xi has seen this situation as an opportunity to be the leader of free trade and its institutions. Opportunity that has been weakened with the outburst of the COVID-19, Beijing has faced problems of credibility on its way to deal with the pandemics as well as well as its means and ways to interact with the World Health Organization (WHO). Beijing responses have been, like always, multidimensional. In tweeter, aggressive; behind the stage, hard to

avoid any embarrassment and demanding; in public, a generous power pouring money and medical goods anywhere.

Chinese dominant elites' perceptions about the world and they place are different now. That is a problem that has been there in the relation with ASEAN, but it will be more apparent every day.

Beijing, from now on with stronger determination than before, it is not seeking a North America kind of arrangement or a European sort of integration. In the relation China South-East Asia does not exist the same equilibriums as in any other part of the worlds. Most of all, they lack the Chinese perspective of history and of the future.

The ASEAN-China relation has begun another phase, where the unexpected, few months before, an unknown variable, is the main issue in the interaction and the tool to negotiate. It is a matter of material resources, also about health public policies and how to handle a crisis. In sum, how to manage the crisis and take advantages of the counterpart weakness.

VII. CHINA-ASEAN, THE COVID-19 DIMENSION

Xi and his team have seen the pandemic outcomes as a context that facilitates their international empowerment. China has stopped massive contagious, it is financially and medically capable to help others to face the public health problems, tries to put an end to the crisis in Hong Kong, at the same time that tightens its grip in Central Asia. Any news agency, Chinese or not, has informed in July 2020 that its economy has avoided recession and it ready to be the engine of the global economy.

As in anything else, Chinese international interactions are multidimensional. One of its favorite stages remains to be the South China Sea. Meanwhile most governments and populations have the pandemic as their main concern, Beijing navy forces have been highly actives with everybody paying attention and US doing its part to face these movements.

Members of ASEAN, as it was established before, have different perceptions and interests in the conflict. Nonetheless, they have had to face Beijing policies. Since November 2013, Beijing established the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) pretending to impose traffic restrictions. In a similar fashion, it has been trying to implement the same policy in the South China Sea since 2010 and are parallel actions to the constructing of islands. The new ADIZ, that is not official yet, includes the Pratas, Paracel and Spratly islands (Chan, 2020)

Gathered in Vietnam, members of ASEAN discussed about COVID-19 and other issues. Out of 66 items, government leaders devoted two, 64 and 65, to express their distresses and perspectives about the South China Sea. In the first one, they reaffirm that is important to have "peace, stability, safety

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and freedom of navigation”, ASEAN stresses how important is to implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, which is consistent with the United Nations Law of Sea (UNCLOS). Also, they insist in keeping negotiations to have a code of conduct. In item 65, ASEAN representatives express their concerns “on the land reclamations, recent developments, and activities and serious incidents”. In this paragraph insist in the pacific solution of controversies according to the UNCLOS and states that recent development “have eroded trust and confidence”, which “may undermine peace, security and stability” (ASEAN, 2020).

ASEAN has pursued for many years about having a code of a mutual conduct. Negotiations have been arduous, complicated, but with positive outcomes in the past. The main output, a multilateral document (ASEAN, 2002), establishes commitment with the international law, the already mentioned UNCLOS; regional agreements, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South East Asia; and of course, a Chinese input, the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. ASEAN, together with China, among their main commitments, will build trust and confidence, reaffirm their respect to the freedom of navigation and overflight, they said they should self-restraint in anything that could escalate a conflict and will abide by peaceful settlement of controversies. Every party may look to engage in cooperative activities.

At this moment in history, future negotiations on the COC seem to be inevitable, even the very same implementation of the 2002 Framework is ruled out.

Since reality is multidimensional, so are Chinese actions. Even ASEAN members have multiple policies. Meanwhile Beijing is building itself as a hegemon, ASEAN seeks not to be rolled over by China. It is out of the question a physical encounter; costs would surpass benefits. Under the actual circumstances, both parties, Beijing and ASEAN, will continue, at least as an aspiration, to talk about negotiation and the COC. The first, at the same time, will keep advancing in the South China Sea; and the second, will cling to defending the organizational framework, institutions and documents.

Chinese are not giving up pacific actions as a mean to become a hegemon. For its part, ASEAN, among other things, cannot run away of a complex integration that give them a market to export and a source of investment. Bandwagoning is an option to get the best from Japan and South Korea, also markets and investments, as well as aid, and some sort of security in military terms.

In March 13th, in a video conference (ASEAN, 2020), health experts from China and ASEAN had a meeting to find ways of common responses and cooperation. Some of the issues they agreed on are as follows: Enhancing

public health emergency responses, sharing technical information to improve competences in prevention, detection and response, strengthening cooperation in hazard communication, improve dialogue on drugs and increase mechanisms to prevent, detect and respond to health menaces.

ASEAN and its three East Asian partners held a special encounter, April 14th, on COVID-19 (ASEAN, 2020). They agreed on 18 resolutions, where stand out these issues: strength the existing warning system and sharing information, enhance capacities to respond and have medicine, strengthen scientific cooperation, encourage multidirectional support to train human resources, implement measures to keep markets free and help business, reinforce measures to stabilize chain of manufacturing and supply, keep alert to avoid financial crisis, and promise to work with the WHO.

Few weeks later, May 29th, explicitly with similar agenda that the former (ASEAN, 2020), a higher meeting was held between ASEAN economic ministers and their Chinese counterpart, to talk about COVID-19 and strengthening cooperation in the framework of ACFTA. This type of meetings demonstrates an existing competition among the non-region partners and every one of them demands its own political space. This statement has specific topics. Beijing thanks ASEAN members and private actors their support, both in kind and in cash. ASEAN responds in similar terms. In point number 6, they stress that the ACFTA will trigger trade, investment and growth, as an instrument to facilitate free flow of trade. They will defend free, open, transparent, non-discriminatory exchange of goods. Their mutual goal is to create, in WTO, a predictable environment to business and investment.

What was the unknown variable in 2020, COVID-20, became the axis of the multilateral cooperation China-ASEAN AND ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan and South Korea). The pandemics helped them to begin more institutionalized multilateral cooperative efforts in at least two levels: the ASEAN + 3 and ASEAN with one each of them.

VIII. MISLEADING CONCEPT, ELUSIVE FUTURE: SOME REFLECTIONS

Because of the growing USA-China conflict with no end at sight, and some other important variables, the international system is changing in a speed non-seen in many decades. It is hard to grasp it. It is harder to understand it and to create-recover the right concepts.

The idea prompted by media, followed by politicians and even some analysts, is that the world is living or will live in the near future a cold war.

It is misleading in so many ways. First, history, the social processes, is not linear, nor cyclical. Also, it would seem that there is only one way and solution. There are many distorted aspects: there is no an agreed status quo with rules more or less fixed to provide, with international institutions to buffer

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conflicts between powers, certain amount of stability; there is no postwar Germany, as a permanent source of uncertainty and armed conflict; global powers have no agreements on sphere of influences, what exist are remnants of prior processes; forget agreements, there is no hard evidence of a Stalin's mentality that occupying a country could mean imposing, military, an alien social system (Judt, 2005).

This chapter sheds light on some major academic issues that could have practical implications that are not of my research agenda.

I have shown that China has to rely in multidimensional policies to, someday in the near future, achieve hegemony, at least at the regional level. In many aspects, it is the stronger economy in the area, and it has more power than any of its partners. Chinese power is supported with ideas, interests and institutions to achieve its goals at some point in forthcoming times. What gives Chinese elite more strength is its autoconstructed identity that is a locomotive to go abroad to become a hegemon.

Elites in Beijing are engaged in one war of positions, ASEAN, and in one war manœuvre, accessing to the South China Sea in a complex context.

Most issues faced by China, and by ASEAN for that matter, are intermestic from its very inception. No matter how hard Beijing attempts to keep almost everything enclosed inside its borders, sooner than later, the Chinese government goes to the international level to prove it is right and to ask for support from its peers. It can be Xinjiang or COVID-19.

What in politics is seen as an anomaly, it is considered normal in economics, where intermesticity is an accepted rule. Main difference: what it is not acceptable in politics, international regulations that give certainty, is not just needed but welcomed in economics. Politically, cession of sovereignty is not acceptable.

It has been hypothesized and exposed that China has no hegemony, therefore is not a hegemon, yet. This assertion was fortified with the proposal of using several theoretical approaches. One theoretical perspective is insufficient to construct and analyze reality. Under this perspective, even powers can be socialized, and it is useful for all the parties involved in the process. Asymmetry among partners and historical aims of China complicate the environment and the future of negotiations.

It is obvious that Beijing political dominant elite, as the previous elites, seeks being a global power, a hegemon. What is no apparent is how the process work, the way politicians behave and the different forms that they pretend to obtain what they see as their attainable historic aims. Even more difficult is to pretend foresee the actual outcomes of the disputes in progress.

Interpretation of history, domestic and international political socialization, perception of the intentions of the other, pressure of social actors, economic

situation, and state of political legitimacy are just a few of the variables to be studied and to construct an analysis to understand Chinese international actors or any actor for that matter.

Here, I presented a few variables, mainly those related with institutionalization and cooperation, but some linked with conflict were not displaced. Under the proposal of a double hypothesis: China has not all the material and ideological instruments to be a hegemon. In order to comprehend this, scholars have to use several and combined theories.

Theorists, mainly in USA, are in two groups: those who believe that conflict is avoidable and those who consider otherwise. Groups are heterogenous and both try to influence politicians, however the second group is full of persons that have seen the policy on China as a moral crusade.

Even in a war, there are some open communication channels, most of the time they are non-public. The context, global and regional, is one where China and the United States are playing the chicken game, where the set of options are reduced to the minimum, one where players can lose control of variables and the actions of other actors now under their power.

Interactions ASEAN-China take place in a highly competitive, complex, verbal violence, growing tensions in the South China Sea and, among many other issues, diplomatic clashes dominated for tit-for-tat retaliations. And yet some negotiation spaces still exist.

Trade agreements are not easy. Its negotiations can take years. Finally, at some time, negotiations end. It is possible to measure everything, and experts create formulas to solve practically anything. As I have shown here, agreements create institutional frames where certainty is sought by the parties and help to build trust that led to spillovers that in return will build more confidence and institutions increasingly transnationals... to some extent.

There are two problems. One is what is at stake in the South China Sea, the second is what Chinese elites are looking for.

Where feelings, points of view on history, territorial claims based on what the space was supposed to be like before, or anything that is hardly measurable and objectively demonstrable are involved, it is almost impossible to reach an agreement. In fact, it is impossible to negotiate when a leadership, with power, means and will, expects beforehand to get a specific outcome and not another different. There is nothing left to be done.

Actors, some of them and in some issue, are playing zero-sum games. That is the game China plays in the South China Sea, which does not happen in other realms.

In order to be a hegemon, Beijing makes decisions and already acts like one. Its global policies are multidimensional, and yet differentiated and they are a statement. China needs access to the Pacific Ocean: cannot have any

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kind of hegemony if does not happen. It is trapped by the regional order built since the Second World War. Hence it does not care about any territorial claim coming from ASEAN or from some of its members. On one track, there is a policy of cooperation to face the pandemics; on the other, the military advance to construct its own sea space and power.

History helps to understand how actors were shaped and socialized. Through history, we can get glimpses about the decisions they will take in the future. Nonetheless, contexts change, dominant elites also are not always the same. Some actions seem clearest, some are grayest. For decades, the pattern of actions with and against India seem to have an understandable pattern, what does not happen with Viet Nam, were Beijing seems to be erratic and with no logic. In fact, with most countries, patterns are there, even with Washington and Trump. It is not different with ASEAN.

It does not mean that could be possible to determine how is going to be the future of China and the decisions politicians will make. What we can see in the interactions China-ASEAN is that Beijing is in another phase of its process in the path to be a hegemon. It has determined what is seeking and will not stop until it gets what it wants. About certain issues, Chinese will act no matter what international organizations and/or governments think. Now the PRC is designing and implementing cooperation policies, but it is becoming more aggressive and assertive.

Institutions does not end conflicts. Establish rules to manage them, settle differences and establish foundations to provide certainty. It is impossible to expect wars end because of organizations. Again, there are unknown variables, many actors, and multiple interests that make impossible to control all of them.

The end of an era, American hegemony, seems to be at sight; a new institutional structure is far to exist; and new historic blocs are in the making process.

Offensive realism tries to determine that war is inevitable. If it does not happen tomorrow or next year, it will sometime in the future because it is a tragic destiny of states that interact in a system that make states inevitably go to war.

Just like the end of the world, will it happen? Will be a sort of fate be more important than human decisions?

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