

CHINA

The “ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS”: HOW DOES IT COULD SURVIVE?

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the main structural foundations of China’ state model and to contribute for a prospective view on the future of the “one country, two systems”, at a time when Taiwan reaffirms to reject the Beijing’s “reunification” strategy, and the Hong-Kong and Macau’s autonomy, as settled in the Basic Laws, are approaching to the deadline.

In this regard, it also aims to trace the bi-line of Xi Jinping’s thought about China’s evolution, in domestic and international terms, as well as the incidence of the “socialism with Chinese characteristics” on this evolution, taking in the account the discrepancies, the ambiguities and contradictions of the “one country, two systems” in the light of the socialist regime and China’s one party-rule.

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Introduction

Despite the growing importance of the Portuguese-China relationships – two countries having a long history of bilateral contacts because of Macau –, and the increasing presence of China in the world, it’s difficult to find in Portugal enough specialized studies on the modern China. The most probable reason for this reality could be priorities of Portugal’s external policy much more focused on the Portuguese Speaking Countries, on the transatlantic relationships and on European Union. So, the Western world and its correlated links with other geographies have been the principal dominium of the Portuguese academic studies mostly designed by strategic and political approaches, and by feelings of proximity on what related to a common civilization, culture, and democratic

values. In fact, a part of the geographical distance factor, civilization has worked as a structural barrier between Portugal and Asian countries.

The status of Macau under the Portuguese administration and its real character of a “missionary colony”, more than a commercial warehouse, didn’t call to the Portuguese scholars’ attention to develop studies on China’s political evolution. The opposing political regimes of both countries also helped this situation. Even the Macau’s handover to China did not influence a different point of view, as the small number of specialized studies on China can testify.

After Portugal and China’s diplomatic rapprochement (at the end of the eighties), and due to China’s growing presence in the Portuguese economy (since 2011), another attitude begun to emerge inside the Portuguese academic sphere. However, studies on China’s economic, political and social evolution are still a small number.

Even foreign studies translated into Portuguese are of a very limited expression, but none dedicated to the “one country, two systems”.

Moreover, to deal with the “one country, two systems” seems to be a real challenge as this is a very sensitive political matter that offers contradictory perspectives depending on the opposing ideological camp observers can talk about it.

As many use to say China is a mysterious country, despite having adopted some of the western rules. Continuity *versus* modernity are then two different sides of the “one country, two systems”, from which the modern China was born. The impact of this subject on the way the Chinese society and its leaders have to face is not China’s exclusive, even if it can cause many perplexities and disruptions in the country. It must be seen as mix of tradition and modernity, where western influences paid their part in the game.

Taking this in account is understandable why the “one country, two systems” has so little representativeness in studies on China.

So, to find titles on these matters, in Portugal, was like an adventure, the reason why this study is barely an essay where many settled questions have no conclusions.

Several difficulties can be appreciated all along the present study, due to deficiencies of knowledge about the modern China and its peculiarities. They can

also be perceived in the last point regarding to bibliographical sources, most of them obtained from the Internet. Only the Web could offer better support giving access to specialized sites, some small studies, and foreign articles of opinion makers in the media.

An Overview on the Modern China

The “one country, two systems” was created by Deng Xiaoping (1978-92), underneath his political prospective of a “new China” in the “new world” that should permit the country’s reunification and economic growth, the recovery of the national pride, the survival of the communist regime, and China’s affirmation in the international arena.

Given China’s rivalry with Western countries and their international dominion, being the USA the main target because of its economic and technological advances, Beijing should enhance policies to develop and modernize the country for placing China on the top of the world order. At first, these policies should take out of poverty millions of people, answering to the needs of the Chinese growing population and of the socialist regime consolidation.

Deng Xiaoping’ strategy was planned for taking profit from capitalism assets, at a time when Western countries were showing their superiority and imposing their rules, while the soviet regime was denouncing its failure. In these circumstances, China was confronting a new world order where its balance position would disappear soon, with the country and its regime being in upsetting conditions to face internal and international new challenges. Accordingly, China should adopt structural and constructive policies while exhibiting the strength of its government’s convictions and capabilities to surpass any difficulties coming either from domestic dissidents or from the external scepticism and distrust on China’s political regime.

After being persecuted during Mao’s despotic command, Deng Xiaoping reappeared in China’s political domain claiming for reform, with a self-pragmatic vision of the country’s development. He was then elected Secretary-General of the Communist Party (Central Committee), becoming China’s supreme leader.

Because of this pragmatic vision (a mix of nationalism, socialism, Confucianism, culturalism and strategy), Deng got to be known as the “Architect of the Modern China”.

Due to Deng’s wide-ranging plan China could breakdown its past isolation, while opening the economy to the Western world and facilitating dialogue with foreign nations. Deng Xiaoping was the first Chinese leader to visit the USA, despite the opposition of radicals inside the Communist Party. He was simply paving the way to China’s development and to the Chinese insertion into the world order.

The priority of Deng’s plan was related to the country’s economy, not to waive the socialist regime. Socialism (at first, Marxism-Leninism) is still China’s official ideology.

China’s adoption of the market economy was officially stated as “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. This would be outlined in the 4th Constitutional revision, in 1982, and reinforced after by the 5th Constitutional Revision, in 2018, under Xi Jinping’s willpower that added to this new political paradigm “for a new Era”.

“Socialism with Chinese characteristics” is the new political paradigm in China, which consists on a singular thought-brand ideology that tries to adapt Marxism-Leninism to China’s identity, history, culture and traditions, and also to moral precepts of Confucianism and the time circumstances.

Many experts argue that Deng Xiaoping, more than a communist, was a nationalist leader who aspired to unify China, to revenge its past humiliation and to drive the nation into to the new world order, competing in power, pride and innovation with the major Western countries.

The breakout of frontiers between undeveloped and developed countries, the rescue from China’s humiliating past and from its international isolation, the Chinese people’s well-being, the consolidation of the socialist regime and the rise of China to a leadership position in the world would be the main requirements of the Beijing’s national policy, since Deng Xiaoping’s mediation.

Still in progress, the “one country, two systems” was foreseen as an important political tool to unify China, by pacific means, and to eradicate external distrust about Beijing’s political beliefs and attitudes. This formulation

on the new Chinese state model was also viewed as an instrument to enhance economic, scientific and modern technological patterns of China, helping to insert the country into the competitive new global order.

Actually, Deng Xiaoping' structural reform opened the path to resume China's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The main goal was to achieve the country's "reunification", breaking Taiwan's and international resistances, as long as the British and the Portuguese obtained consent for Hong-Kong and Macau's handovers.

In the economic field, this reform permitted China's integration into the global free market, while the access of the country in the WTO was reinforcing it.

At the turn of the millennium, China became one of the fastest-growing economies, being now the second economy of the world.

China's economic development allowed the Chinese people to acquire better standards of living, with millions getting out of poverty, having access to education, health care and employment and to freely making tourism abroad. These changes contributed to give to the Chinese governance an image of political moderation, despite frequent accusations of human rights violations. The socialist regime's propaganda, as shown at the Olympic games, in 2008, worked hard to instil the idea of general consent and that Beijing was paving the way for the country's democratization. This continues to be the unavoidable question around the Beijing's national strategy, where the "one country, two systems" (seen by experts as innovative but contradictory plan) still represents the instrumental option of the Chinese state model.

Rather than diminish the central state authority, the "one country, two systems" – a mix of pragmatism, nationalism, political ideology and "smooth power", based on moral and behavioural precepts of Confucianism – has been allowing the government to engage policies and practices of liberal economies, through a transitional process that aims to achieve China's development, the Party's legitimacy and the international affirmation of the country.

Taiwan was – and still is - the main addressee of the "one country, two systems". Being supported by Western countries, especially the USA, the democratic and capitalist self-government of Taiwan got to stay out of China's "reunification" objective, rejecting the "one country, two systems".

This formula only entered into force with the delegation of state's powers of a limited autonomy to Hong Kong and Macau. By two international agreements (the joint-declarations) and the Basic Laws (state laws) these two Chinese territories would be both organized into special administrative regions, according to the Constitution. To maintain China's sovereignty untouched and national policies unified, external and defence policies were not included into the SARs autonomy and self-government capacities. Nevertheless, it was overseen that both regions could cooperate with international institutions, and participate in different foreign events, in the economic and financial domains, exercising obligations that come from multilateral forums, thus benefiting China's interests at the same time.

The consolidation of the Chinese socialist state has always been the central axis of the envisaged transitional process, where the Communist Party should retain an overall power. The Communist Party was also engaged on what related to the national defence by bigger assertiveness in the state's policy, if needed, by force (the local organs of the Party's control, the Police and the Popular Liberation Army). Having no separation of powers in China, the socialist regime puzzled political, judicial, executive and military powers in only one assemblage to rule the country: the Communist Party.

Individual liberties as well as freedom of expression and religious worship have been under the radar of the Chinese authoritarian regime, showing the Beijing's political determination to maintain the socialist order, if needed by the blockage of those liberties throughout security measures and stringent people's control. The same can be said about minorities, on which the government has acted extremely harshly. Technological advances in China, such as the face recognition data system, were put at the Communist Party service to reinforce its power over the Chinese population.

Despite efforts of the government for exhibiting an image of "moderation" of the socialist regime, China has been frequently criticized abroad because of human rights violations, the lack of democracy and the situation either in Tibet or in Xingjian. In this region, the Uighur population (Islamic) has been suffering from the state's brainwashing policy to put an end to challenges that this minority represents to the socialist regime. All the state measures to maintain

the Party's authority are justified with the need to eradicate political controversies and conflicting attitudes against the socialist regime, the internal stability or the unity of the country. In short, the government and the Communist Party's aims are to centralize more the power of the state, despite its regional model.

China's Constitution Law recognizes national minorities. Many times they were object of the official propaganda to offer, internationally, a good image of the country. The Olympic Games in Beijing (2008) and its official narrative about "ethnic cohesiveness" were an example of the central government's political propaganda.

The reality is that the Chinese socialist regime faces difficulties on acting as a social leveller and a promoter of cultural assimilation to dilute differences between people and communities. Actually, Beijing's efforts to give to China an image of a miscellaneous and respectful country are somehow devaluated by segments of the Chinese population, as one can see in Hong-Kong or in Taiwan on their opposite reactions. Taipei's leaders, for example, have been trying to demystify the socialist regime and the "one country, two systems", opposing Beijing's arguments based on the idea that China's state model "is in charge on the respect of political differences between the Mainland and the peripheral territories".

Globalization effects, mainly the social impact of information flows, are having a strong influence in the Chinese public opinion. This is one of the reasons for the official decision of creating China's own Web tools, in parallel with the blockage of some global websites (Google Search, Facebook, Instagram). These measures are intended to avoid risks of the state to loose the Web control. This kind of "silence curtain" on the Web, even if the only exist in the Mainland, backs the ambiguity and the tortuous political spirit that still prevail in the "one country, two systems" model.

Beijing's intentions about the "reconstruction" of a unified judicial system in the country comprise also the judicial buildings of the two Special Administrative Regions, seen as important outfits of the state structure of the People's Republic of China. The judicial measures adopted recently by Macau's authorities (the "fugitives bill" and the prerogative given to the Chinese

magistrates for judging processes related to the state security) are in line with the Beijing's aiming to unify the judicial system of the state. Despite Hong-Kong's rejection about the entry into force of a similar law (the "fugitives bill"), the implementation of those judicial measures in Macau can only signify a deep modification in the MSAR's autonomic ground, even before the Basic Law's deadline. In the same direction, it signifies also that the "one country' supremacy" in the judicial sphere - one of the most important pillar of the state - is threatening the "one country, two systems".

The state incentives in the SARs' economic, financial and migration fields make part of the Chinese strategy to reinforce China's presence, in line with the gradual downgrading of these regions' autonomy. In the same direction, the Guangdong Greater Bay Area Plan, projected to create a vibrant, developed and integrated full-size region, in the Pearl River, can be seen as benefiting primarily the state's national policy of unification. This emblematic regional project envisages, not only the improvement of economic development, but also the full integration in the Chinese nation of those "city-states". The geographic proximity between the Guangdong Bay area and Taiwan, along with the possibility to reinforce economic links with this "drifter island", makes part of Beijing's major expectations for diluting Taipei's opposition against China's reunification. Despite China's official narratives warning Taipei against any independent's attitude and threatening it with the use of military forces, peaceful integration is the main objective of the central government. The peaceful reunification still is the right drive for preserving the legitimacy of the socialist regime.

As China is pursuing development, the internal stabilization and the projection of its power, economy is a national priority, which receives state incentives according to the capitalist system's rules. The Belt & Road Initiative, announced by Xi Jinping in 2013, is clearly part of the economic global project of China, having extensive political goals and incidence on the country's capacity to spread its power around the world. For China, no matter the conjuncture decisions and the near future, the "one country, two systems" still represents one step away on the BRI's execution, as it tries to match political differences, economic asymmetries with ecological requirements, calling for peace and the

well being of the humankind, to eradicate international fears on China's global intentions.

In this sense, the "one country, two systems" clearly ratifies the "five principles of the pacific coexistence", being, at the same time, part of the Chinese strategy for peace, based on China's long historical and cultural traditions. The "one country, two systems" responds also to the Communist Party's analysis about the trajectory of the People's Republic of China and the current world situation, both divided by extremisms, incongruences and conflicts. Relativism seems to have place on these Party's analysis.

Internally, China's fast and unbalanced economic growth generated corruption, even inside the Communist Party. This matter took such a dramatic dimension that the socialist regime faced discredit, with the Communist Party feeling its authority threatened. Xi Jinping's arrival to power was tributary of this awful situation that resulted on the accusation of many important Chinese people, even high positions in the establishment, by crime of corruption.

Xi Jinping's election opened a new era on China's enhancement, and also a new era for the rescuing of the Communist Party's credibility and the Party's political power enrichment.

Xi gave to "socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era" a constitutional character, turning it into the main "ideology" of the state (Marxism-Leninism still is the state's official ideology). This turned into irrelevant diagnosis some prognostics about the failure of the "one country, two systems".

"Socialism with Chinese characteristics" is a thought-brand socialist ideology, which predicts "reform", "openness" and a "smooth and mixed power", giving sustainability to the "one country, two systems". It intends to favour China's supremacy and its power projection, on which the BRI should act as a launching pad for a deep overturn in the country's path and destiny.

Since Deng's call for "reform and openness", China always watched to the West as the most talented and brilliant model on the economic and financial fields. Aftermath the world crisis (2008/09), the collapse of financial markets in the USA and in Europe, wounded that good opinion of China's policymakers about Western countries giving path to the idea of a big change in the

international system was on the way. This overturn could represent the best opportunity for putting in practice the Chinese theories on “pacific development” and “harmonious world”, to achieve the wishful “China’s magnificence”.

For a generation of Chinese leaders, who watched the failure of the Cultural Revolution and the collapse of the URSS, the socialist regime’s victory would be based on the creation of people wellbeing and wealthy, and on the consolidation of a society without indiscipline and turbulences. These main objectives would be the right orientation for reaching the “Chinese dream” and the “renaissance of China” (two concepts replete of a strong nationalism), combined with guarantees to attain social cohesiveness and the country’s unity, the Beijing’s abandonment of “gradualism” in the process, and the adoption by the central state of bigger assertiveness in the international affairs. All of these orientation pillars would proof the executable character of the national strategy, exhibiting China’s capacity and strength.

All along this process, one can understand the ambiguous face of a state-government that matches nationalism, Marxism-Leninism, Maoism, Confucianism, economic liberalism, democratic socialism, but currently, an increased authoritarianism. It also matches a personalized power with some traces of collectivism, in the domestic field. In the international arena, it matches military enforcement with peaceful designs, and a selected multilateralism (UN/WTO) with bigger assertiveness in its bilateral relations. All of these characteristics of the current Chinese government are inspired by notions of grandeur and supremacy, but also by fears: fears of internal forces; fears of international powers and dynamics.

Being the supreme leader of the “modern China”, Xi Jinping probably expects to inscribe his name in the world history, namely with the BRI, and in the Chinese history, by the construction of a “moderate and prosper society” (these are moral precepts of Confucianism). Nevertheless, nobody can guess yet which will be the fate of the “one country, two systems”, as it depends on many internal and external factors.

What one can understand is that China (and its socialist regime) is now in a cross-border on several aspects, from the economy to politics in general. But these problems are not a Middle Empire’s exclusive.

The coronavirus crisis is threatening the political system of some nations, as it increases popular distrust and internal contestation, a part of representing a threat to the global economy. China, but also the world is facing uncertainty.

Nowadays, the global scenario is of struggles and challenges, which are difficult to solve. Stronger nationalist and isolationist forces everywhere are threatening even globalization, ever connected to liberalism. And this one is risking of disappearing due to fears of the “other” and insecurity feelings, but also to the power concentration in only one creature.

The raising “walls” and “barriers” between countries speaks now about interruption of globalization, if not a “*deglobalization*” process, sinking people’s expectations.

Reconstructing China

Since Deng Xiaoping’s leadership (1978-92), China’s major problem has been making compatible the huge rural dimension and the growing population with the national imperative to achieve a fast industrialisation, whose economic benefits could allow the regime survival and the country’s modernization. Yet few decades ago, China’s economy was still based on market small production (rural and manufacture) that existed since the very old times (about 3500 years ago).

The first step in this development process would be the dismantling of the country’s communes and the providing of commercial authorizations, upon tributes to be delivered to the state. The non-existing private property favoured the state control and also the contention of the internal resistance.

Under these new circumstances, the internal market could grow up giving place to a domestic market without capitalists (the “Chinese socialist economy”), where the state took care of creating a sophisticated monetary economy (state banks), granting at the same time its sufficient capillarity. For its part, the state provided the expansion of the internal demand, created conditions to a fast urban process, with easy access to bank credits (“monetary economy”), and facilitated the industrial production (“industrial decentralization policy”). The introduction of the private property, even limited, accelerated this process.

In this revolutionary scenario, the Chinese society fall into disharmony: the field (free, rebel and Taoist farmers) against the city; social and territorial inequalities between the rural interior and the industrialized coast became severe (a direct consequence of income asymmetries); problems with the environment became crucial (around 70% of the water is contaminated); the pressure on natural resources turned unsustainable; state enterprises showed to be inadequate to the extreme competitiveness; the transition of this kind of enterprises to answer to market demands generated corruption; and the advancement of the infrastructures in rural areas (roads, railways, motorways, airports) created disconcert and ruptures.

A part of these difficulties, China should also face ethnic and religious structural problems that constitute a threat to the regime, to the country's unity and security, and to its international prestige.

In the Beijing's view, the solution should come, internally, either from the nationalistic appeal – the unity of the nation (with the full integration of Taiwan, Hong-Kong and Macau) -, or from China's political, economic, technological and military robustness (taking memories of the imperial *Qing's* period); externally, it would come from China's modernization, from the multilateral intermediation, and from the affirmation of the country's power in the international arena. The UN, the WTO, the BRICS, the SCO, and lastly the BRI, would be the main instruments to achieve those goals, as long as the Constitution Law¹.

The regional state model, created by Deng Xiaoping and now boosted by Xi Jinping, is not really a product of China's democratization process – as it usually occurs in the West with regional or federal countries –, but a programmatic step in the “socialism with Chinese characteristics” plan, as the president Xi is selfless to defend. In fact, Deng Xiaoping, who encouraged reform and China's openness to the world, was responsible for the Tiananmen disaster, in 1989, contradicting the supposed inspiration taken from the URSS' last events of Glasnost and Perestroika.

¹ UN – United Nations; WTO – World Trade Organization; BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa; SCO – Shangai Cooperation Organization; BRI – Belt & Road Initiative.

² Coronel Liu Mingfu, professor in the University of National Defence of China is

In China still persist some traces of the “revolutionary state”, shaped by Mao Tse Tung that intersects with the “developmentalist state”, defended by Deng Xiaoping.

Reforms have promoted and still continue to promote the transformation of the Chinese socio-economic structure and institutions, in a successive process that, with its contradictions, advances and retreats, is interpreted as making part of the Chinese history. Thanks to the political authority of the Communist Party, reforms have been gradual, oriented by a long-term vision, evaluated pragmatically and implemented experimentally, which suppose a continuing learning, and also innovative formulas of management and internal organization.

Henry Kissinger (2011) said that the Chinese Empire was governed, for centuries, by the meritocratic and homogenous “mandarin” order, which achieved to its consolidation during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), obeying always to moral precepts of Confucius (551 B.C. – 479 B.C.), based on the ethic compromise of governors with people’s interests and the Chinese civilization.

In a period of slower growth these contradictions result in political and social imbalances, and tensions that call into question the “harmony” of the country, until a new political and social compromise will enter into force. But this compromise (the “social contract”) has always the same objectives: the political legitimacy, the state integrity, development and the income rent of the population.

Coming from the acquiescence of the rural population (at that time the majority of the Chinese population), the Communist Party has been flexible and innovator, showing capacity to adapt policies to new challenges and to re-invent itself, by a long-term vision and an accurate analysis of internal and external main forces, and new ideas.

Despite the current slowdown of the Chinese economy, it is still the most dynamic in the world (GDP: 6,1%). Nevertheless, the growing imbalances in China (the countryside *versus* the city, infrastructure constructions, the explosion of the real-state, national minorities, the debt of the regions, and the leverage of some segments of banking and non-financial sectors) are calling into question the “sustainable” development of the socialist regime, which has to be supported by a less intensive growth (seen as the “new normal”) and a new

“social contract” to reduce tensions, and social and regional imbalances.

This transitional period asks for the reforming of the socialist development regime, which is giving path to the conflict of interests and to opposing policies.

As Xi Jinping said in a public interview, “without reform and openness China won’t be like it is nowadays, not to talk about its future. Through reforms, we solved many important problems and hereinafter we insist to use the same instruments to surpass any difficulties and challenges. We defined two centenarians as our main goals: to double the GDP and the rent per-capita until 2020 (when the Communist Party celebrates its first century), based on figures of 2010; and to finalize the construction of a society moderately prosper, until 2049 (when the People’s Republic of China celebrates its first century). It signifies the final construction of a modern, prosper, powerful, democratic, civilized and harmonious socialist country, fulfilling the Chinese dream of big rejuvenation of the nation. We are in this process for deepening the entire measures of reform, to improve and develop the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and to implement the country’s modernization and to improve the Chinese government capabilities. We intend to progress, in a coordinate way, on reforms of economic, political, cultural, social and ecological systems and on the construction of the Party. In parallel with this dizzying internal dynamics, China will expand capacity for projection of its power in the economic, financial, political, diplomatic and military fields.” (IPEA, 2015, p 17-18)

In international terms, it signifies the reconstruction of the Sino-centric system, based on the prominence of China in the Asian and global geopolitical and geostrategic chess, taking memories of China’s old place in Asia and of the first Silk Road construction that connected Asia to Europe.

Xi Jinping, whose guidance has been blurring collective leadership, wants to complete this ambitious plan through his personal leadership, the consolidation of the Communist Party and the restoration of China as a big world power, at a minimal stance in parallel with the USA. The “Eurasia” great aspiration could be not so far from China’s best dreams fulfilment – as it probably has been planned since last decades.

Xi Jinping's era is marked by a sharp ideological imprint and by Beijing's greater assertiveness on what refers to the nationalistic policy, either in the international diplomacy or in the confrontational strategy facing United States. The old antagonism with Moscow, turned into a tactical alliance, is now used to breakdown sceptical barriers between China and Russia and to benefit both countries from the declining of the old great powers (USA and EU) in the international arena. "*Westlessness*" came as a phenomenon that gives hope to great countries of the other side of the barrier, on what related to democratic values, liberalism and political consent.

The Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), having a strong impact in national and international spheres, obliged Beijing to take political dispositions that could interfere with China's model of the "one country, two system", because of external reactions and attitudes. In these circumstances, Beijing accused the need to answer to requirements of reinforcing the authority and credibility of the central government. Any way, these dispositions have been encompassed with greater incentives in the economic and migration fields, and a more restrictive state control, namely by the reinforcement of security measures. But, in the name of legitimacy and credibility of China's socialist regime, Beijing has been obliged to combine a "low profile" with threats from the use of force on Taiwan and Hong-Kong matters, using a tactical contention in face of Taipei's obstinacy and Hong-Kong's pro-democracy protesters, avoiding to surpass its "political warnings".

The programming of China's construction in different phases (the "Chinese dream" and the "renaissance of China") is like a political instrument of the Communist Party to attain national goals. But it can be seen also as the government's agenda of preventive state measures, dully dated.

The military parade, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, was an emblematic demonstration of China's great power. It intended to be a message directed to the Chinese population and to foreign leaders that Beijing already fulfils the conditions needed to face any challenges or threats posed by opposing forces to the socialist regime's willpower and to the country's fate. It represented also China's demonstration

that it is not afraid to fight against internal and external hostilities on what refers to any central state political deliberation.

This symbolic event should also be seen as an attitude of triumphalism of Xi Jinping, nourished by his nationalistic convictions, the consolidation of his personal power, and the idea that China could recuperate fast from the economic decrease and it will come out victorious on its national goals.

China' state model

China is not a homogeneous country, even if the Chinese population can be identified by a single Asian ethnicity (the Han ethnicity represents about 90% of the Chinese people).

Its territorial and demographic huge dimensions, and historic upheavals contributed to a Chinese chess configuration composed by different cultures, religions and several ethnic groups. China has 56 national minorities, using a multiplicity of recognized languages. Although, Mandarin is the most important language in China.

Acting as an aggregating pole, the political centre in the Chinese territory, during the Qing Dynasty, achieved to build a millennial civilization, by its willpower and bureaucracy, which stressed the dissimilarity of the Chinese population in face of neighbouring "barbarian peoples", singularizing China from other nations and territories abroad. The Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 B.C.) gave to China the ideological and cultural uniformity of Confucianism, which contributed to its progress in agriculture and commerce, being responsible for the first trade connection between East and West, the historical Silk Road.

These conquests and specificities, having a structural effect, would be the leitmotiv to transform China into a continental power, and more than a nation, into a "civilization-state".

After sequentially Empires and Dynasties, and depending on the unifying range of their interventions, the Chinese aggregator pole has been the roller Communist Party of China, since 1949.

From 1982, China turned into a decentralized unitary state, almost similar to regional states. Its territorial and political organization is legally based

on the delegation of administrative powers to different regions, provinces and municipalities, whose distinctive profile is characterized by unequal political and administrative competences, and also by their demographic and territorial dimensions. This delegation of administrative powers was made from the centre to the periphery (from top to bottom), without any regional or minority claims.

In total, the regional administrative departments of China have limited and discretionary autonomy, as the central state did not abdicate from its sovereignty, political power and the conception of the country's unity. The external and defence policies, considered the core-centre of China's sovereignty, were not transferred to local administrations, even to the special administrative regions (SARs). Nevertheless, the two special administrative regions (Hong-Kong and Macau) can exercise some competences in the international sphere, always under the central government control. Each one host an official department that represents Beijing, localized in both territories, for a better political articulation.

In order to realize the Chinese territorial integrity and to complete the state sovereignty over all the coveted territory, China assimilated some characteristics of federal states, despite contradictions and the ambiguous borders between the primacy given to the centralized and authoritarian socialist regime, and the adoption of liberal practices in some parts of the Chinese territory.

With small differences, the administrative map of China is a heritage of the Qing Dynasty (221 B.C.), which always intended to guarantee the unity of the Middle Empire. In this map, Taiwan is the only missing to complete the unity of the coveted "Imperial" China.

Referring to the territorial and administrative organization, China has twenty-two provinces, five autonomous regions, four cities directly administrated by the central government, and those two special administrative regions. All of them depend on the central government, localized in Beijing.

In the light of delegated competences, China's administrative division is not also homogeneous. A high level of autonomy was given to Hong-Kong and Macau, two city-states, having each one a small territory and an inexpressive population, especially when compared with the Mainland. They are ruled by

their temporary Basic Laws – a state-law, with some differences that can last at least 50 years (until 2047 and 2049, respectively).

By the Basic Laws, the two special regions can have their executive and legislative powers, their judicial system, their own currency, their cultural and linguistic traditions, and also their exclusive competences for concluding some international agreements or for participating in specialized international organizations.

The “one country, two systems” state-formula signifies the Chinese combination of three legal orders inside the same unitary state, due to the autonomic judicial system of Hong-Kong and Macau.

The universal suffrage is not simply granted in those laws. Only the Hong-Kong’s Basic Law allows the universal suffrage, as being gradually applied on an “ultimate aim” of the people. Due to the Chinese internal situation and for the socialist regime survival, Beijing is been dealing with this legal prerogative as a bone of contention, especially on what refers to democratic claims of Hong-Kong’s population.

Unlike the other administrative divisions of the country, these two SARs were not integrated before in China. Each one had a different colonial status given by the British Empire and by the Portuguese administration. So, only after related international agreements have been negotiated and signed (the joint declarations) Hong-Kong and Macau would belong to China, almost completing its territorial sovereignty. As it was agreed and ratified by the parties, in the light of both joint-declarations, Beijing assumed the compromise to maintain the three-dimensional systems that existed before their handovers (economic, social, cultural and some political, and individual liberties), throughout both transitional processes. From that occasion, these two special administrative regions became the legal entities that embody the new autonomic reality under the Chinese sovereignty.

The two Basic Law’s guarantees to respect the previous social, cultural and political atmosphere has not being questioned in Macau, what differs from Hong-Kong’s. On the contrary of Hong-Kong’s population claims, the Macanese society had never experienced a liberal system before. With about 650 million inhabitants, Macau is a small city-state, created by Portugal and the Portuguese

navigators, with a maritime geography where almost nothing existed before and all along its own history democratic rules had never been present. The Macau's handover agreement guarantees the maintenance of civil, religious and cultural traditions (at the handover's event about one hundred thousand Chinese people, having Portuguese nationality, lived already in Macau), giving to the MSAR a singular atmosphere, which created conditions for development and social stability.

If the Hong-Kong's political situation was rather different from the Macau's, mainly because of dissimilar influences during their colonial experiences and after because of China's economic penetration, the transitional processes of both regions can be seen quite dominated by the Chinese nationalism.

The conflict between the socialist ideology (communism) and liberalism is much more accused in Hong-Kong. Nevertheless, both transitional processes reflect the primacy of the "one country" concept, upon the instrumental formula of "two systems".

Despite of Beijing's political guarantees, China's economic option on capitalism and the evident success of Macau's autonomy (MSAR), Taiwan never accepted to be a province of the People's Republic of China, defrauding Beijing's major expectations. By rejecting the "one country, two systems", and arguing that Taiwan never belonged to the People's Republic of China, Taiwanese political leaders use to denounce the Beijing's appeal for the "reunification" of the country as "false" and "illegitimate". To reinforce this position, they even invoke Hong-Kong's democratic claims as being a proof of the "one country, two systems" failure, condemning also Beijing's usual practices to allegedly harm democracy in Taiwan.

If the autonomic system has been instrumental to Beijing's policy for the peaceful unification of the country, Taiwan's rejection of the "one country, two systems" risks hurting China's national goal. Last elections in Taiwan gave majority (57,1%) to the president Tsai Ing-Wen, the pro-independence Taiwanese leader and the main opposite to the autonomy agreement with China based on the "one country, two systems". The current political situation in Taiwan risks to compromise relations with China, even if Beijing, not to harm

more this conflicting climate, preferred to emphasize China's motivation to work consistently in order to boost peaceful relations. According to the consensus reached in 1992 and the idea of a "peaceful mother-land reunification", Beijing is always warning about China's rejection of Taiwan's attempts at independence.

Taiwan is clearly the main threat to China's territorial integrity. It can also be the main obstacle to China's willpower to give to the "one country, two systems" the seal of Beijing's political clairvoyance and a well-designed state policy.

As the "Chinese dream" says² the reunification of China is programmed to happen by 2049, when legal dispositions about the Hong-Kong and Macau's autonomy will reach the deadline. President Xi, in a solemn declaration to the people, has strongly emphasized that the country's reunification is a "historic task". At that occasion, he also threatened Taiwan with the use of all means, if needed with the military force, to accomplish the national goal of China's reunification. It's important to note that Xi's declarations were pronounced at a special conjuncture marked by the rising China and Western countries declining, which was giving the idea of an inversion of powers in the international arena.

Hong-Kong is also another challenge to China's national policy, clouding Beijing's best expectations to exhibit the "one country, two systems" credibility and to maintain social stability. Mass-protests claiming for democracy, streets violence, the decreasing of the HKSAR's economy, and people accusations against the central government's actuation on the coronavirus crisis, have been putting in danger peaceful relations between Hong-Kong and Beijing. For damaging more this complex scenario, the Hong-Kong's democratic opposition won district elections (387 seats within the total of 452 seats for being directly voted). This democratic message ran the world and worsened China's political situation.

Due to the ideological struggle, all these problems highlight the contradictions of China' state model and the difficulties that Beijing is facing to

² Coronel Liu Mingfu, professor in the University of National Defence of China is the author of *"The Dream of China: The Thought of the Great Power and the Strategic Attitude in the Post-American Era"*, published in 2010. This author is of the opinion that it was happening changes in the Sino-American relations of power. Because of that China should abandon gradualism for rescuing its historic mission in the sense of a great national objective. In Henry Kissinger, "Da China", p. 538-539

underpin the socialist regime. It's hardly difficult to make prognostics on how and when China's state model will be definitely settled.

According to the western vision, democracy, human rights and the separation of powers in China continue to be the "Gordian knot" of a political problematic that risks awakening the "red dragon".

In the meanwhile, the extent, scope and nature of the two pragmatic regional arrangements (HKSAR and MSAR) show that they do not fit in any classical state model, be it of a territorial autonomy (regional), or be it a federal or a confederate state, even if the two SARs have elements of all these appointed models.

The results of China's autonomic and asymmetric state model, although imperfect and controversial, have been basically positive from several points of view, including the centre-state perspective, the subnational perspective, and also the international community perspective.

China's reunification goals are almost totally accomplished, by a peaceful manner. With these two small and differentiated "city-states", China became bigger and even more influent, which meant the Chinese respect for international rules and peace, allowing the reinforcement of China's legitimacy in the international arena. By getting its sovereignty over these two SARs, China could open doors to the international trade and finances, setting privileged links with the Commonwealth and the Portuguese world. At the same time, the EU-China relations became facilitated given to the special links of Hong-Kong and Macau with their ex-colonies, at that date two European member-states.

International reports on the Hong Kong and Macau' situation usually gave positive marks regarding fundamental rights and economical system, as it happens with EU institutions, UN specialized bodies, private financial companies and agencies (for example, on what related to Macau, the "casino" big enterprises). Until now, those reports have contributed to the credibility and stability of China's state model.

On the contrary, China has been always facing bad scores on what refers to human rights. Tibet, Xingjian and Hong-Kong (the police actuation against the mass-protests in the HKSAR, last year) have been central to these international condemnations of Beijing's attitude towards Chinese citizens and regions, with

consequences on China's external relations. Partnership cooperation agreements between the EU and China have been hindered on several aspects because of human rights' issue. Trump's administration – the big rival of China's government - also uses to invoke the human right's issue to hamper bilateral agreements and a good climate of dialogue.

International trust on the Chinese economic and financial fields could be seriously damaged if China's global influence had not the importance that it really has, since the past two decades. However, international suspicion on China' state model ends up threatening credibility and validity of the “one country, two systems”, with consequences even inside China as the legitimacy of the socialist regime is called into question.

Beyond the well-known socio-political problems in Hong-Kong, its economic slowdown has given way for Beijing to find an alternative to the HKSAR's role. Even the MSAR's obeisance seems to be not enough to the central government abdicate from exercising all its power over the entire China. The Guangdong Greater Bay Project emerged recently as the best scenario to China's resolution of the SARs' problematic. The Chinese regional policy is giving path to the full integration of both city-states, as it provokes a dilution of their autonomy.

Central government policies and actions suggest that the “one country, two systems” is not so important as the socialist regime survival and the stability of the state. In these circumstances, either Hong-Kong, because of its political rebellion, or Macau, notwithstanding its loyalty, have their autonomy threatened, in the near future, if the “one country, two systems” enters in a downgrading political process. Despite Xi Jinping's political programme, which reaffirms the maintenance of the “one country, two systems”, a strategic evaluation of internal conjuncture could advise Beijing to act according to it.

In a globalized world, external and internal factors interact. Thus, China's evolution should not be envisaged only in terms of domestic policies as Beijing's monolithic vision is tempted to do. Chinese policymakers tend to believe that this could be the right way to control a so big, heterogeneous, asymmetric and complex country, like China. Having this in mind, it's not a big surprise that the central government has decided to take more strict control measures, trying to

govern globalization placing barriers where it judges to be required. Freedom of expression, religious beliefs, the Web and the media, especially those of Western countries, use to be always under the scrutiny of the Communist Party and China's central government.

When Deng Xiaoping decided to implement the "one country, two systems", he believed China would need about one century to complete its full reunification, and to reach development and modernization, at the same level of Western countries. Given the quickness of China's economic growth and its technological advances, but missing the country's total reunification, Xi Jinping decided to take a step forward, establishing 2050 for the "Chinese dream" achievement. He recognized therefore that China is still at the first stage of its enhancement process. President Xi's "faith" in a shorter period for that process could be seen, at first, as a manifestation of the Communist Party's loyalty to the "one country, two systems" and of the Party's confidence on the good results of the formula, and, secondly, as the central government pressure on all the stakeholders to accept China's plan. These two formulas of interpretation could be in connection with the Chinese pragmatism, as Xi Jinping wanted to anticipate China's national programme, without giving too many details.

For cultural reasons, Chinese leaders don't use to exhibit their own feelings, in public. Chinese leaders don't promote "populism"; they prefer to maintain a more distant image so as not to devalue the state power. Xi Jinping is no exception to this behaviour. Only in official and special events he uses to appear, making adequate speeches. Taking this in account, it is not an easy task to foresee the future state model of China, as the available sources are exclusively official narratives, purged of any debate or contradictory. In these circumstances, this issue tends to be always a motif of speculation, having small sustainability.

Since the Hong-Kong and Macau's handovers, several foreign policymakers (including some Portuguese) have been of the opinion that these SARs will be totally integrated in the motherland China, after the Basic Laws' deadlines. This appreciation has pervaded often on speeches, despite advises about China's diplomatic compromises. However, these compromises are only in

effect until the Basic Laws' deadline. After that, China has hands free to articulate and establish new regional status, even changing the Constitution Law.

Basic Laws are integrally Chinese state-laws, and any pressure from abroad risks for being viewed as interference in China's internal affairs, something that Beijing strongly rejects as the five principles of the pacific coexistence announce.

Due to the current economic situation, economy seems to be the central axe of China's policy, with the "one country, two systems" being the main reason for Beijing to respect international compromises (joint-declarations). The legitimacy of the People's Republic of China and of the Communist Party has its part on that evaluation. Taiwan is a collateral issue, the reason why Beijing seems to be in the disposition for waiting some more time, until China acquires all its capabilities for acting. The eventuality of the Taiwan's issue trigger a conflict between its supporters and China slows down Chinese nationalist impulses.

Because of its complexity, China's current situation could endorse the idea that the "one country, two systems" outcome depends much more on the country's economic development and internal conditions (stability and the Communist Party's reinforcement) than on the acceptance by the international community of Chinese sovereign provisions.

Pillars of China's Constitution Law

Since 1949, the Constitution Law of the People's Republic of China is granted, that is, it was written and imposed to the people by the governing power without participation or citizen's consent.

The Constitution of 1982 prescribed a set of political values, principles and purposes according to the Marxist-Leninist theory, Mao's revolutionary struggle, and the centralized state power, under the authority of the Communist Party.

The constitutional revision of 1999, specified better Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic theories, added to those main ideological pillars.

The last constitutional revision, in 2018, introduced other important pillars: the supreme leadership of the president, for life, and the ideological compact that combines the inspiration of the previous theories with the Chinese socialist ideology, “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. This new approach to socialism is based on China’s civilization, its cultural traditions, the Chinese heterogeneous society and the country’s economic realities and needs. This new approach to socialism (already assigned by Deng Xiaoping) wants to signify also the Communist Party’s respect for the country’s history and for China’s internal and external compromises.

This fundamental law recognizes the multicultural and multinational character of the state. Nevertheless, it advocates the state’s unique personality (the concept of the “one country”), which shall be promoted and granted by the single ideology strength, under the “revolutionary” direction of the Communist Party of China. This notion, “revolutionary”, signifies the extension in time of Mao-Tse-Tung theory, which intends to give legitimacy and strength to the Communist Party. It also signifies the Marxism-Leninism survival, as it continues to be the country’s official ideology, in written, by strategic reasons of legitimacy and the Party’s dynamic. Nevertheless, in practice, China’s policymakers assigned “socialism with Chinese characteristics” in their policies.

Officially entitled “People’s Republic of China”, this designation does not deny that the original communist ideology – Marxism-Leninism - still prevails performing the Chinese state regime.

The Constitution Law also recognizes the right to autonomy of minorities, proposing, among other discretionary measures, the creation of special administrative regions, but preserving the inalienable character of the People’s Republic of China. The unity of the state cannot be set in question ever. This clause comes from the “one country” concept, especially on what refers to Hong-Kong and Macau. On what related to Taiwan, the same notion is transformed and becomes the “only one country” concept. This subtle differentiation used by China’s policymakers has a lot to do with the different political situation of those territories; different because of the previous and historic status of each one.

Through the delegation of state powers for the constituency of the two special administrative regions, they were given mini-Constitutions, named Basic

Laws. Each one is a state law. Their own autonomy and executive practices must comply with China's Constitution, which overlaps them.

Their special administrative autonomy, defined and ruled by law, should be setting up in the light of pre-existent specific conditions, which meant China's recognizing of the need to give to the SARs a high degree of autonomy in respect for their history and traditions.

This accuracy language wanted to specify two different realities: a) - the Taiwan's reality, as only a matter of China's national interests and policy; b) - and those of Hong-Kong and Macau, as a matter of external relations with countries having administrative powers in those territories (Great Britain and Portugal).

China's Constitution gives a sacralised character to the country's territory. According to this essential value, China's "reunification", overcoming any "feudal and colonial" original traces, is a duty of the Chinese population. It is understood as a collective task that nobody can avoid (the "historic task", as said recently by president Xi).

In the light of the Constitution, the state assumes the compromise to "fight capitalist ideas and others equally decadent viewpoints". According to this formulation, the socialist regime must act as a "unite front" against internal and external opposed forces. Mao Tse Tung's theory about the "continuous fight" still persists in this constitutional enunciation, giving to China and to Chinese policymakers a problematic character, no matter the internal and external political juncture.

These precepts of the Constitution can be translated into the socialist doctrine of the state, where the Chinese population is submitted to China's monolithic regime, applied to the whole territory, contradicting the dual notion of "two systems".

China's openness to the world (according to Deng's doctrine) is expressed by the constitutional inscription of the five nuclear principles of the Chinese diplomatic relations (or the "pacific coexistence"): mutual respect by sovereignty and territorial integrity, no mutual aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equity and reciprocity of advantages, and the pacific coexistence.

These five principles of the "pacific coexistence" (first enunciated with India, in 1954) have more of a defensive character than a "neutral" position in

the international arena. A part of being a “peace flag”, they were also designed to be a factor of trust and attractiveness. Encompassed with the very long China’s history, they emphasize Beijing’s capacity of making long-term plans, the Chinese pragmatism in the international relations domain, and a well elaborated “soft power” policy.

The 5th constitutional amendment of 2018 submitted the future of China to the Communist Party’s authority, even in the military sphere. The armed forces of China (the Popular Army of Liberation) are at the service of the Communist Party to defend the Chinese revolution (obviously, to defend the socialist regime). This purpose aimed to forearm China’s regime from any collapse similar to the well-known soviet collapse.

Since this last revision, president Xi became China’s supreme leader, for life. His personal power was consecrated in the Constitution, contributing to downgrade the memory of Deng Xiaoping, as the “architect of the modern China”, but not to delete Mao’s ideological legacy. From that moment, Xi Jinping can lead the country by an authoritative manner that tends to blur the country’s collective leadership.

It also granted authority to Xi Jinping’s brand thought on “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, an enunciation that exists since Deng’s tenure, transformed now into the state ideology, even if Marxism-Leninism continues to be China’s official ideology. This nuance has to do with the regime and the Communist Party’s legitimacy, not putting away Confucius inspiration and the Chinese pragmatism.

Under Xi Jinping’s direction, the “unified patriotic front”, the “harmonious relations” between ethnic groups, and the “pacific external policy” are supposed to be enriched and well defined. Stressing the construction of a “moderate prosper society”, Xi Jinping calls to the moral values of Confucius, the hallmark of the Chinese old civilization.

In an enlarged horizon (the Chinese long-term vision), the president defends a “future shared community”, with the “Chinese cities” having more legislative faculties, as well as the implementation of new coordinated measures for the innovative, ecological and open development for all, encompassed with

an integrated plan to the economic, political, cultural, social and ecological progress.

All these propositions make also part of the BRI, as well as of the new China's regional policy (Guangdong Greater Bay project). This policy was designed for promoting an inter-regional comprehensive cooperation aiming the country's unity and modernization, to perform better China's power expansion.

With its geopolitical and geostrategic characteristics, and its wingspan, the BRI is a world project that never existed before. It is not only the biggest China' state project, but also the Chinese instrumental task to implement a new world order.

These projects - one with internal purposes and the other with a global dimension - have clear nationalistic ambitions, showing that China's national interests are at the top of Beijing's political priorities. Obviously, they were not designed under a "consensual agenda". But if the Guangdong Greater Bay project can suggest that it could be able to harm internal acquaintanceships, the BRI calls to the nation pride and China's capabilities, what is seen as threatening the current world order.

The strengthening of president Xi and the Communist Party's powers is supposed to give legitimacy to the official narratives about the "Chinese dream" and the "China's renaissance". Both narratives have to be accomplished until two symbolic dates: in 2021, when China has to complete the construction of a "society moderately prosper in all fields"; and in 2049 (one century after the People's Republic of China foundation), when China has to achieve the stage of a "modern, prosperous, strong, democratic, harmonious and culturally advanced socialist country", ... "to surpass the USA, in all relevant dimensions that define the national power of any state, and to substitute Western liberal order by another order with a new hierarchy, based on the main continental power (China)".

So, taking these goals in account, Taiwan's issue should be solved at that time, precisely when the autonomic transition period of Hong-Kong and Macau will end, to ensure the "one country, two systems" and its results in all strategic dimensions.



China's Constitution is clearly an ideological document, with structural effects in several dimensions. It establishes dogmatic precepts that tend to disregard the political sense of citizenship as well as individual rights, enabling autocratic actions of the central power over the population, along the Chinese territory. The Constitution Law of China is the supreme ideological guideline for Chinese policymakers, all them submitted to the president and the Communist Party, aiming the structural construction (and maintenance) of the People's Republic of China.

The regional but unitary state model, as settled in the Constitution, doesn't diminished this overall ideological perspective and related executive actions, as the central government didn't delegate the main political power, centralized in Beijing and granted by the army. However, it doesn't observe the Marxist principle of "class struggle", but compels all the Chinese citizens to be loyal, not specifically to the nation, but to the People's Republic of China, and to obey the Communist Party's authority.

With this new Constitution, "socialism with Chinese characteristics", being ideologically equivalent to China's "civilization-state", takes a dimension that surpasses the country's official borders. Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora are also included in this "civilizational" border, which has been helping China to spread its influence.

The expansion of China's power, namely in the Southern Asian Seas, can be observed on Beijing' sovereign claims in particular over Taiwan. Hong-Kong (Macau is not so problematic) is also included in these claims, but within another political approach: (less) autonomy and (less) democracy. They all represent decisive tools of the national strategy serving to equate the "civilizational" concept with China's "Imperial" concept. The civilizational concept recalls being tributary of China's history and dimension, and of the relationships with its "submissive" neighbours. The imperialist view of China in the neighbouring countries of the region (Vietnam, Singapore) and in the Southern Asian Seas is now at the top of international concerns about peace and security in the region.

China's new Constitution doesn't recall worldwide political values. Instead, it wants to give a universal character to the Chinese values and supremacy.



One of the main pillars of this Constitution is nationalism, hardened by socialism and tempered by the moral precepts of Confucianism. Confucianism functions, here, as the cultural coverage factor. “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” is intended to give to China’s society - a diverse and multicultural group of citizens experiencing new challenges and new ways to face politics and world realities -, a national identity based on an amalgam of cultural and political precepts that need to obtain public recognition and, at the same time, to impose itself by economic and modernity factors, even dismissing individual rights. In the modern China, there has been an exodus from the rural world to the cities. But, modernity also went to meet the rural world taking with it a new vision on society, politics and the new world requirements.

China’ socialist regime, ruled by the Communist Party, topped by the authority of the president of the republic and defended by the army, has the crucial mission of completing and guarantee the unity of the country (the unitary and multinational state), preserving at the same time the assemblage of the Chinese population (including minorities), as well as of creating political and material conditions for China’s development, modernization and external projection. Despite criticism and contradicting current forecasts, the rising China has been strengthening the Beijing’s socialist regime.

Precepts of the new China’s Constitution include a variety of former constitutional revisions that cement even more the control and supremacy of the Communist Party, which sees its supervisory powers enlarged. This fundamental law still exhibits inspiration in the Soviet Constitution (1936), mixed with precepts and ideas of a “smooth” compacted ideology - “socialism with Chinese characteristics” - turned now into a legitimized paradigm of the state, as official narratives use to show. Moreover, it maintains the legal structure for liberalizing economic policies, given by the constitutional revision of 1982. This is a signal of continuity and perseverance, even in the international context.

Notwithstanding, China is a one-party state system that denies multiparty competition, the reason why international distrust still prevails on the Chinese policymakers actions, knowing that it comes mainly from geopolitical struggle between the great powers.



Before this last revision, the Communist Party and its leadership were only referred in the Preamble, usually not binding, which is not the case with the text currently in force.

Despite its hybrid character, China's Constitution is not a consensual fundamental law, as it was designed and approved by a small part of China's population: the People's National Congress, the highest organ of state authority.

According to the ideological precepts of the Constitution, national interests and political circumstances, Chinese policymakers had to toughen control measures (the big "firewall", for example) and to use the autocratic authority of the state, for maintaining the Chinese people away from external critics and the socialist regime untouched. At the same time, they had to appeal for the never ended "social contract" upon which China's political regime and state's integrity have to survive.

The "one country, two systems" at stake

Since the 80th decade of the last century, the "one country, two systems" is being present in several academic studies and in the Chinese and foreign media, as an innovative state-building policy that tries to solve China' structural problems: the reunification of the country (Taiwan, Hong-Kong and Macau), the compliance with the Chinese civilization and vicissitudes of history, the demands of the growing and heterogeneous Chinese population, and the country's development requests. These problems have to be seen in the light of the new world realities, namely the Soviet regime collapse, the URSS implosion, the Western countries superiority, and the victory of capitalism and neoliberalism.

The most important part of Chinese academic studies on "one country, two systems" formula refers that it signifies "unity, organization, scientificity (experimentalism), coexistence and harmony". These two last characteristics are supposed to be in accordance with international exigencies about world peace and development, and with national requirements on what refers to China's reunification.

Against these opinions, many Western studies refer "contradiction, the supremacy and the transience" of this formula, because of the "two systems"

inherent opposition, the inequality and disproportion of the main political unit, and doubts about its foreseen deadline. In general, Western experts recognize the innovative character of this formula, being however sceptics to its results.

None of these studies refer, openly, the “one country, two systems” deadline, as a possibility or even as a case study.

The juxtaposition of the socialist regime and the capitalist system tend to blur their borders, with socialism (communism) stifling individual liberties and other essential pillars of capitalism. So, the main question is not really about the future integration of both systems, but about the annihilation of the most vulnerable: the capitalist system in this case. Comparative demographic indices and huge differences on what refers to power capabilities can drive to this kind of analytic considerations.

Some Chinese studies, clearly politicized, intend to theorize the “one country, two systems” saying that it represents a contribution to theorize the “pacific coexistence” and also Marxist formulation of the state, reasoning on the good results obtained until now, but in a propaganda style. As it could be easily understood, it seems that nobody tried to speculate about a “closed” state model or even to elaborate a state-building theory based on this hybrid formulation.

In academic terms, it's almost easy to understand how this problematic issue can be subject to politicization, given the current political trends, the need of making correct predictions or the motivation for political propaganda according to particular interests. Knowledge about the inapplicability of this formula to other cases in different scenarios didn't help to take Deng's formulation in more serious studies on its future. It is known that some Chinese scholars tried to study the application of the “one country, two systems”, for example, to the Korean peninsula or to Indonesia, because of East-Timor, but they concluded that it was not feasible.

The transitional process of the Hong-Kong and Macau's autonomy, being different from their very beginning, the Taiwan's irreducible independent position, and China's autocratic approach have contributed to the opposite criteria of evaluation about the “one country, two systems”.

Tibet's autonomy struggle, Taiwan's independent claims, the long-lasting mass-protests for democracy in Hong-Kong, and human rights situation in

Xingjian, because of Uyghur Islamic minority discrimination, have contributed to political conflicts between Western countries and China. Having the BRI as the main background motivation, this atmosphere of malaise has become thicker with the commercial war with Trump's Administration.

Being denounced for human rights violations and for the lack of democracy and individual freedoms, China is now trying to clear the state's political image by presenting to the world the Macau's autonomy as the best example of the "one country, two systems" good results. Contradicting the other problematic cases, Macau represents to Beijing the national flag of a controversial, but a well-defined national policy. As the Basic Law's deadline approaches and China's political and economic situation is not really glamorous, Beijing envisaged the need for stressing the importance and the validity of the "one country, two systems", as instrumental to the "Chinese dream" national compliance.

During Macau's celebrations of the handover's 20th anniversary (Dec. 2019), president Xi emphasized the MSAR's atmosphere of "harmony". At the same occasion, the Portuguese authorities decided to express a positive opinion on the "one country, two systems" and about the transitional process of Macau. In line with China's authorities, they stressed the Macau's "excellent results" what could testify the validity of the "one country, two systems" state model.

Though the social stability in Macau has not been yet truly questioned, it's out of the question that risks of contagion from the political struggle between Hong-Kong and the Mainland still exist. This is the reason for the central government's decision on taking special measures to reinforce state control and political articulation with Macau's authorities. Essentially based on the Portuguese system, the Macau's judicial building has been subject to "nationalization" process as dictated by Beijing. Similarly, Macau's external actions are under a deep Beijing's control, in particular, on what related to the Macau's Executive practices in the international domain. This reinforced articulation with the central government has much to do with the Guangdong Greater Bay project, envisaged to full integrate Macau, Hong-Kong and other neighbouring cities for the compliance of the Chinese regional policy. As a unitary state, China's regional policy – truly a cooperation policy between

Chinese cities - aims to create social and economic conditions to consolidate the unity of China. In these circumstances, the MSAR, as a geostrategic “platform” of China’s interests, namely on what refers to the Chinese presence in the Portuguese Speaking Countries (Forum Macau), gives to Macau a crucial position in China’s external performance and also in the BRI plans execution.

Given the results and the official propaganda around Macau’s peaceful transitional process, especially when compared with the HKSAR’ social instability and economic fragilities, Hong-Kong suffers from a downgrading position in China’s political agenda. This situation, not beneficial for both administrations, is helping the central government to look for economic alternatives, as Hong-Kong is losing its past influence. The Greater Bay of Guangdong appears to be the comprehensive answer for it.

Even if Macau is considered China’s “good student” and an important tool of the “one country, two systems” model, the eventual future replacement of both city-states by a vibrant and powerful economic region, based on the liberal economy, seems to be in accordance with Beijing’s state policies. The rising China and its reinforced presence in the economic world affairs (WTO) are drowning out the economic, financial and political importance of both SARs. On the other hand, the Guangdong Greater Bay project helps to dilute more the Hong-Kong and Macau’s autonomy and to strengthen China’s “nationalization” process on structural policies.

Beijing looks for having hands free to implement better a centralized national policy, ruled under the socialist regime, giving path to liberal economic commitments when and where China’s wants to. In these circumstances, the “one country” can subsume not only the “two systems”, but to differ the according calendars.

The “one country, two systems” has always signified a strategic plan for China’s development and for getting a worthy place in the new world order. Turned into a process, this formula has acquired a specific dynamic and an evolutionary dimension, mainly because of the economic development of the Mainland China, and accordingly because of Hong-Kong and Macau development. Their mutual conditioning has been present in this process, what shows that it could interfere stressing their different regimes and goals, if China enters in a

slow motion of its economic growth and if internal stability cannot be assured. This is the reason why the central government is using its force to contain the growing displeasure of the population.

National identity, the Chinese exclusive character modelled by Confucianism, and the socialist ideology have played a significant role on this strategic formulation, designed to magnify China – the “Middle Empire” -, and to break down barriers between East and West. At the same time, it tried to respect different realities of the country, and to erase difficulties of China’s reunification process.

The idea of the “pacific coexistence” has, in this stance, both internal and external incidences.

At the very beginning, the “one country, two systems” was not considered in terms of a geostrategic dimension. It was based predominantly on China’s internal necessities and nationalistic goals, even if Taiwan, having a mix of nationalistic and international interests, was the main addressee. Later, the geostrategic approach took an important place too, as the rising China should gain international prestige and pursue its global expansion, requiring, at first, China’s regional hegemony in parallel with the legitimacy of the socialist regime.

The steps defined by Xi Jinping, in the meanwhile, for “China’s renaissance” and for the “Chinese dream” have to be seen now as the Chinese geostrategic approach to the “one country, two systems”, where the BRI represents its main substance. This geostrategic approach to the “one country, two systems” is central on state policies for the country’s reunification and for the projection of China’s power. 2049 was officially declared a crucial date.

Beyond strict economic aspects, the “one country, two systems” recalls to a competitive international policy, where multilateralism, China’s global influence and the Chinese defence policy (mainly the navy forces and infrastructures for border defence of China’s interests along several foreign countries) have not been underestimated.

According to this, the “peaceful reunification” and China’s emergence into the world order signify the country’s total liberation from a humiliating past. Being an outcome of the “one country, two systems”, the reunification process

and the rising China should evidence a “well defined and well-done state policy”, under socialism inspiration.

In detail, this formula was envisaged as being favourable to the Chinese adoption of economic reforms for the country’s development and modernization (obeying to “Four Modernizations” principles), for granting the socialist regime and, externally, for promoting national interests and the indisputable sovereignty of the People’s Republic of China. The “one China/one country” ideational concept was settled in these fundamental points, based on the idea that the state government would be able to obtain China’s full recognition by the international community (national territory and national regime). Being “China” the legitimate representative of the People’s Republic of China in the international community of nations, Taiwan’s issue should only be managed within the internal domain. The Chinese definition of the five principles of the “pacific coexistence” only reaffirms this political perspective of China’s authorities.

In pragmatic terms, the “one country, two systems” should give to the Mainland better advantages taken from China’s international experiences, the country’s participation in cooperative and multilateral stances, the creation of better life conditions for the population and, as a natural consequence, the reinforcement of Chinese patriotic feelings. After the end of China’s isolation period, this hybrid state model could simply signify to the central government, and continues to be, “the best of the two worlds”.

As the Constitution dictates, all the Chinese citizens are obliged to support the socialist regime as a universal patriotic exigency - being a different duty if they live in or out of China, or even if they live in the SARs. For the central power, this is a subject connected to the idea of the “united front”, as established in the Constitution. So, the symbiosis between national identity, patriotic feelings and the socialist ideology (or the socialist regime) takes a relevant place in the present analysis, especially when it can be taken in consideration the demographic weight of the Mainland China in comparison with SARs’ population figures (1,386 billions against 7,392 millions in Hong-Kong, and 625 thousand in Macau).

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The Basic Laws of Hong-Kong and Macau are supposed to safeguard China's national unity and sovereignty, namely through the assignation form of local executive authorities (without universal suffrage), their declarations of loyalty to the central state and their compliance with Beijing's determinations. According to the conceptualization of the "one country, two systems", these precepts can only confirm that the "one country" concept is invested on higher political prerogatives over the "two systems" formula. So, the common notion of a supposed equality and equilibrium is not assured, being the reason why some expert's criticism and scepticism continue to make them heard.

Giving the constitutional and other legal guarantees, the "one country, two systems" symbolizes the coexistence of two different regimes: socialism, inside the main territorial parcel of the state, and capitalism, in its peripheral territories. According to this, it was given to the unprecedented political formula of "one country, two systems" an instrumental character that could harm, somehow, the capitalist system, as it works serving the socialist regime and its interests.

By giving authorization to both SARs to use their own administrations, their legislative capacity, their judicial power (with capacity to judge in the last instance), to improve their own skills, and to preserve their cultural traditions, China took commitments for maintaining their previous social, judicial and economic systems unchanged. Moreover, the central government's policy should empower SAR's administration capabilities, for attracting investment, knowledge and other foreign useful instruments to boost international trust on China. This should permit China to profit from the autonomic system, while safeguarding its main national interests and external and defence policies, the hard-core of the state sovereignty. Although, the priority given to development and modernization of the country recommended Beijing to extend state authorization for the SARs' improvement of international cooperation. So, since the beginning of the autonomic process, the SARs have competences to sign cooperation agreements, to assume their own international practices, and to participate in specialized international forums, or even to host international organizations, such as the EU Delegation in Hong-Kong (covering also Macau) and the Forum Macau. This particular multilateral organization, the Forum

Macau, is China's creation to focus on the country's influence in the Lusophone and Latin countries, boosting the capacity of making Macau a geostrategic platform for the implementation of China's international interests.

Benefiting from their multidimensional contacts that banking, tourism, gambling and international cooperation programs also helped to entitle, both SARs were settled into a special dynamic, making them China's strategic poles for spreading its world influence. Being two free-market zones, located in the most dynamic area of the world economy, Hong-Kong and Macau contributed a lot for China's economy growth and for the Chinese economic competitiveness. In fact, China rose to the second place of the world economy.

Thus, China's rising power and the "one country, two systems" – the most important tool for the country's development and openness to the world - perform a reforming and legal compound that, since 1982, has been incorporating experiences, contradictions and disruptions. Internally, it has been showing some disintegration factors that could even lead to socialist regime devaluation, as corruption cases and democratic claims in Hong-Kong can testify. Even Taiwan's rejection to the "one country, two systems" could influence negatively this situation, if the Chinese "firewall" was not in charge to minimize those factors.

In face of these threats, the Beijing' solution was to give to "socialism with Chinese characteristics" a constitutional character, as it is perceived to be the state response to tackle those distortions. Thus, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" became the ideological framework of the "one country, two systems", in order to make compatible the "two systems" concept.

To achieve the country's development and territorial integrity, and to stop ethnic struggles and conflicts between the countryside and the cities, the constitutional delegation of state powers to some regions – Hong-Kong and Macau – gave to China a similar image to federal states. Some of those delegated powers to SARs are even higher, such as independent customs, the issuance of currency, the judicial last instance and religious freedoms. However, the uniformity and supremacy of the central power, the unbalanced administrative structure of the country, and different skills given discretionary to distinctive regions, turned China into a unitary regional state, not a federal state. It's

obvious that the “one country, two systems” in this territorial design of the state is somewhat unspecified, having no borders or limits, corresponding only to different regimes and ideologies.

China’s purpose to attract Taiwan was, obviously, the main objective of this autonomic structure option, despite the regime’s issue being clearly defined in the “one country” concept, and after in the Basic Laws about SARs’ executive and parliamentary composition, once the universal suffrage is not allowed. Only ideology is at stake in this constitutional formula, but always supervised by the central government. In this case, ideology functions as a “hinged door”, depending on the interests involved.

Despite China’s national interest on Taiwan, it must be stressed that the consistence and durability of a hypothetical federal system – if it was the Chinese case -, on which the delegation of powers was done discriminately, from the top to the bottom, without people’s consent, could be set in question, risking to generate regional confrontations. China’s regional state, being territorially and demographically unbalanced, can undermine national feelings, being subject of comparative disadvantages claims, specifically from national minorities and from other Mainland regions. So, the “one country, two systems” can generate disruptive feelings even inside the Mainland China.

To avoid these problems, apart of the strict state control, Beijing has been promoting policies for internal migrations in order to balance regional demography and to dilute exclusive identities other than China’s national identity. The Beijing’s decision to build from the scratch modern and smart cities in the country’s Western Asian border, and to suppress barriers with Hong-Kong and Macau, apart of promoting national economic interests, was based on the national requirements of attracting young people to problematic areas and of erasing Hongkongers and Macanese identities. However, there is no assurance that these decisions can provoke negative feelings, not only because of the comparison between differences existing in distinctive parts of the country, but mainly because of the feelings of “invasion” nurtured in the SARs. Hong-Kong is at stake because of the alleged China’s demographic and economic “invasion”.

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In China, there are three dissimilar judicial systems (China, Hong-Kong and Macau) that coexist at the same time. This judicial coexistence signifies not

only a rupture of the state judicial system, but also a challenge to the central power, namely for the need to develop a judicial theory according to China's territorial singularities and to "socialism with Chinese characteristics". This matter is having influence in the Chinese internal governance and in the international relations of each SAR, namely on what concerns to their economy, in order to give them enough autonomy for negotiate and defend their specific interests. At the end, the imposed inter-territorial cooperation in parallel with the Beijing's power centrality signalizes only one beneficiary: the People's Republic of China.

The current turbulences in China's internal situation and changes in the international conjuncture have obliged Beijing to approach Hong-Kong and Macau's judicial systems from a new political viewpoint, giving them a higher national restrictive character. New judicial measures in Hong-Kong have been the core-centre of riots, mass-protests and the increased democratic claims, since the middle 2019. These disturbances provoked discomfort in Macau (and collaterally in some specialized sectors of the Portuguese community), whose population felt affected by the new judicial state's decisions. Despite of negative reactions, China didn't retreat in its decisions, showing to be decided on pursuing its nationalistic drift.

The Basic Laws' dispositions on maintaining the SARs' capitalist system unchanged, throughout 50 years; apart of being an international duty, these China's commitments are fundamental questions making part of the state policy, which should be stable and profitable. Nevertheless and despite the state control, an atmosphere of uncertainty and misperceptions hover these questions.

In the Chinese culture the time-notion is different from the Western's. It must look at the China's long history to have a glance of what it really means. Hence, 50 years time for China's policymakers are not as much as Western people can realize. Even Deng Xiaoping believed that China's transformation into a modern society should take, at least, one hundred years. Regardless any other considerations, such as the quickness of the world changes and the effects of globalization in this process, it's almost certain that China didn't give up to use the state prerogatives, if needed, to modify the Basic Law's calendar, even the substance of the SARs autonomy. Right now, these modifications can be done by

a state decision, in accordance with SARs' authorities, preferably after each transitional period that finishes in 2047 (Hong-Kong) and in 2049 (Macau).

China's policymakers never said that Basic Law's deadlines would be used to undertake a process to completely integrate Hong-Kong and Macau in the Mainland. The same on what refers to modify the SARs' autonomy status after those dates.

To legitimize any state decision, the Constitution (Art. 31st) states that the SARs legal regimes should be defined and instituted "in the light of existing conditions". This constitutional disposition opens different ways to realize China's interests, mainly when the Basic Laws are approaching to the end.

Nothing in the Basic Laws says that the existing rights and freedoms in Hong-Kong and Macau should or will be cancelled. This detail suggests that the SARs autonomy would be a matter of negotiation and depending on the negotiation results (or even on its process) those rights and liberties would be defined according to the political and economic Chinese conjuncture, not forgetting the attitude of loyalty and obeisance of the regional authorities towards China.

As already emphasized, the "one country, two systems" has no deadline itself. According to Deng Xiaoping's beliefs the reunification and development of China, for producing a modern socialist country, under the "two systems" formula, could last one hundred years, suggesting a generational process that could end with China's national revitalization. However, Deng never questioned the socialist regime survival; on the contrary, he defended that having socialism in the poverty, capitalism should be used as an instrument for the country's modernization.

In a similar viewpoint, but in a different stage of political power, Xi Jinping always stressed the importance and validity of this unusual political tool. He also didn't set a deadline to the "one country, two systems" or even to the SARs autonomy, in absolute and clear terms. Nevertheless, Xi Jinping's political formulation on "socialism with Chinese characteristics" suggests the autonomy deadline is already marked, however the future of China's state model is not yet

defined, having to complete “China’s renaissance” until 2050, to fully realize the “Chinese dream”.

All this seems to depend on the political and economic China’s evolution, especially if the Chinese policymakers continue to privilege socialism rather than liberalism, or if in the dialectic process of China’s evolution the synthesis shall be the economic priority over politics.

Although globalization has been moulding a general vision of the realities that tends to be almost uniform, China’s evolution process has to be seen in the light of the Chinese history, culture and mentality. These characteristics – as well as the Chinese ethnic criteria - are deeply in contrast with those belonging to the Western civilization. Obeisance, discipline, family dedication, work dedication, personal overcoming and a community spirit, are values belonging to the Chinese civilization. One can stress the strong influence of Confucianism on the Chinese culture, history and society, adding also the lack of democracy experience along its history. All these factors contribute to the idea that socialism seems not to hurt people so much at a point of creating a rupture in the socialist system, especially when the real struggle is between rich and poor and the interior *versus* exterior. In a so big and heterogeneous country it can be difficult to hide this struggle, mainly when the central government uses the subject to emphasize its willpower and politics aim to eradicate poverty and corruption.

Beijing’s policymakers look at “socialism with Chinese characteristics” as being a specific regime that tries to make hedges between people and between regions, being also an ideology that adapts better to the Chinese people’s mentality and needs. This viewpoint tries to give the idea that there is a general consensus in China (the “social contract”), where nationalism, as a catchall ideology, is not absent. Finally, the socialist regime is envisaged as regime that respects all the Chinese people’ singularities.

China is really an unfathomable and complex country. In the current international competition between the great powers, Beijing’s policymakers are convinced that it is useful to reinforce the country’s peculiarities, showing to the

world the success of the Chinese socialist regime and, in particular, the success of the “one country, two systems”.

Just as there is a conception of exceptionality of the Chinese society, the “one country, two systems” is seen as the most functional and active bridge between East and West.

Hong-Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions

In China, autonomy, as a tool, includes a variety of goals: the decentralization, mostly determined by political and economic reasons; the increasing confidence in the socialist regime; the subtle model to reinforce links between the centre and the periphery to attain the country’s reunification; and the conflicts resolution, as an alternative to secession and to the war. Autonomy involves different realities and also specific concepts that may differ on nature, origin, main purposes, scope, competences and mechanisms of dialogue, based on law instruments that can be strictly domestic or also international instruments.

Joint-declarations related to Hong-Kong and Macau are international treaties, deposited at the UN. They set out the essential commitments of the process of the transference of sovereignty with implications on the Chinese legal system, public administration, exercise of sovereignty powers, political structure, judiciary, and fundamental rights, among many others, as well as a transition framework that is attached to the act of the handover of sovereignty itself. The first joint-declaration was on the question of Hong Kong - the Sino-British Joint-Declaration of 1984 -, as a result of negotiations between China and Great Britain. The second joint-declaration was on the question of Macau, as the result of negotiations between China and Portugal, in 1987. They are similar to one another, despite political narratives and some historic and cultural individual singularities.

The reasoning for the creation of these Special Administrative Regions was mainly China’s reunification, under the “one country, two systems” engineering. The “rest” (the day after) would follow. Among other purposes, they

would serve to show Taiwan that the formula really works and brings common benefits.

The overwhelming majority of the population, in both SARs, is Chinese Han, as it also happens in the Mainland. Thus, the protection of national minorities was not the main factor behind the high degree of autonomy of the SARs, although the Macau's Basic Law addressed the *Macanese* (mixed Chinese-Portuguese people's origin or in a wider concept, the "Portuguese people") with specific protective norms.

In Hong-Kong, the *Hongkongers* were not singularized as a minority, rather than a cosmopolitan inhabitant group that benefited from the economic and financial free status of the territory. Only politics and ideology would after given to the *Hongkongers* an explicit identity character.

On what refers to the cultural heritage, there are specific norms mainly related to the spoken languages: Portuguese in Macau, and English in Hong Kong maintained their status of official languages now shared with Mandarin and Cantonese. The SARs' Basic Laws guaranteed to stay different from the Mainland, giving them freedom of religion, including the Catholic faith. On this matter, the Basic Laws guarantee that religious entities and believers may maintain and develop their relations with religious organizations and believers elsewhere, and educational institutions of all kinds may retain their autonomy and enjoy academic freedom, as well as the historical sites and relics have to be protected, specifically in the case of Macau because of its religious traditions of a catholic "missionary colony". Not the same on what related to Hong Kong, with a different history on religion.

These guarantees belong to the "second system" of China ("two systems"), what intended to be a political message of confidence to the world. In fact, these guarantees are consequence of a more important political goal, not precisely the driving force behind the process. They are relevant and emblematic instruments of China's larger strategy, being not the essential issue that pre-determined the concretization of autonomy.



Deng Xiaoping said in a famous meeting with Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister: *“When we speak of two systems, it is because the main part of China, with a population of one billion, is practicing socialism. It is under this prerequisite that we allow capitalism to remain in a small part of the country. This will help develop our socialist economy, and so will the policy of opening to the world.”*³

1 – Hong-Kong (HKSAR)

During the Qin Dynasty (third century B.C.) Hong-Kong became under the Chinese rule, and it remained part of the Chinese Empire for about 2.000 years. Between 1842 and 1898, the British Empire gradually took control of the three regions that are now the modern Hong-Kong: the Hong-Kong Island, the Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories.

The only interruption on the British control over Hong-Kong happened during the World War II, when Japan occupied the territory. After the Japanese defeat, Great Britain regained its rule over Hong-Kong.

China’s defeat in the two Opium Wars (1839-1860) came at a high cost: Hong-Kong was made a British colony by the Convention of Beijing (1860).

In 1898, a second convention was negotiated, leasing the New Territories (localized between Boundary Street, the oldest line that divided Hong-Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula, and Shenzhen River, the modern border that divides the Mainland China and Hong-Kong). The lease was set to expire in 99 years, what meant that China expected Great Britain to handover the region on July 1, 1997.

In 1982, with the expiration date of the British control looming, Great Britain and China’s leaders met to negotiate the transition of the New Territories. The Hong-Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula were out of the 1898 lease,

³ Mention in Paulo Cardinal, *“Autonomy as a tool for peace – some topics using as a reference point the Chinese SARs seasoned with a Kantian perpetual peace fragrance”*, p.8, www.academia.edu

but Margaret Thatcher decided to negotiate also those regions, considering that they only could survive all together and be a barrier to socialism.

In 1984, Great Britain and China signed the joint-declaration outlining their plan for Hong-Kong. It stipulated that Hong-Kong would become part of China on July 1, 1997, but “the current social and economic systems” and the “life-style” in Hong-Kong would remain unchanged for 50 years.

By the “one country, two systems” formula, Hong-Kong should continue to operate as a capitalist economy and its population has to maintain the same rights and liberties (liberty to speech, and press, assembly and religious beliefs freedoms), at least until 2047.

a) - The transition process of the Hong-Kong autonomy

The historic trajectory of Hong-Kong was different from the Mainland China, which became a Communist country in 1949. Up to 100,000 Chinese refugees went to Hong-Kong after the Communist Party took power. Capitalist Hong-Kong was like a magnet to who was persecuted in China and wanted to live a free better life.

Hong-Kong soon experienced an economic boom, becoming home of a multicultural, international community, and one of the most important financial and commercial Asian free headquarters.

From 1997 to 2008, the Chinese economy’s growth rates, the increase in mutually beneficial cross-border financial and economic activities, and China’s emblematic successes (Olympic Games, Shanghai World Exhibition and space actions), produced a pro-Chinese reaction among the Hong-Kong community. Even during political crises - the opposition to the proposed National Security Law, in 2003, the demonstrations against the controversial Art. 23 (the Moral and National Education plan), and the anger over the government’s handling of the SARs – most of the people from Hong-Kong directed their fury towards the local administration as opposite to Beijing.

This good climate ended in 2009, with protests against the construction of a high-speed rail link to China: Chinese customs and immigration law applied in parts of the terminal building, symbolizing an encroachment upon Hong-Kong's territorial rights. This controversy and other apparently trivial disputes encouraged the desire for a local government beholding its population needs and expectations.

The central government felt what it saw as ungratefulness, because of the huge Chinese investments in Hong-Kong, and business opportunities in the Mainland given to Hong Kong's investors since reunification. Both sides entrenched themselves on opposing facts: Beijing on data and statistics, Hong-Kong on the frustration of many people, especially those belonging to the political elite.

These events in combination with the "Umbrella Movement", which blocked the city for 79 days, in 2014, inspired people to create a social conscious of identity.

The "two systems" concept seemed not to offer easy solution to such frictions, despite its unprecedented, innovative and engineering formula, except through the universal suffrage, as promised in the Basic Law, which was claimed for many in Hong-Kong. According to their opinion, only a leader accountable to all Hong-Kong citizens (as opposed to anyone selected by a college of 1.200 carefully screened electors) could solve problematic Hong-Kong's issues.

For Beijing, the universal suffrage was unthinkable. In governing a vast and heterogeneous country, with a long history marked by political conflicts, Beijing's leaders thought about the instability and uncertainty that could be brought by free elections in Hong-Kong.

In 2010, moderate democratic lawmakers in Hong-Kong participated into various dialogue closed sessions with Mainland officials, which resulted in the Democratic Party (the largest opposition party) endorsing a compromise proposal that would institutionalize universal suffrage by 2017, but allowed Beijing to vet candidates for the chief executive position.

Some democrats and radicals saw that proposal as a betrayal of a genuine suffrage. Their opinion gained significant support, particularly

among Hong-Kong youth, formed through the combination of multiplying socioeconomic inequalities, scandals with high-ranking officials, and controversies over legislative mechanisms. Many people pivoted towards systematic scepticism or more fundamental positions on what related to the local administration and to Hong-Kong's relations with the Mainland. In Beijing, this increasingly criticism towards the central state, was seen as a potential threat to China's sovereignty and the socialist regime.

The attempt to allow the judicial extradition (the "fugitives bill") to the Mainland led to long last mass-protests in Hong-Kong (2019) that even Hong-Kong's Executive retreat didn't stop. It strained British-Chinese diplomatic relations, hardened the US-China commercial conflict, and fuelled increasing concerns that China was stifling public dissent, interfering in local politics, eroding freedoms and human rights in Hong-Kong.

The coronavirus crisis also increased the difficult "coexistence" between the Mainland and Hong-Kong, as many Hongkongers accused Beijing for devaluating the real number of the affected people and for masking the reality, to maintain China's image and the socialist regime untouched.

But the transitional autonomy process is not yet completed and the situation risks to hamper the procedure. Beijing considers the Hong-Kong's new ideological strand as secessionist and perilous to the internal stability, as well as a bad example to other regions, like Macau or even Xingjian, the region where Islamism is threatening China's culture and unity. Also Taiwan is under China's political overview, given the reinforcement of the "no" to the "one country, two systems".

Actually, Hong-Kong is suffering from this problematic situation, showing its economy decrease. At a time when China is experiencing greater economic difficulties and Beijing's better expectations of recovering are being denied by international distrust, Hong-Kong autonomy represents another threat to the socialist regime and to the "one country, two systems" credibility.

In 2047, the Hong-Kong's Basic Law will expire. At least until then, the Hong-Kong autonomy is in effect. But, the uncertainty on China's decision about the future of the Hong-Kong autonomy is clouding the

political atmosphere and hampering the relations between the centre and the periphery. The consequences in the economic situation of the HKSAR have not been made to wait, with collateral effects on China's economy, international prestige and political evaluation about autonomy's future.

b) – The Hong-Kong Identity

At the beginning, Beijing's policymakers believed that the declining of the approval of Hong-Kong's population on China's regime could be solved through a better knowledge of the Chinese history and state policies, coupled with a rigorous civil education. When the political atmosphere in Hong-Kong was getting worse, the central government decided to introduce the Moral and National Education program, in 2012, aiming to bridge the gap between the Mainland and Hong-Kong.

Many inhabitants of Hong-Kong, particularly young people, created the anti-MNE movement to denounce the "brainwashing propaganda" of the Chinese socialist regime.

From that date, Hong-Kong assisted to increasingly opposing identities feed by the HKSAR's cosmopolitan background, the wave of Chinese immigrants and China's growing economic influence. Problems linked to tourism and immigration from the Mainland, which emerged as being lifted travel restrictions, in combination with extremely high housing prices, placed Hong-Kong society almost at an emergency situation. Hereinafter, the conflicting climate has been about jobs, housing, and the way of life. But overall this conflicting climate is about ideology.

The mixture of demographic changes and economic dislocation generated a sense of threat, upon which people of Hong-Kong would reshape their identities and politics around opposite lines.



The emergence of local feelings, independence wishes, and conflicting ideologies (democracy *versus* communism) would compromise the Hong-Kong-Chinese common identity as expected prior to 2008.

An identitarian sentiment was nurtured in the Hong Kong's political opposition. Accordingly, in 2014, the central government issued the formative white paper on the chief executive elections, scheduled for 2017, which called for all candidates to "love the country (China) and love Hong-Kong", and stipulated stringent selection criteria over the candidatures.

The "one country, two systems" arrangement never explicitly addressed cultural questions in Hong-Kong. Only the Constitution has a say on this important matter. But, the devising line of the "two systems" gave to this question a problematic, controversial and instable character that could threaten the country's territorial integrity and cohesiveness, as "two nationalisms" were in confrontation.

The "one country, two systems" is now facing its biggest challenge as Beijing sees the Hong-Kong's nascent movement for democracy as opposed to the socialist ideology that rules the country, while those in the movement denounce it as the "one system" illegitimate fight against the other, the "second system".

Even if China can already have other alternatives to the economic and financial weight of Hong-Kong (in the Greater Bay of Guangdong), the "Pandora Box" of democracy, individual rights and freedoms is now open through the universal suffrage claims, while Beijing looks to the democratization of Hong-Kong as threatening China's political and economic ascent. China also looks at this situation as an illegitimate external interference of foreign enemies that aim to undermine the stability of the country and the Chinese development strategy. One of the foundations of the regime is thus threatened.

2 - Macau (MSAR)

After the arrival of the first Portuguese navigators to the “Middle Kingdom”, in 1515, Portugal settled in Macau. Then the two kingdoms decided to establish a “gentlemen’s agreement” that legitimated the Portuguese presence in the territory, giving to it an “informal” belonging status of the Portuguese administration.

This agreement benefited both sides. China could use Macau as an important staging centre for its trade, made in security, with Japan and other neighbouring regions, while Portugal could take good profits from this situation, spreading its catholic influence around the Pacific region. Moreover, Portugal could assist China’s interests as a loyal partner engaged in defending South China Seas from several marauding enemies.

Macau didn’t play the role of an authentic Portuguese colony, but as a “missionary colony”. At the very beginning, there was almost nothing in the territory, being its utility of a Portuguese creation. Thus, it remained a Portuguese trading centre located in the China’s territory, where catholic institutions settled for spreading faith.

In the multi-secular dialogue between Portugal and China, Macau, and its particular administrative status, always represented the permanent and friendly axis of the relationships between Portugal and the “Rising Sun Empire”.

The Sino-Portuguese Joint-Declaration for the Macau’s handover was signed on the 20th December 1999, after quiet and consensual bilateral negotiations.

As settled in the Macau’s Basic Law, the transition period of its autonomy is of 50 years, the same established for the Hong-Kong autonomy transition. For Macau, this period will finish in 2049, but nothing is said about its future.

Together, the Joint-Declaration and the Basic Law perform the legal grounds of Macau’s administration rules, under the sovereignty of China (the “one country” concept).

The “one country, two systems” formula (also based on the “Four modernizations” theory of Zhou Enlay) has been framing the evolution of Macau’s economy and society, while maintaining the Portuguese heritage in several pivotal domains, namely in the judiciary field and in the cultural, religious, education and the Portuguese language domains, even if the

Portuguese remains somewhat emblematic due to the traditional weight of the Cantonese and the growing presence of Mandarin speakers.

Nevertheless, it was the liberal economic system settled in the territory and the rising China that boosted Macau's economic development and, consequentially, its participation in the China's global strategy of influence.

Due to its development, Macau is placed at the second place of the world's GDP ranking and of the OECD young students ranking. This ranking first place belongs to China.

a) - *The Portuguese influence in Macau*

The handover transitional process of Macau has been quiet and peaceful, which cannot be said on what refers to Hong-Kong, whose population is seen as more participative and vindictive of their rights, unlike Macau's population having not similar democratic traditions.

Nevertheless, before the handover Macau was already an open economy and an Asian open market, acting as a "meeting-point" between Orient and Occident, due to its free zone character.

With political representatives half-done elected, maintaining the same jurisdictional and monetary systems (and even its official name), and benefiting from religious and educational liberties, Macau could keep its credibility in face of international requirements, dominated by neoliberalism. Its growing economy, based on gambling and tourism, gave to Macau social stability, good infrastructures and capacity to expand links to foreign markets and to attract foreign and Chinese investors.

The Forum Macau, created in 2003 by Beijing's initiative, has become a major incentive and a strategic tool for Macau's projection and for the enhancement of the cooperation between China and the Portuguese Speaking Countries.

Due to the historical presence of Portugal in Macau, this special administrative region is officially bilingual (Mandarin/Portuguese). Although,

only 2,4% of the population speak Portuguese, being the Cantonese the most important contact language in the territory.

According to official data (2018), the Portuguese population in Macau is about 11.965, representing only 1,4% of the total (635 thousand). Nevertheless, the General Consulate of Portugal in Macau has the registration number of 169.023 citizens holding Portuguese passport, the highest sum since the creation of this diplomatic mission, which covers now the two SARs. This number includes 38 thousand people that were transferred from the older Portuguese Consulate in Hong-Kong, closed in 2003. This discrepancy signifies that most of the citizens holding Portuguese passports didn't declare them, because of the Chinese nationality law, which determines that all the people born in Macau, like in the Mainland, has the Chinese nationality, even those holding Portuguese passports. China doesn't recognize double nationality.

The Portuguese heritage in Macau has a historical relevant presence, with catholic churches, ancient houses, old statues, street names and the paving of central streets and squares, living together with Chinese cultural symbols. Because of the diversity and richness of this historical heritage the city centre of Macau was named World Heritage by the UNESCO.

The Portuguese language and education leads the relationships between Portugal and Macau, with extension to the Portugal-China bilateral relations. Yet, Portugal doesn't figure in the first places ranking of Macau's most important commercial partners.

Edmund Ho, the first executive chief of Macau, and after Fernando Chui Sai On, contributed a lot to a good relationships with Portugal and the Portuguese Speaking Countries, which helped the Macau's economic development and internal stability (the unemployment ranked 2%, in 2017), and, at the same time, the bilateral cooperation with China.

The Cooperation Framework Agreement between Portugal and Macau was signed in 2003, coinciding with the Forum Macau creation. The joint-commission met for the first time eight years later, in 2011, despite having been agreed that both parties should meet each two years.



Since then, the Portugal-Macau relationships have been improved, with a perceptive impact on economic, cultural, education and scientific cooperation fields, extended to the bilateral relations between Portugal and China, and to the trilateral cooperation with the Portuguese Speaking Countries. The Portuguese language functions as a cultural edge, being Macau a geostrategic platform for China to boost its influence in African and Latin American countries, all them sources of oil and raw materials. Macau is a very important basis to the Chinese global strategy.

Not to loose influence in the Portuguese world, Portugal is making diplomatic efforts to reinforce bilateral links with Macau, but always under the political will of refocusing relationships with China's central state.

The Portuguese language (the third global language for business, namely related to oil and gas) is expected to represent 266 millions people, around 2100. Angola, Brazil and Mozambique – big producers of oil, gas and other natural resources - are on the top of the world's ranking of the population growth speaking Portuguese.

This major pillar of the Luso-Macanese relationships gave to Macau a “strategic platform” character, used by China to spread its influence in Africa, Europe and Latin America. Macau represents also the most important “hub” for Portugal-China bilateral relations.

Despite of these factors, it is not out of expectations that in the near future the Portuguese cultural heritage, in Macau, could be diluted, and surpassed by China's growing influence in the territory. The Chinese regional policy (the Greater Bay of Guangdong) is paving the way for this to happen.

Over the past few years, the Macau Special Administrative Region has been positioning itself in the Chinese BRI's strategy, for improving its development and regional importance. In 2016, it was decided that the Forum Macau would articulate activities within the BRI, doing the linkage with the Portuguese Speaking Countries. As the warehouse of the Forum, Macau has been improving affinities with those countries, under China's leadership, to

accomplish the expected mission of turning the city-state into a platform of China's interests.

In 2019, the Forum Macau (5th ministerial conference) gave priority to investments and trade improvement, to cooperation development capacity, to the human resources training, and to cultural exchanges between China and the Portuguese Speaking Countries. For better developing and sustaining these cooperation fields, Portugal and Macau signed a MoU that establishes the cooperation improvement in the economic, business and enterprises fields, giving priority to tourism, professional training and start-ups.

Portugal, as a privilege partner of Macau, a European facilitator, and a "leading" member of the Community of the Portuguese Speaking Countries, has been demonstrating its political will for stressing the country's influence in these scenarios, which would be reinforced by its formal accession to the BRI, in 2019.

For its part, Macau aims to act as a bridge between China, Portugal and the Portuguese Speaking Countries, to better promote its development and reaffirm its strategic position. Being also an alternative link between the New Territories (Hong-Kong) and the Mainland China, Macau's political will is to surpass structural fragilities (and the Hong-Kong's financial supremacy) and to reinforce its own autonomy. For this to happen, Macau is stressing its singular role in the Portugal-China economic relations, namely by facilitating Portugal's access to the China-Macau bilateral agreement that provides trading exemptions.

According to this strategy, in parallel with Beijing's interests improvement, Macau expects to transform the city-state's economy into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure and a platform for trade and business multilateral cooperation. The new bridge that connects Macau to Hong-Kong, and to the Mainland, is expected to facilitate these objectives, with a big impact in the future of Macau autonomy.

The "Greater Bay Area Plan" (Macau, Hong-Kong and other 9 cities of the Guangdong province) is expected to help Macau, as a "key city" in the area and a "core engine for regional development", to leverage its distinctive characteristics, but within the regional integration Chinese policy.

Given its heritage and being a place where diverse cultures from East and West have long co-existed, and been integrated, Macau is seen as the best Chinese “open-city” to develop cultural and tourism industries, and to improve the character of a cultural exchange-centre between China, the Lusophone countries and the Latin world. Trade, financial services, technology and innovation, high education, health care and legal services, are seen as strategic areas for the Macau’s cooperation improvement with the Portuguese Speaking Countries, under China’s “umbrella”.

According to the Portuguese cultural heritage of Macau (Mandarin/Portuguese/Cantonese), the hybrid character of the population, the affinities with China, and the success of the MSAR transition process, this city-state is seen as a strategic tool for China’s national and international interests, namely on what refers to the country’s reunification and to the credibility of the “one country, two systems”. All along this process, Portugal has been always present, acting as a tempered force to project out of the borders the Macau’s Portuguese legacy, singularities and the stability in the territory, never diminishing China’s sovereignty.

The “good example” of Macau gives to Beijing the legitimacy to use the MSAR to testify the validity and credibility of the “one country, two systems”, and to argue with the need for preserving China’s unity and stability.

While retaining “the best of the two worlds”, China is trying to ensure the inclusion of both SARs (Macau and Hong-Kong) into the Chinese sphere of governance, by hardening Beijing’s political control and by using a more emphatic “national” policy in crucial domains as the judiciary.

b) - 2019, year of celebrations

China’s external policy carefully combines pragmatism and symbolic aspects belonging to the Chinese culture and civilization to celebrate. This is one of official manifestations why China cannot be seen as a simple “nation-state”, rather than a “civilization-state”, due to its heterogeneous character, long history, territorial dimension and huge population.

The “one country, two systems” has much to do with this civilization meaning (the original idea of a big continental country having a superior dimension, the enormous capacity of assimilation, and the ability of “coexistence” that leads to spread the Chinese influence). This formula has also much to do with the Chinese pragmatism (the application of well worked ideational schemes or theories that combine analysis, circumstances pounder, goals, priorities, risks evaluation, and a framework calendar). All those factors have been reinforced by the knowledge about the long and troubled China’s history and Chinese cultural traditions and mentality, this one influenced by Confucianism.

Along the preparation of the exchange state-visits of the Chinese and Portuguese presidents, Beijing, Lisbon and Macau’s authorities got consensus on three important celebrations, during 2019: the 70th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China, the 40th anniversary of the resumption of China-Portugal diplomatic relations, and the 20th anniversary of Macau’s handover.

When the president Xi Jinping visited Portugal, in 2018, and the president Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa visited China, in 2019, it was officially emphasized the importance of cultural celebrations on each country, to improve bilateral relations and a better mutual knowledge. This was specially envisaged, as the background needed for mutual understanding to develop economic bilateral relations.

Many bilateral agreements were then signed, and several cultural events were scheduled for 2019, entitled each “the year of China in Portugal” and “the year of Portugal in China”.

Among those bilateral agreements, the MOU for the accession of Portugal to the BRI was politically classified as the most important. At a time when international distrust on China was paving the way to harm Chinese world interests, this agreement was classified as having strategic relevance both to Portugal and China. Naturally, it also had implications in the Macau’s performance, either in national or international terms.

Related to celebrations of the Macau’s handover, Portugal decided to consider them a matter of China’s internal politics, avoiding creating political misunderstandings specially when Hong-Kong was facing disturbances. This was

the reason why none of the Portuguese authorities participated on those celebrations (against all the expectations), being designated the General-Consul of Portugal in Macau to officially represent the country in the event. Despite this cautious decision, Portugal opted for not being aware of Macau's celebrations, sizing the opportunity to send political messages to Beijing. President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, the Prime Minister Antonio Costa and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Augusto Santos Silva were the leading presences in different events, along the country, to celebrate the Macau's handover. Their speeches were in tune to recognize the success of the Macau's autonomic transition process, emphasizing the validity of the "one country, two systems" as a legal instrument of progress and development, and of guarantee to maintain cultural and social liberties in the territory, yet being silent to what related to the Basic Law's deadline. They only "warned" Beijing on China's diplomatic commitments and duties to preserve unchanged what was settled in the joint-declaration, stressing the Beijing's obligation to full respect it, "independently of the conjuncture circumstances".

The vigilant silence of Portuguese authorities on the internal situation in Hong-Kong, and their apparent reticence about the future of Macau autonomy, were not only in respect of China's sovereignty, but also the Portuguese acceptance of whatever the future autonomic "status" of Macau Beijing will decide. This attitude also showed that Portugal, yet defending the virtues of the "one country, two systems", opted for not provoking a political conflict with China, even accepting Macau autonomy downgrading.

This comes to the conviction that Portugal gives priority to bilateral relations with China. The Portuguese political drive is to refocus on China the bilateral relationship, under the "state-to-state" official framework. In these circumstances, Macau risks to loose its self-importance, acting preferably as a Chinese city-state, integrated in a bigger and vibrant region, while benefits from being China's "platform" for the Portuguese and Latin world. In economic terms this is the most valuable position of Portugal in face of China's great power.

On what related to political consequences of this Portuguese option, it seems that Beijing was given "hands-free" in pursuing the "one country, two systems" according to China's national interests.

For Portugal, the most problematic questions related to the state policies of China are the preservation of the Portuguese legacy in Macau and the human rights violations. In a broader interpretation, both issues are inter-connected helping the Portuguese authorities to stress, with legitimacy, China's diplomatic compromises as settled in the joint-declaration and the Macau's Basic Law. Being a small country and having not the same political weight as international organizations, like the UN or EU, Portugal prefers to endorse the human rights situation in China to the multilateral domain, the one that Beijing still considers as important to China's prestige.

On what refers exclusively to Macau, its status of "services platform" for China's development helps prospects of the central government to totally absorb the MSAR in the Chinese sphere of governance. China's regional policy is now the most efficient instrument to integrate Macau, even maintaining some degree of autonomy. The same can be said about the BRI, as this initiative requirement, to attain national objectives, are linked to Macau's future participation.

In fact, the MSAR (or the HKSAR) is China's national production, which displays around the world the slogan "Made in Macau-China". This symbolic economic propaganda only reflects the Macau's reality, showing at the same time the political significance of this matter for China's national policy.

c) - About the future of Macau

Macau is seen as a good example of social inclusion (better than Hong-Kong), of a stable economic centre in Asia, and of a liable entity in international affairs. The Macau's autonomic model and the respect for the guarantees established in the Sino-Portugal joint-declaration, settled in the Basic Law, have long been a reality, as different international organizations have attested, namely the EU institutions that follow-up the MSAR's evolution, the UN specialized bodies, and the WTO.

Nevertheless, the signature of the Justice agreement between Portugal and Macau, in 2019, known as the "fugitives bill", seemed to make a deviation on the Macau's judicial old system. The time coincidence of the Hong-Kong similar law that fumed the long last instability in the territory could testify China's

intention to “nationalize” the judicial system of both SARs, to unify this important domain for the socialist regime. Due to the general elections in Portugal (October, 2019), the ratification process was delayed. It is still unknown what will be the position of the Portuguese Parliament on this matter: to vote in favour of a debate, but how about the final results?

“China’s issue” is a sensitive matter on many perspectives. Because of China’s ideological regime and human rights violations, it is usual to provoke political disturbances in Portugal, with the Communist Party and the Socialist Party (this one, for state reasons) showing a more ductile position on what related to China’s national interests; on the contrary, the right parties and the Left Bloc usually demonstrate opinions against China, for its regime, attitudes and intentions. So, that crucial matter is still in a slow-mode, on which Portugal seems not to be interested to enter in any strife with China.

Macau doesn’t have competences on external and defence policies. However, China gave to Macau the capacity to develop the economy through the improvement of international relations, namely with the Portuguese Speaking Countries. Hosting the Forum Macau, Macau fully profits from the Beijing’s protection to enhance international cooperation either in the economic or in the cultural and education fields, contributing at the same time to China’s interests and to the affirmation of Macau autonomy.

Given the MSAR exclusive competences in those domains, Macau can be partner of specialized international organizations, subscribe cooperation agreements and participate on the appropriate international events. Due to Portugal’s influence, Macau has a permanent delegation next to the EU institutions, in Brussels; EU has a delegation in Hong-Kong that also covers Macau (this reflects the relative economic importance of both city-states).

The “one country, two systems” was clearly stated in the China’s reunification policy. However, this formula should not be seen within a framework for the construction of a liberal democracy, even if at that time China’s policymakers seemed to be more relaxed in terms of ideological straight control. It shall be envisaged instead as China’s economic compromise, owing a

transitional character. This is the spirit of the Basic Laws, according to the Constitution and the Communist Party's rules.

For Beijing, reunification simply means "one China". Officially, Portugal (Macau), as well as Great Britain (Hong-Kong), accepted and subscribed these legal stances, knowing that Beijing's ambitions have long been China's (peaceful) reunification. But, at the same time, China's central state is interested on preserving the SARs autonomy status, for economic reasons. So, Macau still represents a trading and financial hub, and a singular instrument for China's international cooperation, centred on cultural aspects and on the respect for Western rules.

In these circumstances, the future of Macau depends much more on the economic development - with Beijing taking the best profit -, on autonomic institutions compliance towards the central state, and on Macau' social stability, rather than Western style liberties preservation. The future of Macau can also depend on China's political strategy to achieve national reunification, on the Beijing' self-confidence (in domestic and international terms), and on China's capacity to spread its power. The message of the president Xi at the military parade on the 70th anniversary of the PRC (1/10/19) was enough clear about China's national objectives, encompassed by the public and universal presentation of the Chinese power dimension and capacities.

The transition period of 50 years to define the future of Macau autonomy and the current framework to straight the articulation between Macau and Beijing's authorities - these ones being the political core-centre of the state -, come together on the following key-principles: the sovereignty of China, the unity of the country, the nationalization of territorial identities and, last but not the least, China's goals to become a great world power.

For this to happen, apart of the "good example" of Macau, the situation in Hong-Kong has to be controlled and reversed. If not, it risks infect Macau's internal stability. On the other hand, China has to deal with Taiwan's refusal on the "one country, two systems". This major problem could act as a dilatory factor that could oblige Beijing to extend the SARs' autonomy deadlines.

Due to historical reasons, the democratic identity of Macau's institutions is still weak. For several reasons, they feel closer to China on many domains, such as ethnic, territorial, cultural, historical, economic and strategic. These wide-ranging aspects of proximity can contribute, in the future, to a formal assets reduction of the MSAR autonomy.

The rising China, its fast economic growth and social development have been pushing the Macau' socio-economic growth, which performs better standards of living of the population. Macau turned into a pole of attraction for new inhabitants, particularly Chinese people, but also Portuguese people (specialized people, like lawyers) and people from other nationalities, such as American and African people, and many foreign students. The Macau's population growth (and the house prices increase) did ring the alarms in Beijing that decided to extend the territory of Macau inside the Mainland, giving also better conditions for settling new enterprises.

The economy of Macau is still very dependent on gambling and tourism. The need to diversify its economy, giving priority to the "new economy" (new technologies, start-ups, environmental technologies, maritime resources) and to reinforce internal stability is under China's radar, because it can also attract foreign investment at a time when international links have to be improved.

The contrast between the Macau's past situation (before the handover) and its present situation obviously favours China's national interests, but it can also be a challenge to Macau autonomy.

European Union (France, in particular), the USA (China and the USA are partners on Macau's gambling), and the Portuguese Speaking Countries (mainly Portugal and Brazil), are the Macau's biggest partners. Altogether, they represent a huge crossroads for China's political weighing on what refers to the continuation or not the SARs autonomy, and in what terms it shall be settled.

Regarding the Portuguese Speaking Countries, Macau got to strengthen its position as privileged interlocutor and China's "platform", to which the Forum Macau has largely contributed.



Included in the Great Bay of Guangdong – one of the most competitive bays in the world – Macau cannot be out of sync with the Beijing political guidelines, for reaching the inclusive modernization of the country. Already partner of the three Guangdong’s Economic Free Zone agreements, Macau represents one of the most important pieces of China’s national strategy to attain its global interests.

In fact, Macau is the lone story of success of China’s “peaceful reunification” under the “one country, two systems” state policy.

The previous Executive chief of Macau, Chui Sai On, answered in an interview to the main question posed in this chapter, and he declared, “*Macau shall to defend the sovereignty of China and the high degree of its autonomy*”.

This declaration, made in Portugal, could be seen as the single words avowed with “faith” by a China sympathizer that wanted to testify a “non-existent” defiance to the “one country, two systems”. But, if Chui Sai On was in Portugal representing the “two systems”, it can also happen that his opinion, in line with the “one country” policy, coincides with Macau’s population major opinions, despite some phenomena of protests voiced by local activists, taking the example of the ideological struggle in Hong-Kong.

Nevertheless, he clearly admitted that Macau didn’t give up from its expectations on a “high degree of autonomy” within China’ sovereignty, he stressed.

Xi Jinping’s doctrine

The 19th Congress of the Communist Party (2017) gave a constitutional character to Xi Jinping’s political thought on China. The final document approved would be introduced in the Constitution Law, being the first deep amendment in 14 years time (2018).

As proposed by the Communist Party, this constitutional revision follows Marxism-Leninism orientations, the Mao Tse-Tung thought, the Deng Xiaoping theory, and the “Three Represents” guidelines of Jiang Zemin.

According to the “Three Represents” theory (2000), the Communist Party represents the most advanced force in China; always follows the most advanced

culture; and always defends the fundamental interests of the Chinese population majority.

This last revision of the Constitution took also in consideration the “Scientific Outlook on Development” and, finally, it incorporated the Xi Jinping’s thought on “Socialism with Chinese characteristics to a New Age”.

These impressive political contributions to the history of the People’s Republic of China gave density to the “social contract” and to the country’s ideological guidelines compact, now translated into the Constitution Law, in parallel, with the Party’s rules. All together, they emphasise the “socialist ideology”, the collective character of China’s society (against any individual or liberal values), and the prevalence of Xi Jinping’s personal power, which, for the construction of a socialist society and for the “renaissance” of China, will impose the “four integrals” or the “four ethic-political imperatives” that consist: on the construction of a “moderately prosper society”, free of poverty; on the deepening of reforms and openness; on the empire of law in the country’s administration; and on the fortification of the party’s discipline at the service of the great Chinese nation, especially in the fight against corruption.

The Communist Party’s rules (the Party’s Constitution for 89,5 millions members, which obliges the entire Chinese population), the consecration of the Party’s highest authority over the country, and the concentration of power in Xi Jinping’s hands, perform the current political building of China, as legitimized by the Constitution Law and theorized by Xi Jinping’s doctrine on “socialism with Chinese characteristics”.

However, political effects of the coronavirus crisis have been affecting Xi Jinping and the Party’s credibility calling into question the principle of legitimacy. In fact, more than difficulties in the Chinese economy – extended to the world economy -, the coronavirus crisis appears to be the biggest threat to the “social contract” and to the socialist regime, despite the central government control measures for stopping the propagation of related prejudicial news.

The imposed “sanitary cord” is probably the biggest crisis that the socialist regime is facing after the country’s openness to the world, affecting China’s economy, internal stability and the international image of the country, with consequences still unknown.

a) – The “social contract”

Over the past few decades China has been governed by a non-written “social contract” between the government and the Chinese population. The central idea of this contract is legitimacy.

By a tutelage narrative, China’s government serve the Chinese population, from which it gains legitimacy. At the people’s eyes, the ideological legitimacy (first of all, the Marxism-Leninism, as a “national doctrine” that defends the monopoly on power to attain the society’s well-being; at the modern ages, its matching with the Chinese values and traditions) is given by the performance of the state governance, expressed on education, political policies, virtues and discourses of politicians, the civil protection, and the defence of national interests. An important part of this legitimacy comes from the preservation of ancient values and traditions (mainly, Confucianism and Taoism), from the rescuing of a century of the country’s humiliation and from peace maintenance. For example, the scenery of China’s eventual military intervention in Taiwan, calling for Taipei’s foreign supporters involvement, would be dangerous for the legitimacy of the socialist regime.

With some variations depending on the conjuncture, the sources of the Communist Party legitimacy have been nationalism (an imported concept, having exceptional importance at the beginning of the Chinese socialist regime), legitimacy of performance (crucial in the years of reform) and political meritocracy (nowadays, probably the most important concept).

In the light of the “social contract”, the Communist Party retains the monopoly on power and, in return, it has to accomplish economic growth and poverty reduction. The central government has to enable the Chinese people to feel proud again of their great nation and civilization. After a century of humiliation, China had to regain its great power so that it could be treated on the basis of equality by Western rich countries.

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The Chinese national identity has a strict link with the “social contract”, giving to it density. So, to give substrate to this contract, the government has been instilling a big array of nationalism while the Chinese citizens were granted with new liberties that they had not in the past, despite some freedom restrictions. The “red-line” was (and continues to be) something that the Communist Party could perceive as a threat to its survival.

Deng Xiaoping’s ideas of meritocracy in the Party’s role and composition, and of individual rights were definitely prevented by superior interests of the nation and by the social cohesion, granted by the socialist ideology (Marxism-Leninism is China’s official ideology, now smoothed by the “Chinese characteristics”).

According to the need of economic development and China’s openness to the world, Beijing radically modernized its economic policies, reversing the initial Marxist or Maoist aversion to providing monetary compensations for labour or to accept private property. These reforms have been responsible for the significant growth of the Chinese middle class, which got the potential to be the most influential group in China when looked at its socio-economic status. As a result, the considerably large middle-class comes to perceive the Communist Party as being responsible for its rising levels of prosperity.

Since the inception of Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents” meant to attract private entrepreneurs to Party membership, the middle and upper classes saw the Communist Party as being responsible for their economic well being.

The government provided an environment for a healthy, regulated economy, to encourage the creation of private property and wealth, and in return it could have its rule legitimized. The government or the Party guarantee jobs to the people and a healthy economy was the focal reason for them to tolerate the strict control that the Party maintained over the state.

The world financial crisis of 2008/2009 affected China’s economy, although not so deeply as the majority of other countries, especially in the West. Nevertheless, it becomes increasingly difficult for academic graduates to find jobs, the volume of China’s exports dropped, and the unemployment raised unexpectedly, affecting tens of millions. The possibility of a financial crisis

challenged Beijing's ability to hold up its side of the deal (the "social contract") with the population.

When Xi Jinping took the power, in 2013, there existed signs of inequality between rich and poor, of a huge corruption, of the life threatening environmental damage, and of human rights abuses that risked fracturing the society and the social contract. The regime was at risk of collapsing.

Thus, the key objective of Xi Jinping was to address the country's administration through the strategy approved at the Party's Congress to rebalance the social contract, as a question of life or death for the Communist Party, even if the reform will be much more difficult than before. Everywhere, reforms always witnesses winners and losers, and in this scenario, the main losers were state-owned enterprises, banks, local governments, Party officials, and many government ministries and interests groups.

The Chinese government became particularly adapted at maintaining or regaining control over the population by the censorship, physical repression and through the creation of an environment where fear of speaking or of inadequate attitudes are object of a legitimate state control.

Due to the advanced technologies including surveillance, censorship, and controlled access to information (Western websites are blocked in China, such as Google search, Facebook, Instagram, and so on...), Beijing's authorities are now empowered as never before, to monitor, identify, and censor those whose activities are perceived as a threat to the regime.

Continued civil unrest on the part of groups desiring independence from Communist Party's rule being also a result of ethnic inequality, religious suppression and denial of freedom of expression illustrate the real dimension of threats to the Party's ability to maintain total control over the state.

Regardless, the most significant threat to the power monopoly held by the Communist Party could be a pronounced economic downturn. Although, risks of eliminating the Party's influence seems to be insignificant, even if the Chinese economy only raised, in 2019, 6,1% (the minimum over the past decades). The trade conflict with the USA, the internal demand reduction, unemployment and bank system fragilities can explain those figures. However, the current

coronavirus crisis will deep those figures, with unknown social and political consequences.

The “economic divide” between rich and poor raised the need for equilibrate the national “social contract” for the Party to survive. The project of recalibrating China’ “social contract” involves some relaxing measures on the economy and society, while exerting more political repression as arrests and ethnic and territorial actuations, as well as recent freedom of expression denials can testify.

The most notable Beijing’s reforms consisted in: the end of one-child policy, being permitted to couples to have two children; to abolish 351 labour camps, which housed more than 50.000 detainees; to relax the household registration system, which denied internal migrants access to social services outside their home-town, for small and medium size cities; the establishment of the “new state security committee” to help coordination to external and defence policies; to minimize risk of disputes with neighbours (like Japan); and the “new leading small group” led by Xi or the vice-president to drive reforms.

Rising social discontent, being not enough to force the Communist Party itself to go out from power, could be sufficient to tempt some members of the elite to take advantage of the situation to their political benefit, thus leading to internal instability within the Party and damaging its credibility. While the Communist Party shows an extraordinary ability to suppress dissent, many argue that it cannot contain such dissent for so long. But nobody can guess how long the situation can last and what will be the main detonator of a bigger conflict. Experts argue that the present situation in China of popular discontent only has contributed to the reinforcement of the Communist Party’s rule, as the government’s control measures augmented, being increasingly tough and sophisticated.

The Communist Party of China is progressively structured around a rigid hierarchy and a personality cult centred on Xi Jinping. It signifies a drastic shift from the meritocratic structure that existed under Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao’s tenures, even if Xi Jinping was elected by the political meritocracy method, in 2013.

Any changes in China come from the top not from the bottom, and voices claiming for greater citizens participation in local politics and for an end to the Party's monopoly on power are not loudly enough to resonate in the majority of the Chinese people.

Thus, China's monolithic regime is going on, and Beijing wants to maintain the "social contract" alive, while facing international pressures, some local dissidents and, above all, big challenges to the country's prestige and economic growth.

In these circumstances, the "social contract" seems to depend a lot on the international conjuncture, given externalities of China's economic development. Beijing's capacity to satisfy internal demands and to face "deglobalization" can be set in question at a time when the coronavirus crisis is producing perplexity and the Chinese people's distrust on state authorities. Despite of Party's care measures (the president has been preserved from the public opinion), Xi Jinping seems to be on the top of these adverse feelings.

b) - Xi Jinping, the supreme leader of China

The Communist Party argues that abolishing presidential term-limits gives to the presidency the same unlimited tenures of the Party's high representatives and of military heads. Strengthening this leadership "trinity" is seen as being suitable for a long-term stability of China and for structural policies.

President Xi holds now the unlimited leadership either of the Communist Party of China or the People's Army Liberation.

After the international economic crisis (2008/09) and answering to its collateral effects in China, the consolidation of Xi Jinping's power obeys to political purposes in the domestic and international fronts.

Domestically, the removal of term-limits gives to the president the required capacity to introduce structural reforms directed to the economy, the society and the Party's bureaucracy. In the international front, Xi Jinping aims for making China a global power, which procedure observes the following stages: 2020, 2035 and 2050.

Notwithstanding the apparent indefinite nature of the state (state economy planning *versus* capitalist rules), in the economic field the president Xi preconizes some flexibility degrees on pursuing domestic economic policies, which could be painful to many Chinese in the short-term. Although, the president is empowered to pursue policies he believes will be beneficial in the long-term, having no concerns of the short-term implications as he uses his constitutional rights.

The government's decision that the market must play a decisive role in allocating resources to encourage the economic growth, was accompanied by taking away direct and indirect subsidies to state enterprises. This is expected to improve the private sector while maintaining the economic policy planning, although threatened by the China-USA commercial conflict and by the new coronavirus effects. China's economy decreased in 2019 to 6,1%, and it is expected that those effects will deep that economic decrease. Thus, many doubts are floating over China's economic performance in 2020 and 2021, as the world economy is facing a similar crisis of 2008, for the same reasons. "*Deglobalization*" phenomenon is calling into question the best economic estimates all over the world.

In the military field, it was expected that China's army would complete mechanization efforts by 2020, and modernization by 2035, eventually evolving into what Xi Jinping termed "a world-class army by 2050," finalized with a "blue water navy" capable of hemispheric, if not global force projection. These stages were also scheduled in the light of the country's reunification policy and China's renaissance as Xi Jinping's government plans.

In terms of China's international image, the removal of the president's term-limits Beijing wants to give a message of stability and continuity, at a time when many foreign leaders are questioning the reliability of leadership term-limits for state policies execution, as it happens in Turkey, Russia or even in USA with Trump's second mandate being almost assured. Benefiting from these international trends, the constitutional removal of the president's term-limits signifies a sovereign manifestation of the state, as well as a call of attention to foreign leaders to respect the non-interference in China's internal affairs, giving to the president XI hands-free for pursuing his national policies.

Domestic reforms and the political perseverance of the Chinese leadership wants also to signalize to its foreign partners (and potential partners) that they can rely on China's internal stability and continuity, as opposed to the unpredictability coming from many important countries, as it happens with the USA, China's main rival, or with the European Union, which suffers from internal disarticulation and disaggregation. The strategic weakening of the EU – a world voice that always monitored China's actions and policies – can give intensity to Xi Jinping's national and international objectives.

So, the constitutional revision of 2018 gave to the president Xi the supreme leadership of China at a time when national and international conjuncture was in favour of the concentration of state powers to combat threats coming from inside or outside the country in any political, economic, social and technological fields. The socialist regime was the main tool to achieve this goal.

c) - Xi Jinping's "mandate of the sky"

Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, both the Constitution and Communist Party's rules aim to reinforce the country's economic, political, cultural, social, scientific, technologic, military and diplomatic tools, as well as its administrative structure, to endorse China's global strategy.

This great ambition of Beijing's policymakers is based on the "way of thinking and acting" of the Chinese people (Confucianism), converted in the state, and on the belief of China's supremacy.

The state top position of Xi Jinping rescues memory of the "heavenly mandate" that existed in the Imperialist ages, which granted the exceptional character of the Chinese Empire and its Emperor (the Chinese *exceptionalism*), submitted to the law of nature. Absolutism was the Empire's political regime.

Currently, the legal "enthronization" of China's president gives to Xi Jinping the same exceptional character for ruling the country on the way he believes being necessary to attain national objectives and to show the world the Chinese civilization's superiority, while adapting Marxism-Leninism, and Maoism, to the country's new contexts (domestic and international).

This means a process where the Chinese people, independently of their ethnic, minority and identity belongings, has to pursue the construction of the People's Republic of China as it was envisaged: great, unique, powerful, prestigious and an example for other nations. This process has to be realized under China's socialist regime and the "democratic dictatorship", being the sole ideology and architecture of power that fit a so big and heterogeneous country to continue structural reforms.

In the president Xi's assessment of the country, structural reforms will firmly improve the socialist democracy and institutions, as well as the socialist state of law. These reforms will develop the socialist market economy, under a new development outlook and a self-dependent and hard-work way, to modernize China's industry, agriculture, defence, science and technology, promoting, in a coordinate method, the country's progress and development on several domains, such as material, political, cultural, ethical, social and ecological. All these "well-designed and well-defined" politics will transform China into a powerful and modern socialist country, for being prosper, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious, with a pleasant society. This compact will accomplish China's revitalization goal.

Political orientations of Xi Jinping are designed in respect of the following "Four Cardinal Principles": to keep socialism path, to uphold the people's democratic dictatorship, the Communist Party leadership, and Marxism-Leninism and the Mao Tse Tung Thought. As the Communist Party clearly determined, the national revitalization shall observe these four principles, while opposing the "bourgeois liberalization".

It is relevant to observe that both Marxism-Leninism and the Mao Tse-Tung Thought overshadow these principles enunciation, while the Deng Xiaoping Theory is somewhat devaluated. This hardening of the regime means the need of creating political background to implement the necessary structural reforms, given the short and the mid-term negative implications on the Chinese society.

The new version of the Constitution Law stresses the one-party system (Art. 1, Para 2). This also means a throwback to the constitutional versions of 1975 and 1978. The elimination of the presidency and the vice-presidency term-

limits (Art. 79) is also a throwback to the previous constitutional norms. The Chinese new governing structure, on what is related to the administrative and judicial branches, in parallel with the establishment of Supervisory Commissions (Art. 123-127), places the National People's Congress (theoretically the highest organ of the state) above those entities, so as the enshrinement of Xi Jinping thought.

Xi Jinping thought on "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics to a New Age" was adopted as the main doctrine of the new Constitution. To consolidate its "universal" character the Communist Party is in charge to control not only the legislative, administrative, judicial and military branches of the state, but also academic institutions (universities, research institutes, and think-tanks), and private sectors of the society (business and non-profit organizations alike).

Xi Jinping's guidelines theory obeys to fourteen principles, as follows: 1. to guarantee the Party's leadership all-along the process; 2. to have the central focus on the society; 3. to continue an integral and deep reform; 4. to adopt a new development outlook; 5. to accept that it is the society that rules the country; 6. to guarantee that all the governance areas are based on law; 7. to defend socialism values; 8. to guarantee and to improve the social way of life through development; 9. to guarantee the harmony between men and nature; 10. to look for a global focus on the national security; 11. to defend the Communist Party's absolute authority over the People's Army Forces; 12. to defend the "one country, two systems" and improve national reunification; 13. to promote the building of a society with a shared future for all mankind; and 14. to exercise the total and rigorous Party's control.

This doctrine recognizes China being at the first stage of the socialist state construction. In this process, Xi Jinping established two symbolic scenarios marked by an ideological and nationalistic wisdom: the first century of the Communist Party foundation (2021); and the first century of the People's Republic of China foundation (2049).

In the central state perspective, China's "reunification" has a relevant place. At the present stage, the "one country, two systems" represents an instrumental and unavoidable tool not only to complete national unity, but also for China's modernization and its international prestige. Priority is given to

peaceful means for accomplishing those goals, even if the official narrative on Taiwan's issue drives sometimes to the military force.

To complete the Hong-Kong and Macau's assimilation - already two developed city-states and China's strategic platforms to external markets -, and to fully incorporate Taiwan in the "one country, two systems" - decreasing in the meanwhile Taipei's resistance and international scepticism -, are points of honour of China's national policy and its purposes of the country's reunification. So, Hong-Kong's democratic claims and Taiwan's refusal for being integrated in China encounter Beijing's sovereign goals, as well as the socialist regime. Actually, Taiwan's last electoral results, reinforcing independents, and the instability in Hong-Kong have been undermining China's peaceful reunification aims.

Since China's openness to the world, Taiwan's issue became an international theme. For the resumption of diplomatic relations between China and the USA - and all along their history - Taiwan was considered a delicate matter for both countries, with China claiming international recognition of "one China" and the respect of the "non-interference" principle. In these circumstances, Taiwan represents to Beijing a national and international sensitive matter that coerces China's freedom of action.

Currently, any Chinese military intervention, being under the Communist Party authority, is subject to a scrutinized political decision, for legal and legitimacy reasons. More than ever, this decision belongs to the president.

Obeying to Xi Jinping doctrine, Beijing's policymakers elaborated a structural reform policy. Its main axis is economy, and in concrete terms it was designed according to the "socialist market economy" framework, theorized in the 18th and 19th Congresses of the Communist Party. By this policy the central government allows market to function, but not with full power decision; the government will intervene when market fails.

In the social domain it envisages freeing the Chinese population from poverty (until 2016, 800 millions people have already went out of poverty), and from inequalities between the countryside and the cities.

Xi's doctrine also includes "ecological socialism" as well as the "eco-civilization" theory, aiming government's efforts to succeed and attain the universal legitimation of the BRI, seen as the most important and innovative

China's instrument for the country's revitalization and its international affirmation. The Land Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road, including their cross land and maritime derivations, the BRI, announced by Xi Jinping in 2013, is considered the lone "democratic alternative" for development to the "unfair" international system, dominated so far by the USA (the Bretton Woods system, established in 1944). With this in his mind, the president Xi strongly defends this global initiative as the only one that allows humankind development in fair, equilibrated, ecological and comprehensive conditions.

For the reversal of the international financial governance, Beijing created the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the BRI Fund of China. China is also using the NDB funds, a multilateral financial instrument belonging to the BRICS, the group composed by emergent world powers such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

China's aspiration on a "new world order" is based on the "sovereignty" concept. This means that relations between states are ruled by national interest perquisite. This "sovereignty" concept replicates the Wien European order of 1648, now adjusted to China's perception that the world already entered a new "post-sovereign" era (the "New Age"), on which values as democracy and human rights must be submitted to sovereign states and their national interests.

In Xi Jinping's view, China's hybrid socialist regime and the Chinese "popular democracy" shall be respected and the country treated equally as a great power, like the USA. For China, the new world order is a multipolar one where nations have to deal on a sovereign basis.

For Beijing, the five principles of the "pacific coexistence" (a concept created in 1954, in an agreement for peace between China and India) have to signify a kind of "free-space" to implement China's deliberations, notwithstanding different regimes and other countries' political perceptions, which orderly have to coexist. In the last instance, these principles of the "pacific coexistence" refer to a wishful global acceptance of ideological differences between countries, and mostly to the non-interference in China's internal affairs.

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Final considerations
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Since the entry into force of the “the one country, two systems”, many foreign policymakers, scholars and experts in politics whispered that China’s socialist regime would dissolve being replaced by a liberal regime. In a globalized world, liberal order should win despotism and collectivism wherever they subsisted.

In their opinion, China’s economic development and collateral effects of the collapse of the URSS would be the *leitmotiv* for such a revolutionary political process. However, those prognostics were done without taking in account the Chinese culture, its weight and traditions, people’s pride in the Middle Empire civilization, and a common vision where China would occupy the centre of the world, this one idealistically unified and ruled by a wise, virtuous and sensible “Emperor”.

Actually, neither the socialist regime turned into a liberal regime nor globalization signified the triumph of liberalism in China. Even the wishful unified world under China’s influence – the BRI – is facing threats both from inside and outside the country. Quite the reverse, China only took profit from liberalism and globalization to develop the country, to maintain the socialist regime and to extend influence beyond borders, but not to change its own political system and state model.

Beijing’s conviction is still based on the idea that “the government serve the people” (the tutelage narrative), what in the majority opinion of the Chinese people corresponds to democracy, as the government guarantees peace, development and national recovering. So, the socialist regime continues to have people’s consent, unless a great crisis could happen.

At the end of the Cold War, in 1989, China still was an isolated country in the community of nations. It suffered from the distrust and scepticism of many other countries, from the political impact of dissidents, refugees and mass-protests (Tiananmen), and the continuing turmoil in Tibet and Xingjian, as well as from the international resistance to the Chinese claims on Taiwan.

Managing to surpass this problematic period, China entered into an economic development process at the turn of the century, which contributed to place the country at second place of the world economy, being recognized as an

emergent power. In parallel, Beijing got to obtain a political legitimization of state's ideological regime, favoured by the new international spirit of peace and harmony, to which contributed the most commercial interests of the USA and the good-will diplomacy of European countries, all charmed by market opportunities that China could offer, and by Beijing's leaders strong convictions and perseverance.

Having sovereign responsibilities over Hong-Kong and Macau, London and Lisbon's political disposition to negotiate the handover of both territories was also a firm contribution to the legitimacy of China's socialist regime, and to the legitimacy of China's claim on the "one country" concept. Joint-declarations and their international legal status are a testimony of the recognition of China's reunification strategy, under the socialist regime. Moreover, they were in line with the deadlines that Beijing, in enjoying sovereign powers, decided to establish in the Basic Laws.

On the side of China's national interests, the Beijing's claim on "constructive" international relations would be the main precept for the country's development, enjoying globalization and supporting at the same time the monolithic regime's endurance and the Chinese global affirmation.

Deng Xiaoping's great ambition was to complete China's peaceful "reunification". Besides the easy-going assimilation process of Hong-Kong and Macau, Taiwan still remains the leading political problem of the People's Republic of China, which has been always present since the Mao Tse-Tung's leadership. Actually, after Hong-Kong and Macau's handovers, Taiwan turned into the main addressee of the "one country, two systems". Beijing's constant invectives against Taipei's leaders, and their international supporters, can testify China's national priority on reunification.

Taiwan is the stronghold of a government that once ruled the entire China, until the civil war ended and the Communists took victory over the Nationalists, exiled in Taiwan. Since then, it becomes a democracy, a capitalist rule system (with its own army), strongly supported by the USA, and where the population increasingly identifies as "Taiwanese", an identitarian feeling opposed to the Chinese identity. This is a dangerous situation that has been replicated in Hong-Kong, where the "Hongkongers" are taking the streets,

causing social instability and blocking the economy. This situation rather differs from Macau's, where the "Macanese" identifies more with China's national identity. Nevertheless, the risks of contagion still remain.

In the meanwhile, Beijing doesn't give signals of slowing down the attention of the central state, through a "nationalization" policy in some autonomic domains, such as the judicial system. The regional policy inscribed in the Guangdong Greater Bay Area project aims to dilute the SARs autonomy, as a peaceful attempt to really unify the country.

The "one country, two systems" is not a solution to the problematic of identity, being more and more unwilling to overwhelm the ideological devise, as identity, in some cases, tends to surpass economy, the highest priority of China's national requests.

Despite growing economic ties, to reduce the room for manoeuvre of Taipei's leaders, the divisive line between China and Taiwan is ideology. Taiwan's continuing rejection for being subsumed in the "one country, two systems" didn't demobilize Beijing's perseverance so far, as the Chinese leaders swore to unify the country, if needed by force.

Taiwan is clearly a political dilemma for China. Any decision will have crucial effects in the international and internal domains, even in Hong-Kong and Macau's related problems, mainly when the Basic Laws are approaching to their deadlines.

In fact, a military intervention in Taiwan or even the Beijing's intrusion in the Hong-Kong autonomy could damage seriously the Communist Party's legitimacy and also the "one country, two systems" credibility. China's international image, the economic progress of the country and its strategic interests, could be spoiled in such a dramatic situation, having severe consequences on what refers to the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), the unprecedented national project designed to reinforce China's global position.

Since the beginning, the BRI has been facing challenges and international criticism, predominantly the opposition of Trump's administration and fears of some European countries. Currently, being China in an economic slowdown situation, the BRI is facing also huge financial problems, mostly related to the

capacity of the Chinese institutions for supporting the debt-weight of many acceding countries.

China is no more an isolated country as it was in the past. If globalization helped China's development, it can also bring difficulties to Beijing, mostly in the economic sphere, which risks setting in question the socialist regime. Now, the coronavirus crisis is at the centre of the state's main concerns as it affects China's economy and socio-political stability.

Xi Jinping's announcement on "China renaissance" and "Chinese dream" (emphasizing their crucial dates of 2021 and 2049) was a step forward of an old national strategy. With this announcement, Xi treated to send a message to the Chinese people and to the international community. Avoiding a confrontational narrative, internally, he wanted to advice dissidents not to produce disruptive movements or activities; externally, Xi put pressure on Taiwan and its international supporters not to take obstructive actions. Publicizing the central government program, Xi wanted to clearly show China's decision on pursuing its specific trajectory to fulfil national objectives in a detailed calendar.

According to the country's reunification strategy, the president's message can be unglued into different parts: 1) - the question of Taiwan, being not only a domestic issue, but also an international issue, where China's naval empowerment has a say; 2) - the double question of Hong-Kong and Macau related to the autonomic status evolution after 2049 (the Macau's Basic Law deadline), where internal dissidents are threatening Beijing's political order.

Taking all these factors in consideration, Xi Jinping's political alignment is clearly of a hard-line that devaluated Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic theory and recuperated Mao Tse-Tung's ideological principles (the president Xi's "original inspiration"), strengthened by nationalism. With his personal power reinforced by law, Xi Jinping didn't give up from socialism, even if he wants to smooth China's socialist regime through the alleged "Chinese characteristics".

In fact, the official focus on the "Chinese characteristics" serve to pave the way for China's revitalization, as these singularities (presumed to be ethnic, cultural and historical) permit the one-party rule system (the "one country" concept or the "Empire"), the president unlimited and personalized power (the "Emperor" elected by merit), as well as the hybrid socialist regime (fears from a

similar destiny of the URSS). This hybrid socialist regime that the “one country, two systems” reflects, acts as the government’s framework to assimilate national minorities, to facilitate cooperation with neighbour communities and foreign countries, to access external markets, as well as to accept some individual liberties, the private initiative, and to give room for foreign investment.

In ideological terms, this is a combination of nationalism, Confucianism, Marxism-Leninism, Maoism and Socialism, ruled by a monolithic regime. However, this mixture can be explosive especially when applied to an asymmetric country, in terms of geography, demography, ethnicity, identity and economy.

Globalization turned China into a vulnerable great country due to foreign influences, emphasizing discrepancies and disruptions, what has contributed to tighter the central government’s control.

Being small and differentiated parts of China, either Hong-Kong or Macau risk to be easily subsumed in the central government’s political order, if capitalism was not so crucial for the state economy and modernization. Actually, economic liberalism belongs to that ideological combination, which is tempered by an authoritarian regime (with no separation of powers) and a strong government led by the president and the Communist Party.

As said before, China is more a civilization, than a nation, which intends to rescue the imaginary of the Middle Empire, to revenge the one-century of humiliation and to show the world its supremacy. Nationalism that even globalization effects didn’t delete is still robust in China, as the people’s peculiar mentality and the country’s fast economic growth would testify. This unparalleled atmosphere shows that the majority of the Chinese people see itself as belonging to China, in the exclusive sense of a nation and civilization, as their physiognomic traits also reflect.

According to these considerations and contradictions, the “social contract” could be set in question, mostly because of the repressive actions of the government and the current crisis. As it is known, the “social contract” has been the main pillar of the socialist regime. But, at a time when the economy, the social stability, the territorial unity and the international distrust are opening cracks in the Chinese political building, does it plenty function?

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China looks for being a modern state that allies culture, history, traditions, people cohesiveness, development, and, last but not the least, the refocus of the country into the modern world, in order to substitute the condemned Eurocentric perspective. This compound makes part of China's "cultural strategy", which Beijing is being ponder to accomplish the national "calculative strategy". This strategy should combine moderate with reactive attitudes or opt for bigger assertiveness in the international arena. On what refers to Xi Jinping's intervention, it is viewed as the reinforcement of a "pragmatic gradualism" that gives primacy to the economic development, the internal stability and China's international respect, all of them in a wishful harmony. But this kind of intervention only takes place in the international arena; in the domestic field, Xi Jinping uses to combine assertiveness and greater political control with the "calculative strategy", when needed, on what refers to decisions that can be scrutinized or condemned by international powers (the actuation of the policy in Hong-Kong and Beijing's initiatives to erase Taiwan's independence goals).

In this complex scenario, the "Chinese dream" could not giving up from what China can receive for being integrated in the international system and from the positive effects of globalization in the country's economy. This is the reality, even if this political slogan (which sounds propaganda but can be found in the Chinese history) wants to signify the national renovation big project that proposes to rescue traditional culture and China's greatness, throughout the construction and consolidation of the People's Republic of China, using ideology and the bureaucratic structure of the Communist Party.

Trying to surpass contradictions and perplexities, Xi Jinping defends a common destiny of the mankind (lead by China and the CPC), putting aside disruptive differences in favour of the coexistence and peaceful development, either in the internal domain or in the international sphere. Peace, as China's development strategy holds up, and pacific coexistence are the main "corridors" to politically attend "peaceful development". This elaborated political thought is particularly important both to China and Xi Jinping's global and emblematic project, the BRI, and for this project's international recognition, especially by Western countries, still disbelievers on what refers to Beijing's intentions and attitudes.



All Beijing's official proclamations and political thoughts are based in only one ideology: socialism, envisaged by China's policymakers as the "world best political model", to which the Chinese population must obey, and the foreign countries have to respect as the "light guidance" for the humankind. "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" with its plasticity is seen as having merits to adapt universally. It seems that only in these circumstances, Beijing would expect to achieve the wishful thinking China's world leadership.

According to these elements, one can ask if Xi Jinping will pursue his proclaimed intention for maintaining the "one country, two systems" alive?

The "one country, two systems" was shaped essentially for China's reunification, for breaking the country's international isolation, and for reforming its economy, through pragmatism, discipline and obeisance (the neo-authoritarianism of Deng Xiaoping), and through the improvement of political merits within the establishment. Taking these principles in account, the "one country, two systems" could have conditions to be pursued, although some adjustments to new realities needed.

Due to the very nature of the Chinese regime, democratic dialogue is out of the question. So, adjustments will only come from Beijing's determinations, what can drive the country to a structural more unified policy. If Beijing's policymakers were interested on dialogue, it already could have started with the participation of all stakeholders. Actually, the time seems to be short to come to it. Moreover, the reinforcement of the central government's control doesn't let us to foresee this kind of dialogue.

In any circumstances, the "one country, two systems" could endure while it is perceived to be useful to China's national interests. Pragmatism, nationalism and a wide-ranging political vision will have the last word on the future of this hybrid concept.

China's past humiliation continues to draw people's national identity and to contribute to the country's internal stability, mostly given by the Communist Party's pedagogy and its straight control over the country. On the other hand, China's transformations along its history and the country's adaptation to successive crisis, disruptions and instability, endured Beijing's policymakers to engineer solutions and the Chinese people to accept them. The Chinese

philosophy and the singular mentality of the people (which one for Western people it's not easy to realize) could help finding adequate solutions.

Everybody probably knows what are Beijing's main goals, but only China's central power knows what will be the future measures. Many factors are over the table, even if the diagnosis was already done. Unpredictability is for sure a crucial element to enter in the Beijing's political equation.

In a globalized world, China cannot be as isolated as it was in the past, under risks of economic stagnation and socio-political implosion. Thus, the "Chinese dream" should be addressed within the community of nations, in respect for universal rules and common values, which China use to show no to be interested on hardly struggle, even maintaining the non-interference principle untouched. Any struggle could affect the BRI, as well as convictions, force and perseverance of Beijing's policymakers. This could signify a political defeat for China.

Throughout the BRI and the execution of a "diplomacy of influence" (even if Beijing uses subterranean forces abroad), Beijing's international strategy gives priority to the reaffirmation of China's civilization (source of legitimacy for the central power) for attaining its wishful "Imperial dominion". This wide-ranging strategy includes the Chinese strengthened presence both in the sea routes (the Maritime Silk Road, involving maritime derivations), and in continents (the Land Silk Road), as it happens in Africa, Latin America and Europe. Many experts in Europe, say that the "Chinese dream" is connected to the old Imperial imaginary for regaining the "Eurasia" concept, as the Land Silk Road, the 1+16 European dialogue format and the bilateral relationship of appeasement with Russia could testify.

In short, to maintain the "one country, two systems" unchanged is like to be the first pragmatic step to far-reaching China's global strategy.

Could be prompted to ask if Xi's pragmatism is enough to answer to political, social, economic and health challenges that China is facing in the domestic front. The last appearance of the president Xi in the Hubei province to visit patients infected with the COVID19 seems to be a manifestation of his political self-confidence.



Nevertheless, national minorities, territorial asymmetries and claims for democracy are confronting the Communist Party's supremacy and the president's authority. These challenges take even more relevance at a time when the country's economy is suffering from its growth decline and from international pressures, which compromises the "social contract".

All these questions still remain without clear answers, mostly because of Xi Jinping's ambiguous thought and contradictory attitudes. Instead, the central power is strengthening political control over the Chinese population, placing at the Beijing' service the Constitution Law and China's technological advances.

According to the power nature of the Communist Party of China (granted by law, with a universal and discretionary character), the "one country, two systems" stresses the "one country" concept. Can this concept be compatible with the central government's acceptance of liberal rules and values as the "two systems" model suggest? Is this dual character of the Chinese state the corollary of the "pacific coexistence", mostly when it was designed within China?

The Constitution Law does not give clear answers too. This is not surprising due to the Constitution's granted nature and its instrumental character, at the service of a governing power ideologically imposed to the Chinese entire population, since 1949. After the dark period of the Cultural Revolution, internal stability, the meritocratic policy and the economic growth of China (now, the second economy of the world) gave legitimacy to the socialist regime and credibility to the "one country, two systems". These circumstances can only suggest that any adjustments and discretionary measures are competences of Beijing's policymakers. In a so big country with the majority of the Chinese people being politically almost alienated (or silent) and submitted to the central state tutelage, political dissidences have not enough power to counter Beijing's deliberations. So, it can be almost certain that Hong-Kongers will never benefit from universal suffrage, as it could drive to a breakdown of the socialist regime.

Many foreign experts are of the opinion that only economy could help to clarify China's state model and the future of the "one country, two systems". On the other hand, many European policymakers show to believe that Hong-Kong and Macau will be soon completely integrated in China, as the Basic Laws will

achieve to their deadlines, which is in consonance with Xi Jinping's agenda on the "Chinese dream" accomplishment.

At this stage, one can ask if China's central power is opting for the "one country, one system" model, as it was designed by Deng Xiaoping And, in this scenario, one can also ask if Beijing will permit Taiwan to keep its self-government independent and political autonomy, risking the total independence of the island, as a sovereign state.

As all these questions interfere with China's main national goals - the reunification of the country and its full territorial sovereignty - it's hard to say what will be the real results of the "Chinese dream" and what will be the upcoming state model of China. As China has a very closed and concentrated power, only the future can give the right answers, having the assurance that the international conjuncture could influence them any way.

To conclude these inconclusive reflexions, it must be stressed that China is still facing big uncertainty due to the coronavirus crisis, with effects in the political, social and economic order. The official announcement of a pandemic COVID19 disease, by the World Health Organization, still continues to affect China's economy, as the world is closing borders and suffering from another big economic crisis, probably bigger than the financial crisis of 2008.

As the coronavirus crisis begun in China - the big world factory - many Chinese products and also the Chinese diaspora have been subject to foreign boycott and prejudices. An "anti-China" climate has spread in many foreign countries, now affected also by the same disease, with harmful consequences in the world economy.

After decades, Beijing's policymakers saw China once more isolated from the international community. Globalization, which signified golden opportunities for the Chinese economic growth, is now challenging hard China's economy that became extremely fragile. In economic terms, nobody knows yet what will be the extension of these crisis consequences, but some experts are already handling with a GDP decrease about 2%. The world GDP is also in a decreasing dynamic.

Actually, the entire world is facing a "*deglobalization*" process, which can act in China as a double-edged sword in the economic and political fields.



In the political domain, China's situation is rather unpredictable. While the popular displeasure seems to increase in China, Xi Jinping and the Communist Party are trying to contain it using all the repression measures over the people. In a hostile attitude, Hong-Kong decided to close its borders to people coming from Macau and the Mainland, and to accuse Beijing of lack of transparency while managing the disease. Macau only decided to close Casinos, Hotels, restaurants and public services, for two weeks, and around two months after those measures, announced the COVID19 expansion controlled.

Moreover, in the contemporary China, the socio-economic polarization, the urbanism and the literacy, education and exposition to the media increase, augmented people's expectations on the state decision power. In these conditions, a prolonged crisis undermining people's faith on economic growth or giving the perception of an incompetent actuation of the central government could initiate a discrediting process of the state power, even calling into question its legitimacy.

Currently, China's situation in the international sphere is not really very friendly. International distrust and foreign media campaigns against China are affecting the country's image and credibility, which could reinforce its isolation and economic breakdown. The global situation is not also in favour of China's needs and expectations.

In short, China is suffering from a very difficult and complex situation that casts even more doubts about the "one country, two systems" future. Though, this situation tends to turn the "one country, two systems" into a more fragile and contradictory formula of China's new state model.



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