

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

*“China is a sleeping lion. Let her sleep, for when she wakes she will shake the world” – Napoleon Bonaparte*

Years after the Cold War ended, China has secured itself a place in the emerging power shelf within the international society. Often perceived as contesting the established power – the United States, the rise of China has left everyone in the world on their edge, and it is for a good reason. Up to this date, China is still seen as trying to ‘race’ – or at least stood at the same level – with the United States. In 2018, Chinese Gross Domestic Product (GDP) went as much as US\$ 13,608 billion, a US\$1,465 billion addition to the previous year (World Bank, 2019). Not only America, but China has also taken the position of other countries. China successfully replaced Japan in 2010 as the country with the biggest economy. Japan’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which counted for US\$ 5,474 billion was exceeded by China, with US\$ 5,879 billion (Mahapatra & Ratha, 2014). Moreover, China is currently leading the world’s economy with the largest both inbound and outbound merchandise shipping. Last but not least, China also holds the largest share of foreign exchange reserves and is the largest recipient and donor of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Morrison, 2013).

Looking at these rapid developments of China today, it is unthinkable that China was once an extremely poor with a relatively stagnant and inefficient economy (Morrison, 2013). It was all thanks to the significant economic reform in 1979 that the economy of China has grown rapidly over the years. Apart from its economy, the post-reform China has also integrated itself into the international society, and it is mesmerizing to think that over the past forty years, China has travelled a path from a nation isolated from the international community to one integrated into it (Shambaugh, 2018). Aside from being an economic power, China is also showing its rapid progress in military. Moreover, its annual economic growth has been progressing rapidly, making it the fastest in the world and unprecedented in the world history of economic development (Wang, 2009)

Along with its economic developments, China also demonstrated impressive growth in terms of its influences across the world. In 2013, Xi Jinping cultivated a policy called The Belt and Road Initiatives or One Belt One Road (OBOR). Under the official statements by the Chinese's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), this policy is formed to promote global trade along with integrating the global economy in the basis of cooperation. The Belt and Road Initiatives is rooted in 3 fundamental principles; *gongshang*, *gongjiang*, *gongxiang*<sup>1</sup> or discussion, collaboration and sharing.

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<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping himself reiterated this concept as the ethos of BRI. Under this principle, it is articulated that shared growth can only be achieved through discussion, collaboration and sharing, which in turn will lead to a more fair, open, equitable, and inclusive global governance. Through this principle too, China

One region that stands out particularly to scholars is the South Pacific since it used to be dominated by the United States. However, if China keeps on doing what they are doing right now, it would not come as a surprise that the region might turn its stance toward China. China is now believed to be one of the biggest donors right after the United States and Australia (Yang, 2009). Briefly observed, Chinese engagement with the Islands might look sincere. However, the reality proved to be different. Some scholars pointed out how the tension between Taipei and Beijing is likely to be China's real motive in the region. Under the US influences, the Pacific Islands countries supported Taiwan as a sovereign country – a rather sensitive issue for the mainland, China. However, the growing influences of China, countries within the Islands are starting to have a change of stances. In 2019, two of the Pacific Islands countries – the Solomon Islands and Kiribati – bailed on Taiwan and switched over to Beijing, leaving Taipei with only 15 diplomatic partners (Dormido & Jason, 2019).

When it comes to the broadening of Chinese dominances to the Pacific Islands and its real motives, scholars are in disunity. Jian Yang (2009) argued that the expansion of Chinese influences in the Islands is primarily due to the declining presence of the United States and its ally, Europe. Crocombe (1995) stated that it is attributable to the fact that the US is currently occupied with the rapid increase

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envisioned an international community that is based on a win-win cooperation led by Chinese government.

of trade competition, aid, investment, tourism, education and even research in East Asia. On the other hand, Henderson and Reilly (2003) argued that at some point, China overtake the US and put South Pacific under its domination. If this is true, then the *American lake* would someday turn to *Chinese lake*. Windybank (2005:28) shares a similar view, concurring that China – through a phenomenal mix of exchange, helps, and honorable strategy – is chipping away at an establishment to assemble another territorial request with China as the pioneer and the US as a pariah.

On the other side of the coin, a big number of scholars refused to believe that China is aiming to dominate the Islands. Zhang (2007: 368) argued that there is not enough proof that China is intentionally working to fill in the vacuum of power in the Pacific. In fact, the economic ties between China and the Islands provided the latter more opportunities (Yang, 2009). China might have the biggest number of diplomats, but that does not mean it too, has a big number of diplomatic missions.

Seeing how China is setting milestones in different aspect of its rise, the need to understand its behavior in a different perspective would be understandable. To use theory originated in the Western world would be like trying to put the last puzzle piece to a completely different puzzle. Cox (1981) argued that theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose. Mainstream western international relations theory (IRT) has largely dominated the disciplinary discourse (Yaqing, 2016). The domination of western IRT was – and still is – so prominent that

Archaya and Buzan initiated a project which seeks to address the question of “why is there no non-Western IR theory?”. Though IRT may pose itself to be universal, it can also be seen as speaking for the West and in the interest of sustaining its power, prosperity and influence (Acharya & Buzan, 2010). Drawing from Cox’s argument, Asian have an interest in international relations theory that speak for them and their interest (Acharya & Buzan, 2010). In the realist argument, China is always perceived as a threat. This is a simple example of how the use of western international relations more often than not, represents no one but the west. The conventional western-centered international relations theory is both too narrow and in its source and too dominant in its influence to be good for the health of the wider project to understand the social world in which we live (Acharya & Buzan, 2010).

In order to fully understand China’s behavior in the international community, applying a view originated from the country itself will surely serves a better mean. Against this specific background, this writing will attempt to examine Chinese growth and how it successfully positioned itself within the international structure using a perspective coming from none other than China. Specifically, Daoism as one of the most prominent philosophical traditions in China will be implemented with the hope that the way China behaves and exercises its influence throughout the world can be better understood.

## **1.2 Research Question**

1. What is the strategy that China used in order to expand its influences in the South Pacific region?

### **1.3 Research Aims and Objectives**

This research aims to explore the strategy used by China in order to gain prominence in the South Pacific Region.

### **1.4 Conceptual Framework**

#### **1.4.1 Constructivism**

Constructivism first emerged in the international relations theory in early 1990. Its emergence is often associated with materialist scholars failed to provide a materialist reason behind the end of Cold War (Klotz & Audie, 1962). Gorbachev's *new thinking* demanded a constructivist approach to be able to fully understand the cause as to how the Cold War ended (Schultze, 2009). Alexander Wendt, a prominent figure in constructivism, in his book *Social Theory of International Politics* contends that the sudden and unforeseeable ending of Cold War is attributable to the growth of constructivism (Wendt, 1999). Unlike traditional international relations theories such as realism, liberalism, and Marxism whose origin come from political discourse, constructivism derives from a social theory. Originally, constructivism is not an international relations theory, rather it is a sociological theory being applied in international relations.

Constructivism comprised of two basic tenets: first, intangible elements are more important than the tangible ones, and second, interests and actor's actions are mainly

determined by these intangible elements more than by the tangible element ones (Wendt, 1999). Rather seeing the international structure as *given* and static, constructivism perceives the world as socially-constructed, dynamic and constantly changing. Vendulka Kubalkova, used the word ‘construction’ in order to help provide a comprehension of constructivism:

a constructivist views the world as inseparably social and material, viewing people in the world as makers of their world, and viewing the world as a never-ending construction project”  
(Kubalkova, 2001)

In other words, international relations in the eye of constructivism is a product of social interactions among actors (Rosyidin, 2020). Under a realist view, national interest one key concept in international relations, is perceived as merely material and something that is predetermined, for example, maximization of power and wealth. Constructivist on the other hand, posits that national interest is not something to take as a given. Instead, national interest is seen as a very fluid concept and is bound to change depending on actor’s perception of themselves as well as their perceptions of others.

Ontologically, constructivism emphasis the way norms, identity, ideology, culture and language shapes identity and guide actions (Klotz & Audie, 1962). This research however, will center on how culture shapes state’s foreign policy making. Attempt at linking culture and state behavior first appeared in the “national character studies” of

the 1940s and 1950s (Lantis, 2009). Clifford Geertz in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) defined culture as:

a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life” (Geertz, 1973)

In respect of the role which cultures play in state behavior, Berger noted that beliefs and values deriving from culture can serve as a unique lens to view national behavior which in turn will shape the viewpoint of events and even generate societal responses (Geertz, 1973). By the same token, Thomas Banchoff formulated a constructivist model of foreign policy in which he argues that decision taken at critical historical junctures have shaped the development of foreign policy over time (Banchoff, 1999).

#### **1.4.2 Daoism**

China is a country famous of its richness of philosophy traditions. Three leading schools of thought in Chinese philosophy are Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism. In the eye of the Western world, Chinese philosophy is often being misrepresented as “non-philosophy”, or as a form of religion. But Chinese philosophy is not simply a way of living, a doctrine inviting believers or followers (Liu, 2006). However to come up with a complete definition of Chinese philosophy would not be an easy task since it will require a comprehensive explanation of China’s background such as history, and culture. Instead of offering a *definition*, Liu (2006) developed a *list* of some broad characteristic of Chinese philosophy.



The pre-historic Chinese did embrace a Supreme Being whom they referred to as “*Shang-di*”. Their belief to the Supreme Being did not necessarily being translated to the God and human relations like one is Christian, for example. In ancient Chinese thinkers' belief, the universe has no ‘Creator’, no intentional process of creation as well as personal judges in the name of the Universe. Unlike Greek’s personified gods or goddesses, their religion is more about worshiping Nature (Liu, 2006). Furthermore, their primary thesis is that the world of Nature corresponds to that of the human kind. In other words, what men do will affect Nature and vice versa. In conclusion, the world to ancient Chinese is an organized nature ruled by order and regularities instead of odds (Liu, 2006).

Daoism is a school of thought dated back as far as 600 BCE. In the present days, two popular Romanization for the term *Daoism* exist, *Dao* and *Tao* (Liu, 2006). However, these two refer to the same thing. Three names that are closely linked to the origin of this philosophy are Laozi (Master *Lao*), Zhuangzi (Master *Zhuang*), and Liezi (Master *Lie*). Out all of these names, only Master *Zhuang* is taken to have been an actual person while the other two seem to be legendary characters who may be based on historical figures (Coutinho, 2014). The teaching of Daoism is documented under the Laozi’s *Daodejing* which along with the Bible, stood to be one of the most widely translated book in the world (Miller, 2003).

*Dao* literally means “the Way”, “path” and is symbolized with *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are both complimentary and competitive. On the one hand, the two are

competing forces or completely opposite of energy which constantly work against each other, however, *yin* and *yang* complement each other since the world basically consists of these two elements (Liu, 2006). The concept of *yin* and *yang* does not mean a simplification of the world as a mere binary, as something good and evil, or light and dark. For a better understanding on how this kind of dualism works, Boddle provided an explanation:

Never...is the suggestion made by [all thinkers who adopt the *yin-yang* ideology] that the one can or should wholly displace the other. Hence there is no real analogy with the dualisms based on conflict (light vs darkness, etc.) so familiar to us in the west. Conversely, *yin* and *yang* form a cosmic hierarchy of balanced inequality in which, each complements the other and has its own necessary function.

Under the western philosophical traditions, we are familiar with the Hegel's dialectics way of thinking. According to this "master-slave" dialectics, one pole could not exist with the opposite, even with the aims to overthrow or defeat the other. The contradictions between the two polar opposite simply could never reach synthesis (Ling, 2014). Meanwhile, under the Daoist dialectics, one pole exists with the aim to complement the other contradicting pole which in turn produce transformation both internally and externally. In other words, *yin* operates within *yang* and *yang* within *yin* (Ling, 2014). For example, conflict and cooperation are polar opposite, but they both correct each other's weaknesses (Rosyidin, 2019).

*Yin* refers to qualities associated with the feminine such as cold, weak, accommodating, passive, gentle and soft meanwhile *yang* represents hot, hard, strong, vigorous, firm, aggressive, active and strong. However, this does not imply that *yang* supersede *yin* in terms of value. Each of those traits bears value depending on the context and circumstances (Ling, 2014). One would not be desiring to be hot, hard, strong in every situation neither to be cold, weak, and soft all the time. Looking from this dialectic, we can always see that this world is always the combination of both elements of *yin* and *yang*.

## **1.5 Hypothesis**

The growing influences of China in the Pacific Islands can be best explained with the Daoist dialectics. This is proven by the combination of both hard and soft power utilized by China in order to widen its reach up to the South Pacific region. Under this Daoist view, what China does is the perfect example of the use of the *yin* and *yang* principles, where two things that might look contradictory are able to complement each other therefore leading to success. Author holds that applying a western perspective on China's rise will only frame China as the bad guy and that its rise should be seen as something cautionary.

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

### **1.6.1 Research Type**

This research is a qualitative research which according to Creswell (2008) is characterized by the reliance on unstructured and non-numerical data. The data is

obtained in the form of field notes written by the researcher during the course of his or her observation, interviews, and questionnaires, focus groups, participant-observation, secondary-sourced data and etc.

### **1.6.2 Study Area**

The study of this research will be limited to the 13 members of the Pacific Island Forum consisting of, Cook Islands, Nauru, Nieuwe, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Kiribati. As for the time limits, this research will take place starting from 2006 to 2020. This time scope is determined upon the fact that China intensified its relations with the afore-mentioned Pacific Islands countries in 2006 which was marked by the Premier Wen Jiabao signed off the China-Pacific Island Countries Development and Cooperation Guiding Framework (Yang, 2011). Meanwhile 2020 is chosen due to the still-ongoing China's activeness in the region up to this date.

### **1.6.3 Data Collection Methods**

This research will use secondary data, in which data are obtained from secondary sources including but not limited to earlier research, journals, news, government publications and also books. In other words, this research will use existing data. These data will then be collected and summarized in order to increase the credibility of this research.

### **1.6.4 Data Analysis**

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) define data analysis as the process conducted by a researcher to reduce data to a story and its interpretation. In another word, data analysis is the process of reducing large amounts of collected data to make a complete sense of them (Kawulich, 2014). Data analysis process of this research will use one of Merriam's (1998) proposed model which is the literary model. This models centered on grammar, syntax, and ideological perspectives. This model also underlines the use of ideological and theoretical perspectives to analyze and interpret narratives (Merriam, 1998).

### **1.6.5 Writing/Research Structure**

#### **Chapter I: Introduction**

The first chapter of this research will consist an overall introductory which include background of the research, research question, theoretical framework, as well as research methodology used in this research. Through this chapter, the researcher hopes to shed some light on the idea of the research.

#### **Chapter II: China's Global Emergence & Its Presence in South Pacific**

The third chapter will aim to explain how China emerges as a major global power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Included in this chapter are set of initiatives and policies undertaken by China in order to grow its leverage across the world. This chapter will also look back to the history and examine how China's presence in the South Pacific from the beginning up to this date.

### **Chapter III: The *Dao* in China's Growing Presence in the South Pacific**

This part of the chapter will explore the role of cultures in China's foreign policy making in general. Moreover, the *yin* and *yang* principle will be put in the context of Chinese increasing leverages in the South Pacific, represented by the combination of soft and hard power applied by China in the region.

### **Chapter IV: Conclusions**

Finally, the last chapter will contain final findings of the research. Moreover, this chapter will also summarize the main idea of the research as well as suggestions for future research.