Bridging Towards Political Power: China and the New Institutionalised Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Experiencing rapid economic growth backed by high-level leadership support, China exerts tight political influence and information control by using a new approach *sharp power,* encompassing strong economic fabric, political integrity, global transfer of people and knowledge. To compete in international competition—China has been using redistribution method to contest its power politics upon conducting collective repression on flouting democratic reform in Hong Kong, ethnic minority assimilation—Tibetan and Uighur, and One China Policy against Taiwan, to global campaign to dominate influence by political, economic and technological representations. The actions deliberately carry underlaying goals to define economic prosperity with the expense of political freedom. This research paper aims to deliberate key points on China's endeavours to strengthen political power both internally and internationally with the averse to govern democracy—and construction on world politics by using economic power mostly in the cultural and technology inventories. This study used qualitative method through data collection techniques based on internet observation and library research. The using of sharp power concept as a novel approach coined by independent *think tank* National Endowment Democracy is conceived to delineate deep understanding on China's political power by engaging other two underlying concepts as reinforcing instruments which support sharp power concept. The results of this research which shows China's strategies are alternatively institutionalised through the emergence of economic assistance, technology, and socio-cultural instruments.
Keyword: China, Sharp Power, Political Power, Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Non-traditional issues have been emerged and occupied international security agenda. Pre cold-war, study of military-security became notably headlines composing theoretical reflection of war and violence built up with strategy and diplomacy. Nowadays, international security compromises power politics which has constructivist turn on environment, society, and economy. With these new approaches, international security would hold greater risk of world interrelation through intangible actions predominantly

by human narcistic and fascism. On the political security, government carries obligation and control over ideological devotion of the nation. Beyond the political territorial, government manages to campaign political integrity within holistic concept to point the underlying capabilities of internal affairs narrative (University of Groningen, 2020).

In today's world, the ambition to reach domination as powerful force is intensifying. When upcoming world war is unlikely to happen, countries start bounding together based on common values or shared identity–mutual benefit, peace, and development–creating middle class power. However, the multi-polarization is not always a threat safe concept (Tao, 2015). The term of nationalism is on the rise where countries start seeking self-determination through constellation to brand their own identity. Integrating non-democratic regimes has been a dominant foreign-policy concept carried out by Western powers according to political leaders and analysts where China was part of the 'integration' mission. The idea to encourage meaning political reform to China was appeared to be unanticipated where Chinese repressive regimes continued to deepen their authoritarianism (Lebow, 2007).

People ought to think that liberalism appear to be possible solution to end warlord regime since the roughly New Cultural Movement occurred in 1915. Nonetheless, majority of Chinese intellectuals perceive authoritarian solution remained in China's recourse. Experts view that the main fear of Chinese people is the absence of authority. Although Chinese people sense of deficient in their government leadership, they live a better off now than before Deng Xiaoping took seat in 1979 and believe the government will manifest the needs of the people. Profoundly, they support reform if necessary, but are not fond with words like 'revolution'. The image perception brought by Western media tend to flatter American values which distort dramatic views on China political system (Kuo, 2019). Nevertheless, being ruled by succession of authoritarianism has led China gain the title as global economy. The glorious past and then awaken China's ambition to be the next global leading power, replacing Western power, after centuries of record as being the leading power in Asia.

Sharp Power

The new world order began composting 'centre' and 'periphery' terms to define economically strong states and countries which are mostly excluded ideologically post the defeat of communism. Although the emerging terms have denounced communist system as the role player in the new governance system of liberal-capitalist, China on the contrary created institutional structures to counter the West domination and maintain communism authority–depicting 'hot pursuit' to deter self-independence movements and object domestic opposition parties to implicitly securing business linkage by coming through economic affluence and initiatives. China has successfully used 'soft balancing' approach during the Persian Gulf crises to unconditional support to U.S. after 9/11. Now that economy has become leading instrument for China to maintain balance of power in a broader range, the country moved into deeper political engagement especially in former communist countries and is now being integral part of market-oriented country (Akkaya, 2009). Presently, China benefits from its powerful membership in numerous affiliated international organizations such as an ultra-distinguished seat in the United Nations and its entry to World Trade Organization in 2001 where it started experiencing rapid economic growth. Thus, with great power, China could prompt other great nations who previously are major backer of Taiwan recognition to reconsider their decisions towards *One China Policy,* giving a decisive advantage for the People's Republic (Bosco, 2017)

With the strong bargaining power in the economical contest and soft-balancing approach, recent study identifies China's behaviour specifically towards world political system with best describe approach beyond interpretation of hard and soft power. National Endowment of Democracy (NED), U.S. based-think tank coined a term *'sharp power'* in December 2017 relating to China strategy towards international political run. Precisely, NED describes Sharp Power as *'efforts at censorship and the use of manipulation to degrade the integrity of independent institutions. Neither "hard" but nor "soft," sharp power has the effect of limiting free expression and distorting the political environment'*. On his presentation in House Intelligence open hearing on China's Digital Authoritarianism, Analyst Christopher Walker expressed his critical thinking on how China, displayed as leading non-democratic regime plays the pendulum swing of global politics. He stated, *'in this new era of contestation, China has claimed a larger role on the global stage and has sought to promote its own preferred ideas, norms, and approach to governance.'*. Profoundly, the sharp power has been carried as instrument to conduct China foreign policy whether represented within or outside country (National Endowment for Democracy, 2019).

In the context of **inward-looking policy** while addressing current repression policy and awareness of personal space security in Hong Kong, Uighur community and Tibet, French Political Scientist Francois Godement argued that Chinese majority (Mainland parametrically) fear that broader personal space and identities may brought disaster to Chinese society. This has been approved on how majority Chinese vote and behave around their social media on how they trust their government to provide necessity and security (Godement, 2018). The centralized policies are then powered by incumbent chairman of CCP, Xi Jinping's rule for life approved by China's National People's Congress (CCP) in 2018 which researcher Christian Goebel quote China is 'becoming a personalized dictatorship' (Fulda, 2019).

Despite argues from many experts and scientists towards the lifting limits for Xi's presidency will absorb further authoritarian resilience, Godement expressed no surprise for the Chinese Communist Party channelling Leninism made such decision. Rather than be shocked of what extent Xi will do for China, Godement question what Xi will do for the world next (Godement, 2018). **In the outward-international context**, the using of sharp power has perceived China's counterproductive action against openness and agonize reciprocal deal. To retreat itself from the outside world, China's isolation triggers prejudice to pursue political power by mistreating the fundamental rights of diverse identities within the country. Upon addressing sense to build economic engagement, China urges countries to unilaterally recognize the Mainland control over Taiwan, Hong Kong, and specific communities – Tibet and Uighur – which do not share the same values and interests.

On the other hand, many believe China ambitions towards unilaterally is primary based on the ambitious political agenda to represent itself not only as economic power but also political power (Fulda 2019). Many argues that China articulates the meaning of becoming number one through 'realist' interpretations in pursuit of fulfilling 'Chinese people dream' whereas researcher Peter Ferdinand examines changes the nature of China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping leadership to be more 'active and distinctive' (Ferdinand, 2016). Throughout Xi's presidency, China has shown its existence by showing range of approach from high politics such as – *credible deterrence* towards India; Africa & Middle East Military installation based in Djibouti; unilateral claims on South China Sea to mediocre politics such as–cultural and technology constellations. As stated

by Xi Jinping, China's foreign policy must accommodate the fundamental goals such as (1) protect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, (2) promote economic development, and (3) reclaim international respect, status, and images (Fulda, 2019).

Despite its involvement in the world interrelation hub of political economy, China has not yet integrated itself on issues relating to human rights as itself has embroiled in interstate hostility and failed to interlink economic prosperity with the absence of freedom of expression and press. Thus, Prof. Jin Canrong simply described China to remain an inward looking unless it has something with money, others in the outside world are not interesting. Nonetheless, Prof. of political science David Shambaugh believed that the world would soon see China's modest step to redistribute power in international system (Shambaugh, 2013)

Reconceptualizing Modernization

Political scientists have been struggling to determine the real term of 'modernization' concept. In the case of China, many subjects the limits on 'modernization theory' is likely to be overly simplistic. Carothers and De Gramont (2013) describe the 'conventional' modernization theory as linear process ending up in Western-style where sustained economic development would generate democracy or shape country into liberal-democratic form of governance (Carothers and Gramont, 2013) . Dr. Andreas Fulda argued that the momentum of China political development could be clearly seen on the 4th June massacre in 1989 when People's Liberation Army (PLA) was authorised to suppress pro-democracy movement. However, the momentum was a key starting of China economy to go global. Precisely, the end of globalization as a pivotal moment to converge the world under the scheme of globalization has excluded China to be part of the process where it continues to build development trajectory on its system (Fulda, 2019).

Furthermore, Grasso, Corrin, and Kort (1997) argue that if modernization is defined by radical changes in politics, society, culture, and economy, it means that each country which seeks or jump into modernization might experience revolution. On the contrary, the political system in China hasn't conceptually transformed despite experiencing numerous waves of cultural and political disruptions. While Chinese peasant majority contribute to the uprising, the revolution happened in China did not necessarily overthrow one class to another, in fact the revolution wave had strengthened China's identity as socialist-centred country, gathering Chinese with common purpose to unite social order (Grasso, Corrin, and Kort 1997). Even after China's entry to WTO (indicator of country's openness to modernization), the form of democracy remains unclear, and internet censorship began abruptly dictating policy in which foreign ownership is limited to 50% for value added services and 49% for cellular phones and domestic and international services. Nonetheless, according to Liang & Lu, majority of Chinese are supportive towards government involvement in the internet regulation considering greater role in governing society (Liang and Lu, 2010).

Based on Fan Yang's (2016) cultural approach, she claimed that global news media has a pivotal role to integrate Western modernity with global market economy and cultural meanings of the nation thus the cultural ties between state and the people are not maintained, but continue to experience renewal due to globalization. Meanwhile during Mao Zedong regime, the notion to build subnational communities and integrate Chinese values around the globe came across with the concept of diaspora, major contribution to raise money from Chinese living overseas (Grasso, Corrin, and Kort 1997). Under the framework of 'overseas Chinese' communities, China projected to construct global

narrative perception ethnically and culturally of Chinese people doing business as successful incorporate adjusted to flexible citizenship (Yang, 2016). However, China did not completely reject foreign values.

China shifts to capitalist mode was born out after 1978 upon recalling what Tony Saich aptly named as 'lost decade' in China's cultural revolution (1966-76) under Mao Zedong's fault line 'the Great Leap Forward', leaving a shattered social order. Thereupon, CCP adopted 'four modernization' at its 3rd plenary session in December 1978 focusing on agriculture, national defence, light industry, and science and technology. However, for Western scholars the four term hadn't yet compromised 'liberal democracy' which could be counted as the fifth point of modernization. Thus, the struggle for democracy continued. Despite gradually transitioning to more market-oriented economy and initially successful in kick starting, elites were still among those benefitted from this transition (Fulda, 2019).

Chinese people are also the supporting actor of China's re-modernization who most likely suspect external forces as an instant threat of People's Republic political security. Analyst claimed that economic modernization has brought China a significant rise in GDP especially in the mid 2000 which has become one of the indicators of life satisfaction. Thus, life satisfaction in China can be measured narrowly by materialistic factors, although other social problems still exist. The central government implemented a policy agenda aiming for social harmony in the post 2006 by promoting people's livelihood. The city government of Hangzhou, for instance, set a goal in 2012 to build a city based on quality of life model. As a result, the policies had improved health rate and political participations (Abbott et al., 2015).

Fig. 1 Growth in GDP per Capita (US$) 1998-2012
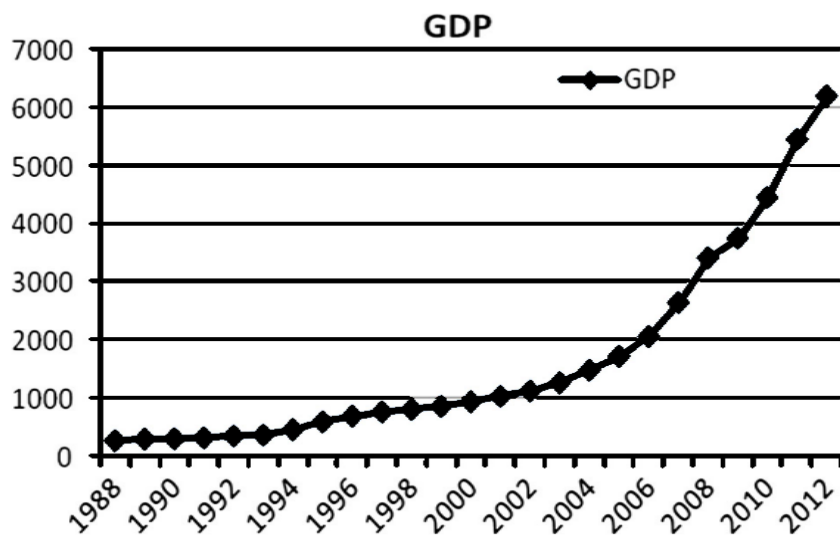
Sources by Abbott et al., 2015

Political scientist Richard Ned Lebow added that the main control totalitarian state may fear that nontotalitarian government interventions will lead to greater 'rebel region' demands for liberalization (Lebow, 2007). Therefore, China rules out the missing fifth point of modernization to deter further hostility upon addressing democracy as part of its modernization process. According to Former American Politician Henry Kissinger

(2011), the Central Committee approved the term *'socialist modernization'* suited to referring Deng's 'reform and opening up' policy in 1978 (Kissinger, 2011). In return, China maintain alliance through program designed within its investment and development aid which comprises wider range of other nation's internal affairs and people to people exchange under the framework of foreign policy. In the educational and cultural transfers for instance, China has conducted initiatives of public diplomacy through the establishment of Confucius Institute outside China as what The Former Chair of The Propaganda Committee of CCP Li Changchun describes as *'setup of China's reform and opening up and modernization'* (Flew and Hartig, 2014).

The Rising China

According to Kagan and Crossick (2007), the Rising China is not merely reflected on the positive performance of its economy in world arena. In fact, China positions itself as political power through pragmatic view which challenges the meaning of new 'modern history'. Kagan referred China's behaviour to the U.S. at the end of 19th century where economic rise required broader foreign market thus the desire to grow profit accumulation and the ambition within policy makers have shown intertwining growth ever since (Kagan and Crossick, 2007). The Rising China is theoretically propelled by the basic layer of having 'China dream/*Zhongguomeng*'. Former vice president of the Party School of CCP, Li Junru, referred the term to the Chinese people as a hundred-year dream of industrialization and modernization. He then explained the country's goal of becoming 'rich and powerful' thus the need of economic development and rising standard of living are necessary (Ferdinand, 2016).

On the contrary, Kissinger (2011) stated that China sees itself as the returning power instead of the rising power. China's global expansion occurred in three stages (1) 'reform and opening' in 1978 (2) 'invited the world in' throughout the 1980s, and (3) 'go out' and 'go global' in early 1990s marking the start of China's engagement with cultural and normative approach (soft power) (Kissinger, 2011). Shambaugh (2013) then added that China's soft power is part of its multidimensional power thus he used the horizontal term of 'spread' instead of 'rise' to examine China's spreading influence on broader range and footprint. However, Shambaugh disagreed with proclaims toward China would 'rule the world' with its weak integration to any communities and possess no allies considering U.S' hegemony has not yet collapsed. The main global link and foreign policy is China's own economic development through One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative. OBOR initiative encompasses wide range of structural cooperation not just trade and investment, but also public policy and cultural exchange in recipient countries supported by internal capabilities such as world's largest producer of goods, military capacity, continental land mass, hydroelectric dam, exporter, and other nominations wherein its citizens to put expectation towards China could be the next leading power (Shambaugh, 2013).

In addition, despite many acquisitions on China remains being partial economic power, it has leaved global economic footprint—in aid programs, direct investment and multinational corporations, and global energy markets—and surpassed many world titles such as overtaking Australia as the largest wine producer by volume in 2011 (Shambaugh, 2013). In sum, China's sharp power is particularly dominated by One Belt One Road agenda with strategy to enable business possibilities and development assistance and welcomed by ethnic Chinese business representatives and political representatives in OBOR countries. The OBOR is also a nutshell part of China's endeavour to redefine modernization term without citing political freedom. Professor Xiang Lanxin, Director of

the Centre of One Belt One Road Initiative at China National Institute argued that the initiative is a profound challenge to the current political and economy status quo amongst multipolar superpowers (Wade, 2016). Shambaugh also argued that China use developing countries as foundation to cultivate its influence in which corelate the premise of OBOR recipient countries as important stage since most of them are entitled developing countries (Shambaugh 2013).

Previous studies referring these concepts approach different findings which corporates economic aspects to contest China as new emerging power and highlights the internal political regime as separate ideas. However, this research finding instead provides collaborative concepts describing China as an emerging power with authoritarian system and applies these approaches to define how China use the concepts to enhance its political power in the world arena through its leverage on economic aid and authoritarianism roleplay. To approach further understanding, the literature review will be simply described onward:

Fig 2. Defining Sharp Power *(author's personal view)*
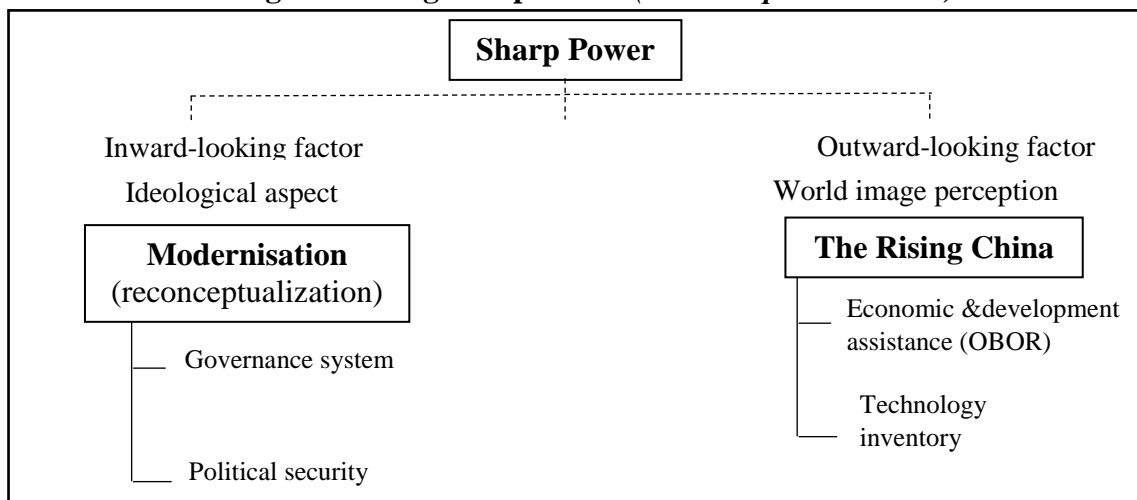
Source framework designed by the author

As sharp power consists of internal and external factors—governance systems, and institutionalized strategies through economic, educational and cultural platforms—this can be described as the best feature for understanding China's strategy of exporting political influence and showcasing its ability to become the next political power. The aim to build a unified national identity is embedded in China's policy making as well as to build perceptions of a global narrative by engaging in deeper cooperation and collaboration. Taken together, outside networks can fuel Chinese prosperity narratives around the world. The use of **sharp power** concept in this study aims to mediate the use of **grand strategy**, in which on several occasions used to examine China's behaviour in conducting foreign policy (in accordance to Lukas Danner's China's Grand Strategy). In a narrow perspective, grand strategy as a fundamental realist concept, is often defined as a strategy to maintain and enhance national security by using coercion (Danner, 2018).

However, Danner's (Danner 2018) approach to grand strategy is reflected on China's 'peaceful development' as the main course. He then argues that since China is unable to carry out its own values, norms and rules in an international system dominated by Western powers thus it creates a constructivist method on how to build the system in its own way

particularly in the economic aspect. Yet, Danner's peaceful development (outward-looking factors) was not observed within a framework of internal background as an element for carrying out foreign policy. He states that channelling China to internal legitimacy would diverge from 'peaceful development' because China would demonstrate an assertive attitude when it comes to internal affairs. According to him, the grand strategy is a measure of whether the framework of 'peaceful development' has contextualized China's hopes of creating a world system in accordance with the internal dimensions of legitimacy (Danner, 2018). Whereas the use of sharp power in this research becomes a convergence of two other concepts on how to define a bigger role on a global scale through the **Chinese way** - a strong leadership system (internal) and support for economic assistance and educational-cultural exchange (external). Therefore, this study focuses on the strategic adjustment of China's own reflection system to achieve global governance standards—applying other emerging concepts to describe China as an emerging power and leveraging these terms to contest its presence both economically and political.

This research was limited on the time OBOR started to operate in 2013 and focused on niche parameter of countries recipients of China's OBOR, current internal hostilities and technology affiliation. This research paper used qualitative method, secondary sources in which information was obtained through internet observation—official government, independent institution/organization platform and mass media—and library research—book and journal reviews. The use of theoretical framework is mainly analysed by sharp power concept as an aligning approach to define other two concepts defining internal and external factors – modernisation (reconceptualize) and the Rising China – which underline China's foreign policy. This research paper concludes with discussion of China's sharp power for understanding the strategies carried by economic assistance and socio-cultural and technology inventories around the world which could redefine the implications of its political power projection and construct global narrative perception towards itself.

DISCUSSION

The paper argues that China's sharp power can be understood as range of instrumental tools to gain political power from both within the country and abroad. The sharp power constitutes a complex of soft power techniques, not entirely embedded as hard power, upon countering negative perception in the international communities. All the strategies — (1) maintaining authoritarian regime and (2) building advantageous international links through economic leverage—have embodied within China's efforts to enhance political power.

Ruling Authoritarian Style: Way to Incentivize Political Unity

Fulda suggested China's communist nomination intensifies access to corruption and collusion due to inclusivity and centralized government. Technically, under the frame of communist state, land is owned by party-state and it applies for 'lease' system. The early reform in the 1990's and 2000's had allowed officials benefited from monopolistic 'land lease' for development purposes which includes rural-urban society reallocation project. He also mentioned collusion and corruption were interwoven, giving power for power and power for money. The turning point of 1989 pro-democracy and anti-corruption movement apparently has marked the birth of what Pei Minxin called as 'crony-

capitalism', a term to refer 'mutually relationships between business leaders and government officials' (Fulda, 2019).

Despite all the material development, many Chinese are still unhappy. Experts believe that China has misinterpreted the 'China dream' with the fulfilment of the daily needs passively, when the term supposedly close to encourage ambition and innovation for better and fair life actively (Ferdinand, 2016). Nonetheless, according to his book *Dictator's Dilemma,* Bruce Dickson contends perspective that economic development in China is somehow the basis of political support and the legitimacy of the regime. Chinese people create a sense of patriotic pride of China's constellation in its growing international influence. Dickson also added proceeding views on how the decline of nepotism and favouritism, and the less of repressiveness and intrusiveness in post-Maoist era build a strong devotion in the society towards political framework. In contrast, Dickson proposed a contradictory explanation that economic growth is not very 'trustworthy' to be considered as the regime support. The CCP has covered itself with frequent bad track records of corruption and online censorship in which youngest cohorts vote less support (Dickson, 2016)

Upon reaching political unity inside the country, China acts as sole de facto representative of the conflicted areas and justify ideology as the main instrument to structure splinter state and polities. By which, China adopts Hallstein doctrine in prescribing the recognition of East Germany. The doctrine states that the Federal Republic better known as West German would not establish diplomatic relation with any state that recognized the existence of East Germany under Soviet regime and eventually put East Germany on isolation phase for 25 years from the non-communist world. According to Richard Lebow, same doctrine applied in Taiwan referring to *One China Policy* (Lebow, 2007). China Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, emphasized that Taiwan is 'inseparable part of China' in responding Taiwan's new passport cover design. China views Taiwan as a renegade province and the new cover is considered as further move to Taiwan independence (Chung, 2020).

Taiwan has asserted legal identity as an independent entity and refused the existence of the Mainland sole unification. Meanwhile, China adheres to reject the concept of Taiwan being in state of de jure existence and disclaims Taiwan sole-representation status. In the 1980s, Taiwan began unprecedented movements by setting up Three Principles of the People—economic liberalization, social pluralization, and political democratization. Under President Lee Teng-hui of Republic of China, his words of *'lay a foundation of mutual respect, peace and prosperity'* marked as the beginning of the friendly interaction between two sides but then continue to constantly have strained relationship (Lebow, 2007).

Speaking of Taiwan to have different view on ideology, political scientist Richard Lebow argues that ethnic, linguistic and religious differences undoubtedly add the possibility of division, even in China (Lebow 2007). Giving a glimpse of ideological confrontation, China surges the level of hostility into violence and ambiguously sparks concerns globally calling out China as the preparator of human rights abusers and ideology fanatic. The three conflicted autonomies—Tibetan Autonomous Region, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region—have been reluctant to keep up on the socialist realm of Communist regime and have partially deserted the use of the Chinese characters. Beijing maintains a centralized control to constitute dispute self-autonomy regions under one nation of the Mainland. The core of building political entities is a stimulus package to gain broader participation and institute

divisional structure. As long as they are still under China supervision, political restraints will always be issue since the Mainland upcoming purpose is to quest greater political power (Lebow, 2007).

Tibetan independence has been an intriguing issue for the U.S. strategic foreign policy and the future of Sino-American relations with compromising human rights issues where Secretary State of the United States Mike Pompeo officially released visa restrictions under the reciprocal access to Tibet on July 7th 2020 upon addressing Beijing systematic travel obstruction for U.S. diplomats and officials, journalists, and tourists to The Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan autonomous areas in Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces (Pompeo, 2020). The international advocators also arrange support groups such as Students for a Free Tibet, International campaign for Tibet, International Committee of Lawyers and The Tibet International Network and numerous NGOs such as Amnesty International and Asia Watch who have actively lobbied Washington (Goldstein, 2004).

India has also been allied with Tibet for hosting exile Dalai Lama the spiritual leader and Tibetan official representative once he denounced the Seventeenth-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet and eventually sparked an uprising between anti-China and China military. Ever since, the Tibetan 'meaning autonomy' still question international issue on illegal occupation. Post cultural and religious liberalization riots in 1987-1989, China began shift back on 'hard-line' approach to emphasize national integrity and accelerate Tibetan economy and development. International communities call upon China atrocity and address China to have failed covering fundamental human rights of Tibetan people. However, Goldstein assures that despite the absent of ethnic sensibility and concessions from the CCP, Tibet will become marginalized and unable to develop economic market without China (Goldstein, 2004).

Another example of internal hostility seeking for autonomous regions is Uighur community in Xinjiang, depicting Mainland's endeavour for homogenic assimilation. Uighur community is one of ten Muslim ethnics in China, comprising 10 million out of 21 million Muslims who maintain their linguistic, cultural, and religious heritages. The Chinese Nationalist Country (now Taiwan) USSR (now Russia Federation) vied for influence towards Xinjiang from 1911-1949. However, the native residents in Xinjiang composed by Muslim pilgrims from North-Western desert sought for self-determination and established Eastern Turkistan Republic in the 1940s. After the ensuing turbulence with the People's Liberation Army, the minority obtained autonomy in 1955 known as *Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region*. During the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, communist government had provided health and education, ensuring medical system and higher rate of literacy (Bachman, 2004).

The act against Uighur and its community's attribute become intensifying when Xinjiang authorities destroyed 31 mosques, stating out that 'Islam' in Xinjiang is part of 'Arab Empire' imposition between 2016-18. The CCP denies the allegation of *ethnic cleansing* while justifying the education camp is built to deradicalize Muslim extremists and to teach Confucius ideas of social harmony after around 3.000-5.000 Muslim Uighur are reportedly joined ISIS in Iraq and Syria (Byrnes, 2018). Post 9/11, China assigned high surveillance on Uighur upon addressing the growing of Islamic radical movement and has continued until recently. However, observers and human rights watchdog subjects 'religion intolerance' towards China's alleged 'political' re-education camp (Raza, 2019).

The re-education program first began in Qing dynasty and has been conducted through labour since 1955 to counter revolutionaries with secular-patriotic political

docility. In the camps throughout Xinjiang are also found children, women and elderly being held. Any religious representation and attributes are banned, detainees who refuse the lessons will be punished with torture, food deprivation, or solitary confinement where international actors are allowed to enter with restricted conditions and guidance from Chinese authority (Raza, 2019). Despite the negative allegations, Beijing asserts that the action is projected to help them 'accelerate and achieve common prosperity'. It then added that the shifts in the minority region could avoid hostility due to identity differentiation. The central government also offers to what to be beneficial transaction where minorities receive high offices and economic opportunity and the Han will be granted with economic benefits and control over the minority. Therefore, most studies claim that China implicitly considers minorities to recognize socialism superiority and ultimately integrate with Han culture (Rossabi, 2004).

As Han immigrants settled in the minority regions, economic benefits have occurred in the last half decade (Rossabi, 2004). The government has also provided infrastructure investment in the region with railways and roads linking to China. Ever since, Xinjiang has been the centre of extensive investment. In 1950s, with the support of transmigration policy, The Han majority in Xinjiang already established Production and Construction Corps (PCC) which comprises military, judicial functions and production sector making it an empire of economic imperialism in Northwest China. Other perspective on geo-economic and strategic thinking also assumes that raising national security in Xinjiang is basically for preserving economic beneficiaries. The China National Oil Corporation, major supplier of national petroleum, develop oil field in Western Kazakhstan and project to link up a thousand-mile pipeline network from Kazakhstan to Xinjiang. The interstate hostility could trigger gun activities which eventually consequence China economy and affect the regime's legitimacy (Bachman, 2004). Central government collect at least 80% of the profit from the oil and gas company, considered as 'unjust exploitation' to non-Han community who reside in the area (Raza, 2019). As Uighur is sceptically perceived to be incapable to build economic development, China assimilates two choices (1) if they participate, they will do better economically (2) otherwise they will not and will be suppressed (Bachman, 2004). Simply, this makes China to have demonstrate the power to impose control over Xinjiang as geopolitical interest, apart from theological and cultural clauses.

As China continues to create regional stability by repressing cultural and ideological differences, it also strengthens political influence as an effort against 'separation'. While Tibet and Uighur Region pledge to have an autonomous region to rule their own system; Hong Kong, which already holds the title of special administrative region, now struggles to completely break free from the Mainland authoritarian regime. Hong Kong shares the same intriguing commonalities as Taiwan, pursuit of democracy. Despite having land border with China, while Taiwan on the other hand being separated by sea, Hong Kong and Taiwan were once under colony rules. From 1843 until 1997, Hong Kong was part of British Empire, winning gamble over Opium war with China with a brief period of times occupied by Japan. Thus, the colonization holds critical moment of the fact that both entities were once under two influential parties which prompted rapid economic development. However, Hong Kong and Taiwan experienced different trajectories on political development (Johnson, 2020). Fulda argues that British has left weak democratic legacy resulting Hong Kong sovereignty to PRC in 1997 which then jumped into authoritarianism post 1997 even though it has been granted as Special Administrative Region since 1984 to remain in capitalist system (HKSAR) (Fulda, 2019).

Nowadays, the world has seen encroachment of the central government in Hong Kong's authority. From June 2019 until nearly the end of 2020, Hong Kong experienced march demonstration upon calling off government's legislation to allow extradition bill of criminal suspects to any jurisdiction including Mainland China (U.S. Department of State, 2019). On June 30th 2019, National People's Congress passed national security laws for Hong Kong officially which came into force the same day. The laws are mainly purposed to ensure stability and prosperity for the special administrative region. The bill encompasses outlawed acts such as (1) secession, (2) sedition: subversion of state of power, (3) foreign collusion: collaboration of external or foreign forces to endanger national security, and (4) terrorism: engagement to local terrorist (Johnson, 2020).

In accordance to Hong Kong basic law, it is written that any restriction on rights and freedom shall not violate the provision on two international treaties (1) civil and political rights; (2) economic, social and cultural rights (Johnson, 2020). The law is the outcome from the subsequent event in 2019 over extradition bill whereupon lead to undermining the right of a fair trial and the concept of 'one state, two systems'. Previously, the extradition bill has been introduced proposing to allow extradition without formal agreements with Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan in certain circumstances. Thus, independent experts are calling for renewed attention on 'human rights situation' (M. Chung, 2020). Despite Article 4 of National Security Law containing *'freedom of speech, of the press, of the publication, of association, of assembly, of procession and demonstration'* (The National People's Congress, 2020), the Hong Kong protest showed police brutality and arbitrary arrest of intellectuals and ban any tributes of freedom of expressions. It sparks underlying question whether the Central Government truly comprehend the meaning behind 'freedom of speech, association, and demonstration' unless they bias the meaning related to implicit 'democracy' concept. Hong Kong residents believe freedom of speech is still yet fully controlled by the Central Government where three quarter of the seats in HK legislative council are loyal to the Chinese government (DW News, 2020).

Engaging Sharp Power: Constructing New Approach in World Politics

For decades, China has shaped public opinion and perceptions around the world by associating soft power with many forms of engagement—*One Belt One Road Initiative,* encourage people-to-people exchange, educational programs, extensive cultural activities and global reach-development of media and tech enterprises. In the cultural perception, despite the counter action to blend in wired internet and broadcasting, Beijing keeps a firm grip on internet and media environment in the country to ease maintaining control over its citizens. In other words, Chinese authorities has been using globalized digital technologies to gain both internal advantages and abroad (National Endowment for Democracy, 2019). In the context of engaging cooperation, China is entitled for having lack of reciprocity deal with other countries (Kassam, 2019). China bluntly broke the Shanghai Communique of 1972 with U.S. to team up with Soviet and continued to flow military assistance in support of communist-based North Vietnam's conquest over South Vietnam. At that time, U.S. under President Nixon representative put gamble to acknowledge 'One China Principle' over Taiwan as part of China until China left humiliating defeat for the U.S. and defining term of 'Vietnam syndrome' (Bosco, 2017). Its strategies reflected on institutionalised instruments have gained the country to build binding cooperation with countries and set the underlying consequences if any of which question China's sovereignty and capability.

OBOR: An Economic Leverage and Instrument to Set Rules

President Xi Jinping at the end of 2013 announced one of the largest development plans in history – Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Maritime Silk Road. Collectively called as *'One Belt, One Road'*, the ambitious economic initiatives within foreign policy frame projects infrastructure program connecting China with neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, the maritime silk road is schemed to build ports and railways connecting China's southern provinces and fast-growing economy of Southeast Asia and Southern hemisphere (Cai, 2017). China's 'strategic strongpoint' to re-open its silk road initiative across Indo-Pacific is set to associate economic zones in Southeast Asia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Oman, Kenya, Djibouti, Tanzania and Australia in order to provide China with economic benefit and maritime. Profoundly, China plans to involve 65 countries where it has established 75 economic and trade cooperation zones in 35 countries (Wade, 2016). OBOR is not only focused to facilitate development investment and maritime hub, there are at least another five keys as follows:

Fig 3. OBOR Initiatives
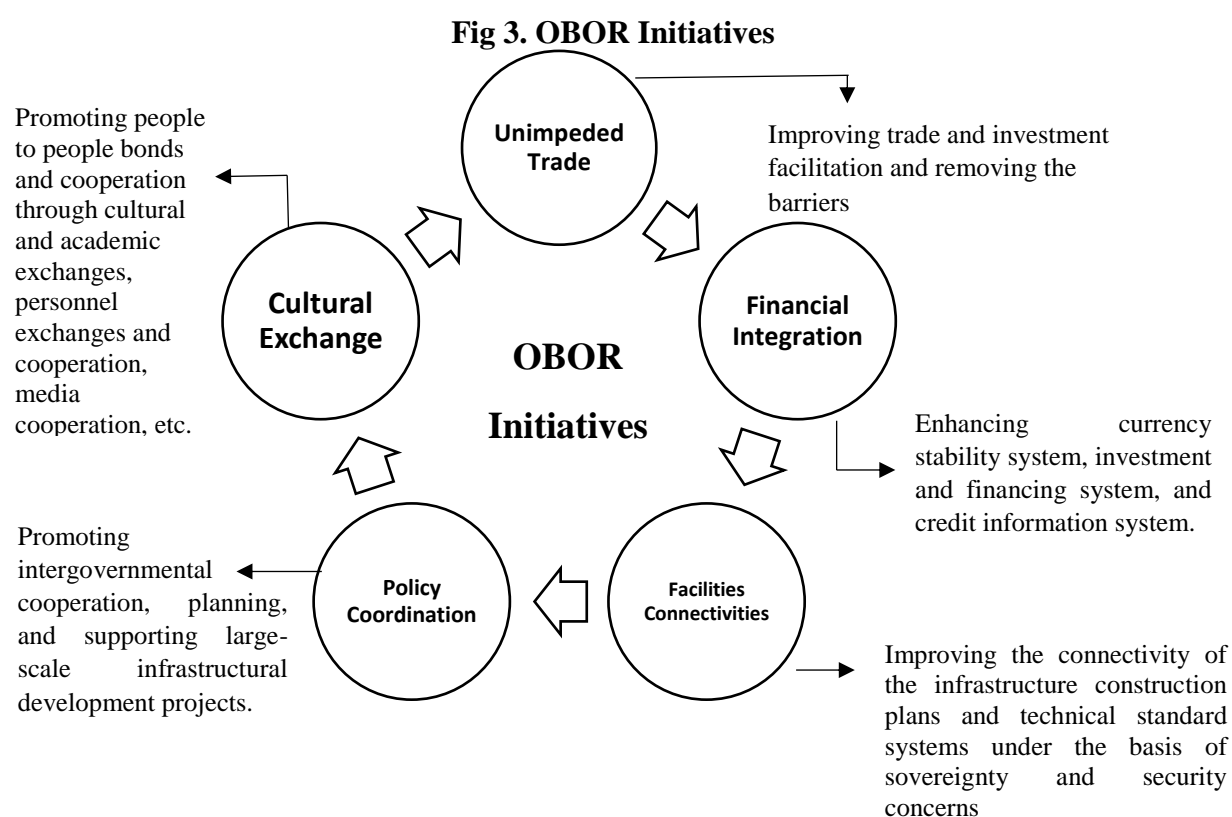
Sources by The State Council of People's Republic of China, 2015

Although the OBOR as stated on the Action Plan is delineated as 'a win-win cooperation that promotes common development and prosperity, the embarkment of the concept has beyond defined to include strong-binding issue, throwing a dependency vibe for the countries' recipients. It is more likely to be win-win solution for China where economic growth will enable an intriguing political influence where subsequently leads to providing new open market for China in favour for political adjustment. According to researcher, Al-Zghool assumed that china's OBOR could be interlinked to contemporary demonstration of what Raul Prebisch describes as 'dependency' (1971) where China as

the core state will have the 'peripheral' states of OBOR framework under its control. China's OBOR is projected not only to extent its market, but also to season a political influence in a country which sovereignty issue is potentially vulnerable (Al-zghool, 2019).

Djibouti is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, located in geostrategic crossing hub of Bab El-Manded strait, checkpoint of the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea and foreign military hub which host bases for Japan, United States, Italy, France, and now China. In 2016, Djibouti approved China to build military facility based in Doraleh Ports in accordance to 'defence agreement' signed in 2014, which will host up to 10.000 Chinese troops. The two countries established 'strategic partnership' by the late 2017 where Djibouti's economy relies heavily on trade and international port. To transform into big commercial trade hub, Djibouti requires major infrastructure investment. The China-backed infrastructures focus on port facilities, a railway and two airports accounting for $420 million contract and a pipeline to provide Djibouti water from Ethiopia accounting for $320 million contract. International Monetary Fund estimate Djibouti's external debt has risen from 50% in 2016 to 104% in 2018, putting the country on an entangled debt with China (Blanchard and Collins, 2019). In short, Beijing succeeded to have created a China-friendly political environment and business ecosystem on the commercial hub of Africa-Middle East (Dutton et al. 2020) . Other trajectories have also been projected such as military installation in Pakistan to deter U.S.-India joint military contest, new construction ports in Indonesia to interoceanic railroad with Peru and Bolivia—suchlike coordinated and strategic actions through military and economic power.

Cultural and Educational Platforms

In the external context, China has been seizing to topple down world's rank through political instruments with people to people exchange. There are approximately 650.000 Chinese students overseas in 2018 with English-speaking countries as the main destination. Sending Chinese students overseas was part of China's tactic to expose its 'open-up communism'. In 1978, U.S. President-elect Jimmy Carter pioneered to re-build diplomatic relation with China thus sent scientific advisor to meet paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. Deng then advantaged the occasion by asking the U.S. envoy to deliberate the message that Deng wanted to send 5.000 Chinese students to U.S. Experts see Deng's decision as a gamble, for a non-liberal personality, he wanted the world to start thinking that communism is the right governance system for China while on the other side wanted to tolerate Western liberal ideas to learn the path the States became rich and successful. Jimmy Carter instead promised to allow 100.000 Chinese students to enter the country. Until 2019, there are at least 390.000 Chinese students counting up to largest income in U.S.'s (The Economist, 2020).

The current global pandemic which discourages overseas students to finish their study could also worsen the educational financial system. While educational institutions opt to have online cases to repress the virus transmission, Chinese students in their home country will face difficulty to keep up with the course since most Western website are blocked in China. In Australia, the Kangaroo country's support for global suggestion to inquiry the covid-19 origin in April 2020 has tensed assertive approach by Chinese representation around the world. In result, China imposed suspension on Australian beef export and warning Chinese students studying in Australia to watch out for allegation of racism (Duran and Needham, 2020). According to Prof. Salvatore Babones in addressing Chinese ministry of education' warning, some Australian universities could lose $8.3

billion tuition revenues for the next two years if Chinese students do not continue their study in Australia (BBC, 2020).

For years, Chinese students and officials have been vocal in protesting universities the attend for having thorny political discussion relating to China. In 2017, China officials banned new state-funded scholars from attending an American university that has hosted the Dalai Lama (The Economist, 2020). Beside using the Chinese students overseas to blackmail states' interrelation, China also moves towards educational transfer through operating Chinese culture-based institutions, Confucius Institute (CI) in both OBOR recipient countries and countries which conduct broader range of cooperation with China. The idea to develop CI was originated in 2002 and first appeared pilot in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 2004. By 2019, there are more than 480 Confucius Institutes operating around the world. In Africa, China has left more than 50 CIs as a momentum building for African students who willingly apply study in China or work at Chinese company or act as cultural mediator (Einashe, 2018). China's institutionalised educations also involves HKSRP in the hub through 'Hong Kong's Four Unique Advantages' convened in a Hong Kong Belt and Road Summit. According to former Chief Executive HKSAR, CY Leung states that Hong Kong would take part as financial role and facilitate educational exchange between Hong Kong and OBOR countries (Wade, 2016).

The CI framework is under project on Ministry of Education and the Hanban, abbreviation for the Office of Chinese Language Council International to promote Chinese language (Mandarin) and culture in foreign countries. Although the general principles of the CI are mainly to offer chance to understanding China and pursue ideas to understanding international culture and cultural exchange, many perceives that CI has more strategic dimension. Most observers view CI as a tool of public diplomacy under a broader frame of China's foreign policy. Terry Flew and Falk Hartig also argued that CI is networked as China's public cultural diplomacy and part of political constitution of the country's state-centric public diplomacy system (Flew and Hartig, 2014). Political scientist Don Starr then slightly described CI as 'propaganda project' of China leadership. Relating to strategic dimension, it often leads to criticism tone of reaching political system both from domestic and international fields. Starr categorizes *abroad* criticisms into two (1) practical concerns: legal issue, finance and academic viability, (2) ideological concerns: the presence of Chinese government-backed institution will lead to potential integrity to China's ideology and fear to loss academic freedom (Starr, 2009).

In the internal affairs, China also strengthen educational platform to integrate Chinese culture within its citizens some of which uproar critics over having the practice of 'political re-education'. Not only notable re-education camps in Xinjiang, by Summer 2020 China instructed Inner Mongolian who settle in Northern China to use Mandarin language on three main subjects – literature, politics and morality, and history – in elementary and middle school curriculum. Mongolian fear that young generations would gradually lose distant cultural identity. The protest also was posted online on social media platform, depicting footage of peaceful crowd shouting their rights of using their mother tongue. Nevertheless, by morning, the posts relating to peaceful campaigns were disappeared from the sites, presumably detected by online censor (Qin, 2020).

The case using educational platform has been around in the past few years when China use students as what experts say as 'economic blackmail'. The program to promote intercultural and educational exchange are parts of China's sharp power through institutionalised strategy to integrate Chinese values around the globe while on the other hand will gain political economy benefits from Chinese students who study overseas.

Meanwhile the re-education campaign in the internal regions subjected to intestate hostility would strengthen national-political unity with prohibitions to express self-identity which differs from the Mainland's image and values, making China's domination more tangible.

Wired Technology: Internet and Mass Media

Technology development is now entangled in broader geopolitics and political security concerns. Now that internet is crashing into global world politics, China has reopened possibility to join the new mainstream internet grid, thrives to be a leading innovator in technological advancement. Notwithstanding authoritarian regime – free flow of information and formation of civil cyber groups are posed to be potential threat, treating internet development as a new tool of government control (Liang and Lu 2010). China has been labelled as country which continue rising nationalism, that is never respected internet freedom. Since China's registration to line internet in 1994, internet censorship began timelining regulation as multidimensional systems governing internet infrastructure, commercial and social use (Cheung, 2018). However, only government agencies and business are permitted to run the operation of internet service and establish Internet Connecting Network. The rising internet users significantly took off in the early 2000s. With the rising of economic and political development, China expressed concern about the information security system. As President Xi stated in 2013, *'the internet directly related to the national ideology and the regime security',* allowing government to jump into internet activism in both public and personal life (Miao and Lei, 2016).

The government sets technology informational under frame 'secure and controllable' to maintain political-social stability and cyber security international competition, providing virtual based platform to connect people such as WeChat, Baidu Tieba, Sina Weibo, Tencent QQ for the people where Western-built providers such as Whatsapp, Youtube and Instagram are banned (Cheung, 2018). Meanwhile to enter world political constellation, China embraces socio-graph approach to market social media platform for both internal and global use. In the last three years, global citizens are also enjoying short-form mobile video, Tiktok, established by Beijing-based internet ByteDance. With a tagline 'make your day', Tiktok has global offices three continents—Los Angeles, New York, London, Berlin, Paris, Jakarta, Singapore, Seoul, Tokyo, Mumbai, and Dubai (Vox, 2020).

Years earlier, social media WeChat has also reached global. WeChat encompasses many features ranging from interpersonal interaction and mobile payment app. Successfully thriving world telecommunication and commercialized internet society with so-called 'super apps, many countries vaguely build sense of awareness of the prominent cyber security. U.S.-India have blocked TikTok, WeChat and several Chinese apps on behalf on personal data security. However, many experts point out that the main reason for those countries to block Chinese-based apps are mainly due to the counterattack of China's rising influence in world's politics and wired technology. On the other hand, the call out to ban Tiktok and WeChat sparks concern to have violated self-expression, usually term to attack China of not allowing freedom of expression, making the 'techno-nationalism' on the rise (Vox, 2020).

Apart from internet governance and censorship, mass media is also interlinked with state affairs. Majority of Chinese and numbers of global citizens are outraged by how

Western media coverage deliver biased information towards China, calling Western of being 'envied' of China's fast development. For the independent media operated in China, government applies policy in which media must comply with a pro-govt exposure to not uprising liberal editorialising thus it will give the media an ultimatum for journalism. South China Morning Post (SCMP) and Xinhua News could be intriguing examples. SCMP is Hong Kong-based, English-speaking newspaper established in 1903 and now under ownership of China's eminent entrepreneur and member of the CCP. SCMP is still vaguely perceived as pro-Chinese in nature although subsequently deliver unbiased reports since Hong Kong riots began by broadcasting a democracy activist, Joshua Wong. Meanwhile Xinhua News/New China News is a state-run press agency mainly channelling China leadership corners, successful economy development, and national prosperity. Others call it as concepted forum to depict China's propaganda. In Hong Kong, free journalism also must adhere with the following rules to only broadcast positive image towards China, making the freedom of press in the special region with capitalist system ranked below global average (Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA), 2019).

China's culturally and politically opening to the world is arguably considered strategic decision. From great upheaval upon controlling internal stability to great come back as the 'returning power', China has launched its staged strategies through institutions which are built by maintaining ideological regime and building advantageous international links. The setup reform and opening has shocked the world where China was perceived to unable pursuing 'modern world' standards without embracing democratic values. Based on inward-looking, China interprets Chinese people dream with the fulfilment of the daily needs as the basis of political support and the legitimacy of the regime–ignoring freedom of expressions and inserting bad track records of corruption among government officials in which youngest cohorts gradually vote less support. China also exercises high surveillance on internal hostilities–Tibet, Uighur community, Hong Kong–hindering the fact of re-education camp and human right abuses and threatening international critics with cutting off diplomatic ties and economic assistance.

While these instruments–tightening domestic politics–are being enhanced, China keeps laundering its economic business as a foundation to build trusts among countries which have taken loan from. The main objective is to convince the world that China is the top foreign investor or powerful lending countries to achieve geostrategic and geopolitical interests, a business-political opportunity network. China sets strategic strongpoint on its foreign policy within the scheme of 'peaceful development' through economic and socio-cultural aspects, owning infrastructure transfer and people to people exchange programs. Setting on reform and opening, moving towards technology development is also a compromise solution, creating video-sharing platform *TikTok* and fuelling techno-nationalism among countries skeptical of China's potential censorship.

CONCLUSION

China holds both economic and political power status which could influence world interrelation with its tit-for-tat tricks despite having abundant 'no-reciprocal' records. By setting international supports towards Tibet into difficulties to conduct cooperation—Visa restriction and media blockage on U.S. nationals, and assistance to Indian insurgents—security and centralized law enhancement in Hong Kong, and cultural assimilation to Uighur community prone to 'illiteracy and poverty', the use of

modernisation (reconceptualization) is internally coherent with the **first hypothesis** of maintaining authoritarian style as China's instrument to reassure the world that it has imperative control over internal political affairs. As Danner describes China's behaviour towards internal legitimacy as assertive, this research paper examines the authoritative regime as part of strategies to unify national identity, build patriotic pride among citizens, repress dissenters who could potentially fuel nationwide ideological scepticism, and assert outsiders that China holds full control over its political sphere.

Conversely on **the second hypothesis**, China approaches more peaceful behaviour by providing development assistance, building institutionalised educational and cultural centres, and moving towards internet governance. China, by ruling out ideology use to guide foreign policy, projects to approach its own terminology of 'peaceful development'. The pursuit to achieve political domination is long trajectory and yet a mission to convince the world that any party wants to question China will hold the consequences. It has been avoiding international criticism with putting some projected cooperation and development assistance under threat, thus challenge the foreign governances to take a lead in confronting neglected human rights values in China. Interestingly, scholars believe that China's attempts to influence any cultural, political, economic, or military in world order are parts of its normal *state of affairs*. The term of calling China to not having 'incomplete modernization' perhaps spark dilemmatic on whether China is completely willing to complete modernization phase by comprising 'liberal democracy' aspect. Perhaps, China's ambitious pursuit of regaining political power recognition will redefine the term of 'modernization' that being 'modern' doesn't include freedom of expression.

Others agree that regional power best describes China instead of global power. However, the parameter of worlds favouring China's investment development aid could be spotted in almost continents. Now that globalisation has retreat itself from interconnected world, leaving disparity in societal and political fabrics due to pandemic, China strengthen its OBOR initiative with recipient countries. As observers agree on second slow*balisation* term coming after the first wave in 2008 world financial crisis, China navigates opportunity in the slow*balisation* phenomenon by offering a helping hand for WTO members to challenge the economic recession. The degrading tone on China resilience in the world bargaining power has over casted once the country, the world's biggest fossil fuel emitter, is also at the same time the leading actor on renewable energy—particularly on solar cells and wind turbines. Perhaps, China would use *Chinese restaurant syndrome* relating to MSG usage as Xenophobic issue to dispute relations with other entities—another trick to show who dominates over whom.

Despite the explanation, critical reviews, and arguments abovementioned, this research paper still has deficiencies, remaining weak arguments and limitations. Thus, this research paper needs proceeding arguments and critical thinking which could deliver collaborative elements to examine China's internal and external role in defining self-existence. The explanations and arguments which constitute China's assertive and peaceful behaviour remain overlapped. In the above argument, it is stated that China will embrace peaceful instruments towards international counterparts. However, it depends on which country has on and off tensions with China, especially when they question China's legitimacy in its own internal affairs. The subsequent research could use rational choice or comparative thinking approaches to study China's foreign policy towards certain countries - (1) middle economy power countries (recipients of OBOR Initiatives) and (2) countries which oppose China's rule of authoritarianism and question economic & development assistances.

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