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Harmony and Multipolarity – Contradiction or Mutual Dependency? – An exploration of Chinese academic discourse

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List of Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
GIS	Global International Society
IR	International Relations
IRT	International Relations Theory
M.A.	Master of Arts
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of the Peoples Republic of China)
PRC	Peoples Republic of China

Contents

1. Introduction

Throughout the decades, China's public diplomacy discourse has been shaped by a growing number of reappearing key terms and concepts. Sometimes rivalling the meaning of existing ones, such as "rule of law", „freedom" or "human rights", the vocabulary has also been expanded by novel terms like the "China Dream" or "Socialist Core Values" (See: Oud and Drinhausen 2021; Ohlberg 2016). In this context, "harmony" (和谐 - héxié) and "multipolarity" (多极 – duōjí) have become absolute staples of Chinese foreign policy rhetoric. As such, these concepts have transcended to Chinese IR, where they are discoursively reproduced by a number of domestically and internationally well-known scholars, most notably Yan Xuetong, Qin Yaqing and Zhao Tingyang. I argue that the accumulation of their works, the way they speak about harmony and multipolarity at different occasions and in different contexts, ultimately constructs a reality in which their individual interpretations of harmony and multipolarity relate to each other with inherently reinforcing as well as contradicting features alike. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of each of these scholars' individual world order discourses, I aim to expose not only how individual constructs of harmony and multipolarity integrate into their academic visions of world order, but also how these constructs become subjects of scrutiny, further analysis and sometimes careful disregard or critique. My goal is to contribute to a growing body of literature occupied with enhancing the universal understanding of common Chinese foreign policy concepts and the way China's IR scholarship explains and integrates them (See for example: Turner 2009; Callahan 2012; Scott 2013; Nordin 2016; Chu 2020).

My choice falling on these two concepts in particular, is by no means coincidental and is rooted in the assumption that the features inherent in constructions of harmony and multipolarity are filled with contradictory as well as potentially reinforcing aspects. To begin, there is hardly any concept that has been discussed as intensively by International Relations scholars or foreign policy practitioners as the "balance of power" (Kaufmann et. al. 2007: 1). A central concept that is deeply engraved into balance of power thinking, especially within neorealist traditions, is the concept of polarity. It is perhaps the key structuring element of the international system that defines how great power interaction develops and how mechanisms such as the balance of power or the security dilemma play out (De Keersmaeker 2017: 4). A central theme featured in the polarity discourse has since been stability or, in other words, the question which type of power configuration is most stable

and least prone to conflict, especially war (De Keersmaker 2017: 4; Mearsheimer 2001: 15). The literature showcases proponents and opponents of every type imaginable. Whereas in 1948 Hans Morgenthau argued that multipolar systems are more stable than bipolar ones, Kenneth Waltz claimed the opposite (Morgenthau 1948: 169; Waltz 1964). The end of the Cold War and Charles Krauthammer's famously termed "unipolar moment" (Krauthammer 1990) then gave rise to what Layne 2009 calls "unipolar stability realists" (Layne 2009: 150) such as Wohlforth and Brooks 2008 and more implicitly related: theories of hegemonic stability (De Keersmaker 2017: 25). During the course of history, all of these (realist) claims have found empirical credibility by the same explanatory variable, namely the absence of war among great powers. While unipolarists may find themselves proven by the relative stability since the end of the cold war (Wohlforth 2009: 56), bipolarists would raise the argument that the cold war remained cool (Mearsheimer 2001: xi, 340), and multipolarists find validation in the "Concert of Europe" (See: Hyde-Price 2007: 43). Hence, whenever polarity is discussed, stability, peace, and war are of imminent interest. Furthermore, the polarity discourse is not limited to the academic debate, but preferences for certain types of power configurations have also found their way into the general diplomacy vocabular of state leaders and foreign policy practitioners. Former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for example, called Multipolarity "a theory of rivalry" (Rice 2003). Russian President Putin claimed that "the unipolar model […] is flawed because at its basis there is and can be no moral foundations for modern civilization" (Putin 2007). China under President Jiang Zemin incorporated the concept of 多极世界 (duōjí shìjiè – Multipolar World) into its foreign policy in 1992 at the 14th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (Turner 2009: 168). In April 1997, Jiang even signed a joint declaration with the former Russian President Boris Yeltsin stating:

> *"In a spirit of partnership, the Parties shall strive to promote the multipolarization of the world and the establishment of a new international order"* (Jiang and Yeltsin 1997)

Later, former President Hu Jintao noted that multipolarity constitutes "an important base for achieving a durable peace on this planet" (Renmin Ribao 2001). Evolving from a critique of bipolarity in the late period of the Cold War into a critique of unipolarity and US-Hegemonism, a multipolar world has been a long-standing foreign policy goal for the PRC (See: Womack 2004; Eisenmann and Heginbotham 2019: 55-59).

Next to the the promotion of multipolarity, China's public diplomacy consistently stresses the ideal of harmony, a core concept in Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought, which carried significant meaning in Chinese governing principles throughout thousands of years, but which also inhibits the danger of "meaning anything and everything" (Nordin 2016: 2-3). At the very least, its meaning implicates a relation to peace and a normative desire of abstaining from "extremes" (See: Li 2006: 600; Li 2007: 6777). In the Chinese foreign policy discourse, the promotion of harmony arguably reached its peak during the Hu-Era, when President Hu Jintao introduced his twin slogans of Harmonious Society (和谐社会 - héxié shèhuì) and Harmonious World (和谐世界 - héxié shìjiè). Yet, it was later incorporated in Xi Jinping's China Dream (See: Callahan 2015: 993-994; Nordin 2016: 4) and like multipolarity, harmony still finds significant application in China's foreign policy discourse today (See for example: Chinadaily 2017; CCTV 2018; See also: Coco 2020). In fact, among the collection of speeches from 2016 to 2022 given by China's foreign minister Wang Yi and issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 34 of them contained references to either harmony, multipolarity or both (See: MOFA 2022). Furthermore, both concepts were mentioned repeatedly in China's 2019 white paper titled *China and the World in the New Era* (State Council of the PRC 2019). Eisenman and Heginbotham (2019) argue that, under Xi, strengthening relations with developing countries follows the goal of establishing a "more "Democratic" and "Multipolar World", which in turn aims to curb U.S. unilateralism (See: Eisenman and Heginbotham 2019). Chen (2017) emphasizes that for Xi, the Confucian ideal of "Great Harmony of the world" remains to be the ultimate goal of the still vaguely defined "Community of Common Destiny for All Mankind" (人类命运共同体 - rénlèi mìngyùn gòngtóngtǐ) (See: Chen 2017). Domestically speaking, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) treats harmony as a so called "socialist core value" (Lam 2017: 9).

Finally, there are two explicit examples that I want to highlight in order to stress the intricate and intertwined standings that the two concepts share in China's public diplomacy in the past and present. The first is a statement given by former Chinese and Russian presidents Jiang and Yeltsin, following up their 1997 joint declaration in the year of 1999. In a rare instance the concepts of harmony and multipolarity were placed in a context that implies a direct relation where multipolarity "facilitates harmonious co-existence" by saying:

> *The two sides call for the concerted effort of all the nations to set up a democratic, balanced, and **multi-polar** world pattern to facilitate **harmonious** co-existence,*

> *constructive mutual influence, and mutual exchanges among the various cultures.* (MOFA 2000)

The second is a statement given by Wang Yi, the current minister of foreign affairs:

> *How could countries work together for a better future at a time of growing economic globalization,* ***multi-polarization****, cultural diversity and in an information era? China's solution to these significant questions is to build a community of shared future for mankind. The China solution is put forward to help address the changing international order and system. What it points to is a bright future where all are free from want, all have access to development and enjoy dignity, and all live in a beautiful world of* ***harmony*** *and mutual respect.* (Wang 2016)

What this quote attests to is that harmony and multipolarity are two conditions that the current Chinese foreign policy still advocates for. While in this instance "multi-polarization" is mentioned without normative additives, there are other quotes where Wang is specifically stating the endeavor to "promote multipolarity" (See: MOFA 2020), just like there are instances where he speaks about "promoting harmony among all nations" (See: Wang 2020).

Research Question and Puzzle

Although harmony and multipolarity are staples of Chinese foreign policy discourse, they are rarely being discussed in tandem by Chinese IR scholarship, nor has the discussion of one concept against the backdrop of the other drawn much attention of Western scholarship either. Considering that both concepts contain normative implications for world order, an inquiry into the feasibility of a multipolar world that is also harmonious appears to be worthy of pursuit.

If we look at Confucian harmony as a governing principle, certain characteristics stand out that either contradict or support the idea of multipolarity. First, Confucian harmony requires heterogeneity of at least "two or more co-existing parties" (Li 2014: 9) as implied in the often-cited idiom of "*harmony with diversity/seeking harmony with differences"* (和而不同 - hé ér bùtóng) (Callahan 2015: 994; Li 2014: 143). Li (2014) explicitly cites Krauthammer's case against multipolarity[1] (See: Krauthammer 2001 as cited in Carnegie Europe 2003) when

[1] The quote in question: *"Multipolarity, yes, when there is no alternative. But not when there is. Not when we have the unique imbalance of power that we enjoy today - and that has given the international system a stability and essential tranquility it had not known for at least a century."* (Krauthammer 2001, as cited by Carnegie Europe 2003)

he makes the argument that harmony with differences is opposed to unilateralism as implied by unipolarity. This leads to second, Confucian harmony presupposes tension between different parties (See: Li 2014: xi). Tension is also an inherent feature of the existing multipolarity discourse (See for example: Clegg 2009: 75; Burrows 2017: 5; Monteiro 2011: 21), giving rise to the argument that tension crated by a multipolar setting potentially promotes the development of harmony. Third, harmony therefore requires multilateralism and respectful international relations where differences can be reserved in order to, fourth, achieve transformation of a more "favorable environment for each party to flourish" through successful coordination. Fifth, Confucian harmony is not to be understood as a final state, but as a process that needs continuous renewal to maintain harmonious relationships (See: Li 2014: 9, 146,147). In a nutshell, Confucian harmony demands conflict to be either contained or incorporated and there is true agency for human beings to balance each other in order to harmonize the world and ultimately walk a "middle road" (See: Li 2014: 14, 80). However, while the aspects of tension, different parties, and balancing resemble aspects inherent in multipolar world orders, human agency, and the normative need to reserve differences usually don't fall into classical realist conceptions of multipolarity (See for example: Mearsheimer 2001: xiii, 3). Although Li's elaborations should not be seen as the ultimate definition of the social construct that is Confucian harmony (or harmony in general), they nevertheless offer an entry point into the core dilemma that I argue lies at the heart of supposed harmony under multipolarity. That is, how to ensure successful cooperation within a multipolar world, in order for harmony to prevail and without running into collective action problems, deadlock or even war. In other words, the condition of harmony in a multipolar world demands actors to be willing to reserve differences *by themselves,* due to the lack of central authority that would otherwise be able to enforce it. It would require an ontological change of mind from a mentality of confrontation or hegemony to a mentality of harmony (See: Wu 2020: 146; Li 2014: 147). Put differently, harmony requires universal principles to be accepted without hegemony in a Gramscian sense to enforce them (See: Femia 2010: 3, 7), due to the absence of global hegemonic reach in a multipolar world order.

China's long standing and regularly renewed pledge to "never seek hegemony" (Global Times 2021; Xinhua 2021) and the combined policy goals of a harmonious- and multipolar world give rise to the following research question: *How does Chinese IR scholarship construct and deal with the relation between harmony and multipolarity in its constructions of world order?* By engaging with this question, I hope to contribute to the wider debate on

Chinese world order conceptualizations and see if and how some of the most representative and collectively discussed Chinese scholars who engage in the world order debate, namely Yan Xuetong, Qin Yaqing, and Zhao Tingyang (See: Acharya 2019, Wang 2017, Callahan 2012) discoursively integrate these two foreign policy concepts in their constructions of world order. On a broader scale, my engagement with this question also serves as a test to the feasibility and logical coherence of two popular Chinese foreign policy concepts when discussed against the backdrop of one another.

The underlying puzzle that can be derived from this question is characterized by the interplay of harmony under the condition of multipolarity. I argue that while multipolarity can be a precondition for harmony, it simultaneously can keep harmony from prevailing, due to the demand for an ontological change of mind that cannot be enforced hegemonically in a given multipolar setting. However, differing perceptions of both concepts might lead to differing conclusions in which their co-existence could become feasible. This is also the reason why my analysis largely remains conceptual and with its focus on Chinese IR discourse. Instead of advancing a universal claim to the meaning of harmony and multipolarity, my analysis is based on the assumption of pluralistic universalism where I identify Chinese academic debates revolving around the topic of world order as one of multiple foundations in the context of Global IR, thus approaching it with an open mind to alternative constructions of meaning (See: Acharya 2014; Acharya and Buzan 2019: 301). Hence, when I speak about the feasibility of harmony under multipolarity, I am referring to the feasibility within the constructed reality of Chinese IR in general and the individual scholars in particular.
Embracing this research puzzle, my primary goal is to understand how the China-favored multipolar world is being conceptualized and supported by Chinese academia, under the condition that Chinese foreign policy rhetorically demands it to be harmonious. Hence, I argue that there is a normative claim for what I call “harmonious multipolarity”.

The proposed question begs a few theoretical assumptions. First, I take the official Chinese position to “never seek hegemony” (Global Times 2021) at face value and assume that China indeed seeks a multipolar world order. Second, that there is a conceptual relation between harmony and multipolarity that can be either contradictory or complementary. Additionally, for Chinese scholars to represent and portray Chinese foreign policy coherently, they would have to discuss multipolarity at least implicitly with a background of harmony or vice versa. I will elaborate on the unique circumstances surrounding Chinese International Relations Studies further below. Third, in order to be able to understand and interpret the Chinese

discourse on these two topics, I assume the ontological existence of pluralistic universalism (Acharya 2014). Doing so, I draw from Berger and Luckmann 1991 in that I not only accept the "empirical variety of 'knowledge' in human societies, but also […] the processes by which *any* body of 'knowledge' comes to be socially established *as* 'reality'" (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 15). It is thus not the goal to outrightly dismiss claims, because they might not necessarily relate to my own interpretation of social reality, but instead accept "whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity of such 'knowledge'"(Berger and Luckmann 1991: 15). In other words, I argue that reality is socially constructed. Hence fourth, the actuality that some scholars and policy makers favor multipolarity and others do not, indicates that multipolarity means different things to different people. The same goes for the concept of harmony, which some might see as the "Origin of Totalitarianism" and others as a "Patron of Pluralism" (See: Li and Dühring 2020: 1-8). For these reasons, I abstain from issuing fixed meanings to any of these concepts and argue instead that harmony and multipolarity, as well as any concepts that draw meaning from those terms are social constructs. It is my primary goal to understand the assumed coexisting realities of the harmonious and multipolar world as proposed by the Chinese government and discussed by Chinese scholarship depending on how harmony and multipolarity might be conceptualized in any given context. Definitions given earlier reflect my preliminary understanding of the two concepts, which ultimately led to the emergence of the research puzzle presented above. In order to breach said puzzle, perceptions of harmony and multipolarity would have to differ in any given context.

Thus, it is the core idea of this M.A. thesis to analyze a selection of texts from Chinese IR that are concerned with Chinese constructions of world order and see if and how constructions of harmony and multipolarity play into it. My reason to focus on Chinese IR scholarship as opposed to official documents or newspaper articles is two-fold. First, being used normatively in non-academic contexts, the meanings of multipolarity and harmony are usually presupposed and thus often objectively assumed (See: Searle 1995: 4-5). In other words, due to unreflective, objective biases in non-academic discourse, there is limited discussion or critical reflection on how these two concepts might relate to each other or if they are related in the first place. Be it of contractionary, complementary, or even mutually dependent nature. I am not trying to contradict Robert Cox here and claim that social science is free from treating certain meanings as fixed and that theory is not "always for someone or some purpose" (Cox 1986: 207), but rather see the social scientific debate as the location

where conceptualizations and discussions of meanings rather take place and where I would most likely expect to find more thorough engagement with meaning when inquiring about reconciliations of harmony and multipolarity. That said, my inquiry will largely take place on a conceptual level, mainly to allow for a more open discussion about harmony and multipolarity without constantly having to fall back into comparisons with my own perception of the status quo reality. Second, I argue that Chinese IR scholarship has a unique trait in that most of it is first and foremost concerned with China as the object of reference. Gloria Davies sees a nationalistic tendency in Chinese critical inquiry that she describes as "*worrying about China*" (See: Davies 2007: 1) Nordin 2016 maintains that this tendency is particularly evident in the Chinese school (of IR) debate, where she argues that the promotion of China's national interest is seen as an underlying goal (Nordin 2016: 38). One of my research subjects, Professor Qin Yaqing of China Foreign Affairs University for example believes that:

> "*China needs a theory to explain why China can be peacefully developing and can achieve a peaceful rise*" (Qin 2010, as cited in Kristensen and Nielsen 2013: 29)

Whereas Professor Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University stated himself that his sense of nationalism influences how he chooses his research topics:

> *"My nationalism affects my choice of research topic and the aspect of the topic I study. I choose topics in international relations that are strongly relevant to China. Among these relevant questions, I choose to study what is most relevant to China's core interest."* (Yan 2013, as cited in Lu 2013: 245)

Mokry (2018) agrees that Chinese academic debates sometimes "offer a window into CCP thinking". The fact that most of the important debates regarding China's role in the world usually take place hidden from the public eye, means that the endeavor of interpreting official Chinese foreign policy speech becomes an unusually difficult subject matter. However, the limited academic debate can sometimes shed light on official Chinese conceptions about world order. First, the party-state's National Planning Office for Philosophy and Social Science appears to play a substantial role in setting research agendas, in how it distributes its funding. Coupled with common CCP censorship practice, boundaries for what can and can't be published set a clear signal for scholarly debates to take place along official policy concepts. Second, some selected scholars such as Zheng Bijian or Wang Huning have directly contributed to past formulations of China's foreign policy agenda,

hinting at intimate relations between China's scholarship and the party's foreign policy formulations. Third, but possibly more difficult to verify, officials and scholars may have gone through similar socialization and education experiences, which in turn may have aligned their world views and perspectives (See: Mokry 2018; Also see: Hartig 2016). All of the above lends weight to the argument that Chinese academic discourse is to an extent concerned with explaining, advising and refining Chinese foreign policy concepts, which multipolarity and harmony certainly are.

Thesis overview

Following this introduction, I will offer a literature review based on terms and topics relevant to this M.A thesis in chapter 2. I will summarize and look at existing academic inquiries featuring multipolarity and harmony by Chinese and Western scholars, thereby creating the basis for my theoretical approach, which will be laid out in detail in chapter 3. In the following chapter 4 I will elaborate my rationale for selecting discourse analysis as my method of choice, lay out my case- and text selections, present my general approach revolving around a set of guiding questions derived from information gathered in the initial literature review, as well as hint at potential caveats. Utilizing an inductive approach, the analysis in chapter 5 will be the core of my M.A. thesis and follows a scholar-concept dichotomy by which I will look at each scholars own construction of the concepts in question. I will summarize my findings and conclude this M.A. thesis in chapter 6.

2. Background information and literature review

2.1. A Chinese School of International Relations?

In 2007, arguing that "almost exclusively Western sources of International Relations Theory (IRT)" failed to correspond to major global developments, Buzan and Acharya 2007 set out to ask the question: "Why is there no non-western international relations theory?". Their explanation attempts ranged from the possibility of universal truth of Western IR, to Western IR inhibiting "hegemonic status in the Gramscian sense", over to the possibility of existing theories hidden behind language barriers, to local conditions that prohibit any chance of development of non-western theories or to the idea that Western IR simply enjoys a head start that is in the process of being caught up (Buzan and Acharya 2007).

For the case of China, Qin 2007 came up with three factors that could explain the absence of a Chinese IRT. First, he argued that there is an unconsciousness of what he calls "international-ness" in the traditional Chinese worldview. Second, Western IR discourse supposedly played a dominant rule within the Chinese academic community. Finally, he stated that Chinese IR research lacked a "consistent theoretical core". Still, Qin was hopeful and determined that the emergence of a Chinese IRT is only a matter of time (Qin 2007: 314). In recent years, a variety of prominent Chinese International Relations scholars went significant lengths to develop and introduce alternative theories, largely inspired by traditional Chinese history, as well as ancient philosophies such as Daoism and Confucianism. Not only is the stated goal to diversify IR in accordance with accusations of Eurocentrism, but also to offer new instruments to help explain China's rise and its implications (See: Qin 2018a; Yan 2019, Zhao 2019a).

While the focus of this M.A. thesis lies in the exploration of harmony and multipolarity, the analysis will inevitably take place as part of a wider debate about Chinese visions of world order. The authors in question, Yan Xuetong, Qin Yaqing, Zhao Tingyang and their respective approaches have been subject to a variety of academic inquiries. Acharya 2019 takes all three into account, encouraging and appreciating the emergence of distinct Chinese approaches to IR, while also warning about the low regional scope of applicability, limited academic reach, lack of a vibrant research agenda apart of these rather famous scholars, possible lack of longevity, as well as the close proximity to "official policy of the country of its [a Chinese International Relations Theory] origin" (Acharya 2019)

Summarizing Chinese world order theories under the term "Tianxia Theories"[2] Chu 2020 points out a variety of "problematic traits" inherent in Chinese IR approaches, ranging from "selective and arbitrary reading" of Chinese philosophy, "exaggerated claims of Chinese culture's pacifism" to "rigid adherence to a "West vs. non-West" binary and "serving as a cover for Chinese nationalism". In his article, Chu asks how proponents of such Tianxia Theories "reconcile the internal incoherence and logical inconsistencies of their theories", which is an inquiry with some similarity to the approach advanced in this M.A. thesis (Chu 2020).

While other critical assessments of Chinese IR and related visions of world order have been made (See for example: Noesselt 2012, Cunningham-Cross 2014, Zhang 2012, Wang 2017,

[2] Most of these theories, although to different degrees, usually refer to the ancient world ordering concept of 天下 (tiānxià), usually translated with *All under heaven*.

Grachikov 2019), often even pointing at the entanglement between Chinese academia and the state (See for example: Hartig 2016; Mokry 2018), none of them have inquired about the compatibility of harmony and multipolarity, two continuously reappearing concepts featured in decade-long Chinese foreign policy discourse (See: Jiang and Yeltsin 1997; Renmin Ribao 2001; MOFA 2022; Also See: Turner 2009; Callahan 2012; Scott 2013).

It has been shown that a recurring feature of status quo Chinese academic research, is the implicit or explicit emphasis on China as the object of reference and nowhere is this more evident than in the field of Chinese IR (See: Davies 2007: 1; Nordin 2016: 38). According to this strand of literature, the Chinese academic debate about IR-related concepts, such as multipolarity and harmony, does not only serve as theoretical inspiration outside of (sometimes called) eurocentrist Western IRT's, but should simultaneously be treated as discursively constructed empirical data itself, which is precisely what I aim for in this M.A. thesis.

2.2. Multipolarity discourse

General concept

Among other factors, but especially owing to China's rise, the last two decades have shown a striking reemergence of the multipolarity debate in IR. Its newfound relevance gave rise to the authoring of numerable books and an uncountable amount of journal articles discussing the feasibilities, advantages, and disadvantages, as well as possible world order scenarios. In this section I will therefore summarize the strands of literature and the academic context that my M.A. Thesis blends into.

The concept of multipolarity is usually depicted as a possible power configuration within the classical realist concept of balance of power (De Keersmaeker 2017: 4; Mearsheimer 2001: 15; Waltz 1964). It represents the idea of several poles of power taking part in the shaping process of the international order as opposed to unipolar orders led by hegemonies or empires, or bipolar orders as experienced during the Cold War (Ferguson 2018: 89). The process by which an international system becomes multipolar is hence called multipolarization and explained by relative powershifts from unipolar or bipolar powers to other rising powers within the system (Clegg 2009: 13). Multipolarity is thus almost exclusively being discussed in relation to other possible power configurations like unipolarity and bipolarity. Beginning with Charles Krauthammer's "unipolar moment"

(Krauthammer 1990) at the end of the Cold War, multipolarity has usually been debated in the context of current and future world orders against the backdrop of US-unipolarity (See: Layne et. al. 2009; Layne 2012; Wohlforth and Brooks 2008, Raymond 2019) De Keersmaeker further argues that ever since Kenneth Waltz proclaimed that multipolarity would be less stable than bipolarity, "there has been a close theoretical link between polarity and the outbreak of war" (De Keersmaeker 2017: 4; Also see: Waltz 1964; Waltz 2001). Hence, the degree of stability under the premise of anarchy appears to be the primary dependent variable within the realist polarity debate. De Keersmaeker observed that participants in this debate discuss it with either numerical or hierarchical understandings of it. Whereas unipolarity discourse assumes hierarchy by taking a top-down perspective, multipolarity usually follows a numerical understanding. In a purely numerical understanding of multipolarity, the hierarchy between great powers remains undefined. While all of them follow national interests, none of them can be said to lead the hierarchy within the anarchic system in which they exist (De Keersmaeker 2017: 113, 195).

In his attempt to further conceptualize multipolarity, Acharya 2004 came up with two distinct motivations states can have if they pursue a multipolar order as a foreign policy goal. Namely, "multipolarity as a strategic pursuit" and "multipolarity as a normative quest". Whereas normative multipolarity is dependent on a strong sense of collective identity, adherence to international law and advocacy of international institutions, strategic multipolarity is pursued out of balance of power preferences, such as described above (Acharya 2004: 2). This distinction also demonstrates that multipolarity serves not merely as an objective analytical tool within IR circles, but also represents possible strategic considerations for foreign policy makers that can be used normatively and serve as a strategic resource in form of critique against unipolarity, as an ideal worth promoting or a danger to abstain from (Rice 2003; Putin 2007; Jiang and Yeltsin 1997; also see: Womack 2004: 351).

Outside of the realist paradigm, more ideational references to terms such as multiplicity, pluralism, or polycentricity are featured when multipolarity is being discussed. In his book on Indian foreign policy for instance, Singh 1999 refers to a polycentric order in relation to unipolarity (Singh 1999: viii). Cui and Buzan 2016 point out that pluralism refers to ideological differences between actors whereas multipolarity only determines the power relations within a given system. To combine these two aspects, they came up with "ideological multipolarity" (Cui and Buzan 11-15).

On the flip side, when elaborating on Russia's world view, Sakwa 2018 sees a clear

connection between Russia's argument "that an international system made up of a plurality of states with their own national interests" and the argument of a multipolar world to justify it:

> *"The ideological framework in which Russia asserted the pluralist model is through the idea of multipolarity."* (Sakwa 2018: 37)

Furthermore, one section is titled "*The cold peace and world order: Hegemony vs. pluralism"*, implying that hegemony and pluralism are sometimes treated as opposites. However, Hegemony, at least on the global level, strikes strong resemblances to unipolarity so that synonymous usage of these terms is far from being a rare occurrence (See: De Keersmaeker 2017: 6, 7, 25, 26). While global hegemony presupposes unipolarity, one could still make the argument that unipolarity doesn't necessitate hegemony. Yet, this debate goes to show that academic consensus on what multipolarity means in the context of the 21st century remains remarkably limited.

Looking at it from an English School perspective, Acharya and Buzan 2019 argue that "the classical idea of multipolarity is inadequate to the task" of describing the "emergent new structure of GIS (Global International Society)" and propose the term "deep pluralism" instead (Acharya and Buzan 2019: 265, 281).

Accordingly, the debate has expanded towards new conceptualizations of somewhat multipolar power configurations. Propositions such as "unipolar-plus" (Ferguson and Dellios 2016), "multi-order world" (Flockhart 2016), "G-Zero world" (Bremmer and Roubini 2011), "interpolar world" (Grevi 2009), or "multiplex world order" (Acharya 2017) have since been made to conceptualize the complexity of globalized interdependence coupled with the decline of American unipolar power. What this shows however, is that multipolarity can mean different things to different people, which is why it is important to analyze what Chinese academia thinks about the concept and how their particular understanding might relate to harmony.

China and multipolarity

Womack 2004 argues that China's strive for multipolarity evolved from a "deeply critical" stance on hegemony. Since 1986 the concept has played a key role, first as a critique against bipolarity during the last years of the cold war and later against American unipolarity (Womack 2004: 351-353). Under Xi Jinping the concept remains an important component

of China's preferences for global governance (全球治理 - quánqiú zhìlǐ) (Huang 2017). Thus, multipolarity has regularly emerged within academic discourse regarding Chinese visions for world order and its foreign policy in general. Indeed, Silvius 2019 elaborates that generally, academic debates on multipolarity have to a large extent taken place against the backdrop of China's rise in which it has often been viewed either as a spoiler, supporter or shirker of responsibility within an international order dominated by US unipolarity (Silvius 2019: 624; also see: Clark 2011; Deng 2001; Layne et. al. 2009; Layne 2012; Ikenberry 2013; Ikenberry et. al. 2015; Pan and Chen 2013).

Constructivist approaches such as by Scott 2013 or Turner 2009 have also pointed out that multipolarity comes with different connotations depending on the actor. China is being argued to view multipolarity more through the lens of sovereignty than the EU for instance (Scott 2013; Turner 2009). Yet, compared to the Russian perception and utilization of multipolarity, which Ferguson 2018 describes as being "…based on goals to assert its historical claim of being to being an essential player in European, Eurasian, and Asian affairs" and "part of a zero-sum game", China's grasp is described to include multilateral aspects of power sharing and win-win mutuality (Ferguson 2018: 91). Wang 2013 goes as far as to argue that unipolarity, bipolarity and multipolarity are western concepts as part of "Western International Relations theory" and that ancient Chinese perceptions of hegemony refer more to the political, whereas western theories emphasize economical as well as military aspects (See: Wang 2013). As outlined in the previous section, perceptions of multipolarity are intertwined with conditions of modern interdependencies, lending weight to the argument that China's own understanding of multipolarity is crucial for determining the factor that harmony plays in it.

In China, discussions about multipolarity appear to be mostly positively connotated throughout the spectrum. Although debates seem to have shifted from more theoretical discussions to accepting multipolarity and multipolarization as given facts and a natural trend. Accordingly, theoretical discussions usually cover presumed benefits of multipolarity such as diverse representation of values and culture, equality and multilateralism, as well as independence and autonomy free from US-hegemonism. Furthermore, multipolarity is often highlighted as a common goal when it comes to China's bilateral relations with states like Russia or India. Stability, a long-time foreign policy paradigm for China, is argued to be higher under multipolar conditions, hinting at dangers of American interventionism (See: Yu 2004, Qin 2019, Shen 2001, Gao 2011, Wang 2019). Same as earlier, hegemony, is

almost always being discussed in the context of US unipolarity. The term "U.S. unipolar hegemony "(美国单极霸权- měiguó dānjí bàquán) finds regular usage and both terms 单极 (dānjí – unipolarity) and 霸权(bàquán) are often being applied synonymously (See: Qin 2021b; Zhu 2019; Li 2013). Especially the argument of unipolar instability continuously carries weight among Chinese foreign policy circles. As recent as in a 2021 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Yan Xuetong, one of the loudest Chinese IR voices, reemphasized the "instability fueled by unilateralism, protectionism and hegemonism" according to the latest five-year plan (Yan 2021). Whereas these are characteristics that Chinese scholars often associate with multipolarity, they alone do not clarify how a multipolar world could theoretically be governed. This is where discussions about world order become relevant. For instance, Chen 2013 argues that a multipolar world should be inclusive, cooperative, but most of all governed by a framework of what he terms great power coordination model (大国协调模式 - dàguó xiétiáo móshì) (See: Chen 2013). Yan Xuetong contends that international cooperation will become increasingly issue-specific and characterized by a lack of "truly international (or even regional institutions)" (Yan 2021). Indeed, Plagemann et. al. 2021 observed that "nation-state-driven connectivity strategies.", such as the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, "have emerged as a core element of international politics in today's multipolar world" (Plagemann et. al. 2021: 1). While Yan mentions that the international system is shifting towards multipolarity, he sees the US-China relationship at its core, thus hinting at the future possibility of a bipolar setting in which China and the United States handle conflicts through its bilateral relations (See: Yan 2019; Yan 2020; Yan 2021). In line with many contemporary scholars who believe that today's emerging multipolarity does not resemble classical realist notions of the past, Qin Yaqing disagrees with Yan Xuetong to an extent in that he is convinced that economic globalization and deep interdependences disable even large countries to ignore all interests of small or medium sized countries (Qin 2019: 31). Both of these authors and their differing views will be subject to analysis later on.

2.3. Harmony as a discursive concept

The idea of this MA thesis is not to undertake a historical deep dive into the origins and evolutions harmony, but to look at how it is valued, perceived, and applied by Chinese actors today. Before addressing the most relevant strands of literature in this regard, it is nevertheless worthwhile to list some of the most fundamental works on which a modern understanding of harmony is mostly based upon. While Li Chenyang has written extensively

on the Confucian idea of harmony (See: Li 2006, Li 2014a; Li 2014b; Li and Düring 2020), his monograph titled *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony* provides a comprehensive summary of the origins, key elements, and practical considerations of Confucian harmony. Accordingly, harmony is considered to be one of the "most cherished ethical and social ideal in Chinese culture, particularly in Confucianism" (Li 2014: 1; Also see: Yao 2000: 36; Chen 2017: 172). According to Li (2014) the *Thirteen Classics* (十三经 - shísān jīng) and the *Twenty-Two Masters* (二十二子 - èrshí'èrzǐ) serve as "the most authoritative sources of Confucian philosophy specifically and of Chinese philosophy in general", thereby including the ancient concept of harmony (Li 2014: 3). The *Thirteen Classics* refer to a collection of some of the more well-known works, such as the *Analects* (论语 - lúnyǔ), *Book of Rites* (礼记 - lǐ jì), or the *Book of Changes* (易经- yì jīng). The *Twenty-Two Masters* on the other hand, refers to major ancient philosophers such as Laozi, Zhuangzi or Confucius himself (See: Li 2014). Evidently, harmony transcends most of China's ancient philosophies, but its meaning remains blurry at best. Thus, before moving to more practical literature on how harmony plays into Chinese foreign policy and its academic debates, I will outline existing attempts to summarize meanings of harmony.

Meanings of harmony

Li 2014 argues that the key concept to understand harmony is centrality (中 – zhōng). While this adds another blurry term with many connotations that in some contexts even is synonymous to harmony, a main difference is that centrality can be viewed as a practice, whereas harmony resembles more of an outcome. Li 2014 thus stresses that harmony can only exist in a state of balance for which centrality functions as the guiding principle. Centrality can thus be understood as the balancing process between two tendencies and sometimes even extremes, which usually should be avoided altogether. Hence, centrality does not imply sticking to a middle road from the beginning but allowing opposite tendencies to the same extent so as to arrive there naturally (See: Li 2014: 80). With this in mind, harmony becomes more graspable when contrasting it with 同 (tóng - sameness) as in 和而不同 (hé ér bùtóng), which has previously been translated with *harmony with diversity/seeking harmony with differences.*

> *"Harmony is thus characterized by the absence of such conformity. Indeed, the Confucian understanding of harmony describes the coming together of things,*

> *persons, or actions in a process of unification that preserves their differentiation. Harmony takes place through mutual adjustment, accommodation and transformation. When harmony is achieved, things thrive, people flourish and society prospers."* (Li and Düring 2020: 4-5)

This explanation stresses the unity aspect of harmony. It is only achieved when unification doesn't come at the price of sacrificing diversity. On the contrary, harmony can only be realized when each party is allowed to preserve their differences while still showing the ability to manage emerging conflicts (Li and Düring 2020: 6). Chen 2017 cites Western Zhou thinker Shi Bo (史伯 - shǐ bó) saying:

"Harmony is that by which things are actually generated; whereas through sameness things are unable to continue. Bringing different things together so as to arrive at equilibrium is called harmony. One is thereby able to richly develop and unite things" (Shi Bo as cited in Chen 2017: 22)

According to Chen 2017, sameness is what halts progression and the merger of "different things" to the state of equilibrium "is called harmony" (Chen 2017: 22). A common allegory for harmony in classical Chinese philosophy is the interplay of music. Rošker 2013 hints at the example of the infeasibility of an orchestra where all instruments stick to one musical tune. Consequently, while difference is a key prerequisite, there are limitations (Rošker 2013: 8-9). These limitations are set by "rules of the rites" (礼- lǐ) and are being brought up in the *Analects* for instance:

> *"Harmony is what is most prized in the practice of the rites [*li*]. It is what makes the way of the former kings beautiful, and this [principle] applies to matters big and small. Yet it does not always work: if you aim only at achieving harmony [in everything] because you know that it is the ideal and do not let the rules of the rites guide your action, it will not work."*[3] (Kong 2014 as translated by Chin Anping)

[3] 禮之用，和為貴。先王之道斯為美，小大由之。有所不行，知和而和，不以禮節之，亦不可行也。」(`Lǐ zhī yòng, hé wéi guì. Xiānwáng zhī dào sī wèi měi, xiǎo dà yóu zhī. Yǒu suǒ bùxíng, zhī hé ér hé, bù yǐ lǐjié zhī, yì bùkě xíng yě.') (See: https://ctext.org/analects/xue-er)

It is implied that adhering to the "rules of the rites" paves the way to a proper harmonious outcome. In relation to 和而不同 (hé ér bùtóng), sameness and extremes are to be avoided by allowing for diversity in a setting, which Li 2014 calls "creative tension", suggesting that conflict is needed for the process of harmonization, but has to remain within certain boundaries. "Rules of the rites" or "ritual propriety" are hence responsible for creating the frame of reference in which tension can flourish (See: Li 2014: 1, 65). In Confucianism these rules then resemble a moral compass that is acquired by each individual through a process called moral self-cultivation. This continuous process is needed to nurture persons that are "well-cultured in virtue, diligent in action, and pleasant in personality", qualities necessary for harmonious societies. Such morally and culturally refined persons are traditionally called 君子 (Jūnzǐ) and their moral qualities enable them not only to harmonize with themselves, but with others as well (Li 2014: 95-100).

An important dilemma is that Confucian scholars disagree on how to practice self-cultivation and where said moral principles come from. Some scholars argue that one should follow moral principles taught by Confucius and other sages, others stress that self-cultivation relies on "one's natural goodness", are thus universally acquirable by observing the inner self (See: Qin 2018a: 190; Chen 2017: 35, 136).

Lastly, harmony does not always imply peace. While harmony is described as a relational concept, depending on ontologically harmonious individuals and their relations (See: Li et. al. 2018; Li 2014; Chen 2017), Bodde 1982 argues that in many philosophical traditions, harmony does not know good and evil and that what is perceived to be good and evil is both needed to ensure harmony on a macro scale:

> *"This is, that what we call 'evil', far from being a positive force trying to destroy the cosmic harmony, is, on the contrary, just as much a part of that harmony, and just as necessary for its functioning, as what we call "goodness." Or, looked at from a slightly different point of view, it is an occasional falling-away from the harmonious centrality of all things—arising, in the case of man, because of his inadequate understanding of the cosmic pattern."* (Bodde 1982: 258).

It is again the extremes, that harmony seems to be most concerned with. Despite harmonies positive connotation, it has sometimes been criticized as a gateway towards totalitarianism, especially by non-Chinese commentators. In his works on China, Max Weber argued that:

> *"The cosmic orders of the world were considered fixed and inviolate and the orders of society were but a special case of this. The great spirits of the cosmic orders obviously desired only the happiness of the world and especially the happiness of man. The "happy" tranquility of the empire and the equilibrium of the soul should and could be attained only if man fitted himself into the internally harmonious cosmos."* (Weber and Gerth 1959: 153)

Li and Düring 2020 believe that Weber's view reflects the assumption that harmony externally derives from a higher order and pre-determines a model of existence for humans, actually disallowing pluralist interpretations of social order (Li and Düring 2020: 2). In the same vein, the authors describe Martha Nussbaum's and Karl Poppers writings revolving "around the virtue of keeping one's place" in the sense that conflicts might be resolved for harmonies sake at the cost of not being able to express personal opinions. Harmony is thus characterized by "a lack of distinction or individuation" and suppressive elements, ultimately contradicting the previous argument of being a concept welcoming of pluralism (See: Li and Düring 2020: 2-3; Also See: Nussbaum 1992; Popper 2008). To some extent, this assumption is shared by E.H. Carr who argues that the Smithian "harmony of interests" usually comes "…at the expense of somebody else.", by which he is referring to the liberal doctrine of "asserting the identity of [one's] interests with those of the community as a whole", pursued by dominant greatpowers such as the British empire during the 19th and 20th centuries (See: Carr 2001:42, 232):

> *"Biologically and economically, the doctrine of the harmony of interests was tenable only if you left out of account the interest of the weak who must be driven to the wall, or called in the next world to redress the balance of the present."* (Carr 2001: 50)

Carr's assumptions are fundamental, because they provide a realist assessment of the utopia that harmony is often being portrayed as. According to Carr, harmony, in the realist as opposed to the idealist sense, requires a blend of morality and power, because the voluntary self-sacrifice that utopian harmony would demand for collective wellbeing can realistically only be achieved by providing a more threatening alternative of force. In other words, a self-sacrifice becomes a "forced submission to a stronger power" (See: Carr 2001: 168). In his discussion of the aforementioned „harmony of interests", early Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong, albeit in a different context and with a different opinion, nevertheless agrees with the argument that the shared interest criticized by Carr does not naturally evolve from within

but is the outcome of (external) cultural inputs. Accordingly, the selfish aspects of the Smithian "harmony of interests" in which every individual follows its own interest leads to a harmonious outcome as imagined by the "invisible hand". To Fei, however, an important detail is if this learned interest or desire serves the purpose of contributing to human existence. In that context, harmony resembles the obstacle-free pursuit of common interests, which are only common, because they are culturally predetermined, or put differently, limited by culture (See: Fei 2005: 120-121). To Carr, this kind of harmony requires the unawareness of individuals that their interests are predefined by a factor like culture:

> "*The harmony is none the less real if those concerned are unconscious of it*[4]*."* (Carr 2001: 43)

In summary, ancient Chinese thinking of harmony is being portrayed as a virtuous goal for human interaction, achievable only within a society of culturally and morally refined individuals that are capable of reserving differences while managing their conflicts, thus not trying to assimilate each other into sameness, which in turn would take away the ability to balance, a crucial precondition for achieving and maintaining harmony. However, harmony is sometimes being seen as the exact opposite by western commentators, disallowing contradictions ultimately opening up totalitarian possibilities "for harmonies sake" where the pretext of disharmony can be used to safeguard the interest of a dominant group.

2.4. Discursive intersections of harmony and multipolarity

While there does not seem to be any piece of literature locating the relation of harmony to multipolarity at its core, many have broached the topic. Ironically, a title edited by Schulze 2018 called *Multipolarity: The promise of disharmony,* though raising a lot of issues with multipolarization, fails to deliver on what the authors think about harmony or disharmony as the word is rarely mentioned throughout the entire book. Implicitly, the outset of the book assumes that the decline of U.S. hegemony and the emergence or persistence of other powers such as China, Russia, and the European Union is characterized by the erosion of a coherent international order. Judging by the title, the authors perceive this circumstance as a state of disharmony, a striking difference to previous elaborations where the plurality of actors is the enabling factor of harmony in the first place (See: Schulze 2018).

[4] Referring to the previous argument that interests are being asserted from the top to the bottom

Li 2014 who has been cited repeatedly throughout this chapter, briefly discusses the infeasibility of harmony under hegemony by disagreeing with Charles Krauthammer's 2001 comments on unipolarity and unilateralism (See: Krauthammer 2001), stating that:

> *Hegemony as a one-sided approach advocated by unilateralists is not conducive to harmony. Going alone unilaterally not only makes a nation vulnerable, it also increases the gap between states, and hence results in more disharmony. Making oneself vulnerable and creating a disharmonious environment can only work to one's detriment. A harmony approach calls for working with other states and coordinating with concerned parties to build consensus. It requires multilateralism. It requires every nation to take other nations seriously and respectfully.* (Li 2014: 146-147).

A realist counterargument comes from Carr who believes that "Any international moral order must rest on some hegemony of power:" He bases his argument on the assumption that power always plays a central role when it comes to the abandonment of a self-interest that stands in the way of international harmony and that alleged self-sacrifices for the sake of it can usually be traced down to the element of power (Carr 2001: 168). Thus, because to Carr morality is not universal, it requires a degree of dictation through the exercise of hegemonic power, which means that Carr's realist understanding of harmony resembles a status quo where the interests of a dominant state are asserted on and being followed by less powerful states in a hegemonic order.

Zooming in on more China focused literature regarding harmony and multipolarity, there is a significant amount of literature dating back to the Hu era, trying to explain the former president's concept of "harmonious world", sometimes hinting at links to multipolarity. Yu 2010 for example, argues that "a trend towards a multipolar world is also a necessary political prerequisite for the harmonious existence of the diversity of civilizations" (Yu 2010: 3). Yu et. al. 2007 elaborate that the political concept of "harmonious world" advocates for the establishment of a multipolar world, the pursuit of multilateralism and opposition to hegemony and unilateralism[5] (Yu et. al. 2007: 58). Furthermore, arguing for a "harmonious new world order", Liu 2006 assumes that a peaceful, friendly, and harmonious world order should be built on the foundation of a multipolar balance of power[6] (Liu 2006: 37). What

[5] „…和谐世界主张建立一个多极世界⍰奉行多边主义…" („…Héxié shìjiè zhǔzhāng jiànlì yīgè duō jí shìjiè fèngxíng duōbiān zhǔyì…")

[6] „…在多极均势基础上建立一个和平、和睦、和谐的世界新秩序将是最佳的理性选择。" („…Zài duōjí jūnshì jīchǔ shàng jiànlì yīgè hépíng, hémù, héxié de shìjiè xīn zhìxù jiāng shì zuì jiā de lǐxìng xuǎnzé.")

these authors have in common is the categorization of multipolarity as a precondition for harmony. Crucially, what they fail to address are the why's and how's deriving from their claims. While Liu 2006 has no problem mixing ideas of harmony and balance of power, the following authors appear to have a deviating view.

Huang and Shih 2016 developed a distinct theoretical framework attempting to explain China's view on the international system. "Balance of relationship" therefore offers "parallel or a supplement" to the idea of "balance of power". Like balance of power, they conceive balance of relationship as a strategy. However, while balance of power is interpreted as a self-help approach under the assumption of structural anarchy, balance of relationship seeks to control said anarchy through trustful relationships, thereby reaching harmony, which the authors understand as the counterpart to anarchy (See: Huang and Shih 2016: 18-20). Although the authors do not discuss multipolarity directly, they nevertheless engage with harmony in a realist environment of anarchy and balance of power. However, by substituting balance of power with balance of relationships, power configurations are replaced by relational networks.

In his book *Harmony and War,* Wang 2010 argues that China, throughout large parts of its history, demonstrated "realpolitik-related" behaviors and that, while popular, "the idea of a pacifist tendency in Chinese use of force…there is little evidence to support the *sui generis* view" (Wang 2010: 185). Relating harmony to peace and pacifism, Wang 2010 locates Confucian strategic culture at the opposite end of realist strategic culture. If understood as a realist description of a power configuration from a balance of power perspective, multipolarity might not have a place in an ontologically Confucian framework. Similar to Huang and Shih 2016, fundamental differences demand the exclusion of either the Confucian or realist ontology in order to prevent contradictions. This aligns with Li 2014 highlighting the differences between "mentality of harmony" and "mentality of confrontation" (Li 2014: 147). In summary, while some authors see harmonious or Confucian mindset at opposite ends with a realist ontology, authors such as Yu et. al. 2007 or Liu 2006 have no issues viewing a multipolar balance of power as foundational for international harmony.

Moving on, a variety of international scholars have critically reflected on harmony as a distinct Chinese foreign policy concept, but rarely against the backdrop of multipolarity and its implications. While not discussing multipolarity directly, Bell 2017 remarks that a harmony oriented Confucian approach to foreign policy usually rules out the use of force as a means "…to promote its political values to the rest of the world.", hence he tries to come

up with alternatives, such as through NGO's, to spread the harmonious mindset internationally (Bell 2017: 142). In this case the restraint not to use force does not stem from anti-hegemonic ideals, but a presumed pacifist attitude rooted in a harmony oriented foreign policy approach, an argument contradictory to Wang 2010. Like Wang, Callahan and Nordin take critical stances towards harmony in China's foreign policy, yet they only broach the topic of multipolarity. Elaborating his understanding of the harmonious world policy, Callahan points out that the harmonious world is characterized by the coexistence of different civilizations. He argues that "…the talk of multiple civilizations underlines how China prefers a multipolar world order." (Callahan 2013: 41). In a later article, Callahan compares the different implications of the millennia-old ideal of 大同 (dàtóng – Great Harmony) and 和而不同 (hé ér bùtóng – harmony with diversity), arguing that 大同 also indicates sameness, while 不同 (bùtóng – different) implies the opposite. Consequently, he levels the claim that China's often applied Great Harmony rhetoric does not stand for a "caring-sharing society, but the appeal to unity over difference, and the collective over the individual." (Callahan 2015). Nordin 2016 holds that an overuse of Chinese harmony rhetoric has led to it losing its meaning overall. In her book, she also makes the point that this rhetoric, even without Hu's slogan of "harmonious world", has transited over to the Xi administration. Similar to Callahan who insists that harmony either implies one, sameness or difference, Nordin argues that:

> *"...there is an inherent and irresolvable philosophical contradiction in the two claims about harmony, which makes harmony impossible by definition. In the literature examined in this book, harmony must by definition be universal, but its universalization by definition makes harmony impossible, because again it disallows the otherness or multiplicity that is its precondition. If everything and everyone has to be harmonized into the one system governed by the Chinese elite, then there is nothing left that can balance against that system, and so harmony cannot be achieved."* (Nordin 2016: 2)

While she hints at the denial of multiplicity in a setting of universal harmony, she doesn't draw a connection to China's multipolarity rhetoric, even though, as Callahan has pointed out, multipolarity might be closely linked to the demand for multiple civilizations.

Having shown the fundamentals of multipolarity and harmony and academic discussions about them, I want to reiterate a variety of factors that led me to question the compatibility of these concepts in the first place, subsequently leading to the formulation of my research

question. First, harmony is often described to be reliant on pluralism and diversity. We have seen that multipolarity is sometimes understood to also include ideological dimensions, subscribing to the idea of pluralism and cultural diversity among different poles. Depending on the understanding of multipolarity, it could serve as a foundation for difference within the international community and enabling it to balance each other to avoid extremes. Second, even without the ideological dimension, unipolarity in a realist understanding of balance of power, could arguably be perceived as an extreme, as well as a tendency towards sameness from a harmony perspective. Third, there is a demand for a specific set of moral values requiring individuals within a multipolar system to self-cultivate, in order to acquire a harmonious mindset. If harmony is understood as a status quo that requires every actor involved to live by harmonious values for it to prevail, these values would have to be exported. Under the assumption that the classic realist idea of multipolarity is a conflict oriented one, ridden by security dilemmas, a harmonious mindset is unable to evolve on its own. This doesn't mean that multipolarity must always imply conflict, but that actors within a multipolar world are equipped with a conflict-oriented mindset based on realist assumptions if their ontology doesn't change towards a harmonious one. A harmonious multipolar world thus depends on the precondition of a harmonious mindset of everyone involved. To export this mindset becomes a necessity that is not solvable by (global) hegemonic practice when multipolarity is demanded and requires other means such as soft power for example (See: Nye 2009; Bell 2017).

Thus, the question remains, if and how Chinese scholars' imaginations of world order deal with the contradictory and synergizing elements of harmony and multipolarity, which again heavily relies on their own respective understandings of these concepts. After all, the assumptions above reflect my own understanding of harmony and multipolarity based on my reading of the literature, which itself offers multiple differing viewpoints. Subsequently, a different interpretation of these concepts could imply a different understanding of their compatibility.

3. Theoretical Approach

What I have shown in my previous elaborations on the literature, is that ideas of harmony are in many ways at odds with the realist ontology of confrontational anarchy. Understanding multipolarity as a realist concept imagined as a power configuration within an anarchical international self-help system characterized by security dilemmas and thus, confrontational

mindsets. Supposedly, "harmonious multipolarity" requires a fundamentally different ontology in order to make sense.

I do not concern this M.A. thesis with actors or structures from a primary perspective. Rather, I aim to understand perspectives of relevant actors within the field of IR and the broader social sciences on discursive constructs and draw conclusions regarding their compatibility and coexistence, externally demanded by Chinese foreign policy rhetoric. What the previous isolated and non-isolated reviews of harmony- and multipolarity literature have revealed, is that understandings of both concepts can deviate significantly and require an approach accounting for different interpretations, opening possibilities to negate potential dilemmas that I have pointed out earlier. To accept the coexistence of different explanations based on culturally distinct ontological and epistemological assumptions demands a theoretical approach capable of discussing harmony and multipolarity from different perspectives. As I am concerned with the analysis and interpretation of socially constructed meanings of, in my understanding, discursively related concepts, I will draw inspiration from several strands of literature usually associated with constructivism.

Alexander Wendt famously said that "Anarchy is what states make of it", arguing that the reality of anarchy is defined by actors' interpretations of it (See: Wendt 1992), which in turn are dependent on cultural factors (See: Wendt 1999: 377). While some will interpret China's "use" of harmony simply as a means to increase its softpower (See: Hagström and Nordin 2020), I refrain from sticking to such predetermined explanations within realist frameworks. My goal for this M.A. thesis is not to find one universal explanation of how multipolarity and harmony are brought together by Chinese IR scholarship, but to discursively assess different possibilities by acknowledging that reality is socially constructed and inherently pluralistic (See: Katzenstein 2012: 12; Acharya 2014; Qin 2020b). As Qin 2018a puts it:

> *"In other words, there is no singular reality, but only plural realities. Balance of power, for example, was a Westphalian reality. But it was in fact what the agents made of it, just as Wendt's discussion of anarchy goes. The Tribute system was also a historical reality in East Asia for hundreds of years, where balance of power and anarchy were neither a reality nor a systemic feature at all, for the agents there made realities different from what has been found in the Westphalian international system."* (Qin 2018a: 21)

Though I disagree with Qin's notion of plural realities because I believe that it gives way to increasingly groundless theory building based on excuses of multiple realities, I nevertheless agree that the social construction of reality is inherently pluralistic due to historical, geographical, and cultural diversity of its actors. Hence, I lean towards Acharya's proposition of "pluralistic universalism [which] allows us to view the world of IR as a large, overarching canopy with multiple foundations" (Acharya 2014: 3-4). For Acharya, pluralistic universalism is a precondition for what he coined "Global IR", an attempt to integrate different strands such as "western" and "non-western" IR and account for locally diverse ontologies and epistemologies. Stressing that "Global IR" should not be understood as a theory, "…but an inspiration for greater inclusiveness and diversity…" within the disciple of IR, Acharya summarizes his assumption as follows:

> *1. It is founded upon a pluralistic universalism: not "applying to all," but recognizing and respecting the diversity in us.*
> *2. It is grounded in world history, not just Greco-Roman, European, or US history.*
> *3. It subsumes, rather than supplants, existing IR theories and methods.*
> *4. It integrates the study of regions, regionalisms, and area studies.*
> *5. It eschews exceptionalism.*
> *6. It recognizes multiple forms of agency beyond material power, including resistance, normative action, and local constructions of global order.* (Acharya 2014: 3)

My point here is not to invent new theories, but rather to embrace the possibilities that non-western modes of thinking and theorizing come to different conclusions and accept these as part of reality. Agreeing to a notion of pluralistic universalism allows me to interpret Chinese constructions of "harmonious multipolarity" more openly, without being bound to eurocentric theoretical constraints. In the same vein, it allows me to embrace the possibility that something like a "Chinese ontology" exists, opening up new ways of exploring meanings of the concepts in question (See: Zhao 2006). While the assumption of a socially constructed reality that is inherently pluralistic is an ontological claim, it creates an epistemological necessity for how we get to know and explore this reality. To meet this necessity, I draw on existing constructivist literature and take language seriously in that it is not merely a tool for describing social reality, but instead responsible for creating it in the first place. This means that language not only comes with a *descriptive*-, but also with a *constative* function (Austin and Urmson 1975: 1-4). Speech is hence the constructing mechanism of social reality. Accepting that language is *doing* (Onuf 2013: 33-34), I am first and foremost concerned with analyzing and interpreting discourses, that is:

> *"…the space where intersubjective meaning is created, sustained, transformed and, accordingly, becomes constitutive of social reality."* (Holzscheiter 2013: 3)

Furthermore, I understand discourse as the mechanism with which states, societies, individuals and thus also scholars make sense of their environment and ways of living (See: Epstein 2010: 2).

I raise the post-structuralist claim that discourse is intimately related to power. Discursive practice not only shapes "objective truth", but also limits alternative choices. Discursive power is therefore characterized by a productive and repressive component (Herschinger and Renner 2017: 325-326; Epstein 2010: 1-9; Diez 1999: 599). I view my object of study, the Chinese academic debate on world order and subsequently multipolarity and harmony, as both a victim of limitation through eurocentric discourse that is influencing if and how Chinese alternative understandings of International Relations and related concepts can evolve and be reproduced, and at the same time as a platform where discursive power is wielded, thus creating claims to "objective truths" itself (See: Herschinger and Renner 2017: 325-326; Milliken 1999; Gordon and Foucault 1980: 38).

As I have highlighted in my literature review and background chapter, I understand the role of Chinese IR scholars as explainers, refiners, and advisors of Chinese foreign policy. As Mokry 2018 has pointed out:

> *"While not completely aligned with official positions, a few publicly visible Chinese scholars can shed some light on how the Chinese leadership thinks about world order…"* (Mokry 2018: 4).

In addition to other statements already discussed (See for example: Davies 2008, Nordin 2016, Yan 2013, as cited in Lu 2013), I see three reasons why the mentioned roles apply. First, they are explainers as evidenced by visible attempts to not simply refer to a concept but reference it in relation to other concepts (See for example: Yan 2008: 160; Qin 2011: 251). Nordin 2016 for instance, refers to a scholar's attempt "…to explain what "harmonious world" is…" (Nordin 2016: 25). Second, they are refiners, because they don't necessarily align completely with the official positions, as Mokry 2018 has pointed out in the quote above. The fact that the majority of their discourse still revolves around popular Chinese foreign policy rhetoric shows that they not only explain but refine these concepts by placing them into established IR- or ancient philosophical contexts to also proof and legitimize their

use (See for example: Yan 2019; Qin 2018; Zhao 2021; Also see: Davies 2008; Mokry 2018: 6). Third, they are advisors, because of subtle normative recommendations evidenced by usage of advisory verbs such as" should" or praises of certain policies in line with their theories (See for example: Yan 2019: 86, 136; Qin 2011; Qin 2021d: 11).

In summary, my theoretical framework revolves around the assumption of pluralistic universalism, which in my understanding represents the idea of one overarching reality as the aggregate of spatially and temporally diverse ontologies. This reality is produced and reproduced by discourse, which is not limited to descriptive-, but also constative functions, potentially infusing multipolarity and harmony with differing meanings, thus allowing for a more open and less biased inquiry. The discourse is embedded in the context of Chinese IR as a medium to explain, advise and refine Chinese foreign policy concepts and rhetoric.

These theoretical assumptions give rise to methodological considerations. I therefore put forward discourse analysis as my method of choice, primarily because "it allows for an analysis of the contestedness of certain concepts" (Diez 1999: 599), which is an underlying argument of this M.A. thesis when it comes to multipolarity and harmony from a Chinese academic perspective.

4. Methodology

In alignment with the theoretical assumptions lined up in the previous section, I will now lay out my case as to why I believe discourse analysis to be the most suitable methodological approach relative to my research goal, which is to inquire how Chinese scholarship deals with harmony and multipolarity in its conceptions of world order. Next, I will detail the scope and main corpus of research material. That is, texts written by Chinese scholars that implicitly or explicitly discuss harmony, multipolarity, or both. I argue that even if a text is not explicitly discussing harmony under the condition of multipolarity, which holds true for all texts in question, it is still possible to discursively bring them into context by asking relevant questions. I will formulate and discuss these questions in the following section, using them to guide the reader through the analytical steps. I want to use the last section to hint at possible limitations adjacent to my methodological approach.

4.1. The case for discourse analysis

As mentioned, my research will be conducted by paying close attention to language. In other words, I am going to focus on the processes by which social reality is constructed and preserved. Doing so, I claim that "…incomplete, ambiguous, and contradictory discourses…" posses the power to produce a social reality perceived by us as real and solid. The basic assumption that "without discourse, there is no social reality" means that "without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experience, or ourselves" (Phillips and Hardy 2002: 1-2). Thus, understanding Chinese academic discourse featuring harmony and multipolarity, opens the gate to understanding if and how Chinese academia constructs a harmonious multipolar world. Put differently, arguing that harmony and multipolarity are discursively created social constructs, discourse analysis offers tools to understand the processes by which they were constructed. This is because the type of discourse analysis that I pursue here is not only concerned with what the selected texts say, but also the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which they are embedded in (Phillips and Hardy 2002: iv). While remaining firm on the assumption that language is *doing* (Onuf 2013: 33-34), I am not dismissing the fact that actions are always embedded in social contexts. Thus, I understand discursive power to be relational (Gordon and Foucault 1980: 245-246) in the sense that discourse "does not occur in a vacuum" and the different contexts in which they appear are again represented by discourse (Phillips and Hardy 2002: 4). It is precisely the significance of context that encourages a discursive approach. The aforementioned relationship between Chinese academia and the state and the strong emphasis on China as a constant referent object for Chinese IR scholars creates a context in which scholars see themselves tasked with responding to Chinese foreign policy needs. The question how these scholars deal with distinct Chinese foreign policy concepts such as harmony and multipolarity only gains its relevance from this particular context, which creates the expectation that harmony and multipolarity are being discussed in the first place. Thus, by asking relevant questions and paying critical attention to the contexts in which harmony and multipolarity are discussed, I am trying to identify the implied meanings and discursive connections between the two.

4.2. Research subjects and their relevance

While harmony and multipolarity could be discussed from many different perspectives apart from International Relations, I view these concepts in the context of China's foreign policy rhetoric and thus in relation to Chinese visions of world order. Ultimately, this M.A. thesis resembles an exploration about if and how Chinese academics assess the feasibility of a world that is harmonious while also multipolar. As explained earlier, this feasibility heavily relies on the individual subjective understanding of what harmony and multipolarity means to those Chinese scholars who concern themselves with theoretical discussions of world order. Building on the assumption that Chinese IR scholarship is attributed with functions of explaining, refining, and advising on China's foreign policy (See: Davies 2007; Mokry 2018; Nordin 2016), I view Chinese academic texts on new concepts for world order as a discursive attempt to either incorporate or dismiss Chinese foreign policy concepts such as harmony and multipolarity. While the primary goal is to increase the understanding of the compatibility of these two concepts, I cannot dismiss the critical aspects my approach ultimately implies. The fundamental criticism that arises depending on the findings of my analysis revolves around the conclusion that if renowned Chinese scholars are unable to conceptualize visions of world order that incorporate these two important Chinese foreign policy goals of international harmony and multipolarity, it ultimately exposes aspects of inconsistency within China's foreign policy discourse.

With that in mind, my analysis will focus on the works of three domestically and internationally well-known Chinese scholars of International Relations and their takes on world order in general, namely Yan Xuetong, Qin Yaqing and Zhao Tingyang.

Described as "China's most influential foreign policy analyst and theorist of international realations" (Bell 2013: 1), Yan Xuetong has written extensively on China's rise, the trajectory of it, and its role in- as well as its impact on international order. His nomination as one of the world's most influential public intellectuals by *Foreign Policy* in 2008 (See: Foreign Policy 2008) serves as an indication of his international reach, keeping in mind the level of control the CCP has on his field (See: Mokry 2018). Being a political realist himself, Yan subscribes to the assumption that political leadership shapes international relations. The scholar's proposition is a type of world order characterized by what he terms "humane authority", a distinct type of seemingly unilateral leadership that he believes to be different from hegemony (See: Yan et. al. 2013; Yan 2019). For this M.A. thesis, a selection of texts,

written by Yan Xuetong, in which he elaborates his ideas on humane authority, will provide one of three strands of empirical material subjected to my analysis. While the main body will consist of his 2019 *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, other works will be of relevance as well (See for example: Yan et. al. 2013; Yan 2018; Yan 2019).

The second scholar whose works are subjected to my analysis is Qin Yaqing. Whereas Yan spearheads the realist school within Chinese IR, Qin is often perceived as the loudest constructivist voice in China (Kristenen and Nielsen 2013). His proposal, a "relational theory of world politics", maintains that the future world order is characterized by globally intertwined relations rooted in the belief that different cultures matter. Most extensively elaborated in the eponymous 2018 book called *A Relational Theory of World Politics*, Qin has applied and refined his approach in a variety of other works, which the analysis will shine a light on as well. Same as with Yan Xuetong, I view his 2018 book as my primary source of discourse, while paying similar attention to other texts as well.

The last strand of empirical material differs from the first two in the sense that Zhao Tingyang, the scholar in question, is an outsider to the field of IR to some degree. Other scholars tend to describe him as a modern Chinese philosopher and while he cannot exactly be categorized as a Chinese IR scholar, his attempt to heave the ancient concept of *Tianxia* (天下 – tiānxià) into the present nevertheless stroke a significant chord within Chinese and western IR circles even to the extent that a variety of books, journal articles, and newspaper articles have been discussing his work (See for example: Chu 2020; Wang 2017; FAZ 2020; Callahan 2012). His approach leaves the impression of a highly centralized system, which is supposed to be the establishment of an "all inclusive" internalized world (Zhao 2019a: 43). I view Zhao's 2021 book *All under Heaven* as the most authoritative piece of literature explaining his theoretical beliefs and assumptions. Same as with the other two scholars, this source will be supplemented by other relevant texts published by Zhao.

As evidenced, all of these scholars are assuming leading roles within their respective domain of study, thus being equipped with significant discursive power, albeit within a discursive arena characterized by academic censorship (See: Angermuller et. al. 2014: 6; Chu 2020; Mokry 2018). In chapter two I have signified the connection that harmony and multipolarity share to visions of world order and argue that the latter serves as an overall discursive framework where discussions with respect to the former take place. Since world order is precisely the center of research for these scholars, I deem their work to be well suited and

most corresponding to my research goals. I want to emphasize that my primary reason to select these three scholars is their representative function in developing and expressing potential Chinese visions of world order, by streamlining popular Chinese foreign policy concepts in a certain direction. While they might be inclined to integrate concepts such as multipolarity and harmony into their frameworks, their individual constructions could differ.

All of these authors have published a significant number of articles, books, and book chapters throughout their career, a fact that is followed by certain analytical implications in respect to my text selection. Since the body of literature at hand might appear overwhelming if I were to review and analyze the authors life's work in its entirety, I want to spend the following section to detail my approach to the material.

4.3. Scope and text selection

While most of the scholars' work has focused or at least broached upon questions of world order, the first limitation is established by pieces that have not. Although this line might be blurry at times, I will decide, depending on titles and abstracts, if texts in questions are relevant to my research question or not. This leads me to my second rule for limitation, which is a focus on key terms. Naturally, if an article inhibits any mentions of harmony or multipolarity, it is deemed qualified for research. What my literature and background sections, as well as my theory chapter have indicated however, is that meaning can be highly subjective and certain terms might be closely related or even function as substitutes for the terms in question. Constructs like peace, unity in diversity, pluralism, multiplicity, unipolarity, unilateralism or anti-hegemonic rhetoric in general could be indicative of the scholars' biases and convictions towards harmony and multipolarity. I am aware that the selection of these terms is again influenced by my own biases as a researcher and that intertwined meanings could be misinterpreted on my end (See: Klotz and Lynch 2007: 20). Same as with previous elaborations on my own assumptions on multipolarity and harmony, such preliminary assumptions serve as an entry point into the debate revolving around these concepts and will be weighed against possibly differing interpretations by Yan, Qin, and Zhao. One last limitation is defined by a timeframe. While a multipolar world had been on the Chinese foreign policy agenda many years prior, the "harmonious world"-diplomacy only took off in the early 2000s under President Hu Jintao (See: Womack 2004; Callahan 2015). Hence, my timeframe loosely ranges from the early 2000s into the present and additionally depends on how active the scholars in question were at any given point. Of

course, the foreign policy environment has changed significantly within the last 20 years. Hence, the objectives and conclusions drawn by scholars invested in China's foreign policy discourse might have changed as well. The supposed paradigm-shift under Xi Jinping from 韬光养晦 (tāoguāngyǎnghuì – conceal one's strenghs and bide one's time) to 奋发有为 (fènfā yǒu wéi – striving for achievement) is likely to have had an effect on academic writing in the field of IR as well (See: Yan 2014). This doesn't mean however that multipolarity and harmony have faded from either foreign policy- nor academic discourse, but it will undoubtedly have an influence and must be kept in mind, especially when context matters as an important component of discourse analysis and the meaning of concepts that I try to derive with it (See: Angermuller et. al. 2014: 3; Phillips and Hardy 2002: iv).

In summary, relevant texts by any of the three scholars are to be counted as such, if they were published between the early 2000s and 2021, discuss visions, meanings, or interpretations of world order, and/or if they mention harmony, multipolarity or any of the (supposedly) related terms mentioned above.

While I have explained my reasons for selecting these authors in particular, this decision by no means represents the only viable route. Political speeches, media coverage or works by different scholars could also have served as viable case selections, because the concepts selected transcend through these different types of discourse. Yet, since my research focus was set on discursive constructions by representative figures of Chinese IR and the assumption of a strong interlinkage with China's foreign policy establishment itself, I deem these selected cases to be most valuable for exploring connections between harmony and multipolarity. With these selectorial considerations in mind, I will now discuss my approach to the material itself, that is the methodological steps I'll take while reading through the texts.

4.4. Approach to the material

A conclusion drawn from my initial literature review and background chapter is that multipolarity and harmony are mostly being treated and discussed apart and with a degree of isolation from each other. I have also made the case that there is reason to believe that these two concepts could and should be related. The fact that these two concepts have not been explicitly discussed in relation to each other doesn't mean however that there is no implicit discussion or discussion founded on intricately different perceptions of meaning. In

other words, one doesn't necessarily have to say "multipolarity" to mean "multipolarity" and if one uses "multipolarity" it lacks meaning without context.

In order to explore this discursive relation between harmony and multipolarity thoroughly, I will deliberately keep my guiding questions open and abstain from engaging with the text using pre-set categories. Such an inductive approach enables me to stay open to differing constructions of what I have termed "harmonious multipolarity", which I assume under the premise of pluralistic universalism (Acharya 2014). The role of my guiding questions is to streamline my research process towards answering the final research question of *how does Chinese IR scholarship construct and deal with the relation between harmony and multipolarity in its constructions of world order?* Obviously, this is an intertextual endeavor, as none of the authors, or any authors in general have set out to actively define "harmonious multipolarity". Instead, I argue that the accumulation of their works, the way they speak about harmony and multipolarity at different occasions and in different contexts, ultimately constructs a reality in which their individual interpretations of harmony and multipolarity relate to each other. To approach my research question, the first and most important step must therefore be to understand how the selected scholars write about these two concepts and interpret their individual understandings of them. Naturally, my initial focus is on the discourse around explicit references of harmony and multipolarity. The aim is to identify commonalities and patterns, essentially the terms with which the scholars speak about them. This process not only helps me to understand what these concepts mean to said scholars, but also adds new key terms with which to further analyze the remaining material. On an intertextual level, it also enables me to search for terms derived from one concept in the context of the other, thus getting closer to actual constructions of *harmonious multipolarity.* Since my research is aligned towards questioning the compatibility of harmony and multipolarity, I pay special attention to conflicting, as well as reinforcing statements throughout the reading process.[7]

The questions to initiate my research process are in part inspired by Diez (1999) and refined so that they fit the subject matter of "harmonious multipolarity":

What are the terms with which the authors speak about multipolarity and harmony?

[7] I am referring to constructions of one concept which might either reinforce or contradict constructions of the other.

This is the most general and fundamental question, necessary to unlock key terms and interpretations to further engage with the material at hand. Meaning is fragile and contested, it only exists within its discursive context (See: Angermuller et. al. 2014: 3; Diez 1999: 610; Klotz and Lynch: 2007: 19) and I view the terms with which Chinese IR scholars speak about multipolarity and harmony as part of that context.

What terms do resemble harmony and multipolarity?

Although similar, this question asks for specific terms with synonymous character as opposed to accompanying expressions. Again, this question serves to broaden the understanding of the general context in which harmony and multipolarity are being discussed. However, it also highly depends on my own subjective interpretation as a researcher to categorize a term as a substitute for another concept.

What are alternative meanings of harmony and multipolarity in different contexts?

While the diversity of contexts is limited by the scholar's profession[8], there is still room for differing contexts within their professional limitations. For example, harmony could be discussed on a domestic, philosophical or practical level, whereas multipolarity might find usage in historical or political contexts. As meaning is tied to context (See: Fairclough 1992: 25, 64; Angermuller et. al. 2014: 3), a differing context may provide a different perspective with which to interpret a scholars particular understanding of harmony, multipolarity and their compatibility.

How and against which concepts are harmony and multipolarity being contrasted?

This question builds on the previous question in that it pays attention to context, but differs, because the context explicitly depends on contrast with other concepts. The practice of contrasting different interpretations and constructions will be my primary tool for analysis, also because I established my constructivist assumption of pluralistic universalism in which there are no absolute benchmarks depending on objective reality, but relative ones (See: Klotz and Lynch 2007: 106). My goal is to find common terms or meanings that both, constructions of harmony and multipolarity, can be contrasted with, thus establishing an indirect link between the two.

Which political pre-decisions are implied in those terms?

[8] They usually mention harmony and multipolarity in IR-related contexts.

This question is to be asked in respect to the intricate relation between Chinese IR and the state, as well as the role that scholars take in it. Earlier I argued that, to an extent, Chinese IR scholar's role is to not only inform, but also to explain Chinese foreign policy. With harmony and multipolarity being forwarded as desirable foreign policy goals (or ideals), it is likely that meanings of these concepts are being handled with particular care.

How is the status quo being described?

This question aims to draw interpretative conclusions from the way the scholars speak about the status quo. Is it multipolar or harmonious? If not, what are they praising or criticizing? These sub questions should help me to further interpret meanings of said concepts by focusing on the flip sides of their arguments. A critique of hegemony could also be interpreted as critique of unipolarity and unilateralism and an implicit suggestion for multipolarity for example. If the scholars portray the status quo as neither harmonious nor multipolar, a critique of the status quo offers valuable information as to what it is lacking in order to be describable as "harmonious multipolarity".

All of these questions aim to inform the final research question of *how does Chinese IR scholarship construct and deal with the relation between harmony and multipolarity in its constructions of world order?* After interpreting the scholars individual understanding of both harmony and multipolarity by answering the questions above, my goal is to identify contradicting as well as reinforcing features inherent in my interpretation of their understanding and ultimately link my conclusion to their respective constructions of world order.

4.5. Caveats and potential shortcomings

Before delving into the analysis, I want to point out a few caveats and potential shortcomings underlying my research framework and process. The first remark is that discourse analysis' focus on language and speech patterns relies on the researchers own language proficiency. The material analyzed consists of academic writings in both English and Mandarin and there is always a danger of nuances being lost in translation.

Furthermore, I am aware of the biases that even a self-aware researcher cannot fully eradicate (See: Klotz and Lynch 2007: 37). Although I demand this analysis to be as value-neutral and as open towards differing constructions as possible, I cannot fully deny the risk of being guided by my own subconscious biases.

Even if the analysis itself is conducted with the utmost neutrality, the selection of texts and authors to analyze limits the conclusion based on the material reviewed. While I have laid out my reasons as to why I have selected these particular three scholars, they only represent part of China's IR discourse.

With all these caveats in mind, this M.A. thesis aims to contribute to a growing body of literature focusing on the enhancement of universal understanding of common Chinese foreign policy concepts and the way China's researchers integrate and explain them in an IR context.

5. Analysis

My analysis is structured by a scholar-concept dichotomy. This means that I will look into each scholar's perception of harmony and multipolarity individually in order to eventually tie them together in a later stage. I will start by analyzing Yan Xuetong's constructions of both concepts and repeat this process for Qin Yaqing and Zhao Tingyang respectively. Each scholar-analysis ends with a section that interprets the concepts against the background of each other, utilizing the terms and patterns identified in the previous sections.

5.1. Yan Xuetong and Humane Authority

Yan Xuetong's research focus equals the title of his 2019 monograph *Leadership and the rise of Great Powers*. With China in mind, he emphasizes the importance of leadership as a strategic resource as well as the trajectory and role that great powers should play within the international system. So far, he has come up with two tightly intertwined theoretical approaches that I want to elaborate in a bit more detail, as they make out a large part of the context in which he talks about harmony and multipolarity.

Essentially, Yan is interested in the factors that determine how a declining hegemon is surpassed by a rising state (Yan 2019:2) and why only "few rising states have been able to replace the dominant state." (Yan 2019: 190). This is where Yan tries to distance himself in part from classical realist paradigms (mostly) preoccupied with tangible resources, in that he argues that "Moral Realism regards morality as of equal importance to policy making as power, capability, and interest". This is to say that he stresses the value of what he calls the state's "Comprehensive Capability", which includes political, military, economical, and cultural factors (Yan 2019: 6, 13). Immediately, one could assume that this approach would

be value-based and thus follow idealist instead of realist patterns. However, his core argument being that a state can instrumentalize morality and use it as a strategic resource, Yan argues that "the role of morality is to influence policy makers' concerns about how national interests should be achieved rather than what national interests ought to be" and hence defines "Moral Realism as the approach to understanding a major power's behavior when morality is a contributing factor to its leadership's strategic preferences". In essence, Moral Realism in international relations should be understood as the inclusion of moral concerns into the decision-making process of international leadership (Yan 2019: 6-7). As a theoretical foundation, Moral Realism ties into his attempt at envisioning a new type of world order, which he terms "humane authority". Derived from the term 王道 (wángdào – rule by virtue, but Yan describes it as principle of humane authority) it is presented as an alternative to 霸道 (bàdào – rule by force, often affiliated with 霸权 - bàquán – hegemony). A leading state is perceived as humane authority by others when it is: "setting itself as a good example to other states through actions in accordance with international norms"; "…promoting beneficial international norms through rewarding the states that obey these norms"; "punishing the states that violate international norms" (Yan 2019: 43, 48). To further draw a distinction between hegemony and humane authority, Yan cites Guanzi:

> *"One able to enrich the state is a hegemon, while one able to rectify wrong states is a sage king"* (Guan Zhong, as cited in Yan 2019: 43-44)

The presumption here is that a state that is sufficiently adhering to moral principles (while assuming there is something like universal morality) can "rectify" states that disturb international order and is thus able to maintain it sustainably (see: Yan 2019: 44). In summary, this leadership type is described as favoring the carrot over the stick. He backs up his argument by saying that whenever ancient Chinese rulers were encouraged to follow the principle of humane authority, it was out of the belief that a benevolent foreign policy toward weaker neighbors would lead to them following China's leadership out of gratitude, whereas a hegemonic leadership would only have been maintained by the neighbor's unfavorable cost-benefit calculation in case they would challenge their leadership (Yan 2019: 49). In short, Yan envisions a world order based on strong political leadership, that is acknowledged by most, because it adheres to moral principles deemed as such by the majority of actors within the international system. It is apparent, Yan's approach relies on unipolar and unilateralist preconditions already at odds with his construction of multipolarity.

5.1.1. Constructions of multipolarity – Yan Xuetong

Throughout the reading process, I was able to identify two different contexts in which Yan refers to multipolarity. In the first instance and in the most general sense, Yan favors to speak of multipolarity in a traditional theoretical manner. Plainly describing the concept as one of "three basic types of international configurations", next to unipolarity and bipolarity, he draws a clear distinction between power configurations and the international system. Furthermore, the scholar is opposed to the idea that "changes in power configurations" have to be "indicative of system transformations" (See: Yan 2019: 161). Usually, Yan discusses this theoretical dimension when he describes current trends within the international system. While earlier, he predicted that a bipolar world is more likely than a multipolar one based on realist comparisons of China's' and the U.S.'s hard power capabilities (See: Yan 2019: 197-198; Yan 2015), he recently seems to have changed his prediction to a "multipolar order with U.S.-Chinese relations at its core" (See: Yan 2021).

The theoretical perspective appears to be the context in which the scholar is most comfortable addressing multipolarity. It is closely related to the second context, which is a historical one, based on the interpretation of ancient Chinese imaginations of the international system. Now, within these historical interpretations, his construction shifts from a strictly theoretical explanation to a normatively connotated one. This normative dimension is characterized by two extremes, stability and chaos, in-between which he is discussing different power configurations throughout different historical periods.

> *"When the Quanrong tribes invaded central China in 770 BCE, most of the Zhou allies refused to respond to King You's call for help, and the Quanrong army eventually slew King You at Mount Li. After these events, Zhou lost its domination, and the* ***interstate configuration changed from unipolar to multipolar****. The history of the Western Zhou system* ***thus*** *underwent the* ***change from order to chaos."*** (Yan 2019: 177)

Yan equates the change from a unipolar to a multipolar configuration with a change from order to chaos.

> *"The founding of the Qin Dynasty transformed the Chinese interstate system from absolute anarchy to relative hierarchy, wherein actors transmuted from monarchies to a single empire along with non-Chinese kingdoms and tribes, and the*

> *configuration* ***changed from multipolar to unipolar****. Thereafter, the type of Chinese interstate system became known as the empire-centered tributary system.* ***When the tributary system is consolidated, interstate relations are in order; otherwise, they are chaotic****."* (Yan 2019: 180)

It becomes evident that Yan's construction of multipolarity is closely related with the assumption of chaos and disorder, whereas unipolarity implies order and hierarchy. Knowing that Yan associates chaos with multipolarity, it is worth questioning what type of system Yan believes is most suitable for bending it into order. Drawing from Xunzi, Yan argues that:

> *"…stability in the international system depends on the nature of great states. States of* ***true kingship bring stability*** *to the international order; mighty states bring chaos; hegemon relations are* ***stable*** *with hegemon allies and* ***chaotic*** *with non-allied states. "(*Yan 2008: 136).

In other words, Yan believes that the leadership of great powers determines how stable or chaotic the international system turns out to be. Since we know that Yan's construction of multipolarity is associated with chaos, a sustainably stable and peaceful system also relies on the number of poles within it and by definition it would have to be less than three. Yan's position therefore uniquely differs from the popular strand of Chinese IR listed in my literature review, which favors the supposed stability of multipolar systems

In the context of Chinese IR and its relation to the state and Chinese foreign policy rhetoric, Yan's positions do not seem to fit official discourse. While this could be interpreted as a serious deviation from official rhetoric, it is less so when placing it against the backdrop of anti-hegemonic discourse (See: Womack 2004). Seen in this context, what Yan is suggesting is in fact a solution that circumvents the necessity of multipolarity by proposing a unipolar model that is not hegemony, but "humane authority". While he believes that a hegemon can stabilize relations with allies, external, non-allied actors remain in a chaotic relation with it. Accordingly, he speaks of double-standard norms (or double-standard principle) adopted by hegemonic states and the adaption of moral codes for humane authorities, drawing a clear normative distinction between the two types (Yan 2019: 52; Yan 2018: 5; Yan 2013: 220). Taken together, Yan's elaborations reflect a belief in which chaos prevails under conditions of multipolarity or hegemony and can only really be overcome by having a moral leader (humane authority) at the top of a hierarchical unipolar system.

In the next two steps I will analyze Yan's construction of harmony to subsequently relate to his construction of multipolarity.

5.1.2. Constructions of harmony – Yan Xuetong

The most authoritative point of departure in relation to Yan Xuetong's construction of harmony isn't exactly an academic article written by him, but an interview conducted with him in 2012 right after the leadership transition from Hu to Xi. In this interview, taken by the online platform *Theory Talks*, Yan emphasizes that "we realists don't believe the world can be harmonious", admitting that even domestically "…China has not achieved a harmonious society". He explains the Chinese government use of harmony rhetoric as a desirable ideal, more than an actual achievable outcome. Identifying as a realist first, Yan advocates against the usage of harmony rhetoric:

> *"So instead of deploying such terms, it makes sense to speak of a less violent, less conflictive environment. So we realist commonly refer to less violence and less war as a desirable outcome, but we never talk about harmony."* (Yan 2012, as cited in Creutzfeld 2012)

Similar to his stance on multipolarity, Yan doesn't seem to favor China's harmony rhetoric. Another takeaway from this quote is that the scholar's construction of harmony appears to be a state of no violence and no war. Since this outcome is an impossibility for him, he reduces the benchmark towards "less violence and less war", which subsequently could not be equal to harmony, but a sub-par version of it. In other words, if an achievable form of harmony is equal to a situation with minimal war and minimal violence, it is a situation that is "relatively stable" (See: Yan 2019: 48). While this passage provides important context and paints Yan's own perception of harmony as an unachievable ideal, he is also contradicting himself when saying that he as a realist never talks about harmony. On the contrary, harmony is a widely featured concept in many of his academic publications.

> *However, this is no easy task, because of the opposing creeds of Chinese traditional values and Marxism, whereby the former advocates harmony and the latter struggle.* (Yan 2019: 138)

First off, when distinguishing different strands of ideology within China, Yan singles out harmony as the defining characteristic of traditional Chinese values, while attributing

struggle to Marxism. By using the term "opposing", it becomes clear that Yan defines harmony as the opposite of struggle. In other contexts, the scholar draws on Xunzi to derive his arguments. Admittedly, a citation of an ancient Chinese philosopher cannot possibly be interpreted as the authors own opinion. However, in a 2020 article on *Xunzi's and Kautilya's Thoughts on Inter-state Politics*, Yan argues that:

> ***Unfortunately**, their ideas about leadership morality have not been whole-heartedly adopted by major powers to their foreign policy-making in the twenty-first century.* (Yan 2020: 299)

The fact that Yan deems it unfortunate that some of these ancient ideas and philosophies remain unadopted by major powers, citations of Xunzi's thought can be attributed with significant implications for Yan Xuetong's own opinions. It is in this context that Yan cites Xunzi in order to lay out his understanding of how to achieve a harmonious international environment:

> *"If you wish to **harmonize** all under heaven and restrain Qin and Chu, there is nothing better than **employing intelligent and exemplary persons**."* (Xunzi, as cited in Yan 2013: 83)

Ultimately this quote and the implications for the achievement of harmony can be interpreted as the foundation of his own world order proposition of humane authority: "True Kingship" or the idea of a hierarchical world order with an elite leadership that adheres to morally exemplary principles and is thus naturally accepted by most actors within the international system (See Yan 2019; Yan 2013; Yan 2008). In a different instance Yan elevates another Xunzi quote, specifically identifying harmonization as the task of a sage, or "True King":

> *"Since the world is the weightiest burden, only the strongest person will be able to bear it. Since it is the largest thing, only the most discriminating will be able to allocate social responsibilities properly. Since it is the most populous entity, **only the most enlightened will be able to make it harmonious**. Only a sage is capable of fully meeting these three conditions. Thus, only a **sage** is **capable of being a True King**."* (Xunzi, as cited in Yan 2008: 148)

Since Yan 2019 identifies sage kings as the agents within humane authority (Yan 2019: 43-44), this quote can be directly related to his own world order approach. Keep in mind that the Chinese term for humane authority 王道 (wángdào) in its literal sense translates into

"Way of the King" or „Kingly Way". Now, the relation between "humane authority" and the concept of harmony becomes especially clear in the following quote:

> *"According to pre-Qin thought, China's rise may have two different strategic goals, namely, to establish either a* ***humane authority*** *or hegemony.* ***The former is a comparatively harmonious international system****; the latter is the more commonly seen international system. Similarly, the world is faced with two options during China's rise: either to establish a new type of international order or to repeat an American-style hegemonic order. The establishment of a* ***new international order requires changing not only the international power structure but also international norms****."* (Yan 2013: 204)

While sticking to his earlier realist elaborations that complete harmony is an impossibility, he nevertheless argues that an international system led by humane authority can be "comparatively harmonious". However, there is more to this quote than the information that humane authority implies a harmonious environment. It simultaneously discredits hegemony for not including "harmonious" in it. Admittedly, he employs the adjective "comparatively" and hence relates back to the previously discussed sub-par state of harmony, but he could have also chosen different adjectives such as stable, peaceful, or less conflict oriented. Instead, he ultimately decided to apply precisely the harmonious rhetoric that he dismissed in his 2012 interview. Not only that, it also becomes the central feature and goal of his approach to world order.

In yet another context, Yan makes the case that humane authority, which he usually speaks of as a universal type of leadership akin to hegemony, should eventually become an ideal for China to aspire to (Yan 2013: 99). Arguing that a primary condition for states to "…become a superpower modeled on humane authority…", Yan singles out China's "harmonious world" diplomacy as a means to barter for acceptance and "be respected by others" (Yan 2013: 100). Thus, the context in which Yan speaks of harmony is closely related to soft power (See: Nye 2009), ultimately constructing the concept as a strategic asset or a component of what he terms "comprehensive capability" (Yan 2019: 13). In this context, harmony is not primarily to be understood as a norm to promote and aspire to internationally, but a (realist) means to increase one's relative power share within the international system.

5.1.3. Harmonious multipolarity – Yan Xuetong

Although it turns out that Yan Xuetong carries some unique thoughts contrary to official Chinese foreign policy rhetoric, his academic positions remain closely intertwined within the broader harmony and multipolarity discourse. Admitting that perfect harmony is an impossibility (See: Creutzfeld 2012), he is still bound by- and refers to the concept on a regular basis.

The question at hand now, is how Yan Xuetong deals with harmony under the assumed condition of multipolarity. The short answer is that he doesn't. Drawing from intertextually derived meanings, I argue that Yan's construction of multipolarity resembles chaos. When Yan speaks of chaos, he doesn't speak of a balancing sort of chaos, which could be a precondition for harmony, but about extremes like situations where "war predominates over peace" (See: Yan 2019: 66; Also see: Yan 2018: 15). Yan has made it clear that in his construction, hegemony leads to chaos as well and only the other unipolar setting, humane authority, can promise a "comparatively harmonious" (Yan 2013: 204) and "relatively stable" (Yan 2019: 48) international order. I have made the case that for Yan, harmony equates to "no war, no violence". These are not characteristics implied by chaos or in Yan's construction, a multipolar setting. Rather, harmony, if achievable just to an extent, can only be established under elite, morally excelling leadership, which ultimately demands a unipolar condition. Furthermore, viewing harmony from a power perspective, Yan understands the concept less like an end in itself and more like a means to an end, which is a unipolar system with China acting as its single pole providing leadership modeled after humane authority.

Hence, I argue that for Yan, harmonious multipolarity is an impossibility and if harmony should ever become a leading paradigm in international relations, it could only happen under hierarchical leadership within a unipolar setting. In Yan's construction, harmony resembles a norm to be imposed from the top, rather than occur through a natural balancing process. If a goal of humane authority is to establish a „comparatively harmonious" (Yan 2013: 204) international order, this is made possible by the humane authority's ability to "…rectify those states that disturb the international order…", so that "…the order based on its leadership can durably be maintained." (Yan 2019: 44).

In sum, Yan Xuetong's constructions of harmony and multipolarity not only contradict each other by the need of unipolar leadership for what he calls a "comparatively harmonious" outcome, they are also met with severe doubt on their respective individual levels. Achievable harmony resembles a global situation of "less violence and less war" or relative stability. This stability by definition cannot persist in a multipolar setting that is assumed to be chaotic in the first place. Referring back to the title of this M.A. thesis and given that in Yan's construction, it is not multipolarity that could lead to a "comparatively harmonious" outcome, but his unipolar model of humane authority, it is safe to say that for Yan, harmonious multipolarity indicates contradiction rather than mutual dependence.

5.2. Qin Yaqing and Relationality

Qin Yaqing, widely regarded as a leading Chinese constructivist, advances the idea of relationality for world politics. Primarily being proposed as an IR theory that is concerned with shifting the focus from the individual to the relation (See: Qin 2018a; Qin 2020c; Qin and Nordin 2019), Qin's approach cannot be classified as a particular vision for world order like Yan Xuetong's Humane Authority or Zhao Tingyang's Tianxia approach. Nevertheless, Qin's relational theory of world politics normatively engages with questions of international coexistence and norms of conduct, which qualifies his academic writing for my research, especially since the scholar regularly refers to harmony and multipolarity in his works. First and foremost, Qin's relational theory must be seen as an overarching context in which the scholar speaks about harmony and multipolarity. I argue that it is precisely this lens through which Qin sees and interprets these concepts.

Generally speaking, Qin's relational theory "takes processes defined in terms of relations in motion as ontologically significant.", which means that actors "base their actions on relations in the first place." (Qin 2016: 33). Similar to Wendt's famous North Korea-United Kingdom comparison, Qin argues that actors act differently towards each other depending on their mutual relationship (See: Wendt 1999: 255; Qin 2016: 38). However, Qin's approach diverts drastically when it comes to its epistemological assumptions. Qin argues that Wendt's approach bases itself on rationalism and a positivist methodology, which Wendt himself termed "Scientific Realism" (See: Wendt 1999; Qin 2019: 87-90). He concludes that wendtian constructivism relies on the assumption that agent and structure are "two separate entities in the first place" (Qin 2019: 90), then advances the argument that his approach,

which is based on a "Confucian worldview" and what he calls the *zhongyong* dialectics, leaves the "atomistic" agent-structure dichotomy behind, because it favors neither agent nor structure, but relationships and dynamic processes (See: Qin 2019: 149-150; Qin 2016). According to Qin:

> *"…any relationship involves the existence of the self and its coexistence with the other. The self-other relationship is thus not only something indicating two interacting entities, but also a crucial factor that brings the two into an immanent coexistence."* (Qin 2019: 149-150)

For Qin, this means that existence presupposes coexistence and that these two constantly reinforce each other through their mutual relationship in what he calls a "dynamic process of spiritual development" (Qin 2019: 130). Most importantly, this dynamic process that is assumed in Qin's relational perspective should not be understood as a merely descriptive assumption of the nature of relationships. Instead, it is characterized by a normative proposition with considerable implications for this analysis. Qin states that:

> *"For a member of a cultural community who sees the world as composed of complex and ongoing relations rather than individual entities, what is important is not the individual agency that enables and controls her independent ego, but the collective agency whose members live in* ***harmony****. A relational perspective, therefore, holds that* ***harmony is the ultimate and ideal order of society****."* (Qin 2016: 38-39)

In other words, harmony turns out to be a leading paradigm for Qin's theoretical elaborations. Finally, the scholar frequently refers to the relationship between *yin* and *yang* as the so called "meta-relationship". The primary characteristic regarding *yin* and *yang* is that, according to Qin, these two are in a:

> *"…continuous process of* ***harmonization*** *and* ***keep moving toward central harmony****, which, as the natural and ultimate state of the cosmos, characterizes the relationship between the polarities."* (Qin 2019: 152-153)

In this context, Qin describes the meta-relationship as a "prototype and the simplest form representing all relationships" (Qin 2019: 152). Thus, it is indicative that harmony is a normative concept, tightly intertwined with Qin's own academic elaborations. Now, if one was to look deeply into Qin's theoretical foundation and logical coherence, his work doesn't come without caveats. Starting from the seemingly self-explanatory *a priori* assumptions

about the way “China” or “the West” thinks to the statement that relationality “may well be [the Confucian] counterpart” to rationality in “Western mainstream IR” (Qin 2019: 107-108; 114), there would be much left to question or even criticize. However, the actual coherence and explanatory power, or put differently, the scientific quality of Qin’s theory is not a primary concern yet. Rather, the idea of this section was to provide a key context in which Qin’s constructions of harmony, multipolarity and “harmonious multipolarity” will inevitably occur.

5.2.1. Constructions of multipolarity – Qin Yaqing

While Qin Yaqing is seen and sees himself as a constructivist (See: Kristensen and Nielsen 2013), he still engages with realist concepts such as power configurations and notably multipolarity on a regular basis. On the most basic level, Qin talks about multipolarity when he describes realist talking points, such as the concept of balance of power. In an essay from 2006 he writes:

> „无论是单极，还是多极，都体现了实力的对比。无论是认为单极可以创造稳定秩序，还是多极可以创造稳定秩序，都是以实力为基础的。一种实力分配格局的崩溃，也必然是实力较批的结果，所以，战争被视为改变体系态势的基本手段。“ (Qin 2006, in Qin 2019: 9)

> *“No matter if it is unipolar or* ***multipolar****, it all highlights the contrast of power. No matter if one believes that unipolarity can create a stable order or multipolarity can create a stable order, it is all based on power. The collapse of a certain power distribution has to be the outcome of greater power. Thus, war is regarded as a basic means to change the situation of the system.”* (Authors translation)

Later citing Waltz and Singh, this quote is evidently not reflective of Qin’s personal opinion, but a description of how classical realism perceives the international system. It shows however, that to Qin, the concept of multipolarity is originally rooted in a realist understanding of balance of power. Intertextually speaking, it is a build up to an argument made in a later essay that seems to reflect his actual academic position, namely that first, multipolarization is indeed a process with which he tends to describe the present and future and that second, the current trend towards multipolarization isn’t reminiscent of the classical realist understanding of it:

> “第三，**世界多极化**趋势不是历史上’大国均势’的重复，不是以牺牲小国利益为代价的“大国统治”“大国制衡＂。由于国家大小和强弱不同，自然禀赋和发展水平不同，在世界事务中的地位和作用也不尽相同。但是，在经济**全球化**的新历史条件下，各国相互依存加深，**你中有我，我中有你**，即便是大国也不能和难以完全无视中小国家的利益，**仍需要寻求其他力量的合作**。(Qin 2009, in Qin 2019: 31)”
>
> *“Third, the trend of the **multipolarization of the world is not a historical repetition of the ‘balance of power between great powers’.** Because of countries difference in size and power, their natural abilities and development levels, their status and role in world affairs are also different. However, under the new historical conditions of economic **globalization**, the interdependence of countries is deepening, [in the sense that] **I am part of you, you are part of me**, and even large countries have a hard time completely ignoring the interests of small and medium-sized countries. **They still need to seek cooperation with other powers.**”* (Authors translation)

Qin’s own construction of multipolarity becomes something different from the realist position that he described earlier. He doesn’t just not use the term, instead the term is being transformed into a specific construction of multipolarity that fits the scholars own academic positions. Now the terms with which he speaks about the status quo multipolarization of the world are terms like integration, cooperation, interdependence, and globalization as opposed to power, conflict, or even war. Especially quotes like “你中有我，我中有你” (nǐ zhōng yǒu wǒ, wǒ zhōng yǒu nǐ – I am part of you, you are part of me) appear reminiscent of Qin’s later elaborations on relationality and the “simultaneity of existence and coexistence”. In this context, Qin doesn’t understand multipolarization as a confrontational competition for hegemony, but as the dawn of “coordination, consultations and cooperation” (Qin 2021a). Even more so, Qin’s construction of multipolarity is intricately linked to the idea of equality between nations, or in Qin’s words:

> “世界多极化最终展现的应是世界上的事情由各国平等协商…” (Qin 2009, in Qin 2019: 32)
>
> *“The **multipolarization of the world** should ultimately show that things in the world are **negotiated** on an equal footing by all countries…”* (Authors translation)

This is where Qin's construction of multipolarity converges with his construction of pluralism. While clearly separated from each other whenever used in the same sentence, pluralism resembles a normative demand and expectation Qin has towards multipolarity:

> "一个**多元世界**的时代正在开始，**多极权力格局**、多层制度安排、多维思想理念是其典型特征。多元世界以包容性多边主义作为基本的秩序形态，包括以多边国际制度维护世界和平与发展、通过政策协调达成国际合作、平衡国家利益和全球利益以保护全球公地。" (Qin 2021d: 1)
>
> *"An era of a **pluralistic world** is beginning to form, it has a **multipolar power structure**, a multi-layered pattern of governance, and a multi-dimensional distribution of ideas. A pluralistic world, assumes **inclusive multilateralism as its basic type of order**, it includes multilateral institutions to build and maintain world peace and promote development, to coordinate policies to reach international cooperation, and to balance global and national interests to protect the global commons."* (Authors translation)

According to Qin, a pluralistic world forms on top of a multipolar structure. Hence, his construction of multipolarity is equipped with the function of enabling pluralism in the first place. Pluralism however isn't the only viable translation for 多元 (duōyuán). It could simultaneously be translated as diversity, an important term also to keep in mind for the later analysis of Qin's construction of harmony. In a 2021 article, describing current trends in global affairs as a „多极多元交汇的复合体" (duōjí duōyuán jiāohuì de fùhétǐ - complex of multipolar and diverse (or plural) intersections), Qin actively links these two concepts, highlighting their interconnectedness. The repetitive use of 多级多元 (duōjí duōyuán – multipolar and diverse (plural), a total of six times throughout the text, further exemplifies this point (See: Qin 2021b). Notably, pluralism is not a concept Qin treats with utmost impartiality. In fact, it is a principle that he personally promotes in his works. Not only does he see an antidote to "global governance failure" in it, to him a pluralistic form of governance also stands opposite to "hegemonic governance", arguing that it is "very much needed" (See: Qin 2015: 108-109). Evidently, Qin displays opposition to the idea of hegemony and the type of unilateral governance that he assumes with it. This attitude is a constant feature and can be observed in many of his works (See for example: Qin 2016; Qin 2018a; Qin 2019). What is not too apparent, but becomes more obvious by applying an intertextual perspective, is what Qins construction of hegemony contrasts into. In the previous example,

"monopolistic governance or hegemonic governance" is being contrasted with "pluralistic governance" (Qin 2015: 109). In other contexts, however, it is used against the backdrop of emerging "multipolar power centers" (多极力量中心 - duōjí lìliàng zhōngxīn) (Qin 2021c: 64). I will not argue that Qins constructions of pluralism and multipolarity are synonyms, after all he made it clear that multipolarity is a structural feature, whereas pluralism generally refers to a type of governance. What I want to point out, however, is again the proximity with which these terms are related in his constructions, exemplified both by how he fuses them into integrated terms and their individual contrast to hegemony.

There is one last term within this forest of related expressions that blends into Qin's construction of multipolarity, namely multilateralism. In a most general sense, Qin's understanding of multilateralism is one of international cooperation (See Qin 2020e: 41). In the previous quote, the scholar assumes "inclusive multilateralism as [the] basic type of order" in a "pluralistic world" (See: Qin 2021d: 1). However, as I argued above, there are instances where Qin speaks of pluralistic governance in its own right. Furthermore, referring to multilateralism as a type of order instead of governance, makes it seem as if Qin understands these concepts on a separate level. Yet, in other instances he refers to multilateralism as "the most rational form of global governance", not only highlighting his normative bias towards the concept, but also suggesting that to Qin, multilateralism could be synonymous to pluralistic governance (See Qin: 2020e: 41). In any case, it becomes clear that the assumption with pluralism is deeply intertwined with the idea of multilateralism. Knowing that Qin associates pluralism with multipolarity, we are also able to include multilateralism into Qin's construction of multipolarity. This direct connection is further backed up by Qin's own constant references to multilateralism when he speaks about multipolarity and vice versa (See for example: Qin 2009, in Qin 2019: 10; Qin 2011, in Qin 2019: 78; Qin 2021d: 11-12). I thus argue that Qin's construction of multipolarity consists of a triangle relationship between pluralism/diversity, multilateralism, and multipolarity itself. Put differently, all of these concepts that also have the character 多 (duō - multi/many) in common (in respective order: 多元 - duōyuán, 多边 - duōbiān, 多极 - duōjí), come with reinforcing features. If the scholar does not at times demonstrate a synonymous understanding of these terms, in his construction they at least presuppose each other. There is one remaining caveat with Qin's construction of multilateralism however, which is that he doesn't view the current form of multilateralism as equal to his normative ideals. Rather, when he speaks of "inclusive multilateralism", he does so on idealist terms. There are multiple instances where Qin can

be observed criticizing the current practice of multilateralism (See for example: Qin 2018a: 318-356; Qin 2020a). Arguing that the current form of multilateralism has exclusive, hegemonic, and individualistic characteristics in need of reform, Qin goes on to propose the idea of:

> *"A new multilateralism, with **pluralism, participation and partnership** in the lead, will provide meaningful hope for bridging the two societies and bringing forth more effective and legitimate governance in our world."* (Qin 2020a: 17).

Finally, and similar to Yan, the terms that Qin processes in his works are often rooted in Chinese foreign policy rhetoric and also suggest China to be the ultimate object of reference. While I argued that Yan offers different solutions to the same problems, Qin appears to stick with China's multipolarity rhetoric. Where Yan advocates a different form of unipolar leadership, that is supposedly not hegemony, to circumvent the anti-hegemony rhetoric advocated by Chinese foreign policy, Qin's critique of hegemony is supplemented by advocating further multipolarization, which he not only argues to be a way to avoid bipolar competition with the United States, but also an enabler for pluralistic forms of global governance (See: Qin 2020b). In this regard Qin aligns his theoretical elaborations with the argument to "never seek hegemony" (See: Global Times 2021; Xinhua 2021). Note however, that this strategy is being advised while using the bywords "at present" and against the backdrop of "the great cause of [China's] national rejuvenation", which both potentially indicate the unwillingness to restrain oneself to a multipolar setting in the long run. In fact, Qin actually sees the ability to practice self-restraint as a key condition for the "harmonization of relations" (Qin 2019: 355). Hence, we can already identify overlapping features of Qin's constructions of harmony and multipolarity. Before linking these concepts however, I will first have to delve into Qin's construction of the former.

5.2.2. Constructions of harmony – Qin Yaqing

Different from the case of Yan Xuetong, harmony takes a more central spot in Qin Yaqing's theoretical elaborations. In his seminal 2018 *A Relational Theory of World Politics*, Qin refers to *harmony* a total of 136 times with *harmonious* peaking at 61. It is not my intention to deviate into a quantitive method at this point, but rather highlight the significance of the concept for Qin and his theory building efforts. Curiously enough, even though Qin continually refers to harmony, also including other works subjective to my analysis, he

appears to presuppose a number of *a priori* assumptions in relation to the concept. Even when actively attempting to clarify the concept by dedicating a whole sub-section to it, he mostly refers to it in contrast to other concepts, making it seem like an abstract ideal. As such, he draws from different philosophical sources attempting to explain the concept:

> *"Daoism believes that* ***harmony is to return to the state of nature*** *while Confucianism holds that* ***harmony is the state of nature to be reached through practicing centrality*** *in society:"* (Qin 2018a: 183)

Here, harmony could either be interpreted as a process (Daoism) or as a goal (Confucianism). In both cases he uses the state of nature as a point of reference, which could be anything and nothing without proper context. The context he provides is a quote from the Confucianist book of *Zhongyong* which says that:

> *"Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused, it is called centrality. When the feelings are aroused and each and all attain* ***due measure and degree, it is called harmony****."* (Tu 2008, as cited in Qin 2018a: 183)

Favoring a Confucian understanding and similar to elaborations by Li 2014[9], Qin also views centrality as a "mechanism" to "enable and sustain this state of nature.", which again refers to harmony in a Confucian context (See: Qin 2018a: 184). To understand harmony as the "state of nature" might explain why Qin struggles to detach himself from *a priori* assumptions about the concept. Harmony becomes a naturality that is in no need of explanation because it is assumed to be self-explanatory.

It is thus necessary to derive what components Qin's construction of this "state of nature" (or harmony) is made up of, by analyzing what terms it is usually accompanied by. Additionally, it is worthwhile to inquire which terms and concepts Qin sees in contrast to harmony. Looking at how Qin speaks about disharmony and "no harmony" will be helpful to further narrow down Qin's actual construction of harmony.

Throughout my reading process I was able to identify a variety of terms and concepts, which usually accompany Qin's discussions of harmony and disharmony. Whereas harmony commonly appears next to terms, such as stability, centrality, mutually inclusive, peace, cooperation or difference (See: Qin 2014: 293, 304; Qin 2018a: 187, Qin 2020d: 7, 10), disharmony or the absence of harmony is followed by bywords such as conflict, disorder,

[9] I described the idea of "centrality" in section 2.3.

unnatural imbalance or "deviation from the state of nature" (See: Qin 2018a: 188). In this regard, I want to emphasize two terms in particular, cooperation and conflict, which themselves can also be read in contrast to each other. In the case of cooperation, Qin not only sees the concept related-, but in its purity, it is interpreted as almost synonymous to harmony:

> *"**和谐指一种最大程度合作状态**，合作则是指自我与他者，个体与群体之间的最佳互动关系。"* (Qin 2020d: 10)

> *"**Harmony refers to a state of maximum cooperation**, while cooperation refers to the best interactive relationship between self and other, individual and group."*

On the other end of both harmony and cooperation there is conflict. In the case of conflict, Qin himself regularly juxtaposes the concept with harmony. However, he also stresses that "fundamental harmony of relations does not mean that there is no conflict in the natural and the social worlds" (See: Qin 2018a: 187). That is also why he characterizes the previously mentioned meta-relationship with the words "…harmony rather than conflict." (See: Qin 2014: 293). By applying a relative adverb such as "rather" instead of an absolute one such as "or", Qin abstains from completely characterizing these two concepts as polar opposites, while also showing their interrelatedness. This is especially relevant, because it relates back to the different perceptions of harmony discussed in the previous chapters. What Li and Dühring 2020 described as the contrast between the *Origin of Totalitarianism or Patron of Pluralism* (Li and Dühring 2020), is precisely the crossroads at which Qin's construction of harmony takes a relativist stance somewhere in the middle. In the sense that conflict is allowed, but not necessarily a desirable feature, Qin argues that his construction of harmony, built on what he calls the *zhongyong dialecticts,* assumes:

> *"… a world that differs from the Hobbesian jungle, where everyone fights against everyone else. It is a world where **differences make harmony** and **where conflict has no ontological significance**."* (Qin 2018a: 189)

For Qin Yaqing, harmony can only be achieved in a world where harmony stands above conflict. In other words, a world that is supposed to be harmonious requires a shared harmonious mindset:

> *"Of course such a harmony is not a God-given. Rather it is the result of the* ***joint belief that harmony is possible and desirable*** *and of the joint effort that builds up the harmony."* (Qin 2018a: 313)

What Qin is admitting here, is that harmony indeed is a norm, possibly even ideology, that requires adaptation by a certain majority of actors involved. As indicated by the previous quote, Qin's construction of harmony rests on the premise of difference (or heterogeneity). Consequently, this type of harmony ontology can only develop under said premise. Arguing that hegemony leads to assimilation and homogenization, the scholar is clearly opposed to the idea that a homogeneous society can ultimately be harmonious. In Qin's understanding, homogeneity is precisely the premise that "Western" constructions of harmony seem to assume:

> *"These theories and views perceive the world in their own ways with different foci, but it seems that* ***they all imply a deep-seated belief*** *or inarticulate worldview:* ***Homogeneity is the premise for harmony*** *and* ***difference leads to disharmony****."* (Qin 2018a: 186)

By contrasting his own assumptions with those different constructions of harmony, Qin further exemplifies his conviction that "harmony rests on difference" (Qin 2018a: 187) and is not to be achieved by homogenization. That said, it remains to ask why Qin believes difference to be so important for a harmonious outcome.

To answer this question, it is necessary to keep in mind that Qin's entire construction of harmony rests on the so called "meta-relationship" between *Yin and Yang,* introduced in a previous section. By putting forth the idea that the relationship between these prototypical polar opposites constitutes an "organic whole", Qin argues that:

> *"…the Chinese conceptualize the universe in a polar way, believing that progress and evolution take place by interaction of the two opposite poles."* (Qin 2016: 39)

Intertextually speaking, Qin's mention of "progress" simultaneously refers to the "continuous process of harmonization" and the move "toward central harmony" (Qin 2018a: 153). In other words, Qin sees the interactive relationship between polar opposites as a continuous move towards harmony. The idea is that assimilating the other side would lead to the formation of a homogenous whole, making any interactive relationship between polarities an impossibility. Referring to different notes in music and different ingredients in

cooking, Qin reproduces existing constructions of harmony by Mencius and other ancient scholars, where especially music serves as a popular allegory for explaining the concept (See: Qin 2016: 39; For example, see also: Mencius as cited in Sturgeon 2019). It also reflects a deterministic understanding depending on questionable equivalents. By completely neglecting the possibility that different notes in music and different ingredients in cooking could similarly lead to subjectively bad outcomes, Qin paints a utopian picture where difference always leads to harmony (the good outcome).

While the analysis above served to underline the scholars' fundamental assumptions about the theoretical characteristics of harmony, it remains to be clarified how the concept is utilized in his own theory. It is evident that to Qin, harmony in the context of the meta-relationship is a universal concept that is assumed to have cosmological applicability (See: Qin 2018a: 192). What Qin is interested in, however, is not the relationship between salt and vinegar or between violins and guitars, but between humans. Thus, when Qin discusses harmony against the backdrop of his theory, it is about social relationships and the harmonization thereof. In a non-universal context, harmony is being displayed as the ideal state of relationship. Harmonization in turn refers to a way of managing relationships "… so that harmony in diversity can be created and sustained" (Qin 2016: 29). In line with the argument for a harmony mindset, what Qin is suggesting is not just the attempt to nurture good relationships with others, it very much depends on the collective agreement that (relational) harmony should be everyone's primary goal. With that in mind, Qin compares his idea of "relational governance" to what he calls "rule-based governance". By shifting the focus from actors and structures to relations, he defines the "harmonization of relations" to be the mechanism that drives a relational approach. The driving mechanism of rule-based governance on the other hand is being identified as "enforcement of rules". When viewed in juxtaposition, it appears that Qin is downplaying the importance of rules, at least whenever harmony in relationships is threatened (See: Qin 2018a: 350). Since rules are usually recognized as a way to settle conflict, Qins construction (in the broader sense) suggests that there is no need for rules when "conflict has no ontological significance" in the first place (See: Qin 2018a: 189). In other words, where there is harmony, there is no conflict and where there is no conflict there is no need for rules.

However, there is one major caveat with this argument, which is again, the precondition of a collective agreement that harmony must be the primary goal within the relationship.

In line with Chinese foreign policy rhetoric, Qin also often refers to 和而不同 (hé ér bùtóng - harmony with diversity/seeking harmony with differences) (See for example: Qin 2016; Qin 2020d). This expression is crucial for fully grasping Qin's construction of harmony, because of two reasons. First, it builds on the previously discussed assumption that difference is what enables harmony to develop, but second it also indicates the need to be able to reserve differences or put conflict aside. To summarize in Qin's words:

> "*Harmony does not mean to converge all members of a society into a homogeneous one, but to* ***manage relations among these members in such a way that their differences will not lead to conflict and disorder****, but on the contrary, can add up to stability. Like in music, different notes are composed into beautiful melodies, and like in cooking, different ingredients and flavors are combined to make delicious food. In this way, politics is more about the management of relations so that harmony in diversity can be created and sustained."* (Qin 2016: 29)

In other words, Qin's construction of harmony suggests that relations should be managed in a way that difference does not lead to conflict, but safeguard stability. Hence, in a harmony-oriented society, conflict among different actors should not arise in the first place. Due to relationships built on the very premise of avoiding "conflict and disorder" preventively, there is no subsequent need for rules as a mechanism to settle conflict. Put differently, Qin discoursively advances an ontology in which conflict shouldn't exist.

As previously discussed, he also admits that conflict is not an exact juxtaposition of harmony, thus leaving room for interpretation. It is also necessary to differentiate between discourse focused on theoretical elaboration and discourse with advisory and explanatory functions regarding the status quo. In view of the former, Qin very much acknowledges the existence of conflict, although he usually advises for its mitigation or avoidance, thus indicating his own normative harmony orientation even in realpolitikal contexts (See: Qin 2021b). Hence, even in articles with concrete explanatory and advisory functions for Chinese foreign policy, Qin can be seen promoting the need for an internationally established harmony mindset in which difference is not a root cause of conflict:

> *"如果依照差异必生冲突的逻辑思考问题，国家之间的冲突就不可避免"* (Qin 2020d)

> *"If you follow the logic that differences must lead to conflicts, then the conflicts between countries will be inevitable."* (Authors translation)

Now, the first mechanism that comes to mind when thinking about the ability of multiple actors to constantly prioritize harmony over conflict is the collective will to practice self-restraint. Qin argues however, that self-restraint is only of significance in a world where a harmony mindset has not taken it's hold:

> *"All these, no matter whether they are external constraints or* ***self-restraints****, depend on something impersonal, power of coercion, of institutions, or of norms. They do not depend on humans per se.* ***Trust*** *in the Chinese cultural condition depends exactly on* ***humans who are considered as moral beings in the first place****. It is exactly* ***this trust on humans that creates confidence in harmonizing relations*** *among humans."* (Qin 2018a: 347)

Subsequently, Qin views trust as a key condition for his relational governance model (See: Qin 2018a: 336). By asking how this trust is supposed to be established, it is important to note that Qin derives the mutual ability to trust each other from another precondition, namely morality (Qin 2018a: 342-343). In other words, if you can be sure that the other side only consists of 君子 (jūnzǐ – virtuous person) or how Qin puts it, "…moral people who follow strictly moral norms in their behavior and sincerity toward others…", there is no reason not to trust them (Qin 2018a: 343, 346). The key issue is again, how to know and make sure that the other side follows such "moral norms" and frankly, what these norms even consist of. Qin's answer to that is similar to the one Li 2014 offered in section 2.3.. Hence, the scholar's construction relies on the assumption of the practice of self-cultivation (See Qin 2018a: 344). He admits however that Confucian scholars share "disagreement on ways of practicing self-cultivation", even though they all agree that "self-cultivation is the main channel to realize harmony…" (Qin 2018a: 190).

Qin doesn't tackle the fundamental questions of what self-cultivation entails and how others would be free willingly motivated to self-cultivate. Since morality is constructed as the factor that enables trust and trust is a key requirement for harmonization of relationships, Qin's entire harmony construct is built around an unknown variable. This is because in Qin's discursively constructed reality, the concept of self-cultivation is treated as being self-evident. It becomes more evident in the following quote, where Qin does nothing but

reproduce a meaning that is already constructed around claims relying on self-explanatory assumptions:

> *"The Confucian practice of self-cultivation is, as expressed in the well-known motto, to "**cultivate oneself, put one's house in order, run the state well, and let peace and prosperity prevail in the world**."* (Qin 2018a: 191)

The use of terminology such as "well-known motto" further underscores Qin's expectation that the reader will know what exactly Qin is referring to. In this case, the scholar expects that if an actor practices self-cultivation others will follow by example. Yet he omits why this chain of causality should be true, adding another *a priori* assumption to the list.

In a nutshell, self-cultivation ensures that actors can trust each other, because the moral values acquired by it are expected to keep actors from breaking said trust. It thus becomes a key aspect that the author simply assumes will happen but does not elaborate any further than the quotes suggest. Subsequently, the establishing factors of his construction of harmony rest on the premise of a concept that is itself constructed in ambivalence terms.

Before concluding this section, I want to shift the focus from Qin's theoretical idealism over to his more practical discussions about how harmony does or could manifest in the real world (or international system). Here, Qin prefers to emphasize the importance of multilateralism. As quoted earlier, Qin also likes to refer to harmony as "a state of maximum cooperation" (Qin 2020d: 10). At the core, the scholar seems to agree that cooperation serves as the primary goal to multilateralism (See: Qin 2020e: 41-42). I have also pointed out in the previous section, that Qin's understanding of current forms of multilateralism is unequal to his normative beliefs of what multilateralism could be capable of and in the context of harmony as "a state of maximum cooperation" it is possible to argue that for Qin, multilateralism could be a kind of manifestation of relational harmony. In other words, Qins construction of a "new" type of "multilateralism" (See: Qin 2020a) is the attempt to put his ideas of relational harmony into practice. By pleading for more "pluralism, participation and partnership", Qin attempts to promote an increase in diverse representation[10], harmony

[10] "Only teaching new actors or socializing them into existing multilateral institutions is inadequate at best and insulting at worst" (Qin 2020a: 16-17),

orientation[11], and ironically, awareness for the reality of multipolarity[12]. Thus, I understand Qin's construction of "new multilateralism" as the mechanism to practice harmony in matters of global governance.

In summary, Qin advances a far more idealist understanding of harmony than his colleague Yan Xuetong. Here, harmony is being portrayed as a guarantor of stability, peace and order, strongly implying the absence of conflict as the closest way to put the concept into words. Building on existing ancient philosophical constructions, Qin's understanding of harmony then takes the differences symbolized by *Yin and Yang* as a precondition for any development towards harmony. As such, only the interaction between different entities can further the progress towards harmony. Homogenization on the other hand, negates the possibility of fruitful interaction between what he calls "polarities", simply by disallowing for the formation of a different side or "pole" (See: Qin 2016: 40; Qin 2018a: xiii). However, by basing this assumption towards favoring difference on doubtful equivalences such as music or cooking, Qin constructs a utopian idea with limited scientific precision. Furthermore, while often referring to the need for acquiring moral virtue through means of self-cultivation, for the most part the scholars construction lacks answers to the question of how self-cultivation, and subsequently its implications for morality, trust, and ultimately harmony, is supposed to be established among relevant actors. This is especially relevant when viewed against the backdrop of anti-hegemony and the formation of a multipolar world. Even though Qin's construction fails to incorporate answers to these practical implementational questions, there are still numerous discursive indications linking the concept to multipolarity on a theoretical level.

Thus, the next section is dedicated to identifying links between Qin's constructions of harmony and multipolarity in a non-isolated context.

5.2.3. Harmonious multipolarity – Qin Yaqing

Qin's construction of harmonious multipolarity drastically differs from Yan's in many ways. Yan Xuetong made it clear that he is opposed to the idea of a multipolar world, while

[11] „Different from competition for self-interest, partnership is based on amity and trust, seeking harmony in human relations." (Qin 2020a: 17)
[12] "It [pluralism] draws our attention to a world composed of multiple actors with no single power able to take responsibility for global governance." (Qin 2020a: 17)

simultaneously doubting the feasibility of harmony. Harmonious multipolarity thus appears as a discursive impossibility for said scholar. Qin on the other hand has a favorable way of speaking about either of the two concepts and discoursively promotes them individually. The question is how the scholar envisions the feasibility of having a world that is multipolar and at the same time able to achieve and maintain harmony.

Looking at the two individual analyses featured previously, there are several overlapping features of Qin's constructions of harmony and multipolarity within their respective discourses. The most intricate links being the regular references to pluralism and diversity, as well as the interrelated assumptions of cooperation and multilateralism inherent in both discourses. The frequent mentioning of "poles" and "polarity" in both, the context of harmony and multipolarity is also of interest for this part of my analysis. On the whole, I argue that Qin's constructions of harmony and multipolarity are related in a way that indicates a mutual dependency in an IR context.

Taking Qin's construction of harmony as a starting point, we can identify enabling preconditions inherent in his construction of multipolarity. To start with, I have pointed out that the interaction of difference is what fuels the process towards harmony. Compared against the backdrop of my sections 2.3. and 2.4., it becomes evident that Qin follows a thorough Confucian understanding of harmony with the assumption of 和而不同 (hé ér bùtóng - harmony with diversity/seeking harmony with differences) at its core. Similar to the depictions by Li 2014, Qins construction builds on the idea of complementation and equilibrium between different poles (Compare: Li 2014: 123; Qin 2018a: 193). When speaking about the "meta-relationship" between *Yin* and *Yang* Qin refers to them as "polar opposites" or "poles" (Qin 2016: 39). Now, while he does emphasize dialectical aspects of said meta-relationship and specifies that it refers to "two polarities as harmonious", he also makes it clear that his theory is built around the accumulation of "all relations" (See: Qin 2018a: xvii, 152, 185). That said, it appears that the "polarity" referred to in the case of harmony is one of opposites, whereas the "polarity" in his construction of multipolarity refers to extremes in the sense of power centers. In an article written in Chinese, Qin also refers to *Yin* and *Yang* as 阴阳两极 (yīnyáng liǎngjí – Yin and Yang bipolarity) (See: Qin 2017). Following this logic, I could argue that a bipolar power configuration is what enables the harmonious interplay of Qin's meta-relationship. However, he never specifically emphasized the need or wish for a bipolar world order. I reckon that it is because it is not

power distribution that the poles in his construction of harmony represent, but difference. A power configuration alone doesn't necessarily imply difference. Politically, economically, and culturally very similar nation states could well be different poles of power as I've pointed out in my background chapter. I have made the case however, that Qin believes multipolarity to be the enabling condition for pluralism, which follows the assumption that a multipolar world for Qin is also a more diverse one (See: Qin 2021d). There are no instances where he actively discusses why he makes such an assumption, but seeing that he does, means that his construction should be understood as one that includes the idea of pluralism. This leads to the conclusion that if multipolarity enables diversity to unfold and diversity is the primary driver for relationships to become harmonious, I interpret that for Qin, multipolarity is a precondition to harmony. Hence for Qin, harmonious multipolarity becomes a possibility by seeing the poles in multipolarity not merely as poles of power, but also as what I term "poles of difference". By that assumption, even actors with insufficient power to be considered a pole of power in a classic realist understanding of multipolarity, could still be considered a pole of difference contributing to the development of harmony.

The next discursive commonality I want to emphasize is that of multilateralism. Qins elaborations suggest that to him, multilateralism is the only viable solution to governance in a multipolar world order. Depending on the extent that multilateralism allows for the variables of "pluralism, participation and partnership" (Qin 2020a: 16), the cooperational aspects of multilateralism could be refined so that a "state of maximum cooperation" (Qin 2020d: 10) can be achieved. Since the scholar explained harmony in exactly these terms, Qins arguments suggest that harmonious multipolarity becomes a possibility by the means of multilateralism, because ultimately, Qins normative ideal of multilateralism can be interpreted as a proxy to the process of "harmonization of relations" itself (See: Qin 2018a: 341, 350, 355).

At this point I want to discuss the one central common denominator over which all of the above constructions have been contrasted with, namely hegemony. As it was with Yan Xuetong, Qin Yaqing's constructions can all be read as a critique of hegemony in line with Chinese foreign policy rhetoric. From diversity and pluralism to multilateralism and ultimately harmony and multipolarity, every construction is being contrasted against the concept of hegemony. For instance, in his critique of status quo multilateralism, his idea of a „new multilateralism" is subject to comparison with existing multilateralism which is "too

hegemony-centric" (See: Qin 2020a: 16); the "pluralistic world (多元世界 - duōyuán shìjiè) is used as an opposite to "the hegemonic order" (霸权秩序 - bàquán zhìxù), or "the ideology of hegemonic power/state" (霸权国的思想理念 - bàquánguó de sīxiǎng lǐniàn) (See: Qin 2021c: 65); multipolarity finds its comparison in the context of power configuration and hegemonies interconnectedness with unipolarity, where at times it is constructed almost interchangeably so that hegemony exists in the same category (See: Qin 2021a); lastly, harmony is indirectly put into contrast by implying both that harmony requires difference, but hegemony denies that in the sense that "monism….is perhaps the most effective way for hegemonic dominance" and its necessity to "reinforce homogenization through either elimination of alternatives or assimilation of dissidents" (See: Qin 2018a: 11-12).
This goes to show that the discourse of Qin Yaqing regarding the concepts of harmony and multipolarity can be interpreted from two angles. The first should be understood as an attempt to refine, explain, and even make compatible these two prevalent Chinese foreign policy concepts. The second interpretation however is one of anti-hegemony, where every concept in some way or another is presented as a better alternative to hegemony. Whereas Yan Xuetong almost exclusively followed this second road, on which these concepts are utilized as a critique of global hegemony, Qins discourse appears to be less linear and more nuanced, because his constructions ultimately attempt to realize and merge these concepts on a theoretical level.

While the inconsistencies with his theoretical elaborations based on anti-homogenization and need for diversity and difference are obvious when put into context of China's domestic trajectory, I am limiting my critique to theoretical statements in order to not depart from my own theoretical assumptions.

In sum, Qin paints a picture in which harmony and multipolarity cannot only coexist, but even reinforce each other due to the assumption that harmony needs difference and multipolarity is there to provide it. However, Qins construction of harmonious multipolarity is not to be left without question marks. Starting from the undefined *a priori* implication of multipolarity as an enabler of pluralism to the universal requirement of a harmony mindset nurtured by the scarcely defined concept of self-cultivation, the scholar's construction of harmonious multipolarity crumbles, since the individual concepts underly incoherencies themselves. Rather, these concepts are being pictured as perfect utopian ideals. If it was for Qin, the international community should strive for a multipolar world order and prioritize

the harmonization of relationships above all. Yet this normative wish remains hypothetical for as long as the international community has not met the requirement of developing a collective harmonious mindset. In other words, Qin's ideal of multipolarity is a construction that already relies on harmony's ontological incorporation as a primary value rather than enabling it.

5.3. Zhao Tingyang and All under Heaven

The third scholar I want to discuss is Zhao Tingyang. Other than Yan and Qin, Zhao is not considered to be an IR scholar and is usually being described as a modern philosopher. However, discussions about his work within the IR community remain constant, a fact that Qin Yaqing embraces by comparing his and Zhao's work eye to eye (See: Qin 2018b: 415) and Yan Xuetong seems to be at odds with (See: Creutzfeld 2012). I argue that the fact that Zhao's work is regularly being cited by Western, as well as Chinese IR scholars, gives them as much of a representative function in correspondence to Chinese foreign policy as Yan's and Qin's work. Same as with the other two authors, Zhao's theory of Tianxia provides the primary context in which to view his constructions. While Zhao's Tianxia model stretches as a life's work with numerous philosophical assumptions and historical anecdotes, I will limit my elaboration of his theory on essential features, allowing me to discuss how the scholar processes multipolarity and harmony within it. The most important difference in relation to his peer's work, is to acknowledge that his references to IR concepts, including multipolarity, can be scarce, and at times non-existent. However, in the case of his 天下 (Tiānxià - all under heaven) model, the lack of reference to multipolarity is precisely the point, as it envisions a world order in which there are no exclusive poles, but a fully integrated world governed by what Zhao termed a "world government" (Zhao 2009a: 8-9) that is supposed to be "all inclusive" (Zhao 2019a: 34). Zhao derives his theory from the assumption that the current ontology of what he calls "the political", is one of enmity, where conflict arises constantly due to decision-making based on "individual rationality" and the presumption of maximization of self-interest. In such a world, "…politics is just a matter of researching how to carry out a struggle to its final conclusion…", but lacks any way "…to ultimately resolve the problem of conflict…" itself in its entirety. Instead, arguing in Clausewitzian terms, "conflicts simply continue by other means or intensify" (Zhao 2021: 4). Considering these assumptions, Zhao is convinced that neither a Hobbesian, nor Lockean, and not even Kantian tradition is able to solve the basic premise of conflict, because

ultimately all of them base their ontology on individual rationality where externalities (外部性 - wàibù xìng) exist next to internalities (内部性 - nèibù xìng). This in turn always holds the potential of "foreigner" and "enemy" distinctions "within political discourse" (See: Zhao 2021: 3, 17). His proposition of Tianxia, however, stands for an understanding of the world where no externalities exist and where the world becomes an internalized totality (See: Zhao 2019a: 1; Zhao 2021: 18).

Instead of referring to politics from the perspective of individual states as basic units, the world should instead become the point of reference or "…the basic unit of politics." (Zhao 2021: 2, 219-220). Therefore, the world of today is conceived by Zhao as a so called "non-world", described as a state of anarchy where the world has not yet reached its "world sovereignty" (Zhao 2019a: 44).

Very similar to Qin's elaborations, this process of internalization only becomes possible through an ontological change in which war and "insoluble conflict" become non-options. Zhao calls it the "ontology of coexistence" (See: Zhao 2021: 4, 18). Drawing from the Confucian ideal of "…the family as a basic unit of coexistence…", Zhao attempts to exemplify the possibility of basing one's rationality on the needs of others in relation to the self. He summarizes his assumptions about an "ontology of coexistence" as follows:

> *"To do away with exteriorization and only have a world of interiorization means that the incentives for coexistence and cooperation are always greater than the incentives for enmity and opposition. And only when the incentives for coexistence are greater than the incentives for enmity can a peaceful and secure order be sustainably realized."* (Zhao 2021: 19-20)

What this quote also tells us, is that the process of internalization and establishment of an "ontology of coexistence" presuppose each other. While at one point arguing for the need to change ontology to coexistence (See: Zhao 2021: 18), this quote implies that the internalization of the world (as a "world of interiorization") is what makes an ontology of coexistence beneficial in the first place. Finally, Zhao identifies "relational reasoning" as opposed to "individual rationality" as the basis for decision-making within an ontology of coexistence. While allowing for reasoning based on individual interests to some rather unspecific extent[13], relational reasoning is supposed to prioritize "shared reason" and shared

[13] With individual examples like: „…if the ontological theory that "existence presupposes coexistence" is correct, then the application of relational reasoning must take precedence over individual rationality." (Zhao 2021: 29)

interests above individual interests. This is based on the idea of Confucian improvement (孔子改善 - kǒngzǐ gǎishàn) and the assumption that "…a certain type of amelioration of interest must simultaneously entail the amelioration of the interests of all involved." Zhao points out the distinction between Confucian- and Pareto improvement by saying that the former aims at guaranteeing improvement of everyone's interest involved whereas the latter only ensures that no actors interests are harmed (See: Zhao 2021: 30).

In sum, Zhao's elaborations can be understood as the attempt to heave the ancient Chinese concept of Tianxia into the modern world revolving around nation states and national interests. The primary goal is being portrayed as the "internalization" of the world that is free from "externalities", because to Zhao, conflict arises from the existence of a constructed other such as "foreigner" or "enemy". The success of Tianxia however, requires a change in ontological assumptions about "the political" itself. It requires the adherence to what he calls a "principle of coexistence" where "relational reasoning" is prioritized over "individual reasoning" and the concept of Confucian improvement prevails (See: Zhao 2021: 1-36).

5.3.1. Constructions of multipolarity – Zhao Tingyang

I have already pointed out that Zhao does not refer to the term multipolarity itself. Though he can sometimes be observed using polarity in one similar way to Qin, namely as opposite extremities (See for example: Zhao 2021: 4, 7, 69), he usually abstains from applying polarity rhetoric. The first explanation, which I have already mentioned, is that he doesn't refer to it, because he isn't an IR scholar. This is a convenient explanation, but not sufficient in the context my theoretical framework, as it assumes the scholars' functions of explaining, advising, and refining Chinese foreign policy concepts. Since Zhao's work is heavily related to the field of IR and very much discusses the essence of international politics, even drawing on contemporary IR research[14], it is curious why he doesn't refer to power configurations, especially multipolarity, when he is laying out a theory occupied with constructing a world order. Sticking to my framework I argue that Zhao's non-reference to multipolarity is not a passive byproduct of him not identifying with IR terminology, but an active decision because (similar to Yan) he doesn't agree with the concept, precisely because it exists within the existing ontological assumptions that Zhao seeks to alter.

[14] Zhao's reference to Hobbessian, Lockean, and Kantian distinctions (See for example: Zhao 2021: 17) heavily implies a reading of Alexander Wendts "Cultures of Anarchy" (See: Wendt 1999).

Nevertheless, my approach to Zhao's construction of multipolarity will require tweaks in that I will look at instances that discursively deny the prospect of multipolarity. Again, contrast will be an important tool to analyze his constructions. Although constructions are subjective to the constructor, in this case Zhao Tingyang, my previous elaborations in relation to the other two scholars as well as my background chapter offer certain starting points from which to derive Zhao's construction of multipolarity. In the context of Zhao's assumptions about world internalization, it is possible to argue that however a scholar constructs multipolarity, it is based on externality, because it assumes a distinction between different entities or poles. This very assumption allows me to argue that Zhao is opposed to the idea of a world order based on multiple poles, because they deny any possibility of internalization. That said, instead of searching for instances where Zhao refers to multipolarity, I paid attention to the way Zhao speaks of externalities in the context of world order so as to approximate a construction of multipolarity.

To begin, the fact that Zhao does not reference multipolarity doesn't mean that he doesn't integrate terms that the other scholars have used in strong relation to multipolarity:

> *"天下体系将成为一种无外的监护制度而维护世界的普遍秩序。**这是一种反帝国主义或反霸权制度**，因为天下体系属于世界而不属于任何国家..."* (Zhao 2019b: 71-72)
>
> *"The Tianxia system will become a type of guardianship system without externality to maintain the universal order of the world. This is system that **is anti-imperialist or anti-hegemonic**, because the world system belongs to the world and not to any country..."* (Authors translation)

To Zhao, empires and hegemonies cannot be fully internalized. Their roots can always be traced back to the unit of nation state. Earlier, I have pointed out the need in Zhao's theory to shift references from the unit of "nation state" to the unit of "world". The quote above assumes an institutionalized system that accounts for- and stands above all actors in the world, making hegemony and empire non-options. In other words, such a system denies nation states to accumulate power that would surpass that of the "world system". Following this logic, unipolarity will be a definite impossibility. However, this doesn't yet exclude the option of multiple greatpowers in a system where the world is still always more powerful and relevant than the individual nation state. By including the assumption that everyone follows an "ontology of co-existence" in the context of Tianxia, it is safe to assume that power and the accumulation thereof cannot be understood in realist conventions, which

leaves to question the role that nation states are attributed with in such a system, especially since it assumes a shifting focal point from "state" to "world". Zhao himself argues that currently "…no political horizon is greater than that of nation-states…", a problem that leads "…to nothing more than bargaining between national interests and a nervous balance of power." (Zhao 2009a: 12). Not dismissing the need for nation-states entirely however, Zhao draws on Mozi when he stresses that "the world is too big to be managed by only the highest form of government…", which is why he believes that the Tianxia system should first and foremost be a hierarchical order with a world government at the top, followed by what he calls "sub-states and other smaller units" in descending order (Zhao 2009a: 13). In a multipolarity context this indicates that nation-states, merely serving as administrative units for an agreed upon world government, could hardly rise to the status of "pole". I argue that in Zhao's construction, this is not because such a state is restrained in doing so, but because it doesn't want or need to, due to the ontological changes. If every state formulates its policies based on "the world" and not self-interest, there is also no desire to increase one's relative power advantage so that national interest can be projected onto others. Instead, moves to increase one's power within the system are negated by the condition of Confucian improvement that demands constant collective improvements (See: Zhao 2019a: 45; Zhao 2021: xiv). Rejecting Hobbesian concepts like balance of power and national interest and generalizing "Western political thinking" with "Carl Schmitt's concept of politics as being between enemies…", Zhao simultaneously emphasizes the insistence that "Chinese philosophies" always had on the notion of family and its assumptions of "human love, harmony, mutual concern and obligations…" (Zhao 2009a: 13-14). Completely excluding different perspectives from both "Western" and "Chinese" philosophy and generalizing them as such, Zhao advances a discourse in which Chinese philosophy enables politics to be treated in the same (positive) way a family member would treat his family (which in itself follows an unspoken assumption of an ideal type family). More importantly, by criticizing that "Western political logic [goes] from individuals to nation-states, and even to imperialist systems…", Zhao summarizes the core of what he believes the status-quo ontology to be and what is in need of change. Thus, we can conclude that his construction is very much opposed to the idea of an assumed status-quo system of nation states competing for maximization of self-interest in a setting of anarchy and norms of balance of power (See: Zhao 2009a: 12; Zhao 2019: xvi). As I have pointed out in section 2.2., this is precisely the context in which unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity are usually being discussed in. Whereas Yan

viewed multipolarity through such a realist lens and normatively linked it with chaos, Qins construction suggested a change in perception where multipolarity could be an enabler for pluralism. Zhao on the other hand dismisses the concept of balance of power in its entirety, suggesting that any form of power configuration is rooted in an individualist, self-interested world view. Neither attempting to change the meaning of multipolarity, nor actively criticizing it, the concept is merely being left as one possible expression of balance of power, which in turn is incompatible with his theory of Tianxia, due to its emphasis on coexistence and Confucian improvement as opposed to maximization of individual self-interest (See: Zhao 2009a: 12-14; Zhao 2021: 30-36).

5.3.2. Constructions of harmony – Zhao Tingyang

Whereas multipolarity terminology didn't find its direct way into Zhao Tingyang's discourse, harmony is nothing less than a center piece of his theory and wider discourse in general (See: Zhao 2009a: 6; Zhao 2021: 10) To begin, for Zhao, harmony is an all-out positively connotated concept. When he refers to harmony, for example in a context of family, it is often accompanied by other positively connotated terms, such as "cooperation, common interests and happiness" (Zhao 2006: 33, 36) or even "world peace" (Zhao 2021: 10). On the negative end, or opposed to the concept of harmony, I identified a similar terminology to Qin's. Zhao's construction also relies on the negative contrast with conflict and chaos. Accordingly, a world that isn't harmonious, is chaotic and conflictual (See: Zhao 2021: 7, 99). These approximations, negative and positive alike, further expand the catalogue of terminologies with which to understand Zhao's construction. However, Zhao is not only passively applying harmony terminology to give his theoretical elaborations a more positive connotation. In some instances, he directly and actively discusses the concept, its philosophical origins, and meanings. The most direct phrase with which he refers to the meaning of harmony goes as follows:

> *"The meaning of "harmony" (hé 和) very clearly refers to the compatibility and complementarity of a plurality of things and events."* (Zhao 2021: 99)

In the same vein as Callahan 2013, and Li 2014[15], Zhao derives his interpretation of harmony from the comparison with the word "sameness" or "uniformity" (同 – tóng). He even admits that he himself doesn't quite understand why these two have been treated as related:

> *"I'm not sure why, but it seems that during a part of the Spring and Autumn period there emerged a generalized confusion regarding the difference between the concepts of "harmony" (和) and "uniformity" (同) that gave rise to the debates regarding the relative importance of harmony he 和 or uniformity tong 同."* (Zhao 2021: 99)

Given that this is the context in which he constructs his own perception of harmony, this relation between harmony and uniformity is key for understanding Zhao's construction. It is thus no coincidence that his harmony discourse is filled with references to degrees of diversity as well as homogeneity. Like Qin, Zhao uses the same analogies of music and cooking by citing ancient philosophical texts like the *Zuo Commentary* (左传). Comparing a chef's approach to cooking with the concept of harmony, his analogy includes sentences like:

> *"Harmony is like making a soup. You use water, fire, minced spices, salt, and plum sauce, and then set a fire under it in cooking the fish. A great chef in looking for harmony, **balances** the flavors, adjusts for what is missing, and mitigates any excess. The relationship between ruler and ministers should also be like this. If a ruler says a course of action is to be taken, but it actually would bring about negative consequences, then the ministers should bring attention to the negatives to present a fuller picture. If a ruler says a course of action is not to be taken but it actually would have some positive consequences, the ministers should bring attention to the positives as a way to dispel the negative aspects."* (Zhao 2021: 99-100)

Balance is a key word here. Zhao however doesn't elaborate on the degree that is inevitably needed for balance. Like Qin, he thereby dodges the same questions regarding the subjective implications. In his analogy, some of these questions would be: Which flavors are missing? How does the chef measure "excess" in need of mitigation? How can ministers be sure that an "action would bring about negative consequences"? Admittedly, this analogy primarily serves the purpose of highlighting the need for diversity and the allowance of diverse

[15] They both hinted at the relation between 和 – hé (harmony) and 同 – tóng (sameness or uniformity)

opinions under hierarchy. However, it is unable to clarify the subjective "how much?" implications and thereby incapable of narrowing down the existing ambivalence inherent in the concept. Instead, it reproduces them. What Zhao is seemingly clear about, however, is that harmony can never be achieved by homogenization as evidenced by the following quote:

> *"The reason that 'uniformity' is not an option is because **'sameness' precludes plurality** and abundance among things, causing life to lose its meaning and vitality."* (Zhao 2021: 100)

Yet, even this preconditional part of his construction is built on the need for subjective degree and measure of both. To be clear, harmony is not to be understood in the same category as uniformity. Harmony is being portrayed as requiring diversity, so here it is diversity that competes with uniformity. However, since harmony is said to require diversity, uniformity is often being discussed in comparison to it. The issue of degree in relation to diversity and uniformity in Zhao's construction of harmony becomes more apparent when he speaks about coexistence. Referring to harmony as "… the optimal coexistence strategy…" (和谐是最优共在策略 - héxié shì zuì yōu gòngzài cèlüè), Zhao links harmony to coexistence as follows:

> *"和谐是最优的共在策略, 因为和谐最充分地体现了合作最大化、冲突最小化的共在原则。"* (Zhao 2009b: 27)
>
> *"Harmony is the optimal coexistence strategy, because harmony most fully embodies the coexistence principle to maximize cooperation and minimize conflict"* (Authors translation)

Not only does Zhao reveal two key assumptions that he shares about harmony, namely cooperation as opposed to conflict, also does he intermingle the terms of harmony and coexistence, so that they almost merge into one and the same concept, both embodying cooperation and minimization of conflict. However, in Zhao's construction, such a "harmonious coexistence" (和谐共存 - héxié gòngcún) (See for example: Zhao 2008: 61) cannot be built on diversity alone. Instead, the scholar insists that diversity without the premise of what he calls "compatibility and cooperation" (兼容合作 - jiānróng hézuò) will only lead to "incurable conflict" (不可救药的冲突 - bùkě jiùyào de chōngtú) (Zhao 2009b: 27). In fact, compatibility is a steady companion in the context of Zhao's harmony discourse (See for example: Zhao 2015: 9; Zhao 2019a; Zhao 2019c: 101). It is a term that indicates the limits of diversity, because it hints at the need for not just any, but a certain type of

diversity in order for harmony to develop. In that sense, "compatibility" in Zhao's construction can only be described as a medium between homogeneity and heterogeneity. Thus, while some elements of Qins construction, like the emphasis on diversity, are reproduced in Zhao's construction, he also stresses the limits of diversity by underscoring the need for diverse entities to have a degree of compatibility between them. In one instance, the scholar criticizes the idea of "…monotheism as a political logic to construct artificial externalities of a culture and pit one culture against others…" and instead argues that "truly artful politics is built on compatibility." (Zhao 2019a: 51). Again, leaving out any clue regarding the extent of compatibility and how to achieve it, the scholar reproduces already existing ambivalences inherent in his construction of harmony.

To an extent acknowledging the vagueness of the term and its implications, Zhao attempts to clarify his own understanding of it in the following quote:

> *"The expression 'compatibility of countries' comes from the most ancient political anthology, the Exalted Documents (尚书). Such* ***compatibility refers to the capacity to transform enemies into friends within a pluralistically inclusive order*** *of political security and peace. Basically, if a political order is not based on an ontological presupposition of '****coexistence****', there is no way to imagine within such an order of discourse the internalization of the world."* (Zhao 2021: 18)

As we can gather from this quote, the degree or measurement for compatibility is derived from two conditions: Pluralism or diversity and the adherence to an ontology of coexistence. In other words, if all actors within a given system (the world) adhere to a principle of "coexistence", elimination or assimilation can never be an option. If elimination and assimilation are impossible, the only variables left are "more compatible" or "less compatible", thus implying that the logic of Tianxia does not allow for absolute incompatibility. Harmony, as the overarching goal of a functioning Tianxia system, is thus constructed as a state or situation where actors are not only guaranteed to not infringe on each other's existence but are also equipped with features of mutual compatibility (See: Zhao 2021: 35, 65, 99). It is therefore implied that in Zhao's construction, harmony increases or decreases depending on the degree of mutual compatibility.

The above quote gives yet another hint at how Zhao's harmony construct differs from previous constructions. By saying that compatibility, which is being constructed as a precondition to harmony, "…refers to the capacity to transform enemies into friends…", it

is implied that actors should be empowered to change characteristics and preferences of "enemies" so that they can become "friends" (See: Zhao 2021: 18). While the same sentence includes the clarification that the order in which this happens has to be pluralistic, it nevertheless incentivizes questions of how much should the enemy be transformed, and which characteristics should be subject to transformation? Ultimately, this statement leads back to the topic of ontological change and how to achieve it. While I so far have elaborated on preconditions, I now want to analyze how Zhao constructs the means with which a world becomes harmonious. In other words, how can these preconditions, primarily an "ontology of coexistence", be acquired?

Evidently, Zhao's harmony construct is primarily embedded in a hypothetical meta-discourse. Whereas Qin's construction of harmony emphasizes self-cultivation as a means to spread a harmony mindset, Zhao, albeit heavily drawing from Confucianism, rarely discusses the role of rites and self-cultivation in this context. In one instance however, Zhao does derive his interpretation from the *Interpretation of Rites,* directly framing his statements following the sentence: "…harmony can be developed under two conditions:" (Zhao 2006: 36). The first quote then refers to the pre-condition of mutual respect in "otherness". Again, Zhao is unable to leave this pre-conditional level by not explaining what needs to happen to develop such a habit. His second statement however attempts to be more concrete:

> *"…an empire of All-under-Heaven could only be an exemplar passively in situ, rather than positively become missionary."* (Zhao 2006: 36)

Not only does he imply that ultimately Tianxia must expand outwardly from a physically non-expanding empire, he also stresses the fact that values should not be imposed onto others in an earlier remark. To clarify his own position vis-à-vis the concept of empire the scholar states that "cultural empire" is not to be confused with "cultural imperialism" (See: Zhao 2006: 36). Nevertheless, this segment indicates that Zhao's construction of harmony relies on an actor that cannot yet be fitted into the unit he termed "world". After all, to Zhao the world is still in a state of anarchy (See: Zhao 2019a: 44). Therefore, he describes the process of arriving at an internalized Tianxia system as "…transition from a non-world to the world." (Zhao 2019a: 65). He admits that Tianxia or All-Under-Heaven needs to develop outwardly from somewhere and this somewhere has to be a nation-state if the international system still remains in the status quo and hasn't been "internalized" yet. He describes the entity that is capable of starting this process of realizing Tianxia as "an empire of All-Under-Heaven…".

In other words, this means that in some way or another, the value of harmony or the ontology of coexistence needed for such a system transformation has to be nurtured by a nation-state and exported by it. Since imposition is not an option, the only means Zhao can think of is by being "an exemplar passively *in situ*" "cultural empire" (See: Zhao 2006: 36).

5.3.3. Harmonious multipolarity – Zhao Tingyang

Having discussed Zhao's constructions of multipolarity and harmony, I now want to bring both into each other's context. I have made the case that multipolarity cannot exist in the context of Zhao's Tianxia proposition, due to its requirement of "world internalization". Where Qin's construction of multipolarity differed from its classical realist meaning in the context of balance of power, Zhao made no such attempt. However, he demonstrated his awareness of Hobbesian anarchy in multiple instances. Even more, the assumption of anarchy serves as a point of departure for his entire theory. It is thus possible to assume that Zhao's construction of multipolarity is bundled into his rejection of balance of power and thus also subject of rejection. While multipolarity is being rejected, harmony remains as a key concept. Portraying it as an ideal goal for relationships and cooperation in a world without externalities, the scholar's theoretical approach is very much built around the establishment of world-wide harmony. However, while his construction of harmony includes aspects of pluralism or difference between entities, his construction of multipolarity does not account for those in the way Qin's does. Even more so, the harmony construction of Zhao Tingyang is more focused on the absence and avoidance of conflict by means of hierarchy and compatibility and at the price of diversity. Even though the scholar puts emphasis on the aspect of diversity, he is unable to envision a pluralist future where every form of diversity is being tolerated. Instead, actors must be compatible, which in Zhao's terms means that they should be able to "…transform enemies into friends…" (Zhao 2021: 18). The issue of degree remains a constant question mark throughout his discourse and doesn't help abolish the argument that such transformation is prune to hegemonic means if the enemy doesn't want to become a friend.

Yet this is not the reason why harmonious multipolarity, or harmony and multipolarity, are a contradiction when put into the context of each other. It is the fact that to Zhao, multipolarity or the balance of power framework in which it would occur, is constructed as an epitome of disharmony or conflict itself (See: Zhao 2021: 20). To recapitulate, for him,

solving the problem of self-interested nation states competing for power, aspiring to eventually become a pole in a multipolar, bipolar, or even unipolar world, means to change collective assumptions about the nature of nation states and their role in the world from sovereign to something subservient to a higher sovereign, namely the world as a sovereign entity (See: Zhao 2021: 16-17). For this to happen, the collective understanding of politics should be built around an "ontology of coexistence", ensuring that national interest can never surpass the boundary where another states existence would be threatened (See: Zhao 2019a: 54-60). Furthermore, the condition of Confucian improvement, which Zhao describes as a type of Pareto efficiency where everybody benefits (See Zhao 2021: xv), restricts balancing on relative and absolute terms. In sum, Zhao's Tianxia is constructed not as a complement to the existing system that he perceives as a system of anarchy and balance of power, but as an actual alternative that "…proposes politics of harmony… as opposed to hostility differentiating between the self and others." (See: Zhao 2009: 13-14). From that we can gather that Zhao is not convinced of the idea that multipolarity and harmony have reinforcing capabilities or even features of compatibility in the broader sense. Instead, for harmony to succeed, a system must be built on hierarchy with an entity at the top that is beyond the unipolar nation state and thus not answering to national interests, but instead to what the scholar calls "world interests" (See: Zhao 2021: 186). However, with Zhao's discourse in large part focusing on the benefits of such a system, which can only be established after an ontological change (from conflict to coexistence) among the majority of actors has taken place, the if's and how's of that ontological change remain largely unaddressed. Zhao's Tianxia harmony thus becomes a utopian construct built upon the single narrative that it is an alternative to balance of power. Zhao's one-sided narrative that the status quo indeed entirely relies on realist assumptions excludes alternative possibilities and creates a singular context in which two ontologies, one of conflict and one of coexistence, are being treated as the only viable choices on the menu. In such a black and white dichotomy, the former is portrayed as a road to chaos (Zhao 2021: 220) whereas the latter is supposed to lead to harmony. A construction of harmony where the Confucian condition of diversity is constrained by the need for compatibility and hierarchy. Admittedly, Confucian thought promotes the idea of hierarchy (See: Zhao 2019a: 14; Also see: Li 2014: 102), so there is no contradiction when discussed in an isolated manner. However, against the backdrop of a realist conception of multipolarity, which in my interpretation reflects Zhao's construction, the guarantee of such hierarchy is questionable. Whereas Zhao's Tianxia demands a

hierarchical order from world government to nation-states, multipolarity as understood from a numerical balance of power perspective doesn't offer a clearly defined hierarchy (See: Zhao 2009; Also see: De Keersmaeker 2017).

In other words, if harmony requires hierarchy under leadership that isn't a unipolar nation state, then Zhao's realist construction of multipolarity is unable to provide this type of hierarchy. Even if one state takes the lead in this multipolar competition for hierarchy, it will only be able to provide unipolar leadership, which is again incompatible with Tianxia, as it requires the departure from balance of power and national interest.

Finally, I want to discuss the issue of ontological change. While the background of this ontological change is not to align multipolarity and harmony, but to get rid of polarity altogether in order to achieve harmony, Zhao deals with the same issue that I mentioned in the beginning of this M.A. thesis, which is the export of harmony without relying on hegemonic imposition. When it comes to this practical dimension, Zhao's construction suggests a type of "cultural empire" that is *in situ* (Zhao 2006: 36) or passively radiating the value of Tianxia and its promise of harmony. Yet again, at this point Zhao's construction still rests on the assumption that balance of power under anarchy defines the status quo. This also means that the nation state still follows the same principles that Zhao defined as "maximization of self-interest" (Zhao 2021: xv). In Zhao's discursively constructed reality that assumes actors to be conflict oriented on an ontological level, one nation state equipped with undefined assets that would enable it to be a "cultural empire" in the first place, would have to undergo the required ontological change before everyone else. Avoiding this issue, Zhao's construction of Tianxia and the rejection of polarity, as well as the promise of harmony that come with it, rely on the assumption that a "cultural empire" first attains an "ontology of coexistence" and somehow passively radiates it so that other actors free willingly stop striving for power and become subservient to a world government. By definition this world government cannot be equal to the aforementioned "cultural empire" that started the process, because then it would be nothing more than a unipolar nation state.

6. Final discussion and conclusionary remarks

While I have occasionally hinted at diverting scholar's perceptions throughout my analysis, I now want to discuss my findings collectively and in some more detail, while also referring to the overarching relationship between Chinese foreign policy and Chinese IR's role in it.

One of my key arguments was that Chinese IR scholars are attributed with explanatory, advisory and refinery roles in reference to Chinese foreign policy and the concepts that it promotes. I subscribed to Mokry 2018's position that "…a few publicly visible Chinese scholars can shed some light on how the Chinese leadership thinks about world order…" (Mokry 2018: 4). In that context I argued that Yan Xuetong, Qin Yaqing, and Zhao Tingyang are of particular importance as their approaches to world order are among the most discussed, not only individually, but also collectively bundled in the form of comparison.

Indeed, all of these scholars' discourse in relation to world order revolved around concepts that were at some point introduced in the context of Chinese foreign policy. Hence, with the exception of Zhao Tingyang and his reluctance to include multipolarity into his theoretical elaborations, it is not surprising that their work largely remains within the orbit of harmony and multipolarity. What is surprising however is that only Qin Yaqing attempts to make both concepts compatible with each other. By altering the context of multipolarity from classical balance of power to pluralism and diversity, Qin's construction of multipolarity discoursively opens the possibility of synergizing the concept with harmony. Constructing harmony as the complementing interplay of diverse polarities, the scholar creates a mutual dependent relationship of both concepts where multipolarity enables the prospect of diversity and diversity fuels the development of harmony.

Yan Xuetong on the other hand doesn't see a viable future world order in multipolarity as he links it to the prospect of chaos. Reducing the utility of multipolarity to the purpose of hegemony critique, he constructs an alternative that is not built on the premise of multipolarity and in his view also does not resemble hegemony. Taken together, his humane authority approach is constructed as a different type of hierarchical unipolar leadership that is also capable of promising a "…comparatively harmonious international system…". Even though the realist's construction of harmony is that of an impossible and unachievable ideal (See: Creutzfeld 2012), he nevertheless uses harmony to promote his theoretical approach, thereby demonstrating the embeddedness of the concept in Chinese IR discourse.

Lastly, Zhao Tingyang dismisses the concept of polarity between nation states entirely. Admittedly, the scholar never referred to multipolarity directly and my analysis reflects my own interpretation derived from the discourse. Since, unlike Qin, Zhao does not come up with an alternative interpretation of the concept of multipolarity, but simultaneously interprets the status quo system from an evidently realist perspective, I argued that his

construction of the concept is rooted in the dismissal of balance of power and the pursuit of national interest beyond national borders. While he is more idealistic about the possibility of harmony than Yan Xuetong, he is unable to envision it in the status quo system that he defines as balance of power under anarchy. While his Tianxia approach aims at establishing harmony on a global scale, it is incompatible with Zhao's assumed status quo system where nation states aren't reduced to hierarchically inferior administrative units of an internalized world with an own government. Furthermore, his construction of harmony does not rely as much on the premise of diversity as Qin Yaqing's does. Naturally, his construction of multipolarity doesn't require alteration from balance of power to pluralism and diversity. Stressing the need for an undefined degree of compatibility, Zhao also hints at the possibility of homogenization if an actor is not compatible enough for harmony to develop. This is a striking departure from Qin, as he clearly opposes any form of homogenization.

My analysis not only shows that these scholars indeed integrate Chinese foreign policy concepts, in particular harmony and multipolarity, into their approaches, but also that their approaches to such integration leads to totally different outcomes. I have so far abstained from drawing conclusions in relation to China's foreign policy discourse as my focus was to analyze the theoretical rather than the political implications of integrating harmony and multipolarity. Since these scholars and their theories are regular subjects of scrutiny and critique already (See for example: Cunningham-Cross 2014; Wang 2017; Cheng 2017; Acharya 2019; Chu 2020), my approach was to derive individual constructions of harmony, multipolarity and what it means to have them exist in the same context, instead of judging their adherence to said concepts preemptively. According to my individual analyses, I see my argument confirmed that both concepts do not possess a fixed meaning as all three scholars relate them with different meanings, demonstrating either accepting or rejecting attitudes towards them. Whereas Qin's construction of harmony diverges from Zhao's by the degree of diversity allowed, Yan's construction doesn't even include the prospect of diversity. While Zhao critically rejects balance of power and any form of polarity that could evolve from it, Yan's approach is built on the assumption of polarity and balance of power[16]. This doesn't mean that he supports the idea of multipolarity. On the contrary, he rejects it. However, the reasons for both scholars rejecting multipolarity are entirely different. Zhao

[16] Yan regularly compares different power configurations and his humane authority assumes a morally exemplary unipolar leader (See: Yan 2019)

rejects the overarching ontology in which multipolarity is a concept while Yan rejects the concept, but not the ontology.

In light of my research question of *how does Chinese IR scholarship construct and deal with the relation between harmony and multipolarity in its constructions of world order(?)*, it can be said that these scholars do not blindly engage with any concept that is being advanced by China's foreign policy makers. They have not only explained, but also refined and advised on the concepts of harmony and multipolarity. What their approaches have in common, is that they are concerned with criticizing the idea of hegemony and praising the value of harmony[17]. The most important finding of my analysis, however, is that in the end, only Qin's depictions of harmony and multipolarity actually account for synergizing elements when viewed from within the logic of Qin's own discursively constructed reality. I have argued in the beginning, that the meanings of both concepts would have to be altered relative to my own understanding that I derived from the literature. In Qin's case this is precisely what happened. Multipolarity was discursively altered into a concept that promotes and enables diversity, whereas its conflictual aspects where being minimized by the assumption that different actors trust each other in a world where relations are being prioritized and streamlined towards the goal of harmony. Whether these constructions are coherent when viewed from outside Qin's internal logic is a different question and I have given various criticisms at certain points, like the appliance of questionable allegories or *a priori* assumptions. The key problem that I have identified in regard to Qin's construction of multipolarity, however, is that the positive connotations he attributes it with already assume actors to adhere to a harmonious mindset in the first place.

While all three scholars provide theories that in some way promise the possibility of harmony, not only do their constructions of it differ from one another, two of three also do not take multipolarity into account, instead requiring a situation that is either unipolar (Yan) or an entirely different system where no poles exist (Zhao). These two approaches advanced by Yan and Zhao are not only incompatible with my depiction of harmony and multipolarity as derived from the literature, but also within the logic of their own constructions. Both, Tianxia and Humane Authority demand a type of hierarchy that is impossible under their respective constructions of multipolarity. Yan's proposal is a system with clear leadership

[17] While Yan Xuetong might take a realist standpoint and believes it to be impossible, he nevertheless values the ideal that is harmony.

providing order and stability while deriving legitimacy by following moral principles. At the same time the scholar denounces multipolar systems as chaotic. Evidently, multipolarity denies the type of leadership he suggests and theorizes about, because it is preemptively assumed to be chaotic. Zhao on the other hand defines the status quo as balance of power under anarchy and constructs it as the root cause for disharmony. His proposition demands a complete departure from national interest to the extent that the formation of poles becomes an obsolete goal. The fully internalized world that he constructs thus cannot develop for as long as the mechanisms that enable multipolarization persist (or bipolarization/unipolarization for that matter).

Finally, I want to discuss the necessity of ontological change. Whereas Yan's construct is built within the same framework that he assumes to be prevalent in the status quo[18], Zhao's and Qin's constructs rely on ontological change to achieve harmony. In both cases, some sort of harmonious mindset needs to be attained by relevant actors. In respect to multipolarity, however, both Zhao's and Qin's approaches come with largely different implications. Whereas in Qin's construction, the ontological change must take place under multipolar conditions, which are closely linked with the premise of diversity or pluralism, Zhao's construction does not exclude the option of a unipolar "cultural empire" to start the process of what he termed "world internalization". That is, as long as it does not impose the change that it expects from others. In other words, even when the world hasn't reached this point of internalization and with it the promise of harmony, multipolarity is largely insignificant in his theoretical assumptions. What the two approaches have in common is that the ontological change they demand has to happen in a passive manner. While Qin takes it one step further by arguing for the need of self-cultivation, which I pointed out as an ambivalent concept reproduced with ambivalent causalities, Zhao excludes any further elaboration on what it means to be an *in situ* exemplar "cultural empire" (See: Zhao 2006: 36). Hence, their attempt to construct a better alternative to their perception of the status quo largely fails to address how to achieve said alternative. In other words, their work revolves around criticizing the status quo of their perception and constructing an alternative to it, while mostly ignoring the issues and implications of transition between them.

[18] In his Moral Realism, morality is supposed to be a component of comprehensive power similar to economic or military components (See: Yan 2019: 1-23)

In summary, all of the scholars analyzed in this MA thesis construct harmony as a desired goal for the international system, even if Yan admits that his approach can only account for a "comparatively harmonious" outcome (Yan 2013: 204). However, the condition of multipolarity is met with more nuance: discursively embraced by Qin, neglected by Zhao and circumvented by Yan.

Implications of my findings

First off, my analysis is based on the assumption that Chinese IR and its constructs of potential world orders responds to Chinese foreign policy. As evidenced by the large body of speeches given by Chinese foreign policy actors in the past and present, harmony and multipolarity have been key components of Chinese foreign policy discourse for many years. Additionally, I have taken this discourse literally, including the often-recurring statement that China does indeed refrain from seeking hegemony. This has enabled the possibility of approaching my cases openly and on a conceptual theoretical rather than realpolitikal level. My case selection of Yan, Qin, and Zhao was not primarily based on their references to harmony and multipolarity, but on their status as prominent representatives of Chinese IR and world order discourse. The fact that multipolarity and especially harmony play important roles in their particular academic discourse not only underscores the importance of these concepts, but also visualizes the link between this academic discussion and Chinese foreign policy. Given the findings that only one of them discursively synergized harmony and multipolarity in his approach adds weight to the argument that the advisory part of their role, which I defined as explainers, advisors and refiners of Chinese foreign policy concepts, should not be underestimated. Considering that Chinese administrations from Jiang to Xi have referred to harmony and multipolarity on a regular basis, but two of three scholars concerned with the essence of world order are unable or unwilling to create frameworks where these concepts are synergized by means of their own construction, I argue that the theoretical dimension of these concepts is only of secondary concern for China's foreign policy. That is, when it comes to imagining a world that is supposed to be harmonious and built on a multipolar foundation, both Tianxia and Humane Authority are incapable nor are they aiming for such an outcome. Even when viewed from within Zhao's and Yan's constructed realities with individually constructed versions of multipolarity and harmony, there is no indication that what they propose contains the attempt of achieving it under the premise of multipolarity. Whereas Tianxia is in demand of an entirely different status quo that negates polarity of nation states altogether, Humane Authority assumes a leadership

based on unipolarity. In the end, while both claim for themselves not to be likened to hegemony, they nevertheless resemble it in various aspects, such as Humane Authorities' practice to rectify misbehaving states or Tianxia's limits on diversity. Thus, not only do Yan and Zhao ignore any external demand for multipolarity, they also exhibit difficulties when it comes to rejecting the idea of hegemonic order. In the context of my framework that particularly emphasized the relationship between IR scholarship and China's foreign policy establishment, these elements offer grounds to believe that neither the rejection of hegemony nor the strive for multipolarity are of primary concern for a Chinese vision for world order with a focus on an at least "comparatively harmonious" outcome. This argument is in part relativized by the attempt to synergize multipolarity and harmony in Qin Yaqing's relational approach, at least when it comes to the conceptual level. Yet, the critical inquiry of Qin's construction of harmony and the essential demand for a preemptive ontological change to achieve it, incentivizes the argument that his approach doesn't leave the realm of utopia. Consequently, Qin's synergy of harmony and multipolarity by utopian means simultaneously underlines the argument that part of Chinese foreign policy discourse relies on utopian explanations and assumptions to proof its coherency.

It is undeniable that China's public diplomacy is filled with references regarding the promotion of multipolarity and the adherence to the value of harmony, yet when it comes to Chinese visions of world order, multipolarity turns out to be a significant hurdle. While my approach resembled an open inquiry without branching too much into realpolitikal territory, further research should ask the why and how questions that derive from this conclusion. Namely, why these world order conceptualizations differ from official foreign policy rhetoric and how it is possible that multipolarity can dismissed by Chinese IR even when China's public diplomacy demands it?

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im Rahmen der Lehrveranstaltung: M.A. Prüfungsmodul

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