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Arařtırma Makalesi

**WESTLESSNESS UNDER CHINESE NATIONALISM: AN
EPISTEMOLOGICAL ATTEMPT OR AN ONTOLOGICAL CASE?***

Çin Milliyetçiliği Bağlamında Batısızlık: Epistemolojik Bir Girişim Mi Ontolojik Bir Olgu Mu?

Cem YILMAZ **

Abstract

This study argues that Westlessness, a fresh concept used to raise awareness inside the Western world on the loosening alliance within the liberal international order, is likely to be more pervasive than previously assumed. As a product of the Munich Security Conference of 2020, Westlessness seeks to re-establish the Euro-Atlantic synergy to stand strong against rising powers, particularly China. On the other hand, the rise of China, despite setbacks, is real and continues to challenge the already evolving international order. This phenomenon is accompanied by Chinese nationalism that has an impact on the assertive foreign policy of the actor. In light of these variables, the study asserts that, despite the creators' epistemological goals, Westlessness is more of an ontological issue. Keeping in mind that the Western world has struggled to act in concert on a range of crises, such as the 2003 Iraq War and Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, Westlessness existed prior to the formation of its discourse. The study uncovers a lack of unanimity on how to respond to the rise of China, highlighting the ontological nature of Westlessness.

Keywords: *Westlessness, Rise of China, Chinese Nationalism, Assertive Foreign Policy, International Order.*

Öz

Bu çalışma, liberal uluslararası düzenin gevşeyen ittifakına, Batı dünyası nezdinde farkındalık yaratmak için henüz inşa edilmiş Batısızlık (Westlessness) söyleminin, varsayıldığından daha kalıcı olacağını iddia etmektedir. 2020 Münih Güvenlik Konferansı'nın bir ürünü olarak Batısızlık, başta Çin olmak üzere, yükselen güçlere karşı güçlü durmak için Avrupa-Atlantik sinerjisini yeniden kurmayı hedeflemektedir. Öte yandan, pürüzlere rağmen, Çin'in yükselişi halen geçerli bir olgudur ve halihazırda dönüşen uluslararası düzene karşı bir meydan okuma içermektedir. Bu olguya, aktörün iddialı dış politikası üzerinde etkisi olan Çin milliyetçiliği eşlik etmektedir. Bu parametreler ışığında çalışma, söylemin yaratıcılarının epistemolojik amaçlarına rağmen, Batısızlığın daha çok ontolojik bir mesele olduğunu iddia etmektedir. 2003 Irak Savaşı ve Rusya'nın 2014'te Kırım'ı ilhakı gibi krizlerde Batı dünyasının birlikte hareket etme yetisinin sınırları olduğu göz önüne alındığında, Batısızlığın, söyleminin inşasından önce de var olduğuna dikkat çekmektedir. Çalışma, Batısızlığın ontolojik doğasını vurgulayarak, Çin'in yükselişine nasıl yanıt verileceğine dair ortak hareket yetisindeki eksikliği açığa çıkarmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Batısızlık, Çin'in Yükselişi, Çin Milliyetçiliği, İddialı Dış Politika, Uluslararası Düzen.*

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** Dr., Bağımsız Arařtırmacı, cemmyil@gmail.com, ORCID ID:https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3421-3314

Introduction

When the “*Munich Security Conference (MSC)*”¹ of 2020 formulated the discourse of Westlessness, many were surprised, and dissident voices soared. While Westlessness highlighted the West's diminishing capacity to act cooperatively on a range of issues like conflict management as a result of a variety of factors such as the changing nature of threats, populism, authoritarianism, and rising powers, others asserted that values such as the rule of law and democracy are deeply ingrained, and the Western liberal international order is unlikely to collapse. Not surprisingly, the discourse is framed in large part as a result of the rise of China, which triggered tectonic shifts in global political economy. Beginning in the 1980s, the actor demonstrated one of the most profound transformations in history, rising to the top in key economic indicators and challenging the international order established by the United States of America (USA) following World War II (WWII).

This study will examine two external discourses, external in Chinese perspective, Westlessness and assertiveness, as well as one internal element, nationalism, in order to argue that the discourse of Westlessness, while appearing to be an epistemological initiative, is more likely an ontological concept. Additionally, the discourse of Westlessness is immature, describing an unfavourable world order and sparking a reluctant debate within the Western world. On the other hand, Westlessness appears to be a precautionary measure by the West to maintain strong ties to restructure the shaky alliance in the face of China's new role in global politics.

Westlessness might be taken both as a result of the rise of China and a factor making it easier for China to reshape the international order. Rise of China, in the Western perspective, has a disruptive impact and, Westlessness has been a catalyst for the sustainability of rising. Apart from the economic indicators, the process demonstrated that an actor without a liberal political system may challenge the liberal international order and cause it to decline. The Chinese case proved that a liberal political system is not a pre-condition to be a key global player.

The study claims that the campaign of Westlessness for constructing awareness for the Western world on key challenges like the rise of China and its disruptive effect on the liberal world order is not effective and it is likely to fail, based on the empirical data and the policy set of Beijing combined with the West's diminishing capacity to act in concert. Accordingly, despite its precautionary feature, the discourse might be more pervasive than its creators would imagine. The reason for this lies in the evolving Chinese nationalism by benefiting from rising economic capabilities. Many would add the Xi Jinping factor that pushes forward a hard-line policy both domestically and internationally. Xi, while strengthening his leadership and his role for the next 15 years, set a security-based agenda in the foreign policy realm that involves further economic development.

The study begins by the evolution of international order from the end of WWII to the era of rising other powers, most particularly China. The section includes the debate whether Beijing will revise or overthrow the existing order. Westlessness, the discourse constructed by MSC of 2020, is discussed as a precautionary attempt of the European liberals to further prevent the decline of the West and call for an urgent recovery against rising and aggressive actors. In the second section, nationalism in China is presented with both domestic and international implications. It is taken as an umbrella concept, in the third section, covering the implications of the rise of China, assertiveness, and China threat uttered mostly by Euro Atlantic producers of opinion. Nationalism is the core of assertiveness in the foreign policy realm. The study defends its argument by stressing on the lack of effectiveness within the West to counter China effectively and the decisiveness within China to prosper and enlarge area of influence globally.

¹ MSC is an informal platform for international decision-makers, a top-level gathering for discussing global security threats and geopolitical developments since the 1960s. Initially a German initiative to foster cooperation with United States during the Cold War, the Conference's circle of participants grew wider over the years as the number and variety of significant players in international security increased, with the core of the Conference remaining transatlantic. Global governance in general, and international security in particular, is certain to become more complicated and difficult to manage, necessitating the transatlantic partners to work cooperatively while also reaching out to new partners. Kennedy labels the conference as a “barometer of transatlantic relations” (Kennedy, 2020: 3).

Is Westlessness the New International Order?

When politicians and scholars talk about the liberal international order, they generally refer to Washington Consensus which refers to a free-market system and leading global financial institutions such as International Monetary Fund and World Bank. John Williamson, a British economist coining the term, had called for to boost the role of the market and halt the role of the state in the economy. Acharya notes that “*liberal order is an international system created and managed by the United States after the WWII to promote capitalism and democracy through building alliances and multilateral institutions*” (Acharya, 2018). The order is particular to the West and selectivity and conditionality apply for entry and get benefit. However, as Mearsheimer puts it, liberal international order has been shaking for a while because of the shift in the distribution of power (Mearsheimer, 2019: 16). Öniş points out “*the relative decline of established powers in a rapidly shifting global order*” and makes attention to the uncertainties the situation generates (Öniş, 2017: 2). Hence, debating on what lies ahead is a priority for decision makers and the academia. In contrast, Beijing Consensus represents a differing system of development and handling the political economy. Beijing version of governance refers to state capitalism and the system is an illiberal one that does not require freedom and being democratic for actors. Financial institutions that are founded in the last decade with Chinese initiative include the multilateral ones such as Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) and Silk Road Fund. They provide loans to many developing actors without requiring them to comply by the rules of the liberal order, not necessarily meaning that the loans do not have requirements at all.

In empirical terms, power has been more diffuse in the last two decades, both in spheres of military and economy,² and Americans are now contending with rivals like China and Russia who are not willing to play by US rules but their own (Ross, 2020). The transformation from G7 format to G20 format meetings is an indicator of the diffusion of power among actors that make up the order (Maull, 2019: 10). Kissinger states that today’s key global players are aware that in the current state of affairs, no actor is in a position to dominate the order as USA did just after the end of the Cold War. Hence unipolarity is not an option anymore where we can talk about multipolarity or a non-polar world (Kissinger, 2016: 255).

Rand Corporation’s Research Report presents three potential trajectories of international order centred on China. In the first trajectory, China does not show a willingness to replace, but revises the existing system. The actor works for to weaken the Washington Consensus within the existing leading international institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and United Nations (UN). In the second trajectory, China creates an alternative or parallel world order with alternative regional or global institutions. As the report puts it, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)³ and AIIB are already solid projects for an alternative order. The third one projects an entirely new world order in which the existing global system is overthrown. The report identifies this scenario with *Tianxia*, China’s historical worldview, in which China as the *Central Kingdom* is the sole dominant power and other actors are obliged to stay loyal to the *Son of Heaven*. Besides reflecting a threat arising from the shift in the distribution of material capabilities, the report seems to perceive an ideational threat from mainly China and Russia to USA. These actors’ ability to influence masses around the world will halt US ideational capacity (Watts, 2020: 14). By contrast, Allan et al. (2018), while stressing that ideational element of the international order is the key to replace it with a different one or revise it, claim that China is far from appealing global citizens with Chinese socialism instead of liberalism. Hence, it is unlikely that China replaces USA as hegemon since the rise of China did not construct an ideational base globally. It is highly unlikely that Beijing works or will work for it either. In the end, the actor is not likely to gather other actors to oppose the democratic and liberal forms of politics.

² In particular, China currently is in the second position in terms of nominal GDP and at the top in terms of GDP calculated with purchasing power parity. In addition, the actor leads globally in terms of foreign trade surplus and foreign exchange reserves. These basic indicators may prove a relative inclination for the actor where it may imply a relative decline in the US power. However, one should keep in mind that relative decline does not mean an instant end of power and it is an ongoing process. (Breslin, 2013: 626).

³ Rudd labels BRI as “the jewel in the crown of Xi Jinping’s foreign policy.” (Rudd, 2021: 49).

Atlantic Council, one of the leading think tanks in USA aiming to galvanize US global leadership, prepared a simulation study on the global order prospects for 2035. The report accepts multipolarity and stresses that it is accompanied by a bipolar competition between US and China (Burrows, 2019). Multipolarity is also labelled as the “post-Western phase” where a unipolar order is not achievable anymore (Burrows, 2019: 54). A significant indicator for the end of unipolarity is that China can openly “talk about pushing US military out of the Western Pacific” (Mearsheimer, 2019: 34). The first scenario is titled as the “World Restored” in which USA is conscious of multipolarity. Besides, restoration of order is possible if the commitment to global trade is ensured and, by this way, a sustainable global growth (Burrows, 2019: 56). The second scenario, descent into chaos, assumes that relations between two competing actors will be uneasy, Atlantic cooperation will be limited on key issues and China will experience a downturn in the economic leg. It would not be difficult to predict the effects of China’s economic problems on other actors, particularly the developing ones. Authoritarian regimes and conflicts will accompany the challenges in the economy (Burrows, 2019: 62). Third scenario suggests “A New Bipolarity” between Russia and China on one side and US and NATO on the other, which assumes an order that is close to hot conflicts between major powers. However, no direct conflicts are forecasted, but proxy wars are possible, a situation which is similar to the Cold War era. Global coordination halts which give an end to globalisation and arms race makes a peak (Burrows, 2019: 72).

International order debates, as the above projections illustrate, include whether the existing order is being replaced with another one or the existing order is experiencing a modification. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hoffman defend the second option. They call the process transformation of the system where multilateralism and inclusivity are enhanced. Rising powers, causing heterogeneity of preferences, are not threats to the system but provide the opportunity to enhance multilateralism (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hoffman, 2020: 1078). By contrast, Beeson and Li defends the first option by presenting a comprehensive list of scholars who argue that China would better overthrow the existing international order and replace it with a new one that would better suit its material capabilities and global role. Such a normative position would imply that an “emerging alternative order” in which China generates its own norms and preferences with ideational influence. Beijing is playing a larger role in existing organizations and founded recently new organizations as part of its global innovation initiative. By the help of this strategy China enhances its foreign aid and international investment capabilities (Beeson and Li, 2016: 493).

Feng and He argue that Beijing challenges the global order, however this challenge will be more peaceful than predicted. The China threat approach is overemphasized, and the feature of the existing international order is oversimplified (Feng and He, 2017: 24). The writers do not agree with Mearsheimer’s claim that rise of the actor will cause revisionism. Utilizing only from realist and liberal theories may not bring an accurate output about the actor and prospects of global order. There is a tendency within the realist theory to present China as a threat and in liberal theory as an ideal model for development and success story. Actually, with the rise of China, realism is in revival for the first time after the end of the Cold War (Keohane, 2021: 118). As Mearsheimer notes, the emerging multipolar international order will be a realist one including challenges of governing global economy and arms control (Mearsheimer, 2019: 44).

Kissinger implies that the conflict that Beijing faces is understandable to a certain extent since, USA expects China to reconcile with the global norms that were created without the participation of China. Consequently, the intention to revise some set of norms of the global order is not absurd (Kissinger, 2016: 248). This point implies that despite conflictual claims, China does not aim to overthrow the existing system but to revise it.

Feng and He point out that the global order consists of sub-orders such as economic, political, and military ones. For the global order to be revised, all sub-orders should be revised which is not possible in the short run (Feng and He, 2017: 28). However, we might observe a shift in a particular sub-order (i.e., economic sub-order). As Rudd puts it, economic and military power will be distributed to actors with different traditions and values (Rudd, 2015: 36). Eventually, what we face is a partially revised international order in which different perceptions and outlooks are presented.

Many accept that liberal international order helped rise of China, including United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent membership and World Trade Organization (WTO) membership. It is equally true that if China attends to revise or replace the international order, it may be evaluated by Western critics as arrogance. As Rudd notes, US policy makers wonder why China would like to change the rules of the global order since she experienced the rise within that particular order. He reminds that Xi Jinping reaffirmed the current political order under UN. In other words, China is not the post-WWII Soviet Union (Rudd, 2015: 32-40). In this respect, one can claim that China will not try to overthrow the global political order. Breslin agrees to the point and adds that the actor will work to reform the existing system, and this will be no easy task (Breslin, 2013: 630-631). Obviously, reform here should be taken as the necessary steps that should be taken from Beijing's point of view. To clarify in Breslin's words, "*There is a strong perception in China that a process of 'power transition' is under way that creates an opportunity for China (and other developing countries) to have a greater say in the way the world is governed. Official Chinese speeches and many academic works typically refer to the shift towards a multipolar world being 'inevitable' or 'irreversible.'*" (Breslin, 2013: 624)

Beijing has reached to a high-capacity military power with the second highest defense outlays, while Washington still has military superiority against Beijing. However, Beijing currently has the same superiority against almost all the regional actors. The military domain, along with the economy domain, is one of the leading elements that make the rise of China real (Christensen, 2016: 112). As Mearsheimer puts it, China has become an economic powerhouse with significant military capability (Mearsheimer, 2019: 42). Following the economic and military domains, soft power elements such as language as a source of cultural power might be an area of comparison. Mandarin Chinese is not likely to replace English in diplomacy, trade and education meaning that the actor will not lead in all key areas. In sum, power should be considered as total that has ingredients such as economic power, military power, diplomatic capacity, soft power along with ideational elements (political ideology, lifestyle etc.), language etc. According to Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore, USA with various elements of power, has the capacity and willingness to unite the world where China is struck on Han nationalism. This differing point is a major indicator that China will not be able to form up a completely new alternative order (Nye, 2020). The actor is not likely to bring all elements of power together to govern an alternative international order.

When it comes to the regional dimension of the debate, one may easily claim that the actor's material status gives China the chance to revise the Asian order in which USA with her allies form a security alliance. The discourse of Chinese elites underlines that US-led alliance system or the regional order lacks to achieve the goals of the regional actors. Hence, there is the need for a new regional order with no outsiders (Foot, 2020: 158). However, this standing is not backed by part of the regional actors, since US strategic standing in Indo-Pacific is still strong with alliances such as Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and bilateral alliances with Japan, South Korea, India. Besides, this intention of China for a new regional order leads to the US rhetoric of "assertive China" and "China threat," however not related solely to this intention. Official rhetoric in USA labelled China as a "long term strategic competitor" since 2017 and "systemic rival," a definition that replaced "war on terrorism" (Parthes, 2020).

Munich Security Report, the concluding document of the MSC of 2020 in which China was the primary agenda item, confesses a "new declinist literature" about the West and explains the causes in two legs. To begin, there are divergences within the Western world. A portion of Western actors are enmeshed in populism and nationalism, which pose a threat to Western liberal ideology at its core. This fact manifests itself in the form of racist leaders and anti-immigrant sentiments. Mearsheimer identifies Brexit and Donald Trump's "America First" policy as internal indicators of the liberal international order's inevitable crisis (Mearsheimer, 2019: 43). Secondly, West's foreign and security policy out of the Western area represent failures and setbacks. The two leading institutional blocks of the West, European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) lack effectiveness (Munich Security Report, 2020). There is a lack of consensus towards Russian aggression and the West, in solid terms, failed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Based upon these cases, Westlessness existed prior to the construction of its discourse. In this context, Kennedy puts on the "hollowness of grand narratives"

which points out to the inefficacy of Western policies in key global issues despite a strength in discourse (Kennedy, 2020: 17).

Some claim that the discourse of Westlessness is fatuous (MacShane, 2020) or an exaggerated mood of the West (Nye, 2020) and it might be tactical. These seem to be part of a standing against further dissolution of the West by taking a precautionary epistemological standing. It is presented as a discourse that would restore loyalty within the West for the liberal world order and Washington Consensus. However, this study argues that Westlessness has an ontological aspect in addition to the epistemological aspect. Apart from the short-term effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, Beijing seems confident in developing with her own characteristics. The process caused major conflicts within the Western world in terms of the action to be taken while not interrupting the economic interdependence.⁴ Rudd talks about the absence of global leadership and the existence of a vacuum (Rudd, 2015: 31). As Kennedy puts it, Europe could not adopt to the changes in American foreign policy (Kennedy, 2020: 2). Turning away from international commitments, particularly in the Trump era, and foreign policy focus on Asia is wakening the Europeans in a slow pace. One can sense an alarming ring for Europe to realize that “it can no longer count solely on USA for its security nor an imaginary West as the bastion of liberalism” (Kennedy, 2020: 6).

MSC 2021 showed a more positive outlook given the fact that USA, with the new president Joe Biden, declared that it would turn back strongly to Transatlantic commitments. Actors including China (along with Russia and Iran) were held responsible risking to unravel the rules-based international order (Munich Security Briefs, 2021: 2017). Though there still exist factions in the attitude towards China by Germany and France which remains as a challenge for the Transatlantic community. In a nutshell, not all actors regard the actor as a strategic rival or its rise as a threat. Besides, the discourse for solidarity is yet to be transferred to the policy arena, otherwise “hollowness of grand narratives” will sustain. In the meantime, Beijing works systemically to achieve the sustainability of development by solid policies and projects (like BRI, Made in China 2025, China 2049 etc.) accompanied by a nationalist foreign and domestic policy.

Nationalism in China

It is not absurd to claim that the nationalist account in China begins with the “Century of Humiliation” discourse. The discourse is a construction of the first half of the 20th century when the nation state was being formed. It refers to the bitter ends of the First and Second Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860) when China began to experience colonialism. Callahan considers humiliation as an indispensable element of the construction of nationalism. It is clearly a nation-building project and a rhetorical part of Chinese subjectivity (Callahan, 2004: 207). In a historical lens, nationalism refers to “adequately strong sentiments of identification with what would be the new nation-state” (Pye, 1993: 109). And it is not only directed towards colonial powers of the time, but to domestic rulers, Qing dynasty, that caused to weakness and despair (Callahan, 2004: 207). Japan’s “Twenty-one demands” of 1915 and the May Fourth movement in 1919 sparked the nationalist sentiments to gain a broader base.

We should note that apart from other colonies of history, China experienced a partial colonialism in which only the coastal section of the country interacted with the imperialists. With the Treaty of Nanking (1842), Hong Kong was ceded to Britain and five ports, namely Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, Shanghai, were opened to foreign trade and these ports became to be known as treaty ports representing coastal China. Mao era marks the end of major challenges for the nation: imperialism, WWII and Japan’s aggression and civil war of 1945-49. Thus, this era of nationalism represented the struggle of the working class and played a significant role in the anti-imperialist rhetoric (Gries, 2004: 117). China turned to a “version of Chinese nationalism that was hostile to coastal China and its values” (Pye, 1993: 124). However, this era of nationalism lacked in terms of content, labelling ancient culture, such as Confucianism, and the modernizers of the early 20th century as other. Following the Mao era, nationalism became obsolete, and the Party was “not sure where to turn to find the essence of a new

⁴ Some Eastern European states’ policy is towards deeper economic relations with China. United Kingdom’s engagement with Huawei on 5G, despite recent steps to end the relationship, is an indicator that David Ricardo’s comparative advantage theory still works. Cheapest products with the cheapest financing tools are likely to be attractive for many actors worldwide.

sense of Chinese nationalism” (Pye, 1993: 133). The statecraft continued to suffer from the contentless form of nationalism.

Wu talks about a dual phase in Chinese nationalism. The first phase is developmental nationalism of the 1910s and the second phase is cultural nationalism of the 1990s. Nationalism of the early 20th century is mostly analysed in the context of reactions within the Century of Humiliation such as the May Fourth movement that supported the ideational wing of the republican revolution (Guoguang, 2008: 468). Pye defines this phase as a quest for wealth and power, in solid terms making the nation strong enough to prevent imperialism and invasion (Pye, 1993: 107). Second phase of nationalism’s distinctive character includes the confidence reached by the actor to achieve development on its own manner. This phase included the way the actor should deal with its rising status and its impact on the global order. When it comes to domestic authoritarian political structure, late 20th century nationalism was a basic means to save the status quo. Nationalism provided saving the legitimacy of the regime, since communism was in decline (Guoguang, 2008: 477). Callahan summarizes this particular point: “*The experience of the East Asian countries convinced many Chinese scholars that the west was neither the only, nor a viable, model for China in its pursuit of modernization. They believed that a rational nationalism derived from Chinese traditional values rather than western liberal ideas should be promoted as a new state ideology to enhance regime authority and facilitate economic development.*” (Callahan, 2004: 203).

Bhattacharya formulizes nationalism in China with two elements. The first element is about nation building, as is the case in Wu’s analysis, and the second is related with achieving the great power status (Bhattacharya, 2007: 236). Nation building is based on Confucian culturalism which takes the concept of *Tianxia*. The Son of Heaven had the power to perform authority within the entire world. Second leg of cultural nationalism has been the superiority of the Han identity which helped to legitimize Chinese rule over vast lands like Tibet and Xinjiang. Bhattacharya tries to explain the nation building process with Confucianism while others use the concept of Century of Humiliation which claim that Confucianism causes weakness and must be abandoned. But he reminds that Confucianism includes the concept of wealth and power meaning that the best way to oppose Western imperialism is to prosper and as Dirlik notes Confucian revival is a form of cultural nationalism that would help stress China’s differing culture (Bhattacharya, 2007: 242; Dirlik, 1998: 119).

Nationalism is presented by the party state as an alternative to declining communist ideology, a new way of achieving regime legitimacy. It has been the accurate way of sustaining political legitimacy in domestic politics and challenging the regional and global order (Zhao, 2013a: 544; Christensen, 2016: 109; Bhattacharya, 2007: 235).

However, the party state has lost part of its flexibility in what the official discourse calls core interests⁵ like Taiwan, Tibet, and South China Sea as a result of popular nationalism (Zhao, 2013a: 545). By contrast, Zhang argues that Chinese statecraft does not only hold the nationalism card to sustain legitimacy, but it holds the card of economic prosperity as well. Hence, responding to popular nationalism is not and will not be affirmative in all foreign policy issues (Jian, 2003: 117). Therefore, another version of the debate is whether nationalism in China is a movement of the masses, or it is a top-down initiative of the state (Gries, 2004: 119). The Mao era can be described as a top-down nationalism where it was an instrument to refill the faith of the communist state and hold the country together (Zhao, 2013a: 539). Masses had always been involved in constructing nationalist feelings and actions, however today’s nationalism includes the weight of the society in which the CPC has to adjust its policies. The changing pattern of the nationalist pattern is illustrated with three cases by Gries. First one is the dispute with Japan on the Senkaku (in *Japanese*)/Diayou (in *Chinese*) Islands. Gries presents Chinese studies suggesting the Party to take a stronger standing against Japan about the dispute, whereas in response, the Party works for to suppress activism. The second case is the effect of an influential book titled “*China Can Say No*” which is written by a group of writers in 1996, on nationalism. The book calls for the state to act strong on core interests and advises the policy makers to reject anything that is

⁵ The disputed sovereignty rights in the South China Sea, Taiwan and Hong Kong issues are among the core interests of the actor. The term has been on the stage officially since the beginning of the 2000s and it characterizes the non-negotiable character of the issues concerned (Swaine, 2011).

contrary to those interests. Gries reminds that the book attracted a massive attention that the Party had to consider. The book represents a case of popular nationalism since it challenged the state's hegemony over nationalist discourse (Gries, 2004: 126). Zhao claims that if Chinese society becomes sick of the political system, it may well be as a result of a failure of solid responses in key foreign policy issues (Zhao, 2013a: 541). In response, "*China Should Not Play 'Mr. No'*" written in 1998 represents the official rhetoric that nationalism should be run by the state. The book calls for the people to abide the principles determined by the Party on key national issues (Gries, 2004: 127). The third case is the protests against the bombing of the Belgrade Embassy of China by US air forces in 1999. One should bear in mind that the protests had both a top-down and bottom-up nature. According to Gries, the cases illustrate that nationalism in China has a social aspect, hence the Party is not the sole representative of nationalism (Gries, 2004: 133). We can include the spy plane incident of 2001 as a similar case which triggered the anti-US sentiments of the society. As a result of the Chinese evaluation of these two cases, there emerged sufficient evidence that USA is fighting to contain China and it is to be responded. Hence, nationalism was carried to the foreign affairs sphere. Where above listed crises with USA are major reasons for Chinese intellectuals and the society to become nationalistic, Jian adds the emergence of the "China threat" theory to the equation (Jian, 2003: 111).

By contrast, Johnston's comprehensive empirical study on Chinese popular nationalism reveals that popular nationalism is in decline starting from the second decade of the 21st century. He claims coercive diplomacy, particularly on maritime conflicts, is not the result of popular nationalism (Johnston, 2017: 9). Besides, he warns against the massive media information on Chinese nationalism, since empirical data proves the other way in terms of popular nationalism. Moreover, he claims, official nationalism diverges from popular nationalism as a result of the Xi factor. A rising discourse of "hostile forces" and anti-foreign propaganda is much observed in Xi Jinping term. Eventually, the survey for popular nationalism cannot suggest that Chinese nationalism has nothing to do with foreign policy, since it does not focus on official nationalism. The study argues on loosening popular nationalism but does not defend that nationalism as a whole is loosening (Johnston, 2017: 39).

Finally, nationalism has been a way of defining China by the West: "...*from a communist menace to a nationalist problem: the China threat*" (Callahan, 2004: 201). This point of view defends that China will work for to compensate the Century of Humiliation via assertiveness and expansion. Nationalism, inter alia its Chinese version, among other factors, is held responsible for the decline of the liberal international order. The issue, as presented earlier, is covered as a major challenge in the Westlessness debate.

Nationalism in the Foreign Policy Sphere: Assertiveness

Martin Jacques, the writer of the book "*When China rules the world*", with a post-Western approach, points out that using Western standards of evaluation for analysing China is meaningless. It is important to evaluate China on its own terms (Jacques, 2009). However, China is an actor with a highly opaque decision-making structure. Taking this parameter into account, we can assert that a comprehensive analysis of Chinese discourse may not be satisfactory to comprehend the actor's policies. "Assertive China," an external discourse with realist overtones, implies that the actor is equipped to use coercive measures in defence and security matters. By contrast, Beijing's political discourse, to a large extent, include liberal features like cooperation and interdependence such as harmony, peaceful rise, common destiny of all mankind, win-win diplomacy. The issue's decomposition makes it difficult for analysts to reach a conclusion about the direction of Chinese foreign policy.

Rudd stresses that China has turned to an active foreign policy, with Xi Jinping, as of 2013 (Rudd, 2015: 247). Zhao admits that Chinese foreign policy is assertive in defending core national interests, which implies that the general orientation of Beijing's foreign policy cannot be considered within this context (Zhao, 2013b: 103). Similarly, Roy stresses that analysts should make a distinction between China's general external orientation and territorial or sovereignty problems. Defensive and non-expansionist character might be observed in the first part but, assertiveness is dominant in the second (Roy, 2019: 54). Within this scope, the discourse of assertiveness becomes superficial for analysing all foreign policy cases of the actor. All we have to capture from the very beginning is that there is a process

going on from hiding capabilities, conducting low profile and biding its time,⁶ to “striving for achievement” and assertive China on core interests. Studies before 2013 generally talk about an ambiguity or unwillingness on the actor’s intentions for being more active in foreign policy (Breslin, 2013: 615-634). On the other hand, Xi declared that while striving for achievement, Beijing will not seek hegemony and not constitute a threat for other actors. This is part of the “China dream” strategy of Xi, the beginning feature of it is moving away from Deng Xiaoping’s focus on sole development. It is a strategy that entails the more effective use of economic and military instruments to distinguish between allies and adversaries (Soronsen, 2015: 67). Apart from economic goals and the goal of fusing socialism and Confucianism, Xi’s signature policy entails a military build-up. Xi was inspired from a book titled “*The China dream: the great power thinking and strategic positioning of China in the post-American era*”, written in 2010 by Liu Mingfu, a retired colonel. The book argues that economic development should be accompanied by military advancement to be truly strong and distinct from Japan (Callahan, 2004). This was exactly what was declared at the end of the “5th Plenum of the CPC” in October 2020. The communique released included a direct link between development and national security, and a perception of threat because of the worsening external conditions. This perception includes taking USA as the leading threat which tries to Westernize and split China (Rudd, 2021: 39). It is not easy to deny the effects of the foreign policy cases presented above by Gries and their constructive spirit on nationalism.

Increasing confidence with more power, anti-China policies by adversaries as a result of the shifting power balance, sustaining the legitimacy of the regime are to be taken as sources of China’s changing and more nationalist foreign policy behaviour (Zhao, 2013b: 107). Scobell and Harold present three competing explanations for Chinese assertiveness: declining US power with 2008 financial crisis, reactive insecurity caused by US assertiveness and nationalism. The first explanation might be considered as an external opportunity for Beijing to close the gap with USA faster. The remaining explanations are self-constructed policies for future achievements combined with the response of the actor to the attitude of surrounding actors (Scobell and Harold, 2013: 112).

What we currently see in Chinese foreign policy is activist inclination for Breslin and a muscular form for Zhao compared to the 1980s (Breslin, 2013: 615; Zhao, 2013a: 535), but what Beijing will risk in this process is yet another big question. China spent two decades modernizing the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), transforming the actor from coast defence to pursuing interests in the East and South China Seas (Zhao, 2013b: 105). Beijing maximized militarization in the South China Sea by constructing artificial islands, followed by military bases, and established Air Defence Identification Zone in the East China Sea in 2014 that threatens Japan, South Korea and Taiwan sovereignty. Roy suggests that Beijing’s assertiveness is mostly limited to disputed territory close to China’s borders. However, he accepts that there are exceptions for this and claims that China conducts a “sphere-of-influence mentality.” This includes “retaining the unequalled privilege of setting the rules for the activities of other states” in areas of key interest (Roy, 2019: 63). Foot even talks about a willingness to use war as a management tool, if necessary, which has a coercive effect in the neighbourhood (Foot, 2020: 154). In October 2020, the term “preparations for war” was coined officially for the first time in the post-Mao era. Xi (2017) emphasizes the decisiveness for peaceful rise, but he also emphasizes that peaceful rise should not be interpreted in such a way that China can abandon core interests while confidently using stronger rhetoric (Jinping, 2017: 296; Scobell and Harold, 2013: 114). Particularly, official opinions were declared by senior party members that reunification with Taiwan is a necessity and should not be put off. Besides, this process may require military action and explains the discourse outlined above. The militarization of the South China Sea and military actions in the region are

⁶ Deng Xiaoping’s signature strategy “hide your strength, bide your time” does not defend being soft. In contrast, the position defends being strong and prove the strength when necessary.

indicators what Beijing can do in its neighbourhood. There is a direct link between Chinese nationalism and an increasing muscular foreign policy (Zhao, 2013a: 535).

Nationalism dispute includes whether it is an enforcing agenda setter in foreign policy, or a means included into the equation when intended by the Party state. China's South China Sea, Taiwan and Hong Kong policies, BRI and Xi Jinping's discourse indicate that both cases are relevant. Today, Beijing is in an expectation of deep respect to its sovereignty which is the main component of nationalism. Sovereignty, a product of the Westphalia system, is much more deeply assimilated in Asia in contrast to Europe, where supranationalism replaced sovereignty to a certain extent. Besides, regional actors work hard to overcome the history of colonization (Kissinger, 2016: 196-234). In the "*Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA)*" of 2014, Xi declared that "Asian affairs should be run by Asians" and called for regional actors not to cooperate with USA for regional security (Feng and He, 2017: 41). However, a security dilemma has already emerged between two nations as a result of bilateral and multilateral alliances between USA and other regional actors (Perthes, 2020).

A significant portion of assertiveness debate is related with USA-China bilateral relations. A massive US-based literature is observed taking China as a threat (Christensen, 2016; Pillsbury, 2015). The rhetoric varies from being a security threat for Asia Pacific to dethroning USA from global leadership. Kissinger's analysis help at this point. "*Possibility of tension between a built-in power and a rising power is not a new situation. It is inevitable for the rising power to take hold of some areas that were considered to be the area of the built-in power. Likewise, the rising power doubts that its opponent can try to block its growth. According to a Harvard research, historical data indicates that ten of the fifteen cases in which an established force interacts with a rising force result with war.*" (Kissinger, 2016: 251).

But isn't there a chance that there might be something different this time? According to Wang Yi, China's Foreign Minister, China opposes the United States' coercive approach to bilateral relations and views Joe Biden's election as an opportunity to mend the relationship, which would include managing the differences (Wang Yi, 2020).

The challenges in bilateral relations might be analysed in two headings: economy and security. The economy heading has a global character, as presented earlier, since it has effects on the evolving international order. On the contrary, the second heading is more of a regional one. It concerns the Indo-Pacific, at least for the time being. Rise of China has resulted in the emergence of a dual structure in East Asia, with China serving as the economic hub and the United States serving as the security hub (Zhao, 2019: 383). The actor's achievements are undeniable in terms of exports, foreign direct investment and technology. Accordingly, the rise of China with all its ingredients and the threat it poses to the US global position is the key to understand Washington's policy against Beijing.

We observe a more solid US policy of Asia and China, in particular with the Obama administration. Focusing on Asia has been parallel to the theories claiming that the centre of gravity in international relations is shifting towards Asia. Pivot to Asia (2010-11) and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which has been ephemeral, are the major components to balance the rise of China and contain the actor with regional allies. Some claim that the Pivot made the bilateral relationship stormier since it caused the actor to cling to nationalism stronger (Zhao, 2019: 379). Pivot to Asia and Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (2017) enhanced American military presence particularly in Western Pacific. Bilateral relations in the security realm might be evaluated in the context of a security dilemma, however both actors work hard not to fall into a Thucydides trap. Military engagement of USA in Indo-Pacific is to contain the actor in a way to prevent China's further strengthening and more specifically coercive actions. China's military advancement, on the other hand, has two dimensions. Firstly, it is to defend against the containment of USA and her allies. When we are talking about Chinese nationalism in the foreign policy sphere, American policy of China matters. Secondly, Beijing has a desire to be effective in the region and secure economic development. It is hard to deny that development and militarization has something to do with the aim of disposing any possibility of ever being humiliated.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the combined effects of a Western constructed discourse, Westlessness, and Chinese nationalism in order to assert that the discourse has an ontological component in addition to its epistemological component.

The emergence of new power centres, including China, resulting in a more diffuse distribution of power, combined with assertiveness and the Xi Jinping factor, all contribute to Westlessness being a longer-lasting phenomenon than its creators foreseen. The creators of the discourse would prefer that Westlessness remain a temporary epistemological issue. European liberals would be pleased to see that the discourse aids the Western world in reorganizing and strengthening its resistance to the Beijing Consensus. This study concludes, however, that Westlessness has an ontological component, as it is real, even before it was declared, and is likely to pervade.

The post-Cold War era presented significant difficulties for the Western world. NATO, for example, has struggled and continues to struggle to adapt to contemporary security dynamics. The EU is a long way from establishing an effective framework for security and defence. The Union is attempting to recover from the shock of Brexit, and Europe as a whole is looking to the other side of the Atlantic for a solid comeback by the new administration. Biden's foreign policy is likely to be oriented toward Asia in order to compete with China. While strengthening alliances in the region, it may not be surprising to hear that USA demands from EU members to keep their cooperation with China to a minimum. Shortly, European actors may face expectations from the other side of the Atlantic while they are expecting the US to effectively engage in Euro-Atlantic affairs. Combating Westlessness effectively is no easy task.

Despite the limitations of its soft power capabilities in areas such as language and ideology, Beijing continues to dominate the global economy through trade, finance, technology, and foreign direct investment. BRI is the ultimate level of strategy that the actor developed in order to ensure the sustainability of global demand under excessive supply conditions. Despite setbacks and short-term effects of the pandemic, the actor is decisive in ensuring growth and development sustainability. The actor's projects as a whole constitute the actions to be taken to achieve great power status. These indicators are inextricably linked to nationalism and assertive foreign policy. Nationalism's historical roots are strong enough to benefit from it today in the policy arena. Nationalism's historical roots are substantial enough that it continues to benefit policymakers today. Additionally, popular nationalism influences assertive foreign policy, though it appears to compete with official nationalism. As the Chinese economy grows, the actor assumes a greater role in global politics, and nationalism motivates the party state to capitalize on this role. Regionally, the actor seeks to secure trade routes and thwart attempts of containment. This leads to an expanding military and increasing deterrent operations. The actor, as outlined, has a number of foreign policy problems yet to be resolved without the intention not to damage the role and status achieved in world politics. In the absence of robust policies to counter the rise of China, Westlessness is likely to persist.

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