



Academic Paper

# Contemporary Chinese Political Theory

## A Call for Arab Engagement



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March 2026



**Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations**

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# Contemporary Chinese Political Theory: A Call for Arab Engagement

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## Introduction

China’s standing in the global power hierarchy is no longer contested. While methodologies for measuring power vary, most frameworks converge on two strategically significant conclusions. First, China and the US constitute the principal poles of power, when aggregating composite indicators of strength. Second, China’s indicators are advancing more rapidly, while US metrics show relative stagnation, a trend most projections expect to continue.<sup>2</sup> This underscores the need to examine both the theoretical foundations of China’s rise and the prospective Arab strategies required to navigate this evolving global balance of power.

Effective strategic planning in international relations requires understanding the intellectual and philosophical foundations of the actors involved. Given China’s prominent role in the contemporary international system, it is crucial to engage with the conceptual framework guiding its policies. Arab universities and research centers remain largely oriented toward Western thought. While understanding Western perspectives is essential, exclusive focus on them, at the expense of rapidly ascending international powers, perpetuates Western dominance in the Arab region and underscores the necessity of intellectual independence.

Contemporary Chinese scholars have developed theoretical frameworks for understanding international relations that remain largely overlooked in Arab political and academic circles. China’s rising global stature since 1978, following the launch of the Four Modernizations, parallels advances in Chinese international relations thought, including the reconsideration of analytical units, methodological approaches, and normative value systems governing global interaction. Crucially, this theoretical work is firmly grounded in China’s philosophical and cultural heritage.

The distinction between China’s “intellectual elite” and its political decision-making circles is largely fluid. As the following pages will show, the strategic theories proposed by Chinese thinkers directly inform China’s practical policies, whether regarding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the discourse on peaceful rise, or security doctrines, etc. This highlights the imperative for scholars and policymakers to engage closely and critically with these political literatures.

## Theoretical Foundations of the Contemporary Chinese Perspective on International Relations

This study first outlines the ideas of key contemporary Chinese thinkers, then identifies the common threads shaping Chinese approaches to international relations, and finally considers their potential application in the Arab context.



## ▷1. Contemporary Chinese Thinkers and Their Core Ideas

### a. Yan Xuetong<sup>3</sup>

Yan Xuetong frames his approach to international relations as a critique of Western realism, both in its classical form, articulated by Hans Morgenthau, and its structural variant or neorealism, advanced by Kenneth Waltz. Unlike the Western focus on power and interest within an assumed anarchic system, Xuetong contends that a state's rise or decline depends on "strong leadership pursuing progress from a moral perspective." In doing so, he moves the analysis beyond a purely materialist paradigm toward a normative framework that refines, rather than abandons, realist assumptions. Xuetong thus advocates a synthesis of realism and morality, what may be termed moral realism. Thus, integrating the classical realist emphasis on power and interest with ethical principles derived from the Confucian tradition, particularly the imperatives of morality and credibility.



**Yan Xuetong**

Building on this "material–normative" foundation, Xuetong applies his framework to the behavior of great powers. He contends that powers seeking leadership from a moral perspective should not rely solely on material strength but must embody a model of ethically credible and trustworthy governance. This represents a shift from politics driven purely by power to "leadership guided by moral principles," rather than dominance through material might alone. He interprets the US–China rivalry as emblematic of the current international order: the US, pursuing power and interest unconstrained by moral considerations (exemplified under Donald Trump) contrasts with China, whose strategy is disciplined by ethical norms derived from the Chinese perspective. Accordingly, Xuetong argues that future competition will hinge not only on GDP or military capacity (the material variables emphasized in Western realist literature) but also on the "moral quality" of international conduct, positioning China as a viable alternative to the prevailing Western model.

Drawing on the principle of political determinism in classical Chinese thought, this theory regards the style of leadership in major powers as a key variable for explaining central dynamics in international relations, including strategic orientations of major powers, shifts in the balance of power, transformations in the global landscape, the evolution of international norms, and broader systemic changes in the international order. It evaluates leaders using two ethical criteria, internal accountability of leadership and external credibility. Therefore, linking moral integrity directly to a state's influence and standing within the international system.

The frequency of US military interventions abroad, the expansion of its overseas bases, and its repeated use of vetoes to block international consensus illustrate the persistence of a "power and interest" paradigm unconstrained by ethical considerations, as exemplified by President Donald Trump's policies.



Professor Xuetong, however, contends that intense Sino-US competition through 2035 does not necessarily imply war. As the power gap narrows, both superpowers are likely to exercise greater caution, achieve clearer mutual understanding of each other's strategies, and implement more effective mechanisms to manage rivalry. In this sense, Xuetong envisions a potential shift in Sino-US relations from a zero-sum to a non-zero-sum framework, reflecting the "ethical" management of strategic competition.

This analysis clarifies his forward-looking view, which foresees neither a decisive Chinese victory nor a collapse of the US. Instead, he envisions a world in which US credibility gradually erodes, driven not by China but by persistent domestic political instability. The recurring specter of "America First" (or "America Alone"), emerging every four to eight years with each presidential transition, will likely force US allies to fundamentally reassess their reliance on Washington. Current US–European tensions may already signal the onset of this recalibration.

The Chinese thinker acknowledges the intensity of strategic competition between China and the US, even as he notes the presence of effective management mechanisms that may mitigate the risk of direct war. He argues that the US is likely to lose its clear strategic advantage over China gradually within the constellation of major powers. In this evolving landscape, China's strategic relations with Brazil and Russia are expected to become stronger than those of the US with the same states, while Germany and France will likely pursue relatively neutral hedging strategies amid Sino-US rivalry. At the same time, India, Japan and the UK will likely maintain stronger strategic relations with the US than with China, albeit with diminishing willingness to participate actively in efforts to contain China. Taken together, these trends would, in his assessment, contribute to the gradual erosion of the US's dominant position in the international system.

Xuetong further contends that even if post-Trump US administrations were to abandon unilateralism, the US would be unlikely to recover the strategic edge it enjoyed over China until 2022, an advantage amplified by the Russian–Ukrainian war. He therefore anticipates that Sino-US strategic rivalry will persist beyond the conclusion of Trump's second term. At the same time, however, he considers it plausible that both powers will institutionalize new mechanisms for managing competition, thereby producing a protracted, stable and war-averse competitive order.

Xuetong argues that Sino-US rivalry will be concentrated primarily in the technological sphere and that a bipolar configuration, anchored in China and the US, will define the emerging international order. Accordingly, the main centers of gravity are expected to crystallize around China, alongside Russia and Brazil, in contrast to a US alignment with India, Japan and the UK. Meanwhile, France and Germany are likely to adopt relatively balanced, hedging positions between the two blocs. Within this framework, middle powers assume heightened strategic significance. The growing attraction of the Chinese model is reflected, in his view, in Brazil's deepening alignment with Beijing, while Russia is projected to consolidate its role as a strategic partner of China rather than a competitor, as was the case from the mid-1950s to 1976. Japan may pursue a more cautious posture, and major European powers are expected to gravitate toward relative neutrality. If realized,



these developments would constitute a significant restructuring of the post-Cold War order. Consequently, a non-zero-sum paradigm would likely gain greater legitimacy, potentially paving the way for a more equitable and stable international system.

#### **b. Qin Yaqing – University Professor<sup>4</sup>**

Qin Yaqing’s approach can be situated within a post-positivist framework. His intellectual orientation is rooted in classical Chinese thought, particularly the triadic conceptual structure of Guanxi (relations), Process and Harmony.<sup>5</sup> He argues that a fundamental limitation of dominant Western theories of international relations, most notably realism, liberalism and constructivism, lies in their emphasis on the attributes of states, such as power capabilities and political systems. By contrast, drawing on Confucian and Daoist traditions, Qin contends that “relations,” rather than states as self-contained entities, should constitute the primary unit of analysis in global politics. In this view, identities



**Qin Yaqing**

and interests are not fixed or autonomous; instead, they are continuously constituted and reconstituted through dynamic networks of interaction among actors and structural components. Accordingly, Qin maintains that China’s rise cannot be understood solely through conventional material indicators. Beyond traditional measures of power, China has actively managed and expanded its relationships with a diverse array of partners, both developing and advanced states, as well as with international institutions, governmental and non-governmental alike. This approach is grounded in the principles of shared gains and a recognition of humanity’s common destiny, reflecting a non-zero-sum, human-centered outlook.

The Confucian perspective, with its humanitarian focus and minimal metaphysical abstraction, together with the Taoist viewpoint, which upholds a pacifist ethic (the virtuous soldier is one who does not fight and that killing confers no moral merit) illuminates both the notion of a shared human destiny and a non-zero-sum understanding of international relations. Central to Qin’s analysis is the relational perspective, which integrates multiple levels of theorization. As an ontologist, he advances a cosmopolitan outlook that transcends narrow national frameworks. As a theorist, he interprets individual behavior within political contexts. As a researcher probing beyond appearances, he explains China’s foreign policy by synthesizing these dimensions. In doing so, he constructs a strategic framework, develops practical principles inspired by Confucian thought, and provides tools to evaluate actors’ adherence, perceiving all dimensions as interconnected rather than isolated.



Therefore, Qin’s perspective emphasizes assessing state relations across multiple dimensions based on “harmony” rather than conflict or dominance. It transcends conventional frameworks, such as the state or nationalism, favoring a broader, human-centered approach. In doing so, it reflects his society’s Confucian and Taoist heritage and seeks to generalize these principles to the international sphere.

### c. Wang Yiwei – University Professor<sup>6</sup>

Wang Yiwei frames his theory around the BRI, presenting it as a means to “legitimize” China’s foreign policy through “global appeal.” He views BRI not merely as an economic or geopolitical project, but as a model of “modernization and globalization” that contrasts with the Western paradigm of colonialism and hegemony. Rooted in a non-zero-sum, shared-benefit perspective, it reinforces the idea of a common human destiny.

Therefore, from a normative standpoint, Wang argues that the international system should emphasize consultation over unilateralism, cooperation over coercion, and shared gains over zero-sum calculations. He contends that this approach curbs warlike tendencies, reduces societal disparities, and mitigates financial crises generated by competitive capitalist markets.



**Wang Yiwei**

### d. Zheng Bijian<sup>7</sup>

Zheng Bijian’s theory of “peaceful rise” is the most widely accepted framework within the Chinese Communist Party. It seeks to convey that China’s development will not follow the coercive, hegemonic path of Western powers but will be grounded in the “legitimization of external behavior,” thereby reassuring both its neighbors and the broader international community.

This theory aligns closely with broader Chinese political thought and intersects with Yan Xuetong’s concept of “moral realism,” which asserts that a state’s rise need not follow a conflict-driven path, often referred to in Western literature as the “Thucydides’s Trap.”<sup>8</sup> China, in this view, is morally distinct from Western powers. While moral realism acknowledges the possibility of strategic competition with the US, it maintains that China’s success stems from the “superior morality and credibility of its leadership.” The theory of peaceful rise complements this by emphasizing predominantly peaceful means rooted in effective leadership. In essence, moral realism centers on character and purpose (particularly the role of credible leadership) whereas power transition theory, by contrast, explains the mechanisms of international competition through peaceful, non-zero-sum dynamics.



**Zheng Bijian**



The shift from “peaceful rise” to “peaceful development” has broadened the theory’s scope, extending it beyond a purely Chinese framework toward a global perspective. To avoid the competitive or conflictual connotations of “rise,” the Chinese government issued a white paper titled “Peaceful Development.”<sup>9</sup>

e. **Liu Yuejin**<sup>10</sup>

The concept of “hyper-securitization,” developed by the Copenhagen School and elaborated by Barry Buzan, especially after the 112001/9/ attacks, has been a central concern for the Chinese scholar Liu Yuejin. In Western literature, hyper-securitization is characterized by:<sup>11</sup>

- ▶• Exaggerating perceived threats to the point of regarding them as imminent, pervasive, and all-encompassing.
- ▶• Treating danger as self-evident, requiring constant preparedness.
- ▶• Expanding the concept of security to encompass political, military, economic, social and cultural spheres.
- ▶• Viewing any leniency in addressing the threat as a form of complicity.

Chinese scholars generally regard hyper-securitization as a form of “misperception,” arguing that its focus (terrorism, the Chinese threat, technology, and ideology, etc.) reflects Western tendencies toward excessive dominance, often invoked to justify disproportionate military force. From the Chinese perspective, this approach destabilizes the international system by provoking overreactions and undermining trust, effectively “militarizing” all spheres. Liu Yuejin emerges as a leading critic, contending that the “inflation of threats” signals a failure in security management, arising from imbalances in risk assessment, policy coordination and development priorities. Such distortions expose institutional weaknesses within the state. He further notes the expansion of the security concept, from domestic (internal security) to international (the nation-state), and ultimately to both, driven by the growing interconnection of global actors and accelerated globalization.

Liu Yuejin observes that the term “national security” entered official Chinese political discourse relatively late compared to its established usage in many Western contexts. It first appeared in 1983, while the broader conceptual shift from a “war and peace” paradigm to one framed in terms of “security and threat” did not take shape until the 1990s. He traces the evolution of Chinese security thought since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, highlighting geographical variation in security concepts, including differences in state power and status, ideology and political system, as well as culture, history, and geography.<sup>12</sup>

According to Liu, China’s security concept has developed through three phases:

- ▶• A traditional military-centered approach (1949–1978) focused on internal and external threats.
- ▶• A non-traditional phase (1978–2012) emphasizing economic security.
- ▶• Under Xi Jinping, a framework centered on “political security,” defined as safeguarding the authority and governing system of the Chinese Communist Party.



Furthermore, the notion of hyper-securitization has gained greater prominence in Chinese academic literature, particularly after Japan's discharge of nuclear-contaminated wastewater into the sea, which has expanded the environmental dimension of security discourse.<sup>13</sup>

Liu contends that the Western conception of security departs from effective coordination among units of the international community and exhibits a lack of proportionality between perceived threats and the strategies adopted to address them. Moreover, it tends to privilege security over development. This approach is evident in Western academic literature through the broad generalization of terrorism and ideological threat, the militarization of non-security issues, and, ultimately, the deployment of hyper-securitization to legitimize external intervention. By contrast, Liu advances an alternative model grounded in a more accurate assessment of international realities and risks, the strengthening of preventive measures to forestall escalation, proportionality between threat and response, and the integration of security and development as complementary and mutually reinforcing goals.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Core of the Chinese Perspective on International Relations:**

The core principles of Chinese political thought, as articulated by its leading scholars, rest on the following principles:

- ▶● Prioritizing a non-zero-sum approach; managing competition through nonviolent means and mutual gains.
- ▶● Recognizing ethics as a central dimension of international relations, offering a counterpoint to Western realist perspectives.
- ▶● Emphasizing development as a higher priority than domination.
- ▶● Asserting the moral role of “political leadership” to guide international relations ethically.
- ▶● Enhancing the state's prestige and the “appeal of its political model” through ethical influence rather than coercion.
- ▶● Warning against hyper-securitization, which inflates perceived threats and spreads their effects across all sectors.

## **▷2. The Middle East in the Chinese Security Perspective**

In the aftermath of China's political transition following the death of Mao Zedong, Chinese diplomacy increasingly embraced a disciplined pragmatic orientation, often characterized as “ethical realism,” in place of rigid ideological dogmatism. This shift was encapsulated in Deng Xiaoping's “cat theory,” first articulated in 1962 and subsequently consolidated through the Four Modernizations.<sup>15</sup> In practice, it translated into a strategy centered on balance and dialogue with all actors, while prioritizing economic



development over defense spending.<sup>16</sup> In parallel, Chinese political discourse highlights the “Three Represents” theory, formulated by former President Jiang Zemin, which asserts that the party should:<sup>17</sup>

- ▶• Represent the development requirements of China’s advanced productive forces, focusing on economic growth, technology and modern productivity.
- ▶• Represent the direction of China’s advanced culture by promoting progressive and innovative values rather than traditional or rigid forms.
- ▶• Represent the fundamental interests of the vast majority of the Chinese people by maintaining stability, improving living standards, and integrating entrepreneurs and the middle class into the party.



**Jiang Zemin**

The contemporary Chinese political discourse on Middle East security emphasizes several key operational principles:

- ▶• Upholding non-intervention.
- ▶• Strengthening regional autonomy.
- ▶• Promoting development to foster stability under the Global Security Initiative (GSI).
- ▶• Expanding diplomatic engagement, serving as a “supportive mediator” in conflicts, exemplified by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the diplomatic efforts to bridge Saudi-Iranian relations.
- ▶• Balancing regional powers, including Iran, the Gulf states, and Türkiye.. thereby constraining US influence.

Based on the above, the core pillars of China’s approach to Middle Eastern security are:<sup>18</sup>

- ▶• **Development-driven stability:** Beijing considers economic growth the foundation of security, aligning its 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030) with the development visions of Middle Eastern countries.
- ▶• **GSI:** Xi Jinping’s initiative promotes a “common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable” security approach, explicitly rejecting “power politics” and “coercion.”
- ▶• **Non-interference and mediation:** China encourages regional actors to build their own security frameworks, favoring diplomatic mediation over military intervention, as exemplified by support for ceasefires in Gaza and efforts to foster relations between states, such as the Iran-Saudi Arabia rapprochement, etc.
- ▶• **Balancing of power:** Beijing aims to maintain a regional balance by employing its partnership with Iran as a counterweight to US influence, while concurrently consolidating its ties with Arab states.



- ▶ **Anti-imperialist discourse:** Chinese officials consistently denounce US “military adventurism,” presenting China instead as a dependable partner committed to respecting regional sovereignty. In early 2026, this narrative increasingly emphasized the expansion of security partnerships with Islamic nations to promote post-conflict stabilization, after prolonged conflicts, with particular reference to support for the Palestine issue. However, many observers argue that such support has remained largely diplomatic rather than substantive.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

A comparison between Western approaches to international relations, both broadly and in their engagement with the Arab region, and the Chinese approach across these same dimensions suggests that the latter aligns more closely, both in the short and long term, with Arab aspirations. In particular, China’s conception of security, which is closely tied to development and less inclined toward hyper-securitization, its emphasis on non-zero-sum international relations, and its commitment to a substantive rather than merely rhetorical normative framework in the conduct of international affairs set it apart from dominant Western paradigms. Moreover, the adoption of political initiatives that do not rest on military intervention, together with the explicit recognition of Palestinian rights as articulated in UN resolutions, constitute significant indicators. These elements, taken together, warrant careful consideration when formulating strategies for engaging with this intellectual framework and the state that advances it.

The intellectual models discussed above represent the dominant current within the Chinese approach to international relations. They reflect the orientations of both state authorities and the ruling party, while also resonating with significant segments of the Chinese intellectual elite and public opinion regarding the Arab region. Furthermore, reactions among Israeli elites to China’s expanding role in the region indicate a measure of “concern.” In principle, such responses may further enhance the resonance of the Chinese perspective within Arab intellectual and political discourse.<sup>19</sup>

It is striking that Arab research centers, and even universities, have yet to give Chinese political thought the attention it warrants. Prominent Chinese theorists remain largely absent from much of the Arab literature on politics and international relations, a gap that requires deliberate redress. Moreover, the Chinese knowledge system, in both its positivist and metaphysical strands, is arguably closer in substance and analytical orientation to Arab intellectual traditions than its Western counterpart. This affinity offers a strategic opportunity; however, its effective utilization depends upon a rigorous understanding of the core premises underpinning the Chinese epistemological framework.

It is important to acknowledge that the historical relationship between the Arab world and China has generally been positive, particularly when contrasted with the more negative image of the Western perspective within Arab and Islamic intellectual frameworks. This relative advantage should be thoughtfully leveraged in managing relations with China as an ascending global power. Furthermore, China is increasingly positioned to provide



alternatives comparable to those offered by the West across both military and civilian domains. This reality is reflected in trade figures: the volume of Middle East–US trade represents only 35.5% of China–Middle East trade, which neared \$400 billion in 2025.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, engaging with the Chinese language, literature, art, and both classical and modern political and moral thought is not merely a matter of cultural enrichment. It is essential for understanding the “general spirit” of Chinese society and for cultivating a nuanced diplomacy capable of engaging China effectively. This requires the establishment of dedicated institutions to guide and coordinate Arab political engagement with China, a pivotal actor in the international system.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.

<sup>2</sup> See detailed studies tracking rising and declining powers across hundreds of indicators in:

Ray Dalio, *The Great Powers Index: 2024 | How the Leading 24 Countries Are Doing and Their Prospects for the Next 10 Years*, site of Economic Principles, 9/9/2024, [https://economicprinciples.org/downloads/DalioRay\\_Power\\_Index\\_Appendix.pdf](https://economicprinciples.org/downloads/DalioRay_Power_Index_Appendix.pdf); Top 10 Countries on Global Soft Power Index 2026: US leads the chart as China narrows the gap; where does India rank?, site of *The Indian Express*, 5/2/2026, <https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/top-10-listing/top-10-global-soft-power-index-2026-us-china-india-rank-10498498/>; US National Power Industries Are at Risk, site of Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, 17/11/2025, <https://itif.org/publications/2025/11/17/us-national-power-industries-are-at-risk/>; China now ranks higher than the US in global reputation, site of Brand Finance, 20/1/2026, <https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/brand-finance-global-soft-power-index-2026-china-now-ranks-higher-than-the-us-in-global-reputation/>; Ross Douthat, *This Is Why America Is Losing to China*, site of *The New York Times* newspaper, 4/9/2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/04/opinion/china-global-superpower-dan-wang.html>; and Hemant Adlakha, *How a faster than expected US decline is a cause for worry in China?*, site of Modern Diplomacy, 11/8/2025, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/08/11/how-a-faster-than-expected-us-decline-is-a-cause-for-worry-in-china/>

<sup>3</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Yan Xuetong and Fang Yuanyuan, “Interstate Leadership, Moral Realism, and their Critics,” in Yan Xuetong and Fang Yuanyuan (ed.), *The Essence of Interstate Leadership: Debating Moral Realism* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2024); and Yan Xuetong, *Inertia of History: China and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), passim.

Yan Xuetong is a leading Chinese international relations scholar, ranked among the world’s 100 most influential thinkers, and long served as a professor at Tsinghua University.

<sup>4</sup> Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 102–127 and 184–194.

Qin Yaqing is a prominent constructivist scholar in international relations. He has taught at several Chinese universities and serves as chair of various committees, including advisory bodies affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the Confucian and Daoist perspective, especially the three key dimensions in Chinese thought, see Robert O. Ballou (ed.), *The Portable World Bible* (New York: Penguin Group, 1988), pp. 492–528 and 542–574.

This study presents the original Confucian and Daoist texts, essential for understanding Chinese cultural heritage. Daoism emphasizes pacifism and harmony with nature or the natural order, while Confucianism focuses on human relationships.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Yiwei, *The Belt and Road Initiative: What will China Offer the World in its Rise* (Beijing: New World Press, 2016), passim; and Joel Wuthnow, *Chinese Perspectives on the Belt Road Initiative: Strategic Rationales, Risks, and Implications*, China Strategic Perspectives, No. 12 (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 2017), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-12.pdf>

Wang Yiwei is a leading Chinese scholar in international relations and a university professor who has taught at several institutions. He focuses on the geopolitical and geostrategic dimensions of international affairs and examines the transition from maritime powers to what he terms a “post-maritime civilization.”



<sup>7</sup> Zheng Bijian, China's "Peaceful Rise" to Great-Power Status, site of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, 1/9/2005, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2005-09-01/chinas-peaceful-rise-great-power-status>; and Dai Bingguo, "Adhere to the Path of Peaceful Development," site of USC US-China Institute, 6/12/2010, <https://china.usc.edu/node/20144>

Zheng Bijian is one of the leading theorists of the Chinese Communist Party and serves as an advisor to the Chinese state. He has held several high-level positions and has focused his studies on globalization and transparency in international relations.

<sup>8</sup> The term "Thucydides's Trap" dates back to the Peloponnesian War, originally referring to Spartan anxiety over the rise of Athenian power (analogous to contemporary US concerns about China's growing influence). See Graham Allison, Thucydides's trap has been sprung in the Pacific, site of *Financial Times* newspaper, 21/8/2012, <https://www.ft.com/content/5d695b5a-ead3-11e1-984b-00144feab49a>

<sup>9</sup> Information Office of the State Council, China's Peaceful Development, site of English.gov.cn, 6/9/2011, [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2014/09/09/content\\_281474986284646.htm](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284646.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Liu Yuejin combines two roles: he is both a security officer and a politician. This dual perspective likely explains his pronounced focus on the security dimension in international relations.

<sup>11</sup> For details, see Barry Buzan, *The United States and the Great Powers: World Politics in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 172.

<sup>12</sup> Jonna Nyman, "Towards a global security studies: what can looking at China tell us about the concept of security?," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2023, pp. 673–697, <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/202427/1/nyman-2023-towards-a-global-security-studies-what-can-looking-at-china-tell-us-about-the-concept-of-security.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.; Yunyou Wang, "The Critical Cognitive Analysis of Hyper-Securitization Strategy: A Case Study of China's Official Discourse on the Japan Nuclear Contaminated Water Discharge Incident," *Discourse & Society* journal, vol. 36, no. 5, 2025, pp. 725–742.

<sup>14</sup> Liu Yongtao, "Security Theorizing in China," in Arlene Tickner and David Blaney (eds.), *Thinking International Relations Differently* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 72–91.

<sup>15</sup> The great pragmatist: Deng Xiaoping, *The Guardian* newspaper, 18/12/2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2008/dec/18/globaleconomy-economics>

<sup>16</sup> For further details on these shifts, see Walid 'Abd al-Hay, "Cautious Engagement: Will Politics Constrain China's Role in the Middle East," *Al-Siyasa al-Dawliya* journal, Al-Ahram Foundation, Cairo, issue 207, January 2017, pp. 25–29; and Walid 'Abd al-Hay, Walid 'Abd al-Hay, *Al-Makanah al-Mustaqbaliyyah li al-Sinfi al-Nizam al-Duwali 1978–2010* (China's Future Status in the International System 1978–2010) (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Studies and Research, 2000), pp. 183–186.

<sup>17</sup> Zhu Daqiang, The important thought of the "Three Represents" marks a new level of party building theory, site of Everwin Law Office, 20/9/2011, [https://en.everwinlawyer.cn/dtjs\\_details/8.html](https://en.everwinlawyer.cn/dtjs_details/8.html)

<sup>18</sup> Chinese FM calls for security partnership with Islamic nations to address regional conflicts, site of TRT World, 27/1/2026, <https://www.trtworld.com/article/1dd457edb3ec>; Behrouz Ayaz, How the Gaza War Changed Arab Elites' Perception of China, site of The Diplomat, 13/10/2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/10/how-the-gaza-war-changed-arab-elites-perception-of-china/>; Riya Sultana and Ronen Cohen, "China's Red Sea gambit: a paradigm shift of NSAGs and the Maritime strategic dilemma in the Middle East," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* journal, vol. 12, no.1, 2025, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311983.2025.2495475>; Jin Liangxiang, China and Middle East Security Issues: Challenges, Perceptions and Positions, site of Istituto Affari Internazionali, 8/8/2020, <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaip2023.pdf>; and Alessandro Arduino, China just shifted gears in the Middle East, site of Think China, 19/12/2025, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/politics/china-just-shifted-gears-middle-east>



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