

# How Does China Impact the Future International Political Order?

## Conceptual Reflections of the “China Model” in Light of China’s Fragmented Polity\*

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This article ties in with the research on an emerging “China model” as an alternative to conceptions of political order introduced and promoted by the “West”. While the term “China model” will remain of enormous political importance and is in need of further research, the emergence of a “one size fits all” model of Chinese policy making is rather unlikely. Instead of searching for such a model, social scientific research should analyze whether and how the fragmented Chinese polity is being impacted by such unitary “ideas” of a Chinese political order and vice versa.

*Keywords:* China, China model, Beijing Consensus, international political order, globalization, fragmentation

### Introduction

China is making a path for other nations around the world who are trying to figure out not simply how to develop their countries, but also how to fit into the international order in a way that allows them to be truly independent, to protect their way of life and political choices in a world with a single massively powerful centre of gravity. (Ramo, 2004, p. 3)

This quotation from Joshua Cooper Ramo’s “Beijing Consensus” summarizes what many politicians, scientists and “ordinary” citizens in the “West” seem to fear: For a long time, the “Western” path to long-lasting prosperity consisting out of a double liberalization of the economy and the society, i.e. a market-economy alongside democracy, was seen as the one and only successful developmental path. However, the Chinese success-story<sup>1</sup> has taken place within an autocratic regime (Freedomhouse, 2014) combined with a partial and selective liberalization of the Chinese economy from the state’s direct influence (ten Brink, 2011).

The leaders of many authoritarian countries study the People Republic of China’s (PRC) development closely and aim to copy its “success story”. This has fueled concerns among countries of the “West” that this development may continue. Such a development would run counter to the declared ambition of the “West” to spread democracy across the globe (Callick, 2007; Halper, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2007; Lyman, 2005; Thompson, 2005). What is more, it even raises concerns about the possibility that the spread of this “Chinese model” may have a detrimental effect on the current international order as the “West” fears the undermining of the current

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<sup>1</sup> The economic turbulences (especially at China’s stock market) in 2015 do not fundamentally challenge the enormous development the People’s Republic of China has taken in the last 35 years: Despite current challenges, both the political and economic weight of the PRC has risen incredibly making China not only one of the world’s most influential countries internationally but taking almost one billion Chinese out of extreme poverty within 20 years (Economist, 2013).

international order not only in terms of the distribution of power but with regard to the underlying principles of the political order.

This ties in with the belief of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) leaders that "world leadership demands an ideology to order the globe symbolically" (Callahan, 2004, pp. 569-570) and does not only rest on material power. While its foreign policy is far from being always in line with its normative concepts, the United States is largely associated with its commitments to freedom, democracy and free trade. China has understood that if it wants to challenge US hegemony in the 21st century, it needs to offer a normative alternative to "freedom and democracy" (Li, 2015, p. 2).

Consequently, policy-makers as well as social scientists have started to ask which principles China will promote in the future both domestically and internationally coming up with several proposals for a "China model" (Bell, 2015; Zhang, 2006), "Beijing Consensus" (Halper, 2010; Ramo, 2004) or "Chinese school" of International Relations (IR) (Qin, 2011; Yan, 2011; T. Zhao, 2009).<sup>2</sup> However, none of these attempts to identify a "core" idea of Chinese political order and (foreign) policy-making has gained wide acceptance. The most likely reason for this is that none of them comprehensively explain the empirically visible Chinese behavior: China is a huge country in geographical terms and has a population of more than 1.3 billion inhabitants. In such a big country the political, economic and social conditions are extremely diverse containing an extreme divide between urban and rural areas as well as coastal and land-locked provinces. Furthermore, China has carried out a tremendous number of both economic (e.g. by means of Special Economic Zones) and political experimentation (e.g. by introducing village elections in some parts of China) which has led to the development of a high degree of fragmentation. Hence, the PRC has not followed a "one size fits all model" but has met its challenges by eagerness to experiment but also pragmatism. Structurally, this is also manifested in China's fragmented polity with many different actors shaping the PRC's (foreign) policy decision-making including the double structure of state and CCP agencies both at the central and regional/local level, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), think tanks, media/social media and the general public (Jakobson & Knox, 2010).

Although both the complexity of challenges as well as the fragmented polity make the emergence of a "China model" or a unitary vision of a Chinese-led political order almost impossible, the discussion and search for such a "model" has never ended. Quite to the contrary it has gained political impact domestically and never faded away internationally.

This is the starting point of this solely conceptual paper which makes two claims: Firstly, since there seems to be a political "demand" both domestically and internationally for a "China model", it will remain politically influential despite its shaky empirical grounds. Hence, social scientific research on this phenomenon has to be continued. Such research should, however, not search for a new conception of a "China model" (para. 4) but empirically analyze the existing discourses and practices (para. 2). Secondly, most promising is research that relates such discourses in search for a unitary idea to the practices of (foreign) policy decision-making in China's fragmented polity. In this context, the paper seeks to raise core research questions for further analysis (para. 3). Hence, I do not come up with conclusive answers but limit the task of this paper to conceptual issues for future research.

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<sup>2</sup> While the term "Beijing Consensus" is widely associated with the approach of Joshua Cooper Ramo (2004), the term "China model" has been defined very differently (Kennedy, 2010, pp. 473-475). This paper does not stick to a specific definition since it engages with the impact of these discourses and not the content of it.

### **The “China Model” Between Discourses and Practices**

China is rising and has achieved the potential to re-shape basic principles of the international political order. Consequently, the idea of a “China model” has emerged in the political and scientific discussions a couple of years ago and has remained debated ever since (Barma & Ratner, 2006; Bell, 2015; Burton, 2008; Callick, 2007; Dirlik, 2006; Halper, 2010; People’s Daily, 2005; Ramo, 2004; Su, 2013; Thompson, 2005). In the following, I review literature originating in the West pointing out that pragmatism in contrast to a clear-cut “model” that could be transferable to other states and regions, has developed into a core component of a great variety of conceptualization of a “China model”.

Remarkably the terms “China model” and “Beijing Consensus” do not only originate in the “West” but they were only very skeptically received in China itself (Jacques, 2011). China’s initial reticence has two reasons: Firstly, Chinese officials preferred to keep quiet about a possible “China model” because they did not want to provoke the US by questioning the American-led international order (The Economist, 2010). Secondly, the Chinese leadership remained not fully convinced that they have found the right path constantly fearing chaos. Most important in this context is that the Chinese policy-makers and social scientists attribute the country’s economic success story to China’s pragmatism. This pragmatism leads China to carry out different solutions to different challenges in the huge and diverse country (Glaser & Murphy, 2009; The Economist, 2009). Hence, many believe that it is the absence of a model in the traditional sense that has caused China’s success.

Ironically, the non-existence of a “model” is also reflected in Joshua Cooper Ramo’s concept of a “Beijing Consensus” consisting of three major “theorems”, namely innovation and experimentation, economic growth and sustainability, and self-determination, incorporating China’s pragmatism and unorthodox policies by means of its first major “theorem”: innovation and experimentation. Ramo goes as far as to argue that the Beijing Consensus “is flexible enough that it is barely classifiable as a doctrine. It does not believe in uniform solutions for every situation” (Ramo, 2004, p. 4). However, not only with the term “Beijing Consensus”, Ramo is suggesting such a doctrine but with the way he develops it.

Apart from this inconsistency within Ramo’s own writing (Dirlik, 2006), his concept has caused other criticism as well: Joshua Kennedy (2010), for example has argued that Ramo confuses the reasons of the PRC’s success in the past with what it might aim at in the future (innovation, sustainability and social justice). In Dirlik’s (2006) eyes, the “Beijing Consensus” sole relevance is that it offers an alternative to the conventional concepts of order and development introduced and promoted by the “West”. While this is politically significant it is anything but a “model”.

Similar to Ramo, Zhang Weiwei’s (2006) vision of a “China model” is also shaped by the PRC’s non-dogmatic policy-making approach mentioning “people matter” instead of dogmas, constant experimentation, gradual reform on a trial-and-error basis instead of shock therapy, selective learning from international experiences and sequencing of reforms as the “China model’s” characteristics. For Zhao Suisheng (2010) the true “China model” is a “non-ideological, pragmatic, and experimental approach to spur both social stability and economic growth while not compromising the party’s authority to rule” (p. 431). Like these approaches, Daniel Bell’s (2015) recent book on the “China model” refers to a pragmatic problem-solving approach instead of a clear-cut model when he attributes China’s success to the virtue of its leaders and the underlying meritocracy. Finally, even Naughton (2010) who explicitly rejects the idea that the Chinese success

is caused by flexibility and pragmatism notes that there is no “Beijing Consensus” because neither in Beijing nor internationally there is a consensus on the fundamental reasons for the PRC’s achievements.

All this indicates that on empirical grounds the existence of a “China model” is at least doubtful. Given the size, the diversity and the fragmentation of the country, the possibility of a “one size fits all” model to rule China not to mention its transferability to other countries can be questioned for good reason. The PRC’s rise is accompanied by a gradual reform process based on different local experiments causing divergences instead of a clear-cut “model”. Hence, none of the proposed “China models” is able to convincingly explain and justify China’s (foreign) policy summarizing it into an alternative political order. Shouldn’t we better stop to talk about a “China model”?

Maybe, but we cannot end researching it because apart from all signs indicating that there is not such a thing as a unitary “China model” or “Beijing Consensus” both terms do not disappear from the public and academic debates and have been finally picked up in China itself as well. Obviously, there exists a strong “demand” for a “China model” both internationally and domestically which keeps the whole idea alive and politically relevant. In the following lines, I first summarize why and how other (mostly but not exclusively authoritarian) states have an active interest in the persistence of a “China model”. I then turn to domestic discussions on related issues covering concepts brought forward by the CCP, Chinese international relations scholars (academics), and publicists (discussed in the general Chinese public):

As I have briefly discussed in the introduction, authoritarian developing countries welcome the existence of an alternative path to development that does not draw on economic and political liberalization *pe se* (Callick, 2007; Halper, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2007; Lyman, 2005; Thompson, 2005). Furthermore, China undermines established principles of good governance by providing lending and investment without political conditions in contrast to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Alden, 2005). Notably, interest in China’s rise and how it achieved it is not limited to small autocracies (Kurlantzick, 2013, pp. 129-134): The African National Congress (ANC), South Africa’s ruling party, has built up a cooperation with China’s CCP including regular inter-party workshops which provide ANC party officials the opportunity to learn from their Chinese counterpart (Zhong, 2012).

Domestically within China an increasing search for a “genuine Chinese idea” of politics which the PRC could deliver to the world is clearly visible as well. In recent years, the Chinese leadership has developed several concepts to comprehensively explain and justify its (foreign) policy for the sake of enhancing its global soft power. Furthermore, in times of decreasing economic growth rates, the CCP has put even more efforts into portraying itself as the actor who has ended China’s “century of humiliation” and is about to lead it to a world power and admired civilization. Hence, strengthening China’s soft power and providing an acknowledged admirable model of development might not only fuel the national pride and nationalism in China but substitute the shrinking output legitimacy of the one-party regime (Burton, 2008). Signs of a state’s rising international importance are something every leadership likes to see. But China’s power-conscious leader Xi Jinping who keeps emphasizing national rejuvenation and the “Chinese Dream” seems to be particularly amenable to it (Lam, 2015). Consequently, China has picked up the idea of a “China model” after initial irritation for domestic reasons: The international talking about a “China model” and “Beijing Consensus” symbolizes the country’s success under CCP-rule.

In order to enhance the PRC’s soft power, many different actors have started to search for a unitary and unifying concept of Chinese policy-making and political order. Different and competing concepts were

invented by a wide range of actors: Most prominently, the CCP has put forward a number of concepts that aim to comprehensively explain China's (foreign) policy by asserting basic normative beliefs and world-views. These concepts include socialism with Chinese characteristics, the harmonious world (complementing the domestic harmonious society), peaceful development/peaceful rise, and most recently the Chinese Dream. These concepts are a clear sign that China wants to normatively place itself on the world stage (Callahan, 2011, pp. 256-258).

Secondly, Chinese academics have introduced their own "Chinese" ideas of politics as well. For example, Chinese IR scholars have come up with several suggestions for a "Chinese school of IR Theory", most prominently the Tsinghua School of Thought led by Yan Xuetong (2011), the relational approach of Qin Yaqing (2011) and the philosophical work of Zhao Tingyang (2009).

Third and finally, both political and academic discourses resonate in the wider public as well including a number of books discussing how China should reorder the world (Callahan, 2013; Wang, 2010; Zhang, 2011).

In sum, although there is only very little reason to believe that Chinese policies have followed in the past and will be directed by a one size fits all model in the future, the very idea remains politically influential. Literature on the "China model" has rightly emphasized the importance of pragmatism for China's immense successes, but parts of this literature have overlooked that this makes it impossible to transfer China's experiences in form of a "model" to other (developing) countries. The reason that terms such as "China model", "Beijing Consensus" and "Chinese School of International Relations" remain virulent, lies in the fact that they reflect both the factual growth of Chinese influence and its desire to increase its soft power. At the same time, this symbol of national strength helps to legitimize CCP-rule domestically. Summarizing both developing country leaders' interest in the "China model" as well as perspectives in several domestic discourse arenas including CCP-led official discourse, academic discussions and the wider public discourse, I found that both autocratic leaders in developing countries as well as China's ruling CCP have a political interest in the existence of a "China model": While it offers an alternative to liberalization for autocracies around the world, it helps to enhance China's rise in general and its soft power in particular. Furthermore, the international appraisal of China's successes culminating in the search for a "China model" helps the CCP to strengthen its legitimacy based on national pride and nationalism. It is this political interest by both China and autocracies around the world which has helped to sustain the term "China model". But if the PRC propagates a guiding vision and idea which does not at all conform to its own development and policies, it is rather unlikely to be a successful framework. Hence, discourses have to be based on empirical evidence in order to be successful in the long-run.

Until this day, the search for and political interest in finding a "China model" remains politically influential. It shapes mostly but not exclusively developmental policies and provides a legitimizing framework for policies that are not in accordance with the liberalization proposed by the "West". In a nutshell, the "China model" discourse shapes political perceptions by providing a discursive frame that cognitively structures experiences and directs political actions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Theoretically, this argument draws on the sociological theory of framing introduced by Ervin Goffman: Frames are "schemata of interpretation" which "locate, perceive, identify, and label" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21) events in people's life and in the whole world and hence provide a context and framework for understanding the world and given political decisions. Frames are not "God-given" but are very often introduced for strategic reasons: Tying in with pre-existing norms as well as symbols and rites, frames are promoted to change peoples' perception of a given political situation and motivate them to support certain policies (Benford & Snow, 2000, pp. 613-614). At the same time, research has demonstrated that frames are more likely to gain wide acceptance when they are congruent with the "material reality" (Benford & Snow, 2000; Rochford, Benford, & Snow, 1986).

All this implies two important conclusions for future research on China's impact on the international political order: Firstly, it is worth studying the phenomenon of the "China model" discourse further though it is unlikely that a one size fits all model can be extracted from Chinese (foreign) policy-making. Secondly, this research has not only to pay attention to (foreign) policy decision-making in terms of processes and results but its relations to foreign and domestic discourses on a "Chinese idea" of political order and decision-making. This attempt is very complex especially because of two reasons:

Firstly, the relationship of discourses and practices of (foreign) policy-making in China is a particular one. While in most countries, general statements are easily discussed but the details and implementation of it lack far behind, the PRC appears to be the complete opposite at least when it comes to sensitive issues concerning the political order. While the Chinese leaders act very pragmatically and flexible to tackle core challenges they are less willing to discuss the implications of these actions more generally.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, China is not only a huge country in terms of surface and population but also very diverse and fragmented. Hence, the PRC's pragmatic and flexible behavior is carried out by a complex and fragmented polity lacking clear-cut responsibilities and competences and making an already very opaque polity even more a complex "black box".

Both of these factors hamper not only the emergence of a clear-cut unitary "model" which the PRC seem to aim at, it also makes it particularly challenging to understand how China politically "works". Hence, the rest of this conceptual paper is devoted to the question how to deal with these challenges.

### **Unifying Idea Wanted: Where Shall We Search for the China Model?**

The search of a "Chinese idea" of political order has resulted in a wide range of proposals; I have mentioned some of them in the previous paragraph. However, these discourses are very diverse, most of them vague and imprecise and cannot reason the complexity and diversity of Chinese (foreign) policy-making. As to their diversity, for example, the academic discourse within the Chinese IR community: In the three above mentioned approaches, the visions of a Chinese world order based on Confucian writings differ enormously. Yan arrives at a power-focused, neo-realist inspired theory, Qin's writing is constructivist and claims it has extracted a relation-based approach to IR from the Chinese tradition while Zhao's work is explicitly normative. There is nothing wrong with such plurality but all these differences point to the openness of any endeavor following a Confucian path nowadays. Therefore I agree with Qin's (2010) conclusion that there is no unifying "theoretical core" of "Chinese" IR (pp. 39-41).

As of the concepts of openness and vagueness, consider the case of the CCP's "socialism with Chinese characteristics" as some kind of a state "ideology" ever since its introduction by Deng Xiaoping: While itself a product of change from more dogmatic, ideology-driven policies under Mao Zedong, the very concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics itself has changed over time and was adapted to the changing concerns and goals of the CCP leadership. Although Mao had already identified a need to "sinicize" Marxist thought (Dirlik, 2005, p. 78; Mao, 1940, p. XV), the term socialism with Chinese characteristics is a further renunciation of dogmatic ideology, explicitly calling for an adaptation to the constantly changing Chinese circumstances on the ground (Deng, 1994, p. 99). This is even literally embodied in the notion of "Chinese characteristics".

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<sup>4</sup> Author's interview with a Hong Kong-based IR scholar studying China's security policy in the Asia-Pacific. Hong Kong, 2015-06-26.

Finally, all these discursive concepts are “demand”-driven insofar as they respond to China’s desire for a strengthened soft power and consolidation of CCP rule. Consequently, many publicists are explicit about the fact that they aim at contributing to China’s rise (Zhang, 2011, ch. 1). Moreover, Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream is clearly a response to both an international and domestic demand: It is no accident that the Chinese Dream picks up the same speech figure as the American Dream relating but also distinguishing the former from the latter one (Xinhua, 2014). However, the term Chinese Dream has its roots in the domestic societal discussions within the PRC as well. Several well-known books in China (Liu, 2010; P. Liu, 2012; Wang, 2010; Xiang, 2010) drew on the concept as well as the famous blogger Han Han who used the term to criticize the current societal circumstances in the PRC in early 2012 before the phrase was mentioned by Xi Jinping in his speeches (Callahan, 2013, p. 5).

This points to the fact that the Chinese Dream had not been invented by the CCP or Xi Jinping but was “high jacked” from international and domestic Chinese debates. This also implies that the leadership needs to engage into the public debate because the Chinese Dream is a phrase that is associated with certain sources and discussions already and is thus not an “empty” phrase. If Xi wants to promote his own though vague definition of it the CCP leadership has to push through its own interpretation of the Chinese Dream discursively.

In light of the vagueness and plurality of concepts and actors involved in the debates, a mapping of the discussions seems to be most valuable in order to grasp the plurality highlighting commonalities and differences as well as mutual influences of discussions, actors and concepts on one another.

However, the core challenge of all these approaches is that they search for a unitary idea and cannot explain the inconsistencies and diversity of Chinese (foreign) policy-making. Consider the case of state sovereignty as a crucial example: On the one hand, China increasingly accepts to limit its state sovereignty participating in multilateral institutions for example by accessing the Bretton-Woods-Institutions, especially the World Trade Organization (WTO) which includes the recognition of the WTO dispute settlement body that has already interfered massively into China’s sovereign rights (Manjiao, 2012). Additionally, China has agreed to grant Hong Kong far-reaching autonomy under the principle of “one country, two systems” which explicitly accepts that there is not one system governing the whole of China (HKSAR Government, 1984, 1997). Another example is the PRC’s general consent to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P, T. Liu, 2012) and its willingness not to veto UN Security Council Resolution 1973 which legalized NATO’s involvement in the Libya war in 2011.

On the other hand, the PRC clearly rejects in its general statements any compromising of the sovereignty principle and a weakening of states in world affairs (China, 2011; Hu, 2007). By providing loans to African states without any political constraints (Alden, 2005), China undermines the IMF’s attempt to promote good governance principles interfering into sovereign rights of states. Additionally, China’s willingness to support and participate in international institutions is limited. Although the PRC joins more and more international institutions, it does not agree to the erosion of the consensus principle in these institutions (Aris, 2011). Finally, with regard to the R2P, China has clearly rejected any attempt to apply the R2P principle in the Syrian war similar to the Libyan case (Qu, 2012).

All these examples demonstrate that China’s foreign policy remains inconsistent with regards to the role and importance of state sovereignty: Sometimes the PRC guarantees the continuance of sovereignty and non-intervention; in other cases China commits itself to international institutions (including a partial loss of its sovereignty) or agrees not to prevent international institutions from intervening into the sovereignty of other

states (Carlson, 2005). This is not to say that China might not have good reasons for such diversity, but it makes it difficult to identify a clear-cut “China model”.

In this context, a strand of literature is worth mentioning which I term “fragmentation literature”. This strand of literature does not perceive the Chinese state as a unitary actor explaining the mentioned “inconsistencies” of Chinese foreign policy with the fragmentation, decentralization and trans-nationalization of the PRC’s polity (Hameiri & Jones, forthcoming). In times of globalization, the role of the state has started to change ever since the late 1970s which included processes of privatization and deregulation (Harvey, 2005) basically transforming the “Westphalian” state characterized by “command and control” to more “regulatory” functions (Majone, 1994). This development provided more room for private and decentralized actors to maneuver (Leibfried & Zürn, 2006).

Although the PRC is less affected by this trend compared to the “West” these developments have enormous impact on China as well because the country is engaged into the process of globalization. In fact, processes of experimentation, decentralization and economic trans-nationalization have left China’s central state basically with a regulatory function. Very often, Beijing finds it hard to coordinate many different domestic actors’ behavior, both state and private ones. China’s economic and trade relations with other countries have additionally led many different actors, including SOEs and local state agencies, to follow their own interests and stakes in foreign policy, even if they are contradictory to the ones of other PRC state actors (Li, 2014). Hence, the societal pluralization as well as the increased interdependence have led to the emergence of a cacophony of voices in Chinese foreign policy-making with many influential actors and interest groups. Economic actors have gained leverage and decentralization strengthened local and regional state agencies. China’s national interest is thus defined very differently and depends to a large extent on individual interests of diverse actors (Hameiri & Jones, forthcoming) including several CCP institutions (Standing Committee, Leading Small Groups, Policy Research Office, General Office, International Department etc.), central government agencies (different ministries, the central bank, National Development and Reform Commission etc.), the People’s Liberation Army, trans-nationally acting SOEs, local government agencies, research institutions, media and the general public, most notably China’s netizens (Jakobson & Knox, 2010). Clearly not all of these different actors shape every (foreign) policy decision. But they have risen to importance in many processes of decision-making.

From the perspective of the “fragmentation literature” this diversity and complexity causes the absence of a “China model”. Consider the case of SOEs: Although they formally remain under the control of state agencies, many of them have gained significant independence and the relationship between the state and SOEs is characterized by a complex web of interdependence rather than a clear chain of control (Lardy, 2014).

Hence, the diversity of actors goes along with a great variety of interests and perspectives which all manifest in some but not all (foreign) policy decisions taken by the PRC. The fact that no clear-cut “China model” is emerging out of such diversity can be hardly surprising from the perspective of the “fragmentation literature”. Consequently, the “fragmentation literature” tends to neglect the above mentioned discourses and attempts to find a unitary Chinese model of political order.

Although I value the findings of this “fragmentation” literature, I believe that the discourses aimed at a unitary “Chinese” idea that the PRC can offer to the world are a significant political process which should not be neglected a priori. In other words, it is necessary to think the fragmented polity and the attempt to find a unifying framework together. In this context, I propose to carry out research that analyzes possible relations and



influences of discourses and decision-making processes. In essence, four core questions have to be researched:

(1) To what extent do the different discourses aiming at a unitary idea of Chinese political order shape Chinese (foreign) policy-making?

(2) Under which circumstances and to which degree do the fragmented polity and China's pragmatic approach prevent a "Chinese" unitary "idea" of political order to materialize in Chinese policy decision-making?

(3) How does the central state perceive and respond to the processes of decentralization, fragmentation and transnationalization? Is the fragmented character of China's polity as well as its pragmatism reflected in the Chinese discourse aiming at a unitary "idea" of a genuine Chinese political order and if yes, in which ways?

(4) How are these discourses perceived by different influential foreign policy actors? Do discursive concepts constrain or influence actors below the national level? Are the different actors basically interpreting the overall framework and if yes, how do they do it very differently?

In sum, I argue that analyzing concrete case studies with these four questions in mind is much more promising when we research China's normative impact on the future international order than sticking to either only the "fragmentation" approach or continuing the search for a "China model" by pointing out the "lowest common denominator" of Chinese policies and discourses.

### Conclusion

This article engages with China's impact on the future international political order. I have argued that we should continue to systematically analyze both discourses on a "China model" and practices of Chinese (foreign) policy decision-making even though the emergence of a "one size fits all" model is not likely to be detected given China's size, diversity, complexity and its fragmented polity as well as the guiding pragmatism of decision-making. However, since there is a strong "demand" domestically and internationally for such a "China model" the discourse will not disappear any time soon. Consequently, the idea of a "China model" will remain politically influential regardless of its shaky empirical grounds. This does not mean that the empirical validity of a "China model" is without any impact for its success and political influence. To the contrary, framing theory clearly points out that the successful framing of political issues largely (but not exclusively) depends on its empirical credibility and consistency.

Therefore, I suggest not to focus exclusively on either "China model" discourses or practices of Chinese foreign policy-making but to analyze the interplay of a fragmented polity accompanied with China's experimental and pragmatic policy-making and the discourses aiming at a unifying or unitary "idea" of a "genuine" Chinese political order.<sup>5</sup> Such a shift of the research focus would raise the question how elements of fragmentation and unification which both exist in contemporary Chinese policy-making and discourse influence one another: What are the limits of both fragmentation and unification trends? How are both of them made compatible?

The goal of such research is to seek general patterns of the interplay between unifying and fragmenting tendencies in China's current foreign policy-making and its consequences for the future political order. Consequently, I do not opt for inventing a new "China model" but at explaining and understanding the dynamics of discourses and practices between different actors. Ever since all research may become politically

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<sup>5</sup> It might be worth to carry out similar research on other "rising" or "re-emerging" powers because my claim needs not be limited to the Chinese polity.

influential, such analysis may or may not contribute to the emergence of a new “China model” in the future. In other words, political science has always the potential to become politically influential. However, future research on the “China model” should not be inspired by the “demand” for such a model and try to satisfy it but reflect upon it.

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