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# Interpreting and Understanding “The Chinese Dream” in a Holistic Nexus

Xing Li<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** The paper intends to provide a framework for bringing about and understanding the most important and key dimensions of the Chinese Dream in a historical, sociocultural, sociopolitical and global nexus. It represents a part of global efforts to describe and interpret the holistic nature of the Chinese Dream concept both as an internal and external policy statement and as a new vocabulary in international relations lexicon. The paper seeks to deconstruct and demystify the implicit and explicit essence of the Chinese Dream concept in enlightening and critical ways at the time when China’s developments and transformations are still undergoing and moving forward.

**Keywords** Chinese Dream · National rejuvenation · Hegemony · World order

“革命尚未成功，同志仍需努力。”

“The revolution has not yet succeeded, and comrades need to make continuous effort.”

Sun Yatsen

“中国人民从此站立起来啦!”, “社会主义才能救中国.”

“The Chinese People have stood up!” “Only socialism can save China.”

Mao Zedong

“不管白猫黑猫，抓住老鼠 好猫.”

“Black cat, white cat, it is a good cat as long as it catches mice.”

Deng Xiaoping

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“实现中华民族伟大复兴，就是中华民族近代以来最伟大梦想。”

“To realize national rejuvenation is the greatest dream of the Chinese nation.”

Xi Jinping

## 1 Introduction: Chasing the Chinese Dream

Soon after the conclusion of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012, President Xi Jinping put forward, for the first time, the idea of the “Chinese Dream” on a visit to the exhibition “The Road towards Renewal” at the National Museum of China. During the visit, the President claimed that the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation “is a dream of the whole nation, as well as of every individual.” In March 2013, President Xi Jinping further elaborated on the Chinese Dream in his speech at the closing ceremony of the First Session of the 12th National People’s Congress. Since then, the concept and the phrase “the Chinese Dream” have been widely circulated and cited as well as further articulated by the President himself and different scholars and media. The core ideas and implications behind the “Chinese Dream” concept can be summarized into the following aspects:

- Straightforwardly, the concept of the Chinese Dream refers to the great historical *rejuvenation* of the Chinese nation. It embodies prosperity for the country, historical renewal of the nation and happiness for the citizens. The concept implies that Chinese people who live at this great time have the opportunity to enjoy a successful life, to realize one’s dream and to grow and progress together with the country.
- The underlined essence of the concept means the dream of Chinese people, and it covers a whole range of aspects including better education, stable employment, decent incomes, social security, improved medical and health care, improved housing conditions and a better environment. That is, to let Chinese young generations grow up well, have satisfactory jobs and live better lives.
- The concept is claimed to have universal relevance. The Chinese Dream is a dream of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit for all. It is connected to the beautiful dreams of the people in other countries. The Chinese Dream will not only benefit the Chinese people, but also people of all countries in the world.
- The notion of the Chinese Dream surely takes some inspirations from the “American Dream,” an established global icon. The former is not intended to replace the latter. Although they differ from each other in a number of comparative perspectives, they are both based on the premise of global development and world peace, and so the two Dreams are complementary and cooperative.
- The Chinese Dream is seen as being derived from and based on three sources of confidence: a socialist development path with Chinese characteristics; a socialist theoretical system with Chinese characteristics; and a socialist sociopolitical system with Chinese characteristics. These characteristics are safeguarded and

maintained by the Chinese Communist Party, who is the leader and driver of the realization of the Chinese Dream.

There is no dispute in viewing the Chinese Dream as an internal and external policy statement by President Xi Jinping. However, when this concept was dissected globally by world media, it constantly remained elusive and oblique. What does it mean? What does it comprise? What are the historical, sociopolitical and socioeconomic and sociocultural dimensions of the concept? Is the Chinese Dream an ideal or a dream? To a certain extent, “ideal” and “dream” overlap in terms of meaning, both referring to the pursuit of a better result. However, ideal can be both clearly described and sensed, whereas dream can be sensed, but not easily explained in words because of its contextual complexities. Likewise, the concept of the Chinese Dream needs a holistic description not only due to its contextual richness but also because of the concept’s time spectrum crossing the past, the present and the future:

Today’s Chinese Dream is a rich, multifaceted concept, a complex, yet definite idea. It embraces Chinese politics, Chinese philosophy, Chinese culture, the concerns of modern Chinese society; it includes Chinese history and the collective memory of the Chinese people, especially the memories of both the difficult times and Liberation experienced in the modern era. It is a vivid representation of the immediate experience and the real lives of the people, of development and social transformation. It embodies China’s development goals, national consensus, future prospects and plans for the way ahead. It is a condensation of Chinese thought, spirit and wisdom. It embraces the economic, political, cultural, social and ecological aspects of China’s modern civilization.

(*Civilization* 2013, p. 11)

No matter how one chooses to describe and interpret the holistic nature of the Chinese Dream concept, the connotation of the word “dream” implies the symptoms of obscure dreams, that is “the dreamers want change, while unable to pinpoint exactly what they really want, or not knowing how they could make a worthwhile change” (Zhao 2014, p. 128). Recently, the concept of the “Chinese Dream” has become a new vocabulary in international relations lexicon, a concept with profound meanings that the whole world, including China itself, is trying to deconstruct and demystify. A Dutch online platform for commentaries on international relations neatly summarizes the implicit and explicit essence of the Chinese Dream concept in relation to the external world:

The Chinese Dream refers to China’s main aspiration after its rise, which goes beyond modernization or rejuvenation. The essence of the Chinese Dream is a desire not to be westernized (Americanized) in a Chinese way, but rather for China to aspire to be itself (Sinicized) in an inclusive way.

The Chinese Dream is from China, but it belongs to the world (‘of China’). It is not only the Chinese people who should enjoy the dream, but is also for the rest of the world to enjoy. The Chinese Dream is also to be achieved in a

Chinese way ('by China'). And while it is for the Chinese people, the Chinese nation and the Chinese civilization ('for China'), its results will also benefit the rest of the world.

(*Clingendael Asia Forum* 2013, July 16)

For the Western world, the rise of China and the Chinese Dream is received and perceived with a mixture of goodwill, suspicion, distrust and wait-and-see attitude. Helen H. Wang, a China-born author, who used the term "the Chinese Dream" in her book (Wang 2010) earlier than President Xi's official application of the "Chinese Dream" concept, shows readers a great deal of optimism about China's future in which a burgeoning middle, the rise of consumerism, and a new class of upwardly mobile young people are beginning to drive China toward a new and safer world for all.

However, such optimism is perhaps not shared by Western mainstream IR and IPE scholars and opinion-makers. One of the central deep-seated questions is whether the Chinese Dream, despite its well-formulated content and goodwill spirit, is to be realized in the capacity of a reformer or that of a challenger or both under the existing world order. In other words, the unanswered question, perhaps unanswerable, is whether China intends to remain a *status quo* power accepting the world as it is, or become a *revisionist* power aiming to remodel the global order.

The search for answers to the above question triggers the flourishing of literature around the themes of China rise by worldwide academia and media. China-centered literature is extremely diversified and polarized, ranging from "China opportunity" and "China challenge" (Bergsten 2008; Dyer 2014; Kynge 2007; Wang 2007; Yee 2013) to "China threat" (Gertz 2002; Jacques 2012; Mearsheimer 2006, 2010, 2014) and "China superpower," "Chinese century" (Fishman 2006; Shenkar 2005; Shambaugh 2013; Shirk 2008) to "China collapse" (Chang 2001; Gorrie 2013). Some of the literature, especially the literature that is driven by "China threat" hysteria, is embedded with "China syndrome"—a phenomenon of hysteria that can be characterized by a mixture of psychological anxiety, emotional panic and emphatic demonization. In the past three decades, either fascination or irritation with China has influenced Western scholarship and journalism, which often produce abrupt sentiments ranging from excessive approval and unqualified optimism to unwarranted revulsion and deep pessimism. Therefore, it is both necessary and imperative to promote a holistic framework for understanding the Chinese Dream in the nexus between the rise of China and the existing capitalist world system, between the opportunities and challenges brought about by China's upsurge and between its internal constraints and its external responses (Li 2010a, 2014; Li and Christensen 2012; Li and Bertelsen 2013; Li and Farah 2013).

Inside China, there has been strong publicity and a campaign to "chase the Chinese Dream" in recent years. There has been a dramatic increase in the application of the "Chinese Dream" in its foreign language media coverage (See Fig. 1, right, *The Economist* May 4, 2013). There has also been an emergence of a variety of Chinese books on the Chinese Dream topics (see Fig. 1, left). The China-based English journal—*Journal of Chinese Political Science*—published a special issue in 2014 on the theme of the Chinese Dream. It marked a major step to invite



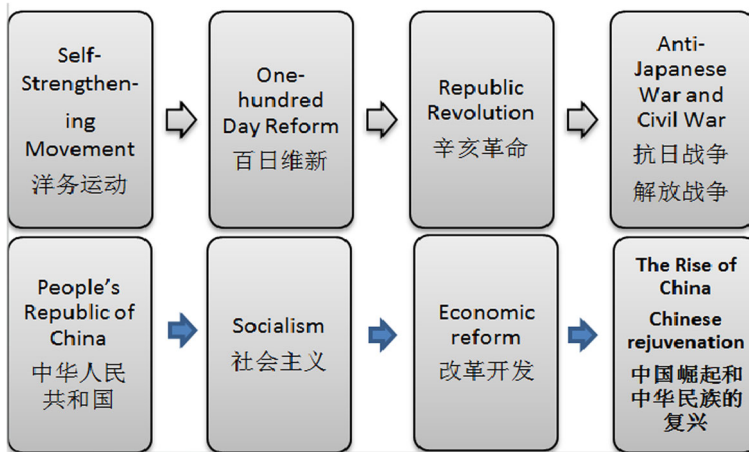
(The Economist, 2013, May 4<sup>th</sup>)

**Fig. 1** Upsurge of Chinese language publications on the Chinese Dream

foreign as well as overseas Chinese academics to join the exploration of the Chinese Dream. Among the different papers with different analytical views in this special issue, Wang Zheng explores the nexus between the Chinese Dream with China's historical trajectory and identity and with legitimacy, master narrative and domestic politics (Wang 2014). Mahoney sees the Chinese Dream “as a discourse that is historically and politically situated and contextualized within a number of other ongoing narratives and policies in China,” and the understanding of the Chinese Dream can only be achieved through “an exercise of political hermeneutics” (Mahoney 2014, p. 15). Zheng Shiping interprets the Chinese Dream as the rising national conference about China's current position and China's future through assessing China's overall performance in comparison with a number of developed and developing countries (Zheng 2014). Is the Chinese Dream understood and shared both inside and outside China? It also raises an array of questions: “Whose dream is the Chinese Dream?”, “Is there only one dream or several different dreams?” “Is the Chinese Dream an individual project, or an elite project or a collective project?” and “How does the Chinese Dream compare with, for instance, the European Dream and American Dream?” Li and Shaw see the Chinese Dream and the existing US-led world order as “sleeping in the same bed with different dreams,” and now both of them are in a “riding-tiger” dilemma reflected by their complicated and complex relationship (Li and Shaw 2014).

## 2 Historical and Political Nostalgia

Although the notion of the “Chinese Dream” is becoming popularized nowadays, especially when the Chinese President is personally propagating it nationwide and worldwide, it can be argued that the historical legacy of the concept started already in the late nineteenth century when the “Middle Kingdom” fell gracelessly in front of the military muscles of European invaders. The cultural and historical nostalgia underneath the Chinese Dream has been the source of driving forces for generations of Chinese revolutionary pioneers to make China return to its glorious past. Therefore, the concept has often been used as a mobilization tool for political

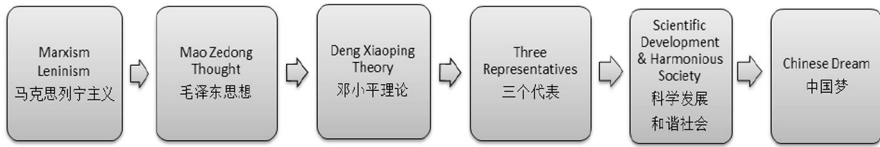


**Fig. 2** Major historical periods of great sociopolitical transformations in China's contemporary history

projects, and the “national humiliation” discourse has been embedded as an integral part of the political projects for nation building and identity construction (Wang 2014).

In the twentieth century, China has undergone more dramatic and fundamental changes than any other country in the world (Fig. 2). If one could travel 175 years into the past, one would witness how Chinese civilization, one of world's oldest and most advanced, fell disgracefully in the wake of Western gunboat expansion. The Chinese empire was shamefully defeated in the Opium Wars of 1840–1842, and as a consequence, Hong Kong was leased to the British. If one could travel 125 years into the past, one would see how China faced another deadly downfall after its deadly defeat by the Japanese navel, and as a consequence, Taiwan was turned into a Japanese colony. About 104 years ago, the Republic Revolution marked the end of China's imperial rule, but the country was soon disintegrated into warlordism. About 66 years ago, we could witness the victory of the Chinese Communist revolution and the start of an independent and self-reliant socialist development path. About 37 years ago, the world was impressed by the dramatic shift of China from Maoist “collective socialism” to Dengist “market socialism.” Today, we are seeing a China that is perceived both as an “economic opportunity” and as a “security threat” in the world order.

Never before in its historical trajectory has the Chinese society been so radically transformed within such a short spectrum (Fig. 3). Politically, the Chinese state and society transformed from a regional core “middle kingdom” to a periphery country, from an imperial monarchy of multiethnicity to a short-lived republic of quasi-nationalism, and from a disintegrated and decentralized warlordism to a centralized revolutionary socialist state. Economically, China jumped from an agrarian state directly to a socialist planned economy and then returned to a market economy after an all-round structural reform. Hence, the country experienced repeated shifts from crisis and failure to very rapid growth and industrialization. Ideologically, the



**Fig. 3** Guiding political ideologies and theories in contemporary Chinese history

Chinese value systems underwent dramatic transformations from feudalism to socialism, from Marxism to capitalism and from collectivism to individualism.

After half a century’s revolution and struggle, Mao and his generation reached the conclusion that China’s development and the welfare of the Chinese people could best be achieved by pursuing a united and collective socialist strategy, which was able to protect national sovereignty and interest in the hostile US-led capitalist world order. What was particularly remarkable with regard to the success of the Chinese revolution in founding a new China in 1949, and in experimenting with Chinese socialism during 1949–1976 was the effect of a great leap forward in transforming China from a semifeudal and semicolonial society into a modern independent power within a very short period of time despite heavy human sacrifice, periodical policy failures, and socioeconomic and socio-political dislocations. Even now many developing countries are still struggling in their search for a development path in order to achieve a similar “great leap” effect.

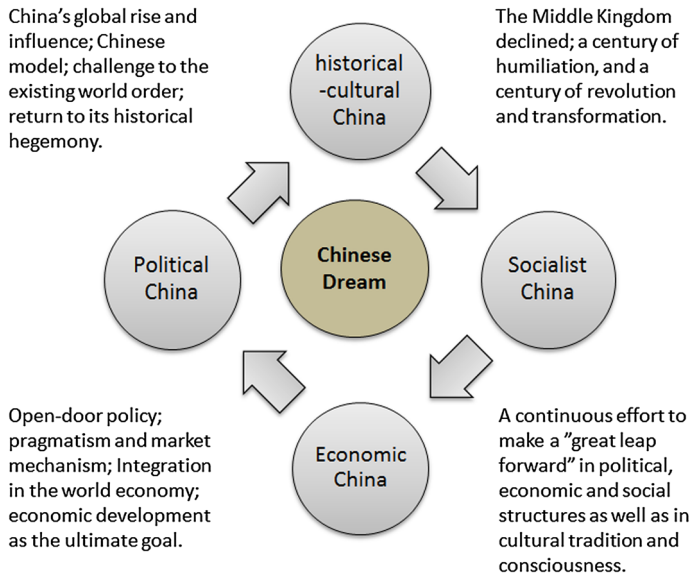
The success of Chinese socialism must be assessed on the basis of grand objectives and overall achievements in human development, equality, welfare and security, balanced development, etc. It is important to postulate that the post-Mao rapid economic growth—actually the undeniable accomplishments of Chinese socialism—laid a solid foundation indispensable to the rapid ongoing economic development. It is largely because of the linkage with rather than the departure from the strong comparative advantages—a solid political, economic and social base—accumulated through the periods of Chinese socialism that the rapid economic development in the past three decades could be realized.

Hence, to study the historical significance of the Chinese Dream, one has to understand the way in which Chinese Marxism, Mao Zedong thought, and socialism emerged and developed, and how their concepts have been elaborated and employed. Similarly, the setbacks and the limits of the Chinese Revolution and Chinese socialism have to be understood from an international geopolitical perspective when comprehending the external constraints on China’s development environment, strategies and alternatives.

### 3 The Four-China Nexus

Therefore, in order to understand the significance of the rich context behind the Chinese Dream one has to place the concept in the context of a holistic approach to understanding China’s transformation and development. One could argue that the Chinese Dream project already started 175 years ago (after the Opium War), during





**Fig. 4** Chinese Dream as an interrupted hegemonic project (This figure is originally derived from the author's introduction to his anthology—*The Rise of China and the Capitalist World Order*)

which the dream has been implemented through a few stages when China was shaped by different values and systems, and different identities and ideologies. These stages left the country with different national memories and legacies: the “historical-cultural China,” the “revolutionary socialist China,” the “economic China” and then the “political China” (Fig. 4).

The historical-cultural China implies the historical greatness and cultural richness of the Chinese civilization, and it also connotes the historical, cultural and political nostalgia that has been constructing and shaping Chinese identities, narratives, memories and worldviews along with a long and difficult reconciliation process with the “century of humiliation” (*Bai Nian Guo Chi* 百年国耻)<sup>1</sup> and “victim mentality” (*shou hai zhe xin tai* 受害者心态)<sup>2</sup> (see Wang 2012). The “revolutionary socialist China” symbolizes contemporary China’s century-long uninterrupted revolutionary struggles for transformations in the midst of great external and internal turbulences; it also represents China’s historically unique

<sup>1</sup> The notion of “century of humiliation” refers to the period between the first Sino-British Opium War (1839) and the end of the Chinese Civil War (1949), during which the political incursion, economic exploitation and military aggression by foreign imperialist countries are regarded as the key external factors that undermined the historical glory of the Chinese civilization and humiliated the Chinese nation.

<sup>2</sup> The notion of “victim mentality” is connected with China’s painful experience of the “century of humiliation” (see note 1 above) during which China had to endure more than 100 years of humiliation at the hands of Western powers and Japan. Ever since then, the Chinese nation continuously feels burdened by this tragic history, which has dominated the Chinese consciousness of its relations with the Western world. It is one of the central factors that instigated Chinese revolutions in the twentieth century, including the communist revolution, and has shaped China’s foreign policy and international relations since the founding the People’s Republic in 1949.

experiment to skip over the stage of capitalism and to bring about a socialist transformation of both the social structure and the consciousness of its people in ways that defied conventional ideological and political norms in established capitalist as well as socialist countries. The “economic China” implies China’s economic reform and integration with the capitalist world system and the dramatic socioeconomic and sociopolitical achievements, which have increasingly made their impact felt worldwide across almost all domains, such as finance, currency, trade, environmental issues, resource management, food security, raw material and commodity prices. Brought about by its global economic impact, the “political China” touches the sensitive but crucial nexus between the rise of China and the existing world order regarding Beijing’s position as a status quo or revisionist power and regarding future world order scenarios—disorder, new order or reorder.

Hence, the understanding of the Chinese Dream can be achieved through analyzing the historical and interactive combination of the four Chinas in a holistic nexus as mutually interdependent entities rather than independent ones. The interconnection of the mutual generation and mutual influence between the four Chinas is the key to understanding the complexities of modern-day China and the underlying dynamics of the impact brought about by the rise of China to the existing world order.

#### 4 An Economic and Political Hegemonic<sup>3</sup> Project

During the last three decades, China’s rapid economic growth began to unleash its worldwide impact ranging from FDI, commodity price, international trade, regional integration, international relations to environment, ecology and energy security. In recent years, Beijing’s economic performance and its policies on finance, currency, trade, security, environmental issues, resource management, food security, raw material and commodity prices are inevitably bearing worldwide implications and are closely linked with the economies of millions of people outside China’s boundaries:

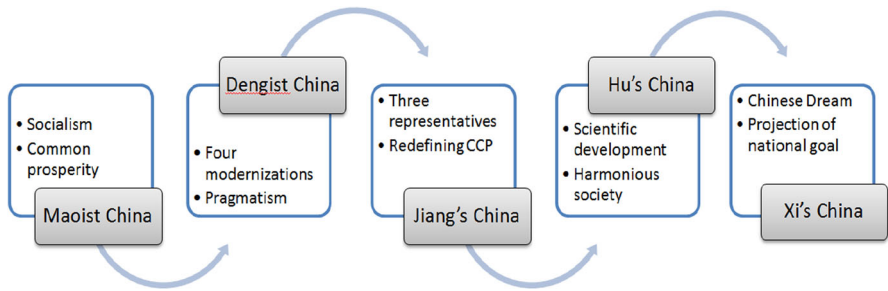
- Being the most populous country and the second largest economy, China’s size and its integration in the world economy has contributed to both opportunities and uncertainties.
- The Chinese currency (yuan) has been a subject of contention regarding whether or not it is undervalued by the state in order to promote China’s export.
- Its trade has raised concerns for workers and firms in both developed and developing countries. China’s competitiveness has put pressure on developed countries while its competition is seen as leading to peripherization of existing semi-periphery countries within the current world system (Li 2008).

<sup>3</sup> The concept of “hegemony” or “hegemonic” is derived from Gramsci (1971). It is one of the essential concepts applied by the Gramscian or Neo-Gramscian theories of politics and international relations. The notion of hegemony has positive connotations referring to “leadership,” “influencing power” and “shaping power” (中文翻译应该是“领导权”, “影响力”和“塑造力”, 而不是中国传统翻译成“霸权”).

- Its demand for energy has led to competition, price rise and conflict. Chinese energy demand has more than doubled during the past decade. Due to its rapid growth and rising share in the world economy, China is expected to retain its critical role in driving global commodity market prices, and its own energy shortage and energy import will unavoidably unleash worldwide impact on energy security (Li and Bertelsen 2013). China's shifts in supply and demand can cause changes in prices, hence leading to adjustments in other countries
- Having the world's largest foreign reserve, China's foreign aid, investment and development projects, especially in Africa and other developing regions, have made the effects felt across the world.
- China's environmental degradation has become a global concern.
- China's relationship with the world's remaining superpower USA has been unstable. It has difficult relationships with its East and Southeast Asian neighbors due to a number of territorial disputes. East and Southeast Asia regions are trying to keep a vital but unstable balance between China, their largest trading partner, and the USA, their traditional security guarantor.
- China's rise and its political impact on the existing world order are often demonized by the realist school of Western IR theories to such an alarming extent that China, as a rising hegemon, is perceived to have an intention of establishing a "Sinicized" world order (a world order with Chinese characteristics), especially in East Asia (Mearsheimer 2006, 2010). The argument behind this perception is that China's development "has the potential to fundamentally alter the architecture of the international system" (Mearsheimer 2014).

To describe the Chinese Dream as an economic and political hegemonic project is to see it as an attempt to go beyond the historical and political nostalgia and construct a new hegemony around the concept of "peaceful rise" for "peaceful development" at the levels of language, social relations, economic development, political practice and people's consciousness. "Hegemonic project" implies that the new Chinese government under the leadership of Xi Jinping has started to explore to what extent China can encompass its current internal and external achievements and convert the growing economic power into enduring and resilient political and cultural influence both domestically and internationally. As one leading Chinese academic puts it, "The rise of China is not only economic improvements but also advancements in culture, social system construction and political governance. We hope to prove that our road is accessible and feasible, demonstrating that other nations should be encouraged to find their own suitable paths of development" (Zhou 2014). Such a project involves domains not only at political, economic and ideological levels but also at the levels of ontology and epistemology. For China's new leadership, the struggle to build such a project represents an extremely difficult and complex task in which many obstacles lie on the realm of internal constraints and external challenges.

At the internal level, despite real internal and external achievements following the economic reform program, the consequences and problems of rapid economic growth have also become potentially threatening and destructive. The rapid move from a planned toward a market economy has not only highlighted some old



**Fig. 5** Nexus between national political identity and development policy under the different generations of China's leadership

problems but has created new social uncertainties and potential unrest. The market economy is gradually pulling the whole nation in various directions. No society in the world has undergone the same magnitude of change that China has experienced in the past decade. Various anti-hegemonic sociopolitical forces are emerging and posing serious dangers to the success of such a project, such as political dissidents, Christian pastors, Uighur academics, internet activists, even some of those inside the establishment are corrupting the state and government to the extent that the party-state's ruling foundation is dangerously threatened. Economic growth has amplified the differences between rich and poor in China, and the magnitude of transformations in China has created significant social, cultural and environmental costs.

Ever since Deng Xiaoping's era, the Chinese leadership has debated the meaning of the “Chinese Dream” terminology, its implications, as well as the motivation for introducing this particular slogan. In addressing emerging socioeconomic and sociopolitical problems, each general of Chinese leadership put forward their own unique policy slogan. Compared to previous political slogans, such as “A good cat as long as it catches mice,” “The Three Represents” or “Scientific Development and Harmonious Society,” the current “Chinese Dream” slogan is multilayered, historically encompassing, timely allowing for various interpretations (Fig. 5).

Therefore, the China Dream concept emerged out of a broad and ongoing debate/dispute sparked by a strong sense of crisis that China is facing after more than three decades of economic reform and marketization. Intellectuals from across the ideological and political spectrum, be they liberals, socialists, traditionalists and militarists, are emotionally engaged in what is called “patriotic worrying.” The Chinese Dream can be seen as a new attempt to address the question “In which direction will China go?” and to reconstruct a new hegemony at the levels of language, social relations, politics and practice, societal development, people's consciousness and even morality. The practical implication of the Chinese Dream, argued by some Chinese scholars, is that it is to function as a “national ideology guide,” and “people's behavior goal” as well as “people's rational and conscious relentless pursuit” (Zhang 2015).

At the political and ideological level of international relations and world order, whether or not the rise of China represents a hegemonic project in the form of an alternative development model has been subject to global debate. Despite the

internal and external contradictions and constraints that have followed China's contemporary development path, some scholars do see China as being able to provide an alternative to the existing liberal international order (Breslin 2009). China's experiences of modernization in the past three decades, as a successful catch-up state, are a possible model for others (Spakowski 2009). The Chinese success is moving the global conventional debate from discussing the dichotomy between "development versus democracy" to the dichotomy between "development and governance" (Lai 2015, forthcoming). The "Chinese governance model," perhaps a better term than the "Chinese development model," has been an issue of worldwide debate. It is an undeniable fact that Chinese economic development in the past three decades has been going hand-in-hand with the gradual socioeconomic improvement and with the durability of the Chinese Communist Party, which has been undergoing an uninterrupted process of "passive revolution"<sup>4</sup> (Lai 2015, forthcoming; Li 2010b). In line with Wan's understanding, the uniqueness of the "Chinese model" is precisely due to the lack of a single "modeling" that the Chinese state officially promotes as a unified ideological and institutional set of values and norms, and thus, it is historically and culturally specific (Wan 2014).

The Chinese model, which is often termed "Beijing Consensus," has made many Western leaders, policy-makers and opinion-makers question the universality of their own system. Thomas Friedman, New York Times foreign affairs columnist, openly admits the affectivity of the Chinese political system that "one party can just impose the politically difficult but critically important policies needed to move a society forward in the 21st century" (Friedman 2009). Even John Williamson, one of the main architects of the "Washington Consensus," acknowledged in an essay in 2012 that Beijing Consensus seemed to gain global recognition at the expense of the Washington Consensus (Kurlantzick 2013).

So the question is whether the Chinese Dream entails a global hegemonic project? The Chinese leadership has been reiterating its standing point that, in opposition to the behaviors of the USA and the West, Beijing has no global norm-setting agenda, no intention to impose its values and no intervention policies. However, the Chinese so-called nonintervention foreign policy has been subject to debate and rethinking in recent years, because many of China's "national interests" are inseparably linked with geopolitical and geoeconomic securities of other countries and regions. Nevertheless, due to Washington's reluctant acceptance of an increase in Beijing's voting power in major international financial institutions, China's dramatic increase in FDI and its leading role in setting up the BRICS Bank is a clear indication that "China [is] to reset global financial order with capital" (*China Daily* 2014, November 3) (Fig. 5). The recent establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is being interpreted as a strong move toward "a new rules-based order" (*The Interpreter* 2015, March 17). In line with the world-system's analytical perspectives, some scholars already envisioned more than 10 years ago a Chinese financial order in Asia in order to challenge the US-led

<sup>4</sup> The concept of "passive revolution" is derived from Gramsci (1971). It implies the self-reorganization and self-adjustment capacities of the elite classes, who are able to respond to socioeconomic and sociopolitical crises by making necessary reforms and modifications in order to retain hegemony.

The emergence of a Chinese financial order?		
The BRICS Bank \$100 billion	The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank \$100 billion	The New Silk Road Foundation \$40 billion

**Fig. 6** Emergence of a Chinese alternative of global financial order?

distribution regime (Ikeda 2003, p. 175). Seen from Beijing’s perspective, the Chinese Dream hegemonic project can be viewed as an aim to promote “a democratic international order” as an alternative to the “unipolar hegemony of the Pax Americana” (Breslin 2009, p. 825), in which China should not be only a rule-follower, but should be part of the rule-setters. Some literature in the past years has already begun to discuss the phenomenon in which the rise of emerging powers, particularly China, is leading the world order toward the diffusion of international norms and is shaping the evolution of international norms and institutions (Pu 2012) (Fig. 6).

Does this imply China’s strategic change in its international relations and foreign policy from the previous “keeping a low profile for biding one’s time” (*Tao guang yang hui* 韬光养晦) to “make a difference through proactive engagement” (*You Suo Zuo Wei* 有所作为)? How to understand China’s international strategy manifested by continuity through change (Qin 2014)? While the Western world is obsessed with the ominous scenario—“When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order” (Jacques 2012), China is seeking to convey positive views about its rise to the world through exporting the “Chinese Dream” as the message of its “peace rise” and “peaceful development” and by arguing that China was historically a benign country and not a revisionist state that sought dominance (Christensen and Li 2013). The core message of the Chinese Dream is that China’s rise is not a zero-sum game, but a mutual win-win situation for the rest of the world.

## 5 The Special Issue of the *Fudan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* (FJHSS)

The international workshop—The Chinese Dream(s)—held on November 13–14, 2014, at Aalborg University, Denmark, was jointly organized by the Confucius Institute for Innovation and Learning and the Research Center on Development and International Relations. The workshop symbolized an attempt as part of the global efforts to interpret and bring about several key dimensions of the Chinese Dream in enlightening, interdisciplinary and critical ways.

This special issue aims to put the discussions of the Chinese Dream in a sociocultural, sociopolitical and global context in which China’s developments and

transformations are still ongoing and moving forward. Meanwhile, it also attempts to offer a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives for interpreting the “historicity,” “essence” and “implication” of the Chinese Dream.

The first three articles in this special issue all deal with the implications of the Chinese Dream for China’s overseas aspirations but from very different perspectives. In “Dreaming of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation,” Jyrki Kallio relates the Chinese Dream to a classical Chinese world view and discusses the two upcoming anniversaries—the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party in 2021, and the establishment of the People’s Republic in 2049—as milestones on the path to the realization of the Chinese Dream. In “The Power of Language: Globalizing the ‘Chinese Dream,’” Anny Boc examines how the Dream is constructed and projected to international audiences, with a special focus on Africa where interest in the Chinese Dream has been especially intense. The Chinese Dream is understood as a narrative that is used strategically by the CCP in order to shape perceptions and behavior of other international actors according to their own agenda. Moreover, the dynamic interactions between the media and politics are taken into account in an analysis of how this impinges on the formation and projection of the Chinese Dream and the corresponding African dream narrative.

In the third article “Multilateralism and the realization of Chinese Dream: A Possible Way to Nurture Mutual Trust,” Feng Yuan argues that the key condition for the realization of the Chinese Dream internationally is to maintain a peaceful stable international environment, especially among China’s near neighbors. At the moment, the increasing assertiveness of Chinese foreign policy is creating distrust toward China’s intentions. The article analyzes the historical and political origins of the current mistrust of China and argues that multilateralism could provide a new foundation for repairing the trust deficiency.

The two final articles in this issue both deal with domestic interpretations of the Chinese Dream. In “The Chinese Dream of a More Progressive Welfare State: Progress and Challenges,” Kristian Kongshøj examines the very concrete dreams of achieving a “moderate” or “appropriate” universal welfare state in order to mitigate increasing inequality and the individualization of social risk. The recent waves of social reform all work toward achieving this goal, but major challenges still persist not least due to the rapidly aging population, the hukou system, and the continued difference between urban and rural China. In the final article, “The Chinese Dream: Imagining China,” Ane Bislev places the Chinese Dream in the context of previous political campaigns in China and examines it from the perspective of a framing discourse. Public political campaigns have a long history in China and the public reception of them varies. In this article, various online reactions to the Chinese Dream are analyzed in order to understand how a political framing discourse is transformed through popular usage.

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