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THE DAO IN CHINA'S GROWING PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

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martenhanura@lecturer.undip.ac.id**Submitted: 9 April 2021; accepted: 9 October 2021****Abstrak**

Meningkatnya signifikansi Tiongkok dalam tatanan internasional menjadi salah satu topik menarik di abad 21. Pasca reformasi ekonomi 1978 dibawah pimpinan Deng Xiaoping, Tiongkok menjadi salah satu kekuatan besar dunia dengan pengaruh yang meluas ke hampir seluruh bagian dunia. Salah satu wilayah yang menarik untuk diteliti adalah kawasan Kepulauan Pasifik Selatan karena merupakan wilayah dibawah dominasi Amerika Serikat sebelumnya. Penelitian ini akan berfokus pada 10 negara di Pasifik Selatan yang mengakui Tiongkok yakni, Vanuatu, Cook Island, FSM, Fiji, Niuee, PNG, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Kiribati. Ketika dilihat melalui perspektif dan teori Barat, kebangkitan Tiongkok selalu dilihat sebagai fenomena yang negatif. Penelitian ini kemudian berpendapat bahwa untuk memahami Tiongkok dan perkembangannya, penting untuk mengetahui bagaimana Tiongkok melihat diri mereka. Dengan menggunakan salah satu ajaran tradisional Tiongkok yakni Daoisme, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui strategi apa yang Tiongkok gunakan dalam meningkatkan pengaruhnya di Kepulauan Pasifik Selatan. Daoisme disimbolkan oleh yin dan yang, di mana kedua elemen tersebut berlawanan akan tetapi pada saat yang sama, saling melengkapi satu sama lain. Melalui Daoisme, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa dalam meningkatkan pengaruhnya di Kepulauan Pasifik Selatan, Tiongkok menggunakan kombinasi dua macam strategi yakni hard power dan soft power di saat bersamaan.

Kata kunci:*Kebangkitan Tiongkok, Kepulauan Pasifik Selatan, Konstruktivisme, Daoism, Budaya dalam PLN***Abstract**

The rise of China as one of the great powers in the international politic has been the hottest topic in the 21st century. Following the economic reform led by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China re-emerges stronger than ever with its influences covering major parts of the world. One region particularly stands out since the prior dominance of United States therein, the South Pacific. The study of this research will be limited to 10 PICs recognising China, Vanuatu, Cook Island, FSM, Fiji, Niuee, PNG, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Kiribati. Under the Western International Relations Theory (IRT) however, the rise of China is always seen in a rather malign manner. This research, therefore, contends that in order to fully understand China's behaviour in the international community, we need to know how China perceives itself. By applying one of the most famous Chinese traditional school of thought, Daoism, this research aims to examine the strategy used in the expansion of China's influence in the South Pacific. Daoism is symbolised with yin and yang, where the two elements are contradictory, yet they complement each other. Under the Dao dialectics, this research argues that China has been utilising a combination of two contradictory elements of power—soft and hard power—in expanding its prominence in the South Pacific region.

Keywords:*The rise of China, South Pacific, Constructivism, Daoism, Culture in Foreign Policy*

INTRODUCTION

“China is a sleeping lion. Let her sleep, for when she wakes she will shake the world” – Napoleon Bonaparte

Years after the Cold War ended, China has secured itself a place in the emerging power shelf within the international society. Often perceived as contesting the established power—the United States (U.S.), the rise of China has left everyone in the world on their edge, and it is for a good reason. Up to this date, China is still seen as trying to ‘race’—or at least stood at the same level—with the U.S. In fact, China’s rise is so remarkable that it got involved in competition with the U.S., which results in the worsening of their relations (Arif, 2016). In 2018, Chinese Gross Domestic Product (GDP) went as much as US\$13,608 billion, a US\$1,465 billion increase from the previous year (World Bank, 2019). Not only America, but China has also taken the position of other countries. China successfully replaced Japan in 2010 as the country with the biggest economy. Japan’s GDP which counted for US\$5,474 billion was exceeded by China, with US\$5,879 billion (Ratha & Mahapatra, 2014). Moreover, China is currently leading the world’s economy with the largest both inbound and outbound merchandise shipping. It is no surprise that China is now named to be the world’s second largest economic power (Gough, 2018).

Along with its economic developments, China also demonstrated impressive growth in terms of its influence across the world. In 2013, Xi Jinping cultivated a policy called The Belt and Road Initiatives or One Belt One Road (OBOR). One region that stands out particularly to scholars is the South Pacific since it used to be dominated by the U.S.. China is now believed to be one of the biggest donors right after the U.S. and Australia (Yang, 2009). Some scholars pointed out how the tension between Taipei and Beijing is likely to be China’s real motive in the region. Under the U.S. influences, the Pacific Islands countries supported Taiwan as a sovereign country—a rather sensitive issue for the mainland China. However, with the growing influence of China, countries within the Islands are starting to have a change of stance. In 2019, two of the Pacific Islands countries—the Solomon Islands and Kiribati—bailed on Taiwan and switched over to Beijing, leaving Taipei with only 15 diplomatic partners (Dormido & Jason, 2019).

Seeing how China is setting milestones in different aspect of its rise, the need to understand its behaviour in a different perspective would be understandable. To use theory originated in the Western world would be like trying to put the last puzzle piece to a completely different puzzle. Cox (1981) argued that theory is always for someone and

for some purpose. Mainstream Western international relations theory (IRT) has largely dominated the disciplinary discourse (Yaqing, 2016; Saeputra, 2018). The domination of western IRT was—and still is—so prominent that Acharya and Buzan initiated a project which seeks to address the question of “why is there no non-Western IR theory?” Though IRT may pose itself to be universal, it can also be seen as speaking for the West and in the interest of sustaining its power, prosperity and influence (Acharya & Buzan, 2010). Drawing from Cox’s argument, Asian have an interest in IRT that speak for them and their interest (Acharya & Buzan, 2010). This needs to be done since the Global South are in nature different than western countries (Saeputra, 2018). In the realist argument, China is always perceived as a threat. This is a simple example of how the use of western IRT more often than not, represents no one but the West. The conventional Western-centred IRT is both too narrow in its source and too dominant in its influence to be good for the health of the wider project to understand the social world in which we live (Acharya & Buzan, 2010).

Against this specific background, this writing will attempt to examine Chinese growth and how it successfully positioned itself within the international structure using a perspective coming from none other than China. Specifically, Daoism as one of the most prominent philosophical traditions in China will be implemented with the hope that the way China behaves and exercises its influence throughout the world can be better understood. Based on the *yin* and *yang* dialectics derived from Daoism, this research argues that China has been implementing a combination of two contradictory element of power, hard power—as the *yang*—and soft power—the *yin* in expanding its influence to the South Pacific region. This combination is conducted simultaneously, therefore showing the complementary nature of the *yin* and *yang*.

This research will consist of four main parts. It starts by discussing constructivism—as the only IRT that takes intangible elements into account when analysing foreign policy behaviour. Furthermore, it will provide a thorough discussion on how culture is linked to decision-making in foreign policy. The second part will focus on China’s traditional culture and how it shapes China’s foreign policy throughout the years. Finally, the last part of this research will attempt to analyse how China’s traditional culture, specifically Daoism, influence its foreign policy behaviour in the South Pacific region.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Constructivism and Culture in Foreign Policy

Constructivism first emerged in the IRT in early 1990. Its emergence is often associated with materialist scholars failing to provide a materialist reason behind the end of Cold War (Klotz & Audie, 1962). Gorbachev's *new thinking* demanded a constructivist approach to be able to fully understand the cause as to how the Cold War ended (Schultze, 2009). Alexander Wendt, a prominent figure in constructivism, in his book *Social Theory of International Politics* contends that the sudden and unforeseeable ending of Cold War is attributable to the growth of constructivism (Wendt, 1999). Unlike traditional IRTs such as realism, liberalism, and Marxism whose origin come from political discourse, constructivism derives from a social theory. Originally, constructivism is not an IRT, rather it is a sociological theory being applied in international relations.

Ontologically, constructivism emphasis the way norms, identity, ideology, culture and language shape identity and guide actions (Klotz & Audie, 1962). This research, however, will centre on how culture shapes state's foreign policy making. In defining culture, Weber contends that culture is what shapes our view of the world (Weber, 1949). On the behavioural sense of culture, Sapir (1994) stressed that culture appears most apparently in a person's behaviour pattern. Attempt at linking culture and state behaviour first appeared in the "national character studies" of the 1940s and 1950s (Lantis, 2009).

Uemura (2015) proposed a cultural constructivist approach to analyse China's foreign policy behaviour. Under this theory he contends that when state X and state Y interact with each other, they interpret the other's behaviour based on their own cultural rationalities. The same behaviour may produce different interpretation in accordance with their own cultural connotations (Uemura, 2015).

Daoism and Culture in China's Foreign Policy

Among major world players, China's foreign policy carries a cultural identity due to its unique cultural traditions. Post-reform Chinese leaders, from Jiang Zemin onwards, have occasionally cited a Confucian concept in foreign policy statements (Zhang F., 2015). During the 13th National People's Congress in March 2018, Xi Jinping incorporated his thoughts on "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" into the Chinese constitution. In the context of foreign policy, his emphasis on "Chinese Characteristics" implies that his government will conduct its international affairs according to China's

traditional values instead of adopting Western models and principles (Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, 2018).

China, along with its long ancient history, produces multifaceted traditional cultures. These cultures are essentially based on three Chinese primary philosophies namely Confucianism, Taoism (Daoism), and Buddhism. Even before the modern days, Confucianism had been used as the traditional philosophy of the Chinese state (*guo xue*, 国学) under the ruling of Emperor Wu (Lihua, 2013). Not only that, but Daoism has also been gaining popularity in Chinese culture. Buddhism too, at times, has also been officially supported by the state. In modern days, these traditional philosophies are back in demand. This is evident in the growing popularity for classes on traditional Chinese philosophy, with emphasis on Confucianism and Daoism.

One of the core values of China's traditional culture seen in its foreign policy is the concept of harmony or in Chinese, *Hexie* (和谐). The Chinese concept of harmony is a comprehensive ideological system which consists of not only values, but also a philosophy. Furthermore, it offers its own perspective on the world (Lihua, 2013). Specifically, *hexie* encompasses principles such as the *Tai Chi* or *Taiji* (太极) principle and the yin-yang dialectics which influence the way human and the evolution of the society are viewed (Lihua, 2013). This concept of harmony is present in the form of three main ideas:

1. Seek harmony not uniformity

In the world full of diversity, seeking harmony does not equal searching for uniformity, where there should not exist any differences at all. Seeking harmony means being able to unite the universe despite the diversity. Under this idea, differences will not lead to conflicts and contradictions if harmony is achieved. Confucius says,

“The gentleman aims at harmony not uniformity (*junzi he er bu tong*, 君子和而不同).” (Lihua, 2013)

This idea of seeking harmony rather than universality has been applied in shaping China's foreign policy evidenced by its commitment to the principle of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect amidst a *mélange* of differences. Manifestation of this principle can be seen in the adaption of the Five Principles

of Peaceful Coexistence (*he ping gong chu wu xiang yuan ze*, 和平共处五项原则) which consists of: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual nonaggression, noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. These values were first introduced by past Chinese leaders in the 1950s and have been implemented in China's interstate relations ever since.

Former Chinese president, Jiang Zemin, in his visit to America back in 2002 elaborated how seeking harmony not uniformity meant the condition of peacefully coexisting and being able to see past the differences to create a harmonious world. Differences are seen as something complementary and supportive. This view was then exemplified in China's twenty-first century directive of building a harmonious world, Asia, and China's neighbourhood (Lihua, 2013). Moreover, in May 2015 President Hu Jintao presented the concept of 'harmonious world' at a high-level UN meeting (Lihua, 2013).

2. Mutual respect between big and small countries

The fact that China is now one of the world's rising powers does not mean it seeks to be 'worshipped' or glorified. China's *hexie* upholds the belief that bigger states should respect smaller ones and vice versa. In the Tao Te Ching (Dao De Jing 《道德经》) Lao Tse writes:

“What makes a great state is how it is like a low-lying, down-flowing stream; the bigger state becomes the centre that tends to all the small states like the smaller streams flowing to lower streams. The larger rivers and seas are respected by all the streams because of their skill in being lower than the smaller streams. Thus, they are the king. Since the larger stream does not strive to be dominant, the smaller streams and larger rivers and seas work together.”

This idea is formulated into policy of fostering a benign, prosperous, and secure neighbourhood or (*mu lin, fu lin, shan lin*, 睦邻、富邻、善邻). Through this idea, China stresses on sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs.

Moreover, China brands its diplomacy with concepts such as equality, mutual benefit, cooperation, and a positive-sum or win-win.

3. Proper handling of interstate conflicts

Even under the concept of harmony, conflicts are at times, unavoidable. However, harmony posits for conflicts to be handled properly and legally. In non-confrontational ones, conflicts should be handled by peaceful means such as negotiations and diplomacy. In the contrary, in the cases of violent conflicts, counter attacks on the basis of self-defence are justified. This view is expressed in a traditional Chinese saying:

“We will not attack unless we are attacked; we will certainly counterattack if we are attacked (*ren bu fan wo wo bu fan ren, ren ruo fan wo wo bi fan ren, 人不犯我我不犯人, 人若犯我我必犯人*).” (Lihua, 2013)

Under the conception of the word *he* (和), China does not forbid any form of military force and justifies the use of it for self-defence reason since survival is a natural goal for every state (Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, 2018).

In line with China’s conception of harmony is its traditional view of the state of the international world. The *tianxia* theory (天下论, *tianxia lun*) or tianxianism (天下主义, *tianxia zhuyi*) emerged during the quest of searching for “China’s International Relations Theories”. Roughly translated, *tianxia* means “all under heaven.” Deriving from ancient Chinese classic, *tianxia* originally points to the conception of world—literally all under heaven—as governed by authority of the Chinese emperor as the Son of Heaven (天子, *tianzi*). According to this cosmology, Heaven bestowed a mandate to the emperor to rightfully rule the Earth (Puranen, 2019).

Taken into today’s context, the *tianxia* theory posits its own perception of the international world. Chinese scholars defined *tianxiaism* as an ideology that challenges the traditional—Western—international order. The current world order was installed by the Western based on their historically contingent picture and viewpoint of international politics. The Westphalian world order along with its main instruments such as national sovereignty, diplomacy, etc. was enforced, leaving the world with no other option. This world order is also operated based on the “Hobbesian law” where humans are depicted as

inherently evil which in turn normalised—even supported—the ever-lasting competition for survival. Meanwhile, *tianxia* puts emphasis on *oneness* and *worldness* where all nations are under the same ‘heaven’ in a family-ship relations (Zhao, 2019)

In terms of foreign policy, the relationship between *tianxiaism* and the Chinese government is never explicit, yet it is still recognisable. The Chinese government has never openly used the term ‘*tianxiaism*’ nor has it ever made explicit quotes from the theory. However, deeper examinations show implicit references to *tianxianism*. Under Hu Jintao’s presidency (2002-2012) the foreign policy concepts of “harmonious world” (*hexie xejie*) and a “new type of great power relationship” were instituted. Both imply the need for a world order in which political units and civilisations coexist peacefully and respect each other’s unique characters. States, with emphasis on great powers, ought to promote the importance of mutual trust and always seek for a “win-win” in every situation. Furthermore, the concepts also underlined the importance of setting aside the destructive, competitive Cold War mentality inherited by the West (Keith, 2012).

The implications of *tianxiaism* values in China’s foreign policy is also visible in Xi Jinping’s tenure. China’s foreign policy during his administration adapted the concept of “community of common future for mankind” or in Chinese, 人类命运共同体, *renlei mingyun gongtongti* (CCFM). Influenced by this concept, Xi sees that along with globalisation, the international community will only grow closer and that we should let go of antagonism and focus instead on economic and political cooperation. Even though no explicit recognition were made, manifestation of the harmonious *tianxia* can be spotted easily. Moreover, Xi himself has used the *tianxiaism* concept of “all-under-heaven-as-one-family” to describe the CCFM policy (CCTV, 2017). In details, Xi Jinping’s statement implied further the presence of the harmonious *tianxia* concept:

“We believe that despite the differences and contradictions of various countries in the world, there will inevitably be bumps and collisions, but the people of all countries all live under the same blue sky and have the same home, and they should be a family. The people of all countries in the world should uphold the concept of "one family in the world", open their arms, understand each other, seek common ground while reserving differences, and work together to build a community with a shared future for mankind.” (CCTV, 2017)

China's long ancient history offers traditional values that are applicable to modern days. Values such as harmony (*hexie*) and *tianxia* are being rebranded by Chinese government and used as a basis of its foreign policy. Through these principles and values, China is offering the world other point of view, as an alternative to the Western-dominated one. For example, under its current leader, Xi Jinping, China launched the policy of community of common future for mankind, which upholds the principle that the international community live together "all-under-heaven-as family," therefore China is always there to promote win-win cooperation, seek common ground, and set aside differences.

The *tianxia* value stems from Confucian traditions, which accentuate the importance of peace and harmony. On the other hand, Daoism provides a relational basis, as an alternative to the West's dialectics. Confucianism's nature of inclusivity goes along with Daoism since both promote the inclusion of all elements in international relations to reach harmony and peace.

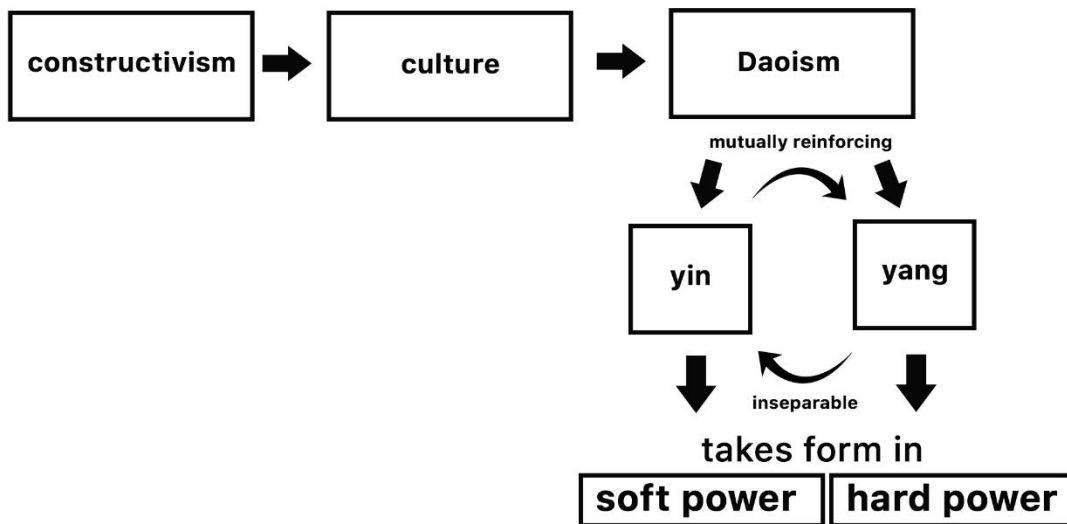
Daoism which dated back as far as 600 BCE, is one of the most prominent Chinese traditional school of thoughts. *Dao* literally means "the Way", "path" and is symbolised with *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are both complimentary and competitive. On the one hand, the two are competing forces or completely opposite of energy which constantly work against each other, however, *yin* and *yang* complement each other since the world basically consists of these two elements (Liu, 2006). The concept of *yin* and *yang* does not mean a simplification of the world as a mere binary, as something good and evil, or light and dark.

Under the Western philosophical traditions, we are familiar with the Hegel's dialectics way of thinking. According to this "master-slave" dialectics, one pole could not exist with the opposite, even with the aims to overthrow or defeat the other. The contradictions between the two polar opposites simply could never reach synthesis (Ling, 2014). Meanwhile, under the Daoist dialectics, one pole exists with the aim to complement the other contradicting pole which in turn produce transformation both internally and externally. In other words, *yin* operates within *yang* and *yang* within *yin* (Ling, 2014). For example, conflict and cooperation are polar opposite, but they both correct each other's weaknesses (Rosyidin, 2019).

Yin refers to qualities associated with the feminine such as cold, weak, accommodating, passive, gentle and soft meanwhile *yang* represents hot, hard, strong, vigorous, firm, aggressive, active and strong. However, this does not imply

that *yang* supersede *yin* in terms of value. Each of those traits bears value depending on the context and circumstances (Ling, 2014). One would not be desiring to be hot, hard, strong in every situation neither to be cold, weak, and soft all the time. Looking from this dialectic, we can always see that this world is always the combination of both elements of *yin* and *yang*. Figure 1 represents how the flow of this study.

Figure 1. Mind map of this research



Source: Processed by the authors.

Compared to the concept of hard power and soft power in international relations, the *yin* and *yang* in Daoism are in most aspect, similar. They both are contradictory and will not be complete without one another. In his book, Nye (2011), specified what comes under hard and soft power. The use of force, payment, and agenda-setting based on those two are considered as hard power. Hard power involves tangible resources such as force and money. Meanwhile, soft power is defined as:

“the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes” (Nye, 2011).

The type of resources associated with soft power often include intangible forces such as institutions, values, ideas, culture, and the perceived legitimacy of policies (Nye, 2011). Hard power is push, soft power is pull.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative research which according to Creswell (2008) is characterised by the reliance on unstructured and non-numerical data. The data is obtained in the form of field notes written by the researcher during the course of his or her observation, interviews, and questionnaires, focus groups, participant-observation, secondary-sourced data and etc. As for the research limitations, this research will be limited to 10 PICs recognising China; Vanuatu, Cook Island, FSM, Fiji, Niuee, PNG, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Kiribati. Time-wise, this research covered the period from 2006 to 2020. This time scope is determined upon the fact that China intensified its relations with the afore-mentioned Pacific Islands countries in 2006 which was marked by the Premiere Wen Jiabao signing off the China-Pacific Island Countries Development and Cooperation Guiding Framework. Meanwhile 2020 is chosen due to the still-ongoing China's activeness in the region up to that date. Moreover, this research used secondary data, in which data are obtained from secondary sources including but not limited to earlier research, journals, news, government publications and also books. In other words, this research used existing data.

These data were collected, summarised, and analysed in order to increase the credibility of this research. Schensul & LeCompte (1999) defined data analysis as the process conducted by a researcher to reduce data to a story and its interpretation. The data analysis used in this study is the illustrative-case clarification method, which is an illustration of theoretical concepts with empirical evidence (Sulaiman, 2020). Furthermore, this method applies theory to concrete historical situations or social conditions and organised data according to the theory. The empirical data found in the study then filled the empty boxes in theory either by confirming, modifying, or even rejecting the theory (Sulaiman, 2020). This method was chosen due to its ability to confirm empirical evidence to existing theory.

DISCUSSION

China's *yang* in South Pacific

As described by Nye, hard power is exemplified by the use of tangible material such as economy and military. China is seen to be using the former element by enforcing a cheque-book diplomacy in the region. Cheque-book diplomacy, like its name, means earning diplomatic relations with the help of *cheque book* or to put it bluntly, money. It

usually comes in the form of aid, loan, or developmental funding. China and Taiwan have long engaged in such diplomacy with South Pacific region as the main site. Back in the 1970s when it all started, South Pacific countries had just won their independence and were extremely dependent on aids. They were yet unable to stand on their own feet and needed external support, especially economically. Taiwan and China, involved in an internal clash, saw that as a fertile ground to gain national recognition from the mini states of South Pacific.

The diplomatic rivalry between China and Taiwan may have begun long ago in the 1970s, however it seems that it is still ongoing up to these days. China, not showing even the slightest intention to retreat, continues to shower the South Pacific states with either loan or aids. As a result, much to China's dismay, two Pacific Island countries switched from recognising Taipei to Beijing in the span of a week. In September 2019, Solomon Island, terminated its 36-years diplomatic relations with Taipei and came to the decision to recognise Beijing. Four days later, Kiribati joined Solomon Island, leaving Taiwan with 15 allies. These bilateral switches exemplified just how China has successfully 'buy' its way into the South Pacific region.

China's aid to the South Pacific states has increasingly attracted attention due to their increase in number. In fact, China is set to take over Australia's place as the largest donor in the Pacific when in 2017, it pledged a total of US\$4 billion in aid (Lyons, 2018). It all started in 2006, in the 1st China-Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Forum, when China granted a total of 3 billion renminbi (US\$492 million) in a concessional loan to the region (Dornan & Brant, 2014). Ever since then, China's total aid spending to the region amounts to US\$1.78 billion, where it is mainly disbursed through three main instruments: grants, interest-free loans, and concessional loans (Bozzato, 2017). In November 2013, the 2nd China-Pacific Island Forum was held in Guangzhou. The most significant outcome of this forum was the announcement of up to US\$1 billion concessional loans by Vice Premier Wang Yang to be provided over four years (Jingxi & Zhao, 2013). In addition, China also announced a commercial loan facility of US\$1 billion, financed under the China Development Bank (CDB). However, in terms of the exact number of China's aid to Pacific, the Chinese government has never officially disclosed the amount given neither it provides detail of aid spent each year and recipient country. Therefore, the data provided are obtained by combing through government announcement, and financial documents dating back to almost 10 years.

On one side, grants—accounted for 20% of China’s aid to the region are used mostly to finance government buildings, schools, and prestige projects. One notable example is the prestigious convention centre in the Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG). The grandeur of The Port Moresby International Convention Centre can be seen by the fact that it hosted the 2018 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). According to the local Post-Courier newspaper, China spent about US\$21.2 million for this project, and later on gave another US\$6.1 million to PNG for the Centre’s maintenance (China Daily, 2018). On the other side, concessional loans which takes up the majority of 80 per cent of China’s aid, tend to focus on financing large-scale infrastructure project such as roads, seaports, and airports (Zhang, Leiva, & Ruwet, Chinese aid to the Pacific and the Caribbean, 2019). While China is by no means the largest donor in the region, its way of delivering aids—by funding large-scale infrastructure—makes these projects stand out.

Aside from granting state-to-state loans to the PICs, China is also giving out loans through a well-funded financial institution with China as the largest shareholder, holding approximately 30% of the share. The Asian Infrastructure Development Bank (AIIB) is said to be paralleling the Asian Development Bank (ADB), not as a rival but as a complementary (Hannan & Firth, 2016). AIIB is operating based on the value of south-to-south cooperation which upholds common prosperity. Unlike the West’s IMF, AIIB is very open, inclusive and requires no necessity to be met when issuing financial assistance. As of today, five of PICs—Vanuatu, Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, and Samoa—are members of AIIB, with Papua New Guinea as prospective member (AIIB, 2021). The membership of AIIB will lead to greater provisions and routinisation of Chinese loans to PICs (Hannan & Firth, 2016). In the face of the global pandemic, Cook Islands and Fiji, whose economies strongly rely on international tourism, turn to AIIB for loans as they face a huge economic sink. The Cook Islands issued a US\$20 million while Fiji US\$50 million (Barrett & Menon, 2021).

As to date, China has yet established military bases in the region. Its military presence, however, is exemplified in the form of military cooperation with PICs. China’s People Liberation Army (PLA) has been maintaining military engagement with the military forces of Fiji, PNG, and Tonga, along with Vanuatu’s small mobile police force (Zhang D., 2020). Between 2006 to 2009, the representative of PLA paid 24 visits to the region, with more than 60% involved their naval ships (Zhang D., 2020). On top of that, China has also actively supported the region with military aid. In 2007, China contributed to the renovation of Taurama Barrack hospital of the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF)

which cost around US\$500,000. A decade later, it supplied 62 vehicles including troop carriers, armoured vehicle, buses and mobile kitchen vans worth approximately US\$5.3 million. In addition, a training of 83 PNGDF officer was also provided (Zhang D., 2020). In December 2018, China donated a hydrographic and surveillance vessel to the Fijian Navy. Additionally, China, represented by PLA, granted another 47 military vehicles to Fiji in 2020. As for Tonga, China provided 8 military trucks worth over US\$500,000 in 2008. Last but not least, the PLA also supplied military uniform and vehicles to Vanuatu's mobile force in 2016 & 2017 (Zhang D., 2020).

China's *yin* in South Pacific

China's *yin* is manifested in three forms of soft power. First, by establishing Confucius Institute and Confucius Class in the region. In the South Pacific, the Confucius Institute opened at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in 2012. The institution was the result of partnership between The University of the South Pacific and Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications (BUPT) (The University of the South Pacific, 2019). At first, CI-USP is only available at Suva, Fiji. However, due to the high demand for Chinese language in other parts of Fiji, in March 2014, CI-USP opened a teaching point at USP'S Lautoka Campus (The University of the South Pacific, 2019). Not even a year later, another Confucius class was established at the Emalus Campus in Vanuatu, then another one in the Cook Islands. Despite the criticisms, CIs are all in all getting positive feedbacks in the South Pacific countries.

The President of Fiji, Jioji Konrote, acclaimed the CI-USP for providing platform of cooperation between China and Fiji, or the South Pacific region in general (Yongxing, 2017). In details, he said:

“The Confucius Institute is providing a platform for building friendship and cooperation between China and Fiji, and the Pacific region. We hope that this will further pave the way for deeper cooperation based on mutual trust, which is necessary for the delivery of the social and economic benefits that we all desire,” (Yongxing, 2017).

Apart from language learning, the Confucius Institute is also actively promoting China's culture by organising events which attracted the locals and are sometimes,

attended by Chinese diplomats. For example, in 2015, the Chinese Spring Festival Gala was held in Suva, Fiji. The event was attended by Mr. Yang Zhaoui, Chargé d'affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Fiji. Chinese traditional performances such as dances of Peacock and To the Spring, etc. had captured the heart of both Chinese and Fijian in Fiji (BUPT, 2015). During the annual “Big Sales Day” of Port Vila International School (PVIS) in Vanuatu, the Confucius Classroom at Emalus Campus of USP took the opportunity to organise Chinese-culture-experiencing activities such as paper-cutting and calligraphy. Red paper with animal patterns and Chinese characters with pictures attracted attentions from kids and adults, who joined to work out art works with scissors or brushes (BUPT, 2019).

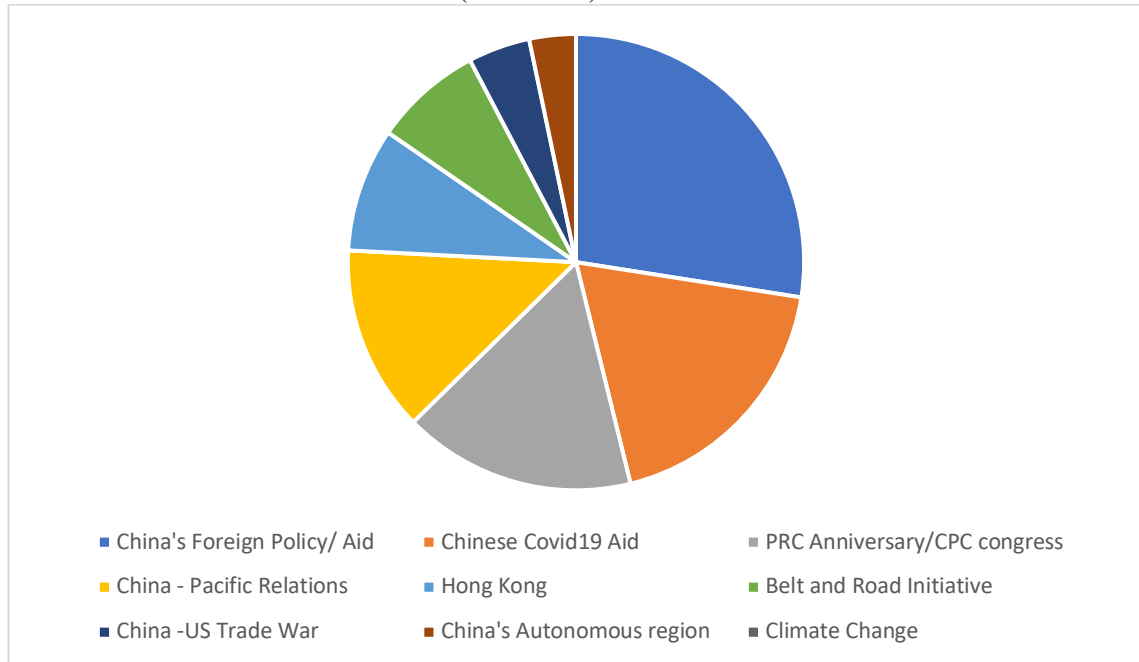
Secondly, China’s *yin* is expressed by its media activity in the region. China also utilise media to tell “its friendly intentions” in the region. It combines both its own media outlet and Pacific’s media organisations to attain this objective. China’s media activity in the Pacific falls into 3 main categories: 1) expansion of China’s official media, 2) the use of local media for publicity, 3) media partnership which includes journalism training, etc. (Zhang & Watson, 2020).

The China Central Television’s English international channel (CCTV-9) has operated in majority of Pacific Island Countries (PICs). It has established operations in the Federated States of Micronesia (2002), Samoa (2005), Vanuatu (2005), Fiji (2006), and Tonga (2006) (Zhang & Watson, 2020). The channel produces variety of programs including news, documentary and entertainment aimed at international markets distributed through the China Global Television Network (CGTN) (Herr, 2019). Chinese media contents in the Pacific are so massive that Australia’s government is said to be struggling competing with China (Samios & Galloway, 2020). China Radio international is also broadcasting to audiences in Vanuatu (2007), Samoa (2010) and Tonga (2010). On top of that, in September 2010, China’s primary states news agency, *Xinhua*, opened its first branch in the South Pacific region in Suva, Fiji. This bureau office collects and distributes news from across the region (Herr, 2019).

Secondly, China is also using local media for publicity, especially in narrating its friendly intentions in the region. Between August 2016 and September 2020, Chinese Ambassador in Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) has published around 92 articles in the mainstream newspapers in these countries such as *Fiji Sun*, *Kaselelhi Press*, *Post-Courier*, *Samoa Observer*, *Matangi Tonga* and *Daily Post* (Zhang & Watson, 2020). Figure 6 shows that

more than a quarter of the articles published were about China's foreign policy or aid. Coming right after is Chinese aid with regard to COVID-19 control in the region (Zhang & Watson, 2020).

Figure 2. News Articles Published by Chinese Embassy in 6 Pacific Countries (08/16 – /20)



Source: Zhang & Watson (2020) *China's Media Strategy in the Pacific*. Sydney: Department of Pacific Affairs Australian National University.

The third and last activity of China's media strategy in Pacific is by actively sponsoring Pacific journalists' visits to China for training or exchange as well as building media facilities and bolstering ties with local Chinese media in Pacific (Zhang & Watson, 2020). For instance, China provided trainings to the South Pacific's journalist by flying them directly to China. These trainings took place in August 2015, October 2016, and June 2018. These trainings gained favourable responses from Pacific's local journalists. All journalists and reporters interviewed by Herr (2019) spoke highly of the quality and quantity of the trainings provided by, and in China. Apart from that, the Chinese embassies is also actively seeking for local media partner to 'publish the story of China'. In March 2019, *Fiji Daily*—Fiji's largest newspaper publisher—and *Vila Times*—first bilingual English-Mandarin newspaper in Vanuatu, established close relations with Chinese embassies (Zhang & Watson, 2020). A year ago, Chinese ambassador to Fiji, Qian Bo talked *Fiji Daily* to help tell 'the story of China' to the region.

Last but not least, China expresses its *yin* or soft power inside its Belt and Road Initiative framework. While its main objective is to create an inter-regional market, the BRI is also used as a platform to allow cultural exchanges between China and member countries. For example, as a result of BRI in PICs, China started an ambitious PIC language-learning in Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU). It offers four-year bachelor courses covering seven languages of BRI's members in the South Pacific. This program sealed the approval of the Ministry of Education in 2017 and is aimed to support the BRI by facilitating cultural exchange between China and member countries (Zhang & So'oa'emalelagi, 2019). In accordance with this program, Wu Yingjie (2016) argued that in order to boost China's soft power, cultural exchanges are crucial in BRI. By actively expanding cultural exchange, BRI member countries will be able to feel China's sincerity in development, while at the same time exposing its traditional culture.

The Simultaneity of the *yin* and *yang*

With its burgeoning economic capability, China could have chosen the easy way and just continuously shower the region with money. However, due to the importance of co-implication of *yin* and *yang*, China is aware that applying a single element alone will not deliver as much results as when both are applied. In Hu Jintao's words, he believed that China needs to maintain a balance between hard power and soft power to prevent other countries from allying against China (Amartya, 2020). For instances, had China focused solely on hard power (*yang*), it would not have gained the same amount of favourable responses to when soft power (*yin*) is applied at the same time as it adds to China's attractiveness to the region. On the contrary, projecting only soft power (*yin*) will lower China's reliability in the eye of the South Pacific countries. This is where the complementary nature of *yin* and *yang* is present. China's hard power (*yang*) will build the image of it being a dependable partner of the South Pacific, while the application of soft power (*yin*) will accentuate China's charm in a benign manner. Fully aware of the significance of this balance, China exercises an ideal proportion of hard power and soft power to increase its presence in the region. This part will then demonstrate how Chinese *yin* and *yang* work together simultaneously.

In 2006, Fiji—one of China's largest partners in the region—was alienated by Australia and New Zealand following the military coup waged by Bainimarama. China however remained indifferent and even called for a reasonable and understanding attitude from Fiji's neighbours. When other countries hurriedly pulled back aids from Fiji, reports

show that aid pledged by China to Fiji increased by sevenfold one year after the coup, from US\$23 million in 2006 to US\$161 million in the following year (Yang, 2011). During the same year, China also provided training for Fijian civil servants and technical staff to China. This training was part of China's plan that was announced by Chinese premier Wen Jiabao's during his visit to the region in 2006 (Yang, 2011). In the same year when first Confucius Institute was opened in Fiji, China was also providing assistance for the construction of the Kiuva Sea Wall (Guxia, 2015). China granted a total of US\$2.5 million where a Fijian minister saw this as "symbol of the strong cordial and lasting relations between China and the government of Fiji" (The Fijian Government, 2013). Moreover, a journalist from *Fiji Sun* participated in a 10-months China Asia and Pacific Press Centre Journalist Training Program held by China in March 2018 (Doviverata, 2018). In that year too, China had just invested a total of US\$9 million for the redevelopment of the Suva Civic Centre, which gained huge favour from Fijian (Xinhua, 2018).

In the case of Cook Islands, a simultaneous combination of *yin* and *yang* was also seen, especially in the year of 2008. During that year, official number of Chinese aids to Cook Islands was published with details as follows:

- US\$2.9 million economic and technical cooperation grants
- US\$1.1 million soft loan for the construction of education administration building (Hanson, 2010)

At the same time, China's media activity was also seen by the fact that the Cook Islands daily newspaper in that year had more letters and commentaries on Chinese aid projects and the country's relations with China than on any other subject (Crocombe, 2010).

Other China's media strategy in the South Pacific is by providing training for the region's journalist to China. In 2016, about a dozen journalists from local media were on a 10-day tour to China where Vanuatu was represented by the Daily Post—one of the country's biggest print media (Roberts, 2016). At the same time, China gifted Vanuatu about US\$28.5 million in the form of 1,000-seat national convention centre (Radio New Zealand, 2016) (Smyth, 2019). Just recently, China donated in cash US\$100,000 to Vanuatu in light of COVID-19 (Zhang D., China's COVID-19 diplomacy in the Pacific, 2020). It then published an article written by Ambassador Zhou Haicheng on Vanuatu Daily Post. Titled "*Stronger Together*", this article reassures that China sees the

pandemic as global challenge and that it will be there to support Vanuatu in battling the virus (Chinese Embassy in Vanuatu, 2020).

In the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), China is actively using the country's local media for publication. For example, in 2020, in response to the global pandemic, China granted medical supplies and a cheque of US\$100,000 to FSM to help the country overcome the virus (CIDCA, 2020). At the same time, Chinese ambassador, Huang Zheng, published an article at the *Kaselehlie Press*—local print media—titled “*Engrave the collective memory and share China's experience in an effort to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic by working hand in hand*” in its Vol. 20 (Embassy of The People's Republic of China in The Federated States of Micronesia, 2020a). Other than topic about the global pandemic, in 2020 China has also published other issues at *Kaselehlie Press* as well, such as when Huang Zheng published an article titled “*Facts of China's Xinjiang Issue Tolerate No Fabrication.*” Through this article, the Chinese government seeks to correct misinformation and misunderstanding going around in the media regarding the Xinjiang issue. It aims to prevent FSM people from being misled by distorted facts and allegations (Embassy of The People's Republic of China in The Federated States of Micronesia, 2020b). This aligns with China's objective of its soft power, which is to correct misunderstanding and allegations regarding its rise, and to tell the world a ‘friendly’ narrative of China.

Lastly, at the opening of Confucius Institute at the National University of Samoa in 2018, China was also seen issuing a funding for the upgrading of a port in Samoa called Asau (Firth, 2019). Samoan Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailee said that his government had “secured funding to widen and deepen the channel” (Firth, 2019). Furthermore, as part of China's cultural exchange with the region, one of China's top universities, Liaocheng University in Shandong province, started a Samoan language course. This language course is part of Chinese diplomacy which aims to show China's real interest to the region. One of the teachers said, “This opportunity will allow a stronger cultural ties between the Chinese and people of the Pacific Islands,” (Srinivasan, 2019). Cultural exchanges were also seen in Samoa's Confucius Institute at the National University of Samoa in April 2019, where cultural activities were held. For example, the CI in NUS organised Chinese traditional festival activities such as Mid-Autumn Festival and Chinese Lunar New Year (Latu, 2020). In the same year and month, China and Samoa entered Phase four of the China-Samoa Agricultural Technical Aid Project (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2019). Through this project, China provided

funding directed to Samoa's agricultural fields where it is evidenced to be directly beneficial to the local farmers.

Owing to this combination of soft and hard power, China's diplomacy in the South Pacific hit its peak when in 2019, Solomon Island and Kiribati simultaneously conversed from recognising Taipei to Beijing. Their conversion from Taipei to Beijing is done at their own will and not in any sense, being pressured by China. Prime Minister of Solomon Island, Manasseh Sogareh said in a statement responding to his country's switch, "We would be simply irresponsible to isolate a global, willing player to assist developing and least-developing countries" (Clarke, 2019). In the opening of China's embassy in Honiara on September 21, 2020, he added how the switch of diplomatic ties to China, has put the country "at the right side of history, as a member of the United Nation" (Solomon Islands Government, 2020). Likewise, Kiribati expressed its respect for China. During his first visit to China in January last year, President Taneti Maamau spoke to Xi Jinping about how his country "speaks highly of China's important role in safeguarding world peace, and promoting common development," moreover he added, "[we] appreciates China's active commitment to the advancement of South-South cooperation and helping small and medium-sized country like Kiribati to speed up development process and address challenges such as climate change" (Pala, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Applying Daoism would enable us to understand China and its behaviour better. For example, the paradox of China's strategy in the South China Sea dispute can be better understood with Daoism. As we all know, China puts its sovereignty above everything while at the same cultivates the good neighbour policy with Southeast Asian countries, including with claimant states (Rosyidin, 2019). China is persistent in maintaining its military presence in the area. Speaking at the National University of Singapore, Xi Jinping remarked that "the South China Sea islands are China's territory since the ancient times" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2015). To support its unilateral claim, China did not hesitate to resort to the use of force. For instance, in April 2001 Chinese F-8 fighter aircraft was involved in an incident with the U.S. unmanned EP-3 aircraft around Hainan Island. Five years later, China conjointly conducted a military exercise with Russia in South China Sea. These two cases provide an example that China is consciously trying to demonstrate its military muscle.

On the other hand, Xi Jinping underlined the importance of cooperative approach. China is willing to commit on the establishment of cooperation with claimant states and major power in any form of inter-states cooperation. China never opts to close the possibility of negotiation in order to achieve mutual progress (Feng, 2007). One of the most notable progress is when in September 2016 China and Vietnam agreed on a joint communiqué related to the peaceful settlement of the dispute (Rosyidin, 2019). In the multilateral context, China showed its willingness to agree on a COC single text negotiation proposed in ASEAN-China ministerial meeting in Singapore August 2, 2018.

The example above is one of the many instances where Daoism is apparent. In line with the dualist nature of Daoism, China upholds the belief that coercive approach is meaningless without cooperative one. By applying Daoism, we can truly understand the duality of China's foreign policy, specifically in South Pacific. The way China is expanding its sphere of influence to the South Pacific region is based on the Daoism values of *yin* and *yang*. China's strategy is represented by combining two elements of power—hard and soft power. Taken into Daoism, *yang* is associated with masculine traits, therefore it represents hard power. Meanwhile, *yin* is linked to feminine traits, thus it equals soft power. The *yang* element, is seen in the way China exercises cheque-book diplomacy where it continuously 'buy' its way into the region through lavish supply of aids and loans. This diplomacy hit its peak when in 2019, China successfully converted two of Taiwan old allies in the region—the Solomon Island and Kiribati—into recognising Beijing simply because China could provide more than what Taiwan could afford to offer. At the same time, China is actively projecting its *yin* element—soft power to the region. Soft power is as important as hard power since it is effective to build China's positive image as well as correcting existing misunderstanding about its rise.

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