State socialization in the Asia-Pacific:
China as alternative socializer

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Introduction

In 1962, Aron noted that international systems are characterized by the configuration of power relations\(^1\). Behind this argument lie two observations: first, power holds importance mostly in its relative form\(^2\), and not in absolute terms; second, it is best understood as a relational attribute\(^3\). Numerous studies have intended to tackle the issue of defining power and identifying its determinants, ranging from precise quantitative attributes such as geography, military power and economic wealth\(^4\) to broad and vague studies on the immaterial dimensions of power\(^5\). No definition is, in itself, quite satisfactory. As Nye rightly notes, “power is […] like love, easier to experience than to define or measure, but no less real for that”\(^6\). Following Holsti\(^7\), we contend that power is multifaceted in nature. Holsti identifies four characteristics of power: relations, means, capacities and process. Despite the attractiveness of a clearly delimited theory composed of detailed variables representing the different dimensions of power, we argue that power is diffused across these dimensions, and includes such a variety of determinants that it appears hardly feasible to identify each and every one of them. For that reason, our approach to power is closer to a conceptual framework.

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than to a theory\(^8\): we explain power not only as an aggregate of material and immaterial capabilities, but also as a process and a set of relationships that enable a state to perform its national role conception\(^9\), in order to reach its foreign policy objective(s).

Thus, while it is true that the United States holds the dominant place in most of the capabilities of power, what enables the current hierarchy to be are the social relations among countries and the way in which the configuration of power defines and influences these relations. The key to maintaining a hierarchical order lies in its relational attributes: the relationships that the leader forges with its followers, based on mutual recognition of their status (leader and followers) and power differential, are the nodes that bind the system together and perpetuate it. Indeed, “hierarchy is not a ‘natural law’ [and] every social order needs to be justified”\(^10\) and recognized. In that sense, American power is normative and rules-based, in the sense that it relies on the diffusion of American-based values, norms and institutions. The principles of Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism are at the roots of a perception of the superiority of the American nation, and the duty of its people to expand their norms and values to other peoples and countries – the American West for the Manifest Destiny, expanded as American exceptionalism in global politics. These values, understood as intrinsically ‘good’ by the United States and its allies, are seen as proof of American superiority and differentiate Washington from the ‘Others’. On this ground is developed American foreign policy, which seeks to maintain American leadership by diffusing its norms and values, through a process of socialization whereby the leader ‘teaches’ the values of the system to other states so that these states ‘own’ them\(^12\). Consequently, any strain on the

\(^8\) Kenneth N. Waltz defines a theory as “a picture, mentally formed, of a bounded realm or domain of activity […]. A theory indicates that some factors are more important than others and specifies relations among them”, in *Theory of International Politics*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1979, p. 8-10. Sheldon Stryker defines a theory in the same way, and differentiates a theory from a conceptual framework by explaining the latter as a “set of concepts drawing attention to particular aspects of the empirical world”. In *Symbolic Interactionism: A structural Version*, Menlo Park, CA, Benjamin/Cummings, 1980, p. 3.


\(^12\) Wendy S. Grulnick, Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, “Internalization within the family: The self-
relationships between leader and followers can lead the latter to question or challenge the leader in its status, which in turn impacts the social order itself. Thus while the United States remains, to this date, the only superpower – thanks to its capacities and several formal and informal alliances– its relative power is in decline. The ascent of China, coupled with global and regional dynamics in the past few decades (financial crisis, protracted regional conflicts, etc.), bring a challenge to American leadership and erode its status. In this regard, as Lieber points out, the limits of American leadership are more ideational than material: “while the leader’s position is considered rightful and legitimate by its followers, challengers perceive it as illegitimate, based on coercion and force. Consequently, challenges to the international system will arise from secondary states that are dissatisfied with the order and/or the leader”.

Here lies the crux of the matter for the current global leader: the recognition and support of other states are eroding and, arguably, China’s own legitimacy in rising. We argue that the consequences of China’s power process have an impact on the relations between the United States and other countries – whether reinforcing of weakening them; nowhere is it felt more importantly than in China’s neighborhood. Based upon this observation, we seek to address the following question: How does China’s power process affect the socialization process of states in Asia?

**Power as a process**

As Waltz explains, the international system structurally constrains states. However, structure does not predetermine how the states will respond to this pressure. Thus hierarchy in the international system is neither fixed nor the result of absolute capacities; it is best explained by motives and actions. Jesse, Lobell and William have identified strategies of responses to hegemony, on a continuum from bandwagoning to hard balancing. Based on this scale, we argue that “the structuration of the system depends directly on the countries’ reaction to hegemony, [thus] highlight[ing] the relational nature” of the system:

“these reactions are determined by the perception countries have of their own role in international politics, influenced by their national role conceptions. When this role conception is either compatible with or complementary to that of the United States, these countries tend to be followers. In return for their support they gain additional opportunities to reach their goals. However, when a country’s national role conception is incompatible with Washington’s own national role conception, determination theory perspective”, in Joan E. Grusec and Leon Kuczynski (eds.), *Parenting and Children’s Internalization of Values*, New York, Wiley, 1997, p. 135.


16 Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

17 Vandamme and Struye, “Global Swing States”, p. 34.
it will tend to oppose American leadership.”

The distinction between East and West and their mutual perception, made by Bhabha in his research on colonial relations, further elaborates our analysis of countries’ reaction to hegemony and remains relevant in the contemporary system, where the competition opposes China and the United States for the status of global leader: “to the extent that the West sees itself in the East, the East has a certain power over the West and it becomes a threat to the West. It threatens to undermine the claim of the West to superiority, which is dependent on its claims of the Otherness and inferiority of the East”

Bhabha’s study points to the potential debilitating aspect of leadership in the international system: by needing collaboration with secondary powers, the United States uses “indirect rule”, wherein the dominant power relies on others to rule by diffusing its norms and values. The implication is that secondary powers learn the functioning, norms and institutions of the system, implementing, defending and perpetuating them. These norms, of Western origins, become owned by every members of the system which, by integrating them into their own identity, acquire the resources and gain the legitimacy to uphold them including, if necessary, against the dominant power:

“Power is more fluid than fixed; identification blurs the boundary between [leader] and [subordinate]. Moreover, the condition of collaboration which makes indirect rule possible means that the [subordinate] not only takes over the skills of rulership but some of its culture – its language, practices of self-presentation, and the aesthetics and affections of the ruler. This very deep level of identification or mimicry undermines the psychic and cultural boundaries separating the [dominant] power and the [subordinate].”

Thus, “instead of approaching power as flowing in a linear, one-sided way from the ruler to the ruled, [our analysis] underscores the two-way directionality of power, even if rulers clearly have more social power”

The dependency upon and identification with the ruled by the ruler undermine its power by giving more power to the ruled, “the skills and the space to potentially resist and subvert the former”. In addition to this ambiguity, “the identification on the part of the [subordinate] creates an ambivalent relationship to the ruling power”. In this ambiguity lies the essence of leadership: the ruler, or dominant power, must create enough incentives for the ruled to maintain and defend the power relation, but not to an extent that the ruled will overthrow the ruler. Thus leading, in that sense, is about providing enough incentives to protect the status quo, while being a follower means enjoying the status quo without entertaining revisionist objectives. The system must be established so that it is “much

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18 Vandamme and Struye, “Global Swing States”, p. 35.
20 Seidman, Contested Knowledge, p. 261.
21 Seidman, Contested Knowledge, p. 261.
22 Seidman, Contested Knowledge, p. 262.
23 Seidman, Contested Knowledge, p. 262.
24 Seidman, Contested Knowledge, p. 262.
more advantageous for subordinates to pursue their individual goals and interests within, and according to the parameters set by, the system than to challenge it”

An implicit assumption in our analysis is that we look at the international system as a social system, i.e. “a (bounded) set of interrelated components, such that change in one component of the system initiates change in other components of the system”

Holsti defines international systems as “any collection of independent political entities – tribes, city-states, nations, or empires – which interact with considerable frequency and according to regularized processes” Consequently, as member of a social system, a state self-identifies with said system and its values, and determines its own behavior according to the system and the leader

Mimicry thus becomes a tool through which secondary states, by acting like the United States, gain in power. As they mimic Washington by acting in accordance with its rules and norms, they engage in the same behavior that is recognized as legitimate power: because the leader engaged in certain behaviors and established the rules of the game, it became recognized as the leader. Thus when other states engage in these same behaviors and follow these same rules, they integrate and make their own the very behaviors that have been recognized as those determining the role of leader. In doing so, although the boundaries of the system determine what is ‘appropriate’ behavior, the behavior of secondary states pressures against and reshapes, to a certain extent, these boundaries, i.e. “social and cultural barriers between dominant elites and subordinates”

As a result, states other than the leader become entitled to point out and criticize boundary crossings on the part of others, i.e. “any noncompliance with the prevailing norms, values, and/or expectations of others involved in a specific social situation” This process can be directed towards secondary states that do not abide by the rules and norms of the system; it can also lead subordinate powers to criticize the leader, when the latter adopts boundary crossing behavior. When they do so, subordinate agents engage in normative behaviors, similar to those of a normative power, that is an actor that can “shape what can be ‘normal’ in international life”

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China as a normative power

China’s ascent is illustrative of the process whereby secondary powers, by integrating the rules of the game, gain in power and challenge the leader: by owning and implementing the rules of the capitalist liberal economic system, it has gained in relative power by becoming the second global economy – or the first, depending on the indicators used. The more it has gained in economic power, the more Beijing has taken a stand as defender of the norms and values which have formed the basis of the system, namely respect for state sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in other states’ internal affairs. By bringing these elements forward in its foreign policy, it has, implicitly or explicitly, opposed American (and more generally Western) interventionism, which has been widely criticized from 2003 (Iraq) onwards. In a previous study, Vandamme and Struye de Swielande show that, as China’s power is increasing, its self-role definition becomes incompatible with that of the United States, “leading to a type of externalized inter-role conflict”33, i.e. “a conflict between non-compatible, competing, or clashing role expectations about self and others” 34, in that case with systemic relevance. This incompatibility is at the core of the competition between the two powers35, each of them defining itself as leader of the international system: during his State of the Union address in January 2014, President Obama thus indicated that “no other country in the world does what we do. On every issue, the world turns to us, not simply because of the size of our economy or our military might – but because of the ideals we stand for, and the burdens we bear to advance them”36. Meanwhile, China affirms that regional leadership in Asia falls under the responsibility of Asians –“Matters in Asia ultimately must be taken care of by Asians, Asia's problems ultimately must be resolved by Asians, and Asia's security ultimately must be protected by Asians”37– not long after Secretary of State Clinton pointed out the need for a US pivot/rebalancing to Asia38. Consequently, as China power increases, it represents more and more a challenge to the self-perception of the United States as the world democratizer and enforcer of international norms. Beijing reads and interprets its own past in such a way that its historical narratives bring it in direct opposition to the West: China aims at erasing the “Century of Humiliations” and revive its former status, in particular in Asia. This can be seen particularly in the recent declarations by President Xi Jinping with the Chinese Dream or the rejuvenation of the Chinese civilization. China is being clear: its status is at least that of regional leader: “Certain non-Asian powers, through forming alliances

33 Vandamme and Struye de Swielande, “Global Swing States”, p. 35.
34 Harnisch et al., Role Theory in International Relations, p. 256.
35 While economic interdependence has been emphasized as an element of stability and cooperation, we defend, as was exemplified by the economic interdependence between Germany and Great Britain on the eve of World War One, that it is not the case – in fact, economic interdependence can even increase the risk of conflict, as some neorealists argue (Walt for example).
38 Hillary Clinton, “America's Pacific Century”, Foreign Policy, November 2011.
and cliques with some Asian countries, have constantly interfered in the balance and cooperation of Asia”

We thus contend that “China’s objective a minima is to control the Asia-Pacific region and act as its leader. This is not a new ambition – see for reference the Tributary System from 1368 to 1841.”

Resulting from this development, we assess that, while the rise of China is closely linked to its material capabilities, it is best understood “within its specific social context.” The status of the country builds upon the degree of support it receives from other countries in the system, for its foreign policy position and action. Defending the core values of the system as China sees them is central to its power process: Beijing thus associates with developed countries as an economic power, yet it adopts a position of developing country when addressing the economic South (the so-called South-South cooperation). The rhetoric of ‘peaceful development’ and ‘harmonious world’ are illustrative of its willingness to appear as a benevolent power in global affairs: “China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature, oppose hegemonism and power politics in all forms, and will never seek hegemony or expansion.” The rhetorical use of Confucian philosophy is in this regard a soft power tool through which Chinese leaders aim at conveying a positive image of their country.

The tianxia concept brings an interesting insight into the Chinese vision of world order. Literally translated ‘All-under-Heaven’, tianxia refers to “a ‘universal’ order which had been established [...] and handed down the ages” and with the emergence of which the beginning of civilization is claimed to coincide. This concept underpins a type of rule within which Chinese and non-Chinese coexist in harmony, and is drawn up as a “utopia that sets the analytical and institutional framework necessary for solving the world’s problems.”

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39 Xi Jinping speaking at the CICA.
40 The tributary system refers to the system in which “the suzerain center enjoyed its authority in recognizing the legitimacy of the substates, but int never interfered unless a substate declared war on another member of the family of All-under-Heaven”; Zhao Tingyang, “Rethinking Empire from the Chinese Concept ‘All-under-Heaven’ (Tianxia, 天下)”, in William A. Callahan and Elena Barabantseva (eds.), China Orders the World. Normative Soft Power and Foreign Policy, Washington D.C., Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011, p. 28.
41 Vandamme and Struye de Swielande, “Global Swing States”, p. 36.
43 On this subject, see Niall Duggan, “China’s changing role in its all-weather friendship with Africa”, in Sebastian Harnisch, Sebastian Bersick and Jörn-Carsten Gottwald, China’s International Roles, New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 207-225.
47 Dessein, “New China”, p. 156.
Thus, while the concept of tianxia is based upon a profound change of the institutional order of the international system, it is done so with the objective to bring peace and harmony under Chinese leadership.

Yet, despite the underlying vision of systemic change, China shows a willingness to work within the boundaries of the system by being involved in a number of international organizations, and through which it supports and favors the respect for certain international rules and laws: “in many global institutions, Beijing has proven a willing partner. […] China was a founding member of several of the global institutions at the center of this order, including the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank” 49. In September 2015, Foreign Minister Wang Yi even declared China to be “a ‘staunch supporter of the current international order’”50. Such conduct is particularly interesting and reflects the fact that despite being a major power, if it wants to get recognized in that status, Beijing still has to abide by the rules, and any deviation from them leads Western countries to target the country as a deviant member of the system, a behavior which “may involve using illegal means to achieve what the [actor] has learned to value or engaging in deviant activities as a way of rejecting or avoiding the conventional standards”51. Notwithstanding, “the meaning of deviance is not so much intrinsic as extrinsic to behavior: the label is attached by those with whom the reprobate interacts in a way that reflects the meaning they choose to attach to the behavior. This meaning, in turn, depends on properties of the responders and of the type of interaction they have established with the agent”52. Hence interestingly, because of the interpretative dimension of deviant behavior, Beijing is constrained to a certain extent by the same limitations as those of middle-status actors53:

“due to concerns about legitimacy, choices of middle-status actors are often more constrained than those of their high- and low-status counterparts. Unlike high-status actors, whose legitimacy is assured even if they deviate from typical behavioral norms, and low-status actors, who have little to lose by violating these norms, middle-status actors must conform to expectations in order to avoid risking their standing”54.

Status-based hierarchy in the international system

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50 Fontaine and Rapp-Hooper.
53 This argument is used by the author in another study about middle powers, to be published in 2017, yet it appears relevant in the case of China as well, although we do not identify China as a middle power.
An implicit assumption that we have made so far is that the international hierarchical order depends upon countries’ statuses, and that China, although a confirmed major power, is engaged in a status-seeking process to reach the status of regional leader, at least, or global leader, at most. The notion of status is largely used in IR studies; yet, if we consider the amount of literature on the concept of status – and its related notions such as position or role – the limits of such use without further conceptualization appear rather quickly. Status as a theoretical concept comes from the field of sociology, where it has been developed by authors such as Linton (1936), Parsons (1951), or Stryker (1980). Parsons defines status as “a structural position within the social system”\(^{55}\). Since we look at the international system as a social system, we contend that a key dimension in understanding the system is the iterative nature of international interactions. This repetitive process creates expectations among actors towards each other’s behaviors, expectations which play a part in framing the status-role bundle\(^{56}\). When others’ expectations are met by the social actor, i.e. the state, then the latter is recognized as legitimate in its status and associated roles. Recognition is thus key in structuring a social system: “status and the power to act are not inherently attributed to the resources possessed by a given entity, but depend on their recognition in a given set of international interactions”\(^{57}\). The condition for such recognition is that social meanings must be shared among the actors; this is made possible particularly by the iteration of interactions, which enables actors to build shared meanings and symbols, and consequently shared expectations about certain statuses and their associated roles. Thus Larson, Paul and Wolfforth determine that statuses comprise “collective beliefs about a given state’s ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout)”\(^{58}\).

From these different theoretical considerations, we understand international status as being a structural position in the social stratification of the international system, which arises from material and ideational elements of power held by a state and recognized by others. Status implies several characteristics:

1. Status implies a hierarchy hence asymmetry\(^{59}\). This hierarchy is structured on a status-based differentiation, and in that sense, “is tied to both the amount of support (centrality) and the diversification of support (robustness)”\(^{60}\) from others.

2. As a consequence, status reflects the need for a country to be recognized in the international system – as compared to absolute power, which relates to a country’s


\(^{56}\) Parsons, *The Social System*.


\(^{59}\) Tanguy Struye de Swielande, Interview, May 2016.

\(^{60}\) Sauder, Lynn and Podolny, “Status: Insights from Organizational Sociology”, p.274.
control over capacities and resources. As long as the state is not recognized by others in the status it aims, it is engaged in a process of status-seeking, which takes place both at the material and at the interactional levels. Through this behavior, the state “seeks to influence others’ perceptions of [its] relative standing by acquiring status symbols.” Thus by engaging in capacity-building, a state gains more and more absolute power; through interactions, this absolute power becomes gain in relative power, which in turn can transform into variations in the social status of the state.

(3) Deriving from the second point is the fact that status is compared to other statuses in a positive or negative manner: “‘Status’ is an attribute of an individual or social role that refers to position vis-à-vis a comparison group; status informs patterns of deference and expectations of behavior, rights, and responsibilities.”

(4) Since it is a structural position, status is inactive per se. It becomes activated when the status-holder behaves according to its status, i.e. when the status holder holds the roles associated to the status; we adopt Walker’s definition of role, i.e. “repertoires of behavior, inferred from others’ expectations and one’s own conceptions, selected at least partly in response to cues and demands.”

(5) A status is thus attached to a set of role behaviors that states hold as part of their foreign policy to reach their national objectives and defend their national interest, based on certain behaviors that have been observed as appropriate by significant players of the international system and the state’s significant others (the status-role bundle).

China as a norm-maker

By acting not only as a norm-taker, but also as a norm-maker, China adopts one of the roles that is typically associated to higher statuses in the system: “rather than accepting the US version of the present UN-centered security system, China has attempted to revise the system by placing absolute sovereignty and non-intervention at the head of security management.” Thus China defends the Westphalian-based norms of the system, i.e. state sovereignty over its territory and people, non-interference in other states’ internal affairs, and legal equality of all members of the system. Yet international relations also take place according to a second logic, the liberal one, which is based upon “free trade, democratic government, national self-
determination, adherence to international law, respect for human rights”⁶⁶. This liberal order “insists upon the inexorable eradication of difference between international system’s constituent units”⁶⁷, thus demanding a certain amount of insight into the domestic affairs of states by external actors. If we focus on China’s behaviors and actions, we notice that most of its behaviors which are non-compliant with the international order are in fact non-compliant with the liberal-based norms. Beijing is, by contrast, a steady defender of the Westphalia-based norms: for example, it contributes largely to the United Nations⁶⁸ – in terms of budget or troops for peace operations. Additionally, its military does not engage in foreign interventions, and Chinese leaders usually condemn foreign interventions in third countries. As a consequence, we argue that China’s goal is to reform the international system by using a rhetoric of ‘rectification’, defending the norms which stem mainly from the Westphalia-based system – although it also takes a number of norms from the liberal system.

Thus, while we can say that China has been socialized successfully into the system, as it has integrated and now supports most of its basic norms, it also aims at reshaping another aspect of the system, by putting forth state sovereignty and non-intervention while rejecting other norms of the system, for example the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea or “most aspects of the international human-rights order”⁶⁹. Such an observation brings us to question the process of socialization: as we consider the international system as a social system, it implies that the members of the system, states, are socialized into it. In its broadest sense, socialization refers to “the way in which [agents] are assisted in becoming members of one or more social groups”⁷⁰, in order to anchor them in a position considered adequate⁷¹ in the system. Socialization is understood as a reciprocal, two-way process wherein the target of socialization is active – and not only reactive – in its own socialization process⁷²:

socialization [is not] a fully predictable process that compels [agents] to think, feel, and act in accord with the dictates of society. Nor [does it] simply promote


⁶⁷ Peter Harris, “Losing the International Order”.

⁶⁸ The UN is, in essence, the international organization within which every states are equal to one another.

⁶⁹ Fontaine and Rapp-Hooper.


⁷¹ The adequacy of the position is determined by the degree of convergence between a state’s self-role conception and others’ expectations. Inadequacy in the position and subsequent role will derive from a state enacting a role which is rejected by the system and its units, or from a state enacting a role that it has not validated but that it is obliged to fulfill.

⁷² We adopt here the theoretical paradigm of symbolic interactionism: in IR studies, the constructivist perspective borrows from symbolic interactionism in establishing that “(1) the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and (2) that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature”; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 1; The most recent evolution of symbolic interactionism has focused on its structural nature: each interaction among actors of a social system is seen as parts of the whole system, and shapes, in some way, the system.
cultural uniformity and the smooth reproduction of social order. Instead, [it] stresses the dynamic, reciprocal, and somewhat unpredictable nature of [the process].

Hence socialization is a structuring process, which mechanism reinforces the status quo of the social order. Although socialization is generally understood in an intuitive manner as a vertical top-down mechanism (leaders socializing new comers into followers’ roles), it in fact also occurs as a vertical bottom-up, and a horizontal peer-to-peer, process. Thus “an important aspect of dynamic systems theories […] is that systems are seen to be self-equilibrating. [Social agents] act in such a way as to keep the partner’s behavior within acceptable boundaries” 74. One of the core features which socialization builds upon is the “self-corrective property of systems [as] a conservative force” 75. The emphasis here is put on the continuing nature of socialization in social interactions: while older and/or higher-status members are generally considered as the socializers, they in fact also change and adapt their role behavior depending on their interactions with the newest and/or small-status members. The ultimate outcome of socialization is “the production of [agents] who can adjust themselves and their behavior to the situations they face” 76 in accordance with the guidelines, values and norms of their social environment. This is evidence of the reciprocal nature of the process, and of the capacity of the state to “own” its social environment’s values and to integrate social messages so as to adopt a status and behavior relevant to the social environment. The ideal outcome of socialization is to lead “an agent [to switch] from following a logic of consequenciality to a logic of appropriateness”; i.e. from the actor being viewed as acting in a purely rational cost-benefits manner to “following internalized prescriptions of what is socially defined as normal, true, right or good, without, or in spite of, calculation of consequences and expected utility” 78. Upon this process of socialization will depend the degree of sociability of the state. Sociability is “the play-form of association […] related to the content-determined concreteness of association” 79; as applied to any form of interaction, sociability “rests on maintaining reciprocity in the values offered and received in interaction” 80. From this latter definition stems the fact that the state will be recognized, adequately socialized and integrated into the system, so as to increase its level of sociability. Drawing from the literature in sociology, developmental psychology and social psychology, we identify seven functioning

74 Eleanor E. Maccoby, “Historical Overview of Socialization Research and Theory”, p. 22.
75 Maccoby, “Historical Overview of Socialization Research and Theory”, p. 22.
76 Sandstrom et al., Symbols, Selves, and Social Reality, p. 86.
78 James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, “The logic of appropriateness”, ARENA working papers, Centre for European Studies, 04/09, p. 3.
characteristics of socialization81: (1) socialization is the teaching of good habits; (2) socialization aims at regulating the impulses of the [agent] being socialized; (3) in continuity with the second point, socialization holds a supportive function for the newest [agent]’s capacities to self-regulate; (4) socialization is specific to contexts and domains – meaning that different types of social systems will imply different processes of socialization; (5) the member being socialized is an agent of its own socialization; thus, (6) being an older member of the system is not a passive position, it is an active role which is integrated within a bidirectional, reciprocal process; (7) throughout the development of the newest member, the interactions between the latter and the older members of the system change, in particular with the socializer(s).

As applied to the international system, these seven functions enable states to go through the two stages of socialization identified by Sandstrom et al., i.e. primary and secondary socialization. Primary socialization refers to “the process by which [agents] learn to become mature, responsible members”82 of the social system, while secondary socialization “refers to the more specific, formal training that [agents] experience throughout their life”83. Using this dynamic of two-stage socialization, we contend that socialization in the international system also takes place at two levels: primary socialization refers to the informal institutions and norms that organize the system, i.e. the Westphalian norms of state sovereignty, legal equality of all members, and non-interference in internal affairs. The secondary stage of socialization corresponds to the liberal order, and is in that sense issue- and domain- specific, for example into the human rights order, the nuclear regime, or the commercial system, by learning their


82 Sandstrom et al., Symbols, Selves, and Social Reality, p. 87.

83 Sandstrom et al., Symbols, Selves, and Social Reality, p. 87.
functioning rules and adapting to the norms and institutions that delimitate them. Maccoby highlights the fact that socialization occurs at “successive stages of development”, thus pointing to the continuing nature of the process. When deviance occurs in the primary stage of socialization, it will more likely be interpreted as an institutional failure of the state to comply with the norms of the system, and/or of the system to facilitate the integration process of the newest state. If deviant behavior is linked to the secondary level of socialization, it is more likely to be interpreted as a conscious and voluntary act of defiance and rejection of the norms and rules of the system. An illustrative metaphor of this is the socialization process of children throughout their development: “as children grow older, parents are more and more likely to view misbehavior as knowing and intentional, responding accordingly”.

Socializing others in Asia

What appears from these elements is that socialization can be studied as a broad process or it can be narrowed down to particular points in time, i.e. socialization in a specific context. Let us here focus on the specificity of the Asian regional context. The particularity of Asia today is that China’s power process has an impact on the socialization process of its neighbors. Although it generally uses a rhetoric of peaceful rise externally, Beijing’s policy within its region has proved to be more aggressive than elsewhere, and certainly in the case of the Asia-Pacific – suffice to mention the situation in the South China Sea and the diverse territorial disputes that oppose Beijing and its neighbors. What explains this dynamic is the fact that the United States is as much a power of the Pacific as it is of the Atlantic Ocean – an element that European scholars and policymakers tend to forget. In the Pacific, the United States’ projection of power and positioning as leader has most notably taken the form of numerous partnerships (e.g. Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand), which range from commercial agreements to military alliances of mutual defense. In doing so, it is in direct competition with China, which only direct access to the sea is the Pacific Ocean. We thus note the direct clash of the two powers’ respective interests in the Pacific, where their lines of defense and projection overlap. Consequently, while Beijing respects and defends the norms that are in accordance with its own national interests, it aims at reshaping the regional order so as to limit American influence and emerge as leader.

In parallel with the strong assertiveness of its regional foreign policy, the hierarchy that China aims at setting up is being constructed through a logic of relations: Kavalski thus points out that “the ability of a normative power to exert influence is contingent on its capacity to

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84 Maccoby, “Historical Overview of Socialization Research and Theory”.
85 Eleanor E. Maccoby, “Historical Overview of Socialization Research and Theory”. It should be noted that Eleanor Maccoby holds a PhD in psychology, and her research deals with developmental psychology. We argue that the stages of socialization and the socialization process of states as agents of the international system can be studied in a similar – although adapted – way that individuals’ socialization processes in their social environments.
86 For further reference, see Tanguy Struye de Swielande, “The Reassertion of the United States in the Asia-Pacific Region”, Parameters 42:1, Spring 2012, p. 75-89.
generate locally appropriate interactions”\textsuperscript{87}, arguing that “China’s introspective look recollects a normative power premised on the practices of interaction rather than explicit norms of appropriateness”\textsuperscript{88}. China thus aims at establishing its leadership by adopting a logic of relationships rather than a logic of appropriateness: instead of having the other behaving in a way that has been learnt and integrated as ‘normal’ and ‘adequate’, China aims at influencing behaviors through the idea of ‘mutual benefits’\textsuperscript{89} through an active regional diplomacy: strengthening of its participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum since the signing of the 2004 FTA, will to assume a leadership role among the BRICS, dynamism of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, etc. President Xi defends greater regional economic integration: “With various new regional free-trade arrangements cropping up, there have been worries about the potential of fragmentation […] We therefore need to accelerate the realization of FTAAP [Free Trade Agreement in the Asia Pacific] and take regional economic integration forward”\textsuperscript{90}. The latest of these regional moves is the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, conceived of as an alternative to such existing institutions (WB, ADB). What China seeks to establish is increased regional cooperation and integration – the 2015’s Leaders’ Declaration of the APEC thus pointed to the need of “promoting connectivity”:

“We reaffirm our commitment to achieve a seamlessly and comprehensively integrated, innovative, and interconnected Asia-Pacific. We welcome progress implementing the APEC Connectivity Blueprint for 2015-2025 under the pillars of physical, institutional and people-to-people connectivity”\textsuperscript{91}.

As well as promoting economic dynamics, Beijing uses a rhetoric of common identity, culture and history to consolidate regional ties: “We have to beware not to fall into the snare of division or Westernisation”\textsuperscript{92}. The repetitive reference to a common Asian identity, the epitome of which is represented by the ‘Asia for Asians’ declaration, aims at projecting a social identity which other regional countries can refer to and identify with. This social construction aims at influencing Asian states’ mechanism of identification, i.e. “a permanent, incomplete, and open process of socialization that prompts one to search actively and independently for one’s own personality and strengthens the subjective component in the


\textsuperscript{88} Kavalski, “The Shadows of Normative Power in Asia”, p. 313.


formation of self-conception”\(^93\). By embedding this process into the social reality of the Asian region, China’ objective is to provoke an emotional response as a result of “a positive relationship or […] positive feelings”\(^94\), and a cognitive mechanism of “recogniz[ing] similarities in perception and evaluation of the world with other group members”\(^95\). In doing so, Beijing incorporates another (Asian) dimension into the socialization process of Asian states in the system, and presents itself as the leader of this identity-based relational construct, thus aiming at fostering a “process through which national leaders internalize the norms and value orientations espoused by [China] and, as a consequence, become socialized into the community formed by [China] and other nations accepting its leadership position”\(^96\). Beijing’s objective is to guarantee the systemization of this process, i.e. “sociopsychological processes or mechanisms that link the [actor] and social institutions and make people able and willing to function within any kind of hierarchical social system”\(^97\).

**Conclusion**

The assumption this paper builds upon is that power not only stems from material capacities, but derives from and perpetuates a social process that enables a state to have influence and achieve a certain status in the international system. That status must be recognized as legitimate by other members of the system, and mainly by the global dominant socializer, i.e. the United States. In order to maintain the current hierarchy and the legitimacy of its own status of superpower and global leader, Washington has extensively built upon the diffusion of norms and values, thus creating a normative order based on a ‘right/wrong’ differentiation. In its need to rely on other states to lead, however, the United States has contributed to the diffusion of tools and indicators for legitimate behavior, thus creating the conditions that could ultimately erode a part of its power.

China’s ascent to the status of major power is understood in direct correlation with these dynamics and, in fact, is embedded within this specific social context. Indeed, we have seen throughout this analysis that China is asserting its power along three dimensions. The first one revolves around mimicking the role behaviors of the leader, the United States. Beijing integrates in its foreign policy the defense and supporting of international norms, and uses them against the leader by using a rhetoric of ‘rectification’ of the system: by pointing out the boundary-crossing behavior of the leader and the need to abide by the system rules, Chinese leaders thus call for the need to modify the current order, as its leader sometimes does not behave by the rules. They thus imply the illegitimacy of the current leader; in doing so, they build up their own legitimacy as the power which defends the values of the system. Their integration into the international system has enabled them to own these values and norms;


\(^{95}\) Korostelina, *Social Identity and Conflict*, p. 18.


\(^{97}\) Diefenbach, *Hierarchy and Organisation*, p. 73.
China now presents itself as their ultimate defender. The second dimension which China’s power process builds upon is their taking one of the main roles of leader, i.e. that of norm-maker: “at the international level, those whose influence places them at the apex of a regional (or global) hierarchy tend to be the principal source of the assumptions behind whatever normative accord can be found: they are its norm-setters.” They build this role through a logic of relationships based on mutual interests, so as to appear as a benevolent power. Acting primarily in the field of economic relations, where a large part of its power lies, China is asserting itself in other sectors as well; in some ways, we answer affirmatively to Thies’ questioning whether “socialization in one sector spill[s] over into the other, such that states that might not otherwise be conformists in one sector are because of the other.” Not only does China gain in legitimacy in other sectors thanks to its status as a major economic power, Beijing relies on this spillover dynamic to increase the socialization process of other states around its leadership. This leads us to the third dimension of China’s power, which is the mechanism of identification that Beijing aims at triggering among Asian states so as to influence the creation of a group identity that would eventually prove cohesive enough to be stronger than the relations Asian countries maintain with the United States.

The second and third dimensions have a direct impact on the Asian social environment; an element of ‘China-as-leader’ is being incorporated into the social dynamics of the countries in the region, so that their socialization process will be modified to support less and less the United States and, more and more, China. The latter, by imitating the power process of the United States, has learnt the basic roles and rules of what it means to have the status of leader and, learning from the mistakes made by the former, is building a regional order in which it will be able to emerge as regional leader and benefit from strong relations with its neighbors, as a springboard towards asserting a more dominant position globally.

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98 Nincic, Renegade Regimes, p. 21.
99 Thies, The United States, Israel, and the Search for International Order, p. 149.
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