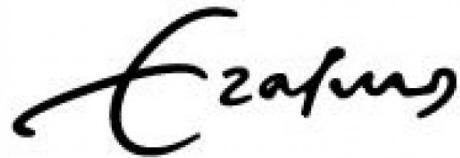


**Erasmus School of  
History, Culture and  
Communication**



# **Sparking the (Relational) Revolution:**

Development and Application of a Relational Model of International Relations based on Friendship and Guanxi.

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## Abstract

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This thesis aims to renew the study of international relations by shifting from static, state-centred models to a more relational perspective that incorporates both Western and Chinese understandings of relationships. The first objective is to provide a more comprehensive framework for analysing international relations through the integration of the Western Friendship Theory and the Chinese concept of *guanxi*. The research addresses the central question: How does the integration of Western and non-western theories of interpersonal relationships enhance our understanding of international relations?

To achieve this goal, the thesis critically engages the existing literature on both friendship theory and *guanxi*; both theories highlight similar aspects of a relationship, like affectivity, reciprocity, and equality. The key difference between the two lies in the static nature of friendship compared to the more dynamic understanding of interpersonal relationships embodied by *guanxi*. From this critical assessment of pivotal literature on the subjects, a new theoretical framework is developed combining these two perspectives offering a dynamic, multicultural understanding of international relations. The integration of the two allows for greater depth in the analysis of interpersonal and international relationships.

A case study is included to illustrate the practical application of this integrated framework and how it can be useful to assess the state of the relationship between two actors. This model can be applied in two ways: comparatively between several dyads of actors; longitudinally if applied multiple times to the same dyad over a determined historical span. The case focuses on China's practice of awarding friendship medals, particularly since 2012, under the leadership of Xi Jinping.

This thesis not only broadens the cultural scope of international relations studies but also provides a more dynamic framework for analysing and engaging in global diplomacy. By incorporating both Western and Chinese concepts, it offers a nuanced understanding that is better suited to the complexities of contemporary international relations.



*To the unpredictable outcomes of life.*



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## Introduction

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This thesis aims to promote a renewed approach to analyzing international relations, echoing the efforts of Julian Go and George Lawson in advocating for a ‘relational revolution.’ This approach seeks to address the oversimplification of global life inherent in mainstream IR models, namely Realism and Liberalism. The central issue with these mainstream models is their reductionist view of global life through the lens of the state as the primary actor. This perspective can be not only limited but also potentially hazardous if not handled properly. Societies and states are composed of individuals, and it is ultimately individuals who make the decisions that shape our world. Therefore, it is crucial to refocus attention on individuals by adopting the perspective of the person as an actor, acknowledging that individuals have the power to influence and alter global dynamics.

To build a framework capable of capturing the nuanced structure of global life, I will use the concept of friendship. As Alexander Wendt points out, this concept is severely underexplored by scholars, despite its frequent use in political discourse.<sup>1</sup> Yuri van Hoef’s attempt to create a theoretical model to analyze interpersonal relationships in international politics represents a significant step forward. However, his model falls short in two key areas: 1) it is built exclusively on Western scholarship, and 2) it is a static concept. Van Hoef’s model classifies interpersonal relationships in binary terms—you are either a friend or you are not—based on five criteria: affect, a shared project, altruistic reciprocity, moral obligations, and equality. While this approach is a valuable contribution, it oversimplifies the complexity of real-world relationships, neglecting the spectrum of relationships that exist between pure friendship and total unfamiliarity.

To resolve this issue, I propose a new framework based on Friendship Theory, addressing two additional necessities: 1) the need for a robust non-Western counterpart to broaden the theoretical foundation and achieve global relevance, and 2) the need for a more dynamic understanding of interpersonal relationships. Incorporating the concept of *guanxi* offers a solution to both problems. *Guanxi*, fundamental in Chinese culture, refers to a network of personal relationships based on mutual trust, reciprocity, and instrumentality, influencing various aspects of professional, private, and public life,

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Yuri van Hoef, “Positive Peace Through Personal Friendship: Franco-German Reconciliation (1974–1995),” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Peace*, ed. Katerina Standish et al. (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2022), 1033–50, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-0969-5\\_54](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-0969-5_54). Evgeny Roshchin, “The Concept of Friendship: From Princes to States,” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 599–624, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106069325>.

including business and politics. Theorists of *guanxi* introduce a dynamic spatiality to friendship, allowing relationships to vary across several dimensions. According to Xuezhi Guo, there are four dimensions across which a relationship can vary: a) instrumental dimension, b) etiquette dimension, c) moral dimension, and d) emotional dimension. These two theories present not only conceptual similarities but also relevant theoretical commonalities. After some theoretical work, this thesis proposes a new model that integrates the factors and dimensions of both friendship and *guanxi* theories. Friendship emerges as the most positive kind of relationship that a good *guanxi* can offer, positioned at the extreme right end of the spectrum. The following image illustrates the synthesis of these theories. This synthesis addresses the two aforementioned problems: 1) *guanxi* enriches the cultural diversity that the concept of friendship has historically lacked, and 2) *guanxi* provides friendship with a dimensionality that has never been modeled before. In doing so, this thesis seeks to establish a new framework for analyzing international relations from a relational perspective, effectively transforming the study of international relations into the study of international relationships.

In the second part of this thesis, I will introduce a case study to illustrate the application of this theoretical framework. In contemporary Chinese politics, the term "friendship" has gained prominence as a way to describe foreign relations. Since Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012, the Chinese Communist Party has increasingly used the term in public declarations, official laws, and ceremonies, embedding it within the core values of the Chinese socialist system.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, only 6.6% of the Chinese population reportedly uses the term 'friend' to describe a personal connection.<sup>3</sup> As Alan Smart argues, this statistic should not deter further investigation. He suggests that in Chinese society, friendship should be understood in the context of other interactional idioms, noting conceptual overlaps between friendship and *guanxi*.<sup>4</sup> By framing friendship within the context of *guanxi*, this thesis aims to address the gap identified by Wendt and resolve the Western/non-Western dichotomy in friendship theory—and in international relations more broadly. This approach seeks to bridge cultural differences and

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Explanation of the 'Ironclad Friendship' between China and Pakistan," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, August 30, 2022,

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/zggcddwjw100ggs/jszgdzgz/202208/t20220830\\_10757639.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/zggcddwjw100ggs/jszgdzgz/202208/t20220830_10757639.html);

Changhao Wei, "P.R.C. Law on State Medals and State Honorary Titles," China Law Translate, August 31, 2019,

<https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/p-r-c-law-on-state-medals-and-state-honorary-titles/>; Xu Zhao, *Competition and*

*Compassion in Chinese Secondary Education* (New York: Springer, 2016); Astrid H. M. Nordin and Graham M. Smith,

"Reintroducing Friendship to International Relations: Relational Ontologies from China to the West," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 2018): 369–96, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcy011>.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Smart, *The Anthropology of Friendship* (London: Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003135821-7>, 119.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Smart, *The Anthropology of Friendship*, 120.

overcome what Foucault describes as heterotopia, a space where differences disrupt conventional language and cause discomfort in dealing with diversity.<sup>5</sup>

The Chinese government formalized the use of "friendship" in the 2015 "Law on State Medals and State Honorary Titles," which introduced the Friendship Medal. This law declares the Friendship Medal as the "highest State honor," implying that being recognized as a friend of China is the highest accolade a foreign personality can receive.<sup>6</sup> Since its inception, the medal has been awarded to twenty individuals, encompassing a diverse range of public and private figures. This selection process provides a valuable pool of examples to analyze the nuanced meanings behind the term friendship and explore its implications for fostering peaceful international relations. These sources will be analyzed using content analysis, guided by existing literature on the agency of Chinese politicians both within and beyond China's borders. This examination will offer insights into how the concept of friendship, when contextualized within *guanxi*, can contribute to a deeper understanding of international relationships and promote more effective diplomatic engagements. In summary, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing international relations by integrating Western friendship theories with the Chinese concept of *guanxi*. This approach not only broadens the cultural scope but also offers a dynamic understanding of interpersonal relationships, ultimately transforming the study of international relations into the study of international relationships.

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<sup>5</sup> Emilian Kavalski, "The Guanxi of Relational International Affairs," *Chinese Political Science Review* 3 (February 23, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-018-0096-0>.

<sup>6</sup> Changhao Wei, "P.R.C. Law on State Medals and State Honorary Titles," China Law Translate, August 31, 2019, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/p-r-c-law-on-state-medals-and-state-honorary-titles/>.

## Research Question, Societal and Scientific Relevance

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This thesis explores how integrating Western friendship theories with the Chinese concept of *guanxi* can provide a nuanced framework for understanding international relations. Specifically, it examines how China's use of the "Friendship Medal" and "Reform Friendship Medal" reflects this relational approach. The central research question is: *How does the integration of Western Friendship Theory and the Chinese concept of guanxi provide a more nuanced framework for analyzing international relations?*

### Societal Impact

This research has significant societal implications, promoting deeper cultural understanding and fostering international cooperation. By emphasizing personal relationships and mutual trust in diplomacy, it suggests innovative strategies for building peaceful and respectful global interactions. Recognizing the role of interpersonal dynamics in foreign policy can help diplomats and policymakers develop more empathetic and effective approaches. Additionally, this study raises public awareness about the complexities of international relations, encouraging a more informed and engaged citizenry. Ultimately, by bridging cultural divides, this work contributes to reducing misunderstandings and enhancing global cooperation.

### Scientific Impact

The scientific relevance of this project lies in its challenge to traditional international relations theories, which often overlook the importance of individual actors and personal relationships. By integrating Western and non-Western perspectives through friendship and *guanxi*, this thesis offers a more inclusive and dynamic theoretical framework. The empirical analysis of China's friendship medals provides concrete evidence supporting this model, demonstrating how state-driven narratives and personal connections shape global politics. Methodologically, the use of content analysis on governmental sources showcases a robust approach to studying international relations. This interdisciplinary work, drawing from sociology, cultural studies, and political science, enriches our understanding of power dynamics and conflict resolution. In sum, this research advances international relations theory by proposing a relational approach that emphasizes cultural diversity, empirical evidence, and innovative methodologies, offering new insights into the complexities of global interactions.

## 1. Friendship in IR: Why and How

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### Introduction

In the realm of International Relations (IR), the theoretical landscape has long been dominated by mainstream theories such as realism and liberalism. However, these theories often fall short of capturing the complexities of human behavior and social relationships within the global arena. On the contrary, Friendship between political actors and other individuals at various levels across the social spectrum, appears a more valuable approach to better understand these complexities. This chapter embarks on a journey to explore and transcend the limitations of traditional frameworks and offer a more nuanced understanding of international relations. I begin by critiquing mainstream IR theories, highlighting the significant shortcoming of reducing global life at mere state-as-an-actor analysis, and proposing how a shift towards relational models that emphasize the importance of interpersonal connections can make up for it. Through the reframing of Van Hoef's theory of friendship in a processual constructivist setting, done by incorporating a non-Western perspective such as *guanxi*, I aim to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the evolution of IR theory and its implications for understanding contemporary global dynamics.

For decades, realism has been the main framework of reference for the majority of scholars and policymakers.<sup>7</sup> Recently, the tide has turned, and studies show how scholars venturing into the post-soviet world prefer using liberalism as a reference.<sup>8</sup> While being different in many aspects, these two still share an oversimplified view of global life where State and institutions represent the sole players in the political arena of international relations. In the present work, I intend to echo Julian Go and George Lawson efforts to push for a 'relational revolution' and overcome the simplifications that affect the classic grand theories.<sup>9</sup> The authors make the case for a more relational IR since we cannot just assume (and explain) entities as if they are a given. For this reason, we cannot employ concepts like 'states' or 'institutions' and expect those to be explained by (or out of) themselves.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, this thesis is one more attempt to bring the 'social' and the 'international' as close as possible. This

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<sup>7</sup> John A. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491733>.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas C. Walker and Jeffrey S. Morton, "Re-Assessing the 'Power of Power Politics' Thesis: Is Realism Still Dominant?," *International Studies Review* 7, no. 2 (June 1, 2005): 341–56, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2005.00504.x>.

<sup>9</sup> Julian Go and George Lawson, *Global Historical Sociology*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316711248>.

<sup>10</sup> Angelika Epple, "A 'Relational Turn'?: The Merging of History, Sociology, and IR," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 33, no. 6 (October 31, 2020): 908–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1838202>.



strand of research attempts to offer an alternative approach to International Relation, turning the logic of the security dilemma. This is important for both scholars and policymakers. That's because, in political IR, relational models like the one singled out here, can become a theoretical ground, an instrument through which policymakers can achieve sustainable peace or, as the Chinese would put it, harmony for all that is under the sky. For IR literature and scholars, this piece of work becomes one more building block for a discussion over a renewed, relational IR.

### 1.1 The Need For A Change

The need comes from the idea that looking at the international from the “state-as-actor” perspective is not enough to address the complicated process that drives choices and consequences. It is necessary to broaden the framework of analysis in order to understand how “actors interpret, decide, pronounce and implement.” Foreign policy is an act of construction carried out by multiple “human-as-actor” at multiple levels. Human-beings decide in the end what foreign policy is.<sup>11</sup>

In examining human behavior, it is crucial to recognize the diversity of individuals and the communities they belong to. Each person's actions are shaped not only by rational considerations but also by their unique identity and subjective experiences. To understand these dynamics, a more sociological approach is indispensable. This approach diverges from traditional theories that prioritize rational choice, by instead delving into the intricate web of social relationships and personal ties that influence how individuals form their interests. Drawing from Alexander Wendt's insights, we can liken this perspective to Liberalism, which emphasizes how institutions shape state interests. However, in this sociological framework, the focus shifts towards understanding how interpersonal connections mold individual and collective interests.<sup>12</sup> By examining the role of social structures, norms, and networks, we gain a deeper understanding of human behavior. This perspective acknowledges that people are not solely driven by rational calculations, but also by the complex interplay of social influences. Thus, by exploring these dynamics, we can unravel the intricate drivers of human agency and interest formation and how they evolve over time. The focus on the human dimension is a way to start looking at international relationships rather than mere relations.

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<sup>11</sup> Steve Smith, “Foreign Policy Is What States Make of It: Social Construction and International Relations Theory,” in *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* (New York, Routledge, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (April 1992): 391–425, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027764>.

## 1.2 Repositioning Van Hoef's Theory of Friendship

In its latest iteration, Friendship follows classical realist Hans Morgenthau by asserting “that human drives are central to understanding politics, and that it is our values, ideas, and, yes, the will to power, that explain human behaviour best.”<sup>13</sup> In Van Hoef's terms, friendship is a means of power perfectly aligned with the interests of the realist policymaker that consists of getting the upper hand within the context of the security dilemma. Van Hoef's view challenges what has been the approach in the doctrine up to that moment in time. Before him, others have framed the issue of friendship in a different way. On the exact contrary, according to Roshchin, the fact friendship is undertheorized is unsurprising, since the majority of IR scholars engage in global politics under the light of the security dilemma, where competition for strategic advantage is key. In such a vision of the world, friendship is often reduced to unrealistic and naïve.<sup>14</sup> He conceptualizes friendship in IR as more than a simple anthropomorphic metaphor, but rather as a “normative argument” for those who seek to turn the logic of the security dilemma around from *fear* to *trust*.<sup>15</sup> In other words, friendship is a means to approach global politics turning the fears stemming from the uncertainty of the relationships set on Hobbesian assumptions into a potential future of trust and mutual understanding.

In his attempt to justify the employment of the concept in IR, Berenskötter sets off from the Hobbesian assumption (on which the security dilemma is based) to explain the position of realists on the matter. According to him, realists, even if they were to accept the notion of a ‘friend’ motivated by “genuine intentions,” wouldn't trust each other for the sole uncertainty that characterizes human relations.<sup>16</sup> For realists, the way states respond to this uncertainty, is by triggering the securitization process. Drawing from Heidegger, he argues that what humans really fear is not the outcome of this uncertainty, but the anxiety that comes with the uncertainty *per se*. In this case, the uncertainty can be explained as uncertainty of the outcome.

Following this logic, there's no justifiable teleology in concluding that the right way to deal with such anxiety is to foster the (over)empowerment process. This very point of the reasoning is

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<sup>13</sup> Yuri van Hoef, “Modelling Friendship between Elite Political Actors: Interpreting the Relationships of Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing, Kohl and Mitterrand, Thatcher and Reagan, and Bush and Major” (PhD Dissertation, The University of Leeds, 2018), 40.

<sup>14</sup> Evgeny Roshchin, *Friendship among Nations: History of a Concept, Friendship among Nations* (Manchester University Press, 2017), <https://www.manchesterhive.com/view/9781526116451/9781526116451.xml>, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Evgeny Roshchin, *Friendship among Nations*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Felix Berenskoetter, “Friends, There Are No Friends? An Intimate Reframing of the International,” *Millennium* 35, 3 (2007): 647–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298070350031501>, 655.

exactly where friendship comes in as the alternative to a historically preferred course of actions. Escaping the logic of balancing by getting closer,<sup>17</sup> Trust and genuine intentions are not guaranteed. The transition from mere relations to genuine relationships is a process that takes time and doesn't always occur under all conditions. Certain prerequisites precede the attempt to build a relationship, while others may become evident over time. Similarly, conditions that were initially present at the outset of a relationship may evolve and no longer suffice. Nevertheless, we are consistently faced with two elements: the initial encounter, where two actors first become acquainted, and the ongoing fluctuation between a mere relation and an established relationship, evolving into friendship in the most ideal circumstances.

Both Realism and Liberalism are an attempt to explain the outcome of relations between humans (better, States) with a well-defined nature. This aprioristic behavior does not consider specific variables that might influence the goals, expectations, and ways to approach relations over time. The interesting element of this logical overturn – that makes it more than just a mere rhetorical exercise – lies in the idea that humans are not pre-constituted unities and, therefore, it is not possible to predetermine their behavior. What is possible, though, is to study the construction of relationships between specific set of humans and learn behavioral patterns and that lead to a specific outcome. The learning potential stemming from this approach is what makes it a strong tool in the hand of the policymaker to forge positive (and, thus, stronger) relationships by closing the cognitive gap that normally generate uncertainty in the interaction with others. “Other” in this case can be a fellow politician or any other person across the social spectrum.

### 1.3 A Constructivist Stance?

What emerges from the discussion above is that it is necessary to adopt a markedly constructivist stance as a valuable way to explain the multifaceted nature of the occurrences that involve humans. This means to look at society and its constructs as in Nicholas Onuf's words: “reality holds that people make society, and society makes people.”<sup>18</sup> However, it is necessary to fix one crucial flaw that characterize constructivist analysis, which is the creation of consistent theories. As Jeffrey T. Checkel puts it: “Constructivists have convincingly shown the empirical value of their approach, providing new and

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<sup>17</sup> Andrea Oelsner, “Friendship, Mutual Trust and the Evolution of Regional Peace in the International System,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (2007): 257–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230701208061>.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Onuf, *Making Sense, Making Worlds: Constructivism in Social Theory and International Relations* (London: Routledge), 2013, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203096710>, 4.

meaningful interpretations on a range of issues of central concern to students of world politics. At the same time, constructivist theorizing is in a state of disarray. These researchers, much like the rational choice scholars they criticize, have made too rapid a leap from ontology and methods to empirics, to the neglect of theory development.”<sup>19</sup> Checkel’s words are clear, constructivism lacks theoretical models, and that’s exactly the deficiency that rethinking friendship theory in constructivist terms can help making up for. I previously shown how Van Hoef’s follows Morgenthau in inscribing friendship in classical realism. Here I change the premises of Van Hoef’s discourse by stating how friendship must not be seen as a tool for leveraging the relationship others to gain power, but a way to create trust between parties to achieve sustainable peace.

Furthermore, this thesis aims to engage with the wave of emerging relational theories that seek to expand the boundaries of classical constructivism. One strategy involves spotlighting non-Western approaches to challenge the limitations of Western-centric theorizations.<sup>20</sup> In essence, as Western theories often reflect and develop upon Western ontologies, they may inadequately capture and interpret the complexities of the broader global landscape.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, on top of everything listed up until this point, the work addresses two other concerns: the underdevelopment of theoretical frameworks within the constructivist paradigm (as explained by Checkel) and the imperative to incorporate non-Western ontologies into Western theorizations. By reframing Van Hoef’s concept of friendship within a constructivist framework and incorporating a Chinese ontological perspective, specifically through the lens of *guanxi*, this study aims to establish a common conceptual ground between seemingly disparate conceptual worlds. Moreover, this approach imbues friendship with a more dynamic profile, facilitating its comprehension within constructivist frameworks.

#### 1.4 Toward Relationism and New Constructivism

While Constructivism is to be considered the broader frame of reference, I feel that this theoretical realm, when applied to International Relations needs to put more emphasis on the relation, rather than the single individual or the structures that are thought to shape it. To accomplish this, I draw on the insights of Qin Yaqing, who highlights a crucial dimension missing in Western IR, namely the concept of

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<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey T. Checkel, “The Constructive Turn in International Relations Theory.” *World Politics* 50, no. 2 (1998): 324–48. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100008133>, 338.

<sup>20</sup> Milja Kurki, “Relational Revolution and Relationality in IR: New Conversations,” *Review of International Studies* 48, no. 5 (December 2022): 821–36, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000127>.

<sup>21</sup> Shibashis Chatterjee, “Western Theories and the Non-Western World: A Search for Relevance,” *South Asian Survey* 21, no. 1–2 (March 1, 2014): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0971523115592470>.

‘relation’ and its evolution over time that potentially ends up being a friendship. Even Alexander Wendt, widely regarded as the progenitor of constructivism,<sup>22</sup> has evolved his stance on the significance of ‘relationships’ as he refined his theory over time. Yaqing points out that, in his early works, Wendt viewed the agent-structure relation as a "simultaneous and symbiotic" process. However, as his academic career progressed, Wendt shifted towards a more structuralist position, wherein the structure precedes the individual, relegating the process of interaction to the background.<sup>23</sup>

I pick up the strand of relational theories, in particular processual constructivism, to reject the idea that states are the basic unit through which to analyze international politics and support the claim for a renewed constructivism, a form of New Constructivism.<sup>24</sup> This endeavor consists of the idea of putting forward the relations between individuals as analytical units, holding the individual to exist only when placed in a social context. The relation becomes the item to be studied, allowing the researcher to move across a spatial dimension of the relation that allows to investigate the formation, where it stands in time and how it got to that specific point.<sup>25</sup> Timo Walter explains the general scope of New Constructivism in the following piece of text: “this ‘New’ edition would restore empirical inquiry to the heart of the Constructivist project within International Relations (IR) by firmly anchoring the analysis of the ‘International’ and its changing nature as a social order in a close examination of the practical activities by which it is enacted and reproduced.”<sup>26</sup>

This view suggests a highly dynamic, everchanging social landscape where individuals find their sense in the respective relationships they’re inserted into. International relations are ultimately social relations and social since social relations are in a perpetual process of formation and reformation, it follows that the study unit must revolve around the relationship between two individuals to understand the dynamic that moves people closer or farther to each other. In this particular aspect we find a limit of Van Hoef’s friendship, which is a static concept that is either present or not. This, in the

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<sup>22</sup> Vincent Pouliot, “The Essence of Constructivism,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 7, no. 3 (October 1, 2004): 319–36, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jird.1800022>, 321.

<sup>23</sup> Qin Yaqing, “Relationality and Processual Construction: Bringing Chinese Ideas into International Relations Theory,” *Social Sciences in China* 30, no. 4 (November 1, 2009): 5–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02529200903342560>.

<sup>24</sup> David M. McCourt, “Practice Theory and Relationalism as the New Constructivism,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (September 1, 2016): 475–85, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqw036>.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, “Reclaiming the Social: Relationalism in Anglophone International Studies,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 5 (September 3, 2019): 582–600, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1567460>.

<sup>26</sup> Timo Walter, “The Road (Not) Taken? How the Indexicality of Practice Could Make or Break the ‘New Constructivism,’” *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 538–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066118779664>.

author's opinion, represents a simplification of human relations that does not help in shake the perceived naiveness off the concept of friendship in IR which is often dismissed as such. However, Van Hoef's attempts rather successfully to conceptualize and somehow operationalize a possible state of a relationship, disregarding all the potential alternatives to it, which are not limited to simple enmity.

### 1.5 The Gap in Research

Within this gap of research is where this work comes in.

- 1) It has been proven to be missing a theoretical landscape in constructivist thought;
- 2) Western IR is still quite limited to non-western points of view;
- 3) Constructivism lost focus on the relationship between individuals, relegating it to the background.

Classical Friendship Theory addresses some of these issues, but alone is not enough to make up for these shortcomings, that is the reason why it needs to be reformed. Since, according to Van Hoef, Classical Friendship is a mere instrument in the hands of the realist politician, the fact that his theorization approach also contributes to moving forward the constructivist agenda as shown in point 1 is nothing but an unconscious deed. That is why reframing his theory under the constructivist framework is already a progress forward encapsulated in a statement. Adding *guanxi* to this theoretical scramble is a good way to pursue each of the points mentioned above.

First, it adds theoretical sturdiness to classical friendship by diluting the concept in a relational spectrum where friendship represents just one of many possibilities of relational states, though still representing its most positive configuration. Relations become relations-in-motion and fluctuate from semi-unknown all the way to friendship and back, with no guarantee of either the direction of the process or the result. Second, a good way to push the boundaries of a theory and pursue the goal of making it more and more encompassing is to explore different ontologies. Different ways to deal with the nature of being, existence and reality. *Guanxi* happens to be a Confucian concept deeply rooted in Chinese society. A concept that has attracted surprisingly little attention from western IR scholars. "Guanxi" ('关系' in simplified Chinese), constitutes one of the two components of the term "guoji guanxi" ('国际关系' in simplified Chinese), translating to "international relations" in English. What may initially appear as a mere anecdote transforms into a compelling rationale for academic interest in the concept. This has become a scapegoat both to study a different conceptualization of global politics and to create a bridge between different yet very similar conceptualizations, as I'll show later on. Third, *guanxi* is founded on relational grounds. In Chinese conception, the individuals exist and only

exist in their relationships. synthesized with Classical Friendship, *guanxi* appears to be the perfect expedient to reason about International Relations by putting the focus on human-human relationships.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has endeavored to navigate the theoretical landscape of International Relations (IR) by advocating for a relational turn in discourse. We have interrogated mainstream IR theories, revealing their limitations in capturing the complexity of human behavior and social relationships within the international arena. Through an exploration of Van Hoef's theory of friendship and the integration of non-Western perspectives like *guanxi*, we have sought to broaden the theoretical framework of IR and offer a more dynamic and inclusive approach to understanding international relations. By emphasizing the importance of interpersonal connections, community affiliations, and the fluidity of human interactions, we aim to contribute to the ongoing evolution of IR theory and its relevance to contemporary global challenges.

## 2. Historiography

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### 2.1 Operationalisation Of Friendship

Chinese people stress interpersonal harmony to such an extent that they pursue harmony for harmony's sake, and anything, such as manifest conflict, that will jeopardize or destroy harmony will evoke anxiety. People living in a harmonious society are freed from the threat of aggression from the other.<sup>27</sup> As Yang points out, Chinese people live in “disharmony anxiety and conflict phobia.”<sup>28</sup> For them, pursuing *guanxi* becomes a way to address this anxiety that comes from the substantial uncertainty that characterizes other people’s intentions. Analogously, Roshchin, explains how unsurprising it is that *friendship* is undertheorized since the majority of IR students engage global politics under the light of the security dilemma, where competition for strategic advantage is key. In such a vision of the world, friendship is often reduced to unrealistic and naïve.<sup>29</sup> He conceptualizes friendship in IR as more than a simple anthropomorphic metaphor, but rather as a “normative argument” for those who seek to turn the logic of the security dilemma around from *fear* to *trust*.<sup>30</sup> In his attempt to justify the employment of the concept in IR, Berenskötter sets off from the Hobbesian assumption (on which is based the security dilemma) to explain the position of realists on the matter. According to him, realists, even if they were to accept the notion of a *friend* motivated by “genuine intentions” wouldn’t trust each other for the sole uncertainty that characterizes human relations.<sup>31</sup> For realists, the way states respond to this uncertainty, is by triggering the securitization process. Drawing from Heidegger, he argues that what humans really fear is not the outcome of this uncertainty, but the anxiety that comes with the uncertainty *per se*.

Following this logic, there’s no justifiable teleology in concluding that the right way to deal with such anxiety is to foster the (over) empowerment process. In this very point of the reasoning is exactly where friendship comes as the alternative to a historically preferred course of actions. Escaping

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<sup>27</sup> Robert J. Taormina, “Social Harmony in Decision Making: Costs and Benefits in Chinese Society,” *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 5 (May 12, 2014): 128–34, <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2014.25026>, 130.

<sup>28</sup> Yueyu Shu, Yinxia Zhang and Huifang Li, “Kuo-Shu Yang and indigenous Chinese psychology in the view of knowledge mapping,” *Psychological Research* 15, no. 3 (2022): 195-204.

<sup>29</sup> Evgeny Roshchin, *Friendship among Nations: History of a Concept*, (Manchester University Press, 2017), <https://www.manchesterhive.com/view/9781526116451/9781526116451.xml>, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Evgeny Roshchin, *Friendship among Nations*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Felix Berenskoetter, “Friends, There Are No Friends? An Intimate Reframing of the International,” *Millennium* 35, no. 3 (September 1, 2007): 647–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298070350031501>, 655.



the logic of balancing by getting closer.<sup>32</sup> It seems here that the two logics overlap pretty much unequivocally: the element of anxiety generated by the uncertainty is resolved by disclosing information about each other, and conforming to a foreseeable behavior reduces anxiety by creating a reasonable expectation about the counterpart's intentions. Following the intersection outlined so far, reframing friendship and *guanxi* in common terms becomes a way to reignite a debate started by Van Hoef and Oelsner about how this approach to international relations can be a valid way to pursue peace, both negative and positive.<sup>33</sup> In *guanxi* society, people will cherish harmony all the more in their interactions with people who have good *guanxi* with them, because they are reluctant to hurt an otherwise stable *guanxi* by actively pursuing a dispute.<sup>34</sup>

Historically, *guanxi* has also been promoted – and relied on – by politicians to “get things done.” It is reported repeatedly that at various levels of Chinese society, the concept works as a “lubricant” to make social transactions smoother.<sup>35</sup> Analyzing common practices in cross-cultural interactions, J. Nolan notices how this approach of relying on one's own *guanxi* network to conduct affairs is something that might not be as Sino-centric as one might think. In particular, he analyses how similar conceptions of relations can be applied in several other places in Asia, like India, Indonesia, or Korea. He ends up concluding that there might be a case to be made about how personal connections become more crucial “where formal legal frameworks have yet to be fully established.”<sup>36</sup> This expedient allows us to repurpose the concept in international politics by drawing the attention to how legal frameworks in international relations might not be considered well established as they lack the important element to make them effective in case agreements are not respected. The absence of enforcement mechanisms

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<sup>32</sup> Andrea Oelsner, “Friendship, Mutual Trust and the Evolution of Regional Peace in the International System,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (2007): 257–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230701208061>.

<sup>33</sup> Yuri van Hoef and Andrea Oelsner, “Friendship and Positive Peace: Conceptualising Friendship in Politics and International Relations,” *Politics and Governance* 6, no. 4 (December 28, 2018): 115–24, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i4.1728>.

<sup>34</sup> Zaixiao Zhang and Mingli Zhang, “Guanxi, Communication, Power, and Conflict in Industrial Buyer-Seller Relationships: Mitigations Against the Cultural Background of Harmony in China,” *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* 20, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 99–117, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1051712X.2013.775625>.

<sup>35</sup> Seung Ho Park and Yadong Luo, “Guanxi and Organizational Dynamics: Organizational Networking in Chinese Firms,” *Strategic Management Journal* 22, no. 5 (April 4, 2001), 455–477, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/smj.167>, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Jane Nolan, “Good Guanxi and Bad Guanxi: Western Bankers and the Role of Network Practices in Institutional Change in China,” *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 22, no. 16 (October 1, 2011): 3357–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.586869>.

undermines the attempts of any international court to bring stability and, potentially, peace and security.<sup>37</sup>

If we accept the international legal framework as not “fully established” yet, then the circle closes around the idea that, beside unenforceable law, something else must be contributing to a more effective conduct of international relations – which occurs regardless. Grammatical locutions like *pacta sunt servanda* (pacts must be respected) relying on the counterparts’ *bona fide* (good faith) have been describing for centuries how the behavior of international actors is ultimately based on personal commitment. Broadening our understanding of how personal relations work in international politics can be done by bringing *guanxi*, friendship, or other potential similar conceptualizations. This represents a way to create non-legal expectations between states (and state representatives) that might be reliable because “self-enforced” by the personal attachment to the relation and the fear of showing oneself as an unreliable partner. For this reason, one could be ostracized from future relational networks. In China, for example, it is said that if there is no strong system of laws or well-defined popular faith to uphold the ideals of legitimacy, *guanxi* can be expected to continue its crucial role in Chinese politics.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.2 *Guanxi* as a Relational Spectrum.

This conceptual convergence between friendship and *guanxi* into more theoretical approaches. Both friendship and *guanxi* doctrines caught the interest of scholars who attempted more theoretical approaches that, when compared, kept confirming that the two underlying concepts were not just parallels, but intersected in more than some sporadic cases. For this comparative exercise, Chen and Chen’s and Guo’s two different *guanxi* theories are going to be juxtaposed to each other and then to Van Hoef’s friendship theory, which represents the theoretical pinnacle of friendship scholarship. The former scholars contributed to establishing analytical frameworks through which to study particular *guanxi* dyads. For starters, they both base their approach on the idea that *guanxi* is not a static concept, but a dynamic one.<sup>39</sup> This stands in stark contrast with friendship theory since, according to Van Hoef,

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<sup>37</sup> Matúš Štulajter, “Problem of Enforcement of an International Law – Analysis of Law Enforcement Mechanisms of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization,” *Journal of Modern Science* 33, no. 2 (2017): 325–35, 326.

<sup>38</sup> Xuezi Guo, “Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics,” *The China Journal* 46, no. 5 (July 1, 2001), 69–90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3182308>, 71.

<sup>39</sup> Xiao-Ping Chen and Chao C. Chen, “On the Intricacies of the Chinese Guanxi: A Process Model of Guanxi Development,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 21, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 305–24, <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:APJM.0000036465.19102.d5>, 315.

friendship is set apart by the characteristic of altruism,<sup>40</sup> implicitly ruling out the possibility of any nuanced kind of friendship that might have one or more features of friendship but not all of them. In short, you're either a friend or not. This means that if *guanxi* can be purely instrumental, friendship cannot.

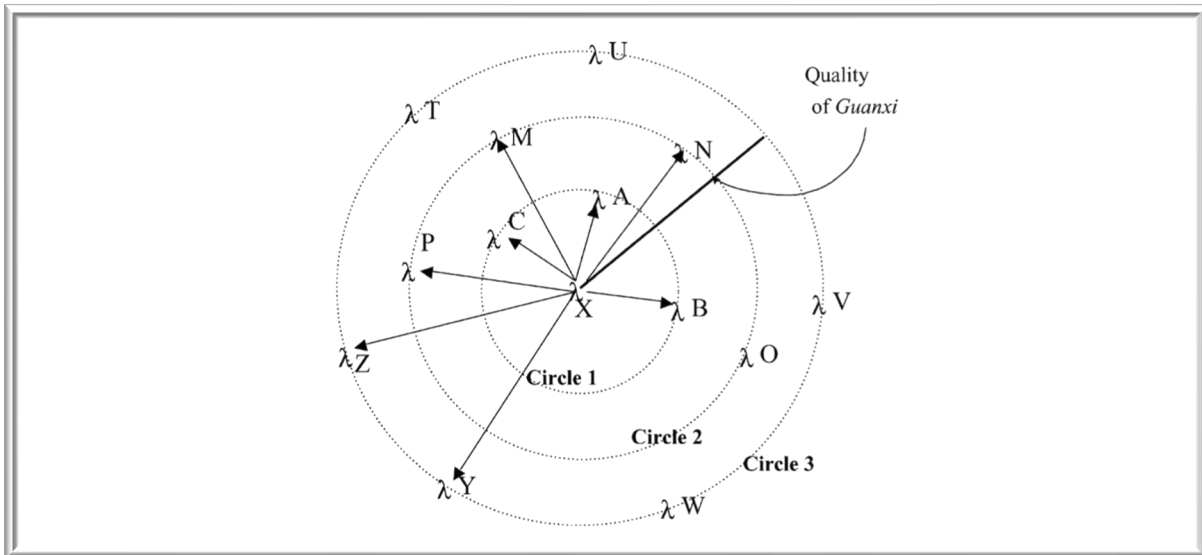


Figure 2.1: "A Person's Guanxi Net."<sup>41</sup>

*Guanxi* theorists point out how *guanxi* changes in purpose and quality.<sup>42</sup> On one side, Chen and Chen's work clearly conceptualizes their criteria as a way to assess the quality of the relationship, to determine whether a given *guanxi* is good or bad in a given moment in time.<sup>43</sup> It is clearly visible in figure 1, this allows us to project every *guanxi* in an ego-centered net where every relationship is pinpointed farther or closer to the 'self' based on the outcome of the assessment. In a slightly different way, Guo is just as convinced that *guanxi* must be seen as "ranging along a spectrum" that doesn't go from bad to good, but ranges from "more instrumental" to "more emotional". The presence of a range of possibilities allows us to keep the concept of friendship alive as a specific point on the spectrum. This also gives us the possibility to state how *guanxi* can be a key addition to it with the potential of

<sup>40</sup> Yuri van Hoef, "Positive Peace Through Personal Friendship: Franco-German Reconciliation (1974–1995)," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Peace*, ed. Katerina Standish et al. (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2022), 1033–50, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-0969-5\\_54](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-0969-5_54), 1036.

<sup>41</sup> Xiao-Ping Chen and Chao C. Chen, "On the Intricacies of the Chinese Guanxi: A Process Model of Guanxi Development," 312.

<sup>42</sup> Xuezhi Guo, 'Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics', 89.

<sup>43</sup> Xiao-Ping Chen and Chao C. Chen, "On the Intricacies of the Chinese Guanxi: A Process Model of Guanxi Development," 312.

introducing friendship theory to a more nuanced definition that can vary in time based on the effort of the counterpart.

Like Chen and Chen, Guo gave us a peak of how his ranging system works by also making clear which criteria – in his nomenclature, “dimension” – must be paramount for a *guanxi* to be located in a specific part of the spectrum (see *figure 2*). In such a case, it is interesting to understand what distinctive elements set the two theories apart and see whether the authors come as alternatives to each other or simply as describing different components of the same concept. As Guo states mentions that *guanxi* has variable quality, he immediately validates Chen and Chen’s perspective that *guanxi* can be better or worse. In the following table, are shown the elements that constitute a *guanxi* according to the two authors:

<b>Guo</b>
Instrumental Dimension
Etiquette Dimension
Moral Dimension
Emotional Dimension

Table 2.2: Guo’s Elements

	<b>Chen and Chen</b>
Trust (Xing)	Ability
	Sincerity
Feeling (Qing)	Affection ( <i>ganqing</i> )
	Obligation ( <i>renqing</i> )

Table 2.2: Chen and Chen’s Quality Criteria

According to Guo, *guanxi* is still a hard concept to define, and one must consider that no clear line separates the four dimensions that often overlap to some extent.<sup>44</sup> Relationships are characterized in different ways and thus differ greatly. While the author never labels any combination as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, he states that relations characterized by the predominance of moral and emotional dimensions are generally stronger and long(er)-lasting compared to others where etiquette and instrumentality reign. As we’ll see later, this also finds validation in Van Hoef’s theory, which conceptualizes friendship on the same grounds. Unpacking the concept, Guo ends up making use of the very criteria outlined by Chen and Chen. The emotional dimension is more influential – thus making the *guanxi* better – when *ganqing* (also ‘affection’) levels are high. On the contrary, *guanxi* is to be considered worse

<sup>44</sup> Guo, “Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics.”, 88.

when the obligation of responding to a help request come from mere social pressure with no significant personal engagement – the definition of Guo’s etiquette dimension. When *guanxi* is mainly based on etiquette, the author shares Chen and Chen’s assessment criteria, for which the relationship is worse because the levels of *renqing* are high while affection is not.<sup>45</sup> Chen and Chen’s conceptualization makes use of Guo’s *guanxi* to create a spectrum of relationships diversified in their purpose and quality.

### 2.3 Pathways to the Relation

One main difference that sets the two theories apart and that requires a separate study is that *guanxi* scholars spend a lot of their intellectual work describing the pathways that lead to a relation,<sup>46</sup> which is something that the friendship theory hardly does.

<i>Guanxi</i> stages	<i>Guanxi</i> objectives	Interactive activities	Operating principles
Initiating	Setting up bases	Familiarizing	Mutual self-disclosure
Building	Enhancing quality	Expressive & instrumental transactions	Dynamic reciprocity
Using	Getting benefits re-evaluating <i>guanxi</i> quality	Exchanging favors	Long-term equity

Table 2.3: *Guanxi* Stages According to Chen and Chen<sup>1</sup>

Chen and Chen advance a theory that, among the other critical contributions to the subject seen so far, introduces us to a model of *guanxi* development that consists of three stages: initiating, building, and using *guanxi*. Each phase is assessed through three criteria: the *objective* related to the stage, the behaviors and *activities* of the parties, and the *operating principles*. This makes *guanxi* quite a dynamic concept. The fact that you cannot change the starting *guanxi* base makes its starting moment statically related to the premises, nevertheless, it can differ greatly in the expectations originated at a given the stage of relationship.

<sup>45</sup> Guo, “Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics.”, 86; Xiao-Ping Chen and Chao C. Chen, “On the Intricacies of the Chinese Guanxi: A Process Model of Guanxi Development,” 314.

<sup>46</sup> Xiao-Ping Chen and Chao C. Chen, “On the Intricacies of the Chinese Guanxi: A Process Model of Guanxi Development,”

Unlike friendship scholars, theorists spend a lot of their intellectual work in describing the pathways that lead to a relation.<sup>47</sup> In this case, the effort is not fortuitous but reflects the importance of the so-called ‘bases’ on which the relationship is founded. Jacobs defines the concept clearly as the sense of shared identification between two or more actors involved.<sup>48</sup> Even though bases are relevant in influencing the pace of the relationship-building process, it does not predetermine its outcome.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, scholars who define *guanxi* categorically (in the sense of classifying each relation by the base), admit the possibility of a *guanxi* relation between strangers. Interesting parallelism can be traced between the concept of base and the idea brought by the friendship scholar Kupchan about how the sense of “we-ness” (*guanxi*’s shared identification) is generated through the “persistence of a narrative [...] depicting an appropriately and trusting friendship.”<sup>50</sup> The two approaches seem to converge since they both require the relationship to be inscribed in a narrative framework that depicts them closer. Guanxi bases are the beginning of the story of a relationship. In simpler terms, that means that two people do not necessarily need to be of similar personal data or a common past to claim a common social identification<sup>51</sup> as long as the relationship is framed into a working and progressive narrative of closeness.

Initiating *guanxi* means essentially starting a relationship with a stranger. This stage is functional to familiarize with the counterpart through the mutual self-disclosure. The goal is to find some common ground on which to base the future relation. It is not just about finding commonalities in terms of past experiences, but also in terms of current situations and future projects. On this regard, the idea is to create a so-called anticipatory base by “impressing the other upon one’s own potential contribution to the relationship. So, on one side finding common roots in the past might help triggering an immediate emotional response, on the other this does not seem to be mandatory. A peak of what a relationship might look in the future might be enough to initiate *guanxi*, leaving any emotional response to future moments in time. To trace a line with Guo’s dimensions, seems that the more shared

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<sup>47</sup> Xiao-Ping Chen and Chao C. Chen, “On the Intricacies of the Chinese Guanxi: A Process Model of Guanxi Development,”

<sup>48</sup> Bruce Jacobs, “A Preliminary Model of Particularistic Ties in Chinese Political Alliances: Kan-Ch’ing and Kuan-Hsi in a Rural Taiwanese Township,” *The China Quarterly* 78 (June 1, 1979): 237–73, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000040467> 243.

<sup>49</sup> Tong Chee Kiong and Yong Pit Kee, “Guanxi Bases, Xinyong and Chinese Business Networks,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 49 (March 1998), <https://doi.org/10.2307/591264>, 77.

<sup>50</sup> Charles A. Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends*, 2012, <https://www.cfr.org/book/how-enemies-become-friends>., 52.

<sup>51</sup> Chen and Chen, “On the Intricacies of the Chinese Guanxi.”, 311.

features are found in the outset of the building process, the higher the chances of the relation to fall into the emotional dimension, therefore the higher its quality.

The second stage is referred to as *guanxi* building. It is the process of enhancing what Chen and Chen define as Xing (trust) and Qing (feeling). In this phase, the line between business and social events is blurred since sociality is considered, for all intents and purposes, a way to achieve instrumental ends as well as to initiate a cycle of exchanging favors. This underpins features of reciprocity and the long-term will to stay in the relationship. Moreover, Chinese reciprocity should also be *other-oriented* – in the sense of truly satisfying the other and not acting merely to get rid of the debt – and *unequal* – in the sense of escalating favors at every iteration of the cycle. The last stage, *using guanxi*, refers to one's inclination to, indeed, use their own *guanxi* for favors. For most, this represents the ultimate option when no other way is viable. It is important to highlight how being asked for favors is seen not as a burden but as sign of trust and faith just as much as receiving them. This is to be held true always in a spirit of equity and balance in the long run.

#### 2.4 Why Studying Friendship through *Guanxi* Lenses

*Guanxi* shares important features with friendship. Looking into the fundamental premises of the two approaches to interpersonal relations, it seems clear that they share an identical view on how to deal with the anxiety originating from the uncertainty of other people's behavior, namely: getting closer and striving for common goals. Unlike friendship theorists, Chinese scholars spend more words identifying the pathways to a relationship and determining a set of clear criteria through which to assess the state of a relation. That makes *guanxi* relations a spectrum of potential configurations, while friendship is strict in defining itself apart from other kinds of personal connections. Admitting the existence of different 'degrees' of friendship might be a good way to start exploring how a generic personal relationship is moving closer or farther to friendships-like ideal types. In this spectrum, friendship as the most positive kind of relationship that a good *guanxi* can offer, positioned at the extreme right end of the spectrum. The following image illustrates the synthesis of these theories.

How the two theories are heavily intersected from a theoretical standpoint will be demonstrated in the next section, where Guo's approach will match almost unequivocally with Van Hoef's model of friendship. This theoretical effort will be helpful studying the meaning of the friendship medal established in 2015 by Xi Jinping. The marginal use that the term *friend* has in Chinese society makes the choice of using the world *friendship* in titling the award an attempt to lure us on the Chinese side of

the western/non-western gap to understand what that is behind and how might come to preserve<sup>52</sup> and achieve positive peace.<sup>53</sup>

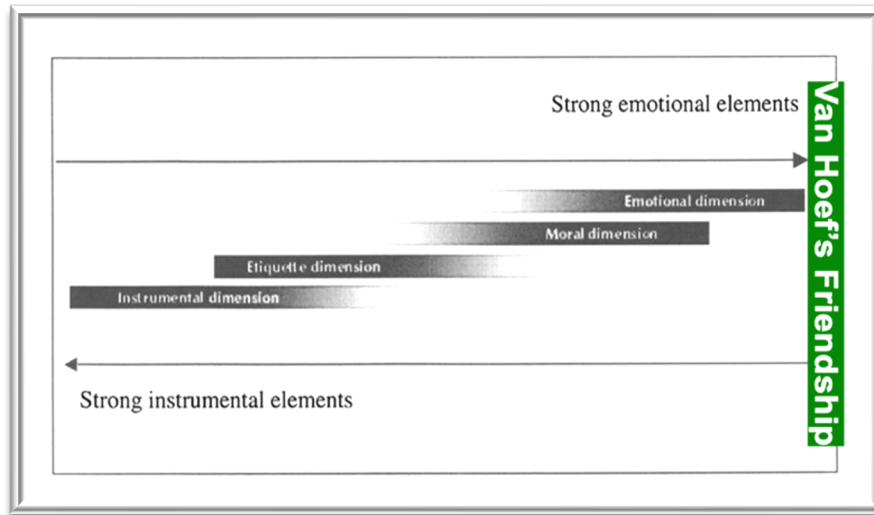


Figure 2.2: Friendship in the Guanxi Spectrum.

<sup>52</sup> Changhao Wei, "P.R.C. Law on State Medals and State Honorary Titles," China Law Translate, August 31, 2019, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/p-r-c-law-on-state-medals-and-state-honorary-titles/>. contributions to the preservation of world peace".

<sup>53</sup> Yuri van Hoef and Andrea Oelsner, "Friendship and Positive Peace: Conceptualising Friendship in Politics and International Relations," *Politics and Governance* 6, no. 4 (December 28, 2018): 115–24, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i4.1728>.



### 3. Theory, Sources & Methodology

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#### 3.1 Remodeling Friendship

Shown in *table 4* is the element characterizing friendship pointed out by Van Hoe. Such elements, if juxtaposed to Guo's dimensions, show a consistent overlapping – even in the mere nomenclature – which is worth to be explored. From the following analysis, this overlap will prove to be consistent to make possible the creation of a hybrid theory that will be useful to study Chinese conceptualization of friendship. To come to terms with the Chinese *guanxi* through the lens of friendship theory, some work is required to make the ontology of this new realm applicable to any case study. In doing so, I'll merge into one comprehensive theoretical framework all the founding features of, indeed, friendship theory laid by Yuri

Van Hoef and all the *Guanxi* dimensions provided by Xuezhi Guo through the examination of Chinese elite politics. The two frameworks lay out respectively five characterizing elements in the case of the friendship theory and four in the case of *guanxi*. As much as those seem to overlap to a certain extent, a very evident caveat here is that there's a mismatch in the numbers of elements considered, which is why it is required to either collapse two elements of the friendship theory into one or break one *guanxi* dimension into two. Investigating a bit further into the single elements of each theory, it is possible to get to the conclusion that the former solution — collapsing two friendship theory's elements into one — suits more the scope of the analysis as well as the more general attempt of the theoretical effort to fill the gap "toward east." This last goal is to be pursued, at least is in this initial conciliatory stage, by compromising the western definition rather than the contrary. Therefore, the resulting framework will have four elements that I recommend for this purpose:

<b>Van Hoef</b>
Affect
Shared Project
Altruistic Reciprocity
Moral Obligations
Equality

*Table 3.1: Van Hoef's Model*

Table 3.2: Hybrid Factors

<b>Hybrid</b>
Affectivity
Effort Tangibility
Morality
Net Reciprocity

#### a) Affectivity

Friendship Theory's conception of affect coincides clearly with *Guanxi*'s emotional dimension. Van Hoef states that the emotional link between two humans is what makes friendship such a "powerful bond." In the same way, Guo, when speaking about emotions in *guanxi* says that dimension rests on the concept of *ganqing*, or, as he unravels, "the deepest kind of sentiment, aroused by the closest human ties." It is interesting to note how the two authors, when talking about the consequences of such emotional attachment, highlight two opposite outcomes that are not mutually exclusive but turn out to be complementary to each other. On one side, Van Hoef points out how the danger lies in the fact that an emotionally attached leader can take decisions that are potentially dangerous for the community of reference. That means sacrificing one's self-interest for the sake of someone else's benefit. On the other side, Guo points out how an emotional bond can be asymmetric between the two parties, meaning that contracting parties are always exposed to the risk that the counterpart will abuse the emotional advantage to exploit the relations for instrumental means. To set things straight, Guo resorts to Liang Shuming's definition of friendship, which defines true friendship as those relations characterized

by mutuality.<sup>54</sup> In other words, the two authors provide us with two interesting analytical tools to qualify or disqualify relationship from the realm of friendship. Van Hoef suggests that it is possible to recognize affect, among other ways, by noticing when one end of the dyad acts selflessly, or even better, against its own interests. On the other hand, Guo warns us that whoever takes leverages its position of emotional superiority to take advantage of the other must not be considered as friend.

### **b) Effort Tangibility**

Here is where the grand project characterizing the friendship theory merges with *guanxi*'s instrumental dimension. The two narratives, once again, heavily overlap, both revolving around the idea that actual friendly relationships are founded on the idea of each other's betterment. This comes from the degree of instrumentality through which it is possible to "exploit" the relationship. The authors both agree on the fact that "unbeneficial" relationships are to be dropped or neglected. This instrumental part of the relationship is thus a necessary condition not only for friendships to originate but also for them to thrive in the long term. What is to be verified in this case is the presence or absence of such shared effort toward something tangible that brings benefit to both parties, either alternately or simultaneously.

### **c) Morality**

In both cases, the moral component is described as an act of mutual obligation toward each other. Morality represents an external constraint that can potentially save the relationship in those stages where the counterparts fail to fully fulfil the need to have tangible shared projects. However, in other cases morale exposes the relation to the opposite outcome: if a counterpart calls for help invoking such moral constraints, a negative answer might turn to be a potential deal breaker since all the other prerequisites come to miss. This is mainly because, in a friendly relationship, you do not collect favors, so nobody is legally obliged to give back—even if the hypothetical balance leans towards the asker. In this case, *guanxi* gives us an interesting insight on how these emotional constraints are built, and this is through shared identification.

### **d) Net Reciprocity**

This is probably the biggest theoretical leap since this is the point of reasoning where the 1:1 conformity ends. Two concepts of the friendship theory collapse into one. Namely, the concepts are *altruistic*

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<sup>54</sup> Liang Shuming, *Fundamentals of Chinese Culture* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

*reciprocity* and *equality* that come together with *guanxi*'s *etiquette dimension* to give birth to a synthesized factor that takes the form of *net reciprocity*.

In Van Hoef's account of friendship, the altruism with which friends "act for the sake of friendship" is possible because no pre-constituted authority rules the relationship. What he calls *equality* makes it possible to speak of altruistic reciprocity.<sup>55</sup> On the contrary, Chinese *guanxi* happens within the hierarchical structure and is perfectly respectful of power differences. Equality in this case takes the shape of *equity* since the reciprocity works as the less powerful actor of the dyad is entitled to ask for favors without creating the expectation of reciprocate.<sup>56</sup> In order to understand how the virtuous cycle gains momentum, it is necessary to look at a concept dear to Chinese society, which is *harmony*. In the name of this concept, all the political processes, despite the inviolable hierarchy, tend to have a consensual base, rather than forcing order down the chain.<sup>57</sup> It is exactly the necessity to maintain this harmonious structure that guarantees reciprocity in the relationship. In this case, I see a bit more comprehensiveness in the Chinese account of the relation friend-friend, since it frames the existence of such relation conscious of the power disparities. What *net reciprocity* ultimately represents is the establishment of a reciprocal relationship net of the acknowledged (and natural) power disparity between the contracting parties, all for the sake of maintaining harmony in the relationship.

### 3.2 Case Study and Primary Sources

Studying the recipients of the award will set off from e-governmental or para-governmental sources to get primary information on who were the recipients and what were the key reasons that led to the party decision to deem them as friends. As pointed out by Wang et al., studying "vast volumes of [governmental] documents can support situational awareness and trend forecasting in fast-changing social and economic environment."<sup>58</sup> When it comes to "para-governmental" sources, I refer to Richard's definition explaining how those sources originated from institutions that are "dependent in some way upon Government - by means of finance, through ministerial appointment or approval of members of the governing body, through Government vetting of policies, or because they are acting as agents

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<sup>55</sup> Yuri van Hoef and Andrea Oelsner, "Friendship and Positive Peace.", 117.

<sup>56</sup> John P. Alston, "Wa, Guanxi, and Inhwa: Managerial Principles in Japan, China, and Korea", *Harvard Business Review*, March 15, 1989, <https://store.hbr.org/product/wa-guanxi-and-inhwa-managerial-principles-in-japan-china-and-korea/BH015>.

<sup>57</sup> Guo, "Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics.", 75.

<sup>58</sup> Xiaoyu Wang et al., 'Towards Intelligent Policy Analysis: A Discourse Structure Parsing Technique for Chinese Government Document', *Information Processing & Management* 60, no. 4 (1 July 2023): 103363, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2023.103363>.

of Government.”<sup>59</sup> In the case of the Chinese system there’s a number of news agencies that are directly controlled by the party; and another consistent number that even if it is not controlled by the party is heavily influenced by it. Influence does not only come in terms of funding (which grants a certain amount of control over the media), but it also comes in terms of censorship, as China is reported to be one of the most restrictive media environments in the world. In its annual report, Freedom House enumerated a plethora of reasons why information in China is anything but independent.<sup>60</sup> This very reason is the basis that allows me to use almost any news channel as a primary source since even if the information that goes public is not pushed directly by the government, the advanced filtering system makes it possible that such information, as Xi Jinping once said, follows the party’s “thought, politics, and action”.<sup>61</sup> In Xi Jinping’s thought we find the rooted belief that technology is essential to the upgrade of the Propaganda Apparatus; in his view, all forms of media communication must converge into the state-owned narrative. As Sheng Zou points out, Chinese state-owned media (including newspapers) are in the privileged position to “deliver soft propaganda due to their role as almost exclusive sources of public affairs information.”<sup>62</sup>

An In-Depth analysis conducted by David Shambaugh explains quite lucidly, how enormous the bureaucracy of the Chinese propaganda system is and highlights the number of institutions involved in this intricate web.<sup>63</sup> The Chinese official state news service, the Xinhua News Agency which covered the medal awarding systematically in the years is the perfect example for this case. As will be clear later, many of the sources consulted in this study are either issued directly by Xinhua or they directly refer to it when reporting the news. More specifically, since the 1980s, China has built an entire apparatus dedicated to external information that serves the purpose of shaping China’s foreign policy around the world. Publications like the People’s Daily, China Daily and CCTV are directly under the control of the coordinating office of external propaganda. The so-called “information office”

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<sup>59</sup> Stephen Richard, ‘The Publications of British National Para-Governmental Organizations’, *Government Publications Review* 5, no. 4 (1 January 1978): 399–407, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0093-061X\(78\)90048-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0093-061X(78)90048-5).

<sup>60</sup> Freedom House, “China: Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report,” Freedom House, 2024, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/china/freedom-world/2024>

<sup>61</sup> Associated Press, “Xi Jinping Asks for ‘absolute Loyalty’ from Chinese State Media,” *The Guardian*, February 19, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/19/xi-jinping-tours-chinas-top-state-media-outlets-to-boost-loyalty>.

<sup>62</sup> Sheng Zou, “Restyling Propaganda: Popularized Party Press and the Making of Soft Propaganda in China,” *Information, Communication & Society* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 201–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1942954>.

<sup>63</sup> David Shambaugh, “China’s Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy,” *The China Journal* 57 (2007): 25–58, 30.

is the front organ for the world.<sup>64</sup> Looking at the literature, we could see how other scholars have analyzed Chinese state-owned media to understand cultural practices. In her work, Wu conducted a content analysis on a series of publications of the People's Daily to explore the revival of Confucianism as a way to secure the leadership in post-revolutionary China.<sup>65</sup> In the same way, I'll dig into a plethora of media publications to find traces of hybrid guanxi in the party narrative.

Finally, When I speak of governmental sources, I mean websites and archives that are openly accessible through the internet and that fall into the domain ".gov.cn" which is per se a guarantee that the origin of this data is from official channels. This is because the ".gov" domain name is issued by a central authority located in the United States that refers to the Central Information Office (CIO) and consists in a process that requires official permissions to get the access to the "top-level domain."<sup>66</sup>

### 3.3 The Method: Content Analysis

In time, scholars have analyzed various aspects of the Chinese political environment, both internal and external. This work will follow other studies on Chinese governmental sources that use content analysis as their primary methodology. In this field, content analysis on governmental sources has been carried out to study policy prioritization over environmental issues,<sup>67</sup> or what devices have been used to achieve integrated care.<sup>68</sup> Even more interestingly for this case, content analysis has also been used to analyse China's agency in the international arena according to "its own word".<sup>69</sup> Following this strand, the study will apply content analysis insofar as it is the most direct way to explore the meaning

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<sup>64</sup> David Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy," 55.

<sup>65</sup> Shufang Wu, "The Revival of Confucianism and the CCP's Struggle for Cultural Leadership: A Content Analysis of the People's Daily, 2000–2009," *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 89 (September 3, 2014): 971–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.882624>.

<sup>66</sup> United States Government, "About the .gov registry," accessed 13 August 2023, <https://get.gov/about/>.

<sup>67</sup> Xibing Huang et al., 'Environmental Issues and Policy Priorities in China: A Content Analysis of Government Documents', *China: An International Journal* 08, no. 02 (September 2010): 220–46, <https://doi.org/10.1142/S0219747210000142>, 242.

<sup>68</sup> Xin Yue, Kaining Mu, and Lihang Liu, 'Selection of Policy Instruments on Integrated Care in China: Based on Documents Content Analysis', *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2020 17(7) (n.d.): 2327, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17072327>.

<sup>69</sup> Ana Cristina Alves and Su-Hyun Lee, 'China's BRI Developmental Agency in Its Own Words: A Content Analysis of Key Policy Documents', *World Development* 150 (1 February 2022): 105-715, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105715>.

of a text.<sup>70</sup> The method is used for “compressing many words of text into fewer content categories.”<sup>71</sup> Each set of texts is related to a specific case of the study sample, and the contents analyzed must be linked back to the theoretical framework, specifically the set of four criteria results of the process carried out in subsection 2.1. Those are, namely: a) affectivity; b) effort tangibility; c) morality; d) net reciprocity. The case studies are described as theoretically informed. This means that they do not only specify an empirical phenomenon but also highlight a meta-theoretical description and analysis of an innovative project. The theoretical impulses that are integrated into the study focus on the perspective of the data to be collected.<sup>72</sup> Content analysis “bridges the gap between descriptive accounts of texts and what they mean, refer to, entail, provoke, or cause.”. In other words, it is an important tool to establish cultural indicators that can also have policy implications.<sup>73</sup>

For practical utility and proven usefulness, I’ll comply with Krippendorff ‘s outlined path to describe in detail the nature of my sources and the boundaries of my analysis.<sup>74</sup> As said, the sources I intend to analyse come from official governmental websites and newspapers reachable online without struggle. Those texts come in the format of (mostly short) posts. The analysis happens with an acknowledgment of the biases that unequivocally affect the source, but this is intentionally part of the idea behind this work. As in Alves and Lee’s attempt to describe the Belt and Road Initiative’s developments, the idea here is to report a point of view that is not “objective” but to find “who gets to be a friend of China” according to Chinese politics, again, in “its own words”.<sup>75</sup> The interest here is to see what are the reasons that China brings as a justification of labelling a person a ‘friend’ according to their public rhetoric. This represents at the same time the worth and the limit of this analysis: studying the official rhetoric of Xi Jinping’s presidency while leaving out the further reasons that are likely to

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<sup>70</sup> Charles Bazerman and Paul Prior, *What Writing Does and How It Does It: An Introduction to Analyzing Texts and Textual Practices* (Routledge, 2003).

<sup>71</sup> Steve Stemler, “An Overview of Content Analysis,” *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation* 7, no. 1 (1 June 2001), <https://doi.org/10.7275/z6fm-2e34>, 1.

<sup>72</sup> Dr Andreas Langer and Dr Simon Güntner, “Theoretically Informed Case Studies,” (Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, March 2013), 6.

<sup>73</sup> Klaus Krippendorff, “Basic Content Analysis,” *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 1 January 1987, [https://www.academia.edu/83842132/Basic\\_Content\\_Analysis](https://www.academia.edu/83842132/Basic_Content_Analysis).

<sup>74</sup> Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071878781>.

<sup>75</sup> Ana Cristina Alves and Su-Hyun Lee, “China’s BRI Developmental Agency in Its Own Words,” *World Development* 150 (February 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105715>.

have influenced policy choices and rhetoric. The latter are not recognizable in the sources of this analysis and thus are purposefully left out of this work. While digging deeper would require studying each case separately in a private sphere that is not accessible through public documents.

This work considers the whole text provided by the sources mentioned above, focusing on specific sentences or combinations of words (such as ‘mutual understanding’) that are often found together that will make the unit of analysis and can be brought as an example of the actual presence of one criterion. The sources are gathered through the *snowball sampling*: starting with a few texts that are helpful and then use them to find more sources that are related or relevant to the issue, by following references, citations, links, and so on. This method allowed me to find some articles that were not immediately reachable through a simple web search. The sources analyzed are limited to the English language and to the information related to the award of the medal and the relationship between the two parties. This, of course, leaves the thesis exposed to a limited sample that might not cover the entirety of the sources available on the issue. As said earlier in this section, the thesis wants to study the narrative that China wants to push outwards. This sets one other boundary; it also suggests a further potential bias. Not only did the set of sources analyzed come from public documents voluntarily disclosed by the government – therefore filtered by it and biased by definition – but were also selected only from those written in English, and the reason is soon explained. The goal here is to understand the reasons that China openly disclosed to the world that brought the country to define certain people as ‘friend’. While some of these reasons can (and will) be deducted from the recorded history between the two parties, the propaganda system also directly made some statements that placed the emphasis on some events and communications that were considered to be a more determining factor than others. Limiting the analysis to English sources comes mainly from the idea that this thesis has a conciliatory approach between a western and a Chinese perspective on the subject (friendship), and in order to do so it is necessary to look at those documents that speak directly to the counterpart; this excludes all the sources written in Chinese Mandarin.

Relying on governmental, non-independent sources might still represent a problem since the target of the analysis aims to paint a well-rounded picture of the reasons behind the relationships. While this is interesting, it requires a whole separate research and different sources altogether. This represents a challenge – in the most complete and well-rounded way the relationships with the sources available – and a gap already in the premises of the study since the focus will be primarily on reading first-party sources.



## 4. Between Formal and Theoretical Friendships

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### 4.1 The ‘Friendship Medal’: An Introduction

As pointed out by Alan Smart, the term ‘friendship’ is not a popular concept in China. Indeed, only 6.6% of the population is reported to deem ‘friend’ a personal acquaintance, not even the ones whom they share the strongest common base with. Nonetheless, from the Sino-Soviet medal of Friendship in 1955, to the ‘Friendship Award’ in 2021, long is the list of prizes in the name of friendship. For practical reasons, I will take into account only two of them, namely: the ‘Friendship Medal’ and the ‘Friendship Reform Medal’. Both of these medals were established post-2012, during the Xi Jinping tenure as president of the People’s Republic.

The 27th of December 2015, the standing committee passed the law on “Law of the People’s Republic of China on State Medals and State Honorary Titles” with which two state recognitions were implemented. In article two it is unequivocally stated how the two are “the highest state honour.” In the following article 3 it is explained how the ‘friendship medal’ is to be conferred “upon foreigners who have made outstanding contributions to China’s socialist modernization and the promotion of Chinese-foreign exchanges and cooperation, or preservation of world peace.” Further into the document it is “establish[ed] a State Book of Achievements to record the recipients of State medals and State honorary titles and their accomplishments.” This would be a relevant source for my case since it would be an excellent primary source from which gathering first-hand information about the reasons that led to the decision of bestowing the medal on a specific persona. Even though it is supposed to be public, the document is not available yet. One possible reason for this delay can be the fact that the law was enacted only in 2019, while the first medals were conferred only in 2021 so perhaps filling out the book might require more time. For future research purposes it might be interesting to go back to this study and reassess each case in this pool in lights of the words of the committee. Regardless, receivers of this medal are the following personalities:

- **Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin** (President of Russia);
- **Nursultan Nazarbayev** (1<sup>st</sup> President of Kazakhstan);
- **Raúl Castro** (First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba and Former President of Cuba);
- **Maha Chakri Sirindhorn** (Princess of Thailand);
- **Salim Ahmed Salim** (Former Prime Minister of Tanzania);
- **Galina Veniaminovna Kulikova** (First Chairman of Russian-Chinese Friendship Association);

- **Jean-Pierre Raffarin** (Former Prime Minister of France);
- **Isabel Crook** (Educator);
- **Norodon Monieath** (Cambodian Queen Mother);
- **Nguyen Phu Trong** (General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam).

#### 4.2 The ‘Reform Friendship Medal’: An Introduction

Unlike the friendship medal, the ‘Reform Friendship Medal’ was not established as permanent honor, but an acknowledgment *una tantum* conferred to ten foreigners “for their outstanding contributions to the country’s reform and opening-up over the last 40 years.”<sup>76</sup> The medal was awarded to 10 foreign personalities in 2018 including people from every sector of society who managed to put themselves in the front row of China’s development. This list covers almost all sectors of civil society from entrepreneurs to exponents of international organizations who eased the way of China into the global world. Putting this additional ten names aside of the awardees of the previously introduced ‘Friendship Medal’ helps having a more comprehensive view of the interests of People’s Republic in acknowledging international figures. Even though several politicians are still included in this list, most of the names listed here refer to figures not directly involved in politics. This second list includes the following names:

- **Alan Merieux**
- **Werner Gerich**
- **Klaus Schwab**
- **Konosuke Matsushita**
- **Masayoshi Ohira**
- **Lee Kuan Yew**
- **Juan Antonio Samaranch**
- **Stephen Perry**
- **Maurice R. Greenberg**
- **Robert Lawrence Kuhn**

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<sup>76</sup> An Baijie and Cao Desheng, China Daily, “10 Foreigners given Medals for Roles in Reform, Opening-Up,” *China Daily*, December 19, 2018. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201812/19/WS5c194335a3107d4c3a001816.html>.

## 4.4 The Analysis

### 4.4.1 Vladimir Putin

*The China-Russia friendship has “no limits.”*

*Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin in a Joint Communication. 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022.<sup>77</sup>*

The term ‘friend’ or ‘friendship’ is employed in many official communications. In this section I’ll try to understand the extent of this allegedly limitless friendship between the two leaders and their respective countries. This analysis can be divided in two sections: one assessing the common strategic reasons that brings the two countries together; the other describing a more intimate side of the relation specifically between the two leaders and how this may have influenced their decisions in foreign policy.

From the merely strategical point of view, there are several areas that see the interest of the two countries converge. According to a 2022 report commissioned by the Swedish Defense Research Agency key reasons for China and Russia’s cooperation includes their extensive shared border spanning 4200 kilometers, the mutual need to legitimize their domestic political system, the allure of material benefits, regional security, and the shared ambition to reshape the global order following coincident vision. According to the same report, there are just as many reasons that limits the scenarios of collaboration, that are a conflictual history and the competition over the same region in which they both strive for security. The same goal of reshaping the global order takes on different traits. If somehow China still benefits from the current system, Russia suffers more. Overall, the relationship is characterized by a substantial imbalance that could bring long-term consequences.<sup>78</sup> Regardless of those consequences, in the short term the interests seem to align clearly.

Interestingly, unlike other instances involving the friendship medal, Chinese and Russian media allocate more space to discussing personal aspects of their relationship. In an article published by CGTN announcing the awarding of the medal, Xi Jinping is reported to have stated how Putin “is the most well-known and most respected leader of a major country to Chinese people. He is also my best

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<sup>77</sup> Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, “Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development,” kremlin.ru, February 4, 2023, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>.

<sup>78</sup> Christopher Weidacher Hsiung, “China’s Perspective on Russia. Assessing How Beijing Views and Values Its Relationship with Moscow Now and Later,” report no. FOI-R--5267--SE, Swedish Defence Research Agency, October 27, 2022, <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--5267--SE>.

friend and confidant.”<sup>79</sup> Xi Jinping went on to emphasize that he has had “closer interaction with [Putin] than with any other foreign colleague.” No other leader has received such recognition as a friend; no to mention the fact that nobody has never been defined a confidant. This seems to suggest that relationship between the two goes beyond a merely political friendship. Such thesis appears to be corroborated also by come public declarations that slipped Xi Jinping’s mouth that portrayed Putin as literally his “best and bosom friend.”<sup>80</sup> The two leaders met more than 40 times since Xi Jinping got to power in 2012 and they refer to each other as “dear friends” ever since. They have exchanged gifts, celebrated birthdays, watched sport games and visited each other’s hometowns. All of this suggests how the relationship between them goes beyond their official roles. Some commentators also noted how the closer ties between Beijing and Moscow partly reflect the warm relationship between Xi and Putin.<sup>81</sup> Recently, in terms of political decisions affected by their relationship there can be the Ukraine War, where China is maintaining a more “balanced position” in a context where their historical advocacy would have been for non-interference in other states’ sovereign borders.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, assessing the relationship between the two leaders and their respective countries involves defining the boundaries of their seemingly limitless friendship. Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping share a very close, personal relationship that sets them apart from other pairs of political leaders. They sure do not lack instrumental reasons to be friends and it is possible that a combination of the two gives birth to a moral dimension that sets this relationship apart from all the others analyzed so far. Especially for the affection component that has been disclosed to the public with intention to portray the relationship in such a way to the world.





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<sup>79</sup> Wang Lei, Zheng Yibing, and Liu Hui, “Xi Presents China’s First Friendship Medal to ‘best Friend’ Putin,” *CGTN*, June 8, 2018, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414f3467544f77457a6333566d54/index.html>.

<sup>80</sup> Consulate General of the People’s Republic of China in Chicago, “Written Interview by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People’s Republic of China With Mainstream Russian Media Organizations,” Consulate-General of the People’s Republic of China in Chicago May 6, 2019, [http://chicago.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/xw/201906/t20190606\\_4658015.htm](http://chicago.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/xw/201906/t20190606_4658015.htm).

<sup>81</sup> Erin Hale, “Personal Ties That Bind: How Xi-Putin Relationship Has Evolved,” *Al Jazeera*, March 18, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/18/personal-ties-that-bind-how-xi-putin-relationship-has-evolved>.

<sup>82</sup> Chen Zheng, “China Debates the Non-Interference Principle,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9, no. 3 (2016): 349–74.

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin need each other in the united front to justify their domestic politics both in opposition to western dominance, and for the balance of the region since the two countries share 4200 km of borders.	
<b>Morality</b>	The sources considered do not allow us to get any signs of situations where neither of the two resorted to moral (external) constraints to balance out the relationship. This does not mean that this hasn't happened at all, just that the primary sources involved are not exhaustive for the purpose.	
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing can be said for net reciprocity. The sources do not allow us to get historical information on the development of the relationship between the two countries, thus making it impossible to identify moments where net reciprocity came into play.	
<b>Affectivity</b>	Signs of affectivity are identifiable in this case more than in others. The two leaders seem to share a relationship beyond their institutional roles. They exchange gifts, visited each other's hometown, and defined each other an "intimate friend". This show of affection is not acknowledgeable in any other case in this list.	

*Table 4.1: Vladimir Putin Analysis*

#### 4.4.2 Nursultan Nazarbayev

Nursultan Nazarbayev who served as president of Kazakhstan from 1990 to 2019, played a significant role in shaping the country's foreign policy. In 1992, he established diplomatic relations with China in 1992 and aligned his Kazakhstan's development strategy with the Belt and Road Initiative, a prominent project sponsored by China. Notably, in 1994, he successfully resolved a border dispute, which Xi Jinping said were turned from "1780 kilometers of boundaries into a friendship belt."<sup>83</sup> In the pursuit of maintaining a balanced relation with China, he also overlooked relevant issues like the fate of Kazakh in Xinjiang. He declined a large amount of asylum requests of people who were trying to flee the Chinese region fearing a totally undesired backlash coming from the People's Republic. All these efforts allowed Nazarbayev to "cherish his friendship with Xi Jinping".

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Nursultan Nazarbayev, besides being the one Kazakh politician that formally established diplomatic relations with China, he aligned his country with the Belt and Road Initiative.	✓
<b>Morality</b>	Interestingly, in this scenario primary sources report a pretty clear case where the external constraint came into play in order to maintain the relationship balanced. Since 2014, Xi Jinping's government started a fight against terrorism in Xijiang at the expense of the ethnic minorities living in the region. The kilometers of borders shared by the two countries run by the Xijiang region, where a strong Kazakh minority is present and subjected to the same treatment as the Uighurs. The deafening silence of president Nazarbayev can be seen as a way to keep the relationship balanced.	✓
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	The primary sources analyzed in this study do not report any present or past scenario where the two countries exchanged favors net of their objective power disparities.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	No actual signs of affections have been acknowledged in the primary sources taken into account in this study, delineating the mainly instrumental character of the relationship.	X

*Table 4.2: Nursultan Nazarbayev Analysis*

<sup>83</sup> China Plus, "I Will Cherish This Deep Friendship Forever": Nazarbayev', *China Plus*, April 29, 2019, <https://chinaplus.cri.cn/chinaplus/news/china/9/20190429/282459.html>.

#### 4.4.3 Raúl Castro

Raul Castro, the brother of Fidel Castro, holds the position of first secretary of the central committee of the Communist Party of Cuba. China and Cuba share a common vision in their ideas of how the world and the state should be particularly rooted in their shared socialist foundation and their mutual support in the fight against imperialism. Raul Castro was formally awarded the medal because of his “outstanding contributions in support of China’s socialist modernization.” In more than a single occasion, Fidel’s brother performed the Chinese communist hymn, ‘The East is Red’, earning him the affectionate epithet “Grandpa Raúl.” The Chinese foreign affairs minister website describes this as a sign of “longstanding, profound affections for China.”<sup>84</sup>

Cuba and China maintain consistent similarities inasmuch countries whose governments are the outcome of a revolutionary movement, the anti-imperialist stance that manifests in a non-interference policy. This is especially important since allows China and Cuba to adopt an analogous stance on issues like Hong Kong and Taiwan that are all part of ‘One China’. Cuba sees in China its only supporter while, on the other side, what Cuba represents for China in a key geopolitical ally that can help counter US presence in the south China sea by challenging its dominance in the Caribbean, US’s “backyard”.<sup>85</sup>

The instrumental dimension, as always, seems to be clear from both sides: from merely geopolitical interests, all the way to the mutual admiration of their respective socialist systems, acknowledging one another’s unique characteristics. These two countries share not only a solid base (as defined in *chapter 1*) but also a common project both in terms of mutual development and learning as well as in terms of ideological challenges.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, even though Raul Castro and China might have had a pretty close relation to the rhythm of “The East Red”, that does not automatically translate into a full-fledged friendship between the two countries. Notably, there is a lack of clear signs of affection emerged from China towards Raul. In contrast to the case of Putin, where Xi Jinping personally spent





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<sup>84</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “From a ‘Messenger’ to a ‘Believer,’” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, August 30, 2022, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/zggcddwjw100ggs/jszgddzg/202208/t20220830\\_10757640.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/zggcddwjw100ggs/jszgddzg/202208/t20220830_10757640.html).

<sup>85</sup> Scott B. MacDonald, “Cuba’s Changing of the Guard and Sino-Cuban Relations,” CSIS, February 28, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/cubas-changing-guard-and-sino-cuban-relations>.

<sup>86</sup> Yinghong Cheng, “The ‘Socialist Other’: Cuba in Chinese Ideological Debates since the 1990s,” *The China Quarterly* 209 (March 2012): 198–216, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741011001548>.

words on the relationship between the two. It seems the case here that the narrative is unidirectional and tends to highlight how “Cubans take pride in China’s Friendship Medal”, rather than the contrary.<sup>87</sup>

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	The respective leaders praise each other’s effort to promote socialist values. Moreover, the two systems clearly share a vision of how the world should (not) be, that is ruled by imperialist structures. On this ground of shared values is built the Cuba-China project which consist in cooperating in various fields from trade, economy (Cuba is part of the New Silk Road) but also intelligence cooperation. A very recent case confirmed by US authorities tells us how China is using the Cuban country as base for spying activities towards the United States. These are all difference declinations of the anti-imperialist idea of the world that they’re seeking together.	
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	
<b>Affectivity</b>	On the notes of “The East is Red” Raul Castro sung out loud his feelings towards the Communist China and, more in general, towards the socialist sentiment shared by the two political systems. Despite that, except for the awarding of the medal, there is no clear feedback of the same sentiment the other way around. Further investigation might confirm the existence of the affective component (or not). For these reasons, in this case I won’t neither confirm nor deny such existence, conferring the orange flag.	

*Table 4.3: Raúl Castro Analysis*

<sup>87</sup> Xinhua News Agency, “Cubans Take Pride in China’s Friendship Medal Awarded to Raul Castro: Official - China.Org.Cn,” September 30, 2019, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2019-09/30/content\\_75262316.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2019-09/30/content_75262316.htm).



#### 4.4.4 Maha Chakri Sirindhorn

Maha Chakri Sirindhorn princess of Thailand is a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. The woman is reported to be a long-time “Sinophile” that dates back at least 40 years. During this time, she played a pivotal role in fostering and strengthening the relationship between Thailand and China. To be noted is that she is also a Chinese literary scholar that made a significant contribution in translating important pieces of literature from Chinese to Thai. Her efforts were instrumental in “turning around the perception about the country.”<sup>88</sup> Princess Sirindhorn has forged a “strong bond” with Chinese citizens donating money in various circumstances, supported many educational and cultural projects in China and personally participated to many autochthon festivities.<sup>89</sup> In the same way, the two countries share a grand vision, working towards “a shared future.” Since no countries interests align perfectly, this makes no exception the two countries make efforts to solve their disputes in consensual ways and are eager to promote mutual understating, which once again turns out to be a crucial keyword when it comes to define a friend in Chinese terms.

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<sup>88</sup> Jitsiree Thongnoi, “Thailand’s Long-Time Sinophile Princess Sirindhorn to Receive China’s Friendship Medal,” *South China Morning Post*, September 22, 2019, , <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3029681/thailands-long-time-sinophile-princess-sirindhorn-receive-chinas>.

<sup>89</sup> CRI, “Princess Sirindhorn: An Outstanding Envoy of Sino-Thai Friendship,” China.Org.Cn, March 31, 2015, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2015-03/31/content\\_35204902.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2015-03/31/content_35204902.htm).

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	What is noticeable is the effort in laying the foundations for a framework of peaceful resolutions of disputes that create frictions between the two countries (Thailand is part of the South China Sea dispute). In this effort, the Royal Family of Thailand played a huge role. Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, above all, is the main exponent in this initiative.	✓
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	X
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	Maha Chakri Sirindhorn dedicated an entire lifetime to promoting the image of China in her country of origin, Thailand. This is a very important statement made through 40 years of declarations of love. Unfortunately, no information was not available for understanding if the sentiment is mutual.	≈

*Table 4.4: Maha Chakri Sirindhorn*


#### 4.4.5 Salim Ahmed Salim

Salim Ahmed Salim is a Tanzanian politician who work in the international arena for decades. In the years '69 and '70 of the XX century he served as ambassador to the People's Republic of China.<sup>90</sup> Later, when he became Tanzania's permanent representative at the United Nations, he campaigned hard for the restoration of mainland China's seat in the organization, which is why he was awarded the friendship medal in 2018. Oddly enough, Salim was "quite surprised" when he came to know that he was going to receive the medal.<sup>91</sup> That makes wonder if that means that he didn't feel close enough to the Chinese country to expect it, or that's a common feeling between the political leader who got the

<sup>90</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tanzania, "Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim," The United Republic of Tanzania Embassies and Diplomatic Missions, , <https://www.tzembassy.go.tz/ambassadors/view/dr-salim-ahmed-salim>.

<sup>91</sup> Wang Mengzhen and Li Da, "Friendship Medal Recipients Witness China's Achievements," *CGTN*, accessed September 30, 2019, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-09-30/Friendship-medal-recipients-witness-China-s-achievements-KpR18qVu80/index.html>.

prize. This seems to rule out the possibility of true affection between the two parties and, in this case, the medal appears no more than the acknowledgment of a man's actions.

<b>Affectivity</b>	As said, the surprise with which Salim Ahmed Salim responded to the news that he was in the list of awardees for the medal almost makes it seem like his relationship with the country (or any of its representative, for that matter) weren't nearly as close to describe an affective kind of relationship.	<b>X</b>
<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	This case shows how purpose driven this award is. While missing the coverage on every side fact about the relationship, it is still clear that the main reason why Ahmed Salim received the medal is because of his effort to restore mainland China's seat at the United Nations.	
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	<b>X</b>
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	<b>X</b>

*Table 4.5: Salim Ahmed Salim Analysis*

#### 4.4.6 Galina Veniaminovna Kulikova

Galina Veniaminovna Kulikova is the First Deputy Chairperson of the Russia-China Friendship Association. After Putin, she is the second Russian to have earned the award for having “dedicated her entire life to promoting cooperation between the two countries.” Chinese sources report that Kulikova authored a book titled “People’s Diplomacy Between Russia and China”, where she spent words in describing the ups and downs of Sino-Russian friendship and pays tribute to all the people who collaborated in bringing the two countries together.<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, neither the book or any direct source

<sup>92</sup> Global Times, “Galina Kulikova: A People-to-People Diplomat for China-Russia Relations - Global Times,” *Global Times*, July 15, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202107/1228734.shtml>.

related to the Russia-China Friendship Association seem to be available online limiting further exploration in this direction. Nevertheless, a fascinating philosophy emerges from these few sources that are available, highlighting how Kulikova believed in a “people to people” approach. In said case, citizens from both nations engage directly, sometimes subverting the established diplomatic order. This philosophy resonates with two key themes discussed in this work. First, ‘citizen diplomats’ are often “motivated by a desire to engage with the rest of the world in a meaningful, mutually beneficial dialogue”, meaning that the component of mutuality of their interest in building stronger relations is always present. That mirrors China’s emphasis on encouraging stronger relationships by rewarding people for their individual behavior through the friendship medal. Second, Kulikova’s approach offers a way to subvert official structures through unconventional ways of shaping foreign affairs. Notably, some recipients of the friendship medal come from countries that in this list we notice that some people who have been awarded the medal hail from states that cannot exactly be defined as friends. Nevertheless, this fact didn’t stop the people from those countries to fetch opportunities and deeper understanding. This, in my opinion stands as one of the main points of the theory: when it comes down to international relations, personal connection can make a difference and, in some cases, perhaps even hijack the foreign policy of a country. The unofficial that overrules the official and “gets things done” when politics encounters difficulties in reaching consensus.

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Also, in regards of the tangibility of the effort, can be said the same as in the previous case. With this medal, China is not rewarding only those efforts that have direct material outcomes, but also (in my understanding, especially) those efforts that lead to laying the foundation for a “shared future” which has to go through a process of mutual understanding that all those actors have been recognized to be pursuing, not least Galina Veniaminovna Kulikova.	
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	
<b>Affectivity</b>	Just as Maha Chakri Sindhorn, Galina Kulikova spent her entire life building up the relations between Russia and China. Just as the Thai reigning, she put a lot of effort not only in nurture institutional relations, but she believed in the “people to people” approach. This means that Kulikova not only had China in her heart, but also got one for herself in Chinese society.	

*Table 4.6: Galina Veniaminovna Kulikova*

#### 4.4.7 Jean-Pierre Raffarin

As the only French person and European politician who received the medal, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, served as the prime minister of France under the presidency of Chirac between 2002 and 2005, he was the only French politician to be honored with the friendship medal. His medal was awarded because of his outstanding contributions to China’s modernization. These contributions are extended, but not limited to, his visit in China during the SARS pandemic in 2003 – this happened while the rest of world leaders were cancelling their planned visits.<sup>93</sup> This was just the pinnacle of a political career in which


<sup>93</sup> Global Times, ‘It is Not the People Serving the Party, But the Party Serving the People - Former French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin and the CPC - Global Times’, 12 August 2021, <https://www.global-times.cn/page/202108/1231314.shtml>.

he “spared no effort to strengthen Franco-Chinese ties.”<sup>94</sup> In his book, “Chine – Le grand paradoxe” (China – The great paradox), the author argues that despite all the numerous differences between Europe and China – particularly in the realms of human rights – the China issue represents an opportunity for Europe to assert its unique identity as an international actor. He contends that China must not be demonized and that initiatives such as the New Silk Road are as much a challenge as they are an opportunity.<sup>95</sup> As recently as 2022, the former French politician participated to the Global Economic Development Forum held in Beijing. On that occasion, he summarized the reasons for including China in the international dialogue, emphasizing the shared responsibility as inhabitants of “the same planet, [...] our common home.” The appreciation of his speech by Chinese underscore the value of Raffarin’s message, which words promotes a peaceful “common vision that can only be achieved by common efforts.”

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<sup>94</sup> Prisma Média, ‘Jean-Pierre Raffarin - La Biographie de Jean-Pierre Raffarin Avec Gala.Fr’, Gala.fr, 23 February 2023, [https://www.gala.fr/stars\\_et\\_gotha/jean-pierre\\_raffarin](https://www.gala.fr/stars_et_gotha/jean-pierre_raffarin).

<sup>95</sup> Jean-Pierre Raffarin and Claude Leblanc, *Chine - Le grand paradoxe* (Michel Lafon, 2019).

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	“Peace”, “understanding”, “common future” are words that are omnipresent in the narrative related to this award, and this instance makes no exception. Raffarin is an example of how an effort is tangible beyond the material consequences of the act. In this case, what is rewarded is not the special cooperative treaties that might have (and did) come because of a certain way to approach China, but the fact that this approach makes it easier to create a platform that facilitates future relations and the solving of problems in the areas of common interest.	
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	<b>X</b>
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	<b>X</b>
<b>Affectivity</b>	The relationship between the former French politician and China is characterized by a long political career spent in the name of strengthening the relationship between the two countries. While this was clearly appreciated by Chinese authorities, this does not necessarily have to prove the existence of an affective link between them. The dialogue between the two does not seem, at least according to the sources utilized in this instance, to never exceed formal boundaries.	<b>X</b>

*Table 4.7: Jean-Pierre Raffarin Analysis*

#### 4.4.8 Isabel Crook

Isabel Crook, affectionately referred to as an “old friend of China”, boasts a profound and enduring relationship with the country, even before it became the People’s Republic. Born in China to Canadian parents in 1915, she dedicated much of her life studying and understanding the country and its communist practices in a cross-culturalist perspective towards the west. According to a Chinese source, her life’s work has revolved around “helping the world understanding China better.”<sup>96</sup> Throughout her long career as an anthropologist and her first-hand witness of pivotal events in China’s history, ranging from the revolutionary movement against the Qing dynasty to the death of Mao and beyond. Her communist ideals influenced her life greatly. She married David Crook, a member of the British Communist Party (of which she later became honorary chairman), and actively campaigning for the land reforms that played a crucial role in the genesis of Mao’s communism.<sup>97</sup>

Her enduring affection towards the People’s Republic and her continuous efforts to uphold socialism have been recognized with the Friendship Medal. Isabel Crook’s remarkable dedication efforts in promoting Chinese understanding, her pivotal role in the nascent educational system show an unflagging commitment to the cause and the Chinese project.

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<sup>96</sup> CGTN, “Isabel Crook: Anthropologist Helps World Understand China Better,” *CGTN*, July 17, 2021, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-07-17/Isabel-Crook-Anthropologist-helps-world-understand-China-11Y1SK5WDni/index.html>.

<sup>97</sup> China Daily, “Isabel Crook: Live with China One Century,” China Daily, July 7, 2017, [http://www.china-daily.com.cn/china/2017-07/07/content\\_30034479.htm](http://www.china-daily.com.cn/china/2017-07/07/content_30034479.htm).



<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	The documentary intent carried out by Isabel Crook embraces completely the political sensibilities of the country since the scholar is a staunch supporter of communism. The interest of the two parties matches perfectly and create a solid ground for the relationship.	✓
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	X
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	Isabel Crook comes in a very particular position since she was born in China from foreign parents, thus being recognized as foreigner. She had a very unique relation with the country and made significant effort in studying, as an anthropologist, China in the most intimate level, shedding lights on the revolutionary identity of Chinese people.	✓





*Table 4.8: Isabel Crook Analysis*

#### 4.4.9 Norodom Monineath

Norodom Monineath is the queen mother of Cambodia in the capacity of “important witness and promoter of China-Cambodia relationships.” In 2020 she was awarded the medal for her “outstanding contributions to promoting the development of bilateral ties and enhancing the friendship between the two peoples.”<sup>98</sup> All the sources available report the same exact information and, in this particular case more than in others, what emerges it is very generic and relates mainly to the efforts made to build and preserve the friendship between the two countries. One more, interesting detail is that, according to Chinese media, the bestowing of the medal represents “the Chinese people's reverence for Queen Mother Monineath and their profound friendship with the Cambodian people”, revealing this way a sentiment that resembles the affection between the two countries. Indeed, as some say, unlike other

<sup>98</sup> Xinhua, “Xi Awards Cambodian Queen Mother China’s Friendship Medal,” *State Council of People’s Republic of China*, November 7, 2020, [https://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202011/07/content\\_WS5fa5f89ec6d0f7257693f41b.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202011/07/content_WS5fa5f89ec6d0f7257693f41b.html).

countries, Cambodia seems to be embracing China's to the point that it is said to be bandwagoning the stronger country.<sup>99</sup>





<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Cambodia bandwagons China in most of its decisions. Both economically – through the Belt and Road Initiative China has become the biggest foreign investor in the country – and strategically. In Asian institutions the two countries supported each other against other southeast Asian countries (mainly Vietnam) in their own disputes.	
<b>Morality</b>	At least from the Cambodian side, it seems clear that they'd be inclined to do whatever it takes to keep the relationship balanced, even damaging relationship with other strategic partners. Nonetheless, the fact that on the Chinese side it is not possible to state the same, lets me conclude that the criteria is not fully met, yet not completely absent.	
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices. Interestingly, in this case must be considered that China has a huge leverage against Cambodia and while there is no sign of reciprocity at this moment in time it'll still be easier to spot unlike other cases where the ratio power disparity/subjugation is way lower.	
<b>Affectivity</b>	Cambodia and China share a long historical bond, and even in recent times, Cambodia has not hidden its benevolence towards the partner. The sentiment is mutual because it doesn't follow strictly institutional lines but reaches the larger audience of "the Chinese People."	

*Table 4.9: Norodom Monineath Analysis*

<sup>99</sup> Sovinda Po and Christopher B. Primiano, "An 'Ironclad Friend': Explaining Cambodia's Bandwagoning Policy towards China," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 39, no. 3 (December 1, 2020): 444–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103420901879>.

### 3.4.10 Nguyen Phu Trong

Nguyen Phu Trong, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam was awarded the medal by Xi Jinping. Trong was recognized a “staunch Marxist,” and a “close comrade and sincere friend of the CPC.”<sup>100</sup> The medal symbolizes the shared hope both parties and peoples for a better future together, despite some remaining differences that lingered even after the normalization of relations between the two countries. It symbolizes a pledge of goodwill.<sup>101</sup>

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	The recent struggles about the South China Sea dispute makes it hard to believe that a sincere collaboration is possible between the two parties. In spite of that, Vietnam is a signatory of the Belt and Road Initiative promoted by Xi Jinping in 2012 and outflow destination of a good deal of Chinese investments. Vietnam might not be aligned but definitely have some shared interest in pursuing economic opportunities.	
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	
<b>Affectivity</b>	In this particular instance, despite the political affinity of the two systems, the interests of the two countries are still too far apart. The South China sea dispute doesn't allow the actors to fully engage in a sincere relationship given the strategic discrepancy.	

*Table 4.10: Nguyen Phu Trong Analysis*

<sup>100</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, “Xi Jinping Awards General Secretary of the CPV Central Committee Nguyen Phu Trong the ‘Friendship Medal’ and Holds a Grand Awarding Ceremony,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, October 31, 2023, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/wshd\\_665389/202212/t20221211\\_10988778.html](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202212/t20221211_10988778.html).

<sup>101</sup> Huong Le Thu, “Rough Waters Ahead for Vietnam-China Relations,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 30, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/09/30/rough-waters-ahead-for-vietnam-china-relations-pub-82826>.

Alan Merieux is a French businessman who succeeded his father in the role of chairman of the Institut Merieux. According to the Global Times, the Merieux family “has long been friends with China” that preexisted the moment “China and France established diplomatic relations.”<sup>102</sup> In 1963, Alain founded BioMerieux with the open commitment to “making the world a healthier place”.<sup>103</sup> Following the long tradition of his family and perhaps inspired by these words, Alain travelled to China for the first time in 1978, shortly after the shift of power from the hands of the late Mao to Deng Xiaoping. The newspaper acknowledges that China’s condition has for long been “far behind the world in science”. With the cooperative effort between Merieux, his family and China, significant milestones were achieved, accompanied by expressions of appreciation, mainly from Merieux towards the Chinese government rather than the contrary.

Upon assessing the relationship between Alain Merieux and the Chinese government, it becomes apparent that declaration of affection and respect are predominantly unidirectional, and always from Alain to China. This trend is not only observed in Chinese controlled media, but also in other sources more closely related to the Merieux Foundation. Chinese media frequently highlight the friendly words that Alain has conveyed about the Chinese system and society. In the press release issued by the Institut Merieux the day following the reception of the medal, the focus was more on the “instrumental” role of the relationship between the two actors in achieving grand projects than it was on any other affective component.<sup>104</sup> In general, the relationship does not line up with the criteria of affectivity laid out in the last chapter. If it does show some sense of affectivity, that’s accompanied by hints of an asymmetrical relationship that does not guarantee a long-term approach, potentially making the two counterparts vulnerable to substitution or abuse by the other party.

The essence of the relationship mainly revolves around the projects accomplished together. The mutual respect that emerges comes from the possibility for the Institut Merieux to enter a new market full of potential and conduct business from a privileged position. On the other side, for China this was a great chance to exploit foreign expertise to fill a wide scientific gap that had set China behind for years. On the moral side of the issue, it would be reasonable to expect that China would probably give the right of way to Merieux to realize major projects in the health department. That is, one side,

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<sup>102</sup> Global Times, “The French Comrade-in-Arms in China’s Fight Against SARS - Alain Mérieux and the Communist Party of China,” Global Times, August 3, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202108/1230406.shtml>.

<sup>103</sup> Quotation retrieved from the section “Who we are” of the website of BioMerieux. Link: <https://www.biomerieux.com/corp/en/who-we-are.html>.

<sup>104</sup> INSTITUT MERIEUX, “ALAIN MÉRIEUX RECEIVES THE PRESTIGIOUS CHINESE: REFORM FRIENDSHIP AWARD.,” INSTITUT MERIEUX, December 18, 2018, <https://www.institut-merieux.com/en/alain-merieux-receives-the-prestigious-chinese-reform-friendship-award/>.

because of the experience developed in dealing with each other. On the other side this is not only a matter of practical constraints of familiarity, but also to honor the secular relationship with Alain, and the entire Merieux family.<sup>105</sup> There is limited evidence of reciprocity in the relationship, especially considering that Institute Merieux’s involvement in China has started well before formal diplomatic relations between the two countries the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries. This also reinforces the notion that even if this relation cannot be strictly categorized as a friendship; it still is a viable way for conduct international business and relations between countries transcending formal customs.

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	“Making the world a healthier place” encapsulates pretty well the shared project between the two parties. The reason is because it explains clearly how the concrete outcome is the interest in building healthcare facilities closely related to a global effort to improve the conditions of developing countries.	✓
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	X
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	A more in-depth study is necessary.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	A more in-depth study is necessary.	X

*Table 4.11: Alan Merieux Analysis*

<sup>105</sup> CGTN, “BioMerieux: China-France Friendship Lasts Forever,” CGTN, April 3, 2023,

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2023-04-03/BioMerieux-China-France-friendship-lasts-forever-1iHEKepyRVu/index.html>.

#### 4.4.12 Werner Gerich

Werner Gerich, a German engineer who was posthumously awarded the medal after his death. He holds the distinction of being the first foreigner director of a state-owned factory in China. In 1984, he was assigned to Wuhan as a counsellor and rapidly assumed the leadership not only of the entire state-owned company but was soon “lecturing” politicians on company reforms. Despite initial difficulties and some uncertainty about public opinion in China, he sure was respected enough by Chinese establishment that they quickly elevated him to a propaganda icon.<sup>106</sup> Former Chinese president Zhu Rongji praised him, referring to Gerich as “Mr. quality”. Rongji cited Gerich’s unwavering commitment to his word and his relentless pursuit of excellence. “He does what he says, is never satisfied, tackles the smallest and gets to the heart of the matter,” Rongji said.<sup>107</sup> Evidently, Gerich played a crucial role in China’s industrial development. It emerges in a pretty incontestable way that, unlike the case of the Merieux family, politicians spent words on the figure, while Gerich was, as his son describes him, a “workaholic” whose opinions on China never really emerged, inasmuch it seems like he’s interest was uniquely show a display of his skills and expertise.<sup>108</sup>

In this case, as probably in most of the cases to follow, the foundation of the relationship lays in the project shared between the two parties. Their collaboration aimed to revolutionize Chinese State-Owned Enterprises by providing an important knowledge transfer from drawing from his lifelong experience in German industries. In terms of morality, it never occurred in Gerich’s lifetime a case where he failed to deliver, thus the relationship was never really put to the test requiring relying on non-instrumental factors to keep the relationship going.

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<sup>106</sup> CGTN, “China Reform Friendship Medal Recipient: Werner Gerich, First Foreign Head of Chinese SOE,” December 18, 2018, [https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414f30637a4d31457a6333566d54/share\\_p.html](https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414f30637a4d31457a6333566d54/share_p.html).

<sup>107</sup> Von Johnny Erling, “Ein Rentner - in China berühmter als Marx,” *DIE WELT*, November 16, 2011, <https://www.welt.de/print-welt/article694660/Ein-Rentner-in-China-beruehmter-als-Marx.html>.

<sup>108</sup> People’s Daily, “Feature: Werner Gerich, China’s First Foreign Director - People’s Daily Online,” *People’s Daily Online*, January 11, 2023, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/0111/c90000-9537100.html>.

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Was a crucial part of Chinese industrial development. “Mr. quality” as he was renamed, has been acclaimed for his achievement and the skill-transfer that he provided with his work in the country.	✓
<b>Morality</b>	According to the sources analyzed, the man “never failed to deliver” and for that reason it seems that there has never been a case where the relationship was put to test. While that doesn’t mean that morality never influenced the relation, but that it does not come from the information considered here.	X
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	A more in-depth study is necessary.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	Werner Gerich was trusted and respected by the Chinese elite of his time (as Zhu Ronghij reminded us). This has been confirmed posthumously by the award of the medal even when he was not involved anymore. However, affect is the purest sense is not revised.	≈

*Table 4.12: Werner Gerich Analysis*

#### 4.4.13 Klaus Schwab

Klaus Schwab, the founder and chairman of the World Economic Forum (WEF), initiated his relationship with China after the announcement of Deng Xiaoping to open Chinese economy to foreigners in 1978. Indeed, Schwab’s first trip to Beijing dates to that exact moment. The following year, a Chinese delegation landed in Switzerland ready to make China a key player in setting the global agenda, amidst criticisms and apparent contradictions.<sup>109</sup> As often happens in these cases, it is challenging to track the relationship in the direction of Schwab, while it is easier to understand it the other way. On one side, a clear sense of gratitude and consistent recognition of Schwab’s role in influencing global dynamics. On the other hand, over the years Schwab has faced both acknowledgment and criticism for adopting too much of a friendly stance towards China. In 2022, on the sidelines of the APEC

<sup>109</sup> Keith Bradsher, “The Story of China’s Economic Rise Unfolds in Switzerland,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 2020, , <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/18/business/davos-china.html>.

CEO Summit, he commented on the Chinese model as of “role for many countries.”<sup>110</sup> A strong statement that reveals Schwab’s attitude towards the country as well as the open commitment to keep China part of the global discourse. However, Schwab has not explicitly stated the benefits reaped by him, or his organization from China’s with the World Economic Forum.

We could subsume that by advocating for a more present China in the “systemic transformation of the world” process he fulfils both the WEF’s ambition to be a global actor in influencing the agenda and Chinese historical aspiration, discussed in the previous chapter, of a shared future for the mankind. This sets a solid ground for a long-term project that will bring Schwab and those who will succeed him to be in extremely friendly relationship. Moreover, one could say that such relationship rather than being characterized individual-institution (Schwab-Chinese Communist Party) will take the trait of an inter-institutional friendship if the WEF will maintain its relevance also after the Schwab era. This commitment was reinforced by a Memorandum of Understanding that China issued in 2017 that explicit the intention of the two counterparts in collaborating and working closely in the following ten years.<sup>111</sup> This is no binding agreement and clearly reflects the intention of China to conduct business – including international relations – through a consensual means.

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<sup>110</sup> CGTN, “Klaus Schwab: Eye on Global Governance,” *CGTN*, November 19, 2022, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-11-19/Klaus-Schwab-Eye-on-global-governance-1f5j1FnfKvK/index.html>.

<sup>111</sup> WEF, “World Economic Forum Signs Strategic Collaboration Agreement with China,” *World Economic Forum*, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/press/2017/01/world-economic-forum-signs-strategic-collaboration-agreement-with-china/>.



<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Schwab thrust open the doors of the international arena for post-Mao China which was at the time seeking international recognition. Deng Xiaoping and Schwab collaborated closely to bring China on the international stage and raising the awareness on the rising status of the country.	✓
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	X
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	The sources never allowed me to peak through the institutional relation of the two actors. Thus, excluding the affective outcome from the analysis.	X

*Table 4.13: Klaus Schwab Analysis*

#### 4.4.14 Konosuke Matsushita

Leader of Matsushita Electric (later named Panasonic), Konosuke formally received the medal as considered the “God of management” whose approach to business was based on the creation of shared values between various stakeholders. This approach aligned perfectly with the purpose of his first interaction with a recently opened China.<sup>112</sup> Matsushita first interaction with Japan indeed happened in 1978, when Deng Xiaoping – neo-ruler after Mao and proponent of the Open-door policy – was in the country to sign the Friendship Treaty between Japan and China. This detail will be discussed more thoroughly in the next subchapter, but it tells a lot about the spirit characterizing the relations between the two countries at the time. When in front of each other, the two came to terms with a verbal agreement known as the “Gentlemen agreement” and is summarized by two lines of conversations that unveil a more profound sentiment than the mere economical perspective. Deng Xiaoping asked, “Can

<sup>112</sup> Naoki Kuriyama, “Konosuke Matsushita’s Humanistic Management,” *Humanism Business Series*, (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, February 16, 2021), [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-51545-4\\_2](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-51545-4_2).

you give a little help to our modernization efforts?” and, according to sources from both sides, Matsushita promptly replied “I will do everything to help.”<sup>113</sup> A few more words added on the from Matsushita explain to us how the modernization effort which he took part was interestingly related to the belief that the XXI century would have been “a time of prosperity for Asia”, and thus cooperation was a request that couldn’t be denied, almost, I would say, a moral obligation toward the newfound partner.<sup>114</sup> Matsushita later went to China at the age of 84 accepting the invite of the Japan-China Friendship Association to visit the country in the perspective of a broader effort to promote mutual understanding.<sup>115</sup>

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Matsushita did “everything he could” to help the country. His expertise gained him the nickname of “God of Management”. He brought a new approach to business that consisted in creating a ground of shared values between different stakeholders.	✓
<b>Morality</b>	The actions of Matsushita were moved by a sense of identification with China and based on the idea that Asia should stick together to lead the development in the XXI century.	✓
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	The gentlemen agreement between Matsushita and Deng Xiaoping lets shine through a relationship of mutual respect between the two men. While this doesn’t give us any feedback of the relationship behind the curtains is still charged with a certain sentimental value.	≈

*Table 4.14: Konosuke Matsushita Analysis*

<sup>113</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Gentlemen’s Agreement Between Deng Xiaoping and Konosuke Matsushita,” August 29, 2022, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/top-ics\\_665678/zggcddwjw100ggs/gg/202208/t20220829\\_10756877.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/top-ics_665678/zggcddwjw100ggs/gg/202208/t20220829_10756877.html).

<sup>114</sup> Panasonic Holdings Corporation, “Visiting China: in 1979 at age 84,” Panasonic, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://holdings.panasonic/global/corporate/about/history/konosuke-matsushita/story4-07.html>.

<sup>115</sup> Franziska Seraphim, “People’s Diplomacy: The Japan-China Friendship Association and Critical War Memory in the 1950s,” *The Asia Pacific Journal* 5, no. 8 (August 1, 2007), <https://apjif.org/-Franziska-Seraphim/2502/article.html>.

#### 4.4.15 Masayoshi Ohira

Masayoshi Ohira is a historical figure in Japan who served in many prominent political roles. He was awarded the medal for his “sincere efforts” in the “normalization of relations between Japan and China.” First as foreign minister in the Tanaka administration, then as prime minister himself, Ohira spent a good deal of energy promoting the image of China to the world.<sup>116</sup> His belief and actions had an impact in the founding principles of the joint statement that was issued after an inter-state meeting in 1972 expressing the “desire to put an end to the abnormal state of affairs that has hitherto existed between the two countries.” This document made the way to an actual treaty known as “Treaty Of Peace and Friendship Between Japan and the People's Republic of China” which had a decisive impact in the normalization between the two countries.<sup>117</sup> Even though Ohira’s actions and efforts didn’t turn the China and Japan into affectionate parties – since territorial and historical disputes between them are still well and alive – it definitely seems that the period of Ohira activity represented a huge step forward in the direction of a closer friendship, triggering a virtuous cycle of societal effort in weaving new relations with the new partner. Resorting to article VI of the Peace and Friendship treaty it emerges which principles Ohira inspired to the new relations between the countries:





*The Contracting Parties shall develop relations of perpetual peace and friendship between the two countries on the basis of the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.*<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> CGTN, “China Reform Friendship Medal Recipient: Masayoshi Ohira, a Name Forever Remembered by Chinese People,” December 21, 2018, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674d33637a4d31457a6333566d54/index.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Hong N. Kim, “The Fukuda Government and the Politics of the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty,” *Asian Survey* 19, no. 3 (1979): 297–313, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2643695>.

<sup>118</sup> Japan and China, “Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and The People’s Republic of China” (1978), <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201225/volume-1225-I-19784-English.pdf>.

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Ohira contributed a good deal in bringing China back to the international stage by acknowledging the country making efforts in promoting its image abroad. Treaties were signed that set the relations of the two countries down a path of “mutuality, equality and reciprocal benefit.”	
<b>Morality</b>	Just as in the case of Matsushita, the pragmatism that brought the two party to take a shared path consists in the necessity to make things work in spite of the frictions that are still existing.	
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	While not even this case checks the box of reciprocity, it has a different feature that emerges from the joint statements and declarations co-signed by the two countries. This doesn't indicate that the reciprocity is between China and Ohira, but that on paper this exists between China and Japan (that Ohira was representing at the time). This, in my opinion is worth recognizing by giving the orange lights to this relationship. Whether this theoretical “equality” will be respected in the concrete conduct of international affairs is yet to be proven and, in any case is not showed by the sources taken into account in the present study	
<b>Affectivity</b>	Ohira's intentions were recognized “sincere” which is far from being just a side note to the relationship. That means that, on one side, Ohira was acting without the idea of profiting from his actions; on the other, this was seen by Chinese elites. While this enhances the trust between the two parties, doesn't directly translate into a verdict of affect, which I do not believe is present. That would be the case if from the sources emerged more side facts about the relationship.	

*Table 4.15: Masayoshi Ohira Analysis*

#### 4.4.16 Lee Kuan Yew

Lee Kuan Yew is widely considered the founding father of Singapore.<sup>119</sup> He was awarded the medal for his “significant contributions to deepening the friendship between the two peoples and expanding cooperation between the two countries.” While maintaining a balanced stance between China and the US over the years, in his book “One Man's View of the World” he made some important statements about the Chinese system and was ready to bet on the fact that China “will do it its way” and probably never becoming a democracy, showing respect for the cultural differences, also implying that the west cannot expect China to become too close to their idea of governing a country.<sup>120</sup>

Lee Kuan Yew’s relations with Chinese leaders go a long way. He is “one of the few world leaders who had met with all generations of the Chinese leadership” from Mao to Xi Jinping. The latter recently described him as “an old friend of China;”<sup>121</sup> and his legacy is still having an impact in Singaporean politics. After 31 years in office, Lee Kuan Yew retired in 1990, but the relationships with China never ceased to grow stronger. As recently as March 2023, the prime minister in office Lee Hsien Loong, after a meeting with Xi Jinping announced a further boost in the bilateral relations with the country to an “All-Round High-Quality Future-Oriented Partnership.” The consequence is that the two countries will grow closer with “**strong[er] friendship and deep[er]** understanding.”<sup>122123</sup>

In conclusion, the relationship is not characterized by merely instrumental purposes, but it also seems to appear to be a sort of moral relation between the leaders and countries behind them. The political trust built in his long tenure was based also on deep understanding of the Chinese history and culture, probably also due to his Chinese descendance, that led the man to talking about China in the international stage with a “rare sense of objectivity” for which he never “went out his way” in complimenting or praising the country.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Donald E. Weatherbee, *Historical Dictionary of United States-Southeast Asia Relations* (Scarecrow Press, 2008), 213.

<sup>120</sup> Kuan Yew Lee, *One Man's View of the World* (Straits Times Press, June 2013), 15.

<sup>121</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Lee Kuan Yew on China: ‘It Will Do It Its Way.’,” August 30, 2022, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/top-ics\\_665678/zggcdwjjw100ggs/jszgddzg/202208/t20220830\\_10757651.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/top-ics_665678/zggcdwjjw100ggs/jszgddzg/202208/t20220830_10757651.html).

<sup>122</sup> Koh Wan Ting, “Singapore, China Conclude ‘substantive Talks’ on FTA, to Expand Cooperation in 6 Areas,” *CNA*, March 2023, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/china-singapore-free-trade-agreement-negotiations-pm-lee-3389996>.

<sup>123</sup> Koh Wan Ting, “Singapore, China Elevate Bilateral Ties Following PM Lee Meeting with Xi Jinping,” *CNA*, March 2023, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/pm-lee-hsien-loong-china-xi-jinping-beijing-partnership-3388341>.

<sup>124</sup> Global Times, “Lee Kuan Yew on China: ‘It Will Do It Its Way.’,” *Global Times*, July 16, 2021, <https://www.global-times.cn/page/202107/1228843.shtml>.

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Lee Kuan Yew worked towards the boost of “All-Round High-Quality Future-Oriented Partnership.” As in other cases, the effort acknowledged is spending his influence in creating a common platform from which China and Singapore could collaborate more, while supporting the status of rising power of China.	≈
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	X
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	This case is an interesting display of how even persons that cannot exactly be described as subjugated to China. He believed to be a visionary leader who understood the importance of maintaining balanced relationship with the big players (in this case, USA and China) to keep Singapore as independent as possible. China, aware of that, still appreciated the frankness with which he stated that China will take its share of history and that the world better be paying attention.	≈

*Table 4.16: Lee Kuan Yew Analysis*

#### 4.4.17 Juan Antonio Samaranch

Juan Antonio Samaranch was a sport administrator who served as head of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for more than 20 years. He was awarded the reform friendship medal in 2018 for “blazing the trail China’s Olympics.” Indeed, Samaranch is recognized to have played a key role for the Chinese bid for the Beijing Olympics in 2008.<sup>125</sup>

While this might seem of secondary importance, this for China was an important milestone in the process of fulfilling the ‘100 years dream’. The 2008 Olympic is often referred to by many as the ‘coming-out’ party of the People’s Republic of China since it was a way of “using sport as a vehicle through which to put China on the world stage” for finally showing off all the advances that the country has been gathering over the last century and a promise to never leave stage ever after.<sup>126</sup>

In this sense, what Samaranch managed to bridge was a chance to bring the country in the spotlight and for this reason he’s now “a household in China.”<sup>127</sup> All this influence and privileges that he gained through his activity also brought the two countries to jointly nominate him president of the China-Spain Council Foundation for his special relation with the country who put him in the position of middleman between the two countries. However, even if the relation between the country and the individual is strong and can be considered a full friendship, this doesn’t entail the same for the country of reference. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Samaranch effort works as a driver of convergence between them.

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<sup>125</sup> CGTN, “China Reform Friendship Medal Recipient: Juan Antonio Samaranch, Blazing the Trail for China’s Olympics,” December 21, 2018, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674e34637a4d31457a6333566d54/index.html>.

<sup>126</sup> Jonathan Grix, Paul Michael Brannagan, and Donna Lee, “China’s Coming Out Party? The Beijing Olympics, 2008,” in *Entering the Global Arena: Emerging States, Soft Power Strategies and Sports Mega-Events*, ed. Jonathan Grix, Paul Michael Brannagan, and Donna Lee, Mega Event Planning (Singapore: Springer, 2019), 69–82, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-7952-9\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-7952-9_6).

<sup>127</sup> Martin Egan and Miguel Moyano, “Samaranch, the Olympics and China: ‘Our Extraordinary Friendship Continues,’” March 10, 2023, [https://newseu.cgtn.com/news/2023-03-10/Samaranch-Olympics-China-Our-extraordinary-friendship-continues--1i2C8FrjIDC/share\\_amp.html](https://newseu.cgtn.com/news/2023-03-10/Samaranch-Olympics-China-Our-extraordinary-friendship-continues--1i2C8FrjIDC/share_amp.html).

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Samaranch “blazed the trail of China’s Olympics”. This event helped the country to work toward the China Dream which sees sports as a key value for the comeback from the 20 <sup>th</sup> century of humiliation. Samaranch didn’t just help in organizing the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, but an actual “welcome party” for China in the international stage.	✓
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	X
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	Samaranch sure enjoyed a very special treatment, probably because its role was particularly crucial for the success of the effort. A glimpse of affectivity is visible when we consider how he was nominated honorary citizen of Beijing, which is a treatment that none of the other names in the list received. This being a not owed gesture, I believe it is enough for allowing the orange check to this box.	≈

*Table 4.17: Juan Antonio Samaranch Analysis*

#### 4.4.18 Stephen Perry

Stephen Perry is a British businessman part of a lineage of ‘icebreakers’ in the relations with China. In fact, he was awarded the medal insofar as the most recent attempt of “carrying on the mission” in the thawing relationships between the two countries.<sup>128</sup> He is the chairman of the 48 Group Club, a non-profit organization with the explicit motto “Equality and Mutual Benefit” which purportedly echoes the words pronounced by Zhou Enlai in 1953 and used after that as a basic principle for the foreign relations with many countries.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>128</sup> CGTN, “China Reform Friendship Medal Recipient: Stephen Perry, Carrying on the ‘ice-Breaking Mission’ between China and the UK,” December 18, 2018, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514d35637a4d31457a6333566d54/index.html>.

<sup>129</sup> The 48 Group Club, “About The Club,” The 48 Group Club, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.the48group-club.com/about-the-club/>.



The interests line up pretty evidently but again it doesn't seem to emerge an affective relation between the two countries, at least not as much as it did for Juan Antonio Samaranch, reflecting the fact that characters that spent more efforts to promote the image of the country seemed to have found a closer place in Chinese relational web, at least in the narrative of the party that emerges through Chinese media.

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Perry and the 48 Group Club were recognized the role of icebreakers. This helps me to conclude that the main reason why Perry was awarded the medal as well as the essence of the shared effort between the two, is the will to connect culturally distant and (at the time) conflicting societies.	✓
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	X
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	The award and the sources analyzed do not transpire any form of affection.	X

*Table 4.18: Stephen Perry Analysis*

#### 4.4.19 Maurice R. Greenberg

In nearly 40 years as CEO of the American International Group (AIG), he managed to become the first fully licensed insurance company in China. Through the STARR foundation, he also invested in cultural programs around the world.<sup>130</sup> As described by Chinese State media Maurice, Maurice R. Greenberg is “an insurance magnate. Not only in business, but also in China-U.S. relations.” Greenberg worked as a middleman moved by the idea that building trust between China and the US would be a

<sup>130</sup> STARR Insurance Company, “Maurice R Greenberg,” STARR Insurance Company, accessed May 6, 2023, <https://starrcompanies.com/About/Leadership/Maurice R Greenberg>.

“stabilizing force” in an uncertain world.<sup>131</sup> The driving force of Greenberg reflects pretty clearly the scope of friendship as a way to deal with uncertainty by mutual understanding which comes “in the interest of the two parts.” “Not only have we helped students at schools, helped cultural issues, helped build hospitals,” he said. “I believe we’ve helped bridge the differences between our cultures.”

Pushing the idea of a friendship between China and the United States is out of the question, but it is undeniable how people like Greenberg play a crucial role in bringing the two countries together rather than the opposite. A clear pattern starts to come up among all these recipients and it is that, besides the business opportunities, they all seem to value their agency as a way to promote *understanding*, implicitly acknowledging the role of China to the world, at least according to the public statements that emerge from the primary sources used in this analysis. Here, as in other cases before, the element of affection can only be imaginatively researched in facts without a clear confirmation from both parties. In this case, for example, it might be interesting to highlight how Greenberg was named honorary citizen of Beijing, a treatment reserved to no other names in this list.

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	The two actors collaborated in building the insurance sector, making Greenberg so involved that he became the first insurance fully licensed company in Chinese history.	✓
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	X
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	X
<b>Affectivity</b>	The award and the sources analyzed do not transpire any form of affection.	X

*Table 4.19: Maurice R. Greenberg Analysis*

<sup>131</sup> CGTN, “China Reform Friendship Medal Recipient: Maurice R. Greenberg, Provider of ‘reinsurance’ between U.S. and China,” December 21, 2018, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414e33637a4d31457a6333566d54/index.html>.

#### 4.4.20 Robert Lawrence Kuhn

According to Chinese media, Robert L. Kuhn went out his way to tell the “true story” of China, echoing once again how Chinese officials value the narrative of itself abroad. It is specifically reported how Kuhn’s work “helps interpret China, its system and policies, for international audiences.” What distinguishes Kuhn from the other recipients is the privileged access that he built over the years. Some commentators report how, excluding Henry Kissinger and a couple of other names, “no other American citizen has spent more time with China’s top leaders.”<sup>132</sup> According to him, Kuhn managed to get close to the Chinese elites in decades of collaboration as strategist and advisor of the People’s Republic government. His means and narrative purpose are well summarized in his book ‘How Chinese Leaders Think’ where he interviewed more than 100 Chinese officials, including Xi Jinping. In an introductory sentence he states how his goal is to “invite readers to question the validity of the so-called “China threat” and to consider the relevance of an emerging “China model.”<sup>133</sup>

Despite the several critiques that the book and Kuhn’s work in general have received (mainly from western observers) the point for my analysis stands. Even if Kuhn’s approach to Chinese affairs is compliant with the government, he would only mean that being compliant is a way to get closer to the party, even if not every character in this list proved it mandatory. At the same time, however, not any other character in this list happened to have such deep contact with the country’s power structure; with only the exception of Lee Kuan Yew, who had on his side the perk of being the head of a state and of Chinese descendency.

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<sup>132</sup> David Barboza, “Inside Man,” *The Wire China*, September 27, 2020, <https://www.thewirechina.com/2020/09/27/inside-man/>.

<sup>133</sup> Robert Lawrence Kuhn, *How China’s Leaders Think: The Inside Story of China’s Reform and What This Means for the Future* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	Khun devolved his entire career in promoting the image of China in the US. The shared project between the two consisted in enhancing understanding by having a foreign scholar interpreting Chinese affairs according to the “true story.”	✓
<b>Morality</b>	Governmental and party sources did not allow a proper investigation on the history between the actors. Analyzing secondary sources would allow to study specific moments where external constraints played a role in determining policy choices.	✗
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	Same thing must be said about net reciprocity. A more in-depth study is necessary.	✗
<b>Affectivity</b>	The privilege that he acquired through the years has no equal. The number of high-profile politicians and personalities that he managed to get a personal connection show how he managed to fully engage with Chinese society. The number of personal connections show how affectionate Chinese communist party is to this character.	✓

*Table 4.20: Robert Lawrence Kuhn Analys*

## 4.5 Overview and preliminary Considerations

	Affectivity	Effort Tangibility	Morality	Net Reciprocity
Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin	✓	✓	X	X
Nursultan Nazarbayev	X	✓	✓	X
Raúl Castro	≈	✓	X	X
Maha Chakri Sirindhorn	≈	✓	X	X
Salim Ahmed Salim	X	✓	X	X
Galina Veniaminovna Kulikova	✓	✓	X	X
Jean-Pierre Raffarin	X	✓	X	X
Isabel Crook	✓	✓	X	X
Norodon Monieath	✓	✓	≈	X
Nguyen Phu Trong	X	X	X	X
Alan Merieux	X	✓	X	X
Werner Gerich	≈	✓	X	X
Klaus Schwab	X	✓	X	X
Konosuke Matsushita	≈	✓	✓	X
Masayoshi Ohira	≈	✓	✓	≈
Lee Kuan Yew	≈	≈	X	X

<b>Lee Kuan Yew</b>	≈	≈	X	X
<b>Juan Antonio Samaranch</b>	≈	✓	X	X
<b>Stephen Perry</b>	X	✓	X	X
<b>Maurice R. Greenberg</b>	≈	✓	X	X
<b>Robert Lawrence Kuhn</b>	✓	✓	X	X

Table 4.21: Analysis: Overview

Three considerations:

At a first glance, it is pretty evident how disproportionate is the frequency of the element “net reciprocity” and “morality” compared to the other two elements. The reason of this little relevance is to be ascribed mainly in the type of sources taken into account for this study. Governmental sources and public statements do not allow a deep analysis of the relationship but just fragments of personal opinions on the subject. Given that morality and reciprocity come as constraints influencing the decision-making process of the actors involved in the dyad, in order to measure their presence, it would be necessary to find vicissitudes where those constraints came to play. Through these sources it was possible to conclude that morality was present for just a few names, while reciprocity was practically never identified.

The “effort tangibility” is almost always present. This is a meaningful statement since it helps us to conclude how the instrumental part of the relationship is basically a prerequisite for any further stage. This reflects in a pretty accurate way what is shown in *figure 2*.

Affectivity is controversial. It is complicated to measure and requires a kind of information and hard to come by in public statements. Any of those cases has been assessed without considering the award of the medal as a gesture of affection, even though this could be – in a comparative case with non-recipients – a sign that might make sense to include. What this theory allows you to do is not only verify whether we are in front of a friendship or not, but also assess at what stage of the relational process a certain name stands. To do so, it is necessary to calculate a score based on the elements that it was possible to identify in the process of analysis. Since I spoke of the “quality” of a relationship, it means that achieving some aspects of the relationship is worth more than achieving others. This is very clear if you look at the frequency with which some elements have been found in this study: effort

tangibility is found 18 times out of 20, while affectivity is only 4. And this is not only a methodological problem but indeed reflects the idea that it is easier for a relationship to share a common project than for it to be characterized by affection. For this reason, I excogitated a scoring table that also reflects this consideration. To do so, I took into account how Guo described the evolutionary nature of the relationship in *figure 2*. In this instance, the instrumental dimension will be the less worthy, while affection will be the most.

	Effort Tangibility	Morality	Net Reciprocity	Affectivity
✓	1	2	3	4
≈	0.5	1	1.5	2

*Table 4.22: Friendship Scoring System*

Applying this scoring system to the assessment of the case study I got the following results:

	Name	Friendship Score
	Nguyen Phu Trong	0
	Salim Ahmed Salim	1
	Jean-Pierre Raffarin	1
	Alan Merieux	1
	Klaus Schwab	1
	Stephen Perry	1
	Lee Kuan Yew	2,5
	Raúl Castro	3
	Maha Chakri Sirindhorn	3

	Werner Gerich	3
	Juan Antonio Samaranch	3
	Maurice R. Greenberg	3
	Nursultan Nazarbayev	4
	Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin	5
	Galina Veniaminovna Kulikova	5
	Isabel Crook	5
	Robert Lawrence Kuhn	5
	Konosuke Matsushita	6
	Norodon Monieath	6,5
	Masayoshi Ohira	7

*Table 4.23: Scoring Overview*

This method allows you to compare different relationships with each other, investigate on the reasons why some are doing better than others, and potentially use the information as a compass in dealing with the country (or character) of reference.



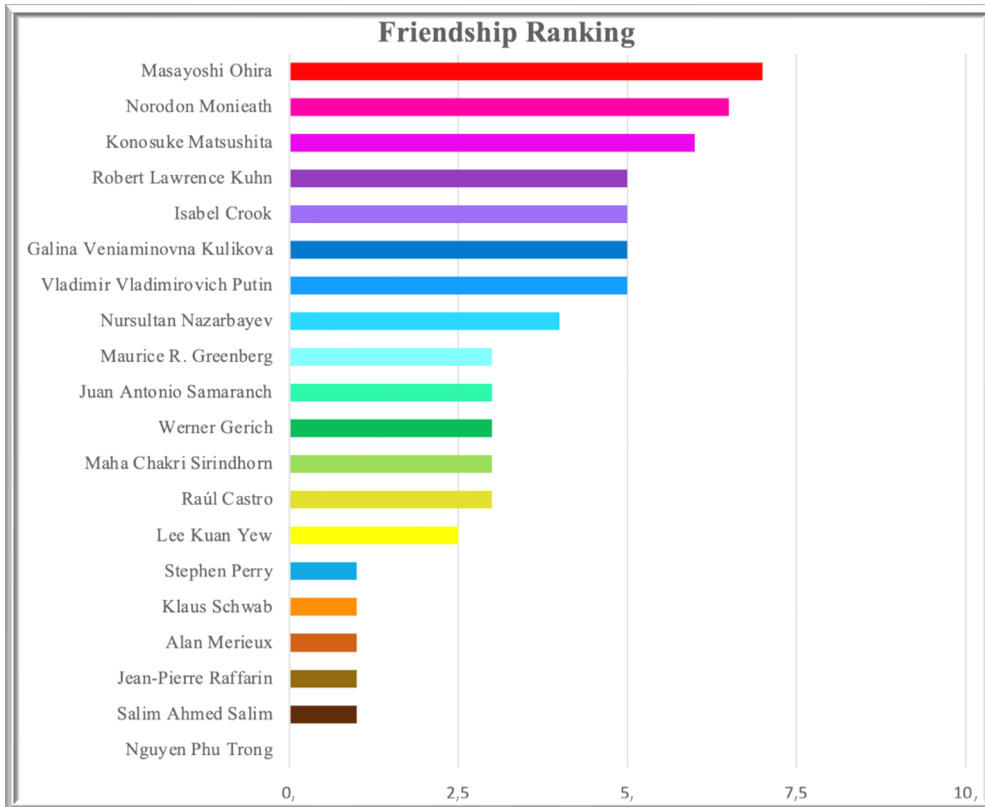


Figure 4.1: Friendship Ranking

The scoring system also allows a series of visualizations that help the reader have a clear first view of what the state of the relationships in a specific set of names. For example, *figure 24* makes it possible to see immediately how those friendships are ranked. In the same way, *figure 25* allows us to visualize the distance of a name from the actor of reference in a more spatial way. This gives you a clearer idea of the distribution of connections in a certain range and is more suitable for studies that involve a large number of names.

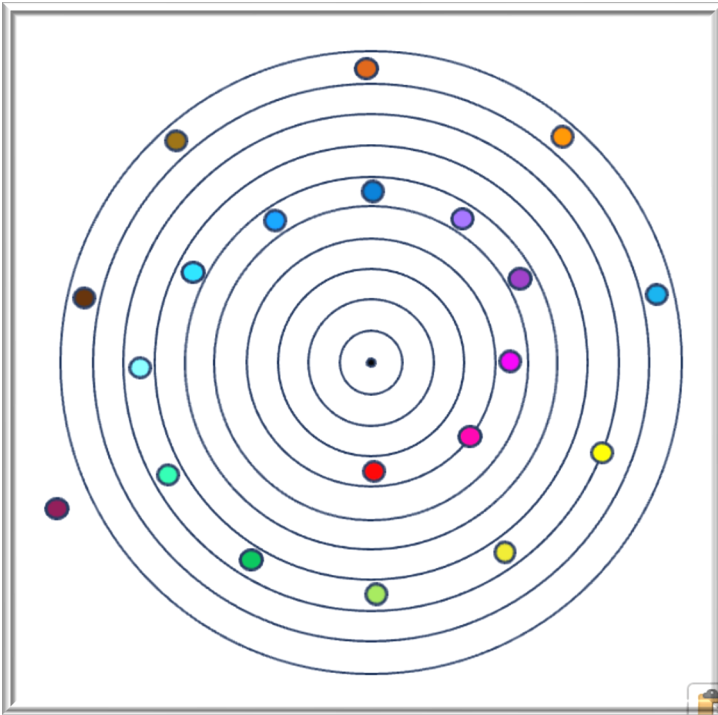


Figure 4.2: Circle of Connections

### Who Gets to be a ‘Friend’ of China?

The answer to this question is double-edged. In short, on one side, whoever checks convincingly all the criteria outlined by this theoretical approach, gets to be a friend of China; the biggest leap for friendship is to get to the affection phase, breaking the chains of formal structures. On the other side, none of the names analyzed here seem to match the requisites to be defined as ‘friend of China’. Of all the people labelled as ‘friends’ some get closer to the theoretical friendship (though never really reaching it) some are not even to be considered part of the relational web of Xi

Jinping’s Chinese Communist Party. Those who manage to get closer share one or more of these attributes:

a. They have a **similar cultural background**. It is mainly due to their geographical and historical proximity to China that it is possible to argue that some of the names at the top of the list acted following a sentiment of “shared identity.” For example, the Japanese awardees Ohira and Matsushita explicitly stated that their efforts were motivated by the strong belief that Asia should work together in the century to come. In the same way, Isabel Crook, born in China, cherished a sense of belonging that has been clear throughout her entire career;

b. They share **political ideas**. Again, Isabel Crook was a convinced communist who acted in perfect consideration of these ideals and made them a founding principle of her studies. Robert L. Khun also married the Chinese cause and spent his whole career promoting the image that China itself defined as “the true story.” In a slightly different way, Putin represents an important political ally when it comes to legitimizing the internal political dimension of China in opposition to the west;

c. They are affected by **shared geopolitical interests**. Russia and Kazakhstan share thousands of kilometers of borders with China that require careful management and shared solutions. China needs the support of countries like Cambodia to gain more power for the negotiations in the South China Sea dispute against other southeast Asian countries. Most countries of origin of the names on the top of the list (as well as in the rest of the list) are part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

## 5. Tracking Change: A Longitudinal Study

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The application of the model in the previous section has shown, given a core actor, it is possible to build a social web in which to position a set of actors. This way, it is also possible to compare two individuals and their respective positions relative to the core actor.

As said several times before, one of the greatest values of this theoretical framework is the possibility that it grants us the ability to assess in a more detailed fashion the evolution (or involution) of the relationships between two individuals over time. To do so, it is necessary to take a step back and create a context in which the model can be applied multiple times at different, consecutive moments in time. Putting the results side by side, it is going to be possible to pinpoint the variation of the relationships of two given individuals.

Delving more into the procedure, let's imagine a case where we wish, indeed, to analyze the evolution of the relationship between two individuals over time. Let's call these individuals X and Y. Besides the two counterparts in question, it is also necessary to identify two more elements:

- a) The **historical span** to consider ( $H$ ). The historical arc represents the entirety of the period that we seek to explore. It's the timeline that describes the relation;
- b) The **number of instances** ( $N$ ) in which we need to fragment our timeline. This parameter allows us to choose with which frequency to apply the model and, subsequently, in how much detail to study the evolution of the relationship. Each will be studied according to the model, allowing the researcher to snap a shot of the relationship at a **given moment in time** ( $i_n$ ).

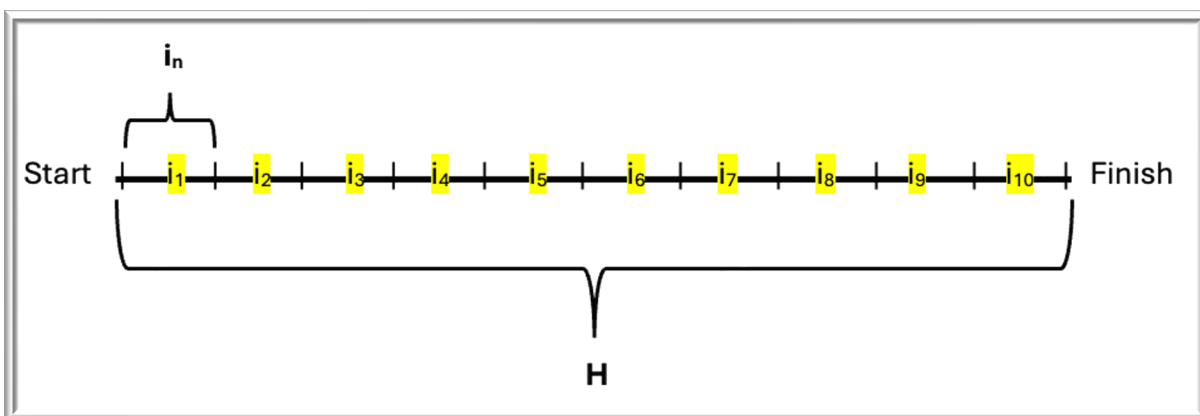


Figure 5.1: Study Design

Once we establish the structure of the analysis, we shall proceed with applying the model for each  $i_n$ . In detail, this means that every time slice becomes a case-study on its own, for which it is necessary to

find specific sources that were produced in the time slice in question, or that have been produced some other time but that are specifically referred to that timeframe. From each analysis will follow: a qualitative result (namely, a deep investigation of the relationship between the two individuals); a sort of quantitative result. As we know, analyzing the relationship through the model presented in this work grants a friendship score (shown in *Table 27*) that, being a number, allows us to make all sorts of operations, not least the chance to plot the results.

Now, let's consider a hypothetical case based on the diagram shown in *figure 1*. Let's say we have two characters,  $X$  and  $Y$ , and we want to analyze the relationship over a span of 10 years ( $S = 10$ ). We want to observe the annual changes in this decade-long relationship, so we will divide the historical arc in 10 fragments ( $N = 10$ ).<sup>134</sup> For each instance  $i_n$ , we apply the model in the same exact way we did in the previous section, and after that, we pile up the results in a *progression table* that will help us keep track of the advances of the process. Let's proceed examining in detail the hypothetical case  $i_1$ :

1. General examination of the case study in search of the element to feed the model;
2. Summary of the results:

<b>Effort Tangibility</b>	...	≈
<b>Morality</b>	...	≈
<b>Net Reciprocity</b>	...	≈
<b>Affectivity</b>	...	✓

*Table 5.1: Mockup Scoring Table*

<sup>134</sup> The fact that  $S$  (historical span) and  $N$  (number of instances) correspond is purely coincidental. For the same time span, it would have been possible to study the change every 6 months, every week, or potentially even every day. The only limit to this increasingly detailed segmentation of the historical span is clearly the necessity to find a sufficiently robust corpus of sources to make the analysis of a progressively smaller and more specific fraction feasible. This is not possible in the case study of this thesis, but it could be in cases involving characters who perhaps engaged in extensive personal correspondence (which must be accessible) or who published many articles or opinion pieces about their counterpart.

Following the rules outlined in the scoring table shown in table 4.22 we calculate the score of  $i_1$  which, in this hypothetical case will be:

Effort Tangibility	...	≈	+0,5
Morality	...	≈	+1,0
Net Reciprocity	...	≈	+1,5
Affectivity	...	✓	+4
Friendship Score:			7

3. Update of the progression table;

X/Y Relationship	$i_1$	$i_2$	$i_3$	$i_4$	$i_5$	$i_6$	$i_7$	$i_8$	$i_9$	$i_{10}$
Friendship Score	7	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

*Table 5.2: Progression Table X/Y*

At this point, we have in our possession a detailed analysis of each instance, along with a series of numeric scores. Those scores can be easily plotted into a graphic that will allow us to have a clearer idea of the fluctuation of the relationship over time (*Graphic 1*).

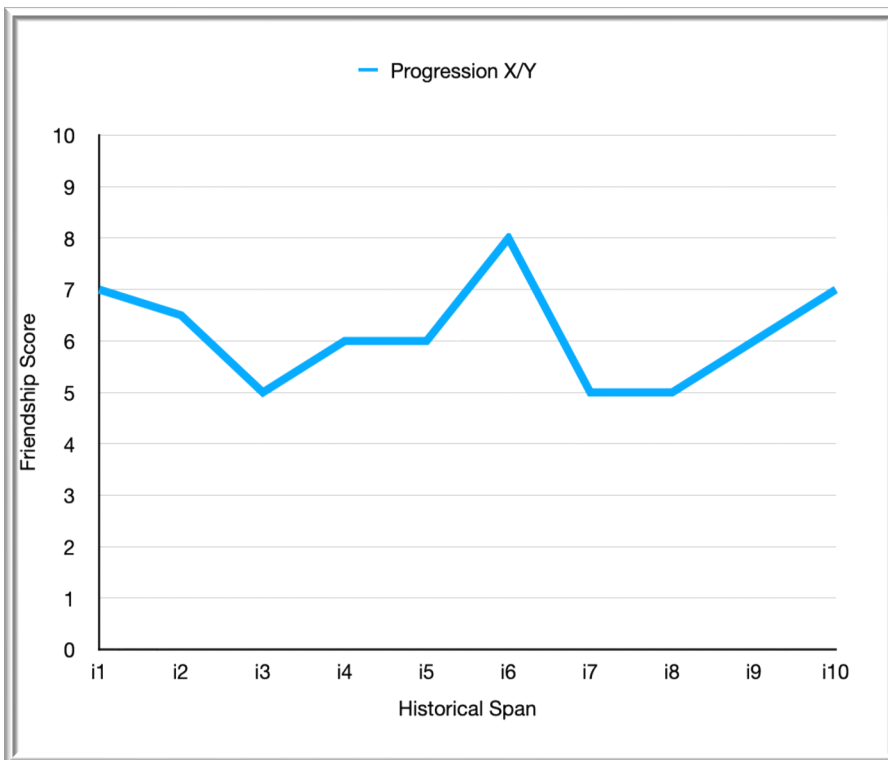


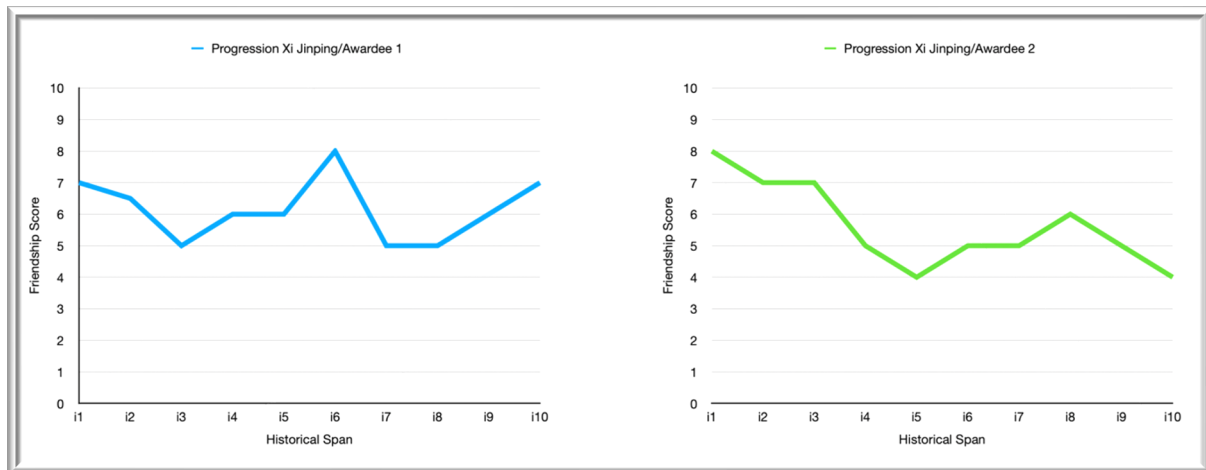
Figure 5.2: X/Y Progression Curve

Expanding on this reasoning, it is possible to plot in the same graph different curves belonging to various pairs of individuals, this way, conducting a comparative study by placing the evolution of two relationships happening simultaneously in the same time span. This applies both in the case (1) of different pairs where only one of the two parties is replaced, and in the case (2) where both are replaced.

The two cases lend themselves to different case study. In the

case examined in this work (referring to the friendship medal), it would make more sense to hypothesize a type 1 comparative analysis, where one of the parties remains constant (specifically the Chinese counterpart in the relationship), while the other can vary.

In order to revisit the example discussed above with generic individuals X and Y, we now replace the X with the name of Xi Jinping, and Y now stands for a random awardee of the Friendship Medal. Consequently, *Graphic 1* would now represent the progression of the relationship between two actual individuals. Suppose now we have studied in the same way the progression of the relationship between Xi Jinping and another recipient; we could obtain another progression table (similar to *table 1*), and thus a consequent curve.



*Figure 5.3: Two Progression Curves in Parallel*

We would then find ourselves in front of two parallel graphics, each representing the progression, within the same time span, of two pairs of individuals. Both pairs have Xi Jinping as the common node on one side, and another recipient of the medal on the other. In a very simple fashion, the two curves can be superimposed in order to have a clearer comparative graphic of the progression of the two distinct relationships.

## Conclusions

This section attempts to further extend the application of the model, highlighting a fundamental aspect of the theoretical conceptualization: the ability to measure a relationship and the way it changes over time. While the initial part of the theory's application was focused on the general evaluation of the relationship between two individuals, this final section delves into the specifics of a particular relationship between two individuals and seeks to analyze its progression over the years. In doing so, the author aims to virtually demonstrate an additional and crucial application of the theoretical framework proposed here. The hope is that this tool could assist researchers or policymakers in evaluating relationships between individuals involved in international relations, guiding their research or political activities towards a better understanding of the other.

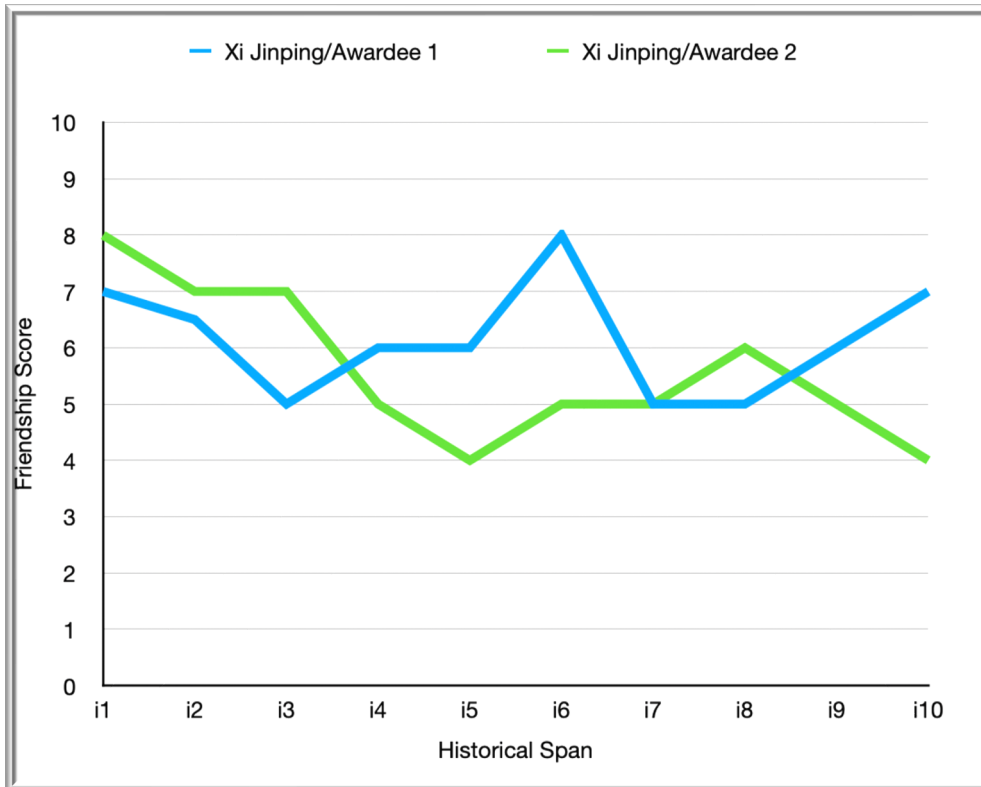


Figure 0.1: Two Progression Curves Plotted Together



## Final Conclusions

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### Social and Academic Intent of This Work

This thesis was born from a dual necessity: first, the deontological need to shift the focus back to the individuals who animate global life and its institutions, rather than maintaining as the focal point a generic set of entities such as state or international organizations. In a slogan, this thesis is not about international relations, but international relationships. The shift is about moving from a discussion of generic interactions between entities, to a deeper exploration of why these entities interact in certain way, sometimes establishing more intimate connections with some than with other. This urgency aligns with the cause promoted by Lawson and Go, who call for a ‘relational revolution.’ At its core, this work attempts to dismantle the reductionist doctrines that have historically characterized the dominant theoretical frameworks, such as Realism and Liberalism in all their forms.

In order to achieve this, the thesis starts with a very human concept: friendship. This concept, surprisingly unexplored accord to Wendt’s observation in 1999, has since attracted numerous scholars who attempted defining its relevance in the realm of international affairs. To make their way through the criticism that relegated the concept of friendship to a naïve idea, unfit for serious international political analysis, friendship scholars had to build a solid theoretical argument to validate the concept. Roshchin, for instance, conceptualized friendship not as a mere anthropomorphic metaphor, but as a normative argument that aims to turn the logic of the security dilemma from fear to trust. More recently, Van Hoef advanced this concept further, operationalizing it into four factors that describe a friendship between two political actors. However, Van Hoef placed his model within the neo-realist taking this way a step back in the doctrine who were trying, not without difficulty, to distance themselves from the security dilemma.

Given these premises, this thesis seeks to recontextualize the concept in two ways: first, it aims to consecrate this theoretical approach within the neo-constructivism paradigm, which takes elements from classical constructivist theory and varies in two main things: first, it shares features with the classical constructivist thought, which is well summarized by Nicholas Onuf’s words which holds that “that people make society, and society makes people.” The ‘neo’ prefix is justified by the deviation that the concept takes from the classic theory in the direction of a greater consideration of the individuals, their relationship, the way they build those relationship and how those affect the world. In detail, this new approach to constructivism is called ‘processual constructivism.’

Second it attempts to address an important limitation of Van Hoef’s theory which resides in its inherent static nature. To do that, I turn to another concept that share many aspects with friendship:

the Chinese notion of *guanxi*. *Guanxi*, fundamental in Chinese culture, refers to a network of personal relationships based on mutual trust, reciprocity, and instrumentality, influencing various aspects of professional, private, and public life, including business and politics. Besides its general definition, some scholars crafted a model that, not at all dissimilarly to Van Hoef's model, defines a set of criteria to assess the state of a relationship. As I explained in the main text, these criteria overlap for the most part, and in the theory building I provided an integrated theory that merges the two sets (*table*).

However, there's a key difference between the two approaches that makes *guanxi* even a better addition to my case. If friendship helps us understanding whether a certain relationship is a friendship or not, the former provides for a spectrum across which a relationship can span over time. While Van Hoef's model demands a relationship to meet all the criteria to be studied, *guanxi*, as theorized by Guo, does not. In the *guanxi* paradigm, Van Hoef's concept of friendship becomes just one possible configuration within a vast range of alternatives, allowing the theory to account for relationships that are not yet friendships but have the potential to become such (for reference look at .

This integrated approach to the study of international relationships takes the name of Relational Theory of International Relations. The application of such model constitutes the second part of the thesis, the Chinese practice of awarding 'friendship medals' to international personalities. This evocative case study is especially interesting considering the cultural context; as Alan Smart notes, only 6.6% of the Chinese population statistically labels a personal connection as a 'friend.' This raises the question of why a state that seldom uses the term 'friend' considers it the highest honor to award. Exploring the reasons behind these awards can provide valuable insights into what the usage by governmental sources of the term 'friend' and what it takes to be deemed as such.

### **Theoretical Insights: Advantages and Limitations**

The integration of western friendship with the Chinese concept of *guanxi* provides substantial theoretical insights into the relational dynamics that underpin international diplomacy from top officials to people from the civil society. This approach transcends the limitations of traditional IR theories like realism and liberalism, which often fail to capture the complexity of personal relationships in state interactions. One of the primary advantages of this approach lies in its ability to offer a more holistic understanding of international relations. By recognizing the importance of personal ties and cultural nuances, the theory enriches our comprehension of diplomatic engagement. It acknowledges that behind every state and institutional interaction, there are individuals whose relationships shape the outcome of these engagements. This shift from merely structural analysis to one that includes relational dynamics adds substantial depths to our understanding on global politics. Moreover, this theoretical framework has practical relevance for diplomats and international actors, particularly those engaging

with China. It emphasizes the fact that cultivating and maintain personal relationship can lead to more effective and sustainable diplomatic ties.

However, the theory also has its limitations. One significant limitation is its cultural specificity. While *guanxi* is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, its applicability may be limited in other contexts. The nuances and the intricacies of *guanxi* may not fully translate to other cultural setting, making it difficult to apply this theory universally. This cultural specificity requires a careful and context-sensitive approach when extending the theory beyond Chinese diplomacy. Additionally, the multifaced nature of *guanxi* can complicate its consistent application in empirical research. The theory demands a profound understanding of cultural subtleties and relational dynamics, which can be difficult to achieve without extensive knowledge of the cultural context. This complexity necessitates a nuanced and well-informed approach to research and analysis. This structured approach also translates into the phase of handling the case studies, which have to be very well defined in terms of the actors involved, and they require a well corpus of primary sources, which are not easy to come by when the goal is to tap into the most intimate sphere of individuals (that's where signs of affection lie).

### **Case Study Analysis: Strengths and Weaknesses**

The case study of the friendship medals awarded by Xi Jinping from 2015 to 2021 serves as a practical test of the integrated theory, applying the theoretical framework to a real-world scenario. This case study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of *guanxi* and friendship in chines diplomacy. I concluded that China uses these awards to strengthen diplomatic ties. This is true even considering that none of the names in the list reflects the idea of affectionate relationship that is friendship in Van Hoef's term, or the best desirable outcome in Guo's spectrum. Here, what emerges is that the term friend in the context of this medal is more a tool to trace a path to follow for those who seek to get closer to the Chinese political system. than a kind recognition of an achievement. This analysis offers practical insights for diplomats and international actors seeking to build and maintain strong ties with China. It highlights the importance of demonstrating tangible efforts, building trust, and cultivating reciprocal relationships.

However, the case study also has its weaknesses. One notable limitation is the reliance on official documents, which may not capture the full spectrum of *guanxi* dynamics. Official documents often present a formal and structured view of diplomatic interactions, potentially overlooking the informal and subtle aspects of personal relationships. To gain a comprehensive understanding of *guanxi*, future research should incorporate qualitative interviews with key stakeholders to capture the informal dynamics and nuances of relational interactions. Another limitation is the scope of the case study. Focusing solely on friendship medals limits the generalizability of the findings. While these awards

provide valuable insights into one aspect of Chinese diplomacy, other forms of diplomatic recognition and actions by different political leaders might reveal additional dimensions of guanxi. Expanding the scope of research to include various forms of diplomatic recognition and interactions would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a broader perspective on the role of guanxi in international relations.

### **Future Research**

The findings of this study open several important ways for future research, which are crucial for advancing the understanding of relational dynamics in international relations. Building on the insights gained from this research, future studies can explore various dimensions and applications of guanxi and friendship theories. One promising direction for future research is to explore how different non-Western cultures conceptualize and operationalize interpersonal relations. Comparative studies involving culture such as Japan, India, or Middle Eastern countries could provide valuable insights into the universality and specificity of relational approaches. Understanding the similarities and differences in relational dynamics across cultures can enhance the applicability of this framework and more generally help making steps forward in dealing with other.

Another important area for future research is conducting longitudinal studies to track the evolution of the relationships over time. Considering how, for the most part, the thesis focused on studying static relationship, relegating change over time to a mere theoretical exercise. While this was marginalized because of a problem of missing time and space, it does not follow that researching those relationships longitudinally is of secondary importance. Longitudinal studies can offer a dynamic understanding of how relationships develop, change and influence diplomatic outcomes over extended periods. By examining the long-term trajectories of a relationships, researchers can gain insights on the the factors that contributes to the durability and effectiveness of diplomatic relationships.

Expanding the scope of research to include diverse diplomatic contexts is also essential for a comprehensive understanding of this integrated approach. Future studies should investigate various forms of diplomatic recognition and interactions, including informal gestures, actions by different political figures, and other types of awards. This broader perspective can provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of interpersonal relationships in different diplomatic scenarios and highlight the diverse ways in which personal relationships shape international relations.

Finally, integrating insights from anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies can enrich the understanding of guanxi and friendship in international relations. Interdisciplinary approaches can provide deeper insights into the cultural and social underpinning of relational dynamics. By drawing on

multiple disciplines, researchers can develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complexities of individuals' interactions in diplomacy.

### **Final Thoughts**

This thesis contributes to the ongoing dialogue in international relations by emphasizing the importance of personal relationships and cultural frameworks. By integrating Western Friendship theories with the Chinese concept of *guanxi*, it provides a more inclusive and culture-sensitive approach to understanding international diplomacy. This research encourages scholars and practitioners to embrace the diversity of relational practices, fostering a more nuanced and effective strategies for global engagement. The integration of friendship and *guanxi* theories offers a fresh perspective on the relational dynamics that underpin diplomatic interactions. By recognizing the significance of personal ties and cultural nuances, this approach enriches our understanding of international relations. It highlights the importance of building trust, cultivating reciprocity, and understanding the informal dynamics that shape diplomatic relationships.

However, this theoretical framework also presents challenges, particularly regarding its cultural specificity and complexity. The applicability of *guanxi* beyond the Chinese context requires careful consideration and nuanced approach. Future research should explore the universality and specificity of relational dynamic across different culture, conduct longitudinal studies to track the evolution of the relationships, and expand the scope of research including diverse diplomatic contexts.

In conclusion, this thesis lays the groundwork for a relational revolution in international relations, emphasizing the importance of personal relationships and cultural frameworks. By integrating insights from different theories, it provides a more holistic and culturally sensitive understanding of diplomacy. This research encourages a shift from a generic focus on entities to a deeper exploration of the individuals and relationships the shape international interactions. Future research should continue build on these insights, expanding our understanding of the complex web of relationships that shape the world of international relations and fostering more effective and nuanced strategies for global engagement.

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