

# 1. Introduction

Although the People's Republic of China's (PRC) new found international significance and rapid rise on the global stage have been widely commented, such analyses have tended to focus on global systemic implications (Ikenberry, 2008; Schmidt (ed), 2009; Bergsten, 2008; Breslin, 2005); specific bilateral implications (Hughes, 2009; Terada, 2010); or internal resources. (Shrik, 2007; Hsu, 2009). Only recently has a series of mid-level analyses started to emerge aimed at assessing the PRC's distinct impact on the regional scene. It seeks to identify how Beijing's choices will come to shape the distinctive structural features and key policy dynamics of the emerging Asian multilateralism and regionalism. Within this context, the question as to whether the PRC has developed a distinct and identifiable '*Neighbourhood Policy*' –akin to the efforts deployed by the EU in its own backyard– would certainly contribute towards better understanding the regional implications and calculations associated with the PRC's rise. In seeking to unpack the PRC's macro-regional approach, this paper will strive to identify whether China has over the past decade(s) come to develop a coherent set of policies which are aimed at identifying and organizing its neighbourhood(s) in a multilateral fashion. Furthermore, if such a '*Chinese neighbourhood policy*' can be isolated, it is most likely to be characterized by a distinct set of goals and means rooted in their specific relationship to the state and its borders. This paper therefore sets out to verify the hypothesis that the PRC has generated a specific "*Asian Neighbourhood Policy*", the milestones and methods which are akin to the "*European Neighbourhood Policy*", but the underlying models of which are radically different.

## 2. The "*European Neighbourhood Policy*": An Original Comparative Template

Within comparative regionalism, an important literature exists that compares East Asian and European experiences of regional cooperation. This body of work has established that both regions have over the past decades experienced in varying fashions a common trend towards neo-regional cooperation. This rise of '*regionness*' (Hettne, 2000) is a shared global dynamic with very distinct regional expressions (Teló, 2007). Overarching systemic comparisons can establish said common orientation, but fully understanding the underlying distinction between Europe and East Asia requires more focussed, mid-level policy-based comparisons. A promising policy-lens which remarkably has rarely been used up to now is the notion of *neighbourhood* which carries with it insights into region-building and is premised on a transferable notion of proximity.

## 2.1. A Return to Multi-polarity: Ordering Interdependencies through Regions?

As this millennium's first decade comes to a close the international system continues to be rocked by transformational undercurrents which have only been accentuated by the recent crisis. Over the past three decades, a constant within both the academic and policy-related literature on International Relations (IR) has been the supposition that the tense but uniquely stable bi-polar World Order associated with the Cold War could not survive the specific international context which produced it (Keohane, 1986). If the bi-polar perspectives –*both conceptual as well as practical*– are antiquated, the exact nature of the subsequently emerging international logic(s) has remained the core controversy of International Relations (IR) studies over the past 3 decades. Fostered through both continued epistemic innovation, and changing international realities, a lively and renewed debate on IR has animated both the academic and policy-making communities. With the dissolution of the stifling, yet also order-generating, straightjacket of the Cold War; a wider range of dynamic variables and uncertainties came to the fore. Beyond the paradigmatically distinct critical approaches, systemically-oriented IR debates have come to be driven by a rehabilitated dialectic between those systemic approaches stressing possible sources of ordering and cooperation; and those highlighting disruptive and conflicting forces. As such, commonly accepted evolutions within the international system –such as: (i) *growing interdependencies* (Keohane, 1984), (ii) *new emerging powers* (Santander, 2009), (iii) *diminishing distances* (Ruggie, 2009), (iv) *the increasing free flow of information and technology*, or (v) *the accelerating impacts of deepening economic globalisation*– have invariably been seen as both possible sources of enhanced cooperation, as well as potential new risk factors.

This opposition between what one can identify as a largely ‘*neo-Kantian*’ tradition, and a roughly ‘*neo-Hobbesian*’ one has come to frame IR debates (see Tab. 1.1.) over the past decades. Whereas the determined European experience of 5-decades of regional integration is both conceptually and politically intimately linked to *neo-Kantian* approaches, the uneven and heterogeneous Asian multilateralism calls upon a multitude of conceptual and political discourses, the concerns of which tend to remain *neo-Hobbesian* at heart. Obviously pluralism and dissonant voices enrich the debate on both sides; nevertheless, both Europe and East Asia appear as the two key areas in the ongoing debate on the future of “regions in the global order”. Each of these two particular regional experiences have come to reflect one side of the fundamental debate in IR, whilst also proving to be the loci of some of the most innovative and enterprising regional efforts. (Telò, 2004). As a result, a comparative analysis of the European and East Asian experiences is of particular value as it confronts two determining cases, each reflecting different paths towards a shared result: increased regional cooperation.

**Tab.1.1. Key-Postulates underwriting the structuring opposition between neo-Kantian & neo-Hobbesian readings**

	Neo-Kantian	Neo-Hobbesian
Systemic driver of IR	Democratization & economic growth	Stressful security affairs and relative power
Primary instruments	Institutional arbitration & economic instruments	Military power & economic levers
Interdependencies imply	i. Decreased efficiency of military instruments ii. Confusion of policy priorities hierarchy iii. Growing Impact of exogenous factors on internal order	
Evaluation of implications of interdependencies	Opportunities for institutionalized Cooperation	Vulnerabilities as number of potential sources of conflict increase
Stabilising factor	Multilateral cooperation	Articulated power hierarchies

In light of the fundamental opposition sketched out above, the literature has increasingly sought to bridge the divide by focussing on mid-range theories aimed at illuminating specific governance efforts within a complex international system see-sawing between stability and change.

As the fluid, and even potentially chaotic, nature of the currently emerging international reality has become ever clearer, a significant segment of the aforementioned IR debate has focused on possible stabilizing factors which might contribute towards ordering the newly unleashed interdependent world order. If the first decade of the Post Cold War Period seemed to offer the vision of a short lived “*unipolar moment*” (Chollet & Goldgeier, 2008) centred on American hegemony (Chollet & Goldgeier, 2008), the subsequent decades have confirmed the premise of an increasingly complex international system. The result is an increasingly byzantine and less predictable world order marked by a multitude of interwoven seats of power with distinct points of reference. Assessing the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) rise and its implications must therefore be done within the context of a *multidimensional international scene* (Nye, 2003) characterized by a number of *centres of relative gravity* (Haass, 2008), and settled through a *plurality of cooperative institutions set up at varying levels*. (Teló, 2007). Accordingly, this paper limits itself to a single dimension: the implications of China’s rise on the Asian Region as assessed through the institutional forms of neighbourly cooperation. As the regional strategies deployed by Beijing are unpacked through comparison, this paper hopes to offer a better understanding of their implications for the emerging Asian multilateralism and regionalism. As older systemic approaches have been uprooted by changing realities, seemingly established dichotomies such as “West-Rest” (Anderson, Ikenberry & Risse, 2008) or “North-South” (Ross & Chan, 2002; Martin, 2008) have been challenged by evolving political realities. In contrast, the continued impact of geography, and in particular that of ‘*proximity*’, has emerged as a uniquely enduring independent variable which in various forms and intensities continues to play a central role in contemporary IR (Cohen, 2010). This has given a renewed meaning to historic tendencies to organize world affairs by regional poles. As homogenizing forces associated with globalisation have done away with past distinctions, both analytical as well as strategic thinkers have sought to re-affirm existing differences through regionally organized poles. ‘*Proximity*’ as an instrumental factor called upon by policy-makers –ranging from the 19<sup>th</sup> century “*Monroe Doctrine*” to the current “*European Neighbourhood Policy*” – enjoys a long tradition. Equally, as an analytical tool, ‘*proximity*’ has been both a consistent independent variable within all weighted models of economic integration – ranging from Balassa to current gravitational models of international trade, as well as a defining factor in the growing literature on (neo-) Regionalism.