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# Redefining Global Dynamics: Integrating Non-Western Perspectives in International Relations Amidst Rising Powers

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### Abstract:

This thesis seeks to understand the complex interplay of influence and strategy between China and the nations of the Pacific, pushing beyond the traditional bounds of Western-focused International Relations theories. For this, it begins by scrutinizing the limitations of conventional models like offensive realism and economic statecraft in fully understanding China's engagement with the Pacific. The thesis is organized into three chapters that piece together the puzzle of China's ambitious strategies in the Pacific. Starting with a deep dive into the theory of offensive realism, we explore why China might take an assertive stance in global politics. Then, we shift gears to examine how China cleverly employs economic tools, from investments to sanctions, before shifting the lens towards integrating non-Western perspectives into international relations, enriching our understanding of global dynamics through the lens of the Pacific Islands' unique geopolitical and cultural context. Together, the study proposes a fresh perspective in International Relations, advocating for a blend of Western and non-Western theories to capture the rich tapestry of global diplomacy more accurately. It sheds light on the proactive, strategic actions of Pacific Island countries, illustrating their adept negotiation of sovereignty and strategic interests in the face of global competition. By arguing for a more inclusive, nuanced, and equitable approach to International Relations, this thesis seeks to broaden the discipline to fully respect and represent the diverse narratives and strategies of all states involved. The insights offered reveal not only China's multifaceted approach to extending its influence but also the assertive diplomacy of Pacific nations. These narrative challenges the binary of dominance and dependence, urging a re-evaluation of how international relations are understood and studied. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of recognizing the sovereign agency of smaller states and the need for IR theories that reflect the complex realities of our global, multipolar landscape. This work enriches our understanding of international dynamics, advocating for a more comprehensive and globally representative International Relations discipline.

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## Introduction

### Opening Statement:

In the shimmering vastness of the Pacific Ocean, small island nations, often perceived as mere dots on the world map, are rewriting the rules of global diplomacy and raising the question “why are world leaders racing to the Pacific Islands?” (Mulyanto, 2023). Frequently overlooked due to their size, these nations are at the forefront of a significant shift in geopolitical dynamics driven by China's escalating involvement in the region. This shift has not only attracted Western nations' attention but has also stirred a debate among International Relations (IR) scholars. Some argue that China's ascent and its interactions with Taiwan, juxtaposed with the United States' strategic responses, exemplify a new era of geopolitical competition, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region (He & Li, 2020). This scenario underscores the evolving nature of power politics, traditionally dominated by military and economic might. This thesis will argue that traditional Western International Relations theories, while insightful, fall short of fully capturing the nuances of China's strategy, especially its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Unlike the military-focused approach of offensive realism championed by John Mearsheimer, China leverages economic power to extend its influence, necessitating a re-evaluation of how power is understood and utilized in international politics. David Baldwin's seminal work on economic statecraft offers an essential framework for grasping China's strategy, highlighting the use of economic instruments in foreign policy that operate with coercive power akin to military strength. The critical engagement with non-Western perspectives is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between China and the Pacific. As Acharya (2011) has argued to make a case of “Global International Relations”, a fundamental shift in International Relations' study has to include non-Western ideas, challenging the field to move beyond Western-centric norms and to embrace a multipolar world order. This shift is not about diminishing the value of Western theories but about enriching the field with a diversity of perspectives, especially in analysing regions like the Pacific, where traditional Western theories may not fully apply.

China's rise illustrates a departure from traditional power dynamics, focusing on economic partnerships and cultural ties rather than primarily on military strength. The BRI exemplifies this strategy, symbolizing China's commitment to building connections between itself and many developing states rather than confrontations. This approach requires a broader analytical framework that incorporates both Western and non-Western perspectives, offering a clearer understanding of the complex interplay between global powers and smaller states. By integrating diverse theoretical insights, this thesis aims to shed light on the multifaceted nature of international relations in the Pacific, where small island nations navigate their strategic interests amidst great power competition. This analysis challenges the traditional views on power and dominance and emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of global politics. In doing so, it advocates for an International Relations discipline that acknowledges the sovereignty, agency, and unique perspectives of all states, encouraging a rethinking of dominance and influence on the global stage.

#### Research aims:

The main aim of this study is to understand China's manoeuvres in the Pacific, home to numerous 'small states'. This objective requires first critically assessing how China's policies on aid have been understood in IR to appreciate the global context in which the present China's manoeuvres in the Pacific emerged and is observed. This is to take a comprehensive approach that merges lesser-explored theories beyond the typical Western International Relations lens. In the first chapter of the thesis, I will delve into offensive realism to examine why China may adopt assertive strategies to protect its global position amid the unpredictable global political landscape. This analysis will explore China's use of economic statecraft, including investments and sanctions, to align Pacific Island nations with its strategic goals. Additionally, I will investigate the unique dynamics and importance of the Pacific region to understand China's interests in expanding its influence and securing key positions and relationships crucial for its security and economic aspirations. This combined analysis offers fresh insights into China's strategies, highlighting the

importance of viewing the Pacific islands not just as passive backdrops but as active participants in their own right within the intricate dance of global geopolitics.

Understanding China's approach through these three lenses reveals not only the strategic manoeuvres Beijing employs to expand its influence but also the broader implications of such actions for the international order. As I will discuss more fully in the next section, integrating non-Western perspectives on power and international relations challenges and enriches the conventional understanding of global politics. It brings to light the unique ways in which non-Western actors perceive power dynamics and respond to the international structure, thereby offering a more holistic view of international affairs that recognises the sovereignty, agency, and cultural integrity of all states, including those in the Pacific Islands. This focus not only contests the traditional narrative that often portrays smaller states as passive recipients of larger powers' policies but also highlights the active and strategic ways these nations navigate their relationships with major powers. By doing so, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the strategic responses of smaller states in the Pacific, enriching the academic and policy discourses on China's rise and its complex implications for global politics. Moreover, advocating for an International Relations discipline that embraces both Western and non-Western theories advocates for a more inclusive, representative, and equitable field. This approach not only enhances the analysis of specific regional interactions but also contributes to the broader goal of globalizing the field of International Relations.

#### Overview of Literature and Theory:

The aim of this section is to provide an overview of the literature and theory that informs this thesis. More specifically, it critically examines the range of scholarly perspectives on China's presence in the Pacific. This analysis focuses on themes such as aid, development, and geopolitical rivalry. By doing so, it sets the stage for questioning the applicability of Western-centric International Relations theories to the unique dynamics of China-Pacific interactions. The section seeks to highlight the necessity of incorporating non-Western viewpoints into the discourse. This will enrich

our understanding of the complex interplay between global powers and small island states. Ultimately, it advocates for a more inclusive and nuanced approach to International Relations that better captures the realities of the Pacific region.

Aid:

Alberto Alesina and David Dollar raised the fundamental inquiry, "Who gives foreign aid to whom and why?" (Alesina and Dollar, 2000), prompting an exploration of the dynamics underpinning foreign aid distribution. The identification of donors can be straightforwardly attributed to nations possessing the necessary resources and capabilities to provide aid. The recipients, conversely, are typically those nations in dire need of assistance, delineated by their socio-economic and developmental exigencies. However, the motivations underlying the provision of foreign aid are considerably more complex, engendering diverse scholarly interpretations and categories of aid. The prevailing scholarly consensus posits that the impetus for donor countries to dispense aid is largely driven by the intention to secure and perpetuate their economic and political influence (Kim & Shin, 2019). Echoing this perspective, Hans Morgenthau, a proponent of classical realism, argued as early as the 1960s that foreign aid is predominantly politically motivated, with humanitarian aid constituting the sole exception to this rule (Morgenthau, 1962). The aim of foreign aid is to improve the lives of less advantaged nations, which includes economic growth. While historically in some cases this has proven to be the case, foreign aid has also attracted plenty of criticism. For one developed countries are in a position to use their economic power to further their foreign policy goals (Bindra, 2018). According to Clair Apodaca, foreign aid can be used to either punish an "unfriendly or ideologically antagonistic regime" or it can be used to reward a "friendly and compliant regime" (Apodaca, 2017, p.1). A perfect example of this is the donor-recipient relationship that colonial powers have to their former colonies. Both the United Kingdom and France allocate most of their aid to former colonies in Africa (Alesina and Dollar, 2000 ; Becker, 2020).

Literature from western scholars on China in the Pacific has many different facets, with many of them focusing on issues such as aid and development, as well as

competition and rivalry. These two sides shape the understanding of what can be seen in the news and can be read in articles. According to Matthew Dornan and Jonathan Pryke, when comparing official developmental assistance in the Pacific to the rest of the world, they found that the 10 Pacific Island nations are amongst the 25 countries who receive a higher per capita aid proportionate to national income, than the rest of the world (Pyke and Dornan, 2017 ). According to Clair Apodaca, foreign aid can be used to either punish an 'unfriendly or ideologically antagonistic regime' or it can be used to reward a 'friendly and compliant regime' (Apodaca, 2017). Zhang Denghua, a leading Pacific scholar, argued in 2017 that China has no strategic interests in the Pacific, and that the engagement in the South Pacific is just like any other interest in developing countries (Zhang, 2017). Could the attention therefore be on the proportionality of the impact, on a group of some of the smallest states in the world? The alternative is the rivalry that ensues with several states in the Pacific still recognizing Taiwan. With the possible consensus being that China's aim for using aid is not entirely based on moral and humanitarian objectives, but rather as a tool for competition with Taiwan (Zhang, 2019). Decreasing the sphere of influence that Taiwan could have in the Pacific, while increasing their own influence and diplomatic power. China's increased presence in the Pacific has prompted the United States to increase attention and interest in the region, showcased by the regular talks now held between the United States and Pacific leaders. The question is being raised why are western states concerned with a state that is within the geographical Indo-Pacific region?

### China and the Liberal World Order

Some scholars argue that China's rise constitutes a grave challenge to the liberal international order constructed after World War II (Nelson, 2021). They suggest that China's economic and military power undermines the liberal order and poses a threat to its sustainability. On the other hand, there are scholars who argue that China's rise can be accommodated within the existing multilateral governance framework of the liberal order (Kutlay, 2019). This suggests that China, as one of the chief beneficiaries of the open global markets, does not have revisionist incentives to overturn the liberal order. Instead, China can be integrated into the liberal order

through existing institutions and rules. Furthermore, there are concerns that China's rise may undermine the liberal norms at the global stage (Wang & Zeng, 2020). This perspective suggests that China's growing influence may challenge and weaken the liberal values and norms that underpin the liberal international order. For instance, Graaff and Apeldoorn (2018) propose three plausible scenarios delineating the dynamics of the relationship between China and the liberal international order. The first scenario envisages the possibility of overt conflict, while the second envisions China's integration into the liberal world order, leading to cooperative interactions. The third scenario, as echoed by Graaff et al. (2020), envisions the concurrent existence of two discrete systems, thereby challenging the conventional conception of a monolithic global order. The argument made by the second scenario and Kutlay seems at this stage more likely, given that China profits from the existing system as much as any other state would. However, this also suggests that scholars would have to look at China the way liberal states are being analysed. China is neither liberal nor democratic, and therefore the logic would prevail that there is a need for other types of frameworks.

Within western international relations, the current debates remain around China, and the future of the liberal world order. A key focus of this discourse is the escalating geostrategic competition between the United States and China, which is reshaping international cooperation and power dynamics (Woods, 2023). This geostrategic competition is very well represented in the Pacific, where China has signed several bilateral agreements with Pacific Island countries, which "propelled the United States into action, launching a counter diplomacy aimed at protecting the US Indo-Pacific strategy, which relies on free access to the Pacific Islands." (Woods, 2023, p.2). This rivalry carries significant implications for the global balance of power and strategic interactions. Along similar lines are the current discussions on the BRI where the debates concern the geopolitical implications of the BRI, with the United States perceiving it as China's strategic response to the "Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy" and a method to strengthen its regional power status Hu et al. (2023). Scholars from the liberal theory such as Liu and Yang argue that while the West, particularly the United States, views liberal democratic values as integral to the post-war international order, China prioritizes a pragmatic approach that emphasizes an UN-

centred, rule-based multilateral framework, downplaying the significance of power and ideology. Furthermore, they argue that “Although China has no apparent intention to overturn the LIO, it does wish to see an international order that recognizes its great power status, provides a more equitable distribution of benefits, and allows resistance to some liberal norms that may jeopardize its core interest and harm its regime security.” ( Liu & Yang, 2023, p. 1398). Essentially what the current debate is showing, is that the role of China and the current power structures remain immensely important to both western and non-western international relations. Therefore, creating a space where both western and non-western International Relations are being analysed is necessary to create a global international relation that encompasses a wide variety of voices.

#### Non-western international relations

China disrupts the western centric conception of the liberal world order and power. International relations theories such as realism and liberalism were created to explain how states should behave, wherein this behaviour is based on western conceptions of statecraft and power. This eurocentric westphalian interpretation of statecraft and power was built on centuries of colonialism that saw a few states at the pinnacle of power. Thus, realism helped to explain the multipolar power system, wherein more than two states create an unstable power structure, which is why european states escalated so quickly into war in 1914 (Christensen & Snyder, 2011).

The discipline of International Relations has undergone significant evolution beyond the traditional paradigms of Realism and Liberalism, incorporating a diverse array of nuanced theories and perspectives. However, despite this evolution, Western-centric theories continue to dominate the teachings and scholarly work in the field, which in part may be because "most contemporary international relations theory... is produced in western nations by western authors for western readers. " (Young, 2014, p.29). Realism and Liberalism, the foundational theories in International Relations, have been shaped by Western thinkers and experiences. Realism, emphasizing state security, self-interest, and the anarchic nature of the international system, is exemplified by scholars like Thomas Hobbes, Carl von Clausewitz, and John

Mearsheimer. Liberalism, focusing on cooperation, institutions, and economic interdependence, is represented by thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Joseph Nye, and Robert Keohane. These theories, though instrumental in shaping the International Relations discourse, are rooted in Western historical and philosophical contexts. While Realism and Liberalism have become more nuanced over time, with other branches such as Neorealism, Neoliberalism, and Constructivism, the core of these theories remains Western-centric.

There is however a growing number of scholars who have started the debates on western and non-western international relations. This debate has shifted considerably in the past two decades, with Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan's foundational text, *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and Beyond Asia* (2009), taking a lead in the discussion on non-western international relations. As the rise of China provokes a possibility of a multipolar world, so does it provoke increased discussions around non-western international relations. Oliver Stuenkel in *Post-Western World: How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order* (2016) for example speaks about the emerging multipolar world. He argues along the lines that the rise of emerging powers challenges the traditional narratives of International Relations by demonstrating that Western dominance and perspectives are no longer the sole or even the primary engines driving international dynamics (Stuenkel, 2016). The argument in "A Bibliometric Analysis on Trends, Directions and Major Players of International Relations Studies" by Ratnaria Wahid, Shazwanis Shukri, & Mohammad Zaki Ahmad focuses on the global expansion and diversification of International Relations as a field of study yet highlights the persistent dominance of Western influence within the discipline. They aptly argue that "seemingly, the non-Western contributions to the International Relations field have yet to establish their own footing in the field despite much discussion about diversifying International Relations. This remains a challenge for non-Western scholars, journal publishers, and institutions seeking to contribute to the ongoing debate in the study of international relations." (Wahid et al., 2023, p.202).

While there has been an increasing amount of scholarship dedicated to the discussions of non-western or global international relations, western international

relations still are the dominating field. Analysing power relations according to western international relations isn't only one way of doing it, a large portion of global politics doesn't fall into the western paradigm, including China and the Pacific Islands. There is a compelling argument for the critical integration of non-Western perspectives into this field, as highlighted by a variety of scholars, for example Butcher & Griffiths (2017) have been pivotal in proposing a framework that recognizes the significance of non-Western and pre-modern political systems in understanding states, state systems, and international orders. They content that this non-western framework "pins sovereignty to a lean and culturally neutral conception of the state, one that divides the internal composition of hierarchy from the external variation in anarchy, and one that can be applied across a diverse set of state systems and orders" (Butcher& Griffith, 2017, p.335). These non-Western views offer unique insights into global dynamics that are not captured by traditional Western theories. Despite the push for a more inclusive Global International Relations the integration of non-Western perspectives faces significant challenges. Western International Relations theories continue to dominate scholarly work, conferences, and publications, often marginalizing non-Western contributions. This is partly due to the historical and institutional weight of Western academia, as well as the linguistic and cultural barriers that hinder the dissemination of non-Western ideas. As a result, while the field of International Relations is moving towards a more inclusive and diverse understanding, Western International Relations theories still hold a predominant position, underscoring the need for continued efforts to balance and integrate non-Western perspectives.

### Thesis statement and Research questions

The thesis emerged from a hunch and initial observation that the existing framework of International Relations , with its heavy reliance on Western theories like offensive realism and economic statecraft, doesn't quite capture the full story, especially in regions where smaller states hold their ground against larger states. Recognizing that these conventional paradigms didn't do justice to the nuanced and active ways in which Pacific Island nations engage with a rapidly ascending China led to a

deeper exploration. This exploration takes two-pronged approach. Firstly, it looks into Western theories to understand China's bold moves in the Pacific, analysing its use of both military power and economic leverage. The research expands its horizon, weaving in non-Western perspectives to paint a fuller, richer picture of these international dealings. Considering the issue from a wider vantage point uncovered an important discovery, that Pacific Island nations aren't just passive players in the geopolitical game. Instead, they're crafting their own narratives, making strategic moves, and navigating the complexities of international politics with a surprising degree of agency.

By marrying insights from both Western and non-Western schools of thought, this study aims to shed light on the multifaceted nature of China's engagement in the Pacific. It looks beyond the conventional forms of power to understand the strategic responses from Pacific Island nations. This comprehensive approach highlights the thesis's central argument: the field of International Relations needs to break free from traditional Molds and embrace a more inclusive, nuanced understanding that recognizes the sovereignty and strategic prowess of all states involved. The path to this thesis statement was a journey of critical analysis, moving from acknowledging the shortcomings of current International Relations theories to advocating for a discourse that genuinely represents the complex dynamics at play in the Pacific. It's a call for a more globally attuned International Relations discipline that accurately reflects the interplay of power, strategy, and diplomacy in the modern world.

This thesis explores how Pacific Island nations navigate their strategic autonomy between major powers by leveraging China's economic statecraft and initiatives like the BRI, challenging the adequacy of Western-centric International Relations theories, especially offensive realism's focus on military power, to reshape our understanding of international power dynamics and state behaviour.

The research questions driving the analysis of the thesis are:

- How does the engagement of rising powers, particularly China, with smaller states reflect and potentially reshape the norms and structures of the existing international order?
- How do China's actions in the Pacific Islands, analysed through the lens of offensive realism and economic statecraft, illustrate its strategic approach to reshaping regional power dynamics and pursuing global influence?
- How do the strategic narratives and engagements of Pacific Island countries with China challenge traditional International Relations frameworks on power and agency, and what does this reveal about the need for integrating non-Western theories to better understand these dynamics?

#### Method and Limitation:

This thesis ventures into the complex world of international relations with an eye on China's expanding role, its dynamic interplay with nations in the Pacific, and different mediums of power being analysed. It questions the prevailing dominance of Western-centric viewpoints by weaving in perspectives from the broader, often overlooked parts of the world and shines a light on the savvy manoeuvres of smaller states. By employing a rich blend of a broad literature review and Critical Discourse Analysis, this work offers a deep dive into the subtleties of global politics. At its core, this thesis undertakes a thorough literature review, critically evaluating theories such as offensive realism and economic statecraft for their failure to fully capture the interactions between emerging superpowers and less dominant states. It stretches the conversation further by integrating non-Western theories and insights into China's strategic plays in the Pacific, aiming to bridge identified research gaps.

Drawing on Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the thesis analyses diplomatic exchanges, official documents, and media portrayals from both China and various Pacific Island nations. This scrutiny lays bare the often-hidden power plays, ideologies, and strategic narratives driving these engagements. Critical

Discourse Analysis proves essential in understanding how smaller nations assert their sovereignty and strategic ambitions even as they navigate the complex waters of relations with a behemoth like China. The narrative is enriched with case studies from places such as the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, selected for their distinct approaches to engaging with China. These real-life examples anchor the theoretical discussions in tangible scenarios, showcasing how Pacific states balance their sovereignty and strategic objectives against China's looming presence. These investigations not only lend solid evidence to support the thesis's claims but also highlight the diverse tactics employed by these nations in the face of external pressures. Nevertheless, the thesis is candid about its boundaries, notably its concentration on China's engagements in the Pacific, which may not encompass the full breadth of China's international policy manoeuvres. Moreover, the preference for qualitative research and Critical Discourse Analysis might side-line other significant aspects of China's impact, like economic investments or military expansions. Despite these constraints, the thesis stands out in the field of international relations for its original viewpoint, advocating for the recognition of non-Western narratives and the pivotal role of smaller states in the fabric of global politics.

Thesis structure:

This thesis unfolds in three chapters, each layering to deepen our understanding of China's rapid rise and its complex interactions on the global stage, particularly through the lens of International Relations theory. We begin by delving into the story of China's ascent in the world and its implications for the realm of International Relations theory. This journey navigates through the contrasting landscapes of Western International Relations theories, notably realism and liberalism, to scrutinize their alignment with China's distinct path to prominence. John Mearsheimer champions a vision of offensive realism focused on military might, suggesting that conflict is an inevitable companion to China's rise, asserting, "The rise of China will not be peaceful at all" (Mearsheimer, 2006). This bold claim, rooted in the assumptions of anarchy and the quest for survival, contrasts sharply with John Ikenberry's more optimistic liberal perspective, which envisions China's growth as a

chance for deeper integration into the existing liberal world order without causing a disruptive hegemonic shift (Ikenberry, 2008). This opening chapter sets the stage for a nuanced debate, challenging us to ponder the potential paths of China's unfolding story on the world stage, beyond the binaries of conflict and cooperation.

Next, we shift our gaze to China's strategic use of economic instruments in shaping its international relations, guided by the insights of David Baldwin and others. Baldwin introduces the concept of economic statecraft, highlighting the dual use of economic tools for coercion and collaboration in foreign policy (Baldwin, 1985). Building on this foundation, we explore how China's BRI epitomizes its approach to expand influence through infrastructure and trade, serving both economic interests and strategic ambitions. Yet, this ambitious global project raises questions about debt sustainability and geopolitical intentions (Kostecka-Tomaszewska & Krukowska, 2021), suggesting a complex impact on regional dynamics and the global order (Petry, 2022; Manzoor et al., 2022). This chapter unravels the layers of China's economic strategies, revealing the intricate balance between power and partnership in its global pursuits.

The narrative then travels to the Pacific Islands, where the geopolitical currents and strategic interests of China's engagement come into sharp focus. This section advocates for the inclusion of non-Western perspectives to enrich the theoretical tapestry of International Relations, ensuring a more accurate reflection of the diverse realities shaping international relations in the Pacific. The proactive stance of Pacific Island nations, leveraging narratives such as the "Blue Pacific" to assert sovereignty and navigate the complexities of global politics, illustrates a sophisticated engagement with major powers (Kabutaulaka, 2020). Through a detailed examination of speeches and policies, including those of Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister James Marape and Solomon Islands' Prime Minister Manasseh Damukana Sogavare, we see a vivid picture of how these nations articulate their place and power on the world stage. This exploration, grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis, highlights the islands' strategic diplomacy and collective agency, urging a re-evaluation of traditional international relations theories to embrace the rich diversity of global perspectives and experiences. Each chapter, building upon the last, paints

a comprehensive picture of China's rise, the strategic dynamics at play, and the vital voices of the Pacific Islands, culminating in a call for a more inclusive, nuanced, and globally representative field of international relations. This journey through the chapters not only challenges existing theoretical paradigms but also invites us to envision a world of international relations that genuinely reflects the complexity and interconnectedness of our global community.

## Chapter 1: "Economic Power and Military Strength: Rethinking China's Rise and the New Paradigms of Global Power Dynamics"

### Introduction:

The debate about China's place in the world has sparked intense discussion among scholars, particularly between those aligned with the realist perspective, like John Mearsheimer, and proponents of liberalism, such as John Ikenberry. With these two theories still covering much of the debate in western international relations, and China not being a western state, the conversation raises an important question: Do Western theories of international relations fully capture the essence of China's ascent? John Mearsheimer, a leading figure in the school of offensive realism, has significantly influenced how we view global power dynamics, especially regarding China. He starkly posits, "China cannot rise peacefully," suggesting a path marked by tension and potential conflict (Mearsheimer, 2010, p. 382). His theory, centred on the aggressive pursuit of power for survival, positions military strength as the ultimate measure of a state's power. Mearsheimer's offensive realism is built on the idea that the international system's anarchic nature and the inherent offensive capabilities of great powers drive states towards aggression to ensure their survival (Mearsheimer, 2014). Exploring Mearsheimer's work sheds light on how the interplay of power among leading nations, particularly China and the U.S., is crucial for understanding the framework of global politics and security strategies from a structural realism standpoint.

On the flip side, John Ikenberry suggests a different future, one where China's rise doesn't inevitably lead to conflict. Instead, he sees a possibility for China to be integrated into the existing liberal world order, a process that would require proactive efforts from Washington to strengthen this order (Ikenberry, 2008). This contrast between Mearsheimer and Ikenberry's viewpoints encapsulate the broader discussion about the influence of military versus economic power in shaping international relations. Emerging discussions are beginning to highlight the

increasing significance of economic prowess in global affairs. The concept of economic statecraft, where states use economic tools to achieve foreign policy goals, becomes particularly relevant. The idea its proponents suggest is that economic prowess allows states to enhance their military capabilities, exert influence, and extend their power, which are also key components of China's strategy for regional dominance (Markowitz & Fariss, 2011). China's use of economic statecraft, exemplified by initiatives like the BRI and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, showcases its strategic application of economic resources to extend its influence (Haga, 2021). Moreover, the mutual benefits of economic interdependence, as seen in China's extensive partnerships and regional collaborations, underscore the nuanced and interconnected nature of modern international relations (Yu & Sui, 2022).

This chapter explores the complexities of China's global ascent and the different power dynamics at play, examining the perspectives of offensive realism and economic statecraft, alongside the dynamics of Sino-US relations. It argues that while the realist focus on military might provide valuable insights into the strategies of great powers, it falls short of capturing the full spectrum of modern international relations, particularly in the context of China's rise. By analysing the foundational assumptions of John Mearsheimer's offensive realism and contrasting it with China's economic strategies, this study challenges the notion that military power is the sole determinant of state influence. Instead, it highlights the importance of economic power and interdependence, offering a more nuanced understanding of great power politics that incorporates economic statecraft into the study of China. Through examining the complex relationship between the US and China, this chapter refutes the inevitability of conflict suggested by offensive realism, advocating for a broader approach that recognizes economic leverage as a vital component of international power dynamics. This perspective not only deepens our understanding of China's rise but also encourages a re-evaluation of traditional realist assumptions, suggesting new avenues for cooperation and competition in the international arena.

## 1.1 Analysing the Complexities of China's Rise: A Realist Perspective on Offensive Realism, Economic Statecraft, and the Sino-US Dynamic

This section discusses the concept of offensive realism, primarily focusing on the ideas of John Mearsheimer, and its application to the international relations between major powers, particularly the United States and China. It explores Mearsheimer's theory that states, driven by the anarchic nature of the international system, seek to maximize military power to ensure their survival and achieve hegemony. The text also delves into the role of economic power in this context and considers alternative perspectives such as *realpolitik* and economic statecraft to understand the dynamics of Sino-U.S. relations and China's rise as a global power. While there are many different scholars to pull from Mearsheimer offers the most pessimistic view about the Sino-US relations, because when reading John Mearsheimer's scholarly works one thing becomes very clear, very fast; to borrow directly from Mearsheimer "to put it bluntly China cannot rise peacefully" (Mearsheimer, 2010, p 382). As an offensive realist the main concerns that Mearsheimer has is that a state's main concern is to "maximize relative power, with hegemony as their ultimate goal" (Mearsheimer, 2014, p.22). Furthermore, great powers are determined based on their military capabilities (Mearsheimer, 2014). He therefore argues that the metric of a great power is intrinsically linked to its military capabilities, thereby suggesting that a state's resources are fundamentally allocated towards bolstering its military apparatus.

### 1.1.1 Offensive Realism and China's Global Ascent

Offensive realism is based on five assumptions, which are related to basic assumptions that all realists share. The first assumption is that the international system is anarchic, meaning there is no "higher ruling body in the international system" (Mearsheimer, 2010, p, 31). The second assumption is that "great powers inherently possess some offensive military capabilities" (Mearsheimer, 2010, p. 30). This includes any military resources, including nuclear weaponry. The third assumption is that "state can never be certain about other states' intentions" (Mearsheimer, 2010, p, 31). As such states should fear other states, given that they are always on guard. The fourth assumption is that the primary goal of great powers

is survival. The ultimate aim of a great power would be to be the strongest state in the international system, thus influencing every other state. This stands in comparison to small states, whose aim is survival. Finally, Mearsheimer assumes that "great powers are rational actors", capable of making strategic decisions to navigate the complexities of the international arena. (Mearsheimer, 2010, p 31). These assumptions collectively form the bedrock for an analysis of offensive realism, offering valuable insights into the strategic behaviours of states within the anarchic international system. Through this lens, the discussion ventures into the strategic interplay between military and economic dimensions of power, elucidating the complex and multifaceted nature of state behaviour and international relations, particularly in the context of the evolving dynamics between the United States and China.

According to Shiping Tang, the debate within the school of offensive realism is marked by two distinct perspectives on why states exhibit aggressive behaviour on the international stage (Tang, 2008). On one hand, structural offensive realism suggests that the inherent aggressiveness of states stems from the anarchic structure of the international system. This form of realism posits that the lack of a central authority to enforce rules and norms leads states to adopt aggressive postures to ensure their survival and security. Tang articulates this viewpoint by stating, "structural offensive realism holds that states become inherently aggressive due to anarchy" (Tang, 2008, p. 453). On the other hand, human nature offensive realism argues that states' aggressive tendencies are a consequence of their insatiable appetite for power and dominance. This perspective emphasizes the role of human nature in shaping state behaviour, suggesting that the desire for power and dominance is a fundamental human trait that translates into the aggressive behaviour of states on the global stage (Tang, 2008). This viewpoint aligns with the idea that offensive realism is a structural theory, as it attributes state aggression to the anarchic nature of the international system rather than individual characteristics or motivations.

Mearsheimer, a prominent scholar in the field who has contributed to the development of offensive realism, seeks to re-formulate Waltz's structural realist theory to explain the amount of international aggression observed in the world (Mearsheimer, 2014). Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism takes a structural

point of departure and emphasizes the role of power in international relations. In this sense, structural power gives states the ability to influence and shape global politics, one of the strengths that great powers have (Mearsheimer, 2014, pp. 18-21).

According to Mearsheimer's theory, great powers relentlessly maximize their power in a highly competitive anarchical world in order to assure their survival by trying to achieve regional hegemony at the expense of other powerful actors (Mearsheimer, 2014, pp.40-42). This theory primarily focuses on military capabilities as the main instrument through which states exercise power and achieve their objectives and as such prioritize military might their quest for power and security. However, this focus has also been a point of critique, as scholars such as Peter Toft argue that Mearsheimer's analysis often overlooks other significant forms of power, such as economic warfare, which can also play a crucial role in international relations (Toft, 2005). This critique highlights a broader debate within the field about the nature of power and the various means through which states can achieve dominance and ensure their survival in an anarchic international system.

“The Tragedy of Great Power Politics”, as described by John J. Mearsheimer, underscores the competitive nature of international relations among major powers. In this view, military power is seen as a means to deter potential adversaries, protect national interests, and project influence on the global stage. Mearsheimer argues that military capabilities play a crucial role in the pursuit of hegemony. Although Mearsheimer acknowledges the importance of economic might, he argues that the two aren't comparable, since “states convert their wealth into military power” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p.79). To him the difference in “latent power and military power” is that the outcome of both is that it goes into building military power. Although wealth doesn't necessarily mean military power, wealth is a good indicator of the possibilities that a state has in projecting power. The end result of these assumptions is that a great power would gain hegemony in the given system or the entire world. Although Mearsheimer repeatedly points to the importance of wealth, wealth cannot exist without a certain degree of economic power. He argues that wealth is measured in terms of ‘mobilizable wealth’ which is the “economic resources a state has at its disposal to build military forces” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 62). Economic power on the other hand can be viewed as a means to influence others, akin to economic statecraft (Balwin, 2020; Nye, 1990). Although Mearsheimer acknowledges economic power in terms of latent power, he undermines the

economic power a state can have. Mearsheimer defines power based on “material capabilities that a state possesses” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 55).

Wealth is a significant factor in a state's ability to project power for several reasons. Firstly, wealth provides a state with the necessary resources to invest in and maintain a strong military (Markowitz & Fariss, 2011). As the costs associated with projecting power decrease or as the wealth necessary to project power increases, states are more likely to project power more frequently and at greater distances (Markowitz & Fariss, 2011). This implies that wealth enables a state to acquire advanced military technology, build a capable military force, and sustain it over time. Secondly, wealth allows a state to exert influence through economic means. States with higher levels of wealth have greater economic leverage and can use economic incentives or sanctions to shape the behaviour of other states (Bell & Wolford, 2014). Extant wealth from primary commodities, such as raw materials, minerals, and oil increases the power of the state, which is reflected in reduced chances of civil war (Bell & Wolford, 2014, p. 519). This suggests that wealth can contribute to stability and influence in international relations. Furthermore, wealth enables a state to invest in power projection capabilities and subsequently project power at greater distances from their home territory (Markowitz et al., 2018, p. 1370). As states become less economically dependent on territory, they are more likely to invest in power projection capabilities and project power beyond their borders (Markowitz et al., 2018). Mearsheimer focuses on how states prioritize power for security in an anarchic international system, viewing wealth mainly as a means to enhance military capability for survival (Mearsheimer, 2014). In contrast, Markowitz et al. highlight that wealth itself can foster stability and international influence by enabling power projection, suggesting a more direct link between economic resources and global standing. Wealth accumulation facilitates strategic partnerships and alliances by increasing a state's attractiveness as a valuable ally, enhancing its diplomatic influence and strategic positioning on the global stage. Furthermore, economic prosperity allows for the development of a robust defence industry, not only ensuring self-sufficiency in military needs but also enabling a state to become an arms exporter, thereby extending its influence through military diplomacy and economic ties. Economic power and military power are tied together, however while military power seeks to intimidate and deter other powers, economic power seeks to

influence and create dependency, thus creating a different way for states to utilize power.

### 1.1.2 The Role of Economic Power

While power projection is associated with military power, economic statecraft is an example of the economic power projection is just as useful. This indicates that wealth provides states with the means to extend their influence and assert their power in regions beyond their immediate vicinity, which any state seeking to achieve hegemony would want to have. This line of argument is consistent with the offensive realist arguments about power projection and the pursuit of hegemony. Mearsheimer for example argues that territorial expansion can be beneficial to a rising power, because it ensures security and prosperity for the state (Mearsheimer, 2014, pp.84-85). What this line of argument lacks is the assumption that states can cooperate, which Mearsheimer points out is “sometimes difficult to achieve and always difficult to sustain” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p.51). But as this chapter will show economic interdependence explains how states can cooperate economically without the need for conflict. As globalization simplified the movement of goods among countries, so that everyone benefits from acquiring goods that they otherwise don't possess. Within the framework of offensive realism, economic power fundamentally underpins military power by providing the resources necessary for military development and sustainment. Economic strength enables a state to invest in advanced military technology, expand its military infrastructure, and maintain a formidable defence force. This interaction suggests that a state's pursuit of power on the international stage is not solely dependent on its military capabilities but also on its economic vitality. This relationship challenges some core assumptions of offensive realism by highlighting that military aggression and the quest for hegemony are also constrained by economic capacities. Economic interdependence, a by-product of globalization, further complicates this dynamic by creating mutual dependencies that can deter military conflicts, suggesting that economic ties could serve as a form of power that influences international relations in ways that traditional offensive realism might not fully account for.

The United States has since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 been the hegemonic power in the international system. The argument here is that a state that achieved regional hegemony would “seek to prevent great power in other regions from duplicating their feat” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 41). Which is where China enters the stage as the rising power in Asia. Historically the United States has invested a great amount of money into China as it was developing and welcoming China into the global trading system in the hopes that it would adopt western ideals (Mearsheimer, 2021). However, what he also argues is that the United States is partly responsible for helping China become the competing power. As Mearsheimer points out in the 1980s “U.S. presidents had granted China ‘most favoured nation’ status, a designation that gave the country the best possible trade terms with the United States “(Mearsheimer, 2021, p.3). The initial idea behind that was to create a power in the region that could balance out the Soviet Union. The issue wasn’t to give China this special status, but that the United States kept renewing it until it became permanent. While this may not entirely explain the rise of China, it does explain in part the simplified entry of China into the existing globalized trading system, and thus enabling China to grow its economy even more so than it did before. What the United States now does in relation to China is more akin of a Cold War. Mearsheimer argues that unlike the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, this new rivalry is ‘is more likely to lead to a shooting war’, because when both the United States and the Soviet Union established themselves as great powers, the international system was chaotic from years of wars (Mearsheimer, 2021). After the Soviet Union collapsed, the US was the only great power in the system, without competition, being the controlling force in the world. As China grows more powerful, there is a visible trend of countries turning from western-oriented trade and diplomacy to China. One such example can be seen in the Pacific where countries such as the Solomon Islands who previously recognized Taiwan, and now they no longer do. As such the competition between the two great powers is much more tense, because the US would likely want to keep the status quo, and China is seeking to establish itself further. However, unlike what Mearsheimer would predict, with China expanding militarily, this has not yet happened, which may be due to smaller states especially in the Pacific, making their opinion and position clear. Thus, opening up the discussion that goes beyond great power politics.

### 1.1.3 Realpolitik and Sino-U.S. Relations

Realpolitik plays a crucial role in shaping international relations, especially in the context of Sino-US dynamics. This realist concept, often associated with the pursuit of power and the strategic use of force to achieve national objectives, underscores the pragmatic approach nations adopt to navigate the complex landscape of global politics (Feng & He, 2019, p. 511). Realpolitik's relevance is particularly pronounced in the interactions between China and the United States, two major powers with divergent political systems and global aspirations. China is "not an established power attempting to maintain a dominant position, but rather a rising power seeking to better secure and advance its interests as its capabilities grow." (Bladgen, 2021, p. 1176). David Bladgen argues China also engages in the ideational performance of newfound "greatness," projecting an image of strength and power (Bladgen, 2021, p. 1176). This suggests that while China acknowledges the importance of realpolitik, it also recognizes the value of projecting a strong image on the global stage. The difference in power projection and realpolitik is nuanced but comes down to pragmatic nature of realpolitik that is more interested in national interest, rather than deterrence. Meaning that realpolitik is more interested in practical policies that benefit, rather than policies that are meant to intimidate. Yung Wei argues that in the political and economic relations between China, Taiwan, and the United States, realpolitik prevails (Wei, 2004), since both the United States and China have much to lose and to gain from their relationship with Taiwan. China seeks to enforce its one-China policy, while the United States seeks to promote liberalism and democratic values. American presidents have a realist understanding of the relationship with China, recognizing China's growing importance in the international system. They prioritize cooperation over conflict with China in global and regional issues (Wei, 2004). This emphasis on realpolitik highlights the significance of pragmatic considerations in shaping the relationship between these countries, that focuses on influence as a means of power.

In navigating Sino-U.S. relations, China strategically blends realpolitik with symbolic displays of strength, influenced by its pursuit of national interests and pragmatic considerations, while the United States, entangled in security alliances with China's

neighbours, indirectly impacts potential shifts in Chinese foreign policy, highlighting the nuanced interplay between realpolitik and symbolic projection in shaping the geopolitical landscape. The evolving dynamics in the relationship between the United States and China underscore a complex interplay of realpolitik and geopolitical interactions. While China navigates its approach between pragmatic realpolitik and symbolic projection of strength, the United States' security ties with China's neighbouring states, as observed in the South China Sea dispute, indirectly prompt potential shifts towards more aggressive postures in Chinese foreign policy. Feng & He argue that China follows a two-sidedness when it comes to its strands of foreign policy. When the external threat of conflict is low, they follow a more peaceful policy making in line with Confucianism (Feng & He, 2021). However, when China faces a higher level of external threat the more offensive realpolitik takes over. Once those threat levels decrease, the interaction between Confucianism and realpolitik which “encourages a self-restraint behavior”(Feng & He, 2021, p. 530). This is mirrored in the media, where the United States is often depicted as aggressive targeting China specifically, while projecting power and intimidation in the region (Gildore & Syting, 2022). A place of constant friction between China and its neighbours is the South China Sea. The United States has security ties with almost all of China's neighbouring states. China follows a “historic pattern of Chinese protracted, low-intensity and incremental moves to gain control of a large portion of the South China Sea” (Castro, 2016, p. 158). Renato Cruz de Castro discusses the Scarborough Shoal stand-off in the South China Sea and argues that the Philippines has applied a balancing strategy that draws the United States and Japan into the fray in response to China's realpolitik tactic (Castro, 2016). This suggests that the United States may be indirectly pushing China towards more aggressive behaviour (Castro, 2016, p. 157).

There is however also the argument that there should also be an emphasize on economic dimensions in its foreign politics. In fact, He Li argues that China's economic power is just as effective as its military power and that “Asian economies that once relied on the USA are reaching a turning point as China comes to the fore, a trend that may challenge the existing international order” (Li, 2020, p. 163). China's rise as a global power has been a subject of much debate and analysis. One perspective that has been put forward is that economic statecraft, which may offer an alternative interpretation of China's rise compared to realism. Economic statecraft

refers to the use of economic tools and strategies to achieve political objectives. According to Ethan Kapstein, who has written an Afterword in Baldwin's economic statecraft, if there was a state who could challenge the United States, it would be China (Baldwin, 2020). This is simply based on the accumulation of wealth that China has acquired over the past decades. China so far has very successfully made use of different tools of economic statecraft. Fravel challenges the realist perspective put forth by John Mearsheimer, assessing China's potential for territorial expansion. He finds that the potential benefits of territorial expansion for China are limited, which weakens the predictions of power transition theory and offensive realism (Fravel, 2010, p. 525). This suggests that realism alone may not fully explain China's rise. Which relates to the previous argument that as countries become less dependent on ensuring consistent flow of resources, leads to a decrease in the need for power projection and thus territorial expansion (Markowitz et al., 2018). This is based on the notion that territorial expansion is expensive when compared to the benefits. Mearsheimer argues here that a state would have to establish a land buffer, because power projection over land is easier than across water (Mearsheimer, 2014, pp. 83-85). However as can be seen with China branching out throughout the global west, this line of reasoning may not fully encapsulate China's rise and may point towards its more assertive diplomacy.

Jeremy Garlick (2016) further supports the argument that realism is not sufficient to explain China's rise. He criticizes neorealism, offensive realism, and constructivism for focusing on one aspect of China's rise while ignoring others. Garlick argues that these theories offer a clear but incomplete theoretical picture (Garlick, 2016, p. 293). The reason being that while each of these phenomena, which in this case is the rise of China, can be explained, the complexity of the situation cannot (Garlick, 2016, p. 293). This implies that a more comprehensive approach, such as economic statecraft and geoeconomics, is needed to understand the complexities of China's rise, because these theories don't only put emphasis on the clash of rising China with the United States over hegemony and military capabilities. Rather using economic incentives, as a means to push national interest. Additionally, Feng & He (2020) highlight the views of Chinese scholars in foreign policy analysis. They point out that the logic and application of offensive realism in China's case are unsustainable, because the consideration of internal scholarly debates, cultural factors, and the role of economic and soft power in shaping policy, are often

underappreciated in the offensive realist framework that focuses primarily on military power and security dilemmas (Feng & He, 2020, p. 19). This calls for an eclectic approach to international relations, and points towards China's foreign policy, not only depending on military power projection, but various other forms of power. Relying on military power is a very western-centric idea, based on centuries of war and great power competition. That is why in Mearsheimer's analysis of offensive realism, the majority is focused on wars among western states. Assuming that China's rise will not be peaceful, is based on western discourse, and neglects a wider reasoning, that may even have a different outcome than predicted.

## 1.2 Economic Statecraft and Interdependence in China's Rise: A Multifaceted Approach to Power Dynamics

While offensive realism underscores the primacy of military capabilities in great power politics, this chapter delves into the nuanced interplay between economic power and military strength, challenging the traditional realist emphasis on military prowess as the sole determinant of a state's power and influence. This section argues that economic statecraft, marked by the strategic use of economic tools, plays a pivotal role in shaping international relations. Furthermore, it explores how economic interdependence, a key component of China's rise, has become a critical factor in reshaping power dynamics, influencing foreign policy goals, and contributing to the nation's global ascendancy.

Economic power and military power are both significant factors in international relations, but their importance can vary depending on the context and the specific goals of a state. In some cases, economic power may be more influential, while in others, military power may take precedence. In previous sections the focus was on offensive realist interpretation of military power as the primary explanatory factor for how states become great powers, and that it may not be sufficient in explaining China. Realists argue that foreign policy is the only important component of international relations, and that the only noteworthy aspect of national interest is the survival of the state. However, this somewhat ignores the important place that the economy has. In fact, this type of argument would assume that China would behave like a liberal state would. However, the constraints of realism cannot sufficiently

explain China because it doesn't fully function like a western liberal state would. According to Samuel P. Huntington, the clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order are shaped by cultural and religious differences, rather than solely by economic or military power (Huntington, 1997) This perspective suggests that economic power alone may not be sufficient to determine the dynamics of international relations. However, economic power does play a crucial role in shaping international relations. Joseph S. Nye argues that states can exert influence through "soft power," which refers to the ability to attract and persuade others through cultural, economic, and ideological means (Nye, 2004). Economic strength, including factors such as GDP, trade, and investment, can enhance a state's soft power and contribute to its influence in the international arena. Therefore, economics can be seen as another way to enhance a state's power. David A. Baldwin, a proponent of economic statecraft, for example argues for power as a "causal condition that makes a successful influence attempt possible" (Baldwin, 2020, p.139). The discussion surrounding economic power, becomes relevant in relation to the rise of China, given that China has strong economic relations with a large part of the globe, giving it the possibility of increased influence. So, while economic power per se doesn't have the offensive capabilities that military power has, it's influencing powers shouldn't be underestimated.

### 1.2.1 The Role of Economic Statecraft in Shaping Power

Economic statecraft "means using economic devices to achieve country's foreign policy goals and employing the tools of foreign policy to shore up nation's economic strength" (Li, 2020, p. 153). Kai Yin Haga argues that economic statecraft can be both positive and negative in the sense that it involves leveraging economic power, relationships, and tools to shape the behaviour of other states (Haga, 2021). Her argument is that especially in the case of the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank is an effective tool in Beijing's economic statecraft (Haga, 2021, p. 416). Economic statecraft can also be used as a coercive tool. Sanctions are a form of economic statecraft that can be employed to exert pressure on other countries (Drezner, 2003, p. 649). This indicates that pressure is a form of power that states can employ, without the pressure of military force but akin to military force in effect. Russia, for example, has utilized economic statecraft through the imposition of

sanctions against other countries (Drezner, 2003, p. 656). It essentially rewards countries that comply with its statecraft and foreign policy demands, and punished countries that don't, or puts pressure on them until they cave. It can therefore be viewed as an instrument of hard power akin to military capabilities, without the added cost of potential war. Drezner argues that success rate of economic statecraft measures, such as sanctions, can vary depending on the specific goals and contexts (Drezner, 2003, p. 659). Overall, economic statecraft involves the purposeful use of economic resources and tools to achieve foreign policy objectives. It can either be positive, or negative, thus differentiating itself from the negative connotation of military power. It can be employed by countries like China to enhance their global influence, shape the behaviour of other states, and pursue national interests. He Li (2020) emphasizes that economic statecraft is a critical aspect of China's foreign policy, particularly in its relations with Asian neighbours (Li, 2020). China's economic statecraft plays a vital role in shaping its interactions and influence in East Asia, because "Beijing wants its Asian neighbors more pliable..."(Li, 2020, p.163). The way that China achieves this is by regularly punishing countries that oppose it politically, thus making use of the coercive power of economic statecraft.

This use of China's economic statecraft in its foreign policy, particularly in Australia is further pointed out by Audrye Wong. She argues that with the globalization of Chinese capital, economic statecraft has become an increasingly important component of China's approach to international relations (Wong, 2021, p. 283). Especially in the case of Australia, where "economic inducements linked to the Chinese government for political purposes has led to significant backlash in Australia" (Wong, 2021, p.297). However, in the case of the BRI Beijing may be more successful. Ramon Pardo (2018) discusses China's economic statecraft in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI serves as a platform for China to exert economic influence and transform the foreign policy goals of target states through economic interdependence (Pardo, 2018). Pardo argues that in parts of Europe specifically BRI-related incentives have been welcomed, albeit not without friction (Pardo, 2018, p. 247). Overall, economic statecraft argues that China has been actively employing its economic resources and tools to shape its foreign policy objectives, enhance its global influence, and pursue its strategic goals. China's economic statecraft is characterized by its unique approaches, such as the BRI, and

its ability to leverage economic interdependence to transform the behaviour and goals of other states.

The significance of economic statecraft is further underscored by Robert Blackwell and Jennifer Harris, who argue in “War by other means” that illiberal states, particularly China, excel in employing geoeconomics as a potent foreign policy tool. According to Robert Blackwell and Jennifer Harris geoeconomics is the “the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations “economic actions on a country’s geopolitical goals” (Blackwell & Harris, 2016, p. 20). The concept is a derivative of economic statecraft, that argues that illiberal states, including China, are far better at making use of geoeconomics than the United States is. This is in part due to the centralization of its economy, being able to rapidly respond to any given situation. For China, being able to make use of its economic power, funding, free-trade and aid, countries have a prerequisite of supporting China’s position on Taiwan and the one-China policy (Blackwell & Harris, 2016, p.96). This is also the reason why there have been several countries who have previously supported Taiwan, who after signing onto the BRI, no longer support it. This conditionality and the fact that several countries have done it showcases the importance of economics as a foreign policy tool for China. Furthermore, Taiwan itself heavily depends on China for trade. Blackwell and Harris point out that China is still Taiwan’s largest trading partner, which results in economic dependence (Blackwell & Harris, 2016, p.98). Therefore, Taiwan would at this stage not benefit from turning away from mainland China, which benefits China’s goal of the one-China policy. Using its military power, like Mearsheimer would suggest, would deter the US from getting further involved in the conflict, however making use of its economic power, China also uses an effective, yet less aggressive tactic to keep Taiwan close. Additionally, the economic interdependence between Taiwan and China would make a conflict much more costly for Taiwan. In essence, while military capabilities are crucial for national security and deterrence, geoeconomics offers a nuanced and often less costly means of influencing international relations and achieving foreign policy goals. The strategic use of economic dependence and interdependence as mechanisms for coercion or cooperation illustrates the multifaceted nature of power projection in the modern geopolitical landscape. This complexity highlights the increasing importance of economic tools in shaping global dynamics, where the strategic interplay of

economics and politics defines the contours of international engagement and conflict resolution.

### 1.2.2 Economic Interdependence: A Double-Edged Sword

Economic statecraft and economic interdependence are closely linked in several ways. One way in which economic statecraft and economic interdependence are linked is through the direct linking of economic ties to changed behaviour in the target state (Pardo, 2018, p 239). This means that states can use economic interdependence as leverage to influence the actions and policies of other states, thus highlighting the coercive power of economics. For example, a state may impose economic sanctions or offer economic incentives to encourage a target state to change its behaviour. Another way in which economic statecraft and economic interdependence are linked is through the use of economic interdependence to constrain the behaviour of the target state (Kahler & Kastner, 2006). Kahler and Kastner argue that “economic interdependence can act as a constraint on the foreign policy behaviour of the target state, and economic interdependence can act as a transforming agent that reshapes the goals of the target state.” (Kahler & Kastner, 2006, p. 525). Economic interdependence refers to the mutual dependence of states on each other for economic resources and trade. When states are economically interdependent, they have a stake in maintaining stable economic relations and are less likely to engage in actions that could disrupt those relations. This can act as a constraint on the foreign policy behaviour of states, as they are aware of the potential economic consequences of their actions. On the other hand, when states are economically interdependent, their economic interests become intertwined, and they may develop shared economic goals. This can lead to a convergence of interests and a shift in the foreign policy goals of states. For example, increased economic interdependence between two states may lead to a greater emphasis on cooperation and the pursuit of mutual economic benefits. It is important to note that economic statecraft is not without risks and challenges as we have seen previously. As Li argues it can be a double-edged sword, as it can heighten regional tensions and undermine the sender's own end goals (Li, 2020, p. 163). Economic interdependence can be used as a tool in economic statecraft to influence the behaviour of other states and reshape their foreign policy goals. However, the

effectiveness of this form/practice of economic statecraft depends on various factors and carries its own risks and challenges.

China does benefit from economic interdependence in its rise. Economic interdependence refers to the mutual reliance and interconnectedness of economies through trade, investment, and other economic activities. Yu Lei and Sophia Sui argue that China has actively pursued economic interdependence as a strategy to advance its interests and sustain its economic growth regionally (Yu & Sui, 2022, p. 1633). The country has successfully deepened economic interdependence with its partners through initiatives such as free trade agreements and economic regionalism to persuade its partners to “to accept the concept of ‘China's peaceful rise’ by viewing it as an “opportunity” for their economic prosperity rather than a threat “ (Yu & Sui, 2022, p. 1643). This isn’t only beneficial to China’s trading partners, who benefit from easier access to the Chinese market, but also to China who have morphed ‘into a rule-maker from a rule-follower (Yu & Sui, 2022). China's economic interdependence has also led to greater levels of interdependence with other countries, tilting power asymmetries in its favour (Macikenaite, 2020). This is what Geunwook Lee points out will be the most challenging part of preventing conflict between the United States and China (Lee, 2013). Asymmetry between the two most powerful countries may result in China using its financial leverage against the US (Lee, 2013, p. 79). This would play into the arguments that Mearsheimer makes about the issue, which is that close economic ties could potentially lead to higher security risk and exacerbate competition further. Nevertheless, economic interdependence has generally been beneficial for China's rise, as it has provided new impetus for its economic growth and increased its influence on the global stage. In conclusion, China does benefit from economic interdependence in its rise. It shows that economic incentives, and economic power can have strong influence, which China uses to its advantage. The country has actively pursued economic interdependence as a strategy to advance its interests among its partners and sustain its economic growth. China's efforts in economic regionalism and free trade agreements have deepened economic interdependence with its partners. Economic interdependence has also tilted power asymmetries in favour of China and has had spillover effects on emerging markets. However, economic interdependence is not without its challenges, and there have been concerns about potential conflicts. Overall, economic interdependence has been beneficial for China's rise and has

contributed to its economic growth and global influence, thus proving to be an effective tool to enhance its power and create an alternative interpretation of China's foreign policy vis-à-vis offensive realism.

#### Conclusion:

The discussion on China's rise challenges the traditional military versus economic power debate, suggesting a more nuanced global power dynamic. John Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism, emphasizing military might and inevitable conflict, contrasts with views like John Ikenberry's, which envision China's peaceful integration into the existing liberal order through economic cooperation. This conversation introduces economic statecraft, where China leverages initiatives like the BRI to extend its influence beyond military capabilities, suggesting a broader spectrum of power tools in international relations. The complex Sino-US relationship, intertwined with economic interdependence, illustrates how mutual economic ties might reduce the likelihood of military conflict, presenting a more intricate global landscape than previously assumed by realist theories.

This scenario underscores the evolving nature of power dynamics, where economic strategies play a crucial role in shaping state behavior and global politics, moving beyond the simplistic dichotomy of military versus economic might. As China asserts its global stance, the intricate balance between economic prowess and military strength offers fresh insights into international power structures, advocating for a revised understanding of power that encompasses economic statecraft and interdependence. This nuanced perspective on China's ascent and its implications for global dynamics highlights the need for re-evaluating traditional international relations theories, emphasizing the importance of economic factors in contemporary global order and the potential for nuanced conflict and cooperation scenarios.

## Chapter 2: Economic Power Plays: Shaping the World Stage

### Introduction:

In the contemporary landscape of global politics, where economic interdependence and political ambitions are intricately linked, the practice of economic statecraft has emerged as a pivotal mechanism through which states assert their influence and navigate the complexities of international power dynamics. This focus marks a significant shift from the previous chapter, which analysed the concept of offensive realism, emphasizing the traditional reliance on military power as a primary means of asserting state dominance. Economic statecraft, characterized by the strategic employment of economic tools such as sanctions, trade agreements, and foreign investments, serves as a nuanced means for states to pursue a wide array of geopolitical and strategic objectives. Drawing upon the seminal contributions of David A. Baldwin, this chapter underscores the strategic dimension of economic actions, positing them as integral components of a state's foreign policy arsenal, aimed not solely at economic gain but at broader national interests.

The thesis of this chapter posits that economic statecraft is an essential instrument for states to project power and reconfigure global power structures, employing economic strategies within foreign policy frameworks to achieve not only economic growth but also expansive geopolitical and strategic ends. Initially, the chapter lays a theoretical foundation, drawing on Baldwin's analysis to articulate the mechanisms through which economic tools are operationalized as levers of national power. This foundational perspective elucidates the multifaceted role of economic statecraft in global politics, demonstrating its capacity to serve diverse state objectives.

Subsequently, the narrative transitions to a pragmatic examination of economic statecraft in action, highlighting empirical case studies that illustrate both the efficacy and the limitations of these economic strategies in shaping international relations. A focal point of this discussion is China's BRI which epitomizes economic statecraft's potential to extend a state's influence globally, thereby offering a vivid illustration of how economic initiatives can serve as conduits for the redefinition of international power hierarchies.

This exploration is not merely an academic exercise but a critical inquiry into the evolving dynamics of global power relations in the 21st century. As states increasingly leverage economic interconnections to advance their strategic interests, understanding the nuances of economic statecraft becomes imperative. The examination of China's BRI as a case study exemplifies the strategic deployment of economic statecraft on a global scale, highlighting China's ambition to sculpt a new paradigm of international influence through economic means. By dissecting the strategic underpinnings and global implications of economic statecraft, this chapter contributes to a nuanced understanding of the contemporary international order. It posits economic statecraft as a central element in the arsenal of state power, underscoring its significance in the crafting of global geopolitics and the strategic manoeuvres that define the international arena, thereby complementing and expanding upon the analysis of military power presented in the discussion of offensive realism.

## 2.1 Economic Statecraft: Perspectives, Strategies, and Power Dynamics in International Relations

This section introduces the concept of economic statecraft, focusing on how it serves as a powerful tool in foreign policy, shaped significantly by David A. Baldwin's seminal work. Baldwin highlighted economic statecraft's capacity to fulfil geopolitical, security, and strategic aims using various economic tools, emphasizing its role beyond mere economic growth (Baldwin, 2020, p. 31). He argued that economic strategies could effectively wield power to achieve political objectives, underlining that such manoeuvres are means to an end, aimed at broader national interests (Baldwin, 2020, p. 19, 39). This approach allows nations to leverage their economic strength for more than financial gains, aiming instead to enhance their global standing, security, and geopolitical reach. It presents a sophisticated framework where economic tactics are employed not solely for wealth but as strategic components in international relations, offering a nuanced alternative to the traditional reliance on military power seen in offensive realism.

Baldwin explores various aspects of economic statecraft, including economic sanctions, trade policies, foreign aid, and financial assistance, exemplifying both the

negative and positive sanctions (Baldwin, 2020, pp.40-41). He emphasizes that these economic tools can be employed to influence the behaviour of other states, either by “incentivizing cooperation” or by “imposing costs for non-compliance” (Baldwin, 2020, p. 40). Throughout his work, Baldwin illustrates the efficacy and limitations of economic statecraft using specific cases and examples. Instances such as the United States' imposition of sanctions on countries like Cuba, Iran, and North Korea exemplify leveraging economic pressure to induce policy changes. Additionally, he dissects trade negotiations, highlighting how such agreements serve both economic and political ends. Baldwin's foundational contributions set the stage for this section, establishing the fundamental assumptions underlying economic statecraft and the subsequent theoretical frameworks built upon these premises. Baldwin's work shows that the economic toolkit available can be used both in a coercive manner, and in a positive way to build alliances and foster cooperation. It shows that economic tools can influence the perceptions of power, recognizing economic strength and influence as forms of power in their own right. It acknowledges that economic tools can lead to outcomes just as significant as those achieved through military means. Baldwin's perspective on economic statecraft resonates strongly with the notion that economic resources wielded by political leaders serve as potent tools to exert influence in the realm of foreign policy, as Li emphasizes in the context of the United States (Li, 2020, pp. 153).

### 2.1.1 The Strategic and Ethical Dimensions of Economic Statecraft

While Baldwin advocates for this deliberate use of economic means, critics argue that his approach overlooks the inherent complexities and potential pitfalls of relying solely on economic leverage. Moreover, Baldwin accentuates the efficiency of economic statecraft in empowering major powers to convert their economic prowess into political sway without disrupting fundamental economic exchanges, a vital source of national growth and development as discussed by Tüter (2021). Yet, some scholars contend that Baldwin's emphasis on maintaining economic stability overlooks the ethical considerations and potential backlash associated with wielding economic power for political ends, especially when it comes to declining human rights due to sanctions (Peksen, 2009, p.74). Notably, Baldwin diverges from restricting the explanatory power of economic statecraft to specific foreign policy

goals, advocating instead for its characterization as a versatile set of tools available to policymakers for diverse purposes, which is in line with Drezner's perspective (Drezner, 2003, p. 650). By advocating for the broad application of economic statecraft beyond specific foreign policy goals, Baldwin, aligning with Drezner's perspective, significantly broadens the strategic toolkit available to policymakers, allowing for innovative and flexible approaches to a wide array of domestic goals with global reach. This viewpoint underscores the evolving nature of international relations, emphasizing the importance of economic tools in achieving diverse objectives and enhancing non-military influence in a complex, interconnected world. Thus, economically powerful nations can use this toolkit to gain power and domination over smaller states. According to Drezner, this depends strongly on whether economic statecraft is used in "pursuit of low politics (economic and regulatory disputes) or in a high politics (security and political disputes)" (Drezner, 2003, p.650). There are varying degrees of economic statecraft that adjusted to the policy goal. Baldwin's approach also acknowledges the intricate balance policymakers must strike between economic considerations and broader geopolitical interests like national power and security, aligning with Blanchard and Ripsman's argument (2008). Unlike John Mearsheimer, which was discussed in the previous section and who focuses on explaining structural power in the international system, Baldwin's approach focuses more on the practical uses of economic tools in foreign policy, and the power this has on relationship between states, rather than the power relations within the international system.

Offensive realism argues that the top priority is the maximization of relative power, which focuses especially on military power (Mearsheimer, 2014). By virtue of that definition, offensive realism describes hard power, which ultimately always will be coercive. Baldwin on the other hand defines power differently, he notes that in his book he uses power and influence interchangeably (Baldwin, 2020, p. 19). The use of economic statecraft can be both offensive and defensive, akin to a "sword" or a "shield", as it can be employed to assert influence aggressively or to protect against external pressures (McDowell, 2019). Therefore, his examination of the coercive power of economic statecraft differs as well. David Baldwin's examination of economic statecraft, particularly his focus on the role of coercion, defined as the use of "threats or sanctions to influence the behavior of other states" (Baldwin, 2020, p.37), sheds light on the nuanced dynamics of power in international relations. He

argues that economic coercion, a significant yet often overlooked aspect of statecraft, plays a crucial role in shaping the interactions between states (Drezner, 2003, p. 643). This form of coercion, which includes the imposition of sanctions and the strategic use of economic tools to pressurize states into aligning with specific foreign policy objectives, serves broader geopolitical, security, and strategic aims (Lai, 2021, p. 410; Chen, 2020, p. 439).

Baldwin's analysis reveals that economic coercion is not always transparent, posing challenges in identifying when a country is engaging in such practices. This covert nature of economic statecraft complicates the detection and understanding of economic coercion in practice, a point echoed by Kastner and Pearson (Kastner & Pearson, 2021, p. 25). Furthermore, Baldwin underscores the critical role of power asymmetry in economic coercion, suggesting that differences in state power significantly influence the effectiveness and deployment of economic statecraft strategies (Lai, 2021). Baldwin's contributions illuminate the complex interplay between economic tools and power structures within the realm of international relations. By highlighting the strategic use of economic coercion, Baldwin not only emphasizes the potency of economic measures as instruments of influence and control but also aligns with broader theories of power dynamics, such as those proposed by Mearsheimer regarding the offensive uses of military capabilities. Through this lens, economic statecraft emerges as a pivotal element in the arsenal of state power, revealing the multifaceted nature of influence and the intricate ways in which states vie for dominance and pursue their strategic objectives on the global stage.

Baldwin's emphasis on economic instruments as key components of a state's foreign policy toolkit underscores the shift from traditional military-centric power structures to the nuanced role of economic strategies in global dynamics, particularly in how states like China use economic engagement to influence the international order. This perspective complements theories like John Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism by highlighting economic statecraft's importance in the multifaceted pursuit of power and security in an interconnected world. With the support of four assumptions, clearer insights help us to grasp the complex role of economic statecraft in international dynamics, shedding light on its strengths, weaknesses, and the broad range of effects it can have on both the countries that use it and those on the

receiving end. Key assumptions about economic statecraft include its focus at the macroeconomic level (Gowa & Mansfield, 1993), meaning that they argue for economic statecraft is “the effect of free trade on the real income and power potential of states” (Gowa & Mansfield, 1993, p. 408). They further argue that the gains from trade produce “security externalities”, which in turn results in increases in “efficiency with which domestic resources can be employed” (Gowa & Mansfield, 1993, p.408). As a result, a state can invest in military capabilities, and thus power potential of a state. The main argument that they make is that free trade is more successful within political alliances, rather than outside of them, this is especially true in a bipolar, rather than a multipolar system. This is based on the observation that bipolar systems are much less volatile and more stable than multipolar systems (Mearsheimer, 2015). Another assumption about economic statecraft is the ability to convince target leaders to comply with sender's demands and overcome domestic opposition (Blanchard & Ripsman, 2008), which is strongly dependent of a country “stateness”. Blanchard and Ripsman argue that stateness is made up of three components “autonomy, capacity and legitimacy” (Blanchard & Ripsman, 2008, p. 371). Aggarwal and Reddie argue that there is a certain ignorance of economic statecraft in traditional economics and global economic regimes for understanding trade conflict (Aggarwal & Reddie, 2021, p 137).

The contested interpretations of economic relations, suggesting that economic statecraft is subjective, is the fourth assumption (Summers, 2021). The example that Tim Summers utilizes is the relationship between China and Hong Kong. Even though China doesn't view either Hong Kong or Taiwan as separate states, it acknowledges two systems who to some extent also employ separate economic and financial systems. Interestingly he argues that in the case of Hong Kong China employed a form of “inducements, rather than coercion, to encourage those in Hong Kong to benefit from Chinese sovereignty under one country, two systems” (Summers, 2021, p.434). Even by using inducements rather than coercion it would still be considered an economic tool that would benefit the Chinese foreign policy, and as such would fit into the realm of economic statecraft. This indicates that economic tools can be wielded as a form of statecraft. This form of coercion, often more effective than military actions, has been undervalued in the study of statecraft and international relations (Drezner, 2003). The use of economic coercion, exemplified by China's approach towards Taiwan, involves a combination of selective

incentives and punitive measures, shaping the target's policy options. However, it is important to note that while coercive economic statecraft can weaken opponents, it may also have negative repercussions for the coercing state and its allies (Lai, 2021). In the specific case of Taiwan, the economic pressure and coercion from the Chinese side, has led to a diversification of trade by Taiwan, with the aim of becoming less dependent on China economically (Lai, 2021).

### 2.1.2 The Practical Application and Implications of Economic Statecraft

Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Norrin M. Ripsman's work, "A Political Theory of Economic Statecraft," marks a significant evolution in understanding economic statecraft, transitioning from David Baldwin's policy-centric view to a more theoretical and historically grounded analysis. They argue that the effectiveness of economic statecraft transcends the mere economic impact, highlighting the importance of political dynamics, motivations, and the "stateness" of target states in determining success (Blanchard & Ripsman, 2008, p. 371). This approach suggests that economic tools are not just levers of economic coercion but are intertwined with political and commercial strategies, reflecting a blend of knowledge from international relations, foreign policy, economics, and political science (Štiglic, 2017). The complexity of these tools underscores the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to fully grasp the nuances of economic statecraft and its implications on global power structures. Moreover, Norris emphasizes that states, particularly those with state-led development models like China, can manipulate economic and political incentives to achieve broader security and foreign policy objectives, thus blurring the traditional distinctions between economic activities and political aims (Norris, 2021, p.296). This nuanced understanding necessitates a departure from conventional analyses that separate economic actions from political strategies, advocating instead for a multifaceted and dynamic framework that can adapt to the fluid nature of global politics. Blanchard and Ripsman's focus on the specific 'stateness' of the target state further enriches this discourse by providing a more tailored and context-sensitive lens through which the impacts of economic statecraft can be evaluated, moving the conversation beyond whether economic tools can achieve foreign policy objectives to when and under what conditions these tools are most effective (Blanchard & Ripsman, 2008, p. 371). This perspective underscores the nuanced and context-

specific nature of economic statecraft, emphasizing the need to consider the specific conditions and characteristics of the target state when employing economic instruments to influence its behavior. By focusing on the "stateness" of the target state, their framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in economic statecraft and its implications for foreign policy. This perspective diverges from the conventional debate on whether economic sanctions or incentives can achieve foreign-policy objectives, shifting the focus to the more policy-relevant issue of when and under what conditions economic statecraft can effectively achieve these goals (Blanchard & Ripsman, 2008, p. 371).

Scholars such as William Norris have highlighted the importance of considering the target state's features when evaluating the likelihood of success of Chinese economic statecraft, further supporting Norris's argument (Norris, 2021, p. 308). This discussion is especially significant in relation to countries that lack strong institutions, since these countries are more likely to be influenced by incentives put forward by economic statecraft (Norris, 2021). The effectiveness of tools such as coercion in economic statecraft would also strongly depend on whether there are alternatives in terms of trade. Meaning that multilateral sanctions backed by an international organization are particularly likely to extract policy concessions from the target (Peksen & Peterson, 2015). Blanchard and Ripsman's deep dive into the nuances of economic statecraft signals a pivotal shift in how we approach international relations. By focusing on the concept of "stateness," they argue for economic strategies that are custom-made for each country's unique situation, moving past one-size-fits-all historical approaches. This refined perspective allows for a more strategic use of economic tools in diplomacy, shedding light on how to impact international scenes more effectively by acknowledging the distinct traits of individual states. This advancement in understanding not only enriches the conversation around economic tactics but also bolsters their role in shaping global politics and diplomacy.

### 2.1.3 Financial statecraft, Belt and Road Initiative and Bilateral Swap Agreements

The economic statecraft literature provides a new perspective to understand the use of aid and assistance as economic instruments of the state that serve to achieve foreign policy, geopolitical, security, and strategic goals. Economic statecraft extends

beyond traditional economic activities, encompassing financial infrastructures and the use of economic resources to exert influence in pursuit of foreign policy objectives (Petry, 2022, p. 322; Li, 2020). This aligns with the argument about the use of aid and assistance for economic statecraft, as it highlights the instrumental role of aid in advancing foreign policy objectives Chen (2020, p. 439). This study discusses the policy implication that donor agencies can condition aid to improve the fiscal system and management of aid-related government expenditure to facilitate the inflow of private investment and accrual of fixed capital needed for economic growth. This aligns with the argument about the use of aid and assistance for economic statecraft, as it emphasizes the potential for aid to be leveraged to facilitate economic growth and development (Asongu & Jellal, 2015, p. 26). Asongu and Jellal explore the varied effects of aid on economic growth, noting that opinions diverge some believe aid boosts economic growth, while others contend it replaces the domestic savings of the countries receiving it. This aligns with the argument about the use of aid and assistance for economic statecraft, as it reflects the debate surrounding the effectiveness of aid in fostering economic development (Kargbo & Sen, 2014). The article discusses financial statecraft as a subset of economic statecraft, facilitating the achievement of foreign policy through economic means. This aligns with the argument about the use of aid and assistance for economic statecraft, as it broadens the understanding of economic statecraft to include financial infrastructures and foreign policy objectives (Petry, 2022, p. 322). In the realm of economic statecraft, developmental aid goes beyond simple charity or aid; it's a strategic move by countries looking to push their foreign policy agendas, from expanding their geopolitical reach to boosting their security. This perspective transforms aid from a mere act of goodwill into a calculated play in international politics, empowering countries to shape global relations and extend their influence far and wide. Using developmental aid strategically shows us that real power isn't just about muscle or money; it's also about the ability to sway others without twisting their arm. This method reveals a more complex view of power on the global stage, where subtle influence can achieve goals just as effectively as overt strength.

Financial statecraft, evolving from economic statecraft, emphasizes the strategic use of financial institutions and markets by states like China to exert global influence. This approach, highlighted through initiatives like the BRI and the establishment of the Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank, showcases China's growing

prominence in the financial sector, potentially challenging the current economic world order by "the intentional use, by national governments, of domestic or international monetary or financial capabilities for the purpose of achieving ongoing foreign policy goals" (Petry, 2022, p. 321), financial statecraft leverages financial infrastructure and institutions as tools of foreign policy, creating new dependencies and relationships, particularly evident in the BRI context (Petry, 2022, pp. 322, 343). The versatility of financial statecraft, as described by Baldwin (1985, pp. 40-41), allows for a range of applications, from providing aid and investments as rewards to employing sanctions or withholding funds as punitive measures. This reflects a broader capacity to influence foreign policy and international relations through economic power, further amplified by the influence states wield within major financial institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank (Larionova & Shelepov, 2019). Financial statecraft takes the principles of economic statecraft a step further by zeroing in on how countries, like China with its BRI and the Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank, use the financial sector, banks, markets, and institutions, to extend their influence worldwide. It's different from the usual economic manoeuvres such as trade deals or aid; financial statecraft dives into the specifics of financial agreements, like swap deals and investment funding, to weave networks of dependence and sway international policies. This focus on the financial gears of the global economy allows countries to subtly reshape power balances, making financial statecraft a distinct and powerful tool in the world of international relations. China's deployment of bilateral swap agreements (BSAs) and Overseas Development Finance (ODF) illustrates the practical application of financial statecraft in achieving foreign policy objectives, enhancing its role as a creditor and partner to various countries (McDowell, 2019; Chen, 2020). McDowell notes the differentiation between offensive and defensive uses of BSAs, with the former being notably more successful, offering a liquidity backstop outside traditional Bretton Woods institutions for countries in need (McDowell, 2019, pp. 122, 127). This strategic use of financial tools not only boosts China's economic power but also its ability to influence global power structures, underscoring the significance of financial statecraft in shaping contemporary international relations and advancing China's strategic interests on the world stage.

Scholars have emphasized the interconnectedness of economic statecraft with security objectives, both domestically and in foreign policy, highlighting its role in

shaping the strategic landscape of international relations (Aggarwal & Reddie, 2021, p. 139). This is particularly evident in the case of China, where the BRI stands as a hallmark of the country's economic statecraft, aiming to advance its influence and economic interests on a global scale (Norris, 2021, p. 303). In the case of China, the expansion of its economy and global capital has raised concerns about the potential use of economic statecraft to achieve its foreign policy goals, reflecting the evolving dynamics of international relations and the growing influence of economic factors in shaping global politics (Wong, 2021, p. 285). With its offensive properties China can make use of economic statecraft to influence other states. On the other hand, building global capital can protect its own economic interests, and reduce vulnerabilities.

## 2.2 Economic Statecraft in Action: China's Strategic Utilization in Foreign Policy

The previous section created a theoretical framework of what economic statecraft is, and how it's being discussed and used in international relations. This section will evaluate the way that China makes use of economic statecraft in its foreign policy. As already discussed in the chapter, China effectively utilizes economic statecraft to achieve its foreign policy goals, as evidenced by Drezner's analysis of Russia's use of economic coercion, which highlights the success rate of economic sanctions (Drezner, 2003, p 643). Additionally, William Norris emphasizes that while economic statecraft can advance China's interests, it can also undermine its goals in certain situations (Norris, 2021, p. 303). I have furthermore noted that Wong's examination of China's economic statecraft in Australia underscores the increasing attention on Beijing's potential use of economic statecraft to achieve its foreign policy objectives (Wong, 2021, p 285). The scholarly discourse extends to the theoretical frameworks underpinning the development of China's economic statecraft, as evidenced by Grimmel & Eszterhai (2020, p. 227). Their exploration of the BRI showcases how economic power, coupled with Hirschmanesque effects, can exert far-reaching influences on other states' behavior. What the examination of BRI helps us understand is what Norris (2021, p.310) has underscored: the need for ongoing scholarly inquiry into China's post-Cold War economic statecraft, recognizing its evolving nature and suggesting avenues for additional research.

### 2.2.1 Contrasts and Comparisons: China and the United States in Economic Statecraft

China's use of economic statecraft differs from that of the United States in several keyways, but most importantly through its use of bilateral swap agreements. China has been employing economic statecraft in various forms, such as bilateral swap agreements and the BRI, which are arrangements between two countries to exchange one currency for another at predetermined rates to facilitate trade and support financial stability (McDowell, 2019; Kostecka-Tomaszewska & Krukowska, 2021, p. 1020). These initiatives demonstrate China's use of its financial and monetary capabilities to advance its foreign policy goals in the sense that BSA's are utilized in a defensive and offensive manner. It is used defensively to encourage trade settlement in the Chinese currency, reducing reliance on the US dollar, though their effectiveness has been questioned, while offensively, they serve as a short-term liquidity support for partner countries, potentially enhancing Chinese economic influence contingent upon Beijing's willingness to act as a unilateral crisis lender and further internationalize the Renminbi (McDowell, 2019). Additionally, China's policy banks play a significant role in reshaping development finance, indicating that China's economic statecraft extends beyond pure financial interests to pursue broader state objectives (Chen, 2020). By employing financial statecraft, and thus building a strong financial infrastructure China is able to influence states and build an alternative system to that of the United States and European Union, that positions China as a leading financial leader.

In contrast, Scholars have noted that the United States has historically utilized economic statecraft in the form of sanctions, trade agreements, and aid programs to influence the behavior of other countries, with Baldwin himself giving ample examples of this ranging from its use of embargoes to sanctions and aid, with a strong emphasis on Post WW II (Baldwin, 2020) . The U.S. approach to economic statecraft of these kinds, has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy, often leveraging its economic power to shape global trade regimes and advance its strategic interests (Aggarwal & Reddie, 2021). Suggesting that although the United States has made use of economic statecraft for years in its foreign policy, it hasn't garnered as much attention as China's use of economic statecraft has, with western international relations focusing its attention on China's use of economic statecraft.

Furthermore, China's economic statecraft in Latin America has been studied in relation to the declining U.S. hegemonic influence in the region, highlighting the geopolitical implications of China's economic engagement in contrast to that of the United States (Urdínez et al., 2016, p.3). With China filling some of the vacuum that the United States is leaving behind in terms of investing into infrastructures. China's more assertive use of economic and financial statecraft since 2013, has increased the interest that traditional liberal states have in its role in the world order. With especially the BRI showing the increased influence China has on states that previously have only seen a very limited number of investments. This suggests that China is strategically deploying economic statecraft, utilizing financial instruments like bilateral swap agreements and initiatives like the BRI, to advance its geopolitical influence and fill voids left by traditional powers, notably the United States. Unlike the U.S., which has focused on sanctions, trade agreements, and aid, China's approach involves leveraging economic and financial tools to create dependencies and foster development in a way that aligns with its broader state objectives. This assertive application of economic statecraft, particularly evident in regions like Latin America, not only highlights China's intent to reshape global finance and development but also indicates its ambition to challenge the existing world order and assert itself as a dominant global power. This nuanced and expansive use of economic strategies reflects China's broader vision for its role on the international stage, suggesting a deliberate shift towards using economic leverage to secure strategic advantages and influence global governance structures.

China's economic statecraft plays a crucial role in serving its strategic and geopolitical objectives. This is evident in China's utilization of various instruments of economic statecraft to achieve its strategic development goals, especially using the Belt and Road Initiative (Kostecka-Tomaszewska & Krukowska, 2021, p. 1020). China's expanding economic ties around the world are perceived as serving foreign policy objectives, particularly in regions like Africa, where its economic engagements have come under intense scrutiny especially from the United States of America (Carmody et al., 2019). Terms such as debt-trap diplomacy are often used in this relationship, arguing that China's lending practices results in high levels of debt in developing countries. However, no hard evidence exists to support this argument (Himmer & Rod, 2022). As China's economy grows, there is a growing awareness among the Chinese elites of the potential to use economic means to achieve political

and strategic ends, as evidenced by the emergence of the term "economic statecraft" in Chinese discourse (Haga, 2021, p. 392). Besides the Belt and Road Initiative, Kai Yin Allison Haga argues that the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is a strong multilateral instrument of economic statecraft for China, because it not only creates a positive financial incentive for recipient states, but also pulls together member states (Haga, 2021, p. 415). However, China's economic statecraft is not without its complexities, as it can sometimes undermine its own goals (Norris, 2021). Being that China's regional partners remain cautious about the dependency that they face. The building of its economic and financial power seemingly is no different than what the United States has done in the past, the difference is that China has the power to shift the status quo that has been the current world order. Demonstrating China's capability to adopt and effectively utilize Western liberal concepts. As such China demonstrates the ability to find its place in the status quo western liberal order, while also taking a different approach to foreign policy.

Examining various scholarly viewpoints on economic statecraft reveals the distinct strategies employed by China, notably through initiatives like the BRI and bilateral agreements, which differ significantly from the historical reliance of the United States on sanctions and trade agreements. This underscores a fundamental disparity in their approaches and underlying motivations toward shaping global dynamics. To determine whether China uses economic statecraft more effectively than the United States, it is essential to consider various scholarly perspectives on the topic. The use of economic statecraft, defined as the use of economic means to achieve foreign policy objectives, has been a subject of extensive research and analysis. Several scholarly articles provide valuable insights into the economic statecraft strategies employed by both China and the United States, shedding light on their effectiveness and impact. Urdínez et al. (2016) conducted an empirical study examining Chinese economic statecraft and its impact on U.S. hegemony in Latin America. The research delved into how Chinese economic strategies in the region correlate with the diminishing influence of the United States, offering valuable insights into China's role and its implications for U.S. influence. The study concludes that there is evidence supporting the notion that Beijing is stepping in to fill the void created by weakening ties between the United States and countries within its sphere of influence (Urdinez et al., 2016, p. 4). This indicates a highly strategic use of economics to improve relationship with countries in Latin and South America and may also indicate that the

United States focuses its foreign politics on other regions in the world. Furthermore, relating back to the discussions on offensive realism, the assumption would be that the United States would ensure that it harbors good relationship in its region, what these scholars are arguing points to the fact that there is an existing vacuum, which shouldn't be there.

### 2.2.2 China's Geopolitical Strategy through Economic Tools

In the realm of economic statecraft, the critical analysis by Petry (2022) illuminates the pivotal role of China's BRI in reshaping global dynamics. By emphasizing the BRI's influence on financial infrastructure rather than just physical development, Petry underscores how China strategically manoeuvres its economic prowess. This isn't merely about building roads and bridges; it's a calculated move to wield financial control, as exemplified by the growing influence of state-owned stock exchanges in directing investments and shaping market regulations within BRI nations (Petry, 2022, p. 342). Contrarily, Aggarwal & Reddie's (2021) examination is a wake-up call to the myopic view prevailing in global economic regimes. They rightly highlight the oversight in acknowledging economic statecraft as a pivotal factor in comprehending trade conflicts. Their research delves into the strategies adopted not only by China and the United States but also by other major players like Japan, urging for a broader conversation within international organizations. It's high time discussions transcend the dichotomy of the US versus China and encompass the intricate strategies employed by various global economies (Aggarwal & Reddie, 2021, p. 137). Moreover, Norris (2021) chronicles the evolution of China's economic statecraft, marking a significant shift in its approach post the 2008 financial crisis. From initially leveraging foreign policy to serve its economic goals, China has adeptly reversed the trend. Today, its economic might serves as the driving force behind its foreign policy objectives (Norris, 2021, p. 310). This transformation elucidates the unique nature of China's economic actors and their substantial impact on global economic relations. Analysing China's BRI through the lens of economic statecraft unveils its strategic complexities, highlighted by Petry's emphasis on financial infrastructure and Aggarwal & Reddie's push for a broader comprehension of global economic strategies. Norris's findings further underscore the transformative impact of

China's economic actors, notably the BRI, in reshaping regional dynamics, including those in the Pacific, and broader global economic relations.

China strategically deploys economic statecraft through initiatives like the BRI and bilateral agreements, emphasizing financial tools to achieve geopolitical goals. Unlike the United States, which historically leaned on sanctions and trade agreements, China's approach extends beyond pure financial interests, shaping global dynamics by leveraging its economic prowess in multifaceted ways. This divergence highlights China's ability to adopt and adapt Western concepts while wielding significant influence to reshape the established world order. Scholars emphasize China's nuanced use of economic tools, such as the BRI and bilateral agreements, diverging from the United States' historical reliance on sanctions and trade deals. While China's economic statecraft strategically aligns with geopolitical ambitions, it differs notably from the US approach, showcasing a shift in global dynamics through financial control and strategic initiatives. This contrast underscores China's adaptability within the Western liberal order while asserting its unique foreign policy approach, prompting a re-evaluation of conventional perspectives on economic statecraft in shaping international relations.

### 2.3 China's BRI: Strategy and Global Influence

The Belt and Road Initiative is indisputably the linchpin of China's economic strategy, wielding immense influence that resonates profoundly across global economics and politics. The initiative is a very specific type of foreign economic policy tool that China employs, that so far has had a great impact especially on developing states. After having discussed the theoretical and the general practical applications of economic statecraft as a power tool, this section will now turn to the BRI as a uniquely Chinese feature. The pursuit of the BRI is often explained within the logic of economic statecraft, emphasizing China's policy rationale for its pursuit of the initiative (Gloria, 2021, p. 495). Rigorous scholarly documentation has meticulously outlined its transformative impact on outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) toward developing nations, fundamentally reshaping Chinese domestic motives and redirecting OFDI patterns (Yu et al., 2019, p. 1). In fact, Yu et al. establish that countries who actively participate in the BRI "receive 60% more Chinese OFDI deals

“(Yu et al. 2019, p.18). This goes back to what Baldwin would consider “positive sanction” (Baldwin, 2020, p.41). Which is a way for China to establish and deepen its influence by appearing as a benevolent investor. Scholarly discourse thoroughly explores the BRI’s multifaceted role as a vehicle propelling Chinese economic statecraft, highlighting its substantial sway on the global order, and underscoring its strategic implications for China’s economic and political ambitions (Petry, 2022). The acknowledgment of the BRI as a strategically vital national policy sheds light on its geographical implications, potentially influencing regional income disparities in China, a testament to its profound impact on the nation's economic landscape (Qin et al., 2022). Since its inception in 2013, the BRI has unequivocally seized a significant portion of international attention, wielding substantial influence over the global economic and political arenas (Apirakvanalee & Zhai, 2022, p. 2551). It transcends mere commercial transactions, serving as a linchpin for elevating China’s international stature and projecting a unique paradigm of economic statecraft, characteristic of China’s distinct approach (Deng, 2021, p. 741). Deng argues that since the Belt and Road Initiative is a project rather than an institution, China wants to show that it “is not a revisionist power bent on radically changing the world order” and being very aware that as realist scholars would agree, the current international order has become competitive (Deng, 2021, p.714). Deng suggests that by framing the BRI as a collaborative project rather than an institutional power play, China aims to position itself as a cooperative global player rather than a challenger to the existing competitive world order. Furthermore, its association with China’s overarching efforts to bolster influence and safeguard economic interests has cemented its position as the epitome of Xi’s economic statecraft (Norris, 2021, p. 307). The BRI’s monumental significance in China’s economic statecraft is beyond dispute, with its impact reverberating across OFDI, trade dynamics, regional income disparities, international scrutiny, and China’s global influence. This initiative stands as a pivotal instrument advancing China’s economic and political interests on the global stage, symbolizing its strategic importance in China’s economic statecraft.

The impact of the BRI as a tool of economic statecraft has undergone extensive scrutiny across various regions, compelling experts to assess its ramifications especially for smaller states. Scholars like Pardo (2018) have meticulously analysed its effects in diverse geographies such as Europe, Asia, and Africa. Meanwhile, nuanced observations by Garlick and Havlová (2020) highlight a cautious approach

in regions like Iran, strategically aimed at averting friction with other global powers. The initiative's efficacy, as evidenced by studies in specific nations like Indonesia and East Timor reveals contrasting viewpoints on Beijing's economic initiatives, with Indonesia being far more careful towards China and East Timor receiving more humanitarian aid and infrastructure project (Gunn, 2021, p. 317). Quantitative data that uses gross domestic product growth rate as the proxy for economic growth for all the countries under study as presented by Opong (2021, p. 10), suggests a significant positive correlation between BRI and the GDP growth rate in Asian countries, underscoring its pivotal role in regional economic advancement. Especially smaller countries that don't have much in terms of export worthy goods, benefit from Chinese investments. Infrastructure development, a cornerstone of BRI, has been identified as a catalyst for economic growth in partner countries (Chen, 2023, p. 265), exemplifying the initiative's role in enhancing vital infrastructure and fostering economic progress. However, Chen also notes that "BRI has a more prominent role in promoting the economic development of upper-middle-income and high-income countries with relatively good industrial foundations.", indicating that the lower income countries in the BRI have a more difficult time implementing and fostering economic development (Chen, 2023, pp. 271). This shows that China would have to make more investments into developing countries under the BRI. However, the issue with smaller states, and that is something touched on in the previous chapter's discussion on economic dependency, and the coercive side of economic statecraft, is that Pacific Island States face the situation where they need investments for developing their economies, but Chinese investments may seem too good to be true. The way Pacific states deal with this, which is the main point of discussion in the following chapter, is by positioning themselves right, thus leveraging their power.

### 2.3.1 BRI's Geopolitical Strategy

The Belt and Road Initiative stands as a quintessential embodiment of China's strategic manoeuvring in reshaping the global economic and geopolitical stage. The state-led nature of the BRI underlines its transformative geopolitical implications, positioning it as a pivotal instrument for China to bolster its economic and political influence across regions involved in this expansive project (Li et al., 2021, p. 907). As emphasized by scholarly assessments, this initiative not only signifies China's ascent but also potentially tips the balance of power, adversely impacting the

established dominion of the European Union and the United States (Petry, 2022; Kostecka-Tomaszewska & Krukowska, 2020). Multinational Enterprises (MNE's), which are cooperation that are involved with infrastructure projects and can provide direct investments, play a significant role in China's economic policy Michael Witt argues that MNE alignment with state interests underscores the BRI's dual nature, marking it as much a geopolitical manoeuvre as an economic endeavour, given that they serve the state's interests (Witt, 2019). This alignment consolidates China's broader strategic goals, amplifying the initiative's influence beyond mere economic corridors. However, despite its potential for economic development in host nations, the BRI's structural issues and geopolitical ramifications pose significant challenges to the existing global order (Manzoor et al., 2022). Manzoor et al. however conclude that the BRI is not "designed as a geopolitical strategy to challenge the US or any other country for regional hegemony or to increase China's "sphere of influence." (Manzoor et al., 2022, p. 176). Instead, its aim is to improve relationships with its neighbours, thus decreasing the possibility of hostilities. But as mentioned earlier, this may result in increased dependency of smaller countries in China. This raises concerns about the enduring implications of the BRI's impact on the socio-economic fabric of participating countries and the consequential shifts in geopolitical alliances and economic dependencies (Zhang, 2018, p. 340).

Investments may not only happen to bolster economic relationships and trade, but Western leadership also worries that it may also result in military expansion via the building of ports (Zhang, 2018, p. 340). This argument would support what John Mearsheimer argues in the first chapter, that states in the end always return to military power as a means of power projection. This also strongly contrasts what Mazoor et al. argue, that there is no geopolitical strategy of hegemony building behind the BRI. But in essence, the BRI operates as a linchpin of Chinese foreign policy, significantly augmenting China's sway in the regions encompassed by its reach. This dynamic restructuring of geopolitical alignments and economic dependencies holds the potential to herald a substantial reconfiguration in the global order. As it continues to forge ahead, the BRI will persist as a testament to China's ascendancy and its profound influence on global geopolitical dynamics, fundamentally altering the existing power play among nations. This however raises the question of how the Belt and Road Initiative should be interpreted. From a western standpoint China's economic statecraft through the BRI poses a

geostrategic risk, given its increased influence. On the other hand, there are ample scholars who see the BRI not as a geopolitical tool, but a way for China to foster connectivity around the world, and deal with the domestic production surplus. Scholars perceive the BRI as a conduit for China's paradigm of international economic collaboration, giving the Chinese state and commercial entities an edge over the U.S. and EU partners (Kostecka-Tomaszewska & Krukowska, 2020). Amid escalating US-China strategic rivalry, Japan has tactically wielded economic strategies to mitigate global instability and counter China, forming part of a broader hedging approach (Govella, 2021, p. 199). Simultaneously, the BRI is forecasted to bolster China's sway in South, Southeast, Central, and Western Asia, Africa, and Europe, fostering stability among China's western neighbours (Evron, 2018). This ambitious initiative has sparked intense debates across Asia, the United States, and the global community (Li, 2020, p. 152), often seen as a cornerstone of China's economic strategy, augmenting its influence while mitigating vulnerabilities to Western sanctions (Ljungwall & Bohman, 2017). Western nations have approached the BRI cautiously, combining vigilance with strategic analysis. But they are also influenced by its regional impact. For example, studies juxtapose Indonesia's and East Timor's perspectives on the effectiveness of Beijing's economic strategy within the BRI framework (Gunn, 2021). This regional lens compels Western states to evaluate the broader implications of the BRI on regional dynamics and power structures. Also pointing towards what the west should do with China's growing influence in the Pacific.

### 2.3.2 BRI and the Pacific:

The exploration of the relationship between China's BRI and its impact on the Pacific region holds considerable academic importance, offering insights into global geopolitical dynamics as well as localized effects. Given that developing nations stand as primary recipients of China's BRI investments, understanding the dynamics within the Pacific becomes pivotal. This focus on the Pacific in the upcoming chapter is deliberate, as it serves as a compelling case study illustrating how the Pacific states leverage their position. To illustrate the different views on the BRI in the Pacific, this section will look at two leading scholars in this area, to showcase how the previous discussions are reflected in this specific scholarship. The work of Zhang

Denghua and Henryk Szadziwski stands out for its comprehensive examination of these dynamics from complementary perspectives, offering insights into China's foreign policy and its tangible effects on Pacific Island countries (PICs).Zhang Denghua contributes extensively to our understanding of China's diplomatic strategies, particularly through the lens of foreign aid. His research delineates the BRI not merely as an economic campaign but as a strategic endeavour by China to broaden its influence across the Pacific, thereby altering the region's geopolitical landscape (Zhang, 2022). Zhang posits that China's aid policy, which employs foreign aid as a diplomatic instrument in the Pacific, mirrors its tactics in other developing areas, challenging the perception of China's Pacific policy as an isolated strategy. This suggests a more layered interpretation of China's global objectives (Zhang, 2017; Zhang, 2020). In contrast, Henryk Szadziwski prioritizes the local impacts of Chinese investment in the Pacific. His investigative focus on Fiji under the BRI underscores the nuanced relationship between Chinese financial ventures and local sentiment (Szadziwski, 2021). His observations of local dissatisfaction with incomplete Chinese infrastructure projects under the BRI starkly deviate from the predominantly positive official narratives, highlighting a significant rift between governmental policies and public reception (Szadziwski, 2022).

Zhang observes that with China's growing confidence and its keenness to influence global governance, aid has emerged as a pivotal tool for accessing minerals and natural resources. This reflects a broader strategy rather than a Pacific-centric approach, suggesting China's engagement in the South Pacific aligns with its interests in other developing nations. Zhang's exploration reveals that while China's strategic military interests in the Pacific remain debatable, the region's signing onto the BRI indicates a burgeoning Chinese interest there. This expansion of aid is seen as part of a wider pattern rather than an exception, shaped by the geographical and historical proximities of these island nations to both China and the United States (Zhang, 2017; Zhang, 2020). Moreover, Zhang highlights China's collaborative approach to aid, working bilaterally and trilaterally, notably in coordination with the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. This cooperation, particularly in aid, stands out as a less contentious foreign policy area, facilitating benefits for recipient countries and contributing to China's efforts in projecting a cooperative international image (Zhang, 2018; Zhang & Lawson, 2017).

On the other hand, Szadziwski's research emphasizes the concept of "anticipatory geography," reflecting on how Chinese investments, through the BRI, aim to foster a vision of economic revitalization and connectivity. This focus on the lived experiences and local perceptions of Chinese policies underscores a critical examination of the BRI's impact at the community level. His analysis of media portrayals and social responses to Chinese infrastructure projects in Fiji reveals a discrepancy between state-endorsed positive narratives and the concerns voiced through social media and interviews, indicating a broader scepticism towards Chinese investments in the region (Szadziwski, 2021; Szadziwski, 2022). The contrasting approaches of Zhang and Szadziwski together provide a multifaceted view of China's engagement in the Pacific. While Zhang's work offers a macro-level analysis of China's strategic use of aid as part of its global ambitions, Szadziwski's research presents a ground-level perspective on the local repercussions of such strategies. Both scholars contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in China's BRI and its implications for the Pacific, encompassing both the geopolitical aspirations of China and the tangible outcomes experienced by local populations. Their collective work underscores the importance of considering both the strategic motivations behind China's Pacific policy and the diverse responses it elicits among Pacific communities, highlighting a dynamic interplay between global ambitions and local realities.

## Conclusion

In concluding our discussion on economic statecraft, it's clear that this approach marks a significant evolution in how states exert influence globally, expanding beyond the confines of military might discussed in the context of offensive realism. Economic strategies, as illustrated through initiatives like China's BRI, highlight the capacity of economic tools to extend influence and reshape international alignments. This reflects a broader, more nuanced understanding of power in the modern world, where economic interdependence and strategic economic policies play pivotal roles in global leadership dynamics.

This exploration underscores the importance of balancing economic goals with geopolitical strategy, emphasizing the nuanced capabilities of economic statecraft to

navigate this complex landscape effectively. The increasing reliance on economic measures to project power necessitates a reconsideration of their implications for international stability and the structure of global power relations. The intricate interplay between economic and military strategies delineates a more interconnected and multifaceted arena of international relations. Economic statecraft, with its subtle yet extensive impact, challenges conventional dichotomies of power, suggesting a blended approach to achieving state objectives on the global stage. As we move forward, the strategic use of economic tools will undoubtedly continue to shape the contours of international politics, urging a re-evaluation of how power is defined and exercised in the 21st century.

## Chapter 3: Geopolitical Currents and Shifting Tides: Navigating Sovereignty and Strategy in the Pacific Islands' Engagement with China

### Introduction

In the evolving landscape of global politics, the Pacific Islands emerge as a compelling testament to the need for an expanded discourse in International Relations, one that transcends the conventional Western paradigms to integrate non-Western perspectives and the unique geopolitical dynamics of non-Western states interacting among themselves. The traditional Western-centric international relations theories, while providing foundational insights into the machinations of global politics, fall short in capturing the nuanced realities of regions like the Pacific Islands, where the interplay of sovereignty, self-determination, and regional dynamics under the shadow of great power politics presents a complex tapestry that demands a broader analytical lens. This chapter argues for a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive, representative, and equitable international relations discipline that acknowledges and respects the sovereignty, agency, and cultural richness of all states, especially those in strategic yet vulnerable regions like the Pacific Islands. The Pacific Islands, with their unique developmental challenges and strategic importance in the context of geopolitical contestation, offer a rich case study for examining the interactions between small states and rising powers, specifically China's increasing influence in the region and how Pacific states are responding. These dynamics underscore the urgency for adopting a more nuanced International Relations framework that appreciates the diverse motivations, strategies, and impacts of both regional actors and external powers. By integrating non-Western International Relations theories, rooted in concepts such as Confucianism, relational sovereignty, and decolonial approaches, this chapter aims to provide alternative perspectives that resonate more closely with the historical experiences and current realities of Pacific Island nations. These frameworks not only enrich our understanding of International Relations by offering critical insights into power dynamics, culture, and identity but also challenge the dominance of Eurocentric narratives.

The significance of this discussion is highlighted through an examination of two speeches delivered at the United Nations General Assembly by the respective Prime Ministers of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. These addresses articulate the concerns and aspirations of small states in the Pacific, draw attention to their sovereignty and self-determination amidst the geopolitical manoeuvres of great powers. The speeches serve as an illustration of how Pacific Island nations are not passive entities in the international arena but are actively shaping their destiny, leveraging narratives like the "Blue Pacific" to assert their collective agency and redefine their role on the global stage. The foundational reference to the Blue Pacific concept is found in the communique of the 48th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in 2017, where leaders agreed to "act as one "Blue Pacific Continent" by reaffirming that the Pacific Ocean is the common heritage of the peoples of the Pacific and their source of life and prosperity."(Pacific Island Forum, 2017). Moreover, the case of Nauru's diplomatic switch from Taiwan to the People's Republic of China in January 2024 exemplifies the intricate nature of international relations within the Pacific Islands. Nauru's decision not only highlights China's rising influence but also reflects the complex power dynamics, strategic interests, and diplomatic initiatives that characterize the region's engagement with global powers. Although not explicitly mentioned by Nauru's leadership, previous states who were in the same situation, pointed out that the decision was based largely on financial incentives (The Guardian, 2023). Such developments call into question the adequacy of traditional international relations theories and advocate for a theoretical framework that is more attuned to the sovereignty, strategic calculus, and developmental aspirations of Pacific Island countries. It shows that Pacific Island States are adapted to function well within the frameworks of western international relations and non-western international relations, depending on their needs.

This chapter argues for a reconceptualization of International Relations to include a broader spectrum of theories and perspectives, particularly those emanating from non-Western contexts, which includes discussions on decolonization, a culturalist approach to international relations, which draws from pacific traditions. This shift is not merely academic but is imperative for developing respectful, nuanced, and effective international policies and practices that truly consider the interests and dignity of Pacific Island nations. Through this expanded discourse, the field of International Relations can move towards a more globally representative and

inclusive discipline, capable of addressing the multifaceted challenges and opportunities of our interconnected world.

As shown in previous chapters, this examination further illustrates the argument that relying solely on one theoretical framework falls short of capturing the complex dynamics of international relations within the Pacific. The sophisticated diplomatic manoeuvres of Pacific Island countries in reaction to China's expanding engagement in the region, blending aspects of realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism, underscore the intricate approaches to foreign policy these nations employ. These approaches, which deftly navigate between economic gains and the preservation of political sovereignty and strategic interests, reflect a profound grasp of international dynamics that goes beyond mere alliance or opposition. In advocating for an International Relations discipline that better mirrors the varied realities of our world, this narrative not only challenges established viewpoints but also enhances the conversation around the intricate relationship between China and the Pacific Islands.

### 3.1: Navigating the Pacific Waters: China's Geopolitical Expansion and Its Implications for Regional Power Dynamics

The discussion surrounding China's growing influence in the Pacific, as examined by scholars of international relations in the Pacific region, is not merely an academic subject but a vital arena of geopolitical competition. The burgeoning body of research on this topic is necessary, yet it barely scratches the surface of China's complex foreign policies. While the world has been preoccupied with China's activities in Africa (Large, 2008), the Pacific has been witnessing a significant increase in China's presence and activities over the past decade, a trend noted by Phillipa Brant in 2013 ( Brant, 2013). Interestingly Brant highlights that unlike Africa, aid and assistance to the region is not bound to resource deals, such coal or oil (Brant, 2013, pp 158). This doesn't mean that it isn't attached to any conditions. The examination of China's aid to Pacific Island Countries (PICs) by scholars such as Fan and Yuting in 2022 reveals a disturbing trend of the conditionality of Chinese developmental financing (Fan & Yuting, 2022). Although their article is a review of books and articles written about the subject, they argue that there are three main

categories of scholars. The one's arguing that China's presence in the Pacific is due to political reasons, economic reasons, or that it serves several purposes (Fan & Yuting, 2022, pp.132). The surge in Chinese aid to PICs has sparked legitimate concerns about the underlying motives, with scholars like Brant (2013) unmasking China's resource-driven agenda. China's aid is less about altruism and more about securing its interests. Furthermore, Lanteigne's 2012 study on China's soft balancing power behavior exposes the realpolitik behind its regional engagements, as 'China's policies in the South Pacific have taken on a more distinct shape in the form of multifaceted economic engagement and diplomatic contacts (Lanteigne, 2012, p 37). Thus, China's presence in the region has arguably become more assertive, although Lanteigne also points out that he doesn't believe that the Pacific will become the grounds for great power competition (Lanteigne, 2012, p 37).

China's involvement in the region, particularly with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiative, which includes projects such as the construction of ports, roads, bridges, and other transportation infrastructure to facilitate trade and strengthen maritime links between China and countries like Vanuatu. (Kayembe, 2017), goes beyond mere economic outreach. The developmental financing, in addition to the increased number of Pacific states switching recognition may suggest a strategic play at the reduction of American and Australian sway. The move is just a piece of a larger puzzle in the Indo-Pacific area, where China's strengthened ties in the Asia Pacific, including the South Pacific, stand in stark contrast to its bold moves in the South China Sea, as highlighted by He and Li (2020). China's approach in the Asia Pacific appears to be more focused on building cooperative relationships and economic ties, using development financing and infrastructure projects through initiatives like the Belt and Road. This suggests an effort to expand China's influence and reduce the sway of the U.S. and its allies like Australia in the region. The authors suggest that China's strengthened ties in the Asia Pacific/South Pacific, combined with its more aggressive posture in the South China Sea, are part of a larger puzzle in China's efforts to reshape the regional order in the Indo-Pacific to its advantage (He & Li, 2020, p 6). This isn't just regional involvement; it's a sign of a deeper strategic rivalry with the US, underlining the need for a thorough examination of these geopolitical trends. China's deepening role in the region marks a significant shift, challenging the longstanding dominance of powers like the United States (Davis et al., 2020). It isn't just a minor change; it's a major realignment of the power

landscape in the Pacific, reminiscent of the theories of realists like John Mearsheimer. Although he didn't directly reference the Pacific, the concept of shifting power balances he discussed is a worldwide phenomenon. Since the main powers in the region have been colonial states, the introduction of China as a new power in the region, offsets the balance. The growth of China's aid to Pacific Island Countries, now a hot topic in academic circles, shines a light on its increasing influence (Fan & Yuting, 2022). This isn't just about offering aid; it's a strategic part of China's larger geopolitical game plan. China's push for a new multipolar world order is a direct challenge to American dominance, a topic thoroughly discussed in the first chapter. While the first chapter looked at this rivalry through the offensive realist lens, its impact is especially pronounced in the Pacific, altering the strategic framework of the region. As this rivalry intensifies, Pacific states are at a pivotal juncture, their futures heavily influenced by how they navigate this complex power dynamic. China's presence in the region presents a double-edged sword: it's both an opportunity and a challenge. This delicate balance underscores the importance of delving into the nuances of China's strategies and the international response, especially in light of the changing global power landscape.

While some commentators note the potential advantages of new diplomatic, trade, and investment opportunities brought by China's growing influence in the Pacific region, concerns about the implications of this influence are equally pressing ( Wesley-Smith 2021, Salem, 2020). Debates, such as those surrounding Chinese foreign aid to Fiji, oscillate between seeing it as a threat or an opportunity for the country. On one hand, the aid provides much-needed development financing, but on the other hand, there are worries about debt sustainability, transparency, and China's strategic motivations behind the aid. These debates highlight the complex dynamics at play as traditional and emerging donors compete for influence in the Pacific. China sees the Pacific as part of its "greater periphery", which is useful in its peaceful rise (Salem, 2020, p. 250). On the one hand investments into Fiji by China, aids in its development. On the other hand, there is a worrying level of increased migration from China. The Fijian government therefore has to balance the need for development, and the needs of the general population. China's increasing involvement in the Pacific Island Nations through its expanding foreign aid program has raised concerns about its potential to undermine the existing regional order dominated by traditional donors like the US and Australia (Hameiri, 2015). China has

provided aid to Pacific Island nations to gain support for its One China policy and enhance its influence in the region (Cannon, 2020). Additionally, China's economic growth and increased international engagement have contributed to its rising influence in the Pacific islands (Davis et al., 2020). This influence has led to concerns from traditional donors about the Pacific Island nations falling into Chinese debt and subsequently losing their strategic leverage to China (Salem, 2020). Overall, China's economic activities in the Pacific has raised geopolitical concerns and are perceived as a means to expand its influence in the region.

While Western nations often scrutinize China's policies, it is crucial to recognize that such scrutiny may sometimes be influenced by historical biases and geopolitical tensions. For instance, former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's statement highlighting China's military expansion as a significant security threat saying that this is the "biggest security threat we have seen in the region, leading up to the Second World War." (Morrison, 2020). This statement by the former Australian Prime Minister harks back to concerns we've seen in the past, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding and open dialogue to navigate the complexities of the current international landscape. The tensions and historical baggage between Western nations and China can sometimes colour the way these issues are framed and perceived. It's important that we strive to approach these discussions with greater objectivity and a willingness to consider diverse perspectives, rather than falling back on familiar narratives. Only through open and constructive communication can we hope to find a path forward that considers the legitimate interests and concerns of all parties involved. China consistently emphasizes its commitment to sovereignty and non-interference, a stance supported by Chen Zheng's assertion that the evolving global landscape and China's expanding overseas interests have prompted a reassessment of the non-interference principle within China (Zheng, 2016, p 373). This suggests a notable shift in China's approach. However, this analysis is predominantly influenced by a Western-centric viewpoint. It is crucial to recognize that China and many of its partners do not align with Western ideologies. The upcoming sections aim to address this imbalance by introducing non-Western perspectives into the discourse. By doing so, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of China's policies and behaviours in a global context.

### 3.2: Beyond Western Paradigms: Integrating Pacific Island Geopolitics and Non-Western International Relations Theories

The transition from examining Western-centric International Relations theories to understanding Pacific Island geopolitics underscores the necessity for a more inclusive approach that integrates non-Western perspectives. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Pacific Islands, where sovereignty, regionalism, and external influences intertwine uniquely, highlighting the inadequacy of traditional Western International Relations frameworks. The discussion on China's involvement in the Pacific goes beyond just economic outreach and is part of a larger strategic plan to expand its influence and reduce the sway of traditional powers like the US and Australia in the region. The Pacific Islands' strategic use of the "Blue Pacific" narrative and Oceanic diplomacy showcases their proactive efforts to redefine their international role and interests. Firth (2013) elucidates how narratives such as "great power rivalry" and "arc of instability" are instrumental in "constructing a story about the South Pacific, highlighting the role of external actors in shaping regional narratives" (Firth, 2013, p. 550). These narratives not only frame the involvement of non-Western actors but also underscore their significant impact on the political landscape of the Pacific. Moreover, Acharya and Buzan (2019) argue that "the need to include non-Western perspectives in shaping international relations discourse" is paramount for a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of global politics (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, p. 355). This emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and incorporating diverse perspectives, including those of non-Western actors, in oceanic diplomacy within the Pacific region. The concept of 'external' in this context thus encompasses a broad spectrum of actors whose involvement shapes the diplomatic landscape and power dynamics in the Pacific. Recent developments in global affairs highlight the critical need to adopt pluralistic approaches in international relations, which challenge Western-centric narratives and better capture the complex dynamics of regions like the Pacific Islands. This paradigm shift promises a more inclusive and accurate understanding of the diverse interactions shaping our world, particularly in areas of strategic importance.

The discussions on colonization and decolonization in the Pacific region highlight the enduring impact of external influences on Pacific Islanders' autonomy and identity, urging a shift towards inclusive narratives that challenge Eurocentric perspectives. By decolonizing knowledge production and embracing diverse perspectives, a more holistic understanding of the region's history and political dynamics emerges, empowering Pacific Islanders to assert their agency within the global political landscape. Discussions surrounding both the colonization and decolonization frameworks in international relations are important, because in order to create a more inclusive and truly global international relations the impactful and long-lasting effects of colonization need to be taken into consideration. This perspective is essential for re-evaluating traditional power structures and narratives in the Pacific region, because the history of the Pacific region doesn't only include the western colonial history, but also relations with states in Asia. The historical and contemporary political reality of Pacific Islanders, shaped by colonialism and intervention strategies reliant on Western ideas, as noted by Teaiwa (2010) and Sanga (2015), is a testament to the enduring impact of external influences. Teaiwa uses the Bikini as a symbol of colonization, arguing that "largely Eurocentric theories must remain ornamental to narratives that interrupt dominant historical and cultural constructions of islands as military bases and tourist sites"(Teaiwa, 2010, p. 27), suggesting that these Eurocentric theories should not be central or foundational in the narratives being discussed. Instead, they should play a more decorative or supplementary role. This reality is not a relic of the past but a continuing challenge that the Pacific islands must navigate to assert their autonomy and identity in the global political landscape.

When discussing the significance of non-western International Relations in the context of China and the Pacific, it is essential to acknowledge the decolonial connections and relational sovereignty as emphasized by Eun Annabel We (2019) challenges dominant international relations frameworks by emphasizing decolonial connections and relational sovereignty, particularly between Korea and the militarily occupied Pacific Islands. A significant part of the argument is devoted to the idea of decolonizing knowledge. The article suggests that understanding the complex history and effects of colonization in the Pacific requires new ways of thinking and knowledge production that go beyond traditional Western frameworks. The effort to decolonize knowledge is crucial for addressing the lingering effects of colonialism,

from settler colonialism to the impacts of the Cold War era. Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued, particularly in the context of New Zealand's Māori people, that research on indigenous communities often fails to align with the needs and goals of these communities for achieving sovereignty. This concern for creating research agendas and knowledge forms that actively support the sovereignty and autonomy of indigenous peoples is shared by various scholars (We, 2019, p 378). Similarly, to the discussion on non-western international relations, it is important to understand the histories and traditions on Pacific Island States, not as a marginalized group of islands somewhere on the outskirts of the maps, but as states and territories with a long and rich culture.

The effort to decolonize knowledge and centre non-Western perspectives in international relations, as exemplified by scholars like Eun Annabel We, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Yue, and Shani, is crucial for understanding the complex histories, cultures, and power dynamics at play between China, the Pacific Islands, and the broader global landscape. Yue (2015) and Shani (2008) contribute to a non-Western international relations discourse that is not only post-Western but also critical and less Eurocentric. Yue (2015) focuses on moral values rooted in Confucianism. He argues that “attempts by China to provide assistance to the ‘poor south’ are marred by accusations of neo-colonialism” (Yue, 2015, p. 1). And that by using Confucianism more in its foreign policy, would result in better cooperation with the global south because Confucianism argues that “Confucianism promotes a harmonious world under an asymmetrical system crafted out of mutual respect.” (Yue, 2015, p. 11). However, based on the arguments made in the previous chapter, China makes use of its asymmetrical power, to enhance its influence, thus creating uncertainty amongst smaller states. This would harbour understanding not only on different ideas and concepts but would also be able to explain why China may behave differently to a western state. At the moment the majority of scholarship explains China’s behaviour in terms of western concepts, and the lack of non-western ideas may lead to an incomplete picture. Giorgio Shani (2008) examines critical discourses within non-Western cosmopolitan traditions, such as Islam and Sikhism. He finds that although space has been created within international relations for post-western discourses, it “continuous to speak for and to the West” (Shani, 2008, p.722). This argument points towards the fact that even if there is work done in the non-western IR space, it’s still strongly tied to the conventional framework, and

thus not truly non-western. To remedy that “a ‘Post-western’ Critical International Relations would, therefore, need to reconsider the basis upon which a potential ‘dialogue between civilizations can take place in order for it to be inclusive of cultural difference” (Shani, 2008, p 731). The effort to decolonize knowledge and centre non-Western perspectives in international relations, as highlighted by scholars like Yue and Shani, is crucial for understanding the intricate histories, cultures, and power dynamics between China, the Pacific Islands, and the broader global landscape. Yue (2015) emphasizes the importance of moral values rooted in Confucianism to foster cooperation with the global south, advocating for a harmonious world based on mutual respect. On the other hand, Shani (2008) explores critical discourses within non-Western cosmopolitan traditions like Islam and Sikhism, suggesting the need for a truly inclusive 'Post-western' Critical International Relations that transcends conventional frameworks to embrace cultural differences fully.

Seo et al. (2020) offers another significant perspective, examining how traditional ideologies, particularly the Confucian ideal of the “wise mother and good wife,” continue to influence contemporary societies. This persistence of traditional values in the face of globalization and modernization challenges the assumption that Westernization is synonymous with modernity, suggesting instead that non-Western societies negotiate their path towards development while retaining core cultural values. Critiquing these culturalist explanations, one might argue that while they provide a richer, more layered understanding of Chinese politics and its role in international relations, they may also risk essentializing cultures and overlooking the dynamic, contested nature of cultural identity and its influence on politics. Moreover, the emphasis on cultural factors should not lead to the neglect of material forces and interests, which continue to play a significant role in shaping state behavior. However, the strength of the culturalist argument lies in its ability to integrate cultural considerations with political analysis, offering a more comprehensive view of international dynamics. The transition to a more inclusive approach in Pacific International Relations integrates non-Western perspectives, emphasizing the inadequacy of traditional Western frameworks. China's involvement in the Pacific extends beyond economics, aiming to expand influence and counter traditional powers like the US and Australia. The Pacific Islands strategically use narratives like "Blue Pacific" to redefine their international role. Discussions on colonization and decolonization underscore external influences on Pacific Islanders, urging inclusive

narratives challenging Eurocentric views. Scholars advocate for decolonizing knowledge and incorporating non-Western perspectives to understand power dynamics between China, the Pacific Islands, and the global landscape. This shift promises a more accurate understanding of complex interactions in regions like the Pacific, emphasizing cultural values and relational sovereignty

### 3.3: Indigenous Responses and Strategic narratives

Culture and history, which in the Pacific is shaped by regional traditions and colonialism creates narratives, through which current debates in international relations and China can be analysed. The section discusses the Solomon Islands' shift in foreign policy towards China, highlighting the economic factor as a key driver and the complexities of their relationship with China, vacillating between criticism and admiration. Additionally, it explores the Pacific Islands' "Blue Pacific" narrative as a strategic tool empowering these nations to assert their sovereignty and challenge dominant global narratives imposed by powers like the US and China.

The Solomon Islands' evolving stance on China's growing influence over its foreign policy has sparked intense debate, and for good reason. The decision to switch allegiance from Taiwan to China represents not just a mere adjustment but a significant upheaval in the Solomon Islands' global relations (Aqorau, 2021). Scholars such as Aqorau (2021) have delved into this foreign policy dilemma, shedding light on the intricate consequences of aligning with China. Aqorau attributes this shift primarily to economic factors, noting that "China is a major global economic and political player and the Solomon Islands' largest trading partner" (Aqorau, 2021, p. 335). Tarcisius Kabutaulaka emphasizes the acknowledgment that contemporary approaches to economic development often result in environmental and cultural damage, endorsing relentless economic expansion that exacerbates the adverse effects of climate change (Kabutaulaka, 2020, p. 50). This scenario underscores the intricate dynamics at play in the Solomon Islands' interactions with global powers and their profound impact on its populace. The Solomon Islands' mixed perceptions of China, vacillating between criticism and admiration, further complicate its foreign policy landscape (Jain & Chakrabarti, 2023). This dualistic view of Sinophobia and Sinophilia presents significant challenges for the Solomon

Islands in managing its relationship with China and formulating strategic foreign policy decisions. The Solomon Islands' perspective on China's involvement in its foreign policy and domestic affairs is not only multifaceted but also rife with controversy and implications. The interplay of diplomatic realignments, external influences, and the nuanced rapport with China necessitates a thorough analysis to fully comprehend the Solomon Islands' foreign policy manoeuvres and their evolving geopolitical position.

The Pacific Island countries, in the face of increasing geopolitical competition, have crafted the "Blue Pacific" narrative as a countermapping strategy against the dominant cartographies of global powers, which are the great powers in the region. Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, in his chapter "Mapping the Blue Pacific in a Changing Regional Order," articulates how this narrative empowers these nations to assert their sovereignty and agency in international relations (Kabutaulaka, 2021) . Kabutaulaka notes, "Pacific Island countries are pushing back on the dominant narratives and cartographies that powerful countries use to frame how the region fits into their global agendas." (Kabutaulaka, 2021, p. 41), They are pushing back by articulating alternative narratives about the region, such as the "large ocean states" and "Blue Pacific" narratives, which present a different vision of the Pacific (Clarke & Pan, 2022, p 2). This pushback is crucial, as it represents the Pacific Islands' effort to redefine their role and importance on the global stage, countering narratives imposed by powers like the US, China, and Australia. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, both the United States and China make use of strategic power tools, both military and economic, to further their influence in the world. The Blue Pacific narrative is the Pacific version of that, as Kabutaulaka emphasizes, "The Blue Pacific empowers Pacific Island countries by giving them agency to frame and tell their own narratives and map their own spaces and places, their region, in the face of overwhelming global interest." (Kabutaulaka, 2021, p. 41). This represents an effort to decolonize knowledge production and centre non-Western perspectives in international relations. The argument differs from that of both Mearsheimer's offensive realism, where military power is the most prominent form and economic statecraft, where economic power is key to power relations. In line with this argument, narrative and soft power are more often conducted. This empowerment is a significant shift from being passive recipients of external geopolitical interests to active shapers of their regional identity.

Central to the Blue Pacific narrative is its challenge to dominant geopolitical strategies such as the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy and China's Maritime Silk Road. Kabutaulaka argues that the Blue Pacific "facilitates an assertive Pacific diplomacy and empowers Pacific Island countries to be more emphatic in pushing for issues that are important to them." (Kabutaulaka, 2021, p. 42). This assertiveness is a key feature of the narrative, enabling Pacific Island countries to negotiate and assert their interests more effectively in international relations. Moreover, the Blue Pacific narrative reframes the Pacific Islands from being seen as small, isolated, and vulnerable to being recognized as "large ocean states" or a "Blue Continent." This reimagining is vital in altering the perception and strategic importance of the region in global geopolitics. In international relations, the Blue Pacific narrative serves as a counter map and a strategic diplomatic tool for Pacific Island countries. It challenges the existing geopolitical frameworks and offers an alternative that centres the priorities, sovereignty, and agency of these nations. Through this narrative, Pacific Island countries are not only redefining their identity but also actively participating in shaping the dynamics of global power and influence. Central to the Blue Pacific narrative is its profound challenge to dominant geopolitical strategies like the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy and China's Maritime Silk Road. Kabutaulaka (2021) emphasizes that the Blue Pacific narrative plays a pivotal role in facilitating assertive Pacific diplomacy, empowering Pacific Island countries to advocate more vigorously for issues crucial to their interests. This assertiveness, a fundamental aspect of the narrative, equips Pacific Island nations to engage in negotiations and assert their interests more effectively within the realm of international relations. Furthermore, the Blue Pacific narrative undertakes a significant reframing of the Pacific Islands' image from that of small, isolated, and vulnerable entities to being recognized as "large ocean states" or a "Blue Continent." This transformative reimagining is essential in reshaping how the region is perceived and its strategic importance within global geopolitics. By altering these perceptions, the narrative aims to elevate the strategic significance of the Pacific Islands on the global stage, highlighting their interconnectedness and collective strength as a region. In the realm of international relations, the Blue Pacific narrative serves as both a counter map and a strategic diplomatic tool for Pacific Island countries. By challenging existing geopolitical frameworks and offering an alternative perspective that centres on their priorities, sovereignty, and agency, this narrative empowers these nations to actively shape

global power dynamics. Through this narrative framework, Pacific Island countries are not only redefining their identity but also engaging proactively in influencing and shaping the dynamics of global power and influence, asserting their autonomy and significance within the international arena.

Oceanic diplomacy, as detailed by Carter, Fry, and Nanau, represents a pivotal yet underappreciated facet in the field of international relations, particularly in the context of the Pacific Islands. Their policy paper, "Oceanic Diplomacy: An Introduction," challenges the conventional state-centric bias in diplomatic studies, advocating for the recognition of the unique and longstanding diplomatic practices rooted in the diverse cultures and histories of the Pacific Islands. This form of diplomacy, as they assert, "refers to the distinctive diplomatic practices and principles which come out of the long history and diverse cultures of the Pacific Islands." (Carter et al. 2021). The conventional diplomatic studies have been dominated by a state-centric bias, focusing primarily on the diplomacy between sovereign states. The concept of Oceanic diplomacy challenges this bias by recognizing alternative forms of diplomacy that occur between political communities, such as tribes and clans, which may not be based on Western notions of statehood. The argument that traditional Oceanic diplomatic systems continue to be relevant and central in modern contexts, both within and between states, is particularly compelling, because it points to the previous discussion on non-western international relations and its relevance in non-western regions. The authors' insistence on acknowledging these systems addresses a significant gap in diplomatic studies, which has traditionally overlooked non-Western practices. They rightly criticize the prevailing academic perspective, noting that "the state-centric bias of conventional diplomatic studies clouds the ability to 'see' the continued operation of these diplomatic systems." (Carter et al. ,2021). This criticism is not just academic; it has real-world implications, especially in how we understand and engage with diverse forms of political and diplomatic organization. Furthermore, the authors propose a more inclusive definition of diplomacy, one that encompasses a broader range of interactions between political communities. They argue that "diplomacy is a social institution existing between political communities, which governs interactions between them on such matters as trade, exchange, sacred events, access to resources, movement of people, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the conduct of war and its aftermath." (Carter et al., 2021). This article emphasizing the need to recognize and incorporate diverse

diplomatic practices rooted in the cultures and histories of the Pacific Islands. It challenges the conventional state-centric bias in diplomatic studies, advocating for a broader understanding of diplomacy that encompasses interactions between various political communities beyond traditional sovereign states. This discussion resonates with the call for a more inclusive approach in international relations that integrates non-Western perspectives, highlighting the relevance of non-Western international relations frameworks in regions like the Pacific Islands.

In contrast, "Tā, Vā, and Lā: Re-imagining the Geopolitics of the Pacific Islands" by Koro et al offers a critique of Western-centric geopolitical narratives and proposes an Oceanic (specifically, Polynesian) framework for understanding Pacific geopolitics. The authors argue that Western narratives, grounded in rationalist International Relations theories, fail to capture the multi-temporal, multi-spatial, and relational dynamics of the Pacific (Koro et al. 2023). This myopic view overlooks the agency of Pacific states and their complex socio-spatial conceptualizations, embodied in the Oceanic concepts of tā (time), vā (space), and lā (scale). The Western narrative, which often portrays Pacific states as small, vulnerable entities, is contested by the authors who draw on Epeli Hau'ofa's concept of the Pacific as a 'sea of islands', advocating for a perception shift that recognizes the Pacific Islands as large ocean states interconnected by the Pacific continent. The proposal to integrate Oceanic perspectives into geopolitical analysis is a call for a more inclusive, respectful, and accurate understanding of the region's dynamics. By emphasizing the importance of relationality and the quality of relationships (vā), the authors suggest that these indigenous concepts can offer profound insights into international diplomacy and state interactions in the Pacific. This approach challenges the reductionist view of Pacific Island states as mere pawns in geopolitical contests and highlights their inherent agency and interconnectedness. The article's argument is a significant contribution to the discourse on international relations, particularly in its insistence on the inclusion of non-Western perspectives and the recognition of the diverse and complex nature of geopolitical interactions. It underscores the importance of understanding and respecting indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems in shaping a more balanced and nuanced understanding of global geopolitics.

The transition to a more inclusive approach in Pacific International Relations, integrating non-Western perspectives and understanding the complex dynamics of China's influence in the Pacific, as explored by Wallis et al. (2023), sheds light on the nuanced engagement of Pacific Island nations with China's strategic narratives. This analysis reveals that Pacific Island countries strategically reinterpret and instrumentalize China's narratives, such as those related to historical/colonial legacies and the Belt and Road Initiative, to advance their own agendas, challenging the perception of China's narrative power as unidirectional. The Pacific Islands' adept utilization of these narratives showcases a dynamic interaction where agency and strategic adaptation play a crucial role, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of international relations beyond traditional power dynamics. The authors underscore that these narratives, rooted in "historical/colonial, South-South cooperation, and the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative)" (Wallis et al. 2023, p. 464), are being reinterpreted and instrumentalized by Pacific nations for their own agendas. This approach challenges the prevailing view of China's narrative power as a dominant force, offering a fresh perspective on the limitations of such power in the region. The authors' analysis reveals that China's narrative strategy, aimed at reshaping the Pacific Islands' regional order, is not as straightforwardly effective as often perceived. They argue that the narrative power of China is more limited than commonly assumed, as Pacific Island countries selectively use China's narratives to advance their interests, rather than China's (Wallis et al. 2023, p 480). This is a significant observation, as it implies that the influence of a major power like China is not unidirectional or absolute. The Pacific Islands, in their engagement with these narratives, display a form of agency that often goes unrecognized in international relations. For instance, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and Samoa do not passively absorb China's narratives but rather adapt them, using these narratives to leverage greater support from both China and traditional metropolitan powers (Wallis et al, 2023, p. 481). This strategic adjustment and utilization suggest an interaction that is more intricate and livelier than the commonly oversimplified story of a dominant China impacting submissive small states. The narratives that the Pacific Islands have created are there to empower them and push back against the likes of the United States and China. This narrative does however also empower them to stand up for what they perceive to be right. Within academia, dealing with non-Western states requires academics to expand their analysis beyond the traditional concepts of hard and soft power, which are commonly applied to describe strategic

approaches in Western countries. In the Pacific, countries place significant emphasis on leveraging their shared cultures and regionalism to achieve diplomatic objectives.

### 3.4 Analysing Speeches: Development, Geoeconomics, and Strategic Partnerships

In this final section of the chapter, we are diving into speeches delivered at the United Nations General Assembly by Prime Ministers James Marape of Papua New Guinea and Manasseh Damukana Sogavare of the Solomon Islands. Their talks shed light on the specific hurdles and viewpoints unique to smaller nations on the international stage. This discussion highlights the need to broaden International Relations (IR) frameworks to better incorporate the geopolitical narratives and theoretical insights of the Pacific Islands, which are crucial for understanding the nuanced interplays of sovereignty, regional dynamics, and external engagements, particularly in the context of the rising influence of China.

#### 3.4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis in International Relations: A Methodological Approach

Analysing speeches provides deep and contextual insights into international relations, highlighting the significance of discourse in shaping global perceptions, policies, and actions, which helps us see more granular aspects of diplomacy and international politics. Banta (2012) emphasizes the need for Critical Discourse Analysis over poststructuralist discourse theory for examining discourse as a causal mechanism in international relations. He critiques the latter's limitations due to its anti-realist ontology, advocating for a critical realist approach that views discourse as dialectically related to other social practices with causal influence. Banta proposes that "By utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis, researchers can systematically analyse how discourse, alongside other mechanisms, generates social phenomena, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of discourse's role in international relations" (Banta, 2012). Norman Fairclough's seminal work on Critical Discourse Analysis underlines the intricate relationship between language, society, and culture, particularly within international relations. His interdisciplinary methodology focuses on the role of discourse in power dynamics, encapsulating the analysis into three dimensions: text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1992). He asserts, "Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of

signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64), highlighting the importance of understanding political discourse in shaping global power structures, perceptions, and policies. Having analysed a great amount of literature that mainly focuses on the theoretical aspect of how Pacific Islands should behave, it is interesting to analyse how they actually behave, based on their leaders. The speeches were chosen because they address one of the most important multilateral institutions in the world, giving them a large platform. Furthermore, as they both addressed the UN in the same session, a parallel can be pulled between them, since they would most likely cover similar issues. Applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to speeches by Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare and Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister James Marape at the United Nations exemplifies how leaders of smaller states navigate the global stage, challenging Western-centric narratives. This analysis, focusing on the interplay between text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice, unveils how these leaders assert their nations' sovereignty, strategic interests, and identity. It critically evaluates what agency looks like smaller states in international politics and enriches the understanding of international relations from a non-Western perspective, demonstrating the power of discourse in constructing social and political realities and influencing international policies and perceptions.

### 3.4.2 Strategic Diplomacy and Global Positioning of Solomon Islands

The speeches analysed for this section are both from the same UN General Assembly with the theme ' A Watershed Moment: Transformative Solutions to Interlocking Challenges' ,indicating a keen interest in what small developing states have to say. Moreover, the addresses given included the President of the Republic of Senegal, who emphasized climate change and the North-South Inequalities that still exists (United Nations, 2022). Although not a small developing island like both the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, Senegal as a developing nation itself shares similarities and issues. The theme also indicates that innovations are needed for issues that don't single out a singular state, instead this is a key moment in time when countries need to address issues together.

The speeches are those of Prime Minister James Marape of Papua New Guinea's address to the General Assembly at the United Nations on September 22, 2022, which was ahead of the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference, thus there is a great emphasis on the effects of climate change on small developing nations. The second address is by Prime Minister Manasseh Damukana Sogavare of Solomon Islands, at the opening debate of the 77<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly. In their speeches to the United Nations General Assembly, both Prime Minister James Marape of Papua New Guinea and Prime Minister Manasseh Damukana Sogavare of Solomon Islands express very specific concerns and positions regarding the many challenges faced by small states on the global stage, at the same assembly. They emphasize the need for international cooperation, respect for sovereignty, and tailored support to address these challenges. Prime Minister Marape's speech highlights the significant role small island developing states (SIDS) play in addressing global challenges, such as climate change. He argues for a re-evaluation of the global economic and financial architecture to better support the development needs of small states (Marape, 2022). Specifically, Marape advocates for the consideration of environmental, economic, and social vulnerabilities of SIDS beyond gross national income measures. He states, "This structure needs to be changed to better support our development needs," and emphasizes the need for the international community's backing of the proposed SIDS Multi Vulnerability Index (MVI). This index serves as a crucial mechanism for providing concessional financing and debt relief, tailored to the unique challenges faced by these nations.(Marabe, 2022).

On the other hand, Prime Minister Sogavare addresses the geopolitical positioning of small states within the shifting international system, emphasizing the right of sovereign nations to establish diplomatic relations based on their interests. He highlights the principle of "Friends to all and Enemies to None" to describe Solomon Islands' foreign policy stance, advocating for mutual respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of countries. Sogavare's speech is particularly pointed in defending Solomon Islands' diplomatic choices, stating, "Solomon Islands has been unfairly targeted since formalizing diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China... We have been subjected to a barrage of unwarranted and misplaced criticisms, misinformation and intimidation that threatens our democracy and sovereignty" (Sogavare, 2022). This argument highlights the

complex reality that small states must balance their autonomy and development aspirations against the backdrop of intricate global politics. Both leaders underscore the importance of international cooperation, respect for sovereignty, and tailored support to address the multifaceted challenges encountered by small states. Marape emphasizes economic support, while Sogavare stresses geopolitical acknowledgment, reflecting the complex reality small states navigate in balancing autonomy, development aspirations, and global politics. Their speeches call for an international framework that upholds sovereignty, fosters development, and ensures the welfare of small nations.

Reading and listening to the two addresses some slight differences in tones can be identified. The speeches by Hon. James Marape offer a fascinating comparative study in diplomatic language, tone, and thematic focus. Both leaders address global challenges, yet their approaches and emphasis vary, reflecting their nations' unique positions and priorities on the international stage. Marape's speech is characterized by a formal, respectful tone, underscored by expressions of gratitude towards UN officials and predecessors. His language is inclusive and collaborative, frequently using "we" to signify collective action and shared responsibility. Marape emphasizes multilateralism, peace, and sustainability, aligning with the UN's agenda. He highlights specific challenges like COVID-19, climate change, and socio-economic issues, advocating for transformative actions anchored in collective commitments and multilateral support. The speech is optimistic, focusing on potential progress through education, development, and international cooperation.

Sogavare's address, while sharing some thematic similarities with Marape's, such as climate change and sustainable development, places a stronger emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference, and the right to choose diplomatic partners. His tone is assertive, and sterner, particularly when discussing criticisms and pressures faced since establishing diplomatic relations with China. This assertiveness is indicative that Solomon Island's leadership is willing to push back and doing so openly. Sogavare advocates for a "Friends to all, Enemies to none" policy, highlighting Solomon Islands' independence in its international interactions, at an assembly where he addresses all UN recognized states that are present. He also highlights the strategic importance of the Pacific region, urging respect for national sovereignty and cautioning against inflaming geopolitical tensions. Both speeches utilize strategic

word choice to appeal to the international community for support and understanding, yet Sogavare's speech contains a more pronounced defence of national sovereignty and decision-making autonomy. This difference reflects the geopolitical pressures and criticisms Solomon Islands has faced, contrasting with Papua New Guinea's focus on 'collaborative global action' in the context of SIDS and climate. While both leaders address global and regional challenges, Marape's speech is more focused on collaborative efforts for sustainability and development, using a tone of optimism and inclusivity. Sogavare, meanwhile, emphasizes sovereignty, the importance of non-interference, and the challenges of external criticism and geopolitical tensions, adopting a more assertive stance. The contrasting tones reflect the different approaches and priorities of the two leaders. Marape's speech emphasizes multilateralism, peace, and sustainability, using an inclusive and optimistic tone. In contrast, Sogavare's address is characterized by a more assertive tone, underscoring Solomon Islands' sovereignty and independence in the face of external criticism and geopolitical pressures. Placing it in context, Solomon Islands, at this has been pointed out by Sogavare has received criticism for its relationship with China. These differences in tone highlight how small island nations navigate their roles and assert their interests within the global community, with Marape's collaborative approach differing from Sogavare's more defensive posture.

Their speeches, strategic acts of political communication, aimed to assert their countries' positions as proactive, dignified participants in global discourse. By articulating their visions on such a global platform, Marape and Sogavare positioned their nations as key contributors to addressing worldwide challenges like climate change, advocating for the recognition of Pacific Island states' roles and rights in shaping global outcomes. Marape's declaration of it being an "honour and privilege" to address the assembly (Marape, 2022), and Sogavare's emphasis on "sovereign equals" (Sogavare, 2022), highlighted their commitment to engaging with global issues while maintaining national autonomy. Their discussions on climate change, economic development, and regional security, strategically aligned with global initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, underscored a calculated effort to integrate the Pacific's concerns within a broader international framework. Calls for transforming "words into actions" (Marape, 2022) and for "genuine and honest cooperation and partnership" (Sogavare, 2022) urged the international community towards collaborative efforts based on mutual respect

and multilateralism. The impact of these speeches extends beyond the United Nations, influencing both international policy and domestic perspectives. The sophisticated diplomatic engagement reflects a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of global challenges and the importance of inclusive, equitable solutions, asserting the relevance and agency of Pacific Island nations in global discourse.

### 3.4.3: Sovereignty, Self-Determination, and the Pacific

In their addresses to the United Nations General Assembly, Prime Ministers James Marape of Papua New Guinea and Manasseh Damukana Sogavare of Solomon Islands passionately articulated the essence of sovereignty and the unwavering right to self-determination that underscores their nations' engagements on the international stage. Marape's declaration of it being his "honour and privilege to... address this august Hall" (Marape, 2022) positions Papua New Guinea as a respected voice in global dialogue, conveying a sense of reverence and recognition of the importance of this international forum. These halls serve as the stage where sovereignty is enacted and the actions of these two political leaders serve to confirm this. Sogavare, mirroring this sentiment, champions the principle of sovereign equality, asserting that all nations, regardless of their size or power, stand as equals (Sogavare, 2022). Since the speeches took place at the General Assembly, the audience would be very large, encompassing the entire globe. This perspective directly challenges the outdated view of Pacific Island nations as mere onlookers in global affairs, instead highlighting their proactive and influential roles. The speeches address the shifting geopolitical landscape that has reinvigorated global interest in the Pacific, a region central to contemporary international politics. Sogavare's remarks on the "renewed strategic interests in our home; the Pacific" (Sogavare, 2022) underscore the region's importance and the double-edged sword of external engagement that brings both opportunities and challenges, particularly in maintaining the direction of their own development paths. This discourse underscores a keen awareness of the Pacific's strategic significance, advocating for development and cooperation strategies that remain true to Pacific priorities and identity, as encapsulated in the "2050 Strategy of the Blue Pacific Continent" (Sogavare, 2022). In the previous section the discussion on the Blue Pacific strategy proved to be an

important and significant strategy to assert sovereignty and reframe the Pacific, away from Great Power's. Sogavare emphasising this in his address signifies the importance that the strategy has for the Pacific. At the Assembly he is able to share the strategy with the entire international community, thus further asserting their position. Marape's aspiration to elevate Papua New Guinea to a middle-income status by 2050 (Marape, 2022) embodies a broader narrative of economic empowerment and sovereignty. This is further pointed out in 2023 when explained, that Papua New Guinea keeps China in the 'space of the economy, and we went with traditional security partners for security' (Reuters, 2023). His vision extends beyond economic metrics, asserting the right to pursue a development trajectory that is reflective of the nation's unique circumstances and ambitions. This vision critiques the prevailing global economic frameworks that disadvantage smaller nations, advocating for a reimagined global economic order that supports the development aspirations of countries like Papua New Guinea.

Both leaders champion the importance of engaging with the global economy on terms that respect their nations' sovereignty and developmental aspirations. Marape's advocacy for a just global economic system and Sogavare's foreign policy principle of "Friends to all and Enemies to None" (Sogavare, 2022) reflect a shared commitment to economic sovereignty. Economic sovereignty enables Solomon Islands to These stances underscore a strategic approach to international relations and economic partnerships, prioritizing mutual respect and the avoidance of alignments that could detract from their developmental goals. The themes of economic development and sovereignty in their speeches highlight the intricate relationship between national growth ambitions and the global economic landscape, advocating for development strategies that are equitable, sustainable, and cognizant of national contexts. By doing so, they position Pacific Island nations as assertive participants in global development discourse, challenging the international community to support development models that respect the sovereign rights and environmental responsibilities of all nations. There is a clear trend in the speeches that points towards the emphasis of these small states on asserting their sovereignty in all aspects, and their decisions being respected.

Being a member of a globalised world and pointing out that there are issues that everyone needs to address together, doesn't diminish their need for sovereignty,

especially when dealing with great powers. Both leaders emphasize multilateralism as crucial for addressing global challenges and advancing their national and regional priorities. Marape's call for an integrated agenda for peace and sustainability through multilateral efforts (Marape, 2022), alongside Sogavare's appeal for genuine cooperation (Sogavare, 2022), illustrates a deep belief in the power of collective action and shared responsibilities. Their support for global agreements like the Paris Agreement and initiatives such as the "Pacific Resilience Facility" (Sogavare, 2022) highlights their commitment to leveraging multilateral platforms to amplify Pacific concerns and solutions on the world stage. The way the two leaders framed their commitment towards development, reflects their need for development, but not at the cost of their sovereignty. Part of this is making their own decisions and being respected enough for this. On the other hand, it also indicates that being a friend to all and an enemy to none, that it doesn't matter where the economic development comes from. As we have seen in previous chapters, economic incentives can be a way for larger states to control smaller states, and repeatedly calling out attention to sovereignty is their way of telling the world, to respect it.

In their speeches, Marape and Sogavare adeptly steer through the challenges of championing sovereignty and self-determination in an increasingly connected world. The frequent use of terms related to sovereignty, self-determination, and economic empowerment emphasizes the core values and strategic priorities of the Pacific Island nations. They share an ambitious and forward-thinking blueprint for their nations and the wider Pacific, deeply rooted in the right to self-rule and equal standing. Marape and Sogavare elevate their nations' voices in the global conversation, not just advancing their own countries' interests but also pushing for a transformed international system that truly recognizes and values the distinct contributions and rights of smaller island nations in directing our shared future. They present their nations not as remote or passive players but as proactive participants in crafting global solutions. This balance between welcoming international engagement and fiercely protecting their independence underscores their speeches. Their plea for unity within the Pacific and thoughtful interaction with major world powers showcases a sophisticated diplomatic strategy. It's a call to acknowledge the Pacific's united front and the critical role of fair, all-encompassing global leadership. The stories they shared at the United Nations General Assembly deeply resonate with the ideals of sovereignty, progress, and collaborative international efforts.

#### 3.4.4 Analysis of the speeches in a larger thesis context

This thesis delves into the often-overlooked dynamics of small states in the arena of international relations, traditionally dominated by the narratives of great power politics, particularly the intensifying rivalry between China and the United States. Pessimistic views, like those of John Mearsheimer, suggest that the ascent of China is inherently conflictual, leaving smaller states ensnared in the power struggles between behemoths (Mearsheimer, 2014). This perspective, while insightful, tends to overshadow the agency and positions of smaller states in the global order. The insightful addresses by Prime Ministers James Marape of Papua New Guinea and Manasseh Damukana Sogavare of Solomon Islands at the United Nations General Assembly serve as a critical counterpoint to this narrative, showcasing the nuanced and proactive roles small states can play on the global stage.

Marape and Sogavare's speeches underscore not just the sovereignty of their nations but their deliberate and strategic engagement with major global powers and institutions. Marape's expression of honour in representing his nation (Marape, 2022) and Sogavare's emphasis on sovereign equality and a diplomatic stance of having "no enemies – only friends" (Sogavare, 2022) reflect a sophisticated understanding of the complex geopolitical landscape they navigate. These positions challenge the historical depiction of Pacific Island nations as passive entities, revealing instead their active diplomacy and strategic autonomy. The concept of the "Blue Pacific" strategy, as highlighted by Sogavare (Sogavare, 2022), exemplifies the Pacific Islands' collective effort to assert their sovereignty and articulate their narrative on their terms. This strategy is an embodiment of their resistance against being mere pawns in the geopolitical designs of larger powers and a testament to their agency in shaping their destiny. Tarcisius Kabutaulaka's analysis supports this view, arguing that Pacific Island nations are effectively utilizing narrative and soft power to navigate the currents of international relations, countering traditional Western approaches dominated by economic and military strategies (Kabutaulaka, 2021).

This diplomacy and strategic engagement with the global community, as articulated by Marape and Sogavare, reflect a broader trend of small states exercising significant influence through multilateralism and strategic partnerships. The repeated use of the word “partnership” is indicative of framing the relationship as mutually beneficial rather than one of dominance. Their approaches resonate with liberal institutionalism, as proposed by Robert Keohane (1984), which posits that international institutions and cooperative engagements are crucial for peaceful global relations, including for small island states. The Pacific leaders’ advocacy for sustainable development and equitable global economic practices highlights a shift towards recognizing the power of small states in influencing global policies and norms, challenging the traditional *realpolitik* view of international relations dominated by military and economic might. Furthermore, the leaders' emphasis on a fair and equitable global economic system, climate change resilience, and sustainable development reflects an acute awareness of the challenges and opportunities presented by the global economy. Their strategic use of economic partnerships and multilateral forums to advance their national interests underscores the multifaceted nature of power in international relations, as discussed by David A. Baldwin (2020). This approach challenges conventional paradigms, advocating for an international order that respects the sovereignty and developmental aspirations of all nations, regardless of size. Through initiatives aimed at sustainable development and equitable global economic practices, these leaders demonstrate how small states can leverage economic statecraft to influence global policies and norms, challenging the dominance of traditional military and economic powers. This approach underscores the multifaceted nature of power in the modern world, where economic partnerships and multilateral engagement serve as critical platforms for small states to assert their interests and contribute to a more balanced and fair international order.

The speeches of Marape and Sogavare, analysed within the context of this thesis, offer a poignant illustration of how small Pacific Island nations are not just reacting to global dynamics but actively shaping them. Their calls for "an integrated agenda for peace, prosperity, and sustainability through multilateralism" (Marape, 2022) and for "genuine and honest cooperation and partnership with all" (Sogavare, 2022) encapsulate a vision for international relations that values cooperation, mutual respect, and the sovereign rights of all nations. This perspective not only challenges

the conventional wisdom within international relations theory but also calls for a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of global dynamics. This thesis, through the lens of Marape and Sogavare's addresses, advocates for a re-evaluation of the roles and influence of small states in the international system. This showcases the strategic prowess and diplomatic flexibility of Pacific Island nations as they navigate the intricate landscape of global politics, disrupting established narratives of power and influence. By weaving together insights from both Western and non-Western perspectives, the thesis proposes a more holistic and representative discourse in international relations, one that acknowledges and appreciates the agency, aspirations, and contributions of small states, particularly those in the Pacific, in crafting a more equitable and sustainable global order.

#### Conclusion:

Exploring the shifts in global politics, especially through the lens of the Pacific Islands, reveals we're at a crucial juncture. The old ways of viewing international relations, heavily skewed towards Western perspectives, don't quite capture the full essence of what's happening in regions like the Pacific. Here, smaller nations aren't just on the side-lines; they're making bold moves, drawing on their collective "Blue Pacific" identity to stake their claim on the international scene. This breaks away from the dated view that smaller states have little to no impact on the grand scale of things. Watching these nations navigate the complexities thrown their way, particularly with China's rising presence, is nothing short of inspiring. By welcoming ideas from across the globe, such as Confucianism and strategies centred on decolonization, we're offered a richer, more rounded understanding of international dynamics.

The path to a more inclusive and fairer international relations field is laden with challenges. It demands a willingness to challenge the status quo, engage in meaningful dialogues that span diverse viewpoints, and champion policies that truly reflect the ambitions of all countries. The strategic diplomacy and storytelling employed by Pacific Island nations are not just noteworthy but provide essential lessons for international relations and global politics. Opening the doors to a variety of perspectives can significantly deepen our grasp of the complex, interconnected

world we inhabit, fostering international relations that are not only more comprehensive but also more respectful and effective. As we grapple with global challenges, the call for an international relations framework that mirrors everyone's reality has never been more urgent.

## Conclusion: Navigating the New Geopolitical Realities of the Pacific: Sovereignty, Strategy, and the Future of International Relations

The research undertaken in this thesis has been primarily centred on exploring the domain of International Relations to gather and analyse valuable concepts, discussions, and advancements. The objective has been to deepen our understanding of the interplay between existing often western oriented theories and literature, and China, aiming to move beyond the often simplistic and adversarial views commonly depicted in media narratives. This inquiry has challenged conventional International Relations theories and advocated for a more nuanced and inclusive conversation that respects the agency, sovereignty, and strategic insight of all states involved, regardless of their size. The concluding section synthesizes the essential findings and insights from the analysis, emphasizing their relevance and impact on the field of International Relations and the wider geopolitical context.

The initial chapter explores the complexities of China's global rise, examining the perspectives of offensive realism, economic interdependence, and economic statecraft. It challenges the traditional realist emphasis on military power as the sole determinant of state influence, arguing that economic power and interdependence play a crucial role in shaping international relations. The chapter delved into the strategic use of economic tools by China, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, to extend its global influence. It also analysed the nuanced Sino-US relationship, where economic ties have the potential to reduce the likelihood of military conflict, presenting a more intricate global landscape than assumed by realist theories. The chapter advocates for a revised understanding of power that encompasses economic statecraft and interdependence, highlighting the evolving nature of international power dynamics.

The chapter delves into the concept of economic statecraft, emphasizing its pivotal role in contemporary global politics. It explores how states strategically employ

economic tools like sanctions, trade agreements, and foreign investments to assert influence and achieve geopolitical objectives beyond mere economic gain. Drawing on David A. Baldwin's seminal work, the chapter underscores the multifaceted nature of economic statecraft, highlighting its significance in reshaping international power dynamics. By dissecting the strategic underpinnings and global implications of economic statecraft, the chapter contributes to a nuanced understanding of how states utilize economic strategies within foreign policy frameworks to project power, redefine global power structures, and navigate the complexities of international relations in the 21st century. This was further utilized by the example of the Belt and Road Initiative, and how it's being used in the Pacific, thus creating a space that goes beyond just economic statecraft.

In the final chapter, the intricate dynamics of international relations in the Pacific Islands, particularly in response to China's expanding influence, underscore the urgent need for a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive and representative approach. The region's strategic importance and unique challenges demand a nuanced understanding that transcends traditional Western-centric perspectives. By integrating non-Western IR theories rooted in concepts like Confucianism, relational sovereignty, and decolonization, a more comprehensive framework emerges that respects the sovereignty and agency of all states, especially those in vulnerable regions like the Pacific Islands. The speeches by Prime Ministers of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands at the United Nations General Assembly exemplify how Pacific nations are actively shaping their destinies on the global stage, leveraging narratives like the "Blue Pacific" to assert their collective agency. The case of Nauru's diplomatic switch to China highlights the complex power dynamics and strategic interests at play within the region. This calls for a reconceptualization of IR to embrace a broader spectrum of theories and perspectives, fostering respectful and effective international policies that consider the interests and dignity of Pacific Island nations. As global power dynamics evolve, it becomes increasingly crucial to adopt pluralistic approaches that challenge dominant narratives and capture the multifaceted interactions shaping our interconnected world. By decolonizing knowledge production and embracing diverse perspectives, a more holistic understanding of the Pacific's history and political landscape emerges, empowering Pacific Islanders to navigate their autonomy and identity amidst complex geopolitical shifts. This shift towards inclusivity promises a more accurate reflection of global

realities and paves the way for a more globally representative and inclusive discipline in international relations.

Exploring the geopolitical significance of the Pacific Islands, we see a transformation from overlooked entities to vital participants in global discussions. The growing influence of China in this region, set against the backdrop of adept diplomacy by leaders like James Marape and Manasseh Damukana Sogavare, underscores the strategic importance now attributed to these islands. Their compelling presentations at the United Nations highlight their nations' autonomy while deftly navigating the complex web of global politics. China's foray into the Pacific, with its economic ventures and the Belt and Road Initiative, has elicited a range of reactions from these nations, showcasing their careful balance between welcoming development and maintaining their sovereignty. This complex geopolitical conversation is enriched by integrating non-Western international relations theories, shedding new light on concepts of sovereignty and global interaction that align more closely with the Pacific Islands' realities. The focus on sovereignty and self-determination, particularly evident in the passionate advocacy of Pacific leaders on the international stage, breaks away from traditional power structures, advocating for a more inclusive and just approach to global relations. This call for a wider lens in international relations, acknowledging the diverse contributions of global actors, represents a critical step towards reshaping global governance, aiming for frameworks that truly empower small island nations and other overlooked communities on the world stage.

#### Limitations, Reflection and Future Directions

While this study provides a comprehensive analysis of China's engagement in the Pacific through the lens of economic statecraft and the Belt and Road Initiative, there are some potential limitations that could be addressed in future research. Firstly, the study's heavy reliance on Western academic sources, despite the emphasis on incorporating non-Western perspectives, may still result in a Eurocentric bias in the analysis. Incorporating more direct voices and primary sources from Pacific Island nations could help balance this and offer deeper insights into how these countries perceive and navigate China's economic influence. Additionally, the case studies focused on in the paper, while illustrative, may not fully capture the diversity of

experiences across the Pacific region. Expanding the geographic scope to include a wider range of Pacific Island countries could yield a more representative understanding of China's economic statecraft in the region. Finally, the study's qualitative approach, while valuable, could be complemented by quantitative analyses to assess the measurable economic and political impacts of China's initiatives. Incorporating both methodologies could strengthen the robustness of the findings and allow for more nuanced conclusions. Overall, this study lays an important foundation, but future research could build upon it by further amplifying non-Western voices, broadening the geographic coverage, and integrating quantitative data to provide an even more comprehensive understanding of China's evolving economic statecraft in the Pacific.

Diving deeper into the unique experiences of each Pacific Island nation in their engagement with China could have brought the nuanced realities of these interactions to life, highlighting the distinctive blend of history, culture, and economics shaping each island's strategic stance. Incorporating more voices from scholars and policymakers within the Pacific Islands themselves would have lent a genuine and critical perspective to the analysis, challenging the Western-centric narrative that often dominates international relations discussions. Additionally, drawing comparisons with other regions, like Africa or the Caribbean, which also navigate the complex dance with global powers, could have unveiled broader themes and strategies in the relationships between major and smaller states. This expanded approach promises not only to deepen our understanding of China's engagement in the Pacific, but also to offer a fuller, more representative picture of the region's intricate role in the vast landscape of global politics. Looking ahead, there's a wealth of potential in exploring the rich tapestry of non-Western theoretical implications, the deep impact of cultural and historical contexts on international relations, and the innovative diplomatic paths being charted in the Pacific. The dynamic interplay between China and the Pacific Islands, set against the backdrop of global power shifts in the Indo-Pacific, beckons for continued and focused study.

This thesis brings to light the active role of the Pacific Islands in the intricate dance of global politics, urging a profound transformation in how International Relations theories are crafted and understood. It intertwines the assertive sovereignty of the Pacific Islands, China's expansive reach, and the rich insights from non-Western

perspectives to challenge the prevailing Eurocentric focus. By doing so, it calls for a broader, more inclusive approach to International Relations that truly reflects the diversity of global actors. This work is a call to action for International Relations to grow beyond its traditional boundaries, recognizing the voices and narratives of all nations, irrespective of their size. It envisions an International Relations discipline that is not only aware of but actively engages with the myriad ways nations interact on the global stage, paving the way for a more just and inclusive international order. This thesis is a testament to the potential for a richer, more equitable field of International Relations, one that embraces the full spectrum of global experiences in understanding the dynamics that shape our interconnected world.

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