Research Theories and Methods
in International Relations
Moisés Silva Fernandes

The subject that I propose to talk about is that of multi-secular Luso-Chinese relations. We will focus on the levels of analysis in the fields of International Relations, thus completing the questions raised in Professor Luís Filipe Barreto’s excellent address on sources and analytic methods in the scientific area of History in particular and of Social and Human Sciences in general.

Although one of the main priorities of International Relations is to strive to find constants and ruptures, as well as to identify trends in the evolution of the international system so as to conduct prospective studies, the aim of today’s presentation is to categorize and understand the interactions and dynamics of bilateral relations between China and Portugal and vice versa.

Following the clash with the West, from the mid 19th century the Qing Dynasty (清朝, also known as the Manchu Dynasty) started to accept – albeit reluctantly – many of the conventional forms that regulated western diplomatic interactions. Prior to the two Opium Wars in the mid 19th century, China’s attitude to the rest of the world had been completely different: it was Sino-centric, in other words it considered itself the center of the world and self-sufficient.

This change of stance was extremely important because it was effectively at the start of the 20th century that Portugal was able to appoint its first civil plenipotentiary minister and see him recognised, namely the head of its mission in China, José de Azevedo Castelo
Brano who was nephew of the respected author Camilo Castelo Branco. Although he had successfully negotiated two deals with China, the Portuguese Court had refused to ratify them. In spite of these two significant defeats, he was the last Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Bragança Dynasty. Before José de Azevedo Castelo Branco’s appointment as the first civil plenipotentiary minister in China, these functions were carried out by the Governor of Macau who acted as Portugal’s representative to the Government of China and also that of Japan and Siam (Thailand), accumulating this charge with his responsibilities as Governor.

Despite changing from a monarchy to a republic, Portugal maintained formal diplomatic relations with the hegemonic power in Mainland China until 1949. However, after this date it continued its relations with the predominant political regime in the Taiwan archipelago, namely with the totalitarian regime of the Chinese Nationalist Party, GMD, headed by Generalissimo Jiang Jieshi (蔣介石 Chang Kai-shek), until 1975. This delicate and complex relationship has been analysed in a number of works. Indeed, this situation meant that there were no formal diplomatic relations with the hegemonic political power in Mainland China for nearly 30 years, namely between 1949 and 1979.

Inevitably, this intricate scenario required that the Portuguese Central Government and Portuguese Administration of Macau on one hand, and the Central Government of China and the Provincial Government of Guangdong on the other adopted a series strategies to co-opt the tiny political-commercial Chinese elite belonging to the hegemonic power in Mainland China so as to facilitate the continuation of the formal Portuguese administration and the respective management of the concrete interests at stake.

In the field of the theory of International Relations and the studies of comparative foreign policies, there is broad scientific consensus on the levels of analysis that influenced decision making, and thanks to their highly comparative nature, they can be applied to any type of actor, be it the Central State or its sub-units, organisations from civil society, non-governmental organisations and so on. The most developed and consolidated actors obviously have more human and financial resources at their disposal as well as other instruments and response capacities than an actor that has been independent for only
a short time like East Timor, for example, where the lack of resources, instruments and institutional capacities is notorious.

John D. Singer and Celso Lafer argue that there are two main variables of analysis, the internal and the external. On the other hand, Kenneth N. Waltz, one of the most prominent theoreticians of the USA's Neo-realism School of International Relations advocates that there are three broad categories of analysis: human nature, the State and the international system, with his research giving preference to the latter perspective. Others defended that there were four factors: the endogenous, the exogenous, the governmental and the individual. James N. Rosenau, Maurice A. East, Stephen A. Salmore and Charles F. Hermann, however, sustain there are five large groups of variables. In their work on the scientific form of how the foreign policy of the USA should be studied, they argued there were the following variables: the individual, those of functions, governmental, societal and systemic.

Let us now turn to an analysis of the theoretical assumptions of each of the five broad variables and illustrate them with some concrete examples. We will start with the individual variables. These encompass the characteristics of the decision makers that determine the broad guidelines of the States' foreign policy, classified as high politics. In the case of China, there is an obvious difference between the leadership of Mao Zedong (毛泽东) and of Deng Xiaoping (邓小平). Both are from the same party organisation, the Chinese Communist Party, but they represent very distinct forms of dealing with the outside world. This variable covers the values, the talents and the accumulated experiences of the decision makers. The specific experience of Mao Zedong was quite distinct from that of other leaders from the same generation, such as Deng Xiaoping. What are their interests in foreign policy? Are they leaders that are concerned with a foreign policy? Their training: do they have academic qualifications? If so, what kind? When Deng Xiaoping was young, he worked in a factory and studied in France. This experience made him more aware of what was happening outside of China, to other realities; in other words, as a leader it made him more sensitive to the international environment.

If a fair assessment is to be made of the individual variables, the government departments must be able to draw profiles of foreign leaders. This British and American
tradition, of the Foreign Office and the U.S. Department of State respectively, has never been adopted in Portugal. These profiles are extremely useful in the decision making process for high and middle politics and when preparing complex negotiations.

Many of the studies using the profiles of political leaders result from biographies which are inspired above all by theoretical approaches grounded in psychoanalysis. A number of authors have demonstrated how the childhood experiences of political leaders influenced their behavior and the decision making process (Erikson, 1950). Erik H. Erikson tried to establish a correlation between the development crises of Martin Luther King (1962) and Mahatma Gandhi (1969) when adults with their respective political behavior.

Other authors turn to the operational code of the political leaders. Alexander L. George describes this as: "A political leader's beliefs about the nature of politics and political conflict, his view regarding the extent to which historical developments can be shaped, and his notions of correct strategy and tactics" (1969, p. 197). So, let's look at some more concrete examples. Salazar's unshakable defense of the integrity of the Portuguese Empire against the predominant winds of history in the 1960s. Charles de Gaulle's "civilizing mission" of France which ended in Algeria in 1962. The George W. Bush vision that resorted to the Manichaeistic vision of the world ("the forces of good and evil").

It is general knowledge that in the Anglo-Saxon world this theoretical approach triggers great interest among academia, governments and journalists.

Turning now to the functions variable, in other words the positions that the people hold and how the strategic options of the regimes condition the State's behavior. The behavior of the decision makers and those executing the foreign policy is conditioned by the positions they hold and the State's official policy. In spite of the particular attitudes and special talents of the decision makers and executives, even if acquired in the previous regime (because this is obviously what happens), the responsibilities they acquire when they take office include the commitment to the guidelines and practices of their predecessors.

Salazar's foreign policy between 1945 and 1968 was oriented towards obtaining support from the USA and Great Britain to maintain the Portuguese Empire. This position was severely shaken with the Goa crisis in 1961. The regime was obliged to
find new allies in the West: France and the Federal Republic of Germany, who became Portugal’s main suppliers of arms, information and political support.

With the intensification of the iron defense of the mythical Portuguese Empire’s political integrity following the fall of Goa, Salazar resisted the proposal for the realignment of the Portuguese foreign policy that was presented to him by his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Franco Nogueira, and drawn up by André Gonçalves Pereira, José Manuel Fragoso and Luís Teixeira Pinto. Broadly speaking, their proposal was that the Portuguese regime should go ahead with the partial decolonisation of the Empire. On 12 January 1962, Franco Nogueira carried the 18 page document to the President of the Council of Ministers, António de Oliveira Salazar, which called for the reorientation of Portuguese foreign and colonial policies with the aim of reducing Portugal’s international isolation. In essence, this document recognised that the main aim of the anti-colonial movement was the political – and not military – defeat of the regime and that “Portugal did not have the political, economic or military means at its disposal to carry out its policy alone”. Intent on avoiding the regime’s collapse, it advocated the means of political negotiation for the Portuguese colonial question and the abandoning of the “unifying vision and the search for individual solutions for each of the overseas territories”. Accordingly, it was registered that not all the colonies had the same political value and defended that a distinction could be made between “essential and non-essential positions” (underlined in the original). Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde came under the first category while the remaining colonies were relegated to the “non-essential” category (underlined in the original).

As for Macau, it proposed that negotiations would begin with the hegemonic power in Mainland China in exchange for the Mao Zedong regime’s agreement to establish diplomatic relations with Portugal in order to transform “Macau, as a jointly owned free port so as to determine or until the handover of sovereignty with the maintenance of symbolic ties with Portugal”.

Anticommunism was another structuring aspect of Salazar’s foreign policy. However, this guideline was not applied with the same force and intensity in all the colonies or territories administered by Portugal. On the contrary. Anti-communism never ruled in Macau for example. One of the ideologists of the Salazar regime, Henrique Martins.
de Carvalho, Minister of Health and Welfare between 1958 and 1962, wrote a series of communications and books; these included a communication on Portuguese foreign policy that he intended to present to the IV Congress of the National Union in May 1956 in which he advocated that “the defense against communism internally should be separated from the possibility of co-existing with communist states at the international level” (1964, p. 24). This was precisely the phenomenon that was seen in Macau during the 30 years when there were no diplomatic relations between the two countries. In short, pragmatism put strong constraints on the application of the regime’s strategic orientations in the enclave.

The political orientations adopted by the First Constitutional Government from 1976 continue to prevail today. The priorities have obviously varied but the broad lines of Portuguese foreign policy have remained unchanged. Strategic choices such as European integration, privileged relations with the United States of America, cooperation with Portuguese-speaking countries and the resolution of the remains of the first empire, Macau and East Timor, have been the main lines of Portuguese foreign policy since the institutionalization of the Second Republic.

Let’s turn now to the governmental variables. Do the government structures limit or strengthen foreign policy decisions?

The inter-institutional relations between the organs of power condition the behavior of a country’s government. In semi-presidential regimes, the relations between the Heads of State and the government take on very interesting characteristics indeed. After the 1976 Constitution came into force, the negotiations on Macau gave rise to significant behind the scenes conflicts between the Presidency of the Republic and the Government and vice versa. A number of academic studies noted this increased difficulty and referred to the successive negotiations on the territory as a case study of inter-institutional conflict. On the other hand, the very distinct nature of the types of regime (democratic, authoritarian and totalitarian) may end up affecting their respective behaviors. How can a democratic regime, permeable to the influence of public opinion and civil society, negotiate with a totalitarian or authoritarian regime in which this reality is absent or profoundly mitigated by the very nature of the regime?
The importance of the complex coordination and the inter-departmental conflicts within the actual governmental structures. The difficulties of the policy and budgetary coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance that is found in any country; between the information services.

The growing importance and at the same time complexity of the intra-departmental coordination, in other words, on one hand politically speaking between the cabinet of the Minister and the three Secretaries of State for example in terms of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and on the other of the Secretary-General, the Directors-General, the Directors of Services in the political-administrative field. All this leads to a highly complex process of decision making and orientation.

Now, we will move on to examining the societal variables, as these have repercussions on the behavior of international actors. Do non-governmental aspects of society influence the State's external behavior? Are the actors Nations or States? This indicator is of the utmost importance since most States are not Nations. Types of political organisation: unitary, federal or hybrid? Levels of development. What type of society: traditional, industrial or post-industrial? What kind of cultural policy predominates: parochial, passive or participative? Active or passive civil society? The functions of the political parties must also be analysed, as well as those of the interest and pressure groups, the employer and trade union organisations, the agriculture collectives, the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), the organs of the mass media and the existence or not of an informed public. And then the actual academic community which, as we all know, in the United States and the Anglo-Saxon world contributes to the formulation of extremely fundamental decisions while in other countries it is quite simply ignored.

The systemic variable. The weight of certain States on the international stage, profoundly marked by the geographic “reality” and the implicit or explicit territorial and identity disputes with neighboring or distant countries is of great importance. The State has remained the main actor on the international stage since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The 19th and 20th centuries fully confirmed the supremacy of the ideas of nationalism, the strong identification of individuals and groups with the State and the Nation. Although the Nation-State is experiencing a slow relative erosion of its formal
powers, it continues to enjoy the status of playing the leading role on the international stage. Indeed, this fact can be empirically assessed by analysing the evolution of the number of States in the international system. While there were just 53 sovereign States in 1917, the number had risen to 192 in 2005.

In addition to States, other actors emerge who have influence in the international system through the States. International inter-governmental; organisations (world and regional) like the European Union, which is still inter-governmental; the multinationals or transnationals as the United Nations usually terms them; international non-governmental organisations; terrorism and international organised crime. All this brings us to the great complexity that characterizes the contemporary international system.

Turning now to the conclusions. The five large groups of variables that we have just presented allow a more comprehensive, multifaceted, heuristic and pluri- and multidisciplinary approach. We should therefore avoid mono-causal explanations because they distort our research, lead to partial results and can justify the taking of unrealistic, erroneous and groundless decisions.

The importance of one group of variables should not be allowed to outweigh that of others. On the contrary, a considerable number of variables should always be part of the equation when conducting rigorous, balanced and prudent work. In fact, there is a book entitled *Group Thinking: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos*, by Irving L. Janis, which addresses the broad consensus obtained in restricted decision groups lacking in critical thought and an analysis and cold assessment of the consequences that led to the making of serious mistakes like, for example, Pearl Harbor, the Korean War, the Bay of Pigs, the Vietnam War, among other fiascos. According to Janis, these restricted groups of decision makers always need members who are the devil’s advocate. In short, questioning and adversarial practice in restricted groups of decision makers can contribute to improving the decision making process.

The preponderance of each group of variables will obviously depend on the matter or subject under consideration.

I now have some reading suggestions for anyone who would like to further their knowledge in this scientific area or who are interested in these matters. The first work by
Graham T. Allison briefly sets out the various kinds of theoretical approach to the Cuba missile crisis. The book by the same author analyses the Cuba crisis from three different analytical perspectives of the decision models. This powerful work is almost mandatory reading for students of International Relations in North America. The study by Jonathan Bendor and Thomas Hammond is a critical analysis of these two works by Graham T. Allison.

Then the book by João Gomes Cravinho, *Visões do Mundo: As Relações Internacionais e o Mundo Contemporâneo*, now in its second edition and published by the Imprensa das Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, is an innovative and composite approach in the Portuguese university context as it brings a wide variety of important authors and texts to the reader’s attention.

Maurice A. East, Stephen A. Salmore and Charles F. Hermann in *Why Nations Act: Theoretical Perspectives for Comparative Foreign Policy Studies* use the five groups of variables that we have looked at during this presentation. Then, the three works by Erik H. Erikson study the key moments, as the meaning of life, of various public figures and leaders. In Alexander L. George’s ground breaking article “The «Operational Code»: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making”, he focused on the repercussions of cognitive convictions in the behavior of political decision makers and the functions of stress in decision making.

With the aim of broadening and determining the research methods in International Relations, Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (coordinators of the *Historical Sociology of International Relations: Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, which enjoys the collaboration of other academics) make a serious and in-depth analysis of the main theoretical and methodological questions that have marked the great academic debates in the knowledge areas of History and International Relations.

In Robert Jervis’s innovative article entitled “Perceptions and the Level-of-Analysis Problem”, he addresses the complexity of decision making and the four broad variables that make an indelible mark on the theoretical debate: bureaucracy, the nature of the State, the domestic factors and the international environment.
In *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity*, James N. Rosenau concentrates his sharp analysis on the changes and continuities in the contemporary international system, while in his previous work, *The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy: Essays on the Analysis of World Politics*, he argues vehemently in favor of adopting the five broad variables we have just presented.

Edited by
Luís Filipe Barreto

Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, I.P.
MINISTÉRIO DA CIÊNCIA, TECNOLOGIA E ENSINO SUPERIOR

FCT Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia