THE GRIFFITH-TSINGHUA ‘HOW CHINA SEES THE WORLD’

Chinese International Relations Scholars Debates and Foreign Policy Adjustments
By XU Jin
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Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University

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Project Introduction

How to understand China’s rise and its implications for Asia and the world is an imperative task for both scholars and policy makers. China has become the second largest economy next to the United States since 2010. China is also the major trading partner for over 140 countries in the world. As United States-China relations will define the next century, it is essential to build mutual understanding for policy makers. If strategic distrust is a major obstacle in US-China relations, as Kenneth Lieberthal and Jisi Wang have suggested, deepening our understanding of Chinese perceptions and views on international relations will be a crucial task for bridging the perception gap and mitigating the strategic distrust between the two nations.

This project aims to make sense of China’s rise in world politics through examining Chinese International Relations (IR) scholars’ perceptions and debates on key issues in international relations and Asian security. This project will deepen our understanding of Chinese scholars, especially regarding how they perceive world politics and how they can impact Chinese policy making via internal debates. There are two parts in this project. First, we organize and conduct onsite surveys of IR scholars at the annual conference of the Chinese Community of Political Science and International Studies in Beijing. Second, we examine the internal debates among Chinese scholars over international politics, Asian security, and Chinese foreign policy.

With generous support from the MacArthur Foundation (grant No. 16-1512-150509- IPS), the Griffith Asia Institute is able to successfully collaborate with Tsinghua University’s Institute of International Relations to carry out the survey research as well as conduct the research project on the Chinese IR debates through expert conferences and other academic exchanges. This working paper series will feature major Chinese scholars’ analyses of internal debates and our survey findings.

We appreciate your comments and suggestions very much.

Kai He and Huiyun Feng (Co-Chief Investigators, Griffith University)

Xuetong Yan (Lead Project Collaborator, Tsinghua University)
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Abstract
Researchers have seldom focused on the interaction between China’s foreign policy makers and its international relations academia. Since new policies will trigger diverse responses among the scholars, it will be helpful to understand the diversification process occurring in the academic world, and the different ideas behind the various schools. Furthermore, observing the debates will be an interesting way to better understand China’s foreign policy. By comparing two key diplomatic transitions since 1991 with the two key debates in IR circles during the same period, this paper articulates an interaction model between academia and government based on the consistency of ideas.

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This Working Paper Series presents papers in a preliminary form and serves to stimulate debates and discussions among scholars and policy analysts. The views expressed are entirely the author’s own.
Chinese International Relations Debates and Foreign Policy Adjustments

XU Jin

Introduction
All kinds of policy debates arise in the Chinese international relations (IR) academia, especially when major policy changes occur. In early April 2016, a heated debate about China’s diplomacy broke out between retired ambassador Wu Jianmin and the chief editor of Global Times, Hu Xijin. Wu accused Hu of ignoring China’s overall international situation and mainstream world politics, resulting in editorials and opinion pieces with radical perspectives frequently appearing in the Global Times. Hu, in turn, categorized Wu as a dove diplomat with outdated thinking who hopes to totally control diplomacy and expects outsiders to either play the parrot or keep quiet.1

This debate raises a critical question: what is the relationship between the insiders and outsiders of China’s foreign policy?2 This question can then be divided into two related questions: (1) How did policy changes influence the IR academia, and (2) what kinds of policy proposals are more easily supported and accepted by the government? This paper mainly tries to answer the former question while briefly address the latter.

Since the end of the Cold War, Chinese IR academia has never exhibited a unified view on major international issues or major foreign policies, but rather has maintained at least two or more points of view. This raises a related question: what is the nature of the interaction between these different views and major shifts in Chinese foreign policy? For example, when President Xi Jinping announced in October 2013 at a working conference on neighborhood diplomacy that China’s diplomacy will follow the approach of “fenfa youwei” (striving for achievement), the mainstream view

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2 The insiders are policy makers and diplomats. The outsiders are, broadly speaking, IR scholars, mass media, and individuals interested in foreign policy. However, this essay uses the term “outsiders” to refer to IR scholars.
within Chinese IR academia was still the principle of “taoguang yanghui” (keeping a low profile and biding one’s time). Only a very limited number of scholars argued that China should abandon it. When new policies differ from the mainstream view among IR scholars, what inference should we make about the latter’s impact on the former?

This paper provides a theoretical framework for answering these questions. Its core argument is that the consistency of ideas between policy makers and scholars has great impact on foreign policy making. When the ideas held by IR scholars are consistent with the ideas behind the foreign policy of a given period, these scholars will have more influence or become more popular in IR academia. As a result, the new policy will get more and more support from the academic world. Simultaneously, one possible consequence is that these scholars’ policy proposals will be more easily supported and accepted by the government. However, we must not neglect those minorities whose ideas are not consistent with the new policy, because their critical views will possibly become the popular ones should the government put forward a new policy in the future.

Based on an analysis of several major adjustments and debates in Chinese foreign policy during the reform and opening period, this paper generates an interaction model between adjustments in Chinese foreign policy and Chinese international relations scholarship. The implications of this interaction model will help us to observe and identify policy adjustments. As China’s foreign policy is generally guided by a small number of political elites and professional bureaucrats, and relatively speaking is not so easily accessible, if we are able to understand the relationship between policy makers and scholars the difficulty of accessing the relevant literature and information regarding a particular foreign policy will be somewhat eased.

Two additional points should be emphasized here. First, this paper deals with major adjustments in foreign policy, not regular policy decisions or crisis decisions. The merit of examining major policy shifts is that before the government decides to adjust a given policy, it needs to engage in a comprehensive policy review, and

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3 This paper offers an academic explanation for the relationship between academia and the government in China; it does not address the details of Beijing’s foreign policy making process — who does what, when, and why.
demonstrate the appropriateness of new policy directions. Thus, the rationale and motivations behind its decisions at such junctions deserve consideration. Second, due to currently limited accessibility of data, information, and literature, the interaction model identified below may not fully account for some aspects of the relationship between Chinese international relations research and policy adjustments. Therefore, the model is limited in terms of robustness.

The Insiders and Outsiders of China’s Foreign Policy: An Interaction Model

Conducting a literature review of the relationship between Chinese IR academia and policy makers is difficult because there are almost no journal articles or monographs specifically addressing this topic. One possible but indirect account is David Shambaugh’s article “Coping with a Conflicted China” (2011), in which he categorizes Chinese IR scholars into seven schools: Nativism, Realism with Chinese Characteristics, The Major Power School, Asia First, The Global South School, Selective Multilateralism, and Globalism. This categorization is somewhat conducive to this research in that it touches upon the “isms” and thoughts, and more importantly, the ideas behind them. For example, when the nativists are introduced, they are defined as a collection of populists, xenophobic nationalists, and Marxists. They are the twin of the “New Left” in domestic policy debates (Shambaugh 2011: 10). Here we can easily find the ideas behind these “ism” labels, and their corresponding policy tendencies. However, while he explored its implications for US policy toward China, Shambaugh did not connect his categorization with China’s policymaking process (2011: 27).

The main theme of this paper is China’s foreign policy debates, which are centered on specific ideas. Every policy maker and scholar has their own ideas that direct their policy making and academic research respectively. On the one hand, since IR scholars definitely have different responses to new policies according to their ideas, it will be helpful to watch the diversification process occurring in academia. Meanwhile, policy makers will make use of some scholars’ views to popularize new policies if they share some ideas with those scholars. On the other hand, any theory, concept, or policy proposal presented by scholars can be possibly accepted or partly accepted by the government if the ideas behind them are consistent (or partly consistent) with those held by the policy makers. The final result is that some scholars’ views will gain more influence in academia, even becoming mainstream
views, while views that are at odds with a new policy, even if they once were mainstream, will be gradually marginalized. Overall, the match of ideas between policy makers and scholars will make us aware of the distribution of ideas among academics and, in turn, it will help us to grasp the delicate process of change of ideas among policy makers.

From 1978 to 2012, the main ideas held by the Chinese government were: peace, development, cooperation, keeping a low profile, prioritization of the economy, national interest, multi-polarization, and globalism. At the same time, the spectrum of ideas held by Chinese IR scholars was much broader than that of the government. They ranged from “class struggle” (a central idea of Marxism) on the left to “democratic peace” (a typical idea of liberalism) on the right. Discussing the ideas that guide China’s foreign policy making and academic research is important because they are at the center of core policy discourses and debates among IR academia. If one does not consider or understand the real meaning behind these ideas, then one probably cannot truly grasp what is being debated.4

In the following sections this paper compares the academic debates with policy adjustments. First, it selects two diplomatic policy adjustments and the corresponding two debates within IR academia in China since 1991. These two policy adjustments are: (1) In the summer of 2004, the Chinese government changed its diplomatic objective from “peaceful rise” to “peaceful development”; (2) In October 2013, President Xi Jinping put forward “fenfa youwei” (striving for achievement) as the new basic principle of diplomacy. The two debates in IR academia are: (1) the debate on “peaceful rise” or “peaceful development”; (2) the debate on whether or not China should stick to the diplomatic principle of “keeping a low profile and biding one’s capabilities”.

There have arguably been more than two foreign policy adjustments in China and more than two debates in Chinese IR academia in the past 30 years. But I believe that the importance of these adjustments and debates is self-evident, as they cover critical aspects of diplomatic objectives and diplomatic principles respectively. These aspects have been crucial to China’s diplomatic strategy and its development direction.

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4 An anonymous reviewer termed these “guiding concepts” futile slogans and suggested that they should not be discussed. Although unraveling who does what, why, and when is beyond the scope of this paper, I strongly remind students of China’s diplomacy that being familiar with the ideas held by the government and IR scholars is a necessary step to watch and understand China’s foreign policy making.
This paper conducts its comparison from four directions: time sequence, government tendency, the impact of debates on policies, and the result of debates. *Time sequence* refers to whether the government’s decision to adjust a policy preceded or followed the academic debates, that is, whether the debates influenced or were influenced by the policy makers. When a foreign policy decision occurs before the debate in IR academia, the new policy can be said to have triggered the debate. We can then observe which school in the debate becomes the mainstream one and which one becomes marginalized. On the other hand, when the academic debate occurs before the policy adjustment, the government’s decision may be consistent with the views of some scholars, and this may facilitate the taking of sides within academia. *Government tendency* refers to the degree of consistency between government policies and academic views. It can be theoretically divided into inconsistent, partially consistent, and consistent. The *impact of academic debates on policies* can be categorized as no impact, adoption, and partial adoption. The *result of debates* refers to the level of division within academia and the degree of consistency between the views of various schools and the government’s decisions. Theoretically, these can be divided into three types: a mainstream school which stands with the government; a mainstream school which stands against the government; and no mainstream school, with a portion of scholars standing with the government.

**Diplomatic Objective: Peaceful Development or Peaceful Rise?**

The notion of China’s peaceful rise was first formulated by Zheng Bijian, the former Vice President of the Central Party School of the CPC (Communist Party of China), in a speech at the CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies) in Washington DC on December 9, 2002. Zheng stated, “China shall take a brand new road of development featuring peaceful rise, which is essentially different from the road taken by the rising powers in modern world history” (2007: 469). Later, toward the end of 2002, as Zheng summarized his visit to the United States and proposed to the Central Committee that the road of development for China’s peaceful rise should be studied, he wrote:

Both approval and concern are felt by members of the ruling and the opposing parties of the United States, and generally speaking, concern outweighs approval at the moment, and both “China threat theory” and “China collapse theory” have their supporters. Therefore, it is necessary to mobilize relevant intellectual resources for a specific study on China’s peaceful rise through the independent and self-reliant construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics over more than two decades.
On November 3, 2003, Zheng Bijian linked the peaceful rise of China with that of Asia in a speech delivered at the 2nd Plenary Session of the Bo’ao Forum for Asia Annual Conference. He stated:

Asia is now facing an extremely rare and significant opportunity in world history for peaceful rise, of which the peaceful rise of China constitutes a part, meaning that China’s reform and opening up as well as its peaceful rise benefit from the experience and development of other Asian nations, and that China will play a more active role in Asia’s development as a member of Asia (Zheng 2003: 18–24).

The notion of “peaceful rise” attracted significant positive attention from the Central Committee of the CPC and was soon accepted by national leaders. On December 10, 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao (2003) made the statement that “China today is a power of reform, opening up, and peaceful rise” in a speech delivered at Harvard University. On December 26 of the same year, President Hu Jintao (2003) declared in his speech commemorating the 110th anniversary of the birth of Mao Zedong that “we must stick to the road of peaceful development” if China was to follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. On February 23, 2004, Hu Jintao (2004) pointed out again, when he chaired the 10th collective learning meeting of the Political Bureau, that “we must stick to the road of development featuring peaceful rise and the independent foreign policy of peace”.

The proposition of “peaceful rise” ignited immediate and strong responses from IR academia. In March 2004, the School of International Relations (Renmin University of China) and the journal Teaching and Research co-organized a conference on China’s peaceful rise. Its main topics included why China proposed the notion of peaceful rise, whether peaceful rise would be possible for China, and the strategies

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5 Zhongguo Jueqi Dui Yazhou De Fazhan Youli [The Rise of China is Beneficial to Asian Development], http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2003-11/03/content_1157213.htm. Two years later, his article on China’s peaceful rise was published in Foreign Affairs, see Zheng (2005).


8 Hu Jintao Zhuchi Zhengzhiju Dishici Jiti Xuexi Bing Fabiao Jianghua [Hu Jintao Chairs the 10th Collective Study of the Political Bureau and Delivers Speech], Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily), February 24, 2004.
necessary for China to achieve the goal of peaceful rise. Over 50 experts and scholars attended the conference, including almost all of the elites in IR academia. In general, most scholars did not oppose the notion of peaceful rise; however, many expressed concerns over its practicability and a few held that the very proposition of China’s rise would inject further stimulus into the “China threat theory”.

Wang Jisi (2004), then Dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University, voiced support for the notion, contending that it expressed a strong desire for China to develop and strengthen itself in a peaceful environment. However, if the United States insisted on isolating, westernizing, and containing China, Wang (2004: 7) pointed out, how could “peaceful rise” become a reality for China? Yan Xuetong (2004) supported the concept of peaceful rise but not without conditions, believing that rise is the ultimate goal while peace is the means to this end. Yet he questioned: “if the means of peace will not lead to the goal of rise, are we to abandon the goal of rise for the sake of this means, or would we be forced to achieve the goal by other means?” (2004: 6). In contrast, Luo Yuan (2004) held that peace and rise are mutually the means and the ends, as the goals of peaceful rise are peace, security, cooperation, and prosperity, while a peaceful environment is favorable for China’s rise (2004: 12).

Other scholars, such as Zhang Minqian (2004), believed that the key of “peaceful rise” is peace rather than rise, and that the proposition is a response to the “China threat theory”. Emphasis on rise would further stimulate the spread of this theory, while emphasis on peace would highlight that China’s foreign policy should stick to non-violent means featuring integration, win-win, sharing, consultation, and cooperation (2004: 8). Meng Xiangqing (2004) argued that peaceful rise does not imply absolute elimination of armed forces, because whether a peaceful environment could be maintained over a long period does not completely depend on China’s wishful thinking (2004: 15).

A few scholars who argued that the notion of “peaceful rise” should be treated cautiously were mainly concerned about the contradiction between the notion and the traditional foreign policy precept of “keeping a low profile”. They too felt that the notion of “peaceful rise” would serve to stimulate the “China threat theory.” For example, Liu Shenge (2004) expressed doubts about whether China’s existing foreign and security policies are completely consistent with the international community’s response to “peaceful rise”. What is the relationship between the diplomatic principles summarized by Deng Xiaoping in 28 Chinese characters and the notion of peaceful rise? How would one define the relationship between “the primary stage of socialism” and “peaceful rise”? (Liu 2004: 17).

The above debate shows once again that IR scholars in China read the notion of
“peaceful rise” according to different ideas. The realists explain it as means (peace) plus ends (rise), while the pacifists treat it as a whole, insisting that rise would be meaningless without maintaining peace. And there are also some scholars who question it because they still believe in the notion of keeping a low profile.

However, “peaceful rise” proved to be a short-lived policy concept, as the summer of 2004 saw the Chinese government suddenly abandon it in favor of “peaceful development”. The reason for this shift has not been publicly disclosed and unsubstantiated conjecture would not be appropriate in this paper. Yet a comparison between “peaceful rise” and “peaceful development” shows that the Chinese government has obviously accepted the road of peace yet denied “rise” as its end, thus shunning the question about the aim of development. Peace and development have been the basic ideas held by the Chinese government since 1978, while “rise” is an idea that appears at odds with “keeping a low profile”, another basic idea that has been observed for a long time. Thus, it is not really strange that the government has replaced rise with development.

On November 29, 2012, during a visit to the exhibition “Road to Rejuvenation”, President Xi Jinping highlighted that “achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the most lofty dream of the Chinese people since modern history”. Moreover, he has reiterated the notion of “the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” on various occasions (Xi 2012). In my personal understanding the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a synonym for the rise of China; as the Chinese government has abandoned the word “rise”, it has replaced it with the term “great rejuvenation”. Since then, no debate over the relationship between “the great rejuvenation” and “peaceful development” or “peaceful rise” has taken place among Chinese IR scholars, who instead have visibly identified themselves with the notion of “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”.

**Diplomatic Principles: Keeping a Low Profile or Striving for Achievements?**

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, when China’s diplomacy sought to free itself from the shadows of the events of June 4, 1989, while dealing with the new international situation after the Cold War, Deng Xiaoping formulated the principles of China’s

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diplomacy using 28 Chinese characters: observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; keep a low profile; never claim leadership; and make some contributions. Guided by such principles, at the time China withstood the shock of drastic changes in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the USSR, survived pressure and sanctions by Western powers, and opened up a new diplomatic era. And “keeping a low profile while making some contributions” became not only the main diplomatic principle followed by the Chinese government over a long period of time, but also won extensive support from IR academia.

Yet, in recent years, strong disputes among Chinese academics have emerged regarding whether and how “keeping a low profile” should continue to be upheld. Three major views are voiced: unswerving support, adjustment and development, and renouncement (Xu and Du 2015).

As early as 2001, Qu Xing (2001), a staunch supporter of the principle, wrote on the necessity for China to persevere with “keeping a low profile” over the long term, arguing that the key in understanding this notion is to understand the ideas of “hidden capacity” and “biding time”. In his view, “keeping a low profile” refers to not debating ideology with other countries, instead the idea is that China will base its foreign policy on the practices of one fifth of the world’s population rather than elaborating the outlook, the hope, or the advantages of socialism from an ideological perspective. The concept also refers to a bid for time for China’s rise and development as a socialist country, that is, to achieve modernization by the middle of the 21st century (Qu Xing 2001: 14). The necessity for China to persevere with the strategy of “keeping a low profile” lies in two basic facts: China is not facing the danger of invasion, and peace and development remain the most important themes for today (2001: 16).

In 2011, Qu Xing continued to advocate this view, arguing that there are three key words in Deng Xiaoping’s articulation of “keeping a low profile”: “guang”, “hui” and “wei”. In his view, “guang” refers to ideology, that is to say, China should determine its foreign policies based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence rather than shaping its international strategy and foreign relations based on ideology; this is what ‘tao guang’ truly means. Hui refers to the time for economic development while wei references the sense of building a new international political order. From these three perspectives, questions concerning the necessity of continuing with the notion of “keeping a low profile” may be answered (Qu 2011).10

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Those Chinese scholars who believe in adjustment and development of the principle argue that the relationship between “keeping a low profile” and “making contributions” should be interpreted flexibly, combining unchanging principles with flexible tactics. These scholars believe that the relationship between “keeping a low profile” and “making some contributions” is analogous to the relationship between cage and bird: “keeping a low profile” is compared to a cage while “making some contributions” is the bird within it. A larger cage may be designed to provide more room for the bird to flutter its wings, but nevertheless it cannot flee from the cage. That is to say, “making some contributions” must not break free from the fundamental framework of “keeping a low profile”.

Wang Jisi (2011) has pointed out that the strategic thinking of “keeping a low profile” is still very relevant to the current reality which China faces, hence must be consistently followed instead of abandoned. Yet such consistence is by no means a synonym for scholasticism, for the essence of this principle would be unsustainable without being supplemented and adjusted according to the developments and changes in the domestic and international environments over the past two decades. Without the context of “keeping a low profile”, attempts to “make contributions” in international affairs would lose their target (2011: 7).

Renmin University professor Shi Yinhong (2010) contended during an interview that “keeping a low profile” is an interim strategy rather than a workable doctrine for the next 100 years. When to keep a low profile and when to make some contributions will depend on the actual situation. The principle of keeping a low profile should not be abandoned, while more contributions must be made (2010: 35–36).

In contrast to these more moderate views, Yan Xuetong has in recent years been advocating that “keeping a low profile while making some contributions” should be renounced as a diplomatic principle. In a speech at a conference in 2011, Yan (2011) claimed that China’s diplomatic principle should be switched from “keeping a low profile” to being “a responsible power”, because the former is more appropriate for weak nations rather than great powers. In his book Inertia of History (Lishi de Guanxing) published in 2013, Yan argued that China will became one pole of a
bipolar world in the next decade; therefore China needs to learn to become a respected leader of the international community, especially a more respected leader than the United States. Consequently, the strategic principle of “keeping a low profile” should not remain valid, although a strategic culture featuring humbleness and prudence should be upheld (Yan 2013a: 187).

In October 2013, the Central Committee of the CPC held a work conference on neighborhood diplomacy which was attended by all the standing members of the Political Bureau. President Xi Jinping (2013) summarized in his keynote speech that China has to strive for achievements in neighborhood diplomacy in order to create a favorable external environment for its development.Shortly after the conference, a heated debate on the relationship between “keeping a low profile” and “striving for achievement” (fenfa youwei) proposed by President Xi broke out between staunch supporters of “keeping a low profile” and advocates for its renouncement.

Qu Xing (2013) believes that there is no contradiction between “keeping a low profile” and “striving for achievement”, as the latter is but another way to express the former (2013: 27). Yan Xuetong, on the other hand, argues that the central government has replaced “keeping a low profile” with “striving for achievement.” Yan notes that the former is less proactive than “making some contributions.” In a semantic sense, “keeping a low profile” is the opposite of “striving for achievement”; the two notions are not parallel, let alone in a progressive order (2016). He continues to point out that “keeping a low profile was necessary in the past because China was weak, or because China has to show its weakness to international society. Striving for achievement aims at showing our neighboring countries that we are more powerful than them. That is an essential change.”

In a 2014 article, Yan Xuetong gives an extended analysis of the difference between “keeping a low profile” and “making some contributions” based on moral

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12 ‘Xi Jinping Zai Zhoubian Waijiao Gongzuo Zuotanhui Shang Fabiao Zhongyao Jiaohua’ [Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech at Symposium on Diplomatic Work with Neighboring Countries], Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily), October 26, 2013. Despite the theme of diplomatic work with neighboring countries, this symposium actually set the tone for China’s diplomatic policies for the next five to ten years, judging from its level (tone?) and the essence of President Xi’s speech.

13 Yan Xuetong, ‘Cong Taoguang Yanghui Dao Fenfa Youwei, Zhongguo Jueqi Shi Bukedang’ [From “Keeping a Low Profile” to Striving for Achievements, the Rise of China is Unstoppable], available at http://www.ceweekly.cn/2013/1111/68562.shtml.
realism. Yan (2014) contends that the key difference between the two notions is that the former emphasizes economic benefits while the latter highlights political leadership. The foreign policy principle of “striving for achievements” has since the summer of 2012 proved to be quite effective. Yan points out with confidence that although the mid- and long-term effects of “striving for achievements” are still to be tested by time, compared to “keeping a low profile”, it is a more conducive way of creating a favorable international environment for China’s peaceful rise.

The debate over “keeping a low profile” in Chinese IR academia is far from being concluded, as all schools attempt to prove that their opinions are consistent with the central government’s new policy. It is worth mentioning, however, that on the one hand, since the beginning of the Xi Jinping administration, the notion of “keeping a low profile while making some contributions” has never been used in the speeches delivered by senior foreign policy officials including the Foreign Minister. On the other hand, when Mr. Wu Jianmin died in a car accident in June 18, 2016, his death and his insistence on “keeping a low profile” triggered once more lively debates amongst Chinese scholars and diplomats; even President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang sent wreaths to Wu’s family. What can we conclude from the two events above? Do they indicate that the Chinese government has been renouncing this principle gradually but not without resistance? If so, will the view advocating its renunciation become mainstream in the next few years?

Conclusion

This paper proposes an interaction model between Chinese IR academia and foreign policy makers, focusing on the debates in Chinese IR academia before and after key foreign policy changes over the past 25 years. Although it is an indirect approach, watching debates is a useful way to obtain a better understanding of China’s foreign policy, because these debates will reflect the consistency of ideas between policy makers and scholars, and in many ways are indicators or signals of official policy changes.

China’s foreign policy adjustments since the 1980s have triggered several debates, of which the goals and principles of diplomacy are the most important. This paper illustrates that the consistency of ideas between scholars and the government can explain the evolution of these debates.14 In addition, this paper also argues that those

14 For a more detailed analysis of these debates, please see Xu (2017).
who share the same ideas with policy makers will gain an upper hand in the debates, which results in their views becoming the mainstream in IR academia, while those scholars whose ideas stand in opposition to those of policy makers will be gradually marginalized. When confronted with several different policy recommendations, policy makers will choose the ones that are wholly or partially close to their own ideas, and then take advantage of this fit to promote their new policies.

As China’s diplomacy continues to evolve, the constant emergence of new policies, new practices, and new notions provide Chinese IR academia with abundant topics for debate. This paper predicts that future debates will address (but not necessarily be limited to) the following issues: whether China should continue with the “principle of priority of China-U.S. relations”; whether the international structure is moving toward multi-polarization or bi-polarization; whether the non-alignment policy should be maintained; and whether diplomacy should serve economic development or the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Scholars’ views, which hold the dominating majority support on these issues, tend to exert more influence and their views have the opportunity to prevail in IR academia. At the same time, lively scholarly debates over these issues will provide the Chinese government with an eclectic choice of theories and concepts.

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